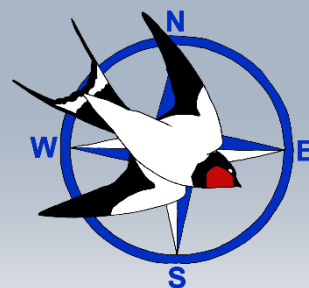


The newsletter of the British Bird Observatories Council



Welcome to the second BOC Newsletter.

Last year the Bird Observatories Council produced its first newsletter – primarily a summary of the year with contributions from each Observatory. The newsletter was full of the excitement of 2014, with some stunning pictures of the rarities that Observatories so frequently attract! We published it online as an E-newsletter, hosting it on the BOC website as a PDF file. Little did we know that the number of hits we would get would take us over our monthly traffic allowance for the website in TWO HOURS!!! We therefore had to rapidly change where the file was hosted and put new links on social media etc.

Over the next few days, links were put out on the BirdGuides and Rare Bird Alert websites as well as on Twitter and individual Observatory web pages. From the BirdGuides link alone we had 1400 views in the first three days, and I was receiving emails from people asking to be put on 'the mailing list'! Based on the success of the first edition we decided that a second one would be produced... and here it is, again packed with some fantastic summaries from the Observatories. Great stories of migration, major rarities and non-avian wildlife too.

It also seems appropriate here to say thank you to Peter Howlett, who, after 23 years will be stepping down as BOC Secretary. Peter has done a sterling job in producing the minutes of the BOC meetings, organising the BOC AGM and other mid-year meetings, providing all the food etc. that we need to keep everyone happy over the BOC weekend meetings. Peter has organised, produced and manned the BOC stand at the Bird Fair each year as far back as I can remember and his input and dedication will be missed.

However, we do have a replacement. Alison Duncan (North Ronaldsay's Warden) is going to take over the role from February. Alison is a very suitable replacement, having been involved with Observatories since 1985 and Warden on North Ronaldsay since 1988, as well as being involved with the BOC when Kevin Woodbridge, her husband, was Chairman for over 20 years!

Many thanks to all the contributors

Steve Stansfield – BOC Chairman



Skokholm – Richard Brown

This was our second year as a reaccredited Bird Observatory and what a year it was. Record numbers of Guillemot, Razorbill and Fulmar were breeding around the cliffs and the Puffin count went over 6500 for the first

time since before the War. Manx Shearwater and Storm

Petrel surveys both suggested that the populations were stable, despite the attentions of predatory Great Black-backed Gulls and Short-eared Owls. Our guests get involved with Puffin colour ring observations and these suggested that overwinter survival was nearly back to normal following the wrecks of two winters ago. The Lesser Black-backed Gulls wearing GPS devices returned for the breeding season, allowing us to download tracks of their winter movements; a variety of overwintering strategies were found, from coastal trips to Morocco to a whole winter spent in Pembrokeshire. Manx Shearwaters were also tracked for the first time on Skokholm, revealing which areas of the Irish Sea were being used during chick feeding. We also received funding for some exciting new Storm Petrel projects including a new study wall which will contain 100 nest cavities and a tracking project which will investigate their winter movements.

Avian highlights during the spring included a Nightingale, a Magpie (only the 15th to be seen on the Island since Lockley began daily recording in 1933), two Wryneck (the ninth and tenth spring records), a Hooded Crow (only the 12th Island record), a Red Kite (just the fourth record for Skokholm), a Pale-bellied Brent Goose (the first to be recorded), three Marsh Harriers (an unusually high spring total), an Osprey, a Stock Dove (an Island tick for the Wardens) and only the eighth Spring record of Melodious Warbler. It was an excellent spring for many of the commoner migrants with record totals of Blackcap and very good passages of Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Redstart and Grasshopper Warbler. The big news in June was the arrival of a Swainson's Thrush to the Cottage Garden. This was the first time that this species had been logged in spring in the UK. It was only a second for Wales (the other also having occurred on Skokholm). 'Swaino' sparked what was only the second ever twitch to Skokholm, with 90 birders arriving over three special visits to see the bird. A fantastic time was had by all and the Island made its usual mark on the hearts of those that came:



Swainsons Thrush – Richard Brown

'I have been on many twitches and birding trips this year, have to say I enjoyed the Swainson's Thrush trip the most' tweeted one birder this autumn.

There was a fine supporting cast during its nine day stay including a pair of Red-necked Phalarope which spent two days on North Pond (the first for Skok).



Red-Necked Phalarope – Richard Brown

A singing Firecrest, a Common Rosefinch and the first record of breeding Red-veined Darter for Skokholm. To hope for more than one American bird a year is greedy; the four logged in 1967 (including the other Swainson's) was gratuitous. Nevertheless, when a Long-billed Dowitcher flew over our heads and landed on North Pond this September, we didn't complain.



Long-billed Dowitcher – Richard Brown

Other autumn highlights included four Goldeneye (fifth record for Skok), Long-tailed Skua (third for Skok), Kingfisher (the 14th for Skok which was ten years to the day since the last one) and Dartford Warbler (second for Skok). Again there was a fine variety of other migrants including breeding plumaged Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stints, Wood Sandpipers, Turtle Dove, Barred Warbler, three Siberian Chiffchaff, four Yellow-browed Warbler (equalling the Skok record), ten plus Firecrests, Red-breasted Flycatcher, an invasion of Coal and Long-tailed Tits and an Ortolan. The Red-breasted Flycatcher was of particular note as, eight days after we ringed it, it was found feeding in a pub garden near Loop Head, County Clare by our good friend Phil Brennan (this was only the third international movement ever recorded for this species). The wader total for our little North Pond came to an impressive 27 species.

A total of 54 different visiting ringers spent at least one week with us this year, handling 7312 birds of 67 species in

total. There were 956 Storm Petrel handled, nearly one in seven of which was already wearing a ring. The Manx Shearwater transect continued to produce some excellent data and proved particularly popular with ringers looking to increase their seabird experience. Over 1000 Willow Warbler were ringed for a second consecutive year and the 383 Blackcap was a Skokholm record. Other ringing highlights included a male Merlin, four Water Rail, a Great Skua ringed on St Kilda, three Cuckoo, two Wryneck, a Nightingale, six Black Redstart, the Swainson's Thrush, five Ring Ouzel, a Melodious Warbler, four Yellow-browed Warbler, eight Firecrest, 22 Coal Tit and a Rosefinch.

As always, much of what was achieved this year was only possible thanks to the efforts of our brilliant Long-term Volunteers. Each year we invite four people, two from 1st April until 30th June and two from 1st July to 30th September, to live on the Island and learn how to warden a National Nature Reserve. This opportunity is a fantastic step towards a career in conservation and previous participants can now be found working with seabirds all over the world. If you are interested please visit: <https://t.co/nBfRSXFDCr>



Dungeness – David Walker

The year started fairly quietly with very little in the way of cold weather and even Brent Geese already moving east. Offshore one or two Great and Pomarine Skuas were wintering and a steady turnover of Caspian Gulls was noted.

Despite the generally mild weather the spring was slow to get underway and overall numbers were as is the norm these days i.e. generally poor. Reflecting national trends only two Turtle Doves and no Wood Warblers were seen and numbers of Willow Warbler were noticeably low. Eastward movements of seabirds began well enough but ended very quickly with what is normally our busiest period between mid-April and early May failing to produce very much at all. Only 18 Pomarine Skuas were recorded and numbers of most waders and terns were very low. There were several Bee-eater sightings during the latter part of the spring but perhaps the most unlikely record was that of a Nuthatch. Breeding birds included a pair of Ravens and five pairs of Black Redstarts but Wheatear numbers remain low and a cause for concern. The numbers of departing summer migrants during the first half of the autumn were disappointing despite seemingly good conditions but the latter part of the autumn was much better. Good numbers of Firecrests and Goldcrests, Chiffchaffs, Robins and "continental" Coal Tits were noted but thrushes were noticeable by their absence with the exception of Ring Ouzels which passed through in excellent numbers. There was a steady stream of eastern rarities during October including Dusky and Pallas's Warblers, several Yellow-browed Warblers, a Barred Warbler and three Great Grey Shrikes. Other notable birds during the autumn included a Black Stork which circled the Point in August and an Ortolan Bunting in September.

There was no doubt about the highlight of the year though when an American Empidonax flycatcher was found feeding amongst the fishing boats on September 22nd.

We were quickly able to rule out Willow and Alder Flycatchers and by the end of the day there was a general consensus that the bird was in fact an Acadian Flycatcher and a first for Britain. Some faeces were also collected and later confirmed the identification. After disappearing from the area of its initial discovery it was later found in one of the local gardens where it gave great views to around a 1000 birders.



Acadian Flycatcher – David Walker

A Short-toed Treecreeper was also noted in the same garden in September but was almost impossible to see.

Seawatching during the autumn was often disappointing with skua numbers very low but there was a notable spell of Balearic Shearwater passage with a record day total of 92 on Aug.25th, a Grey Phalarope was present for five days and two White-winged Black Terns and a Whiskered Tern were also seen.

It was a very interesting year for insects with the highlight being the discovery of a breeding colony of Tree Crickets and then the finding of Sickle-bearing Bush-crickets at the same location. These were the first and second breeding records for Britain respectively and created plenty of interest and even appeared on the BBC One Show. Moth migration was interesting during the autumn with exceptional numbers of Vestals and Small Mottled Willows and good numbers of Hummingbird Hawk-moths, Bordered and Scarce Bordered Straws. Six species of macro-moth were also added to the already very long DBO list with Orange Moth, Bedstraw Hawk-moth, Splendid Brocade (at last), Orache, Orange Sallow and Beautiful Hook-tip. Other notable records included Fern, Brussels Lace, Red-necked Footman, Buff Footman, Jersey Tiger, five Convolvulus Hawk-moths, Purple Clay and three Ni Moths.

Good numbers of Clouded Yellows were recorded and a Long-tailed Blue was seen in September.

It was a quiet year for migrant dragonflies so it was a nice surprise to add Downy Emerald to the area list and only the second record of a Broad-bodied Chaser for the Long Pits was also seen.

A concerted effort to record the Shield-bugs was maintained and notable hymenoptera included the bumblebee *Bombus ruderatus* and the extremely rare mining-bee *Andrena nana*.

Porpoises were seen throughout the year in decent numbers but the highlights on the cetacean front were small pods of White-beaked Dolphins on three days during the spring.

Work continues on our long term project to get all of our original paper log data computerized.

Following a cross-channel project looking at the differences in migration between the English and French side we hosted a meeting in July of various groups, including SBBO and Cap Gris Nez, interested in taking this further. A preliminary collaborative project was agreed involving collecting data of 20 migrant species with a view to extending this in the future.

A new venture for the Observatory was the introduction of clothing line with very smart fleeces, sweatshirts and polo-shirts and featuring our Pomarine Skua logo.

Our original website has become harder and harder to maintain as time has passed so we have been working on a new website which will hopefully be launched at the beginning of 2016.

Jobs and opportunities at Dungeness

The Observatory has already appointed David Campbell as the assistant warden for the 2016 season.

As you can see from the above the work of Bird Observatory covers much more than just birds and anyone with any interest in wildlife is welcome to stay at the Observatory. For more details contact David Walker by email at dungenessobs@vfast.co.uk or by post to Dungeness Bird Observatory, 11 RNSSS Cottages, Dungeness, Kent TN299NA.



Sandwich Bay – Ian Hodgson

For most of the first two weeks all of Europe was colder than usual, as far to the east as Turkey, but it became warm in the second week and the jam of migrants broke with a substantial arrival of warblers on the 13th. The flirtation with summer was brief, however, and values soon subsided to the low teens in a nagging NE wind and the final week brought some much-needed rain.

Migrants continued to be generally slow to arrive, with Willow Warbler on the 1st, Swallow and Garganey on the 2nd, four Firecrests on the 6th and House Martin, Ring Ouzel, Whitethroat, Whimbrel and three Green Sandpipers on the 7th. Sedge Warbler appeared on the 9th, with Common Tern, Willow Warbler and Tree Pipit on the 11th, Yellow Wagtail on the 12th and 26 Blackcaps on a warm, sunny 15th; outstanding for a spring morning.

Record numbers of singing males remained to occupy breeding territories, entertaining anyone who would listen with a fascinating array of mimicry of other species, including Nightingale and Reed Warbler. Things improved a little, with Reed Warbler on the 16th, Cuckoo, Garden Warbler and Greenshank on the 19th, Hobby on the 20th, Turtle Dove on the 23rd, Wood Warbler and Little Tern on the 26th, Whinchat on the 27th and Swift and Wood Sandpiper on the 28th. Numbers of some species were very low, with only 24 Yellow Wagtails all month, while largest daily totals of Wheatear and Willow Warbler were just six and seven, respectively.

Offshore movement was unremarkable, though 330 Brent Geese and five Avocets flew N on the 2nd and while visible migration owed as much to persistence as anything a movement of 308 Linnets on the 14th was the largest in spring since 2007. Otherwise, finch passage was unexceptional. Birds of prey were again a major feature of the month, with eight Red Kites and probably over 30 Buzzards on the 7th, with at least 20 more Buzzards over Pegwell on the 28th. The total of 27 Red Kites and at least 129 Buzzard sightings during the month set new Observatory records and an Osprey flew over Pegwell on the 26th.

Wader passage was poor until the last few days of the month when two or three Kentish Plovers, up to 80 Whimbrel and a Wood Sandpiper were recorded in Pegwell. Scarce species included Pied Flycatchers on the 14th and 28th, three Redstarts, a Wood Warbler in the Elms on the 26th and totals of six Garganey and eight Firecrests; equal in number to Goldcrests this month. It was a good month for rarities, even if most were seen from Pegwell. An Alpine Swift flew SE inland there on the 6th, a Hawfinch was calling from aspens in the Great Wood on Worth on the 11th and a Purple Heron flew over Pegwell on the 15th. Also at Pegwell, a Glossy Ibis flew SW inland on the 22nd, a singing Savi's Warbler appeared in the reeds at Stonelees on the 25th and amid an excellent arrival of migrants on the 26th Osprey, Kentish Plover and two Spoonbills were recorded.



Short-eared Owl – Ian Hodgson

May began to settle down after a fractious first week, but it remained cooler than usual across the whole of Europe north of the Mediterranean. With few exceptions, temperatures here just about reached the seasonal norm but cold winds were a frequent feature.

Passerine migrants were few and far between, though there was some good news. A Nightingale took up

residence on Worth from the 7th and a Spotted Flycatcher appeared the next day, with five on the 12th. Visible migration was so poor that it would not get a mention but for a Tree Sparrow that flew over Stonelees on the 2nd; only the second record since January 2013 and a Woodlark over the Observatory on the 25th. Wader passage did little more than stutter along for most of the month, with Greenshanks being the main species of note, including 12 on New Downs on the 2nd. However, there was a notable arrival of 270 Sanderling, 350 Ringed Plover and a Temminck's Stint in Pegwell on the 16th and ten Black-tailed Godwits on New Downs on the 30th.

Raptors were again a significant feature, with Ospreys over Worth and Pegwell on the 4th and a third individual on the 9th. At least 20 Buzzards were seen from Pegwell on the 13th and on the 17th no fewer than 14 Red Kites and a Black Kite were seen from Pegwell, with another (or the same) Black Kite on the 21st. Honey-buzzards were seen at Pegwell on the 19th and over the Observatory on the 24th and the month concluded with totals of 20 Red Kites and 64 Buzzards.

At least 69 Mediterranean Gulls were recorded during May, following a total of 37 in April, including 29 first summer birds flying S from Pegwell on the 4th and ten inland from the NE on the 21st. Although most were immature birds, at least five adults flew over on the 21st, suggesting displacement from breeding colonies elsewhere. Spoonbills were present in Pegwell throughout, with records from Backsand on the 2nd and Restharrow on the 5th. A Roseate Tern on the 6th and an Iceland Gull on the 12th were both seen in Pegwell, a Stone Curlew appeared at Dickson's Corner on the 17th and the 19th brought a Bee-eater in Stonelees and a Great White Egret on Worth. Two Black-winged Stilts (only the second Observatory record) and two Black-necked Grebes were on New Downs on the 30th.

Migration continued to be rather late and an arrival of 12 Wheatears on the 8th was the largest of spring, while four Hobbies were hunting over Worth. Whitethroats were also slow to arrive on the Estate, but there were good numbers elsewhere, with up to 44 singing on Worth. 21 territories of Cetti's Warbler was a record but the increase in Blackcap numbers was phenomenal: 30 singing males in the recording area represents an increase of at least 50% in the last two years. Two Garden Warblers, normally a scarce breeding species at the Bay, also took up residence on Worth.

The start of August was bright and very warm, with temperatures in the mid-twenties, though the second half of the month was less settled, albeit with some hot spells. The average temperature for the month was a slightly above average 22°C.

In a month in which the total of Wood Warblers recorded this autumn increased to four, 60-70 Willow Warblers, the first Whinchat of autumn and two Treecreepers were recorded on the 2nd, ten Garden Warblers were present on the 5th and Nightingales were trapped on the 8th and 27th. An Icterine Warbler was trapped on the 14th, up to 19 Whinchats were present on Worth in mid-month and five Redstarts and a Wryneck were recorded on the 25th, along with a scattering of Pied and Spotted Flycatchers. A Red-backed Shrike was in Pegwell on the 27th and a Hoopoe, first seen outside Deal a few days earlier, appeared close by on the 29th. It remained on the Bank

Holiday weekend, which also featured over 50 Whinchats and about 25 Wheatears.

22 Curlew Sands were in Pegwell on the 3rd, with a Pectoral Sandpiper and a Little Stint there next day, but wader passage was otherwise slow until beyond mid-month. Four Black-tailed Godwits, two Wood Sandpipers and a Spotted Redshank were at Restharrow on the 19th and in rain on the 20th four Temminck's Stints dropped in to the scrape and 19 Little Stints and 60 Little Terns were in Pegwell, with another Temminck's in Pegwell on the 24th, a notable 14 Common Sandpipers on the beach on the 25th and a Little Stint on the scrape on the 31st.

60 Mediterranean Gulls and two Spoonbills were in Pegwell on the 4th, the Spoonbills oscillating between there and Backsand for most of the month, one or two Garganey were on the scrape from the 19th and 24 Black Terns were in Pegwell on the 24th.

Visible migration was typically quiet but a Green Woodpecker flew out to sea until lost to sight on the 2nd and raptors included an Osprey NE on the 19th and a Honey Buzzard over Worth on the 21st. However, the event of the month was the appearance of a family party of four Short-eared Owls on the 21st; the first confirmed breeding by this species for more than three decades.

The first ten days of September were largely dry, with temperatures around 16-18°C, but the week around mid-month was very unsettled with lengthy spells of rain. It remained changeable until the last week which became dominated by fresh easterlies. The average temperature for the month was a slightly below average 17.5°C.

The month began with 32 Whinchats, a Hoopoe and a Wryneck and light overnight rain precipitated an excellent early autumn arrival on the 2nd of 26 Lesser Whitethroats - good numbers these days - about 160 Blackcaps, three Spotted Flycatchers and two Redstarts, while 37 Siskins flew N, with a Long-eared Owl in full view in the Oasis that gave scrummy views all morning. An Icterine Warbler and a Wryneck were found at Pegwell on the 3rd and around 500 Siskins were recorded on the 5th, which is remarkably early for a species that normally moves in numbers from mid-September to early November, with 600 the next day, including an amazing 193 that were trapped - the Bay's previous annual record ringing total was 56! Four Firecrests appeared on the 10th and by the 13th more than the county's annual record Siskin total had been ringed, with an incredible 1,242 having been trapped by the end of the month.

A remarkably early Radde's Warbler was found on the 11th, followed by a Yellow-browed Warbler on the 17th, as totals of 4,520 Siskins and 94 Grey Wagtails broke existing British records by a street, while other notables overhead included at least 3,100 Meadow Pipits, four Tree Pipits, our first Crossbill for nearly two years, a Hobby that flew out to sea, three Dotterel S above the shore and a Honey-buzzard. Another Yellow-browed Warbler was found at Pegwell on the 18th, two Lapland Buntings flew N on the 20th, with 40 Goldcrests and 200 each of Chiffchaff and Blackcap in the bushes, and a third Yellow-browed of the autumn on the 26th was put into the shade by the appearance of seven on the 29th, five of which remained the next day when four were found in Pegwell, along with a Wryneck. Apart from being notable from a

local point of view, the influx of Yellow-browed Warblers was estimated to have involved an astonishing 650 in Britain during the last week of the month.

Raptors may not have been as numerous as they can be in September, but quality was outstanding. An Osprey, 30 Buzzards and two Honey-buzzards flew over Pegwell on the 2nd, with eight Buzzards over SBBO and the first Merlin of autumn appeared on the 6th, but the 23rd was remarkable, with the Bay's first record of PALLID HARRIER and a Red-footed Falcon, both of which were within a few hundred metres of each other on Worth at one point.



Pallid Harrier - Martin Sutherland

Other notable records included a Dotterel at Pegwell on the 9th and a lanky Baltic Gull on the Point on the 22nd.

Spells of easterlies continued into October, which became increasingly unsettled in the approach to mid-month. Temperatures, around 13-16°C in the first half, declined to 12-14°C from the 13th. The second half was rather dull and the easterly influence ended at the end of the third week, allowing autumn to fizzle out unspectacularly. The average temperature for the month was a below average 14°C.

However, this amazing autumn continued well into October, with several hundred Goldcrests daily until the 18th including at least 600 (including a staggering 357 ringed) on the 2nd and 186 pouring N across the Observatory track on the 14th as hundreds more arrived. Ringing controls and recoveries associated with this influx included a Latvian-ringed individual and one that made its way west to Maidenhead eight days after being ringed here. The record influx of Yellow-browed Warblers continued with a probable new arrival at the north end of the Haven on the 1st, one at Pegwell on the 2nd and singles on New Downs on 3rd and Worth on 4th bringing the total to at least 17. Two new birds turned up on the 19th, the same day as a Pallas's Warbler at the edge of Cinque Ports golf course (**photograph by Steve Ray**)



A RED-FLANKED BLUETAIL was trapped on the 20th – the first since one was infamously killed by a weasel in October 1956. A Lesser Whitethroat that was trapped on the 18th was confirmed by DNA to have been of the race *S.c.blythi*, identical to one sequenced from Kazakhstan around the same time. Given the scarcity of Great Grey Shrike in the last couple of decades, an influx of ten this month was probably just as remarkable. Two appeared on Worth on the 15th with an influx of at least 120 Robins, a third flew in off the sea on the 18th and at least six on the 20th included four at Pegwell.

Continuing the theme from an outstanding September, visible migration did not disappoint, with notable Goldfinch movements of 2,010 on the 12th, 6,200 in only an hour on the 17th and 2,180 on the 22nd, when 25 Crossbills flew N. Tree Sparrows made a slight resurgence with a total of 23 during the month, including nine on the 8th, a Richard's Pipit flew over on the 12th and 126 alba wagtails flew N on the 4th.

Raptors included a Honey-buzzard over Pegwell on the 1st and Rough-legged Buzzards at Pegwell on the 4th and New Downs on the 25th, though the only notable wildfowl record was of 23 Pink-footed Geese in Pegwell on the 1st. Seven Firecrests arrived on the 2nd in a total of 43 for the month, ten Ring Ouzels appeared on Worth on the 12th and a Dartford Warbler was at the sailing club on the 20th, with at least three on the 25th.



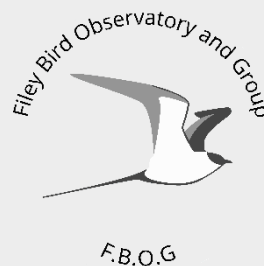
Holme – Sophie Barker

In what was generally a rather quiet year, it was a case of quantity rather than quality at Holme this year with Goldcrests in October breaking all previous records. 829 of these little gems were caught just at the Observatory site during the month of October. All the NOA's sites combined have never produced more than 459 Goldcrests in an entire year (2005). This indicates the scale of the influx and could be seen as a sign that extreme weather is producing extreme migrations.

A symbolic Great Grey Shrike singing from the top of a pine tree on the 19th October was a very special visitor. The other main surprise of the autumn was a staggering 7 Water Pipits trapped and ringed using ground traps and a tape lure.



Water Pipit – Sophie Barker



Filey – Mark Pearson

2015 was a year of further consolidation and progress for the observatory, with a concerted effort to develop several areas of our remit. This included our most comprehensive calendar of events and activities ever, with everything from after-dark

safaris to the ever popular Woodcock Music Festival and a wide range of walks and talks; all were free and open to the public. Our surveying capacity is improving steadily, with much of the area now covered for BBS and several specialist surveys introduced annually.

We're a dedicated and dynamic bunch here at Filey, which is hopefully reflected in our annual report. The overhauled, revamped 2014 FBR was published to widespread acclaim, described by Rare Bird Alert as a "Gold Star, 10/10, Triple AAA standard work which sets the benchmark for bird reports nationally..." - very gratifying for the small and entirely voluntary team who deliver this and all other observatory projects and responsibilities. 2016 is the 40th anniversary of the group, and we're planning a special publication to celebrate – watch this space for more....

Bird-wise, the highlight of the year was undoubtedly the Spanish Wagtail which briefly graced our East Lea reserve in April – as perhaps might be expected from a taxa which still isn't officially on the British list, the record is still in circulation, but fits all the criteria required by the relevant committees. The spanking male *iberiae* was followed soon after by an equally striking *thunbergi* at the same site, and the spring also delivered a Red-rumped Swallow and various other 'notables'.



Spanish Wagtail – Mark Pearson

East Lea is owned and managed by FBOG for all wildlife, and so it was especially gratifying to find up to 12 Red-veined Darters present in the summer, with breeding noted on several occasions – indeed it was probably the best place in the UK for this species in 2016. August produced Britain's first Greenish Warbler of the autumn and was characterised by a fantastic influx of drift migrants, particularly Wrynecks, and included local scarcities such as Temminck's Stint and Wood Warbler.



Wryneck – Mark Pearson

September was fairly quiet, but delivered another Grey-headed Wagtail (two in a year of a less than annual subspecies in Yorkshire being particularly noteworthy), while October brought a dark-morph Honey-buzzard, two Pallas's Warblers, our second-ever Great White Egret and a long list of other scarcities. Perhaps most impressive, however, were the record numbers of both Short-eared Owl and Whooper Swan – the former over a protracted period, and the latter mostly in November.



Whooper Swans – Mark Pearson

Without harsh weather to shake things up, winter periods here can be quiet, but the bay is always worth a studious scan – and 2016 produced not one but two Surf Scoters, one at either end of the year (which is three in three years – surely the best place to catch up with species on the English east coast?). In fact, the latest Surfy continued a personal lucky streak of Bay rares in recent Decembers: after the Brunnich's two years ago and the White-billed Diver last year, I'll be going nowhere in December 2016....

Happy new year from all the team at Filey



Landguard – Nigel Odin

The mild winter brought us very few birds offshore in the early part of the year with no Auks seen and low

Diver numbers. Spring 2015 also saw all the commoner migrants arrive in unspectacular numbers with no "falls" as has become the norm in recent years. After these two depressing statements an early season addition to the site list was a White-tailed Eagle that drifted south over the area and into Essex on 23rd March. Other half decent scarcities during the spring were Hawfinch, Red-backed Shrike and, into June, Red-rumped Swallow & Marsh

Warbler to help compensate for the lack of birds. A total of at least seven different Serins were noted during the year with five of these in spring and Spoonbill also had a good year with four records of ten birds.

Siskin had an absolutely spectacular year being noted in every month apart from January with sample counts of 201 heading south 14th July & 430 in the same direction 11th November. What was going on with this species this year?

Another addition to the site list was a Black Stork heading south 28th August that later turned up near Clacton-on-sea. Goldcrests turned up in record numbers this autumn with several day counts over 100, ringing records broken plus a ringing control from southern Norway. A Pallas's Warbler turned up with them 26th to 27th October but the expected arrivals of Blackbirds, Thrush's & Robins never happened this year. Staying on the depressing theme autumn totals of most duck & waders species heading past were very poor but when another first site record in the form of a stunning adult male Pied Wheatear for two days in early November then all is forgiven. An adult Red-breasted Goose going past with Brent Geese always raises the question of whether it is a wild bird or one of the feral individuals that haunts this part of the world but either way it livens up goose counting.



Pallas's Warbler – Languard BO

Our ongoing studies of trapping migrant Grey Wagtails continued and brought a cracking recovery of one that hit a window and was then released in the Netherlands ten days after it was ringed at Landguard in October.

Moth wise it was a good year for migrants plus yet another 14 species added to the site list and we had three records of the migratory Red-veined Darter dragonfly.



Striped Hawkmoth – Landguard BO

During 2015 the seasonal Warden was Chris Bridge who will be returning for another season. Annual reports and updated species lists will be available early in 2016 on www.lbo.org.uk



Calf of Man - Kevin Scott & Shaun Murphy

The Calf season began on 18 March accompanied by glorious weather and the appearance of two new

members of the Manx Wildlife Trust led team at the Observatory, Judit Mateos taking on the Ornithological Warden role and Harry Savage joining as the Estate Warden. The island was then continually manned until the season ended on 20th November, previous attempts to leave having been hampered by strong winds.

Migration wise, the season was fairly uneventful with no national rarities being recorded and nothing exceptional recorded in terms of numbers moving through in the spring apart from Blackcaps which were recorded in much higher numbers than normal. Autumn was notable for the passage of Redpoll with 218 being ringed. A total of 3458 birds of 60 species were ringed during 2015. Unusual ringing included 2 Yellow-browed Warblers (both caught on 18th October), Water Rail, Common Snipe and Shelduck.



The colour ringing projects on Chough, Gulls, Wheatear and Rock Pipit were continued and some interesting re-sightings were received, the highlight of which was a locally hatched Wheatear colour ringed in August 2014 seen at Helgoland Bird Observatory, Germany in April.

Monitoring work in connection with the eradication of the Brown Rat continued throughout the season. Survey work in the Manx Shearwater colonies was refined and a substantial amount of time was dedicated to this work during the summer months. Existing colonies were found to be expanding and also a new colony was located. A total of 105 adults and 2 pulli were ringed and 34 retraps caught which included several birds that had been ringed as pulli on the Calf.

On the Estate side, after a couple of months of reliance on the tractor at the start of the season for all Calf transport, morale was boosted by the arrival of a new ATV. After much consideration of the merits of alternative vehicles, a Polaris Ranger was finally squeezed on Scrayll in June and shipped over to the Calf. Funding for the new acquisition was gratefully received from the Friends of Manx National Heritage.



Another significant milestone during the year was the replacement of the channel marker into South Harbour. A casualty of the January 2013 storms, the absence of the marker, allied with some large projecting stones in the bottom of the harbour, had made navigation into this harbour tricky in the intervening period. Manx National Heritage staff and volunteers, working day and night between tides, managed to reinstate the marker with some ingenious use of flotation devices.

Volunteers meanwhile continued with the considerable on-going task of reinstating the Sea Field drystone wall, while good in-roads were made into pond clearance at the Withy. Other routine maintenance tackled included giving the front of the Observatory a well-deserved lick of paint.

Although bookings for the Observatory accommodation were promising at the start of the season, the weather put paid to these prospects with many stays cancelled due to boats not being able to operate.



Walney – Colin Raven

At the beginning of the year, the waters off Walney Island became the stronghold of the wintering Shag population on the North West coast of England; however, the sea was otherwise relatively quiet,

although a juvenile Pomarine Skua was logged on two occasions. Wildfowl included 206 pale-bellied and 65 dark-bellied Brent Goose, 53 Barnacle Goose and two Long-tailed Duck. Flocks of 8,550 Knot and 1,000 Golden Plover were present while 10 Greenshank and four Jack Snipe were all settled in traditional winter haunts. Around 40 Little Egret assembled at low tide in the sheltered tidal creeks along the eastern side of the island and Merlin and Short-eared Owl were amongst the raptors that hunted the island daily. Wintering passerines were represented by a single Snow Bunting, 220 Twite and 20 Tree Sparrow – the latter an infrequent occurrence on the island and a legacy of the exceptional passage the previous autumn.

A hint of spring was soon provided by a steady increase in the numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull back on territory and the first Sandwich Terns then appeared offshore while totals of 1,620 Pink-footed Geese and 237 Whooper Swan headed north. Although the first Chiffchaff and Wheatear arrived on cue spring migration was generally subdued with only the latter and Blackcap approaching reasonable numbers, even though two Ring Ouzels and a Black Redstart were recorded. A long-

staying Hooded Crow put in regular appearances and was briefly joined by two additional birds while both Osprey and Hen Harrier flew through. Waders included peaks of 100 Whimbrel and 34 Purple Sandpiper amongst the usual species while a pair of Garganey also put in a brief appearance. Highlights over the sea were limited to 27 Arctic Skua, eight Puffin, three Pomarine Skua, three Great Skua and a Black Guillemot.

Away from birds, a **Grey Arches (Photo below)** in June would appear to be the first for the island.



The breeding season censuses saw further declines in the Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Eider colonies while more promising were an increase in Little Terns and the first instance of Arctic Tern nesting on the island for around 25 years. However, all five species showed poor or no productivity.

The first signs of autumn were already beginning to show from late June with a summering Greenshank joined by the first returning birds and 42 Black-tailed Godwit and a female Garganey quickly followed. A juvenile Citrine Wagtail – Cumbria's first, was to prove to be the passerine highlight of the year in what was generally a poor autumn passage. What was historically the staple species, Willow Warbler, only totalled around 150 birds and other species were also only present in low numbers, although six Pied Flycatchers were above the average of recent years. The influx of Yellow-browed Warbler along the east coast of Britain finally penetrated to the island with three birds logged along with two Black Redstarts and a Snow Bunting. Highlights over the sea involved a single Cory's Shearwater, Leach's Petrel and Black Tern while three Long-eared Owl and single Hen Harrier, Marsh Harrier and Osprey were also recorded. However, it was the skies that provided the main interest, diurnal migration was strong with good numbers of passerines on the move, though it was a record passage of Pink-footed Geese that provided the main interest with an exceptional total of 22,695 logged along with 171 Whooper Swan.

The second winter period showed that the year had turned full cycle. Although a record 64 Little Egret remained to winter, the year ended much as it had begun with 176 pale-bellied and 65 dark-bellied Brent Goose, 80 Barnacle Geese, 20 Twite, 18 Shag, 10 Greenshank, seven Purple Sandpiper, four Jack Snipe and a Great Northern Diver once again inhabiting traditional island haunts. Some variety was provided by

two female Velvet Scoter and single Pomarine Skua and Glaucous Gull.



North Ronaldsay – Alison Duncan

Spring lacked any big numbers of migrants but highlights included an impressive Long-tailed Skua passage with 79 on 13th May, a male Rustic Bunting on 20th (present for 10 days), 3 sightings of

Bee-eater from 23rd and the second island record of Veery (11th for Britain) trapped on 30th.



Veery – NRBO

There were 2 pods of Orcas seen on 13th and 24th and a Todd's Canada Goose at the end of the month. Amongst Bluethroats, Icterine Warblers and Red-backed Shrikes in early June was the first spring record of Olive-backed Pipit for the island on 5th. A male Western Subalpine Warbler was trapped on 20th June.

Some Arctic Tern colonies successfully fledged young this summer, though not on the same scale as 30 years ago, better than in many of the last 20 years. Black Guillemots (Tysties) had a very successful breeding season.

The largest fall in August for many years occurred around the time of the bird fair (unfortunately for some of us!) with good numbers of Willow Warblers and a Booted Warbler. Other August highlights included a record count of Swifts (352), Red Kite, Citrine Wagtail and 2 Greenish Warblers. Citrine Wagtail and Greenish Warbler also appeared in September; there was a good passage of Yellow-browed Warblers (31 on 21st) as elsewhere, Blyth's Reed Warbler and an immature male Northern Harrier from 25th was present for a large part of the autumn.

October saw a good fall of Goldcrests but also Pechora Pipit and Firecrest, large passage of Redwings and other thrushes with other highlights of 24 Short-eared Owls and a Humpback Whale made its way past the south end of the island.



Male Northern Harrier

After almost 5 years as AW and Housekeeper Mark and Fleur Warren are moving on and for 2016 we welcome Euan Ferguson and Carmen Azahara, who will share the 2 posts and Bryony Baker as seasonal relief housekeeper. George Gay will be returning as a volunteer in 2016. Our expanded programme for volunteers this season has been very successful and is still open to applications for volunteers for 2016. Some of our volunteers have been helped by the BTO's Young Bird Observatory Volunteer Fund and in fact the remainder of the Adrian and Wendy Cawthorne Appeal Fund has now been put to the YBOVF to help young people to visit North Ronaldsay.



Spurn – Paul Collins, Ian Walker and Andy Roadhouse

The early winter period remained mild and as spring approached a bright warm spell took over, sadly the rest of the spring and early summer was mostly cold and wet hampering the breeding season. Late summer fared much better with much warmer weather, sadly a bit late for some species. Autumn was mild with a mostly eastern airflow which helped with the rarity factor but did little to aid any southerly passage. The rest of the year was just windy with SW gales.

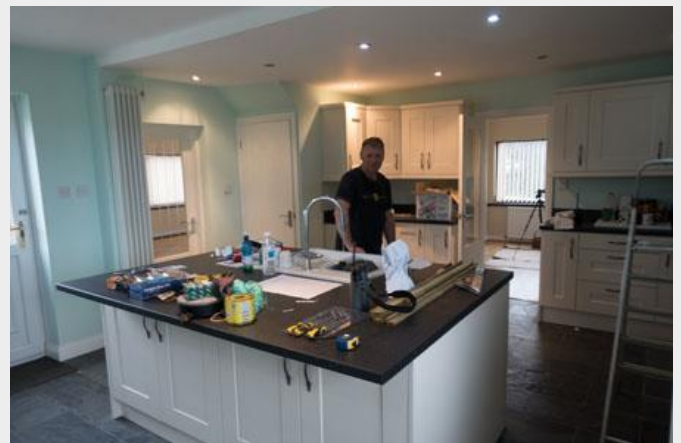
This year proved to be a record year for species recording with 265 (if all records are accepted) including three new species for Spurn: American Wigeon, Laughing Gull and Blyth's Pipit. Other highlights were a Black Stork, White-winged Black Tern, Red-flanked Bluetail, 2 Arctic Warblers and a Radde's Warbler.



Black Stork - Spurn BO

Ringling was on the whole below average with just over 9000 birds ringed, mainly due to a poor breeding year and lack of passage, although Lesser Redpolls were ringed in record numbers.

The event of the year for Spurn Bird Observatory has to be the purchasing of a new observatory building in Kilnsea which will be made fit for purpose over this winter. After refurbishment it is hoped that the new accommodation becomes an asset within the local community and the birding fraternity with at least 11 beds in a new more modern set up to suit all needs, all we need to do is pay for it!



We think you'll agree Spurn Bird Obs is going from strength to strength and we intend to keep improving and developing everything we do, but we really need to reduce the mortgage we have had to take on to purchase this property, please visit our [Just Giving campaign page](#) and help out if you can, you'll be helping secure the future of Spurn Bird Observatory and ensuring we are here for years to come.



The third **MigFest** was held from 4th to 6th September and was hailed as the best yet. Over 200 tickets were sold for the weekend event and local farmers, Sue and Andrew Wells, had made a larger barn

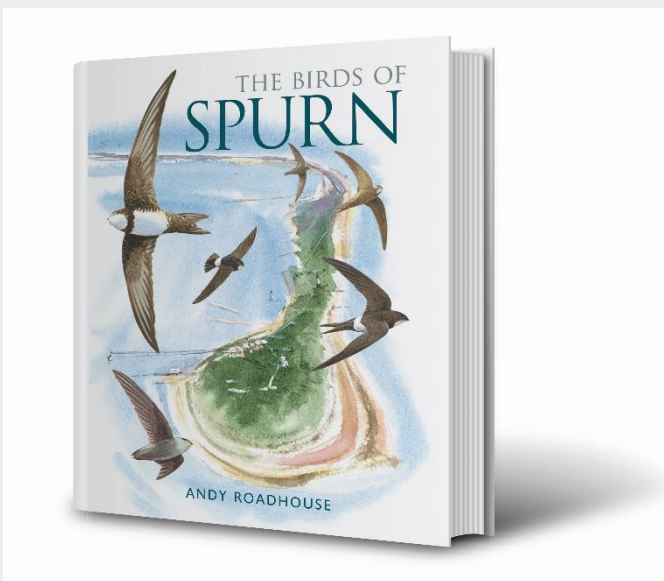
available to host the increased numbers. Birders had come from far afield including Holland, Germany and Hungary. A whole range of events had been organised which included tutored seawatching, viz-migging and gull/wader identification. There were also digiscoping classes, painting workshops and ringling demonstrations.

Weather conditions were less favourable than previous years and pride of place went to seabirds with Sabine's Gull, Cory's Shearwater, and processions of Sooty Shearwaters and Skuas.



An obliging Barred Warbler did however delight the passerine fans. Various talks and presentations took place throughout the day and the keynote Saturday evening lecture was delivered by the well known Israeli birder, Yoav Perlman, who gave a tantalising account of migration in Israel. A new feature this year was the Young Birder of the Year Award. This was organised in conjunction with the Next Generation Birders and sponsored by Swarovski. Three finalists were nominated by NGB and were tested in the field on their identification skills, the most competent received a pair of Swarovski binoculars. This competition will now become an annual event. The MigFest 2016 will be held from 9th to 11th September in conjunction with our new partners the BTO with whom we have recently signed a Friendship Agreement.

Birds Of Spurn



Andy Roadhouse has been working on a new book for the last seven years which will be called 'THE BIRDS OF SPURN'. It is the first definitive work on the birds of the Spurn area including Easington with records dating back to the mid-19th Century and it is expected to be published in early 2016. The book will be hard backed with between 500-600 pages and full colour throughout.

All 388 species recorded in the Spurn area up to the end of 2014 are included and all are illustrated with either photographs or with artwork provided by some of the best bird artists in the country. There are plenty of statistics and graphs taken from 70 years worth of Observatory

records. Also there are rarity accounts of certain rare finds, tales of great days birding, whether it be falls, good sea-watches or good vis-migging days.

The history of Spurn is covered along with the people who have made a difference and put Spurn firmly on the map. Descriptions of habitats and sites provide a useful site guide and a where and when to visit to make the most of your visit to Spurn. New detailed maps will enhance this even more.

The book is designed as a publication that will never go out of date, as any FRIEND OF SPURN BIRD OBSERVATORY who purchases the book will receive an annual updated list by email to print off that will include new species, new record counts, early/late dates, ringing totals etc. and will neatly fit into a separate folder that is integral with the publication itself. This is a new concept with think has never been used before. It will without doubt will be on all birdwatcher's bookshelves for many years to come.

Copies can be obtained from the Spurn Brd Obs Website



Flamborough – Craig Thomas

During the early months, rough grassland along the cliffs attracted a Rough-legged Buzzard, six Short-eared and two Long-eared Owls, 80 Twite, 200 Yellowhammers and 80 Corn Buntings. A Greenland White-

fronted Goose that took up residence during February was unprecedented.

Over the last three years the Observatory has created a small wetland at Thornwick where a Mandarin appeared on 31st March; only the third ever record. In the local context, a Green Woodpecker on 4th April was the month's rarest record, with additional sightings including an Alpine Swift on 11th, Little Bunting on 15th and a Red-rumped Swallow on 30th. Usually spring's best month, May was disappointing and dominated by westerly winds - Thornwick attracted a Garganey on 12th, whilst a Bee-eater and Icterine Warbler on 24th stood out.

Five Bee-eaters overflowed the Headland on 6th June; a singing Rosefinch appeared on 8th and a male Red-backed Shrike two days later, when yet another Bee-eater graced the Outer Head. A singing Greenish Warbler located on 15th represented spring's last notable passerine migrant. The following day a Temminck's Stint graced Thornwick Pools and nearby a flock of 11 Bee-eaters flew south over Bempton. Six Pomarine Skuas were offshore during the latter half of June, a pair of Garganey visited Thornwick on 18th and 1420 Common Scoters flew north on 23rd. Breeding records included a pair of Shelduck, one pair of Little Ringed Plover that unfortunately failed and a male White Wagtail that bred with a Pied.

The return wader migration started with a Wood Sandpiper at Thornwick Pools on 1st July, where there were two Red-veined Darters. Seawatching picked up during the last week of July with the introduction of northerly winds and highlights included Balearic and Sooty Shearwaters and all four skuas, including an adult Long-tailed on 30th. The start of August was relatively

quiet, with two Minke Whales showing well during the second week the undoubted highlight. Light north-easterly winds on 14th heralded the first arrival of passerines, headlined by an Icterine Warbler, with two Red-backed Shrikes over subsequent days. Another pulse of migrants occurred from 19th, including a handful of Icterine Warbler, Red-backed Shrike and Wryneck. A more substantial fall occurred on 23rd/24th August produced a Honey Buzzard, 85 Pied Flycatchers, 220 Willow Warblers, four Icterine Warblers and four Wrynecks. A Garganey stayed on Thornwick Pools on 26th August and another Red-backed Shrike made landfall on 31st. September began with the discovery of an Eastern Subalpine Warbler on 1st; although elusive, it stayed into early October. Moderate northerlies on 7th resulted in a movement of 1149 Fulmars and 131 Sooty Shearwaters, whilst a Fea's Petrel headed north the next day. Light north-easterly winds on 9th September prompted the arrival of a Honey Buzzard, Red-backed Shrike and Barred Warbler, whilst two Yellow-browed Warblers were early arrivals on 11th; the autumn proving to be the best ever for the species. A minimum of 1200 Meadow Pipits arrived on 17th September, with 1006 Little Gulls moving south on 21st. The latter week of September was relatively quiet, although new arrivals included Crane, Barred Warbler, Firecrest and up to eight Yellow-browed Warbler daily.

Light winds on 2nd October produced a Honey Buzzard and a Great Grey Shrike, whilst nine Yellow-browed Warblers were present the following day and 16 on 4th, with a Richard's Pipit the highlight of 5th. An arrival on 6th October included 20 Yellow-browed Warblers, 27 Ring Ouzels and 310 Song Thrush. The introduction of easterlies from 9th produced more migrants, including an Olive-backed Pipit. A Basking Shark off the Headland the next day was a very rare event, whilst a late Red-veined Darter was also present. A significant fall occurred on 11th including a Bluethroat, Great Grey Shrike, two Red-breasted Flycatchers, 860 Goldcrests, with a Red-flanked Bluetail appeared the following day. Another Red-flanked Bluetail graced the Headland on 13th October, whilst new arrivals on 14th included a Siberian Stonechat, three Great Grey Shrikes and a Pallas's Warbler.



Siberian Stonechat – Craig Thomas

Another Olive-backed Pipit was located on 15th, along with three Pallas's Warblers and a Little Bunting; a Dusky Warbler made landfall the next day and two more Pallas's Warbler appeared on 17th. Winds switched to the west during the latter half of October and migration stalled, although another Pallas's Warbler appeared on 26th and a Hume's Warbler the next day. The month's final day produced a particularly showy Pallid Swift and a southerly movement of 1005 Golden Plovers



Pallid Swift – Craig Thomas

Record numbers of Whooper Swans headed south during November, including 154 on 15th that smashed the previous day record. With only a handful of previous sightings, a Black-necked Grebe on 21st was welcome, with 130 Little Auks moving north the next day. December proved to be mild and unsurprisingly quiet, although a Richard's Pipit on 2nd was unusual and a Yellow-browed Warbler on 20th without precedent.



Little Auk – Craig Thomas



Bardsey – Steffan Walton

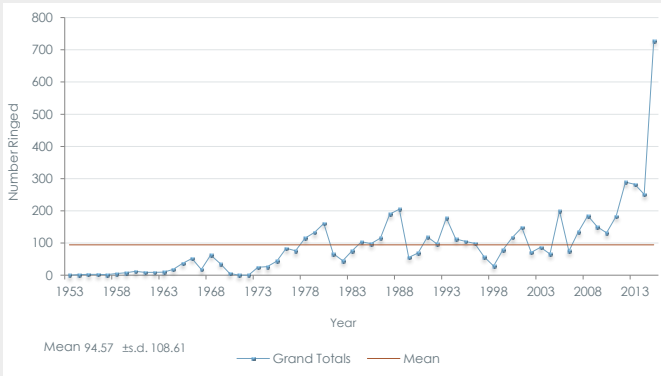
Returning to the island early March, the wardening team were quick off the mark

finding the first Chiffchaffs and Wheatears. The rest of the month was a quiet affair apart from a good run of Firecrests, Black Redstarts and Glaucous Gulls.



Firecrest - Steve Stansfield

The observatory buildings fared well in the winter storms but a great bunch of volunteers helped getting the observatory reading for the first guests of the season. April will be remembered as much for the scorching weather as the brilliant numbers of phylloscops and Blackcaps. On many days over 1000 of the former and 200 of the latter were present around the island. Birds were literally dripping from every bush. Ringing numbers naturally benefited with more Blackcaps ringed in three weeks than any previous annual total!



Blackcap annual ringing totals 1952-2015

Following into these nets were a good run of 'ringing scarcities' with singles of Yellowhammer, Pied Flycatcher, and Wood Warbler ringed, as well as a Fieldfare with a brood patch in Late May!!

Some nice early arrival dates were noted including Wryneck, Reed Warbler and an incredibly early Spotted Flycatcher, only the second in Britain in 2015. Bardsey also got in on the west coast Hoopoe invasion with potentially two touring the island in April along with a tantalising set of Long-eared Owl records. Unfortunately May was to follow, a complete write-off with ferocious gales and almost non-stop rain.

The events of June more than made up for it though. It started with a bang as a stunning male Shorelark displayed in the north-west arable fields.



Shorelark – Steve Stansfield

A totally bizarre record and the first of this species since 1997. Soon after a splendid Red-breasted Flycatcher was trapped and ringed, and a Common Rosefinch toured the Lowlands.

The morning of the 10th will be remembered for many a year as the day the stunning male Cretzschmar's Bunting appeared. Apart from a few days playing hide-and-seek at first, the bird showed well in the lighthouse compound until the 20th.



Cretzschmar's Bunting- Steve Stansfield

Over 500 people came to the island to see this 6th for Britain and first for Wales. The birders were very grateful of the effort that BBFO's staff went to get them to the island and were very generous and donated over £2000 to our small charity. This is the first record away from the Northern Isles and a very welcome addition to the lists of the 500 birders who made the trip to our fantastic island!



Not content with this mega-rarity. Some good island records also put in an appearance during this time such as Wood Sandpiper, two Quails and the first Red-veined Darters for six years. Thus, despite a surprising lack of Golden Orioles, Subalpine and Hippolais Warblers, spring ended on a particularly high note.

The summer was all about monitoring our breeding birds. The Manx Shearwater census continues to report an increase with potentially 21,000 pairs now present. All other seabirds held steady with most showing either slightly increased populations or high productivity, sometimes both. Particularly notable was the discovery of new Puffin colonies on the East Side. On the passerine front, Blackcaps capitalised on their unprecedented spring passage. Two pairs bred at Nant; only the second ever breeding records and the first for a decade. Sparrowhawks attempted to breed at Nant, the first since 2009, whilst two pairs of Goldcrest were also notable. Record numbers were recorded for species such as Meadow Pipit, Wren, Pied Wagtail, and good numbers of Wheatear bred for the second year running. The hoped-for breeding of Black Guillemots failed to materialise but at least three birds continue to be territorial at the North End. The second breeding record of Canada Goose on

Ynys Gwylan Fawr was a surprise but it was disappointing to see Ringed Plovers make no such attempt this year. Whitethroats suffered a disastrous season with a complete failure but Cuckoo bred for the second successive year following excellent spring passage.

During these summer months a fair share of our non-avian highlights occurred. A Scarlet Tiger was discovered at Cristin on 5 July becoming an excellent addition to the island list. An Azure Damselfly seen on 8 July was the first for 14 years but a Ringleet found on The Narrows a few days later was the real surprise, a first for the island no less. In August, an excellent count of 230 Grey Seals was the highest since 2011, with the month also recording the year's peak counts of Common Dolphin and Risso's Dolphin. Another first for the island materialised on 17 August with a Banded Demoiselle photographed amongst the gorse on the South End. Lastly, a Dark-green Fritillary seen on 24 August was the first recorded for a decade.

Autumn was late arriving on Bardsey and even then made for a struggle at times. The autumn may mostly be remembered for fine records of scarce island species including Roseate Tern, Long-tailed Tit, Gadwall, Hawfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, Bullfinch, and an almost unprecedented arrival of Coal Tits. Early highlights such as Great White Egret and Serin would have been well received if they had been more than just fly-bys. However things finally hit with a shock flock of three Ortolan Buntings discovered at Ty Capel amongst a hoard of Linnets. Surprisingly, a different bird was to be found in same area a few days later.



Ortolan Bunting – Steve Stansfield

The island benefited from calm easterlies throughout September and October producing new records for Yellow-browed Warbler and Firecrest, yet surprisingly just one Wryneck.

At least three Siberian Chiffchaffs were seen during this period with a stunning Pallas's Warbler trapped and ringed on 19 October. Unexpectedly decent seabird passage was recorded in the calm weather with good numbers of all four Skuas, Balearic and Sooty Shearwater, along with small numbers of Sabine's Gull and Grey Phalarope. The settled weather had other additional benefits by allowing the highest ringing total for many years to be recorded and a high survival rate for the newborn Grey Seal pups. Some great new firsts for the island were recorded by our brand new bat detector deployed by NRW; Nathusius' Pipistrelle and Noctule both logged on 16 September. Autumn saw new visitors to the island with a fresh bunch of Next Generation Birders once again experiencing island life, the Society of Wildlife Artists collaborating with us and the BTO Flight Lines project to

document migration in action, whilst we also trialled our first ever 'Migration Week' with great success. With guests departing the last days of the season had a few final highlights left. One of the terrific finds of the year concerned a Red-flanked Bluetail found at Nant on 25 October; becoming only the third record for Wales.

Fierce winds and fading light made viewing awkward though everyone saw the bird eventually before retiring in the evening to say goodbye to BITL warden Rhodri Evans. Not to be outdone, the spectacle of over 10,000 finches passing through on 31 October alongside a minimum of 19 Short-eared Owls took some beating. Finally, one of the most interesting and rarest records of the year went to the pristine male Vagrant Emperor found near Cristin Withy on 1 November.



Vagrant Emperor – Steve Stansfield



Isle of May – Mark Newell

I am very pleased to report that the Observatory has enjoyed another successful year with the Low Light fully occupied for virtually the whole season and with a productive breeding season for most seabirds. An extended spell of east winds resulted in a particularly exciting autumn migration with species new to the island recorded.

I am once again very grateful to Mark Oksien who, with the support of many volunteers, completed the construction of the concrete tank bases and installed the new water tanks – a considerable task anywhere but especially so on an island. Mark also led on completing the pathway and steps around the new extension. Another improvement was the replacement of the old kitchen stove with a nearly new model acquired in the saleroom by Iain English at a knock down price. The solar panels performed well through the season and briefly were generating, in high summer, sufficient power to heat the water and provide visitors with a hot shower!

At the forthcoming AGM on 18 Feb. 2016, Margaret Thorne will formally stand down as Hon Secretary after 16 years. Her help and support over this time has been invaluable and very much appreciated. We are delighted to welcome Julian Osborne as her successor. Our finances continue to be very sound and I would like to thank Niall Campbell for all his help and guidance through the year and not just on financial matters!

We envisage upgrading all the traps in future years and subject to funding hope to start this programme in 2016

by renewing the Bain Trap. As ever the help of volunteers will be required in early spring and if you are free to help please contact Mark Oksien.

As in previous years we have enjoyed great help and support from the SNH team of David Steel and Bex Outram who have provided us with invaluable assistance and outstanding sightings!

January- At least 50 Little Auks just off the isle while three Short-eared Owls were present during a visit 29 – 30th. February -A Buzzard was present on a brief trip out on 25th along with an early Shelduck. March- A Snow Bunting flew over on 18th & 19th with eight Jackdaw on the latter date a notable count. A Stonechat appeared on 26th. April - The month began with a new addition to the island list and the most extraordinary sighting of recent times with the discovery of a Red Grouse on 4th. Quite where this sedentary species had come from will remain a mystery with the nearest moorlands at least 20 miles away, it remained until 11th mainly in the Kirkhaven area. An immature Glaucous Gull also appeared on 4th and was seen occasionally throughout the month. A Tree Sparrow was present on 6th while five Velvet Scoter past on 19th began a run of sightings but were the first records since 2010. The 24th brought a pair of Gadwall to Tarbet, only the fourth & fifth island records, and a fall of migrants with Grasshopper Warbler and Yellow Wagtail the highlights. Despite a brisk northerly on 30th a Quail appeared.

May -Strong south easterlies and rain on 3rd brought a light fall of common migrants but the highlight occurred at dusk with the islands first record of Great White Egret. It circled over the isle for a few minutes before heading north and was presumably the same bird seen at Loch of Strathbeg (North-east Scotland) the following day. A Wryneck was seen on 4th May, while the 5th saw probably the biggest fall of the spring including a large number of common migrants, with Tree Pipit the most impressive with at least 50 present while three Cuckoos were in song. A Wood Warbler was seen on 6th after which the rest of the month ticked along with common migrants, but nothing exceptional happened until the group of seven Killer Whales which passed the island on 28th May and lingered long enough for all present to observe.



Orcas – Stuart Rivers

June brought a few surprises with a Common Rosefinch on 5th June, and a second on 13th found while searching for a Common Nightingale around the Top Trap area. A Black Guillemot on 20th June was an unseasonal sighting. A count of 193 Common Scoter heading past the island

on 24th June was an island record. July-An adult Pomarine Skua on 13th July was an early autumn sighting, with two Black Guillemot also noted. The 16th July brought a juvenile Black Redstart which had definitely not bred on the isle. A Short-eared Owl on 18th July was also an unusual date, while an adult male Red-backed Shrike on 28–29th July was even more unexpected.

August started with single Wryneck on 1st (and another on 23rd), two Ruff on 3rd with the islands sixth Kingfisher on 8th. Red Kites present on 8th and 15th were only the fourth and fifth island records. Two Wood Warblers were present on 14th. A juvenile Red-backed Shrike appeared on 21st, while there were a number of Icterine Warblers with the first on 18th increasing to four on 23rd, and a Barred Warbler was found on 19th with two on 23rd. The 24th brought a Blue-headed Wagtail and 15 Reed Warblers, another record count for the May. Highlight of the month was probably the Humpback Whale seen breaching off the north end on 22nd before heading north east.

September Began quietly with the first scarce migrant being a Common Rosefinch on 8th increasing to three on 11th, when yet another Wryneck was also present. The first Yellow-browed Warblers were two on 10th with three on 17th and further birds to the month end. With only seven previous records sightings of Honey Buzzard on 12th & 17th were particularly welcome as was a juvenile Red-footed Falcon from 14–19th, the isle's third record. Remarkably photos came to light revealing that the same bird was seen four days later at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire. The month ended with a record passage on 2,541 Pink-footed Geese on 25th, a Siberian (tritsits) Chiffchaff and Basking Shark on 28th and two juvenile Sabine's Gulls lingering on 30th September. The year's third (and isle's 6th) record of Gadwall with a male on the Loch for three days.

October was another month which started slowly before bursting into life on 4th with ten Yellow-browed Warblers, a Lapland Bunting and 35 Little Gulls offshore. The following day brought the first Richard's Pipit since 2002, seven Jack Snipe (second highest day count) and a significant fall of thrushes. Rare still on 6th was the isle's third record of Red-throated Pipit near the North Horn overshadowing the Hoopoe (14th isle record) which was probably seen the previous evening and stayed until 12th. A second record of the year of Kingfisher was surprising on 8th with a day record of 1451 Barnacle Geese over. The third addition to the isle list (and first for Fife) came in the form of a Pallid Harrier flying north on 10th with presumably the same bird seen heading south on 12th.



Pallid Harrier – Bex Outram



Hoopoe – David Steel

A remarkable few days continued with three Firecrest and an Olive-backed Pipit on the 11th joined by a second the following day; the 6th & 7th records. Red-breasted Flycatchers appeared on 12th and 15th while a Great Grey Shrike appeared on 18th when an adult Mediterranean Gull was lingering offshore. Only the 5th isle record it appeared to linger around the isle with erratic sightings until of a bird until at least 26th November while a second adult and a second winter bird joined it on 26th October. The month ends with good numbers of thrushes peaking at 4539 Redwing and 858 Fieldfare west on 27th with 300 Brambling, 11 Short-eared Owls and a Barn Owl was found roosting in the Byres (12th record and first since 2007). Blackbirds totalled 3000 on 29th with 80 Woodcock, 6 Short-eared Owls and a late Tree Pipit amongst other migrants. The 30th brought six Goosander and 43 Little Gulls.



Olive-backed Pipit – Bex Outram

November -Coverage was much reduced but the early part of the month was generally quiet after a phenomenal October. Most notable sightings came at the end of the month with a then record count of 15 Short-eared Owls from 24th - 26th at least. At least 40 Little Auk were off the isle on 26th when the Mediterranean Gull was

seen again. A female Goldeneye was also lingering on the Loch. December-A brief trip over the night of 16th produced an adult Whooper Swan seen at various parts of the isle which had apparently been present all month. At least two Woodcock were present but the standout species was Short-eared Owl with a phenomenal minimum of 24 present around the Low Light, eclipsing the previous record set last month.

Work parties 2016

Replacement Heligoland Traps: The aim is to move from the annual patching up of the Heligoland traps to a complete replacement of the four traps starting with the Bain. To carry out this work and open up the Observatory for the year a volunteer work party is planned for much of March 2016 (5th March-2nd April). Most of the work is expected to be fairly hard labour so volunteers need to be able-bodied and prepared to shift heavy loads of timber, concrete and netting. Accommodation will be in the Low Light with volunteers staying on for a week, or multiple periods thereof. Accommodation and transport to the island will be free for work party members. It is the intention to arrange the catering on a communal rather than individual basis with the cost shared by each weekly party. It would be appreciated if volunteers could indicate any special food needs. Mark Oksien will be the overall manager of the work party and will be on the island throughout. He will be responsible for drawing up an overall plan and programming the work. If you would like to volunteer or discuss what is involved could you please get in touch with Mark Oksien by email: markoksien@btinternet.com

SOC sponsored week for young birders

The second Young Birders Week occurred on 4th July 2015. From a total of thirty applicants six keen participants were chosen from across the UK and spent a week undertaking a variety of activities involved in a stay at a bird observatory and the wider work undertaken on the Isle of May. In addition to undertaking census and trap rounds, the group experienced an assortment of seabird ringing and a chance to participate in various aspects of seabird research, reserve management and several social activities such as an intra-island quiz. Thanks to Eleanor Grover, Sam Hood, Ptolemy McKinnon, Emily Robertson, Glen Wilson & Julia Young for their enthusiastic participation. Further thanks to the leaders: Mark Oksien, Stuart Rivers and Eilidh McNab and various members of SNH and CEH for providing insights and activities.





Hilbre – Steve Williams

Hilbre Bird Observatory – By Steve Williams

Three colour ringed Pale-bellied Brents remained in the wintering flock in the early part of the year including birds from both the East and the West Atlantic flyway populations; with birds ringed in Canada, Denmark and Ireland.



Hilbre (from Middle Eye)

The first migrants started returning in early March with first Stonechat then Wheatears Chiffchaff and Sand Martin recorded and the sole record of Woodcock of the year was noted on 20th. A Magpie caught and ringed on 25th was only the third to be ringed at Hilbre. Huge numbers of Common Scoters continue to be recorded towards the wind farms off North Wirral but the Surf Scoters found at the end of the month from Hoylake shore were just too far away to be picked up from the islands. April was a great month for migrants and a Tree Sparrow caught and ringed on 8th was a particular highlight, although quite sad how scarce this species has become on the islands. It was a good Ring Ouzel April with three birds caught on one day being a record for a day on Hilbre (9th).

However, a single Osprey (16th) was a poor showing this Spring by the standards of recent years. Little Ringed Plovers are scarce, but increasing, at Hilbre so two on 23rd were an excellent sighting, a control Spanish-ringed Sedge Warbler (24th) and an early summer plumaged Curlew Sandpiper (26th) rounded off an excellent month on the islands. It was a fantastic spring for Dunlin passage with numbers building up during late April and early May to over 10,000 at times and the odd Curlew Sandpiper were picked up during early May.



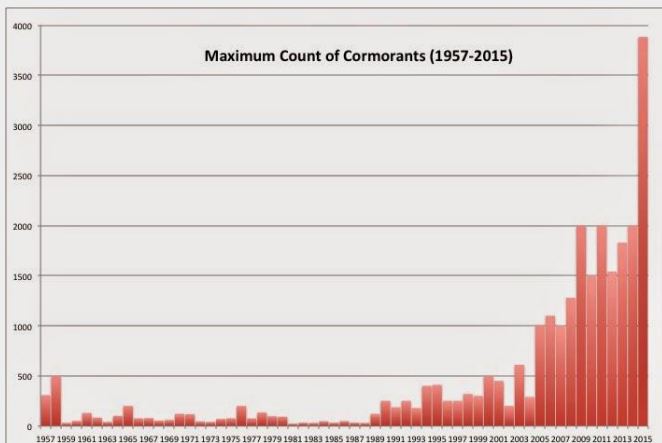
Dunlin

May was not a great month for warblers this year but Spotted Flycatchers were noteworthy for single birds arriving in the first half of the month followed by more in June. A dramatic rescue on the island over May bank holiday weekend of a visitor who had fallen from the west cliffs into the sea, involved several different emergency services, and was a reminder to all that Hilbre is still a wild and dangerous place at times.



Pale-bellied Brent Goose 'HDRB' – ringed on Axel Heiberg Island, Arctic Canada

Recent years have seen the Obs notice larger and larger numbers of Cormorants leaving the estuary at dawn with January counts this year eclipsing previous records. 3,884 were counted on 20 January 2015 and we understand this may be a UK record count. This tied in with the discovery of a huge night-time winter roost further up the Dee estuary by RSPB staff.



Cormorants leaving the estuary at dawn



Rock Pipit carrying food, the highlight of the year for many at the Obs was the first proven successful breeding of Rock Pipits on the island since 1987; one of the adults was ringed in April (and re-trapped during the Summer) and a couple of the young were also ringed during the late Summer. An unseasonal (but not unprecedented) Black Redstart spent a couple of days around the west side during July when Mediterranean Gulls were conspicuous amongst large numbers of Black-headed Gulls and even larger numbers of terns congregating as usual on the sand banks around the islands.

Perhaps the most unusual visitor was a young fox that appeared in the Obs building even briefly alighting on the Obs dining table in July! However, a juvenile Goldcrest caught and ringed in July was the first ever record of the species in that month on the islands and was presumably a fairly local breeder. August was a very poor month for Willow Warblers indeed. The weather was just not conducive for us. However, after a few sightings during early summer another Hummingbird Hawkmoth was seen (12th). The weather was not even very good for seawatching either; in fact the whole autumn until mid-November was poor on that front.



Hummingbird Hawkmoth

September was much better than August and small numbers of common migrants passed through. The middle of the month brought the first of two Firecrests this autumn (13th) and a couple of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were noted; a scarce but increasingly annual visitor to the islands. The highlight of the month however was a control Reed Bunting that was caught. We rarely catch more than one or two Reed Buntings per year so to catch a ringed bird was a real bonus; we look forward to finding out where and when it was ringed. October continued where September left off with more interesting birds caught and hardly any sea-watching again. The month started well with 4 Long-tailed Tits caught and ringed on 1st (not an annual occurrence at Hilbre). This was followed by Hilbre's first Great Spotted Woodpecker caught and ringed on 4th. A Slavonian Grebe on 10th was a nice record but was topped by a **Yellow-browed Warbler** (picture below) caught that day; our first for five years the last of which was caught on exactly the same date.



Another **Firecrest** (picture below) appeared on 12th.



The Canadian colour-ringed Pale-bellied Brent Goose returned on 15th. A Whooper Swan on 25th was noteworthy was a probable Rough-legged Buzzard on 26th a day that saw a large fall of Chaffinches with over 300 seen 100 of which were down on the island. More Short-eared Owls were noted during October/November making it a good autumn for this species on the islands.

November started with a Brambling 'down' on the island on 4th; only the second of the year. November at last provided some sea-watching weather with gales bringing in the first and only Leach's Petrels of the year with singles on 16th, 20th and 21st, a Grey Phalarope on 20th, Bonxies (really good numbers with 5 on 16th, 9 on 18th, 3 on 20th), Great Northern Divers on several dates from 16th, a pair of Gadwall only the 13th record for the Obs on 20th and a Goosander (20th).



Purple Sandpipers (above) appeared in slightly increased numbers with 16 on 14th; sadly significantly less than in the past. December saw the Brent flock were grew to at least 235 on 4th including a single dark bellied form. In the flock were no less than four colour-ringed individuals including returning birds that were ringed in Canada, Ireland and Denmark and a new bird which was ringed in Iceland this spring (May 2015). The latter having been seen in Northern Ireland earlier this autumn (thanks as always to the Irish Brent Goose Research Group for the information). A flyover Yellowhammer also on 4th was the first record since 2003. A flyover Snow Bunting on 14th was more expected but a Lapland Bunting on Little Eye the same day was a good winter record of a species that is more of an autumn visitor to Hilbre. With no employed staff the number of day-visits by a small group of volunteers this year has once again been exceptional with coverage excellent throughout the year but particularly at peak migration seasons. The Obs decided in July this year that it was a good time to expand its committee, especially with Steve Williams stepping down as Secretary after many years in the role. This will also spread the burden of the work beyond three or four individuals who have done much of the work behind the scenes for many years.

Our new committee is now comprised:

- Chairman and Ringing Secretary** Chris Williams
- Secretary** Phil Woollen
- Treasurer** Alan Hitchmough;
- Environmental Officer** Tony Bell (with Assistant Dr Gavin Broad)
- Rarities Secretary** Mark Turner
- Records Officer** Steve Williams (with Assistant Colin Jones);

2016 will be our 60th year and we are hoping to mark it with a number of events.

Photos by Barry Barnacal, Gavin Broad, Colin Jones and Steve Williams



Gibraltar Point – Kev Wilson

The effects of the December 2013 surge tide continue to influence daily life on site, with much of the operation and staff still functioning from temporary facilities. A £15,000 grant from East Lindsey District Council enabled the purchase of a static caravan to accommodate volunteers.

A mild winter period with no significant high tide or storm events. The establishment of a winter Pink-footed Goose flock locally is becoming somewhat of a feature, with up to 1500 birds involved. Otherwise, a small number of shore larks and Waxwings and some good diver numbers offshore provided winter interest.

There was a welcome return to full-staffing levels early in the year with the appointment of Jim Shaw as Assistant Warden.

There was a slow start to spring migration with strong north and west winds – March ended with gale force westerlies and no sign of a Wheatear. Unusually, there were no spring Black Redstarts around the old building complex (now uninhabited). The old Visitor Centre and Field Study Centre were demolished in May and the ground cleared for the building of a new Visitor Centre.



New Visitor Centre under construction – Jim Shaw

April had produced the first county spring record of little bunting and a superb adult White-tailed Eagle that eventually drifted over from the North Norfolk Coast.

There was another bizarre movement of jays in May, but that month was fairly cool with periods of north-westerly winds suppressing migration. The highlights though were a good run of golden oriole records – attracting birders from far and wide and a Caspian Tern in the evening roost on 30th. However, the month ended without a Pied-Flycatcher, Redstart or Whinchat!

A common bird census was organised, the first since 2011, but fieldwork was somewhat limited due to the unsuitable weather. Perhaps illustrating the point, both redwing and fieldfare were recorded in June! The survey by staff and volunteers (thanks to Rob Watson) confirmed the scale of the Willow Warbler crash, Turtle Doves still hung on in small numbers, sedge warblers arrived on territory in good numbers but there was no Grasshopper Warbler this year.

The annual CES survey was successfully completed by Dave and Liv Vincent whilst George Gregory maintained daily ringing input at the Bird Observatory.

The Little Tern Life Project provided a major boost for shorebird protection again this year. Overseen by Richard Doan (Shorebird Warden) again, additional support was provided by Anthony Bentley (Assistant Shorebird Warden) and Nige Lound (night cover). Work in particular to combat fox predation through night patrols and diversionary feeding along with good weather and ample food stocks during the latter part of the season culminated in 32 pairs of little terns raising a total of 30 juveniles. It was particularly pleasing to report good success too for Ringed Plover as the species was on course to be admitted to the Red List.

On the lagoons though, breeding waterbirds fared badly, mostly due to a fox making daily sorties out to the islands to predate the nests of Black-headed Gulls, avocet, lapwing and common tern.

Once all the July hay crop had been ruined by rainfall, the latter part of the summer provided something of a heat wave and a good opportunity to study the re-colonisation of dragonflies on the Freshwater Marsh – salinity in most of the ponds having significantly reduced since the saltwater flood of December 2013. A total of 17 species were recorded during the year with highlights being red-veined darter, hairy dragonfly, small red-eyed damselfly and black darter. The annual butterfly transect was completed with the butterfly highlight being a dingy skipper – the first confirmed record of modern times, but it was a lean year for moth-trapping. August produced bee-eaters on two dates, a massive sanderling roost (9000) and the first Black Stork for the site. A migrant fall late month saw a welcome arrival of Willow Warblers, pied flycatchers and a record seven wrynecks. The month ended with up to 3 Pomarine Skuas offshore.

September produced two main bird highlights; the first white winged black tern (a juvenile) since 1973 and a superb, long-staying juvenile red-footed falcon that had paused on the Isle of May earlier in the month.



Red-footed Falcon – Kev Wilson

The month was marked by the sad announcement that the Trust's founder and President, Ted Smith, had passed away. Ted will be fondly remembered by all at "Gib", the wider Lincolnshire Trust and beyond, having contributed

so much to the nature conservation movement nationwide since the late 1940s. The legacy of his work remains very strong and by this time, the new Visitor Centre building was taking shape. Another aspect of Ted's vision was the collating of bird observatory data – he established the Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory in 1949 – and we are grateful to Centrica for continuing another three years of funding to enable us to continue the Data Archive Project. Some 900,000 records have been input onto the site database by George Gregory and much of this has been checked by a small team of volunteers, overseen by Mike Archer.

The latter autumn period provided some very exciting birding with large influxes of thrushes and Goldcrests along with record numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers, both Little and Rustic Buntings, the first Dusky Warbler for the Obs (surprisingly!) a Red-flanked Bluetail and a popular juvenile Pallid Harrier.



Rustic Bunting – Martin Swannell

The passage of whooper swans brought some spectacular sights (and sounds!) again from late October, coinciding with the arrival of the pink-feet during an unusually mild late year period. By the end of the year 240 species of bird had been recorded – one of the highest ever totals.

At the November meeting of the Observatory Team, Mick Briggs was thanked for all his input as Ringer in Charge, as he stood down. George Gregory will take over and Mike Polling has taken up the post of Secretary.

I would like to thank all staff, volunteers and other contributors who have helped us at Gib during 2015.



Portland – Martin Cade

It's probably fair to say that if Portland was memorable for one thing during 2015 it was that it was a relentlessly windy year with, for example, the ringing total always pegged back through so many mist-nets being either out of action or ineffective. That's not to say the birding year was in any way a write-off: one of the nationwide influx of wayward juvenile Black Storks that appeared overhead during August constituted a long-awaited addition to the island list, both migration seasons came up with spells of strong passage – even if these were rarely sustained – and there

was always a good scatter of oddities to keep visitors entertained.



Black Stork – Duncan Walbridge

In the absence of severe weather the early months of the year passed largely uneventfully: wintering singles of Black Brant, Black Guillemot and Hooded Crow were of note, whilst the first visible Coot to grace the Bill for 34 years was a local highlight.

Spring passage of the likes of Meadow Pipits and Stonechats was detected as promptly as the beginning of February but the longer distance trans-Saharan migrants started to show up more or less on cue from early March. Spring was very much a season of two halves with a strong arrival of the likes of phylloscs, Blackcaps and Redstarts through late March and April; however, a shocker of a May saw much reduced numbers of the larger warblers in particular. These events were reflected in the Obs garden ringing totals: 1657 in April was well on par with recent years, but 230 in May represents but a third of the recent average for that month. For the most part sea passage was a huge disappointment, with woeful numbers of terns a feature throughout.

The spring rarity tally was topped by the second island record of Bonaparte's Gull.



Bonaparte's Gull, Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls – Pete Saunders

Whilst scarce migrants included the first spring Tawny Pipit for many years and a record count of 4 Golden Orioles together.



Golden Oriole – Martin Cade

In contrast to spring, autumn passage was unprecedentedly slow to get going, with not a sniff of any numbers until well into the second week of August. Thereafter it was a steady if never spectacular season for common migrants: Grasshopper Warbler and Sedge Warbler fared very poorly early in the season, whilst later it was a very low-key season for thrushes; Goldcrest was the stand-out success, staging a conspicuous recovery from the doldrums of recent years, whilst amongst the more irruptive species there were good showings of *ater* Coal Tits, Siskins and Redpolls. The aforementioned Black Stork provided the rarity highlight of the autumn, with a back-up cast that included the first Olive-backed Pipit to be ringed for 45 years and, for the second year running, a Western Bonelli's Warbler.



Western Bonelli's Warbler – Martin Cade

Although routine fieldwork carried on in much the same vein as it always has, an exciting new development this year has been the initiation of a nocturnal migration sound-recording project; although still in its infancy - and throwing up all manner of conundrums as sampling continues - this project has already revealed a wealth of hitherto unsuspected happenings overhead in the hours of darkness, as well as providing us with a gauge of the sheer volume of passage of some species that we're not otherwise tapping into.



Fair Isle – David Parnaby

In any summary of a year on Fair Isle, the rarities tend to grab the headlines and 2015 was no different, with the island's 386th species leading the way - Great White Egret. More notable on a national scale were Siberian Thrush, Siberian Rubythroat,

Red-flanked Bluetail, Pallas's Grasshopper, Moltoni's, Paddyfield, Aquatic, Booted and two Lanceolated Warblers, a whole host of other rarities and some 'big' island birds like Mute Swan and Goshawk.



Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler – David Parnaby

Several species had notable years, with Yellow-browed Warbler in particular breaking records: earliest ever (9th Sep), highest day count (76), highest annual total (207) and most ringed in a year (82). In fact, YBW was the commonest bird ringed in September! Other birds to experience good years included Tree Sparrow (strongest spring passage since 1974), Short-eared Owl (record count of 38) and some impressive raptor passage in mid-September that saw a record day-count of Sparrowhawk (10), 13 Kestrel, three Hen Harriers, two Merlin, Peregrine, and a Pallid Harrier (reflecting similar passage at our neighbours Utsira, albeit on a smaller scale). A flock of Glossy Ibis took up residence at the Observatory for a while too.



Glossy Ibis – David Parnaby

Westerly winds meant that some species were in short supply in spring (only three Bluethroats and no Wood

Warblers were logged for example), although the first Tawny Pipit for ten years and Rustic Bunting were found. Autumn saw some exciting times, with the likes of Radde's Warbler, Ortolan Buntings and Olive-backed and Red-throated Pipits arriving in easterly winds, interspersed with westerly winds bringing quieter spells, although some large falls of thrushes and Woodcock kept up the interest until mid-November.



Radde's Warbler – David Parnaby

Seabirds had a mixed season, with some species (including Bonxie, Shag, Guillemot and Razorbill) all registering high productivity, whilst others did very badly. Bonxie numbers crashed, Kittiwakes continued to decline and Arctic Terns are almost gone as a breeding species, but Guillemots (20,924 individuals) and Razorbills (1,930 individuals) both showed increases from the last all-island count taken five years ago. Breeding landbirds on Fair Isle are more limited, but Redshank bred for only the third time and Dunlin and Corncrake may have nested.

Sea mammals included several visits from Killer Whales, regular sightings of Risso's Dolphins throughout the autumn and over 50 Grey Seals pups born on the isle. Research included the RSPB continuing their seabird tracking work, work on Storm Petrel foraging and some interesting studies into Euphrasia and lichens.

The FIBO Migration Project advanced, with analysis of the FIBO logs (which were digitised thanks to a grant from SOC) throwing up some interesting trends. The Migration Project generated a fair bit of publicity for the work of FIBO, and Fair Isle featured in the media on several further occasions, including the island's bid to attract more residents by setting up a community development project, a paper using FIBO data to analyse Puffin declines, Ben Fogle's 'New Lives in the Wild UK' and much more. The FIBO website also saw some major work and it is now a treasure trove of information and pictures, with more still to come.

On an island with a population of only around 60 souls, the Obs has an important role to play in the community and, amongst other things, we were pleased to employ several islanders this year. The Obs continued to play a role in helping the community's bid for Marine Protected Area status for Fair Isle, which we're hoping to see further progress on in 2016.

FIBO's guesthouse had another busy year and we were pleased to welcome many guests old and new, birders and otherwise. We'd like to thank all the staff, volunteers and Directors who helped to make 2015 a great success and for anyone who wants to be part of 2016 on Fair Isle (as a guest, staff member or volunteer), check the website and get in touch.



Next Generation Birders at Bird Observatories in 2015 – Jonnie Fisk

With the help of the BTO's Young Bird Observatory Volunteer Fund,

<http://tinyurl.com/OBS-YBOVF> four young

birders got to experience Orkney life by volunteering at North Ronaldsay this year, joining resident NGB Gavin Woodbridge. Their visiting periods pretty much covered the entire Obs year, and between them saw some incredible birds accordingly, as well as the aurora borealis and Killer Whales. Migrating Long-tailed Skuas, Pechora and Olive-backed Pipits, American Golden Plover, Veery, Blyth's Reed Warbler and Northern Harrier (thanks BOU!) were just some of the fantastic birds seen, plus a few of them went island-hopping for a Papa Westray Chestnut Bunting!



American Golden Plover on North Ronaldsay – George Gay



Blyth's Reed Warbler on North Ronaldsay – Espen Quinto Ashman

Now a spring tradition, the mid-May weekend meet-up at Spurn Bird Obs was, once again, great fun. 18 young birders gathered at East Yorkshire's "nose" to get stuck

into a weekend of spring migration, as well as enjoying a small footy match, Friday evening barbecue and a pub quiz. We were also lucky to be at Spurn the same evening as a local folk music event, so many of us arrived to the sound of acoustic guitars and a pie and pea supper! We got some top birding done. One group of NGBs discovered a Golden Oriole while working their way towards the point. Other highlights came in the form of Spurn's first American Wigeon, Spoonbill, Cuckoos, Little Stints, Little Gulls and Hobbies plus resident Barn and Little Owls. It was great to meet some young birders for the first time, see old friends and just enjoy the fantastic setting.

Along came August, and after another great BirdFair weekend, two different groups of NGBs hopped in cars and made their way to two separate Welsh fishing coves, their final destinations Skokholm and Bardsey Islands.

NGB has a particular connection with Bardsey Obs: it has held an NGB week in September 2014 and is the homeland of our very own "Bardsey Ben" Porter, (now relocated to Cornwall where we fully expect him to find Nanjizal's next mega yank!)



Team Bardsey with the Obs Staff.

The 2015 Bardsey NGB week, attended by 8 young birders, was a hit. The team caught up with Long-tailed and Pom Skuas and the second Grey Plover for the Bardsey year. The ringers managed to get experience with Manx Shearwaters and European Storm Petrels, among other birds. A great laugh was had by all and one NGB loved it so much he stayed on the island for a few extra days! Team Bardsey finished the week on 94 species.



Ben Porter helping BBFO staff ringing shearwater chicks with the Bardsey NGBs

For the first time, an NGB week at Skokholm Obs was organised in conjunction with Bardsey, meaning in total 14 NGBs were on Welsh island Observatories at the same time! The group on Skokholm got stuck in with birding, seabird ringing and the world's largest slowworms!



Team Skokholm

Particular highlights for the teams on Skokholm and Bardsey was the evening flight of the Manx Shearwaters, the nocturnal activity of Storm Petrels

Team Skokholm also connected with this decade's largest Golden Plover flock for the island! The weather gods smiled on the NGBs and granted them a couple of extra days on the island as rough seas meant they were stranded on the island! Team Skokholm finished the week on 86 species.

Having the two events on the same dates was excellent as it meant both teams had an informal competition over which island could record the most, and the best, species within the week. We got regular updates from the two islands, meaning the trips got a lot of attention from "landlocked" NGBs. Hopefully this year we can drum up a lot of interest for similar events.

Come October, Spurn was destination of choice again for 12 of us over the 8th - 15th, jamming in on great birds including a Red-flanked Bluetail, 2 American Golden Plovers, Little Bunting, Pallas's and Radde's Warblers, a few Great Grey Shrikes, 2 Richard's Pipits, and Yellow-browed Warblers. However, the sheer number of migrant Goldcrests was probably the birding event of the week. They carpeted lawns, fed on the Humber mudflats, perched on camera lenses and shoulders - a real lesson on the power of migration!



Red-flanked Bluetail at Spurn – Tim Jones

From 26th - 31st October, 5 NGBs also organised a trip to Portland, seeing Firecrests, a Pallas's Warbler, ater Coal Tits, Short-eared Owls and other migrants as well as

Portland's classic fare of Little Owl, Balearic Shearwater, Dartford Warbler and Black Redstart.



Pallas's Warbler at Portland – Ben Porter

The team enjoyed 6 days of birding and ringing, with "Bardsey" Ben Porter finding and photographing a Little Bunting which sadly scarpered before the rest could get onto it.



Little Bunting at Portland – Ben Porter

With bird observatories being hotbeds of migrant and rarity action, it is no surprise that several different sites were visited by young birders of a more 'twitchy' persuasion. Journeys were made, Landguard Pied Wheatear, Spurn's Black Stork, Bardsey's Cretzschmar's Bunting, a Swainson's Thrush on Skokholm and the Dungeness Acadian Flycatcher attracted huge numbers of admirers.



Pied Wheatear at Landguard – Jake Gearty

All of these events are in addition to of many different members simply taking individual visits and trips to observatories up and down the country, going for the birding, the ringing opportunities and the sheer pleasure of watching migration in action. Mention should go to 17 year-old Hampshire birder Josie Hewitt, who used her own time to stay at Bardsey, Portland and Skokholm Bird Observatories in 2015!

BIRD OBSERVATORY CONTACTS

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Cape Clear Bird Observatory

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Holme Bird Observatory

Web site: www.noa.org.uk
Warden/ Secretary: Sophie Barker
Broadwater Road
Holme-next-the-Sea
HUNSTANTON
PE36 6LQ
Tel: 01485 525406
Email: Info@noa.org.uk

Isle of May Bird Observatory

Website: www.isleofmaybirdobs.org
Secretary: Margaret Thorne
Craigurd House
Blyth Bridge
West Linton
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Tel: 01721 752612 Mobile: 07818887315
Email: craigurd@hotmail.com

Landguard Bird Observatory

Web site: www.lbo.org.uk
Warden: Seasonal
BOC liasion: Nigel Odin
Landguard Bird Observatory
View Point Road
FELIXSTOWE
IP11 3TW
Tel: 01394 673782
Email: landguardbo@yahoo.co.uk

North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory

Web site: www.nrbo.co.uk/
Warden: Alison Duncan
Twingness
North Ronaldsay
ORKNEY
KW17 2BE
Tel: 01857 633200
Email: alison@nrbo.prestel.co.uk

Portland Bird Observatory

Web site:
<http://portlandbirdobs.blogspot.co.uk>
Warden/Secretary: Martin Cade
Old Lower Light
PORTLAND
DT5 2JT
Tel: 01305 820553
Email: obs@btinternet.com

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory

Web site: www.sbbot.co.uk
Warden: Ian Hodgson
Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory
SANDWICH
CT13 9PF
Tel: 01304 617341
Email: info@sbbot.co.uk

Skokholm Bird Observatory

Web site:
<http://skokholm.blogspot.co.uk/>
Wardens: Richard Brown /Giselle Eagle
Skokholm Island
Martins Haven
Pembrokeshire
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Tel: 07971 114 303
Email: skokholmwarden@gmail.com

Spurn Bird Observatory

Web site:
www.spurnbirdobservatory.co.uk/
Warden: Paul Collins (FP)
Spurn Bird Observatory
Kilnsea,
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HULL
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Tel: 01964 650479
Email: pcnfa@hotmail.com

Walney Bird Observatory

Web site:
<http://walneybo.blogspot.co.uk/>
Ringling Trainer/warden: Colin Raven (FP)
18 Seathwaite Road
BARROW-IN-FURNESS
Cumbria
Tel: 01229 830517
Email: walneyobs@gmail.com