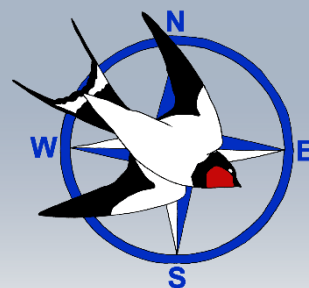


The newsletter of the British Bird Observatories Council



Welcome to the first BOC Newsletter.

Back in 2012, Patrick Old from Sandwich Bay suggested that we put together a brief roundup of the year's highlights from each Observatory. We discussed this again at the 2013 meeting of the BOC, so to try and get things off the ground I have put together this newsletter. Please feel free to print a copy for your Obs and email it to your members and friends. I hope you enjoy reading it and hearing what happened in 2014 at the British Observatories

Thanks to all the Obs who have contributed and to Richard Brown for looking at the proof. I hope you don't mind that I have taken some images from your web sites to illustrate your articles.

Hope 2015 is as good if not even better than 2014!

Steve Stansfield – BOC Chairman



Skokholm – Richard Brown

The first year of operating as a reaccredited Bird Observatory was an exciting and varied one. The winter seabird wrecks inevitably led to a lot of attention focussing on our Puffin, Razorbill and Guillemot colonies. Both whole Island counts and the monitoring of colour ringed individuals showed that all three species had been heavily impacted, although counts were still some of the highest in recent decades. Productivity was also on the low side, perhaps owing to a reduction in the fitness of the breeding birds. Skokholm again played host to seabird projects in conjunction with the Edward Grey Institute and Cardiff University and this year saw the start of two exciting new projects, one a Lesser Black-backed Gull GPS tracking study run by the BTO and one a Storm Petrel project run by Cardiff and Gloucestershire Universities.

It was an excellent year for ringing on the Island with 48 different visiting ringers helping us handle 8483 birds including 6098 new birds of 59 species. Avian highlights included the first Collared Pratincole for Skokholm and Pembrokeshire, the first Eastern Subalpine Warbler and Purple Heron for Skokholm, Cory's Shearwater, two Spoonbill, the fourth to sixth records of Mute Swan, Dotterel, a couple of Wryneck, Richard's Pipit, Siberian Lesser Whitethroat, Icterine Warbler, four Red-breasted Flycatcher, Common Rosefinch and an Ortolan Bunting. Non-avian highlights included the discovery of five new species of bat for Skokholm, including Nathusius' Pipistrelle and Leisler's, as part of a project looking at bat migration. The moths again came in for further scrutiny with

around 45 species of micro-moth found to be new for the Island including the Nationally Scarce A species *Enteucha acetosae* and *Caryocolum vicinella*.

As always, so much of what was achieved this year was thanks to the work of our four long-term volunteers who spend three months on the Island helping with all aspects of our work. We will again be looking for four volunteers for 2015, details of which can be found on the Skokholm blog (skokholm.blogspot.co.uk) or the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales website:

<http://www.welshwildlife.org/skokholm-long-term-volunteers-2015/>



Isle of May – Mark Newell

A mild winter merged into spring, which proved to be remarkably calm and dry. Although there were very few windy days the prevailing direction was easterly which brought about a flurry of scarce migrants throughout the spring. The autumn was largely dominated by westerlies but occasional blasts of mainly south-easterly produced a few pulses of migrants and a few outstanding rarities. **January** Red-necked Grebe – 2 (20th & 21st records) **February** Egyptian Goose - 1st record **April** 5 Tufted Duck – 2nd highest day count **May** Serin – 1st record, Firecrest – 25th record, Hawfinch – 7th record, Icterine Warbler – 4 individuals **June** Red-backed Shrike – 2 individuals **July** Quail **September** Citrine Wagtail – 2nd record, Lanceolated Warbler – 2nd record, Hobby – 6th record **October** Bearded Tit – flock of 13+. 2nd record, Long-tailed Skua – 10th record, Wigeon – 123 highest day count, Yellow-browed Warbler – 2nd highest day count **November** Taiga Bean Goose – 1st record

Following completion of the upgrade of our accommodation, the 'official re-opening' of the Low Light took place on 5 July



2014. Around 60 persons attended the event. IoMBO Trust Chairman, Ian Darling, gave thanks to those involved in the task, particularly Mark Oksien, who supervised the upgrade, and all the individuals and organisations who had donated money towards the redevelopment. Ian Ross, Chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage completed the ceremony with a short speech and the cutting of the cake.



The upgrade has allowed us to run the first 'Young Birders' Training Course', in collaboration with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. Six participants spent a week from 5 July experiencing/contributing to Obs life and were supervised in practical tasks such as species recording & monitoring, seabird ringing and habitat work. In August solar panels were installed at the Low Light (see *Scottish Birds* 34:4 Dec 2014). The next major task is to improve the storage capabilities for the water supply, with work due to commence in March next year – volunteers welcome!

Our best ever yearlist total (164) in 2013 included White-billed Diver and Bridled Tern, both new for the island, and our seventh Radde's Warbler, while 2014 has provided first records of Egyptian Goose and Serin, plus second records of Citrine Wagtail, Lanceolated Warbler, Bean Goose (two *fabalis* birds) and Bearded Tit – the latter a flock of 13+ birds though one lost to a Peregrine as they flew over! 2014 marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Observatory, and as part of our celebration of this, and to underpin our promotion of the Observatory and its work in the future, a new logo (our first 'official' one) has been designed.



Spurn – Paul Collins

The year began festooned in rubbish and mud from the tidal surge on the previous 5th December. After many weekends volunteer workers from all

over the county had begun to make a big difference to the clean up with piles of rubbish (mainly plastics) taken away by the council bringing back some resemblance of normality to the place, albeit with the breach in the peninsula being twice as long as it was in the previous October when it had first breached, destroying the road.

TV presenter, naturalist and all round nice guy Mike Dilger agreed to become patron of the Observatory and together many fundraising events are planned.

The Church Field owned by the Observatory was extensively planted up with trees and a new Heligoland trap with funding from the Sita Trust. With very few trees in the area this new habitat is hoped to be very fruitful once it is established, watch this space.

Other events took place throughout the year including the annual BBQ which was enjoyed by all that attended. The second ever Spurn Migration Festival also took place in early September with more people than last year having a great time with plenty of good birds around and very interesting varied talks in the evening, along with the very popular Hog-roast, making it a must for 2015.

On the bird front the year started with three long staying Bewick's Swans and the occasional sighting of a Black-throated Diver at sea and a very unseasonal Green Sandpiper. Whilst February's highlights were mostly at sea with a Fea's Petrel, some Glaucous Gulls and a Grey Phalarope, the odd White-fronted Goose in and around the area kept us going until spring arrived. The biggest highlight of the spring was the first confirmed sighting of a White-billed Diver heading back out to sea from the Humber, the 385th species recorded at Spurn. A back up cast included Ring-necked Duck (2nd record), Pallid Swift, plenty of Red Kites and a single Honey Buzzard and Montague's Harrier, along with the usual Bee-eater, Bluethroat, Hoopoe, 4 Marsh Warblers, 6 Icterine Warblers, 2 Subalpine Warblers, Yellow-browed Warbler, 4 Red-breasted Flycatchers, 4 Golden Orioles, many Red-backed Shrikes and a Woodchat Shrike, not forgetting the 3 Common Rosefinches.

A much better breeding season than the last few years, with most passerine species faring well. A pair of Greylag Geese raised three youngsters in the Triangle, the first breeding record of this species. Record numbers of Little Terns fledged (60), all down to the continued hard work of the wardens especially during their nightshifts keeping foxes at bay.

An amazing autumn with three new species for the Spurn area (if all records are accepted) starting with a long staying Masked Shrike (third UK record) followed on the same day by an elusive Blackpoll Warbler and then a close fly-by Stellar's Eider. Apart from these firsts there was the second Terek Sandpiper, an Isabelline Shrike another Pallid Swift and Pacific Golden Plover as back up.

Then the "lesser" rarities included single Olive-backed and Red-throated Pipits, 2 Radde's Warblers, a Little Bunting and Rose-coloured Starling, with the bulk being made up of a Hoopoe, 14 Wrynecks, a Green Woodpecker (rare for Spurn), 3 Woodlarks, 4+ Richard's Pipits, 6 Water Pipits, a Bluethroat, 3 Marsh Warblers, 2 Icterine Warblers, 18 Barred Warblers, 43+ Yellow-browed Warblers, 13 Red-breasted Flycatchers, 12 Great Grey Shrikes and 4 Common Rosefinches. Whilst just to underline the good breeding season 8800 Tree Sparrow flew south. Seabirds were represented with single Balearic and Cory's Shearwater, a handful of Leach's Petrels and 14 Long-

tailed Skuas, 2 Red-necked and 6 Grey Phalaropes and record day counts of Great Skuas (335) and Little Auks (332).

After this amazing year the winter petered out leaving us to organize ourselves against some massive planning applications which could have huge detrimental effects on the Spurn community and the fauna and flora that use it. Let's see what 2015 brings!



**Landguard
Bird
Observatory**

Landguard – Nigel Odin

We were extremely fortunate in 2014 that Tim Bagworth returned for his second year as seasonal

warden. The position of Seasonal Warden for mid-March to mid-November 2015 is unfilled at present with further information available from landguardbo@yahoo.co.uk

2014 saw all the expected spring migrants arrive up to a month earlier than they had in the long cold spring of 2013. The first baby birds were also noted up to a month earlier with juvenile productivity much better than the previous year. Spring falls of common migrants were low in number but in the scarcity department a couple of Serins passed through in March with May 27th bringing Common Rosefinch and singing Greenish Warbler. June was great for the number of baby birds including only the 4th site record of Nuthatch. Perseverance with the ringing resulted in the 1st site record of White-throated Sparrow found in a mist net on 19th June. Three pairs of Ringed Plover on the nature reserve fledged seven young which is the most productive year this century which has only produced a grand total of eleven young in the previous 13 years.

In autumn September was better than for many years with a good variety of species and scarcities including 3 Wryneck, 3 Red-backed Shrike, Red-throated Pipit, Red-breasted Flycatcher & Ortolan Bunting. The entire autumn produced record numbers of Grey Wagtails with over 100 ringed plus a control caught on 28th September that had been ringed 108km east of us in Hertfordshire as a pullus on 12th April this year. Not sure what this tells us about Grey Wagtail passage except that we have more to learn. A total of 39 Tree Pipits is also better than for many years but Redpolls, conversely, had their worst autumn ever. Decent falls were almost non-existent during the autumn although 14th October was eventful producing 35 Ring Ouzels and 70 Robins. The day prior to this saw what was probably the bird of the year in the form of a large dark petrel flying past loosely associating with two Sooty Shearwaters that eluded a positive identification. Much time is spent at Landguard undertaking "viz mig" with notable movements being 3,110 Swallows south 23rd September, 8,530 Wood Pigeons south 22nd October and offshore 12,378 Brent Geese south 30th October.

Moth wise another dozen species were added to the site list. Butterflies included the first site record of High-brown Fritillary which was the first in Suffolk since 1959.

Annual reports and updated species lists will be available early in 2015 on www.lbo.org.uk



Walney – Colin Raven

At the beginning of the year violent winter storms saw large areas of the island regularly flooded and also produced a seabird wreck with Razorbill and Guillemot most affected along with smaller numbers of Kittiwake and Fulmar. Several Great Northern Divers were regularly seen offshore amongst 11 Shag and good numbers of Red-throated Diver and Common Scoter. An out of season Great Skua, adult Mediterranean Gull and a total of 19 Little Gull were also logged. Up to 27 Little Egret stalked the eastern shore and wildfowl in residence included 172 pale-bellied Brent Geese, 84 Barnacle Geese, and 60 dark-bellied Brent Geese while an adult Black Brant also occasionally wandered into the recording area. Wader highlights involved 11 Greenshank, five Jack Snipe and two Black-tailed Godwit. Passerines were generally in short supply although a wintering flock of up to 50 Twite were present and a blizzard of seven Snow Buntings was seen.

Spring passage over the sea was dominated by a White-winged Black Tern - the first island record and the first to be seen in Cumbria since 2001. Additional sightings included 19 Arctic Skua, four Pomarine Skua, three Little Gull and single Black Tern and Blue Fulmar. The skies added totals of 181 northbound Whooper Swans and 830 Pink-footed Geese and diurnal migration steadily increased through March, though sightings were dominated by Meadow Pipit (1,495 on 30th, 1,505 on 31st). Both Marsh Harrier and Osprey headed north. Although the island's earliest ever Cuckoo was trapped and ringed (14th April) passerine migration was generally unspectacular with a late female Black Redstart the highlight. The summer months saw the continued and spectacular demise of the island's Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull colony and the Eider colony again had a very poor breeding season. The Great Black-backed Gull population however remained stable whilst a pair of Coal Tits was found to be breeding, just the fourth island record and Water Rail also bred successfully. The main observatory activity concerned the complete dismantlement and rebuilding of one of the four heligoland traps after 30 years' service.

Early autumn saw the build-up of a newly formed hirundine roost on the island which resulted in the ringing of record numbers of Swallow and Sand Martin. Wildfowl and wader passage began with an early returning Pintail and Wood Sandpiper while Greenshank numbers steadily increased until 30 birds were present and several Little Ringed Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and Spotted Redshank were also logged. Although good numbers of Sedge Warbler were recorded passerine activity at the beginning of the period was generally light with what was perhaps the worst Willow Warbler passage through the island ever witnessed. Passerine highlights were dominated by Cumbria's and the North West of England's first Red-eyed Vireo but also provided a supporting cast of eight Yellow-browed Warblers, several Black Redstart and a Lapland Bunting. Diurnal passage began to build from late August and produced an unprecedented and protracted movement of

Tree Sparrow and day peaks of 2,085 Linnet and 5,400 Meadow Pipit while southbound wildfowl involved 5,775 Pink-footed Geese and 201 Whooper Swan. Migrant raptors included Short-eared Owl, Hen Harrier, a late Marsh Harrier (16th October) and the latest ever Osprey (16th November). A record 88 Little Egrets congregated on the island while the sea was generally quiet but added two Leach's Petrels, two Pomarine Skua and 10 Arctic Skua. As the year drew to a close a Great Northern Diver again patrolled historically favoured localities offshore where it was joined by a Slavonian Grebe while single Little Auk and Pomarine Skua were also logged. Wildfowl specialities were again in residence with 173 pale-bellied Brent Geese, 80 dark-bellied Brent Geese and 42 Barnacle Geese recorded. Waders back in their winter haunts included 33 Purple Sandpiper, 10 Greenshank and 4 Jack Snipe. At least 51 Little Egret remained. Passerine sightings were led by a wintering flock of 12 Tree Sparrow – an unusual event on the island, 200 Twite and eight Snow Buntings while a Hooded Crow completed a year in residence.

record 7,600 Meadow Pipits and 39 Grey Wagtails flooded N on the 22nd, with 36 Common Buzzards and a minimum of 60,000 House Martins the next day and 301 alba wagtails on the 30th. October was dominated by a relentless SW airflow that produced record low numbers of Redpolls and Siskins and 3 Yellow-browed Warblers and an Isabelline Shrike (photo by Steve Ray) were rather against the run of play.



North Ronaldsay – Kevin Woodbridge

NRBO has had an excellent season in 2014 with condition favouring a strong spring and autumn migration, and exceptional breeding productivity. This is reflected in the species annual recorded total which is one short of the all-time record - it would only take one Waxwing to equal it (time yet!).

Migration highlights included huge numbers of Blackbird and Woodcock in late autumn with record numbers marked, and rarities in abundance including such headline grabbing birds as Myrtle Warbler, Scops Owl, Isabelline Shrike, Eye-browed Thrush (picture below by Mark Warren) and Black-billed Cuckoo.



It was massively gratifying to see healthy Arctic Tern colonies after a hiatus of some two decades, with the majority fledging and some 500 pullus ringed. Tysties also did very well and even the long declining Black-headed Gulls showed a reversal of misfortune.

A new 'double dyke' Heligoland trap was erected over the sheep dyke to the west of the observatory, and with the closure of the last island shop, grants have been obtained to develop a grocery store within the observatory.

Coverage was less than ideal, particularly in the autumn as a result of staff illness, and it is hoped to improve on this through an expanded volunteer force in 2015. The deal is free board and accommodation in return for an average two hours a day working on directed practical tasks around the observatory and its croft land, with an expectation that the rest of the time is essentially dedicated to assisting with the bird work, both census and ringing. Details from alison@nrbo.prestel.co.uk



Sandwich Bay – Ian Hodgson

A mild, extremely wet winter and a warm, settled spring produced a notable recovery in breeding numbers and a memorable set of unusual birds, including Rough-legged Buzzard, Serin and Baltic Gull in March, 2 Cranes and a Blue-winged Teal in April and, in May, the Observatory's first Black-winged Stilt, Roller, Red-rumped Swallow, an arrival of 4 Golden Orioles on the 19th, Montagu's Harrier and the remarkable sight of a Booted Eagle, moving N in the company of 2 Honey-buzzards on the 25th.

August was quiet, with little more than single Wryneck, Osprey and Honey-buzzard, but September was excellent, with record numbers of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs, an Icterine Warbler in the first week and 26 Spotted Flycatchers on the 6th in the best arrival of this species since the 1960s, accompanied by good numbers of Whinchats and Redstarts. An Observatory





Dungeness – David Walker

The year started with something of a bang with a Hume's Warbler found in the trapping area on Jan. 2nd which then stayed until Apr.21st and attracted lots of attention during this time (See picture below). This was followed by a flyby adult Ross's Gull

on Jan.13th amongst huge numbers of gulls and auks passing by and feeding offshore.



The spring saw plenty of early arrivals but overall numbers were as is the norm these days generally poor. Seawatching saw good numbers of Great Skuas, Common Terns and Arctic Terns but the wader and Black Tern passage was poor.

There were several spring highlights including a series of Bee-eater sightings and a singing (but very hard to see) Blyth's Reed Warbler on May 28th.

Autumn saw a slight improvement in the numbers of some departing summer migrants including Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers and Tree Pipit but numbers of Sand Martin, House Martin, Whinchat, Wheatear and Yellow Wagtail remain very poor. Later in the autumn the numbers of thrushes, Robins and 'crests were poor but with the notable exception of Ring Ouzels which passed through in near record numbers. The usual visible migration of finches did not really happen with only Goldfinch in anything like decent numbers and very low numbers of Bramblings, Siskins and Redpolls.

Seawatching during the autumn was fairly quiet for the most part, with one notable day of 100 Sooty Shearwater on Oct 8th, until late in the season when a record passage of Pomarine Skuas occurred. Balearic Shearwater numbers were disappointing.

Eastern vagrants failed to make an appearance – they all arrived up north. However, an Audouin's Gull (see picture) was found on Oct.12th- the third Dungeness record and only the seventh British record.

Notable breeding records included the continued success of both Peregrine Falcon and Raven. Wheatear numbers continue at a low ebb and three pairs of Black Redstart bred on the power station.

Porpoises were seen throughout the year in decent numbers but the highlight on the cetacean front was a small pod of White-beaked Dolphins on May 20th. The best of the



dragonflies were a Lesser Emperor on July 18th and a Black Darter on Sep.21st. Good numbers of Clouded Yellows were recorded and butterflies were generally seen in improved numbers.

Staffing at Dungeness for 2015

The Observatory will be looking to appoint a suitably qualified person as an assistant warden for the 2015 season. The post would ideally run from March to October and would suit a C or T ringing permit holder. Accommodation would be provided. The salary is expected to be £450 per month. Further details and applications with CV should be sent to David Walker by email at dungenessobs@vfast.co.uk or by post to Dungeness Bird Observatory, 11 RNSSS Cottages, Dungeness, Kent TN299NA.



Holme – Sophie Barker

Holme got off lightly in the sea surge at the end of 2013 but stormy weather and very mild conditions made for one of the duller winters I can remember! Spring was notable for us with good rarities in the form of an Alpine Accentor on April 26th (although only 1 person saw it

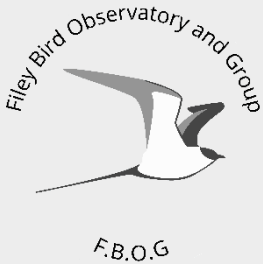
see Connor Rand's Picture below!), and a singing Yellow-browed Warbler and a Western Subalpine Warbler on May 6th.



Overall spring migration was moderately productive here, and a good breeding season began – and to an extent ended – on the early side. North-easterlies kicked off autumn migration in early September and it was a long and drawn out affair, highlights were a big day on October 14th with over 400 birds ringed including 197 Robins and 122 Goldcrests. A Pallas'

Warbler obligingly followed the next day, and at the end of October a thrush fall brought some decent numbers of Redwings and Blackbirds. Our other main highlight was that having established catching of Rock Pipits last year, we caught 3 Water Pipits amongst these in 2014. Some migrants are still trying to struggle in even now, with finches and thrushes still arriving in dribs and drabs!

As you know we have no accommodation here at Holme and no paid posts coming up. We are however always happy to welcome volunteers to help with seawatching, general birding records and even data entry if they are that way inclined.



Filey – Mark Pearson

Another productive and fruitful year draws to a close here at Filey, with one of the main causes for celebration being the complete overhauling and redeveloping of the annual report. The 2013 model has a larger, full colour, more

accessible format, with extended sections on various other taxa, lots of articles, an extended annual review and much more. It took the team a lot of work but we're very proud of it (and it's only eight quid!), and the reviews have been very gratifying, too - for example, "The evolution of the annual bird report has taken a refreshing step forward" according to Birdguides, and "the benchmark for other reports to aim for" according to Birding Frontiers.



The new website goes from strength to strength, our reserves are in fine fettle, we have very welcome and talented new blood on board, and the birding hasn't been so bad either.... 2014 may not have given us two firsts for Yorkshire like last year (buy the above report for the full stories!), but the last couple of months alone have provided our third ever Fea's (type) Petrel, our fifth White-billed Diver, our first Little Bunting in 13 years, plus Rustic Bunting, Great Shearwater, Rough-legged Buzzard, numerous Grey Phalaropes and record day counts for Redwing and Fulmar, to name a few.



Bardsey – Steve Stansfield

Another fantastic year in many ways. The year began with the worst winter storms for many years, causing extensive damage to the foreshore and slipway as well

as some of the island's properties, including the Observatory. Our hide on the beach at Solfach was completely swept away,

however, Todd Chater, a roofer/builder from the midlands paid for the materials and built a new one for us in Dudley then transported it to Wales in 'kit form' and assembled it on the site of the old one. We also had new Velux-type roof-lights fitted in the Observatory during the early spring. A generous donation allowed us to buy all new bedding for the Obs, so new Duvets, covers, sheets and pillow cases and new pillows were all ready for the start of the season. Unfortunately visitor numbers were low, with approximately 60 visitor/weeks down on last season.

Migration wise there were some very good arrivals of bird in spring with a scattering of rarities to boot. A Stone Curlew was seen on 1st April, with the second White Stork for the island a few days later. A pair of Black Guillemots took up residence at the north of the island and we hoped that breeding may be attempted in 2015. Mid-May saw one day with 300 Spotted Flycatchers on the island, along with 140 Common Whitethroats, and a good scattering of other migrants. A female Eastern Subalpine Warbler was present the following day. On 25th May a stunning female Citrine Wagtail was found and stayed for a few days in the company of a dapper Blue Headed Wagtail. The Citrine was only the second record for Bardsey (see picture below). Other goodies included Marsh Warbler, a couple of Honey Buzzards and a good run of Golden Orioles saw at least four birds on the island in May. Early June saw the 'icing on the cake' in the form of the island's second ever Blyth's Reed Warbler which was found singing in the Farm garden and later trapped.



Overall, it was an excellent year for breeding birds on Bardsey. Many species bred in numbers not seen for decades, and some even set new records. Seabirds generally held their own with reasonable counts and productivity. The Manx Shearwater productivity thankfully returned to normal after last year's poor figures. A large increase in Razorbills to over 2200 pairs on Bardsey brings the population back to traditional figures. On Ynys Gwylan Fawr the Puffin population increased to levels not seen for 13 years whilst the one on Bardsey is greater than ever before with up to 55 pairs thought to be nesting on the east side now. Moorhens as an easy meal, but with no Buzzard present this season, the Moorhens raised 21 chicks. The Oystercatcher population was quite high compared to recent years, 101 territories in total, but unfortunately productivity was very low. Passerines on the island fared well this season with multiple broods and high productivity. Wheatear were

present in excellent numbers, the most for 25 years, whilst Stonechat had a productive season with 43 young seen. Both Meadow Pipit and Rock Pipit had a terrific year. Swallow and House Martin were present in usual numbers, with Swallow being particularly productive. The garden finches, Chaffinch and Goldfinch, continue to show record breeding numbers on Bardsey. Though speculative, it is possible these populations could be artificially high due to the high amount of bird seed put out during the winter, improving survival rate. Warblers showed a mixed season, with Sedge Warbler decreasing slightly, but Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler faring well. Linnets appeared to delay nesting, but then took advantage of good weather in July and August; a slightly increased population fledged very good numbers of young. Choughs had an excellent breeding season with nine pairs.

Autumn began with a bang as the island's second Citrine Wagtail of the year was found in early August. A Bonelli's Warbler was discovered on 31 August, and then on 4 September a good arrival saw Greenish Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Wood Warbler, Ortolan and Wryneck amongst hundreds of Willow Warblers and other common migrants. A Nightingale (following one singing in Spring) was trapped in the Obs Garden, with a Wryneck trapped minutes later. There was a good run of nine Barred Warblers and c30 Yellow-browed Warblers, including ten on one day in late October (along with Red-breasted Flycatcher, Barred Warbler, Hawfinch, Bullfinch, four woodlarks and c100 Balckcaps and a late Whinchat). Two Yellow-legged Gulls were seen on the autumn and were the second and third records for the island. A Hoopoe spent a week here in Early October. Some good sea passage was noted, though numbers were generally down, as calm conditions did not make for large numbers to be moving. Late October saw six Grey Phalaropes, three Sabines Gulls, four Long-tailed Skuas (plus lots of Greats and Arctics), a dozen Poms and record counts of Razorbills (14,600). November saw the season end with a fine Grey Phalarope trapped and ringed on a small flood pool on the Narrows.



Calf of Man - Kevin Scott & Shaun Murphy

The 2014 season at the Calf ran from 16th March to 10th November and it certainly had its moments! Our wardens this season were Jodie Crane (Ornithological Warden) and Nick Purdew (Estate Warden).

Rarities included an Iberian Chiffchaff heard singing (and recorded) in April and 2 male Eastern Subalps caught within 30 mins of each other on 14th May. However, an escaped Great Horned Owl discovered at very close range whilst checking the old Upper Lighthouse in September was 'exciting' for the warden for different reasons!

The Manx Shearwater Recovery Project (rat eradication) showed its worth yet again with another increase in AON to 424 (up from 249 in 2013). A data logging project on the breeding Manxies is currently being applied for to start during the 2015 season. Once again, we were indebted to volunteers who assisted with the on-going bait point monitoring work. After just over a year of the Calf being apparently rat free, we suffered a setback in September when a rat was detected on a trail camera near Cow Harbour. After this sighting and quite a number of bait blocks later (see bait station pic below), fortunately there were no further signs!



Seabirds all had a good season and another 100 Gulls were colour ringed in conjunction with the Manx RG's project on large Gulls.

A minor mishap in manoeuvring the Obs's quad bike in August resulted in the warden being airlifted by RAF Valley's Sea King helicopter for a check over but luckily the only damage was to their pride (and the quad)! Fine spells of unbroken sunshine this summer obviously helped to boost our visitor numbers to the Obs with just over 400 bed nights recorded.

We were pleased to have the benefit of the hard labour of two corporate volunteer groups from Lloyds and Royal Scandia over the season, both assisting with the on-going job of rebuilding a drystone wall near South Harbour (Picture below). The good weather also allowed us to catch up with some much-needed building maintenance work to the Obs, with a building contractor spending a fortnight over on the Calf.



We're now looking to fill both the Ornithological and Estate warden posts for 2015 with the closing date for both being

16th Jan. As usual, we're also keen for any volunteers to work on the Calf. See www.manxwt.org.uk for contact details.



Hilbre – Steve Williams

As always each season had its own highlights but spring in particular stood out this year and April was perhaps the best month of the year for many reasons but ringing was excellent and record numbers of Ospreys passed through. Two new species were added to the Obs list

in April - the first a drake Green-winged Teal found loafing on the sea with a large flock of 400 Teal (unusual in itself at Hilbre) on 4th and the second a singing male Little Bunting found on 28th and was also trapped and ringed.



It was an excellent spring for Redstarts with double figure numbers ringed (the best total for many years) and we seem to have found how to catch White Wagtails this spring with 7 ringed by end of May, mostly caught in a particular potter trap at the North End. It was also an excellent spring for Wheatears with over 50 caught this year. A Wood Warbler caught in May was the first on the island since 1997 and only the ninth ever. However, the warbler was not as rare as a Pheasant seen at the end of March; only the second seen on the islands. It was a good spring in general for us particularly for passerine migrants and despite a poor autumn the year ended with over 940 birds ringed (good for us!). A Common Spotted Orchid was found in June; any orchid is exceptionally rare on the islands.

Autumn was less favourable than spring with very little sea watching weather (the first Leach's Petrel did not arrive until 22nd October) but very little in the way of Willow Warbler arrivals either. Autumn scarcities included a Kingfisher which shot over the island in September (possibly only the third record for the island) and the more regular Firecrest put in a solitary appearance on 11th September. A Black Redstart caught in November, the first since 2010. The winter produced mixed fortunes for two Hilbre specialities - Purple Sandpipers continue to decline with a maximum of only 6 so far this winter

but record numbers of Pale-bellied Brent Geese continue to occur and December brought yet another colour-ringed bird this one is our first from the 'East Atlantic Flyway' population being ringed in Denmark in May 2011. This bird was still present on the last day of the year with two other colour-ringed birds including a Canadian ringed bird; a nice way to close the year

The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust



Gibraltar Point
Bird Observatory

Gibraltar Point – Kev Wilson

The legacy of the December 2013 surge tide hung over the Reserve for the whole of the year and had a major bearing on the Trust's operation. Temporary facilities were set up to provide visitor information shelter, toilets and refreshments, environmental education services including outdoor classroom, toilet block and staff offices. After 50 years of resident school, university and natural history groups staying on site at the Wash Study Centre, the provision of residential accommodation on site is no longer possible. A sad end to this unique experience on a unique site. Some regular groups such as Pinner RSPB were able to stay in a Skegness Hotel to continue their annual visit (since 1974!). Volunteer accommodation has also been decommissioned following the flooding and this curtailed our volunteer training scheme and halved our site team. A local caravan site and a neighbour kindly offered temporary accommodation to two volunteers. It is hoped to provide a static caravan on site for volunteers in the near future, whilst new plans for an elevated Visitor Centre have gained planning approval and are pending confirmation of a funding package. The new building includes an upper deck viewing area that will be a welcome facility for migration watchers.



High water mark at the obs – George Gregory

Much of the dune and saltmarsh landscape is little changed after the tidal flooding, indeed the Sea Buckthorn scrub has survived well. However, in affected areas, there has been significant die-back of the large mature Hawthorns which are so much a feature of the scrub community and doubtless play an important role where nesting turtle doves are concerned. Mature sallows, so important for early and late migrants such as warblers and crests have also succumbed to salt-water inundation as well as some pines. Where the Bulldog Bank sea wall was breached, the Freshwater marsh was immersed under sea water until the latter part of the winter and here, a floristically rich dune slack meadow with 30,000 southern

marsh orchids previously, has been dramatically altered – now showing signs of colonisation by saltmarsh pioneers.



South Marsh Road flooded, 7 December 2013.
Photo - George Gregory

The archive data project reached an important milestone after five years of commencement, with 50 years of data input on computer and all of it checked by a team of up to 16 volunteers, led by Mike Archer. The next phase of work involves validating records post 1998. Inevitably, work has slowed with the inputting and checking of contemporary data and the production of annual reports! (apologies to all for the lack of progress on this recently).

The Bird Observatory blog meanwhile continues to provide topical information on birding and wildlife events with daily upkeep by George Gregory. Details at:

<http://gibraltarpoinbirdobservatory.blogspot.co.uk/>

Regular coverage and counts of the census area has been difficult to achieve with a very small number of regular observers prepared to count common birds. Particular thanks go to John Shaughnessy, Nige Lound and Richard Doan. Whilst Rob Watson and Dave Hitchin continue to cover WeBS counts, Rob having contributed for over 20 years.

Regular ringing activity at two sites continues to provide good, standardised data throughout the year (5548 birds ringed of 71 species) in addition to the completion of another year of CES and particular thanks are due to George Gregory, Dave and Liv Vincent, Mike Polling and Mick Briggs.

By late December a total of 245 species had been recorded on site during 2014, with many highlights throughout the year, including: the first Great Reed Warbler for Gib. Trapped and ringed on 23rd May, Spate of Nightjar records include churring males on 25th May and 11th June. Long-staying spring Honey Buzzard 30th May to 13th June. Good numbers of finches using new feeding station including Serin from 7th-14th May. The first Black-winged Pratincole for Lincolnshire on 14th July. LIFE funding enables additional resources for Little Tern protection. 20 pairs fledge 26 juvs and nesting Ringed Plovers have a successful season too. Excellent wader numbers and variety on the lagoons, including White-rumped Sandpiper and Broad-billed Sandpiper together on 29th July. Large autumn wader roosts include spectacular numbers of birds, with Knot peaking at over 100,000. Good migrant fall in September bringing Yellow-browed Warblers, a record number of Red-breasted Flycatchers and an Olive-backed Pipit. Migrant fall in mid-October bringing good numbers of Robins and thrushes including Ring Ouzels, Great Grey Shrikes, record

numbers of Blackcap and the Reserve's second Radde's Warbler. Influx of Rough-legged Buzzards down the east coast. An unprecedented arrival of Grey Phalaropes in October, including 15 on 18th. Record Pomarine Skua passage of 81 south on 2nd December.



Flamborough – Craig Thomas

2014 proved to be an excellent year for Flamborough Bird Observatory. We were blessed with several high quality birds, including the early April Crag Martin that delighted many during its three-day stay. At the same time, a Tawny Pipit took up residence and lingered for nine days; a very rare bird on the Yorkshire coast north of Spurn. The main highlight over the summer was the successful breeding of a pair of Marsh Warblers which successfully fledged at least three young, whilst a calling Corncrake took a liking to a field on the edge of the village from late June. The best of an above-average seawatching season was a 'twitchable' Fea's-type Petrel that flew north on 21st September; it was later tracked up the east coast and enjoyed by well in excess of 100 birders, whilst a fly-by White-billed Diver was a treat later in the autumn. Late August and September featured notable influxes of Barred and Red-breasted Flycatchers, although most scarce migrants remained decidedly that, whilst autumn ended with a November Citrine Wagtail delighting many. However, not all local rarities hit the national headlines, with Flamborough's second ever record of Marsh Tit proving unexpected in September.



The Observatory website was launched in early March, with daily updates of the sightings blog maintained ever since; tens of thousands of visits proves testament to its undoubted success. Records have been received on a daily basis throughout the year, despite the lack of employed staff. The website has proved to be an excellent forum to showcasing the work of the Observatory and, consequently, membership has increased by 50% since its launch. The number of members taking an active role in helping run the Observatory has also grown, with personnel changes including Martin Garner taking over from Ian Marshall as recorder; Ian taking a well-deserved rest after years of sterling service. The full-colour Annual Report was published in early spring, significantly earlier than its immediate predecessors and sales have also increased on previous years. This reflects the quality

of a publication that is enhanced by the artwork of Jack Ashton-Booth, Ben Green, Ray Scally and Dim Wallace amongst others.

FBO has also continued to work ever more closely with partners on the Headland, not least Thornwick Caravan Park and Green Future Building. This partnership has been responsible for the expansion of a very small pond into the most significant area of freshwater in the area.



Records of passage waders have been transformed, with Avocet, Curlew Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper now appearing annually, whereas previously they were more 'miss than hit'. In addition, new hides have provided excellent viewing opportunities for visitors and have enabled the Observatory to engage with a new audience from the nearby Caravan Park. This work has continued over the New Year and we are all now looking forward to the forthcoming spring passage. Additional conservation effort has included entering into a management agreement for Old Fall Plantation and the subsequent creation of a willow hedge on the boundary of the wood and the excavation of a pond on its northern edge.



Fair Isle – David Parnaby

The year opened with SE winds that saw our ferry go for a record-breaking four weeks without sailing. It turned out that both the SE winds and record-breaking were to be themes of the year to come. The SE airflow helped deliver an exceptional spring for rarities, with

Cretzschmar's Bunting (photo below by Roger Riddington),



Caspian Stonechat, Hermit Thrush, Calandra Lark, Collared Flycatcher, Red-flanked Bluetail, Moltoni's Warbler and Bridled Tern (see Ciaran Hastells' Pic below), the latter two both firsts for the island, amongst the outstanding highlights, with a Glossy Ibis also an addition to the Fair Isle list.



The summer proved to be the best of recent years for breeding seabirds and, whilst the populations of most species are severely depleted compared to those of the 1990s, productivity for most species was pleasingly high (Puffins, Razorbills and Kittiwakes having their best productivity since 1997, 1998 and 2000 respectively for example), whilst the 424 Bonxie territories was a new record population.

Storm Petrel ringing was a big hit with staff, volunteers and visitors alike and it was an especially good year for this popular species with 2453 ringed along with a handful of Leach's Petrels (and the Swinhoe's Petrel ringed in 2013 also returned).

We also saw the beginning of our project to analyse the FIBO Log data (recently computerised thanks to a grant from SOC), which is certain to produce some interesting findings in future years.

Autumn commenced with a visit from the Shetland Wildlife Explorers and an island wedding, that saw the Obs (and everywhere else on the island) fully-booked with friends and family of the happy couple. Nothing was going to stop the celebrations, not even the record-breaking rainfall that fell on the big day, with almost six inches of rain causing flooding on the roads and very nearly in the Obs! Highlights from the autumn included Lanceolated Warbler, White's Thrush, Red-flanked Bluetail, Grey-cheeked Thrush, Pallid Harrier and Siberian Stonechat (probably of the form *stejnegeri*), along with a week that produced three Fair Isle megas in the form of Barn Owl, Treecreeper and Blue Tit. Ringing was also good at times, with new records set for the number of Redwing (406), Woodcock (39) and Chiffchaff (100) ringed, contributing to 7125 birds ringed during the year, the best total since 1998.

As the autumn progressed, it became apparent that we were in with a chance of breaking the Fair Isle year list record of 217 species set in 1992. After a few near misses of birds turning up in Orkney and Shetland, November saw lots of arrivals amongst continuing SE winds. Amongst them a Shorelark equalled the record before a Bullfinch took us to 218 (with the later splitting of Moltoni's Warbler pushing us up to 219).

Other highlights during the year not already mentioned included Laughing Gull, Paddyfield, Blyth's Reed (5), Arctic (2), Greenish (2), Eastern Subalpine and Western Subalpine (3) Warblers, Olive-backed (7), Red-throated (3) and Richard's (7) Pipits, Short-toed Lark (7), Crane, Pectoral Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Green-winged Teal and a whole host of scarcities and local rarities. Cetaceans were well represented as well, with two Humpbacks feeding close inshore a particularly memorable occurrence.

We also saw record breaking numbers of visitors to the Obs in 2014 and anyone wishing to visit in 2015 should get in touch sooner rather than later, whilst bookings for 2016 open in March for Friend of Fair Isle members and April for everyone else.

Many thanks to all our guests, the staff and volunteer team (including the FIBOT Directors) and the islanders as well as everyone else who helped out during what was another exciting and busy year for FIBO.

If you'd like to be part of the FIBO team in 2015, job and volunteer vacancies are now on the website and blog. <http://fibowarden.blogspot.co.uk/>

IBOC 2014 - Peter Howlett

At the end of August, Steve and Emma Stansfield and I travelled to Falsterbo, in southern Sweden, to represent BBFO and the British Bird Observatories Council (BOC) at IBOC 2014. There we met up with other representatives from the BOC, including David Walker, Wes Attridge, Stephen Message and Jill Hollamby from Dungeness, Mike Archer from Gib Point, Will Miles from Fair Isle, Chris Sharpe from the Calf of Man, and Richard Dobbins and Wendy James from Skokholm.

The conference was the brainchild of Lund University and Falsterbo Bird Observatory and they had invited Steve, as Chair of the BOC, as a keynote speaker. I think this says something about the regard with which British observatories are held, as there were observatories from 20 countries represented at the conference.

After the welcome speeches, the conference kicked off on the Friday evening with an overview of the work of Falsterbo Bird Observatory, followed by an inspirational talk by Yossi Leshem from The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel. He showed us how studying bird migration was helping engage young people and bridge religious and political divides in one of the most divided parts of the world - Israel.

Saturday was full on and the range of talks amazing, from trying to protect the billions of birds which cross the Gulf of Mexico each spring and autumn to monitoring trends in European migrants passing through Finland and Africa. As keynote speaker, Steve was up after lunch and gave an excellent account of how the British observatories are contributing data to national research projects led by the BTO amongst others. Dave Walker gave a talk about sea passage at Dungeness and Cap Griz Nez across the English Channel.

Sunday continued in a similar vein, with talks showcasing the different methods of monitoring migration and how they have had an impact on our understanding of bird movements. Traditional ringing was covered, but, not surprisingly, there was also a great emphasis on new techniques, such as the use of geolocators, satellite tags and stable isotope analysis of feathers (you can identify the geographical region where the bird grew the sampled feather).

Monday focussed on public outreach and education, arguably one of the most important areas we need to focus on to ensure we are seen to still be relevant into the future - by funders and public alike.

The conference wasn't all work though. The opportunity to visit one of Europe's premier migration points - in the middle of autumn - meant the visit was extended by a few days and the three of us arrived there a few days early to enjoy the migration. Coming

from the UK where (with a few exceptions) counts of most of our migrants number in the hundreds (if you're lucky!) it was incredible to see the golf course at the southern tip of Falsterbo carpeted in Yellow Wagtails and the sky full of the calls of these and Tree Pipits. The totals for these two species for our first day were 2,260 Tree Pipits and 3,400 Yellow Wagtails. On top of this, we also jammed in on some decent raptor migration and on that first day we also saw several hundred Sparrowhawks and over a thousand Honey Buzzards



and a couple of smart male Pallid Harriers (Pic below by Peter Howlett). We had a couple more good days before the wind went easterly and that really cut down the number of birds passing through.

The conference was a great inspiration to all of us. For more details see the IBOC website www.birdobservatories.com/iboc2014/



This was the first International Bird Observatories Conference but such was the positive mood it was unanimously agreed there should be a second, most likely near Cape May in the USA in autumn 2016 - I've started saving already!



Next Generation Birders at Bird Observatories in 2014 – Matthew Bruce

2014 saw many members of the Next Generation Birders visiting the Observatories of Britain. Many of these visits were self-funded but

the YBOVF (Young Bird Observatories Volunteer Fund) grant was also well used. The value of Bird Observatories is priceless and it is massively important to get young people involved and supporting their local/favourite obs. NGB are very grateful to Steve Stansfield, Paul Collins, Andy Roadhouse, the Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust, and all others involved in encouraging young people to get involved last year.

The first 'official' NGB meet up was held at Spurn Bird Observatory in May and was a great success. In the end, 20 NGBs made the trip, meeting each other for the first time and enjoying social activities from a game of football to a pub quiz. The birding may not have been "vintage" Spurn but NGBs still managed to find Firecrest, Hooded Crow, Black Redstart and, for the lucky two, Wryneck. Other NGB visits to Spurn included Migfest in Autumn which was a great success and hopefully we can encourage even more young birders to attend next year.

Portland Observatory also hosted at least 4 NGBs over the year, some using the very welcome YBOV scheme to fund the trip down there, including Josie Hewitt, a 16 year old C Permit holder, who had the chance to ring birds such as Wheatear and

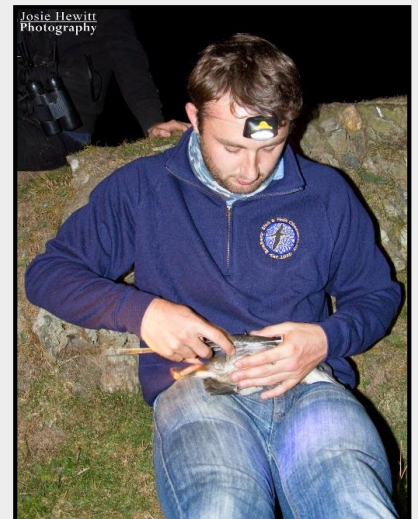
Whinchat. The Young Birders week on the Isle of May gave a couple of NGBs the chance to spend some time up close and personal with sea birds and also get a taste of Island Observatory life. By all accounts another great success and we hope to see something similar in 2015.

2014 also saw the start of a partnership with the Observatory on Bardsey.



Next Generation Birders on Bardsey

Five NGBs (including myself) ventured out to west Wales for a week of migrant finding and ringing in October. Highlights included seeing Firecrest, Yellow-browed Warbler, Barred Warbler, Rissos' Dolphins and getting the chance to ring Manx Shearwaters (right), whilst the lowlights included no showers for a week due to a water shortage! Hopefully this week long trip will become an annual event for young people to gain experience of Observatory life.



All in all a great year for young people to be visiting these wonderful places, hopefully in 2015 the list of trips and events will be even longer and the number of NGBs visiting Observatories even larger.

YBOVF was used by several of the NGBs to fund trips to Observatories in both 2013 and 2014. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/OBS-YBOVF> for detail for 2015 funding.

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Young Bird Observatory Volunteer Fund

The BTO will provide a number of grants of up to £200, to support young people looking to visit one of the accredited British and Irish Bird Observatories.

The application process has now closed. Please consider applying next year.

Priority will be given to applicants aged 21 or under who are able to get fully involved in fieldwork and general observatory activities.

Applicants will need to provide:

- A brief statement of experience and their plans for the visit.
- Outline costs (travel and accommodation only; food is not covered by the grants or Observatory)
- Where possible, a reference from a BTO member. If the applicant is a ringer, this should be from their trainer, or another 'A' permit holder.

BIRD OBSERVATORY CONTACTS

Bardsey Bird Observatory

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Calf of Man Bird Observatory

Web site: <http://manxbirdlife.im/info/the-calf-of-man/>

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Secretary: Shaun Murphy

Manx National Heritage
The Manx Museum
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Email: shaun.murphy@mnh.gov.im

Cape Clear Bird Observatory

Web site: <http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/Birdwatching/CapeClearBirdObservatory/tabid/567/Default.aspx>

All enquiries:
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Copeland Bird Observatory

Web site: <http://www.copelandbirdobservatory.org.uk>
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Dungeness Bird Observatory

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Flamborough Bird Observatory

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Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory

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Hilbre Bird Observatory

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Holme Bird Observatory

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Isle of May Bird Observatory

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Landguard Bird Observatory

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North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory

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Portland Bird Observatory

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Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory

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Skokholm Bird Observatory

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Spurn Bird Observatory

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