



No. 42. June 2013

And so the second year of our life at FIBO has come to an end and the third season is upon us; welcome to the latest FOFI newsletter and the latest updates from the island. As usual 2012 brought a range of experiences; some exciting spring birding and a fantastic autumn, an improved (but sadly still not great) breeding season for the seabirds and a busy season at the Obs, where various unfortunate incidents led to the kitchen being understaffed for long periods. Thanks to the efforts of the staff, volunteers and various islanders, the food provided was still to the usual high standards. Indeed thanks are due to all those people for helping us survive!

By the time you get this newsletter the 2013 team will be settled in and we will be hitting our peak of visitors and ornithological work: check the back page for details of prices and special offers if you're thinking of visiting this year. You will also know that bookings for 2014 opened earlier than usual. Again, check the back page for details and don't leave it too late to plan your next trip.

We have heard back from many FOFI members about the newsletters, the summary of responses so far is that you would like to see the newsletters continue, but in email format only, with more information about island life and crofting, but news on birds restricted more to the seabirds and other features (sightings information being readily

available elsewhere). This and the next newsletter will continue in paper format whilst we get the databases up to date, but from 2014 the FOFI newsletter will be issued as an email only, so please ensure you let us have your email address. In the meantime, we will welcome more feedback on what you would like the newsletters to contain.

We would also like to hear from any Friends of Fair Isle who would like to help out FIBO in other ways. We're always happy to have people help with our work, either volunteering at the Obs (check the website for latest volunteering vacancies) or 'working from home'! We can often use help with, for example, data inputting, whilst we also need people to help man the stands at the Bird Fair at Rutland and the Scottish Bird Fair at Edinburgh, no great expertise in birding is necessary, just enthusiasm! Perhaps you have other skills that you think would be of use to the Obs, if so, please let us know. In recent years we have benefitted from donations of binoculars, books, microscopes and other items and we are always happy to receive more. If you have anything you think could be useful to our work, please let us know.

Although the winter festivities brought enjoyment to the island as usual, 2013 was only a few days old when we received the sad news that Myers Jimmy had passed away just short of his 102nd birthday.

His funeral was a chance for friends and family to pay their respects and celebrate the life of this well-loved gentleman. Sadly, we never had the chance to meet Jimmy, who had moved to Lerwick by the time we arrived on Fair Isle, but we have heard many things about him and Roger Riddington pays tribute inside. Finally, although the winter has not been a particularly bad one for the weather, there have been a few days of extreme conditions. The most dramatic of those was in early February, when exceptionally high seas washed away part of the wall at South Light, thankfully nobody was hurt, nor were anyone's houses damaged but we're afraid the 'seawatching bench' is no more!

David and Susannah Parnaby
Warden and Administrator, FIBO



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James Anderson Stout (1911–2013)



In January 1941, Jimmy watched as a German Heinkel 111 bomber crash-landed on Vaassetter, killing two of its five-man crew. When the pilot, Karl 'Heinz' Thurz, returned to Fair Isle in 1987, Jimmy was the first person to welcome him back to the isle. Heinz then went on to inspect the remains of his aircraft.

© Dennis Coutts

James A. Stout, more commonly known on Fair Isle as 'Mires Jimmy' or 'Jimmy Midway' died in January 2013, a few weeks short of his 102nd birthday. He was the last of the Fair Isle men who had known all the key people involved with the discovery of Fair Isle as a hotspot for migratory birds and those involved with the establishment of the Bird Observatory. It is no exaggeration to say that Mires Jimmy was valued and respected for his ornithological knowledge and his friendship in equal measure, not only by every Obs warden but by all the 'birdy folk' who spent any time on the isle.

Jimmy was born at Field, on 7th March 1911, to George and Helen Stout. In 1941 he married Edith Eunson and they lived in the house at Midway, adjoining the old Mires croft. The couple had five children: Jimmy, Teddy, Edith Ann, Andrew and Maurice (Teddy and Maurice pre-deceased their father). In December 2008, Jimmy moved to Overtonlea care home at Levenwick, on mainland Shetland, where he was able to receive 24-hour care.

Jimmy's father, generally known simply as Fieldy, was one of three islanders who were enlisted to help the early ornithological pioneers who visited Fair Isle. After his first visit, in 1905, Dr William Eagle Clarke (who was instrumental in identifying Fair Isle as a special place for the observation of migratory birds), trained up first George Wilson Stout, of Busta, and Jerome Wilson, of Springfield. Clarke's successor was Surgeon Rear-Admiral John H. Stenhouse, who first visited the isle in 1921. Fieldy effectively became Stenhouse's protégé and, in the interwar years, Fieldy and Jerome Wilson were key to maintaining the recording effort on the island.

It is clear that Jimmy inherited his father's interest in birds at an early age. Jimmy was an astute observer and a decent shot even then – and he kept those qualities sharp until well into his old age. The first of his landmark ornithological achievements came when he was just 14 with the discovery of Britain's first Pechora Pipit at Gaila on 23rd September 1925 (his attention was drawn to the bird by its unfamiliar call). Stenhouse shot the bird the following day and its identity was confirmed. Two days after that Stenhouse, Jerome Wilson and Fieldy came across Britain's first Paddyfield Warbler, later shot by Fieldy. Those of us who have seen Fair Isle at its best can only imagine the effect of such a spell on the enthusiasm of a youngster. Stenhouse was staying at Field (as he did habitually) and throughout his life Jimmy spoke with enthusiasm and respect for the man.



The Pechora Pipit at National Museums Scotland. ©Tommy Hyndman

Jimmy played a key role in another addition to the British List: Pallid Harrier in 1931. A second-summer male, present on the isle from 24th April was eventually shot by Jimmy on 8th May. The bird, confidently identified by Fieldy, was sent away for confirmation. The specimen was sent to the NMS in Edinburgh initially, where its identity was questioned, but Fieldy was robust in his reply and the bird was eventually sent to London, where the identity (as Pallid) was confirmed. Two other exceptional records from Jimmy include a Crested Lark seen near the Chapel on 2nd November 1952 (this remains the only Scottish record); and a bird shot by him in October of about 1928, thought to have been a Calandra Lark. That would have been the first British record too, but alas the specimen was lost in the post.

Between the wars, there was a great demand for specimens from museum-based ornithologists, and Jimmy was paid a small sum for each rare bird he shot – for a really good one, it might have been as much as a guinea (£1.05). While the money was an incentive, there is no doubt that Jimmy had a genuine interest in the birds as well. A more lucrative market was for Woodcock, which the Fair Isle men shot in late autumn, and which were shipped to game dealers on the mainland. Jimmy was a regular on the hill with his gun in late autumn, and in later life, he would recount tales of good Woodcock days with particular relish.

Mires Jimmy was an approachable, articulate and unassuming man who would undoubtedly have described himself as a crofter rather than an ornithologist. His life revolved around his family, Fair Isle, the croft and the sea (he was a crew member of the *Good Shepherd* for 36 years, latterly its skipper). The hospitality offered by Jimmy and Edith was legendary, and the conversation there might range across any number of subjects, but there is not one person who came away from a visit to Midway without the feeling that their life had been enriched by the experience.

Roger Riddington and Dennis Coutts

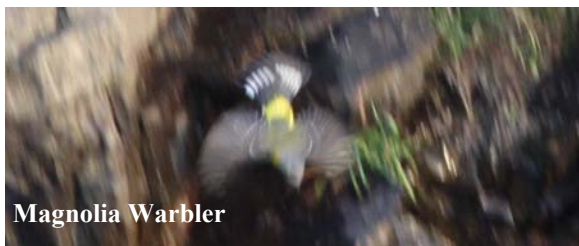
A fuller version of this obituary will appear in the 2013 FIBOT annual report

Ornithological Summary 2012



Magnolia Warbler

No doubting the star bird of 2012; the magnificent Magnolia Warbler found on the cliffs of Lerness on the afternoon of 23rd September. The Obs machine went into full effect to make sure all the birders on the island got to one of the more remote locations on the island and enjoyed great views of this superb vagrant. Following just hours after a Lanceolated Warbler was trapped at Da Water on a day with clear blue skies and just a breath of easterly wind, this was Fair Isle at its best and came at the start of a run of rarities that continued for two weeks.



Magnolia Warbler

In strict Fair Isle terms, the next rarest bird was the drake Green-winged Teal on Da Water in the spring, only the second island record following one in 2009. A Ring-billed Gull in spring and a Hume's Warbler in the autumn were both third records, the Buff-bellied Pipit in September was our fourth record as was the Siberian Rubythroat in October, although the latter was only the 9th for Britain. A Firecrest in the spring was only our 5th, this species seemingly struggling to make it north with any regularity.



Siberian Rubythroat

The classic autumn period delivered most of the impressive haul of the year's rarities with the final total including: 2 River Warblers, Pechora Pipit,

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Black-throated Thrush, 3 Lanceolated Warblers, 3 Blyth's Reed Warblers, 2 Paddyfield Warblers, 6 Arctic Warblers, 5 Citrine Wagtails, 8 Olive-backed Pipits, 3 Thrush Nightingales and 5 Arctic Redpolls—quite a roll call! The use of DNA to help establish identifications is an increasingly useful tool in the birding armoury, and the field identification of several birds including 'eastern' Subalpine Warbler, 'eastern' Grasshopper Warbler, 'Siberian' Chiffchaff and *halimondendri* Lesser Whitethroat was backed up by the lab work of Dr Martin Collinson at Aberdeen University.

In addition to the tremendous rarities mentioned above, the usual hauls of scarcities throughout the year are detailed on the FIBO website.

March brought Fair Isle's earliest ever Ruff and Blackcap. April saw some impressive numbers of birds arriving, with falls late in the month producing large numbers of Robin, Brambling and Chiffchaff.

May saw some impressive waves of migrants, one day in particular standing out, when light easterly winds on 23rd saw a fall that included 10 Icterine Warbler, 9 Red-backed Shrike, 3 Common Rosefinch, 2 Bluethroat, two Dotterel, Quail and 64 Spotted Flycatcher. The counts of Icterine Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher were the second highest spring counts for Fair Isle. The pleasant weather and cracking plumage of many of the birds involved make spring falls especially enjoyable. Migration continued well into June, when the breeding season was also in full swing. By July breeding birds and Storm Petrel ringing provided the interest.

In early August Leach's Petrels regularly added to nocturnal excitement with the first rarities and falls of migrants from mid-month. The last two weeks of August have increasingly proved a good time to connect with falls given the right weather.

The first three weeks of September were plagued by westerly winds that did at least bring Buff-breasted and Pectoral Sandpipers, but from 20th onwards the improved conditions brought some mouth-watering birding.

Although early October also saw westerly winds, the rarities continued to arrive. Easterlies returned from 11th and further arrivals from then into November brought several more highlights, including record numbers of Waxwings and the first Fair Isle Blue Tit since 1989!



©Tommy Hyndman fair-isle.blogspot.co.uk

Overview: Fair Isle is one of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's (JNCC) key sites for the Seabird Monitoring Programme, with JNCC providing FIBO with funding to carry out intensive monitoring. The work has been carried out to the same specifications since 1986. Some species have their whole breeding population counted annually, with others on a three or five year rotation. Standardised plots used to monitor breeding numbers and breeding success (productivity) annually for all species. Other work includes monitoring the diet of certain species.

Although 2012 was a better year than 2011, some species still fared very poorly. However, it was pleasing to at least find some auk chicks alive in the colonies

Gannet Current Population: 3,862 AOS (most recent count: 2012) General trend: Increasing

Having only colonised the island in 1975, Gannets are one of the main seabird success stories of recent years on Fair Isle and the population continues to do well. Productivity was good in 2012, with 0.85 chicks fledged per AON, but the overall population fell by 5.45% from 2011, suggesting that the recent increases may have levelled off.

Fulmar Current Population: 29,460 AOS (2011) Gradual decline, possibly now in reverse

Although there was no whole-island count in 2012, the population plots showed an increase of 8.9% since 2011 and productivity remained reasonable at 0.48 chicks fledged per AOS.

Shag Current Population: 235 AON (2008) Rapidly decreasing

It was a better year for the beleaguered Shag population, with the population plots showing a 60% increase from 2011 (to 32 AON) and productivity relatively high at 0.95 chicks, the best year since 2007. There will be a full island count in 2013 which, despite 2012's encouraging figures, is likely to show a further decline in the island population.

Arctic Skua Current Population: 20 AOT (2012) Decreasing

With only 20 AOTs (a 31% decrease from 2011) and one chick surviving to fledging age, it was another poor year for the emblematic bird of FIBO. The survival of the species as a breeding bird on Fair Isle is hanging by a thread.

Great Skua Current Population: 300 AOT (2012) Generally increasing but perhaps now levelling off

The 300 AOT represent a new record for the Fair Isle breeding population and a productivity of 0.53 chicks per AOT was an improvement on 2011.

Kittiwake Current Population: 1,225 AON (2012) Rapidly decreasing

Another drop in the breeding population (by 14.8%) from 2011 continued the drastic decline of this species that has continued since the late 1980s when 19,000 pairs bred on the island. For the second consecutive year, the productivity plots produced no chicks.

Arctic Tern Current Population: 227 AIA (2012) Population fluctuates, but generally decreasing

Although 227 AIA were located, only seven chicks fledged, although this is still an improvement on the eight years in the last decade that have produced no chicks at all.

Common Tern Current Population: 1 AIA (2012)

A pair nested on Bunes and fledged one chick, the first breeding on the island since 2005.

Guillemot Current Population: 19,501 ind (2010) Decreasing

Numbers on the monitoring plots increased (by 32.7% from 2011), perhaps indicating a stabilising of the population after steep declines in the last 15 years or so, but productivity was again poor, with 0.14 chicks per AIA

Razorbill Current Population: 1,365 ind (2010) Decreasing

Although breeding productivity increased to 0.23 chicks fledged per eggs laid, the numbers on the population plot continued to fall.

Black Guillemot Current Population: No figure Slight increase

The count in the population plot (the east coast between the lighthouses) was 182, the highest total since 1997. Productivity is not monitored due to the difficulty of accessing a suitable number of nests.

Puffin Current Population: 10,706 ind (2012) Unclear, but probably decreasing

The total of individuals was a 47.1% increase on the last count (in 2009), although this is a very crude estimate of the total population. The 0.6 chicks fledged per egg laid represented a good breeding season.

Key:

AOS Apparently Occupied Sites

AOT Apparently Occupied Territories

ind Individuals

AON Apparently Occupied Nests

AIA Apparently Incubating Adults

2013: the Seabird Season so Far

As I write this in the third week of May, it's unclear how the season will pan out for the seabirds, but the signs so far are not promising.

The spring has been generally cool and windy, with this affecting some of our monitoring work (we couldn't get good enough conditions for a full island Puffin count for example). What we have seen though is not promising, with auks returning to the cliffs in small numbers and only a few eggs laid so far (most of which have been predated). Black Guillemot monitoring was also affected by the weather, but a count in late March showed numbers present to be broadly similar to recent years. We'll hopefully be heading to Greenholm soon to check the Puffins, which have been returning intermittently to the island in the last few weeks—although the current northerly gales are not good for our little boat!

Shags seem to be having a poor season, with few nests still going successfully in the plots, whilst Kittiwakes have yet to make a serious start on nest building.

Bonxie numbers are notoriously hard to judge until we start the full-scale monitoring, but it is clear that Arctic Skuas are struggling, with no eggs so far and only 9-10 birds present on most days.

Fulmars have just started egg laying, so it's too early to say how the season will go for them.

Gannets have been one of the few consistently successful species in recent years and the colonies look reasonably full this year, with the first chick seen already.

Sadly, the bad years for Fair Isle's seabirds are occurring more frequently, which emphasises the importance of the continued monitoring work undertaken by FIBO.

Nothing's Gonna Change My Love for You



HW94380, 25 years after ringing

The vegetable scraps that are put out for the hill sheep regularly attract gulls and skuas looking for a free meal. Several of these birds have had their rings read this year (which can be done with a telescope from the Obs windows). So far, they have all been birds ringed on Fair Isle and some of the more interesting records include a Great Black-backed Gull ringed as a chick in 1994 and the Bonxie (pictured above) which was ringed as a chick in 1988, making it older than some of the Obs staff (although still well short of the British record of 34 years old). Another interesting Bonxie record recently was a Danish ringed bird found in the Double Dyke trap. We await details of the record, which is likely to involve a bird from the Faroes. And in case you're wondering about the title of this column, it was the song that was top of the charts for Glen Medeiros on 9th July 1988 when the Bonxie seen outside the Obs was ringed!



South Light after the high seas destroyed part of the wall. Note the large blocks that have been washed down onto the football field.

Visiting FIBO in 2013

Open from:

20th April — 31st October

Prices

All prices are per person per night for full board accommodation in an en-suite room.

Single Room:	£65
Double/Twin Room:	£60
Single Occupancy:	£80
Family room: adult	£60
12 years and under	£25
five and under	Free

SPECIAL OFFERS 2013

Young person discount: £30 per night

A limited number of places are available in a dorm room for visitors aged under 25 at the time of their visit. Offer excludes 13th Sep – 13th Oct.

Spring Special (20th April – 12th May):

Enjoy migration, seabirds, flora and more.

Single Room:	£50 per night
Double/Twin Room:	£45 per person per night
Single occupancy:	£65 per person per night

August discount:

There's a chance of migrants and cetaceans, plus Puffins and Storm Petrels early in month,

Single Room:	£50 per night
Double/Twin Room:	£45 per person per night
Single occupancy:	£65 per person per night

Late autumn offer (14th – 31st October):

Some of the rarest birds have arrived at this time.

All rooms: **£45** per person per night

Friends of Fair Isle exclusive:

A **20% reduction** in all room rates in July for all members of FOFI (membership must have begun before 1st January 2013).

Visiting FIBO in 2014

Bookings now open!

Obs open from 11th April to 31st October .

2014 Standard Rates (full board, en-suite):

Single Room:	£70 per night
Double/Twin Room:	£65 per person per night
Single occupancy:	£85 per person per night
Children (6-12):	£30 per night
Children under 6:	free

2014 Discounts (per person):

- * Under 25s: £32.50 per night (excludes 20th September to 4th October).
- * FOFI July offer: 20% off all room rates
- * 19th April – 11th May £50 per night
- * 1st - 31st August £50 per night
- * 15th - 31st October £50 per night

See website or contact FIBO for details

Visiting Britain's most remote inhabited island isn't as daunting as you may think! Just follow the steps below:

1. Contact us to find out if there are spaces for the dates you wish to visit.
2. Book your transport to Fair Isle.
3. Book your transport to Shetland.
4. Get back in touch with FIBO to confirm your booking and pay your deposit.

Transport to Fair Isle:

Flights:

Depart Tingwall (near Lerwick): daily except Sunday (one Saturday flight from Sumburgh)

DirectFlight: 01595 840246

Ferry:

Depart Grutness (near Sumburgh): Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

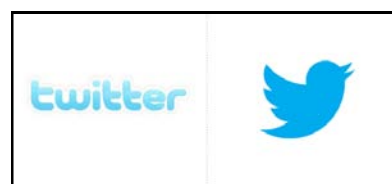
Good Shepherd: 01595 760363

Subsidised Taxi from Lerwick to Tingwall:
01595 745745 (must be booked in advance)

As well as the website and Warden's blog, you can follow the latest new from FIBO on Facebook and Twitter.



facebook.com/fairislebirdobservatory



twitter.com/FI_Obs



Hear news about sightings like this Killer Whale (photographed in May off Bunness by Becki Rosser) first by joining us on Facebook and Twitter.