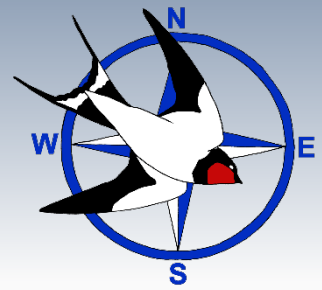


BOC News January 2020

The newsletter of the British Bird Observatories Council



Chairman's Welcome

Steve Stansfield

Welcome to this sixth 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 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 2019. I was also invited to Cape Clear Bird Observatory to give a presentation at their 60th Anniversary festival about the work of the BOC and Observatories.

2019 saw some major highs and some devastating lows for Observatories. Clearly the largest talking point and deepest low was the total destruction of Fair Isle Bird Observatory by a fire which engulfed the whole building and left nothing but a large pile of ash and twisted metal in early-March. Fortunately no one was injured in the blaze and Susanna and David Parnaby, along with their two children were safe. The new Observatory on Fair Isle was the fourth incarnation of the Observatory on the island and was built just nine year ago at a cost of £4 million.

The images opposite show the Observatory before the fire, shortly after completion in 2010, then during the fire on 13 March and the remains the following day. Fortunately FIBO still managed to operate the monitoring work during the year, and the birding community rallied round to donate equipment needed to continue the vital research and monitoring work the Observatory undertakes each year.

Much of the cost of re-building the Observatory will be covered by insurance, but there will still be a substantial shortfall, so **If you would like to make a donation to help with the re-build of the next Observatory on this magical Isle then please contact the FIBO Treasurer mikewood14@aol.com who will advise on the best way of making a donation.**

The BOC wishes FIBO, its Directors, along with David and Suzannah all the best for the coming years and we can't wait to see and hopefully visit the new Observatory once it has been re-built.



The BOC has been continuing our efforts to get all the Observatories data digitised and uploaded to BirdTrack, with many Observatories now getting all their data onto the system shortly after the year's end, and some are even doing it 'live' each day. Fortunately all Fair Isles ringing and census data had been digitised, so the loss of the written logs did not mean all the data was gone for good!

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 31st year working at Observatories, I remain very positive about the future, and the number of youngsters that are once again spending time at Bird Observatories. Spurn Bird Observatory had a joint SBO/BTO Young Leaders Training course during 2019. Both Bardsey and the Isle of May ran

their Young Birders' Training week and The BTO are helping by part funding (along with a very generous anonymous donor) the Young Bird Observatories Volunteer programme (YBOV). Bardsey ran a Joint-Universities week for undergraduates in April which was funded in part by the BTO. Later in this newsletter, there is a report by Ben Porter on page 71 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.

And Exciting new radio tracking project was launched and Nick Whitehouse will introduce 'Project Yellow-Browed' later in this newsletter.

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.

Summary of the 2019 BOC AGM at BTO HQ, Theford on Saturday 2 February 2019



Full House! The BOC Meeting at The Nunnery 3 February 2018 – photo Steve Stansfield

From left – Peter Morgan (Portland), Kevin Woodbridge (North Ronaldsay), Steve Williams (Hilbre), Dave Leech (BTO), Peter Howlett (Bardsey), Alison Duncan (North Ronaldsay and BOC Secretary), Chris Williams (Hilbre), Mike Archer (Bardsey) Dave Walker (Dungeness), Mark Pearson (Filey), Jim Morgan Flamborough, (Richard Brown (Skokholm), Jonnie Fisk (Spurn) Giselle Eagle (Skokholm), Gavin Woodbridge (North Ronaldsay), Rebecca Jones (Filey), Erin Taylor (Portland), Steffan Walton (Sandwich), Gill Holamby (Dungeness), Scott Mason (BTO), Sophie Barker (Holme), Rob Adams (Spurn), Sarah Harris (Spurn), Steve Newman (Holme), Heikki Karimaa (Hallas Bird Observatory in Finland), Tim Jones (Spurn), Aron Sapsford (Calf), Stuart Rivers Isle of May), Adrian Blackburn (Gibraltar Point), Salley Hunter (Sandwich), Nigel Odin (Landguard), Ian Hunter (Sandwich), Emma Stansfield (Bardsey), Steve Wing (Cape Clear).

The meeting was very productive and very large with some 42 delegates, including representatives from 18 of the 20 bird observatories within the UK, many BTO staff members, a Finnish observatory representative there to learn more about how British Bird Observatories operate, as well as skype attendances from Alderney and Long Point in Canada!!

The Chair was tasked with keeping the meeting under control, running smoothly and managing to fit a massive agenda into an eight-hour meeting. Well we did it, running over by just ten minutes. The meeting was opened by a wonderful introduction from Dave Leech (Head of the BTO Ringing Unit) and then the Chair and Secretary were re-appointed.

We discussed the new Observatory on Alderney, we had discussion based around Safeguarding and there was discussion surrounding the BTO/BOC Agreement and MOU and the BOC Constitution. The chair reported on a Feather Sampling project with Dave Leech, head of ringing at the BTO, and then, Mike Archer, presented a report on the Young Bird Observatories Volunteer program. There was an update on BirdTrack from Scott Mayson from the BTO, who began his speech by announcing that all the Bardsey data from 1953 to the end of 2018 had now been sent to the BTO for upload onto BirdTrack. Simon Gillings from the BTO gave a presentation on Nocturnal sound recording and Promoting the collection of standardised nocturnal flight call data – a project that the many Observatories are now looking to take part in. We then had a presentation from Paul Stancliffe from the BTO, Rob Adams (Chair Spurn BO) and Stu McKenzie (Long Point BO, Canada) on Bird Tracking Technology on a possible MOTUS project – see later...



Summary of the 2019 BOC summer meeting, Spurn Bird Observatory on Saturday 20 July 2019

The main reason for the meeting this summer was to have a discussion about and vote to approve the draft Constitution that had been previously circulated. The Chair outlined the need for and scope of a BOC Constitution. This would help to form the basis for the BOC-BTO MoU. Although BOC is not a charity the Constitution has been drafted to reflect the good practice taken from the Charity Commission template. BOC-BTO MoU update – A re-draft produced by Dave Leech has been sent to the BTO Senior management team for comment. The need for an Executive Committee has been in BOC Constitution since 2004, but one was never drawn up. It was proposed that the make-up of the Executive Committee, following the adoption of the new constitution should be: Steve Stansfield (Chair), Alison Duncan (Secretary), Peter Howlett and Steffan Walton. This was proposed by Chris Williams, seconded by Peter Morgan and carried unanimously

There was an update on the Motus project where Robert Adams and Nick Whitehouse Nick described the process so far: Chris Hewson had done some work in Cornwall using similar fixed radio telemetry technology, we would have 3 bodies working together – BOC, BTO and Hull University. A Steering group was set up to include a Post Doc researcher from Zoology department Hull University, the Chair BOC, BTO, and regional Bird Obs reps – N, E and SE.

Alderney BO – an update on the New ABO was read out by the chair in the absence of a representative from ABO. An ABO/AWT MOU had been drawn up and the proposed accreditation application was in hand and that new Chanel Islands rings are sponsored by Zeiss with the Zeiss web address on the rings. There was an update from Fair Isle about the disastrous fire that destroyed the building and contents in March – the cause of the fire is still not known but is not foul play. The insurance was largely resolved, a project manager has been appointed, tenders would be going out to architects, QS and contractors. The footprint will remain largely the same but more research facilities Sarah Harris from the BTO/Spurn spoke about Observatory activities and was to circulate a data collation spreadsheet – Sarah asked Observatories to help with compiling a resource sharing ideas and activity which can be used for many purposes including directing enquiries to the right Observatory.



Alderney John Horton

Another exciting year for birds. Five more new species were recorded for the island (subject to rarity panel approval); Olive-backed Pipit, Thrush Nightingale, Barred Warbler, Booted Warbler and Dusky Warbler. These records should of course be considered against there having been no sustained recording of bird migration in Alderney until the ABO was launched. If accepted these 5 species take the birds of Alderney list past 300 species. With interest in the ABO growing we have seen increased staff and visitors this year, both very effectively contributing to achieving 100% daily census coverage in our recording area at the East of the Island throughout the spring and autumn migration periods. 2019 saw our highest annual bird list to date of 177 species. Also as a key part of the ABO's contribution to the long-term monitoring of bird populations and migration, over 10,000 birds were again ringed this year.

Through Jan-March 7 Black throated and 6 Great Northern Divers were reported. Beyond our resident breeding Little Grebe, records of similar species are irregular at best, this year a Red-necked (only the 9th record here) was found in Longis Bay 4th Jan, it remained off the NE coast until the 14th. A Back-necked Grebe (only 5 previous records) was in Braye Bay 4th-6th Feb. We made an earlier start at ringing Storm Petrels off 'mainland Alderney' this year beginning with 5 on 22nd May. Our annual 2 night session on Burhou island targeting this species was cut to one evening due to the weather but this effort did manage to process 362 birds; amongst them 8 UK controls including a bird ringed in Tyne and Weir and another ringed as pulli on Lundy in 2016, amazingly we understand this bird to be the only Petrel chick ever ringed on Lundy. A Cattle Egret was found by visiting Guernsey

birders 26th April, single Great Whites' were seen 16th April, 29th May and 25th Aug. An immature Purple Heron was present at Longis pond 25th/26th August, the first record since 2002.



Purple Heron - Tommy Saunders

Visiting Hampshire ringers were delighted to see a Black Stork passing over the Obs 13th April, a White Stork was reported 'off the south cliffs 5th May. The mild winter at the start of the year afforded us precious few wildfowl

records. On 31st September 2 Pink-footed Geese flew over Mannez and on the previous day 30th October 2 Red-breasted Mergansers in Saye Bay, these the first seen here since 2004. This year's Honey Buzzard passage recorded 5 birds May/June and 31 Individuals Aug/Sept. 3 Ospreys were spotted this spring, 5th April 8th and 13th May. We get a lot more Black Kites here than we do Red' and this spring sightings involved at least 4 individuals during April; 1 on 8th, 1 on 15th, 1 on 20th/21st and 1 on 23rd. A Spotted Crake was at Longis pond 30th Oct. A Common Crane flew over the NE end of the island 24th March. On 28th Oct 2 further birds were spotted flying SW over Essex Castle, located shortly afterwards on the south cliffs' fields, they were not present the following morning but were seen in Guernsey 29th and 30th.



Common Crane – John Horton

2 Curlew Sandpipers were present at the north end of Longis Bay 29th Aug-2nd Sept. Single Purple Sandpipers were seen in February and November and a Wood Sandpiper flew over Longis reserve 13th May. A Pomarine Skua was seen 6th Sept and between 17th July and 5th Sept there were reports of 8 separate Yellow legged Gull. Single Little Gulls were seen off Mannez Lighthouse 6th and 10th Aug. Spring saw us record 24 Cuckoos (our best total to date) whilst during the same period Turtle Dove sightings only amounted to only 3 birds. A long-eared Owl was in Barrackmasters Lane 15th July sparking rumours of them breeding but this was not proven. Further sightings involved 1 Longis Common 18th Sep and one in Mannez quarry 28th Oct. A Nightjar flying around the bird observatory courtyard 27th April was the first of 2 records, the other 20th Sept (Longis Common) plus an unidentified Nightjar 6th October at dusk over Mannez Quarry. Our first Swift was spotted 29th April and the last 15th Sep. A single Bee-eater flew over St. Anne 29th June and a Hoopoe showed well on the Mannez Garrenne 17th April, a Wryneck was at the same location 23rd/24th April and later records were of 2 more on 23rd Aug and 1 on 10th Sep. Our only Woodlark record this year was a single over Mannez 8th Nov.



Hoopoe - Phil Clay



Barred Warbler - J Horton.



Thrush Nightingale -Photo Joe England



Dusky Warbler - John Horton



Booted Warbler - Lorraine Benson

An Olive-backed Pipit found by migration assistant Joe England at Mannez 'green waste site' this was the 1st record for Alderney and 1st spring record for The Channel Isles. It was a good year for Tree Pipit, this included 29 Ringed (16 birds 09/04 to 01/05 and 13 birds 18/8 to 01/09) Water pipit was seen in Longis bay 1st March and 7th May, a fine male Blue-headed Wagtail was at Whitegates fields 16th May. The Island's 1st record of Thrush Nightingale was a bird trapped on 1st May at Mannez. A strong passage of Black Redstarts saw a minimum count of 9 (max 16) daily between 29th Oct and 8th Nov. Spring Ring Ouzel passage involved over 100 birds with a high count of 31 23rd April. Records of Fan-tailed Warbler during April, June, July and Oct involved 4 individuals A Barred Warbler – ringed at Mannez quarry 5th Oct, another 1st record for the island.

Nine separate Dartford Warbler territories were identified. On 20 September a 4th consecutive day of strong E and NE winds brought in a Booted Warbler - located during the daily census skulking amongst low vegetation in an open field at the NE corner of Whitegates adjacent to the campsite. A first record for Alderney it followed one found in Guernsey on the 8th Sept suggesting this may possibly have been the same individual. We had 3 spring records of Wood Warbler and 7 Autumn records of Yellow-browed Warbler. The last of 5 species added to the list of the birds of Alderney this year was a Dusky Warbler ringed at Mannez quarry 18th Nov.



Red-backed Shrike – John Horton

An excellent autumn passage of Pied Flycatchers included over 30 ringed. Two very vocal Golden Orioles delighted a visiting Naturetrek holiday group 12th May. A Woodchat Shrike was at Mannez Garenne 30th April – 3rd May and a Red-backed Shrike was ringed at Longis Nature reserve 1st September, this was Alderneys' 19th record, but first one to be ringed, and surprisingly the first recorded since 1998. The individual was re-trapped on 3rd Sept having gained a 10% weight increase.

A Serin was at Barrackmasters Lane 8th April, 3 Common Crossbill flew over St. Anne's 29th June, another over the golf course 26th Aug. A cracking male Common Rosefinch was ringed at Longis reserve 27th May then seen briefly 28th. 4 separate Hawfinches were recorded

during April. A Snow Bunting was in Longis Bay 17th Nov and a singing male Cirl Bunting was observed at Giffione 26th March, though not subsequently seen, a pair successfully bred on neighbouring Guernsey this year. Some interesting late moving migrants records this year included a Garden Warbler 23rd Oct, Whitethroat 30th Oct, Willow Warbler 31st Oct and Swallow 5th Nov. Lastly on the bird front, having ringed over 3500 Redwings here since 2016, we got our first 'control'! A Norway ringed bird, original ringing data awaited.

On the "domestic front" for our small dedicated team a highlight of 2019 was Alderney Bird Observatory becoming a stand-alone company and registered charity. Our original business plan first pitched to the states of Alderney in the spring of 2016 presented that our new bird observatory would begin as a 2yr pilot scheme, sighting an ambitious longer-term goal of becoming a stand-alone independent organisation as soon as it was practical. Setting out almost 4yrs ago with a great deal of enthusiasm but zero funding, it was a very proud day for all involved to reach this very significant position, at times it has been a decidedly rocky road!



Woodchat Shrike

The introduction of the seasonal voluntary position of 'Migration assistant' was a great success during 2019 attracting quality candidates who were a great asset. We were also delighted to welcome our first young birder who stayed for a month supported by the BOC young birders program. The 2019 seabird ringing trips also got right back on track enabling us to continue again with the valuable seabird monitoring that has been taking place in Alderney since 1945 and offer valuable experience to several visiting UK ringers. On a personal note it was a wonderful opportunity to attend and deliver a presentation at the IBOC conference in Israel in March, the whole event was a fantastic experience. 2020 is shaping up nicely with the recruitment of our new Assistant Warden Elliot Monteith and our first dedicated 'Moth trapping weekend event' planned for 25th/26th July 2020



Bardsey George Dunbar & Steve Stansfield

2019 had a slightly different start to other years, as Emma went back to the island without Steve to open up the Lodge and Observatory and get it cleaned down and freshly painted and up and running ready for the season. Meanwhile, I was on the mainland preparing for a trip!

Emma and Connor, along with new Assistant Sam (our New Assistant Warden) and two volunteers, Lynda Roberts and Mike Smart crossed to the island on the 18th of March. Also arriving around this time was an all-new cast for the island and there was a real buzz with two brand new assistants and new Trust Staff. For Steve though, it was time to get ready to fly!! So why was Steve on the mainland whilst the others were painting and scrubbing the Lodge? Well, Steve was attending the third International Bird Observatories Conference at Eilat in Israel, representing both Bardsey, and the British Bird Observatories Council. The conference was fantastic, with over 100 delegates from 30 countries. Birding in the area was somewhat brilliant too, with thousands of Eagles, Kites, Buzzards, Flamingos, Storks and much more...

Upon Steve's arrival back to the UK, it was a dash across from Yorkshire to Bardsey and back to work, finishing off painting and getting the Lodge ready for the first guests. Our second Assistant, Lewis Hooper, arrived at this time too.

The following week of 20th April, saw the arrival of nine students from Aberystwyth, Swansea and Bangor universities. The week was part funded by the BTO and The Willis Trust, and intended to introduce young birders to Observatory work, very similar to our acclaimed Young Birders' Week which we have run since 2014. The week was a great success, even though the weather was somewhat mixed, The students, aged 18-25 and living in Wales (part of the funding requirements) had a great time, ringing Manxies, Whimbrel, seeing new birds such as Pomarine Skua, Storm Petrel, Wood Warbler and Osprey, and seeing some great migration, including hundreds of Whimbrels, Willow Warblers and some Grasshopper Warblers. We had the usual bird race and quiz, with Sam and Lewis being team captains (team Lewis won the Bird Race and Team Sam won the quiz).

In mid-April Connor turned 17; you have seen pictures of him since he was a baby, and now a very strong and helpful young man, he is an asset to the Observatory and the island, and I (proud father moment) would like to thank him for all his help getting the Observatory ready and the stuff he does behind the scenes helping me and

Emma keep the Lodge and Observatory running smoothly.

Monitoring projects and research

As well as the normal daily census and ringing, each year we undertake a number of research monitoring projects and other studies. This year we did the usual Chough Monitoring, Breeding Landbird and Breeding Seabird monitoring, the Manx Shearwater Productivity monitoring. We also began a four-year census of the Manx Shearwater population.

Volunteers and Interns.

We have had a pretty good run of volunteer helpers and interns this spring. Lewis was joined initially by Vic Bevan for two weeks, a retired IT specialist. Then Tom Williams. After Tom's two very successful weeks came Ed Betteridge. Both had great fun and were able to help out with the shearwaters. Our first intern of the year was George Beadle, who had not done any ringing before, but left the island buzzing after his experiences, ringing Storm Petrels, Manxies, gulls and Shags. We also had Josie Hewitt come along again to help out. Josie as ever was great in the seabird colonies, helping us with our two new colour ringing projects on Shags and gulls Alex Starace came as one of our interns in late summer and George Dunbar on a three-month placement to the season's end.



Observatory Staff Lewis Hooper and Sam Prettyman with volunteer Ed Betteridge

Members' Weekend and AGM

Another successful members' weekend and AGM were held in early July at Prenteg Following the AGM, BBFO's five-year Strategic plan was presented to the members present and a discussion about how to implement it produced some very interesting comments.

Following this we had a wonderful lunch produced by Alicia Normand and Annie West. This was then followed by a well-kept secret. A special award for Outstanding contribution to the work of the Observatory was made to

Steve Hinde by our President Bishop David Hawkins. Following this wonderful moment in the Observatories history, I then gave a presentation on the International Bird Observatories Conference and my trip to Israel in April.

Emma, Connor and Steve headed off for their summer break they had a very pleasurable day on Hilbre Island, and we were given the 'red carpet' treatment by the Chairman of Hilbre Bird Obs, Steve Williams. It was then time for us to head off to Spurn Bird Observatory for a meeting about an exciting new project using radio telemetry using micro technology and Nano-tags, which give off a radio signal and can track birds up to 10Km from a base station. There will be more about this in future Observatory newsletters but you can read all about it at www.motus.org. The following day we had another meeting at Spurn, this time the Bird Observatories Council. Here were discussed a reviewed our constitution, which, once slightly amended was unanimously accepted by all present.

Then Steve and Emma dashed back to the island. We spent the first week getting the very last details ready for the report to go the printers and then preparing for our inaugural 'Golden Oldies Week'. The week was fantastic. Gareth and Meriel held a cheese and wine evening at Caffi Enlli. We had about 25 people turn up who sat around being entertained by music played on a Hammer Dulcimer, whilst Gareth kept everyone's glasses topped up throughout the evening!

In August, we had our annual **Young Birders' Training Week**. It was again great! A delay of two days due to a summer storm saw many of the youngsters on the mainland for two days, but on Monday they arrived.

Young Birders' with Manx Shearwater Chicks



A quick tour round Nant in the evening where we watched Risso's Dolphins offshore was followed by an heading off to Nant Valley at 10.30pm until 1.30am catching Storm Petrels and Manxies!

The second morning was very special, as almost all of the young birders managed to see a fantastic Fea's Petrel which Steve found, gracefully glide along the west side of the island about ½ a mile offshore. This left the whole Obs

buzzing. Then it was out doing Manxie chicks in the afternoon and ringing Manxies at night!

September saw Emma and Steve head off to County Cork in the Republic of Ireland and to Cape Clear to give a presentation about Bird Observatories and one about Bardsey to the Cape Clear 60th Anniversary Wildlife Festival. This was such a great event and we were proud to be part of it.

Spring Migration Summary

March was productive in the way of island scarcities with the 15th ever record of Gadwall and both the 22nd and 23rd records of Kingfisher. There were some good arrivals of Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers late on in March, though Blackcap numbers were quite low compared to recent years.

April saw some good arrivals, with an early Osprey seen over the ~Narrows, a few Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts.

May continued this spell of island wildfowl scarcities with the 28th record of Shoveler on one of the island's ponds and the 41st record of Pochard – the 1st for nine years. The 14th saw the first record of Turtle Dove for the year, with one heard singing at Nant. The next day, three were seen there – a brilliant count for North Wales of this sadly increasingly rare British bird. The standout highlight of May, and the spring, however, was saved until 19th. The day started off poorly, with reduced migrant numbers compared to recent days. Nets were opened at the Observatory anyway, perhaps in the blind hope of something special being out there. This hope was rewarded when Sam Prettyman found a Western Orphean Warbler in one of the nets in the garden at Cristin. This was the first record for the island, the second for Wales and only the sixth for Britain. The bird was not seen again after its release, though a Firecrest was found in the garden while searching for it.



Western Orphean warbler – Lewis Hooper

The only other scarcity of the month came in the form of a Common Rosefinch found at Nant on 22nd.

June started off well with another Common Rosefinch being found at Nant on 1st in with a group of Lesser Redpolls which were then joined by a singing Cuckoo. The 2nd was even better, when a singing Golden Oriole was found, a young male. This was the only record of the year but, thankfully it gave frequent views throughout the day.



Golden Oriole – Lewis Hooper

Another island scarcity was found on 4th, three Barnacle Geese – only the 21st record for Bardsey. This Spring's rarities weren't over yet either as a Greenish Warbler was found singing in the garden at the Observatory. Eventually, it made its way into the Heligoland trap, this is the 19th record for the island of a bird which is now almost becoming expected in the Spring.



Greenish Warbler – Steve Stansfield

Breeding Summary

Summer was poor in the way of birds on the island and this saw attentions move to monitoring the island's breeding seabirds. Two trips were made to the Gwylan islands to focus on ringing Puffins, Shags and Great Black-Backed Gulls and a few trips were made down the East side of the island to target the nesting Herring Gulls, Razorbills and Guillemots. 2019 has shown some interesting changes in breeding populations. Some all too familiar outcomes occurred, of course. Par for the course, Shelducks failed to fledge any offspring despite the usual annual attempts, the chicks being swiftly predated by gulls, crows and even seals before they can shed their downy plumage.

Some interesting breeding behaviour was recorded from passerines. During late May into June two apparent Siskin pairs were caught, the females in both pairs sporting rather large, wrinkled brood patches. Unfortunately, these birds were not recorded after mid-June and they were not included in this report. And it was not just Siskins that were unusual, Goldcrests bred once again, and this year juveniles were actually caught before their crests had formed, as well as Willow Warblers which very rarely breed here.

The number of pairs for many species have held steady from 2018. However, there have been some rather dramatic changes in just a single year. Meadow Pipits are quite easily the most alarming, although they are difficult to map, it was quite clear early in the season that numbers were low, and so more effort was put into mapping the pairs. Despite the added effort, just 46 were recorded which is a drop of 42% from the ten-year mean. It's not exactly clear why this is the case; farming practices have changed suddenly and noticeably since last year, with less intense grazing, leaving the sward longer and uneven. This, though, should have created a habitat more suited to Meadow Pipits, so the reason for the sharp decline is unclear. The population did decline quite severely from 2017 into 2018, so perhaps this year just saw a continuation of that same short-time trend. It's possible that the population will bounce back just as quickly.

This season's seabirds breeding populations have remained steady. For the third year running 45 Shag nests were recorded, which is an increase on the ten-year average. On the Gwylan Islands, the Cormorant colony is steadily growing, and has reached a total of 20 pairs this year. The Great-black Backed Gull population has also remained steady on Ynys Gwylan Fawr. The highest it has been in the last three years, hopefully the improved productivity is a sign of continued growth into the future, although this probably isn't such a pleasing statistic to the island's breeding Puffins. After a drop last year, the Kittiwake population has realigned with the 2015, '16 and '17 population count and the productivity had been an increase on the ten-year mean too. This is similar for

Guillemots, last year the population took a slight plunge, but bounced back this year, although the increase that took place from 2013-2017 seems to have ground to a halt. Puffins on Bardsey continue their uninterrupted population growth, jumping to 143 occupied burrows, up from 132 in 2018.



Puffin colony – Steve Stansfield

For the first time since 2016 some breeding success was noted with Little Owls. Although only two pairs apparently attempted to breed, which is fewer than almost every previous year, one juvenile was making itself very obvious in Nant Valley.

Autumn Migration Summary

Autumn passage appeared to begin at the end of **July** when the first Pied Flycatcher and Tree Pipit were seen along with increasingly large numbers of waders around the coast.

August however held the first rarity of the Autumn with a Cory's Shearwater being seen flying North along the West Coast, this is only the third record of this large shearwater species from the island and the first for nearly thirty years. The 6th saw seawatching improve with the first Balearic Shearwater of the year – another bird becoming increasingly uncommon on passage from Bardsey. However, a further three were seen on a seawatch on 10th thanks to the gale force South-Westerly winds along with two Wood Sandpipers, another good bird for the island with these being only the 19th record. The first Sooty Shearwater of the year was also recorded in August on 17th along with a high count of 263 Arctic Terns. The seawatching theme continued with the island's 10th Great Shearwater and 24th Roseate tern being seen on 19th along with another Sooty Shearwater. The first major Autumn highlight also came in August on 20th when Bardsey's third Fea's Petrel flew South along the West Coast. Thanks to the bird being viewable for nine(!) minutes, almost everyone at the Observatory managed to see it and it so happened to fall on the first day of the Young Birders' Training Week. The first passerine scarcity of the Autumn appeared on 26th in the form of a

Wryneck, unfortunately views were brief as it soon dropped into the dense gorse cover on the mountainside.

North-Westerly winds on 4 **September** saw the first three Leach's Petrels and Sabine's Gull of the year pass the island along with 24 Arctic Skuas, 21 Great Skuas and seven Pomarine Skuas. A Lapland bunting on the 8th was the first of the year of this scarce migrant. A Goshawk was also found on 8th, another rare Bardsey bird for the year. The second rare bird of the Autumn came on 10th when an Isabelline Wheatear was found on the South End of the island by one of the Observatory's guests. After being flushed by a Sparrowhawk, the bird was relocated on the Narrows, just in time for the Warden arriving back from his trip to Cape Clear to give a talk at the 60th Anniversary Wildlife Festival. The Isabelline Wheatear then remained on the Narrows until it was last seen on 16th, this represents the third record for the island.



Isabelline Wheatear – Steve Stansfield

The 19th saw a further two Lapland Buntings over the island along with the first Hooded Crow and Short-eared Owl of the Autumn. Easterly winds on 20th saw an arrival of migrants and another Lapland Bunting, two Wrynecks and the first Ring Ouzel and Firecrest of the Autumn were found also. Hirundine passage was the main feature of 25th and as ever, everyone was on the lookout for something more interesting in with them but it was still a surprise when Steve had a Red-Rumped Swallow moving South with the many hundreds of Barn Swallows – this is the fourth record for the island and the first in Autumn. The first Long-tailed Skua of the Autumn was recorded on the 28th along with another Sabine's Gull and Leach's Petrel. The month's relentless westerly winds that had prevented all birds from the east from reaching us finally produced a good land bird on 29th in the form of Wales' first American Buff-Bellied Pipit found on the West Coast mid-afternoon. The day also saw another Long-tailed Skua and Wryneck

recorded, which were rightfully eclipsed by the pipit. The last day in September saw migration pick up and the first two Yellow-browed Warblers of the year were recorded with a further one Lapland Bunting and the Buff-Bellied Pipit being seen again, briefly.



Buff-bellied Pipit – Steve Stansfield

October started with the first Great Northern Diver of the Autumn on 1st and another Short-Eared Owl. 2nd saw four more Lapland Buntings, the second Black Guillemot of the year and another Sabine's Gull. A Yellow-browed Warbler on 5th was the third of the Autumn. Despite continued Westerly winds, the 10th yielded yet another Lapland Bunting which was followed by another the next day as well as a Snow Bunting – the first of the Autumn. Wind finally dropped by 14th, allowing for the first Brambling of the Autumn to be recorded along with another Yellow-browed Warbler, three Ring Ouzels and a good late total of 20 Blackcaps. The calm conditions of 14th continued into the next day allowing the best day of vis-mig of the Autumn so far to unfold. Two Richard's Pipits and one Woodlark were headlining, however 646 Skylarks, 142 Siskins and nine Tufted Ducks – the 35th Island record – also warranted a mention. 16th saw the first two Woodcock and Jack Snipe of the Autumn along with another Woodlark – the 23rd record for the island after one the previous day. 19th saw Northerly winds hit the island and with them came a small group of Twite, the first of the Autumn, six Little Gulls and a further four Woodcock. Perfect migration conditions occurred on 20th and thrushes and finches moved in good numbers. 1484 Chaffinches, 189 Siskins, 124 Goldfinches, 20 Bramblings, 17 Song Thrushes, five Mistle Thrushes (first of the Autumn) and one Ring Ouzel were recorded along with another Yellow-Browed Warbler. The following day saw more thrush movement with over 300 of both Redwing and Fieldfare roosting in the evening and 603 Jackdaws and 28 Bramblings moving through during the day. 22nd was quieter but during the last half hour of light,

two Yellow-Browed Warblers dropped into the garden at Cristin and began calling loudly – seemingly fresh-in birds. Another good was picked up on 24th with a juvenile Glaucous Gull passing down the West Coast – a scarcity for the island. The penultimate day of October saw three Great White Egrets fly down the West Coast and circle back over the Observatory, still a rarity on the island with these representing the seventh record.

November saw a nice splash of colour added to the end of the year with a male Red-Breasted Flycatcher being found at Nant. The bird showed well all afternoon and was a nice addition to the year list one day before we would have to leave for the Winter. While it was being watched, a nice showy Firecrest also appeared.



Red-breasted Flycatcher – George Dunbar

This year has been a strange one, there seems to have been a distinct lack of regular scarcities with no Subalpine Warblers in spring and no Barred or Melodious Warblers or Grey Phalaropes in Autumn. However, it seemed that there would be a mega, then a period of quiet, then another mega and another period of quiet, etc. which isn't to be sniffed at, however some scarcities to tide you over are always nice – but then I suppose two additions to the island's list are too...

All in all 2019 was a very pleasant year on the island, we had some good laughs and saw some fantastic birds and we are all looking forward to returning in 2020!

Spring 2019 was relatively quiet for birds, with the occasional rarity thrown in to liven things up a bit. The season this year started on 18 March when the staff made it back to the island during a gap in the weather.



Calf of Man Aron Sapsford

The season began somewhat belatedly when myself, Dan Woollard (Estate Warden), Di

Swayne and Mike Haigh arrived at South Harbour during the morning of the 18th March. An earlier attempt to get to the Calf during the 7th and 8th had been thwarted by Storm Gareth, which persisted for the next 10 days!



Spring migration was already underway with a number of Goldcrest around the Observatory when we arrived and two Sand Martin flew through on the 19th - the earliest date for eight years. Wheatears began arriving from 21st and single Swallows were seen on 23rd and 31st March. All Tit species are relatively unusual on the Calf, however we appear to receive a small annual spring passage of Great Tit during March and this year was no exception. Coal Tit are generally less regular and a single present from 24th - 26th March was just the 13th record for the month. The bird also

exhibited characteristics of the Irish subspecies *P. a hibernicus* which has only been recorded on the Calf once before, in October 1993.

A few more migrants arrived towards the end of the month with the first Willow Warbler and Blackcap on 28th and a Yellowhammer trapped on 30th was an unusual capture, being just the 16th ever ringed here.



Coal Tit showing features of *P. a hibernicus*

Since 2012 a programme of Rat eradication and monitoring has been undertaken on the Calf and one of the first jobs of the new season was to activate a contingency grid around the Observatory, after the presence of an individual had been detected near the Observatory compost heap during the winter. A considerable amount of time and effort was also employed in checking and renewing many of the non-toxic bait stations and marker canes, many of which had become damaged or lost due to winter weather. Constant monitoring of these bait points is a key element in ensuring that Rat re-infestation of the island is avoided and we were particularly helped during this season by the appointment of Di Swayne as our Volunteer Assistant Warden. Di's tireless enthusiasm and energy in ensuring that the hundreds of sites were visited and checked each month, often in challenging and poor weather conditions, is greatly appreciated. It is pleasing to report that no signs of any rats were found during the bait point monitoring, although a second individual, for the season, was recorded on camera trap footage at the Observatory compost in August, but as with the first sighting the animal was quickly removed.



Ring Ouzel

April began with a fine Ring Ouzel around the Observatory on 1st, although in general other migrants were few and far between. The first Manx Shearwaters were seen ashore on 4th and the start of a light spring passage of White Wagtails was seen from 6th. The first 'fall' of Willow Warblers on the 7th included at least three *P. t acredula* types and other new migrants included a House Martin and Tree Sparrow on 8th - the latter being relatively unusual as a spring bird on the Calf.

The 9th April marked the 60th anniversary of the start of the Bird Observatory on the Calf; back in 1959, Einar Brun and his wife, Dido, crossed to the Calf and began to record the birds that breed here and move through on migration. There have been 25 Ornithological Wardens during the past 60 years, adding at least 60 species to the Manx Bird List. In the absence of any more formal

celebrations, a cake was cut and a toast to the next 60 years was made.



Happy Birthday Calf of Man Bird Observatory

Moderate to strong easterly winds during the 2nd week of the month looked promising but only a handful of spring migrants were blown in, with our only Black Redstart of the year on 10th being the highlight. Calmer conditions on 17th released a rush of migrants and included the first Whitethroat of the year and our earliest ever Reed Warbler, beating the previous record by an astonishing 10 days. Good numbers of Willow Warblers arrived over the next few days, along with our first Grasshopper Warbler (on 18th) of the spring and a Long-eared Owl that roosted in the back garden of the Observatory during the 20th – 22nd. The theme of early migrant arrivals continued with a male Whinchat trapped in the Front Field on 25th, the earliest arrival date for 10 years.

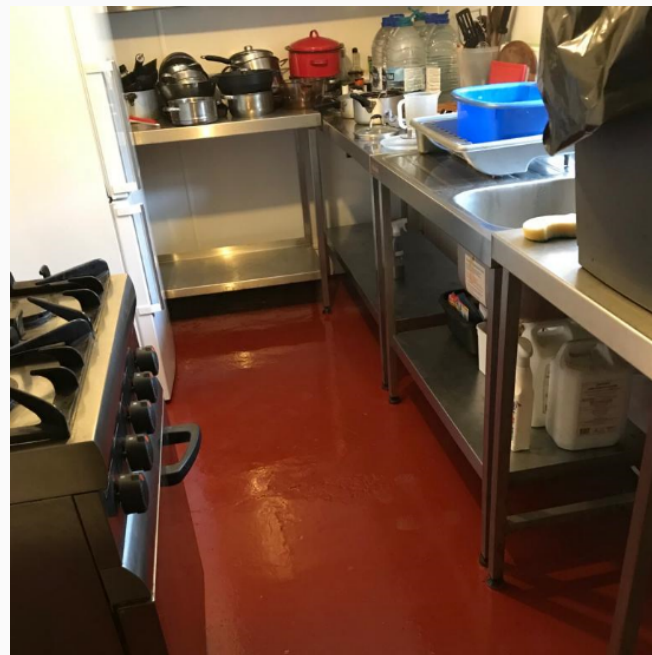
Volunteers play a vital part in ensuring that we are able to achieve many of the habitat management and building maintenance tasks on the Calf, as well as providing valuable support in assisting with environmental surveys. The long-term dry stone walling project continued with Dave Fisher and Pat Griffiths maintaining their long-standing service and completing sections of repair work along the front wall and back field in April, as well as starting a new section at the Twin Fields during June. Paul Corrin continues to provide sterling assistance turning his hand to the many different projects and tasks that are found to be needed both indoors and outdoors.

Maintenance at the Observatory is an on-going task and there were many jobs to complete to give the place a spruce-up prior to the 'guest' season starting. Water ingress through the porch roof continues to be an issue despite a renewed bitumen roof but some remedial works and re-painting with damp-proof paint seems to have made a significant difference. Dampness is a continual problem in such an old building with thick stone walls and repainting the walls and floors is annual task, once spring is here and things have dried out a little.

The wood stoves also play an important role in drying things out and during the summer the stove in the Warden's lounge was replaced for a much more efficient

system. In fact a little too efficient and it was necessary to keep the door to the common room open for the remainder of the season and allow some of the heat to disperse to other parts of the building!

Freshly painted floor in the kitchen.



Coppicing of the Willow scrub at the Withies, which was started in autumn 2018, was continued with the main Withy and area to the north of the millpond thinned and reduced significantly in height. Work to enlarge the water-surface area of the Millpond was on-going throughout the year; with teams from Hansard International and the Civil Defence clearing silt and vegetation during the early spring, removal of spore-heads of the invasive Horsetail during the summer and clearing of vegetation and raising water levels in autumn.



The Millpond



MV Ocean Adventure

May got off to an excellent start with a large arrival of commoner migrants on 1st, which included a number of new species for the year with Cuckoo, Swift, Garden Warbler, Tree Pipit and Spotted Flycatcher, as well as less commonly recorded Marsh Harrier and 'flava' Wagtail. A Canada Goose flushed from the Millpond on 4th was an unexpected record, as were two Little Egret that flew south past the Burroo on 6th. A Short-eared Owl found in the Glen on 9th remained until 10th, when it put on a good show for passengers from the MV Ocean Adventurer during their guided tours of the Calf. This is the 2nd year running that this cruise ship, which specialises in nature-based tours, has visited the Island and spent time exploring the Calf.

A good series of four Lesser Whitethroat records began on 11th, whilst a Wood Warbler on 12th was the first spring record since 2011. Bird of the month was a Nightingale (19th Calf record) trapped at the Observatory on the morning of 17th and was the forerunner to an excellent second half of the month which produced another Wood Warbler (18th), Subalpine Warbler (20th), a 'tristis' Chiffchaff and Melodious Warbler (21st), 23 Sanderling (7th Calf record) and Pied Flycatcher (22nd), Stock Dove (23rd) and a second Subalpine Warbler (23rd-25th).



Nightingale – Paul Corrin

It is pleasing to also welcome back volunteers from previous years, with Mike Haigh, Stephen Vickers, Dave Neal, Peter Norrie, Oscar Adedeji, Richard and Gill Watts, Mark Fitzpatrick and Ed O'Connor all returning to assist with bird-related monitoring, as well as welcoming new volunteers Garry and Candice Barker, Andrew (Pedro)

Roberts, Miriam Lord, Ian Beggs, David Wilkinson and Frank Street.

It is often the case that early June can be the harbinger of something 'rare' and in recent years we have managed a run of spring Red-breasted Flycatchers. Not to be out-done, this years' bird turned up on the 6th, taking this run of spring records to four consecutive years and six individuals in total.

With spring migration hardly over, our attentions turned more towards the breeding birds of the Calf, with the growing Eider populations season already well under way and many of the seabirds having one of their most successful years in the past decade. Since Eiders first bred on the Calf in 1992 the species has become well established, with perhaps as many as 70 pairs breeding annually. Efforts to locate nests led to 38 nests being monitored and the recapture of females at nest show a high level of site fidelity from year to year, with 20 previous year re-traps caught in 2019, including birds from as far back as 2009 and 2011. However very little is known about the origins of these birds or where they go once they leave the Calf after the breeding season. Seventeen 'new' Eiders were ringed including the first ever two males that were dazzled in the Puddle during early May.



Drake Eider

Seabirds in general had a good year for productivity, although the long-term decline in Shag breeding numbers continue with a further 20% decline to just 65 pairs. Razorbill and Guillemot numbers appear to be remaining fairly stable, whilst the establishment of a small Black Guillemot colony below the Lighthouses is

encouraging. Puffin numbers remain very low and although a couple of pairs were seen in suitable areas, windy weather during the summer made boat surveys impossible. All three 'large' gulls had their best breeding season for almost a decade, with productivity being considerably higher than in recent years. As a result it was possible to add 305 Herring Gull, 53 Great Black-backed Gull and 15 Lesser Black-backed Gull to our long-term colour-ringing study (picture below).



Following on from last year's failure of any raptors to breed, it is pleasing to report that two pairs of Peregrine bred successfully; each raising at least one young – the first time two pairs have bred on the Calf in a single year. Passerines also seemed to have a largely successful breeding season, in particular Stonechat and Wheatear young were particularly numerous during the late summer.

Autumn passage began early with the first dispersing young Grey Wagtail recorded from 19th June and an adult Green Sandpiper put in an appearance on the Millpond on 24th - the first ever record for the species in June. The 3rd breeding record of Willow Warbler was confirmed the following day, when a newly-fledged juvenile was trapped. For the third consecutive year, a Redstart was trapped during the last few days of the June. This time a 2nd year male, following a female (with brood patch) in June 2018 and a recently-fledged juvenile in 2017.

July continued the early movement theme with a number of juvenile Blackcaps moving through, along with Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Goldcrest recorded in the first week and followed by Sedge Warbler on 15th when an adult female Whinchat was unexpectedly trapped in the Glen. A second Green Sandpiper was on the Millpond on 25th and the beginnings of a mass influx of Painted Lady butterflies was noted on 30th when 238 were counted, increasing to a record count of 850 the following day.

2019 was an excellent year for Moth recording on the Calf with 211 species of moths, consisting of 128 macro and 83 micro species recorded. Eleven new species were added

to the Calf list, with seven of these occurring during the month of July alone.



Chilo phragmitella, *Notocelia cynosbatella*
Pandemis dumetana
 Round-winged Muslin, *Orthotelia sparganella*
 Small Marbled, Small Fanfoot

August started positively with small numbers of warblers continuing to move through and included the only Wood Warbler of the autumn on 2nd. Fourteen House Sparrow on the 3rd continued an above average showing for the species and Tree Pipit on 8th was the start of their autumn

passage. Unfortunately, from 9th, the weather was not conducive to further passerine movements and other than a few White Wagtails beginning to move through, attention turned towards the sea in hope of some passage offshore. The 19th produced four new species for the year, with six Knot, two Arctic Tern, a pale-phase Arctic Skua and Common Gull, along with a southerly movement of 1600 Manx Shearwater. The strong winds continued through much of the remainder of the month keeping passerine migration to a trickle of 'Alba' Wagtails.

An immature male Migrant Hawker dragonfly near HG1 on 26th continued the recent trend of this species being relatively commonly seen throughout autumn and confirmed that the species is now breeding on the Calf.



Migrant Hawker

Seawatching continued to provide the main focus during the first half of September and with Ed O'Connor returning to keep vigil from Culbery, we were treated to a good range of species and numbers including Great Northern Diver, 14 Leach's Petrel, a juvenile Sabine's Gull and 12 Great Skua on 4th and two Leach's Petrel, Grey Phalarope and Pomarine Skua on 6th. Lighter winds on 7th brought a more significant passerine movement with 47 Tree Sparrow, 96 'Alba' Wagtails, 10 Tree Pipit and a Reed Warbler, increasing with 130 Goldcrest, 25 Blackcap, 72 Robin, 65 White Wagtail and 808 Meadow Pipit on 8th, when an adult Hobby was found near the Twin Fields and remained to 10th.

A quick switch back to the sea produced further Pomarine Skuas on 9th and 11th and a Black-throated Diver on 12th whilst Meadow Pipit passage peaked at 1282 on 16th and a Wryneck was seen briefly near Cow Harbour on 17th, when a record count of seven Buzzard was also made.

The following week was frustratingly quiet, although the 6th Calf record of Mediterranean Gull was recorded flying through the Sound on 20th. Calm conditions on 25th brought a welcome arrival with 42 Chiffchaff, 60

Goldcrest, a late Grasshopper Warbler and a Pied Flycatcher, whilst increasing south-west winds on 26th brought a further three Pomarine Skuas off Culbery. The first signs of an unprecedented movement of Pink-footed Geese were flocks of 22 and 14 on 29th September followed by 71 and four on 1st October and 11 on 2nd. These records of five flocks, totalling 122 birds eclipsed the previous total of 100 birds recorded from eight sightings in 60 years. Two Brent Geese off South Harbour on 2nd October were new for the year and the first since 2016.



Yellow-browed Warbler

The now annual arrival of Yellow-browed Warbler began with a single from 6th- 12th, with another individual on 13th and two new birds on 14th. Less regular was a Great Crested Grebe seen flying south off Culbery, with Auks, on 7th being just the 14th Calf record and first since 2005. The eastern theme continued with a 1st year Red-breasted Flycatcher in Mill Giau on 12th plus a lateish Reed Warbler at the Withy, a Pied Flycatcher in Mill Giau on 13th and the only Treecreeper of the year there on 15th.



Red-breasted Flycatcher

A second winter Mediterranean Gull flew south off Culbery on 16th and three Short-eared Owl were around the islet on 19th, when the beginnings of a good autumn thrush passage started, with several counts in excess of 200 Redwing and 300 Blackbird during the latter half of October and into November.

The good passage of divers continued with a further Black-throated on 11th and single Great Northern on 16th and 26th with at least five birds present on 27th. Seawatching also provided a 1st winter Little Gull on 24th and 1390 Kittiwake, 30 Common Gull and 1628 'Auks' south off Culbery on 27th.

Calmer conditions for the last few days of October produced more passerines movement with two House Martin on 28th being the 4th latest Calf record. The first of three small parties of Long-tailed Tit arrived on 29th and a Richard's Pipit was seen and heard in the Lighthouse Fields before it flew off towards Caigher on 30th, when 2574 Starling headed west.



Owing to a number of mechanical breakdowns and volunteer illness the number of management tasks achieved during the autumn was somewhat lower than anticipated, although following some severe rainfall which washed a considerable amount of aggregate off the track down to Cow Harbour, repairs and improvement to the ditching along the track were carried out. The 'old' seawatching hide at Cow Harbour, which was originally built in the 1970's, was taken down and a 'new' three-man hide erected in its place. Particular thanks are due to Mark Fitzpatrick and Ian Beggs for help with the dismantling the 'old' hide and laying of the 'new' footings and to Mike Prior who conducted the majority of the re-build.

Numbers of raptors present on the islet were noticeably high during the autumn with daily counts of up to three Sparrowhawk and four Merlin recorded regularly. This was reflected in the species ringing totals of 10 and four respectively. Three of the Merlin were females and biometrics taken suggest that these birds were of the Icelandic race *F. c. subaesalon*.



Merlin

Up to 45 Twite were present along the East coast during the first week of November and a Wheatear on Burroo on 8th was the latest ever Calf record by four days. The strong passage of Meadow Pipits during the autumn led to a record species total of 1235 being ringed and it was rather fitting that, on 6th November, one was the 8000 bird ringed this year – only the 2nd time in the Observatories 61 year history that this milestone has been passed.

A flock of eight Long-tailed Tits arrived during atrocious weather on 9th and remained to 10th when they were trapped at the Observatory. One of the birds was a control and subsequently it was discovered that the bird had been ringed near Doncaster in April 2019. The movement of 285 Km is one of longer distances recorded for the species and perhaps most notable as the first recorded movement between mainland UK and the Isle of Man for the species.

The season ended on the 10th November, with a brief weather window providing the opportunity to leave the island before more autumn storms descended.

One would imagine that life on an isolated island could be a lonely one, however this is far from the case and although the island has a tranquil beauty it is also a vibrant hub of conservation management and scientific study. Many people play a vital role in ensuring everything runs smoothly and we are particularly grateful to the many people that facilitate our programme of work; in particular, the boatmen who bring our supplies each week and during the summer months land day visitors to explore the islet; both Manx National Heritage and Manx Wildlife Trust provide a wide range of support and advice and the many volunteers that pass through each season bring a great sense of achievement and enthusiasm to the place. The Calf is a special place and those that visit are often captivated by its uniqueness.

We are currently recruiting for several long-term volunteer positions during the 2020 season. For further information contact lara@manxwt.org.uk



Cape Clear Steve Wing

2019 was the 60th Anniversary of the Cape Clear Bird Observatory and we held a very successful Wildlife Festival in the first two weeks of September to

help celebrate the occasion. Guided walks and/or ringing demonstrations were held daily, followed by an evening presentation on a very varied range of subjects!

We were greatly honoured to have David Lindo, AKA The Urban Birder, who, after declaring the event open gave a very interesting and eye opening presentation on urban birding, especially the Owl city in Serbia!



David Lindo, The Urban Birder, – Steve Stansfield

This was followed on the Tuesday evening by the Two Tims, Davis and Jones, from North Devon. They gave a hugely enjoyable – and reminiscent – talk about Lundy Island, its birds, natural history and landscape. Their talk has resulted in many requests to organise a trip to the island! Wednesday was a very diverse evening! Dr Paddy Sleeman, UCC, gave a great insight into the populations, diets and risks to the Irish Owls – to a very select audience! This was followed by what was more of a performance by Diarmuid O'Driscoll, who came armed with 10 random articles found on Cape and then proceeded to relate stories woven around each one. A magical and captivating evening! Steve Stansfield (Chairman of the Bird Observatories Council) and his wife, Emma, gave an in-depth talk on Thursday about the work of the Bird Observatories and their huge dataset that is used to lobby Government departments. They followed this with a short,

rapid fire presentation on 'their' island, Bardsey – thoroughly enjoyed by all! Friday was a special night, in that we welcomed back Tom and Stephanie Green (Wardens of CCBO in 1968 and 69!) to Cape again to give a talk on the early years of the Observatory! Many of the Capers attended this talk and it turned out to be a very sociable evening!! Saturday was another double header with Andrew Power and friends giving us a preview of their wonderful documentary about the Terns of Rockabill Island – brilliant footage and very well put together! This was followed by Michael O'Keeffe explaining how light effects the way we see birds. Simple, you might think but seriously, not so! An incredibly complex subject matter explained so very well, even I could understand! We welcomed back Sam Bayley on the Sunday evening, to give us an update on his Colour ringing project on the Lesser Black-backed Gulls on Cape. He is getting some amazing results and recoveries already and we look forward to hearing the next update. Monday was the turn of the National Biodiversity Centre and Dr Liam Lysaght on the ways we can help with Surveys and how to record the results – having led a Butterfly walk in the afternoon in very testing conditions! Dr Geoff Oliver gave a very interesting talk on Tuesday, about the Lagoons of Co Wexford, their changing properties and the growth of new sites. While it seems some are in a depressing state, hope remains for the future of this special habitat. This was followed on Wednesday night by an impromptu talk about the birds of Tanzania by myself after the planned speaker had to cancel. On Thursday, Pádraig Whooley (IWDG) gave a great talk about the Whales off West Cork and beyond and entertained us all with some wonderful stories! It's amazing just what and how much is out there! The last 'talk' of the Festival was given by Dick Coombes (BWI) on the Migration hotspot of Point Pelee, Canada. All the birds we hope to see in the autumn contained in one humorous presentation, full of 'oohs' and 'aahs'. Then, to conclude the festivities, Cape Clear's second Bird Race was held on the Saturday, starting at midnight and ending at 6pm in Cotters Yard! Great fun was had by all who took part, the winning team scoring 56 of the 64 species seen overall and it just showed that the more eyes on the island, the more species would be seen!

This year saw what is probably the first over-wintering Common Buzzard on the island, reflecting the ever-widening spread westwards of the species in Ireland. Other bird highlights include Woodchat Shrike, Hobby, a rare spring record of Reed Warbler, Western Subalpine Warbler, Hawfinch, Nightjar, Red Kite and Common Rosefinch. Our Common Buzzard stayed with us for the whole season, joined at times by up to ten others! In mid-July, a Common Crossbill on a window feeder behind the Youth Hostel was a pleasant surprise for the owners! Also in mid-July, a decent seawatch saw good numbers of Cory's Shearwaters, 1 Great Shearwater, a few Sooty Shearwaters and 2 Wilsons Petrels. Unfortunately, the

seawatching failed to live up to expectations as most of the sea life moved well offshore.



A juvenile **Woodchat Shrike** (photo above – Steve Stansfield) was found in late August, near the Post Office and stayed for two days. It, or a second bird, was seen for 10 days in September along the Low Road. The usual trickle of August warblers and flycatchers was improved by the finding of Icterine, Garden and Reed Warblers along with 2 separate Pied Flycatchers.

A Green Sandpiper in early September was a nice surprise, as was a juvenile/female Common Rosefinch. A second Icterine Warbler was seen at the Lake and a juvenile Red-backed Shrike joined the long staying Woodchat along the low Road. Always a delight to see was a Firecrest on the 29th September. October saw the first Divers seen from the ferry, always a sign of the approaching winter! Single Hen Harriers and Short-eared Owls early in the month added to that impression. The only Wryneck of the year was found above the High Road around the same time as a Melodious Warbler was seen in Michael Vincent's Garden.



Red-eyed Vireo

A Red-eyed Vireo was found in the Priests garden but move to Brid and Seamus' garden, where it stayed for 11 days! A single Osprey was seen flying south down the

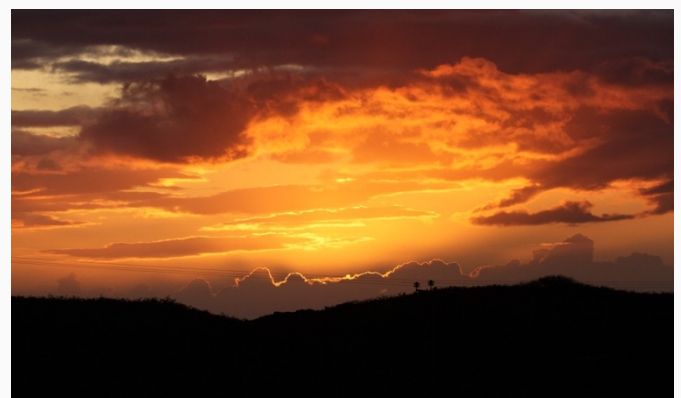
island on 16th. Perhaps the most frustrating record of the year was a very brief glimpse of what was either a Marsh or Willow Tit in the Priests Garden on 20th. The year ended with a Hume's Warbler being caught and ringed and then a first for Cape, a Black-necked Grebe, found on the lake in December!



Black-necked Grebe - Mary Cadogan



Hume's Warbler



Cape Sunset



Copeland Chris Acheson

The 2019 season at Copeland Bird Observatory was, as always, one of ups and downs - many highlights combined with less welcome events and situations. A working daytrip on 18th March preceded the first residential visit four days later. It was found that the ravages of Winter had caused the electrics to fail, though the buildings were generally in good condition. Work on the electrical system over the next couple of manned periods did not recover the situation until a full day-visit by our “electricity repair

team” on 18th April successfully restored the lighting and hot water supply – what a difference! The “first-footers” located a Raven’s nest with 3 eggs on the east cliff.

The Observatory was manned for 25 weekends over the year, as follows – 1 in March 3 each in April, May, June, July and September, with 5 in August and 4 in September – and 4 intervening weeks, 1 in April 1 in August and 2 in October. There were several Open Days during the year.

During 2019, only 1059 new birds were ringed at the Observatory. This was the lowest annual total for decades and is accounted for by a number of reasons, principally weather related. A few weekends were lost due to inclement weather (and occasional boat trouble), preventing us from getting to the island. Throughout the

season, a combination of strong/unfavourable winds, heavy rain and sometimes fog affected movement and thus the ability of migrants to reach the island. Such

conditions, which seem to be generally on the increase, also restricted use of nets on the island. Availability of manpower was another significant factor.

Spring migration was disappointing and as we didn’t manage to connect with the main runs of our staple migrants, the year totals for Willow Warbler and Goldcrest were 76 and 60 respectively. Spotted Flycatchers were scarce with only one ringed. Five of the 6 Wheatears trapped were of the Greenland race (*Leucorhoa*). The weekend of 19-21 April was notable for the appearance of a Ring Ouzel on 20th – regrettably this escaped through a hole in the net as the ringer was working to extract it –

along with a Long-eared Owl seen on the same day. A Wood Warbler was noted in the company of newly arrived Willow/Chiffs the next day. The following week was windy with much rain. Perhaps the non-ornithological highlights of the week were 151 Grey Seals hauled out onto the seaweedy rocks of adjacent Mew Island in 3 main groups – an amazing sight – and the full albino, pink-eyed Rabbit frequenting the main Heligoland Trap area.

The highlight of the Spring was the appearance of a Lesser Whitethroat on 30 May. It was still present on 1 June, but remained uncaught.

Among the seabirds, 359 Manx Shearwaters, 11 Eider Ducks (18 retraps) and 13 Black Guillemots were ringed. Black Guillemots are still recovering from a decimation of numbers caused by a 'rogue' Otter a few years ago. Among the Gulls, 2 Common, 35 Lesser Black-backed and 6 Herring Gulls were ringed. 2 Oystercatchers were also ringed.

It is worth highlighting the opportunities for ringing seabirds at Copeland Bird Observatory - the relative low numbers indicated for the species above are more a reflection of effort and availability of manpower than the species' status. There is enormous potential for ringing large numbers of Manx Shearwaters and gulls especially, (both adult and pulli). Researchers from Oxford University have been studying the Manx Shearwater colony annually since 2007. They deploy satellite trackers to monitor the birds' movements over a 3 week period during incubation (late May to Mid-June) and again later

when the adults are feeding chicks (Mid-July to early August) – all with fascinating results.

Throughout the season, the need for general maintenance of accommodation, facilities and habitat can detract from ringing and ornithological activities. This includes general repairs, plumbing, fire safety/security/bio-security checks and tests, cleaning of jetties, mowing paths and Shearwater sub-colonies and trimming of mist net sites, to mention a few! We acknowledge and appreciate the support of National Trust and Ulster Wildlife staff and volunteers who put in one or two weekends annually in support of the Habitat Management Programme. Their work, and that of other observatory members, ensures access to all parts of the island by keeping the paths free of encroaching Bracken and Ragwort and improves access the Manx Shearwaters by keeping the vegetation under control.

In 2019, the big project was the refurbishment and repair of the East Landing – one of our 2 jetties allowing access to the island. Constant battering by the sea over the years since the last overhaul had caused serious degradation of the structure and we were in danger of losing it completely. After months of planning and preparation (not to mention years of fund-raising!) the work was carried out by our friends, TandH Engineering, overseen and supported by our own Davy Galbraith and other members, during the first week of September. It involved shuttering and encasing the whole structure in concrete – extremely hard work by all throughout the week, in 2 daily shifts at low tides. The successful consolidation of the jetty will stand us in good stead for years to come.

Due mainly to the unfavourable weather conditions that had also blighted the Spring, Autumn ringing numbers

were low. The ringing highlights were a Garden Warbler on 12 October and a Yellow-browed Warbler on 26

October. A single Curlew, lamped on 25 October - the Observatory's 6th – and a Redshank the following night, are also worthy of mention.

The most significant event of the Autumn was, actually, a non-event! Usually the finch month, October was almost devoid of finches this year. Only small parties of Goldfinches were seen – just 26 ringed all year – and Redpolls were virtually absent. Only 7 were ringed all year and 5 of these were in the Spring. This is virtually unprecedented for Redpoll, though numbers ringed have been declining for the past number of years. Usually our prime October finch (with occasionally 5-600 ringed during the month) their non-appearance this year is one of the factors that have contributed significantly to the much lower overall annual ringing total at the Observatory in 2019. It seems that Scandinavian finches are exploiting new food resources in the North, meaning that, if they have to move South later than has happened before, they may be passing through the Island after mowing has ceased for the year.

Throughout the season a total of 105 bird species were recorded which is also down on recent years. The highlights were our 5th Osprey on the 23rd May, the third since 2012, the 10th Little Egret, 22nd Little Gull and the 4th Long-eared Owl this decade – the 47th since 1954. As well as those birds ringed and mentioned above, a second Yellow-browed Warbler was sighted on the 11th of October, these birds representing the 12th and 13th records for the observatory. The collapse of our breeding Moorhen population is complete with zero birds recorded in 2019 after one sighting in 2018. Moorhen was once a very common breeding species with max counts of 104 birds visible on Mew Island alone and catches of over 40 birds in some years. It was suggested that the initial decline witnessed c25 years ago was because of Peregrine Falcons taking up residence for the first time but this was short lived and the numbers continued to tumble... Ten butterfly species was a fairly typical year but a Common Darter dragonfly was a great record with only a handful of previous records.

The observatory is open for bookings for 2020, please check out the website for more details - <http://www.thecbo.org.uk/>.





Dungeness David Walker

The year started fairly quietly with very little in the way of cold weather movement and indeed there were already signs of spring movements from mid-January with good numbers of Brent Geese moving up-channel. Good numbers of Red-throated Divers, Gannets and auks were wintering offshore. A species whose numbers are going through the roof in recent winters is Cormorant with a peak count of 7550 in January. For long periods during the year there was no Patch but good numbers of gulls were attracted when it was operating and in the first winter period included three Glaucous Gulls and 40 different Caspian Gulls. Sandwich Terns began to reappear from Feb.19th and good numbers of Great Skuas appeared to be wintering offshore. A couple of Chiffchaffs and up to six Firecrests over-wintered in the area.

It was 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. Six Wood Warblers were of note but there was only one Turtle Dove along with very few Cuckoos, Swifts, Sand Martins and Swallows (the lack of these was noted across Romney Marsh as well) and Willow Warblers and only 12 Redstarts, five Whinchats and six Tree Pipits.

Rarities included a White Stork, Red Kite, a Kentish Plover, three Bee-eaters, a fine male Red-backed Shrike and three Serins. An undoubted surprise of 25th April was a Yellow-browed Warbler in the Heligoland Trap.

Stonechats seemed to be everywhere with 13 pairs present (many of the males at least appearing to be *ssp rubicola*) and lots of young being fledged. While they have been present all year the resident pair of Peregrine Falcons again failed to nest.

The numbers of departing summer migrants during the first half of the autumn were about average, with the exception of Pied Flycatchers which had their best autumn for some years, and all three hirundine species which had very poor movements. Passage Cuckoos were almost non-existent and only two Turtle Doves were seen. The latter half of the autumn was very slow going though with very few thrushes and finches arriving although good numbers of Goldcrests and Firecrests passed through.

Rarities during the autumn were very scarce but included a Wryneck, a Shore Lark, three Yellow-browed Warblers, a Pallas's Warbler, a Siberian Chiffchaff, Red-backed Shrike and three Treecreepers. An eastern-type Lesser Whitethroat was also trapped on Oct.30th and DNA analysis subsequently confirmed that it was of the subspecies *halimondendri* and becomes the tenth British record.



Shore Lark



Red-backed Shrike

The spring seawatching was at best average with a decent passage of Common Scoters in April, good numbers of Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwits and Common Terns but for the second spring in succession the Pomarine Skua numbers were disappointing with only 88 birds seen. Good numbers of Great and Arctic Skuas were seen. Breeding birds included a pair of Ravens and five pairs of Black Redstarts and Wheatear numbers increased slightly.



Central Asian Lesser Whitethroat *S.c. halimondendri*

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. Balearic Shearwaters appeared in good numbers with a peak of 57 on Sep.26th. Four Grey Phalaropes were found and Caspian Gulls were a fairly regular feature in the latter third of the year.

The back end of the year more or less petered out with a couple of Firecrests attempting to winter and good numbers of auks offshore. The winter feeding station was re-establishment in the trapping area. Remarkably, even before Christmas, Brent Geese were already making their way back to mainland Europe.

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 again during the summer on nocturnal surveys of these species. Visiting the sites earlier in the season also produced several nymphal Sickle-bearing Bush-crickets and thus confirmed the continued breeding in the area and accurate emergence dates were achieved for both species. The Tree Crickets were abundant.

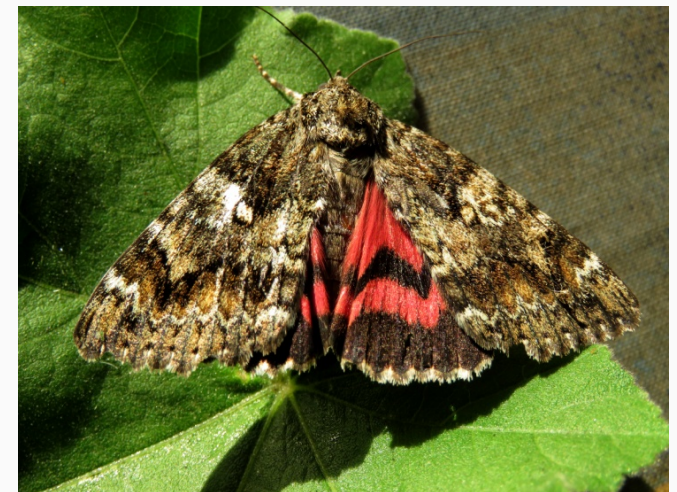
It proved to be another excellent year for insect migration with a steady supply of scarce moths and a few exciting dragonflies and bees being found. Five "macro" moth species were added to the Observatory list this year in the form of Portland Ribbon Wave, Hoary Footman (two), Bloxworth Snout, Radford's Flame Shoulder and a Dark Crimson Underwing. Other goodies included Large Emerald, Rosy Wave, Tawny Wave, Grass Rivulet, Pale Oak Beauty, Waved Carpet, Spring Usher, Red-necked Footman, four Convolvulus Hawk-moths, two Golden Twin-spots, Dewick's Plusia, Pine Beauty, two Tree-lichen Beauty, two Pale Shoulders and a White-speck. There were also a number of rarer "micro" moth species trapped and included the pyralid *Chrysocrambus linetella* trapped on June 24th - one of the moth highlights of the year.



Hoary Footman



Bloxworth Snout



Dark Crimson Underwing



Portland Ribbon Wave



Chrysocrambus linetella

Some rare dragonflies were noted with perhaps as many as eight Lesser Emperors being found and of more significance, a Willow Emerald and two Southern Migrant Hawkers – both new species for the Observatory. A few Small Red-eyed Damselflies continue to hang on to their status as a breeding species in the area.



Willow Emerald 9th September



Southern Migrant Hawker 10th September

Some butterflies had a reasonable year with good numbers of Grizzled Skipper, Small Copper and Brown Argus. Also of note were a Large Tortoiseshell in March and a female Long-tailed Blue in August which appeared in the Observatory garden and even laid eggs on a Bladder Senna plant.

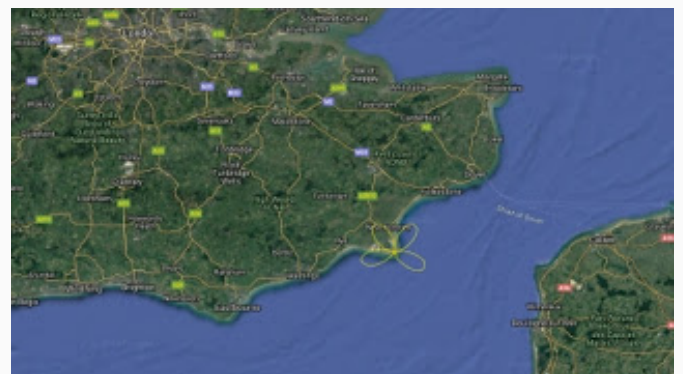


Long-tailed Blue

High numbers of Porpoises were seen again during the year with highest counts mainly between late March and early June and with a peak count of 35 on Mar.28th. A pod of 15 White-beaked Dolphins were also seen on May 24th.

Other projects

Over recent years, stimulated by talks at the International Bird Observatory Conferences, and with increasing use of radio tracking to monitor migration patterns we have installed our own receiver. This is linked to Project Yellow-browed, and is in collaboration with other Bird Observatories, Hull University, BTO, BOC and Bat Conservation (see article on page 70). Thanks go to EDF for permission to use the building and for providing a cherry picker for the day and especially to Ewan and Sue Parsons who carried out the initial setting up of the systems and continue to support our data collection. It's an exciting time in the development of technology to further ongoing scientific research. It is hoped that more receivers can be installed along the coastline in the coming years to increase the overall coverage



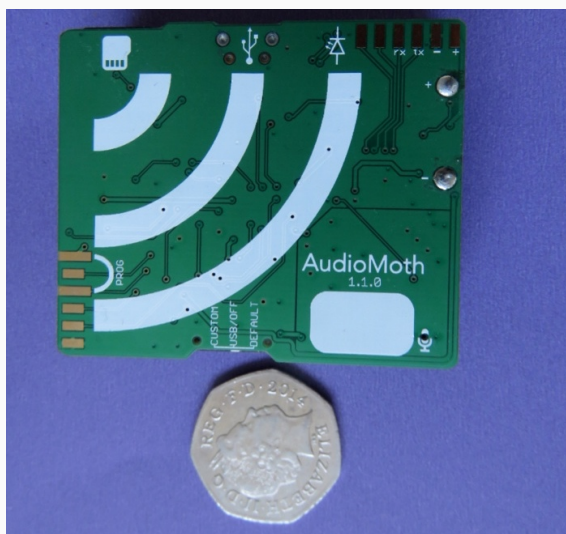
Map showing the areas covered. Yellow ovals centred on Dungeness



The Motus receiver.

Nocturnal migration recording

We have also been experimenting with recording nocturnal migrants (NOCMIG) using an Audiomoth device. This is a small and relatively inexpensive device which is easy to use and seems to produce decent results. The only drawback with the system is that it can be quite time-consuming but we will be continuing next year. We are also hoping to set up a similar device with different software which will be dedicated to recording bats.



Audiomoth sound recorder

Work continues on one of our long term goals to get all of the original paper log data computerized and it is now very close to completion.

Staffing

Jacques Turner-Moss returned as our Assistant Warden from early March to the end of October but will be moving on. We are therefore hoping to appoint a new assistant for 2020 season.

For further information you can check out our website at www.dungenessbirdobs.org.uk



Fair Isle
David and
Suzannah Parnaby

The obvious headline from 2019 was the loss of the Obs buildings to fire on 10th March. The bulk of the Obs data was backed up but losses included such irreplaceable items as chatty Logs, artwork by Richard Richardson and others, handwritten descriptions and parts of the original Good Shepherd. Thankfully, nobody was hurt and progress is being made on the rebuild, with a target opening date of 2021, so we are all now looking to the positives that lie ahead, with regular updates being posted on the FIBO website for anyone wanting to follow our progress.



Fire destroying the Observatory building



Smouldering remains the following day



The foundations were all that remained following the clear up

Another positive was the truly amazing response to the disaster from the Obs network, birding community, the public of Shetland and beyond and, of course, the Fair Isle community. There are too many to thank individually here, but we both remain incredibly grateful for all the help we've received. Thank you everyone.

We were determined that the ornithological work of the Obs would continue, so we have to give a special mention to 'Team Phoenix' the staff and volunteers who answered our call. Richard Cope and Chris 'Doddy' Dodd returned as experienced hands (becoming the longest-serving Assistant Warden and Ranger respectively in FIBO's history), whilst the volunteer team of Max Hellicar, Tom Gale, Nina O'Hanlon, Glen Tyler, Sarah Harris and Rob Hughes, with help from Logan Johnson and Alan Perkins, were invaluable.

Thanks to Team Phoenix we are able to report on a full season of Obs work. The seabird monitoring, which is carried out as part of JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme, saw a mixed year for seabirds. Most species populations remained relatively stable compared to recent years, although still well down on the populations from the early 1990s. It was especially pleasing to see the highest breeding success since 2006 for both Arctic Terns (0.28 chicks fledged per AON) and Arctic Skuas (0.6 chicks fledged per AOT), but it was a relatively poor year for Gannets (0.64 chicks fledged per AON was the lowest since 2002) and especially Bonxies (just 0.14 chicks fledged per AOT, the poorest year since 2005). Fair Isle Bird Observatory wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the JNCC Support Co.

Recovery of tags to show the wintering areas of Guillemots and Razorbills (for Professor Bob Furness) and Arctic Skuas ([image below](#)) (for BTO) continued, and there'll be some fascinating results to publish for birds that have had two years of wintering data recovered. In addition, a joint project between RSPB, SNH, FIBO and NTS has begun looking at Fair Isle's Storm Petrels, with some



interesting results already regarding the species' breeding locations on the Isle.

Aside from seabirds, it was good to be able to report successful breeding for the third consecutive year for that recent colonist Red-necked Phalarope, with a single chick fledging.

Census was carried out as normal and the migration seasons contained some spells of really exciting birding. Spring included the first Franklin's Gull for the Isle, the best Bluethroat year since the 1980s and a decent crop of rarities culminating in an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and River Warbler turning up in the Obs nets at the same time on 16th June. Summer birding highlights included a July Arctic Warbler and a record arrival of Two-barred Crossbills, with an unusually early start to autumn migration that saw three Icterine Warblers in late July, before westerly winds came to dominate a lot of the early autumn.



River and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers – from @FI_Obs Twitter



Two-barred Crossbill – from @FI_Obs Twitter

However, unlike the horrible autumn of 2018, when almost the entire migration period saw westerlies, there was a fantastic spell of easterly winds that brought some of the best birding that many on the Isle had seen in some time. Beginning with the incongruous sight of the Isle's first Black-winged Stilt on North Haven beach on 9th October, there was then a six day spell from 12th that saw the year list rise by 13 species, including Brown Shrike, Pechora, Red-throated and Olive-backed Pipits, Lanceolated,

Pallas's, Radde's and Dusky Warblers as well as a phenomenal day of thrush passage (almost 13,000 Redwings being the highest day count since 2000) and a multiple arrival of Red-flanked Bluetails.



Eastern Olivaceous Warbler – from @FI_Obs Twitter



Male Citrine Wagtail – from @FI_Obs Twitter



Franklin's Gull - from @FI_Obs Twitter

Ringling totals were somewhat lower than most years, as the staff being based in the south of the Isle meant there were slightly fewer trap rounds carried out. Despite that, a record number of alba wagtails were ringed, and the 90 Chiffchaffs represented the fifth highest ever total. Interestingly, the six highest annual totals for Chiffchaff ringling on Fair Isle have been 2014-2019. Norwegian-ringed Ruff, Grey Wagtail, Chiffchaff and Blackbird were all caught or seen during the year on the Isle, whilst 30 movements of Fair Isle-ringed birds reported this year

included ten Bonxies seen or found in a variety of European locations (whilst our first darvic-ringed Bonxie returned to the Isle; a two year old bird that was found harassing Barnacle Geese in late September), a 21 year old Arctic Skua found dead in Brazil, a Blackbird moving to Norway, an 'Icelandic Redwing' ringed in autumn 2018 found dead in France almost exactly a year later and two House Sparrows moving to Shetland (movements of 42km and 72km).

Other wildlife is also recorded by FIBO and the usual scatter of cetacean records included a few Killer Whale sightings, whilst an amazing year for insect movements saw Lepidoptera recorded in large numbers including record years for Peacock butterflies and Bedstraw Hawk-moths. Amongst the new species recorded for the Isle was an Eyed Ladybird in the Haven in August, the first ladybird to apparently arrive on Fair Isle under its own steam (six other species have all been known or suspected accidental imports). An interesting year for insects was finished off with the first record of the marsh beetle *Cyphon variabilis* for the Northern Isles found as a stowaway on our Christmas tree (joining Common Wasp and Seven-spot Ladybird as additions to the Isle fauna found in Christmas trees in recent years)!

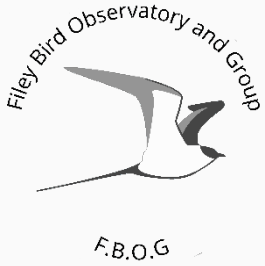


Seven-spot Ladybird



'Log on Tour' Team Phoenix at Quoy

With the rebuild of the Obs likely to gather pace significantly, there's no doubt 2020 will be an interesting year and we look forward to sharing it with you, so please do stay in touch with us via social media and our website.



Filey Peter Dunn

In 2019 we fine-tuned the way we worked and had a number of changes to officers and social media.

At the time of writing we are completely re-writing the website which we hope to be up and running in early 2020, but in the meantime the old one is still active with just minimum information.

Twitter, Facebook and website looking to integrate allowing news to flow between the three forms of media. Our Twitter page has steadily increasing numbers of new followers. It is hoped that shortly a live Twitter news feed will be added to the newly refreshed website and then trickle down to the Facebook group page so regardless of what media is used news will get to all formats. Facebook has changed from a page format to a group page so members and non-members can contribute sightings and photos from within the Filey recording area, which will immediately appear on the groups timeline.

We have continued working closely with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust managing Filey Dams Nature Reserve which resulted in new landscaping and a brand-new hide completed in 2019 giving great views across the reserve. Our own reserve at East Lea has also been improved, the structural changes we have undertaken to the reserve have bedded in well. By bringing the shelved edge of the pool closer to the hide and putting in a new island with some of the spoil that came out we have significantly



increased the wader habitat and roosting opportunities. This has also improved the viewing and photo opportunities for our members. Alterations to the sluice gave us better control of the water throughout the year and the underground link to the Dams reserve allowed us to control the mud situation in the Dams reserve by downloading water from East Lea to the Dams in the hot late summer weeks.



Towards the end of the late autumn wader migration period we also took the opportunity to drain the whole pool (into the Dams) to entice any passing wader to a large body of wet mud and small shallow pools. A Black-winged Stilt (our second, after a 28 year gap) stopping for two days was a good result of this decision as was the clearing of many fish from the now shallow pool's by Grey Heron, ducks and gulls, all of which had a field day. We hope this will go some way to improve our poor showing of dragonflies and newts this last year due (we believe) to fish predation on their eggs.

The sluice has now been raised to the maximum to take pressure off the Dams outflow and also to drown the pool islands to kill off excess vegetation, a lot easier than getting stuck in the mud to do it by hand.

On the downside the grazing cattle knocked down our Barn Owl box by using it as a scratching post. Work is underway to have this back up before the season begins. All in all, a good year for East Lea with more regular visitors. We hope our wildflower experiment in the meadow will take off and our desire to put in more dragonfly pools reach fruition

The seawatch hide on the Brigg has been given a long overdue makeover in 2019, with pointing and waterproofing improvements, thanks to a contribution from the Michael Clegg bird race funds.

Recording:

We have completed inputting all our past historical records (from 1977 through to 2018) onto Birdtrack. The 2018 Report has been issued and we are now back on track regarding publishing our Annual Reports. 2019 was

a superb year for rarities and vagrants at the Obs, not least because of our dedicated group of observers who visited daily all our hotspots (and beyond).

Notable were our first records of Sooty Tern in June (superseding an either/or Sooty/Bridled Tern back in 1999), and of course our first Red-flanked Bluetail! Caught in the nets in the Top Scrub during October Ringing Week, it ticked all the boxes for a happy band of ringers and even hung around the release site until the next day, giving most visitors and locals a second bite of the cherry. Large white birds were a feature of the year, with Great White Egret recorded in four months, and a Spoonbill taking up residence at the Dams during the summer. Seabirds included Cory's Shearwater, Fea's type Petrel and Caspian Gull. Formerly annual migrants also re-appeared, with Turtle Dove, Bluethroat, Marsh Warbler and Icterine Warbler recorded.

Bottle-nosed Dolphins were seen often during the summer, and rare dragonflies included Hairy Dragonfly, Vagrant Emperor and Red-veined Darter.



Yellow-browed Warbler – Peter Dunn



Spoonbill – Peter Dunn



Great White Egret – Peter Dunn



Barred Warbler - Dan Lombard



Red-flanked Bluetail – Dan Lombard



Flamborough Craig Thomas

The year's main highlight related to the opening of the new Seawatch Observatory. Able to accommodate up to 20 birders, the facility will revolutionise seawatching. On too many occasions, stormy weather has forced birders to watch from a more sheltered South Landing; ironically, the very conditions that are most conducive to watching from the exposed outer head ... but a problem no longer!



New Seawatch Observatory - Steve Stansfield

Birders testing the building were amply rewarded with a Pallid Swift flying back and forth in front of the windows, but this year's seawatch season brought much richer rewards: Yorkshire's first ever Sooty Tern appeared in front of the observatory in early July, having been recorded at RSPB Bempton Cliffs at the end of June. Later in the year, a White-billed Diver delighted occupants as it was watched tracking north amongst a host of seabirds displaced by the strong northerly airflow.



Sooty Tern – Will Scott

Additional seawatching highlights included an above average showing of cetaceans: both Fin and Humpback Whales were recorded, together with the more regular Minke Whale. The year opened with White-beaked Dolphins showing well off the Observatory, whilst

Bottlenose Dolphins were a regular visitor for the first ever time; photos showing individuals originated from the Moray Firth population.

Avian highlights early on included Flamborough's first ever wintering Bittern and a flock of 200 Corn Buntings. Two Swallows at RSPB Bempton Cliffs on 23rd February were Yorkshire's earlier ever, as was a House Martin on 8th March. The latter month ended with the discovery of a male White-spotted Bluethroat. Notable sightings during April included an Alpine Swift, our third-ever Cetti's Warbler which was trapped and ringed, the first Nightingale for a decade, and a Goshawk which, after staying for several days, intriguingly flew east out to sea. Only our third-ever Woodchat was located in early May, whilst the latter week brought Bee-eater, Grey-headed Wagtail and Serin. Spring's best bird was reserved for early June, with a male Black-headed Bunting discovered on 7th; staying for several days and coinciding with the arrival of a Subalpine Warbler, it attracted many hundreds of admirers. Another Alpine Swift appeared mid-June, whilst the month closed with the discovery of a singing Western Subalpine Warbler.



Black-headed Bunting – Craig Thomas



Woodchat. – Craig Thomas

Return passerine migration began in earnest at the end of August during a spell of light onshore winds: daily counts of 66 Whinchat and 42 Pied Flycatchers competed for attention alongside Wryneck, Rosy Starling, Icterine Warbler and Ortolan.



Icterine Warbler – Craig Thomas

Two more Cetti's Warblers in September were indicative of a significant change in status, whilst there was a scattering of typical drift migrants albeit in a westerly-dominated airstream. A daily maximum of 20 Yellow-browed Warblers was recorded in early October, with single Radde's and Pallas's Warblers making landfall on 15th, along with two Richard's Pipits and five Siberian Chiffchaffs and a male Red-breasted Flycatcher. Another Radde's Warbler was discovered in early November, a month that also hosted two long-staying Hume's Warblers and an adult Kumlien's Gull. The year closed with significant numbers of passerines exploiting the stubbles, including 178 Yellowhammers, 49 Snow Buntings and 42 Lapland Buntings.



Hume's Warbler – Andrew Allport

Both our 'Spring Migration weekend' and October 'Migweek' proved ever more popular. Hundreds of visiting birders enjoyed a series of evening talks, guided walks and seawatch and ringing demonstrations, alongside the spectacle of migration at its finest: Migweek coinciding with the spectacular landfall of thousands of thrushes and finches. A total of 1020 birds was trapped and ringed during the week, with ringing demonstration events attended by 420 visitors. These events are now firmly embedded within the observatory calendar and offer visitors an introduction to the riches of Flamborough alongside making significant contributions to the local economy. The numbers of birds caught in the week contributed to a record year for the ringing team, whose collective efforts resulted in well in excess of 3000 birds being processed for the first time.



Red-breasted Flycatcher – Craig Thomas



Migration Week – Craig Thomas



Shore Lark – Craig Thomas



The 'Garner-Richards' Seawatching Observatory



A Firecrest on 1st January was a great start to this year and indicative of fairly mild conditions. Nonetheless a good spread of winter wildfowl included up to 3000 Pink-footed Geese in the roost, with up to eight White-fronted Geese, a Whooper Swan flock of up to 50 and a family party of five Bewick's Swans coming into roost in the evenings.

An Iceland Gull frequented the gull roost while two very approachable Glaucous Gulls delighted photographers on the beach.



Glaucous Gulls – Owen Beaumont

January had been very dry, leading up to a comparative "heat wave" in the February half-term week – resulting in record numbers of visitors for this period. Early spring birds were represented by three Chiffchaffs, while several Brimstone and Comma butterflies were on the wing. Water levels on the lagoons were low at this time but a Cattle Egret pausing on 26th was a third for the Reserve and up to 12 Goosander were coming into roost. Offshore a feeding flotilla of 800 Eider had gathered and a Little Auk passed by.

The winter months saw the continued development of a large new ridge out from Greenshank's Creek which now provides extra capacity for roosting waders and potential for nesting shorebirds pending shingle quality and extent. There was an early build-up of waders making good use of the ridge system in late February with up to 11400 Knot, 4190 Grey Plover, 3150 Bar-tailed Godwit, 5240 Dunlin, 2950 Oystercatcher and 324 Sanderling.

Visible migration picked up in March with a typical range of Finches, Pipits, Thrushes, Raptors and Corvids. A southerly movement of over 4200 Chaffinch on 15th March was exceptional and there were two days of Merlin passage totaling 12 birds, before a record passage of 13 Sparrowhawks and 43 Common Buzzards on 23rd.

"The" Pied Crow moved south with Rooks on its seemingly annual spring migration – although again missed by the

regular birders (which could prove serious!). More typically there was a very good run of Woodlarks and Firecrests (max four on 30th March).

Winter management work had concentrated on clearing rough vegetation and scrub regrowth in the dune slack system and the completion of the first full year of grazing with Highland ponies which has been very successful, in combination with cattle and sheep on the dunes and marshes. Of course, there is always plenty of data work to carry out during bouts of bad weather! In addition to keeping on top of contemporary records (c25000 per year) there is a large focus on historical records, researching and inputting to ensure the completion of a comprehensive data set. Modification of the Wildlife Recorder 4 package to include an on-line field-sheet has enabled simplification of the inputting process and the Environment Agency have pledged generous funding to cover three years for a part-time Data Assistant to cope with the workload.

April weather was often cool and windy, visible migration was somewhat disappointing, although the third week was ideal for survey work. The small team of staff and volunteer surveyors started the Common Bird Census, covering all six habitat blocks – the first time that the full survey had been carried out since 2015 and complementing the CES that was also carried out successfully.

From early on in the season it was clear that we were going to continue cataloging the ongoing crash of Willow Warblers and the ultimate local extinction of Turtle Doves here. Surprisingly it was a very good spring for the arrival of Cuckoos whilst around the lagoons, a party of Garganey was very encouraging as were late Water Rail (possibly breeding?) and Bearded Tit. The Gadwall population continues to grow with at least four broods. Other than Willow Warbler most other Warbler species were very well represented on territory with further increases in Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler and Blackcap. There were four Grasshopper Warbler territories and Whitethroats were omnipresent! A pair of Spotted Flycatchers attended a nest site in the Plantation over the course of a week but unfortunately did not persist.



Garganey – Ben Ward

Although not confirmed breeding in the county yet, Great White Egrets were regular (occasionally two birds)

alongside the first Spoonbills of the year (up to three). A superb male Eastern Subalpine Warbler was trapped on 29th April – the first example of this form in the county and enjoyed in the field by several county listers. A Serin also on that date was the second of the year.



Subalpine Warbler – Owen Beaumont

May is probably the most eagerly anticipated month for birders at Gibraltar Point and there were good birds from the start – with a Nightjar and female Red-necked Phalarope on 3rd, a Wood Warbler on 4th and then, an Iberian Chiffchaff – a first for Lincolnshire, in song from 7th to 10th May, having turned up during a period of cold and wet northerlies!.



Iberian Chiffchaff – Ben Ward

Its last day saw the start of a great arrival of spring migrants, with six Redstart, two Ring Ouzel, eight Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, another Wood Warbler, four Firecrest, and nine Cuckoos.



Red-necked Phalarope – Roger Wardle

Following a Ringtail on 13th May, an adult male Montagu's Harrier performed very well over the course of a week. A Kentish Plover was picked out on the Haven during a large influx of Ringed Plovers (up to 650) on 14th May and there followed at least two more Serin, three Red-rumped Swallows, two Temminck's Stint and a Golden Oriole.



Montague's Harrier – Ian Bollen

Ringed Plover nesting was underway in early-May but the first few pairs were predated by Carrion Crows. Little Terns arrived back as expected and there was a strong northerly passage involving 281 on 4th May with 100 Sandwich Tern, 41 Arctic Tern and 36 'Commic' Terns. The availability of suitable shingle for nesting shorebirds was reduced this year and only 10 pairs of Little Tern attempted nesting on isolated ridges. This made wardening difficult – not least to deter the activities of foxes. Night wardening was kindly funded by the family of the late Bill Paul (previously Honorary Ringing Secretary) but ultimately only one pair was successful in fledging a chick.

It was a similar situation on the Croftmarsh lagoons where the colony of Black-headed Gulls, Avocets and Common Terns were impacted heavily by fox predation. Ironically low water tables had allowed fox access to the breeding islands but then in June a spate of prolonged torrential rain saw water levels rise and flood out two pairs of nesting Avocets. Remarkably a pair of Little Ringed Plovers raised a juvenile. The rainfall that peaked at 74mm on 10th June saw the adjacent River Steeping burst its banks and flood the town of Wainfleet and a large tract of farmland. The Reserve's main car park became a depot for emergency response vehicles bringing generators and pumps to help alleviate the situation.

June rarities included two Bee-eaters south on 7th, another Serin on 19th and the first of four Quail records on 26th – these included a nocturnal migrant and one watched arriving off the sea. A Marsh Warbler was trapped on 28th and a Puffin was offshore on 29th. The next day, 10,000 Swift moved south.

Dragonfly and Damselfly populations were well recorded again this year with a total of 16 breeding species on the water bodies of the Freshwater Marsh – a remarkable recovery after the saltwater inundation during the tidal surge in December 2013 and with Southern Hawker and Willow Emerald confirmed breeding this year. Vagrant species seen were: Banded Demoiselle, Red-veined Darter, Brown Hawker and the Reserve's first record of Vagrant Emperor. On the negative side, there were no Common Emerald Damselflies this year. The annual butterfly transect was carried out with one of the highlights being a very large influx of Painted Ladies.

In a remarkable year for Serin, the sixth bird of the year was seen on 19th July and there followed an extremely hot period of weather peaking at 31.4° C on 24th, when a Purple Heron arrived off the sea, Spoonbills were up to seven and Med Gulls reached a reserve record of 17. A Cattle Egret paused for a while on 28th.



Cattle Egret – Owen Beaumont

However, this day will be remembered for a record arrival of Wood Sandpipers – 35 on the lagoons; the soundscape more reminiscent of an African winter wetland – one of the year's highlights for several locals.



Wood Sandpipers – James Siddle

The easterly winds that brought the Sandpipers also brought a Wood Warbler and three early Pied Flycatchers.

Swift movements started to pick up and there was an impressive arrival of summer plumage waders from the north, funneling down the nearshore into The Wash. 31st July was a massive day with 30,000 Swift and several hundred Sand Martin passing, and a large movement of waders involving 20 species, including Wood, Green and Common Sandpiper, Ruff and Curlew Sandpiper with hundreds of Knot and Dunlin arriving.

The spring tides in early August then provided a fantastic wader spectacle with 50,000 Knot, 4,500 Bar-tailed Godwit, 9,300 Oystercatcher, 870 Curlew, 5,850 Sanderling and 8,280 Dunlin. This was enjoyed by 60 people who attended two High Tide Wader Watch events. The second Kentish Plover of the year at this time was most unexpected but did not compare on the unexpected scale to a juvenile Goshawk that frequented the East Dunes over two days. Sandwich Terns were arriving in large numbers, over 3,300, to feed offshore and roost at the beach and estuary. Roseate Tern were picked out of the roost on two occasions and a small number of Black Terns.



Kentish Plover – Kev Wilson

Moth-trapping was carried out most weeks from spring to autumn and yielded a good spread of the coastal specialities, with Marsh Moth confirmed still present as well as White Colon, Crescent Striped, Saltmarsh Plume, Sand Dart, Star-wort, Kent Black Arches, Rosy Wave and Lyme-Grass. Migrants included two Delicates, a Tree Lichen Beauty, Convolvulus Hawk Moth, Reddish Light Arches and Scarce Bordered Straw. A Pygmy Footman in July was a first county record.

Hirundine passage built up during Aug with 550 Swallow south on 13th and 1,582 Sand Martin south on 26th. The former date saw an influx of 150 Willow Warblers along with the 5th Wood Warbler of the year, a Cettis Warbler, a Redwing and a small number of Garden Warblers, Tree Pipits and Wheatears. A further arrival during the latter part of the month brought up to 21 Whinchat, two early Stonechat, 17 Pied Flycatchers, three Redstarts amongst more Wheatears, Yellow wagtails and Warblers

The lagoons supported up to 17 Spoonbills, 340 Black-tailed Godwit, 320 Redshank, 12 Spotted Redshank, 17 Greenshank, five Wood Sandpipers with smaller numbers of Ruff, Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints.

September recording was often restricted to one ringer and one other field worker on many days and partly as a result, it was a fairly quiet month. Some regular scarce migrants were absent/not detected, such as Wryneck, Icterine Warbler, Barred Warbler or Red-breasted Flycatcher. However, a Common Rosefinch was found on the 20th and the first Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn on 22nd. A bulky, upright and pale Wheatear on this date nearly evaded identification as Lincolnshire's first Isabelline.

A spell of exciting sea-watching occurred mid-month with highlights being a Leach's Petrel, two Sabine's Gulls, five Pomarine Skuas, a Long-tailed Skua, six Sooty Shearwaters, two Balearic Shearwaters and Black-throated Diver.

Visible migration then really picked up during the last week of the month with Finches, Sparrows, Wagtails, *Hirundines*, Raptors, Buntings and Pipits. Notable day counts were of 3696 Meadow Pipit and 2104 Linnet south on 27th when three Lapland Bunting and a Great White Egret also passed, followed by a juvenile Red-footed falcon that flew through all too briefly during another busy day for passage on 30th.

Movement continued apace well into October on a good run of south-westerly winds with an unprecedented number of Reed Buntings. Totals for the morning session on 12th November over three hours as follows; 54 Whooper Swan, 480 Pink-footed Goose, five Brent Goose, 14 Wigeon, five Teal, a Pintail, two Buzzard, six Black-tailed Godwit, a Snipe, 13 Stock Dove, four Collared Dove, four Great Spotted Woodpecker, 12 Jay, 14 Rook, 62 Carrion Crow, 382 Skylark, 45 Swallow, 76 House Martin, a Coal Tit, 115 Starling, two Ring Ouzel, 15 House Sparrow, 157 Tree Sparrow, a Flava Wagtail, seven Grey Wagtail, 67 Alba Wagtail, 551 Meadow Pipit, 456 Rock Pipit, 41 Brambling, 693 Chaffinch, 223 Greenfinch, 1057 Linnet, 30 Redpoll, a Crossbill, 2618 Goldfinch, 107 Siskin, 1155 Reed Bunting, a Snow Bunting, a Lapland Bunting and four Yellowhammer all south.

By this time, autumn thrushes were starting to arrive, including flocks of ring ouzels – totalling 53 on 13th. Rarities seen during the first half of the month included three Richard's Pipits, a Bluethroat, a Little Bunting, a Hawfinch and an early Pallas's Warbler. A fund-raising bird race on 6th October achieved 116 species in very challenging conditions – the highlights being a tideline Sabine's Gull and a Long-tailed Skua.

Sea-watching was also to provide the main focus later in the month with a single flock of 36 Goosander on 17th, Gannets (max 2270 on 20th), Auk sp (max 701 on 20th),

regular Long-tailed Ducks, velvet Scoters, Little Gulls (max 17), Pomarine Skuas (max 5), Little Auks (max 8), Great Northern Divers, Black-throated Divers (max 5) , and singles of Red necked Grebe, Leach's Petrel, Puffin and Purple sandpiper.

Whooper Swan passage peaked at 281 south on 28th, whilst the next day brought our latest ever Wryneck and the build-up of an enormous Starling roost at the Mere – with up to 24,000. This roost continuing into December. Also around the Freshwater Marsh, up to eight Water Pipits at this time.

Another Pallas's Warbler occurred on 30th Oct and early November was to continue the run of late rarities with the years only Barred Warbler on 4th, nine Lapland Buntings south on 6th, a great arrival including a new Pallas's warbler, Siberian Chiffchaff, two Firecrests, a Rough-legged Buzzard and an Iceland Gull on 7th and then an Olive-backed Pipit on 8th. A male Hawfinch took up temporary residence around the Plantation from 16th-23rd and another Pallas's warbler on 24th was our latest ever, but by this time, most attention was again looking seaward where there were more sightings of Great Northern and Black-throated Divers, Pomarine Skuas, Velvet Scoters, Little Gulls, single Puffin and the years only Grey Phalarope.



Pallas's Warbler - Garry M

Slavonian Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Long-tailed Duck and Black-throated Diver seemed to be wintering locally into December, but a late Manx Shearwater was unusual. The final quarter of the year was extremely wet and prolonged rainfall raised water levels higher than ever, flooding some footpaths around the Reserve and covering much of the grazing marsh with surface water. This was appreciated by flocks of Lapwing and Pink-footed Geese. The latter also attracting parties of White-fronted Geese and two Tundra Bean Geese.

As the year drew to a close, an important funding package was confirmed through the Dunescapes Project which will provide two 'ZedPods' on site for accommodating volunteers.

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 2019.



Hilbre Steve Williams

2019 began where 2018 left off with up to three Eiders present daily, a feature of the first winter period around the islands. The decline of our wintering flock of

Purple Sandpipers continues with just seven birds seen in the first winter period and the last bird seen on the very early date of 30 March 2019. It does not seem that many years ago that we had over 40 birds regularly and a few of the wintering birds remained into the first week of May! So it was somewhat of a surprise when a single bird appeared on 17 May.



Eider

However, the Pale-bellied Brent Goose flock peaked at 230 birds in January and March (down on last year but still good numbers for Hilbre). This included the Canadian ringed bird as well as at least four other colour ringed birds – two from Iceland, one from County Waterford and one from County Wicklow in Ireland.

Colour-ringing of our own wintering Turnstones in the past has revealed sightings in Iceland but we have long suspected that our Turnstones come from as far as Canada (like our Brent Geese, Knot and Purple Sandpipers!). So it was with great excitement when we received a photograph from visiting birder Stephen Simpson of a leg-flagged Turnstone seen on Hilbre on 26 March 2019.



Leg-flagged Turnstone

Incredibly this bird has been ringed and flagged at Alert, Qikiqtaaluk Region, Nunavut, Canada by François Vézina's team (Université du Québec à Rimouski) on 31 May 2018. Alert is the most northerly-populated place on the planet (according to Wikipedia!).

It seems that this bird was only passing through as it was not seen again but we look forward to further colour ring sightings from the waders around Hilbre in the coming years.

It was a good year for Stonechats on the islands and this species often heralds the start of spring on Hilbre with the first birds arriving were three males on 17 February a month that also saw several Sparrowhawk records, a Blue Tit (scarce on the islands) House Sparrows and Stock Dove as well as a Short-eared Owl on 27 February which was seen at dusk in front of the Landrover headlights.

Eiders increased to six birds on 2 March and were seen displaying – this was the forerunner to a prolonged stay by a small number of birds including male and females into May with a female present to early July sometimes joined by a second bird. This prompted suspicion that Eider had bred for the first time in Cheshire and Wirral and this was confirmed by an observer further up the Dee estuary at Heswall when a female and two fledglings were seen. Where they had nested remains a mystery.

Migrants trickled through in early April but a recent feature for the islands at this time of year is the morning departures of Pink-footed Geese from the estuary making their northwards journey to Iceland. Often they are heard before they are seen but they sometimes also spend the night roosting on the sand before departing at dawn.

On 16 April 2019 a Norwegian colour ringed Oystercatcher was on the shore and subsequent enquiries proved that it was ringed in Norway in July 2017.

Migrants passed through during late April and a couple of features this spring included good numbers of Yellow Wagtails with many birds 'down' on the islands and slightly better numbers of Tree Pipits passing over than in recent years. An early Lesser Whitethroat on 24 April was assumed to be the annual single bird caught and ringed but another was caught on 15 May this year; the latter date also produced the sole record of Marsh Harrier during Spring.

A couple of Northern-type Willow Warblers '*acredula*' were caught and ringed on 22 April – cold, grey and long-winged amongst several more typical yellow and green birds it made for a good comparison.

A female Ring Ouzel was caught and ringed on 18 April a day that was a classic April day on the island with a nice fall of 75+ Willow Warblers, 6 Chiffchaffs, 8 Blackcaps (a good year for this species), a male Redstart, Sedge and



Willow Warblers – left P.t. acredula

two Grasshopper Warblers as well as Common Sandpiper and Short-eared Owl (one of eight records this year). However, one of the scarcest sightings in April was a Brimstone Butterfly – only the sixth record for the Obs found in the Obs garden at the south end on 20 April.



Short-eared Owl

The breeding season was an interesting one with sadly no Rock Pipits apparent this year, the ever present Eiders and pair of Crows found nesting on the cliffs of Middle Eye. Incredibly an Oystercatcher nest was also found on the cliffs of Middle Eye with two eggs laid. These remained not predated with an adult in attendance for a few weeks but sadly disappeared. Whether finally taken by the nearby Crows, the resident fox or the newly arrived Magpie (which appeared at the end of June and remained remarkably but annoyingly stayed until the end of the year) we do not know but this was the first nesting attempt by Oystercatchers we are aware of at Hilbre.

Shelducks were present and displaying down on the island again this summer a nice sight after a couple of years absence for which the fox was blamed.

A Pyramidal Orchid was found flowering in one of the paddocks in June remaining into July – this was only the second record for the island and a repeat performance

(in a different paddock) from the last time one was found on Hilbre 40 years ago in 1979!

It had been a good spring for Redstarts on the islands but a male on 29 June was a rather unusual date, particularly for an adult and it was joined by a Blackcap for which is was also a good year.

Ospreys were seen in both spring and autumn with the continued increase in sightings of this species at Hilbre.

A fine adult Pomarine Skua was found on 20 August and observers were alerted to its presence on the mainland as it was seen to land on the edge of the East Hoyle sandbank. This bird was almost certainly the one that remained on and off along the North Wirral coast between Hoylake and Meols into September.



PomarineSkua

The mast was taken down this year by Wirral Borough Council for safety reasons so the islands profile will no longer be the same. The sea cave work (cliff protection work) at the North End during August caused a fire which burnt for several days and caused the main island to be closed to the public for the first time in the Observatory's history (i.e. since our foundation in 1957).



Fire burning in a sea cave

As a consequence August bank holiday weekend was probably the quietest (for people!) on the island in our history but produced some nice records including Osprey, Spotted Flycatcher (which also had a good year) and Emperor Dragonfly. Sadly the less said about the catastrophic environmental disaster caused by the fire

the better. However, it was uplifting to see volunteers from the Obs and elsewhere coming together to help with the clean-up.



Osprey

A winter Black Guillemot was noted on 28 August and was seen very sporadically on a few occasions to the year's end including on 24 December.

The first two Leach's Petrels of the autumn were noted on 1 September along with Pomarine, Arctic and five Great Skuas and it was certainly a good autumn for skuas at Hilbre.

The 4th September was probably the best day of the year on the island for recording and it was an absolutely classic autumn seawatch day at Hilbre. Birds included 29 Leach's Petrels, 28 Manx Shearwaters (not particularly impressive numbers for Hilbre), but the 'grand slam' all four species of skua were recorded with a record count, for Hilbre and Cheshire and Wirral, of 101 Arctic Skuas, nine Great Skuas, two Pomarine Skuas (including an adult and sub-adult) and a stunning first summer Long-tailed Skua.



Seawatchers above and Long-tailed Skua below

The day was not done there with no less than three Grey Phalaropes and final knockings as darkness drew close one observer found a juvenile Sabine's Gull from the Obs balcony with gulls and terns on the sandbank opposite the Obs. As noted on our blog '... a great end to a fabulous Hilbre day!'

Leach's Petrels were seen in small numbers on a couple of subsequent days.

A Treecreeper was found first on a fence post and then on the outside of one of our heligoland traps by a visiting bird group on 14 September. Although scarce at Hilbre this was, perhaps surprisingly, the sixteenth record here and September is a particularly good month for this species at Hilbre.

However, the bird of the year at Hilbre was totally unexpected and not that scarce on the mainland. A Kingfisher was found at the North End as the tide started to flood on 20 September it quickly moved roost positions a couple of times evading observers before everyone managed to get good views as it flew around the North End and landed on some rocks in shell bay.



Kingfisher

Only the fourth record for the island following records of singles on 3 January 1963, one also near the North End on 5 October 1972 and one which flew low over the island calling on 5 September 2014. This year's bird fell neatly at the mid-point between the two dates of the previous autumn records (5th September and 5th October).

Unlike the previous three records this year's bird reappeared on subsequent dates being seen on 23, 25 and 29 September and 1 October 2019.

On the insect front a great record was the male Black Darter, dragonfly, on 21 September which was only the second for Hilbre following the previous record on 1 October 2013.



Black Darter

The only Marsh Harrier of the autumn was noted on 23 September.

October produced the usual increase in returning Brent Geese as well as the annual passage of Rock Pipits and we caught three birds. A Yellow-browed Warbler showed briefly on 1 October and now becoming more than annual on the islands expectation these days is that we will get more than one a year despite the lack of conducive weather conditions this autumn. The 13th October is the best date in the calendar at Hilbre for Yellow-browed Warbler and this year did not disappoint when a bird was found in typical south-easterly conditions and was caught and ringed. However, this date became only the second time ever on Hilbre when both Yellow-browed Warbler and Firecrest occurred on the same day when the latter appeared at midday in the Obs garden.



Firecrest



Yellow-browed Warbler

Two Twite found on 15 October flying past observers landed at the south end and were photographed. Remarkably these were probably the first Twite ever to be photographed on Hilbre (that we are aware of) also on that date three Whooper Swans flew past and a single Snow Bunting flew over, possibly a different bird that appeared for a few days at Little Eye later in the month.

A Long-tailed Tit was caught and ringed on 20 October – the only record this year .

Sparrowhawk and Merlin are regular visitors to the islands in spring and autumn but both showed particularly well during November this year which is reasonably late in the year for the former if not the latter.

The Purple Sandpiper flock increased from the first winter period to nine birds on 11 December – the highest count of the year.



Purple Sandpipers

The year ended where it began with the flock of Pale-bellied Brent Geese increasing to 324 birds and a single dark-bellied bird and including at least seven colour-ringed birds including a new bird ringed in Canada on 26 July 2014 and having only been reported twice since, once in Iceland and once in Northern Ireland before being found at Hilbre on 13 and 19 November and 4 December. Thanks as always to Graham McElwaine of the Irish Brent Goose Research Group for information on colour ringed Brents.

Photos By Alan Hitchmough, Colin Jones, Andrea Sawiak, Stephen Simpson, Brian Tollitt, Chris Williams, Steve Williams, Phil Woollen



Holme Sophie Barker

2019 was a strangely uneventful and yet productive year. Beginning with some freezing temperatures in January and a few highlights such as Water Pipit (27th) and a Purple Sandpiper on Holme Beach (29th). In an almost reverse pattern to that of 2018, early 2019 saw some very high February temperatures producing many early butterfly and moth records, and far better spring totals than have been seen in recent years. This prompted Obs staff to put the moth traps on two weeks early for the first time and we recorded 14 moths during February, including 8 Mottled Greys and 3 Dotted Borders. While the numbers were impressive for the time of year, the species were unremarkable. Birds for February included 3 Crossbills in the pines on the 16th.



Common Crossbill – Nick Bowman

A few migrants began to arrive in March with a Firecrest and Brambling ringed on the 23rd and a Mealy Repoll on the 30th. In April spring migrants caught included Black Redstart (18th), Ring Ouzel (18th), Pied Flycatcher (19th), and another Mealy Redpoll (19th). A record number of 34 Linnets were ringed at the Observatory during 2019, the majority of which were caught in March and April attracted by the short dune grassland of the east bank.



Pied Fly by Gary Elton.

This is a significant increase from the previous 10 years with none caught at the site at all between 2002 and 2011. Numbers of spring warblers caught were higher than in

recent springs too, with 43 Blackcaps ringed in April 2019 alone, a record for HBO in April. Chiffchaffs (38) and Willow Warblers (32) were also fairly numerous during the month, and Sedge Warblers were also common during this spring (17 caught in April). A noticeable increase in the number of Grasshopper Warblers in the past two years saw more singing males heard in the Observatory recording area than previously. Two Firecrests were ringed in May (6th and 11th), and a Grasshopper Warbler on the 12th. A single Tawny Owl chick was ringed in the pines (8th).



Firecrest – Theo de Clermont

Abnormally dry conditions on the grazing marshes carried over from the 2018 drought and continued to affect the area for much of the year, with lower counts of many wetland birds particularly noticeable in the first winter period, and poor results with nesting waders in spring. This was exacerbated by a deluge in the second week of June, causing a sudden jump in the water levels. This inundation didn't last however, with a heatwave in July propelling temperatures to 38 degrees Celsius at HBO on 25th July, and the bizarre sight of many butterflies seeking shelter in the hides to escape the sun! Fortunately the summer was not so devoid of rainfall that conditions were as tinder dry as in 2018, but they did continue to affect the local wetlands with predominantly dry conditions continuing until November. Ringing totals for June and July were more than modest, not helped by the frequent hot days. However, a Red-backed Shrike in the dunes was enjoyed by a few on 14th July.



Red-backed Shrike by Cat Buck

A Scarce Light Plume was a new moth species for the Obs on 9th July.



Scarce Light Plume - David Bratt

In August many more warblers, particularly Reed (31) and Sedge (35) were caught with a Pied Flycatcher of note on the 27th. The ringing year was something of an improvement on the previous two, and although there were no classic arrivals of migrants, almost 1,000 more birds were ringed at the Observatory in 2019 than in 2018 (1,894), itself a big improvement on 2017 (1,476). There were no special species highlights this autumn, but in September impressive numbers of Meadow Pipits (196), Blue Tits (106), and Blackcaps (60) were ringed. A total of 378 Meadow Pipits were ringed during 2019 with a Stavanger ringed bird captured on the 19th September. In October a further 133 Meadow Pipits were still outdone by a major influx of Long-tailed Tits with a total of 211 ringed during the month, and these could sometimes be seen flying low over the east bank in an easterly direction before ending up in the nets at the far end! This was the second most abundant ringed species of the year (after Meadow Pipits) with 341 caught during 2019, a further 89

of these in November, and a record total for this species at the Observatory. Blue Tits were also very numerous during autumn with a ringed year total of 320. Yellow-browed Warblers were ringed on the 22nd September and 5th October, with a Pallas' Warbler seen on 7th November. A pit-tagged Merlin was caught on the east bank on the 28th October and proved to be a young female ringed as a nestling in Yorkshire in June.

After all the low rainfall seen in 2019, things changed radically in November and water levels became very high – record-breaking - areas of the marsh which had never been seen to hold water before were under feet of it. By the end of the year, with all our rainfall crammed into November and December, there were some very high counts of waders and wildfowl. A Glossy Ibis in the recording area for 6 days in late November was one of the highlights of the year. Up to 700 Golden Plover and 1000 Lapwings were recorded in December, and on the Observatory reserve a first winter Waxwing was seen on a few dates either side of Christmas, before being ringed in the New Year.



Gossy Ibis – Les Bunyan



Waxwing - HBO



Isle of May Mark Newell

January

The first human presence on the isle this year commenced on 9th with thorough coverage on 10th when a Red-necked Grebe and 6 Short-eared Owls were the highlights. Very few overwintering passerines with 25 Rock Pipits the most numerous while 4 Woodpigeons continued the recent colonisation. A visit at the months end found only 2 Short-eared Owls but 4 Little Auk was seen past on 29th.

February

A brief visit on 7th found 3 Short-eared Owls with 4 noted on 13th. Again passerines such as Robin and Blackbird were lacking with only a couple of each. Four Pink-footed Geese flew over on 15th when a Skylark was noted. A Lapwing on 19th turned out to be the only record of the year.

March

Little coverage until late month when a Short eared Owl was seen on 23rd and was present into April. Also on 23rd a Chiffchaff was present with up to two until the month's end. A male Tufted Duck was on the Loch from 24-26th. The 25th was notable for the isle's second record of Common Crane with two adults north (previous record May 2004), while a Greenfinch was the only spring record. The first Wheatear was on 28th while on 29th a Tree Sparrow began a two day stay and a Crossbill and an Osprey over were early records. Two Goosander flew south on 30th when four Mallard were present for the start of a run of sightings. On 31st 10 Whooper Swan flew north.

April

A Treecreeper on 1st was a little foolish to arrive on a largely treeless isle. A Moorhen found on the Loch on 5th was the first record since 2002 and remained until 13th. The 18th brought a stunning Hoopoe (15th island record) which spent the day around the middle of the isle, while Great Skua and Sand Martin were the first of the year. The first House Martin appeared over on 19th with the first Whinchat on 20th. Common Tern was the first tern of the year on 21st while Lesser Whitethroat was added on 22nd. Common Sandpiper on the Loch was new for the year on 24th when a Jack Snipe began a three day stay. The 25th brought a male Pied Flycatcher, Arctic Tern on 26th, Greenshank on 28th and Sandwich Tern added on 30th.

May

A quiet start to the month with just a trickle of migrants before dreich conditions on 8th dropped the year's first Garden and Sedge Warblers. A Green Sandpiper on 9th began a two day stay while an acrocephalous warbler eluded specific ID amongst a small pulse of common migrants. Swift was added to the year list on 13th with Spotted Flycatcher the following day. The 15th was

notable for the isle's 6th breeding record of Mallard with a female and eight ducklings on Rona while a Roseate Tern was in Kirkhaven. Barely a whiff of arrivals on 16th included a female Red-breasted Flycatcher, the 7th spring record in the last eight years while the day ended with a brief Humpback Whale off the north end. The 17th brought the first Bluethroats in three years including a male in full song above Burnett's Leap, but this was eclipsed on 18th when 12 were logged, the most numerous migrant of the day and the highest total since 1994. A Wood Warbler began a four day stay while Cuckoo and Yellow Wagtail were also year ticks. Migrant numbers gradually dropped over the following days with the last Bluethroat on 21st. A Bar-tailed Godwit on 23rd was notable and four Velvet Scoter flew past on 25th.

June

The 1st brought the year's first Canada Geese totalling 43 while Arctic Skua was added on 2nd. More significant arrivals on 5th with a Marsh Warbler and an Icterine Warbler (remaining until 8th) along with a large movement of Red Admirals and Painted Ladies. A second Icterine Warbler was trapped on 6th when the year's only Red-backed Shrike, a female, was found around the Top Trap. A Norwegian ringed Siskin was caught on 8th. Typically things quietened down after this point but a Roseate Tern was regular and a Black Guillemot was seen on 10th. Five Red-breasted Mergansers flying south were the first of the year on 16th when a late Osprey flew north. A 'blue' damselfly on 19th was all too brief but a Hummingbird Hawkmoth in off the sea on 29th was a little more obliging. The 30th brought a Quail at Three Tarn Nick, the first for two years.

July

The first record of Storm Petrel this year occurred on 7th with a couple birds displaying in the middle of the isle. Over the coming weeks at least 16 birds were noted indicating some level of breeding attempt for the first time. Great Skuas were noted on 10th, 14th, 27th and 30th with a Pomarine Skua on 16th. An escaped Saker Falcon caused quite a commotion around the isle on 24th but eluded all attempts at capture and wasn't seen subsequently. A spell of easterlies late in the month was ridiculously productive for the time of year. Apparently the earliest UK autumn record of Aquatic Warbler with one present for three days from 27th. The 8th record for the isle but only the second since the 1960's mirroring the national trend. On 28th the year's first Common Rosefinch was caught along with a Reed Warbler while a Quail was flushed, meanwhile thousands of Painted Lady arrived. A Wood Warbler appeared on 29th while remarkably a Melodious Warbler replaced the Aquatic on 30th, only the 8th island record and first since 2012.

August

A Treecreeper arrived on 6th with another Wood Warbler appearing on 10th as waders took more prominence with Ruff on 20th and 28th and 62 Golden Plover flew past on

24th, when 40 Knot were counted. A Cuckoo arrived on 18th while impressive hirundine passage on 24th with 38 House Martin, 207 Sand Martin and 394 Swallow. An Osprey flew south on 24th while 25th brought yet another Wood Warbler, along with a Short-eared Owl, Green Sandpiper and Greenshank. A Reed Warbler on 26th joined the Wood Warbler and 38 Tree Sparrows flew over on 27th. An impressive count of 115 Swift flew south on 29th and a Great Northern Diver was early on 31st.

September

A Pink-footed Goose on 3rd was early with 10 on 4th when two Black Tern were offshore on 4th and a Grey Plover over on 5th. An Osprey flew south on 7th while a Rosefinch on 8th (until 9th) completely outshone by the island's first record of Collared Flycatcher, an adult male. The first Lapland Bunting of the year on 8th was followed by a female type Marsh Harrier on 12th. Three adult Pomarine Skua were noted on 17th when a Bar-tailed Godwit began a lengthy residency. A Whooper Swan was early on 19th with another Lapland Bunting on 20th and Rosefinch on 21st. The first Yellow-browed Warblers of the year appeared on 22nd with ten with diminishing numbers to the end of the month. While an 'Eastern' Stonechat was caught on 22nd. The island's 7th Arctic Warbler was caught on 25th. A Pomarine Skua offshore on 28th (two on 30th) with a Little Bunting around the centre of the island.



Adult male Collared Flycatcher – Mark Newell

October

A quiet start to the month with a lingering Lapland Bunting while a Black Guillemot on 2nd and two Goldeneye on 3rd were notable. The 4th finally brought the island's second ever record of Red-flanked Bluetail following one in 1975! It remained until 6th when a Red Kite (8th record) flew over and a Richards Pipit dropped in. Also on 6th were a Shorelark until 8th and a Great Grey Shrike until 9th, while 50 Ring Ouzel was an impressive total. Two Scaup passed on 12th with a Velvet Scoter on 13th when Mediterranean Gull and Water Rail were noted. Yellow-browed Warblers

put in an appearance again from 15th peaking at three on 18th. A second Richard's Pipit of the autumn on 17th was eclipsed by the island's 5th Blyth's Reed Warbler and then 9th Radde's warbler on 22nd (until 24th). The autumn's second Great Grey Shrike began a two day stay on 19th while three Long-tailed Tits appeared on 27th with one remaining into November.



Red-flanked Bluetail

November

The month began with 8 Chiffchaffs present at least 4 of which were Siberian, these remained until at least 13th. A Yellow-browed Warbler on 2nd was a very late record while the first Hawfinch of the year flew over with a Merlin in hot pursuit and out of sight. Strong easterlies on 3rd brought the first Waxwing of the year which briefly settled on the island, a Black Redstart while the day ended with a 3rd winter Glaucous Gull off the east side. The 4th brought a seven-striped Sprite with the island's ninth Pallas's Warbler in the Top Trap, the first since 2001 it remained the following day. Two adult Waxwing joined the juvenile. A further arrival on 5th brought an Olive-backed Pipit around the Main Light, the 11th island record but 7th in the last 5 years. A Lesser Whitethroat was certainly one of the eastern races while a new Yellow-browed Warbler joined the remaining Black Redstart, Waxwings and Pallas's Warbler. A Black-throated Diver close past the west cliffs on 6th was only the 17th island record and first of the year. Fewer migrants around on 7th but a male Firecrest was a notable entry onto the year list it remained until at least 13th. The run of daily year ticks over the last week came to an end with a Little Grebe on the Loch on 8th, with only eight records this century the bird remained until at least 27th. A Great Northern Diver was seen on 9th and 10th. A Whimbrel was in the Curlew roost on 26th and 27th the latest island record. Also present were two Short-eared Owls and low numbers of thrushes. On 27th a female Goosander flew around the island and a female Yellowhammer was only the second record of the year.

December

Only a brief visit to the island this month with three Short-eared Owls with single Merlin and Sparrowhawk amongst a small number of passerines on 16th and 17th.



Spurn Tim Jones and Paul Collins

As with each year before it, 2019 was a big year for Spurn Bird

Observatory. The year started with the normal New Year's day hangovers and who could, through blurred vision, find the first notable bird of the year.

Early winter is an excellent time for maintenance work on the observatory buildings and grounds. Tasks undertaken at Spurn range from time with painting at the Obs to habitat management. A huge thanks must go out to all those volunteers who dedicate their free time to help with these tasks.

During 2019 the observatory acquired its latest piece of land; Sykes Field. This was a huge undertaking for the observatory, and work began almost immediately to perfect the habitat on the site. Even in its first year, the site has recorded such rarities as Booted Warbler, and local scarcities such as Bearded Tit. Thanks to Bird Holidays for helping the observatory acquire this land.

Local charity events were once again well supported by the observatory; The usual January sponsored bird race was well attended, raising funds for worthy causes around Yorkshire, as was the Easter annual fancy dress bike ride for a local cancer charity.

The annual observatory members BBQ was well attended in August, lasting well into the night. The Spurn Migration Festival has gone from strength to strength and this year was no exception with excellent talks, good birds and a fantastic social atmosphere.

Spurn became the latest partner in the new Motus receiver system, evolving the way birds are recorded in the area. The antenna was put into position during September, and while there have been no hits as yet, we await in anticipation.

Man-nights at the Observatory were good and membership is now around 900.

The wonder of Spurn is that there are excellent birds to see throughout the year. As with the national trend, the numbers of commoner birds seem to be getting less and less each year with hirundines well down for the second year running being especially noticeable.

The effects of climate change are becoming more evident each year with dramatic changes in arrival/departure dates for migrants species. This year alone Spurn recorded a Swallow in February and November Willow Warbler and Redstart.

2019 has followed on nicely from 2018, with the Observatory on the brink of reaching the magical 400 species mark, which is pretty awesome for a land based site. Well with the Dusky Thrush becoming our 399th species, being as expected, accepted, the 400 was achieved in fine style with a rather stunning drake Baikal Teal on Kilnsea wetlands, though of course subject to acceptance.



Baikal Teal – John Hewitt

There were yet again many other fantastic rarities during the year with the 2nd and 3rd Red-eyed Vireo taking pride of place in many birders note books. The Easington bird was probably the bird of the year, giving stunning views feeding on berries down to a few feet at times, in the same location as the famous 2016 Siberian Accentor. Birders travelled from afar to see it and behaved immaculately in such a sensitive site.

A twitchable Stejneger's Stonechat was our 2nd, DNA coming to the rescue for this new evolving species, while our 3rd Collared Flycatcher, a female, gave everyone an interesting identification challenge. The 4th Isabelline Wheatear, Green-winged Teal and Broad-billed Sandpiper (the 1st was only in 2008), 4-5th Cattle Egret, 5th Pacific Swift and Great Reed Warbler were gratefully received by locals. Our 6th Great Snipe took up temporary residence a stone's throw from the last in 2013.

The autumn also brought our 7th Western Bonelli's Warbler, 7-8th Hume's Warbler and 8th Blyth's Reed Warbler, while the first 'summer' record of Pallid Swift was also our 8th with our 11th Booted Warbler being the first since 2009, but present for 3 days and our 13-15th White-rumped Sandpipers graced Kilnsea wetlands.



White-rumped Sandpiper – Rich Swales

The 14th Arctic Warbler (half of which have been recorded since 2015) was maybe the most under stated rarities of the year and there will possibly be some sort of write up on this bird at some point? Our 20th Rustic Bunting continues Spurns relative domination of this species in Yorkshire terms and lastly our 16th Siberian Stonechat (which was one) will maybe need some of the other records reviewing at some point with the splitting of this group.



Isabelline Wheatear – John Hewitt

Local listers had plenty to get their teeth into, the highlight being our 12th Goshawk, the first seen by multi observers and maybe the first to not be tinged with doubt. The year also had the 8th Green Woodpecker and Raven, the 9-10th Black Kite and 10th White Stork plus the 12-13th Mandarin which were well received.

An impressive list of other good birds seen during the year, a few of which eluded the list last year starting with an amazing 20 Great White Egret, 3 Montagu's Harrier, 3 Honey Buzzard, male Red-footed Falcon, 4 Dotterel, 2 Temminck's Stint, 1 Bee-eater, 2 Golden Oriole, 5 Red-rumped Swallow (including an autumn bird), 2 Richard's Pipit, 2+ Cetti's Warbler, 3 Barred Warbler, 1 Dusky Warbler, 5 Pallas's Warbler, 5 Red-breasted Flycatcher, 2 Rose-coloured Starling, 2 Bluethroat, Nightingale, 4 Serin and 2 Little Bunting (including a spring bird), while shamefully it's maybe time to now add Turtle Dove to this list.



Bluethroat – John Hewitt

The year was up and down for overland visible migration and seawatching with few days of ideal conditions, but

the year did have fantastic arrivals of common migrants in August including some big days of Willow Warbler, brilliant numbers of scarcer waders, particularly Wood Sandpipers in spring and autumn, some of the best Tern roost movements for several years, a nice late autumn arrival of Russian White-fronted Geese, while the 2 adult Long-tailed skua hovering over Clubley's in late June will live long in the memory. There were many other highlights during the year, too many for this write up, none more so than Marsh Warbler successfully breeding for the 2nd year in a row. More to come in the report



Little Bunting – John Hewitt



Red-eyed Vireo - John Hewitt

Summer was a challenge due to the weather, which specifically effects the Little Tern breeding on the beach. However the wardens, Sandy Davidson and Mick Turtle, assisted by a raft of volunteers, did brilliantly to keep the predators away and helping the birds raise plenty of chicks.

The breeding season for most species seemed much improved over the last few years, but there are always some species that struggle whatever the weather.

The year ended with a species list of 264 (pending records accepted).

Ringling was better than the two years but will be in the region of 8000 birds with highlights being a Great Reed and Booted Warbler and good numbers of Tree Sparrows. Overall 2019 was another exceptional year at Spurn, and we can't wait to see what 2020 brings us.

Unfortunately in 2019 we failed to attract a warden this year although Anthony Wetherill helpfully covered the position for part of the autumn. In 2020 a Seasonal Warden is required from Mid-March to mid-November with interested parties asked to email landguardbo@yahoo.co.uk

The weather was kinder this year with a noticeable improvement in the numbers and breeding success of many, but not all, of the local species. The spring got off well with a totally unexpected Red-flanked Bluetail on March 23rd which is only our third ever with the previous ones in the more expected autumn period. Numbers of migrants held up, following last year's slump, although Wheatear numbers were depressingly poor with a spring day peak of just 15. Let's get away from the doom and gloom side of the current birding situation with notable spring visitors including Bluethroat, Hoopoe, Serin, Stone Curlew, Water Pipit, Wood Warbler, Hoopoe and 2 Bee-eater. The second complete surprise of the spring was a totally unprecedented "tristis" Chiffchaff trapped on June 28th (DNA confirmed by Martin Collinson at Aberdeen University) giving us an insight into what they actually look like at this time of the year.



Siberian Chiffchaff in June

Finally a "Danish" ringed Chiffchaff trapped at the end of May was unusual in that it had a "pollen ball" on its forehead despite being ringed in Denmark in early April suggesting that it left Denmark, visited the Mediterranean and then came back northwards to us (we normally just get Chiffchaff with "pollen balls" on their foreheads in March/April when they are newly arrived from southern Europe).

After failing to see any Cuckoo or Turtle Dove in 2018 it was extremely pleasing to get 10 records of the former and five of the later. Both these species were very common last century but it is doubtful whether the current generation of younger birders will ever be able to witness the regular sight of Turtle Dove flocks in three figures in the

Suffolk and Kent countryside as some of us did in the "good old days". The sighting of a Turtle Dove nowadays gets the pulse racing in the same way as rarities used to in my youth.



Turtle Dove

Mid-summer produced many highlights in the locally dispersing birds department including record numbers of Coal Tits and the best Linnets breeding year for several years.

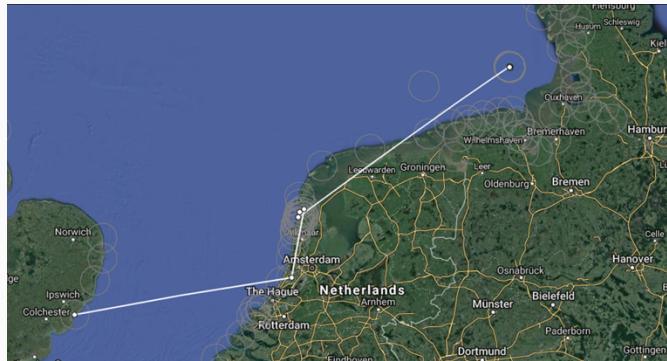


Linnets

Autumn brought 2 Hawfinch, 2 Puffin, 2 Wood Sands, 2 Wood Warbler, Balearic Shearwater, Dartford Warbler, Great-grey Shrike, Red-footed Falcon, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Shorelark, Storm Petrel plus our best ever autumn for southerly movements of Woodlark in October with a maximum of 11 on 15th. Blue Tits had their best autumn since 1983 and the Long-tailed Tit record was smashed with at least 384 passing through in a five week period from mid-October. A notable control was a Grey Wagtail in September that had been ringed as a pullus in Hertfordshire in April which is remarkable as our only previous Grey Wagtail control was five years ago also of a bird trapped in September of a pullus from Hertfordshire in April from a site less than a mile away!

An automated radio telemetry tower ("Motus") installed by Wageningen University, Holland in the spring came up trumps at the end of October when a Robin ringed and

fitted with a tiny nanotag at Helgoland, Germany was detected leaving the Dutch coast and recorded flying over Landguard less than 4.5 hours later as it flew inland. Instant gratification as we had the information about this bird on line pre-dawn as we were waiting for it to stop raining to open the nets for the morning. Apart from this bird it was an improved year for Robin migration with 120+ on site on a couple of October days plus a couple of Belgium controls helping to indicate there areas of origin.



Robin Control via Motus – a British first

Can't finish the birds section without mentioning that the Cormorant record was broken again in November this year with the truly spectacular sight of 3,678 heading out to sea on mass to go fishing at "stupid o'clock" in the morning. Last, but not least, to return to depressing news with Redpolls having an absolutely disastrous autumn to remind us that if, we are honest with ourselves, there is more bad news than good.



Huge movement of Cormorants

Insect wise the moths traps were very entertaining with another 21 species added to the site list including two firsts for Britain in the shape of *Symmetrischema pallidochrella* that had presumably hitched a lift on a container ship from North America and Israeli Tiger Moth *Olepa schleini* that presumably arrived on a Castor Oil Plant via the horticultural trade. A personal favourite was Fischer's Estuarine Moth that is one of very few moths given legal protection under Section 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

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



Fischer's Estuarine Moth



Death's-head Hawkmoth



Red-breasted Flycatcher



North Ronaldsay Alison Duncan

2019 was an interesting year for birds with an excellent total of 206 species recorded. Though cold weather slowed some spring migration and breeding birds had mixed fortunes, a larger fall than in many recent years mid-October was an unforgettable experience for many and there were three brilliant firsts for the island this year.

Long-staying winter visitors included the drake Green-winged Teal, a Eurasian White-fronted Goose and the first over wintering Ruff (5). Notable sightings were a White-billed Diver past the sea watch hide on 22nd January and an Iceland Gull on 23rd, though white-winged gulls were scarce this winter. The drake Smew was seen regularly on Bewan between visits to nearby Sanday; a Black-throated Diver was seen on 31st and Little Auk in Nouster on 1st February. An influx of waders on 6th February included 51 Black-tailed Godwits and 816 Golden Plovers and the first big cetacean was a Humpback Whale off Bewan on 11th. Usual spring migrants began moving with a notable passage of Skylarks peaking on 26th, with an impressive new island record count of 576.



Male Green-winged Teal

An adult Kumlien's Gull was seen at Bewan on 20th March and a young White-tailed Eagle on 22nd was followed a week later by an adult, along with typical first spring appearances of Jack Snipe, Bonxie, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, and Lapland Bunting. Among other first arrivals in early April were White Wagtail, Black Redstart and Mistle Thrush on 5th and Hawfinch and Grey Wagtail on 7th. The annual census of Black Guillemots on the calm morning of 11th produced a record total of 921, well up on the previous record of 841 in 2017. With a cold easterly air flow, the first Willow Warbler appeared on

14th, Garganey on 15th and the earliest ever Redstart on 16th with Swallow and Greenshank. Yet another White-tailed Eagle and Sand Martin followed on 17th, with Goshawk, Blackcap and the earliest ever Bluethroat on 18th, and Whimbrel and Common Sandpiper on 19th.



White-tailed Eagle – Simon Davies

The host of generally early arrivals continued with Arctic Skua and Tree Pipit on 22nd, Whinchat, Lesser Whitethroat and Ring Ouzel on 24th; Pied Flycatcher, Grasshopper Warbler and the island's first ever spring Yellow-browed Warbler on 25th; Whitethroat on 27th and House Martin on 28th. A blurry photograph posted on the Obs WhatsApp group on 29th heralded the identification of a most unexpected spring migrant after weeks of south-easterlies – an amazing Mourning Dove feeding confidently on short grass outside the Lighthouse - a first for the island and just the 6th record for Britain. A summer plumaged White-billed Diver off Trinley, Waxwing at Holland and the first Wood Warbler since 2016 rounded off April.



Mourning Dove – Simon Davies

Calm conditions on 1st May produced a total of 91 Great Northern Divers (the second highest after 132 in 2009), an adult White-billed Diver, and a scattering of migrants included a male Blue-headed Wagtail at the Lighthouse. Cold northerlies followed and though numbers of migrant waders and Arctic Terns increased, migrant passerines were less numerous: 2 Shorelarks appeared on 8th May, a 4th White-tailed Eagle passed through on 10th and a

Savi's Warbler was trapped at Holland on 11th, another first for the island. Fine sunny conditions continued with the next day's excitement in the shape of a female Collared Flycatcher, seen briefly by guests, then trapped in one of the Heligolands. A female Marsh Harrier flew north on 14th, with a chilly south-easterly breeze, 2 Dotterels appeared at the Lighthouse on 15th with another 2 the following day as well as a smart adult Pomarine Skua past the Beacon.



Collared Flycatcher



Male Bluethroat – Simon Davies

Another fine sunny day on 17th saw an Osprey circling the obs, 5 Dotterels, Cuckoo, Spotted Flycatcher and the best bird caught indoors this year: a cracking male Eastern

Subalpine Warbler which had flown into the bar and was hand caught by Kevin at a window; it was present until 21st. Scarce birds followed with 2 Bluethroats at Viggay and Rue on 18th and a third at the obs the next day; an adult summer White-billed Diver, Little Gull and Little Tern on 19th; Icterine and Wood Warbler and a red male Common Rosefinch arrived on 20th. Strong north-westerlies followed, and though most small migrants disappeared, there were 2 singing Corncrakes and a beautiful female Red-flanked Bluetail found in the afternoon of 24th at Holland.

Rough north-westerly weather brought a long dead but impressive Sperm Whale ashore at Garsowick on 28th; it stayed the summer providing much feeding for gulls before breaking up in the autumn. Brief spells of easterly brought a Reed Warbler on 30th May, Black Tern and Spotted Crake on 2nd June, a very mobile adult Rose-coloured Starling on 3rd and yet another White-tailed Eagle (1st year) on 4th. Light north-easterly and rain saw male and female Red-backed Shrikes near the obs on 6th, an adult Common Crane on the Links and 5 Risso's Dolphins were seen off the Lighthouse. A Marsh Warbler found near the Lighthouse on 7th turned out to be Swedish ringed, the first recovery of this species from Sweden to Britain.

The first Turtle Dove seen since 2016 arrived on 20th June, and 2 Red-necked Phalaropes on 26th were followed by 4 on 8th July. Other notable July records included Black Tern on 3rd and 30th, Marsh Warbler and the first of a few Common Crossbills on 9th, with a female Two-barred Crossbill on 10th, 13th and 18th. An unseasonal Shorelark at Bewan on 12th was seen on and off throughout the rest of the year up to 30th November! Hobby was seen on 15th and 25th, Grey-headed Wagtail on 20th and the first Black Redstart of the autumn on 27th July.

The cold weather this spring did affect breeding birds with waders, Black-headed and Common Gulls, and Arctic Terns experiencing poor productivity, and though many passerines did poorly early on, second broods were more successful. Notable successes were Garganey fledged for a second consecutive year, two young Corncrakes were seen during silage-making and the first breeding records of Quail and Woodpigeon were confirmed. Contrasting with 149 Black Guillemot chicks ringed, just 33 Arctic Tern chicks fledged from some 636 pairs attempting. There was an increase to 79 active burrows at the Sand Martin colony and a record number of 13 singing male Sedge Warblers with at least 4 pairs fledging young.

Influxes of Painted Ladies were seen from mid-June, with a peak count of over 150 on 27th July, along with good numbers of Diamond-backed Moths. Hummingbird Hawkmoths were seen on 9th July, 12th August and 29th September. Regular moth trapping produced a Poplar Hawkmoth on 28th June and several other island firsts this

summer with White Ermine, Oblique Carpet, Blood Vein and Bedstraw Hawkmoth; increasing numbers of Dark Arches caught peaked at 242.

Early autumn highlights were an Icterine Warbler on 1st August, an adult Rosy Starling on 8th and a female Grey-headed Wagtail on 10th. Among waders, some 62 Black-tailed Godwits on 18th was a high autumn count. A Western Subalpine Warbler discovered at Upper Linnay on 24th was in heavy moult and had presumably been around for a little while and Warblers continued to star with a Melodious on 25th and a Greenish at Sennes on 26th. Wheatear passage in late August peaked with 260 on 30th.

The island's earliest ever record of Little Auk was on 3rd September, along with early Pink-footed Geese and an adult Sabine's Gull cruised past the sea-watch hide on 5th. Migration picked up on 10th with a Common Buzzard, 3 Barred Warblers, a Marsh Warbler, 2 Common Rosefinches and a Little Bunting. Following a week of strong westerlies, the wind eased and changed to easterly, producing excellent sea-watching on 18th with a Great Shearwater, 205 Sooty Shearwaters, 2 Leach's Petrels, 5 Long-tailed Skuas and a juvenile Sabine's Gull along with thousands of common seabirds.

A Buff-breasted Sandpiper made a brief appearance on 20th and the first 2 Yellow-browed Warblers seen this autumn were on 22nd, with a peak count of 16 on 27th and a grand total of 44 this autumn. Between 22nd and 25th there were 4 different Red-breasted Flycatchers recorded and a Red-flanked Bluetail was found on 24th. Among other migrants a good total of 21 Redstarts were seen on 25th along with 3 'eastern' Lesser Whitethroats, the first of a remarkable 19 during the autumn. Of these, eight birds provided DNA and six have been confirmed as *blythii*. Highlights at the end of the month were a Rustic Bunting at Sandar, Richard's Pipit and Grey-headed Wagtail on 28th, a Citrine Wagtail seen and heard briefly and 2 Red-backed Shrikes on 29th and a Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll trapped at Holland on 30th.



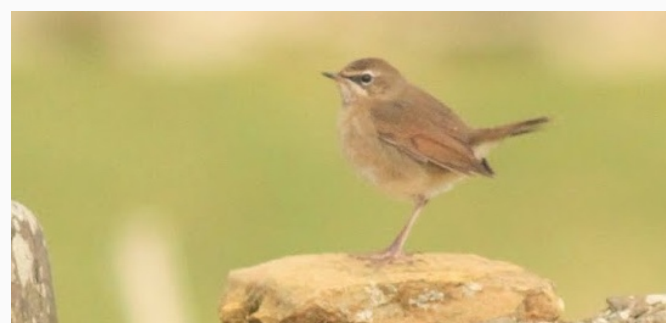
Yellow-browed Warbler – Simon Davies



Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll – Dante Shepherd

A Great Grey Shrike on 6th October remained for several days, the regular drake Green-winged Teal returned on 13th but a young Osprey was sadly found dead under a wind turbine in the north of the island on 15th. An unlucky Brown Shrike was also found dead, on the road between Nouster and Holland early on 15th, our second island record, unfortunately a road casualty. However, the first of a record number of 26 Siberian Chiffchaffs seen this autumn was also on 15th. A major fall on the morning of 16th saw thousands of birds, mainly thrushes, with some 10,977 Redwings, 1197 Song Thrushes, 11 Ring Ouzels and 320 Robins recorded. A male Hawfinch also on 16th stayed until 28th, with a female seen on 18th. Numbers of thrushes and common migrants declined though there were several smaller arrivals through the month and other birds of note were a Goosander on 20th, a late Red-breasted Flycatcher on 26th, a White-billed Diver on 27th, 61 Little Auks on 29th and 104 Tufted Ducks on 31st was just short of the record island count.

A Coue's Arctic Redpoll was seen briefly on 1st November and possibly the same one was recorded on 13th. A few Waxwings were recorded early in the month, however, the undoubted highlight of the autumn was on 6th, when Peter Donnelly noticed a female Siberian Rubythroat from the window at Purtabreck, the first record for the island and for Orkney. Though still present the following morning, the bird vanished later that day. Interesting sightings towards the end of the year included a pale Arctic type Peregrine seen on 19th, a pod of at least 10 Orcas on 21st, a Glaucous Gull on 25th and a female Scaup on 28th November. Follow our sightings on <https://northronbirdobs.blogspot.com> and see www.nrbo.org.uk



Siberian Rubythroat – Simon Davies



Portland Erin Taylor

A year without a first for Portland was something of a disappointment but a long-awaited – 60 years is a very long wait! - second in the form of a Great Reed Warbler was much appreciated. Overall though 2019 was a frustrating year with a series of 'might-have-beens' and an exceptionally wet and windy autumn that largely spoilt what's often the most rewarding season of the year.

A short, sharp cold snap in early February saw the arrival of 10000 Redwings amongst a host of other typical refugees but before the month was out spring arrived remarkably early when propitious weather conditions resulting in earliest ever records of Swallows, Sand Martin and Ring Ouzel, together with Wheatears and House Martins. March brought a surprise in the form of a Cirl Bunting but, thereafter, the spring was not a vintage one, with little in the way of the big falls of migrants that are usually such a feature of the season at Portland.



Cirl Bunting. – Martin Cade



Melodious Warbler – Martin Cade

There was however plenty of variety, and an awful lot of it was yellow: a Melodious Warbler topped a collection. This also included 9 Golden Orioles, 9 Wood Warblers, 8 Serins and a strong passage of Yellow Wagtails; other scarcities included a Kentish Plover, two Hoopoes and a single Bee-eater. In terms of local rarities it was an excellent spring for woodland species and corvids with Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Hawfinch, Jay and Hooded Crow all featuring.



Serin – Martin Cade

As spring melted into summer a Rose-coloured Starling added some colour but another Hawfinch stole the show when it frequented a bird table in the Obs garden for a week.

Early autumn saw well above average passages of Yellow Wagtail, Tree Pipit and Grasshopper Warbler but we had to wait until mid-season before scarcities of the likes of Wrynecks, Ortolan Buntings and Lapland Bunting showed up to provide some much-needed impetus to proceedings. The arrival of both a Purple Heron and the Great Reed Warbler on 18th September marked the rarity pinnacle of the year but it was downhill all the way after that as the first of the wind and rain that was to so blight the rest of the year set in with a vengeance.



Purple Heron – Martin Cade



Great Reed Warbler – Martin Cade

The likes of a series of Caspian Gulls and a couple of Pallas's Warblers ensured that October and November weren't a complete write-off but there could and should have been so much more...



Pallas's Warbler – Pete Saunders

It might have been very mediocre for birds but 2019 had plenty of other highlights. On the butterfly front a series of Large Tortoiseshells in the early spring and mid-summer were very popular whilst a huge arrival of Painted Ladies was one of the spectacles of the year. Another half dozen

additions to the moth list through the summer and autumn included Britain's third Geometrician, whilst a showy Vagrant Emperor dragonfly in late October topped off what was a really rewarding insect year.



Geometrician - Bob Johnson



Vagrant Emperor – Martin Cade



Convolvulus Hawkmoth – Martin Cade



Sandwich Bay Steffan Walton

Well, needless-to-say 2019 was another successful year for SBBOT. We have start this summary by talking about our Restharrow Scrape Project. This was a herculean task that involved many people and many hundreds of man-hours, eventually culminating in us raising over £350,000. This allowed us not just to purchase Restharrow Scrape but to extend and re-model the wetland, build a new hide, lay new paths, disabled parking, signage, fencing, gates, and employ a new Assistant Warden. It quite rightly takes centre-stage. A big thank you to everyone who has contributed so far to the project and those that continue to do so.



Restharrow Scrape by N.Mitchell

Bird-wise, January began with good numbers of Water Pipits and Short-eared Owls whilst a small flock of overwintering Pink-footed Geese was unusual. Mid-February saw the usual return of return of Shelducks, Ringed Plovers, Coots, and Avocets back to their breeding areas. There was a record arrival of Garganey at the end of March with at least 24 birds on the 28th. Even more bizarrely, a Night-heron was sound-recorded flying over us at night. RSPB staff became much more noticeable at the Observatory as we agreed a three-year contract with them to share our office space. During this time we also ran trips to North Wales and Islay, attended the Bird Observatory Council meeting in Thetford, Royal St George's Greenkeeping Course, and ran Bird Identification and Disturbance Sessions in conjunction with Kent Wildlife Trust. Greg Lee arrived as a volunteer in early Spring and spent three months with us learning the ropes at an Observatory. His eager eyes were well-received and he contributed plenty of bird, moth, and bat sightings during his stay with us.

In April, the Observatory began a five-year contract with the Environment Agency monitoring the birdlife on New Downs, a new crow trap was built, and there were meetings regarding MOTUS and Kent Ornithological

Society records. The accommodation was very busy but Dawn Stockley, who joined us as Field Centre Manager in late 2018, was up to the task and has since proved to be a valuable member of our team. Good numbers of Sand Martins were recorded, a Kentish Plover was present on the 3rd, and followed by a White Stork and a run of Cattle Egrets on the 9th, 18th, 21st, and 22nd, another Kentish Plover on the 24th, and regular sightings of Spoonbills and Ring Ouzels. A couple of Red-rumped Swallows on the 1st was a good start to May and it continued with another two Kentish Plovers, three Golden Orioles, two Honey-buzzards, singles of Montagu's Harrier, Black Kite, Purple Heron, and Temminck's Stint, plus good movements of Little Tern and Red Kite. The AGM was a great success as were our guided river trips at Grove Ferry and the day out across the Channel at Parc du Marquenterre.



Black-headed Gulls on Restharrow Scrape by S.Ray

A Quail on 1st June and a Hoopoe on the 3rd were the last notable spring migrants but further avian highlights came in the form of Black-headed Gulls and Egyptian Geese breeding on Restharrow Scrape for the first time. A juvenile Siskin trapped on the 11th was certainly interesting too, it must've bred somewhere not too far away. As the weather heated up so did the invertebrate records too with Speckled Footman and Currant Clearwing appearing, Ringlets seemingly cementing themselves as a resident in the Recording Area, whilst our first independent Bee Identification Course run with Steven Falk was an overwhelming success.

Autumn began picking up slowly during July and by the end of the month Waders, Terns, and Warblers were abundant. A Cattle Egret on Worth on the 23rd was unseasonal. There was good productivity of nesting Turtle Doves on Worth and Cetti's Warbler was confirmed to have bred on the Estate for the first time. A few Garganey began appearing followed by impressive numbers of Wood Sandpipers. The contents of the moth trap were fantastic too with Splendid Brocade, Dewick's Plusia, Dark Crimson Underwing, Shining Marbled, Pale Shoulder, Marbled Clover, Great Brocade, Dusky Hook-tip, and Mocha all making an appearance.



Bright Wave by D.Taylor

In August it was great to have regular sightings of Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, plus a few Wood Warblers, and we ran another excellent Ringing Course. A mega emergence of butterflies saw 503 Red Admirals counted on the 7th and 285 Painted Ladies on the 8th, whilst there were sightings of Southern Migrant Hawkers for the second year in succession. The nocturnal sound-recording picked up more surprises near the end of the month with Ortolan Bunting on the 26th and then Dotterel the following night. A Honey-buzzard flew over on the 29th.



Southern Migrant Hawker by S.Reynaert

Later on in September the winds switched and seemed to hamper visible migration. Despite this a Wryneck was ringed on the 9th and a super flock of 10,000 Swallows was observed coming into roost overnight on the 12th.



Wryneck by A.Lipczynski

Once again there were sizable arrivals of Blackcaps, and later on Chiffchaffs, which are now becoming standard

events in the Sandwich Bay calendar. Meanwhile a White Stork wading around the saltmarsh in Pegwell Bay on the 29th was from the recent Knepp release scheme. During the month we also advertised for an Assistant Warden to lead on the outreach and interpretation side of the Restharrow Scrape Project and help out with Observatory activities. Rebecca Downey impressed in interviews and was appointed at the end of the year.

October started well with Sabine's Gull and Purple Sandpiper amongst a big Brent movement on the 2nd, followed by a flurry of late Turtle Doves. One of the more intriguing events of the autumn was the prolonged Tit passage through the Recording Area. At least 167 Blue Tits and 110 Long-tailed Tits coasted through the area on the 3rd, with only our ninth ever Nuthatch the same day. Considerable falls of Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps became the norm, with hundreds bouncing from bush-to-bush, and once again there were excellent numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers.

In November there were sporadic sightings of Little Gull, Slavonian Grebe, Mandarin, and Hen Harrier throughout the month. Three Cranes flew past offshore on the 2nd and two Bean Geese went over on the 16th. A run of Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls on the new Restharrow Scrape were well-received. Three Cattle Egrets appeared on the 25th and were joined by a Glossy Ibis the next day. The Ibis toured around Worth for a week or so before moving on but the Egrets remained until at the end of the year. Insect news was brought to a climax with the discovery of a Vagrant Emperor on the 17th. This was the first SBBOT record of this migratory dragonfly and became our 31st species of Odonata, making us surely the most bio-diverse area in the UK for this taxonomic group. The year ended once again with up to 3,000 Cormorants offshore and good numbers of wintering Short-eared Owls, Water Pipits, and Snow Buntings.



Glossy Ibis on Restharrow Scrape by S.Reynaert

With so much going on why not come for a visit in 2020? Whatever your reason for visiting Kent, the Field Centre offers modern and comfortable, self-catering accommodation with a kitchen, library, wi-fi, and free parking (with a new en-suite room available from March), allowing you to be on hand for early morning ringing, late night moth-trapping, or just time to explore the local area.



Skokholm Richard Brown and Giselle Eagle

It was another remarkable year on Skokholm. The best part of a quarter of a million seabirds returned to breed in what proved to be an excellent season for the majority of species. Following the hottest February on record it was perhaps no surprise that the majority of breeding seasons were earlier than the average; the first Puffin to appear was the third earliest on record, the peak March Puffin day count of 7447 was the highest on record and the first Guillemot egg was the earliest to ever be recorded in Wales. It was predicted that somewhere in the region of 64,000 Manx Shearwaters fledged from Skok this year, whilst 62% of Fulmar pairs and 84% of Puffin pairs also fledged a chick. With such high productivity it is hard to imagine that the breeding populations of these stunning species won't continue to increase over the coming years, indeed the impact of man in the open ocean would seem to be the biggest threat at present. Skokholm is also home to Britain's fourth largest and most accessible Storm Petrel colony, this a species high on the list of things to see for most of our guests. With this in mind we have constructed a viewing arena from which we can comfortably watch the nocturnal comings and goings of hundreds of birds (using a brilliant infrared viewing system so as to not disturb them). We were noticing a lot more activity around the 'Petrel Station' during these guided walks, but the uptake this year was still a surprise; at least 13 of the 119 nest boxes were in some way occupied and the first two chicks to fledge from this artificial study wall departed during late September.



One of the first chicks to fledge from the Petrel Station being fed. The British Birds Charitable Trust sponsored infrared cameras for viewing the nests without causing any disturbance.

Whilst the spring and autumn counts of most common migrants were unremarkable, good numbers of birds were again ringed, with well over 7000 processed during the course of what was in reality a rather average year. Visiting ringers were again instrumental, not just in helping to process migrants, but also with our core monitoring projects such as the colour ringing of large gulls, the Manx Shearwater transect and the systematic ringing of Storm

Petrels. The Wheatear colour ringing project continued to provide remarkable insights into their breeding biology, with survival rates proving to be higher than those published previously and with novel behaviours logged (leading to the first of what will no doubt be many excellent BB notes for Ian Beggs). Volunteers made and installed 40 bespoke nest boxes to help with this project in future years.

The birding was always exciting; be it crests clinging to Skokholm's spectacular old red sandstone cliffs or Hen Harriers quartering the Bog for Snipe, there is always something going on. However it is inevitably the more unusual birds which stick in the memory; although it wasn't our best year for variety, indeed the year-total ended 11 down on the 2017 record, there were still some real Island scarcities. March saw the 17th Hooded Crow for Skok and the most bizarre sighting of the year, four Black Swans which cruised past the Lighthouse and out towards Grassholm. Into April and a flyover group of ten Pale-bellied Brent Geese was just the 15th record for Skokholm, the 18th record of Little Ringed Plover was on North Pond and a Hobby which steamed south over the Island was the first since 2012. In May a stunning American Golden Plover was found on North Pond; this was just a second for Skokholm following the first for Wales logged here on 26th September 1981.



American Golden Plover – Richard Brown

The following week saw three Black-crowned Night Heron fly west over the Courtyard just as we had sat down to drink a cup of tea; this became the 297th species to be logged on Skokholm since records began in 1927. A Greenish Warbler was found at the Obs the following day, a bird which was subsequently trapped; who better to ring it than Bird Observatory stalwart Mike Archer who was here digitising the Skomer Island bird logs. Four Quail was the highest annual total this century. On 10th June species 298 arrived; a Laughing Gull flew west over the Courtyard, again just as we sat down to drink a cup of tea. We were starting to wonder whether we should incorporate more tea breaks into our day. Six days later, during what was probably the grottiest weather of the summer, a Stone Curlew appeared on Western Plain; this was a fifth for Skokholm and just a sixth for Pembrokeshire.



Stone Curlew – Richard Brown



Night Heron – Richard Brown



Laughing Gull- Richard Brown

June also produced a breeding plumaged Spotted Redshank and the eighth Skokholm record of Short-toed Lark. On 26th June a Laughing Gull flew over the Island; it was identified by its primary covert patterning as the same individual seen on the 10th, but where had it been for the last 16 days? During the introductory talk on 5th July (when again lots of tea was being drunk), a Great Egret flew over the Courtyard; this was the 299th species to be logged on Skokholm (we're taking bets on the 300th).

Early autumn produced three Sabine's Gulls, multiple Turtle Dove, a Red-backed Shrike, a Common Rosefinch and two each of Grey Phalarope, Firecrest, Wryneck, Yellow-browed Warbler, Siberian Chiffchaff and Red-breasted Flycatcher. The star of the autumn arrived on 12th October; a Red-eyed Vireo was discovered in the Courtyard Elders by Long-term Volunteer Jodie Henderson just as, you guessed it, she sat down for a biscuit and a cup of tea!



Red-eyed Vireo – Richard Brown

The end of the autumn saw something of a diver and duck bonanza; a daycount of 18 Great Northern Diver was a new record, whilst the 14th record of Tufted Duck, the third Island record of Long-tailed Duck and the second Skok records of Velvet Scoter and Ring-necked Duck were also logged. The latter was the fourth North American species to be seen this year, a tally one short of the 1967 record (when Pectoral Sandpiper, Swainson's Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Baltimore Oriole and Rose-breasted Grosbeak were logged).

There were also some pretty exciting non-avian records in 2019. The moth trap produced rare and scarce species, the highlight without doubt being the first Skokholm record of Bedstraw Hawk-moth which arrived on 3rd August. In what was a remarkable year for migrant butterflies (the Painted Lady invasion was spectacular) the highlight was the first Pembrokeshire record of Long-tailed Blue; found on Isthmian Heath on 24th September, this wayward beauty was almost certainly swallowed by a Swallow. The second Skokholm record of Nathusius' Pipistrelle, detected at the Quarry on 23rd September, was perhaps the mammalian highlight. An Island record of 14 Grey Seal pups included two successfully weaned twins; twins are a real rarity in the wild, with only a handful of other suspected cases. Even fish got in on the non-avian excitement, with breaching Thresher Shark and Tuna both seen from the Lighthouse.

We are currently on a different small Island, studying Black Petrels on Great Barrier off New Zealand, however we'll soon be back to start preparing for the 2020 season. If you would like to join us as a guest or as a visiting ringer see here:

www.welshwildlife.org/skomer-skokholm/skokholm/
If you would like to be one of our four Long-term Volunteers see here:

www.welshwildlife.org/volunteer/long-term-volunteers/
And, to keep an eye on what we're up to, follow us on the Blog, on Twitter, on Facebook or on Instagram:

www.skokholm.blogspot.com
[www.twitter.com/SkokholmIsland](https://twitter.com/SkokholmIsland)
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www.instagram.com/skokholm_island/



Walney Colin Raven

January proved to be a generally settled month, although 68.3mm of precipitation was recorded over 21 days, light to moderate winds dominated and temperatures fell below freezing on three days with lying snow (28th) a rare event on the island. The calm seas revealed single Great Northern Diver (10th) and Black-throated Diver (20th) amongst up to 15 Red-throated Diver and a wintering congregation of 28 Shag (20th). Additional sightings were led by a Gannet (12th) and small numbers of Common Scoter and Kittiwake. An adult Black Brant remained all month amongst 247 light-bellied and 80 dark-bellied Brent Geese while a total of 421 Pink-footed Geese flew through. Colour ringed birds were prominent within the Brent Goose flock and included three birds previously ringed at Axel Heiberg Island, in the Canadian Arctic. Additional wildfowl included up to 13 Shoveler and five Scaup whilst a Goosander was unusual (18th-21st). Wader highlights amongst good numbers of the commoner species involved four Purple Sandpiper (6th), two Jack Snipe (10th), five Black-tailed Godwit (20th) and six Greenshank (23rd). Little Egret were prominent with up to 40 birds seen (3rd). A Short-eared Owl was flushed from the salt marsh by the rising tide (21st) and a Buzzard appeared (14th) while there were regular sightings of Merlin and Peregrine. Interesting passerines were, as usual, in short supply but included a flock of 55 Twite while three Tree Sparrow (6th) and a Treecreeper (21st) were more unusual wintering birds. A total of 99 species were recorded in the month.

A total of 75.9mm of rain was recorded over 14 days in February with temperatures falling below zero on three days at the beginning of the month and light to moderate winds again dominating. A herd of 20 Whooper Swan were on the sea (23rd) where 82 Razorbill (2nd), 440 Common Scoter (3rd), 55 Kittiwake (9th), 41 Red-breasted Merganser (16th), 19 Red-throated Diver (17th) and up to eight Shag and a handful of Gannet were also recorded. The Black Brant remained all month amongst 300 light-bellied and 70 dark-bellied Brent Geese and 1,854 Pink-footed Geese were overhead. The Goosander put in several appearances and the 13 Shoveler and five Scaup remained along with six Greenshank and five Black-tailed Godwit. A Woodcock (2nd) was the product of cold weather movement and 12 Purple Sandpiper and 50 Snipe were logged (23rd). A Water Rail appeared (23rd) and Merlin and Peregrine remained the pick of the raptors. Up to eight Tree Sparrow frequented a garden feeding station and two Treecreeper were found to be wintering (2nd-3rd) along with Coal Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Long-tailed Tit. A Water Pipit (21st and 23rd) was amongst 18 Rock Pipit and the Twite flock had reduced to 32 birds (9th) while the first migrant Goldcrest

(25th), Siskin (23rd) and Mistle Thrush (23rd) all appeared. A total of 82 species were recorded in the month.

March proved to be a damp month with a total of 114.1mm of rain spread over 20 days. Average temperatures were recorded and winds were generally light to moderate excepting for a period of westerly gales mid-month. Offshore highlights involved Goosander (1st), Little Gull and Long-tailed Duck (11th) and Great Northern Diver (18th) along with the first Fulmar (4th) and Sandwich Tern (30th). The Black Brant remained all month along with 288 light-bellied and 62 dark-bellied Brent Geese, 50 Whooper Swan headed north and the last wintering Scaup departed (15th). A flock of 18 Purple Sandpiper (23rd), eight Greenshank (24th), an Avocet (25th) and a single Jack Snipe (30th) were the pick of the waders. A Buzzard began temporary residence (23rd-31st) and a Hooded Crow flew through (23rd). Spring migrants began to arrive with an early Wheatear (4th) followed by Blackcap (22nd), Chiffchaff (23rd), Sand Martin (24th) and Ring Ouzel (30th). A total of 111 species were recorded in the month.

Easterly winds dominated during April producing a dry month with rainfall totalling just 43.8mm over eight days, while daytime temperatures peaked at 21C. Offshore sightings were led by a Long-tailed Duck (8th), three Little Gull (19th), Pomarine Skua (20th), six Pomarine Skua and three Great Skua (28th) and four Puffin (30th) – the start of an unprecedented influx. Also seen were 10 Arctic Skua and 37 Red-throated Diver, 630 Common Scoter and 114 Sandwich Tern (27th) while the first Arctic Tern (13th), Little Tern (21st) and Manx Shearwater (25th) appeared. A total of 300 Pink-footed Geese and five Whooper Swan flew north and 272 light-bellied Brent Geese were still present (7th) with the last birds finally departing (25th) while a Gadwall dropped in (17th). Waders included 6,000 Knot (12th) and 1,050 Sanderling and 44 Whimbrel (20th) with the Sanderling flock holding two colour ringed birds previously marked at Pontevedra, Spain. The Buzzard remained (to 19th), Ospreys flew through (5th and 23rd) and a Long-eared Owl roosted (12th). A few Twite remained (to 13th) and summer migrants continued to arrive with Willow Warbler (7th), House Martin (9th), Grasshopper Warbler (7th), Common Sandpiper, Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler (19th), Lesser Whitethroat (20th), Reed Warbler (22nd), Yellow Wagtail (23rd), Redstart (24th) and Spotted Flycatcher (29th). A total of 128 species were recorded in the month.

May was another dry month with 43.1mm of rainfall spread over 15 days; winds were light to moderate and generally from the north excepting a short spell of southeasterlies mid-month and again at the months end. Temperatures peaked at 18C. Offshore highlights involved at least 12 Velvet Scoter amongst a huge flock of 12,000 Common Scoter (12th-18th) and an exceptional total of 109 Puffin (26-30th), two Black Tern (8th) and a Black Guillemot (24th).



Black Guillemot

Other sightings included: 12 Arctic Skua, 47 Arctic Tern (19th), 30 Little Tern (20th), 640 Guillemot (21st), 460 Manx Shearwater, 137 Gannet and 10 Fulmar (27th) and two Great Skua and 90 Kittiwake (30th). The last dark-bellied Brent Goose departed (5th), a total of 250 Pink-footed Geese headed north (to 7th), four Gadwall appeared (19th) and a drake Scaup lingered (from 9th). The last of the wintering Greenshank (1st) and Black-tailed Godwit (23rd) also departed and an impressive 212 Whimbrel (5th) and 2,800 Sanderling (18th) were logged. Two Spoonbill were short-term visitors (12th) and single Short-eared Owls were seen (5th and 19th) along with a Buzzard (19th). A male Firecrest held territory (7th-9th) and a Hooded Crow put in several appearances (5th-22nd). The last summer migrants to move through involved Swift and Garden Warbler (1st), Wood Warbler (3rd), Tree Pipit (5th) and Whinchat (9th). A total of 124 species were recorded in the month.

A total of 73.9mm of rain fell over 17 days in June; winds were predominately light to moderate and from the south with temperatures peaking at 24C at the end of the month in conjunction with a week of easterlies. Offshore sightings were led by three Velvet Scoter (2nd), Little Gull (6th), Mediterranean Gull (20th) and a total of 86 Puffin (19-28th), along with 525 Manx Shearwater (3rd), 565 Manx Shearwater and 80 Kittiwake (9th), Great Skua (21st) and 245 Common Scoter (26th). The drake Scaup put in another appearance (16th), a Gadwall was seen (24th) and waders began to return with 1,000 Knot (18th) and a Greenshank and 40 Black-tailed Godwit (24th). A Marsh Harrier flew through (10th) and a Cuckoo (27th and 30th) was to prove to be the only one of the year. Unusual passerine sightings were limited to a Yellowhammer (10th). An island breeding census established confirmed breeding for 67 species and revealed there is still a good population of warblers with Sedge Warbler (105-115 pairs), Whitethroat (105-115 pairs), Willow Warbler (55-65pairs), Blackcap (30-35 pairs), Lesser Whitethroat (25-30 pairs), Chiffchaff (9-10 pairs), Reed Warbler (5-6 pairs) and Grasshopper Warbler (2-3 pairs). A total of 112 species were recorded in the month. A notable influx of Painted Ladies occurred (1,000-27th) and associated with this were seven Black-tailed Skimmer and five Red-veined Darter – only the second time the latter species has occurred on the island.



Black-tailed Skimmer



Red-veined Darter

July produced 91.6mm of rain on 17 days and above average temperatures peaked at 30C. Light to moderate north-westerlies dominated for the first half of the month before mainly light southerlies were to the fore during the final two weeks. The sea provided a Pomarine Skua (9th) and totals of 10 Arctic Skua, six Puffin, five Mediterranean Gull and four Great Skua amongst good numbers of Common Scoter (800-7th), Little Tern (15-17th), Manx Shearwater (1,050-20th), Sandwich Tern (270-22nd) and Gannet (235-22nd). A colour marked Sandwich Tern had originally been ringed at Cemlyn Bay, Anglesey. A Marsh Harrier lingered (28th-29th) and two Water Rail called from suitable breeding habitat (26th). Waders included 49 Black-tailed Godwit (2nd), 400 Knot (5th), 12 Greenshank (25th), three Common Sandpiper (3rd) and a Wood Sandpiper (25th-28th). Swift numbers built (114-23rd) and a Stock Dove (16th) was the only one of the year. Yellow Wagtail were more prominent than in recent years with birds recorded almost daily (from 15th) and other early southbound migrants involved Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Spotted Flycatcher, Redstart, Whinchat and Wheatear and associated with this movement was the island's fourth Cetti's Warbler (20th) and unusually at least three Treecreeper. A total of 119 species were recorded in the month. Another Painted Lady influx was apparent late in the month (2,315-30th).

August was another damp month; a total of 115.3mm of rain fell over 24 days with temperatures peaking at 27C in the final week. Relatively light and variable winds from the beginning of the month were then punctuated by stronger westerlies up to gale force mid-month before a few days with light east winds were followed by another

spell of westerly gales. The sea proved to be generally disappointing with the highlights limited to three Goosander (4th), a Mediterranean Gull (24th), nine Little Gull (27th) and two Leach's Petrel and three Black Guillemot (31st) along with totals of 12 Arctic Skua and five Great Skua amongst reasonable numbers of Little Tern (22-2nd), Manx Shearwater (215-11th) and Common Scoter (675-29th). The first Merlin reappeared (4th) while single Marsh Harriers (7th, 13th and 27th), Osprey (11th and 13th) and two Buzzard (26th) flew through. Waders began to build with 330 Sanderling (13th) and 300 Turnstone (31st) while "fresh" waders involved 21 Greenshank and 10 Black-tailed Godwit (29th), two Common Sandpiper (21st) and single Wood Sandpiper (2nd and 8th) and Green Sandpiper (3rd and 27th).



Yellow Wagtail

Passerine activity was generally unremarkable although a further three Treecreeper appeared and Yellow Wagtail remained prominent with 68 birds logged through the month, highlights were limited to a Pied Flycatcher (25th) and a Hooded Crow (25th-27th). Diurnal migration finally gained some momentum towards the month's end with 116 Tree Sparrow (25th), and 105 Tree Sparrow, 38 Grey Wagtail and 38 Tree Pipit (all 27th). Ringing controls included Cormorants ringed at Denny Island in the Bristol Channel; Puffin Island off Anglesey and Stack Moor on the Isle of Man and a Sandwich Tern ringed at Lady's Island Lake, Wexford, Eire. However, the longest travelled involved a Turnstone that had been previously ringed at Grise Fjord, Nunavut, Canada. A total of 126 species were recorded in the month. The impressive Painted Lady invasion peaked (6,345 – 3rd).

It remained wet in September with 130.8mm of precipitation spread over 23 days and temperatures peaking at 22C (21st). Although westerlies, up to gale force, dominated the first week the remainder of the month was typified by generally light winds from the eastern quarter. Highlights over the sea involved two Black Guillemot (1st), Velvet Scoter (2nd-4th), Great Skua (6th), Puffin (26th), Great Northern Diver (28th), a total of five Arctic Skua and up to six Shag. Also seen were 1,020 Common Scoter (2nd), 125 Razorbill (11th), 125 Gannet (24th) and 24 Red-throated Diver (24th), with the last Little Tern and Arctic Tern (6th) and Manx Shearwater (26th). A total of 5,390 Pink-footed Geese flew through (from 10th) and the first Light-bellied Brent Geese returned (18th) with a steady increase (100-29th) through the month, included

in the flock were a high proportion of juveniles indicating a successful breeding season. Waders included 6,000 Oystercatcher (16th), 4,000 Knot (25th), 1,200 Redshank (16th), 420 Golden Plover (27th), 300 Turnstone (18th), 30 Greenshank (9th), 10 Black-tailed Godwit (16th). Two Mediterranean Gulls appeared (8th) with a further bird (15th). Several Buzzard were unusual and both Merlin and Peregrine provided regular sightings with single Osprey (8th), Marsh Harrier (21st) and Short-eared Owl (25th) also logged. Little Egret numbers began to build (32-1st) and the first Water Rail of the autumn appeared (18th). An itinerant Hooded Crow was seen (4th, 15th and 30th) and five Jay were logged (15th). Southbound passerine passage was generally light, however, peak day totals included 1,150 Meadow Pipit, 450 Swallow and 56 Grey Wagtail (7th), 28 Tree Sparrow and 12 Tree Pipit (8th), 14 Wheatear (16th), 1,195 Meadow Pipit (18th), 1,840 Meadow Pipit and 65 Pied Wagtail (20th), 500 Swallow and 90 House Martin (21st), 55 Chiffchaff, 49 Goldcrest and 45 Robin (25th) and 660 Skylark, 70 Pied Wagtail, 46 Goldcrest and 38 Robin (30th). Migrant departure dates involved Spotted Flycatcher (7th), Sedge Warbler and Yellow Wagtail (10th), Tree Pipit (17th), Swift and Sand Martin (18th), Grasshopper Warbler, Whinchat and Whitethroat (25th) and Lesser Whitethroat (30th). A total of 124 species were recorded in the month.

A series of depressions sweeping in from the Atlantic during October provided for a generally mild, wet and unsettled month with calm and dry days at a premium. A total of 141.7 mm of rainfall was recorded and only five rain free days were noted during the month. Offshore records included: Goosander (3-3rd), Black Guillemot (4th and 11th), Pochard (7th), Little Gull (8th), two Velvet Scoter (19th and 26th), Great Northern Diver (22nd and 25th) and up to 10 Shag and a total of five Great Skua. Also seen were 400 Common Scoter (6th), 16 Red-throated Diver (11th) and 150 Razorbill (31st). A record 95 Little Egret were logged (11th) and included a colour ringed bird originally marked at Bangor, North Wales. Single Marsh Harriers flew through (14th and 28th) and a Buzzard appeared again (28th) with regular records of Merlin and Peregrine. A Tawny Owl was heard (12th and 15th) and three Short-eared Owls were seen (15th) along with the more expected sightings of both Barn Owl and Little Owl. A total of 8,620 Pink-footed Geese (1,625-21st) and 523 Whooper Swan (346-26th) flew through and the Brent Goose flock increased steadily to hold 221 light-bellied and nine dark-bellied birds. Amongst these was the presumed returning adult Black Brant (5th). The first Scaup reappeared (28th) and waders included the only Spotted Redshank of the year (4th) amongst up to 21 Greenshank and the first returning Purple Sandpiper (27th). Passerine highlights were limited to the lingering Hooded Crow along with Firecrest (15th) and Treecreeper (17th) amongst a steady trickle of Goldcrest and Chiffchaff. Whilst Bullfinch passage was the best ever recorded finch totals in general were unspectacular with low numbers of most species exemplified by just 56 Siskin

and 44 Lesser Redpoll, eight Brambling and two Twite (from 11th).

Tree Sparrow fared better with 330 birds recorded; the first Redwing (4th), Brambling (20th) and Fieldfare (20th) all appeared. Diurnal migration was well below normal strength, but included peaks of 350 Linnet and 260 Pied Wagtail (3rd), 3,760 Meadow Pipit, 560 Skylark, 315 Pied Wagtail and 69 Chaffinch (14th), 275 Redwing (21st) and 40 Tree Sparrow (28th). Last migrant dates involved: Willow Warbler (2nd), Whimbrel (13th), House Martin (14th) and Wheatear (19th). A total of 122 species were recorded in the month.



Twite

The wet and unsettled theme continued through November with a total of 90.8 mm of rainfall recorded over 24 days. Moderate easterly winds dominated throughout the month, interspersed with two days of westerly gales towards mid-month and only the occasional calm day. Offshore highlights involved Black Guillemot (11th and 19th), Great Skua (11th), Velvet Scoter (18th), several Great Northern Diver (11th-28th) and up to 18 Shag along with 225 Razorbill (5th), 287 Common Scoter (16th), 6,500 Eider (18th), 22 Red-throated Diver and 49 Kittiwake (26th) and the latest ever Sandwich Tern (23rd). A total of 1,725 Pink-footed Geese and 91 Whooper Swan flew through and record numbers of light-bellied Brent Geese were seen (400-25th). A total of five Scaup and several Goosander were logged while waders included 11 Purple Sandpiper, seven Greenshank and several Woodcock amongst 750 Golden Plover (15th), 6,000 Knot (17th) and 7,600 Oystercatcher (27th). The latest ever Marsh Harrier flew through (27th), Merlin were prominent and up to 80 Little Egret were recorded (2nd).

A Tawny Owl was heard again (6th). The Hooded Crow remained all month, a Yellow-browed Warbler finally appeared (3rd) and a Snow Bunting appeared (3rd, 5th and 15th). However, passerine activity remained at a trickle and the anticipated thrush passage failed to materialise while finch totals included a further four Bullfinch but just seven Brambling, 48 Lesser Redpoll and

72 Siskin and a flock of up to 35 Twite (27th). The last migrant dates involved: Swallow (3rd), Blackcap (8th) and Chiffchaff (29th). A colour-ringed Cormorant had been marked at Mageoerne, Denmark and a total of 117 species were recorded in the month. The recent breeding success amongst the Grey Seal colony continued with a total of seven pups seen.



Yellow-browed Warbler

The rain continued to fall throughout December with only two dry days recorded amongst a total 93.2 mm of precipitation. Calm days remained at a premium with westerlies up to gale force dominating the first two weeks to be replaced, in the main, by south-east winds during the final two weeks of the year. A Slavonian Grebe was added to the year list (2nd) and other offshore sightings included Great Northern Diver (6th), Great Skua (7th), Black Guillemot (2-15th), Shag (33-20th), Long-tailed Duck (24th) and Velvet Scoter (25th) amongst a few late Gannet (to 22nd) and good numbers of Common Scoter (100-4th), Kittiwake (40-11th) and Red-throated Diver (91-22nd). A Water Rail squealed (19th) and Merlin sightings were regular. The last few Pink-footed Geese headed south along with three Whooper Swan. The Brent Goose flock held 382 pale-bellied and 94 dark-bellied birds while additional wildfowl included 18 Barnacle Goose (15th), up to five Scaup and a Goosander. Waders included 110 Sanderling (17th), seven wintering Greenshank and four Purple Sandpiper (13th). A Water Pipit was recorded (10th-16th), the long-staying Hooded Crow put in several appearances while late thrush movements included 210 Fieldfare, 24 Redwing and three Mistle Thrush (all 20th). Finch flocks included 35 Twite (18th) while a few Tree Sparrow visited a garden feeding station. Colour-ringed birds included a Black-headed Gull marked at Phisligar, North Ronaldsay and a Knot from Griend, The Netherlands. A total of 108 species were recorded in the month moving the annual total on to 174 species.



3rd International Bird Observatory Conference
EILAT ISRAEL
MARCH 28th– April 1st 2019

IBOC 2019

The world's bird observatories flock together

Gill Hollamby -Chair Dungeness Bird Observatory
Steve Stansfield – Chair of The BOC

This year saw the 3rd IBOC hosted by Eilat Bird Observatory in Israel. Five British Observatories and The BTO attended and represented the UK. The conference was held at a very up market venue to the south of Eilat at the Isrotel Yam Suf. The program was long and varied, with each day starting at 5.30am with pre-conference birding trips to birding hotspots nearby.



The Conference in Full swing

Thursday 28th March

This was labelled "**World Migratory Bird Day**" with a focus on the impact of plastic on seabirds and marine life.

There was a pre-conference gathering at the Bird Sanctuary and along the beach for an educational awareness-raising event implemented by the IBRCE and SPNI in cooperation with Environment for the Americas and the Municipality of Eilat in the bird park and after a short introduction to the problem by Susan Bonfield, we did a clean-up walk towards the north beach of Eilat, concluding the event with a beach cleanup. The goal was to increase the awareness of the damage caused by plastic pollution to seabirds and other marine life. In the long run it was hoped to reduce the volume of plastic used around the shores of Eilat by changing the behaviour of the public and local businesses and also lobby for new regulations that deal with the source of plastic found on the beach and its surroundings (restaurants, businesses, the port, the navy and oil company)

Introduction and Opening Session of IBOC 2019 – Chair Dan Alon

Dan Alon, Director of the International Birding and Research Center Eilat (IBRCE), opened the conference and welcomed 150 delegates from 60 Observatories from 34 Nations!

SPNI Our conservation efforts – Iris Hann

Iris Hann from SPNI (Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel) gave a presentation on the conservation and protection of Israel's wildlife the work that SPNI do. The SPNI undertake conservation work, education, working with children especially in relation to reducing plastic use, leading the cleaning up of Israel's plastic use, providing trails, working with all populations to help connect people to nature.

The story of the Israeli bird observatories – Dan Alon

Dan gave a presentation outlining how Israel began ornithological work. There was no ornithological work done in Israel before the 1960s, most research was being carried out by other countries. The first birding point in Israel was established by the late Shalom Zuretz at the fish ponds on Kibbutz Ma'agan Michael. The first Bird Observatory was established 1983 in Eilat by Yossi Lesham, followed by the urban centre in Jerusalem. Their focus was education and to encourage people to watch birds and help towards conservation. In 2011 the Society for the Protection of Nature initiated the National Network of Bird Watching Centres. Today there are 7 Bird Watching Centres all over Israel.

Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael – Jewish National Fund (KKL) – Doron Markel

This presentation was about creating a nationwide birding network – their primary goal is to provide a variety of ecosystems for citizens wellbeing based on forestry. They have been managing land and forests for many decades and are working on managing the ecosystems for both people and nature. They are also working on other strategies, e.g. pelican feeding areas away from fishponds. They work in partnership with SPNI

The Internet of Wildlife TM – Mike Lanzone (IoW)

The Internet of Wildlife is a collaborative Project working to join organisations of different sizes across different habitats and continents. Connecting technology and wildlife to answer the big conservation questions of today and tomorrow. We are all used to the way technology monitors our activities, from your watch uploading health data, to your phone monitoring your house and garden. How can technology join bird observatories? Eagles are already being monitored for flight tracks, wing beat data, nest activity, tracking/shooting of eagles. There is an early warning system for eagles to trigger proximity alarms which shut down turbines if they come too close. There are many other ways that technology can help with habitat usage, nest sickness but need to work out how to collaborate across projects and countries. VultureNet is a project which uses trackers to tell if vultures are dying before they die by tracking wingbeats/flap etc. They are working on using trackers on small organisms to talk to larger organisms, e.g. Small passerines passing data to turtle, whales or otters. These larger organisms then transfer the data to the Internet.

The International Birding and Research Centre, Eilat – Noam Weiss

Noam showed that Eilat is in a unique place as a land bridge from Africa to Europe on the edge of the Sahara Desert. Historically Eilat was an area of forests and marshes which were destroyed in building Eilat. The flyway needs to be like a road, clear and safe with stop over feeding sites. There are many hazards like power lines/light pollution. Many of these sites are gone so everything was pushed into sewage farms, fields etc. The IBRC encourages community participation and promotes Eilat as a bird migration town. Because of their intensive monitoring, through ringing and migration counts, and their positive approach, they are the 'go to' for information and look for solutions that work for nature and people.

How can Bird Observatories better serve and outreach to birdwatchers – Alena Kacal

Jerusalem BO is a 1.8-hectare natural island in the middle of the city with a pool for water. Their focus was ringing and research with over 10,000 birds ringed each year but now put a lot of effort into conservation and education. They did some extensive research to see how they can improve things for bird watchers. 3 main things emerged – birders not well represented across all segments i.e. not many Arabic and orthodox Jewish birders, mainly male with not many female birders and only one female 'bird expert', and most birders started early. So they now need to strengthen outreach to children, engage more women and try to engage other ethnic groups. They have 14 ringing programmes with clubs for children and there were 4 youth teams in the Champions of the Flyway. They are now working on training for bird call recognition to help engage more people.

Avian life-history, ecology, evolution and global biology – Nir Sapir (Avian Flight Laboratory, Haifa University)

Nir gave a presentation about the function and maintenance of feathers. The function for colour, flight and covering was explained. Feathers need replacing for different reasons so there are several different strategies and different sequences. Some moult all their feathers simultaneously and others moult individual feathers. This has to be fitted in with the annual cycle of migration and breeding. The laboratory has collected data about moult and the important thing is to collect data about moult to help our understanding of bird biology.

The day ended with a Meet and Greet and Dinner at the Yam Suf hotel.

Friday 29th March – Day Host: Alena Kacal

New world bird observatories: Their origins, evolution, speciation, demography, and ecology – C J Ralph

C.J. was the first Keynote Speaker of the event. He gave us a good look at the traits that make a Bird Observatory successful, such as the people, close personal encounters, nice places and the excitement of a net round when you don't know what'll be found. There are many different definitions of a Bird Observatory but important that they are one-stop-shops for info – and welcoming to visitors. Key elements are partnerships, good leadership, diversity of programs and good access to the public.

Conservation Session, Chair: Susan Bonfield






Presentation list:

-  National Institute for Ornithological Research – Eshel Ophir
-  Conservation of declining species through Bird Observatories, experiences from the highlands of Costa Rica – Pablo Elizondo
-  The Jordan Valley Birdwatching Centre: Through peaceful solutions of conflict between birders and farmers – Tuvia Kahn
-  Mangrove regeneration project implication on migratory birds – Fagimba Camara
-  Community bird conservation: the case of the association Nature-Communautés-Développement (NCD) in Senegal – BAH Mouhamadou Aliou
-  Boats or Birds: Yeruham Birding Center – A case for grass-root Conservation – Yoram Zvik

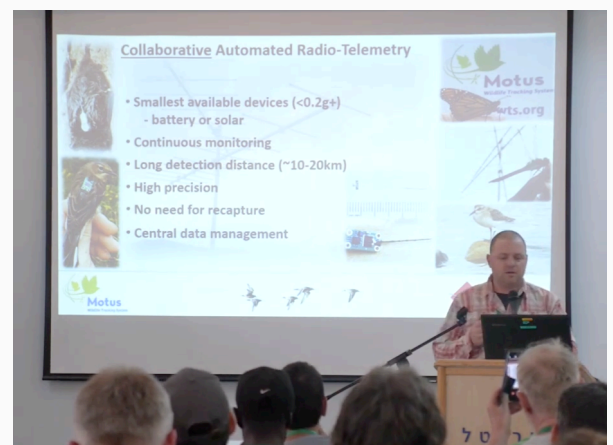
This session covered the different ways that bird monitoring and conservation issues were dealt in various countries. This included Israel, which has a goal of well-equipped research stations linked through a central organisation. Jordan is looking to solve the conflicts between farmers and the migrating birds that funnel through the flyway through coffee meetings and discussions, including protection for Pratincoles that nest in fields. Issues for Pelicans whose watering areas have dried out so they use fish farms is the most important problem to work on. Gambia, is looking to support the regeneration of the mangroves to support migration and to support local women in making briquettes to save forest destruction and protecting honey for them to sell as an income stream. Costa Rica has the longest running monitoring group in South America and see Bird Observatories as critical to collecting data, i.e. Isotope analysis showing a clear separation between birds wintering in Venezuela and Costa Rica. This has allowed science to identify the most critical areas for conservation. Senegal is looking to develop conservation communities with ecological goals that can work out acceptable systems of intervention. Yeruham in Israel, is working on resolving the conflict between boating interests and conservation which have arisen following the building of a dam and large lake. Setting up a ringing station and raising public awareness with a lot of education and voluntary activities means the area is now seen as for birds first.

Technology and Disease Session, Chair: Rob Adams

Presentation list:

-  The Motus Wildlife Tracking System – Stuart Mackenzie
-  Bringing Data collection to the XXI century – Pedro Martins
-  Using remote sensing of avian habitat to direct bird conservation – Susan Bonfield
-  Migratory waterfowl and dissemination of Influenza virus – Björn Olsen
-  Long- term surveillance of Influenza A viruses in migrating duck populations – Magnus Hellsröm

This session, chaired by Spurn Bird Observatories Rob Adams had a variety of presentations about the use of new technology to track different animals, from the small to the huge. We looked at tags and trackers, remote sensing using satellites and the use of photography to record habitats and identify individual animals and how they were used to direct conservation efforts. i.e. Vegetation types after a burn, canopy condition, arrival and departure dates.



Stu McKenzie from Long Point BO Talking about Motus

This can be done across unstable or soft ground and across inaccessible jungles or forests. Linked into this were two talks on the use of tracking to understand how wildfowl, and the change in some populations' habits, help transmit the Influenza A virus between breeding and wintering areas. It focussed on the way Bird Observatories can help to provide the information to inform further research.

Towards a centralized platform for storing and displaying data – Gerard Troost

Gerard gave a Keynote presentation the possibilities of a central storage system with easy access to the stored data. He showed us how Trektellen works and what some of the advantages are. There was a short discussion on some of the problems.





Third session workshops by Gerard Troost and Björn Malmhagen.

Which are the most important needs for Bird Observatories to start storing data in a common platform?

This workshop session which looked at some of the needs for Bird Observatories, e.g. Data collection, Analysis, Phenology. Different areas were discussed and various ideas were suggested as to how Trektellen could best support Bird Observatories.

Role of Bird Observatories Sessions, Chair: Björn Malmhagen






Presentation list:

-  Information and data sharing through birdobservatories.com – Magnus Grylle
-  The role of bird observatories in monitoring the state of Israel's birds – Yoav Perlman
-  How bird observatories can mediate environmental conflict through transparent conservation, scientific processes and management-relevant research and monitoring – John D Alexander
-  Conservation fund raising through corporate organisations – John Horton
-  And then there were four – David La Puma
-  Challenges and opportunities of establishing a network of bird observatories and national bird banding scheme in Ecuador – Nicole Büttner

This session went through many of the ways that Bird Observatories contribute to different conservation and educational strategies in various countries. It isn't enough to have a Facebook page, we need to tell the world we are here and that we are doing a good job. We need to act together worldwide to maintain a public image worldwide. Birdobservatories.org was demonstrated as a way of tuning and streamlining workflow and enabling collaboration. It was shown how Bird Observatories data could not only record and demonstrate the state of our environments but also act as mediators in conflict between nature and man. Cross country agreements and Friendships build on individual observatories activities and give opportunities for international collaboration. Ecuador is a very diverse country with one of the largest bird lists in the world. They have had long term monitoring but no ringing scheme. We were shown how they are implementing a ringing network and ringing scheme across the country and how this is improving their professionalism and giving them more leverage and recognition in environmental debates. A great presentation from John Horton (Alderney) who talked us through an innovative approach to sponsorship by explaining how they teamed up with Zeiss to sponsor the cost of their rings.

Monitoring Projects Session, Chair: Mike Lanzone

Presentation list:

-  Bird Observatories are not just for birds – David Walker
-  Nature Paradise in Chernobyl exclusion zone of Belarus – Alexandre Vintchevski
-  The African Bird Atlas Project – Ulf Ottoson
-  The French Migration Atlas – Louis Sallé
-  February precipitation in the wintering grounds of the Lesser Whitethroat as a migration clue – Irith Aloni

This session looked at the way our data can contribute to various monitoring schemes. David Walker's talk covered a brief introduction to Dungeness BO's work in birds and then went on to show how we have widened our monitoring to cover moths, butterflies, crickets and grasshoppers etc. We were shown result following the accident in Chernobyl which now has an area of around 220,000 ha which are strictly protected with only researchers allowed in. The African Bird atlas is looking to build on the South African Bird Atlas Project to spread across all of Africa and the French Migration Atlas is using some of the large amount of data collected to analyse and share trends and pinpoint areas for future priorities and research. With the changes in phenology of many birds several projects have looked at the possible reasons. This project looked at the

wintering grounds for Lesser Whitethroats and concluded that it wasn't the overall amount or timing of precipitation but that precipitation in February was the cue that sparked migration.

Birding Tourism as a tool for conservation – Jonathan Meyrav

The final Keynote of the day was about how bird and Eco-Tourism had risen across the world and how in Israel they have spent a lot of time in developing a strong and viable bird tourism branch. The funds raised are used support many of their other areas, such as education and research.


Saturday 30th March – Day Host: Nadav Israeli

Avian Ecosystem Services – Bea Maas

The day's first Keynote by Bea saw us look at the various kinds of research available and some of the studies that demonstrate how pest suppression services impact on the economic and environmental issues but that it is hampered by gaps in our knowledge. This is where a collaboration between scientists, bird observatories, and the general public could help solve the problem leading to a better understanding of how to manage them sustainably.


History of Bird Observatory research Session – Chair: Bea Maas

Presentation list:

-  Migratory and resident bird population trends – Gideon Perlman
-  20 years of monitoring birds in an urban landscape through ringing – Manuel Grooeslet
-  Migration banding and the value of consistent methodology – Trevor Lloyd-Evans
-  From Helgoland Bird Observatory to the Institute of Avian Research – Jochen Dierschke
-  A review of bird ringing history in Mongolia and Bird ringing activity of the Khurkh bird ringing station – Batmunkh Davaasuren
-  20 years activity of Turov Ringing Station, Southern Belarus – Pavel Pinchuk

This session looked at the way that research projects and data collection from different parts of the world can inform scientific and ecological decisions. This includes data showing the differences and effects of climate change on e.g. trans-Saharan migrants against other migrants in Israel. Monitoring of birds in an urban city setting led to the planting of trees and the creation of a green space to help House Sparrow and House Finches among others in Mexico. The long-term monitoring at Manomat has given a robust set of data that show correlation between spring and autumn migration and climate change. A short history of and an overview of studies on Helgoland show that even a small island in the north sea can provide vital data. A short history of ringing activities in Mongolia as joint Russian/Mongolian/Hungarian expeditions that were opportunistic and non-stationary. The data are not available and non-digitised. They have only recently started their own stationary ringing stations but have already identified electrocution as biggest threat for Saker Falcons.

Bird Observatory Development Session, Chair: David La Puma

-  The outbreak of bird observatories in Brazil – Luiza Figueira
-  Perspectives of Bird Observatory Development in Armenia – Lusine Aghajanyan
-  Paso Portachuelo, a field laboratory for bird migration studies at northern south America.
-  The birth of next-generation banding station in Cape May, New Jersey – David La Puma

An interesting session on the development of new bird observatories in Brazil and Armenia which illustrate the importance of data collection to inform environmental decisions. Armenia have a culture of birding as a business, keeping its information for their clients so its difficult to get any data. Both see education as important working to overcome this and are at looking modern technology like geo-locators, radio recordings and GPS tracking. Cape May is a long established observatory which recognised the need to collect data after IBOC14 and is now moving into banding but this is linked to the setting up of a network of radio telemetry grids to monitor things like arrival/departure directions, habitat usage and site fidelity. We looked at some of the processes of setting up a 'New-generation' ringing station.

25 Years of empowering new generations of birdwatchers and conservationists – Amir Balaban

The next Keynote by Amir showed that from research they had done, most birdwatchers start at a young age so the Jerusalem Bird Observatory has set up a programme of after school groups, ringing demonstrations, summer camps etc. This has led to a pool of keen, young volunteers which provides a good basis for future researchers and conservationists.

Lightning Session, Chair: Jonathan Meyrev

- Monitoring waterfowl spring and autumn migration at Lake Hornborgasjön 1991-2018
- Monitoring antibiotic resistance through wild birds – Jonas Bonnedahl
- Establishing a long-term raptor migration monitoring programme at Sarimazi – Stefan Opperl
- Working with students and community volunteers to achieve bird monitoring habitat restoration goals – Heidi E Ware
- A role for bird observatories in climate change education – Evan Dalton
- Phenology of avian spring migratory passage in Europe and North America – Stuart A Mackenzie
- Creating a Bird Haven 'out of scratch' in the heart of a busy metropolis – Yuval Dax
- Terns' survival and reproduction in Israel – Inbal Sckekler

This was a lightning session where various aspects were explained in 5 minute talks. This was very quick and very concentrated covering topics such as wader monitoring in Lake Hornborgasjön, Sweden showing marked changes in numbers of migrating wildfowl; antibiotic monitoring highlighting the need for standardised, long-term sampling in birds; the importance of monitoring raptor migration to assess population changes, especially in Turkey; the importance of Bird Observatories educating the public about their work, informing research into things like climate change; a look at the impact of temperature changes due to climate change on the phenology of migration; what were the issues in setting up a new observatory and some of the local difficulties and problems; how to use monitoring to highlight the best conditions for breeding in Little and Common Terns in Israel.

Poster Session

A selection of posters were displayed around the room showing the activities and activities of many observatories and research stations around the world. These included topics such as the Rapid Growth of Barnacle Goose populations in SE Iceland; Binoculars4Charity; Three different observatories under one umbrella in Denmark; On-screen observatory – interactive visualisation of bird tracking data, a look at the Birdmap portal; Using bird data for climate change education.

Caucasus Session, Chair: Doron Markel

Presentation list:

- Development of Besh Barmag Bird Migration Count in Azerbaijan - Michael Heiss
- Batumi Raptor Count – Triin Kaasiku
- Research on waders in Southern Azerbaijan – Christopher Himmel
- Illegal killing of birds in the Batumi bottleneck – Aslan Bolkvadze

This session concentrated on the Caucasus area with a look at the development of bird migration counts in Azerbaijan, the strategies used in counting raptor migration at Batumi. Research on waders that takes place in southern Azerbaijan in an area that is very under recorded but has proved to be very important and resulted in the creation of the Lake Machmudchala and Gyzylagach Gulf as an Important Bird Area. As well as counting raptors at Batumi they have to contend with hunters and falconers which they are working hard to eradicate.

Nocturnal flight call monitoring potential and standards for quantifying bird migration – Simon Gillings

The final Keynote before dinner was by Simon Gillings of the BTO. The BTO is well known for monitoring bird numbers and migration through the day but what happens at night? The BTO are now looking at the potential of data collected by night migration recording. They have produced a best practices guide and looked at the strengths and weaknesses of 'nocmigging' to see how to extract standardised data which may lead to new information on flight paths and migration strategies.



Simon Gillings from the BTO talking about 'NocMigging'

No Borders, Only Beauty - Ricky Arnolds, NASA Astronaut

This after dinner keynote presentation was from Ricky Arnolds, who is a birder, and also an astronaut. He talked about how birds know no boundaries and this was the same with the space station. He explained that the ISS is based on the idea that humans in space are representatives of our species not any country or group. Looking down shows the beauty and apparent lack of political boundaries or strife while the astronauts are working towards improving life on earth and working towards our future exploration of the solar system.

Building partnerships and cross border cooperation to enhance environmental education concerning birds - Yossi Leshem

This final keynote presentation of the day by the inspiring Yossi Leshem showed how Israel developed the birding centre in Eilat and its position at the junction of three continents to foster nature conservation, ecotourism with cross border links through bird watching, training and monitoring activities and social events.







Sunday 31st March - Day Host: Yael Lehnardt

A shifting baseline in birdwatching and conservation in Palestine - Ikram Quattaineh

This opening keynote presentation of the day by Ikram showed how conservation in Palestine and Birdwatching go hand in hand.

Education Session, Chair: Ikram Quattaineh



Presentation list:

-  Lighting the spark: the important role of birds observatories for connecting people to birds and nature - Jody Allair
-  How do we keep our most valued volunteers – Johan Lerentzon
-  Festival of migratory birds of Venezuelan avifauna – Jhorman Piñero
-  World Migratory Bird Day – Susan Bonfield
-  One day all this will be yours – Yael Lehnardt
-  The role of local birding clubs as local nature watchers – Yohay Wasserlauf

This session covered many of the different ways that observatories round the world developed and expanded their activities to include education and outreach. This includes bird clubs, migration days, school and youth based programs and festivals that celebrate the beauty and fascination of birds and migration. A very interesting set of talks.

Technique, methods and research session, Chair: Sean S Walls





Presentation list:

-  Semi-automatic identification – Måns Karlsson
-  Refining the geographic source of Neotropical Migrants at Inglewood Bird Observatory, Canada – Douglas M Collister
-  CTT InSight: high resolution tracking of small organisms with Motus-compatible transmitters – Mike Lanzone
-  Departure decisions in songbirds with different migration strategies – Thomas Klinner
-  Age-specific trends in timing and abundance of autumn passage reveal population dynamics – Dries Engelen
-  Management of and outputs from a large database and the role of bird observatories in Israeli ringing – Ron Efrat

This session covered the use of different methods and techniques to further our knowledge of birds and their breeding and migration strategies. It included looking at Wilson's Warblers in Calgary, Alberta; high resolution tracking of small organisms, such as bats and even Dragonflies; using modern technology we can look at the different strategies of migrants and show the different departure decisions of short and long distance migrants; age-specific trends of migrating raptors showing a shift to safer wintering sites based in north Sahara; the analysis of ringing data leading to a better understanding of our understanding of bird movement and population dynamics.

Species session , Chair: Tal Polak





Presentation list:

-  Long-billed Curlew through the annual cycle – Jay Carlisle
-  Conservation of the Collared Pratincole in Hungary – Ákos Monoki
-  Nature's grossest blunder? – Shai Agmon
-  Cranes, farmers and ecotourism in the Hula Valley, Israel – Inbar Shlomit Rubin

A session on specific species gave us an interesting look at a selection of individual species which included how satellite telemetry has added to our knowledge of and to raise awareness of threats to Long-billed Curlews; how Hungary is using direct protection and conservation efforts to stabilise and improve the populations of Collared Pratincole; a look at the high occurrence of hybridisation of *Acrocephalus* warblers, especially Reed Warbler and Marsh Warbler; how changes in Cranes wintering in the Hula Valley caused problems and the way that damage to farmers crops were minimised by using birding tourism which helped to support crop protection.

Communities and Habitats session, Chair: Itai Shanni

Presentation list:

-  Anthropogenic effects on resident bird communities in Israel – Hamutal Friedman
-  Identification of migratory songbird African wintering habitats – Tal Raz
-  The Be'er Sheva River Park Birding Centre – Eyal Shochat
-  Fundraising at the Swiss Ornithological Institute – Sophie Jacquier

A first talk about how Israel has undergone major changes and how this affected the natural environment. It looked at ways to use data to inform land managers on how to effect biodiversity across different habitats. The decline in song bird numbers is more marked in long-distance migrants which winter in sub-Saharan and we saw how looking at isotope signatures in feathers collected in spring gave a better understanding of the wintering area which results in better information to lead conservation strategies. When the Be'er Sheva wetlands were drained in the 2000s, the municipality, following discussions, planned to turn the area into a large urban park which included a 9 ha lake with a 3ha bird sanctuary. Waterbirds and waders responded and are now using the area. A final talk about the structure, organisation and activities of the Swiss Ornithological Institute, a private foundation based in Sempach, central Switzerland mainly financed by donations, services and a shop and mailing and street campaigns.

We fight Windmills – Noam Weiss (held at IBRCE after dark)

Noam closed the Conference with a great presentation that brought together all the aspects of birding and conservation in and around Eilat looking at the ways that they work with the community to bring together everyone involved to work together in peace with farmers, decision makers and birders.

A very enjoyable way to finish the conference with an outdoor banquet at the IBRCE with lots of food, drink and music plus Thank you speeches to the organisers.



End of conference Banquet – Steve Stansfield

Summary

This is the third IBOC that we have attended and each one has been really informative, energising and fun with many people coming from all around the world. It was a packed programme starting with trips out from 5.30, back for breakfast before the first talk at 9.00am lasting through to 10pm. With breaks for coffee, lunch at various venues around Eilat and back for afternoon/evening talks. It was really good to see several observatories from countries just developing a ringing network, such as Mongolia and Brazil. It was a pleasure to feel that we were able to help answer many of their questions and talk through their problems etc. This conference has followed the trend towards the more 'corporate' institutions and NGOs in various countries and illustrated the differences between independent, self-funding observatories such as we have in Britain and the more university/government sponsored environmental organisations in most other parts of the world. Funding is a universal issue and we had several interesting talks about different ways that these programmes are funded. It may be an area that we look into for the future to see if there is any way we can build more links to universities etc. to support and fund projects of the future.

One area that came up often and was very inspiring was that of outreach. The work, and results, that many of the observatories do to encourage not just children but adults and organisations to see the potential of birding as both good for the environment and for tourism was interesting. As a small observatory we don't have the resources or the manpower to put in a programme of outreach but it is certainly something we can keep in mind when dealing with the public.

You can watch many of the presentations, read the talk abstracts and read about the main speakers by going to the website:

www.iboc2019.com

One of the up sides of attending conferences like IBOC, is that the birding in these areas is usually brilliant! Here are a selection of images take on the morning bird tours prior to the conference talks!

Little Green Bee-eater, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Little Crake

Black Bushchat, Rufus Bushchat

White-crowned Black Wheatear, Bee Eater



Project Yellow-browed - Introducing Motus based radio telemetry to Britain

Nick Whitehouse

At the spring 2019 BOC meeting it was proposed that British Bird Observatories work together using modern tracking technology to learn more about the movements of so-called 'reverse migrants' such as Yellow-browed Warblers across Western Europe into Britain and beyond.



The **Motus** system (www.motus.org) using fixed radio telemetry has a proven track record in America and Europe and the idea is to develop a coordinated network of receiver

stations in Britain to compliment those already in place in Europe and begin to monitor the movements of birds fitted with ultra-lightweight nanotags. See motus.org for information about the system and the many projects and studies that have used the system.

In July, a Strategic Steering Group was formed to oversee **Project Yellow-browed** as it has been named, with membership from the Bird Observatory Council, the British Trust for Ornithology, the University of Hull and the Bat Conservation Trust. The latter demonstrates the versatility of the system which can be used for monitoring the movements of not just birds but bats and even insects such as butterflies and dragonflies.



The project is a pilot and summer 2019 saw some tremendous work take place with Motus receiver stations being installed on the East Anglian coast at Landguard Bird Observatory, Caister, Lowestoft and Dunwich. Spurn and Dungeness bird observatories installed receivers in the autumn and Sandwich Bay are set to install in coming months.

Thanks go particularly to Ewan Parsons from the BCT and Adham Ashton-Butt from the BTO together Heiko Schmaljohan (Heligoland -Germany) and Sander Lagerveld (Wagenigen University - Holland) for their advice and resources in overseeing this initial phases of the project. Dutch staff from their own bat study groups actually came over to Britain to help!

Currently, the receivers in the UK can do just that; receive 'hits' from birds and bats tagged on the continent. The future aim is to start deploying tags on birds (and bats) caught here in Britain. A single station can detect presence and absence of a tagged bird or animal and the timings and direction of arrivals and departure over a range of some 6 km, depending upon terrain. It can show whether movements were non randomized and

having directional function, important if the study is to show that species such as Yellow-browed Warbler are engaged in a change of migration strategy and their presence is not just the result of random post breeding dispersal. As more and more receiver stations are added over a wider geographical area, potentially creating a pan-European network, these movements can be effectively 'tracked'.

A plethora of studies has been suggested from the migration movements of species such as Yellow-browed Warblers, Blackcaps, Lesser Whitethroats and thrushes. Ideas are coming in thick and fast to ensure the system is used throughout the calendar year. The winter foraging movements of Snow Buntings and Twite along the east coast and their connectivity to the continent has been suggested as has the movements of Swifts and hirundines. If the network is extended inland, there are uses potentially in rare bird protection and conservation.

Excitement for Project Yellow-browed and Motus has been heightened in 2019 with three Robins and a Dunlin picked up on receivers in East Anglia and the associated press release organised by the BTO which resulted in an article in The Times newspaper no less!. Nick Whitehouse from Spurn delivered talk on the project for the BTOs Annual Conference at Swanwick in December with caused a stir of interest among the many delegates from a vast array of backgrounds from birders and ringers to researchers, academics and naturalists. Some inland ringing groups are now keen to join the project.

Further great news came when Hull University announced the appointment in November of Dr Lucy Mitchell to undertake post-doctorate research on ornithological migration, which will include overseeing how Project Yellow-browed goes forward. We wish Lucy well and are determined to support her with all our best efforts.

There are many issues to work through to ensure the pilot project reveals its full potential, including radio frequency compatibility with the continent and the training and accreditation of ringers to deploy nanotags. Funding of course for any scientific project will always be an issue. But if the costs are spread over the lifetime of the equipment (over 10 years), then it can be seen as perhaps less expensive than might be viewed at first consideration.

We hope several more observatories will install their own receiver stations in 2020 and join the growing network. Only then will we have a fair chance of evaluating the contribution the system could make. We view it as being fully complementary to and not competing with bird ringing and other technologies such as satellite tracking and geolocation. Let's continue with energy and commitment to see the project realise its full potential.

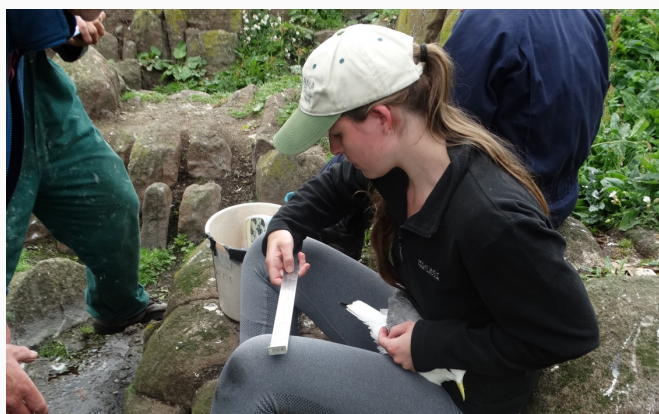
Young Birders at Bird Observatories in 2019

Ben Porter

2019 was another extremely eventful year for young people engaging with the network of Bird Observatories across Britain Ireland - indeed, it seemed like one of the strongest years yet for involvement of young birders in the work and activities of bird observatories, showcasing how important these sites have become for training, educating and engaging people with the natural world and important studies that are carried out as part of their varied work. A plethora of well-attended events were organised throughout the year all across the country's bird observatories, whilst individuals were once again able to experience observatory life first-hand through the grants provided by the British Trust for Ornithology's young bird observatory volunteer fund and the British Birds Young Birder's Grant. A whole range of different trips were awarded grants in 2019, taking the participants from Sandwich Bay in the south-east to North Ronaldsay in the far north, and the newly-accredited Alderney Bird Observatory in the channel. Below are some of the highlights from the year's events.

Young Birders' training course on Isle of May

The popular young birders training course on the Isle of May returned in 2019, providing six young naturalists with a unique opportunity to participate in the work of this fantastic bird observatory: from the daily recording of birds and other wildlife, to seabird studies, bird ringing, visible migration watches and seawatch counts when the weather allows.



Paige Petts taking wing-length from adult Kittiwake she had just ringed – Stuart Rivers



Emma Moreland with puffling during a 'Puffin grovelling' session to monitor chick development rates – Stuart Rivers

The week's trip also enabled the participants to find out more about the Isle of May National Nature Reserve (NNR) and to experience the many aspects of island and bird observatory life, and produces an end certificate outlining their achievements on the Young Birders' Training Course to present to potential employers.

Bardsey Island Lodge and Observatory

Bardsey Observatory again appointed two young birders this year as the Assistant Wardens. Lewis Hooper and Sam Prettyman had both experienced some Observatory life in the past, Lewis on North Ronaldsay and Sam at Gib point and Flambrough. Both had a great year and saw some pretty cool birds including Orphean Warbler, Fea's Petrel, Isabelline Wheatear and Buff-bellied Pipit.

After joining several of the past young birder's weeks on Bardsey Island and volunteering for three weeks in 2018, this year saw George Dunbar taking to the island for a three month intern stint at the bird observatory in the autumn. George will be returning to the island in 2020 replacing Lewis Hooper - a brilliant case to show how young birders have returned and continued on from the opportunities provided through their visits over previous years. Geowrg writes: *After visiting Bardsey for three previous years of young birders' weeks and I did three weeks volunteering in 2018, I decided to apply for the intern post for autumn 2019 once I had completed my A Levels and had my results. Bardsey is truly a magical place, I've become completely immersed in its wildlife,*



George Dunbar and Lewis Hooper – Steve Stansfield

its people and its sheer natural beauty. While picking a highlight is always difficult, this year for me, it must have been gaining more ringing experience on the island. Bardsey gives the opportunity to gain more experience with birds I don't get to handle often such as Seabirds, Waders, Storm Petrels and, of course, Manx Shearwaters, for which the island is renowned. I would, wholeheartedly, say Bardsey is somewhere everyone should try and get to at some point in their lives.

Josie Hewitt similarly joined the BBFO team for part of 2019, particularly to get involved with the spring seabird ringing activities which form an important part of the observatory's work: *This year I was only able to spend a fortnight volunteering on the island due to other commitments, so I headed straight to Porth Meudwy after my last Uni exam of the year. Unlike 2018, in which the 'big freeze' delayed the nesting dates of all Bardsey's seabirds, my visit in 2019 was perfectly timed to coincide with the peak opportunity for ringing seabirds and their chicks... and that's just what I did at every opportunity! I was lucky to visit the Gwylans on two occasions during my stay - these small islands lie a 20 minute boat trip from Bardsey and are jam-packed with nesting seabirds; Shag nests line the rocky slopes, auks jostle for space on the cliff ledges and Great Black-backed Gull chicks sit tight in the long grass atop Gwylan-fawr. Aside from the Gwylans, I also assisted Steve, Sam and Lewis with ringing activities on Bardsey itself. This included the gull colonies around the North East corner, Shag and Chough nests on the East side and a trip to Bae Felen and 'the hole' to target the Auks that nest among the boulders. As always, thanks must go to Steve, Emma and the AWs for making my visit so enjoyable, and hopefully I'll be back on Bardsey next year!*



Josie Hewitt with Great-Black Back Gull chicks – Steve Stansfield

Bardsey Observatory Young Birders' Training Week



The annual Young Birder's week also took place on Bardsey, now in its seventh year on the island. This popular event was held from 17th - 24th August and was once again fully booked well in advance, with 13 youngsters heading across the tumultuous Bardsey sound once the weather had eased enough to allow a crossing to take place. After a delayed arrival, the lost time was made up for during the rest of the week with a packed programme of activities, including night-time ringing of Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels; seawatching off the island's coast during the stormy weather, when a lucky few managed to glimpse a Fea's Petrel flying south past the coast; ringing songbirds in the observatory garden and Rock Pipits on the island's beach using a portable Heligoland trap; daily moth trapping in the observatory; and of course the traditional island bird race held on the Thursday. The observatory staff were ousted from first place by two of the young birder teams, taking the lead with a total of 69 species.

One of the participants in this year's event was Josh Hill, who summarises his week on the island: *The week provided a fantastic experience for young birders to engage with nature, and learn about the multitude of ways in which the observatory conserves and monitors the island's nature. A wonderful opportunity, in an incredible place, alongside the nicest people!*



Young Birder's Setting the Heligoland on the beach to catch Rock Pipits – Steve Stansfield

Kate Fox also joined the Bardsey young birder event and describes some of the highlights from her time there: *The week was an amazing chance to experience island life, and learn more about the day-to-day running of a world class bird observatory. We spent many hours sea-watching, exploring the island in search of wildlife, and of course ringing! I am a C permit ringer and have been ringing for three years now- during which time some of my best ringing experiences have been on Bardsey. It was interesting to see a wide variety of techniques used, such as the portable Heligoland we used on the beach to catch rock pipits for a colour ringing project, as well as various traps, and dazzling for waders.*

Straying away from the west and onto UK's east coast, Owen Beaumont spent the best part of a year at Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory as a residential volunteer: *I was able to get involved with all aspects of reserve management, visitor engagement and bird observatory projects, and the experience gained while at the reserve has proven invaluable to my personal development looking forward, with aspects such as leading groups of volunteers and guided walks along with knowledge of habitats and their appropriate management being standout areas. Living on the reserve for a year allowed me to work on identification skills, with the focus being on birds, but helping with butterfly transects and dragonfly surveys allowed me to work on these orders too.*

Martin Garner Spurn Young Birder event



Andy Clements (CEO of BTO), James King, Corin Woodhead and David Lindo, the Urban Birder. – BTO

A little further north, and Spurn Bird Observatory was the place to be on 7th September, where a gathering of young birders from all across the country attended the Martin Garner Spurn Young birder event, now in its second year and created in memory of the late Martin Garner. This event is held as part of the wider annual Migfest extravaganza, and is run jointly with the British Trust Ornithology, walking successful applicants through a rigours series of activities which test the identification skills and knowledge of the young birders. This year's winners were Corin Woodhead in the 11-13 category, and James King in the 14-16 category, after an intense day's birding which included sightings of Marsh Warbler, White-rumped

Sandpiper, Caspian Gull and Barred Warbler. All finalists received membership of Spurn Bird Observatory and the British Trust for Ornithology, as well as complimentary subscriptions to Rare Bird Alert and British Birds, alongside a glass trophy.

'Having met Martin Garner at BirdFair on a number of occasions when I was younger, it is great to think that his infectious enthusiasm lives on through this competition here. "It's a reyrt place Spurn!", as he might have said.' – Isabel Robson (11), one of the attendants of the 2019 competition.

Spurn Young Leaders Course event

Earlier this year, the BTO announced yet another fantastic opportunity for the young bird lovers. The BTO Young Leaders course, targeting 16-25 year olds, was to be held over 4 summer days at Spurn Bird Observatory, and would be providing advice and support for the attendants on how to improve as a leader. So on the 5th August, 9 young people met in the observatory garden for the start of the course, which began with an icebreaker activity, helping us to get to know one another. The week was a great success and enjoyed by all who attended – even the BTO Staff!!

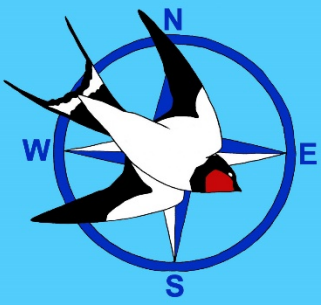


Spurn Young Leaders Week – Jonnie Fisk

Many Thanks!

With such an amazing array of opportunities for young people to get involved with, I'm sure 2020 will be yet another brilliant year for the next generation of young naturalists and birders to get involved with the work of the British Isles' bird observatories. It goes without saying that many of the trips and events described above wouldn't be possible without the support provided by the grants offered by the Observatories and their teams of dedicated staff and volunteers, the BTO, British Birds, the Cameron Bepolka trust the Wills Trust and many more.

If you're a young birder interested in visiting one of the bird observatories for a few days or a week, then keep your eyes peeled for the opening of this year's grants, and get your applications in! I look forward to following this years' events and trips as the season unfolds.



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