

June 2006

# FRIENDS OF FAIR ISLE NEWSLETTER

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## Staff for 2006

At the end of the 2005 season we said 'au revoir' (but not 'goodbye') to Liz, Kathy, Rael and Rory whilst Rachel simply moved down the road to live at Taft. Over the course of the season, all have developed a strong tie to the Obs and will no doubt return in the not-too-distant future.

Recruitment for the 2006 season was considerably easier than 2005 and the Obs had a full compliment of ornithological and domestic staff by May 10<sup>th</sup>.

As in most years there is a mixture of old and new faces. Mark Warren returns for his second season as Migration Officer following a winter of bird ringing in Kenya, a short trip to Sweden and recuperating at home in Cornwall! Will Miles joins us as Seabird Monitoring Officer. He hails from Cambridge and has completed a number of short research contracts with RSPB and was a long-term volunteer at Abernethy. He decided to apply for a job here after visiting as a guest for a week last autumn! One of our 2005 JHMF volunteers, Phil Knott, has landed the post of Ranger, after two summers of RSPB volunteering in Shetland and Orkney.

On the domestic side, the only continuity from the 2005 season is Becki Rosser as General Assistant and 2005 volunteer Thana Chandrasekaran, returning as Childminder. Lois Smallwood returned for three weeks at the very beginning of the

season to help show the new staff the kitchen routine but is unable to work this season. In charge of the kitchen this year is Phil Bell, who has vast experience as a Chef, working recently in St Andrews and on Iona. He is ably supported by Julie Lane from Northamptonshire. Finally, our new General Assistant is Bronwyn Waddell who comes from New Zealand. Early indications suggest that the kitchen is going to be a lively place this season!

We also welcome PhD student Jaroen Mindiman who joins us for 3 months, continuing the long-term studies on the island's starlings and (although not strictly a staff member) he has settled in very well as one of the team.

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## Autumn 2005 Bird Sightings

### August Highlights

The start of autumn migration was notable for its scarcity of common migrants. However, there were highlights including the arrival of Barred Warblers with a maximum of seven (20<sup>th</sup>). Only one Red-backed Shrike arrived (20<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>), but five Common Rosefinch. Single Marsh Warblers were trapped (8<sup>th</sup>) and (21<sup>st</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>) and a Leach's Petrel was caught during a Storm-petrel ringing session (1<sup>st</sup>), with another two (13<sup>th</sup>). A sea-watch (24<sup>th</sup>) produced 12 Sooty and three Manx Shearwaters. Perhaps the best of all was a record flock of 20 Bar-tailed Godwits (14<sup>th</sup>).

### September Highlights

The month started well with warm southerlies encouraging *three* Honey Buzzards to pass over (2<sup>nd</sup>). A Booted Warbler was found late in the day on 4<sup>th</sup> (remaining until 6<sup>th</sup>) and with a Thrush Nightingale (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>), rarity-free August was soon forgotten!

Scarce migrants were recorded in reasonable numbers with at least ten Barred Warblers, (max. six on 2<sup>nd</sup>) and six Rosefinch, three Icterine Warblers, two each of Red-backed Shrike and Wryneck all found during the first ten days of the month. An American Golden Plover was present (8<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>) and a possible Cory's Shearwater (also 8<sup>th</sup>) unfortunately

departed before the crowds arrived. A Western Bonelli's Warbler, which toured the southern crofts on 10<sup>th</sup> (before succumbing to a mist-net), was only our second record. An early Olive-backed Pipit was a good find on the cliffs (25<sup>th</sup>) and a long staying Ortolan Bunting (12<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>) kept the crowds amused. An elusive Spotted Crake was found (30<sup>th</sup>) and two or three Little Buntings were present during the last week.

### October Highlights

The second female Siberian Rubythroat in three years stole the show (23<sup>rd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>). There was strong support from two Black-throated Thrushes; a first year female on Hoini (21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>), and a stunning male at Klingers Geo (23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>). Two Lanceolated Warblers were also found; one trapped in the bird cover-crop at Bulls Park (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>) and the other a classic performer in the long grass near Kenaby (17<sup>th</sup>). A brief Olive-backed Pipit was on the east cliffs (13<sup>th</sup>), with a second located on Rippack (23<sup>rd</sup>). Redpolls caused much debate with an Arctic trapped (20<sup>th</sup>) with subsequent claims 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. A Common Buzzard began a month-long stay on 11<sup>th</sup>. A Red Kite (18<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>) was a real island rarity, being only our 7<sup>th</sup> record whilst the reported Black throated Diver, which flew past Bunes (9<sup>th</sup>), was rarer still (6<sup>th</sup> record). Scarce passerines were well represented with an elusive Short-toed Lark (15<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>) and at least four Richard's Pipit's while three different Bluethroats were trapped during the month, with another present (31<sup>st</sup>). Single Barred Warblers (4<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>), were emphatically trounced by Yellow-browed Warblers, with high counts of 12 (15<sup>th</sup>) and 9 (17<sup>th</sup>) and an estimation of at least 30 birds during the month. A Pallas's Warbler performed well at the far northwest tip of Dronger (15<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>) with two there (16<sup>th</sup>) and different individuals in the south (22<sup>nd</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>). Three Red-breasted Flycatchers were found (5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup>) as were single Red-backed (15<sup>th</sup>) and Great Grey Shrikes (9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>). There was also a singing Black-bellied Dipper (26<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>). On the common migrant front, a fall on 15<sup>th</sup> included 25 Jack Snipe, 170 Snipe, 35 Robin, 300 Blackbird, 2000

Redwing, 500 Song Thrush, 45 Blackcap, 300 Goldcrest and 230 Brambling. Single Scaup and 120 Blackcaps were also recorded (17<sup>th</sup>). A record total of 985 Barnacle Geese (20<sup>th</sup>) was an impressive sight as were the 23 Short-eared Owls on the same date!



### November Highlights

As per usual a few scarce migrants turned up in early November. They included a Richard's Pipit at Barkland (4<sup>th</sup>) and a Little Bunting in Bull's Park (5<sup>th</sup>). The Black-bellied Dipper also remained until 5<sup>th</sup>. Remaining raptors included a couple of Merlins, Kestrel and the Common Buzzard (until 12<sup>th</sup>). Other birds of note included an influx of Waxwings (peaking at 40 on 4<sup>th</sup>), over 200 Snow Buntings, a Goldfinch and a handful each of Long-eared Owls and white-winged gulls. Best of all was the juvenile Sabine's Gull which flew past South Light (12<sup>th</sup>) – only our 4<sup>th</sup> record and first since 1982. Small numbers of Little Auks were also noted whizzing past.

### December Highlights

A typically quiet month but a Goshawk was reported sitting on a post at Quoy before heading east and climbing high into the sky, pursued by a Raven. If accepted, this would be only our 6<sup>th</sup> record and first since 1996. The Goldfinch remained until 7<sup>th</sup> at least. An over wintering Long-eared Owl was noted.

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## New Year Bird Sightings

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A 'small' Canada Goose on 9<sup>th</sup> January did not stay long enough to be identified to race. The wintering Greylag Goose flock peaked at 63 and was joined by two Pink-footed Geese on 26<sup>th</sup>. A lone adult Whooper Swan lingered throughout (the juvenile that was with it having died in December). A Goosander (8<sup>th</sup>), Great Northern Diver (21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>) and a Slavonian Grebe (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>) were noted offshore. Peak wader counts were 41 Lapwing, 60 Redshank, 100 Turnstone and 80 Common Snipe with the first returning Oystercatchers noted (26<sup>th</sup>). Birds of prey were represented by Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine plus the Long-eared Owl, while a Common Buzzard flew in on 29<sup>th</sup>. Passerines included a few Skylarks and (unusually) Meadow Pipits, a handful of Robins, a Chaffinch, up to 72 Twite and 15 Snow Buntings.

February's highlights included the Common Buzzard that remained throughout with three each of Iceland Gull (adult and two 1stW) and Glaucous Gull (all 1stW). Oystercatchers trickled through (peak of just 40). Thrush numbers remained fairly high (200 Fieldfare, 80 Redwing, 30 Blackbird, 10 Song Thrush and a Mistle Thrush) with 55 Twite whilst arrivals included single Pied Wagtail (12<sup>th</sup>), Ringed Plover (17<sup>th</sup>), Wood Pigeon (19<sup>th</sup>), Rook (21<sup>st</sup>) and 'Mealy' Common Redpoll (24<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>).

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## ISLAND NEWS

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### A New Observatory Building

It was agreed at the FIBOT Directors meeting in January 2006, that the best solution for the future of the ageing Observatory accommodation is to construct a new building very near to the current site. This building will incorporate many 'eco' features as well as providing a higher standard of accommodation for staff and visitors. This ambitious project is very much in the early stages but it is hoped that it will be completed within the next three years. A fund will be set up shortly, to help raise money for the

project. More details of where to send donations will be in the next Newsletter.

### Island Comings and Goings

As in every year, there is a certain degree of change in the Fair Isle population. Since the last Newsletter Rachel Eunson (who grew up on Fair Isle and returned as the Obs Co-Cook last season) has moved to Taft with her partner Malachy Tallack, a singer-songwriter from Shetland. The Auld Haa remains empty, but after being advertised as available to rent from this summer, the National Trust for Scotland were inundated with over 350 applicants. Eventually this was whittled down to two families, both American, and the successful family is due to move here in August.

### The End of an Era

It is with great sadness that we report the death of the oldest islander. Jerome 'Jerry' Stout died in his home at Lower Leogh, on 16<sup>th</sup> September, aged 97. Jerry was a well respected and influential member of the Fair Isle Community, who in his time, ran the shop, skippered the *Good Shepherd* for many years and was the first person to own a lorry and run haulage on the isle. He was laid to rest in the island cemetery on 21<sup>st</sup> September following a service in the Kirk, attended by the whole island community.

### Transport to and from Fair Isle

As many of you will be aware, Loganair has finally bowed out of the Shetland Inter-island contract after over 35 years of service. The contract has been awarded to *Direct Air* – a company based in Bedfordshire. Shetland Islands Council have purchased a brand new islander plane which they will lease to *Direct Air*. Loganair will continue to take bookings and provide flights up to the end of July. For bookings after this date, contact Margaret Pearson at Shetland Islands Council, who is taking bookings on behalf of *Direct Air* until they begin the contract:

Tel: 01595 744886

e-mail: [margaret.pearson@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:margaret.pearson@shetland.gov.uk)



### **Thanks to Scottish Natural Heritage**

With a generous grant from SNH, the Observatory has been able to purchase a new digital projector and laptop, with the specific purpose of providing quality digital slideshows to visitors. Many old slides will need scanning before they can be used with the new equipment, and so the trusty old slide projector will still be used until we have managed to complete the transfer of the FIBOT slide collection to digital. A second grant from SNH has enabled the purchase of a new zodiac inflatable boat. This boat is crucial to our long-term seabird monitoring studies but after 10 years of service, the old zodiac was showing signs of real wear and tear and it was becoming difficult to keep it watertight!

### **Ranger Service and Eco-School join forces**

Fair Isle Primary School has recently been awarded their second Eco-School flag for their knowledge of and efforts to help the environment. Much of this work was carried out in conjunction with the Bird Observatory (through the SNH-funded Ranger Service) and the FIBOT Chairman (Roy Dennis MBE) presented the school with the flag in early June. This clearly illustrates the strong link between the school and the Observatory that has been developed in recent years. The Ranger Service is working with the children this year to design, create and maintain a bird friendly, eco-garden just outside the school grounds.

### **Fair Isle Thursdays**

These popular fortnightly music events at the Bird Observatory are now well established during the summer months and continue to be one of the highlights of many visitor's holiday. This year, Fridarey and the other island musicians will be joined by Malachy Tallack, who recently moved to Taft. Singer/Song-writer Malachy will compliment the popular songs and music of Fridarey when he performs numbers from his debut *'The Beach'* and his new album *'Edges and Spaces'*. CDs by Fridarey and Malachy are available on-line from the FIBO shop.

### **Request for Bird Bags**

It has been a couple of years since we appealed for bird bags for our ringing projects and the current bird bags are beginning to show their age. If anyone has sewing skills, some leftover cotton material and some spare time to make new bags it would be greatly appreciated. Bags need to be roughly 12 inches by 8 inches, hemmed to hide any loose threads and with a drawstring at the top. Please send them to us here at the Observatory – Thankyou.

### **Cropping project and Utra Scrape**

Continuing the success of the past two seasons, crops are once again being planted in areas around the island to provide cover and food for birds. The same plots as last year are planted again plus a couple of extra ones that have been kindly 'donated' to us. Furthermore, the new wader scrape at Utra is now looking very promising and is a welcome addition to the birdwatching hotspots on the island. Grateful thanks goes to all islanders involved with these projects.

### **Fair Isle on Film**

2006 seems to be the year for Film Crews on the island. A French film crew from MC4 Productions visited the island in early May to film Puffin breeding behaviour as part of their film for french cinema entitled *'Animals in Love'*. The BBC Natural History Unit has also visited to film a *'Natural World'* programme about seabirds, due to be aired in November/December. FIBO Chairman Roy Dennis stars in the programme which will follow the seabird breeding season from beginning to end at several sites in Britain but with its main focus on Fair Isle. The BBC plan to make 3 or 4 visits to the island throughout the season. Finally BBC's Alan Titchmarsh is due to visit the island for a day in early July to film Skuas as part of a nature in Britain series

### **New Look Website**

The FIBO website has undergone some changes in recent months. It is updated regularly so remember to log-on when you can, or come and visit us in person.

[www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk](http://www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk)