

The newsletter of the British Bird Observatories Council

Chairman's Welcome

Steve Stansfield

Welcome to this fifth BOC Newsletter, and what a fantastic summary we have over the next sixty or so pages! Observatories are renowned for stories of magnificent arrivals of migrant birds, rarities that make the mind boggle, and camaraderie that is hard to find elsewhere. In this newsletter you will find all that and much more from all 20 BOC Accredited Observatories.

Away from my day job as Director of Operations and Observatory Warden at Bardsey BO, I have worked closely with the BOC Secretary Alison Duncan (Warden of North Ronaldsay BO) to progress various BOC items during 2018. I have also had several extremely enthusiastic, positive and exciting meetings with the BTO. As two independent organisations we are continuing to work together to look to the future at the big picture for birds and conservation, and for our organisations. We are delighted that the BTO are keen to increase their support and investment in the bird observatories, and have made resources available to assist us to strengthen as an organisation. We are working to build a strong relationship, adapting and reflecting changes within both organisations and the changing ways that funding is available, so that we can all appreciate, value and understand the huge resource of data and the current daily operations of the bird observatories around the UK.

We have been continuing our efforts to get all the Observatories data digitised and uploaded to BirdTrack; I have had various teleconferences with Observatories and the BTO, and Mike Archer and his team of volunteers are still plugging away getting all the data entered. An article about BirdTrack can be found on page 57.

Full House! The BOC Meeting at The Nunnery 3 February 2018



The future of Bird Observatories relies very much on the massive amount of volunteer hours which go into running the individual observatories, as well as the large number of hours spent by volunteers to move the BOC forward as a body. With that in mind as I begin my 29th year working at Observatories (having begun at Sandwich Bay back in 1990 as a fresh-faced 18 Year old on my 'gap-year' between A levels and University!), I feel very positive about the future, and the number of youngsters that are once again spending time at Bird Observatories. In the mid-1990s to mid-2000s there appeared to be a bit of a dearth of youngsters staying at Observatories. The Next Generation Birders group, as well as other groups have helped encourage youngsters away from their iPads and X boxes and get them back into the field in recent years. A number of Observatories have various initiatives to help get youngsters involved. Both Bardsey and the Isle of May have a Young Birders' Training week every year, and The BTO are helping by part funding (along with a very generous anonymous donor) the Young Bird Observatories Volunteer programme (YBOV). Later in this newsletter, there is a piece on page 59 about what some of the under 25s have been up to at Observatories and how they, who really are the future of the Observatory network, have been getting involved.

Following on from 2017 when Bardsey Bird Observatory were presented with the prestigious BTO Marsh Award for Local Ornithology, 2018 saw Spurn Bird Observatory nominated and presented with the award at a ceremony in London in October. Spurn BO Chairman, Rob Adams accepted the award and the £1000 prize on behalf of the Obs. Congratulations to all involved. See page 56

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



From left – Peter Morgan (Portland), Dave Leech (BTO), Richard Dobbins (Skokholm), Jez Blackburn (BTO), Sophie Barker (Holme), Mike Archer (Gibraltar Point), Jim Morgan (Flamborough), Alison Duncan (North Ronaldsay and BOC Secretary), Chris Williams (Hilbre), Sally Hunter (Sandwich Bay), Ian Hunter (Sandwich Bay), Rebecca Farthing (Filey), Peter Howlett (Bardsey), Alan Hitchmough (Hilbre), Phil Woollen (Hilbre), Steve Williams (Hilbre), Paul Stancliffe (BTO), Kevin Woodbridge (North Ronaldsay), John Horton (Alderney), Kathy Hanlon (Alderney), Steve Stansfield (Bardsey and BOC Chair), Scott Mayson (BTO), Nick Moran (BTO), Aron Sapsford (Calf of Man), Emma Stansfield (Bardsey), Nigel Odin (Landguard), David Parnaby (Fair Isle), Mark Oksien (Isle of May), Dawn Balmer (BTO).

Summary of the 2018 BOC AGM at BTO HQ, Thefford on Saturday 3 February 2018

The BOC Chair (Steve Stansfield) and the Head of BTO Ringing Scheme (Dave Leech) welcomed the 23 representatives from the Observatories and seven members of BTO staff to the meeting. Steve Stansfield and Alison Duncan were then re-elected as Chairperson and Secretary.

The application for accreditation by Alderney Bird Observatory was discussed: Documents for the application for accreditation had already been circulated. John Horton (Alderney's Warden) gave a short presentation. The States of Alderney had given funding of £285,000 to renovate the observatory building, new patrons included Dame Mary Perkins, who had given a donation of £10,000 to equip the new observatory. Phil Atkinson then gave a short presentation on Alderney's recording methods. Alderney gained accreditation with the caveat that all of their census data for 2017 and 2018 are submitted once available as evidence that they meet the accreditation criteria.

A new BOC-BTO Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was discussed; Steve Stansfield gave some background to updating the BTO-BOC agreement. It was agreed the current agreement was out of date and needed reviewing. In 2015 Nick Moran from BTO offered to update it and BOC agreed. In 2016-2017, Nick put the draft MoU together, it was circulated at the AGM and comments were fed back to BTO. Dave Leech then gave a presentation, outlining the need for an MoU between the organisations. Both parties aim to conserve birds and the

BTO are well placed to seek funding opportunities and are experienced in writing proposals to secure funding and the data the Observatories can provide are extremely valuable on a national level. A revised MoU and way forward will be presented at the next meeting.

Dave Leech then gave a presentation on analytical opportunities provided by observatory ringing data: Estimating survival from ringing recoveries and survival rates calculated using re-traps of live birds and showed how very valuable Bird Obs data are. This was followed by a presentation on Bird Track by Scott Mayson from the BTO – There were 6.2 million records submitted in 2017 from mostly 7000 observers. Seven of the observatories have some or all their historical data entered on Bird Track: Bardsey, Filey, Flamborough, Holme, Landguard, North Ron and Sandwich, and others were in progress: Calf, Gib, Isle of May, Portland.

A new Observatories Network Poster had been printed and one copy of the A0 poster was available for collection for each Obs.

Data protection and GDPR was discussed and most Observatories were on the way to having privacy policies ready for the new laws which come in to place in May

Young Bird Observatories Volunteers was discussed. The Chair and Nick Moran explained that funding for this comes from a private donor, matched by BTO, and some from charitable trusts. Young people (21 and under) can apply for up to £200 for travel and accommodation up to 4 nights at an observatory. A total of 66 young people have had support from YBOV, at 11 observatories, over 5 years (2013-2017) the fund used just short of £10,000. The whole scheme has been successful Bardsey had hosted

the most, as a result of a lot of advertising, and some young people on their Young Birders' week have returned on their own finances.

The accounts statement had been circulated – most income was from observatories contributions, with a small amount from book royalties

Alison Duncan, Kevin Woodbridge and Stuart Rivers had run the stand at the Rutland Bird Fair. There was good interest with lots of people dropping by.

The BTO invited the BOC to hold its next AGM (in Feb 2019) at the Nunnery, which was very much appreciated by all Observatories. The meeting closed and everyone adjourned for a Indian in Thetford!



Alderney John Horton

I must say that whilst writing last years' annual summery for the BOC I couldn't help wondering if

we would be in a position to be reporting for 2018. April 2018 would see the end of the two-year pilot scheme agreed with Alderney Wildlife Trust so many things hung in the balance. Thankfully, largely down to a lot of effort from an excellent ABO team and committee, along with tremendous island local support, and continued government support, here we are with a fully functioning observatory and the future looks very bright indeed! In February BOC granting us accreditation status was both momentous and emotional after all the work put in. This huge step forwards also the green light for me to extend my career break from the Metropolitan police to August 2021. Our observatory renovations continued into 2018 and by June we were at last adding the furnishings and final touches ahead of our first guests in August. Items that we sourced and collected over the first two years, everything from the bottle opener with Swifts on, the feather shaped wall mirrors (great job Cathy) and the migrating birds print lampshades could finally be set in place! The ABO sleeps 10; 3 twin rooms and one room with 4 singles. The overall design is a typical observatory with shared cooking, common room and bathroom facilities.



Alderney Bird Observatory Bedroom – John Horton

The warm wet spring and long dry summer were perfect for breeding insects meaning no shortage of food for passage and breeding passerines. The focused efforts by our new observatory again saw several bird species recorded that have not been seen on the island for many years along with new additions to the birds of Alderney list. The focus on a designated recording area this year has ratified that on the back of the first two years broader based field work, that we have chosen the right area for the long term. Our assistant warden Justin Hart has shouldered the majority of the daily census work and pleasingly during the autumn we saw more contribution from ringing trainees who need to brush up on identification skills! Events beyond our control meant we were unable to complete any offshore seabird ringing this year leaving obvious gaps in our data. We look forward to getting back on track during the summer of 2019. In September our Chairperson Paul Veron who has been with us from the outset of this project stepped down from our committee due to ill health. Paul was instrumental in getting the ABO off the ground, everyone involved with this project is indebted to his efforts. Thankfully Paul remains involved through contributing birding and ringing records. Our new chairperson Helen McGregor has taken up the role with great enthusiasm and drive and as we continue to evolve, we are very grateful to have her at the helm. Towards the end of the year we secured sponsorship from Zeiss enabling us to revamp and upgrade our bird rings. Each ring now manufactured to include our sponsor 'Zeiss' along with a web address allowing instant reporting to the Channel Islands bird ringing scheme. The rings are currently in manufacture and should be with us by late January. We are delighted with this opportunity combining marketing and conservation which should ultimately lead to an increase in reported rings.

January recorded 2 Great Northern Diver (6th & 22nd) and what proved to be the only Great Crested Grebe of the year (19th-22nd) A water Pipit on the 6th remained until 6th April. March began with the full force of the 'beast from the east' apparently some the heaviest snows and coldest temperatures in Alderney in living memory. This did bring us some excellent local records of wildfowl; 6 Shoveler on the 1st was the highest count here ever, and 2 drake Pintails (2nd-3rd) the 8 & 9thth records for the island. The harsh weather provided the first Purple Sandpiper since 1999. Conditions also brought an influx of Common Gulls to the Channel Isles and a flock of 10 was also a 'highest on record'. On 3rd March we began our daily migration census work during which Justin and I were delighted to pick up Alderneys 2nd ever record of Iceland Gull (1st in 1984). This was also the 200th species recorded by the ABO since we began records in April 2016, the Gull was present until 1st May. 13th March our first swallow of the year was spotted and on the 19th the 7 Little Gulls. The following day the first Common Redstart of the spring. On the 23rd Dr. Sandy Roberstson photographed a Goosander (only 2 previous records) flying by Platte Saline beach. On the 24th a cracking White spotted Bluethroat was found in Mannez Lighthouse garden.

Our first spring House and Sand Martins came through on March 26th, the same day another rare record locally concerned a Canada Goose. On the 28th Lee Sanders found a male Cirl Bunting, the same day saw our first Willow Warbler of the spring. April began with a Hawfinch on the 1st, and probably the same bird seen on the 3rd. The 6th saw some significant migration that included our first spring Ring ouzel, Water Pipit and Hoopoe, Jenny & John Richardson reported 12 Bramblings. On the 8th 4 Black winged Stilts were at Corbletts quarry. Hoopoe sightings between the 9th & 11th involved to separate birds. On the 9th a Cirl Bunting (1st ringing record) was trapped and ringed at Essex Farm in the winter seed crop we planted in 2017. A male Montagu's Harrier was seen on the 18th and a single Honey Buzzard the 19th. Wood Warbler was seen on the 22nd along with a singing male Serin that was present until 6th August. 4 Hawfinches were recorded on the 24th. Visiting ringers joined us to ring Cormorant chicks on Little Burhou island on the 28th. Month end saw some strong migration that included a single flock of 41 Yellow Wagtails and 10 Pied Flycatchers were on the 29th. On the 30th some 500 Willow Warblers, 3 Wood Warblers 40 Spotted Flycatchers and the first of the year Cuckoo heard and seen. In May Blue headed Wagtail featured with 3 on the 1st and singles on 4 other dates. A Grey headed Wagtail (1st record) was seen on the 24th. 2 Turtle Doves were a welcome sight on the 3rd and Nightingale was also recorded. 2 Bee-eaters were over the golf course on the 16th and another was on the telephone wires at Mannez on the 22nd. Also, on the 16th Black Kite, Goshawk and Osprey were all recorded. Hobby was recorded on 9 separate dates to the 25th with up to 3 on the 19th. On the 21st 7 Mute Swans (another highest total ever) a rare visitor here, were seen flying by at sea from the South cliffs. A Quail (1st since 1989) was seen on the 25th. The first Common Terns returning to our breeding colony site consisted of 8 birds on the 15th. The last of 8 Hawfinches ringed during April & May was on the 24th. A pair of Hen Harriers showed well on the south cliffs on the 27th, the same day Black Kite and Honey Buzzard were found by Mark Guppy who followed this up by finding 2 Rose-coloured Starlings on the 28th. The last week of May also saw some movements of House Martins with up to 60 birds daily between the 24th & 28th. Ending the month another rare bird locally, a fine male Yellowhammer at Mannez on the 31st.

Into June and a further Rose-coloured Starling was seen in St. Annes on the 5th, 8th & 9th. On the 11th a Danish-ringed Lesser black backed Gull was recorded on Crabby beach where a Yellow legged Gull was also present. On the 14th a single Turtle Dove and Hawfinch. 12th-15th the ABO took part in national moth week. Amongst many others the observatory trap does well for the rare Barrett's Marbled Coronet (1 on 12th, 2 on 15th). The Gull roost at Crabby Bay on the 17th facilitated over 60 ring reads and on the 21st a Great White Egret was at Longis reserve.

We began July ringing Buzzard and Sparrowhawk chicks at their respective nests. The same week along the NE coastline we ringed chicks of Oystercatchers, Common Terns, Herring and Great black backed Gulls. Over two sessions 11th & 15th 58 Storm Petrels were ringed. On the 11th 3 recently fledged Dartford Warblers were seen at

Giffione. Arrivals included post breeding Mediterranean Gulls peaking at 20 on the 12th along with 4 2018 hatch Little Egrets likely from the nearby continent. One of the highlights of the year was the success of our Common Tern Colony. Around 30 pairs in total, no chicks have reached fledging in recent years. During 2017 our cameras confirmed that all the hatched chicks were being taken by rats. Working with the states of Alderney we deployed a concentrated bating program in the build up to the 2018 breeding season. This move did the trick resulting in fledged chicks, the first two fledged on the 18th! We were also able to offer valuable fieldwork experience to the Alderney Wildlife Trust volunteer RAMSAR officer during this project.



Common Tern chick – Bibette Head – Photo John Horton

Ringling efforts brought evidence of passerine return migration with Willow Warblers from the 14th July and Sedge Warblers from the 22nd. Whilst doing 'The Big butterfly count' on the 24th I came across two very recently fledged Black Redstarts being fed by an adult, a first confirmed breeding for the island. An impressive flock of 80+ Greenfinches that appeared to be virtually all juveniles were present on Longis Common for the last week of the month and on the 30th we had a year high count of 14 Whimbrels.

On the 4th Of August a Curlew Sandpiper was reported. Between the 2nd & 5th at least 4 Fan-tailed Warblers were present at Longis reserve (2 ringed on the 5th a 1st ringing for Alderney). 3 of the birds were males regularly displaying, a single bird on the 21st was the last record. Migrant Garden Warbler and Pied Flycatchers were ringed on the 5th. 7 Balearic Shearwaters were record on the 10th. Other early August migrants recorded included Green Sandpipers, Cuckoo, Whinchats and Tree pipits. 3 Grasshopper Warblers and a Melodious Warbler were ringed on the 22nd. An impressive movement of Honey Buzzards began passing through with 20 birds reported 28th/29th and a Goshawk was seen on the 30th. 3 Wrynecks were ringed (2 29th & 1 30th). An excellent Tree Pipit passage saw 22 ringed between the 22nd & 30th and a field observation high count of 18 on the 22nd. Yellow Wagtails peaked at 33 on the 30th. An Icterine Warbler ringed on the 30th was the first record since 1982 and another 1st ringing record for the island. The following day a 2nd Icterine was ringed at the same site in the same shelf of the same net!



Icterine Warbler - John Horton.

September started with 20 Honey Buzzards on the 1st and 38 on the 2nd then singles daily to the 7th, then 11th & 13th. 5 swifts made up the tail end of their movement on the 2nd and there was a Great White Egret on the 4th.



Honey Buzzard – over the Observatory – Dr S. Robertson

Between the 1st and 8th some 8-10 Wrynecks were on the island, two more singles were ringed 4th & 5th, a further was seen on the 19th. Another 1st ringing for Alderney was a Great spotted Woodpecker (a rare visitor here) on the 4th, last seen on the 20th. On the same day a further (unringed) Icterine Warbler was recorded during the daily census. On the 13th Rock Pipit numbers reached 26 along the NE shoreline and 35 Wheatears were around the pig pens at Giffione. On the 20th we ringed an Iberian Chiffchaff (2nd for Alderney following last years bird).

Swallow passage reached an estimated 2500 through on the 27th, the same day we had our first Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn. The moth trap produced a Radford's Flame Shoulder, the 2nd record for Alderney.

1st October; the much sort after Oleander Hawk moth (1st for Alderney)

On 7th October we had a year high count of Stock Doves (32) and on the 8th a Great White Egret that was present

until the 11th. Ringing on the 9th produced a late moving Reed Warbler, another Yellow-browed Warbler, and a further unringed Yellow-browed seen later the same day. On the 10th a fine adult Tawny Pipit (2nd island record). A further Fan-tailed Warbler was also found at Telegraph. On the 11th a Honey Buzzard was observed being harassed by one of our local breeding pairs of Common Buzzard. The unseasonal few days of very strong southerly winds then brought us another an unusual visitor, Justin spotted a Swift species over the observatory, identification wasn't easy in the conditions but after almost an hour watching, and several stiff necks, we felt we had a Pallid Swift. Just a day later the same species was reported in Guernsey and soon after came a string of sightings across southern England. If accepted by the Bailiwick rare birds committee this will be a first for Alderney. Mid-month we began to see large movements of Chaffinches (800 on the 18th). Another Yellow browed Warbler was ringed on the 19th. On the 30th a Rough-legged Buzzard was found on our NE coast; the bird was very obliging and stayed in the same area until 6th November.

Rough-legged Buzzard – Photo David Child

Between the 29th & 31st 6 Woodlarks were spotted passing over on migration. Yellow-browed Warblers were seen at different locations across the island on the 25th, 26th, 29th & 30th, the former ringed at Essex farm. Impressive influxes of winter thrushes and finches were arriving daily towards month end (101 Redwings ringed on the 29th). 2 Siberian Chiffchaffs were seen on the 31st. Into November and a mild start to the month. On the 2nd records of 6 species of butterfly and a Hummingbird Hawkmoth. Some very late Swallow records were of 2 birds over Longis pond on the 1st and another over the golf course on the 6th. A Yellow browed Warbler was ringed on the 3rd, a Yellow legged Gull was found on the 4th and a Woodlark on the 5th. Great Northern Diver was seen on the 10th along with 46 Mediterranean Gulls. A Yellow-browed Warbler on the 16th and a Little Gull on the 18th. Another very late record and unusual sight was of a Garden Warbler feeding on a fallen apple at Rose farm on the 18th. Also, on the 18th 3 Greylag Geese (locally rare) were found near the airport and these were joined on the 28th by 2 Pink-footed Geese (2nd island record), present to 16th Dec. A late moving Ring Ouzel was found on the 23rd, large movements of Redwings continued to month end and from the 26th began to include Icelandic race 'coburni'. 1st December an unseasonal Whimbrel was amongst 42 Curlew at the high tide roost Clonque Bay. Redwing movements continued until the 12th (around 300 birds) and following two years of only passage records, Cetti's Warblers remained into the winter months at each of our two reedbed sites. This likely due to larger areas of habitat being left uncut until much later in the year. A nice finish to 2018 was a Richards Pipit found 30th Dec. present until 31st. Only the 2nd record for Alderney, the last being very nearly 40yrs ago 29th August 1979. Indeed, this last listed species is typical of our recording this year; piling on records at this historically under-watched and to many previously unheard-of location, now enormously proud to be The British Isles most southerly accredited Bird observatory.

Spring Migration Summary

2018 was a slow starter for bird migration with a Hawfinch and few Pied Flycatchers the only highlights. This coupled with low numbers of common migrants left us feeling like we were to get a repeat of spring 2017 – i.e. a washout!

However, from mid-May, things began to look up and some nice scarce birds were recorded. A Red-backed Shrike on 12 May was the starter of the good run, a Black Kite on 13th was only the island's fourth record, with a stunning male Hen Harrier in the evening to finish off the day.



Black Kite – Ephraim Perfect

May 14th saw two continental Coal Tits, which were not only the first for the island, but the first for Wales.

A smart male Subalpine Warbler of the eastern form *S.c.albistriata* was discovered in the Observatory garden on 22 May.



Male Eastern Subalpine Warbler – Ephraim Perfect

25th May produced a cracking day, with a stunning male Bluethroat being the smartest bird of the day.

However, the rarest was a male Blyth's Reed Warbler which was trapped on the South End in the morning. A Quail was also seen. The 27th saw a female Red-breasted Flycatcher discovered at Tŷ Nesaf, a Pomarine Skua was seen in the evening and the Blyth's Reed Warbler sang again from Cristin Garden.



White-spotted Bluethroat – Ephraim Perfect



Blyth's Reed Warbler – Steve Stansfield

The 29th saw the second Eastern Subalpine Warbler of spring, this time a female trapped and ringed at Tŷ Nessaf.



Female Eastern Subalpine Warbler – Steve Stansfield

The 30th saw the first of three Greenish Warblers arrive, with a second bird being trapped on Friday 1st June (along with a Marsh Warbler). Saturday 2nd June saw the third Greenish Warbler of the week in the Observatory garden, and another female Red-backed Shrike near Tŷ Pellaf.



The first of three Greenish Warblers! – Ephraim Perfect

A male Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly was discovered on the south end on 3rd, this was a new species for the island, and the start of an invasion that has produced double figures of records in the year on the island!



Broad-bodied Chaser – Steve Stansfield

Wednesday the 6th saw yet another Blyth's Reed Warbler (the second of the year and the fifth for Bardsey and only the seventh ever for Wales!). The 9th June produced the first Minke Whale of the year, with a Wood Warbler on 13th. As spring moved into what is turning out to be a scorching dry summer most migrant bird activity had ended, and attention turned to breeding birds (see separate report), but insects were abundant, with lots of ordonata (dragonflies), including the second record of Banded Demoiselle for the island.



Banded Demoiselle – Billy Dykes

Members' Weekend

This year we changed slightly the way the Annual General Meeting worked and held it as a Members' Weekend. The idea was to have more of an informal gathering of friends of Bardsey in a social atmosphere, rather than just the meeting, and a talk!

On Friday 29th June 20 members of the Advisory Committee, Trustees, Friends and Staff got together for an evening meal at the Ship Inn in Porthmadog. Several of us stayed in the Travelodge, some in nearby hotels and B&Bs. We all met up about 6.30pm. I had taken orders for the meals and emailed them to the hotel a few days before, so as they were prepared for the arrival of the Bardsey crowd. We had a great evening meeting up with folk we had not seen for several months, and even years in some cases!

The following morning Emma and I joined the Trustees for a meeting about a five-year strategic plan before the AGM began. Following the official part of the day, we

had a wonderful lunch which was put together by Annie West and Alicia along with lots of other helpers.

Following Lunch Mark Simmonds OBE gave us a great talk about sea mammal monitoring on Bardsey over the past 20 years. This highlighted the work that has been going on with Friends of Cardigan Bay, WDC and other groups, who have been looking at dolphins and seals that use the waters around the island. Mark mentioned results from various studies about dolphins from the likes of Marijke de Boer, and the photo-identification of Grey Seals from the late Mandy McMath, and more recently Becky Robotham.

Following Mark's presentation, it was my turn on stage. I did a presentation about 20 years of evolution of the Bardsey Bird Observatory. I had slides showing how the Obs was when I arrived in 1998, through to the 60th party in 2003, and the record breaking 2000th Manx Shearwater ringed that year. There were images of hides being re-constructed, old friends and faces, the evolution of the kitchen and dining room. Looking through my images to put the presentation together was great and brought back some memories – both good and bad! I showed images of all the assistants that I have had the pleasure of working alongside, some of the farmers, and much more. The final slide was a summary in numbers which is presented here below!

After the talks, it was time for Cream Tea! Lots of lovely scones, jam and clotted cream (mmmmm) which was put together again by Alicia and Annie along with their band of helpers! It was soon 5.30 and we were being moved on from Canolfan Prenteg.... We said goodbye to some of the people who had arrived just for the daytime events, whilst a group of us went down to the nearby Osprey centre at Pont Croesor, and others went for a walk along the River Glaslyn looking at Dragonflies, where we saw Golden-ringed Dragonfly and Beautiful Demoiselle.

At about 6-45pm we all gathered at the Brondanw Arms in Llanfrothen, where 18 of us this time (a different mix from the previous evening!) gathered for an evening meal. Lots of chatting about past times on the island and about absent friends went on. It was another great evening and brought the very enjoyable Members' Weekend to a close.

After the success of this year's weekend, we will be organising something similar for summer 2019, if you wish to join us it would be wonderful to see you. Keep a lookout on the website and on Twitter.

Summer and autumn 2018 was extremely productive, but very demanding once again. The following summary lists just the key events and happenings and works undertaken since the last beacon.

We returned from our summer break and were straight back in to the depths of things. We had been away for three weeks and had a lot to organise before the upcoming **Young Birders' Week**. The week was a great success and was recognised on social media by the likes of BirdGuides and Rare Bird Alert. As usual it was very hard work preparing and then running the week – Josie Hewitt was invited to help out and was a great help as was Ben Porter. Josie has written a piece for this newsletter about her transition from being one of our initial young birders on the course, to being a valued member of our team.



Members of the Young Birders' Week – Steve Stansfield

Autumn got off to quite a slow start, much as spring did! A Balearic Shearwater was the first of many in mid-August. The next day (16th) produced some excellent sea-watching. Great Shearwater is a rare bird in the UK. Many hundreds do occasionally get seen in the south-western approaches, off Cornwall and Scilly. However, there have been just 269 records in Wales up to the beginning of 2018 and just seven on Bardsey. So whilst Steve Hinde and I were seawatching, and I picked out a large shearwater, eventually exclaiming 'it's a Great', we were over the moon. Fifteen minutes later... 'Steve' I said, 'I may be going bonkers, but I think I've got another Great Shearwater!' and there we had it, #2 for the day and Bardsey's ninth. About 30 minutes after this, both Steve and I at the same moment exclaimed 'heck – there's another!' as we watched a third individual make its way along the west side of the island. The following morning Steve Hinde went to the south hide and what should he have, but the fourth Great Shearwater of the year! Wow...this was just truly amazing. Now back to normality...

Monday 19 August saw a fine Wood Warbler trapped at Cristin by our volunteer George Dunbar. There were also over 100 Willow Warblers, 20 Spotted Flycatchers, a Pied Flycatcher and two Grasshopper Warblers. George continued his good run when he trapped a Tree Pipit on 23rd, the first to be ringed in five years! 5th August produced a Minke Whale off the North End, and a bunch of Risso's Dolphins (which were seen almost daily about this time)

27th August saw a steady passage of 216 Arctic Terns and a Little Tern. The 29th took a while to get going, but once the initial murk cleared midway through the morning, it turned into a real stunner. Terns were clearly on the move; streaming down the west coast and flocking in Henllwyn for the majority of the day. The final tallies were impressive. 367 Arctic Terns were counted, and the 678 Sandwich Terns that passed through constitutes a new record day counts for both species! Four Little Terns also joined the feeding frenzy in Henllwyn briefly, and a Black Guillemot passed by far off the west coast in the afternoon. Thursday, 30 August 2018. On 29th a large shark was seen to launch itself just once out of the sea off the west side of the island. It was a scorcher of a day on 30th that saw the winds finally start to swing around to a more preferable direction for migrants. 73 White Wagtails dropped down onto the Narrows first thing and another 65 'alba' Wagtails flew south with 16 Grey Wagtails. The

first Osprey of the autumn drifted low over Solfach and departed off the South End, and a little while later a distant Marsh Harrier was picked up heading to the mainland. Arguably today's best sightings weren't birds at all, but fish! The WDC team watched a Shortfin Mako Shark breach off the North End (the same animal as the previous day) and an Atlantic Bluefin Tuna was chasing fish off Pen Cristin - two outstanding first records for the island. 31 August was another day packed full of big numbers of commoner migrants, most of which flew over the island. 732 Swallows, 408 House Martins and 318 Meadow Pipits made up the bulk of the overhead passage, along with 33 Grey Wagtails, 12 Tree Pipits and eight flava Wagtails.

Two Ospreys which flew low over the mountain and the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna was once again seen off Pen Cristin where it spent the evening hassling Mackerel.



Osprey – Billy Dykes

On 1 September sea passage was perhaps the highlight of the day, an impressive stream of birds passed the West Coast with Carreg yr Honwy playing host to a large mixed group of Terns. In total one Pomarine Skua, 78 Sandwich Terns and 357 Arctic Terns were noted. It wasn't until the evening however, that the true highlight occurred. The tern passage provided the perfect opportunity to attempt to tape lure Arctic Terns into a net to ring. In Bardsey's history only one Tern has ever been caught which was a Little Tern in 1956, so this was a very unique opportunity. Half an hour in we were fortunate enough to have lured in two terns which were calling to one another, only one went into the net. An amazing surprise saw that this second ever Tern to be caught on Bardsey was in fact not only a control but was also a Juvenile Roseate Tern!



Roseate Tern – Steve Stansfield

A bit of digging the following day and we found it had been ringed as a chick on 11th July 2018 on Rockabill Island, Ireland!

13 September 2018 was another day for seawatching, partly cloudy and winds picking up throughout the day and coming straight from the West before swinging round to the South by late afternoon. Among the Manx Shearwaters was a Leach's Petrel, the first of the year, an individual seen flying slowly past the South End of the island along with 87 Gannets, 17 Common Scoters, three and Arctic Skuas. 14 September was another blustery day made for ideal seawatching conditions and combined with rain showers throughout the day meant waves of birds were noted passing out to sea. By far the most numerous species moving today were Manx Shearwaters, 843 were recorded by the evening, followed by 521 Gannets. Among the numbers lay the scarcities, a Balearic Shearwater was a good find, moving with the Manx Shearwaters, but more impressive were two more Great Shearwaters, now the fifth and sixth of the year, an incredible run of records considering only seven have ever been recorded on Bardsey pre-2018! An impressive supporting cast also included four Leach's Petrels, eight Common Scoters, four Pomarine Skuas, 13 Arctic Skuas, six Great Skuas, 816 Kittiwakes, 26 Sandwich Terns, three Arctic Terns and 163 Razorbills. 15 September was slightly slower: we were still feeling the tail end of hurricane Helene, with unrelenting South-westerly winds which seemed to be producing the goods when it comes to seawatching. Some 208 Manx Shearwaters, one Red-throated Diver, 14 Leach's Petrels, 105 Gannets, four Common Scoters, four Pomarine Skuas, two Arctic Skuas, two Great Skuas and 12 Sandwich Terns highlighted passage. The 16th saw a Corncrake come in off the sea from the west and land on the southernmost point of the island. Other action came from the sea, with a Leach's Petrel flying past off the South End whilst the Corncrake was being watched (!) and a Black-throated Diver passed off the West Coast midway through the afternoon.



Corncrake – Theo de Claremot

On 19th September the wind picked up overnight and by morning it was gusting 80mph in the right places. In this kind of weather it's hard to stand up. Two Balearic Shearwaters passed by offshore and a Short-eared Owl was flushed on the North End, but the day was a little more about quantity than quality. 582 Gannets and 624 Kittiwakes were tallied, and the 765 Arctic Terns that went south over the course of the morning represents another new record day count for the island! 20th was quiet, however 21st saw stormy conditions resume. The winds were howling, and rain came down in the bucket load overnight to leave the island looking saturated and with

slightly fewer leaves left on the trees in the morning. Out at sea it was a four Skua species day, with three Pomarine Skuas, 25 Arctic Skuas, two Long-tailed Skuas and 35 Great Skuas moving south off the West Coast along with four Leach's Petrels and five Sooty Shearwaters. With such strong westerly winds, it seemed like only a matter of time before a Grey Phalarope would show up, and sure enough a lovely confiding individual was found feeding along the shoreline in Solfach late in the afternoon by Myself and Mark Eldridge. 3rd October was a mixed day, the wind had swung round to a southerly direction which had clearly hampered migration. Clearly however, some migrants preferred the headwind and braved the conditions. A little seawatching saw four Common Scoters, one Pomarine Skua, three Great Skuas and 452 Kittiwakes pass by out to sea. One of the main talking points of was an unusual flurry of raptors which made their way over the island in a matter of 15 minutes or so. Nine Buzzards, one Osprey, two Kestrels, two Merlins and a Hobby were all recorded, the latter of which was the first of the year.

On 5th October the winds eventually budged and turned to a North-easterly. This combined with occasional rain showers made it feel indisputably 'rare'. Despite strenuous efforts the morning failed to produce much. By late afternoon moods were tense, with a scarcity surely just around the corner, fortunately, a Common Rosefinch eventually revealed itself in Cristin Withy, finding its way into a net shortly thereafter. On 7th October a minimum of 457 Skylark were totted up during evening log, making it the best day since 1400 were recorded on 19th December 2010. They were joined in the sky by a Woodlark that flew south midway through the morning – only the 21st record for the island. The 11th October saw the first Yellow-browed Warbler of the year associating with a small flock of Coal tits in Cristin Withy, and a Treecreeper was mixed in too.

Traditionally the 13th of October is THE day of the year to find a rare bird on the island, with the likes of Radde's Warbler, Blyth's Pipit, Eyebrowed Thrush, Pied Wheatear etc occurring on this date. Storm Callum had different ideas though. With force 12 winds on Friday and force 9 on Saturday 13th, the only birds we saw were wet and bedraggled! The 14th saw a complete change - a calm north-easterly airflow hit the island throughout the day, and clouds parted to reveal a sunny day. As our guests were unable to leave on Saturday, they left on Sunday 14th, and with change-over finished we sat on the porch for no more than a few minutes, before the first highlight of the day revealed itself. A group of three large white birds coming in from the south originally appeared to be Little Egrets, but as they approached the Wetlands it became clear to Ephraim (the only person with Binoculars!!) that one bird was actually a CATTLE EGRET!



Cattle Egret – Ephraim Perfect

Whilst in recent years they have slowly become an ever-commoner species in Britain, to the extent now that they have begun to breed, this Mediterranean visitor represented the first record for our little island! The species has been a much predicted first for Bardsey.

On 16th there was still a calm easterly airflow in the morning, combined with a heavy shower in the early hours saw a number of migrants grounded by the weather. Once the weather had cleared, it was clear that some new migrants had arrived, and hopes were high of a far eastern bird. The day produced just that, when a Siberian Stonechat appeared in the South End



'Siberian' Stonechat – Ephraim Perfect

gorse. The bird showed well throughout the morning and continued to show into the afternoon as the sun broke through the cloud. This represents just the fifth island record. On the 18th the talking point was definitely the number of birds recorded overhead and their diversity, among the usual species some more notable species included a Richard's Pipit over the South End and two Lapland Buntings. A Lesser Whitethroat that had been skulking in the bushes around Ty Capel and Ty Nessa for the previous few days was finally caught, and in-hand measurements confirmed our suspicions that it was a good candidate for the Siberian subspecies *S. c. blythi*. The standout highlight of 24th was a Water Pipit found on Solfach. Following recent records of an individual on 28th April last year and a long-staying bird in November 2013, this becomes only the 12th record for the island. The 26th was a blustery and showery day but the discovery first-winter Barred Warbler got everyone excited for some time. The 27th produced strong Northerly winds and finally some phenomenal passage was noted almost from dawn till dusk. Migration consisted primarily of finches, but some impressive diversity was noted, in total over 10,000 birds were logged! Coverage throughout the day saw totals culminate to an impressive 49 Skylarks, 149 Meadow Pipits, 45 Blackbirds, 94 Song Thrushes and 83 Redwings, 2342 Starlings, 4110 Chaffinches, 245 Bramblings, 11 Greenfinches, eight Siskins, 174 Goldfinches and nine Lesser Redpolls. Highlights among the numbers included a Richard's Pipit, one Lapland Bunting and a Waxwing which landed briefly at Ty Nesaf making it seventh record for the island, but the first record since 28th December 2016. It was another impressive day on the island on 29th, numbers didn't quite match those of 27th and 28th, but instead some scarcer species were logged. One of the days highlights was discovered among a small movement of wildfowl logged which constituted of three Wigeons, 14 Teals and ten Common Scoters. In the late morning a

group of three ducks proved to be just the 21st record of Velvet Scoters for the island. Otherwise, the standout highlights were two Great White Egrets, which drifted north over Pen Cristin, this is the first record for the island of multiple birds and just the fifth time this species has occurred. It was another eerily calm day on 30th. With the mountain sheltering any breeze from the East, there wasn't a breath of wind. The mist-nets at Cristin and Nant were duly opened, which proved worthwhile with large numbers of finches and thrushes being caught. The nets also provided perhaps the most bizarre record of the autumn so far. At around 0830 a Cetti's Warbler was discovered in the nets at Cristin, the bird was duly processed and released in the garden never to be seen again. Amazingly this constitutes just the second record for Bardsey following one in 1973 also present on 30th of October, 45 years ago TO THE DAY!



Cetti's Warbler – Steve Stansfield

So that was that... another autumn, another bunch of goodies, some lovely pumpkin pies and a week or so spent packing up the Lodge for the winter saw the end of our 2018 season on the island. After some major packing up, Emma, Connor, Billy, Ephraim and I made it off the island on 5th November and Emma, Connor and I started making our way towards Norfolk for the winter.

Both Ephraim and Billy have decided not to return to the island for the 2019 season, and I think I can say this for all our friends and members, good luck guys with your future plans and I'm sure we will see you on the island again.





Calf of Man Aron Sapsford

The season started when Nathan Wilkie and I arrived at South

Harbour during the late afternoon of the 11th March. Unseasonably warm weather over the next couple of days allowed the opening up process and checking of how things had held up during the winter to progress well. We had been accompanied by a couple of local volunteers, Paul Corrin and Mike Prior, who set about helping with many different tasks, from emptying the cess pit, installing donated kitchen units in the old store room, which was to be converted into a new warden's kitchen, and completing redecoration of the warden's lounge and 'office' which was to become a new Volunteer Warden's bedroom.

The first signs of spring migration arrived on the 16th with a Chiffchaff, followed by a Wheatear on 17th when the islet's 4th ever spring record of Long-tailed Tit was recorded. However, the cold conditions that had been experienced over-winter returned with vengeance and we woke up to the rare sight of a dusting of snow laying over the Calf on the 18th. Freezing conditions and strong north-easterly winds over the next few days created the phenomenon of an ice-field above the Cletts, as water from a stream was blown back off the cliff edge and froze in mid-air creating amazing icicles on fronds of Bracken and other vegetation.



Frozen vegetation – Paul Corrin

The weather improved sufficiently that the supply boat could run on the 20th, which allowed Oscar Adedeji to arrive and take up his role as volunteer fieldworker for the spring and summer seasons.

A change to more migration-conducive weather conditions during the last week of the month produced a number of early arrivals, with a Ring Ousel and the observatories earliest ever Common Sandpiper (by 26 days) on 24th, a Firecrest and a White Wagtail on 29th. However, bird of the month was a juvenile Knot, first seen on rocks at the mouth of South Harbour during the afternoon of 25th and later that evening unexpectedly trapped at the Dubh and becoming the 163rd species ringed on the Calf.

The first monitoring trip to Kitterland was made at the end of March, to assess the impact that baiting has had on the numbers of Brown Rat (Long-tails) that were present in 2017, and it is pleasing to report that this and subsequent visits during the summer of 2018 found no further evidence of infestation. Unfortunately, evidence of "bait take" was found on the Calf itself and during the season a total of seven sightings of Long-tails were captured by camera trap around the Observatory, at Cow Harbour and the Millpond. This is the largest number of sightings in any one season since the Manx Shearwater Recovery Project was instigated and the baiting and annual monitoring was initiated in 2012. This worrying increase in activity illustrates the importance of maintaining the on-going monitoring programme, as failure to keep on top of the situation could rapidly lead to re-infestation and a quick turn-around in the fortunes of the breeding success of species such as the Manx Shearwater and Atlantic Puffin.

During autumn 2017, Storm Ophelia had caused wind-blown damage to one of the conifers at the end of the trapping area and ABC Tree Surgery were the first contractors to come out this season to make safe and remove the part-fallen tree. This also allowed some much needed 'topping-out' work to also be carried out in the Plantation, with the additional removal of several of the largest conifers. It is planned that replacement trees, that will have greater benefit for feeding and migratory birds and insects, will be planted in this area.

At the end of March, Kirsty Franklin and Steven Vickers, two volunteer ringers arrived to help out with spring migration. During their stay, as well assisting with the daily census and ringing work, they helped with the building and initial siting of Manx Shearwater nest boxes. The materials for which had been purchased with funds raised by a Facebook funding page set up over winter by long-term Calf supporter Mark Fitzpatrick. We are particularly thankful to Mark and to those that gave so generously to the project, which has allowed an initial 12 boxes to be sited among the shearwater colonies at South Harbour and Kione ny Halby.

The cold weather continued well into April and restricted migration somewhat, although a couple of small 'falls' occurred with light easterlies on the 4th bringing 100 Goldcrest, 30 each of Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff along with 10 Blackcap and two Yellowhammer, whilst on the 9th favourable winds produced a further 100 Goldcrest, a male Firecrest, 50 Chiffchaff, 30 Willow Warbler, seven Blackcap, 22 Wheatear and a male Black Redstart.



Further new arrivals included Sylwia Zbijewska to take up a seasonal field assistant position, Dan Woollard as Volunteer Warden for the season and 10 Chickens, donated by a local farm, and which became a popular attraction to visitors, guests and wardens alike.

A strong south-westerly wind on 17th didn't hold out much hope of an improvement however persistence paid off when a fine male Pied Flycatcher was found behind the back garden wall, representing the earliest Calf spring record by one day. Whilst warbler numbers were low, the recent trend of increasing passage of Goldfinch was very much a feature of late April, accompanied by a better than average spring passage of both Lesser Redpoll and Siskin, with all three species being ringed in record numbers.



Pied Flycatcher – Nathan Wilkie

Towards the end of the month spring finally made an appearance and a flurry of commoner migrants pushed through, with some scarcities including the 3rd Firecrest of the spring, a Long-eared Owl and on the 25th the Calf's second ever Iberian Chiffchaff.



Iberian Chiffchaff – Aron Sapsford

Light easterly winds on 29th produced an excellent array of spring migrants with no fewer than six new species for the year with a Jack Snipe in the Glen, a Cuckoo in the Front Field, three each of Whinchat and Redstart and single Grasshopper Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. Spring passage was still rather poor and at times almost non-existent during the first half of May, with the exception of a small hirundine passage. Occasional new species for the year arrived, with Garden Warbler on 10th and Greenshank on 15th whilst a fourth Firecrest of the spring and a second Pied Flycatcher put in an appearance on 17th. A cracking male Black Redstart was

present on 19th and was a forerunner to an exciting last week of the month which produced an adult male Red-breasted Flycatcher (23rd), 70 Spotted Flycatcher (26th), two Reed Warblers and a Lesser Whitethroat trapped on 29th and an 'Eastern' Subalpine Warbler on 30th.



Eastern Subalpine Warbler – Aron Sapsford

June continued where May had left off, with another Reed Warbler trapped on 3rd; this was the start of an unprecedented series of records which was to produce a total of seven individuals during the spring. A Turtle Dove spent much of the 4th around the Observatory and was the first record for 10 years. Equally unexpected was a sub-adult Sabine's Gull which put in a brief appearance in the Calf Sound on 9th and a second Red-breasted Flycatcher trapped on 10th, with a third individual on 24th.



Red-breasted Flycatcher – Aron Sapsford

Habitat management around the Observatory and in the Glen is an on-going task and we were fortunate to have several working parties of volunteers that made great progress with coppicing at the Top Withy and in the northern section of Willows at the Millpond, as well as continuing with the removal of invasive Horse-tail from the pond throughout this season.

The first staying guests arrived on the Calf at the beginning of May and heralded the start of a very busy season. With excellent weather conditions throughout most of the summer months, the numbers of day visitors coming to the Calf were probably the highest in Calf history. Over the past couple of seasons advertising by local boat crews and an increased profile of the Calf on social media has created considerable interest in the islet, both locally and abroad and this is undoubtedly contributing to the increase in visitors. Another first for the Calf occurred in mid-May when the cruise ship 'Ocean Adventurer' moored off South Harbour and their fleet of 'zodiacs' brought 111 guests and crew ashore. Various guided walks were provided and feedback on their time ashore was fantastic - it is hoped that this may become an annual event in their itinerary.



Guests arriving – Aron Sapsford

With such numbers of visitors coming to the islet, it is important that the harbours are well maintained and during May and July a team organised through Manx National Heritage worked on repairing and improving the Cow Harbour slipway as well as carrying out some routine maintenance tasks at the Lighthouses and around the Observatory.



Slipway Maintenance – Aron Sapsford

Maintenance at the Observatory is a never-ending task and with the new kitchen being created, required some electrical and gas work which was completed most efficiently by the team from A to Z Plumbing, who were

also able to provide an upgrade to the battery bank which provides the electricity supply to the farmhouse. During this process they were able to 'tidy up' some of the pipework at the back of the Observatory and this then allowed the rear of the farmhouse to be lime-washed and some new covers to be built and fitted along the rear trench.

The summer months were somewhat 'mixed' in terms of breeding success for the many species of bird that breed on the Calf; a continuing rise in the numbers of Manx Shearwater recorded is encouraging, however despite increases in breeding numbers of the three 'large' gull species, their productivity was significantly impacted by a period of strong winds and heavy rain. The continuing downward trend in breeding numbers of Shag is of particular concern, whilst the presence of a group of 'summering' Cormorant in a suitable breeding location suggests that the species may, perhaps, re-colonise the Calf once more. Encouraging signs of breeding were shown by both Atlantic Puffin and Black Guillemot, however the lack of regular access to a boat to undertake surveys of their potential breeding locations meant that disappointingly nothing was proven.



Shags – Paul Corrin

It is disappointing that there were no successful breeding raptors this season with the cold, wet spring considered to have caused the failure of any breeding attempts. Ravens were also affected with just one of the two pairs being successful. The cold winter had clearly had a significant impact on the survival of small insectivorous birds and both Wren and Stonechat numbers were considerably reduced, however other resident species such as Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit and Blackbird seem to have been unaffected. Summer migrants appear to have benefited from the warm dry summer with a record number of 40 pairs of Wheatear, whilst one or two pairs of Swallow, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff were all successful. Breeding numbers of Chough remain relatively stable but productivity was thought to be very low this season, with the dry summer causing low survival rates among recently fledged young.



Eiders – Paul Corrin

Since it bred on the Calf for the first time in 1992, the fortunes of the Eider have gone from strength to strength and whilst the secretive nature of this species makes it difficult to survey, a considerable amount of time and effort in finding nests during this season gave an all-time high estimate of 70 pairs on the islet. Other success' during this season was the first breeding record of Woodpigeon for 10 years and the first ever breeding record of Pheasant, bringing the total number of species recorded as having bred on the Calf to 65.

Summer time is also the period when we carry out repairs to the various traps that are used to catch migrants moving through the Calf and following the successful replacement of Heligoland One during last season, it was the turn of the Crow Trap and Heligoland Two to receive transformations. Both of these were fairly major jobs and many volunteers assisted with various parts of the projects. As part of the process of dismantling HG2 it was necessary to undertake the removal of a considerable amount of Fuchsia from along the front wall.



Repaired trap – Aron Sapsford

Having experienced a relatively 'poor' spring migration, it was hoped that the breeding season would be productive and we could look forward to a bumper autumn. Early signs were positive and numbers of juvenile Willow Warblers moving south through the Calf were above average on recent years. Several large 'falls' occurred and ringing interest was provided by three Wood Warbler, four Pied Flycatcher and a Melodious Warbler being trapped during the first half of the month.



Melodious Warbler – Ed O'Connor

Seawatching was the focus of volunteer birdwatcher, Ed O'Connor' when the weather was suitable and his efforts were well rewarded with a series of unusual records including both Balearic and Sooty Shearwaters, a Common Tern, a nice run of Sandwich Tern and Arctic Skua records as well as a host of waders passing by the islet, including the largest flock of Black-tailed Godwit ever recorded on the Calf.

Visible migration can be spectacular on the Calf during autumn, with large numbers of pipits, wagtails and finches passing overhead. The creation of an 'outside' ringing room to help monitor these movements was made possible with the conversion of a temporary unit in the open section of the tractor shed. It is hoped that funding for a more permanent solution can be found some time soon, but this initiative proved particularly successful on several counts. Firstly, being outside, rather than inside the farmhouse when ringing, meant that we are more aware of the volume of birds passing over and autumn 2018 subsequently turned out to be the best year on record for Tree Pipit for nearly 50 years.

Secondly, ringing in this more open environment also means that visitors to the Calf are able to observe our work more easily and this helps to engage those that perhaps wouldn't otherwise be aware of the work we do.



Outdoor ringing station

September began a significant period of change, with the long-term volunteers departing having finished their time on the Calf and the Estate Warden, Nathan Wilkie,



moving on to take up a permanent position as Warden on Skomer Island. Dan Woollard stepped up to take on the role of Estate Warden for the remainder of the season. The weather during the first week of the month was relatively settled and good numbers of migrants moved through with the eighth Reed Warbler of the year being trapped on 4th and a Long-eared Owl on 5th.



Long-eared Owl – Aron Sapsford

The weather deteriorated for much of the remainder of the month, with a procession of strong to gale force winds from either the southerly or westerly quarters which restricted migration significantly. Whilst taking shelter from one of the storms, I was involved in a fall which resulted in being air-lifted off the Calf and a four week stay in hospital. Fortunately Olivia Pargeter, along with Mike Haigh and Alex Dodds stepped in to ensure that the daily ringing and recording was maintained, through to the end of the season, during my absence. Occasional calmer days produced some good visual migration, in particular for Meadow Pipits and some accompanying birds of prey.

October proved to be an exciting month with a number of good arrivals and included highlights of four Yellow-browed Warbler and only the sixth Great Spotted Woodpecker to be trapped at the Observatory. A classic autumn migration day on 6th produced particularly large numbers of birds passing over with an immense 1000 Chaffinch, 150 Skylark, 40 Swallow, 13 Starling, 100 Dunnock, 200 'alba' Wagtail, 456 Meadow Pipit, 80 Linnet, 250 Goldfinch, 21 Siskin and six Tree Sparrow. The largest number of Great Tits ever recorded on the Calf were very much a feature of the month and these were accompanied by a well-above average 'invasion' of Coal Tits, which produced 602 and 80 bird-days respectively.

Perhaps 'birds of the month' were two Little Egrets flying over the Island on 20th, only the fourth Calf record.

A number of calm days during the latter third of the month produced some good 'local' movements of

corvids with up to 700 Jackdaw and 60 Crows making day-trips over to the islet. These calm days also sometimes feature Long-tailed Tits and continuing the 'tit' invasion theme several small parties made it to the Calf with a total of 27 on 28th and five on 30th.

November proved to be a challenging month with more inclement weather making completion of the final tasks of the season more difficult. However, as throughout the season we enjoyed considerable support from a number of volunteers which ensured as many of the habitat management and maintenance tasks as possible were achieved. Ditching work to channel water away from the track leading down to Cow Harbour was carried out during the last few weeks, as was coppicing in the main Withy and an increase in Long-tail bait monitoring following recent sightings. Notable bird observations were fairly few with a single Goosander on 5th and two Red-breasted Merganser on 18th being most of note.

Owing to its isolated position, life on the Calf could be a lonely one; however during 2018 the islet once again had a real "buzz" that was created by the fantastic volunteers and guests that have made such a huge contribution to this year's success. We have had a great many laughs along the way and there were many memorable experiences, in what was a truly another remarkable and record breaking year. If you are interested in visiting the Calf during 2019 or perhaps even joining our growing team of volunteers then please contact the Ornithological Warden at calfoman@manx.net



Cape Clear Steve Wing

Sam Bayley decided at the end of the 2017 season that his future lay elsewhere, i.e. at UCC working as a Research Assistant and with his newly announced wife to be! We wish Sam and Paloma very best wishes for a long and happy future together. Sam put in a huge amount of effort into the Observatory and we thank him for all his efforts!

Steve Wing returned to the Observatory in July 2018 to take on the role of Wildlife Officer after a short spell running Cotters Bar on the island. Steve's partner, Mary, lost her fight against cancer in May (see later) which accounts for the delayed start this season. We are indebted to Mary Cadogan and Dr Geoff Oliver for keeping bird records during the early months of the year and to Ciaran Cronin for stepping in when required, to help run volunteer weekends. As the 'season' didn't actually start until well into the breeding season, no surveys were carried out to assess seabird colonies or passerine breeding successes – or failures. This late start also affected the amount of ringing carried out.

Throughout the second half of the season the daily log was maintained each evening gathering sightings and numbers of species recorded on the island, mainly

focusing on birds, mammals, reptiles, Lepidoptera and dragonflies. This was undertaken mainly at the observatory, except in the autumn when it was done at Cotter's Bar to collate information from people staying at various locations. In addition, a 'day sheet' was compiled for each day to detail the highlights of each day as well as document the results of the more formal surveying as presented below. Mary Cadogan's and Dr Geoff Oliver's sightings were also entered into the Log so we have a record of the effects of the bitterly cold snap in early March. These included 3 Common Snipe were recorded in private gardens on the 1st alongside a single Fieldfare, 57 Redwing and amazingly, 2 Yellowhammers! These were the forerunners of what was to follow! The morning of the 2nd saw : 42 Golden Plover, 6 Lapwing, 25 Fieldfare, 70 Redwing and 2 Brambling with one of the Yellowhammers remaining until the 4th. The poor birds were still arriving and the days totals for the 3rd were 100+ Golden Plover (many in gardens), 100+ Lapwing, 100+ Fieldfare and 100+ Redwing. Numbers dropped from the 4th onwards and we can only speculate the fate of these creatures. A single Brambling was still here on 20th and an Iceland Gull visited briefly on 23rd.

July saw the return of the Wildlife Officer and coverage increased dramatically. There was a small fall of Common Whitethroats on the 1st with 16 noted – the highest total for the month. Other migrant records include, 16 Northern Wheatear and a single Moorhen on 9th, 6 Sand Martin on 10th, 1 Sandwich Tern and 2 Common Swift arrived on the 11th. A single Blackcap on the 28th was the only report for this species for the whole month, as was the single Goldcrest on the following day. Waders made a brief appearance with 3 Common Sandpipers on 19th, a Common Redshank on 20th and another Common Sandpiper on 28th. Parties of Common Scoter were seen flying past on 9th, 15th, 20th and 25th with 35 the high count. Our breeding Little Grebes returned in earnest on the 6th, the first chick seen on 19th and a high count of 17 on 30th. A total of 1400 minutes of seawatching was carried out with the following highlights and high counts for selected species, not in chronological order!

Great Shearwater 1 on 23rd, 23 on 26th and 4 on 30th, Cory's Shearwater 19 on 30th, 12 unidentified 'large' shearwaters also on 30th, Sooty Shearwater 15 on 12th with a high count of 24 on 26th. The highest count of Manx Shearwaters was 3560 per hour on 23rd although they were recorded in good numbers on most days. Storm Petrels were few and far between, only reported on 4 dates, 19 on 4th, 150 on 12th, 3 on 25th and 10 on 28th when a flock of 20 Arctic Terns were also seen. The Gannet high count was 1750ph on 9th. Bonxies were also only recorded on 4 dates with 6 being the highest count on 12th from a pelagic when a Pomarine Skua, a single Wilson's Storm Petrel and 25 Black-headed Gulls were also seen. High counts for the four Auks species were: Common Guillemot 450ph on 25th, Razorbill 150 ph on 26th, Black Guillemot 25 on 12th and Puffin 24 on 22nd.

August is usually THE month for large shearwaters but not this year! Wilson's Storm Petrels were seen on the 6th and it wasn't until the middle of the month that saw any improvement. 38 Great Shearwaters, 12 Cory's

Shearwaters and over 100 Sooty Shearwaters on the 15th being the high counts with a single Wilson's Storm Petrel also on this date. The only Balearic Shearwater of the year was recorded from Blannan on 17th. The Little Grebes continued to produce chicks although the high count remained pretty static, around 19, all month. It was a month for the waders, which isn't said about Cape very often. A Greenshank on 2nd and 13th, Common Redshank on the 6th, Golden Plover also on the 6th and 9th, and a Common Sandpiper on 10th and 11th at the Lake with a different individual on the 26th. A single Whimbrel on 25th completed the wader counts.



Cory's Shearwater - CCBO

September certainly stepped up to the plate with a decent selection of migrants although the seabird tallies were disappointing low again. The month started well with a Wood Warbler in Birds Garden and a Pied Flycatcher in the Nurdy Wood and a Northern Wheatear seen on a wall along the Low Road showed all the characters of the Greenland race, all on the 1st. The last Sedge Warbler of the year was seen on the 2nd. A second Pied Flycatcher was found on 4th and a Long-eared Owl was also seen on the 4th, 5th and the 13th. A spectacular Kingfisher, a regular autumn visitor to Cape, graced the North Harbour from the 6th until the 13th, giving some beautiful views. A single Whimbrel was seen perched and heard calling in Coosa Dougla and a Common Sandpiper was also present at the Lake on the 7th and 8th. A count of 12 Willow Warblers and 500+ Starlings on the 9th were the high counts for these species. The 9th also saw a little increase in seabird counts with 10 Great Shearwaters and 30 Sooty Shearwaters. A Gadwall was flushed from Central Bog on the 10th, an unusual visitor to Cape. Single Merlins were recorded on 7th, 18th and 23rd, with a juvenile/female type Common Rosefinch also recorded on 18th. Turnstones are vastly under recorded on Cape but one did find its way into the log on 21st and the following day, a Green Sandpiper was seen at the Lake. Bonxies were recorded throughout the month but in small numbers and Arctic Skuas were 22nd, 2 on 27th and a single on the 30th. Rooks were encountered along the Low Road towards the end of the month with 3 on 23rd,

with a Common Buzzard on this date, 4 on 26th and 30th. A small fall on the 24th saw the months high counts of Barn Swallow (60), House Martin (40), an amazing count of 10 Common Buzzards, an adult Mediterranean Gull feeding near Bird Island and a single Firecrest. The 25th was a Gull and Tern day! 2 Mediterranean Gulls, 46 Black-headed Gulls, 3 Sandwich Terns, 2 more Common Buzzards and a long staying Turtle Dove (until the 29th) were all noted. A Tree Pipit was seen and heard over Ballyieragh on 26th and 27th, as were single Yellow-browed Warblers and an Icterine Warbler at the top of the Secret Valley. 8 Spotted Flycatchers, a Lesser Whitethroat, 2 Hen Harriers, 3 Coal Tits and yet 3 more Common Buzzards were all seen on the 26th only. On the 27th alone, single Red-throated and Great Northern Divers were seen as well as 69 Black-headed Gulls, 1 Mediterranean Gull, 3 Grey Phalaropes, 2 Lesser Whitethroats, 1 Common Redstart and 6 Spotted Flycatchers plus a single Pied Flycatcher. 2 Yellow-browed Warblers and 4 Spotted Flycatchers were the best for the 28th. The 29th had a nice cross selection of species with: 1 Mediterranean Gull, 27 Black-headed Gulls, a Wryneck near the Post Office, a single Carrion Crow at the crossroads, 1000+ Meadow Pipits, 50 Rock Pipits, 1 Garden Warbler, 100+ Chiffchaffs, 2 Yellow-browed Warblers and 30 Coal Tits. A Good day!

October 2018 will live long in Irish birders memories! It started off fairly quietly with 2 Teal on the Lake, a Sand Martin over and a long staying (until the 12th) Turtle Dove on the 1st, a Tree Pipit and a Crossbill seen on the 2nd, a Red-throated Diver, Long-eared Owl, 42 Pied Wagtails, 2 Reed Warblers and 2 Northern Wheatears on the 3rd. 4 Bonxies, 1 Pomarine Skua and 3 Arctic Skuas were the best at sea on the 5th.



Pomarine Skua - CCBO

On land there were also 1 Whinchat, a peak of 70 Goldcrests and 3 Spotted Flycatchers. 20 Common Scoter passed on the 6th, while on or over the land were 3 Hen Harriers, a month's high of 18 Common Snipe, 2 Turnstone, 8 Barn Swallows, the months high count, 16 Grey Wagtails (High Count =HC from here on!), 1 Common Redstart, 8 Northern Wheatears (HC), 17 Blackcap, 17 Rook (HC), 14 Raven (HC), 1 Siberian Chiffchaff and 8 Coal Tit (HC) on several days. The 2 Teal were at the Lake again with 1 Common Gull and a Whooper Swan (that stayed until 25th) on the 7th, 10 Turnstone and a Mediterranean Gull were on Bird Island, a single Collared Dove on the Lighthouse Road, another Long-eared Owl in Cotters

Garden, a juvenile/female Common Rosefinch by the Escalonia Garden and a Reed Warbler in Cotters Garden. A brief seawatch on the 8th produced 7 Bonxies and 11 Puffins but there was little else of note that day and the 9th saw 17 (HC) Sooty Shearwaters and 22 Bonxies at sea. 1 Cattle Egret, a long staying Lesser Whitethroat (until the 19th), 1 Common Redstart and 2 Black Redstarts were found near the New College on the 10th and they were joined by 1 more Common Redstart on the 14th and up to 9 Black Redstarts on the 11th.



Great Skua - CCBO

The first Redwing of the autumn was also reported on the 11th, as were 1 Great Shearwater, 21 Blackcaps (HC), Common Rosefinch (until the 12th), 3 Reed Warblers (until the 14th), 75 Chiffchaffs and 3 Siberian Chiffchaffs, with one staying until the 13th. The bird of the day, though, was a cracking male Western Subalpine Warbler, initially in Mary Macs garden before being relocated in brambles on the other side of the lake, where it remained until the 15th. An extremely tame White-rumped Sandpiper was found beside the Lake, by the same person and in exactly the same spot as last year's bird, on the 13th and this bird stayed until the 19th. A fall of 200+ Chiffchaffs (HC) and 60 Magpies (HC). A massive flock of 60 Choughs along with 25 Common Buzzards, 1 Carrion Crow in the Bogs and 4 Mediterranean Gulls offshore completed a grand day on the 15th but more was to come!

The 16th saw most folk getting great views of the White-rumped Sandpiper at the Lake when news broke of a Scarlet Tanager being found at the top of the Lighthouse Road before it relocated to a hedge, way behind the Post Office.



White-rumped Sandpiper - CCBO



Scarlet Tanager - CCBO

One wonders just how many birds are missed in areas like this? Thankfully the bird relocated again the following morning to the Priests Garden and it remained between there and the Waist until last seen on the 21st. While looking for the Tanager on the 17th, a Swainson's Thrush was seen on the beach in South Harbour, feeding on insects on the seaweed before it flew into the Priests Garden and disappeared for a few hours. Also on the 17th, Cape's and Ireland's first Veery was found, making this a 4 Yank Day! The Swainson's had gone the following day but the Veery remained for a second day.



Veery - CCBO



Swainson's Thrush - CCBO

The 21st saw a new Cattle Egret around the Lake area but highly mobile and 2 Richards Pipits were seen in fields near the Castle. The Egret stayed until 25th and the Pipits stayed another day. A single Hawfinch was seen flying over the Lighthouse Road on 25th.

A much-reduced ringing effort produced a total of 996 captures of 36 species, 838 were new rings and 158 secondary captures.

2019 is the 60th Anniversary of the Observatory and there are embryonic plans, at this stage, to celebrate the event in style! We are hoping to organise an event similar to the 50th Anniversary (was that really 10 years ago?) and have speakers, presentations, guided walks, sea-watching, pelagics, ringing demonstrations, etc., etc. The timing has yet to be decided but it is likely to be in the July/August period. More details will be posted in the Wings magazine and on social media when we have any decisions made. We are planning a new series of events, A Weekend as a Warden, in which participants will be following whatever I am doing that particular weekend, whether that be ringing, seawatching or just the normal daily monitoring. They are not 'courses' per se but you will have plenty of opportunity to learn!

BirdWatch Ireland will be running the very successful September course, led as ever by Dick Coombes. These courses have become extremely popular and for good reason. Dick organises the week superbly well and covers every aspect of Bird identification, migration and so much more, with the emphasis being on 'fun'. It's a great week and it should be on everyone's 'to do' list.



Copeland
Chris Acheson

2018 at Copeland Bird

Observatory was, as often happens, a year of highs and lows. Unlike the previous year, no rarities were ringed and weather conditions often restricted migration, except for Greenland Wheatears. Ringing totals for our main migrant species were, therefore, significantly lower than in recent years except, again, for Greenland Wheatear. Seabird ringing was more successful this year, with good numbers of a wide range of species processed. Autumn migration, usually enlivened by the trapping of hundreds of finches in late September and October, was similarly disrupted by weather though a few "good" birds turned up in the nets. Nevertheless, 1755 birds of 39 species were ringed at the Observatory, of which 657 were pulli.

The season opened on the 23rd March, two weeks later than in 2017, with the result that our annual ringing total for Goldcrest (which is often in the low to mid hundreds) was only 58 birds as March is the main period of movement for this species on Copeland. Spring was characterized by cold, wet, windy and sometimes foggy conditions which disrupted or curtailed manning on several occasions, often restricted migrant landfall and certainly had an impact on trapping operations. As Spring

progressed into early Summer, heatwave and drought conditions desiccated the island, making life difficult for our Water Rail population of 6 pairs and our last surviving pair of Moorhens. (In the past we had upwards of 40 pairs of Moorhens – a most unusual situation for a small offshore island. Numbers were initially decimated by breeding Peregrines, and today remain depressed by the presence of unwelcome Pheasants which have taken up residence from the shoot on nearby Big Copeland Island). The rabbit population also suffered badly due to the prolonged dry conditions.

A period of continuous manning between 4-13th May – though again often disrupted by unsuitable weather conditions – contributed greatly to ringing totals. The highlight of Spring this year was the trapping of 21 Wheatears, all but 2 of the Greenland race *O.o. Leucorhoa*. With 6 in April and 15 in May, this was the best showing for many years. The following Spring ringing figures for our main migrant species underline just how depleted the northerly movement was at the Observatory - end of year totals in brackets – Goldcrest 40 (56), Sedge Warbler 12 (18), Willow Warbler 61 (93), Chiffchaff 22 (40), Spotted Flycatcher 1 (3). Blackcaps had a very successful breeding year on the Island, contributing to an end of year total of 44. Interesting observations during this mid-May period included, at sea, small numbers of Pomarine, Arctic and Great Skuas, Common Scoters, a Little Gull and single Whooper Swan, with Whinchat (very scarce at CBO), Kestrel, Sparrowhawks and Hen Harrier on the Island.



Wheatear - CBO

A number of factors contributed to the improved sea bird ringing situation. A one-night “Shearwater Special” training opportunity in August and a full week’s manning in early September significantly increased the Manx Shearwater total to 823 (of which 445 were pulli). A group from Cape Clear Bird Observatory (Co. Cork) visiting in early July were keen to ring sea birds so, largely through their efforts, 88 Lesser Black-backed, 85 Herring Gulls and 44 Storm Petrels were ringed. (Although Storm Petrel are known to visit the East Cliff almost nightly from mid-June to mid-September, concentration of effort on ringing Manx Shearwaters over recent years has ensured low annual totals as Petrels have been trapped only for training and demonstration purposes). Only 17 Black Guillemot chicks could be found for ringing, a much lower total than usual. Earlier, on 15th May, 18 new Eider Ducks were ringed on adjacent Mew Island and 27 were re-

trapped. Re-traps included 4 birds from 2008 and 5 from 2009. A further 4 Eiders were ringed on the Observatory Island, again for training purposes. Following an initial nesting attempt on Mew Island, Arctic Terns transferred to the Observatory and by 22nd June, 600 were in the air above the colony along the East Shore, which contained at least 200 nests. Unfortunately, predation of eggs and young was heavy – of 38 pulli ringed, probably only a few fledged. On the same day, 9 Common Gull chicks were ringed.



Black Guillemot pullus - CBO

Environmental and research projects continued apace throughout the 2018 season – the North Hide was rebuilt in April; the South Garden pond was completely cleared out and relined and the exact locations of all 120 new or refurbished Black Guillemot nest boxes were plotted using GPS. Although the Puffin decoys were deployed in April, the sound system flatly refused to come back to life despite our best efforts.



North Hide - CBO

Nevertheless, and very significantly without the attraction, good numbers of Puffins (occasionally up to 100) continued to attend the fledgling colony, with birds often seen exploring burrows – we believe that up to 6 pairs bred successfully in 2018, continuing the slow build-up of the colony since its foundation in 2015. Following a recent rat sighting scare, pinpoint locations of new bait stations were plotted using GPS in early April and on 29th August we hosted a National Trust multi-disciplinary team to discuss and develop our Bio-security arrangements as part of the “Bio-Security for Life” initiative. Over the weekend of 10-12th August members of the 62nd Belfast Explorers Scout group greatly assisted in the repair and refurbishment of our main Heligoland trap. A team from

"True Harvest Seeds" spent a weekend on the Island discussing strategy and doing reconnaissance in preparation for harvesting a wide range of seeds next year.

Moth trapping and recording was very successful on several occasions. On 30th June, for example, 42 species were recorded while over the weekend of 21-22nd July, 91 species were identified over the 2 nights. On one of our regular litter picks (27th April), this one with Ulster Wildlife's Living Seas Team and volunteers, enough rubbish was collected from the shoreline to fill 7 large bags – mostly small plastic items including over 1,000 cotton bud sticks. In the field of habitat management, we were greatly supported over weekends in late June and late July by The Conservation Volunteers and Ulster Wildlife respectively. On their journeys out to the Island both teams enjoyed the spectacle of passing through thousands of rafting Manx Shearwaters, with very few birds taking off. Their vital work included keeping Island paths open and maintaining access to Shearwater sub-colonies, net sites and traps. The research teams from Oxford University enjoyed considerable success in their Manx Shearwater tracking programmes during 2018. 2 students spent 2 weeks (beginning 25th May) tracking Shearwaters during the incubation period. One returned with a different colleague in late July for a 3-week tracking programme covering the period when the adults are feeding their chicks.



Departing Visitors - CBO

Return Autumn migration began on 21st July with a single Chiffchaff, followed the next day by a small arrival of Willow Warblers. From then until the end of September, our staple migrant species passed through in only small numbers, keeping ringing totals low. Best birds ringed were a juvenile Cuckoo on 5th August, 2 Spotted Flycatchers in late August (mainly a Spring migrant), a Treecreeper – the Observatory's 20th – on 15th September and 2 Stock Doves, also in September.

Autumn sightings were much better with a second Little Gull and a rare Sanderling at the end of July, and a Common Sandpiper and 36 Black-tailed Godwits in late August. A Short-eared Owl on 8th September was spotted on the roof of the main Heligoland trap and later narrowly missed entering the South trap. On the same date a pair of Gadwall was seen (and photographed) flying in from the north; they circled over the Sound between the

Observatory and adjacent Mew Island and headed off South again without landing. This was only the third sighting of Gadwall in the Observatory's 64-year history and was clearly the best record of the year. Seawatching in this mid-September period produced small numbers of Great, Arctic and Pomarine Skuas, along with Red-throated Divers, a single Brent Goose and a party of 5 Grey Phalaropes on 18th. On 19th we were amazed to watch several small parties of House Martins battling against force 8-10 winds spinning off Hurricane Ali as they headed south. Another Hen Harrier was seen on the 21st.

October is usually "finch month" at the Observatory – not in 2018! These annual totals (with the highest annual total recorded this decade for comparison in brackets) speak for themselves: Lesser Redpoll 10 (663), Goldfinch 25 (123), Chaffinch 0 (26) and Linnet 2 (27). Presumably with mild conditions to the North, finches felt no pressing need to move South before the Observatory closed at the end of October. Whilst numbers ringed do fluctuate, according to the vagaries of weather affecting minging, migration and netting conditions, clearly 2018 was a disaster in this respect! However, 2 Great Tits trapped on 14th October were only the 18th and 19th to be ringed at the Observatory. Two Great Northern Divers and another Hen Harrier were seen on 21st October. 15 Wigeon on the 28th brought the species total recorded at the Observatory during 2018 to 105, one shy of 2017's total.

Copeland BO is reliant on volunteers to run the observatory through the season and is open to all visiting birders and ringers from March to October. If you are interested in visiting, please check out the website and follow us on Facebook & Twitter for regular updates throughout the season.



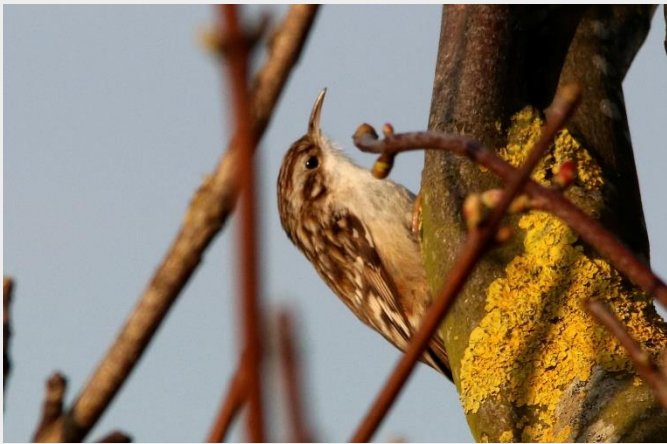
Dungeness David Walker

The year started fairly quietly with very little in the way of cold weather until the so-called "beast from the east" arrived and there after the spring remained generally cold.

Birds of note during the winter period included a Rough-legged Buzzard, two Iceland Gulls, two Glaucous Gulls and a Hawfinch. Good numbers of Great Skuas appeared to be wintering offshore and a total of 18 Caspian Gulls were seen.

It was generally another spring with very few large arrivals but with a steady trickle of some commoner migrants, notably Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps, and also decent numbers of Lesser Whitethroats and Greenland Wheatears. Only one Turtle Dove was noted though along with very few Cuckoos, Swifts, Sand Martins and Swallows (the lack of these was noted across the marsh as well). There were no Wood Warblers, poor numbers of Willow Warblers and only eight Redstarts, three Whinchats and five Tree Pipits.

Rarities included a Short-toed Treecreeper, up to five Bee-eaters on seven days, Nightjar, Red-backed Shrike and a Rose-coloured Starling.



Short-toed Treecreeper 11th April 2018 – David Walker



Rose-coloured Starling May 2018 – David Walker



The spring seawatching was at best average with a strong passage of Common Scoters in early April, record numbers of Manx Shearwaters and some very good Common Tern passage but only 89 Pomarine Skuas were seen. The first spring Long-tailed Skua for a number of years was also noted.

Breeding birds included a pair of Ravens and five pairs of Black Redstarts but Wheatear numbers remain low and a cause for concern. The pair of Jackdaws which nested last year for the first time since 1966 returned to the same chimney. While they have been present all year the resident pair of Peregrine Falcons failed to nest.

The numbers of departing summer migrants during the first half of the autumn were actually better than in most recent years with good numbers of Blackcaps and Garden Warblers and an increase in both Spotted and Pied Flycatchers and also Redstarts but Willow Warbler numbers continue to disappoint. Cuckoo numbers were low and Turtle Dove was not recorded. The latter half of the autumn was very slow going though with very few thrushes and finches arriving with the exception of good numbers of Crossbills. Goldcrests were very late to arrive with most birds not appearing until November.

Rarities during the autumn included a couple of Wrynecks, a Red-backed Shrike and two Ortolan Buntings.



Wryneck 7th September – David Walker

Seawatching during the autumn was generally very disappointing with skua and Little Gull numbers in particular being very low and with very few juveniles seen but one lucky observer had the star bird when a Great Shearwater passed through in July. A reasonable passage of Balearic Shearwater peaked with 16 on Sep.20th. There were unprecedented numbers of Mediterranean Gulls moving through in October and November with a record count of 2050 on Oct.20th. A couple of Grey Phalaropes were found and Caspian Gulls were a fairly regular feature and included ten colour-ringed birds in the latter third of the year.



Grey Phalarope 20th September 2018 – David Walker

The back end of the year saw several Firecrests attempting to winter and the re-establishment of a winter feeding station in the trapping area, There was some surprisingly good seawatching which added Black Guillemot and Puffin (a total of seven birds) to the year list and the final bird caught was this beautiful Long-eared Owl.



Long-eared Owl 13th December 2018 – David Walker

Other wildlife

Following the discovery in 2015 of breeding colonies of Tree Crickets and Sickle-bearing Bush-crickets in the recording area some time was spent during the summer on nocturnal surveys of these species. Visiting the sites earlier in the season also 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.

It proved to be an excellent year for insect migration with a steady supply of scarce moths and a few exciting dragonflies and wasps. Two “macro” moth were added to the list this year in the form of a Many-lined and a

contender for the least impressive rarity ever in the form of a Porter’s Rustic. Other goodies included Dusky Hook-tip, Channel Island Pug, Gypsy, four Convolvulus Hawk-moths, Dotted Footman, Scarce Chocolate-tip, two Golden Twin-spots, two Beautiful Marbled, two White-specks and two Plumed Fanfoots and good numbers of Vestals and Delicates. Also the rare pyralids, *Hellula undalis*, a *Spoladea recurvalis* and nine *Palpita vitrealis*. The recently discovered Rest Harrow colony continues to thrive at the Long Pits.



From top: Many-lined, Beautiful Marbled, Golden Twin-spot and *Spoladea recurvalis* – David Walker

Some rare dragonflies were noted with both Lesser and Vagrant Emperors being found. A few Small Red-eyed Damselflies continue to hang on to their status as breeding species in the area.



Lesser Emperor 3rd June 2018 – David Walker



Vagrant Emperor 24th October 2018 – David Walker

Some butterflies had a reasonable year with good numbers in the spring, notably of Grizzled Skipper, Small Skipper, Small Copper and Brown Argus but the long hot summer did not seem to encourage much in the way of numbers for the later appearing species. One notable highlight was the finding of a Large Tortoiseshell in April. One final highly significant event from an entomological point of view was the finding of at least two Asian Hornets *Vespa velutina* in October. This non-native hornet is considered to be a considerable threat to our Honey Bee populations and the authorities are very keen to prevent its establishment as a breeding species in Britain. It will be very interesting to see whether there are any further sightings next year.

A concerted effort to record the Shield-bugs was maintained but the long, hot summer and subsequent lack of plant growth resulted in very few being seen in the autumn.

Record numbers of Porpoises were seen again during the year and with a spectacular record count of 88 on 19th April. All our cetacean sightings go to the Kent Mammal Group and to the Seawatch Foundation.



Asian Hornet 14th October 2018 – David Walker

Other projects

Work continues on our long term goal to get all our original paper log data computerized. This is a mammoth task but we now have 54 years worth of bird data entered and various colleagues are working hard to try and complete this project.

We also have small catalogue of goods for sale including very smart fleeces, sweatshirts and polo-shirts and featuring our distinctive Pomarine Skua logo. A full list of our merchandise with prices can be found on our website and can be purchased by contacting our warden.



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

Staffing

Jacques Turner-Moss was our Assistant Warden from early March to the end of October and he will be returning for the 2019 season.

Further information

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. The Observatory also provides inexpensive accommodation for anyone wishing to see for themselves the natural history riches that the area has to offer. For further information you can check out our website at www.dungenessbirdobs.org.uk or contact David Walker by email at dungenessobs@vfast.co.uk or post to Dungeness Bird Observatory, 11 RNSSS Cottages, Dungeness, Kent TN299NA



Fair Isle David and Suzannah Parnaby

2018 was a mixed year for seabirds, with both Gannet (4,291 nests) and Bonxie (520 nests) setting new record populations for Fair Isle. The breeding season was especially successful for auks, with productivity (measured as chicks fledged per egg laid) of 0.9 for Puffin, 0.8 for Razorbill and 0.6 for Guillemot. Diet studies showed that sandeels were apparently in reasonable supply, which was pleasing to see. Despite this, the 28 pairs of Arctic Skuas fledged only one chick, a rather disappointing outcome for this beleaguered species.

Arctic Skuas ('Skootie alans' in Shetland) were again the focus of research by the BTO, looking at wintering and foraging areas. Birds tagged in 2017 were found to have wintered in western and southern Africa, with one taking in South America on the journey, so we look forward to seeing more results after the BTO return to the Isle in 2019.

Other seabird research in 2018 included retrieving geolocators from Razorbills and Guillemots for the University of Glasgow, an analysis of over 700 Bonxie pellets by a visiting student and Fair Isle's gannetries contributing to a study looking at the incorporation of plastic into nests, whilst a large part of the summer workload for the Obs staff again went into completing the JNCC seabird studies. Ringing Bonxies with individual marked white rings provided some fascinating movements, including three individuals photographed from pelagics in Spain, one off the Irish coast and another as it passed a headland in Sweden.

The highlight of the breeding season was the fledging of two Red-necked Phalaropes, whilst a Pintail x Mallard hybrid pairing was also recorded.

It was, in many respects, a year of two halves when it came to the migration seasons, with an exciting spring seeing good numbers of scarcities and rarity highlights including Crag Martin, Song Sparrow, Black Kite, Serin, two Thrush Nightingales, 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler', 'two Black-bellied Dippers', Rustic Bunting, Red-rumped Swallow, Blyth's Reed Warbler and three Rose-coloured Starlings. The early part of the spring also saw some large numbers of thrushes and other migrants caught up in easterly winds, with notable peaks of 82 Woodcocks, 22 Ring Ouzels, 1,115 Blackbirds, 234 Fieldfares, 461 Redwings, 181 Song Thrushes, 268 Robins, 63 Dunnocks and 138 Bramblings. A Dotterel on 5th April and Lesser Whitethroats on 13th April were both earliest-ever arrival dates, whilst Grasshopper Warbler (12th April) and Tree Pipit (14th April) were also comparatively early.



From top: Song Sparrow, Red Backed Shrike and Bluethroat – from @FI_Obs

Autumn started well, with two Lanceolated Warblers, Pallid Harrier, five Arctic Warblers, Greenish Warbler and three Blyth's Reed Warblers amongst the migrants in early September but then westerly winds kicked in and birding became tougher.



Arctic Warbler – from @FI_Obs

It was widely acknowledged to be one of the worst autumns on record for a lack of easterly winds in the main migration period and many species arrived in lower numbers than usual, with the year list of 203 being considerably lower than recent years. Despite that, highlights still included Siberian Rubythroat, White's Thrush, 'Coues's Arctic Redpoll' and two Olive-backed Pipits.



Siberian Rubythroat – from @FI_Obs

A total of 4,273 birds were ringed during the year, including eight Marsh Warblers (a new record) and seven Hawfinches (equalling the previous best year), although for many species the slow autumn migration meant totals were below average (Redstart, Tree Pipit, Whinchat and Wheatear all registered totals in the bottom ten years in FIBO history). There were a number of interesting movements of ringed birds during the year, including Long-eared Owl and Siskin from Finland, Chiffchaff and Lesser Whitethroat from Denmark, Black-tailed Godwit from France, Great Black-backed Gull to Russia and a Rose-coloured Starling which moved on to Iceland.

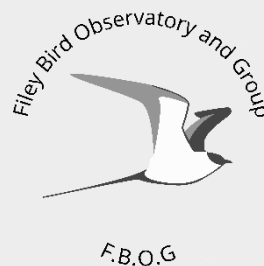
The non-avian highlights included several sightings of Killer Whales early in the season and an amazing movement of over 60 Pilot Whales past North Light on 6th September.



Orca (Killer Whale) – from @FI_Obs

One of the highlights of the year for the Isle itself was the completion of the Fair Isle power project, an undertaking costing £2.65 million, which now provides 24 hour power to the whole-island for the first time. Three new 60kW turbines on the Rippack (which have been named Lukki Minni, Grotti Finni and Tushi, after the Fair Isle Guidfiks, by the pupils of Fair Isle Primary School) replaced the two ageing turbines on Brecks and the Houll, a new solar array has been fitted and other improvements include new battery storage and a high voltage network across the island.

We'd like to thank everyone on the Isle, our staff, visitors, volunteers, directors and all the others who have helped FIBO during a very busy season in 2018 (including JNCC, SNH and SOTEAG for their financial contributions). Here's hoping for more easterlies in autumn 2019!



**Filey
Mark Pearson**

With its fantastic mix of habitats and ideal geographical position for receiving migratory birds, Filey is a very special place to enjoy and study birdlife, and 2018 was no different. Here's a

quick look back over another great twelve months in the FBOG recording area.

Early winter was characterised by cold-weather movements (birds fleeing plunging temperatures and harsher conditions on the continent or inland), with flocks of up to 26 White-fronted Geese among our feral Greylags and Canadas in January (with plenty of Pink-footed Geese also on the move). Up to 30 Snow Buntings graced Carr Naze in the same period, with Waxwings recorded on six dates, peaking with four on 8th. In the bay, Great Northern Divers were a regular treat, with up to 210 Red-throated Divers, while over the sea, odd Velvet Scoters and Northern 'Blue' Fulmars were noted.

February saw a similar cast of specialities, with a Velvet Scoter wintering in the bay and odd Snow Buntings on Carr Naze, but the big story was the Beast From The East, which brought lots of winter visitors to our area – including huge numbers of Fieldfares as well as hundreds of Redwings, Skylarks, Snipe and Lapwings. A Water Pipit at East Lea and the Dams and a Black Redstart at Hunmanby Gap were notable too.

Things quietened down a bit in March, although a Great Egret over the Dams on 9th, a Red-necked Grebe in the bay on 11th, a Long-eared Owl over Muston roundabout on 25th and a Black Redstart in the churchyard on 17th kept things ticking over until April, when spring migration really picked up. A Nuthatch on 19th was a real local rarity, while at least four Firecrests made it an excellent month for this species. Several Ring Ouzels, Red Kites, Ospreys, Mandarins, Black Redstarts, Marsh Harriers and Little Egrets were also recorded, and five Bottlenose Dolphins were off the Brigg on 5th.

May provided further highlights including a Hawfinch on 1st and a Hen Harrier on 4th, as well as another Firecrest and Long-eared Owl; several Little Terns, Hobbies and Marsh Harriers also moved through before another Osprey enlivened a quiet June. A Spoonbill at the Dams on 5th and two Long-tailed Ducks in the bay on 1st were July's bird highlights, although five White-beaked Dolphins, several Minke Whales and a White-letter Hairstreak butterfly were just as exciting contextually.

The Dams was often the place to be in August, with a brilliant variety of waders (including Wood and Curlew Sandpipers and a Spotted Redshank among many commoner species) and a Bittern on 28th, while over the sea, several Yellow-legged Gulls, Black and Roseate Terns and Balearic Shearwaters were noted. Minke Whales were regularly seen, peaking at an impressive five on 9th.



Roseate Tern – Mark Pearson

September was generally quiet for landbirds with the wonderful exception of a Nightjar, which took up residence in a small garden in the middle of town for several nights mid-month! More Black and Roseate Terns made it a great year for both species, with Whooper Swans and Pink-footed Geese on the move overhead by mid-month as well as another Osprey, several Kingfishers

(Dams and Brigg), the odd Long-tailed Skua among commoner cousins and several more Balearic Shearwaters, Velvet Scoters and a Red-necked Grebe over the sea.



Nightjar – Mark Pearson

Always the most hotly anticipated month, October started perfectly with Black Guillemot, a pair of Slavonian Grebes (plus two more later in the month) and a Hawfinch in the first few days, followed by the (belated) first of many Yellow-browed Warblers on 7th and lots of action leading up to and throughout Ringing and Migration Week, characterised by some huge arrivals of migrants from Scandinavia and beyond. Thousands of winter thrushes peaked with 3600 Redwings on 16th, Yellow-browed Warblers and Ring Ouzels were particularly numerous, and Brambling counts were unprecedented - with many hundreds of new arrivals on several days!

39 Pintail north on 19th was another day record with an Avocet on the beach on the same day and a Hen Harrier through the Gap on the next. A northerly blow meant great seawatching at the end of the month, with a Leach's Storm-petrel and 26 Pomarine Skuas past the Brigg on 26th and 32 Poms and a Glaucous Gull past the Gap on 27th, daily Little Auks, and more and more owls arriving over the sea – ten Short-eared and three Long-eared in 48 hours alone.

The best was yet to come, however, with a beautiful snowy Coues's Arctic Redpoll caught by the ringing team on 29th – with Water Pipit, Waxwing, Long-tailed Ducks, Velvet Scoters, Great Northern Divers, Red-necked Grebe, Mealy Redpolls and more relegated to back-up on the same day.

November started well with Rough-legged Buzzard, Waxwing and Firecrest in the first week and continued with a Richard's Pipit over the Gap, Black-throated Diver and Red-necked Grebe hanging around in the bay and Snow Buntings on Carr Naze, but the real highlight was our second national rarity of the year – a Pallid Swift hawking insects in the sunshine over the Brigg on 13th.



Pallid Swift – Mark Pearson

The rest of the month and December continued the quality, with long-staying Black Guillemot, Long-tailed Duck, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers in the bay, Kingfishers at the Dams and the Brigg, wonderfully tame Snow Buntings on Carr Naze and an influx of White-fronted Geese - completing the annual cycle perfectly.

Being a 'virtual' observatory with no premises and no paid staff, we've tried hard to play to our strengths over recent years, and one of those strengths is our outreach and engagement. By raising the profile of the observatory through traditional and social media, the website and other means, we've engendered a much improved connection with our local and wider communities, and delivering a host of free events and activities has further strengthened those connections.

In July we hosted a special Bioblitz as part of Chris Packham's Nature Reserves Are Not Enough campaign to highlight the catastrophic loss of biodiversity in the UK. I'm proud to say Chris's team approached us off the back of our reputation for delivering quality community engagement and outreach, and thanks to our entirely voluntary team, it was a great success. The full story, as with Migweek and various other events, is available to read over on the Obs website – www.fbog.co.uk.



Mark Pearson and Chris Packham

Talking of which, this year's Filey and Flamborough Ringing and Migration Week (**#Migweek**) was unarguably our best yet. After including our neighbours down the road in proceedings for the first time last year, partnering up with Flamborough has now become second nature, and 2018's Migweek ran superbly and smoothly.



Ringing during MigWeek – Mark Pearson

Thanks to the weather, the first couple of days were a bit of a write-off regarding outdoor activities, but our busy talks programme meant we could focus our energies indoors, with talks from various excellent speakers. The weather soon changed from sworn enemy to generous friend, however, and suddenly it was raining birds! An opening in the conditions over the North Sea saw many, many thousands of migrants arriving in swirling squadrons, with Filey and Flamborough showing just how important they are as focal points for this age-old, always enthralling wildlife extravaganza.

Our ringing teams did an amazing job of showing hundreds of visitors birds in the hand, and explaining why bird ringing is such a vital tool for gathering unique data and informing conservation decisions. Over the course of the week, as well as such beautiful migrants as Redwings, Fieldfares, Siskins, Redpolls and Bramblings, you might have been lucky enough to see tiny Yellow-browed Warblers from Siberia or even a Long-eared Owl, straight in from Scandinavia, just a few inches away....

Our guided walks proved to be a huge hit, and anyone who was lucky enough to experience the mass arrival of incoming Redwings, Song Thrushes, Fieldfares, Skylarks, finches and more during the week is unlikely to forget it in a hurry! Our timing was perfect, and our expert volunteers really pulled out the stops, showing participants such quality birds as Short-eared Owls, Pomarine Skua, Hen Harrier, Barred Warblers, Slavonian Grebes, Yellow-browed Warblers, Great Northern Divers, Velvet Scoter and many, many more.

Our keynote speaker for the Martin Garner Inspirational Talk was the absurdly talented and understandably revered bird artist Darren Woodhead. Darren gave his time and skills completely for free, and treated a packed house to a fantastic talk, followed by an amazing demonstration of how he creates his art, which had to be seen to be believed!

Thanks for everyone's support, before, during and after – once again, it really was a pleasure to organise. As always, Migweek – like everything we do – was free and open to everyone, and this wouldn't be possible without an amazing collective voluntary effort. Here's to an equally inspiring 2019!



Flamborough Craig Thomas & Jim Morgan

One highlight stands out above all others - five years in the planning, 2018 witnessed the successful fund-raising and building of our Seawatch Observatory. Jutting eight miles into the North Sea, Flamborough offers an unparalleled location from which to study seabird passage. Vantage points used over recent decades are getting ever more precarious, so it was vital that we identified a suitable location. The building will allow safe seawatching to take place in all weathers, helping us build upon 40 years of seabird datasets.

In excess of £50,000 finance was secured towards planning & construction costs, including £26,000 from Landfill Tax and the balance from members and the generosity of the wider birding public. Construction was completed in November and an official opening is scheduled for spring 2019.



Construction of the seawatching hide – Craig Thomas

Another stand-out from the last 12 months was the Ringing and Migration Week (migweek) organised jointly with neighbouring Filey Bird Observatory. A series of captivating talks book-ended ringing demonstrations and guided walks and were enjoyed by hundreds of birders visiting from far and wide. The week ended with an awe-inspiring painting demonstration by Darren Woodhead. Special thanks are due to our ringing team for helping engage with a great many visitors and share the wonders of bird migration with non-birders. A growing team of ringers was rewarded with a record number of birds rung – 2857 smashing the previous maximum tally of 2715 birds rung way back in 2002. All this despite both migration seasons lacking conducive winds capable of inducing a fall.

So what of the year's birding highlights. 2018 opened with a Richard's Pipit and 44 Lapland Buntings in residence, whilst Glaucous Gull sightings showed a return to form after several lean years. An easterly airflow dominated early spring and was undoubtedly responsible for a

record arrival of Firecrests and stalling the return of Hawfinch back across the North Sea; up to three seen daily were unprecedented for spring. An Olive-backed Pipit that visited a village garden on 28th April was also presumably destined to head off in a similar direction. Two Red-rumped Swallows together in late April appeared on one of the few warm days of spring. An Eastern Subalpine Warbler represented May's star bird, whilst scarce migrants included Temminck's Stint, Red-backed Shrike, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Marsh Warbler and Grey-headed Wagtail.



Temminck's Stint – Craig Thomas

The month ended with a very showy Rose-coloured Starling delighting visitors to North Landing. Another Rose-coloured Starling graced mid-summer, whilst a Humpback Whale appearing with the more usual arrival of Minke Whales represented a Flamborough first.



Rose-coloured Starling – Craig Thomas

Scarce migrants were indeed just that during an August lacking an easterly airflow, with Red-backed Shrike and Ortolan Bunting the best. However, a window of opportunity opened in early September and single Arctic & Greenish Warbler made landfall. Two Olive-backed Pipits were located during an October that also featured a showy Coues's Arctic Redpoll and a Little Bunting. Arguably the year's most impressive sighting related to an immature White-tailed Eagle heading in off the sea in early November; another Little Bunting was present at the same time. The year's final rarity rewarded a work party at the new Seawatch Observatory; a Pallid Swift

enthraling birders by showing down to a few metres as it cruised back and forth along the cliff top.



White-tailed Eagle – Craig Thomas

Flamborough Bird Observatory 2018 Ringing Summary

In a year dominated by westerlies substantial falls of migrants were very thin on the ground resulting in small catches being the norm rather than the exception. Fortunately, with our ever-growing band of ringers and trainees we managed to make good this shortfall by greater activity. In the twelve month period there were 121 different ringing sessions during 100 days of ringing activity at our main headland ringing sites; South Landing, Holmes Gut, Ocean View, Thornwick Bay, Hartindale, Old Fall and Booted Gulley. We also benefitted from regular trapping and ringing in a member's garden in the village where they amassed over 30% of the total birds ringed.

So a record breaking year! 2857 birds of 60 species which has comfortably passed the existing Flamborough record of 2715 birds of 69 species set in 2002 (Archer, Grantham et.al. 2010). It is also pleasing to note that this is the 5th year in succession to see an increase in ringing totals.

The top 5 species ringed during 2018 were: Starling 675, Blackbird 296, Tree Sparrow 225, Meadow Pipit 128 and Blue Tit 117. This top 5 is a reflection of the increase in garden ringing on the Headland, however the ringing of migrant warblers has also seen continued increase. 290 migrant warblers ringed constitutes the highest ever year total at Flamborough, with 5 species also having their maximum annual totals; Sedge Warbler (28), Reed Warbler (13), Lesser Whitethroat (20), Blackcap (66) and Chiffchaff (64).

Although generally lacking the large movements of Meadow Pipits that some other Bird Observatories experience in September, we managed for the second year running to ring well over 100 by the use of tape lure, hopefully we can maintain this trend by focussing our efforts mainly at South Landing. Tape luring of this species has often been attempted in past years at Holmes Gut, but with very little success.

Our dawn tape luring of Redwing again proved to be successful, especially at South landing and our final total of 86 birds compared very favourably to last year's 90.

Hopefully with one or two good fall conditions we should be able to increase this figure.

The months August – November inclusive saw the bulk (67%) of the year's birds caught and ringed. As is the custom October had the highest total (739) even though it was devoid of weather conducive to good falls of migrants. August – November also saw the most ringing activity with sessions completed on 14, 15, 18 and 13 days respectively. Similar to last year the two best days' ringing totals were not at all record breaking, with 102 on the 16th October and 89 on the 20th October. The Ringing and Migration Week (October 13th – 21st) held in conjunction with our friends at Filey Bird Observatory returned 435 birds ringed of 30 species, including the two highest total days already mentioned. This is our most intensively run week of the year, which creates a good deal of anticipation amongst the ringers, however yet again the weather was against us. Given the poor conditions our final total was commendable and many thanks go to the hard-working participants.

Ringing highlights of 2018 would include the Little Bunting (only the 4th to be ringed at Flamborough), a Black Redstart and 14 Yellow-browed Warbler, just failing to achieve last year's dizzy heights of 15! The number of Goldfinch (73) ringed was the highest year total since the Observatory was founded. The Greenfinch total of 35 birds ringed is our highest for well over ten years, but compares unfavourably with the total of 406 ringed in 2002, the inaugural year of the Bird observatory.

To date there is a paucity of recoveries from the year 2018. One of note is :

Chiffchaff

HCV692 3J 08/08/2015 Loch Spynie: 57°40'N 3°16'W (Moray)

R 24/03/2018 Flamborough Head: 54°7'N 0°6'W 441km SSE
2 yrs 228days

Our aim in 2019 is to maintain our year on year increase in number of birds ringed. We will continue to focus on migrant warblers and to also maximise our catches of Meadow Pipit, Redpoll and Redwing. If we enjoy a decent Goldcrest arrival next autumn, hopefully we shall beat the record yet again!



Barred Warbler at Buckton – Mark Thomas



The early winter period was productive for flocks of Golden Plover and Lapwing on the grazing marsh where water levels were high. Wintering Pink-footed Geese are again a feature of the area with a roost of up to 800 birds, attracting up to 16 White-fronted Geese and a Barnacle Goose. Occasional Waxwings and a wintering Bittern were seen.

The wader roost also held good numbers of birds; particularly Knot, Oystercatcher and Bar-tailed Godwit but winter passerines were again in low numbers with few Snow Buntings and only one Shorelark.

A large wash out of marine life, involved thousands of starfish and razor shells, attracted up to 10000 Herring Gulls, with Glaucous, Iceland and several Caspian Gulls during the period. The big freeze in late February labelled the "Beast from the East" saw the Reserve cut off by extensive snowdrifts and a record influx of Woodcock (119). Mid-March then followed with the "mini-beast from the East" bringing two days of gale force easterlies. Subsequently two Ravens patrolled the Reserve and the first Firecrest, Woodlarks and Black Redstarts of the spring arrived with an early Serin.

Gib-based birders were able to locate the Snowy Owl that had toured the Norfolk coast when it crossed the Wash to Wainfleet Marshes – not quite visible from Gib!

Early April will be remembered for a record passage of over 2000 Chaffinches, several Hawfinches, an influx of Little Gulls on the lagoons, Ring Ouzels in the dunes, and a pulse of southern scarcities; Hoopoe, Alpine Swift and Red-rumped Swallows, whilst a party of six Cranes passed over. The month end witnessed an arrival of Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts with a Wood Warbler on 30th.

May then brought meteorological extremes: heat wave, storm, cold northerlies and fog. The end of the month however saw classic weather conditions for an arrival of drift migrants. Those who predicted the fall and booked time off were rewarded with Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Hawfinches, two Common Rosefinches, Marsh Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Bee-eater, and another each of Hoopoe, Red-rumped Swallow, Wood Warbler and Serin. Rarest bird of the month was a Glossy Ibis.



Red-rumped Swallow – Ian Bollen



Common Rosefinch – Roy Harvey

Coverage of the recording area was much improved this year from April to October compared to recent years.

A stocktake of migrant arrivals however, recorded depressing statistics for Turtle Doves – now feared lost as a breeding species and Willow Warblers down to a handful of pairs. Most other Warblers were on territory in pretty good numbers; indeed the intensity of Sedge Warbler chorus down the Mill Pond Road was quite awesome – coupled with two Grasshopper Warblers reeling. On the adjacent Freshwater Marsh possible breeding by Garganey and Water Rail occurred and on the Tennyson's Sands Lagoon the first confirmed breeding of Shoveler.

Following winter island management, there was good productivity from other waterbirds here too including Avocets, an increase to our small Common Tern colony and a successful pair of Little Ringed Plover. The new Stewardship Scheme on adjacent farmland is a significant contribution to the Reserve hinterland, with breeding Little Ringed Plover, Avocet, Redshank and Lapwing.

Out on the shore suitable habitat was reduced for Ringed Plovers and Little Terns but some 20 pairs of Little Terns were settled on eggs by mid-June. Unfortunately Storm Herbert created havoc with 18 inches of tide smothering the colony area. Twelve clutches were saved by the Shorebird Wardening team and went on to fledge five juveniles. This is the final year of the Little Tern LIFE project that has provided essential funding for wardening staff and equipment.

June was very dry and the dune landscape appeared to be in drought although the settled conditions probably assisted many dune scrub nesting birds. CES sessions included good numbers of birds and a healthy crop of juvenile Whitethroats.

The run of scarce migrants continued through June with Common Rosefinch, Golden Oriole, Serin, Montague's Harrier, Caspian and Glaucous Gulls, a Nuthatch ! and a

novelty Pied Crow that went on to tour the country ! Early July brought another four brief Bee-eaters heading south.



Bee-eater – Ben Ward

The full range of the Reserve's butterfly species were recorded including Green and White Letter Hairstreaks, Brown Argus and Wall Brown. Twenty species of Dragonfly and Damselfly were noted on site this year including Red-veined Darter, Small Red-eyed Damselfly and four Willow Emerald Damselflies.

Moth trapping input was generally low but a Concolorous was an interesting new site record and there followed a record number of Humming Bird Hawk Moths, including up to five together at one favoured location.

The heat wave continued through July and August, prompting early hay cutting in the first week of July. There followed a record temperature of 33.1°C on 15th July, then a thunderstorm on 27th July brought 51mm of rainfall.

The early autumn arrival of northern waders in summer plumage is an amazing spectacle. Black-tailed Godwits continued their patronage of the lagoons in increasing numbers; 700+ through August, whilst out on the shore returning Knot had amassed 60,000 by mid-month. However it was the small wader numbers that were exceptional during that period, with 16000 Dunlin and 10100 Sanderling – the latter number, maybe a UK record count. Thirty visitors, who attended our High Tide Wader Watch Event on 12th August, were treated to spectacular viewing. Up to 32 Curlew Sandpiper were around and a brief Red-necked Phalarope dropped in. The annual Spoonbill arrival did not disappoint either with up to 27 individuals on the lagoons. Late month seabird interest included a Roseate Tern and a fine adult

Sabines Gull. Other highlights this month were a fly-over White Stork and a Nightjar.



Spoonbills – Jim Shaw

September commenced with a Spotted Crake outside the Mere hide at very close range over a period of 60 days. This bird drew our biggest twitch for some time with hundreds of birders travelling some distance. More obliging than the White-rumped Sandpiper on 27th !



Spotted Crake – Nige Lound

Despite an early arrival of Pied Flycatchers in the first few days of August, and the years third Wood Warbler, there were no significant falls of Warblers, Robins, Flycatchers, etc. in September this year, no Wryneck for the second consecutive year and no Yellow-browed Warblers.



Wood Warbler – Stuart Ainsworth

However eastern scarcities came in the form of Icterine Warbler and Red-breasted Flycatcher. Then, one of the highlights of the year - a juvenile Red-footed Falcon –

almost repeating the pattern of the previous juvenile here in 2015.



Red-footed Falcon – Glyn Sellors

Great White Egrets are to be expected on occasion during the year but the Reserve's second Cattle Egret arrived on 22nd Sept and the next day saw three species of egret on site when a Great White flew south. Unfortunately much of the old hedge that hosted the Egret roost at Jackson's Marsh was removed by the Environment Agency due to badgers in the sea bank. Unavoidable disturbance caused during the bank repairs over several weeks meant few birds on this lagoon complex.

A day list migration event for visitors on 22nd Sept with a target of 100 species ended up with an amazing total of 117 for the day, including the aforementioned Cattle Egret, but even this was surpassed on 7th October when a small team of birders amassed 121 species including 18 Yellow-browed Warblers, two Barred Warblers, a Richard's Pipit, the Spotted Crake, Hawfinch and Snow and Lapland Buntings.

October continued with no significant falls of Goldcrests or Thrushes although good numbers of birds were witnessed coming in off the sea later in the month; particularly Thrushes, thousands of Starlings, a couple of Waxwings and a good number of Snipe, Woodcock and Short-eared Owls.



Arctic Warbler - Owen Beaumont

An Arctic Warbler on 11th was only the third Reserve record and there were several sightings of Ring Ouzel, Firecrest, Woodlark, Cetti's warbler and Lapland Buntings. A Rough-legged Buzzard passed through quickly but three Hooded Cows settled in for the winter.



Hooded Crow – Ben Ward

However the main highlight of the month was the number of seabirds offshore during the northerly winds. The movement of adult Pomarine Skuas (mostly with full tails and including a single dark morph) was spectacular (188 on 27th) and the supporting cast included many Bonxies, a Grey Phalarope, Leach's Petrels, Little Auks, both Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, Red-necked Grebe, Velvet Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, all three Diver species, with incoming wildfowl such as Whooper Swan and Wigeon adding to the movement.

Visible migration saw good numbers of Pipits, Hirundines and Finches moving this month and passage continued into November when seven corvid species were recorded in a single day; Jay, Hooded Crow and Raven complimenting the regulars. A late influx of Robins was noted and a small influx of unusually large billed Crossbills occurred, one of which was pinned down and identified as a female Parrot Crossbill. A Great Grey Shrike arrived off the sea and a Pallid Swift gave exceptional views around the office on 7th Nov - a Reserve first.



Parrot Crossbill – Ben Ward

A quiet end to the year saw more research into the historic files to digitise the 70 years of Observatory bird records and on that note, a large scale event was hosted at the Visitor Centre to celebrate 70 years since the establishment of the Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory, the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and the Gibraltar Point National Nature Reserve.

Finally, I would like to recognise and thank all staff, volunteers, members, supporters and local birders and ringers for all of their support and contributions again in 2018.



Hilbre Steve Williams

2018 was a record year at the Obs for coverage of Hilbre Islands LNR by our members with over 300 visits logged. Despite the lack of 'migration-friendly' weather in spring and autumn it still proved to be a year to remember.

A cold snap at the end of February and then again during the beginning of March produced some snow and the islands froze.



Frozen Hilbre - Andrea Sawiak

Never an easy time for birds but it usually produces some interesting sights and sightings. For example, a flock of 11 Shoveler were counted on 1st March. Shoveler are a scarce visitor to the islands and this is the second equal highest day count at the Obs following 15 birds seen on 20 August 1978 and 11 seen on 26 August 1961. Stonechats arrived at the beginning of March despite the snow, they usually herald the start of spring here. Seaduck were much in evidence at this time with good numbers of Common Scoters (up to 8,000 counted) and sightings of Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander and the occasional Scaup with up to seven of these formally regular Dee estuary wintering sea-duck present on nearby West Kirby Marine Lake. A brief lull in the cold spell meant that essential repairs to the heligoland traps could be undertaken before the main migration season began.



Trap repairs - Steve Williams

A Common Buzzard on the 9th March was a scarce but increasing sighting for the islands as they now breed nearby on the mainland at West Kirby. A Scandinavian Rock Pipit (*littoralis*) was seen on 13th March further evidence, following the Norwegian colour-ringed bird caught in October 2016, that these birds at least pass through Hilbre in spring and autumn. The year began with less than double figures of Purple Sandpipers (only 9) but better news was the record number of 320 Pale-bellied Brent Geese (21st January) that included up to four colour-ringed birds including the Canadian-ringed bird, but also birds ringed in Iceland on passage and wintering or passing through Ireland. A single Eider had taken up winter residence and up to six were seen during January. This species was a feature almost throughout the year around the islands. A few wintering Song Thrushes and Blackbirds were ringed and Rock Pipits remained wintering around the two larger islands.

Flocks of Pink-footed Geese were a feature of this winter with large numbers now wintering on the Dee estuary once again. Nine Whooper Swans on 7th January were the first of several sightings during the first and second winter periods. Harbour Porpoise records appear to be becoming more regular but with that are the odd stranding with a dead animal in almost perfect condition found on 22nd January. A colour-ringed Turnstone ringed at Hilbre in 2008/09 was still present in the early winter period, a bird that has been seen in Iceland in a previous spring. Feeding wader numbers had increased around the border of the LNR with good numbers of Knot, Dunlin and Grey Plover particularly noteworthy. Numerous sightings of colour-flagged Knot were made around the islands many of which had been ringed by some of our own members in collaboration with SCAN and SW Lancs RG at Altcar, near Formby.

Spring arrived early this year with a small passage of tits towards the end of February with both Great Tit and Long-tailed Tit caught and ringed on 22nd; neither species is annual at Hilbre. Both Tree and House Sparrows were noted during the last week of February, the former now a real scarcity on the islands. The first Chiffchaff and Goldcrest of the spring arrived on the islands on 14th March. Five Eider were present in the morning of the 21st March increasing to six birds later and these were temporarily joined in the ebbing gutter by a pair of Gadwall - a scarce, but possibly increasing, species at Hilbre. This is the sixteenth record since the foundation of the Bird Observatory in 1957 but the fourth record since 2015. Also on 21st 9 Little Gulls were noted but it was not a particularly good spring for this species on the islands. 14 Whooper Swans were heard trumpeting their departure from the estuary on 26th March and with the departure of winter the arrival of spring was heralded properly with the first Wheatear of the spring, surprisingly a female, seen on 27th; a rather late date for recent years at Hilbre.

On 2nd April a colour-flagged Bar-tailed Godwit roosted on the North End of Middle - amazingly it was ringed at Altcar only two days earlier by the same team as were colour-flagging Knot (see above). Many of the Knot were recorded on the Dee estuary including several sightings

at Hilbre. Migrants trickled through for the first couple of weeks of April with the first Wheatears of the year being ringed; but it was generally a very poor year for this species on the islands.



Wheatear - Matt Thomas

Another Common Buzzard was over the main island on 11th April and the first Ring Ouzel of the year was noted on 12th. A Tawny Owl was heard calling early morning of 14th, the first record since one on 23rd February 2011. A Puffin was seen and photographed on 15th April and the first Sedge and Redstart of the year arrived the following morning with the first Grasshopper Warblers arriving on 18th. Another (or the same?) Puffin was seen on 21st – a much sought-after Cheshire and Wirral scarcity. A Northern-type Willow Warbler was caught on 20th along with a fine male Whinchat. The latter is not a species we catch every year. A summer plumaged Red-necked Grebe was seen off Middle Eye on 26th and was the first record for the Obs since a winter plumaged bird off the 'whale-back' on 9 November 2010. An Osprey was watched flying past the main island on 4th May an increasingly regular sight over the islands in the last few years although there were only two records this year with the second arriving in autumn (see below). A Firecrest on 18th May was the latest spring record and the sole record this year of a species that has also become annual at the Obs in recent times.

Three Spotted Flycatchers on 26th May usually heralds the end of spring on the islands but a Garden Warbler was found amongst a small fall of Sedge Warblers and Whitethroats the following day (27th) and a Reed Warbler on 31st (only the eleventh record for the Obs). An interesting-looking late Chiffchaff caught on 28th proved by DNA analysis to be a standard collybita so we are no nearer to understanding where these late spring Chiffchaffs are coming from/going to ... time will tell.

June is a good time on the islands, although considered quiet for birds, the breeding birds are much in evidence and the islands are carpeted in stunning flowers and insects take centre-stage and this year was no different with two Black-tailed Skimmers found on 1st June (only the second record for the Obs). With several other dragonflies seen during the summer months including Emperors in July.



Black-tailed Skimmer - Andrea Sawiak

Shelducks were back displaying on the islands but the permanent presence of a fox has had an impact on our ground nesting birds. Other breeding birds however had a good year with several Linnet nests found, the Pied Wagtails second brooding and several pairs of Swallows unusually successful this year. The most surprising breeding birds were however a pair of Swallows that were found nesting on the cliff face below the Obs garden. This is the first time 'natural' location Swallow nesting has been observed on Hilbre since the foundation of the Obs in 1957.

Our annual BBQ and AGM occurred in July and was well attended by members, family and friends; attendees included three of our founder members from 1957 and they shared their memories and stories with the rest of the members present – young and old.



AGM on Hilbre – HBO

The second Reed Warbler of the year was found and subsequently caught and ringed on 23rd July and was our first July record of this increasing species at Hilbre. The annual late summer tern build up was impressive with good numbers of Common and Sandwich Terns in particular. The similar build-up of Black-headed Gulls brought with them the expected series of Mediterranean Gull sightings but also this year without doubt the bird of 2018 – the Bonaparte's Gull which had previously been seen at Hoylake and was found at Hilbre from the Obs balcony on 17th August; the first record for the

Observatory it conveniently stayed until 29th allowing many Obs members and visitors to see this super rarity.



Bonaparte's Gull – Steve Williams

The first reasonable fall of warblers (of a very poor autumn in terms of numbers) was on 21st with 9 Willows, Whitethroat and a Garden Warbler. A Garden Warbler trapped and ringed on 23rd that meant captures of this species in both spring and autumn; not a yearly occurrence.

The Obs monitors all aspects of natural history on and around the islands and a Curled Octopus was rescued from the high tide line at low tide on 31st August was not that unusual other than it provided members with the opportunity to see this amazing creature live close up and do some research into how long they can survive out of water. It swam off fine upon release changing colour in the process.

The second Osprey of the year flew over the recording area on 5th September.

Another colour flagged and ringed Ringed Plover was found on 6th September that had been ringed on 2nd August 2010 at Makkevika (62°30'N-06°01'E) (Giske Ornithological Station), Giske, Møre & Romsdal, Norway. It was caught in a mist net at their wader station.

This bird was only the second to be colour-flagged on their ringing scheme back in 2010 and they have now colour-flagged 2,130 birds so this is the oldest to be sighted for that scheme.

Giske is an island off the North West coast of Norway and remarkably is where the colour-ringed Rock Pipit that we caught on Hilbre in October 2016 was ringed.

A superb looking leucistic Dunlin was seen and photographed on 7th, a date which also saw the first Leach's Petrel in a poor autumn for seawatching with the only other records being 15 on 21st and 7 on 22nd September. A series of Great Skua sightings were made and Arctic Skuas were recorded in good numbers on occasion but there were no sightings of the rarer skuas this year.

An acrocephalus species caused some consternation amongst Obs members having only been seen briefly and

proved extremely elusive with only brief glimpses in poor weather for a few days mid-month; it may remain specifically unidentified despite some poor 'record shots'.

A Mistle Thrush on 17th September was the first of the British thrushes to be seen on the island during the autumn and is probably the rarest of the six British breeding thrushes at Hilbre. The same day a wing-tagged Marsh Harrier flew past the island and up the estuary and had almost certainly had been tagged in Norfolk. On 22nd the first five Pale-bellied Brent Geese arrived back and included a returning Icelandic-ringed bird. A Great White Egret on 27th September was now a typical date for this rare but another increasing species with less than half a dozen records at Hilbre despite being ever present further up the Dee estuary all year round. Another Marsh Harrier passed through on the same day.

October was a great month on the island, as is often the case, but this year with some unexpected birds rather than classically rare ones as might be hoped for. The first of these was solitary Barnacle Goose which flew in on 4th and landed on the sand to rest opposite the Obs amongst waders and nearby Brent Geese; only the eleventh record for the Obs and the opinions about its provenance were typically divided.



A Sparrowhawk was caught and ringed on 5th and was the first of the year in the hand. The first of a remarkable series of Great Spotted Woodpecker records occurred on 7th when one was found clinging to the outside of the catching box of the Heli trap. It moved to the Newton trap and was subsequently caught and ringed; only the second to be so at Hilbre. This was followed by the remarkable arrival of two Great Spotted Woodpeckers that ended up together in the gardens briefly before flying off on 10th; a day which also saw the second Sparrowhawk of the year caught and the first Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn found in the Old Obs garden mid-afternoon (showing the advantage of full day coverage these days). The second Yellow-browed Warbler of the year arrived on 15th (these are the 17th and 18th records for the island all of which have been caught and ringed).

The returning Pale-bellied Brent Goose flock continued to increase and included the returning Canadian-ringed

bird and our old friend a colour-ringed Turnstone was also noted as was a colour-ringed Lesser Black-backed Gull which had been ringed which was ringed at Southport in Lancashire in May 2017. The month ended well with the fourth Great Spotted Woodpecker of the month and the year and a Short-eared Owl noted on 29th and the only Black Redstart of the year found by Middle Eye on 31st.

November started well with a good fall of thrushes on 5th when finch numbers passing over included Brambling in what was a good autumn for the island for this scarce species here (for recent years). Unsurprisingly a Redwing was caught and ringed the following day. A Woodcock was noted on 7th followed by family flock of Whooper Swans that flew across the mouth of the estuary over the North End on 8th; we had no Bewick's Swans this year. Another Short-eared Owl was noted on 9th.



Short-eared Owl – Andrea Sawiak

The only record of a Snow Bunting was of found early morning on 11th between the Telegraph Station and the Light and it remained here for three days to delight observers and photographers alike.



Snow Bunting – Chris Williams

A small movement of Lapwings was noted on 15th and then a late Goldcrest was caught on 22nd (when a Sparrowhawk was also noted). On 23rd a male Blackcap was the latest ringed at the Obs since 1974 and another was also present but was not caught. Meanwhile, an adult Great Northern Diver and a Little Grebe were present on nearby WKML; the latter possibly the first record for that site. The year ended full circle with one or two Eider present sadly including one with damaged wing. Regular sightings of Peregrine were noted throughout the early winter period.



Hilbre Sunset - Andrea Sawiak

Sadly the decrease in Purple Sandpipers continues with a dismal peak count of only 7 in December. However, the Brent Geese fared better with a good maximum count of 242 birds on 30th November. Pink-footed Geese and Cormorants were recorded leaving the estuary early mornings during the autumn and early winter.

Contact: Chris Williams (Chairman and Group Leader)
chairman@hilbrebirdobs.org.uk



**Holme
 Sophie Barker**

All the Observatories will have experienced harsh conditions as a result of the 'Beast from the East' that struck in February and March and the 'minibeast' which followed. At Holme the notable fall-out included visible mortality especially among waders and winter thrushes, with Fieldfares, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Redshank and Knot found dead in the area and a number of auk casualties also reported. A Snowy Owl in the area over several days spent the 10th March sitting on the beach between Thornham and Titchwell, distantly visible from the sea wall to the east of the Obs, and the following day delighted observers and photographers by showing well at Snettisham RSPB.



Snowy Owl – Baz Scampion

However this was all the good the event could afford. The strong easterlies produced terrible erosion on Holme Beach, swept away the sea defence in front of the Firs NWT Centre and lowered the beach by a matter of metres.



Glaucous Gull - Steve Newman

Cold temperatures severely delayed nesting for our breeding waders. A late spring migration featured an unprecedented movement of Greenland Wheatears, with 23 birds ringed during May, all of them in a small area of the east bank. (The previous best year total for ringed Wheatears at HBO was 11 in 1968).

During June (while the warden was away in Wales) 2 good spring rarities were caught; a Red-breasted Flycatcher on the 7th June and a Marsh Warbler on the 9th.



Red-breasted Flycatcher - Roger Skeen

There were few nesting attempts by waders and widespread failures for those birds that tried to breed. Avocets hatched young well into July along the edge of the Broadwater, as the rest of the grazing marsh had long since evaporated and left little choice for those still trying to breed, but the Avocets did eventually succeed in fledging several chicks. The Swallows which have nested

in the Obs hides for more than 10 years failed to return at all.

As the drought deepened the grazing marshes turned yellow/brown, with reports of very poor numbers of Swallows and Barn Owls breeding on farmland inland. Fires broke out in some fields until the weather finally broke at the end of July, but wetlands continued to remain very dry until the end of the year.

In August the Observatory was dedicated to the memory of founder warden Peter Clarke who passed away in February 2017, and a plaque at the Observatory building was unveiled by Margaret Clarke, Peter's wife, who herself passed away later in the year. They will both be sadly missed.

Insects fortunes varied but while dragonflies and butterflies didn't do too well, it was the best year for moth abundance at the Obs since the moth census began in 2002. Moth of the year was a Beautiful Marbled caught by NWT warden Gary Hibberd on the 13th October.

Autumn bird migration was limited but less dominated by westerlies than that of 2017. A significant movement of Pom Skuas took place in the last few days of October with 189 recorded in a single day on October 26th. Other highlights included a juvenile Common Rosefinch trapped and ringed on October 16th (only one previous obs ringing record in 1997). Other unusual features were a Swedish-ringed Kestrel, and a Swedish-ringed Rock Pipit caught on the same day as 2 Water Pipits. Otherwise overall migrant numbers were pretty unremarkable until November when Blackbirds and Redwings arrived in good numbers late in the month and continued to arrive to the end of the year.



Shore Larks – Les Bunyan

January

The Isle of May year began on 8th with a Lapwing and seven Short-eared Owls (four of which were still present at the month's end). A Red-necked Grebe on 10th increased to two the following day continuing the recent run of winter records. Merlin, Kestrel, Peregrine and Sparrowhawk were all noted this month.

February

Little coverage until 20th when six Short-eared Owls were counted along with the first Skylark, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit and Lesser Black-backed Gulls of the year. The 21st brought a Mistle Thrush and Siskin with a Snow Bunting and Golden Plover on 22nd. A Black Guillemot off Colms Hole on 26th started a run of records.

March

Three Black Guillemot off Altarstones on 1st increased to 6 on 3rd, the second highest island day count, with up to three remaining until the month's end. The 12th brings a pair of Mallard also off Altarstones, four Mistle Thrush and a Red-necked Grebe but eight Stonechat are most notable being the second highest island total though some way off the 19 in March 2017. 24 Whooper Swan over on the 26th (and another 10 on 28th) was notable but a male Shoveler on 31st was the first live record since 2010. An early Osprey drifted north on 26th while a Water Rail was seen on 28th and the month ended with a Hawfinch at Cross Park and three Black Redstarts.



Black Redstart – David Steel

April

Two Whooper Swans are no fools as they head north while a run of Long-tailed Duck records follow with 9 on 2nd, 3 on 7th and 4 on 8th. The second Water Rail of the year lurks on 11th while a Black Guillemot is seen on several dates until 15th. The most notable record of the month is a Raven on 14th, the first since 2010 and only the 10th record. A female Lapland Bunting is present on 15th at the

Beacon. Sandwich Tern, Tree Pipit, Yellow Wagtail and House Martin all join the year list on 20th with a Collared Dove on Rona joining the ranks on 21st when 46 Common Scoter are noted past the isle. A pair of Mallard wandering around the isle on 22nd & 23rd gave hopes of a rare breeding attempt but nothing came of it. The 24th brought a female type Marsh Harrier along the west cliffs, the third record in three years but still less than twenty records and also the only Buzzard of the spring. A first summer Iceland Gull and two Canada Geese were also year ticks. The highlight of 25th was a Great Skua devouring a Herring Gull off the Maidens while the 26th brought a small arrival of Willow Warblers. The evening of 27th was notable for a Bar-headed Goose which flew up and down the isle before disappearing to the south, the first isle record of this escapee/feral species. The first Arctic Terns on 28th brought the sound of summer on the May.

May

A quiet start to the month was surprisingly changed with south westerlies on 4th which brought 35 Willow Warblers and the first Garden Warbler of the year which burst into song the next day. This was followed by the island's 22nd and earliest ever Thrush Nightingale caught in the Low Trap and lingering in the area for the rest of the day. An Osprey flew north on 5th when the year's first Spotted Flycatcher was seen. The 7th brought further new year list additions with Stock Dove most notable alongside Tuffed Duck, Tree Sparrow and Arctic Skua, while a Cuckoo was seen on 8th. Throughout this period a female, leg flagged Pintail-Mallard hybrid was seen. The first Swift on 9th preceded a period of south easterlies which yielded less than hoped. The spring's third Osprey flew north on 10th with a Common Sandpiper on 12th and another Cuckoo on 13th. A quiet few days before a late Brambling on 21st and the year's only Red-breasted Flycatcher, a female type, in the Low Light bushes on 23rd which remained until 25th when a Pied Flycatcher joined the ranks. The 26th brought a rush of good birds crowned by the isle's 6th Short-toed Lark (the first record for 20 years) which favoured the area to the south of the Beacon into June.



Short-toed Lark – David Steel

Also on 26th were a Marsh Warbler (only the 27th record and first since 2012) and an Icterine Warbler amongst other common migrants. Further arrivals on 27th with the

isle's 16th Greenish Warbler found at Tarbet and assumed to be the same later at Palpitation Brae.



Greenish Warbler – David Steel

A female Red-backed Shrike at the Beacon turned out to be the only record while a second Icterine Warbler appeared in the Top Garden. A late movement of 125 Barnacle Geese on 29th ahead of a cracking end to the month on 31st with a brief thrush Nightingale and the isles 3rd Rose-coloured Starling (previous records in 1983 & 1991).



Rose-coloured Starling – Mark Newell

June

The Rose-coloured Starling remained until 4th, the Short-toed Lark until 2nd, while a new Icterine Warbler appeared on 2nd. A total of 131 Canada Geese on 3rd was an island record with another 20 on 4th. The 5th brought the first two Crossbill of the year while seawatching on 6th yielded 18 Barnacle geese and 4 Velvet Scoter. Two Roseate Terns on 10th were the year's first while a Grey Wagtail was unseasonal. Storm Hector on 14th washed off nesting guillemots but brought a Whinchat and three Spotted Flycatchers with two juvenile Stonechats a surprise on 15th. The first juvenile Starlings arrived on 19th while a cuckoo appeared the following day. A Mistle Thrush on 26th was unseasonal.

July

A Black-tailed Godwit in summer plumage on 1st was the only record of the year when the isle was carpeted in Silver Y moths. Two Storm Petrels caught on 3rd were the first of the year. Wader passage continued with the first returning Purple Sandpipers (13) on 6th. A juvenile Cuckoo was caught on 9th while a Sooty Shearwater was noted

on 10th when 137 Manx Shearwaters and 162 Common Scoters were also seen. A Black Redstart on 12th with another Cuckoo the following day and 3-4 Bottle-nosed Dolphins circumnavigated the isle on 14th. A male Black Redstart arrived on 18th when 13 Velvet Scoter passed the isle. An impending weather front on the evening of 23rd forced 61 Swifts south in 5 minutes, the third highest day count. A juvenile Black Redstart on 27th was joined by a second the following day when a Green Sandpiper was noted. A Short-eared Owl and two Pied Flycatchers on 29th.

August

A full island wader count revealed two Knot amongst the more expected species. A new Cuckoo on 3rd along with a Pied Flycatcher and 16 Willow Warblers. A Long-eared Owl was a surprise on 11th along with a new Black Redstart. An Osprey flew south on 15th. Seawatching on 18th was productive with a Black Tern and a Sooty Shearwater. Over 50 Willow Warblers on 19th heralded a significant arrival of birds with 389 ringed in the following three days including 189 on 21st when an estimated 400 were present. Other migrant passerines were seen but in low numbers but 21 Tree Sparrows were notable. The 25th brought the only Ruff of the year, a Black Tern and another 22 Tree Sparrows. Four pale-bellied Brent Geese on 28th were the earliest autumn record. A flock of 68 Tree Sparrow on 30th were the highest total seen on the isle at the time.

September

Excellent start to the month on 1st with the only Common Rosefinch of the year appearing (remaining until 3rd) in the Low Light bushes but this was outshone by an Ortolan Bunting along Holymans Road, the first record since 2010 of this increasingly scarce migrant it remained until 2nd. Significant hirundine passage on 2nd with a record breaking 600 Sand Martins plus 210 Swallows and 250 House Martins. The year's only Barred Warbler was trapped on 3rd while a Treecreeper on 4th was the first of an autumn run of this species.



Treecreeper – David Steel

The 5th saw a Balearic Shearwater offshore, the first since 2009 and only 12th overall. The record count of Tree Sparrows was broken again with at least 70 on 6th when a Buzzard flew over and seven Sooty Shearwaters were offshore followed by a count of 25 on 7th. The first four Pink-footed Geese of the autumn flew past as did 55 Brent Geese on 7th and another 50 on 8th. A Lapland Bunting flew over on 8th when a Long-eared Owl was present and another 25 Tree Sparrows were counted. The highest island count of twelve Grey Plover flew south on 9th. The 11th brought a Black guillemot and an isle record count of 28 Goosander but this was completely overshadowed by the bird of the year in the form of the first American species recorded on the island – a Buff-breasted Sandpiper found in blustery conditions near the Helipad when a second bird was thought to be present. The first addition to the island list since 2015.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper - David Steel

With continuing strong westerlies for the rest of the month there were few notable passerines other than three Lapland Buntings over on 15th so most attention was on the sea. Two Balearic Shearwaters were offshore on 23rd, the first Pomarine Skua of the year on 25th and a Sabine's Gull amongst Kittiwakes on 28th. The raptor highlights were a Hen Harrier on 22nd and a Buzzard on 28th.

October

Two Velvet Scoter and a Great Northern Diver on 1st with three on 3rd when a Black-throated Diver and Pomarine Skua are seen offshore. A Glaucous Gull also on 3rd is the only record of the year while a Treecreeper is caught. A ringtail Hen Harrier appears on 4th while three Pomarine Skuas are noted. The 5th brings yet another Treecreeper and a Sabine's Gull with four Snow Buntings over. 17 Tree Sparrows on 6th while four Pomarine Skuas are seen on 7th and another Treecreeper is trapped on 9th. The 11th finally brings some easterlies and with it passerine rewards. An Olive-backed Pipit is caught (the isle's 8th) while the

first Yellow-browed Warblers drop in (5) and a Hawfinch is caught. Good numbers of thrushes are dominated by 1000 Redwing but 800 Brambling were more significant, while two Yellowhammers were notable. A Water Rail is caught on 12th and a Coal Tit seen on 13th (only 3rd in twenty years). A 2nd winter Mediterranean Gull on 14th starts a run of records into November. A freshly dead Corncrake is found beneath the Main Light (first since 2013) on 15th when the Olive-backed Pipit is seen for the last time.



Olive-backed Pipit – David Steel

The 16th yields another thrush fall with 10,000 Redwing estimated along with 1000 Fieldfare, 1000+ Blackbird and two Ring Ouzels. There are also a further 500 Brambling while a Crossbill flies north. A new Olive-backed Pipit is caught on 17th which remains until the following day. Most notable sighting on 18th are eight Scaup flying west, the first since 2014 but only 17 previous records while 16 Tufted Duck were a record day count. The sole Waxwing of the year flies over on 19th. A juvenile Whooper Swan takes up a three day residency on 20th while the 5th Treecreeper of the year is ringed on 22nd. The autumn's second Black-throated Diver flew west on 24th while the second Coal Tit of the year appears on 25th remaining into November. Two Pomarine Skua on 28th are the last of a good run of records when four Little Auk are offshore. The first and only Sanderling of the year flies south over the isle on 29th while another six Little Auk pass offshore and an adult Whooper Swan begins a fortnight residency on Rona. Two 'Siberian' (tristis) Chiffchaffs appear also on 29th both remaining into November along Holymans Road.

November

A zephyr of Long-tailed Tits dropped in on 1st with 7 present and one lingering until 2nd, the first record of the year. Two Swallows on 1st were one of the latest ever records while a Snow Bunting and Buzzard flew over and the Coal Tit was seen for the last time. The two Siberian

Chiffchaffs remained until 5th with one lingering until 13th. A Long-tailed Duck from October remained until 11th as did the adult Whooper Swan. An adult Mediterranean Gull was last seen on 4th. A Great Northern Diver flew north on 5th while a Water Rail appeared at the Bain Trap. Up to 15 Pink-footed Geese were very approachable as they grazed on the island throughout this period. Short-eared Owl numbers built up to six on 12th while a Black Guillemot was seen regularly until 13th, the last day of continuous observation on the island. A visit late in the month produced a scattering of thrushes and at least four Short-eared Owls on 26th. Two Lapwing south on 28th were notable when Woodcock increased to 12 and an impressive 140 Curlew came to roost.



Matt Scraggs was the 2018 warden and will be returning for his third season in 2019.

Cormorants flying out to sea to go fishing on mass early morning can be spectacular peaking at 2,609 mid-January. Apart from this, winter at Landguard is largely endured, not enjoyed, and not helped by the "beast from the East" which did many species no favours at all coming as it did so late in the winter.



White-spotted Bluethroat – Landguard BO

Mid-March brought three male White-spotted Bluethroats and the best spring for Stonechat for many years presumably originating from similar areas as the Bluethroats. Spring notables included Cattle Egret, two Red Kite, Stone Curlew (only fourth record despite it being a reasonably common bird in East Anglia), Glaucous Gull,

Iceland Gull, Red-rumped Swallow, two Rose-coloured Starling, male Red-spotted Bluethroat, Grey-headed Wagtail, two Hawfinch & Common Rosefinch.



Red-spotted Bluethroat – Landguard BO

Most of the commoner migrant species were late on parade and not "common" at all. The highlight of the spring was the fourth British record of Large White-faced Darter on May 27th coincidentally on the same date as the second British record, also at Landguard, six years previously – even better it was seen by many of the site regulars who were mostly gobsmacked to get the chance to see one as the last individual they missed as it was only a single observer sighting!



Large White-faced Darter – Landguard BO

A long prolonged hot spell and drought prevailed throughout the late spring and summer with many of the garden type species in the area struggling to rear any young or failing completely. The "beast from the east" had devastated Suffolk's Cetti's Warblers so it was surprising to catch a juvenile in mid-July which is only our eighth site record.

Autumn got going with a female Red-backed Shrike early August and the start of the undoubted autumn highlight in the form of Pied Flycatchers.



Pied Flycatcher – Landguard BO

Pied Flycatchers have had a disastrous couple of years so a return to form was much appreciated with a peak autumn day count of six. Whinchat numbers were also higher than recently with a peak day count of 13 in early September. The rest of the autumn was not particularly good for numbers with a poor “vis mig” and mostly awful offshore wildfowl & wader counts. On the plus side Common Buzzard was rare here 30 years ago and even now is notable, despite breeding only five miles away, with 18 in a thermal September 24th unprecedented. Our only BBRC of the year was a juvenile Tawny Pipit present for just a couple of hours at the end of August. Autumn scarcities included 2 Great White Egret, Puffin, two or three Wrynecks, Hoopoe, Shorelark, Pallas’s Warbler, Barred Warbler, Ortolan & Little Bunting.



Wryneck – Landguard BO

Despite the ever declining numbers of birds as this century progresses we still get a good variety of scarcities. On the doom & gloom side no Turtle Dove or Cuckoo were recorded for the first time since records began. The annual bird species site total is 15 down on the previous year with bird-day totals for many pathetic.

The moth trapping started slowly (that devastating late winter cold snap to blame again) and was then highly entertaining. The long hot summer encouraged many species that we have only noted on a couple of previous

occasions to disperse from inland down to the coast. Migrant numbers were okay, especially later in the autumn. Another dozen species were added to the site list including Lace Border and the migrant *Acrobasis tumidana*.



Lace Border – Landguard BO



Acrobasis tumidana. – Landguard BO

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**

Highlights early in the year included a surprising flock of seven Common Cranes on 10th January, the drake Smew from late 2017 reappeared and the long staying drake Green-winged Teal was still present. As well as several Glaucous and Iceland Gulls this winter, a first winter Kumlien’s Gull was identified in early February, staying until mid-May. The Northern Harrier made a brief reappearance and the first of several White-billed Divers this year was on 18th February. A Walrus seen cruising round the coast on 8th March (just over 5 years since the last sighting) was subsequently seen on Sanday and other sites, a treat for a couple of lucky observers. Stock Dove was among a trickle of typical spring migrants

that day too, but light easterlies produced the first ever spring record of Blue Tit on 13th, followed by the 8th island record of Woodlark on 19th. Easterly at the end of the month saw the 4th island record of Red Kite with a reasonable arrival of thrushes and Robins.

With more spring arrivals, there was another Woodlark briefly on 3rd April, the first spring Yellowhammer since 2012 on 4th and earliest ever Tree Pipits with two on 14th. The 15th saw a record-equalling count of 10 Mistle Thrushes, a substantial 42 Dunnocks, 22 Ring Ouzels and among 119 Robins there was a Swiss control, the first ever recovery of a Swiss ringed Robin in Britain. Other notable records in April were 2 drake Mandarins briefly on 21st, the first island record of Iberian Chiffchaff on 25th, singing at Sangar and the second island record of Little Ringed Plover on 26th.

Scarce migrants in May included White-tailed Eagle on 1st, first Bluethroat on 10th with 2 on 12th, Honey Buzzard on 12th, female Red-backed Shrike on 13th and the 7th island record of Nightingale on 16th. A pair of Red-necked Phalaropes on 17th were the first of a few records, a Great White Egret on 18th stayed on Ancum for a few days and female Hawfinch and Nightjar were both trapped on 19th. A female Dotterel, also on 19th, was followed by the first Common Rosefinch on 20th, and more typical May birds with Bluethroat, Marsh Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Hawfinch and Rosefinch all on 25th. A Bee-eater on 28th was the 4th island record; a smart adult Rose-coloured Starling was seen on 30th, along with another Little Ringed Plover, Grey-headed Wagtail, 3 Marsh Warblers and a Red-backed Shrike. A Clouded Yellow was among an influx of Silver Y and Diamond back Moths on 31st.

On 7th June we were visited by the scruffy Black Kite seen elsewhere in Orkney and a pod of 15 Risso's Dolphins were the first of the year. A flock of 55 Common Scoters on 11th was more than double the previous record count. Other June highlights included an adult Pomarine Skua and a French colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit on 12th, 8 Canada Geese on 15th, a female Red-breasted Flycatcher trapped on 16th and a late Iceland Gull on 17th. Large numbers of Kittiwakes seen late in June were sadly failed breeders from elsewhere, but local breeding gulls fledged more young this year and Arctic Terns also fared better than usual with early failures recruiting to a larger colony.

This summer was good for Hummingbird Hawkmoths with records on 3rd, 28th and 30th July and 8th August, and a Lempke's Gold Spot on 21st was another new moth. A very young juvenile Cuckoo on 21st had not travelled far but an escaped Saker that day had originated from Northamptonshire. Two Roseate Terns on 27th were among Arctic Tern numbers building up to over 5050 on 30th. Golden Plovers built up to 1350 on 30th and 81 Knots included a Norwegian colour-flagged bird. Up to 3 juvenile Mediterranean Gulls were present in cut silage

fields in early August and Garganey bred successful with 3 juveniles seen on Hooking Loch. With easterly on 13th, small numbers of migrants included a juvenile Common Nightingale (8th record but 2nd autumn one), the first Icterine and Barred Warbler of the year and a record count of 64 Sand Martins, another successful breeder this year. Notable at the end of the month were Red-footed Falcon and Balearic Shearwater on 27th and a moulting adult Black Tern and adult Buff-breasted Sandpiper on 28th.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper – George Gay

A trickle of migrants began with light easterlies in September, with the first Common Rosefinch of the autumn on 4th and first Reed Warbler on 5th, and an amazing day on 7th with both Greenish and Arctic Warbler, Wryneck and the earliest ever Yellow-browed Warbler. The only Marsh Warbler of the autumn was seen the following day and as the weather turned westerly, a Lanceolated Warbler was a brilliant find on 10th. A Corncrake was seen briefly on 12th and as a month of westerlies set in, an adult American Golden Plover was found on 18th.



American Golden Plover - George Gay

A juvenile Long-tailed Skua was the highlight of some good sea-watching on 1st October, the drake Green-winged Teal returned, and 2 Blyth's Reed Warblers were found on 2nd as a change in weather came at last. South-easterly brought the star bird of the autumn – a Black-eared Wheatear on 11th, along with 2 Little Buntings and the beginning of a fall.



Black-eared Wheatear – Lewis Hooper



Blyth's Reed Warbler – Lewis Hooper

Over 800 Redwings the following day were accompanied by good numbers of other thrushes and finches, first Woodcock, Bluethroat, 26 Blackcaps, a smart male Red-breasted Flycatcher, Great Grey Shrike and Little Egret (4th island record).



Red-breasted Flycatcher – George Gay

A Richard's Pipit, Siberian Lesser Whitethroat and Hawfinch also featured and further arrivals on 16th totalled 1280 Redwings, 583 Fieldfares and 266 Song

Thrushes. As migrant numbers declined towards the end of the month other birds of interest were an Eastern Yellow Wagtail on 23rd, first Little Auk on 26th, Hornemanns' and Coue's Arctic Redpolls, Northern Bullfinch and a Norwegian control Long-eared Owl.

Among gull passage in early November, there were Kumlien's Gulls on 4th and 9th, the second island record of Hume's Warbler, seen then trapped on 16th, and late highlights of Red-necked Grebe and Velvet Scoter. European White-fronted Goose and Smew in early December brought the year's species total to an impressive 218.



**Portland
Erin Taylor**

The take-home message for the year at Portland was that it was a highly unremarkable year in almost every sense. The highlights rarity wise lacked any kind of real 'pizzazz', although a spring male Black-headed Bunting added some much needed glamour to proceedings.



Black-headed Bunting – Portland BO

The Spring (much like everywhere across the UK) was badly slowed by the snowfall, an unusual occurrence at the Bill which led to groundings of Golden Plover and even the odd Knot in the fields around the Observatory.



Golden Plovers in snow – Portland BO

When Spring eventually arrived in April it was to much lower numbers of common migrants than would be expected with a 57% decrease in Willow Warblers trapped compared to 2017 (although this is skewed by the excellent record-breaking totals of the previous year and there was only a 33% decrease compared to the 10 year average). Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps saw a 32% and 9% decrease respectively. However, it wasn't all doom and gloom with Spotted Flycatcher records being the third best ever and a 52% increase in ringing totals on the previous year. Expected migrants such as Grasshopper Warbler, Pied Flycatcher and Common Redstarts were present but poorly represented. Late April saw what we thought would be the beginning of the real movements of birds with 541 birds ringed on 29th, including 350 Willow Warblers. However, this was not to be and numbers fell back to previous levels after this avalanche of a day. Rarities-wise we were scraping the barrel a little early on with a handful of Hoopoes, Golden Orioles, Hawfinch and Dartford Warbler. Our fortunes were altered a little in the late spring with a small flurry of the afore mentioned Black-headed Bunting, Rose-coloured Starlings, Red-backed Shrike and Western Subalpine Warbler all occurring in late May and early June.



Red-backed Shrike – Portland BO



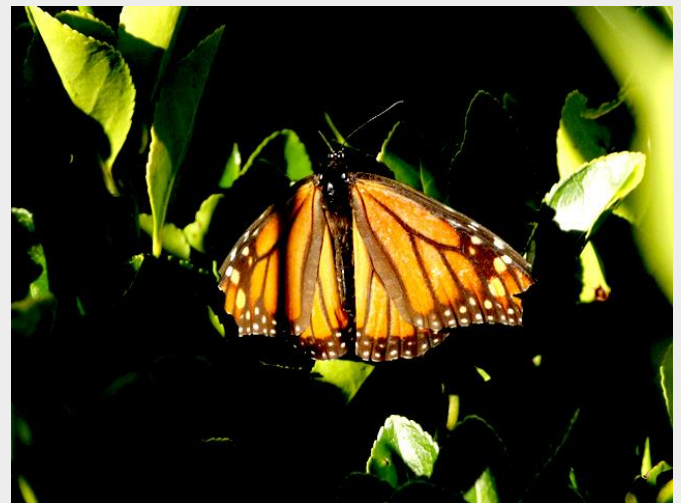
Rose-coloured Starling – Portland BO

The summer saw a reasonable breeding season with pairs of Whitethroats returning to pre-2017 numbers, Kestrels and Little Owls in double figures and rare breeding

records of both Wheatears and Lesser Whitethroats. The real highlight came with the discovery of the first record of breeding Tree Sparrows for Portland. We would like to believe that this is due to the hard work of the implementation of our mid-tier stewardship scheme providing the rich feeding habitat needed to facilitate breeding, however it is equally likely that this nomadic species was in the right place at the right time and will in fact not return again next year, we can only hope.

The autumn season started well with good numbers of visible migrants including Tree Pipits, Yellow Wagtails, Pied Flycatchers and juvenile Sedge Warblers and Willow Warblers throughout July and August. We also saw the second highest ringing total of Grey Wagtails with excellent visible passage throughout the months. The usual scarcities put in appearances with early records of Melodious Warbler and Wryneck.

As the season progressed, it became clear that it wasn't to be a record breaker in terms of numbers or rarities as September failed to produce anything 'mega'. The usual scarce and rares arrived in small numbers with singles of Turtle Dove and Rosefinch, and four records of Ortolan Bunting. The highlight in terms of Portland rarities came with the discovery of the fourth record of Caspian Gull along the East Cliffs. The non-avian highlight of the month saw a Monarch Butterfly arrive after a string of solid Westerlies.



Monarch – Portland BO

The late autumn saw the onset of the now expected movements of Yellow-browed Warblers. A good passage of Woodlarks was accompanied by the best numbers of Yellowhammers for some time and a Little Bunting trapped late in the month was one of two recoded late in the year. Halloween was to bring us our Portland rarity of the year, trumping the Caspian Gulls fourth record with the second record of Rough-legged Buzzard, the first since 1974. November brought with it a final flourish of nice migrants with a highly elusive Dusky warbler to kick off the month, shortly followed by a tricky Pallas's Warbler. The 15th saw Portland get its share of the influx of Pallid Swifts with a lone individual showing well above the West

Cliffs. The final surprise came in the form of a Serin, lingering around the obs for the day on the 23rd. There are too many people to thank individually for their effort in ringing, birding, mothing, nocturnal recording, plant recording and generally keeping the wardens entertained. It was our busiest year for accommodation yet and we hope to see many return next year.



Sandwich Bay Steffan Walton

What a busy year! A complete kitchen refurbishment in March really bolstered the professionalism of the accommodation, and just as well as visitor numbers were high throughout the year. Birds were slow to arrive in spring but conversely it was an early dragonfly season and an excellent showing of Orchids. Our Restharrow Scrape development project then kick-started raising over £144,000 in just 6 months! A real testament to our wonderful community and hard-working team, and coincided perfectly with our first breeding Avocets on Restharrow Scrape. The summer heatwave then brought lots of interesting moth and butterfly records, followed by another hugely successful Open Day and Ringing Course. Ian Hodgson retired as Warden in August after ten years at the helm. We wish him all the best for the future, and also to Steffan Walton who took over the reins. A busy autumn full of surprises included spectacular falls of Blackcaps, record numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers, and a stunning White-billed Diver to cap it all off.

A wet and windy start to the year helped raise the water levels considerably. Wintering birds from last year included three Dartford Warblers, four Bewick's Swans, five Jack Snipes, a few Water Pipits, and five Snow Buntings. Up to 4,000 Cormorants were regular offshore with Great Skua, Velvet Scoter and Black-throated Diver sporadic in appearance. There were occasional records of Bearded Tit, and at least two Firecrests, though rarest was a Tawny Owl roosting in the Great Wood. In February a flock of 25 White-fronted Geese flew over the Elms, a Black-necked Grebe was in Pegwell on two dates, a Glaucous Gull was seen over the Green Wall, and a brief Red Kite appeared. The Beast from the East was the main talking point though. The chill had intensified to the point of being face-stripping, while bemused Lapwings standing around in silly places testified to how cold it had become. Snow flurries blew through, freezing all day and overnight temperatures were down to minus 4°C. Some cold weather movement at the beginning of March included a superb adult male Hen Harrier, eight White-fronted Geese on the Green Wall, and 29 Woodcocks, plus 222 Red-throated Divers and a Black-throated Diver offshore.

The 6th brought two Scaup in Pegwell, a Slavonian Grebe on Stonar Lake, and a Great White Egret on Worth. Three Red Kites were seen on a blustery 8th and on a glass-calm 11th three Slavonian Grebes were on the sea with 345 Great Crested Grebes, and a Woodlark flew north over Restharrow Dunes. Over 900 Chaffinches flew over on the 12th and on the 13th at least 2,250 Redwings flew north before Starlings suddenly took over, 9,000 flying out to sea, while four Black Redstarts were present along the shore. An amazing 20,000 Starlings flew out to sea at first light on the 14th, while two Great White Egrets were present on Worth. Nine Firecrests appeared on the 16th.



The Oasis - E.Smith

Sea-watching during snowfall on the 17th produced 41 Little Gulls. On the 21st a Great White Egret dropped onto Restharrow Scrape and then flew out to sea towards the Belgian coast, while another was over Worth. Four White Wagtails flew through on the 22nd and on the 23rd a White Stork flew south from Pegwell. A Spoonbill flew over the Green Wall on the 24th.

The start April saw spring migrants arriving with Little Ringed Plovers, Swallows, Wheatears, Sedge Warblers, Blackcaps, and Chiffchaffs seen. Visible migration really picked up on the 4th with 163 Siskins and 524 Chaffinches plus two Great Northern Divers at sea. Two Red-breasted Mergansers and an Arctic Skua were seen offshore on the 5th and on the 7th two Hawfinches flew over the Gullies. Offshore passage was notable for five Eiders, two Red-breasted Mergansers, and a Black-throated Diver, and it also brought us the most unexpected sighting of the day too: a BEAVER heading south along the shoreline.



Beaver by A.Lipczynski

Two Hawfinches were seen again on the 8th plus a Ring Ouzel in the Oasis. Two more Ring Ouzels followed on the Hundred Acre Field and a Great Northern Diver was seen offshore. The 11th saw a Spotted Redshank over Restharrow Scrape and a male Redstart bordering the Elms.

New Downs on the 13th produced an excellent 31 White Wagtails and two Egyptian Geese whilst on the 15th the sight of a Bittern flying over the golf course was surreal. The 18th saw the first Grasshopper Warbler of spring and two Great White Egrets.

A warm and sunny 19th produced four Ring Ouzels and a Garganey. A notable flock of eight Black-necked Grebes was on the sea off Pegwell on the 20th, six Red Kites flew N on the 21st, with five more the next day when a Red-rumped Swallow flew over Restharrow Scrape.

May kicked off with an exceptional run of Pied Flycatchers, Redstarts and Tree Pipits for Kent in spring. Pegwell brought us a Spoonbill and seven Little Terns. The 14th saw a summer-plumaged Great Northern Diver, two Garganey and an adult Pomarine Skua on a seawatch. The next day 15 Red Kites, a Honey-buzzard and an Osprey flew over Pegwell and on the 16th as the wind increased again a Manx Shearwater was offshore. On the 18th a Bee-eater flew over Worth and the next day a female Red-footed Falcon appeared on Worth, along with a Mandarin and another Honey-buzzard.

On the 23rd a party of three Crossbills were in the Elms and on a gloomy 25th a Temminck's Stint appeared in Pegwell. A Golden Oriole was singing for a short time around dawn on Worth on the 28th.



Orange-tailed Clearwing by D.Grundy

In June our second Red-rumped Swallow of the spring was the obvious highlight of the 2nd, heading north over Pegwell Bay. On the 3rd a spanking adult Rose-coloured Starling was discovered in the Pegwell area and an Osprey flew over Stonar on the 8th. The 13th saw a Marsh Warbler singing on New Downs. Things returned to a rather torpid state until the 17th when a Black-winged Stilt

appeared at Restharrow and a Great White Egret was seen.

Late June saw an early build-up of returning wildfowl, a trickle of waders, and an unseasonal Shag offshore. The 25th brought a surprise with a Redwing in the mist nets in the Whitehouse. An Osprey flew south over Worth on the 28th.

July was very dry and increasingly hot. A Spotted Redshank flew over the Elms on the 11th and on the 16th a Wood Warbler was trapped in the Whitehouse. On the 18th 250 Swifts came in off the sea and a Pectoral Sandpiper turned up on the garage pool in Pegwell, where it remained for well over a week. The 22nd was notable for a Wood Sandpiper and at least 430 Mediterranean Gulls. A Mandarin turned up on Restharrow scrape on the 28th and on a windy 29th 250 Swifts headed south. The month concluded with another Wood Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler and a Garganey on Restharrow Scrape.



Pectoral Sandpiper by S.Ray

August started with at least nine Pied Flycatchers, and a Kingfisher turned up in the nets on the 8th, much to everyone's surprise. On the 9th a Curlew Sandpiper flew north, with four Tree Pipits on the 11th, three Grasshopper Warblers on the 12th and two Black Terns offshore. The 13th turned up Wood Sandpiper, Redstart, four Curlew Sandpipers, one Spotted Redshank, 27 Whimbrels, and two Little Terns. The 14th brought a Wood Warbler singing in the Elms and a Tree Pipit lurked near the Oasis. A Wood Sandpiper was the highlight on Worth.

Things continue to pick up gently on the 15th, with 11 Yellow Wagtails, two Crossbills, two more Tree Pipits, plus a stunning juvenile Montagu's Harrier that flew through Pegwell. Another four Tree Pipits on the 17th continued the good autumn passage through the area. A Tree Sparrow was on Worth on the 21st with yet more Pied Flycatchers, whilst an Arctic Skua was offshore.



Southern Migrant Hawker by A.Lipczynski

The 26th was our fantastic Open Day and birds did not disappoint with a Kentish Plover, five Curlew Sandpipers, a Roseate Tern, two Black Terns, and three Little Terns in Pegwell as well as three Tree Pipits on the Estate. The next day 530 Mediterranean Gulls on the Estate beach was comfortably a new SBBOT record. A real highlight on the 28th was a roosting Long-eared Owl in Waldershare Gully whilst offshore a Black-necked Grebe and 230 Mediterranean Gulls were notable.

Grasshopper Warblers were found on the Estate on the 30th and 31st with impressive numbers of Lesser Whitethroat too, including 46 on the latter. The Long-eared Owl remained until the end of the month.

A warm calm start to September saw a Spoonbill, two Curlew Sandpipers, the Long-eared Owl, and a fantastic 29 Whinchats. Up to three Redstarts were showing from 2nd-5th along with Grasshopper Warbler, Shag, Crossbills, Wood Sandpiper, Garganey, and Manx Shearwater. Multiple Spotted Redshanks and Pied Flycatchers followed. The 6th was notable for over 2,000 Swallows, five Tree Pipits, 33 Greenshanks, Curlew Sandpiper and a smart Honey-buzzard.



Long-eared Owl by A.Perry

There was another excellent morning of visible migration on the 7th with 10,900 House Martins, 8,200 Swallows and 2,600 Sand Martins. Whinchats numbered 34 whilst on the

9th four Spotted Redshanks and a Honey-buzzard were seen.

On the 11th over 1,000 House Martins flew north. The 13th was a super morning with a fall of 446 Blackcaps, Oortolan Buntings on Worth and another over Pegwell, a Dotterel at Pegwell and a Nightingale trapped and ringed. The next day a White Stork flew over Worth. The Nightingale remained on the Estate until the 17th, the same day 780 Linnets were recorded and a Spotted Redshank was in Pegwell. The following day another movement of 3,000 House Martins headed north.

Another Nightingale was on New Downs on the 20th whilst an Arctic Skua was offshore on the 23rd and a Little Gull in Pegwell. The 24th brought three Merlins, Great and Arctic Skuas, and a Lapland Bunting over Pegwell. A fantastic candidate Siberian Lesser Whitethroat appeared near the Haven on the 26th, with Tree Sparrow, 8,000 House Martins, 3,000 Swallows, two Honey-buzzards and an Osprey making it an even better day. The 27th scored another 7,500 House Martins but singles of Leach's Petrel, Spoonbill, and Arctic Skua offshore on the 28th were even better. The month ended with single Twite and Tree Sparrow on the 30th.

October began with another bout of House Martin migration with 3,800 heading north, plus 220 Siskins on the 3rd, the first Yellow-browed Warbler on the 5th, with 440 Siskins and two Yellow-browed Warblers on the 6th. The Bird Race on the 7th was excellent and recorded 103 species in total in the recording area including Manx Shearwater, 608 Brent Geese, and a late Arctic Tern offshore, Water Pipit on the Green Wall and five Pink-footed Geese on Worth. A record 11 Yellow-browed Warblers were present on the 8th though the rarest bird was our eighth record of Nuthatch in Stonelees, with 970 Siskins north too. At least six Yellow-browed Warblers remained on the 9th.

Three Bearded Tits, Ring Ouzel and eight Yellow-browed Warblers were on the 10th. Despite windy conditions on the 12th a juvenile Red-footed Falcon showed on Worth and a Great White Egret flew south. Two Yellow-browed Warblers were on the 13th and the next day 11 Bearded Tits were on New Downs.

On the 15th a Booted Warbler was in Waldershare Gully whilst an astonishing flock of seven Great White Egrets came in off the sea on the 17th. The next day a Great Grey Shrike was roaming about on Worth.

On the 19th another four Great White Egrets were dotted around, a Long-eared Owl was seen briefly, with 630+ Siskins and 29 Bramblings the highlights of 'vismig'. The Long-eared Owl performed well on the 21st with the Yellow-browed Warbler still and a Water Pipit. The 22nd saw a drake Velvet Scoter offshore. Crossbill passage included 41 over Worth and 33 over Pegwell, whilst the latter held a late Turtle Dove.

Crossbill passage then went into overdrive with 210 over on the 23rd plus a Richard's Pipit over Pegwell. Another 140 Crossbills flew north on the 24th with a Richard's Pipit over the Estate and a Lapland Bunting in Pegwell. There was a good passage of 346 Lesser Redpolls and another 122 Crossbills on the 26th. A late Red-rumped Swallow was over the Observatory on the 27th. On the 28th a serious gale saw 935 Brent Geese, 264 Kittiwakes, three Pomarine, one Arctic, and one Great Skua, and 17 White-fronted Geese offshore. A Little Gull dropped into Pegwell whilst Jack Snipes on Restharrow Scrape peaked at three on the 30th. The last day of the month saw Water Pipit, a touring Hen Harrier, and another Long-eared.

November started well with up to eight Jack Snipes, a lingering Hen Harrier and good numbers of Firecrests, Bearded Tits, Water Pipits, and Short-eared Owls. Crossbills continued moving with 90 north on the 2nd, plus 140 Siskins and two Tree Sparrows. In the evening a summer-plumaged White-billed Diver was discovered in Pegwell. A new species for the SBBOT recording area!



White-billed Diver by S.Ray

The Yellow-browed Warbler was still present on the 5th and the next day at least nine Firecrests were recorded. On the 7th a gale produced both Black-throated and Great Northern Divers. On the 10th a Tree Sparrow was along the Worth track. Another wet and windy day on the 11th scored two Lapland Buntings and two Snow Buntings along Prince's Beach. In the afternoon a Cattle Egret flew across Worth marshes and a 'Swift sp' flew through Pegwell on the 12th.

The 16th saw the Cattle Egret pop in again by Roaring Gutter whilst the 17th had another 'Swift sp' which flew north along the beach front. Unfortunately it didn't stick around and so we continue to wait for a confirmed Pallid Swift to grace us.

On the 18th the Cattle Egret popped into Restharrow Scrape briefly. And I do mean briefly, according to photographs there was approximately 29 seconds in total between arriving and leaving! However seven Pintails flew over and an excellent total of 19 Eider flew south offshore. A clear influx of Geese on the 21st included at least 35 Pink-footed Geese on Willow Farm, two White-fronted Geese on Restharrow Scrape and another single

on New Downs. A cold morning in the gloom on the 22nd saw Great White Egret and two White-fronted Geese over Pegwell, a Bewick's Swan on New Downs, four Water Pipits on the Green Wall, four Snow Buntings along Prince's Beach, a Lapland Bunting on RSGGC, and two each of Marsh Harrier and Raven on Worth. The Worth Pink-footed Goose flock crept up to 47 on the 25th and then 88 on the 26th, with two Tundra Bean Geese, two White-fronted Geese and 3,000 Fieldfares. The Tundra Bean Goose flock increased to four on the 30th, with Red Kite and Velvet Scoter also notable.



Cattle Egret by A.Lipczynski

December began with seven Tundra Beans, seven Pink-footed, and five White-fronted Geese still on Worth. The 4th saw an exceptional flock of 22 Snow Buntings on Prince's Beach and on the 6th a Puffin flew past offshore, our first sighting since 2007, plus the Cattle Egret was relocated on New Downs. A Hen Harrier and Whooper Swan appeared on the 7th and a Rough-legged Buzzard flew over Stonar on the 9th, with the Cattle Egret still present the next day. Smew and Velvet Scoter were offshore on the 14th and on the 18th the Cattle Egret re-appeared by Restharrow Scrape. The end of the year saw an influx of Caspian Gulls in Pegwell with seven on the 21st possibly an SBBOT record, and a gorgeous Waxwing on Worth on the 27th.



Snow Bunting by S.Reynaert

So why not visit us in 2019? Whatever your reason for visiting Kent, the Field Centre offers modern and comfortable accommodation with a Kitchen, Wi-fi,

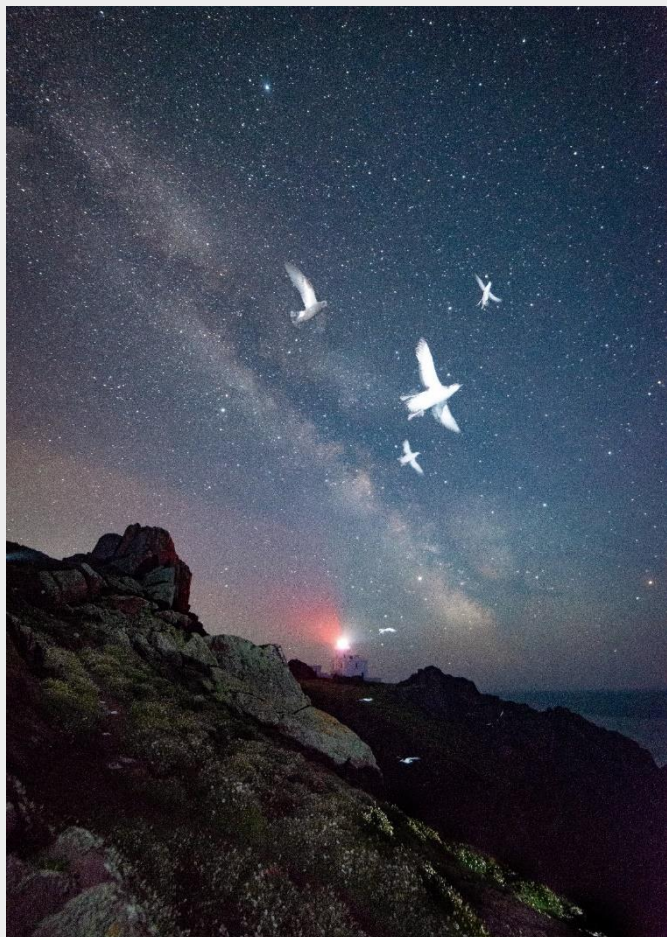
Library, and Free Parking, allowing you to be on hand for early morning bird ringing, late night moth trapping, club events, or just more time to explore the local area. Check out the SBBOT website, follow us on our Twitter page, or Like us on Facebook for all our latest news and events. And please do help our Restharrow Scrape Development Appeal.

Thank You all from the SBBOT Team

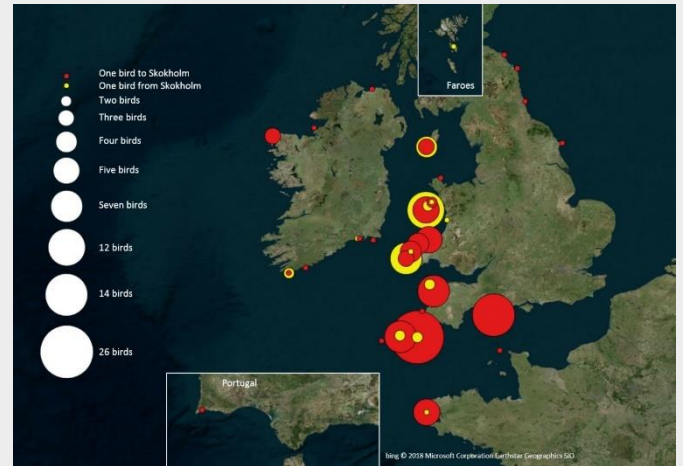


**Skokholm
Richard Brown
& Giselle Eagle**

It was another cracking year on Dream Island. The core seabird monitoring revealed further increases in the whole Island populations of Puffins, Guillemots and Razorbills, with over 17.5 thousand auks breeding successfully on our rat free shores this year. A huge amount of effort was put into a whole Island Manx Shearwater survey; although the official results are yet to be published, we can confirm that some very exciting news is just around the corner and that the Pembrokeshire Islands continue to support well over half of the World's breeding population of what should really be Britain's National bird. Nights around the new moons were truly remarkable, a cacophony of noise that can be hard to sleep through – surely it's only a matter of time before a Little Shearwater adds its voice to the night.



There was brilliant news from the Petrel Station, our bespoke Storm Petrel study wall, with the discovery that four breeding pairs have moved in and others are prospecting; although Skokholm, the fourth largest and most accessible British colony, is home to around about 2000 pairs, the chance to monitor these secretive birds is a rare one on the Island. A new infrared lighting set up, a new viewing area overlooking a sub-colony of 600 breeding pairs and a record breaking ringing season allowed us to introduce more guests than ever to these remarkable seabirds. Over 4500 Storm Petrels have been handled in recent years, more than one in ten of which was wearing a ring; the results strongly suggest that there is a distinct Irish Sea population (see below map).



It was another brilliant ringing season, with guests and staff handling over 8.5 thousand birds which produced plenty of exchanges with other UK Bird Observatories along with several foreign recoveries. A personal highlight was the discovery of a young Robin, ringed by Giselle's old ringing trainer in Northumberland, which reached Skokholm on 5th September (Robins don't breed on Skok, but arrive in their hundreds each autumn). The Wheatear colour ringing project, masterminded by Ian Beggs, continued to produce some fascinating results, providing some exceedingly accurate measures of adult survival and the recruitment of juveniles to the breeding population. Away from the ringing hut it was another enjoyable year of birding; it was always going to be hard to top the record breaking 2017 season, and indeed we didn't, but we somehow managed to see 18 species which weren't logged last year. We added our 14th species in six years to the Island list, with a brilliant Pallid Swift which came as a forerunner to the 2018 irruption.



Pallid Swift – Richard Brown

There were also a few exciting Welsh rares such as Great Shearwater, Cattle Egret, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Richard's Pipit and Melodious Warbler, along with Skokholm megas such as Tufted Duck, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Sparrow and Great Tit.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper – Richard Brown

It was an absolute pleasure to again be writing references for our previous Long-term Volunteers. We are proud of how many of them are now working professionally with seabirds, on islands, at Bird Observatories or all three. The deadline for applications to be a 2018 Skokholm Long-term Volunteer is not until 12th February, so if you fancy living on a spectacular seabird Island and working towards a career in conservation then give it a go here: <https://www.welshwildlife.org/volunteer/long-term-volunteers/>

If you don't fancy crawling around in guano, emptying toilets and being nibbled by Great Black-backed Gulls, but you do fancy a stay on an Island with no day visitors, remarkable seabird colonies and great birding, then you can come as a guest. We still have a few empty rooms during the 2019 seabird season. Take a look here: <https://www.welshwildlife.org/skomer-skokholm/skokholm/>



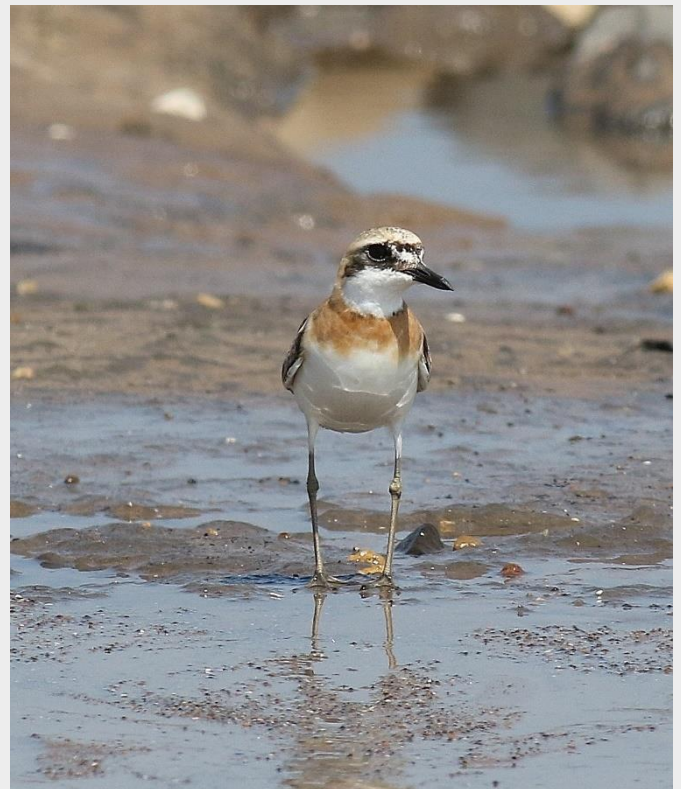
**Spurn
Tim Jones**

2018 at Spurn saw the usual array of rarities with lots of scarcities and locally good birds giving us our second-best year list total of 266 species. We had 13 national rarities with the highlights being our first Baird's Sandpiper enjoyed by plenty in late September when it spent most of the day on Easington Lagoons and a frustratingly brief Dusky Thrush seen by just one lucky observer in his Easington Garden, indeed the very same garden that hosted the extremely popular Siberian Accentor in 2016! Other highlights were our third Green-winged Teal, Squacco Heron and Greater Sand Plover (making us now the only site in the UK with three records), fourth Taiga Bean Goose and Savi's Warbler, fifth Semipalmated Sandpiper sixth and seventh Pallid Swift, seventh Red-crested Pochard, eighth Glossy Ibis, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Citrine Wagtail. As well as a new

record count of Yellow-browed Warblers a whopping 16 Great White Egrets and breeding Marsh Warbler added to unique Spurn experience. Our editors and report team are now busy writing up all these amazing bird records and much more for Spurn Wildlife 2018 and we will have this finished and published by Easter.



Squacco Heron – Jonnie Fisk



Greater Sandplover - Robert Dowley

The year began well with the recruitment of our second member of staff, Jonnie Fisk, who had been a long-term volunteer at the Observatory. He joined the team as Estate Worker in March and has proved to be a valuable member of the Observatory team and his hard work and determination in improving the visitor experience is outstanding. Our Young Professional Exchange continued with two professionals being sent to Cape May (Sarah Harris in October) and Long Point (Daniel Branch in May). We also had a visitor from Cape May (David Webber in September) cross the water to learn more about the Spurn way of business.



Migfest - SBO

A group of three young Spurn birders (Jonnie Fisk, Sarah Harris and Daniel Langston) also went to Falsterbo in August to enjoy the Honey-buzzard passage and their Bird Show. It was a great success with all enjoying their visits and continuing to build the strong relationships between the four Observatories in our International Partnerships.

We attended our third Birdfair in August, where we showcased our work through the year and promoted the Observatory alongside sales of branded clothing and other items and drew an enthusiastic crowd all weekend with all pleased to hear about the work of a British Observatory. During the year we also received a grant from our good friends at British Birds for a 4m high viewing platform that was built in the Observatory garden in the late summer. It was opened by British Birds Richard Porter at our Migfest in early September and proved very popular throughout the autumn including a Pallid Swift and White-tailed Eagle found by observers stationed on the platform!

In October the big highlight of the year for our observatory was the receipt of the prestigious Marsh Local Ornithology Award in recognition of our work with young people and the development of International relationships with 3 other observatories around the world. This is the second award that has been made to a UK bird observatory the first being Bardsey in 2017. So here's hoping that 2019 can live up to the high standards set in recent years here at Spurn Bird Observatory and that we can continue to go from strength to strength!



Chairman Rob Adams receiving the Marsh Award

We ran our 6th Migfest which was once again a huge success, with highlight talks from Richard Porter on raptor migration in the Middle East and Stu Mackenzie from Long Point Bird Observatory in Canada on the MOTUS tagging system revolutionising what they understand about small passerine migration across the Americas. Despite poor weather over the weekend we still had a record attendance and everyone enjoyed themselves. There were enough birds around to keep most happy but it was the friendliness of all the volunteers and real family feel around the barn at Westmere Farm that really made the weekend for most.



**Walney
Colin Raven**

The year began quietly over the sea in January, although the now regular winter gathering of Shag held 30 birds (7th) and a Great Northern Diver was seen (26th). Little Egret sightings were regular (42-10th) while Merlin, Peregrine, Barn Owl and Little Owl all hunted the island. Geese were to the fore with a Black Brant (6th, 8th & 19th) the highlight amongst 304 pale-bellied and 80 dark-bellied Brent Geese and 40 Barnacle Geese while a total of 2,311 Pink-footed Geese were overhead.



Black Brant with Brent Geese – Colin Raven

Additional wildfowl included two Scaup and a female Gadwall. Waders were also well represented with 5,000

Knot and 1,200 Dunlin amongst which were 11 Greenshank, five Black-tailed Godwit, two Purple Sandpiper and a Jack Snipe. Passerines were as usual noticeably absent a Blackcap (1st) and two Tree Sparrow attended feeding station. Finch flocks included 100 Twite, 60 Goldfinch and 34 Linnet while 32 Redwing, seven Mistle Thrush and three Fieldfare were evidence of some cold weather movement.

There was little of note offshore during February other than 40 Shag (4th) until two Sandwich Tern appeared (25th) – the earliest ever recorded off the island. A Buzzard was unusual (4th & 18th), up to 25 Little Egret remained and at least three Water Rail were present. A total of 3,055 Pink-footed Geese and 36 Whooper Swan flew through. The Brent Goose flock held 313 pale-bellied and 72 dark-bellied birds and the adult Black Brant was again noted (24th) while 44 Barnacle Geese were also seen. Additional wildfowl included the long-staying pair of Scaup. Overwintering waders included eight Greenshank and five Black-tailed Godwit along with 3,500 Oystercatcher, 2,200 Knot and 1,400 Golden Plover while 19 Purple Sandpiper were amongst 335 Turnstone (17th). At least one Water Pipit was amongst up to 42 Rock Pipit. A hint of spring was provided by Grey Wagtail and Siskin moving through prior to colder conditions providing 26 Redwing and two Fieldfare while six Mistle Thrush continued to linger. Twite increased (140-8th) and a flock of seven Raven were logged (18th).

March began slowly over the sea with the first Gannet (3rd), before 512 Kittiwake, five Manx Shearwater and four Fulmar (23rd), 4,500 Eider (25th) and 174 Sandwich Tern, 150 Razorbill and four Manx Shearwater (31st) provided more interest towards the end of the month. Little Egret numbers dwindled steadily, a ringtail Hen Harrier was seen (25th) while both Merlin and Peregrine continued to be regularly recorded. A second-winter Iceland Gull appeared briefly (16th). The Black Brant put in regular appearances amongst up to 274 pale-bellied and 65 dark-bellied Brent Geese, also seen were overflying totals of 222 Pink-footed Geese and 336 Whooper Swan. The small group of Scaup increased to three individuals before finally departing (22nd). Waders included five Black-tailed Godwit, four Greenshank and a migratory Woodcock (13th) while 27 Purple Sandpiper were amidst 510 Turnstone and 350 Sanderling (30th) and a Jack Snipe was amongst 42 Snipe (31st). Early in the month, the “beast from the east” failed to significantly affect the island and the green fields attracted an influx of thrushes fleeing the cold weather further inland with peaks of 155 Fieldfare, 152 Redwing, 53 Song Thrush and seven Mistle Thrush logged (3rd-4th). Regular spring passage produced 51 Redwing, 25 Blackbird and two Mistle Thrush (13th). A Hooded Crow (10th) was feeding on mussel beds with Carrion Crow and a single Rook flew through (13th & 24th) amongst a passage of Jackdaw. A Water Pipit was logged (2nd-6th), the Twite flock held 40 birds (4th) and a Yellowhammer was unusual (6th). An early Chiffchaff (6th-11th) may have wintered locally although the first Goldcrest (13th) and Wheatear (17th) began to move through before the return of “the beast” and “blocking” conditions took hold. The wintering Water Pipit reappeared (16th & 18th). Up to four Tree Sparrow

continued to attend a feeding station (4th) and the Twite flock began to decrease. Three Grey Wagtail, three Tree Sparrow and two Siskin moved through amongst a trickle of Meadow Pipit and Pied Wagtail. A female Ring-necked Parakeet took up residence.



Ring-necked Parakeet – Colin Raven

Offshore sightings in April were dominated by a flock of Common Scoter that assembled in the mouth of Morecambe Bay (4,500-28th), associated with this build up were two Velvet Scoter (28th). Further highlights were few but included Little Gull (2-7th, 1-22nd), and the first Arctic Tern (17th) and Little Tern (22nd) appeared. Red-throated Diver moved through (19-22nd) amongst small numbers of Manx Shearwater, Fulmar, Gannet, Guillemot, Razorbill and Kittiwake. A late movement of Pink-footed Geese was noted with 1,782 birds (to 28th). The Black Brant remained (to 1st) amongst up to 278 pale-bellied and 53 dark-bellied Brent Goose while the final Wigeon (7th) and Goldeneye (8th) departed. Waders included 3,000 Knot (6th), 151 Whimbrel (29th), six Black-tailed Godwit (28th) and single Jack Snipe (8th & 13th) and Purple Sandpiper (15th). The last Merlin was logged (7th) and the first Osprey drifted over (8th). The last of the winter passerines departed with Brambling (8th), Fieldfare (8th), Redwing (14th) and Twite (15th). Grounded summer migrants struggled through with below average totals of 152 Wheatear, 57 Willow Warbler (from 7th), 39 Blackcap (from 8th), 38 Chiffchaff and 24 Goldcrest. Other arrival dates included: Ring Ouzel (5th), Swallow (11th), Sand Martin (12th), House Martin (15th), Lesser Whitethroat (16th), Grasshopper Warbler (16th), Redstart (20th), Sedge Warbler (20th), Whitethroat (20th), Reed Warbler (25th). Diurnal passage was equally poor with 21 Lesser Redpoll, five Siskin and single Grey Wagtail (7th), Tree Sparrow (27th) and Hooded Crow (29th) the limited highlights. The moth trap attracted a Twin-spotted Quaker – the first island record.

Highlights over the sea in May involved a Black Guillemot (28th) and Black Tern (29th) along with 15 Puffin (7-19th), a total of six Arctic Skua and two Great Skua and the continued presence of up to 4,000 Common Scoter in the mouth of Morecambe Bay. Also seen were Red-throated Diver (21-8th), Sandwich Tern (663-19th), Arctic Tern (23-27th), Little Tern (17-27th) and Common Tern (4-13th). Waders included Curlew Sandpiper (2-14th), Little Stint

(17th) and the only Common Sandpiper of the spring (2-3rd). Last departures included Greenshank (6th) and Golden Plover (7th) while passage birds were prominent through the month with 3,086 Dunlin, 2,040 Sanderling and 566 Ringed Plover (all 18th), 66 Whimbrel (5th), 55 Bar-tailed Godwit (31st) and 11 Black-tailed Godwit (14th). A late dark-bellied Brent Goose appeared (27th) whilst an unfortunate Water Rail was found predated in suitable breeding habitat. Two Buzzard (5th) were unusual and a Short-eared Owl appeared (10th) while single Cuckoos were present (6th & 31st). A Corn Bunting (6th) was the first 21st century record. A Hooded Crow put in several appearances. The long-staying Ring-necked Parakeet was joined by a second bird. Diurnal migration was slow but eventually provided totals of 226 Swallow, 34 House Martin, 30 Swift, 16 Lesser Redpoll, four Tree Sparrow, two Tree Pipit and single Grey Wagtail (7th) and Siskin (5th). Although two Wood Warbler were recorded (5th), grounded birds also proved generally disappointing with just 85 Wheatear, 67 Willow Warbler, 29 Whinchat, (19-5th), 26 Chiffchaff, 16 Blackcap, 13 Spotted Flycatcher, four Redstart and a solitary Garden Warbler (5th).

Although conditions were generally unsuitable throughout much of June the sea provided a few surprises including an exceptional total of 31 Puffin (11-9th), a single Black Guillemot (13th) and first-summer Great Northern Diver (17th). Also seen were good numbers of Common Scoter (1,400-4th), Manx Shearwater (405-14th & 427-19th), Sandwich Tern (270-18th) and Gannet (114-14th). Although 98 Sanderling (17th) were probably late northbound migrants over summering waders were much in evidence including 800 Knot (20th), 42 Bar-tailed Godwit (21st), 34 Grey Plover (16th) while Greenshank (15th), Whimbrel (24th), Common Sandpiper (25th) and Black-tailed Godwit (25th) provided evidence that return passage had begun. A Quail (2nd) was the first 21st century record for the island. Late northbound passerines involved seven Spotted Flycatcher (2nd), Cuckoo (2nd), Wheatear (4th), and five Chiffchaff and two Blackcap. Successful breeding was noted for Grey Heron, Barn Owl, Raven, Jay, Long-tailed Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker – the latter the first record for the island whilst the presence of at least five summering Little Egret was suggestive that this species may be the next addition to the island breeding list.

Settled conditions remained the theme for much of July and consequently highlights over the sea were limited to Black Guillemot (8th & 22nd) and three Puffin (8th) and three Mediterranean Gull (14th-16th) along with 560 Common Scoter (16th), 376 Sandwich Tern (9th), 28 Little Tern (19th) and 425 Manx Shearwater (23rd) until unsettled conditions produced single Balearic Shearwater, Arctic Skua and Scaup (28th). Wildfowl were few but included two broods of Teal – only the third breeding record and two broods of Shelduck. Disappointingly the renowned gull colony at the south end saw a total breeding failure and it is perhaps indicative of the times that the roof-top nesting birds on the centre of the island again provided better productivity figures. An adult Hobby was logged (28th) and the first Merlin of the autumn appeared (30th). Returning waders included three Ruff and a Snipe (1st),

four Black-tailed Godwit (4th), Little Ringed Plover (9th), 2,264 Curlew (14th), 20 Whimbrel (15th), 52 Golden Plover (16th) 450 Dunlin (19th), three Common Sandpiper (22nd), 25 Greenshank among 422 Redshank (23rd) and 50 Turnstone (30th). Both Long-eared Owl (8th) and Short-eared Owl (28th) were unusual and Little Egret numbers began to build (21-29th). Up to two juvenile Cuckoo lingered (4th-23rd) and Lesser Redpoll (7th), Grey Wagtail (13th), Great Spotted Woodpecker (14th-30th), Coal Tit (15th) and Tree Sparrow and Treecreeper (both 22nd) were perhaps the result of post-breeding dispersal while Spotted Flycatcher (9th) and Blackcap (16th) were the first indications of southbound movement along with a few Willow Warbler. Diurnal passage produced a steady trickle of Swift and six House Martin (15th) amongst increasing numbers of Swallow. The moth trap produced Pretty Chalk Carpet and Scarce Silver Y both new additions to the island list, though an Oak Eggar was the most spectacular and almost as rare.



Oak Eggar – Colin Raven

Highlights over the sea in August involved single Black Guillemot (13th) and Black Tern (17th & 26th) while the first Shag reappeared (5th). However only two Arctic Skua and two Great Skua were logged along with peaks of 33 Arctic Tern (3rd), 22 Little Tern (9th), 517 Sandwich Tern (11th), 325 Manx Shearwater (14th) and 433 Common Scoter (17th). Two Mediterranean Gull were present (13th) and a Water Rail called (5th).



Mediterranean Gull – Colin Raven

A month record total of 58 Little Egret were recorded (27th), a Marsh Harrier (5th) and Osprey (30th) drifted over the island while both Merlin and Peregrine were regularly seen. A Garganey lingered (to 28th) and the first Wigeon (25th) and Shoveler (27th) reappeared. Waders included 1,962 Curlew (10th), 400 Sanderling (11th), 350 Turnstone (28th), 25 Black-tailed Godwit (26th), 22 Greenshank (20th), 12 Whimbrel (10th), four Common Sandpiper (5th) and a juvenile Little Ringed Plover (20th). Several Cuckoo were seen (to 20th) and a few Swift remained over the island (to 12th). Diurnal passage produced totals of 37 Tree Pipit (22-25th), 121 Tree Sparrow (100-31st) and 21 Grey Wagtail (12-25th) before 1,000 Swallow and 1,260 Meadow Pipit moved through (31st). Grounded birds included 10 White Wagtail (25th) and three Yellow Wagtail (21st) while eight Whinchat were amongst 19 Stonechat (20th). Two Pied Flycatcher appeared (4th) along with totals of four Spotted Flycatcher and 59 Wheatear although the number of Willow Warbler moving through the island were again low (50-20th).

Two Great Skua (9th), single Arctic Skua (9th & 11th), a Great Northern Diver (16th), and single Leach's Petrel (16th & 18th) were the highlights over the sea in September amongst 320 Sandwich Tern (1st), 500 Common Scoter (3rd), 53 Red-throated Diver (22nd) and nine Shag (23rd). An adult Mediterranean Gull appeared (8th) and the last Arctic Tern was logged (22nd). Single Marsh Harriers flew through (1st & 28th) while Peregrine and Merlin were regularly seen. Little Egret numbers began to build (36-9th). A total of 4,910 Pink-footed Geese moved through (from 6th), the first pale-bellied Brent Geese returned (13th) with 41 present by the month's end and Whooper Swan began to appear (from 22nd). A drake Scaup took up residence (from 27th). Waders included 30 Greenshank (21st), 10 Black-tailed Godwit (22nd) and single Whimbrel (10th), Ruff (10th-19th), Spotted Redshank (15th), and Little Ringed Plover (23rd). Migrant warblers continued to be worryingly thin on the ground with totals of just 32 Chiffchaff, 23 Goldcrest, six Willow Warbler (to 15th), five Whitethroat (to 17th), three Blackcap and two Sedge Warbler (to 28th). Additional grounded birds were few but included 52 Wheatear (17-15th) and single Treecreeper (7th), Whinchat (8th & 9th) and Spotted Flycatcher (14th). Diurnal migration was marginally better with day peaks of 3,030 Meadow Pipit, 820 Skylark and 470 Swallow (all 28th) and totals of 88 Tree Sparrow (45-23rd), 57 Grey Wagtail (12-22nd), 14 House Martin (to 23rd), 12 Siskin, 10 Lesser Redpoll and single Yellow Wagtail (2nd) and Sand Martin (24th).

The sea remained generally quiet through October with single Leach's Petrel (2nd), Great Northern Diver (20th & 23rd), Velvet Scoter (24th) and Long-tailed Duck (26th) the highlights along with 16 Shag (16th). Also seen were 1,452 Razorbill (7th) and a late Manx Shearwater (3rd). A Marsh Harrier flew through (18th) and a Short-eared Owl was seen (27th). Two Water Rail took up residence (from 15th) while Little Egret numbers steadily increased (86-30th). Wildfowl were led by a drake American Wigeon (29th-30th), presumably the returning bird first seen in 2017 and the first island record. A total of 5,386 Pink-footed Goose and 127 Whooper Swan flew through, the Brent

Goose flock held 187 pale-bellied and five dark-bellied birds. The first Goldeneye reappeared (23rd) and the lingering drake Scaup was joined by a female (28th). Waders included: up to 15 Greenshank along with five Black-tailed Godwit (5th) and a Jack Snipe and two Woodcock (28th). A few Wheatear trickled through (to 15th) while some semblance of warbler passage finally appeared with 81 Goldcrest (22-14th), 37 Chiffchaff (8-15th), 10 Blackcap (6-15th) amongst good numbers of Blackbird (120-28th & 100-29th). Diurnal migration was also much in evidence with 3,000 Jackdaw (18th), 600 Meadow Pipit (1st), 137 Swallow (6th) and 26 Reed Bunting (18th) and totals of 589 Tree Sparrow (130-15th), 386 Chaffinch (101-28th), 72 Greenfinch (10-22nd), 46 Lesser Redpoll (17-14th), 46 Siskin, 39 Coal Tit (22-27th), 20 Grey Wagtail, 11 Mistle Thrush and single Yellowhammer (11th) and Snow Bunting (30th). Arriving winter migrants included: 441 Redwing and 31 Fieldfare (from 11th) and 83 Brambling (from 14th). The small wintering Twite flock reappeared (18th) and steadily increased (30-30th), an itinerant Hooded Crow took residence (4th-27th) and another Treecreeper was seen (10th), however, the highlight was a mobile male Bearded Tit which lingered (15th-29th).

The sea provided few surprises in November excepting single Velvet Scoter (20th), Slavonian Grebe (26th), Great Skua (30th) and three Black Guillemot while the resident Eider flock held 5,020 birds (26th). A total of 2,084 Pink-footed Goose flew through but only 12 Whooper Swan headed south. The presumed returning Black Brant reappeared (10th) was thereafter present intermittently amongst up to 215 pale-bellied and 52 dark-bellied Brent Goose while a flock of 58 Barnacle Geese called in (16th). Additional wildfowl included 1,830 Wigeon (23rd) 80 Pintail (24th) and nine Shoveler (26th). Several Water Rail remained and 74 Little Egret were along the eastern shore (6th). A female Red-crested Pochard (18th) provided the wildfowl highlight and three Scaup lingered with two additional birds seen (20th). A Hen Harrier (17th) and Short-eared Owl (22nd) were the pick of the raptors though three Merlin were logged (10th). Waders included 10 Purple Sandpiper, eight Greenshank, seven Black-tailed Godwit and five Woodcock amongst the usual species while single Jack Snipe were logged (10th & 12th). Late summer migrants involved single Ring Ouzel (2nd), Swallow (2nd), Blackcap (24th) and Chiffchaff (24th) while early morning grounded winter thrushes totalled just 207 Redwing and 63 Fieldfare during the month. The Twite flock increased to 70 birds (24th) and a Water Pipit appeared (19th) amongst good numbers of Rock Pipit (17-10th). Diurnal migration produced totals of 39 Brambling (24-2nd), 16 Tree Sparrow, 11 Siskin and four Lesser Redpoll. Oddities included Hooded Crow (10th) and four Stock Dove (17th) – the latter the first of the year.

At least one Black Guillemot (17th) and the Great Northern Diver (7th) lingered into December amongst 22 Red-throated Diver and 37 Shag (28th). A total of five Little Gull were seen (4-3rd) among small numbers of Kittiwake (35-20th). A flock 19 Barnacle Geese were short-term visitors (9th-10th) and the Brent Goose flock increased to hold a total of 337 pale-bellied and 92 dark-bellied birds along with the lingering adult Black Brant. A total of 190

Pink-footed Geese flew through and the three Scaup and a female Goosander lingered all month. Waders included 5,000 Knot (27th), 58 Bar-tailed Godwit (12th), 28 Black-tailed Godwit (7th), 13 Purple Sandpiper (22nd), nine Greenshank (8th) and a Jack Snipe (19th). A total of 44 Little Egret were wintering and several Water Rail were logged. Raptors included a Buzzard which lingered all month. As is usual the year ended with passerines in short supply although the high tides towards the months end flushed a Water Pipit and 31 Rock Pipit from the salt marshes (24th) and a Hooded Crow called in (19th). Feeding stations at the north end of the island held four Great Spotted Woodpecker, 12 Bullfinch, a Treecreeper and several Tree Sparrow (all 22nd). The Twite flock held 59 birds (24th).



**BTO Marsh Award for
Local Ornithology
Dawn Balmer**



Published in 2016, *Birds of Spurn* by the late Andy Roadhouse, is a magnificent piece of work. In December 2016 it won the BTO/BB Best Bird Book of the Year (<https://britishbirds.co.uk/article/bbbto-best-bird-book-year-2016/>) and was described as '... a hugely impressive volume, combining a comprehensive and well-organised text with a superb assemblage of artwork and photographs, which sets the bar very high indeed for future books of this type. The book will undoubtedly become the definitive reference for this amazing site, a place that is a magnet for birds and birdwatchers alike.'

Anyone with an interest in the work of bird observatories, bird migration, rarities, coastal birding or patch watching will learn a great deal'. There have been many glowing reviews. What sets this book apart is that it is one of the most in-depth pieces of research and writing about a single key birdwatching site. Other recent examples include *Birds of Blakeney Point*. It took eight years of dedicated research and writing to bring this book to fruition and sets the standard very high for other work focusing on a single site. It has contributed a huge amount of ornithological knowledge for the local area. Andy was supported by Spurn Bird Observatory throughout.

Spurn has really come into the limelight in recent years and the local community is completely behind the work of the bird observatory, recognising the many benefits that birdwatchers bring to the area. The new Bird Obs building and the popular Bird Migration Festival have all helped to generate a great community feeling, and raise the profile of Spurn. The Observatory also stands out for its work with young people, encouraging them to visit and get involved in observatory work.

They also have a formal Friendship Agreement between Spurn and Cape May and Falsterbo Bird Observatory. This is probably the first of its kind in the UK where they intend to promote international relationships and share best practice across the globe to further the cause of environmental awareness around the world. The agreement has already enabled visits from Cape May and Falsterbo Bird Observatories to Spurn, and for representatives of Spurn to visit Cape May and Falsterbo, across a number of years.



Rob Adams, Martin Hughes-Games (from BBC Spring Watch who also received an award) Findlay Wilde and Nick Whitehouse (SBO Committee member). Findlay was SBOs Martin Garner Spurn Young Birder winner in 2015



BirdTrack

at Bird Observatories and how you can get involved at home!

BirdTrack is an exciting project, through a partnership between the BTO, the RSPB, Birdwatch Ireland, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and the Welsh Ornithological Society, that looks at migration movements and distributions of birds throughout Britain and Ireland. BirdTrack provides facilities for observers to store and manage their own personal records as well as using these to support species conservation at local, regional, national and international scales.

Since the start of Bird track (and its predecessor – Migration Watch see below) it has been the aims of the BOC to get all the historical data from the Observatories incorporated into this national project. And BirdTrack it is not just a project for professionals at Observatories, the project is aimed primarily at you, the citizen scientist!

Some of the Observatories have now digitised all their data back to the beginning of the Observatory, and even before that in the case of some sites! Skokholm have got data going back to 1933 when Ronald Lockley started the first Observatory there. Between the Observatories they have 4.25% of the entire BirdTrack dataset, this is a

massive amount if you consider that the whole observatory network covers just under 22 thousand acres, equating to just 0.03% of the landmass. Yet the Observatories have submitted so far over 4% of the data. Bardsey has all its data on BirdTrack from 1953 up to the end of 2018 and has the largest single data set for any site in the whole BirdTrack Database at 1.25% of BirdTrack. And with many more Observatories taking up the challenge of digitising their data and getting it entered to BirdTrack, and not only the historic data, but data going forward, the 'BOC' contribution will be immense. North Ronaldsay, Dungeness and Hilbre all hope to have a large part of their data in BirdTrack by the end of the year, Isle of May are in the process of getting theirs done. Skokholm, and Bardsey have their entire data set uploaded and Sandwich Bay are working towards getting their 65 year's-worth of data uploaded. The list goes on!!!

What is BirdTrack?

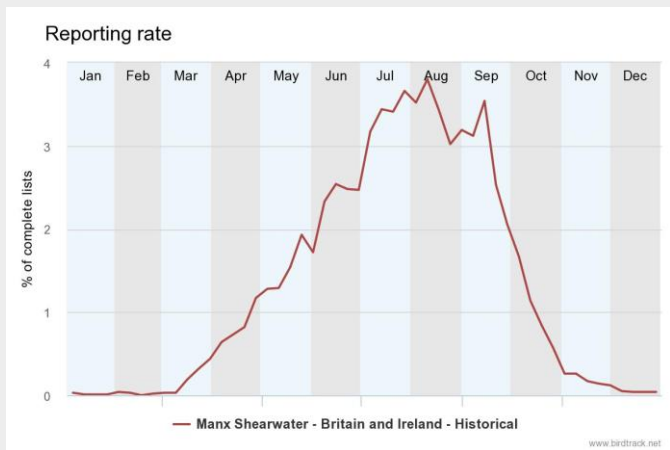
The idea behind BirdTrack is that if you have been out birdwatching or simply watching the birds in your garden, records of the birds you have seen can be useful data. The scheme is year-round, and ongoing, and anyone with an interest in birds can contribute. Important results produced by BirdTrack include mapping migration (arrivals and departures) timings and monitoring scarce birds. We know very little about the timing of arrival and departure of winter visitors and this is just one area in which BirdTrack will provide useful information. There are also many scarce birds where we would like to know much more about their populations.

Rank	Score
1.	107
2.	88
3.	79
4.	71
5.	69

Rank	Count
1.	145
2.	136
3.	135
4.	134
5.	134

So why not join in with the Observatories now and start putting your birdwatching data in to BirdTrack and help the BTO answer some of these questions? Register now to get started, or read on for more information...

The success of BirdTrack relies on your birdwatching lists. Simply make a note of the birds you see, either out birdwatching or from the office or garden for example, and enter your daily observations on a simple-to-use web page or via the free App for iPhone and Android devices. The BTO need to gather a large number of lists at all times of the year from throughout Britain and Ireland. BirdTrack prefers to receive complete lists of birds (all species seen and heard) because the proportion of lists with a given species provides a good measure of frequency of occurrence that can be used for population monitoring. Incomplete lists and casual records can also be entered because they too build our understanding of populations, distributions and movements.



Manx Shearwater – Bob Normand

The local and national results are available on the website



for everyone to look at - you don't have to be a BirdTrack recorder. Every night the BTO computer will summarise that day's records and produce up-to-date maps and graphs showing the latest in migration, movements and distribution. For scarce species, such as Hawfinch, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodcock and Water Rail, we will be building up a picture of their distribution throughout the year. You can also view and analyse your own records through specially designed features.

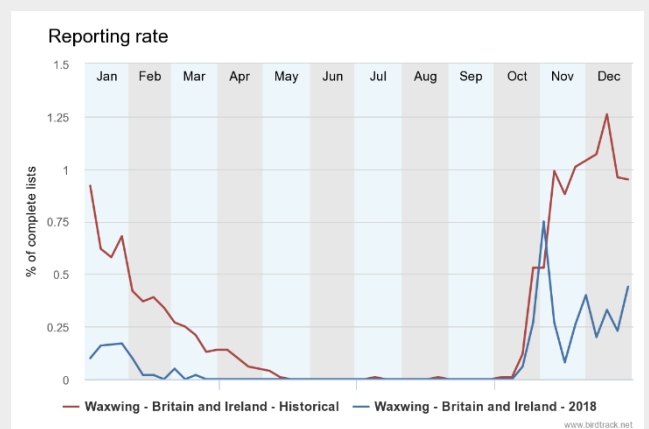
We hope that birdwatchers of all abilities will take part in BirdTrack. By encouraging large numbers of volunteers to join in the project we will be able to gather a large amount of unique and fascinating information.

The BTO continues to develop BirdTrack in order to provide extra facilities for birdwatchers to maintain and analyse their own records, and for county societies to be

able to do this for records within their areas. With your permission, all of your records will automatically be forwarded to the relevant county recorder.

Recording Migration Patterns

BirdTrack developed from Migration Watch, a program in which the BOC and many observatories got involved with. Migration Watch ran in the springs of 2002-2004, and all of the Migration Watch data is incorporated into BirdTrack. Migration Watch was able to record the timing of arrivals and pattern of migratory spread of summer visitors across Britain & Ireland. This was a huge achievement and the power of the Internet made it possible to produce up-to-date daily results. BirdTrack expanded on this to provide a year-round recording package so that we can also study autumn migration (a much bigger challenge) and other movements and distributions.



Waxwing – Steve Stansfield

As with Migration Watch BTO are interested in not just when the first birds arrive or the last ones depart, but we also want to know when the bulk of the population has arrived or departed (whether summer or winter visitors).

We can also get interesting information about passage migrants, such as inland wader movements. We can work this out by looking at the proportion of volunteers that have recorded a particular species on a given day.

By using the lists and counts of species submitted by volunteers we can also investigate how birds filter through

the country; for example, do they head up the centre of the country or do they disperse west or east in spring time?

Tracking the Conservation Status of Scarce Species



Hawfinch – Steve Stansfield

An important aspect of BirdTrack is to provide supplementary information on some of the scarcer species in Britain and Ireland. Many species are monitored well by existing surveys such as the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey and by periodical surveys such as Seabird 2000 and the



Young Birders at Bird Observatories in 2018 Josie Hewitt

Throughout 2018, Bird Observatories continued to welcome young birders through their doors, getting them involved in various activities and helping develop the next generation of bird observatory wardens and assistant wardens.

In early 2018, Alderney became the 20th accredited bird observatory in the British Isles, and in October, Rackie Powell made her second visit to the Obs. Rackie got involved with some mist netting during her trip and was delighted to see huge numbers of Firecrests migrating through, as well as a Siberian gem in the form of a Yellow-browed Warbler. As a C permit holder, she found it to be a great opportunity to broaden her ringing experience and is already planning her next trip!

Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory hosted their now-annual Young Birder's Week in early August and had the largest number of participants so far, with an Obs full of 11 very happy young birders. Throughout the week, participants were able to experience what life is like at an island observatory, contributing to the daily census, assisting with various ringing activities, checking the moth traps and doing a bit of sea-watching. Helping out with ringing the Manx Shearwaters is always a firm favourite amongst the participants, and this year was no different. Most afternoons were spent checking burrows for chicks, and most nights ringing adults, in addition to mist netting Storm Petrels when the weather allowed. Eleanor Grover attended the 2017 trip and had such a great time that she returned in 2018 and, although she didn't think it possible, had an even better trip than last time! Birds are undeniably the main focus of the young birder's week, but there is much more to Bardsey aside from the birds. Moth traps were run on most nights, a bioblitz

Nightjar survey. Others are difficult to survey well due to the habitats they occupy, their low breeding density and their secretive nature.

There is a range of species for which birdwatchers could easily and usefully contribute information. We hope to build up an annual picture of their distribution in Britain and Ireland, which would provide an excellent source of information between national Atlas projects. For species such as Hawfinch, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Woodcock we would like to receive records from throughout the year, whilst some other species are more common but scarce in the breeding season, e.g. Pochard and Dunlin, and so those records are particularly valuable.

Read more about taking part in BirdTrack, or just jump in and register to get started.

<https://app.bto.org/birdtrack2/login/login.jsp>

encouraged us all to look at some of Bardsey's non-avian inhabitants, and cetaceans were sighted cruising along the West coast throughout the week... our 2018 participants even had their first Bardsey dinner interrupted by a pod of breaching Risso's Dolphins!

In 2018, George Dunbar visited Bardsey for his fourth time, this time for a three-week stint as a volunteer assistant warden. Throughout his stay, George immersed himself in observatory life, carrying out a daily census, helping with ringing activities and getting stuck into some sea-watching, with excellent conditions delivering some 30,000 Manxies, 800 Sandwich Terns and multiple Sooty and Balearic Shearwaters. As Eleanor, George and myself are evidence of, Bardsey is a truly special place, with amazing scenery and fantastic wildlife that draws you back time and time again.



Storm Petrel ringing on the Bardsey Young Birders' Week Steve Stansfield



Ringling Manx Shearwater chicks on Bardsey © Steve Stansfield

For two weeks over March and April, Kirsty Franklin experienced the delights of volunteering at the Calf of Man Bird Observatory where she was fortunate to gain a broad range of ringing experience, from Ring Ouzel to Manx Shearwaters and an adult Shag. When conditions weren't suitable for ringing, Kirsty was able to get stuck into plenty of other jobs around the observatory, including building Manx Shearwater nest boxes and various tasks relating to habitat management. While assisting with the important task of recording the island's wildlife each day, Kirsty was treated to some incredible wildlife, including Hen Harriers, Hooded Crows, Eiders and 100's of seals. "It was an absolute pleasure to spend those two weeks on such a beautiful island" and somewhere that Kirsty "will definitely be returning to".

Fair Isle has a long history of attracting young birders, and 2018 was no different. Shetland-based Logan Johnson is lucky enough to have visited Fair Isle every year over the last decade and decided to make another trip before heading off to university.

Despite only spending a few days on the isle, he was able to help out with colour ringing some Great Skua chicks and find a new Fair Isle site for the rather funky micro-moth *Anthophila fabriciana*. The journey to Fair Isle was a little longer for Wirral-based Elliot Montieth who spent two weeks on the isle at the end of August. During his stay, Elliot was able to assist with the daily bird census, habitat management, data entry and various other essential tasks.

A number of scarce birds put in an appearance during Elliot's stay, including Arctic Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Common Rosefinch and a 'self-found' Barred Warbler, though a particular highlight of the trip was seeing 'Fair Isle' Wrens, a subspecies that he'd wanted to see for quite a while!

Toby Carter also spent a couple of Weeks on Fair Isle at the same time as Elliot. Toby took the opportunity to get up close to some of the island's more smelly residents!



Toby Carter with an adult Fulmar



Fair Isle scenery - Elliot Montieth



Repairing Heligoland traps on Fair Isle - Elliot Montieth

Over the summer of 2018, Stephen Vickers spent 3 ½ months as a voluntary assistant warden on Skokholm Island. During his time on Skokholm, Stephen was able to assist with a plethora of different tasks, ranging from daily bird census and Fulmar productivity monitoring to habitat management and colour-ring re-sighting. Bird ringing also featured heavily, and Skokholm was the perfect place for Stephen to gain extensive ringing experience, broadening and developing his skills by ringing a range of species, including seabirds, waders and passerines.

Spurn is a firm favourite among young birders, with gatherings drawing birders from all over the country. Ellis Lucas is a Spurn regular and stayed at the obs for a week in late October... full of enthusiasm to find a rarity. Large numbers of Pomarine Skuas, six Little Auks, a Grey Phalarope and 1000's of thrushes 'in off' made for some exciting sea-watching, while two Arctic Redpoll proved the highlight of the week. Some Sibe action in the form of Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warblers kept Ellis's motivation levels high, although sadly the biggie didn't materialise (this time).



Spurn's Little Tern team 2018

Over the summer, Alex Starace spent five weeks at Spurn as a Little Tern volunteer, working to monitor and protect the colony at Beacon Ponds. With shifts lasting anywhere between 4 and 8 hours, there was plenty of time to observe the birds and their behaviour in great detail – Alex particularly enjoyed “watching the birds head out into the North Sea and later return with fish, either to present to a potential suitor, or to give to a sitting partner, revealing the rough location of an otherwise well-hidden nest”. Despite bad weather preventing ringing of the tern chicks, Alex was able to get involved with plenty of other ringing, with particular highlights of catching Avocet chicks in knee-deep mud on Kilnsea Wetlands and ringing Sparrowhawk chicks in the pub car park.



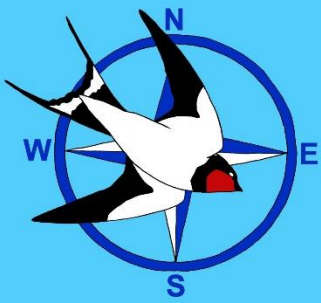
Little Tern Wardens hard at work! - Jonnie Fisk



Checking the moth trap at Spurn - Jonnie Fisk

Once again, particular thanks must be made to the various grants and funding schemes that provide financial assistance to young birders wishing to visit bird observatories: BTO's Young Bird Observatory Volunteer Fund (up to £200 to cover travel and accommodation for trips of 4 nights or more for anyone under 22 years old), British Birds' Young Birders' Grants (up to £250 to cover an obs visit, ringing equipment or small-scale research project for anyone aged 16-21) and Fair Isle's JHM & SAB funds (covers travel costs for anyone aged 16-24 who wishes to volunteer as part of the wardening team).

On behalf of young birders everywhere, I would like to thank all the Bird Observatories for their unremitting support and encouragement of the next generation. As is evident from the testimonials above, visiting bird observatories provides superb opportunities to gain experience, learn and develop valuable skills and forge deep connections with birds and nature, all of which can have lasting impacts on the lives of young birders.



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