



No. 46. September 2018

It's been a while since the last Newsletter, so apologies to all the Friends of Fair Isle who have been waiting for an update. Hopefully you have been able to keep in touch with some of the regular goings on via the website and our social media platforms.

Every year we also get to meet many of our members at the Birdfair at Rutland Water and this year was another busy one on the stand as director Ian Cowgill and volunteers Steve Arlow, Shirley Newbold and Lynn Cowgill met a variety of potential new visitors and old friends. Ian was particularly impressed by meeting a lady who had first visited the Obs in its old naval hut days and was able to recall fascinating stories of 'Fieldy' Stout and George Waterston—a lovely reminder of FIBO's history and heritage.

Thanks to everyone who helped on the stand and to all those who came to say hello. We'll be there again next year, so do try to call in if you're at the Birdfair.



Photo by Ian Cowgill

For those of you who have been to visit us this year, you will have noticed one of the largest construction projects to have taken place on Fair Isle for many years as Fair Isle Electricity Company has taken on a £2.65 million project, which will provide 24 hour power to the whole island for the first time. The current turbines will be replaced by three new 60kW turbines (which have been named Lukki Minni, Grotti Finni and Tushi, after the Fair Isle Guidfiks, by the pupils of Fair Isle Primary School), with a solar array, new battery storage and high voltage network across the island also being provided. The new project should be operational this autumn, so congratulations to everyone involved for all the hard work to benefit the island.

In this newsletter you'll find summaries of the seabird season, interesting ringing movements so far this year and breeding birds, along with changes to the Fair Isle list and features on the FIBO website (a tremendous source of all sorts of information about the island) and Killer Whales. As ever, we'd love to hear from you if there's anything in particular you'd like featured in the Newsletter, so please get in touch.

David and Susannah Parnaby
FIBO Warden and Administrator

Visiting FIBO

This year has been one of the busiest in FIBO's history and 2019 is already filling up, especially in the peak seasons. Please book early if you'd like to visit, to avoid disappointment. Remember that booking for 2020 opens on 1st March 2019 for FOI members, a month before bookings open to the rest of the public.

Visiting FIBO in 2019

The Obs is open from mid-April to 31st October (note, the Obs will be closed from 1st-8th August)

2019 Standard Rates (full board, en-suite):

Single Room:	£80 per night
Double/Twin Room:	£75 per person per night
Single occupancy:	£90 per person per night
Children (6-16):	£35 per night
Children under 6:	free

2019 Special Offers (per person):

Young Person (17-24):	£40 per night
FOI July offer:	20% off all room rates
April – 11th May	£65 per night
15th – 31st October	£65 per night

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Seabirds in 2018

It has been a good season for several of Fair Isle's breeding seabirds, although there have also been a few disappointments. Diet studies showed that there were reasonable-sized sandeels (6cm to 8cm) being brought in, along with young Gadoids (fish of the cod family), which was backed up by anecdotal evidence on visits to the colonies.

This resulted in particularly good years for the auks (especially Razorbill and Puffin), whilst the productivity figures for Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes may have been higher if it were not for predation (Hooded Crows and gulls taking Arctic Tern eggs and chicks, whilst Bonxies were the likely culprits for several medium to large Kittiwake chicks going missing). The poor productivity of Arctic Skuas (only one chick fledged from 28 occupied territories) was especially disappointing, as it appeared that the species that they klepto-parasitise were bringing in plenty of fish. Most Arctic Skuas failed at egg stage, with nests often being left unattended as the birds were off foraging for food, this in turn led to them being vulnerable to predation, with Lesser Black-backed Gulls and other Arctic Skuas seen taking unattended eggs.

Bonxies continue their fluctuating increase, with the figures so far suggesting that the total population has (just) pipped the 2016 count to become the highest-ever number holding territory on the Isle. Bonxie productivity was low however, with many chicks being predated by other Bonxies, especially towards the end of the season.

For the second consecutive year, the BTO came to Fair Isle to continue their tracking work on Arctic Skuas, which should give us some detailed information on the foraging ranges and wintering areas of the Fair Isle population. Guillemots and Razorbills were also tagged last year as part of a study by Bob Furness looking at the wintering areas of these species, whilst a student collected over 700 Bonxie pellets to look at the amount of plastic in their diet. Keep an eye on the 2018 Annual Report for more details.

Summary of the seabird season on Fair Isle in 2018 (note that some of the final published figures may differ slightly from those given here):

Population monitoring

Fulmar (plots)	- 8.3% since 2017 to 363 AOS	LOWEST SINCE 2015
Gannet (whole-island)	+ 10.5% since 2017 to 4291 AON	!!! HIGHEST EVER !!!
Shag (plots)	- 3.3% since 2017 to 29 AON	LOWEST SINCE 2016
Arctic Skua (whole-island)	- 6.7% since 2017 to 28 AOT	LOWEST SINCE 2013
Great Skua (whole-island)	+ 75.1% since 2017 to 520 AOT	!!! HIGHEST EVER !!!
Kittiwake (plots)	- 30.6% since 2017 to 34 AON	LOWEST EVER
Arctic Tern (whole-island)	- 41.0% since 2017 to 190 AON	LOWEST SINCE 2016
Common Tern (whole-island)	no change (0 AIA in 2017)	NO CHANGE
Guillemot (plots)	+ 30.2% since 2017 to 1224 individuals	HIGHEST SINCE 2016
Razorbill (plot)	+ 82.0% since 2017 to 42 individuals	HIGHEST SINCE 2006
Black Guillemot (east coast)	- 7.0% since 2017 to 199 individuals	LOWEST SINCE 2016

Breeding success monitoring

Fulmar (plots)	+ 3.8% to 0.54 chicks fledged per AOS	HIGHEST SINCE 2013
Gannet (plots)	monitoring ongoing	
Shag (plots)	+ 313.2% to 0.91 chicks fledged per AON	HIGHEST SINCE 2015
Arctic Skua (whole-island)	+ 33.3% to 0.04 chicks fledged per AOT	HIGHEST SINCE 2016
Great Skua (whole-island)	- 28.6% to 0.35 chicks fledged per AOT	LOWEST SINCE 2014
Kittiwake (plots)	+ 135.0% to 0.47 chicks fledged per AON	HIGHEST SINCE 2016
Arctic Tern (whole-island)	+ 116.7% to 0.13 chicks fledged per AON	HIGHEST SINCE 2016
Common Tern (whole-island)	no change (0 in 2016)	NO CHANGE
Guillemot (plots)	+ 247.1% to 0.59 chicks fledged per egg laid	HIGHEST SINCE 2015
Razorbill (plot)	+ 58.0% to 0.79 chicks fledged per egg laid	HIGHEST SINCE 1998
Black Guillemot (east coast)	N/A (monitoring sites no longer viable)	NO CHANGE
Atlantic Puffin (plots)	+ 87.5% to 0.90 chicks fledged per egg laid	!!! HIGHEST EVER !!!



This is the only Arctic Skua to fledge from Fair Isle this year, the same number as 2017. That's still better than 2013, 2011, 2008, 2007 and 2004 all of which were total failures.



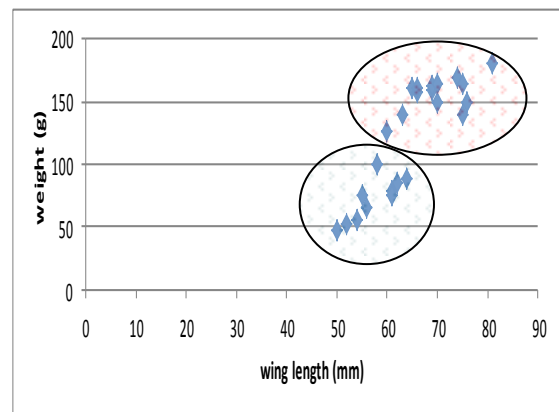
Razorbills carrying Gadoids (left) and sandeels (right) in to their chicks at the Easter Lother colony. Watching an adult Razorbill slide one fish at a time out of its bill into the waiting gape of the youngster is always a highlight of the seabird monitoring.



Kittiwake productivity was the third highest in the last 16 years



Although Razorbill productivity was 0.5 in 2017, many of the chicks that fledged were small



and underweight and would have struggled to have survived their first winter. In 2018 the weights were much better, as demonstrated in the graph above. This shows the final measurements before fledging of the chicks in 2017 (lower, yellow-tinted circle) and 2018 (red-tinted oval). Most of the 2017 chicks were much smaller, but there was a difference of between 40g and 80g of chicks of the same size, which shows just how much better the food supply was in 2018.

Find out about Nina O'Hanlon's work looking at plastic incorporation into Gannet nests here:

<https://ninajohanlon.wordpress.com/2018/06/07/scottish-gannets-and-plastic-nests/>



Compare these typical Puffin food samples from 2018 (above) and 2017 (right) to get an idea of why productivity was better this year.

Both samples are sandeels, but the 2017 fish are so small they're tricky to see (and even harder to weigh and measure!).



The Fair Isle List

In January 2018, the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) adopted the International Ornithologists' Committee's (IOC) list, which resulted in the several changes to the British, and therefore, Fair Isle, list.

Two species were added to the Fair Isle list:

Taiga Bean Goose: split from Tundra Bean Goose

Eastern Yellow Wagtail: split from Yellow Wagtail. The Fair Isle record on 9th October 1909 is the first British record.

Two species were removed from the Fair Isle list:

Hudsonian Whimbrel: which has been lumped with Whimbrel

Isabelline Shrike: which has been split into Daurian and Turkestan Shrike. None of the four Fair Isle records are currently acceptable as either of these species.



Taiga Bean Goose, 11th December 2011, Kenaby.



Left to right: Glaucous-winged Gull, Green Warbler and Crag Martin.



In addition, the following records have been accepted by the BBRC and have been added to the Fair Isle list:

Glaucous-winged Gull, 2nd March 2017

Green Warbler, 4th-7th July 2017

With one record currently pending, which is also a potential addition to the Isle list:

Crag Martin, 14th-16th May 2018

If the latter record is accepted, the Fair Isle list will stand at 391 at the end of August 2018, along with one 'species group' (Daurian/Turkestan Shrike). There are also two species in Category D (Daurian Starling and Red-headed Bunting) and 17 additional species that have been recorded in Category E. For full details, see: www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk/bird_list.html.

The taxonomic changes saw Siberian Stonechat split into two species, with subspecies *maurus* becoming Siberian Stonechat and *stejnegeri* becoming Stejneger's Stonechat. Currently, there are only two acceptable records of Siberian Stonechat for Fair Isle; the long-staying 'Caspian Stonechat' in spring 2014 and the bird on 16th-31st October 2016 that had its DNA analysed.

How you can help.

It may be possible in the future to retrospectively identify some previous records of 'Siberian Stonechat' to species level—if you have good quality photographs of any previous records, we'd love to see them and the same applies to the Isabelline Shrikes seen on the Isle.

Another similar situation exists for Subalpine Warblers and we'd love to get any pictures of records prior to 2012—particularly of males or any birds that show the spread tail. The eastern and western subspecies groups of Subalpine Warblers seem likely to be split in the future and currently it is tail pattern (see the pictures below for the differences, with eastern birds showing a long wedge on the second outermost tail feather) and call that are the safest ways of distinguishing them (although males may be identifiable on plumage). Anyone with photos (or field notes, especially if they mention the bird's call) please let us know.



Left to right: Western Subalpine Warbler 30th May 2017 (Ciaran Hatsell), Eastern Subalpine Warbler 8th May 2014 (Ciaran Hatsell) Siberian Stonechat 16th October 2016 (Steve Arlow)

Ten things you may have missed on the FIBO website

FIBOT director and webmaster Ian Andrews talks you through some of the content of the FIBO website

The FIBO website contains a wealth of information and we are always trying to add more content. Here are ten pages that may be of interest.

Latest sightings ('Latest sightings & archive' dropdown menu). This is the most-visited page on our website and is probably the one you least need reminding about! This page is updated by the Warden on a regular basis throughout the year to provide daily summaries of what has been seen in the Isle. Add it to your browser's favourites to get the fastest access to this page.

Annual bird reports ('Resources' dropdown menu). A full set of pdfs is available to download. These cover the years 1948 to 2012, but new reports will be added in time. Also on this page, you'll find links to FIBO Bulletins (1950-67) and FOFI Newsletters (we seem to be missing numbers 2 and 38, if you have them). For access to online reports for all of Scotland search for the SOC's 'Online Scottish Bird Report'.

Useful downloads for a visit ('Resources' dropdown menu). Here you will find an easy-to-download checklist and A4 map. The list is not the full Fair Isle list, rather it contains the common and scarce birds only. There is space for the ever-optimistic write-ins too!

Online shop ('Shop and payments' dropdown menu). It is possible to buy many items using a Paypal-based online shop. These include Annual Reports, clothing, books, maps etc. Overseas visitors, especially, may also find this a convenient way to pay deposits for accommodation.

Annual calendar ('Birds' dropdown menu). If you are planning a visit, this page runs through the months, describing what might be happening in terms of bird migration through the seasons. Of course, every year is different – that's what brings you back year after year!

Flowers, moths, butterflies and lichens ('Other wildlife' dropdown menu). Two lists have been added recently; Fair Isle's flowers (Camila Quinteros Peñafiel, Nick Riddiford and Alex Twyford) and Lepidoptera (Nick Riddiford). A lichen page (by Steve Price) is also available, providing a summary of the full list published in the 2016 Annual Report.

Financial assistance for young volunteers ('Getting involved' dropdown menu). FIBO has long encouraged young birdwatchers and naturalists to visit the Isle. Two funds are now available to provide financial assistance to anyone between the ages of 16 and 24 who wishes to volunteer as part of the Wardening team. If you are over 24, please pass the word on!

Photographs in the FIBO archives ('Resources' dropdown menu). Photographs are being added to this extensive resource all the time. These are mostly photographs of people and places over the years and document the huge changes that have taken place over the decades. If you have any photographs (slides or prints) that you would like us to add to our archives, please get in touch. We can scan and return and we would greatly appreciate your contributions.

Fair Isle Information ('About Fair Isle' dropdown menu). This page opens up a whole host of areas to learn more about, whether you want to discover more about knitwear, geology or the shop opening hours, you'll find it here!

And finally, the **home page** highlights the new items that have been added most recently. It also gives an idea of accommodation vacancies that may be available (but always check with Susannah for up-to-date information).

Please explore our website and if you have any suggestions, please let David (fibo@btconnect.com) or Ian (ijandrews@live.com) know.



Killer Whales on Fair Isle

Recent years have seen annual records of Killer Whales and, although the numbers have been variable, the trend has been of more frequent occurrences of this magnificent dolphin (they're technically not a whale!) around Fair Isle.

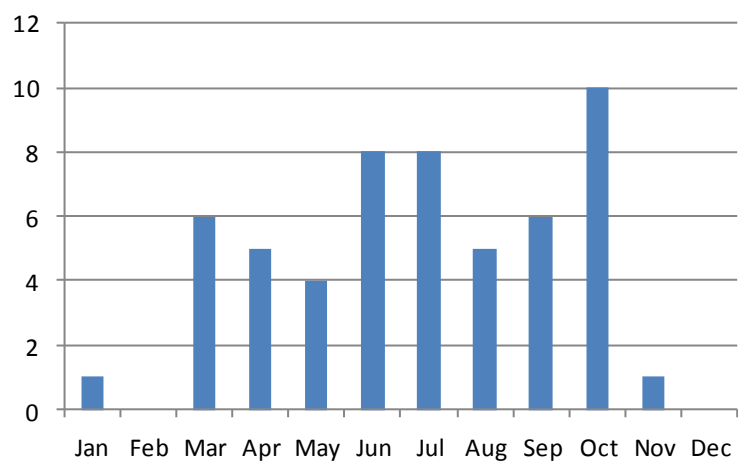
Several sightings involve returning individuals that can be identified thanks to scars on their saddles or the shapes of their fins, with the advent of digital cameras making comparisons between years and different sites much easier.

As a result of this, we know that many of the animals that visit Fair Isle are coming here to hunt Grey Seals and then spend the winter in Iceland where they feed on Herring.

If you have any high-quality picture of Killer Whales taken pre-2013, we'd love to see them to see if we can identify any individuals..



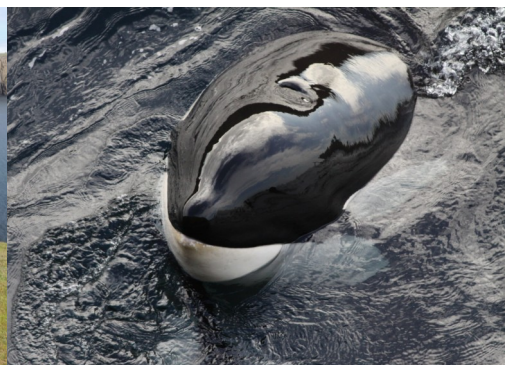
Left: Killer Whale 'Mousa', a regular visitor to Shetland, who has been to Fair Isle in 2011 and 2016 (with her calf) and seen in Iceland in several winters inbetween.



Number of days Killer Whales recorded by month 2008-2017

When can I see Killer Whales?

The graph on the left shows the number of days Killer Whales have been observed by month during the last ten years. Winter sightings are rare and the peak in October is bolstered by sightings on six dates in October 2015. There's a marginally higher chance of sightings in June and July, when long daylight hours and calm seas help detection, but the answer to 'when can I see Killer Whales?' is potentially any time—but you've still got to be very lucky!





The Breeding Birds of Fair Isle



Seabirds are the most notable breeding birds on Fair Isle, but there are also a number of breeding land-birds that are worthy of mention as well. Amongst the resident species, House Sparrow, Starling and Rock Pipit are present in good numbers, with smaller numbers of the endemic 'Fair Isle Wren', Rock Dove (one of the last British 'pure' populations), Hooded Crow and Raven.

Meadow Pipit, Skylark and Wheatear are widespread summer breeding visitors, with Twite also largely absent in the winter, when the majority of the population head to Orkney. A few pairs of Pied Wagtails come to the Isle to breed, with Swallows maintaining a more ephemeral breeding presence.

Waders are well represented, with Oystercatcher, Snipe, Ringed Plover, Lapwing and Curlew all present in roughly that order of abundance, but of the wildfowl, only Eider and a few pairs of Mallards (possibly largely descended from feral stock) nest.



Juvenile Red-necked Phalarope, July 2018

In the last two years we've had some really interesting breeding records, with the headline act being Red-necked Phalarope. A pair fledged three chicks in 2017, with two males producing chicks in 2018, two of which fledged from one nest. The chick from the second nest was predated shortly before fledging.

Perhaps the most surprising breeding record

though was another first for the Isle, with a Pintail seen with eight ducklings in 2018, one of which went on to fledge. Another 'first' was the confirmation of successful nesting by Linnets in 2017. Although the original nest in the Gully was destroyed by bad weather, the birds relocated to the Wirvie area and fledged chicks. The species has been increasing in Shetland and Orkney and breeding was suspected in Fair Isle in 2012, so it was not a surprise that they have finally bred on Fair Isle, although with no breeding records in 2018, colonisation is far from complete. A pair of Carrion Crows that lingered for over a year around the south of the Isle were seen carrying nest material to Malcolm's Head, although it is not clear if the attempt progressed beyond this. Although there have been hybrid pairs with Hooded Crow, this would potentially be the first 'pure' pair of Carrion Crows to breed on Fair Isle or Shetland.

Redshank nested successfully back in 2015 and, although pairs have displayed again since then, there has been no further signs of breeding, whilst Dunlin, whose elusive presence on the upland moorland in the summer often hints at breeding, probably did so in 2017 at least. The pair of Golden Plover that fledged chicks in 2017 was a very good record; previous breeding attempts involved up to two pairs during 1924-1926, a pair that hatched chicks in 1970 and suspected breeding in 1989.

Recent years have seen lingering Chiffchaffs becoming a regular feature of the summer, whilst most summers also see a small number of Robins present, so perhaps one of those could be the next species to breed on the island. As several gardens around the Isle mature and provide new habitats, and we see the effects on the distribution of a number of species due to climate change, it seems

likely there may be more additions to the Fair Isle breeding bird population in coming years. The list of species that have previously nested on the Isle on at least one occasion is fairly extensive and includes: Red-breasted Merganser, Quail, Corncrake, White-tailed Eagle, Peregrine, Whimbrel, Cuckoo, House Martin, Sedge Warbler, Blackbird, Redwing, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Yellow (and 'Grey-headed') Wagtail, Grey Wagtail and 'White Wagtail', What do you think will be next?



Female Pintail, May 2018



Golden Plover, July 2017



So far, 2018 has been an exciting year for ringing movements, with the map above showing some of the more interesting records of birds moving to or from Fair Isle in the first eight months of the year. Red markers are those that were ringed elsewhere and found on the Isle, with the purple markers representing Fair Isle birds moving elsewhere. Full details of all these movements will appear in the FIBO 2018 Annual Report .