

**AUGUST 2010**



**Arctic Warbler** 31st August



**Garden Warbler  
& Barred Warbler**



**Ruff**



**Wood Warbler**

*Photographs by Jack Ashton-Booth*

15<sup>th</sup>: The only notable influx of migrants was a new Wood Warbler at Setter and a new Barred Warbler at Shirva that joined the Barred Warbler from the 15<sup>th</sup>, a Garden Warbler and the Arctic Warbler IN THE SAME BUSH!



**Arctic Warbler**



*Photographs by Jack Ashton-Booth*

14<sup>th</sup>: A juvenile Sand Martin was seen first thing. The second Wood Warbler of the autumn was then found in the Observatory plantation along with 1<sup>st</sup> Reed Warbler of the autumn. Highlight was a 1<sup>st</sup> winter Arctic Warbler discovered at Shirva alongside a supporting cast of a Barred Warbler at Midway, 20 Willow Warblers, a male Blackcap, 2 Garden Warblers, a drake Wigeon, a Teal, 16 Redshank, the two Black-tailed Godwits, 14 Golden Plover, 8 Turnstone, 14

Curlew, a Whimbrel, 3 Dunlin.

12<sup>th</sup>: The juvenile Ruff was still on Da water and was joined by two Teal which were newly arrived immigrants, as was a Kestrel, a Carrion Crow, 11 Willow Warblers, 10 Knot, 2 Golden Plover and a Sanderling. The breeding Sedge Warblers are now feeding young!!

11<sup>th</sup>: A fearless juvenile Ruff and Wood Warbler that arrived along with a single Green Sandpiper, Knot, 3 Willow Warblers and the autumns 1<sup>st</sup> Grasshopper Warbler.

10<sup>th</sup>: A male Blackbird, 4 Garden Warblers, 4 Willow Warblers, 7 Knot, 2 juvenile Black-tailed Godwits, a Green Sandpiper and a Common Rosefinch, 3 juvenile Cormorants, one juvenile bird favouring the South Harbour and two others in Hjukni Geo that both expressed strong *sinensis* attributes.

9<sup>th</sup>: A Swift and a new Greenshank, 4 Knot.

8<sup>th</sup>: Two juvenile Willow Warblers, a Garden warbler at Shirva, 16+ Swallows (comprising mainly of local birds), 60+ Common Gulls, a Common Sandpiper, an adult Black-tailed Godwit, a Sanderling, 45 Storm Petrels (trapped and ringed at night)

7<sup>th</sup>: Two adult Knots and a female Common Crossbill on the Skadan.

6<sup>th</sup>: Garden Warbler, a Short-eared Owl, 45+ Common Gulls, 2 Purple Sandpipers, a Green Sandpiper, 15 Turnstones and yet another Cormorant.

However, the most notable new additions away from the likely autumn candidates were non avian discoveries and involved a Little Cuttlefish and a Gold Spot moth that are both firsts for Fair Isle.

## **JULY 2010**

**July 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup>**: First-summer Mute Swan, Little Stint, Green Sandpiper, two Bar-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, two Grey Heron, Pintail, two Wigeon, five Teal, 65 Black-headed Gulls, Garden Warbler.

**14<sup>th</sup>** Three Chiffchaffs, the first southbound Whimbrel, 9 Common Crossbills, the annual Skua sweep brought the total of chicks ringed this year to over 400.

**12<sup>th</sup>** Apart from a several Black-headed gulls (including some of this year's smart juveniles) and a swift the only real avian activity was orientated around the Obs plantation with the *Alba* wagtail roost steadily building.

**10<sup>th</sup>** 18 Common Crossbills, Shoveler in Furse.

**9<sup>th</sup>** A male Blackcap, a Chiffchaff, 3 Crossbills, 47 Redshanks, 20 Black-headed Gulls, 30 Common Gulls, 48 Lesser Black-backed Gulls , 400 Arctic Terns (including 10 1<sup>st</sup> Summers) a Green Sandpiper and a Teal.

**8<sup>th</sup>** Sand Martin , brood of Swallows being ringed at the mast, a Willow Warbler, two Woodpigeons.

**7<sup>th</sup>** Two House martins, a Siskin, 2Swifts, a Grey Heron, a Dunlin, 2 Chiffchaffs, first juvenile Rock Pipits.

By **6<sup>th</sup>** one or two small groups of Common Crossbills touring the island,

**4<sup>th</sup>** Redshanks and Black-headed Gulls building, a Robin and a Whitethroat summering, rather than new immigrants. The Whitethroat spent a lot of its time amongst the dense foliage at Schoolton (the same croft in which a Whitethroat over-summered last year, only reappearing after it had undergone its annual moult)

**3<sup>rd</sup>** Green Sandpiper, 2 Dunlin

The first few days of July saw small parties of Lapwings, Curlews and single Redshanks cruising over the isle as well as numbers of Oystercatchers slowly building.

## **JUNE 2010**

The month opened well with strong easterly gales but unfortunately the wind was a little too strong to determine the true extent of migrants that had arrived. A thorough scan of the west cliffs didn't reveal many migrants and the only new birds that were observed were inland and comprised of 2 new Spotted Flycatchers, 4 Garden Warblers, a Whinchat and a Common Swift hawking over Gillsetter. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was very quiet indeed which was surprising given the strength of winds that had prevailed the day before. The only birds of note for the entire day were a Common Rosefinch that literally fell out of the sky at Midway, calling continuously as it descended, a female Redstart that arrived late in the afternoon at the Vaadal trap, a Tree Sparrow (trapped and ringed) and a Red-breasted

Merganser on the sea in the south. Although the wind wasn't blowing from the east on the 3rd light south westerly winds coupled with clear sunny conditions must have re-circulated birds that had been caught up in the easterly gales that prevailed as the month began. Unexpected arrivals given the lack of more familiar migrants included a nice bright singing Marsh Warbler in the Chalet garden that was later trapped by the Chalet boys. A Sparrowhawk was observed coming in off the sea at South Ramnigeo and was quickly mobbed by a Carrion Crow. A corking male Red-backed Shrike at Quoy and an equally as corking male Bluethroat that was discovered in the Obs plantation by Becki Rosser that proceeded to give its audience a blue overload as it caught insects from the safety of the bright blue water pipe, the same blue water pipe that was favoured by the White-throated Sparrow during its stint in May. Late afternoon arrivals on this warm day mainly comprised insectivores resulting from a hatch of winged invertebrates and attracted 5 Spotted Flycatchers, a Willow Warbler, a Blackcap, 2 Lesser Whitethroats, 11 Swallows, 15 House Martins and a single Swift. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> were equally as eventful and the first migrant Silver Y Moths and Red Admirals of the year over this period was a good sign that birds may have made landfall. Early morning trap round on the 5<sup>th</sup> disclosed the locations of 2 Robins, a singing Bluethroat, a Reed Warbler, a Whitethroat, a Song Thrush and a Chiffchaff. The same round on the 6<sup>th</sup> produced 3 Lesser Whitethroats and birds seen whilst monitoring seabirds consisted of a *Flava* Wagtail sp. and a Red-throated Diver flying overland. However the ultimate highlight of the day was a flyover pale morph Honey Buzzard that was observed by one lucky camper who was staying on the isle. Unfortunately it passed straight through via Ward Hill after being forced north by the breeding Skuas. Regrettably from then on in birds came surprisingly sporadic even with prevailing easterlies; that's not to say they weren't there its simply because with seabird work recommencing the AW's found very little time to search for migrants. However birds were still passively observed and caught with a drake Tufted Duck on Golden Water on the 7<sup>th</sup> and a considerable incursion on the 8<sup>th</sup> with 2 Short-eared Owls in Field ditch together (good luck to all newly hatched wader chicks!), a female Red-backed Shrike caught in the Vaadal, 2 Quails calling at both Quoy and Gilsetter with one dangerously close to the roadside, 5 Spotted Flycatchers around the south, 3 Collared Doves, a migrant female Peregrine easily told apart from the fulmar-oiled resident female and single Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Grey Wagtail. You would be forgiven for thinking that north westerlies would bring in no new migrants, especially when accompanied by the first drizzle for a good few weeks. However this rule doesn't really apply to Fair Isle and it is usually a sudden change in wind direction that pushes a few birds in. Fortunately for the birding staff one of the birds that joined the newly arrived Common Swift and Chiffchaff on the 10<sup>th</sup> as a result of this wind change was a Blyth's Reed Warbler that was trapped and ringed at the Chalet. With the wind continuing to swing around from all directions

at a very light strength on the 11<sup>th</sup> new birds were again witnessed with a female Teal, 4 Willow Warblers, a Chiffchaff, a Spotted Flycatcher and a female Blackcap. Winds then decided to take a stand still in the North West after this small arrival and apart from a lingering Lesser Whitethroat at Shirva, a new female Blackbird and a Redwing that were presumably failed breeders, Things were very quiet on the bird front until the 13<sup>th</sup> when two Red-throated Divers and a Bee-eater flew over the island making a collective racket. Strangely more migrants arrived on the 14<sup>th</sup> even though the wind was still prevailing from the North West. Stranger still was the fact it involved another failed breeder that took the form of a female Pied Flycatcher that was caught in the Gully and had a rather extensive brood patch. This wasn't the only bird caught in the traps though and the discovery of a male Bluethroat in the Vaadal really confused matters regarding the end of Fair Isles northward spring passage. By the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> it was clear that spring was by no means over and by the day's end a respectable total of migrants were observed, comprising of 2 Chiffchaffs, a Blackcap, a Lesser Whitethroat, a Song Thrush, 5 Collared Doves, 2 Robins and female Red-backed Shrike at Lower Leogh and a stunning male Rustic Bunting found feeding in what was the Chalet pond, making for more than a fitting end to the AW's time in the Chalet. The 16<sup>th</sup> marked a very momentous occasion in the 2010 Bird Observatory calendar as the observatory staff, the researchers and the volunteers moved into the new observatory. Obviously with the observatory birding team busy unpacking and carting stuff up and down the island, birds were only noticed if they were roadside or from the windows of their new bedrooms overlooking Sheep Rock. With this said it didn't take long for the AW's to spot a Great Northern and a Red-throated Diver sat on the sea in Finniquoy as well as two House Martins hawking around the Obs that were getting harassed by the newly resident Swallows who couldn't resist the new Obs either. The highlight of the day for everyone though came just before teatime when Jess (one of our Starling Researchers) ran through the corridors shouting 'there's a Crane...there's a Crane'. Immediately eyes were turned towards Bunes and nearly all the staff appreciated this ungainly but beautiful flyer circling high up to the north whilst dwarfing the breeding Great Black-backed Gulls that persisted in mobbing it. Although it wasn't a pair of White Storks choosing to nest on the roof it was a still an incredibly nice blessing to mark a new chapter in the history of Fair Isle Bird Observatory. With the completion of the ringing room in the new Obs on the 17<sup>th</sup>, meant the nets could be unfurled once again in the Obs plantation. The first birds to therefore christen the new ringing room included a Garden Warbler and a Willow Warbler. These birds had clearly made a short sea crossing from nearby islands given the amount of fat they had both assimilated and given the strong winds prevailing from the south west. This was also the case for the male Blackcap caught at roughly the same time in the Plantation during the first morning trap round from the Obs for nearly a year. With the staff all in place in the new Obs it was time for the first guests to

arrive and their arrival coincided with the arrival of the Obs directors. With more eyes around the island it didn't take long for birds to be discovered and although the time of year and weather conditions were unfavourable for watching birds (northerly gales and fog) avian discoveries still occurred. However they were more rediscovery's than new discoveries and involved non breeding summering birds that decided to show their head again rather than newly arrived migrants. Sightings for the day included a female Red-breasted merganser, a Short-eared owl moulting in Field Ditch, a male and female Blackbird and a Robin at the Chalet. It wasn't the longest day for everyone though as an interesting drake Common Scoter in North Haven that was showing a lot of yellow on its bill base was found dead on the shore in South Haven. Originally this bird was believed to be the drake that had appeared over a month ago but on closer inspection it was evidently an immature drake rather than the adult drake that also had an extensive yellow bill base! With the departure of the Observatory Directors on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the Warden and AW's had time to get into the Seabird Colonies. Once down South Narv they soon realised they wish they hadn't worried due to the sorry state of Fair Isle's breeding seabirds highlighted by the either dead or very underweight chicks. With emotions running low on the way back to the Obs a Turtle Dove flying alongside the car did its bit to lift spirits a little. A trip to the colony at South Ramnigeo also produced a new bird for the year in the form of a Cormorant that was seen from the Zodiac just off Bunes. The only other birds for the day were seen together in the Gully and despite being from opposite ends of the bird spectrum a Woodpigeon and a very unseasonal Dunlin both favoured the stream at the base of the gully. Unseasonal birds weren't restricted to the 22<sup>nd</sup> though and a flighty Shorelark flushed off the airstrip on the 23<sup>rd</sup> was a little unexpected to say the least. A little less surprising was a Garden Warbler trapped in Hjon Dyke and 2 House Martins that passed south in the evening. More birds embarking on an early southward journey passed through on the 24<sup>th</sup> and comprised of a Spotted Flycatcher, a singing male Linnet that had not quite come to terms with a failed breeding season, a new fully feathered Short-eared Owl and 2 female Crossbills that could be the first of many depending on the state of the pine crop in Fenno-Scandia. The first still day for a while on the 26<sup>th</sup> facilitated some drift migrants with 2 Marsh Warblers, 2 Common Rosefinches and a Willow Warbler and a Chiffchaff together in the Obs plantation. It also meant the Birding staff could get back in the boat and visit some of the more isolated colonies. A visit to Sooth Mila Hessland's was just such a colony and clearly far too isolated for a Short-eared Owl that was found saturated in Fulmar Oil. Closer inspection revealed that the bird was in fact the moulting bird that had been residing in Field Ditch that had clearly found out the hard way that you shouldn't try your luck with seabird chicks near to Fulmar colonies. With light south westerly winds at the month's end a handful of enjoyable migrants put in a late appearance. These consisted of only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hobby of the spring, a Black Redstart, a Song Thrush, a

Willow Warbler, 2 Siskin's and 2 Crossbills (28th), 4 Siskin's, a Whitethroat and a Turtle Dove on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 4 Swifts on the 30th. The dove on the 29<sup>th</sup> was a superb addition to the new observatory garden list and was well and truly appreciated by all observatory staff and guests as it fed on the exposed earth just feet from the lounge windows. Another great addition to the Observatory was our 16 year old, John Harrison Memorial Fund volunteer James Dixon who came up from sunny old Essex to help out with the daily bird work.