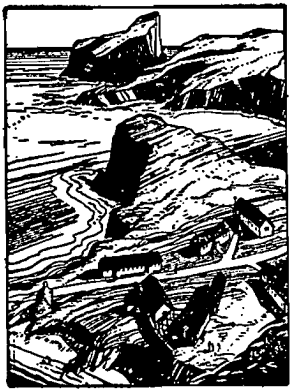
FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY
ANNUAL REPORT
1952



KENNETH WILLIAMSON

Director

Issued to the Friends of Fair Isle

Subscription, £1, 1s. per year

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT 1952

Foreword

My foreword this year is written under easy circumstances for two reasons; firstly, because I had the pleasure of spending a week at the Observatory towards the end of July, and secondly, because I am able, for the first time, to draw your attention to the fact that the Revenue Account showed a small surplus for the year.

However carefully one has followed the work of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory, a visit to the Island and taking some slight part in the activities there, must be an education to anybody. There are two outstanding impressions of the life of the Observatory, the first being the extreme comfort in so remote a place, a tribute to Mrs. Williamson's housekeeping skill, and secondly, the certainty that to achieve the full value from the work it must be continued for many years to come. Each year opens up new lines of research, and it is abundantly clear that, though worthwhile results are attained every year, each further year's work adds greatly to past results and makes more clear the future possibilities. From the Accounts you will notice the satisfactory result has been attained by most careful pruning of the

expenditure, and we feel that this has now been cut to the absolute minimum. I would, therefore, appeal to you once more not only for the continuation of your support, which has enabled this venture to be well and truly launched, but also for your help in making the work of the Trust more widely known and in trying to find other people who will join with you in continuing to support us.

Arthur B. Duncan,
Chairman.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

1952

General

In 1952 the Observatory opened on April 29th and closed in early November. A total of 100 people stayed at the hostel for periods of a week or more, amounting in all to 153 "student-weeks". Of these visitors no fewer than 28 were Friends who had stayed at the Observatory in previous years, a gratifying high percentage of "returns"!

Mr. Arthur B. Duncan, the Chairman of the Trust, spent a week at the Observatory in July, dividing his time between a study of the island's Tipulidae (Crane-flies) and field-work among the growing Arctic Skua chicks. Other Trustees who visited us in autumn were Mr. A.G.S. Bryson, Col. R. Meinertzhagen, Mr. George Waterston (the Laird of Fair Isle), and Professor V.C. Wynne-Edwards.

A research team of five botanists under the leadership of Dr. Elsie Conway of Glasgow University spent a week at the hostel in June, studying the species and distribution of Algae (seaweeds) on various parts of the coast. A brief report on the work of this expedition appeared in Bulletin No. 8 (91).

A series of courses was held in July and early August, and our thanks are due to Mr. Ron Edwards and Mr. Alec Butterfield for the parts they played in assisting the Director in carrying out the lecture programme and organising the field-work. It was hoped that these courses would attract additional visitors to the hostel during the quiet midsummer period, but despite a large number of enquiries the actual response was disappointing. As the work involved in the organisation of such courses seriously interferes with current field investigations it is not proposed to repeat the venture in 1953.

On the domestic side, the Trust was well served by Miss Willa Wishart in her second year at the hostel, and by her sister Mary, who came to us in June. It is a source of considerable satisfaction that they will be rejoining us for the 1953 season. Caretaker duties were again efficiently undertaken by Mr. William Eunson, and winter trapping and observations are being shared by Messrs. James A. Stout, James Wilson and James Anderson.

Since the close of the active field-season Mrs. Agnes W. Thom, of Edinburgh, has given us invaluable voluntary assistance in collating records and doing other secretarial work at our headquarters at 17, India Street.

An important development on the social side was the organisation by the hostel staff of Scottish country dancing (with the right Fair Isle flavour, of course!) every Friday fortnight in the "Canteen Hut". These gatherings

are so thoroughly enjoyed by islanders and visitors alike, and provide such a splendid opportunity of bringing our friends on both sides together, that we propose to make them a regular feature of future Fair Isle seasons. With this end in view the hut has been completely re-decorated during the winter months.

Bird Migration in 1952.

Research during the migration periods was again concentrated on analysis of the various movements in the light of modern meteorological theory. Aspects of the spring migration were dealt with in Bulletin No. 7, and one of these events, a remarkable influx of Willow-warblers at the Isle of May and Fair Isle on May 5th-6th is of such unusual interest that it is being analysed in some detail for publication. The only rarity to pay a visit at this season - apart from 15 Ortolan Buntings at the period just mentioned - was a fine Red-throated Pipit on May 30th. A description of it is given in Bulletin No. 7 (82).

From mid-August until early October the marked north-easterly extension of the Azores high pressure system created favourable conditions for a detailed study of bird-movements originating in the Greenland - Iceland region. Particular attention was therefore paid to the migration from this quarter, with most interesting results, and a review of the period, together with a consideration of some of the more general problems upon which our observations bear, has been submitted to the Scottish Naturalist for publication.

In consequence of so much high pressure to the west and north-west of our area, and the northerly displacement of the polar front between the Azores and Greenland highs, North Sea weather seldom showed the low pressure developments which are conducive to falls of drift-migrants from the Continent, and which played such a notable part in the early autumn migration of 1951. We saw very little of continental species until October, and the movements subsequently were of the usual kind for that month, with intermittent passage of large numbers of thrushes and black-birds. There was once again a well-marked passage of "Northern Chiffchaffs", though a fortnight later than in 1951, and this almost annual invasion has taken its place as one of our special migration and taxonomic studies.

Other interesting birds concerned in the mid and late October movements were Eastern Short-toed Larks, Crested Lark (the first record for Scotland, on November 2nd), Hoopoe, Black-bellied Dipper, Little Bunting and Petchora Pipit. Full notes on these and other autumn migrants can be found in Bulletins Nos. 9 and 10.

Trapping and Ringing.

The poverty of the migration from continental sources, and the fact that the mid-August emigration of Iceland - Faeroe Wheatears by-passed the Shetland area in 1952, kept the ringing total low, - and this despite the operation of a new and most efficient trap. The totals obtained in this and previous seasons are compared in the Tables below:

Table 1.

	1949	1950	1951	1952
Total birds ringed	1505	2390	2236	1933
" species "	63	78	77	74

Table 2.
Totals of Individual Species.

	1948-9	1950	1951	1952	Total
1. Blackbird	160	317	529	333	1339
2. Wheatear	216	320	348	382	1266
3. Starling	283	404	211	233	1131
4. Meadow Pipit	129	124	100	193	546
5. Rock Pipit	140	170	91	138	539
6. Twite	121	190	66	115	492
7. House Sparrow	166	118	29	10	323
8. Redwing	70	93	71	81	315
9. Robin	30	56	92	18	196
10. Fulmar	27	13	77	19	136
11. Chaffinch	20	56	54	4	134
12. Willow Warbler	6	53	26	44	129
13. Arctic Skua	16	36	25	45	122
14. Garden Warbler	7	46	32	9	94
15. Redstart	10	15	23	43	91
16. Puffin	39	7	40	5	91
17. Oyster-catcher	36	9	26	17	88
18. Skylark	13	44	24	2	83
19. Wren	35	34	9	5	83
20. Goldcrest	32	1	30	14	75
21. Pied Flycatcher	10	34	20	10	74
22. Shag	19	14	26	3	62
23. Song Thrush	16	7	25	13	61
24. Herring Gull	16	26	10	8	60
25. Blackcap	18	14	14	9	55
26. White Wagtail	28	13	6	6	53

The 1950 total contains 23 birds ringed in Unst, Shetland, and that of 1952 includes 4 young Merlins marked in Shetland by Mr. W. Kay. The grand total of birds ringed to the end of 1952 is 8,352, of 109 different species.

Recoveries.

Of all the species we have ringed, the Blackbird has been the most productive of returns - as can be seen from Table 3. Not included in this table, but most interesting nevertheless, is the good recovery rate of raptorial birds, - 16.6 percent of the 36 ringed. These include two Kestrels (one of which was recovered in France), 21 Merlins (two recovered in Scotland, and one in Shetland), and 13 Sparrow-hawks (one return from France, another from East Anglia). Again in 1952 an island-bred Oyster-catcher was, recovered in France within a few weeks of fledging, and one of our colour-ringed Arctic Skua young was observed on the shore at Bridlington, East Yorkshire, in late August.

An interesting event was the capture by Douglas Stout of a Norwegian racing-pigeon five days after its release at Randers, Denmark, a trans North Sea journey showing a similar drift to that sustained by many of our spring passage migrants. The occurrence is noted in Bulletin No. 7 (83). Shortly after the appearance of this bird a Norwegian homing-pigeon with a similar ring-number was reported as having been shot in the south of Shetland, so it is likely that more than one bird was concerned in the movement.

There is always, of course, a very strong element of luck in bird-ringing recoveries, and perhaps the ones in which we may consider ourselves most fortunate, in view of the very few we have marked, are Glaucous Gull, Corncrake and Faeroe Snipe. Full details of these and of other recoveries reported by Miss Leach, the secretary of the Bird-Ringing Committee, during the year are to be found in Bulletins No.. 6 (62 and 67), 7 (74), 8 (96) and 10 (117).

Table 3.
Recoveries of Birds Ringed at Fair Isle.

Species	Total ringed	Recoveries Abroad	Britain	Total	%
Blackbird	1339	11	11	21	1.64
Wheatear	1266	4	1	5	0.39
Starling	1131	2	7	9	0.79
Meadow Pipit	546	6	-	6	1.09
Redwing	315	3	-	3	0.95
Oyster-catcher	88	2	-	2	2.27
Song-thrush	61	2	-	2	3.27

Note: Recaptures at Fair Isle not included.

Trapping.

One new trap was in operation throughout the season, a double-ended "Dyke Trap" of our own design, straddling the long dry-stone wall at Vatstrass, between the Observatory buildings and the Gully. A photograph of this trap, taken by Mr. Alex Foote, was published as plate 82 of British Birds for November 1952, illustrating an article by Col. H.G. Brownlow

on the design and construction of Heligoland Traps. This "Double-dyke Trap", as originally planned, had a single catching-box set on the wall in the middle of the structure, serving both entrances; but when the trap was nearing completion in October 1951 we found that although birds went into it readily enough, the absence of a funnel diverging from the main axis of the trap failed to hold the birds, so that the great majority broke back over our heads and escaped. The design was therefore modified so that each entrance was turned into a funnel, with its own door and catching-box, built outside the left-hand wall of the opposite section. This modification has proved extremely successful, and as the birds entering the angled funnel are now presented with no obvious exit except by way of the glass window of the box, escapes are negligible.

The "Double-dyke" was designed and sited primarily to increase our captures of Wheatears, and especially the re-trappings of birds ringed as nestlings on the isle, for these are important in our study of the size of the breeding-stock and the rate of infestation of this population by flatflies Ornithomyia fringillina (see p. 14). The value of the "Double-dyke" is to be seen in the increased number of Wheatears caught, even in a season when the southwards passage of the Iceland - Faeroe stock failed to materialise, as explained in Bulletin No. 8 (97). In addition to the Wheatears, a number and wide variety of other interesting migrants, including Merlins, Sparrow-hawks, Cuckoo, Great Grey Shrike, Corncrake, and many thrushes and warblers were also taken.

There is no doubt that on an island such as ours, where suitable cover (essential to the orthodox type of Heligoland Trap) cannot be grown successfully owing to the high winds and salt-spray saturation, the "Double-dyke" is a most effective design, and we hope to be able to build more of them in years to come.

The Ward Hill Trap, the last remnants of which were whisked away in the January 15th hurricane of 1951, was not re-built. The performance of the various traps during the past four seasons is summarised in Table 4. "Other techniques" includes the Yeoman Net, clap-nets and the Faeroese "fleyg", and the main traps are listed in the order in which they were put into operation.

Table 4.
Total Captures in the Traps
(including re-traps).

	1949	1950	1951	1952	Total
Haa	?	201	99	155	455
Single Dyke	51	129	110	65	355
Gully	550	837	988	573	2948
Ward Hill	?	33	78	-	111
Observatory	190	660	388	433	1671
Mill	-	9	18	6	33
Shore	-	71	40	47	158
Vaadal	-	55	147	134	336
Double Dyke	-	-	50	410	460
Automatics	128	282	218	186	814
Others	?	29	80	48	157

Publications.

Notes and papers based on the work of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory were published

in ornitholigical journals during the year as follows:

The Scottish Naturalist. Vol. 64. "Migrational Drift in Britain, autumn 1951", pp. 1-18; "The incubation rhythm of the Fulmar", pp. 138-147. Notes on the occurrence at Fair Isle of Black-headed Bunting, p.48, Tawny Pipit, p.50, an aberrant Wood Warbler, p.52, Black-bellied Dippers, p.55, and a stranded Cuvier's Whale, p.123.

British Birds. Vol. 45. Spring migration studies of Red-backed Shrike (in collaboration with Alec Butterfield), pp. 247-250; Ring Ousel pp. 251-5, Wryneck and Cuckoo, pp. 255-6, and Subalpine Warblers, pp. 260-1.

The Ibis. Vol. 94. "Regional variation in the distraction displays of the Oyster-catcher", pp. 85-96.

Irish Naturalists' Journal. Vol. 10. "Early arrival of White-fronted Geese" (in collaboration with Robert F. Ruttledge), pp. 263-4.

Bulletins.

Four Bulletins, Nos. 6-9, were issued in the course of the year to those Friends of Fair Isle who asked to receive them, and to foreign ornithologists with whom we exchange publications. The Bulletins are apparently much appreciated for their virtue of keeping Friends in close touch with the work going on not only at Fair Isle, but also at other bird observatories such as Great Saltee, Lundy, the Isle of May, etc. We are grateful to a number of colleagues and Friends who have provided contributions to the present series. No. 6 dealt largely with the winter of 1951-2

at Fair Isle and with the previous year's work on ectoparasites; No. 7 was a spring migration issue with reports from the south of Shetland, the Isle of May, two west-coast observation-points and Great Saltee, in addition to Fair Isle; No. 8 was concerned mainly with the breeding birds of the isle and the early days of the autumn migration; whilst Nos. 9 and 10 contained fuller reports of the autumn season from Great Saltee, Lundy, Isle of May, Fair Isle, Tarbatness and two points in south-west Norway, in addition to a valuable paper by Carl-Fredrik Lundevall on bird-species which have extended their range to Scandinavia within recent years.

Ectoparasites.

The study of the infestation of migrants and resident birds by fleas, flatflies (genus Ornithomyia), ticks and mites was continued along much the same lines as in previous years. This was our first full season employing the technique of examination described in the 1951 Annual Report (p.13) and consequently much more attention was paid to the spring period than in former years.

The spring was undoubtedly the best season for bird-fleas, and infestation in May was very high: a detailed account of the observations made at this time is contained in Bulletin No. 7 (85), and a study of the situation revealed by the season's collecting is being undertaken by the Hon. Miriam Rothschild, to whom all the specimens were sent.

As in previous years, Ornithomyia did not become common until early July when we began to trap the juvenile Wheatears, Meadow and Rock

Pipits, Twites and Starlings bred on the isle. The total number of flies collected was greatly in excess of last year's and is shown by host-species in Table 5. Mr. R. Edwards, who is working on the flies, spent a fortnight at the Observatory in July. The experiment was made of "marking" flies and releasing them on selected hosts in the hope of learning something of their movements, and one "recovery" was made from the same bird after a lapse of seven days. A full investigation of this kind, which might throw light on questions of dispersal, host-preference (if any) and other aspects of the fly's biology should be feasible, and we hope to carry on with this work in 1953 if a suitable marking method can be found.

Table 5.
No. of Flatflies collected, by Host-sp.

Species	Total Examined	Number Infested	Total Flies	Average
Starling	112	53	163	3.07
Rock Pipit	241	61	114	1.87
Meadow Pipit	190	54	102	1.89
Wheatear	250	122	285	2.34
Twite	85	14	18	1.28
House Sparrow	13	2	3	1.50
Totals	891	306	685	

For the purposes of the above Table, all "retraps" are treated as new birds.

Breeding Birds

For the first time for a long number of years the Ringed Plover nested on the island, a pair rearing four chicks on the Vaasetter moor. Snipe were present, and "drumming" was heard frequently, in the bog between the School and Church, and later in the marshy Gilsetter field, but breeding was not established. At least one and perhaps two pairs of Quail were seen or heard on most evenings in late June and July on the Barkland croft, but we were unable to locate a nest. There were about half-a-dozen pairs of Corncrakes, as usual, in the crofting area.

Twite.

During the period of the summer courses students spent much time in the observation, from hides, of events at two nests of the Twite, and it is hoped to publish a full account of these observations at some future date. A preliminary note on the first nest, with a table showing the growth-rate of the young, appeared in Bulletin No. 8 (93). The population study of the island's Wheatears was further investigated and a note on this subject appears in Bulletin No. 8 (87).

Fulmar.

During the early summer a close watch was kept on three pairs of Fulmars, and this resulted in interesting discoveries concerning the behaviour of the birds during the incubation-period. An account of the study has appeared in The Scottish Naturalist. On the last day of October the three pairs concerned had returned from their brief period at sea and were occupying their ledges daily, so we may hope

for more information from them in 1953. We had hoped to capture more adult Fulmars for ringing by means of the Faeroese "fleyg", but in the late summer the wind, which was mainly from the north-east, was not suitable and very few birds were flying close enough to the best catching-sites. One Fulmar, ringed on a nest at Shaldi cliff in 1951, was re-captured from its egg at the same place in July 1952.

The Skuas

The Arctic Skuas had their best season ever: the colony increased to 33 pairs, of which only one pair failed to lay. Of the remainder, one pair only was unsuccessful in rearing chicks, and altogether 45 young birds reached the fledging stage. This represents 82% of the eggs laid, compared with 47% in the previous year. For a fuller account of the nesting-success of the colony over the past four years, and notes on the types of matings and plumage-phases, etc. see Bulletin No. 8 (86). The Bonxie or Great Skua, which is dealt with in para. 95 of the same Bulletin, had a very poor season, only 8 youngsters being reared by the 10 pairs.

Acknowledgments.

Once again we have to thank the island residents for their continued help with, and interest in the work of the Bird Observatory, and for their permission to observe birds among their crops in the autumn. A number of Friends have made donations or presentations of laboratory, library and other equipment, and for these we are very grateful. Thanks are also due to Dr. A.C. Stephen of the Royal Scottish Museum for the loan of an excellent working-collection of bird-skins, and to the Perth Museum and Art Gallery for the continued use of material from the J.G. Millais collection.

K. WILLIAMSON
(Director).

Treasurer's Report

You will remember that last year I called your attention to the fact that our expenditure was £886 in excess of our income, and that at the same time I detailed the steps that we proposed to take to remedy this serious state of affairs. This year, as you will see from the accounts, I am glad to report that the deficit has been turned into a profit: small it is true, but still a profit. And this in spite of that fact that many friends of Fair Isle have been forced to cancel their subscriptions as a result of the general tightness of money.

If you look at the comparative figures for the two years in the revenue account, you will see that subscriptions are down from £452 to £228, a serious drop, but one which is partially offset by the fact that more people are paying by Deed of Covenant. The increase under the latter heading is £79, from £392 to £471, with a consequent further increase as against last year in the amount of Income Tax recoverable. Taking the three headings together - subscriptions, subscriptions under covenant and tax recovered- the over all decrease from last year is only £108. But the fact remains that well over a hundred people, albeit in most cases reluctantly, have found it impossible to continue to subscribe.

Our income as a whole was up by £341, due to a very successful lecture and to a good figure for donations.

Our expenditure was cut all round

and reduced by £609. The comparative figures for the Hostel are a little misleading and should be read in conjunction with those for rates, taxes and insurance. The latter are a more or less fixed liability and the drop from £261 to £183 is the result of charging against the Hostel certain items of insurance etc. which were not charged against it last year. If, therefore, we assume rates, taxes and insurance to be a static figure at £261 the loss on the Hostel has not increased to £370 but decreased to £292.

So long as we continue to run on the same lines, the Hostel will always be a liability. As I have explained in the past, unless kept permanently fully booked the Hostel is an uneconomic proposition. It is unlikely ever to be fully booked throughout the season, yet, since it is indispensable we have just to do the best possible and face the annual loss.

It is perfectly clear that if we are to continue to break even in coming years we must try to keep our expenditure in the region of £1,600, and at the same time boost our income by at least £300 to £400 a year from outside sources such as lectures and donations. This we will endeavour to achieve. But I would emphasize how much each one of you can help by publicising the Bulletins and encouraging others either to join as Friends, to sign a Deed of Covenant, to make a donation or to leave a legacy, however small.

You will see from the balance sheet that last year we received a legacy of £1,000, a generous and welcome gift under the Will of

the late Mrs. Wilkie of Tarbert, Argyll. We should like to use this gift to start a Capital Endowment Fund, which over a period of years might grow to sufficient proportions to ensure a permanent income for the Trust. This would enable us eventually to broaden the scope of our researches in the fields both of migration and of general ornithology. The success of such a fund depends on the generosity of every one of us. We cannot all give four or even three figure donations, or leave four figure legacies, but we can, as Mrs. Wilkie did, remember that there is a Fair Isle Trust and that the work it is doing will only be possible in the future provided we can build up such a Capital Fund.

FAIR ISLE BI

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For Year ended

R E C

1951		
£	392:18: –	Subscriptions under Deeds of Covenant
	452:10: –	Subscriptions from Friends of Fair Isle
	91:18: –	Donations for year
	–: –: –	Proceeds of Lectures, etc.
	52: 7:10	Proceeds of Sale of Booklets, etc.
	10: –: –	Use of Room
	347:15:10	Income Tax recovered
	–: –: –	Miscellaneous Receipts
£	1,347: 9: 8	

P A Y

£	1,321: 8: 2	Salaries, Wages and National Insurance
	750: –: –	Less: Private Contribution
£	571: 8: 2	
	250: –: –	Annual Report
	252: 2:10	Printing, Postages and Stationery
	265:17: 9	Supplies, Furniture, Furnishings, etc.
	261:11: 5	Rates, Taxes and Insurance
	22:19: 6	Lantern Slides, etc.
	175: 7: 7	Travelling Expenses
	351: 4: 2	Loss in respect of Hostel
	83: 6: 6	Administration and Petty Cash
£	2,233:17:11	
£	886: 8: 3	Deficit for year

) OBSERVATORY TRUST

: ACCOUNT

st December, 1952.

I P T S

–		£ 471: 9: 6
–		228:10:11
–		302:10: 6
–		277:14: 1
–		2:11:11
–		10: –: –
–		385: 4: 5
–		10: 5: –
		£ 1,688: 6: 4

E N T S

–	£ 1,161: 4: 4		
–	750: –: –		
	£ 411: 4: 4		
–	88: 7: 6		
–	190: 7: 4		
–	140: 2: 6		
–	183: 8: 7		
–	56:17: 9		
1	103:19: 5		
–	370: 1:10		
–	79:12: 4		
			1,624: 1: 7
	Surplus for year	£	64: 4: 9

BALANCE SHEET

LIABILITIES.

Sum advanced as per last Balance Sheet		£ 1,968:15: -
Price of Huts	-	5: -: -
		£ 1,973:15: -
Sundry Creditor 'Hostel	-	14: -:11
		£ 1,987:15:11

: 31st December, 1952.

ASSETS

Buildings, Traps, etc. per last Balance Sheet		£ 350: -: -
Furniture, Furnishings, etc., at Fair Isle per last Balance Sheet		600: -: -
Furniture, Furnishings, etc., at 17 India Street as per last Balance Sheet		470: -: -
Scientific Equipment, etc., as per last Balance Sheet		196: -: -
Consumable Stores:-		
Food Stuffs	£ 25: -: -	
Livestock	38: -: -	
Fuel	5: -: -	68: -: -
Sundry Debtor - Hostel		8: -: -
Cash in Bank and on Hand -		
Treasurer's Account	£ 27:18:10	
Hostel Account	103: -: -	130:18:10
Balance due by Messrs. J. & F. Anderson, W.S.		16: 1: 7
Deficit on Revenue Account	£ 1,213: -: 3	
Less:		
Surplus for year	£ 64: 4: 9	
Legacy received	1,000: -: -	1,064: 4: 9 148:15: 6
		£ 1,987:15:11

N O T I C E S

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There are still a few vacant places at the Hostel at Fair Isle for observers who wish to see something of the Autumn Migration, and assist with the trapping, ringing and recording. The Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, by Lerwick, Shetland, will supply details.

Those subscribers who have recently joined the Trust as Friends of Fair Isle should note that copies of Bulletins numbers 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 are still available if required. There are also a number of copies of reprints of various papers and of the 1951 series of Bulletins available. Application should be made to Mr. George Waterston, Hon. Sec. Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, 35 George Street, Edinburgh, 2.

T H E

FAIR ISLE SLIPWAY FUND

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As all visitors to Fair Isle well know, the good ship The Good Shepherd is the islanders' one and only link with the outside world. Should any misfortune overtake her as a result of the winter storms, this small and isolated community would be faced with very great hardship. The security of The Good Shepherd, now and in the future, is of vital importance to their well-being.

At present The Good Shepherd lies snugly at her moorings in the North Haven between trips in the summer months. But when the winter storms begin at the end of September amd she must be hauled on to the slipway immediately after each run to and from Shetland. Often this hauling has to be done in darkness and driving rain, and always it requires the help of every able-bodied man on the island.

The population is now perilously near the threshold below which it would be impossible to man the winch for hauling The Good Shepherd to safety. The situation is critical. Fully alive to this fact, the Zetland County Council has approved a scheme for re-building the slipway and installing a power-driven winch, and work on this invaluable improvement is proceeding, and it is hoped the job will be complete before the winter begins.

The Zetland County Council has asked the islanders if they will make a contribution towards the cost of this work, and an islanders' Committee has been formed to devise "ways and means" of raising a substantial sum to this end. As a first step, a collection among the sixteen homes on the island has realised £121.

The Committee would greatly like to add substantially to this sum, and they have plans for doing so. Meanwhile, they would like to appeal to all Friends of Fair Isle to give them a little help. Any contribution, no matter how small, will be most welcome, and will be acknowledged with very real gratitude.

Gifts may be sent to me, or they can be forwarded direct to the Hon. Treasurer of the Slipway Fund Committee, Mr. Jerome Stout, Lower Leogh, Fair Isle.

K. WILLIAMSON.

REPORT OF THE ISLE OF MAY BIRD OBSERVATORY AND FIELD STATION COMMITTEE 1951-2

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The last report in this series, by A.G.S. Bryson, appeared in The Scottish Naturalist for 1951, 63: 56-63. During the two years that have elapsed active field-work was carried on from the end of March until the end of October, and in addition to the observations made on migratory birds much useful work was done (in particular by Dr. W.J. Eggeling in 1952) on the status and breeding habits of the residents and summer visitors.

1. Bird Ringing

The total of birds trapped and ringed in 1951 was the highest obtained in any season, the result of a splendid autumn migration which reached its zenith with the big movement of Robins (Erithacus rubecula) on the first days of October. In all, 2,901 birds of 57 different species were marked, these including 784 nestlings. By comparison 1952 was a poor year for continental passage-migrants and the total of 1,926 birds (including 198 nestlings) was the lowest since 1948.

Interesting recoveries continue to accrue from this work, and have been or will be published in the reports of the Bird Ringing

Committee of the British Trust for Ornithology. Most interesting return concerns a Goldcrest (Regulus regulus) ringed on 28th October 1952 and recovered in Holstein, Germany, on 8th February 1953. This is only the second long-distance journey of a Goldcrest of which the scheme has any record, and in both cases the birds were marked at the Isle of May, the first one travelling to Wales. These instances suggest that the ring does not impede the normal activities of this tiny bird (which weighs from 4 to 6 gm.), as many people have claimed.

During the 1952 season a new trap was built in a gully among the rocks south of Kirk Haven.

2. Selected Species

The following are the most interesting occurrences of migratory birds during the two years - single birds only, unless otherwise stated. The nomenclature used accords with the B.O.U. Check List published in 1952.

Red-necked Grebe Podiceps grisegena. 13th-15th September; and 1st, 3rd, 28th and 30th October 1952. There are two previous records.

Scoty Shearwater Procellaria grisea. 21st September 1952.

Barnacle Goose Branta leucopsis. 7th September 1952.

Canada Goose Branta canadensis. 5th April, 1952. The second record for the island.

Quail Coturnix coturnix. 20th May 1952. The third spring record.

Pomarine Skua Stercorarius pomarinus. 18th September and two on 22nd September 1952.

Glaucous Gull Larus hyperboreus. 26th September 1952.

Little Tern Sterna albifrons. 23rd September 1952.

Turtle Dove Streptopelia turtur. 19th-22nd May and 2nd June, also 10th September 1952.

Nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus. 28th July 1952.

Hoopoe Upupa epops. 2nd-3rd May 1951.

Wryneck Jynx torquilla. One or two, 1st-3rd May 1951.

Woodlark Lullula arborea. 12th and 14th October 1951.

Shore Lark Eremophila alpestris. 2nd October 1951, with two next day, again one or two from 6th to 8th October, and one on 15th.

Hooded Crow Corvus cornix. An unusual number in mid-October 1951, with seven on 13th and fourteen on 15th. For a note on the recent status of this bird in the Forth area, see Bryson (op. cit.), p. 56.

Long-tailed Tit Aegithalos caudatus. Parties of eight on 10th October 1951 and six on 25th October 1952 are believed to have

been visitors from the mainland.

Stonechat Saxicola torquata. A pair on 3rd October, single birds from 16th-18th and on 27th October 1952. See Bryson (op. cit.) p. 60.

Black Redstart Phoenicurus ochruros. The spring records in 1951 were of single birds between 21st-23rd April and on 3rd, 6th and 10th May. In 1952 there was a female on 19th - 20th March, another on 16th-17th April, two birds on 18th and one on 27th. Three arrived on 13th October, another on 20th, a male was present on 23rd-24th, and there were two birds on the next two days.

Nightingale Luscinia megarhyncha. The fourth and fifth Scottish records were noted on 30th April - 1st May 1951, and from 16th-22nd May 1952. The latter, which was trapped, put on 3.9 gm. to reach a weight of 25 gm. in four days from its arrival. It was heard singing by several observers.

Robin Erithacus rubecula. Over 600 were on the island on 1st and 2nd October 1951, the numbers gradually decreasing from then on until 10th, and during this period 297 Robins were ringed.

Grasshopper Warbler Locustella naevia. 17th and 24th April 1951.

Sedge Warbler Acrocephalus schoenobaenus. The spring of 1952 was an exceptional season, and a note on their movements appears in Bull. Fair Isle B. Obs. no. 10 para. 120.

Icterine Warbler Hippolais icterina. 8th-10th August and 1st-4th September 1951.

Barred Warbler Sylvia nisoria. 6th-8th October 1951 and 8th-9th August 1952.

Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita. Two trapped on 10th April 1952 constitute the earliest spring records of this species on the isle. In both autumn seasons there were movements of "Northern Chiffchaffs" approximating to the Scandinavian race Ph. c. abietinus. These occurred between 1st and 10th October 1951 (with a peak on 2nd, as at Fair Isle), followed by a single bird from 13th-16th and one or two from 29th to 2nd November. In 1952, apart from a single bird on 1st October, movement was not until 19th-25th October, with six birds daily between 22nd-24th, - nearly a week later than the peak of passage through Fair Isle.

Wood Warbler Phylloscopus sibilatrix. 13th September 1951. In 1952 recorded on 5th and 16th-17th May, 12th and 29th July, and 10th August.

Yellow-browed Warbler Phylloscopus inornatus. 11th October 1951.

Pied Flycatcher Muscicapa hypoleuca. The biggest spring movement is represented by six on 6th and twenty on 7th May 1951. The best autumn passage, of eighteen birds on 7th September 1951, coincided with a north-easterly airflow between south-west Norway and the east coast, along the eastern side

of an anticyclone covering the British Isles. There were very few at either season in 1952.

Red-breasted Flycatcher Muscicapa parva. Three arrived on 1st October 1951, two being trapped.

Tree Pipit Anthus trivialis. A well-defined passage took place during the first fortnight of May in both years.

Grey Wagtail Motacilla cinerea. Autumn only. Two on 26th September 1951 and singly on 28th September and 6th and 21st October.

Yellow Wagtail group Motacilla flava. Spring only. Two flavissima on 4th-5th May 1951, and 9th-10th May 1952. One on 19th April 1952 and two next day are noteworthy for the early date but the subspecies was not determined. There were two Blue-headed Wagtails M. f. flava on 2nd May 1952.

Great Grey Shrike Lanius excubitor. 12th-13th October 1951 and 17th-24th October 1952 (with two birds on 22nd, both trapped).

Red-backed Shrike Lanius collurio. 10th-12th September 1951 and 14th-16th June 1952.

Scarlet Grosbeak Carpodacus erythrinus. One on 7th September 1952.

Ortolan Bunting Emberiza hortulana. 14th October 1951; 2nd May and 1st June 1952; 24th October 1952, the latest record for the isle.

Lapland Bunting Calcarius lapponicus. 29th September to 5th October 1952, and another on 23rd October.

3. Breeding Birds.

Fulmar Fulmarus glacialis. During the summer of 1952 Dr. W.J. Eggeling made a special study of the small Fulmar colony, the results of which he has published in The Scottish Naturalist (1952) 64; 148-150.

Eider Somateria mollissima. Dr. Eggeling found 34 nests in late May and estimated the population to be not less than 150 birds.

Oyster-catcher Haematopus ostralegus. During the last ten days of May eleven nests were found, accounting for all but two of the 24 birds counted on 27th May 1952. Another nest was found on 22nd June, but this may represent the second attempt of a pair which lost a clutch in the same area a few days before. The first nests each contained single eggs on 9th May, and the second egg was laid in one of these between 1315 and 1400 hrs that day. The late nest hatched just prior to 12th July. Clutch-size:- 5 x C/3, 7 x C/2. In one case the incubation period was 28-29 days.

Lesser Blackback Larus fuscus. Count on 8th May 1952, 350 birds: on 15th June, 302 birds.

Herring Gull Larus argentatus. On the same days counts gave 3,520 and 3,210 birds respectively.

Common and Arctic Terns Sterna hirundo and Sterna macrura. The terns had a disastrous season, due to the depredations of the gulls. The North Ness was completely deserted in early July just after the hatching of the first young, many of the Common Terns moving into the Dunvegan colony, which till then had comprised Arctic Terns only. On 4th August 8 young Common and 27 young Arctic Terns were ringed there, the former being only a few days old whereas several of the latter were nearly full-fledged. There were about 1,000 terns in all at this colony on 10th August, some 600 on the fringe being obviously non-breeders.

Sandwich Tern Sterna sandvicensis. First seen (3 birds) on 20th April. The maximum number recorded was 50 on 24th May, but very few remained to breed. By 13th July Dr. Eggeling had found 14 nests and there was one newly-hatched chick on that day. For 25th July he has the cryptic observation, "No Sandwich Terns; no eggs, no young. Gulls!"

Guillemot Uria aalge. Recent counts of "bridled" birds are:

1951, 12th June. 57 "bridled" in 1253, or 4.60%.

1952, 19th May. 41 "bridled" in 967, or 4.24%.

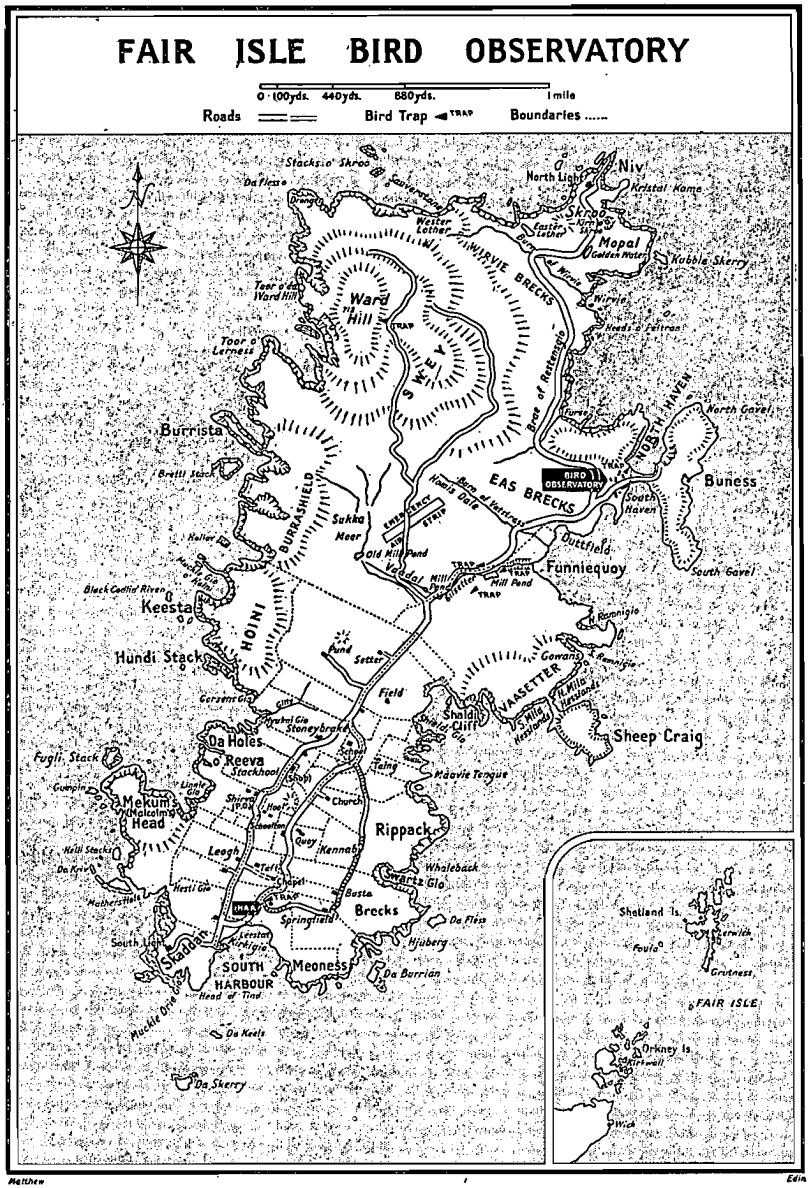
1952, 15th June. 90 "bridled" in 1935, or 4.65%.

About 50 birds were back on nesting-ledges on 1st November 1952.

Blackbird Turdus merula. The only nesting in 1952 was of a brother-sister mating, and it was unsuccessful. The nest was found in a corrugated iron shed on 28th May, with two eggs. The parents, which were trapped, were birds ringed as members of the same brood on the island on 8th May 1950. The young were the survivors of a C/4, of which one chick died in the shell and another shortly after hatching. Both survivors seemed very weakly and did not live long.

Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe. Two pairs raised single broods in 1952: eggs in one nest were hatching on 30th May.

Pied Wagtail Motacilla alba yarrellii. A pair had five young in July 1951 and two pairs attempted to rear double broods in 1952. One family of six young flew on 30th May (the size of the other pair's first brood is not known) and both females were sitting on C/5 in new nests on 26th June.


FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY
0 · 100yds. 440yds. 880yds. 1 mile
Roads
Bird Trap ◄TRAP
Boundaries .....
Stacks o' Skroo
Da Flees
North Light
Niv
Kristal Kame
Skroo
Mopal
Golden Hotel
Kubble Skerry
Wirvie Brecks
Ward Hill
Toor o' da Ward Hill
Toor o' Learness
Sweyn
Burrista
Burrashield
Sukka Meer
Old Mill Pond
Vaadal
Mill Pond
Bird Observatory
North Haven
North Gavel
Buness
South Haven
Outfield
Funniequoy
South Gavel
Eas Brecks
Keesta
Hoini
Hundi Stack
Pund Setter
Field
Vaasetter
Shalland Cliff
Sheep Craig
Da Holes
Reeva
Schoolhouse
Fugli Stack
Mekum
Head
Rippack
Leogh
Kennaby
Whaleback
Brecks
Springfield
Da Flees
Hjuberg
Shadien
South Light
South Harbour
Meoness
Da Burrian
Da Keels
Da Skerry
Muckle Orra
Shetland Is.
Fowlo
Grutness
FAIR ISLE
Orkney Is
Wick