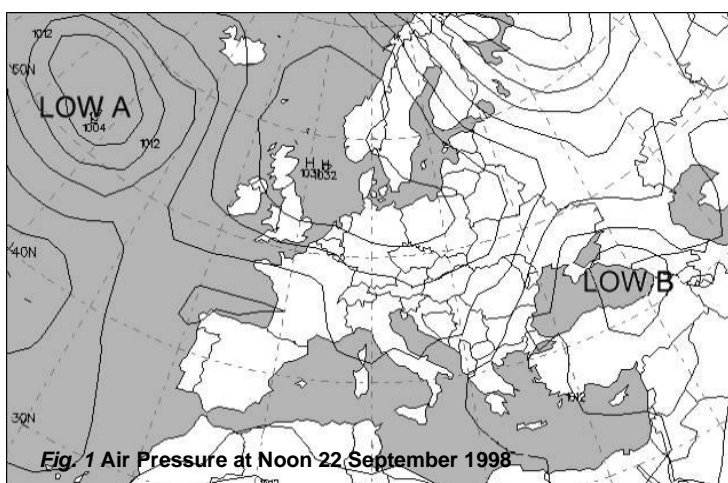


## THE AUTUMN FALL 1998

Over the last four years, 'falls' of migrant birds along the North-east coast of England have been in short supply, especially during the autumn period. The Filey regulars have always relied on the BBC weather forecasts to anticipate the right conditions, and on too many occasions the BBC have 'got it wrong', the low pressure moving that fraction higher than expected, giving Filey its' regular south-westerly winds.

It was with bated breath as we watched the weekly 'farming forecast' on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1998 indicate a period of direct easterlies originating in Siberia. Thoughts of all sorts of exotics abounded and people were frantically booking time off work on the basis of the forecast. This short paper concentrates on the species recorded at Filey during the period 26<sup>th</sup> September to 8<sup>th</sup> October 1998.

### THE WEATHER

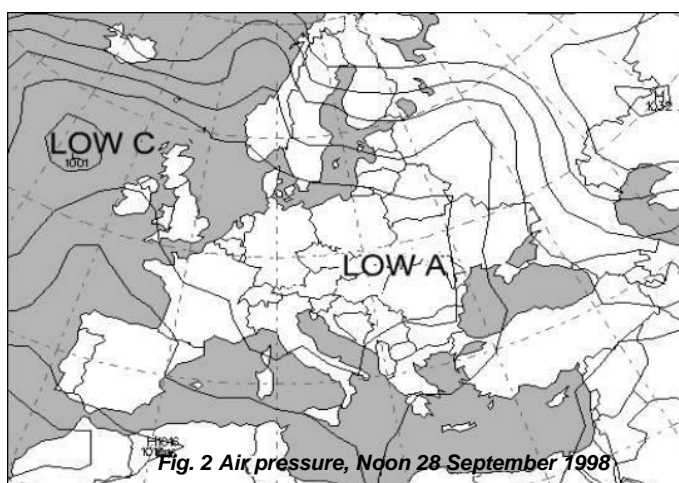


At noon on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1998 an anticyclone (1024mb) was centred just to the east of Scotland, with widely spaced isobars giving the first light easterly winds originating from central Germany (*fig. 1*). The weather over the whole of western Europe was fine and relatively mild.

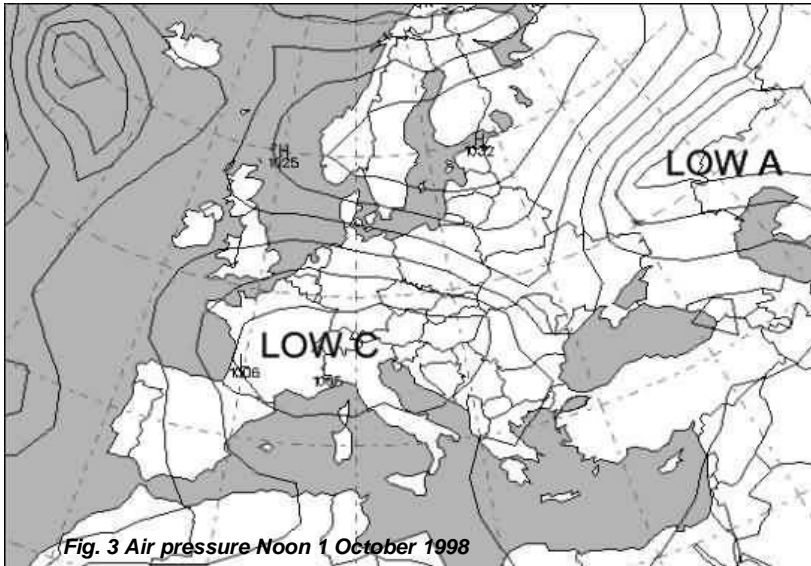
By 24<sup>th</sup> low pressure began to feed in towards Britain, bringing in colder wet air with overcast conditions. **LOW A**, began to deepen and move south-east and by 26<sup>th</sup> September was positioned

in the Bay of Biscay. This brought easterly winds to most of Britain, colder air was being pulled down from the Arctic and drizzle fed onto the East Coast.

**LOW A** then moved east (*fig.2*) but moving below the English Channel so continued bringing easterly winds into Britain. As this low moved further east it was replaced by **LOW C**, which followed the same track.



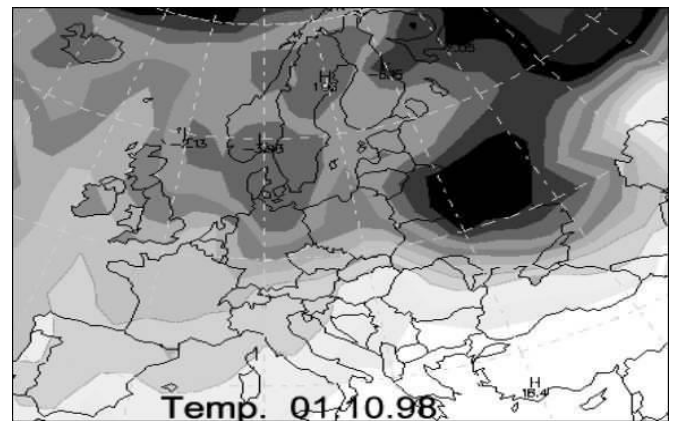
The combinations of these two Lows, together with an anticyclone over Northern Scandinavia pulled the winds in from north west Russia, by 1<sup>st</sup> October (*fig. 3*). The conditions at Filey were just right for a 'fall', occasional coastal drizzle pushed along by ENE winds!



Another feature of these conditions in Europe was the movement of a finger of very cold air which centred on **LOW A** as it passed over Germany into Poland and Russia. (fig.4).

## THE BIRDS

Initial examination of figures from the East Yorkshire Ringing Group area highlighted the main species involved in the 'fall', together with a supporting cast of other migrants. Ringing data showed a big difference in the fat content of some of these species, so a request was made via *Birding World*, *British Birds* and over the internet for data from both British and European ringing stations. It was hoped that looking at this data may have indicated where these birds had originated but unfortunately very few replies were received



The dominant species in the 'fall' was Robin, with Song Thrush, Dunnock and Wren appearing in large numbers. Other migrants which featured as either being late departures or in larger than usual numbers included Redstart, Reed Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest and Reed Bunting. Surprisingly the only 'eastern' species during the period at Filey were two Yellow-browed Warblers on 1<sup>st</sup> October.

A good number of the birds involved in this fall were trapped and examined for fat deposits. All of the Robins, Song Thrushes and Goldcrests were extremely low in fat, whereas species such as Reed, Garden and Grasshopper Warbler, Chiffchaff and Redstart were all around fat 3-4 (using the scale 1-5 where 1 is minimal fat). This indicated that the Robins, Song Thrushes and Goldcrests had travelled a long distance before arriving on the East Coast, whereas the other species had either made landfall earlier and were coasting or had just made the short hop across the North Sea. Controls at Filey and Flamborough included Robins and Goldcrest from Norway and a Goldcrest from Germany.

It became evident from the data received from other English East Coast sites, that Filey may have been on the outer edges of this 'fall' as numbers increased the further south one went. The centre of all activity appeared to be from Flamborough to southern Lincolnshire/North Norfolk, with fewer birds to the north and south of these areas. Most of the data received was for specific areas but the numbers involved on the Flamborough headland showed the enormity of the fall. The following table illustrates the cumulative totals for individual species in each area from 30<sup>th</sup> September to 8<sup>th</sup> October, showing the peak date for each species.

	<b>Dunnoek</b>	<b>Robin</b>	<b>Song Thrush</b>	<b>Willow Warbler</b>	<b>Chiffchaff</b>	<b>Goldcrest</b>
<b>Filey</b>	(1 <sup>st</sup> ) <b>300</b>	(2 <sup>nd</sup> /7 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>2,000</b>	(1 <sup>st</sup> ) <b>800</b>	(5 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>46</b>	(5 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>57</b>	(5 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>600</b>
<b>Flamborough</b>	(6 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>450</b>	(2 <sup>nd</sup> ) <b>4,480</b>	(1 <sup>st</sup> ) <b>3,300</b>	(2 <sup>nd</sup> ) <b>145</b>	(2 <sup>nd</sup> ) <b>1,047</b>	(3 <sup>rd</sup> /6 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>3,175</b>
<b>Gibraltar Point</b>	(8 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>180</b>	(7 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>2,830</b>	(3 <sup>rd</sup> ) <b>1,436</b>	(3 <sup>rd</sup> ) <b>21</b>	(8 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>547</b>	(7 <sup>th</sup> ) <b>1,755</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>7,310</b>	<b>5,536</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>1,651</b>	<b>17,039</b>

The fact that numbers started to rise on later dates, the further south along the coast, suggested that many of these birds continued to 'coast'.

Only a few foreign sites supplied data but those Scandinavian coastal sites that did, showed that although Robin numbers were higher than usual, they were not in the region of the numbers arriving on the east coast of Britain. For example, Turoey, located in south-west Norway, just above Bergen, ringed 230 Robins in 1998 compared to 59 in 1997 and a previous record of 95 in 1995. The peak days being 1<sup>st</sup> October (13) and 2<sup>nd</sup> (16). The same occurred with Song Thrush when they ringed 23 on 1<sup>st</sup>, the previous one-day record being 15. Goldcrest, on the other hand moved in large numbers with 'hundreds' seen along the coast. Peak days came on 1<sup>st</sup> with 225 ringed and 4<sup>th</sup> –167. It was noted that those birds on 1<sup>st</sup> were relatively healthy whereas on the 4<sup>th</sup> they were considered to be in 'critical' condition. One of the surprises at Turoey was the arrival of 20 Willow Warblers on 1<sup>st</sup> October, some of which had very grey heads and necks contrasting with olive backs. They were so late and unlike the local birds and were judged to be from eastern origin.

This only scratched the surface of the total numbers involved, as data from other areas (such as Spurn) was not available at the time of writing. Some single day counts at other sites included; 500 Robins and 250 Goldcrest at Atwick, East Yorkshire on 24<sup>th</sup> September (which was the earliest date) falling to around 150 and 100 respectively on 1<sup>st</sup> October and fewer after that date; 150 Robins, 30 Song Thrush, 30 Chiffchaff and 200 Goldcrest at Holkam on 3<sup>rd</sup> October; 50 Robins in Great Yarmouth Cemetery on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

The effects of this fall was also seen inland and data from the Chiltern escarpment showed a marked westerly movement of Song Thrushes from late September, peaking at 80 on 9<sup>th</sup> October.

## **Conclusion**

It is difficult to pinpoint where these birds had originated from at this early stage, but it is likely that some species had travelled further than others. The combination of a moderate easterly air flow originating from an area of very low temperature around 30<sup>th</sup> September/1<sup>st</sup> October would suggest that the birds may have 'cleared out' from Russia and Poland in great haste. These conditions were similar to those of October 1951 when several thousand Robins hit the east

coast of Britain. Subsequent ringing recoveries in the Mediterranean, the usual wintering destination of Robins from eastern Europe rather than from Scandinavia, suggested the fall clearly included birds of a more distant origin than those normally visiting Britain, (Elkins 1983). With the many hundreds ringed this year, recoveries may prove their origins at a later date.

### **Acknowledgements**

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**Peter J Dunn**