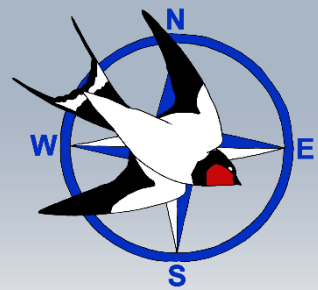


The newsletter of the British Bird Observatories Council



Welcome to the fourth BOC Newsletter.

Steve Stansfield – BOC Chairman

In the past three years the Bird Observatories Council produced newsletters – primarily a summary of the year with contributions from each Observatory. The newsletters were full of the excitement of the seasons for 2014, 2015 and a bumper 2016, with some stunning pictures of the rarities that Observatories so frequently attract!

We publish the newsletters online as an E-newsletter, hosting it on the BOC website as a PDF file. Based on the success of these editions, the BOC decided that we should continue the annual production and publish again in early 2017... and here it is, again packed with some fantastic summaries from the Observatories. Great stories of migration, major rarities and non-avian wildlife too.

In this edition we have put the Observatories in Alphabetical order so it will make finding the site you are interested in easier. We have included a section from one site (Alderney) which has yet to receive accreditation from the BOC, however, we are hopeful that their application will be received and accepted at our next AGM to be held at the BTO HQ, The Nunnery, in February.

Over the past 12 months there has been quite a lot happening behind the scenes at the BOC, I have been working closely with the BTO to try and finalise a new Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations. This has been quite a lengthy process, and is still not over! Many of the Observatories, all whom have different ways of working their own sites, felt that certain areas of the MOU were not favourable to them, whereas others thought the same area was a great idea!! Getting something that we can all agree on is paramount and we hope that over the next year we will be able to iron out any creases in the MOU and have a completed document ready for signing in 2019.

As previously mentioned, the BOC will be having its AGM in Norfolk, at the BTO this year. We have lots of exciting items on the agenda and we are looking forward to several new collaborative projects between the Observatories and the BTO which we hope will only strengthen our relationship with Britain's national ornithological body.

The final two sections of this newsletter detail how many youngsters have spent time at the Observatories in 2017,

and then a section about the 2nd International Bird Observatories Conference, held at Cape May Bird Observatory, New Jersey in the USA.

Over the past year there have been some rather stunning birds recorded at Observatories, my own, Bardsey did not fair too well in 2017, especially after 2016's corker of a season. However, North Ronaldsay managed to get a new bird for the Western Palearctic in the form of a female Red-winged Blackbird from North America in spring, and if that were not enough, the island scored its second Siberian Blue Robin in the autumn, but this time it was not a rain soaked grotty brown thing (!), it was a rather handsome adult male – the sort of bird dreams are made of!



Two of the four British Siberian Blue Robins have been on North Ronaldsay – Lewis Hooper

Finally Can I take a moment to thank all the contributors to this bumper newsletter, to all the photographers for allowing us to use their images.



Alderney John Horton

It seemed impossible that 2017 could be even half as good as our successful first year of operations, not only in respect of birds but also in terms of publicity and progress.

Our priority remained working towards gaining accreditation status with the Bird Observatories Council. A critical factor in this process was concluding negotiations with our island government to renovate the state-owned Nunnery building which houses the observatory. We will have facilities of a high standard for the Bird Observatory to operate from and to accommodate staying guests when the renovations are complete in February. Importantly, local support for this project has remained very positive.

The States of Alderney passed a motion in late summer to commit £285,000 for renovation of the Nunnery (originally built by the Romans and a site of great archaeological interest) which houses the ABO's HQ. Work began in September and as we enter the New Year things appear to be well on track for our official opening on 1 April 2018. On a wider scale we appear to have become the 'go-to' location for BBC Channel Islands radio for all things ornithological.

We were over the moon to win the Insurance Corporation of the Channel Islands Best Conservation Project 2017 award. Catherine Hanlon and Tim Earl of the ABO committee collected the award from Insurance Corporation executives, along with Margaret and Richmond Austin and Chris Mourant from The Channel Islands Bird Ringing Scheme.



Collecting our Best Environmental Project 2017 award from the Insurance Company of the Channel Islands.

Attracting French tourists to the island is important to the Alderney economy. We were thus delighted to take part in a documentary for French television that filmed passerine ringing at the observatory, along with the fitting of transmitters to adult gannets on the Ortac rock colony. We understand the program had viewing figures of around 40 million.

Two most welcome individuals joined the ABO team as patrons this year, generously agreeing to support the observatory.

Specsavers founder Dame Mary Perkins, whose enthusiasm for our work and for the Bird Observatory to progress was abundantly clear, visited us for an afternoon in late April. Specsavers have generously given us £10,000 towards the fitting out, furnishing and linen required in the refurbished Nunnery.

In June we welcomed Simon Barnes, wildlife / conservation author and former sports journalist who visited us to deliver a presentation to our members and open a new bird hide.

The hide at Longis nature reserve was made possible by a generous donation from Naturetrek and the hard work of Alderney Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers. It was designed in-house and incorporates a ringing station separate from the public viewing area.

John Horton attended a BTO ringing course in Kent as an 'independent assessor' during the summer and reported that the event was a rewarding and worthwhile experience. Sandwich Bay Observatory were perfect hosts on top of delivering a cracking course.

Donations of materials from Guernsey-based companies gave us the ability to sow a winter seed crop and plant several native fruiting trees and shrubs. These initiatives added to the island's habitat diversity and increases the autumn and winter food availability for resident and migrant birds.

A further important bonus this year has been the voluntary support of web designer company Design Somerset. Thanks to them we were able to launch a new-look website incorporating online booking in December.

We are fortunate to have a committee on which there is a diversity of strengths, experience and enthusiasm. In addition we have many volunteers who give up their time, support us through membership or make donations all helping the dream of The Channel Islands first accredited Bird Observatory to become a reality.



The Nunnery/ Alderney Bird Observatory & Field Centre Dec 17.

This year saw improved organisation of ringing and monitoring efforts. Increased time and resources were put into birding and monitoring than we were able to achieve

in 2016. This has improved the identification of productive island locations within the recording area and from those a much better overview of the status of breeding birds across the island.

A total of 170 species was recorded in 2017. Of these 61 species were confirmed as breeding this year. Spring sightings added four new species to the birds of Alderney list: Royal Tern, Desert Wheatear, Marsh Sandpiper and Iberian Chiffchaff, the latter two species were also first records for the Channel Islands.



Desert Wheatear 22nd March.



Our research results are also prompting action plans that may bring a significant positive impact on the survival rates of chicks in some seabird colonies. Perhaps some colonies will even return to former sites. The problem was identified through the use of trail cameras which showed that rats are devastating our Common Tern colony. It is likely rats are responsible for the eradication of Puffins (and possibly Manx Shearwaters) breeding on mainland Alderney.

Seabird monitoring continued in partnership with the Alderney Wildlife Trust Ramsar commitment. There were no notable rises or falls in any of the colonies although a severe storm in early June undoubtedly impacted on the Gannets nesting on the lower shelves of our Les Etacs and Ortac sites.

Honey Buzzard migration was quite marvellous with more than 30 individuals recorded against only one record in 2016. Two displaying Fan-tailed Warblers (Zitting cisticolas) competed against one another for territory in the fields above Telegraph bay. Sadly they did not appear to get the chance to strut their stuff to females.

Autumn migration was again a wonder to behold. Surprisingly and encouragingly the prevailing west and north-west winds did not impact on overall numbers that were similar to last autumn's which were dominated by easterlies. The big surprise of the autumn was a Dalmatian Pelican of unknown origin that was seen (and video recorded) by a local in Longis Bay



Royal Tern – 15th May (ringed as chick in North Carolina USA in 2016)

A fine Black-headed Wagtail was also a first record for Alderney in the spring. Nest recording of passerines also saw a notable increase.

Seabirds have been monitored here since the 1940s, but only now are we beginning to understanding the other breeding birds of Alderney and identify population numbers of many species. We are targeting in particular: Dartford Warbler (seven pairs), Skylark (two pairs) and Stonechat (nine pairs).

We identified six breeding pairs of Ringed Plovers largely down to the patient observations of our assistant warden Justin Hart. The breeding success of this species was thought for many years to be just one or two pairs at one location.



Dalmatian Pelican, 17th October.

Ringling was again busy totalling 10,002 new birds ringed. This total is more than 3,000 down on last year but the species total was up a little at 81 (two more than in 2016). It also included seven species ringed in Alderney for the first time. Our seabird ringling saw mixed fortunes with poor weather preventing landing on Burhou in late July leaving our Storm Petrel colony unvisited. We did however manage to process 55 stormies on mainland Alderney that included French and British controls.

There were some notable differences in numbers of some species ringed against last year. The lack of weather from the east, however, had little effect on Redwing numbers with 867 ringed this year, not far behind last year's 926. On the other hand, Robins dropped from 824 in 2016 to 267 this year. Other species that showed exceptional increases against 2016 were Chaffinch (rose from 127 to 412) and Goldfinch (139 to 627, 159 of which were at one site in one afternoon during October).

We ringed good numbers of Firecrest, along with some of the south coast observatories, especially during the autumn taking us to 279 new individuals for the year. From this year's ringling we also obtained a more balanced view of passerine migration across the island as results included a very productive new site in the south-west of the island, adding to the three existing main sites all to the north and east.

Just prior to completing this review exciting news that a Penduline Tit we ringed here at Mannez quarry on 28 October this year was controlled visually by birders in Gloucestershire 20 December. The ring number was read from photographs. A full breakdown of the 2017 ringling results will appear in the 2017 ABO report.



**Bardsey
Steve Stansfield**

Migration Summary
Spring 2016 was

fantastic for birds, both common and rare. 2017 however, was a completed washout (!), with poor numbers of common birds and hardly any scarce birds.

We got off to an OK start with a Pallas's Warbler in April - usually an autumn migrant in the UK. Autumn 2016 had been exceptionally good for Asiatic waifs, including record numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers and Pallas's Warblers. On Bardsey we recorded three Pallas's Warblers which equalled the best ever year. Although in recent decades increasing numbers have been found in Europe in autumn. It is usually recorded in autumn in the UK with very few spring records. So imagine how shocked Ephraim was when he found one hanging in a mist net in mid-April!! This was the first spring record for the island and Wales...

Skip forward two weeks... Mark radioed to the staff at the Obs that he had seen a Pallas's Warbler in the garden at Tŷ Nessaf. Initially the bird was thought to be unringed, but once better views were obtained it was clear the right leg was definitely bejewelled! We began asking just how we had managed to have a Pallas's Warbler here for two weeks and not manage to see it, they are not known for being skulky birds. We spent the next couple of hours getting images of the bird and its ring and it soon became clear this was not the same as the April bird. We managed to get a full ring number from many hundreds of images we shot.

We returned back to the Obs and I contacted Mark Grantham at the BTO (and this was a Sunday evening!!) a quick check of the BTO's data base and Mark was able to quickly let us know that the bird was ringed at Spurn Bird Observatory in East Yorkshire in October 2016!! This has to be one of the best recoveries of 2017 in the UK! But where had the bird been? And indeed where had the first bird been? We can speculate but we will probably never know. We had a good run of Pied Flycatchers, Redstarts and Whinchats in late April; the best spring for some time for these semi-scarce migrants has they have now become. Willow Warbler numbers were down with very few days when birds were recorded into the hundreds. May produced two Golden Orioles, one of which showed well for most of the day. We were also lucky enough to have a rather nice female Red-backed Shrike at Tŷ Pellaf.



Pallas's Warbler ringed at Spurn in 2016 and seen on Bardsey in 2017 - Steve Stansfield



Golden Oriole - Steve Stansfield

Summer saw little in the way of surprises. A Honey Buzzard flew south along the west coast in June and that was about it for spring 2017 I am afraid to say.

Autumn was not much better than spring, with storm after storm hitting us from across the Atlantic, hopes were high for a Nearctic passerine. However, we were only disappointed! The storms did however produce record numbers of Sabine's Gulls with a minimum of 38 individuals recorded, as well as record numbers of both Arctic and Pomarine Skuas, and a good scattering of Grey Phalaropes. All these fierce winds made seabirding good, but made land birding and ringing rather difficult.

23rd August saw the first Wryneck of autumn along with the first three Sabine's Gulls on a flat calm day! The 24th produced a Cory's Shearwater, the first record for Bardsey for over 20 years. The 26th saw a Great Shearwater pass the island, with another on 29th. Skuas were seen on most days and the only Red Kite of the year was seen on 29th.

Autumn saw five Ospreys and two Marsh Harriers, three Hobbies and a good scattering of commoner raptors.

The 11th September saw a good day for sea passage, 8462 Kittiwakes, 1526 Manx Shearwaters 1162 Gannets, the latter being the fourth highest day total in the history of Bardsey. However perhaps the most remarkable totals from the day were 70 Arctic Skuas and 57 Great Skuas, both of which smashed their previous island records of 50 and 39. Six Pomarine Skuas and two Long-tailed Skuas were also logged. In addition 38 Leach's Petrels passed the island during the day along with a Grey Phalarope.



Leach's Petrel – Steve Stansfield

More shearwaters, petrels, skuas and Sabine's Gulls and Grey Phalaropes passed during the next weeks, and on 15th September the bird of the autumn arrived in the form of Bardsey's 5th Buff-breasted Sandpiper.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper– Steve Stansfield

Late September saw an arrival of Yellow-browed Warblers, with 20 individuals seen in the autumn. Autumn saw a good scattering of Ruffs, as well as a single Little Stint and a few Curlew Sandpipers. A Nightingale on 6 October was the first since 2014 and Bardsey got some of the nationally spread Hawfinch action in Mid-October. A Great White Egret was only the fourth for the island and a Woodlark in late October was seen. A new record number of Mediterranean Gulls was counted on 29th with 170 passing the island. Late October and early November saw a good run of Long-tailed Tits, Bullfinches and a few Siberian Lesser Whitethroats and Sibe Chiffchaffs and one of the most bizarre records of the year was a Corncrake seen on 19th November!

General news from the island

Following Steffan Walton's decision not to return to the island for 2017, we advertised for staff. We had several applications and it was a very hard job making a decision who to go for. In the end, we decided to appoint Liam Curson to join Ephraim as our Assistant Warden.

We all returned to the island in early March. The Observatory had stood up reasonably well to the winter. There were however some damp issues. Water had been



Sabine's Gull – Steve Stansfield

coming in through the pointing in the chimneys and there was some staining and marks on the walls upstairs. This was quite heart-breaking especially after we had put so much effort into getting the place ready last spring.

Getting most of the monitoring projects up and running for the year, and the training of two new members of staff took up a reasonable amount of my time. Liam did the breeding bird survey and seabird monitoring, whilst Ephraim carried out the productivity and growth rates of Manx Shearwater and the Chough breeding success. The early part of the year saw me preparing and finishing the report for Natural Resources Wales, a 230-page document reporting on our research and monitoring work for which NRW fund the Observatory each year under a management agreement of section 15 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

I was also working hard on the preparation of the 2016 edition of Bardsey's Wildlife – The 60th annual report of Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory. This year we have a bumper edition, with a large section of the report being about non-avian fauna showing that the report is not just about the birds, and that it deserves its new name Bardsey's Wildlife.

As part of the production of the report, Emma and I set to updating our logo. We felt that the one we have been using was a little stiff and almost cartoon-like. We used a photograph of a shearwater to be able to get a real-feel and life like jizz from a bird to use as a new logo.

Wildlife Walks

We ran a guided walk once each week for visitors staying on the island, we took a circuit of the middle of the island, normally lasting two or three hours, encompassing the west slope of the mountain, the coast, the central lowlands and bird hotspots such as Pen Cristin, Solfach and The Narrows. We charged £5 per person and took out a total of 206 guests.



Visitors at the start of a guided walk

'Meet the Manxies'

From April to August, Bardsey is home to 21,000 pairs of Manx Shearwaters. We did guided events to Meet the Manxies, again charging £5 per person, we took out 95

guests to see the shearwaters after dark and a further 184 guests to see shearwater chicks being ringed, weighed and measured. We begin each walk with a fifteen-minute talk and presentation in our information centre/gift shop. When possible, we tried to coincide the nocturnal walks with Storm Petrel ringing during the summer months, giving visitors the chance to see another exclusively nocturnal and incredibly elusive visitor to Bardsey! A total of 485 guests went on guided events providing an income of £2260.

Shearwater tagging in 2017

Having lived on Bardsey for the last ten years it made sense for Ben Porter to focus his third-year dissertation project with the University of Exeter on some aspect of



Ben Porter and Ephraim Perfect tagging a shearwater

Bardsey's diverse and unique wildlife. After discussing ideas with university lecturers, staff from BBFO and researchers at Bangor university, he decided to study the island's burgeoning Manx Shearwater population. More specifically, he aimed to use GPS tracking devices to discover where our breeding shearwaters are foraging whilst incubating and rearing their chick.

Research carried out on shearwaters on Skomer has shown that their birds can travel as far as the north-east Irish Sea to forage on rich seafronts – a round trip of some 400km. Would Bardsey's birds utilise the same area? We couldn't wait to find out!

Ben was fortunate enough to be awarded two grants to fund the purchase of GPS tags for this study: both from the Welsh Ornithological Society and the BB Young Birder's Grant.



Ben also generously received tags from Charles Bishop of Bangor University and Kane Brides from the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust.

After returning from spring term at university in late May, it was straight to work to prepare and then deploy the first tags. I agreed to help out with the whole project, providing the necessary skills and licensing to carefully secure the tags to the lower back feathers of shearwaters using special tape.

We deployed some 30 GPS tags in the summer weeks as the shearwaters incubated their eggs.

It's been a steep learning curve getting to grips with the process of analysing the GPS data, struggling away with the statistical program 'R' and then visualising the tracks in GIS software. It was fascinating too, though, especially when looking a little more in depth at some of the statistics: for example, one of the shearwaters covered almost 4000km over the course of its five-day foraging trip! This bird visited the waters near Coll and Tiree in western Scotland during its monstrous trip, and was amongst four other shearwaters from the island that spent time feeding in the Firth of Clyde.



figure 1: all the GPS tracks of foraging Manx shearwaters during the chick-rearing stage. You can see how few birds headed south from the island, and that most feeding activity occurs either close to the island near the Isle of Man.

Ben's dissertation will be composed of two main parts: firstly, presenting all the tracking data we retrieved and comparing the at-sea behaviour of 'our' birds to that of shearwaters from other colonies in the UK. Aspects of their behaviour he'll be looking at include the length of foraging trips (both in terms of distance and time) and the areas they utilised for feeding.

He will then be focussing down on the foraging behaviour of shearwaters during their chick-rearing stage. Specifically, to look at something termed 'individual specialisation', which describes how behaviour can be highly specific at an individual level, and can vary from

bird to bird within the same population. Ben will be analysing various aspects of the shearwater's foraging trips to assess whether individuals are faithful to specific areas and routes on their feeding trips.

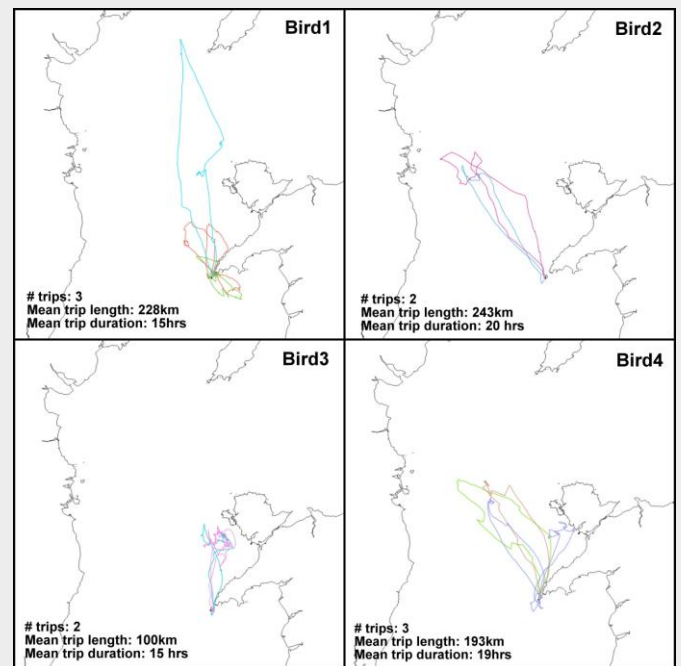


figure 2: the foraging trips of four different chick-provisioning adult bird. These birds appear to demonstrate some 'foraging site fidelity', returning to similar areas each time to feed.

Remember you can adopt some of our Manx Shearwaters – visit <http://www.bbfo.org.uk/adopt-a-manxie> Please order by November 30th if you want one of these for a Christmas gift



Calf of Man Aron Sapsford

We eventually arrived on the Calf on the 15th March during a brief weather window, our arrival

having been delayed a couple of days due to strong winds. I was joined for this season by Nathan Wilkie, as Estate Warden, who was very used to island-life having previously worked on the Inner Farnes and on Mingulay. I had been a warden here previously (1988-90), but this was Nathan's first time on the Calf and so much of the first couple of weeks was spent reacquainting and familiarising with the island and enjoying the start of a good early spring passage of birds.

Goldcrests were already moving through when we arrived and continued in good numbers through until mid-April with higher numbers than have been recorded for over 25 years. A very steady Willow Warbler passage also saw above average numbers recorded, which was true for the majority of the spring warbler migration. High totals were achieved for several common species such as Blackcap, Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler, the latter two achieving the best annual ringing totals for 47 years. Less common species were also recorded in above average numbers with a record breaking seven Lesser Whitethroats and two Reed Warblers, including a Channel Islands control.



Reed Warbler

Efforts to eradicate rats (long-tails) from the islet are on-going and monitoring continued throughout the season; unfortunately their presence was detected on several occasions and contingency measures were deployed to swiftly deal with these encounters. Despite these few sightings, the breeding population of Manx Shearwaters appears to be gradually increasing, with approximately 400 pairs now present whilst numbers of other ground nesting species, such as Wheatear also appear to be flourishing.



Red-footed Falcon

At the start of June we were whisked away from the Calf for a VIP trip to watch the UEFA Cup Final between Real Madrid and Juventus in Cardiff, courtesy of Heineken Plc, but returned just in time to find a second Greenish Warbler for the spring, singing in the Observatory garden.



Greenish Warbler



Colour-ringed Wheatear

A project to try and entice Puffins to return as a breeding species, using decoys and playback lure was continued and numbers of birds seen around the Calf during the summer were encouraging, with breeding suspected on nearby cliffs on the Isle of Man.

Light easterly winds for much of May continued the good run of common migrants with above average showings for Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and Garden Warbler, whilst a run of rarities during the month brought a stunning adult male Red-footed Falcon (2nd Calf record), a group of three fly-over Spoonbill (1st Calf record) and towards the end of the month a female Red-breasted Flycatcher, Subalpine Warbler and to round the month off the first of two Greenish Warblers.

We participated in an Isle of Man seabird breeding survey during 2017 and results confirmed a continuing downward trend for both Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull which were further hit by several storms in June that severely reduced productivity. Shag productivity was also low however both Razorbill and Guillemot appeared to have a successful year. Mid-summer produced the start of an excellent run of Risso's Dolphin records, with regular sightings continuing throughout July and into the first half of August and sometimes involving several pods of animals. Basking Sharks were also recorded in greater numbers than for many years.

In early July, the first of our long-term volunteers arrived, with Mike Haigh, Stuart Cowper, Alex Dodds, Bethan Pugh, Pippa Barlin and Olivia Pargeter helping out at various times through the autumn. The presence of several ringers on the islet for most of the autumn meant that ringing totals achieved the second highest, of 7946 birds of 82 species, in the Observatories 59 year history. Having several extra pairs of hands around also allowed a number of management tasks to be undertaken, which included the digging of a scrape in the Lighthouse fields, much needed coppicing work at the Withy and the complete rebuilding of one of the Heligoland traps.



Heligoland improvements

It is hoped to continue this level of volunteer involvement in the Calf and during 2018 we plan to have long-term placements to assist with migration ringing and monitoring in both, spring and autumn plus a seabird & breeding bird assistant. Plans for monitoring in 2018 include maintaining the current Manx Shearwater survey and expanding coverage to include two other key sites; a survey to try and prove breeding of Storm Petrel; productivity monitoring for Shag, Great Black-backed Gull & Guillemot and a BBS-style survey of common passerines.

Traditionally August should be when autumn migration starts to pick up again, however the weather had other ideas and with what seemed like a constant procession of gales and storms, it wasn't until the end of month that any numbers of passerines began moving through; the only real highlights of the month being three Reed Warblers and an early Olive-backed Pipit seen on 21st. An attempt at wader mist-netting was also successful, with seven Redshanks trapped during one session - quite an achievement given that there had previously only ever been 21 ringed on the Calf.



Redshanks

September continued with prolonged periods of windy & wet conditions followed by just a day or two of calm weather. During these, lulls in between storms, we were often inundated by birds and it was all-hands to the ringing pliers, with large numbers of Robins moving through and tape-luring of Meadow Pipits also proving

very successful. Despite some promisingly strong NW winds seawatching didn't produce the hoped for species or numbers that one might expect, despite everywhere south of us seeming to have large numbers of Leach's Petrels & Sabine's Gulls. Several large arrivals of Goldcrests occurred towards the end of the month and a single Yellow-browed Warbler was trapped on the 26th.



Yellow-browed Warbler

October also saw a series of storms heading our way with Hurricane Ophelia mid-month, followed shortly afterwards by Storm Brian. Thankfully, neither storm did too much structural damage however Ophelia caused considerable loss of life to the seal pups that were in their nursery areas along the south-west coast of the Calf, with an estimated 20% missing after the storm. Seawatching finally stepped up a gear with 2845 Kittiwake on 17th along with 357 Gannet, an adult Pomarine Skua, six Arctic Skua, 13 Great Skua, 59 Great Black-backed Gulls, five Black Guillemots and 812 "Auk spp" moving south. During the second half of the month we enjoyed an excellent passage of Song Thrushes, along with some excellent visual migration of finches and an Olive-backed Pipit was trapped in the back garden on 23rd. This was our second record of the year but the first to be ringed on the Calf.



Olive-backed Pipit

A Great Spotted Woodpecker was around the Observatory on 26th when the first nine Long-tailed Tits, of an invasion that continued into early November and brought 51 new birds and a control.

November saw the continuation of some good visual migration, with good numbers of Brambling, whilst a good run of Woodcock records and several flocks of Whooper Swans were recorded.

The season closed on the 15th.

Owing to its isolated position life on the Calf could be lonely one; however during 2017 the islet had a real "buzz" that was created by the fantastic volunteers and guests that have made such a huge contribution to success of the season. We have had a great many laughs along the way and there were many memorable experiences, in what was a truly remarkable year. If you are interested in being part of the team for 2018 then please contact the Ornithological Warden at calfofman@manx.net



**Dungeness
David Walker**

The year started fairly quietly with very little in the way of cold weather. A few Great Skuas appeared to be wintering offshore,

Caspian Gulls were seen on most days and two Iceland Gulls arrived in mid-January and were joined by a third bird in February. One of these birds then stayed into early June. A flock of five Waxwings were seen on Jan.8th. Brent Goose passage began in earnest from mid-February.

Despite the generally mild weather the spring was slow to get underway and overall numbers were low as is the norm these days. Reflecting national trends only three Turtle Doves, very few Cuckoos, one Wood Warbler, nine Garden Warblers, 13 Spotted Flycatchers and three Pied Flycatchers were seen. Numbers of Willow Warbler were noticeably low. One or two oddities also turned up during the spring and included two Bee-eaters and a Woodchat Shrike.



Woodchat Shrike – David Walker

One of the expected highlights of the spring is the eastward passage of birds offshore and this year the movement of Pomarine Skuas was excellent with a total of 247 birds recorded and including a total of 129 on Apr.29th. There were also a couple of days with a decent passage of Great Skuas and both Little and Black Tern numbers were reasonable and there were several large movements of Common Terns. Rarities included a couple of unseasonal Sooty Shearwaters, a Surf Scoter on May 2nd. One of the more remarkable movements to occur was in early June when a severe storm pushed rapidly through the channel leaving large numbers of Storm Petrels in its wake with a peak here of 40 on 8th.

Other birds of note during the spring included a Cattle Egret, a Stone-curlew and a Puffin.

Breeding birds included pairs of Peregrine and Raven and four pairs of Black Redstarts but Wheatear numbers remain low and a cause for concern. Long-tailed Tits increased to five pairs – it was only a few years ago that this species was considered a scarce late autumn migrant and a pair of Jackdaws nested for the first time since 1966. There were also 12 pairs of Blackcap and three pairs of Lesser Whitethroat.

The numbers of departing summer migrants during the first half of the autumn were small despite seemingly good conditions and the latter part of the autumn was even more disappointing in common with much of the southern half of Britain. Most species were present in very low numbers but a few did put on a decent showing with Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps doing well. Garden Warbler, Robin, Song Thrush and Blackbird numbers were particularly disappointing.



Wryneck – David Walker

Rarities during the autumn included a Dotterel, a Wryneck, two Red-backed Shrikes, a Radde's Warbler and probably the highlight of the year in the form of a Hume's Leaf Warbler – only the third Observatory record.



Humes Warbler – David Walker

Seawatching during the autumn was often disappointing with skua and Little Gull numbers very low but there was a reasonable passage of Balearic Shearwater passage with a peak of 23 on Aug.1st and some large numbers of Mediterranean Gulls moving through in October and November. A Grey Phalarope stayed for six days in November and Caspian Gulls were a fairly regular feature in the latter third of the year.



Grey Phalarope – David Walker

The back end of the year saw two Dartford Warblers attempting to winter, the return of Peregrine Falcons and Ravens to their nest sites and the establishment of a winter feeding station in the trapping area

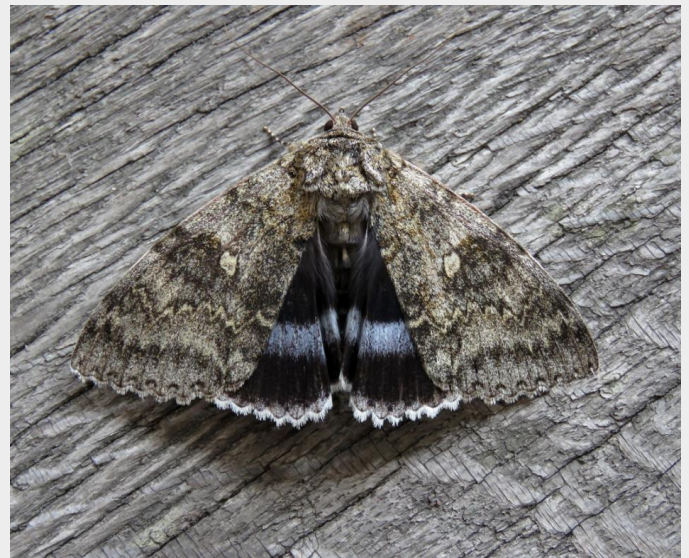


Dartford Warbler – David Walker

Other wildlife

Following the discovery in 2015 of breeding colonies of Tree Crickets and Sickle-bearing Bush-crickets in the recording area a considerable amount of time was spent during the summer on nocturnal surveys of these species. Visiting the sites earlier in the season produced several nymph Sickle-bearing Bush-crickets and thus confirmed the continued breeding in the area and accurate emergence dates were achieved for both species.

One "macro" moth was added to the list this year in the form of a Red-headed Chestnut and there were plenty of other notable records including Sub-angled Wave, Scarce Umber, Pretty Chalk Carpet, Speckled Footman, Jersey Tiger, Death's-head Hawk-moth, two Scarce Black Arches, Blossom Underwing, 24 Delicates, two Small Ranunculus, two Small Mottled Willows, 19 Scarce Bordered Straws, Beautiful Hook-tip, three Plumed Fan-foot and a spectacular Clifden Nonpariel. Work continues on the "micro"-moths and there were a small number of additions to the list among them.



Clifden Nonpariel – David Walker

Good numbers of Clouded Yellows were recorded and quite a lot of time was spent looking for Small Copper aberrations – a number of which were found. Interestingly, numbers of Small Coppers at Dungeness continue to buck the national trend as numbers were fairly high during the year. Grizzled Skippers and second brood Brown Argus numbers were also encouragingly high.

It was a quiet year for migrant dragonflies but several Red-veined Darters were seen during the summer and a few Small Red-eyed Damselflies continue to hang on to their status as breeding species in the area.

A concerted effort to record the Shield-bugs was maintained.

Record numbers of Porpoises were seen during the year and with a spectacular peak of 78 on 7th September. All our cetacean sightings go to the Kent Mammal Group and to the Seawatch Foundation.

Other projects

Work continues on our long term goal to get all the original paper log data computerized. We now have 47 years' worth of bird data entered and various colleagues are working hard to try and complete this project.

Work also continues on a cross-channel collaboration project although the direction of this project has changed somewhat from the original idea. We are now working towards an Interreg project looking at ways of promoting the importance of the Straits of Dover as a migration flyway in partnership with Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory and various groups on the French side of the water.

Building Works

The autumn saw the roof of the Observatory completely refitted.

The seawatch hide has taken quite a battering over the years and this spring we decided to rebuild it almost from scratch but using the original floor. It is now watertight except for the rain entering through the windows when it is in use and has survived several storms unscathed.

Conferences

The second International Bird Observatory Conference was held at Cape May Bird Observatory, New Jersey at the end of October and we were pleased to be able to take part in what was a superb long weekend of inspiring talks and ideas and of course a bit of birding. A talk on "Dungeness Bird Observatory: Past, Present and Future" was also presented to the Kent Ornithological Society Conference in early November.

Shop



Dungeness Bird Observatory

£12 **£8**

We offer Polo Shirts, Sweatshirts and Fleeces and T-shirts in black with the Dungeness Bird Observatory logo in sizes S to XXXL. (Other colours are available on request).

£15 **£20** **£25**

You can also keep yourself warm with our new Woolly Hats or just a nice hot drink from one of our mugs.

£6 **£15**

Pre-orders would be appreciated as we don't have much storage space.

NEW!
£2.50

The advertisement features a grid of items for sale: a polo shirt (£12), a woolly hat (£8), a t-shirt (£15), a sweatshirt (£20), a fleece (£25), a mug (£6), and a woolly hat (£15). A 'NEW!' starburst highlights a set of four items for £2.50. The Dungeness Bird Observatory logo is visible in the top right corner.

In 2015 we introduced a clothing line with very smart fleeces, sweatshirts and polo-shirts and featuring our Pomarine Skua logo. We have added cups, a holdall and fridge magnets to our catalogue during 2016. Prices remain unchanged since 2016 and items can be purchased by contacting the warden.

Staffing

Lee Gregory was our Assistant Warden from early March to the end of October and we are hoping to employ a new Assistant Warden for the 2018 season. For further details contact the warden as detailed below.

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.



Fair Isle
David and
Suzannah Parnaby

The year started sadly, with the sudden death of Eric Meek, a FIBOT director who had previously been Chairman of the board and Assistant Warden at the Obs. Douglas Barr had taken over as Chairman at the start of the year and the board also welcomed two new directors, Karen Hall of SNH and Kerri Whiteside of Fauna and Flora International. We're very lucky to have a board with such a wide range of experience and thanks are due to all the directors for their help in the running of FIBO.



Ciaran Hatsell monitoring Gannets

The staff team in 2017 had a familiar feel to it, with Assistant Wardens Ciaran Hatsell and Richard Cope, Ranger Chris Dodd (a post supported by funding from SNH) and a domestic team of Orlando Krippner, Michael Krippner, Inessa Vetlugina and Sara Bailey all being returnees from previous years, with Hannah Bell as Childminder the only new face. We received many compliments from visitors during the year about the staff

and we would like to thank them for all their hard work during another busy year.

We were also helped by some fantastic volunteers in 2017; check the FIBO website for details of how to volunteer at the Observatory in 2018 and also for a special discount rate for young visitors to the Obs.

Visitor numbers remained high, and that seems set to continue, with peak periods in 2018 already heavily booked. If you want to visit Fair Isle this year, it's probably best to get in touch sooner rather than later, and bookings for 2019 open on 1st April (1st March for Friends of Fair Isle). It's also worth noting that Loganair will be operating flights from Orkney direct to Fair Isle on Mondays and Fridays from late May through to early October 2018.

Whilst Fair Isle is renowned for its rare migrants, knitting patterns and shipping forecast area, its seabirds are also hugely important. Sadly, after three years of reasonable breeding success, 2017 was a poor one for productivity. Although there were increases in numbers of Gannets, Arctic Terns and Tysties, productivity fell for all monitored species except Fulmar. There were exciting research projects started on Guillemots and Razorbills (by University of Glasgow), Arctic Skuas (by the BTO) and Bonxies (by FIBO), all of which will hopefully provide more information on the movements of these species.



Great Skua – Max Hellicar

Although the peak migration seasons suffered from long spells of westerly winds, there were still some outstanding highlights during the year, including (with all records subject to ratification from the relevant records committees): the first Fair Isle records of Glaucous-winged Gull and Green Warbler, whilst the island's first Swinhoe's Petrel returned again having first been caught in 2013.



Green Warbler - David Parnaby

Other extreme Fair Isle rarities included the isle's second Collared Pratincole, third Mandarin, fourth White-winged Black Tern and Western Bonelli's Warbler, sixth Little Ringed Plover, ninth Firecrest and tenth 'Northern Treecreeper'. Other rarities comprised an impressive array featuring Great Snipe, two Woodchat Shrikes, Red-rumped Swallow, two Dusky Warblers, Arctic Warbler, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, White's Thrush, Black-throated Thrush, Thrush Nightingale, Red-flanked Bluetail, two Siberian Stonechats, Citrine Wagtail, four Red-throated Pipits, two Arctic Redpolls, Two-barred Crossbill, three Rustic Buntings and Black-headed Bunting.



White's Thrush - Sarah Sankey



Collared Pratincole – David Parnaby

The back-up cast wasn't bad either, and included: Osprey, two Honey-buzzards, four Marsh Harriers (the best ever year for this species), White-tailed Eagle, three Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpiper, Little Gull, Pomarine Skua, Nightjar, 11 Wrynecks, two Hobbies, six Red-backed Shrikes, two Great Grey Shrikes, three Waxwings, four Shore Larks, 44 Yellow-browed Warblers, two Blyth's Reed Warblers, eight Marsh Warblers, Melodious Warbler, nine Icterine Warblers, 11 Barred Warblers, 'Western Subalpine Warbler', Rose-coloured Starling, 11 Bluethroats, Nightingale, six Red-breasted Flycatchers, five 'Grey-headed Wagtails', three Richard's Pipits, three Olive-backed Pipits, four Hawfinches, 'Northern Bullfinch', 13 Common Rosefinches and ten Little Buntings. In a local context, Little Grebe, two Mute Swans, Great Tit (the first since 2013) and nine Blue Tits (there were only 14 previous records) were also of note.

Although several species were recorded in low numbers, there were some high day counts, including 155 Whooper Swans (16th October, record count), 30 Ruff (12th September, highest count since 1998), 158 Snipe (24th October, third highest ever count), 22 Glaucous Gulls (22nd November, highest count since 1975), 49 Ring Ouzels (20th October, highest autumn count since 1993), 2,279 Blackbirds (19th October, third highest ever autumn count) and 1,714 Meadow Pipits (30th August, second highest ever count).

There were also successful breeding records of Red-necked Phalarope (the first nesting attempt for Fair Isle, with three juveniles raised).



Juvenile Red-necked Phalarope – David Parnaby

Linnet (the first confirmed breeding for Fair Isle) and Golden Plover (just the third breeding record in FIBO's history), whilst nest-building Carrion Crows were potentially the first breeding record for Shetland.

Ringling was very productive, with around 7,600 birds ringed during the year, a significant proportion of which were Storm Petrels, with a record 4,089 new birds caught in a spectacular year for this always popular seabird – it is without doubt the species that introduces the most people to ringling on Fair Isle and leaves the greatest impression on a number of our visitors. There were joint-highest totals of Rook (two), Grey Wagtail (six) and Little Bunting (three) ringed, whilst the three Blue Tits ringed were a record total and only the 3rd to 5th to be trapped on the island! Interesting movements of ringed birds included a Sedge Warbler caught on Fair Isle in May 2016 that summered in the Tay reedbeds in 2017, a Goldfinch ringed in Aberdeenshire in May 2016 that arrived on Fair Isle in early April, a Siskin ringed in the Borders 15 days before it was caught on Fair Isle and two Norwegian-ringed Blackbirds in the autumn. Bonxies found dead in the autumn involved one in Devon, three in The Netherlands and one in Denmark, with a winter bird found in Germany giving an indication of where 'our' birds go when they leave Fair Isle. Two 'firsts' involved a Wren caught in the spring which had been ringed two days previously on North Ronaldsay, whilst our nearest southern neighbours also caught a Rock Dove in the spring that had been ringed as a chick on Fair Isle in 2015 – both the first movements of these species recorded for Fair Isle. The spring also saw a Willow Warbler and a Chiffchaff ringed on Fair Isle caught afterwards on North Ronaldsay, both presumably examples of birds that had overshot on spring

migration starting to re-orientate. A darvic-ringed Barnacle Goose in the spring proved to have a fascinating history – it had been ringed as a gosling in a feral flock in Speyside in 2016 and had been seen in north-west Norway in May 2017 (along with wild Barnacle Geese that winter on the Solway Firth) before turning round and heading back towards Scotland.

The advance of new technology saw another interesting landmark for Fair Isle, with a flock of Taiga Bean Geese offshore from the isle in February being the first birds to be recorded in the Fair Isle recording area without being seen!

A surprisingly wide variety of non-avian taxa are also recorded on Fair Isle, with a comprehensive list of the Lichens of Fair Isle appearing in the 2016 Annual Report (available from the FIBO website), whilst we will shortly be publishing a comprehensive moth list for the isle that has been compiled by Fair Isle resident and ex-warden Nick Riddiford. The undoubted non-avian highlight of the year though were the multiple sightings of Killer Whales in the summer, including some epic displays of hunting behaviour close inshore to the Obs, an experience unlikely to be forgotten by anyone lucky enough to have witnessed it. Analysis of the photographs showed that several of the whales have made multiple visits to Fair Isle, so we're hoping for their return in 2018.



Filey Mark Pearson

2017 was a very productive year for us here at Filey, most memorably for our progress with conservation and land management in the area. A series of funding successes was crowned by the conservation team securing over £30,000 to completely renovate and overhaul Filey Dams Nature Reserve. The Dams, an important local wetland on the outskirts of town, has suffered from succession and encroachment over recent decades, and as such has decreased in value for migratory wetland species, particularly waders and wildfowl. But with potential funds suddenly available this autumn, we had a matter of weeks to put together a bid from scratch, with our small, voluntary team going into overdrive to give us the best possible chance, and in a whirlwind couple of months, we now have a completely renovated wetland which will undoubtedly pull in many, many more birds, both common and rare, in the near future.





Gannet – Mark Pearson

It wasn't a classic year for migration but there was still plenty to enjoy, with the spring producing Red-rumped Swallow, Montagu's Harrier, Green-winged Teal and the Bempton Black-browed Albatross staging a fly-by on its way across the North Sea, while the ringing team's Storm-petrel trapping sessions paid off with a Leach's on the first night of the season at the end of June. The autumn's highlights included Pallid Swift, Great Shearwater and a wandering Rough-legged Buzzard on several dates.

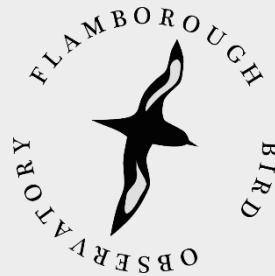


Glaucous Gull – Mark Pearson

In October, we extended our annual Ringing & Migration Week to include our neighbours at Flamborough, and as such a wider range of events and activities – all free and open to everyone – were on the schedule, including a full programme of talks, walks, ID workshops, vismig drop-in sessions and daily ringing demos – a great week, and thanks to all those who helped out.

We also had the privilege of representing FBOG at the International Bird Observatory Conference in Cape May, New Jersey, alongside friends from Spurn, Dungeness, Flamborough and elsewhere. It was a hugely inspiring and educational experience, with many ideas exchanged and partnerships forged, and above all a real sense of community was engendered among observatories of all shapes and sizes and from as far afield as SE Asia, Finland and Costa Rica. One of the many important lessons we learned from our peers was the importance of valuing the diversity and unique nature of individual observatories, and looking beyond the confines of outdated concepts of exactly what an Obs is and does. Much food for thought!

A very happy new year to all our Observatory brothers and sisters and here's to a productive and enjoyable 2018!



Flamborough Craig Thomas

A great year for the observatory, but a terrible year for birding summarises 2017 succinctly. Dealing with the latter, autumn was dominated by westerly winds, with no significant window from the east between early September and mid-November. As a consequence, the number of species recorded was 15 below the heady heights of the previous 12 months. A long-staying Siberian Stonechat and a Little Bunting represented the best sightings of spring



Siberian Stonechat – Craig Thomas



Little Bunting – Craig Thomas



Common Rosefinch – Mark Thomas

Pallid Swift and the second ever Cetti's Warbler were the autumn standouts. However, the undoubted highlight occurred in the summer, when a Black-browed Albatross made two frustratingly brief stays on the northern side of the headland at RSPB Bempton Cliffs.



Black-browed Albatross – Mark Pearson

It was again pleasing to see that a log was maintained on a daily basis throughout and, once again, all seawatch sightings were entered onto trektellen and land-based records onto Birdtrack. Thornwick Pools, a small wetland reserve created by the observatory, proved its worth once more, hosting a Temminck's Stint in spring and Bearded Tit and the aforementioned Cetti's Warbler during autumn.



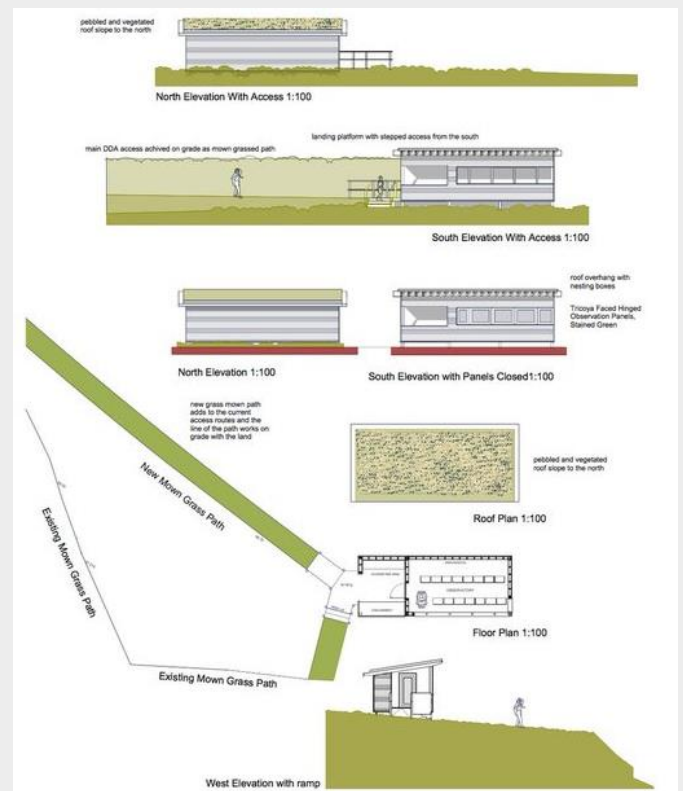
Temminck's Stint – Craig Thomas

The publications team produced a sterling effort over the last year: both a combined 2014/15 Bird Report and the 2016 Report were published within months of each other, with the production of the 2017 Report well underway. The sightings page on the observatory website was updated on a daily basis, with increasing 'traffic' to the website noted throughout.

Additional work parties were convened throughout the year, including one focused on improving the habitats within Old Fall Plantation and were attended by over 25 willing/press-ganged volunteers. The observatory also focused on furthering the social scene for both members and the local community. Several well-attended events were held during the autumn including a social evening, featuring a session by our local band. Such evenings helped boost our finances and ensure that for the first time in several years, the observatory coffers grew over the course of the year.

In addition, Flamborough co-hosted a Migration & Ringing Week with neighbouring Filey Bird Observatory. A programme of ringing demonstrations hosted in the ringing lab in Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Living Seas Centre, guided walks and talks resulted in a very successful week – again, despite the dreaded westerlies. Such initiatives have all helped contribute to a doubling of membership over the last 18 months indicating how successfully the observatory has helped establish a 'community vibe'.

Currently the main focus is on the Seawatch Hide Planning Application lodged with the local planning authority (see below). Working to identify a site and design that satisfies all interested parties has taken over 18 months – we await the decision of the critical meeting in early February. So despite an absence of major rarities, 2017 was most certainly a very positive year for Flamborough.





A fairly quiet year by recent standards, with lower recording effort resulting in another drop in records on 2016.

Some proper winter weather with long periods of fog and low temperatures brought some proper winter birds in January/February including Iceland Gull, Caspian Gulls, Waxwings, Snow Buntings, Water Pipits, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers, Long-tailed Duck and a Black Brant with the Brent flock. The wintering Pink-footed Goose flock on Croftmarsh were joined by a Tundra bean Goose, 34 White-fronted Geese and 14 Barnacle Geese, and the Corn Bunting roost peaked at an impressive 117 birds.



Waxwing - Alan Brewster

Following migrant Woodlark and Raven in late February, the early spring period brought a good wave of migrants in good weather including Firecrests, Black Redstarts, Ring Ouzels, Bearded Tits, Cetti's Warbler, Woodlarks, Lapland Buntings, single Great Grey Shrike and Goshawk and the Reserve's second ever Cattle Egret. However, cold weather then ensued through the end of April and well into early May, with winds from the northern sector.



Cattle Egret - Richard Doan

Despite this, better numbers of Redstart and Pied Flycatcher occurred than for several years. There was even a Wood Warbler with a Yellow-browed Warbler same day.

Following on from two Ospreys, a White Stork and flock of nine Cranes in April, May was to provide some excellent visible migration; two days in particular. The 13th witnessed an excellent migration of Hirundines including two separate Red-rumped Swallows and later, a Bee-eater moving south.

The 28th May then provided an historic day of continual visible migration with many highlights, particularly raptors and Swifts. Most unusual was a passage of 31 Red Kites moving south with 12 Common Buzzard and four Hobby. An Alpine Swift that had gone through Spurn, paused with us a short while two hours later and so too a first summer male Red-footed Falcon. The morning ended with a Black Stork over!



Red-footed Falcon - James Siddle

Other highlights of the month included another Bee-eater, another Red-footed Falcon, two Dotterel, Temminck's Stint, Hooded Crow, Nightingale, Osprey and Crane. There were no end of month easterlies to bring the typical late spring scarce migrants - late May was unusually quiet. However, our Contract Warden, Richard Doan was leading the Patchwork Challenge with several good finds under his belt.

Management work on the Reserve during the spring was dominated by the lambing programme, for which we received much support from volunteers. Residential volunteer placements are available on site for those seeking a career in nature conservation. Placements are a minimum of three months, but sandwich placements of up to a year can be arranged.

Although it was not possible to do a full Common Bird Census again this year, the annual CES ringing study was completed. There were some obvious winners and losers in the breeding bird assemblage. Notably, Sedge Warblers were at probably their highest ever population and the return of Song Thrushes (four territories this year) is most encouraging.

Whilst Willow Warbler continue to persist at a very low density (less than five pairs), Turtle Dove sightings were limited and it may be lost as a breeding bird on the NNR. On the Lagoons, waterbirds enjoyed quite a productive season, particularly Black-headed Gulls and Avocets, but

also successful pairs of Common Tern and Little Ringed Plover.

Garganey and Water Rails may also have bred. The presence of Hairy Dragonflies, Water Voles and increasing numbers of Southern Marsh Orchids are further signs of the recovery of freshwater species after the tidal surge.

Despite problems caused by predators, high tides and bad weather, 33 Ringed Plover and seven Little Tern chicks fledged from the Shorebird Sanctuary. Essential funding for wardening was again provided through the LIFE Project.

Summer rarities included Great White Egret, Honey Buzzard, Willow Tit, a regular Crane and a Sabine's Gull. Spoonbills again provided daily entertainment for visitors with a record count of 20 and the late summer Tern roost involved up to 3000 Sandwich Terns with frequent Black Terns and a single Roseate.

In addition to 19 species of dragonfly on the Reserve, Willow Emerald occurred again this year – the most northerly in the UK. Another of the year's insect highlights was the occurrence of Silver-washed Fritillary on two dates. However, there was little moth trapping carried out again in 2017.

A range of monthly wildlife events was again provided for visitors including the annual national moth night. The wader watches and seawatch events proved popular again and there were some superb displays from the wader roosts. Broad-billed Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper both occurred again during the early autumn wader passage.

Although Sanderling and Dunlin numbers were slightly down on average, Knot, Grey Plover, Oystercatcher and Bar-tailed Godwit were well represented on most tide sequences – although disturbance issues are increasing. Knot roosts regularly amassed 70,000 birds and there were up to 103,000.

Autumn was dominated by continuous south-westerlies that provided excellent bouts of visible migration, particularly for Hirundines, Pipits and Finches. The Reserve record of Redpolls was smashed on 18th Oct when over 1600 moved south, with 3600 Goldfinch also that day. The Hawfinch invasion was reflected here too with 31 birds in October and November, including a flock of 11 on 20th Oct.

There were no significant autumn migrant falls until a pulse of 2000 Redwings in mid Oct. Scarce migrant highlights were restricted to single Red-backed Shrike, Common Rosefinch, Little Bunting, Richard's Pipit and Olive-backed Pipit, with a supporting cast of Yellow-browed Warblers, Siberian Chiffchaffs, Lapland Buntings and Firecrests although a Mandarin Duck arriving off the sea was the rarest bird of October!

Periods of northerly winds in Sept/Oct brought some good numbers of Arctic and Great Skuas with up to 12 Poms on

two dates, a few Long-tailed Skuas, another Sabine's Gull, fair numbers of Manx Shearwaters, but few Sooties. There was a record day count of 10 Puffins and then a massive northerly movement of 3100 Auk sp on 29th Oct.

November sea coverage followed with more Poms and Great Skuas and single Red-necked Grebe, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, with three Shorelarks on the beach. Elsewhere on site Bearded Tits, Lapland Buntings and Firecrests were seen well into that month.

The latter part of autumn will also be remembered for very good numbers of Stonechats and Bullfinches, another good passage of Whooper Swans, a record arrival of Water Rails (up to 22) and a Bittern. Another record count concerned wintering Cormorants with up to 600, which must be a good sign of healthy fish stocks offshore.



Bearded Tit - Paul Neale

The year ended with 233 species recorded on the Reserve. A significant amount of both contemporary and archive data collation, inputting and checking work was achieved and we are grateful to Centrica and EIG for funding the data project.

Finally, I would like to recognise and thank all staff, volunteers, members and supporters for all their dedication and hard work again in 2017.



Hilbre
Steve Williams

After reporting last year on the decline of Purple Sandpipers at Hilbre we thought it would be nice to report on a success story this year as the dramatic increase in Pale-bellied Brent Geese continued to be recorded around the Islands in both winter periods. These included birds ringed in Canada, Iceland and Ireland and record numbers for the Obs area were again counted this year.



Brent Goose photo by Barry Barnacal

A single Snow Bunting was noted around the main island early in the year – a species that is annual but varies considerably in numbers of records from year to year. Storm Doris arrived in February and as is often the case resulted in damage to our Heligoland traps which were quickly made operable by the maintenance team in early March.



Snow Bunting by Barry Barnacal

March was like the flick of a switch and the first spring migrants arrived on the island including the usual harbinger of spring – the first Stonechat on 3rd as well as a scattering of Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails.

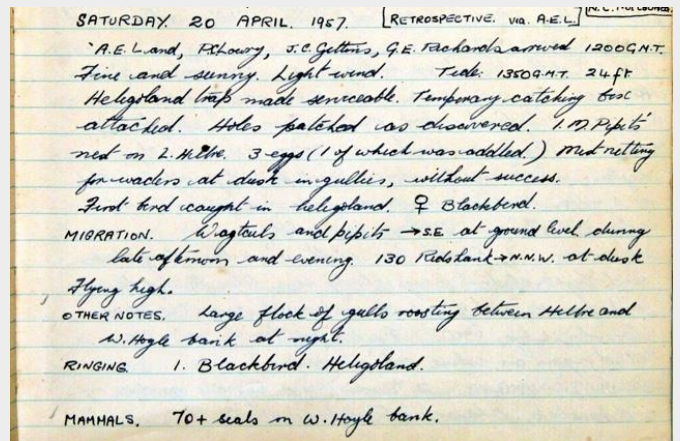
The first Wheatears of the year arrived on 16th March along with first Chiffchaff and Whimbrel noted the same day. A Pheasant seen walking between Middle and Hilbre at the end of March was a remarkable sight on the seaweed covered rocks and only the fourth to be seen in the recording area. It stayed into April.

April got off to a fine start with a Red Kite watched being mobbed as it headed towards the English mainland on 3rd – only our seventh record but all have been since 1994, and a Hooded Crow on 9th which was later seen on the Wirral mainland.



Red Kite (persued by Crows) by Steve Williams

A few of the regulars made the trek out to the island on 20th April despite the wind direction and weather not being conducive for passerine migrant arrivals. It was a day to remember the first entry made in the Observatory log on 20th April 1957 (see below). Therefore we wished ourselves happy birthday for 60 years of the Obs! Appropriately enough the date was marked with the finding of the year's only Glaucous Gull; April being the prime month for white-wingers at Hilbre these days.



Hilbre Bird Observatory first log entry 20 April 1957 (Archive photo by Barry Barnacal)



Glaucous Gull by Steve Williams

A Lesser Whitethroat was caught on 29th April – usually only a single of this species is caught each year at Hilbre. However, passerine migrants had been thin on the ground until the last day of the month 30th which

produced a nice fall of warblers which included a Wood Warbler; only our tenth Wood Warbler ever but our earliest ever being the first April record for the islands, with all previous records being noted in May. Other birds caught in the fall included a fine male Whinchat a Tree Pipit and 70 Willow Warblers; without doubt the best day of the spring for ringing as generally it was a poor spring for warblers.



Wood Warbler (right) with Willow Warbler by Steve Williams



Tree Pipit (left) with Meadow Pipit by Alan Hitchmough

After a good ringing day on 2nd May which included the second Lesser Whitethroat and a Garden Warbler (scarce here), early May continued mostly quiet apart from us catching a French ringed Chiffchaff.



Lesser Whitethroat by Colin Jones

The spring wader passage was impressive as always with nice flocks of Dunlin and Ringed Plover in particular always a feature in May. In amongst these Little Stints were found (rare in spring at Hilbre).



Little Stint (with Sanderling, Dunlin and Ringed Plover) by Steve Williams

As mid-May arrived thoughts turned to possible rarities but the highlight of the spring, if not the year, for many Obs regulars and visitors alike was not on the radar for late spring – a fine Shorelark discovered on 14th May on the newly christened Shorelark shelf.



Shorelark by Steve Williams

It became a long stayer and remained mainly around the North End of the main island until 25th. This was only the eighth record for the islands and the first twitchable record since the Observatory began all those sixty years ago.



Shorelark by Brian Tollitt

As Spring turned to Summer the island was as usual carpeted in a beautiful patchwork of flowers and attention turned towards insects with highlights during this period being two Red-veined Darters (only the second and third records for the Obs) with further dragonfly records including a couple each of Emperor and a Black-tailed Skimmer (the latter a first for the island).



Red-veined Darter by Steve Williams

However, the insect highlight of the year was a stunning first for the island – a Striped Hawkmoth found in the moth trap on 2nd June. It was only the 15th record for Cheshire and Wirral since 1892; and the first for over a decade. Finally, a Brimstone butterfly was noted on 13th June; only the fourth record of this species for Hilbre.



Striped Hawkmoth by Lottie Williams

Ornithological interest continued during this period though with three Spoonbills reported by a visiting birder flying low over the islands on 26th May; only our sixth record of another increasing species. A singing Reed Warbler on 2nd June was still only the eleventh record for the islands.

Ringed Plover was noted in mid-June and this was found to have been ringed in Scotland the previous June (2016) where it was paired to a male, quite what it was doing at Hilbre in June this year is unknown but we hope it is recorded elsewhere subsequently.

Three spikes of Common Spotted Orchid were found in one of the gardens on 22nd June; a single having been found in June 2014 (the first ever on the islands), two in

2015 but none seen last year – so this year's three spikes were therefore a welcome surprise.



Common Spotted Orchid by Steve Williams

This summer we attempted our first ever night-time tern catch. The event was not as successful as we hoped with only one Sandwich Tern being caught – remarkably however it was already ringed. It was ringed at Lady's Island Lake County Wexford, Ireland on 15th June 1997 as a pullus and was caught at Hilbre over 20 years later on 30 July 2017. An incredible return for our first attempt! We look forward to more success with tern ringing in the future.



Sandwich Tern (20 years old control) by Alan Hitchmough

Mid-summer was also time for us to celebrate our 60 years with a members BBQ; a glorious day with members young and old (including one of our founder members) exchanging stories of the past and hopes for the future.



Members at our annual BBQ in July 2017 celebrating 60 years of the Obs

Peregrine sightings were as usual fairly regular throughout the year, but this year also saw several instances of birds 'down' on the main island (which is unusual), and included this bird sat on the Old Lifeboat Station wall right outside the sea-watching hide in early August.



Peregrine by Andrea Sawiak

Tern numbers were good throughout the summer with the usual change in species mix with Sandwich Terns peaking before Common and Little and then in late August a nice arrival of Black Terns was noted in the East Hoyle sandbank roost opposite the Obs.

However, August was quite frankly terrible for warbler numbers; possibly our worst ever for Willow Warblers. September on the other hand was a superb month for birding on Hilbre starting fairly quietly with a Spotted Flycatcher on 1st but things really took off on 2nd with a flyover calling Citrine Wagtail (a first for the Obs if it gets accepted) as well as a Marsh Harrier.

A small scattering of migrants were recorded over the next week or so before the wind started to pick up and on 10th observers thought they heard a Greenshank and then found the bird in question with other waders including Redshank below the Obs before, sadly, all the birds took flight when they observed a square white rump and orange/yellow legs and concluded that it was in fact a Greater Yellowlegs which, if accepted by BBRC, would not only be a first for Hilbre but a first for Cheshire & Wirral. When news came out several observers returned to the island after the tide to search for it but it could not be found; consolation for one visitor was the first Leach's Petrel of the year.

A visiting birder enjoyed a great seawatch on 11th with at least 35 Leach's Petrels noted along with a possible Wilson's Petrel. Again, if submitted and accepted, this would be a first for Hilbre (and Cheshire and Wirral). 49 Leach's Petrels were noted the next day along with 5 Black Terns. 13 Leach's were noted on 13th a day when remarkably a Hobby flew low over the sea-watching hide and was photographed by the Hilbre Ranger, Matt Thomas; still a scarce bird on Hilbre especially in autumn.



Hobby by Matt Thomas

The 14th September was a classic Hilbre seawatch day with 90 Leach's Petrels counted (the best day-count since 2013), a single juvenile Sabine's Gull was noted and a juvenile Long-tailed Skua flew under the beam of the Old Lifeboat Station it was that close to observers in the hide.

The first Pale-bellied Brent Goose of the autumn also arrived that day, a typical arrival during/after a strong North West blow.



Long-tailed Skua by Steve Williams

Sadly not all storm blown Leach's Petrels make it and one of three local Peregrines was noted carrying one on 15th September.



Leach's Petrel (!) by Steve Williams

After early/mid-month was dominated by sea-watching, the weather conditions changed and became more conducive to migrant passerines. A Ring Ouzel found on 24th was not only a rare autumn sighting at Hilbre it was the earliest ever autumn sighting beating the previous earliest 40 years ago (27th September 1977).

A nice fall of Goldcrests occurred on 25th with at least 50 noted on the main island along with 8 Chiffchaffs. The following day our earliest ever Yellow-browed Warbler was found by the Air Raid Shelter (Generator Station) and later it was trapped and ringed. It was only our second September record of this ever-increasing species (the previous being on 30 September 1975).



Yellow-browed Warbler by Alan Hitchmough

Later that day one observer had the privilege of watching a Firecrest drop in off the sea by his feet and start feeding around the Telegraph Station Lookout. That also made its way into the gardens and was later caught and ringed. Quite some day for us which included a fall of Chiffchaffs (35), Goldcrests (25) and 3 late Willow Warblers.



Firecrest by Steve Williams

Attention turned back to the sea in early October with more Black Terns, Great Skuas and Eiders started to appear in small numbers with increasing regularity (with a flock building up to 11 birds and some staying into 2018).

18 more Leach's Petrels were seen 5th October and our old friend the Canadian ringed Pale-bellied Brent returned mid-month for his tenth consecutive winter on Hilbre and other colour-ringed birds including a new bird ringed in Iceland in May this year.

At last the sightings of a small furry animal were explained when a Weasel was photographed by the woodpile in the Obs garden. Quite how a tiny island such as Hilbre can sustain predators like Fox and Weasel is beyond us but no doubt explains the now lack of Shelduck breeding on the island and low numbers of ground nesting birds. The second Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn arrived on 16th (still only the sixteenth record since the foundation of the Obs in 1957, all of which have been caught and ringed, but is the seventh in the last three years here). Interesting to have two records in not such an 'eastern' autumn.

It is hardly surprising considering the numbers in the country but still a remarkable record for Hilbre was a heard-only Hawfinch by Middle on 25th October; the first record for Hilbre.

Two Whooper Swans flew past on 10th December (not an annual occurrence).

As the year headed towards a close we came full circle with the return of our Purple Sandpiper flock but only a maximum count of 9 birds (down to single figures now) but the Pale-bellied Brents continued to increase with a new record count for the Obs of 313 on 1st December (increasing again in the New Year).



Holme Sophie Barker

In January a drake Ferruginous Duck was probably the bird of the year, present from the 2nd to the 27th possibly owing to freezing conditions in southern and central Europe.



Ferruginous Duck

Along with Titchwell, a few miles to the East Holme saw a record number of Long-tailed Ducks recorded offshore with 310 on the 18th February.

Significant events for the Obs were, sadly, in February the death of our founder warden Peter Clarke who died aged 90. Peter was warden for over 30 years (between 1962 and 1992).



Peter Clarke



Refurnished Observatory Building

Donations made in memory of Peter funded a new set of windows and a door for the Observatory building which should extend its life considerably.

Rarity highlights included a superb male Red-breasted Flycatcher on 5th May, one of a series of spring vagrants recorded at Holme in the last few years.



Red-breasted Flycatcher

Up to 3 Great White Egrets were frequenting the grazing marshes at the end of summer.



Great-white Egret

A failed breeding attempt by a pair of Black-winged Stilts was a sad story (but not the only one in the county), the nest being predated before hatching took place. Two Yellow-browed Warblers were ringed in September and October respectively, and a late Firecrest was caught on November 15th. 2017 has probably been the poorest for migration which HBO has seen in recent years, with overall numbers ringed at about half our expected totals. The lack of easterlies during the whole autumn was a particular factor, with numbers of common migrants well down. The one exception to this was the visible migration of Hawfinches which were recorded during October and November, but only a handful of these passed over the Obs itself. A Water Pipit was trapped and ringed on October 23rd.



Isle of May Mark Newell

January

It was two weeks into 2017 before anyone set foot on the isle (14th Jan) but it did reveal a first-winter Glaucous Gull and five Whooper Swans over while Red-necked Grebe and 6+ Short-eared Owls were presumably lingerers. Over the next few days single Black Guillemot, Long-tailed Duck, Little Auk and five Sanderling were all notable as were 5+ Bottle-nosed Dolphins which passed the isle.

February

Almost no coverage in February although an end of month visit proved the Glaucous Gull to still be present. Despite the lack of coverage a Bean Goose (presumably part of a flock) was satellite tracked over the island on 6th Feb attempting to head for Denmark from its Stirlingshire wintering grounds.

March



Black Redstart

A visit on 4th March coincided with a brief easterly blow yielding a Black Redstart and a phenomenal 19 Stonechat (previous day maximum is six!). Clearing conditions the following day saw the Stonechats trickle away to zero by the afternoon although improved visibility brought a first winter Iceland Gull in the roost. It has been a good winter for white-wing Gulls down east coast and the island produced a spate of Glaucous Gull sightings in late March, all involving immatures with a single on 19th, two on 27th with singles on 28th and 30th March. The first summer migrants started to filter through in late March with Chiffchaff from 23rd with 10 on 28th, Wheatear from 22nd and Ring Ouzel (five birds) on 28th March. Highlights during this period included four different Black Redstarts between 23rd & 31st (including a stunning male), an Osprey drifted over and an early White' Wagtail on 30th March with seven Whooper Swans north on 31st. The latter day also produced a male Crossbill which brought a good month to an end.

April

April was dominated by westerlies with spring migrants only turning up in small numbers, however, there were a number of notable sightings for the isle. A Lapland Bunting was a rare spring record on 2nd while a Firecrest on 3rd was only the fifth spring record. A Stock Dove also on 3rd was the first island record since 2013. Jack Snipe on 23rd & 30th were good spring records while single Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were seen occasionally throughout the month. The final day of April saw a reasonable fall with a variety of common migrants Wheatear (45) the most numerous along with 2 Grasshopper Warblers and single Black Redstart.

May

The SE winds at end of April continued into the first week of May bringing a run of good birds. Quail and Wood Warbler were the highlights of 1st while the 2nd yielded the fourth record of Golden Oriole (a male) and the first for 20 years. Also on 2nd the eighth island Hawfinch (until 3rd) followed with Pied Flycatcher and Yellow Wagtail. A trickle of migrants until 10th when 55 Willow Warbler were counted and Twite was a spring notable. The best day of the spring was on 12th when a ringed male Red-breasted Flycatcher appeared on Pilgrims beach which was trapped and proved to be caught in Sweden a week earlier.



Red-breasted Flycatcher

Later in the day an apparent Eastern Subalpine Warbler was found at Altarstones. The 13th brought an increase in common migrants with 12 Sedge Warblers including 1 ringed in Belgium. The second Hawfinch of the spring appeared on 20th. A trickle of migrants until 21st when four Mute Swan flew north, only the 9th record while a Little Gull was present on the loch. The second Quail of the year arrived on 25th along with a Hummingbird Hawkmoth. 21 Barnacle Geese north on 26th was late, while two Little Tern over were the first since 2004. A Common Rosefinch brought the month to an end on 30th.

June

A Quail was seen on a couple dates while a Nightjar on 6th June was the 14th record for the isle which was heard churring on 7th.



Red-backed Shrike

A male Red-backed Shrike was present 6-7th. A Grasshopper Warbler on 15th was a late record while 360 Starling on 18th was the highest count this century. The month ended with 2 Wood Sandpipers 29-30th with a Black Redstart on 30th.

July

Waders held court in early July with Greenshank, Knot and a single Wood Sandpiper all on 1st and a Green Sandpiper on 2nd. The first Storm Petrel of the year was caught on 6th while 3 Black-tailed Godwit dropped in on 9th and a Black Guillemot was offshore on 10th. A Pomarine Skua flew past on 13th while a Wood Warbler on 14th was the second earliest autumn record. The 24th brought the first Cuckoo of the year but this was overshadowed by the isle's third record of Two-barred Crossbill. This adult female was then present until 29th as it worked the hogweed seed heads. A Red Kite on 28th was only the 5th record for the isle while Osprey flew over on 29th.



Red Kite

August

Black Redstart was recorded on several dates in early August, while seven Black-tailed Godwit flew south on 17th. The second Red Kite of the year flew south on 20th

while a Water Rail on 21st was an early record. The isle's second Great White Egret circled over with three Grey Heron on 23rd before heading south. The 24th brought an Osprey over while an adult Sabine's Gull on 29th was the 12th record for the May.



Quail

September

On 2nd September 55 Tree Sparrows arrived, the highest ever count for the isle. The 4th September brought the first Barred and Reed Warblers of the year while the 5th brought a Black Tern offshore while a Ruff was also noted. Green Sandpiper was the highlight of 6th while 15 Brent Geese flew past on 7th. A female Goshawk flew south over the isle on 9th, only 2nd island record with the previous in September 2000. Another Black Tern was noted on 14th while the 15th brought a Stonechat and 11 Sooty Shearwaters. After prolonged westerlies the wind went east on 17th and with it notable migrants; the first Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn was caught, a Little Bunting was seen while the first Great Spotted Woodpecker since 2013 was found on the side of the lighthouse. A Common Rosefinch appeared on 18th while Great Spotted Woodpeckers totalled three on 24th. The 6th record of Arctic Warbler with a bird trapped on 25th remaining until 27th.



Arctic Warbler

A late Cuckoo on 27th was eclipsed by the 8th record of Olive-backed Pipit while Yellow-browed Warblers totalled six.

October

October was dominated by westerlies and as a result rare



and scarce migrants were thin on the ground. However there were a good selection of notable records for the isle scattered through the month. A Velvet Scoter flew past on 1st, while 2 Great Northern Divers did likewise on 3rd. The latter date was notable for a passage of 3685 Pink-footed Geese, the highest day count over the isle. The 4th brought further waterfowl passage with 1435 Pink-footed Geese, 11 Whooper Swan, 3 Gadwall (5th isle record) and a Sooty Shearwater. A Common Sandpiper was a late record while a male Bullfinch appeared briefly. The 9th record of Honey Buzzard passed over the isle on 5th while another impressive 3242 Pink-footed Geese flew south. Other passing wildfowl included 8 Whooper Swan, 1 Pintail and a Gadwall. Another Sooty Shearwater passed while three Jack Snipe were notable. Sparrows were significant on 6th with 6 House Sparrows and 11 Tree Sparrows. A total of 37 Barnacle Geese flew over on 15th, with a Snow Bunting on 16th and a Black Redstart present on 18th. The 19th brought 2 Mediterranean Gulls lingering offshore with one or two present until the month's end, continuing the recent late autumn trend after only 4 records prior to 2013. Two Yellow-browed Warblers arrived on 20th along with 2 Yellowhammers (with one remaining until 22nd). Three Short-eared Owls on 23rd was the autumn high, while 11 Little Gulls were offshore. A burst of easterly winds on 24th brought a significant movement of thrushes with 3000 Redwings, 2000 Blackbirds, 50 Fieldfare and 2 Ring Ouzels, while a Black Guillemot was offshore. A party of nine Long-tailed Tits appeared on 26th with at least 5 remaining until 30th.

November

Mediterranean Gulls continued to linger offshore with an adult & second-winter present until at least 14th. One Short-eared Owl was present on 1st while a Lesser Black-backed Gull was late on 2nd. A flock of 19 Twite went over on 2nd. The highlight of the month was the isle's second record of White-billed Diver with one seen flying north with a Great Northern Diver on 6th. A notable fall of migrants on 7th included 60 Woodcock, 227 Blackbird, 365 Redwing and 18 Fieldfare, with numbers dropping the following day when 11 Twite flew south. A late Chiffchaff on 9th (until 11th) when a Long-tailed Duck was present. Little Auk were noted on most days of seawatching with a peak of 14 on 12th. A male Goldeneye past on 13th was the only record of the year and took the year list to 177, the second highest ever total. Also on 13th seawatching produced another Great Northern Diver, three Red-breasted Mergansers, 4 Wigeon and 77 Pink-footed Geese. A Manx Shearwater on the 14th was the latest ever record with two Red-throated Divers past. Short-eared Owls were regularly at roost with a peak of seven on 27th. There was no recording from 15th until the last few days of the month by which time only a handful of passerines were present presumably reduced in numbers due to the attentions of a daily Sparrowhawk and Merlin.

December

Sporadic visits coincided with mild conditions and a resultant shortage of notable birds however eight Short-eared Owls were resident and a Peregrine was seen with a freshly killed Little Auk.

Matt Scraggs was this year's warden who will be returning for the 2018 season. The year started with the early morning spectacle of Cormorant heading out to sea peaking at 3,253 in mid-January. Counts were erratic due to culling at the roost site inland. A couple of both Glaucous & Iceland Gulls entertained us in the first winter period. Spring was characteristically quiet enlivened by the first site records of Great Reed Warbler singing for three days in early May and a singing Iberian Chiffchaff on the first day of June <http://www.xeno-canto.org/373274>



Great Reed Warbler

Spring notables included four Serin, Hooded Crow, Wryneck, Greenish Warbler, Red-rumped Swallow & a Dutch ringed Whinchat caught only a couple of days after being trapped in Holland. It is pleasing to report a far better year for many common migrants this year with not only a far better visible migration than the previous year but more birds ringed.

Goldfinch "vis mig" totals for the autumn increased from 3,192 birds heading south in 2016 to 22,984 southbound this year with much improved totals of other common finches. Blackbird passage at the end of October & early November was better than in recent years including "controls" from Norway, Holland & Germany. 36,980 Wood Pigeon over the first few hours on October 26th with this mass movement apparently mirrored by counts elsewhere across southern Britain. For those who haven't witnessed it you can't beat a big pig day!

Notable sightings in autumn were a Red-throated Pipit for three days, a flock of ten Bearded Tit (only the 4th site record despite the species being common in Suffolk reed beds), 6th to 9th site record of Great White Egret, 7th record of Dartford Warbler (also common in Suffolk), two Ortolan Bunting, Great Grey Shrike and two late Barred Warbler in early November a surprise late season bonus.

Annual reports for the year and updated species lists will appear soon in the archive section of www.lbo.org.uk



North Ronaldsay Alison Duncan

Many thanks to all the staff, volunteers and visitors who contributed in 2017 to a fantastic year for birds and a busy season for visitors. A new record total of species (219) included many scarce and rare migrants, with two outstanding highlights – a first for the Western Palearctic, female Red-winged Blackbird and first British record of an adult male Siberian Blue Robin! The year of the Blackbird and the Robin....



Red-throated Pipit

On the doom & gloom side only 2 Turtle Dove, 2 Cuckoo & just one Pied Flycatcher was noted all year. Passage of Firecrest and Black Redstart was pathetic in both seasons and numbers of once common migrants like Common Redstart and Garden Warbler remain at a low ebb. Sea watching was okay for waterfowl but poor for seabirds with no shearwaters or petrels all year.

The second winter period produced a couple more Glaucous Gulls, Iceland Gull and four sightings of Puffin which is a hard bird to see in Suffolk.

The moth trapping was highly entertaining with a dose of migrants and another 17 species added to the site list including the first British record of *Amphipyra effusa* in June (not that we knew what it was at the time!).



Amphipyra effusa – first British record

Half a dozen Spurge Hawk-moths in June spread over 14 dates (including three on the morning of the moth mentioned above) led us to suspect that they were reared on site although a search for larvae failed.



Red-winged Blackbird – a first for the Western Palearctic Simon Davies

The male Northern Harrier was present early in the year, though becoming more sporadic, it was last seen on 16th April. Other long stayers included a drake Smew and the returning drake Green-winged Teal which was also present well into the spring. Several Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were seen, and among the wintering geese there were 6 Eurasian White-fronted Geese. A White-billed Diver was seen on 1st February and a Black-throated Diver was present for most of the spring.

Notable migrants in March included Red-necked Grebe, a count of 74 Long-tailed Ducks on 7th, 7 Stonechats on 8th which equalled the day record, Stock Dove on 10th and Hawfinch on 27th. Easterlies at the end of March brought a small arrival of thrushes and other migrants, though more unusual was the third island record of Magpie on 2nd April and first island record of Kingfisher on 4th, found along a ditch near Cauldham. Migrants continued to trickle through despite a spell of northerlies mid-month: a second White-billed Diver was seen on 17th along with first Kestrel and Willow Warbler of the year and a Siberian Chiffchaff. Excellent conditions the following day produced a total of 841 Black Guillemots for the annual island census and some 42 Great Northern Divers.

More westerlies and northerly winds followed with Wheatears up to 115 on 26th. The female **Red-winged Blackbird** found at Garso on 29th April attracted much attention, staying just over 2 weeks and showing very predictably to the delight of many twitchers.

A change to south-easterlies on 30th brought several first for the year migrants like House Martin, Redstart, Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge and Garden Warbler and less predictably, Canada Goose. Arrivals on 1st May included Osprey, Hoopoe, Wood Sandpiper, 4 Tree Pipits, 4 Ring Ouzels and Grasshopper Warbler. Continuing easterlies saw Willow Warblers increasing to 86 and Chiffchaffs to 43 on 2nd and Wryneck on 3rd. Two summer plumaged White-billed Divers off Torness on 8th made 4 diver species present. Eday's long staying Snowy Owl visited us briefly on 10th, while wader numbers were increasing on 11th including 75 Knots, 134 Sanderlings, 227 Purple Sandpipers, 168 Dunlins and a record count of 1167 Turnstones.

As easterlies continued, a female Bluethroat on the Observatory track on 13th was followed by 2 male Bluethroats on 14th; and a variety of other migrants – 2 Sparrowhawks, 237 Ringed Plovers, 3 Short-eared Owls, 120 Swallows, 6 House Martins, 80 Wheatears, 9 Lesser Whitethroats, 8 Spotted Flycatchers, and some corvid passage with 36 Carrion and 20 Hooded Crows. Swift, Cuckoo and 2 Marsh Harriers followed. More notable sightings were another White-billed Diver on 19th, and 6 Orcas, Little Egret and White-tailed Eagle on 21st. The first Common Rosefinch on was 22nd, first of several Red-necked Phalaropes on 23rd, along with a Temminck's Stint on Gretchen, male Surf Scoter on 25th and Honey Buzzard on 26th. The sixth island record of Nightingale was trapped in sheep puns on 27th, and on 28th a Hobby flew through, Knot numbers increased to 370 and large and small non-avian highlights on the coast were a Minke Whale and a Hummingbird Hawkmoth.

Scarcities continued in June with a Short-toed Lark on 1st, a Firecrest trapped on 3rd, 2 female Red-backed Shrikes on 7th and a male Ortolan Bunting and adult male Common Rosefinch on 8th. More Red-necked Phalaropes continued throughout the month with up to 4 present. Dunlin fledged on 28th June was the second confirmed breeding record and a Pacific Golden Plover was the 11th record for the island.

A colony with at least 15 Sand Martin nest holes were noted in early July and a count of 46 on 5th was more than double the previous record. Two fresh juvenile Stonechats appeared on 6th July, most likely from elsewhere within Orkney and amongst over 4000 Arctic Terns, a summer plumaged adult White-winged Black Tern was seen briefly, though it reappeared several times during the summer. A poor season for Arctic Terns saw only around 10 surviving to fledging, but 2 juvenile Garganey were seen around Hooking on 13th and a juvenile Robin trapped at Holland was a surprise on 14th. Up to 5 Red-necked Phalaropes were present on Gretchen including one bird with a geo-locator, most likely from Shetland.

A juvenile Goldcrest trapped on 1st August was presumably from elsewhere in Orkney and an almost full-grown Dunlin chick was proof of another nest. Two Orcas showed well on 2nd, also 12-15 Risso's Dolphins – a good year for these with several sightings. Waders featured with a Pectoral Sandpiper on 7th, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper on 13th, an American Golden Plover on 23rd and a Dotterel on 24th. Passerines began to move in the second half of August, highlights being a Greenish Warbler trapped on 24th, Blyth's Reed Warbler on 25th and first Barred Warbler on 27th. Sea-watching produced a Great Shearwater on 31st and another the following day, continuing with Fea's Petrel on 2nd and some 337 Sooty Shearwaters.

Along with common migrants, Common Rosefinch was seen from 2nd September; with wader numbers building, a Long-billed Dowitcher was seen on 6th and also 3 Curlew Sandpipers and 2 Wood Sandpipers. The sixth island record of Arctic Warbler was trapped near the Observatory on 7th, the first since 2003. A third Great Shearwater on 10th came ahead of the island Bird Observatories race on 11th, though hampered by wind and heavy rain, a respectable 85 species in the day included the first 3 Yellow-browed Warblers of the autumn.

A second Ortolan Bunting was found on 13th and even better counts of waders included 101 Ruffs and 106 Black-tailed Godwits. Balearic Shearwaters were seen on sea-watch on 16th and 17th and the Long-billed Dowitcher made another appearance on 18th. South-easterly weather produced a Bluethroat on 19th, Olive-backed Pipit and Little Bunting on 24th. After a second Blyth's Reed Warbler was trapped on 26th, a Siberian Stonechat was found near the airfield, Olive-backed and Richard's Pipits and 10 Yellow-browed Warblers were seen along with chats, thrushes and warblers. A Rustic Bunting at the Lighthouse on 29th was accompanied by more common migrants and 3-4 Little Buntings, with southerlies on 30th bringing Osprey and Yellowhammer.

The drake Green-winged Teal was back from 1st October, there was a Short-toed Lark at Sandar from 6th, and on 7th, a second Buff-breasted Sandpiper at Lochend and a third Blyth's Reed Warbler was identified from photographs. The 8th was a memorable day with a Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll near Seaside and the adult male Siberian Blue Robin caught at South Ness.



Siberian Blue Robin - Bryony Baker

Unfortunately, it could not be found the following day despite thorough searching. A Dusky Warbler was trapped in a heligoland on 10th, a large passage of Whooper Swans peaked with a record count of 267 and an Ocean Sunfish was seen on 16th. A lighthouse

attraction on 17th saw over 7000 Redwings and there were several arrivals of thrushes and other migrants over the next few weeks. Another Balearic Shearwater and Fea's Petrel followed and a Blue Tit caught on 19th was the seventh island record. A fall on 20th with 275 Robins, over 4000 Redwings and 51 Ring Ouzels included Great Grey Shrike and the first Pallas's Warbler for many years. Highlights that followed included a Coue's and another Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll, 2 more Pallas's Warblers, 2 Shorelarks, more Olive-backed Pipits and a second Dusky Warbler. Sea-watching at the end of the month produced a third Fea's Petrel and 30 Little Auks.

Woodcock were still moving on 7th November with 104 and as migrants decreased, there was a Grey Phalarope and Iceland Gull on 10th. A large arrival of gulls in stormy conditions on 22nd included 6 Glaucous Gulls and a juvenile Kumlien's Gull and an adult White-billed Diver on 29th.



**Portland
Martin Cade**

Nobody could have a complaint about the quality of the birding fare dished up at Portland in 2017. Headlining were two real quality additions to the island list: a Spectacled

Warbler topped off what had been a migrant-filled spring, whilst the UK's first mainland American Yellow Warbler caught everyone on the hop on a balmy early autumn afternoon; some additions to the island list count for more than others and it's fair to say that there was only muted excitement surrounding the pair of fly-by Mandarin Ducks in late autumn that constituted the year's third and final addition to the Portland tally.



Spectacled Warbler – Andrew Jordon

The early months of the year were enlivened by the presence of an overwintering Hume's Warbler; the island's very meagre share of the country-wide Waxwing invasion amounted to just 2, whilst a nice series of Iceland

Gulls and some very showy wintering Short-eared Owls were popular.



Western Subalpine Warbler – Martin Cade

Spring will be remembered chiefly for repeated outstanding falls of Willow Warblers: the final log tally amounting to more than twice the recent spring average and the Obs ringing total got to within a hair's breadth of beating the all-time annual record. It was far from an indifferent season almost across the board, with most summer migrants chipping in with respectable totals – only Whitethroat and Garden Warbler fared poorly on the land, with Black Tern being an almost absentee on the sea. Rarity-wise there was plenty to entertain, with 5 Red-rumped Swallows, 3 Subalpine Warblers, 3 Golden Orioles and singles of Red-footed Falcon, Melodious Warbler (a Portland staple that fared poorly since this was the only one of the year), Greenish Warbler, Dusky Warbler (the island's first spring record) and Common Rosefinch the best of the bunch.



Greenish Warbler – Martin Cade

The sea provided unexpected interest during the summer migration hiatus when unseasonably stormy conditions during July drove in remarkable totals of 26 Cory's and 4 Great Shearwaters – the latter including a twitchable lingerer that afforded extraordinary views from the shore. With spring having set the bar so high on the numbers front it was always going to be a struggle for autumn to compete and the early omens didn't look promising, with many of the July/August departers poorly represented. Mid-season was better for the likes of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs but there were again mixed messages late in the season, with poor numbers of incoming thrushes but

better showings from Reed Buntings and some of the finches. By common consent, the migration high point of the season was what'll likely forever be known as Firecrest Day: pretty well out of nowhere, 15th October saw an utterly unprecedented 150 pitch up at the Bill, with the 68 trapped and ringed at the Obs constituting a total higher than any other whole year ringing total there. As they did everywhere else, Hawfinches tried their best to upstage Firecrest, with the 66 logged being easily the highest total ever recorded at Portland. Nothing got close to upstaging the American Yellow Warbler in the rarity stakes, but 2 each of Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Radde's Warbler along with singles of Caspian Gull, Greenish Warbler, Radde's Warbler and Rustic Bunting were all worthy oddities.



Yellow Warbler – Tim White

The onset of winter was enlivened by the presence of a Yellow-browed Warbler that looked to be getting installed for the duration but otherwise passed off uneventfully.

It was a productive year on the ringing front, with the 7921 new birds ringed representing the third-highest annual total ever. Rustic Bunting was a new bird for the ringing list and no less than nine species were trapped in record numbers, although on the debit side there was no sign whatever of Greenfinch numbers recovering and, from being so common that it wasn't even ringed in some former years, House Sparrow numbers have plummeted to the level where their annual total doesn't even get into double figures these days.

Administratively, the high point of the year was securing recognition for the success of our ongoing conservation farming project in the form of the award of a Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier grant that will cover most of the costs of this project for the next five years.



**Sandwich Bay
Steffan Walton**

Looking back at 2017 there have been some fantastic highlights. The spring will be remembered for a run of interesting raptors overhead

including an unprecedented movement of Red Kites. Even with a lack of rain the summer breeding season proved to be very productive highlighted by our first ever breeding of Common Tern. An extended autumn continued the sterling season with its fair share of rare warblers and late surprises. SBBOT continues to specialise in not just birds, but a whole manner of wildlife, and it is testament to the staff and many volunteers that 358 Macro Moth species, 27 Butterfly species (a new record), and 23 Odonata species were recorded. The appointment of Steffan Walton as Assistant Warden in March was a new step in the next phase of SBBOT and was followed by our most successful Open Day and a brilliant Ringing Course, whilst movement has been made on a Cross-channel Project with our counterparts over in France.

The year started with unusual lingerers from 2016 including five Velvet Scoters offshore and the wintering female Scaup on Backsand Scrape. Two Bewick's Swans on Worth soon increased to four and stayed until late February whilst a run of 'grey geese' included up to five Pink-footed Geese, 30 White-fronts and seven Tundra Bean Geese.



White-fronted Geese by Steve Ray

Single Waxwings put in a few appearances, a calling Tawny Owl was a notable record for the Estate, and a Black-throated Diver was seen several times offshore. A Crane was seen at Pegwell on the 6th February and a gathering of 836 Great Crested Grebes on the 21st was a new Bay record. A Pomarine Skua was in Pegwell, a first winter Glaucous Gull dropped in on Restharrow scrape, and a Great White Egret flew over HQ on the 26th. Cormorants stole the show though with 603 on the 5th, then 1,400 on the 8th, and the next morning an astonishing 2,700. Two Harbour Porpoises were notable though have become almost a regular feature in late winter/ early spring for the last few years. Finally, in the event of the month, a flock of 36 Cranes flew north in heavy rain early on the afternoon of the 27th.

March saw spring arrive and our earliest ever emergences of Small White, Green-veined White, Large White and Holly Blue. A first winter Glaucous Gull in Pegwell was notable with five White Wagtails and a Dartford Warbler more usual. The first few Red Kites drifted over, a rubicola-type Stonechat was seen, a Scandinavian Rock Pipit visited the scrape, and at least 5,000 Starlings were tumbling about the fields on the Green Wall and New Downs, before a delightful summer-plumage Black-necked Grebe was found on the North Stream. The month ended with a scattering of Firecrests, a drake Garganey, Little Ringed Plover, and the Bay's third record

of Lead-coloured Drab and fourth Blossom Underwing in the moth traps.

A superb adult male Hen Harrier flew past the scrape on the 3rd April and on the 6th a remarkable total of at least 28 Red Kites, seven Common Buzzards, four Sparrowhawks and an Osprey flew north. All of which was rather overshadowed by an Alpine Swift that spent some time over the marshes on the 16th, followed by two Kentish Plovers in Pegwell on the 17th. A brace of Spoonbills flew over Restharrow Scrape on the 20th with another Osprey on the 29th. A total 67 macro moth species had been recorded by the end of the month, compared to just 20 at the same time in 2016. Notably, 38% of these were the earliest on record at the Bay.

A storming start to May saw a Kentish Plover in Pegwell on the 1st, two Cranes on Worth on the 2nd, another Kentish Plover on the 4th, a Temminck's Stint on the 6th, two more Cranes and a Black Kite on the 7th, a Wryneck on the 8th, and then a Spoonbill and Grey-headed Wagtail on the 10th. A Honey-buzzard over Worth on the 12th started a terrific run of sightings including a party of three the next day. Butterflies continued to be seen in good numbers whilst a Green Hairstreak on Worth on 16th May was very unusual. A Great White Egret flew in on the 18th not long after a Long-eared Owl had also arrived at height from off the sea. Our 5th Kentish Plover of the spring popped in on the 21st, another Honey-buzzard flew over on the 23rd, followed the next day by a staggering movement of 30 Red Kites and 11-12 Common Buzzards, while four Hobbies and a Honey-buzzard later on New Downs added to the atmosphere. Finally, 17 more Red Kites flew north on the 25th and a singing Marsh Warbler appeared briefly on the 27th. The first Red-veined Darters appeared from the end of May onwards with a total of 22 different records of totalling 51 'dragonfly-days' by the end of the season.



Norfolk Hawker by Steve Reynaert

June started with a repeat of the storm-driven events of 2006, there was an unprecedented influx of Storm Petrels into the bay on the 7th, with twos and threes coming and going all morning. At least nine were involved, probably more, and comfortably higher than the previous SBBO record of three. At least four Storm Petrels continued to pass to and fro on the 8th, with two Balearic Shearwaters and two Black Terns. The next day a Little Gull flew over, a Bee-eater was in Pegwell on the 13th, and another singing Marsh Warbler was on Worth on the 15th. Two Spoonbills remained all month whilst 17 Red Kites and an

Osprey flew over on the 4th. An adult male Red-footed Falcon was on Worth on the 20th. The earliest SBBO records of Marbled White and Small Skipper were recorded during the month in addition to two Clouded Yellows of the form helice. The first of our 2017 Moth Nights on the 16th was very good and although there was no obvious immigration the main trap had 545 moths of 92 species. Highlights during the month included only the third recent occurrence of Red-tipped Clearwing, Four-spotted Footman, and the scarce pyralid *Nyctegretis lineana*. Three Norfolk Hawkers discovered on Worth in late June were the icing on the non-avian cake.

With the exception of a Bee-eater flying along the shore on the 5th avian passage didn't begin in earnest until late July. A Ringlet on 7th was a shock to the system with just one previous record in 1983! Clouded Yellow continued to breed on the Environment Agency's clover-sown spillways of the new flood alleviation scheme, where 39 were recorded on 18th. Perfect conditions on the 19th led to a monster moth night with the carpark trap containing over 1,000 moths of 130+ species. A Double Kidney was caught, a new moth for the area, as well as local specialties such as Pigmy Footman and Oblique Striped. A Great White Egret, ringed from a nest on the Somerset Levels, showed up on New Downs on the 18th, remaining for the rest of the month with a few Spoonbills plus a good run of Little Stints, Wood Sandpipers, and Spotted Redshanks. A Stone-curlew resided in Pegwell all month with a Pectoral Sandpiper present on the 19th, and a Temminck's Stint on the 20th. July saw also an explosion of Willow Emerald Damselfly records a new day record of 156 Migrant Hawkers.



Wood Warbler by Steffan Walton

An Ant-lion was recorded for the second year in succession on 1st August with the evening tides at Pegwell

notable for congregations of up to 850 Sandwich, 500 Common, plus a few Arctic, Roseate and Black Terns. The Stone-curlew remained in situ all month, Wood Warblers were found on the 3rd and the 6th, a Balearic Shearwater flew by on the 8th, and a Black-tailed Godwit was sighted that had been colour-ringed in Portugal. An adult male Red-backed Shrike appeared on Worth on the 9th, likewise a Melodious Warbler on the 13th, and a Quail on the 14th. Blackcaps were on the move earlier than usual, with 50 on the Estate on the 26th and at least 120 on the 29th. The Bay's second record of Beautiful Marbled was caught in the moth trap, as were Ni Moth, the scarce Hoary Footman, and Pimpinel Pug. A Kentish Plover in Pegwell on the 30th ended the month.

Blackcaps were abundant early in September with 100 on the 1st, 115 on the 3rd, a huge arrival of 500 on the 7th and 300 more on the 10th. An impressive 34 Whinchats were present on the 3rd, an Osprey was seen in Pegwell on the 4th, a Black-necked Grebe appeared on the 5th, while the high tide roost on New Downs held a notable 438 Redshanks as well as two Spoonbills.



Ni Moth by Ian Hunter

Seven Ravens over on the 5th was an excellent local count and on the 7th a more or less constant stream of 25-30 Buzzards passed over accompanied by two or three Honey-buzzards and six Hobbies. A Honey-buzzard was seen again on the 9th and the following day one of the birds of the month – an Arctic Warbler – was trapped.



Arctic Warbler by Steffan Walton

Another Osprey flew out to sea on the 13th and two more did so on the 15th, the same day a Wryneck was in Pegwell. The first Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn turned up on the 17th, followed by a most unexpected first SBBO record of Blyth's Reed Warbler on the 19th, and the last sighting of the Stone-curlew in Pegwell.



Blyth's Reed Warbler by Steffan Walton

An arrival of 300 each of Blackcap and Chiffchaff on the 20th paled in comparison to an enormous movement of 110,000 House Martins and 40,000 Swallows overhead. A second Yellow-browed and four Great White Egrets appeared on the 24th, followed by 14 Firecrests on the 25th, another Yellow-browed on the 27th, and a Red-footed Falcon on the 28th. Another 15,000 House Martins flew over on the 29th and a Long-tailed Blue was found on the beach at Prince's Lodge.



Long-tailed Blue by Keith Heaven

A windy October started off with two Sooty Shearwaters on the 1st, the Red-footed Falcon again on the 2nd, Continental-type Coal Tits on the 3rd and on the 5th a Balearic Shearwater passed by. Over 1,000 Goldfinches flew north on the 7th with another 1,500 on the 8th. A Yellow-browed Warbler was trapped and two Crossbills flew north on the 9th and a Dartford Warbler was found on the beach on the 10th, when at least 26 Stonechats were present in the area. The 11th saw the Bay's first ever Oak Rustic recorded followed by a remarkable 47 Stonechats on the 14th, when a Richard's Pipit was also found in Worth. The Bay's first Dusky Warbler since 2004 was trapped on the 15th, with another Yellow-browed the next day. The Dusky was re-trapped again on the 17th, whilst a stormy 29th produced impressive totals of 1,800

Gannets and 2,000 Auks. Eight Hawfinches flew over on the 21st, with 18 Ring Ouzels and six more Hawfinches on 23rd, and 4,700 Chaffinches and two more Hawfinches over on the 25th. The second half of the month featured some record-breaking late dates, including Brown Argus and Holly Blue on the 25th, when 11 species were still on the wing.

A Hawfinch appeared whilst no fewer than eight Dartford Warblers were in Buckthorn on the beach on the 2nd. A Pallas's Warbler, two Yellow-browed Warblers, and our second Dusky Warbler of the autumn amassed together on the 3rd. A very late Red-necked Phalarope appeared in Pegwell on the 15th when two Shorelarks and two Snow Buntings were seen at the Point. A Black-throated Diver showed well offshore on the 16th, a Long-tailed Duck and two Goosanders were in Pegwell on the 17th, and a second Pallas's Warbler was trapped on the 18th. The Pallas's remained for over a week, as did a Siberian Chiffchaff, first trapped on the 21st. A Slavonian Grebe was on the sea on the 27th and a Black Brant was in Pegwell on the 30th.

As the year brought to a close two Black-throated Divers were seen offshore on the 1st, and the next day the Slavonian Grebe was seen again as a Short-eared Owl flew in off the sea and two Great White Egrets dropped by. Six Dartford Warblers were still present on the 4th, a second Siberian Chiffchaff appeared in on the 6th, a Velvet Scoter was on the sea on the 9th remaining until the 16th at least, when four Bewick's Swans appeared over Worth. An Iceland Gull was seen in Pegwell and a 1st winter Glaucous Gull was found at Sandown Castle at the end of the year, as an amazing 2,700 Cormorants flew from inland and out to sea.



Red-necked Phalarope by Steve Ray

So why not visit us in 2018? Whatever your reason for visiting Kent, the Field Centre offers modern, comfortable, self-catering accommodation with a Kitchen, a self-contained Flat, and free parking, allowing you to be on hand for early morning bird ringing, late night moth trapping, club events or just more time to explore the local area.



Skokholm
Richard Brown
& Giselle Eagle

Our fifth season has now ended on Dream Island and what a year it has been!

The fantastic spring, which brought amongst other things, Crane, Bittern, Tufted Duck, Little and Great Crested Grebe to our Old-red Sandstone shores gave rise to the idea that 2017 could be spectacular. Not only could it be a great season for variety of Island scarcities but it seemed that the best Skokholm year-list of 159 species (set in 1988) might just be achievable.

Rich set about analysing the historical bird log data which is instantly available at the click of a button following the digitisation project. Looking at the species lists from nine of the busiest Skokholm years, in order to give us an idea of what we might need to log for a 'big year', Rich determined that we had to encounter a healthy selection of common Skokholm species, a good selection of rare and scarce species, something 'special' and at least four 'firsts' for the Island. The species list was, of course, flexible but one thing was for certain - we were not to see a Hoopoe.



Hoopoe – Richard Brown

Despite there being over 30 Skokholm records there has never been one observed during a big Skokholm year. Perhaps this was a jinx species, or perhaps the particular weather conditions which usually result in this striking continental species arriving to Skokholm meant that variety of other species was less likely. Either way, a sighting of a Hoopoe and our dream would superstitiously be over. We ploughed into the seabird season in late May and the big-year target was put to the back of our minds as our days were filled with seabird research. That was

until, a stunning male Bluethroat turned up at the Well on 27th May following some early morning rain - the anniversary of the Skokholm White-throated Robin.



Bluethroat – Richard Brown

Back to the seabird research again, but we were soon interrupted by a Marsh Warbler on 2nd June which was also at the Well; a first for Skokholm and only a second for Pembrokeshire. Again our attentions turned back to the seabirds but this was interrupted once more -this time, by something 'special'. On the morning of 18th June, we found a male Myrtle Warbler (a North American vagrant) singing in the Sycamore tree in the shelter of the Courtyard.



Yellow-rumped Warbler – Richard Brown

It was the kind of avian encounter you dream about having. But it was real, and it was there, blasting its trilling song to a table of breakfasting guests. It was a balmy June day, with cloudless blue skies and scorching temperatures. The Myrtle Warbler was thus feeding and singing happily amongst the few 'big' trees that Skokholm has to offer. We arranged a boat that afternoon so that some of the local birders could come and enjoy what was another Skokholm first, and only a second for Wales

The remainder of the seabird season passed uninterrupted and as autumn commenced things seemed a little quiet. Cue a Cattle Egret on North Pond on 17th July in full breeding attire, another first for Skokholm. As autumn progressed we became aware that we hadn't encountered some of the 'almost annual' species that we really needed -Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Knot and Turtle Dove had all evaded the Island (or at least our eyes) and the 159 target was beginning to look unachievable. August and September produced a few more goodies for

the year-list, several Sabine's Gulls, a Pectoral Sandpiper, Western Bonelli's, Barred and Melodious Warblers and Firecrest taking the species list to 146.

As October progressed, the species kept on appearing and despite the setback of Hurricane Ophelia (which, although spectacular, sent huge waves towards the Lighthouse, smashing three of the lab windows and punching through one of the first floor windows) we encountered Hawfinches, Long-tailed Skuas, a Radde's Warbler (second for Skokholm), the first Blue Tit for six years, the third ever Dartford Warbler for the Island and a flock of eight White-fronted Geese which took the species total to 158, just one short of the best ever year.



Radde's Warbler – Richard Brown

Conscious that time was ticking, (we still had to finish putting the Observatory to bed for the winter and pack up the Lighthouse) the pressure was on. A pressure which was lifted two days later when a Woodcock brought us level with the best ever Skokholm year. What, if at all, would be the species to take us to 160 and thus crowning 2017 as the best ever year? None other than the jinx bird itself, the species which has never been encountered during a big year (until now), a Hoopoe, which flushed from North Haven the very same day.

And the season kept on giving. November brought a fly-over Long-billed Dowitcher (second for Skokholm), a Richard's Pipit, the fifth ever Bullfinch for Skokholm, a Yellow-browed Warbler and finally, on our penultimate morning, a party of four Long-tailed Tits in Crab Bay, securing the year total at an impressive 165; six species more than the previous best record including six species which were new to the Island, taking the Skokholm bird list to 296. We're now taking bets on what the 300th Skokholm species will be. Answers on a postcard.

Fancy a trip to Skokholm Island? We can accommodate up to 20 guests in comfortable accommodation. There is a well-equipped communal kitchen and dining area, an outdoor BBQ, a well-stocked library and a very comfortable common room with roaring log-burner where bird log is held each evening. Storm Petrels nest in the walls around the accommodation and you're always within a few feet of a Manx Shearwater. You also never know who might be staying.



Spurn Paul Collins

After the previous year, 2017 was never going to reach those dizzy heights, but looking back there were some high points and a few very low points, with Spurn's stalwarts Andy Roadhouse and Alan Cawthraw both passing away. Andy was a very special person not just to me but he touched everyone he met and made everybody welcome with his unique personality, not to mention his meticulous recording, the work he did for the Obs was just incredible, a very sad loss to the birding world.

The annual Migration festival took place in September as usual with our partners the BTO, which was a huge success with lots of smiles on faces all weekend.

As with most years the Obs got involved with all local events such as the fancy dress charity bike ride, quiz nights and whatever is put on locally.

This year we ran a Youth exchange to Falsterbo and Cape May Bird Observatories as part of our ongoing Friendship Agreement. We sent Jonnie Fisk to Cape May in USA and Georgia Locock to Falsterbo in Sweden and we hosted youngsters from both Observatories at Spurn in August and September.



Rob Adams (SBO Chair), Gorgia Locock and Dick Forsman at Falsterbo

On the bird front the year started with plenty of White-fronted Geese moving, nine Waxwings appeared which are always nice at any time of year and the wintering Pallid Harrier made a few visits from its roost site. February continued along the same vein with the Pallid Harrier being the main event with a backup cast of Red-necked Grebe, Grey Phalarope and both Iceland and Glaucous Gulls.

Spring began with some Egyptian Geese, a welcome return of Red-rumped Swallows with the usual early visitors being Woodlark, Firecrest, Coal Tit, Long-eared Owl and some early Swallows and House Martins. With spring in full flow Garganey are always a pretty sight and as with past Aprils a fly by Mandarin Duck is becoming annual albeit an odd sight at sea, Red Kites start to move around now and early southern visitors included more Red-rumped Swallows, Nightingale, Savi's Warbler, Western Sublapine

and two Iberian Chiffchaff's (later confirmed by DNA). One of highlights of the year was a day of four Red-footed Falcons heading south along with an Alpine and Pallid Swift in May, a Broad-billed Sandpiper was seen on the Humber this month and more southern species witnessed were even more Red-rumped Swallows, Bee-eater and Golden Oriole.

The weather during spring and summer was to say on best average hampering breeding birds with spells of cold wet weather claiming many casualties, although Shoveler bred for the first time raising seven young. Summer birding highlights did include a cracking adult White-winged Black Tern with another juvenile bird later on, Honey Buzzard, Rosefinch, a late Icterine Warbler, Crane and another Red-footed Falcon.



White-winged Black Tern – Tim Jones

High hopes in the autumn saw more American waders than most years with a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, American Goldie, Long-billed Dowitcher (just for the Mig Fest again spotted by a BTO employee!!), some Pectoral and White-rumped Sandpipers but one of the main American highlight being a fly through Cliff Swallow. With only one day of Easterly winds all autumn birds from the east were few but four Arctic Warblers were good, with a backup cast of most of the usual's albeit in few numbers such as Red-breasted Flycatchers, Olive-backed Pipits, Oortolan and plenty of Yellow-browed Warblers.



Long-billed Dowitcher – Jonnie Fisk

Good numbers of thrushes arrived in late October – November with 12000 Redwings one day being a grand sight, a few late Barred Warblers and a Bluethroat in November brightened up the years end but bit was not over yet with Spurn's first but well over due Lesser Yellowlegs being found in flooded fields in December ending the year on a high.



Walney Colin Raven

January

It was a generally quiet start to the year with offshore highlights in January limited to a Slavonian Grebe (15th) and the daily presence of 11 Shag. A total of 2,545 Pink-footed Geese headed north while 72 Barnacle Geese (13th), 356 light-bellied Brent Geese and 88 dark-bellied Brent Geese remained in residence. A Shoveler influx was apparent (23-11th) while three Scaup and a redhead Goosander lingered from 2016. A Jack Snipe (14th & 21st) was amongst good numbers of Snipe (230-14th) while additional waders included: 10 Greenshank (13th), 10 Purple Sandpiper (14th) and single Black-tailed Godwit and Woodcock (14th). At least two Water Rail were present, a pre-roost congregation of 60 Little Egret were noted (26th) while raptors included a ringtail Hen Harrier (6th-11th) and Short-eared Owl (29th) along with regular sightings of both Merlin and Peregrine. Passerines were highlighted by a single Water Pipit amongst 31 Rock Pipit (29th) but just five Twite (13th). Unusually, two Goldcrest and single Chiffchaff, Grey Wagtail and Tree Sparrow (all 14th) were found wintering on the island.

February

The sea remained quiet in February with highlights limited to the presence of a Great Northern Diver (11th-26th) amongst 22 Red-throated Diver (4th) and 16 Shag. Also seen were two Long-tailed Duck (11th), 5,040 Eider (17th) and the first Gannet of the year (19th). Little Egret numbers began to dwindle (44-4th) though at least two Water Rail were still present. A further 76 Pink-footed Geese headed north while 349 light-bellied Brent Geese, a record 93 dark-bellied Brent Geese, and 38 Barnacle Geese (4th) were logged. Shoveler numbers remained high (22-11th) while the three long-staying Scaup remained. Waders included 11,000 Knot (26th), 10 Purple Sandpiper (11th), 10 Greenshank, four Black-tailed Godwit and single Woodcock (8th & 24th). Passerine highlight involved the continued presence of at least one Water Pipit amongst 29 Rock Pipit (11th) which included a colour-ringed bird from Bardsey Island. Wintering birds included a Tree Sparrow (4th), Coal Tit (4th & 25th), Grey Wagtail (4th-18th), Chiffchaff (26th-28th) and 25 Twite. Evidence of movement was provided by Mistle Thrush (11th), three Fieldfare and two Siskin (18th) and a Redwing (24th).

March

There was little over the sea during March, although the first Fulmar (19th) and Sandwich Tern (26th) of the year were logged along with a Velvet Scoter (31st). Additional sightings included 12 Shag (1st) and 150 Kittiwake (31st). Little Egret continued to decline (21-9th) and several Water Rail lingered. A total of 405 Pink-footed Geese and 249 Whooper Swan headed north while 340 light-bellied Brent Goose and 81 dark-bellied Brent Goose remained along with four Barnacle Geese. A drake Gadwall (18th-30th) was amongst 16 Shoveler while the long-staying redhead Goosander put in several appearances. Waders included single Woodcock (4th & 12th) and Jack Snipe

(31st) and 17 Purple Sandpiper, eight Black-tailed Godwit and four Greenshank. Both Merlin and Peregrine continued to hunt the island. At least two Water Pipit were present (to 9th) and an increase in Stonechat was evident as passage birds started to move through augmenting the wintering population and 20 Twite remained. The first Wheatear (11th) and Chiffchaff arrived (12th) amongst a small passage of Goldcrest and a fall of thrushes (12th) saw 84 Redwing, 60 Blackbird and 37 Fieldfare logged and a further 40 Redwing appeared (29th). The first Sand Martin returned (31st) and diurnal migration also produced 35 Siskin and eight Grey Wagtail (11th) amongst a trickle of Meadow Pipit.

April

April saw the first Manx Shearwater (90-16th), Little Tern (23rd) and Arctic Tern (7-29th) arrive back offshore while highlights involved a Puffin (14th), Velvet Scoter (15th) and four Scaup (29th). Also seen were five Shag and four Arctic Skua along with reasonable numbers of Gannet (55-29th), Kittiwake (56-29th) and Red-throated Diver (30-23rd). Little Egret remained in residence, Grey Heron were nesting for the second successive year, the last Merlin departed (30th) and the first Osprey of the year appeared (30th). A total of 80 Pink-footed Goose (to 9th) and 24 Whooper Swan (to 8th) headed north, the Brent Goose flock continued to hold 280 light-bellied and 24 dark-bellied birds. Whimbrel were prominent from mid-month (157-29th, 144-30th) and additional waders included: four Purple Sandpiper (14th), 42 Black-tailed Godwit (23rd) – including a colour-ringed bird from Portugal and 5,000 Knot (29th) while several Greenshank lingered throughout. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was drumming in suitable breeding habitat (to 16th). Grounded thrushes were prominent early in the month with 400 Redwing and 54 Fieldfare (1st) a day which also produced the first Blackcap of the year and unusually two Yellowhammer. Wheatear dominated the passage later in the month (70-22nd, 100-30th) and totals of 90 Willow Warbler (from 2nd), 64 Goldcrest (to 8th) and 23 Chiffchaff moved through. Diurnal passage was generally slow with a Brambling (8th) amongst a trickle of Meadow Pipit (120-2nd) early in the month and nine Siskin and 11 Lesser Redpoll were amongst a few Swallow (from 2nd). A Hooded Crow called in (23rd). A Grasshopper Warbler (9th) was the earliest ever recorded on the island before a northerly wind set in and curtailed migration until migrant arrival dates included: Sedge Warbler (19th), Whitethroat (20th), Lesser Whitethroat (22nd), Cuckoo (24th), Reed Warbler (29th), Pied Flycatcher, Redstart and Whinchat (30th).

May

There were few opportunities for seawatching during May with generally settled conditions prevailing, however, a total of 10 Arctic Skua (3-1st) were logged along with 80 Arctic Tern and 110 Sandwich Tern (13th), 140 Gannet, 110 Kittiwake, 110 Guillemot, and five Fulmar (14th) and 265 Manx Shearwater (20th), while a large flock of Common Scoter gathered in the mouth of Morecambe Bay (4,000-14th). Tardy winter wildfowl involved four Shoveler (to 9th) and single drake Wigeon (to 21st), dark-bellied Brent Goose (to 29th) and female Long-tailed Duck (to 30th). Waders were well represented as birds headed north to

their Arctic breeding grounds with 10,000 Knot (1st), 8,000 Dunlin (3rd), 1,260 Sanderling (13th), 925 Ringed Plover (13th), 100 Bar-tailed Godwit (18th), 78 Whimbrel (4th), 13 Black-tailed Godwit (to 13th) and three Ruff (7th), while the last Greenshank and Golden Plover departed (8th). A first-summer Mediterranean Gull was unexpected (29th) while several Little Egret lingered and single Marsh Harrier (5th) and Osprey (8th) flew through. Diurnal migration was sparse with the first Swift (5th) and House Martin (6th) finally arriving while grounded birds included a Ring Ouzel, three White Wagtail and 65 Wheatear (1st) and a late Fieldfare (14th). Totals included: 86 Willow Warbler (28-7th), 18 Spotted Flycatcher (7-13th), 15 Whinchat (5-2nd), eight Chiffchaff, five Redstart and four Garden Warbler. A Hooded Crow was the passerine highlight of the month (27th). Amongst the immigrant moths attracted to the moth trap overnight on 24th was *Palpita vitrealis* a migrant from southern Europe and the first island record.



Palpita vitrealis

June

The generally settled conditions continued into June when a total of five Arctic Skua and single Puffin (4th) and Great Skua (24th) were the highlights over the sea amongst reasonable numbers of Gannet (200-24th), Manx Shearwater (400-24th) and Common Scoter (105-27th). Feeding flocks of terns from local colonies were ever present offshore with peaks of 840 Sandwich Tern (24th), 27 Arctic Tern (28th) and 20 Little Tern (2nd).



Serin

A Spoonbill put in a brief appearance (14th) and at least six Little Egret were still in residence. Waders continued to move north early in the month with 1,000 Sanderling and 700 Knot (3rd) and 2,800 Oystercatcher and five Whimbrel

(10th), however, birds were soon to begin to return with Greenshank (14th), 40 Grey Plover (24th), 915 Curlew, 11 Golden Plover and two Whimbrel (25th) and 37 Black-tailed Godwit (30th). A female Serin was to prove to be the passerine highlight of the spring (1st) while at least three Reed Warbler held territory and Raven provided evidence of breeding. The first few Swift began to head south along with small numbers of Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff.

July

July brought with it the anticipation of autumn though in reality it just brought seemingly relentless wind and rain; indeed only 27 out of the 184 days up to the end of the year were recorded as dry. Seawatching opportunities remained limited with conditions far from ideal, highlights were restricted to a total of six Arctic Skua (3-15th) and a single Puffin (1st & 2nd) amongst good numbers of returning Common Scoter (505-2nd), feeding assemblies of Sandwich Tern (420-2nd), Gannet (78-2nd), Manx Shearwater (170-15th), Little Tern (14-22nd) and the first Common Tern of the year (1st). Little Egret numbers began to build (27-28th). Waders soon began to increase including Black-tailed Godwit (10-9th), Greenshank (12-22nd), Curlew (2,075-22nd), Whimbrel (46-22nd), Grey Plover (90-23rd), Golden Plover (25-27th), Dunlin (562-28th) and Turnstone (50-28th). A juvenile Jay (23rd) confirmed breeding on the island for the second successive year although juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker (20th & 23rd), Mistle Thrush (23rd) and Treecreeper (24th) were all considered the result of post-breeding dispersal from the mainland. A steady trickle of southbound Willow Warbler provided a total of 30 birds while a Wheatear (28th) and Reed Warbler (30th) and light Swift passage further evidence that autumn was approaching.

August

August proved to be a generally frustrating month, the sea provided two Arctic Skua (12th), 18 Little Tern (6th) and 440 Sandwich Tern (11th) but little else of note apart from 70 Manx Shearwater (11th). Little Egret numbers continued to build (35-14th), an Osprey flew through (5th) and the first Merlin reappeared (14th). Shoveler (27th) and Pintail (31st) returned and waders included a juvenile Little Ringed Plover (4th), Green Sandpiper (24th-30th), Ruff (26th-31st) and seven Whimbrel, eight Black-tailed Godwit and 27 Greenshank (11th) amongst 1,020 Redshank and 1,120 Dunlin (19th). There was a gathering of 80 Sand Martin (4th) and early autumn passage provided a total of 17 Tree Pipit – the best for many years along with 120 White Wagtail (from 21st), 106 Willow Warbler (22-13th), 86 Tree Sparrow (from 13th), 44 Wheatear, 40 Grey Wagtail (from 20th), 29 Chiffchaff (from 24th), and 11 Whinchat (from 13th) but only four Spotted Flycatcher (from 9th) and single Garden Warbler (13th) and Redstart (31st). Oddities included another Treecreeper (26th) while seven Raven involved local family groups.

September

The sea finally proved rewarding at times in September with the highlights led by the island's second Wilson's Petrel (10th) along with a total of 18 Leach's Petrel (10-

12th), a juvenile Long-tailed Skua (7th) and four Pomarine Skua (3-10th). Also seen were eight Arctic Skua, a Great Skua (7th), 700 Sandwich Tern (8th), 333 Kittiwake (10th) and 510 Common Scoter and a Scaup (24th). Little Egret numbers continued to build (62-16th) and several Merlin and Peregrine were logged. The island's first American Wigeon (26th-27th) was the highpoint of the month, while 2,228 Pink-footed Geese flew through (from 2nd) and the first Brent Goose (9th) returned. Wader highlight was a Grey Phalarope (13th-15th) and also included 24 Greenshank, five Black-tailed Godwit and two Ruff. Grounded migrants were in short supply, Goldcrest was the only warbler species to appear in any numbers with 140 passage birds recorded, otherwise sightings were limited to 63 Chiffchaff, 14 Whitethroat (to 26th), 11 Willow Warbler (to 26th), three Sedge Warbler (to 16th), two Blackcap and single Garden Warbler (9th) and Yellow-browed Warbler (26th). Also seen were three Spotted Flycatcher (to 18th), five Whinchat (to 25th) and 41 Wheatear. Diurnal passage was also below par with a total of just 1,850 Meadow Pipit (440-26th) and 250 Skylark (145-26th) logged while a total of 400 Swallow (120-17th) provided little evidence of a sustained passage suggesting that a poor local breeding season was replicated elsewhere. Additional sightings included totals of 86 Grey Wagtail, 73 Tree Sparrow (60-9th), four Siskin and two Lesser Redpoll along with 60 Sand Martin (2nd), 40 House Martin (17th) and seven Tree Pipit (2nd). Three Jay (2nd) and single Great Spotted Woodpecker (23rd) and Hooded Crow (26th) were the best of the rest.

October

The seemingly endless series of Atlantic lows continued to cross the island throughout October with wind and rain to the fore and very few suitable days to initiate migration. Despite the conditions, seabirds were in surprisingly short supply, highlights involved five Leach's Petrel (17th), and single Little Gull (4th), Great Northern Diver (22nd) and Long-tailed Duck (30th), along with 26 Shag and a total of seven Arctic Skua and a Great Skua (10th). Also seen were 155 Gannet (2nd), while the last departing Sandwich Tern (4th) and Manx Shearwater (17th) were also recorded. Little Egret peaked (80-23rd) and several Water Rail were seen (from 25th) and at least three Merlin hunted the island. A total of just 3,505 Pink-footed Geese and 208 Whooper Swan (from 5th) flew through. The first Goldeneye reappeared (from 21st), a pair of Gadwall lingered (10th-16th), a female Scaup took up residence (from 29th), four Greenland White-fronted Geese dropped in (31st) and the Brent Goose flock held 281 light-bellied and 43 dark-bellied birds. Passage waders were meagre with 22 Greenshank and single Curlew Sandpiper (9th), Little Stint (9th) and Ruff (19th) the highlights. Apart from a total of 220 Goldcrest, warbler species were again sparse with just 13 Chiffchaff and seven Blackcap logged while only four Wheatear could be mustered. Diurnal migration was only marginally better with 15 House Martin (1st) and two Stock Dove (29th) and a peak day passage of 1,400 Jackdaw, 560 Skylark, 380 Meadow Pipit, 280 Linnet and 44 Pied Wagtail (all 18th) along with monthly totals of 740 Redwing (from 9th), 266 Tree Sparrow, 59 Lesser Redpoll, 34 Siskin, 33 Brambling (from 15th), 33 Mistle Thrush, 30 Fieldfare (from 23rd), 29 Swallow, 21 Long-tailed Tit, 11 Grey Wagtail and unusually two Bullfinch.

Consequently, passerine highlights were few but included Ring Ouzel (1st), Hooded Crow (6th & 29th), two Ring Ouzel (20th), Treecreeper (25th), two Black Redstart (27th) and Common Redpoll (30th). Goldfinch appeared to have fared well with large flocks reported across the island (max 420-1st). The first of the overwintering Twite flock reappeared (24th).

November

During November, although a record 46 Shag flocked offshore (19th), further highlights were limited to a Great Northern Diver (5th-20th) and Great Skua (4th) amongst the last few Gannet of the year (to 18th). A total of 1,135 Pink-footed Geese and 72 Whooper Swan flew through, the first few Barnacle Geese returned (7-10th) and the Brent Goose flock increased to 297 light-bellied and 42 dark-bellied birds, though very few young were seen suggesting a poor breeding season for both Canadian and Siberian populations. Additional wildfowl included six Scaup. Waders were well represented, amongst which, were 1,000 Golden Plover, 16 Greenshank, six Purple Sandpiper and three Jack Snipe. Little Egret were ever present (76-2nd) and at least six Water Rail were in suitable habitat (11th). Passerine highlights involved a Water Pipit (23rd-30th) amongst 21 Rock Pipit and single Snow Bunting (11th & 19th) and Hooded Crow (11th). The last few days of autumn passage produced totals of 51 Tree Sparrow, 17 Lesser Redpoll, seven Brambling and four Siskin amongst a light movement of Fieldfare and Redwing. The final vestiges of summer were provided by a Swallow (4th), Chiffchaff (19th) and Blackcap (25th) while the Twite flock increased steadily (80-19th). The recently established Grey Seal colony produced 10 pups during the month.

December

December highlights over the sea involved a Little Auk (2nd) and the lingering Great Northern Diver amongst up to 30 Shag (9th) and 24 Red-throated Diver (10th). The Barnacle Goose flock increased (35-1st) and the Brent Goose flock held 79 dark-bellied and 302 light-bellied birds – including colour-ringed birds from Netherlands (1), Canada (3), Iceland (4) and Northern Ireland (2) and was joined by Cumbria's second Black Brant (15th). A total of 1,290 Pink-footed Geese and 17 Whooper Swan flew through while additional wildfowl included five Scaup and 10 Shoveler amongst 2,000 Wigeon and 550 Teal. An influx of Jack Snipe was noted (7-3rd) and additional waders included 6,000 Knot – including colour-ringed birds from Iceland (6), Netherlands (4) and England (6), 1,400 Golden Plover and two Purple Sandpiper while 12 Greenshank and three Black-tailed Godwit were settled in traditional winter haunts. A total of 54 Little Egret were located (4th), although numbers declined thereafter in response to several days of frost and at least six Water Rail remained. Buzzard (10th) and Glaucous Gull (28th) proved to be the final additions to the year list. As usual, passerines were in short supply although a hint of cold weather movement produced small numbers of Redwing, Fieldfare and Mistle Thrush while a flock of 85 Twite were in residence and four Tree Sparrow were attending several feeding stations on the island. The Hooded Crow put in another appearance (9th).



BTO Marsh Award for Local Ornithology

Dawn Balmer, Head of Surveys at the BTO



It was my pleasure to nominate **Bardsey Bird Observatory** for the Marsh Award for Local

Ornithology for 2017.

The Marsh Awards are supported by the Marsh Christian Trust and presented by the BTO at the Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA) event in London in October. This award has been presented since 2010 and past winners have included Cheshire & Wirral Ornithology Society, Friends of Skokholm & Skomer, Malcolm Burgess & Piedfly.net and Cross & Stratford Welsh Chough Project. The award is given for **"For a bird club or group that publishes a book, completes a study or conducts any other exceptional activity in the preceding calendar year that advances knowledge about birds"**

I nominated Bardsey Bird Observatory for their work, not just over the preceding year, but over the last few years for their contribution to local and national ornithology. They were the first Bird Observatory to load all their Bird Observation records to BirdTrack and have loaded over 746,000 records covering the period 1934–2014. Subsequent years will be loaded at a later date. These records are a tremendous resource for local ornithology in North Wales. This was a large undertaking by a team of volunteers to input the paper records from the bird log into an excel file, to format the files ready for loading into BirdTrack. As well as being a valuable local resource, now the records are in BirdTrack, they can be used in national and international research projects too.

I've also been really impressed by the way Bardsey Bird Observatory have also built a strong relationship with young birders, organising a 'Bardsey NGB/Young Birders week' (NGB= Next Generation Birders) in 2014, 2015, 2016 and again in 2017 (see <http://bbfo.blogspot.co.uk/p/this-year-bardsey-lodge-and-bird.html>).



NGBs on Bardsey - Steve Stansfield

It's a fantastic opportunity for young birders, ringers or general wildlife enthusiasts to help out at a Bird Observatory and gain valuable experience. The blogs below show what a wonderful time the young birders had, and I'm sure the memories and experience will stay with them forever.

NGB trip report 2014

<https://tinyurl.com/BBFO-NGB-2014>

NGB trip report 2016

<https://tinyurl.com/2015-NGB-BBFO>

Elliot Monteith's intern report 2017

<https://tinyurl.com/EPM-BBFO-17>



Mike Archer, Emma and Steve Stansfield at the Mall Galleries in London

Many Bird Observatories welcome visitors of all ages to visit but I've been impressed with the way Bardsey have made a special effort to engage with young people and to offer them a special experience staying at the Observatory and taking part in Observatory work. There is fantastic work going on at other Bird Observatories too, and I very much hope their work can be recognised in the near future too.



Steve Stansfield collecting the award for Local Ornithology at the Mall Galleries from Sarah Oldfield - Ambassador for the Marsh Christian Trust



Young Birders at Observatories in 2017

Josie Hewitt

Over the course of 2017, many members of the Next Generation Birders journeyed to Bird Observatories around the UK and Ireland. Bardsey and Spurn were particular favourites among the NGBs, but Fair Isle and the Isle of May also saw their share of enthusiastic young birders.

Following a successful stint on **Bardsey** for the duration of Autumn 2016, Ephraim Perfect was offered the role of Assistant Warden for the 2017 season. Liam Curson also joined him on the remote Welsh island, having been recruited as the second Assistant. The pair had a slow start to the season, though the standout highlights of Spring were undoubtedly the two Pallas's Warblers, one of which had been ringed at Spurn seven months previously. Autumn on Bardsey saw the arrival of Elliot Montieth for a 5-week internship, where he was kept busy with learning the ins and outs of running a Bird Observatory and assisting with a wide range of tasks, including: Manx Shearwater census, guided walks, observatory maintenance and data entry. Elliot's highlights from birding "*the most beautiful place on Earth*" included Balearic, Great, Sooty & Cory's Shearwaters, Wryneck & numerous Sabine's Gulls.



NGBs on Bardsey Ben Porter

For the fourth year running, **Bardsey** also hosted a week-long trip exclusively for NGB members. This year, seven NGBs took up the opportunity to get a taste for island living, and over the course of their stay contributed sightings to the daily log, got involved with bird ringing and spent many hours sea watching. Jacob Spinks was one of the NGBs visiting Bardsey for the first time and said that the "wonderful seawatching was quite easily the highlight, with thousands of Manxies and the odd Great and Arctic Skua. The best seawatching highlights were an Osprey flying south and a Sooty Shearwater on the last day".

Heading North to **Fair Isle (FIBO)**, Max Hellicar was welcomed by FIBO for 3 ½ weeks in August.



Max Hellicar on Fair Isle

During his stay, Max was involved in many aspects of **FIBO's** work, including seawatching, census routes, data entry, bird ringing, monitoring of the breeding Great Skuas, moth trapping, and a range of other practical work. Highlights from his unforgettable trip included Fair Isle's 91st Arctic Warbler, the island's 3rd Black Rustic moth and an awesome vis-mig day, with 1714 Meadow Pipits seen heading south.



Max Hellicar with Fulmar chick on Fair Isle

Once again, the **Isle of May** ran their week-long Young Birders' Training Course to give six young birders the opportunity to gain experience in a variety of activities, from the daily recording of birds and other taxa, to bird ringing and co-ordinated seawatching counts. Gus Routledge was a participant on the course in 2016 and loved the island and team there so much, that he returned to the island quite a few times in 2017 and worked with Scottish Natural Heritage too.

Gus's visits to the island have involved "keeping the island running for the visitors" and given him the opportunity to

"help monitor and record passage migrants and assist with the maintenance of many of the things that make the Isle of May so good for seabirds, such as helping cart sand up to the top of the island to top up the tern terraces." Highlights from his visits in 2017 were finding a Little Bunting and also seeing Two-barred Crossbill and Common Rosefinch. But besides the birds, Gus said that he likes "being part of a team who are all out there because they care about birds"... and I think that really sums up the staff and volunteers found at all the British and Irish Bird Observatories!



Gus Routledge on Isle of May



Young birder's on the May – Stuart Rivers

For the third year running, **Spurn Bird Observatory** Migration Festival "MigFest" held the "Spurn Young Birder of the Year" for birders aged 16 and under. This year's worthy winner was Dante Shephard from London.



The five finalists receiving their awards. - Dave McAleavy



Dante Shephard presented with a pair of Swarovski Binoculars. - Dave McAleavy

Many NGBs visited **Spurn** in 2017, including Ellis Lucas, a regular visitor, and Jacob Spinks who attended Spurn's Ringing Experience in August as well as visiting again in late October. Jacob's October visit yielded highlights of thrushes coming in off the sea... "watching hundreds of Blackbirds spiral up towards the sky and fly inland is something really magical".

Ellis's standout memory from **Spurn** in 2017 was the weekend of the 7th October...

"The Saturday was fairly quiet but with heavy rain the birding conditions were made difficult however overnight the wind just seemed to drop which allowed thousands of birds to come over. I remember waking up the next morning and seeing the Obs garden scattered with migratory thrushes, I spent a good hour in the garden seeing many Yellow-browed Warblers, Chiffchaffs and a couple of Pied Flycatchers. It was really exciting when the radio burst to life as you just didn't know what was going to be found. Highlights from this trip included an Arctic Warbler, an Olive-backed Pipit, a Rosy Starling, a Red-breasted Flycatcher and Great Grey & Red-backed Shrikes. That's the beauty of Spurn, anything could show up!"



Dan Rouse, Sorrel Lyall and Josie Hewitt at Spurn

In May, the **BTO** once again hosted 'Bird Camp' for birders aged 12 – 18 with the support of the **Cameron Bepolka Trust**. <https://www.cameronbepolka.com/>



Ben Porter presenting a talk at Bird Camp about the role of Bird Observatories & Bardsey Island – Max Hellicar



Bird Camp birders – Elliot Montieth

The camp was an opportunity for participants to learn more about bird ringing, nest recording and common bird census techniques, as well as a chance to meet many other like-minded individuals. For many of the participants, the highlight was a coach trip to **Landguard Bird Observatory**, where they saw ringing and moth trapping in action.



Young birders being shown how to find nests by Dave Leech, the head of the Ringing and Nest Recording Schemes

Special thanks must go to the various grants and funds that provide financial assistance for cash-strapped young birders, allowing them to seize the fantastic opportunities that are available: **Fair Isle's JHMF** and **SABF funds** are available for anyone between the ages of 16 and 24 years (inclusive) who wishes to volunteer as part of the Wardening team at **Fair Isle Bird Observatory**, and the BTO's **Young Bird Observatory Volunteer Programme**, <http://tinyurl.com/OBS-YBOVF> which provides unremitting financial assistance for birders under 22-years old, covering the accommodation and travel costs of Observatory visits lasting at least 4 nights.

Now it just remains for me to say a massive thank you on behalf of NGBs and young birders everywhere to all the Bird Observatories for their continued support and encouragement of the next generation. The opportunities that are created, experiences gained, and connections that are made have lasting impact and can quite literally change lives.



Elliot Montieth assisting Bardsey Observatory in their Manx Shearwater studies said "Certainly an experience I'll never forget!"



I N T E R N A T I O N A L
BIRD OBSERVATORY
C O N F E R E N C E

**IBOC2017 – 26th to 30th October 2017 at Cape May,
New Jersey**

Gill Hollamby
Chair of Dungeness Bird Observatory

Late October saw IBOC 2017 bring together 150 participants from 15 countries across the globe, with delegates from Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, Iceland, Israel, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States of America, representing nearly 1/2 of all US states, 4 Canadian Provinces, and 80 Observatories and organizations!

British Observatories were represented at the event by Dungeness, Filey, Spurn as well as the BTO.

We were welcomed to the conference by Bjorn Malmaghem (Falsterbo) and David La Puma (Cape May) who gave an overview of IBOC14 and explained what had developed since then with the provision of a world wide website for Bird Observatories to share IBOC documents, experiences, projects and job opportunities.

Day 1

Featured Speaker
C.J.Ralph.

Origins, evolution, speciation
and ecology of observatories
of birds

Dr. C.J. Ralph, opened the International Bird Observatory Conference with this definition: **Bird Observatory: (n.) An organization focused on bird science, education, and/or conservation, usually involving station-based monitoring by banding and/or census for one or more seasons.**

This was a very interesting start to the Conference, C.J. talked through some of his memories of Observatories, followed by a discussion on the definition of a Bird Observatory and how Bird Observatory usage has changed from simply recording what was there, to looking at characteristics of success in productivity/condition and survival etc. Followed by some of the new developments, such as eBird.



Session One:

General Lightning presentations

10 lightening talks covering the following topics:

1. Managing a Constant Effort with 6 hrs ringing in 32 nets (using a rotating no of nets) staffed by volunteers on \$20,000 budget.
2. The use of data from 55 yrs ago to use as indicators of change
3. Providers of training materials, such as photographic identification of birds in the hand
4. Identifying reasons for irruptions/eruptions
5. Setting up Bird Observatories using a university based model
6. The use of Bird Observatories as a place-making tool to raise awareness and empathy for birds
7. The use of biotope data to identify the origins of birds on migration
8. How Bird Observatories help monitor, track migration and Identify impacts of agricultural practices and advise intervention strategies, ie the Lapwing in Switzerland
9. The use of 'old style ringing data' to help improve information for in field identification and to provide comparative data.

Featured Speaker Pablo Elizondo.

Tropical Bird Observatories:
Uses and applications for
science and conservation

An interesting look at the development of bird monitoring in the Costa Rica, Colombia and Brazil. The talk looked at the abundance of bird life in the tropics compared to the data available and explained what was happening to help raise awareness in the tropics. There are lots of unexplored areas so are working on getting the infrastructure right to help with exploration. Costa Rica is a small country but with a strong conservation culture, 56% is forest covered and 25% is protected, because of ecotourism. They are taking a countrywide approach to banding (ringing) to ensure high standards and are looking to expand the network of BOs as a bank of data to help answer ecological questions. We heard about some of the ways they are working for conservation, combining scientific and public activities including joining with Universities from Canada to look at the passage of birds through their annual migrations from start to finish.

Session Two:

Research and Monitoring
Lightning presentations

6 lightning talks that covered the following topics:

1. Identifying important stopover points in bird migration and working towards collaborative assessment and conservation projects
2. How to raise awareness of endangered species and using education to change a shooting culture
3. The use of data to show phenology changes and how birds are responding
4. Working in Mexico to monitor the migration bottleneck between north and south America and setting up training systems for ringing
5. The history of bunting ringing and future of the one ringing station in Korea
6. The importance of experimental research to identify reasons for choices in migration of white-throated sparrows

Session Three:

Outreach and Education
Lightning presentations

4 lightning talks that covered the following topics:

1. How three observatories manage a friendship agreement and organise exchanges for young people
2. How one observatory connects science and research and links this into their education programme
3. A look at a tri-flyway innovation in migration education linking three Observatories in USA, Canada and Jerusalem
4. A quick look at the history of 'World Series of Birding' and how it has developed, leading to the Champions of the Flyway and other like activities.

Featured Speaker

Paul Stancliffe

The British Trust for Ornithology

A very informative talk about the origins and activities of the BTO. While BTO have no Bird Observatories they do support the accredited British Observatories and have a representative on the Bird Observatories Council. There were some interesting statistics from traditional ringing leading on to some information gained through more modern activities, like two migration routes for Cuckoos showing that mortality rates are lower through Italy. Combination of data now showing phenology changes. Some future thoughts, for example supporting the Young Bird Observatory Volunteer Program, Spurn Migration Festival, Young Birder of the Year all of which were generating interest in Bird Observatories, working more closely with Bird Observatories, looking at Observatories becoming Disease Monitoring Centers, looking beyond just migrant birds to insects breeding birds and becoming centers for inspiring young people.

Day 2

Featured Speaker

Kim Kaufman,

Black Swamp Bird
Observatory: Bird Work as a
product, the value of
marketing.

An interesting and humorous talk about how Black Swamp Bird Observatory increased their marketing and some of the ideas they had to increase their marketing potential. How Observatories can work as a bridge between the public and academia. The general public are the most important, so need to cultivate dynamic partnerships and need to have a welcoming point of entry. Some of their ideas included Birder Proms, where local musicians combined to hold a Birder Prom with an emphasis on birds and my favorite was a Bird Tattoo competition! They believe in the Joy of Birds – Tell the story, Share the joy, Save the birds.

Session Four:

Outreach and Education
Lightning presentations

8 Lightning talks covering the following:

1. Creating a guide for Chinese ringers
2. How festivals raise awareness, connecting a Bird Observatory to a seaside town (Filey)
3. Animal welfare compliance in the US
4. Promoting ethical banding principles in the US
5. Making a Bird Observatory into a hub for change
6. Educational curriculum using Broad-winged Hawks
7. Integrating science, stewardship & education in Canada
8. The positive effect of an urban BO in Jerusalem

Featured Speaker
Allen Fish,

Golden Gate Raptor
Observatory: Wielding the
unique power of long-term
Observatory data

Looking at the distribution and sighting data for Broad-winged Hawks over many years and how, looking at the unusual event of a massive movement in September 2012, the changes in sea ice may have had an effect on the jet stream causing unusual patterns for migrating hawks, pushing them from flying southeast towards a more south-westerly path.

Session Five:

Raptors Lightning
presentations

5 Lightening talks covering the following topics:

1. Looking at how raptors cross the desert from a monitoring station in the middle of the desert
2. Migration, timing and population facts with experiences from the River of raptors project in education and conservation and the potential for collaboration in the future
3. The detection of changes in phenology using data from Hawk Mountain
4. What the curriculum can do for our rarely-loved raptors
5. A look at the monitoring of breeding and foraging birds on shorelines.

Session Six:

Brainstorming

6 topics to brainstorm through action statements:

1. Bird Observatories and research
2. Sustaining Bird Observatories long term
3. Education/Outreach programs
4. Information conservation
5. Multi-Observatory projects
6. Future of IBOC

A swarm of Tree Swallows over the Hawkwatch platform – Mark Pearson



Day 3

Featured Speaker

John Alexander

Klamath Bird Observatory: A Bird Observatory Model, using birds as indicators and observation-based science to catalyse ecosystem conservation.

A very interesting talk about the use of citizen science to inform conservation efforts. Birding is people doing what they think is the right thing to do with volunteers helping scientist to take care of environment leading to protection and change. BOs bring together the data and look at trends leading to actions learning from the past. Using the relevant analyses of data can now identify, model and predict where birds should be and can inform different agencies where problems are occurring – i.e. removal of cows from an area improving breeding success of ground nesting birds. They are now using bird data to work with private landowners to restore oak woodlands.

Session Seven:

Lightning and Studying Migration with Technology

7 Lightening talks on the following topics:

1. Love thy neighbour – turning two rival neighbouring Observatories into collaborating friends
2. Monitoring and assessing conservation effectiveness in the Rockies
3. Understanding thrush migration using radio-telemetry
4. Patterns of fall water bird movement along the New Jersey Atlantic coast
5. Acoustic monitoring of nocturnal migration
6. The Motus wildlife tracking system
7. Bird monitoring now and in the future – understanding and harnessing technology.

Session Eight:

Networks

6 Lightening talks with a focus on networks:

1. NGO and governmental cooperation
2. Building community engagement through partnerships
3. The Friendship agreement between Spurn, Cape May and Falsterbo Observatories
4. Building Maryland's first Bird Observatory network
5. The value added in birding through networks
6. The advancing rate of spring migration phenology in Europe and North America

Delegates of the IBOC 2017 at Cape May, New Jersey – USA October 2017 – Photo Lucy Wightman – Taken from IBOC Facebook Page



Session Nine:

Summaries, Wrap-up and The Future

These summaries covered lots of points from the conference but were still in note form and will be shared at a later date. It was agreed that there would be a future IBOC in 2019 but venue still to be decided.

Featured Speaker – Andrew Farnsworth,

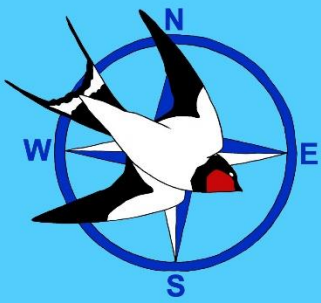
Cornell Lab of Ornithology

An interesting talk looking at the use of data in the past and exploring the ways forward highlighting the use of modern technology and how Cornell University is tapping into the potential of using big data and harnessing Bird Observatories as ways to reach the public, scientists and policymakers.



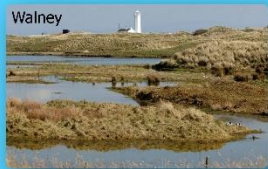
Observatory representatives from around the world (including Filey and Spurn) gathered on the famous Cape May Hawkwatch platform





BIRD OBSERVATORIES COUNCIL

Making birds and migration count
since 1946



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or to visit an Observatory, first visit:

www.birdobsCouncil.org.uk