



WELCOME TO 2016!

By the time you read this, the Obs will have been open to guests for a couple of months and the new season should be starting to shape up nicely.

There's a familiar look to the line-up for the start of the year, with David and Susannah at the helm being joined by several staff

returning from last year. Alice Sinclair Best (childcarer), Ciaran Hatsell, Lee Gregory (both Assistant Wardens), Chris Dodd (Ranger), Orlando Krippner (Cook) and Terri Bowley (Domestic Assistant) are all 'old hands', whilst the new Assistant Cook Michael Krippner and his wife Inessa Vetlugina (Domestic Assistant) should settle in quickly, as the cook is Michael's big brother!

Terri and Alice are only with us for the first part of the season (Alice is starting a blacksmith apprenticeship in Norway in August), so you'll see a couple of changes if you visit in the autumn, but it's good to have a settled team at the start of the year and the feedback we've received so far from guests shows that it's another good bunch this year, so we look forward to seeing many of you in the next few months.

Voelke Keppke, domestic volunteer, is the final face in the team shot below — you can find out how to volunteer at FIBO inside this newsletter.



Back row (left to right): Ciaran, Lee, Susannah, David, Alice, Inessa, Terri, Front row: Voelke, Chris, Orlando and Michael.

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Black-browed Albatross, Fair Isle, 28th May 2016 (left; Lee Gregory, right; Keith Pellow). A first for Fair Isle.

Seabirds 2015

The breeding season in 2014 was one of the better ones of recent years, so we awaited 2015 with baited breath to see whether there was a glimmer of hope that fortunes would start to show an improvement after some very poor productivity for Fair Isle's most important birds.

Although it was certainly not a brilliant year, for some species at least there were continued signs of hope. In particular, there were notable increases in the whole-island counts of Razorbills (1,930 individuals were recorded, a 41% increase on the last count in 2010) and Guillemots (20,924 individuals, an increase of 7.3% from 2010).

Productivity was mixed, with Bonxies having their second best breeding season since 2000 (producing 0.9 chicks per nesting pair), although this coincided with a decrease of 56% in the breeding population to 188 AOT (apparently occupied territories). Arctic Skua productivity fell, but at 0.27 chicks raised per AOT it was still the third best year since 2002.

Breeding success amongst the auks was also mixed, with Puffin productivity falling by nearly 20% to 0.64 chicks fledged per egg laid, whilst Guillemots had their best breeding season since 2006 and Razorbills had their best year since 1998.

Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns had poor years, with numbers of both species decreasing and productivity also falling resulting in only very small numbers of chicks fledging.

The seabird monitoring work that FIBO carries out is supported by Joint Nature Conservation Committee, with Fair Isle being one of the four key sites in the UK for the JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme.

STOP PRESS: early indications are that the 2016 season will be a fairly successful one for many species, with Razorbills and Guillemots starting to fledge, Kittiwakes, Arctic Skuas and Arctic Terns all with chicks and Bonxies breeding in record numbers. Full details will follow in the next FOFI newsletter this winter.

Remembering Ann Prior

FIBO was very saddened to learn that Ann Prior passed away in April. Ann first came to Fair Isle in 1979 and, although not working at the Obs every year since, was a regular fixture in the kitchen until 2014. You knew the kitchen was in safe hands when Ann was Cook and many a Warden and Administrator benefitted from her experience. Ann really came into her own when supplies were running low and the Good Shepherd didn't sail, managing to produce a meal for all with the minimum of fuss and no panic. There was, of course, an awful lot more to Ann than her abilities in the kitchen, she was an accomplished artist and author, and a full obituary will appear in the FIBO 2016 Annual Report.



Spring sightings

Some decent spells of easterly winds brought some very good birding this spring. The best bird's arrival however was not weather-related, with a magnificent Black-browed Albatross found from the Good Shepherd on 28th May, which then lingered over the island for a couple of hours. Another first for the island was a Little Egret (picture below by Lee Gregory) on 20th May. A Calandra Lark on 10th-13th May was the sixth for the isle (from a British total of 19 records). The Little Ringed Plover found at the same time as the Calandra Lark was the more desirable Fair Isle bird, with only three previous records and the last in 1979. It was therefore even more surprising when another was seen on 23rd May. The same day saw a Collared Flycatcher, another top-quality rarity, whilst an impressive supporting cast during May included two Red-throated Pipits, two Rustic Buntings, Woodchat Shrike, Hoopoe and seven Subalpine Warblers. There were some decent numbers of scarce migrants, including a strong passage of Bluethroats and Red-backed Shrikes, with peaks of six and five respectively, but only small numbers of Wrynecks, Marsh and Icterine Warblers and no Common Rosefinch. Short-toed Lark, two Ortolans, Nightingale, Shorelark, three Cranes, Corncrake, 7 Hawfinches and a smart male Red-breasted Flycatcher were also logged.



Annual Report update

We're very sorry for the delay in the production of the Annual Report for 2014. FIBOT was very keen to see the report switch to an all colour version, which has unfortunately slowed down production by longer than anticipated. We're hoping to have it with you within the next few weeks. The good news is that the 2015 report should be able to be produced very quickly afterwards, so we'll hopefully be back up to speed by the end of the year.

My volunteering at FIBO

Logan Johnson, 17

Recipient of a SABF grant

I've been coming to Fair Isle for quite a few years now but one thing I've always wanted to do is work at the Bird Obs, I had three weeks off in May so I decided that this would finally be the time for me to work there.

Being the first volunteer of the year there were a lot of jobs to be done, fixing the garden fence, washing out the bird bags, watering the garden, writing up the Log sightings, finding old records, tour-guiding, clearing out the Obs wader scrape, ringing (with highlights of Swallow, Collared Dove and Bluethroat), census (which was a tad difficult at times because you could hardly see 50 metres in front of you!), monitoring and surveying.

For me, having visited the island many times, you'd think I would have run out of things to do but Puffin monitoring on Greenholm was a new experience for me, the wardening team set out in the Obs boat along the east coast, I've travelled on boats before but never such a peerie one on a big sea! On Greenholm the task was to locate the Puffin nests and to do that was quite simple, stick your hands down the holes to find them! It was fun, it takes time to get into the way of it but I loved having a feel in the nest to find the eggs and parents at the bottom.

The other big excitement came one day when I'd just come back from the south of the island in the early morning, I headed straight to the ringing room, when Susannah came in and said 'there's a Black-browed Albatross off the Good Shepherd and Lee can see it from Bunes!'. With that I ran out the room with Ciaran hot on my heels and we legged it to the Havens, it was just able to be seen but I headed up to Bunes to look with Lee and soon everyone joined us. Next thing you know it was over Bunes and everyone was frantically legging it the other way! We watched it circling over South Gavel and it looked colossal! The atmosphere was unreal and you could just feel it around you, after it flew off to Sheep Rock everyone was just stunned, not believing they had just seen an Albatross!

Want to volunteer at FIBO?

Volunteers are a very important part of the Obs, with a number of people giving their time every year to help us with our work. Volunteering opportunities are advertised during the winter and there is usually a deadline for application in February or March. As well as volunteering opportunities in the wardening team (with the John Harrison Memorial Fund and Simon Aspinall Bursary Fund offering travel grants for volunteers under the age of 25), there are also opportunities for volunteers to help run the bar and to assist with the domestic work (four hours of cleaning a day and clearing and laying tables). Board and lodging is provided free of charge for bar and domestic volunteers.

Full details can be found on the FIBO website.



To all the guests who ask about how Freyja and Grace are, thanks for asking! Grace is now one of only two pupils at the school and Freyja is the only one at nursery. They both love life on the Isle and will be happy to play Dobble with you!

Visiting FIBO

Peak periods in 2017 are already looking pretty full, so please get in touch soon if you're hoping to visit us next year. There are still a few spaces available in 2016 as well, so if you fancy a trip in the summer then get in touch and we'll hopefully see you soon!

Visiting FIBO in 2017

The Obs is open from 17th April to 31st October .

2017 Standard Rates (full board, en-suite):

Single Room:	£75 per night
Double/Twin Room:	£70 per person per night
Single occupancy:	£85 per person per night
Children (6-12):	£32.50 per night
Children under 6:	free

2017 Discounts (per person):

Under 25s:	£35 per night
FOFI July offer:	20% off all room rates
17th April – 12th May	£60 per night
1st – 31st August	£60 per night
16th – 31st October	£60 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)



FIBOT Director Ian Andrews has been putting a lot of work into the FIBO website in the last couple of years and it is now a treasure trove of information about the work of FIBO and the island generally, as well as being the place to check for up to date sightings of what has been seen on the island. Ian is always keen to receive further photos for the website or future publications, so if you have any old photos (particularly dated ones) of people, birds or the island, please get in touch.

As well as the website, you can follow the latest news from FIBO on Facebook and Twitter.

www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk



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