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E D I T O R I A L.

The second bulletin of the 1951 season is naturally concerned with the spring migration, which was practically continuous throughout the month of May, though for the most part very small numbers of birds were concerned.

At the beginning of the month a depression with its centre in the sea-area Sole caused S. and SW. winds over much of France, and an easterly airstream over the North Sea. It is doubtful if the Ring Ousels which arrived at the Isle of May and Fair Isle in strength on the 2nd, or the Fieldfares which followed a day later, would have come anywhere near our coast had not this easterly weather given them a drift off their normal route through the Low Countries to Scandinavia.

The coincidence in the arrival of these - and other - species at Fair Isle and the Isle of May at this period is interesting, and can be studied in Table 1. Gerald Sandeman, John Lees and John Bain were the watchers on the May, and they had a greater share of rarities than Fair Isle at this time. There was an Ortolan Bunting, Emberiza hortulana, on 2-3rd an Icterine Warbler, Hypolais icterina, was trapped and ringed, and a Hoopoe, Upupa epops, seen; Whilst the fifth Nightingale, Luscinia megarhyncha, for Scotland was watched on April 30th and May 1st.

Observational work was quieter thereafter, except for a slight improvement in the period 9-12th, when an extensive anticyclone in the eastern Atlantic caused some drift of birds across the North Sea. The winds, however, had "too much north" in them to bring many birds, and it was not until 20th that we had any real excitement at Fair Isle. On that day Sedge warblers and Bluethroats were more in evidence than on any previous spring date since we began to keep records, a rush of Lesser Whitethroats was succeeded next day by a rush of their commoner relatives, and among other arrivals were a Grasshopper and the Subalpine Warblers. The charts in the "Daily Weather Report" of the Meteorological Office show an extensive "low" in mid-Atlantic, creating much the same picture as before, - helpful southerly winds over France changing abruptly to easterly winds in the northern sector of the North Sea. Indeed, it would not have been impossible for the Subalpine, and others, - to have come from southern France drifting with the wind all the way.

It is hoped to give, in the next Bulletin, an account of a visit to Foula made on May 19th by a party from the Fair Isle Bird Observatory.

13. Spring Migration - Notes on Selected Species.

CHAFFINCH, Fringilla coelebs. A note on the systematic position of those trapped is given in para. 17.

BRAMBLING, Fringilla montifringilla. A male stayed with the Chaffinches from April 14-20th, during which period he was trapped ten times, showing a gradual increase in weight from 24 g. early on 14th to 28.08 g. at midday on 19th. He had a sibilant, high-pitched "see-ip" when handled. A female kept company with House Sparrows at the Haa from May 20-26th.

YELLOW-HAMMER, Emberiza citrinella. There was a strong passage between April 7th-11th, J. Wilson noting nine birds on 10th. Re: marks on the systematic position of one trapped on 28th appear in para. 16. Another male was at the Gully on May 31st, a late date, and a female was present for several days in mid-May.

LITTLE BUNTING, Emberiza pusilla. A male was observed near the Haa on May 18th.

SNOW BUNTING. A pair was captured in the Observatory Trap on April 12th, the male 33 g. and the female 27.28 g. The male was little changed from winter to breeding-plumage, but had the white, black-tipped primary coverts of the adult phase. This and another male taken on 16th at 33.94 g. were Plectrophenax nivalis nivalis, the Scandinavian race. A flock of six arrived on May 2nd (absent from I. of May at this period). The last was a female, May 17th.

ROCK PIPIT. James A. Stout on May 24th, and myself on 25th, had close views of a Rock Pipit at the same locality in the south of the isle, and believe the bird was Anthus spinoletta littoralis, the Scandinavian race, The breast was strongly suffused with pinkish-buff, which appeared much richer than in skins I have seen. The remiges were brown and abraded.

YELLOW WAGTAIL Group. Three birds at Gaila on May 3rd included a male Motacilla flava flavissima, the scarcest form at Fair Isle. Two wagtails of this race were at the Isle of May on 4th. A male Blue-headed Wag:tail, M. flava flava, appeared at Gaila on 18th, staying until 20th, when it was joined by three females, one of which remained until 23rd. There was a male of unknown race on 26th and a female on 28-29th.

WHITE WAGTAIL Group. Single Motacilla a. yarrellii occurred on April 11th and 27-28th. Motacilla a. alba passage was very poor; in addition to those noted in Table 1 a few passed between May 10-19th and there were laggards on May 30th and June 4th (two males).

RED-BACKED SHRIKE; Lanius collurio. And extended note on spring migrants is given in para. 19.

PIED FLYCATCHER, Muscicapa hypoleuca. Remarkably scarce this year. The first seen was a male in normal plumage on May 17th. An interesting male in brown-and-white plumage was on the Ward Hill on 18th. A pair was seen on 20th and a female on 22nd.

CHIFFCHAFF, Phylloscopus collybita.  
Singly on May 3rd and 13th. The first was  
with Willow Warblers and was duller in plumage  
and more sprightly than they.

WILLOW WARBLER. The few trapped on  
various dates in May all matched skins of Ph.  
trochilus trochilus; but one watched at close  
quarters at the Smirri Geo cliff on 28th was  
the brown and greyish-white phase of Ph. t.  
acredula. Two Willow Warblers showing olive  
above and yellow on the breast were nearby for  
comparison.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER, Locustella naevia.  
Singly on May 3rd (James A. Stout) and 20th.

SEDGE WARBLER, Acrocephalus schoenob.  
:baenus. First seen on May 11th.

BLACKCAP, Sylvia atricapilla. A male  
on May 19th, two birds next day, one on 21st  
and one on June 5th.

GARDEN WARBLER, Sylvia borin. One  
ringed on May 31st remained in the Gully till  
June 5th.

SUBALPINE WARBLER, Sylvia cantillans.  
See para. 20.

MISSEL THRUSH, Turdus viscivorus. Two  
on April 1st, singly on 3rd and 9th. A late  
bird was seen on May 13th.

SONG THRUSH. There were one or two on  
most days in early April. An extraordinarily  
grey Turdus ericetorum philomelus trapped on  
17th remained until 20th. Another of the

same race was trapped on May 6th, and Song Thrushes were recorded singly on May 23-25th, 30th (Turdus e. philomelus), June 2nd and 5th.

REDWING. Three Turdus musicus coburni on April 21st, two of them trapped at 78.4 g. and 77.71 g. (wings 116, 119 mm.). A Turdus m. musicus trapped on May 6th weighed 70 g. Three Redwings arrived on 11th and two on 17th.

RING OUSEL, Turdus torquatus. See Table 1. Passage continued with five on 17th and two on 24th.

BLACKBIRD, Turdus merula. See para. 14 for an account of the spring migration.

WHEATEAR, Oenanthe oenanthe. Arrived on April 8th. Three, April 11th and six next day, but no more till seven arrived on 18th. There was passage of Oenanthe oe. leucorrhoea after May 10th. An adult male on May 1st had a wing of 102 mm. but the plumage and weight, 26.65 g., were suggestive of the typical race. Two male Greater Wheatears trapped on May 10th had wings 100, 102 mm. and weighed 35.65 g. and 31.37 g. Another obtained on 16th weighed 30.13 g. and had an unusually long wing, 108 mm. It was in the laboratory at the same time as a local male (24.55 g., wing 96.5 mm.) and comparison of the two in the hand was instructive.

RED SPOTTED BLUETHROAT, Luscinia s. svecica. There were three on May 20th and four next day. A male which had haunted a ditch above Vaadal for 5 days was driven into a net stretched across the deepest part of the ditch on May 25th. It was released at North

Haven and had returned to its ditch a mile away a few hours later, and was also there on 26th. This bird weighed 20 g. and was in its 1st summer. A female trapped in Vaadal on May 30th weighed 18.21 g.

BLACK REDSTART, Phoenicurus ochrurus gibraltariensis. A handsome adult male was at the Observatory on April 24th. A female or immature male was on the island from April 2-8th.

ROBIN. Three on April 1st and one or two daily until 21st. There were six on April 9th, four of them entering traps, and in this period 13 Erithacus r. rubecula were taken. There were one or two on most days in May, and except for the last bird of the season the half-dozen taken were again of the Continental race. One of these, captured in the Ward Hill Trap, returned there following its release at North Haven. A British Robin, Erithacus r. melophilus, the second spring record for the island, was captured at the Haa on May 25th. It was the heaviest Robin of the spring at 19.98 g. - "mantle greenish olive, no greyish suffusion, and well matched by two Clyde skins in the lab. Breast plumage a deeper reddish than in these specimens, looking very rich and dark in the field". This bird was released at North Haven and made the fatal mistake of "homing" to the Haa, for a Red-backed Shrike got it the next day. A Continental Robin first taken on April 7th at 15.31 g. had increased to 17.21 g. by 13th. Another first trapped at 15.47 g. in the Gully on April 9th returned and stayed there till 21st, when its weight was 18 g.



HEDGE SPARROW. More were trapped this year than in any previous season, - all Prunella m. modularis on wing-formula and paleness of under parts. Four were taken between April 7-9th, one was seen on 15th, and a bird trapped on May 2nd stayed till 4th. There was another on 14-15th and a single very late bird (? race) was seen by James Wilson on June 5th. A bird trapped on May 4th (17.91 g. at 0900 hrs.; 18.29 g. at 1630 hrs.) had the wing-formula of Prunella m. occidentalis, with the 2nd primary slightly longer than the 6th, but the centre of the belly was very whitish and a comparison with skins left no doubt that it was of the Continental race.

BLACK-BELLIED DIPPER, Cinclus c. cinclus. A note on a captured specimen is given in para 18.

SWALLOW, Hirundo rustica. The first was on April 22nd.

SAND MARTIN, Riparia riparia. Two on April 26th and two on May 3rd and 12th. The Isle of May records show two on 3rd and three or four on 12th.

SWIFT, Apus apus. Single, May 17th, 20-21st; one or two from 26-28th and on June 5th.

WYNECK, Jynx torquilla. The first was trapped on May 2nd (at Isle of May, one on 1st and two on 2-3rd). There were two on 17th, one on 20th and three on 21st. Two trapped weighed 30.68 g. and 31.36 g.

CUCKOO, Cuculus canorus. Singly, May

1st and 3rd, 9th and 12th. One was ringed at the I. of May on 3rd. Two 1st summer males, trapped on May 27th and June 4th, weighed respectively 81 g. and 79.9 g., and were very thin: compare the 106 g. of a 1st summer male trapped on May 27th, 1950. According to The Handbook (vol. 2: 301) the juv. plumage is completely moulted in winter quarters November-March, but this is not always so. The 1950 bird was in body-moult. That of May 27th, 1951, had the two outer tail-feathers partly grown and the secondaries and greater coverts in moult. The June example was also moulting the secondaries and greater coverts.

SHORT-EARED OWL, Asio flammeus. One very narrowly escaped capture in the Vaadal Trap on May 18th. It remained until 22nd.

MERLIN, Falco columbarius. A female from April 14-18th, occasional between May 2-21st.

KESTREL, Falco tinnunculus. One, May 19th. A female from 21-24th and a pair together 25th. A male was seen from June 2-7th.

SPARROW-HAWK, Accipiter nisus. A pair in Vaadal on May 5th, the male entering the trap. This or another male was still present on 8th, and a female was recorded from 15-17th. I can find only two previous spring records, for May 12th, 1913, and May 6th, 1927.

WHOOPEE SWAN, Cygnus cygnus. Four on April 24th and one on May 19-20th.

PINTAIL, Anas acuta. A pair on May 11th; a female at South Haven on June 2nd.

SCAUP, Aythya marila. Drake, May 26-June 5th.

VELVET SCOTER, Melanitta fusca. A pair on May 6th and daily from 9-19th; female on 21st.

WOOD PIGEON, Columba palumbus. Singly, April 19th and 21st; nine on May 11th; two on May 31st.

TURTLE DOVE, Streptopelia turtur. One, May 30th and one at the same place, June 5th.

CURLEW and WHIMBREL, Numenius arquata and N. phaeopus. Passage in small and fluctuating numbers from May 3rd (Whimbrel were first heard on April 26th).

WOODCOCK, Scolopax rusticola. A small number on April 1st was followed by an invasion of some 250 birds next day. There were three on April 10th, four on May 10th, and odd birds in between. The last, on May 20th and 25th, were both killed by local Peregrines.

TURNSTONE, Arenaria interpres. Some passage in mid-May, with ten on 11th, fifteen on 14th, six on 20th. Last seen, 24th.

PURPLE SANDPIPER, Calidris maritima. One or two from May 11-16th, then five for two days and finally three on 21st.

COMMON SANDPIPER, Actitis hypoleucos.

Two May 17th and 20th and singly on a few days after until June 3rd.

WOOD SANDPIPER, Tringa glareola. One, May 19-20th.

GREEN SANDPIPER, Tringa ochropus. May 20th.

REDSHANK, Tringa totanus. Scarce this year. A slight passage, May 11-15th.

GREENSHANK, Tringa nebularia. One from May 20-24th and one on 29th.

GOLDEN PLOVER, Six Pluvialis apricaria altifrons on May 3rd, nine on 4th and also a flock of eleven flying over. Five P. a. altifrons from May 21-26th and again five on June 3rd, two remaining and associating with a Starling flock until 5th.

LAPWING, Vanellus vanellus. One, May 4th; six, May 11-12th; a few on 17-18th, 23rd, 26th, and five from 29-31st.

BLACK-HEADED GULL, Larus ridibundus. Fifteen on May 11-12th, five on 18th, and ten or more on June 5th were the biggest numbers.

WATER RAIL, Rallus aquaticus. Singly, May 1st and 8th.

CORNCRAKE, Crex crex. Two on May 17th and three next day were the earliest records.

MOORHEN, Gallinula chloropus. Two were trapped on April 4th at 270 g. and 230 g. approx. Singly on April 16th and May 12th.

TABLE 1.

Comparison of Early May Migration at  
Isle of May and Fair Isle.

A. ISLE of MAY.

<u>Species.</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>
Chaffinch			2	2	6	1	3	1					
Brambling	2	1	3	1	1	2	5	4	2	2	2		
Tree Pipit		1	8	8	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	5
Pied Flycatcher			2	2	1	1	6	2	0	8	8	8	6
White Wagtail					1								
Willow Warbler	6	5	15	30	5	2	5	5	5	5	3	2	10
Blackcap	1	1	4	6	4	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	
Whitethroat	1	1	3	12	4	2		3	3	2	1	2	5
Lesser White.			7	12	1								
Fieldfare	2	4	30	30	30	30	10	6	4	2	3	1	1
Song Thrush		1	7	4	5	5	3	3	3	3	3	1	1
Ring Ousel		8	25	8	8	8	8	6	6	6	5		
Whinchat	1		8	8	4	3	5	5	4	3	3	2	2
Redstart	3	2	30	12	2	3	11	27	16	12	12	6	1
Swallow				2	1		1	3				3	7

TABLE 1.

Comparison of Early May Migration at  
Isle of May and Fair Isle.

B. FAIR ISLE.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>Species.</u>
1	1	4	3	1	1			5	1	1	1		F. coelebs.
		2	3					2	1	1			F. montifring: :illa
								N O N E					Anthus trivialis
								N O N E					Muscicapa hypoleuca
8	10	4							3	5	3	5	Motacilla a. alba
1	9	2						1	1	6			Phylloscopus trochilus
		1	1										Sylvia atricapilla
		1			2				2	2	1		Sylvia communis
1													Sylvia curruca
	80	2							1	1			Turdus pilaris
		2			1					2			Turdus ericetorum
820	4								5	3		2	Turdus torquatus
			3	2	3								Saxicola rubetra
	2	1							2	1			Phoenicurus phoenicu. us
		4			1				4	5	5		Hirundo rustica

TABLE 2.

Migration at Fair Isle from mid-May.

Species.	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Reed Bunting																		
E. schoeniclus			2	1	2	8	2	7	2	1			2	2	2			
Tree Pipit																		
A. trivialis					2	4	1	4	1		1		4		5			
Spotted Flycatcher																		
M. striata				2		1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	5	2		
Willow-warbler																		
Ph. trochilus		3	6	12	41	31	6	9	2		5		3		2			
Sedge Warbler																		
schoenobaenus				1	6	1	2	1	1		1	1		1	1			
Garden Warbler S. borin							1			1	3	1	1	1		1	3	1
Whitethroat S. communis			3	3	21	51	31	31	13	7	3	3	6	2	8	2		
Lesser do. S. curruca			3	3	51	21	3	3	3	2	1		2	1		1	1	
Whinchat S. rubetra		2	7	7	5	10	4	6		1			1	1	2	1		
Redstart																		
Ph. phoenicurus	1	3	5	6	5	11	5	3	2			1	2	1				
Swallow H. rustica	21	51	31	25	25	25	20	14	14	21	31	15	2		8	14		
House Martin																		
D. urbica		1	2	3	6	8	6	12	2	9	61	16	6		8	6	3	
Sand Martin																		
R. riparia	2	3	3	1	2	5	1	1		2	5	4	3					

14. Blackbirds in Spring 1951.

Blackbird, Turdus merula, migration took place at Fair Isle on an almost unprecedented scale for spring on April 1st-2nd, with another but smaller wave on April 7-8th. Large numbers of Woodcock, Scolopax rusticola, were involved in the same movements, notably the earlier one. On April 1st 27 Blackbirds were trapped, the number taken on 2nd being 47.

At this period a depression west of Scotland was moving slowly eastwards and filling, and its centre was over the Hebrides in the early morning of April 1st. A westerly airstream covered practically the whole of the British Isles and North France, and an occluded front was pushing in a NE. direction across the middle of the North Sea, easterly winds prevailing on its northern side. Birds attempting to cross the North Sea from France and South Britain had a favourable airstream until they passed through this occlusion, when the easterly winds caused a drift towards Fair Isle and the Shetland area.

By the following night the depression was centred over the North Sea, with a cold front moving NE. between Denmark and Scotland. Winds over England and North France remained westerly and so favourable for migration to the Continent, but were still easterly in the northern half of the North Sea. During April 2nd the depression moved farther east and the conditions ceased to be favourable for the arrival of drift-migrants at Fair Isle, and on 3rd only four birds were trapped.

The recurrence of Blackbird arrivals on



April 7-8th was again associated with a "low" covering Scotland, and a westerly airstream over southern England, northern France, and the south part of the North Sea, giving place to easterly winds farther north. This "low" moved too far to the NE. during the morning of April 8th to provide winds favourable for drift-migration at Fair Isle.

The distribution of age and sex groups in the spring passage was as indicated below (cf. Bull. No. 1, 1951, p. 13). It will be seen that males far outnumber females in the earlier wave, but that the numbers were fairly even in the later movement of April 7-8th.

<u>Date.</u>	<u>Males.</u>		<u>Females.</u>		<u>Total.</u>
	<u>Ad.</u>	<u>lst. s.</u>	<u>Ad.</u>	<u>lst. s.</u>	
April 1-5th	24	28	11	9	72
	<u>52</u>		<u>20</u>		
April 7-9th	2	8	5	6	21
	<u>10</u>		<u>11</u>		
April 11-30th	9	19	13	6	47
	<u>28</u>		<u>19</u>		
May	3	6	8	6	23
	<u>9</u>		<u>14</u>		

It is unusual for Blackbird migration to continue at Fair Isle throughout April and May but during the spring there was a constant trickle of these birds. During nearly all this period the wind was N. or east over the North Sea. A total of 146 was trapped in

April and a further 23 in May, and there was movement as late as May 31st, when 3 were taken. In April 1950 only 5 birds were ringed, the main passage taking place at the end of March; whilst in 1949 passage ceased entirely after April 9th.

#### 15. Ringing Progress in Spring 1951.

Our ringing total on June 6th, with the spring migration virtually over, showed 575 birds of 50 different species. Although this total falls short of last year's at the same date (690 birds of 38 species) the species list is very much better. Few birds were ringed during the past winter in comparison with 1949 and 1950, and the April and May 1951 figures (241 and 114 respectively) show a considerable advance on previous seasons.

Six new species have been trapped since the 1951 account was opened, - Woodlark, Bullfinch, Turnstone, Dipper, Ring Ousel and Subalpine Warbler, - making a total of 98 species ringed since the Observatory began work in the autumn of 1948.

The 575 birds include Blackbirds 244, Starlings 57, Chaffinches 42, Robins 33, Wheatears 17, Skylarks 17, Whitethroats 14, Bramblings 12, Redstarts 12, Willow-warblers 10, Snow Buntings 9, Redwings 9, Song Thrushes 8, House Sparrows 8, Lesser Whitethroats 7, and Hedge Sparrows 7.

16. Continental Yellow-hammer.

A male Yellow-hammer, Emberiza citrinella, was taken in the Observatory Trap on April 28th - wing 93.5 mm., weight 30.59 g. It was compared in the laboratory with specimens of Emberiza c. erythrogenys Brehm (from the Petchora River) and Emberiza c. nebulosa Gengler (from Norfolk - the typical locality of this race - East Lothian and the Clyde area). It was quite unlike the British examples, which had warm reddish-brown fringes to the feathers of the mantle, were brown on the nape and had some reddish-brown on the sides of the breast. The trapped bird was well matched by a Fair Isle specimen collected on March 21st, 1911, having the mantle fringes much paler brown than in the British birds, the nape greenish, very little red-brown on the sides of the breast, and the rump and upper tail-coverts less rufous.

The 1911 specimen is one of five in the Royal Scottish Museum collection examined by P. A. Clancey and identified by him with the eastern race Emberiza c. erythrogenys Brehm (Bull. B. O. C., 68: 123). From previous study of the material in the Royal Scottish Museum, I consider the 1911 specimen, and the bird of April 28th, are not nearly grey-brown enough above for the eastern race, and belong to the typical form. The B. O. U. List Committee have stated that there is no evidence that Emberiza c. citrinella Linn. occurs in the British Isles, - see Ibis, 93: 297 (1951).

17. Migrant Chaffinches in Scotland.

Dr. James M. Harrison has shown (Ibis, 89: 411-418) that Fringilla coelebs hortensis Brehm is a valid subspecies inhabiting Central and S. Germany and the Low Countries, differing from Fringilla c. coelebs Linn. of northern Europe in the strong vinaceous wash on the underparts. The B. O. U. List Committee have recognised the race as a migrant and winter visitor to Britain.

The only specimens of F. c. hortensis in the Royal Scottish Museum collection are from Fife, November 1st, 1906; St. Kilda, November 5th, 1910, and Fair Isle, October 15th, 1907. A Fair Isle bird dated September 22nd, 1921, is probably this race, but there are too many unworn buff-brown fringes on the underparts to be sure. The occurrence of this race at Fair Isle and St. Kilda, where one would expect the typical race to be the dominant passage-migrant on geographical grounds, is interesting, pointing to the existence of a strong NW. drift of birds attempting to cross the North Sea far to the south.

A Fair Isle bird collected on May 6th, 1909, has characters intermediate between F. c. coelebs and Scottish breeding birds (many of which show a very near approach to the typical race) and it may well have been a straggler from Scotland. The only two specimens in the collection which match Dr. Harrison's neotype of F. c. coelebs, and are probably wintering birds of this form, are from Peebles, February 9th, 1938, and East Linton, March 30th, 1891. I am grateful to Dr. Harrison for the loan of a long series to

aid the determination of the Scottish birds.

Chaffinch migration at Fair Isle in the Spring of 1951 began on April 3rd, increasing on 4-5th, when 16 birds were trapped, only three of them being females. By 19th, 39 birds (including six females) had been ringed and most of these had afforded good opportunities for laboratory examination and re-weighing by showing a distinct partiality for the turnip seed which had been strewn liberally in the Gully and Observatory Traps. Two birds trapped on April 3-4th stayed until 19th and 22nd respectively, and one first taken on the 5th was last retrapped a month later, May 6th. It was in good song during the last week of its stay. A female first trapped on May 10th virtually lived in the Gully Trap, roosting and feeding there, until June 3rd.

The male birds were compared with typical skins of F. c. coelebs and F. c. hortensis which I had selected from the Royal Scottish Museum collection, and the majority showed intermediacy between the two races. No really typical F. c. coelebs occurred, although a few were nearer to this form in the brownish-pink colour of the breast. Four birds were considered very good F. c. hortensis, having a strong vinous suffusion on the breast and sides of belly. All the birds had the centre of the belly white. One interesting example was almost brick-red on the breast, as in the phase described by Dr. J. M. Harrison as F. c. scotica. There seems little doubt that the bulk, at any rate, of these migrants was drawn from a region in which the two forms intergrade.

18. Black-bellied Dipper.

A Black-bellied Dipper *Cinclus c. cinclus* arrived on April 28th, when I found him early in the morning haunting the burn which flows through the Gully, at the head of which are two of the traps. One of these is directly above a waterfall and adjacent to the now ruinous clack-mills whose horizontal water-wheels supplied the power that ground the island corn until 30 years ago. This trap the Dipper obligingly entered, only to escape, alas, through a breach in the wall of the trap where a space had been left for the flow of the stream! I spent a busy half-hour block: :ing this opening with rubble and stones, bits of wire-netting, and part of the tail of a Junkers 38 which crash-landed on the moor during the war.

In mid-morning the Dipper reappeared in the Gully and this time, when he flew above the fall, his fate was sealed. After his release at North Haven he returned to the stream and was there on the 29th, but not on any of the following days until May 4-6th, when he was again searching for aquatic life among the shallow pools and moss-grown rocks:

In the field, even at close quarters, one could see no trace of reddish-brown between the white of the breast and the black belly. The contrast was sharp and clear. In the hand, however, a few brownish fringes could be found on the uppermost black feathers, but these were not reddish in tone, but more the coffee-brown colour of the bird's head. I was surprised at the strength of the bird's clasp on my fingers, the sharpness of its

claws, and the strong fluttering of its short rounded wings as it struggled to be free. These attributes, like the continual blinking of the white nictitating membranes which protect the hazel eyes, are all useful adaptations in a bird which spends much of its life walking under water on the beds of swiftly flowing streams.

The bird weighed 60.2 g.; wing 82 mm., bill from skull 20 mm., tarsus 28 mm. The tarsi were grey with a purplish tinge, and the nictitating membranes were yellowish-white. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th primaries were equal and longest; 5th, 3 mm. shorter, 6th, 7 mm. shorter; 1st, 2.5 mm. longer than the primary coverts. Two mallophaga, not yet identified, were collected.

The anxiety note was a low, sharp, tuneless "tchik"; when released, the bird flew off with a series of louder, shriller notes recorded as "tchwik", perhaps a more emphatic variant of the anxiety note.

This supplies the sixth Scottish record. A Black-bellied Dipper haunted the same burn on March 19-20th last year, and there is a previous Fair Isle record for March 30th, 1934. There is a March 30th record from Whalsay, 1936; and an older one from another Shetland locality, Spiggie in Dunrossness, where Tom Henderson saw another bird on January 4th of this year. Jerome Stout tells me he observed a Dipper (? race) at Fair Isle in the late autumn of 1949.

19. Red-backed Shrikes and a method of trapping them.

The first arrival was a female on May 17th; a second female was observed on 19th and a pair next day. Subsequently shrikes were recorded daily to June 2nd, the best days being 21st (two males, one female), 26th (five males, two females), and 30th (five males, two females). A single male was recorded on June 5th.

These birds haunted the wire fences in the crofting area, favouring especially the Setter-Pund-Barkland area; they used the fence-posts and wire strands as look-out points and made frequent sallies to the ground below for insect prey. Small birds killed by shrikes were Twite, Willow-warbler, Garden Warbler, Robin and Sedge Warbler. The last was driven into the catching-box of the Gully Trap and killed and eaten by a female shrike which had been captured on the previous afternoon from a Robin-kill at the Haa. The head is the first part of the victim's anatomy to be attacked, the brain being devoured and the bill and frontal part of the skull rejected. No evidence of "larder"-forming was found, although young birds in autumn do form "larders" when on passage, impaling Shetland Bees Bombus smithianus on strands of barbed wire (see Scot. Nat. 61: 24-5, 1949).

Five Red-backed Shrikes were trapped during this period. The female first taken at the Haa, and retrapped next morning in the Gully, weighed 30.2 g. and 30.59 g. respect:



ively, and was the biggest of all the birds with a wing-length of 97.5 mm. The bird showed some male characteristics: the head, nape and sides of neck were blue-grey, with brownish fringes on the crown; the rump and upper tail coverts were blue-grey with a brownish suffusion on the rump. The ear-coverts were dark brown and there was no white in the tail, except on the outer fringe of the outermost feathers. The underparts were heavily marked. Two others of this sex weighed 25.03 g. and 28.9 g. and were of the normal female plumage-type. Two males weighed 25.98 g. and 27.31 g. and the wings of the four birds ranged from 88-92 mm. Another male found dead on Ward Hill was very thin and weighed only 24 g. (A 1st-winter red-backed Shrike trapped on August 21st, 1950, wing 93 mm., weighed 25.91 g.).

The wing-formula of the six spring birds examined was very constant. The 1st primary was equal to the coverts or 1-4 mm. longer; 3rd primary longest, 4th as long in one case or 1-4 mm. shorter; 2nd, 5-6.5 mm. shorter (but 3.5 mm. in one male); 5th, 6-7 mm. shorter; 6th, 11-12 mm. shorter. Bill from skull, 16-17 mm. Tarsus, 24-25 mm.

It was observed that a shrike, when disturbed at a kill, would withdraw to a distance and return to it soon after the observer had passed. This trait proved a useful aid to trapping these birds, and would doubtless be of help in trapping the other, rarer, shrikes. Five shrikes were induced to come to a shrike-kill that was not their own,

and perhaps any dead bird of small size would prove attractive, though experience suggests that the body must be fresh. The Robin killed by a female shrike at the Haa caught a male the same afternoon, and an hour later another was lost owing to the faulty setting of the trap. Two days later the Robin bait was still fresh enough to catch another male, but on the next day the bait was attracting flies and a shrike examined, but refused to take it. An ordinary spring-net, measuring about 18" by 12", was used, pegged into the ground below the fence the particular shrike was working. Suitable spring-net traps are advertised by Greenrig and by Young's of Misterton, Somerset.

Small points of importance are that the bait should be firmly attached to the trigger-pan (e.g. by an elastic band), otherwise the shrike may remove the bait without springing the trap. Also, should the trap fail to go off the first time, let the shrike enjoy his gains for a few minutes, - he will return the more readily when the trap is reset. The trap should be set on level ground so that the frame of the net falls squarely and leaves the bird no loophole for escape; a good position is about a yard from the fence, below some prominent point (such as a post or strand higher than the rest) likely to prove attractive as a look-out stance. It is not difficult to manoeuvre a shrike along a fence until he is within the effective area of the trap, though this is of course unnecessary if one is using a bird's own kill to catch him.

20. Subalpine Warbler.

The great find of the spring migration, a male Subalpine Warbler Sylvia cantillans, came on May 20th and remained until 27th. It was first spotted, by Phillip Andrews, among some derelict rusty iron girders on Smirri Geo beach, near the South Lighthouse, and on that first afternoon we watched it for a long time as it sat in the sun with ruffled plumage and half-closed eyes, obviously very tired after its long journey. On the following days it was more active, seeking insects on the lichen-covered slabs of a nearby cliff or moving about the beach and the rusty girders, feeding on Chironomid gnats which seemed to be attracted by the warm air rising from the ironwork.

Observation of a bird's habits is always a valuable preliminary to any attempt to trap it, and by the afternoon of the 22nd we had realised the importance to the bird of this unusual environment, and had rigged up over the girders a trap consisting of the Yeoman Net closed at one end with a catching-box. Next morning Harry Crow, Phillip Andrews and Max Budgen waited their opportunity, and at 11 o'clock returned to the North Haven in triumph with their prize.

To those of us who are used to peering at warblers so nondescript in colour that their identification is often a matter of difficulty, this bird's plumage was exotic in its splendour. It had a Nuthatch-grey head and back, brown and much abraded wing-feathers, a rich dark chestnut breast, and a delicate pinkish-buff suffusion on the sides of the belly and flanks. The tail - which was darker than the

back - had a white border, and a small white patch at the bend of the wing was partly concealed by the feathers of the bastard-wing. The most striking features were the clear white moustachial streaks which separated the chestnut and grey, and the quite startling bright red rims which encircled the eyes, - "eyes like a miniature Oyster-catcher", one of the observers remarked.

After laboratory examination the bird was set free at the place of capture, and during the following days it became a ritual with the bird-watchers at the Observatory to spend a half-hour in that sheltered corner of Smirri Geo, delighting in this small vision of beauty and charm whose migration ought to have stopped short a thousand miles to the south. My last memory of the bird is of watching it darting after flies on the cliff immediately beneath a sitting Fulmar Petrel, - a strange juxtaposition, since the normal geographical ranges of the two species are several hundred miles apart.

The Handbook of British Birds (vol. 2: 96) gives six previous records for the British Isles, - three in May, two on June 13th-14th, and one on September 17th. An adult male was taken at Fair Isle on May 6th, 1908. The present bird weighed 10.11 g., had a wing-length of 64 mm., bill to skull, 11 mm., and tarsus, 19 mm. The wing-formula was: 1st primary equal to the primary coverts, 3rd and 4th equal and longest, 5th, 1 mm. shorter, 2nd, 1.5 mm. shorter, and 6th, 3 mm. shorter. This formula suggests Sylvia c. cantillans rather than Sylvia c. albistriata of S. E. Europe and Asia Minor,

which has the 2nd primary longer than the 5th. The dark chestnut of the breast was in the form of a "bib" whose margin was clearly defined, not merging with the pinkish-buff of the sides of belly and flanks. The rump was a cleaner blue-grey than the mantle and head. There were pale brown fringes on the tertials only, and whitish tips to the tertials and innermost secondaries. The tail was blackish-brown, much darker than the remiges, but with the two outermost feathers brown with their outer webs and part of the inner webs white. There was some white at the tips of the penultimate pair.

The legs were pale brown, the soles more yellowish, and the eye-rim brick red. There was a very small reddish-brown "eyebrow" in the grey of the head directly above the eye. The colour of the iris was noted as pale brown, and the bill was black with the basal half of the lower mandible purplish-flesh.

When in the lab. the bird uttered a churr reminiscent of that of the Lesser Whitethroat, but the only note heard on the beach, and that rarely, was a hard chep.

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

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## THE WORK OF THE OBSERVATORY

The purpose of the Bird Observatory is to provide facilities for visitors to carry out scientific research on the island, not only in the sphere of ornithology, but in every aspect of Natural History. Work will be mainly concentrated however on ornithology under the supervision of the Director.

## TERMS

Full board, including service, is *Six Guineas per Head per week*. Reduced terms are available for parties of students from schools and universities.

## APPLICATIONS

Priority in bookings will be given to "Friends of Fair Isle," and to *bona fide* naturalists prepared to take part in the scientific investigations of the station under the leadership of the Director, and to help with such other duties as may be necessary from time to time in connection with the station or hostel. Anyone else wishing to visit the island will be made welcome, provided room is available. Those who are not keen ornithologists are asked to book for the summer months—June, July, and August—so that more accommodation will be available in the spring and autumn for students of bird migration. Application should be made as follows:—

- (1) *If made between 1st April and 31st October.*  
To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory,  
by Lerwick, Shetland. Telegraphic address:  
"Migrant, Fairisle." Telephone Fair Isle 8.
- (2) *If made between 1st November and 31st March.*  
To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory  
Trust, 17 India Street, Edinburgh.  
Telephone: Edinburgh CENTRAL 4532.

## PROSPECTUS

Prospectus giving details of transport to and from Fair Isle, and other information, will be sent on application.

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

0 100yds. 440yds. 880yds. 1mile  
 Roads = = = = Bird Trap ← TRAP Boundaries .....

