

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

REPORT

1958



PETER E. DAVIS

Warden

PRICE 5/-

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

Trustees

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Warden :—Mr Peter E. Davis, The Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland.
(Tel. : Fair Isle 8).

Solicitors :—J. & F. Anderson, W.S., 48 Castle Street, Edinburgh 2.

Auditors :—Lindsay, Jamieson and Haldane, C.A., 24 St Andrew Square, Edinburgh.

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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION — “*Friend of Fair Isle*” — **ONE GUINEA.**

Please support by Donation or Legacy—

THE FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY ENDOWMENT FUND.

With the generous help of the Pilgrim Trust, the Observatory Trustees have established an Endowment Fund for Ornithology and Bird Preservation in Scotland. The objects are:—To establish the Fair Isle Bird Observatory on a permanent financial basis; to extend Fair Isle research methods to other stations in Scotland; and finally to develop Bird Sanctuaries and Bird Protection in general.

Capital subscribed to the Fund will be held as a permanent Endowment by the Trustees and cannot be spent. Income from the Fund will be carefully used by the Bird Observatory Executive Committee in keeping with the above objects.

Please write to the Hon. Secretary for particulars.

GEORGE WATERSTON,
Hon. Secretary.

21 Regent Terrace, EDINBURGH 7.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

Annual Report for 1958

FOREWORD

THIS year's report covers a period when the season was longer than ever before—Mr and Mrs Davis being on the island from 29th January till 18th December.

Not only was it the longest stay that the Warden has ever had on the island but it was a year of quite outstanding ornithological interest with a remarkable list of rare birds recorded even by Fair Isle standards—of all this you will read in the body of the report. During the year, 4579 birds of 101 species were caught and ringed—the first time that any British ringing organisation has topped the century of species in a season. The ringing recoveries (see p. 15) indicate clearly the value of this work.

While ornithologically none of us have ever had any doubts of the success of the enterprise, there have been times when we were worried about the financial future. Although the situation has improved immeasurably it would be foolish to be complacent. Last year we began to recoup our losses and this satisfactory trend has been continued this year. We do, however, depend very largely on our "Friends of Fair Isle," who contribute their annual guinea to keep the Observatory going and to cover the cost of our Reports and Bulletins. We hope, therefore, that you will continue to subscribe to the Trust and perhaps persuade some of your friends to support us as well.

I cannot praise too highly the enthusiasm and continuous hard work of Mr and Mrs Davis and the other members of the Staff to whom the improvement in our position is in an overwhelming measure due.

ARTHUR B. DUNCAN,

Chairman.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

TREASURER'S REPORT

Hostel Account.

You may remember that last year I called attention to the remarkable achievement of Peter Davis and his wife in showing a profit of £383 on the running of the Hostel. This year the profit shown in the Hostel Account diminished to £90 owing to a drop of £50 in receipts and a considerable, but unavoidable, increase in wages and in the cost of provisions. However, it was found after the audit was completed that a sum of £105 was still due by the Zetland County Council for meals supplied to their men during the year. This figure will be included in the 1959 Account, and brings the true profit to £195.

Our intention has been to so arrange our affairs that we can avoid an over-all deficit each year, provided that the Hostel breaks even. It has more than achieved this for two years in succession and I should like once more to emphasise the debt of gratitude that we owe to Peter and his wife for their hard work and skill.

Trust Revenue Account.

As a result of our efforts over the last two years expenditure has been cut to a basic minimum consistent with keeping the Friends of Fair Isle reasonably in touch with affairs through the medium of the Bulletins. For 1958 expenditure was well under £1,000 mainly as a result of giving up the India Street headquarters and of a considerable reduction in salaries.

On the income side subscriptions are slightly down, together with the Tax recovered, and there is an increase in income from the Endowment Fund. Apart from legacy and donations, totalling £250, and excluding the Hostel profit, our annual income was £1,047 against an expenditure of £949. This is extremely satisfactory, but, as I pointed out previously, the maintenance of this annual credit position depends on the continued support of Friends of Fair Isle, preferably through seven year Covenants with their Tax advantages, or, alternatively, upon a large increase in the capital of the Endowment Fund.

May I therefore appeal to you all to encourage new subscribers and to remember that every donation or legacy to

the Endowment Fund is one step further toward the permanent financial security of the Bird Observatory.

Balance Sheet.

You will see that the Trustees, in view of the improved financial position, considered it prudent to write down in the Balance Sheet the value of buildings, furniture and scientific equipment on Fair Isle to a figure which in their opinion represents a more accurate assessment of the true value in the event of a sale.

Endowment Fund.

The financial year of the Fair Isle Endowment Trust Fund, of which the Bank of Scotland is Trustee, ends on 30th June each year. The income of the Fund is payable twice yearly to the Observatory Trustees and the capital value of the Fund as at 30th June, 1959, was £3,949, 3s 2d. Additions to this Fund are badly wanted.

Subscribers to the Endowment Trust are reminded that under the terms of the Trust Deed the capital of the Fund cannot be encroached upon and that the income, although payable to the Observatory Trustees primarily for the benefit of Fair Isle, can be utilised by them not only for Fair Isle, but for bird preservation and ornithological research on the mainland.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

YEAR TO 31st DECEMBER, 1958

1.—Hostel Revenue Account.

	<i>Expenditure</i>	
	1957	1958
Stores at 31st December	£58 0 0	£95 0 0
Food Stuffs, Supplies, etc.	654 15 9	764 0 0
Telephone	24 5 11	30 15 1
Wages and National Insurance	128 9 10	194 12 2
Sundry Payments	26 14 0	46 5 9
Insurance of Huts	68 10 0	68 10 0
Profit as at 31st December	383 1 5	92 11 11
	<u>£1343 16 11</u>	<u>£1291 14 11</u>

Note.—There are sums receivable from Zetland County Council for meals supplied to County Council workmen of £105, 6s 0d.

		<i>Income</i>	
		1957	1958
Board and Bookings Fees	... ..	£1228 7 0	£1150 4 6
Miscellaneous Receipts	... ..	20 9 11	41 10 5
Stores as at 31st December	... ..	95 0 0	100 0 0
		<u>£1343 16 11</u>	<u>£1291 14 11</u>

2.—Trust Revenue Account.

		<i>Expenditure</i>	
		1957	1958
Wages and National Insurance	... ..	£862 1 8	£515 18 9
Rents, Rates, Taxes, Insurance, etc.	... ..	175 15 0	22 10 1
Printing, Stationery, etc.	... ..	172 16 11	174 16 2
Subscriptions	... ..	3 1 0	2 0 0
Travelling Expenses (Hostel)	... ..	186 18 9	50 0 0
Repairs and Renewals (Hostel)	... ..	64 16 8	94 0 2
Expenses of Administration	... ..	86 0 4	90 1 9
Profit carried to Balance Sheet	... ..		440 2 1
		<u>£1551 10 4</u>	<u>£1389 9 0</u>

		<i>Income</i>	
		1957	1958
Subscriptions, etc.	... ..	£632 3 8	£612 5 7
Income Tax Recovered	... ..	300 1 8	293 18 5
Interest on Savings Bonds	... ..	11 1 6	11 1 6
Income from Endowment Fund	... ..	74 8 9	129 11 7
Legacy Received	... ..	0 0 0	100 0 0
Donations Received	... ..	0 0 0	150 0 0
Profit on Hostel	... ..	383 1 5	92 11 11
Lecture Receipt	... ..	19 15 0	
Loss carried to Balance Sheet	... ..	130 18 4	
		<u>£1551 10 4</u>	<u>£1389 9 0</u>

Balance Sheet as at 31st December, 1958.

Liabilities

Capital Account—				
Balance per last Balance Sheet	...	...	£1192	17 0
Less—Sums written off Buildings, Traps, Furniture, Furnishings, Equipment, etc.	...	...	766	0 0
			£426	17 0
Profit from Trust Revenue Account	£190	2 1		
Add—Special Legacy and Donation	250	0 0		
			440	2 1
Balance due to Messrs J. & F. Anderson	...	...	852	8 10
			£1719	7 11
			£1719	7 11

Assets

Buildings, Traps, etc., as written down	...	...	£200	0 0
Furniture, Furnishings, etc., at Fair Isle				
as written down	...	...	500	0 0
Scientific Equipment, etc., as written down	...	...	150	0 0
Investment—£642, 3% Savings Bonds 1960/70	...	...	619	1 3
Consumable Stores—				
Food Stuffs	...	...	£20	0 0
Live Stock	...	...	40	0 0
Fuel	...	...	40	0 0
			100	0 0
Cash in Bank—				
Trust Account	...	...	£29	13 8
Hostel Account	...	...	86	8 10
			£116	2 6
Cash in hand	...	...	34	4 2
			150	6 8
			£1719	7 11

EDINBURGH, 12th March, 1959: Examined and found correct.

Signed, LINDSAY JAMIESON & HALDANE, C.A.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WARDEN, 1958

General

The 1958 season was by far the longest in the history of the Observatory, beginning on January 29th and ending on December 18th. During this time one hundred visitors were accommodated for a total of 141 visitor-weeks. This was a good score by pre-1957 standards, but a disturbing fall when compared with the record of 197 visitor-weeks in 1957. The fall was due partly to much shorter stays by such "official" visitors as Post Office workers, and partly to the absence of university parties which so boosted the figures in 1957. I am glad to be able to report that bookings are coming forward at a very much better rate for 1959.

In addition to catering for our visitors, the hostel provided mid-day meals for up to nine pier-workmen throughout the year; an extra labour which was cheerfully borne by our excellent cook, Miss Pat Adams. Thanks to the culinary efforts of Miss Adams and my wife, the financial outcome of the 1958 season has been more satisfactory than we had dared to hope.

Peter Hope Jones again performed the duties of Assistant Warden with quiet efficiency, and we are very sorry that he cannot be with us in 1959. Our good wishes go with him to his new work at the Tour du Valat station in the Rhone delta.

Island Events. Three outstanding features of 1958 were the visit of the "Meteor" cruise in April, the construction of a magnificent new deep-water pier in North Haven, and the conversion of the house at Midway into an attractive modern residence. The "Meteor", with its 150 passengers on the National Trust for Scotland's "Islands Cruise," provided an entirely new outlet for the knitwear and woven goods produced by the islanders; and quite apart from the economic benefit it proved a major social occasion at the end of a long winter. The cruise is to be repeated in 1959.

Both the pier and the house were also a welcome source of new income to the menfolk. The pier will save an hour's hard labour with flit-boats on each boat-day, and will make the shipping of heavy loads much easier; benefits which are very tangible, particularly on a cold winter day. Mr Robert Ramsay and his team are to be warmly congratulated on their excellent workmanship.

Several more houses in the isle are to be improved in the near future, and a comprehensive water-scheme is expected in 1959 or 1960. A neglected industry, lobster-fishing, was revived with considerable success in 1958, and it is to be prosecuted again in the coming spring. While it would be very rash to say that Fair Isle is "out of the wood," the prospects

and the spirit of the isle are probably better than at any time since the war. Perhaps the happiest sign is the number of young people—no fewer than twenty-seven children under fifteen were resident in December 1958, and sixteen in the local school, compared with only three a decade ago.

North Haven was a busy place in 1958. The Shetland men working at the pier were accommodated in the Coronation Hall, and James A. Stout and his family were living in the adjacent flat while their home was being rebuilt. (Perhaps it was no coincidence that their arrival was soon followed by that of the first recorded flock of *Gallus gallus* in the North Haven area. These interesting birds lived mainly beneath the floor of the Hall, and were subsequently proved to breed there, and in our garage!).

Acknowledgments. It is a pleasure to record once more our debt of gratitude to the islanders for their unfailing friendliness and hospitality, and for their ready help in reporting birds they have seen. It is invidious to mention particular names, when almost everyone has done us some service in the course of the year, but a special acknowledgment is due to Mrs Eve Johnson, who operated small traps at the Haa, and caught nearly 200 birds between July and December.

Through the good offices of Dr A. C. Stephen of the Royal Scottish Museum, a substantial collection of bird-skins was selected by Kenneth Williamson and loaned to the Observatory. These proved invaluable for the determination of critical species and races.

Mr Kenneth Martin kindly gave us 50 more young Sitka Spruces to add to the plantation at Vaadal.

New Developments in the Scientific Work. Two important new lines of investigation developed in 1958. The first was Mr Peter O'Donald's work on the Genetics of the Colour-Phases in the Arctic Skua, a study which may throw new light on the problem of the evolution of dominance. Mr O'Donald's field-work at Fair Isle and elsewhere has been generously financed by the Nature Conservancy. A preliminary paper has been accepted for publication by the journal *Heredity*.

The second new development is concerned with the radar observations of bird immigration to Scotland which are being undertaken by Dr W. R. P. Bourne of the Edward Grey Institute, Oxford. Dr David Lack and Dr Bourne have proposed a reciprocal exchange of information between F.I.B.O. and the Institute, and preliminary comparison of the data for autumn 1958 has shown some interesting correlations. It is hoped that certain aspects will be discussed by Dr Bourne and myself in the scientific press. The radar observations are embraced by the Official Secrets Act, and no results may be published without Air Ministry approval. This very reasonable precaution

means that although we may have a much clearer picture of the ways in which migrants reach Fair Isle, this information may not be at once passed on to readers of the F.I.B.O. Reports and Bulletins. Current theories about migration in the North Sea will evidently need to be modified as a result of the radar work, and for the present our first reports on migration at Fair Isle must be descriptive rather than analytical.

Migration, 1958

For bird migration the 1958 season surpassed any in the last decade. Only October, of all the recognised migration months, was disappointing. The strength and variety of the movements is reflected in the greatly increased ringing-totals, and in the impressive list of rarities.

The first three months of the year were often bitterly cold, with long periods of snow-cover. Few birds were moving before late March, but the earlier months were not without interest. The Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* which had arrived in early December 1957 remained until about January 22nd. A Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* appeared in North Haven on February 12th and was found dead a few days later—there is only one previous record in our files. A Slavonian Grebe *P. auritus* which came on the same day remained until mid-March.

Two big movements of Snow Buntings occurred on February 14th and 28th, and the first Skylarks passed north on the 23rd; all on mild days following periods of snow. Oystercatchers began to return on February 20th. More larks passed through in a mild period in the first days of March, but both these and Snow Buntings were apparently driven south from Shetland by the return of north winds and snow on the 10th.

From March 12th to April 6th the winds were easterly, but for the first two weeks it was cold and dry, and few birds came in. Five or six different Stonechats *Saxicola torquata*, almost unknown in recent years, appeared on March 16th and 17th, and odd ones were often present until mid-April. Lapwings started to arrive on the 17th, and more larks, with the first Twite on the 21st. The first White Wagtail was on the 22nd, and the earliest Meadow Pipits next day. On the 26th there were four Mistle Thrushes, and the first Lesser Blackback; on the 29th Lapwings increased to over 300, and several Rooks and Jackdaws arrived.

The approach of an occlusion and a great SE gale on the 30th ended the dry, cold spell, and brought one of the biggest avalanches of birds in the whole history of Fair Isle. Migrants poured into the isle all day on the 30th; Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, and Robins in hundreds, many Skylarks and Star-

lings. Lapwings now numbered over 500; small parties of Fieldfares and Redwings, a few Ring Ouzels and Wheatears were also seen. The front passed on the night of March 30th-31st, and on the following day the Blackbirds were in thousands, and several hundred Chaffinches had come in. The other common migrants seemed little changed, though many were sheltering from the gale, in the west cliffs. New species seen included several Hedge Sparrows, Brambling, Yellowhammer, and a Woodlark. On this day (with no visitors to help) we ringed the record number of 253 birds.

On April 1st few birds had left, and many more Skylarks and Chaffinches had arrived. New species were three Shelduck and a Moorhen. The gale ended on this day, and many of the migrants departed by the 2nd; most of the rest gradually moved away in the next week, but others were too weak to emigrate, and numbers died of starvation. Some ringed Blackbirds and several Moorhens stayed for a month or more, and odd Chaffinches till early June. Hedge Sparrows, all of the Continental form, continued to pass until late May, an unprecedented passage, and more were ringed than in the whole of the previous ten years.

The rest of April was very quiet by comparison. The only further thrush-passage was in small movements on April 11th-12th and 19th-20th. A Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* and a Tree Sparrow on the 4th were interesting; and odd Pied Wagtails, with a few Whites, occurred from the 3rd onwards. There was an early Sand Martin on the 5th, and a Hen Harrier on the 6th. A few of the local Twites and Wheatears came on the 10th, and Meadow Pipits on the 18th; the main body of all three species arrived on the 22nd. Black Redstarts were seen on several days in mid-April, and the only warbler of the month, a Chiffchaff, on the 13th. The first Swallow was not until the 22nd, and the first House Martins came on the 28th.

The late spring passage, in May and early June, was uncommonly good. The weather was changeable, with an almost unbroken sequence of shallow depressions crossing the country, but overnight SE or E winds were frequent, and with these came many small migrants from the continent. Such movements occurred on May 4th-6th, 11th, 14th-15th, 18th, 23rd-25th, 29th, 31st, and June 3rd-6th. Those of the last week of May were the strongest. Sedge Warblers, Garden Warblers, and Whitethroats were all more numerous than for several years, and there was no recorded precedent for the arrival of about fifteen Tree Sparrows on May 14th. At least two of these remained all summer. Another species we seldom see in numbers was the Red-backed Shrike, which was usually present from May 23rd to June 10th, with up to five daily in early June. The rare birds included three races of the Yellow Wagtail—

Blue-headed, Grey-headed, and British; different Ortolans *Emberiza hortulana* on the 8th and 14th; a Thrush Nightingale *L. luscinia* (third Fair Isle and fourth British) caught on the 15th; a Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* from the 18th to 20th; Bluethroats *Cyanosylvia svecica* on the 23rd and 24th; Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* on the 24th; a Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* from the 30th to June 1st; a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* on May 31st, which stayed for at least three weeks; a Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* on June 5th; an Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* on the 6th, a male Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* on June 12th, and a female next day. The first of several Quail *C. coturnix*, which were to breed later on the isle, was seen on June 13th.

The passage of local and north-western species was usually quite distinct from the arrivals of Continental birds, though one of the biggest movements of Greater Wheatears, on May 6th, coincided with a fall of European birds. Other movements were in light southerlies with fine weather, or in south-westerlies behind a depression—presumably deflected east after leaving Scotland. A small passage of Wheatears, Meadow Pipits, White Wagtails, and various waders on May 1st-2nd falls into the first category, and a much stronger movement of north-western species (including eight Pink-footed Geese) on the 21st-22nd, into the second.

Arrivals of hirundines were also mainly in fine weather with light southerlies or calm conditions; probably most were of British stock and had passed north of their usual breeding area. Swallows and House Martins were seen almost every day in May and early June, but the biggest arrivals (larger than for several years) were in the last week of May and the first week of June, when a few Swifts accompanied them. The largest Swift movement (some 25 birds seen) was however delayed until June 16th.

Fair Isle received a small share of the Crossbill irruption at midsummer. The first bird appeared on June 27th, and up to twelve were seen into the first week of July. A further arrival of eighteen birds on July 11th passed quickly, and there were only odd stragglers until the 28th.

As usual, most of the migrants from late June to early August were waders and gulls. Curlews were scarce, not exceeding the score of fifteen on July 1st, but Whimbrels, Redshanks, Dunlins, Knots, Ringed Plovers, and Turnstones all passed in fair numbers in July, the best days being the 21st and 24th. Green and Common Sandpipers, Greenshanks, and Golden Plovers, were additional species in early August. A big flock of at least 210 Lesser Black-backs arrived on July 15th, when a big herring-fleet was offshore, and a party of up to 50 Common and Arctic Terns, with a few Sandwich Terns,

took up residence on the same day, remaining until early August. Common and Black-headed Gulls passed in small numbers throughout July and August, but movements of the former were on a quite exceptional scale in the foggy easterly weather of late August, exceeding 1000 on the 16th and 19th, and more than 800 on the 21st and 23rd.

Less common birds included an adult Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* from July 29th to August 10th, and two premature "winter visitors," a Glaucous Gull on August 2nd, and a Whooper Swan from the 3rd to 6th.

Apart from single Barred and Garden Warblers in the second week of August, and a small increase of Wheatears on the 14th, passerine migration was absent before the middle of the month. Small drifts of warblers and other night-migrants came with easterlies on the 16th-17th, 19th-21st, and 24th, the most interesting species being Wood Warbler (two 19th, odd birds later); two Ruffs, a Red-backed Shrike, and an Ortolan on the 21st; thirteen Tree Sparrows on the 23rd; an Icterine and a Barred Warbler on the 24th. Different Barreds were seen on the 27th and on the 29th, when there was also an early Fieldfare, and a magnificent Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*.

Another feature of late August was the heaviest passage of Swifts so far recorded; with over 150 on the 21st, and almost as many on the 24th and 26th. The first influx came in dismal pre-frontal weather; the other two may have been redetermined passage from Shetland of the earlier birds.

Movements of the more typical late August migrants—Wheatears, Pipits, and White Wagtails—were on a small scale this season. Wagtails were most in evidence on the 24th and 29th, Wheatears (including some "Northern" birds) on the 26th, and Meadow Pipits on the 27th. A few north-western waders and Merlins were with them.

The first ten days of September were much livelier. This was a time of light easterly winds, often with sea-fog, and European birds poured into the isle. Apart from a flock of some 500 Common Gulls on the 2nd and 3rd, Willow Warblers, Wheatears, Whinchats, and Garden Warblers formed the bulk of the movements, which began on the 1st but were strongest from the 3rd to the 5th. A very wide variety of less common species was involved. Apart from a few Redstarts and White-throats, at least four different Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla*, five Red-breasted Flycatchers *Muscicapa parva*, and over a dozen Bluethroats occurred. Rarer passerines included at least 3 Barred Warblers, an Icterine (5th), Aquatic and Reed Warblers, *Acrocephalus paludicola* and *scirpaceus* (6th), several Turtle Doves, 3 or 4 Ortolans, a Yellow-breasted Bunting *E. aureola* and a Lapland Bunting (9th). Two Northern Pied Woodpeckers

Dendrocopus m. major appeared on the 3rd and a trapped bird remained till the 30th. Tree Sparrows again increased, to 11 on the 5th, and some stayed until the second week of November. Several Wood Sandpipers and Little Stints, up to fifteen Ruffs, and the unusual number of 60 Knots (on the 5th) may also be mentioned. In the aftermath of these movements, two immature Rose-coloured Starlings were seen on the 12th, a Scarlet Grosbeak *Carpodacus erythrinus* on the 15th, and two more Red-breasted Flycatchers on the 17th.

Passage from Shetland and the north-west resumed about September 10th, and continued as a trickle in the rest of the month. Greater Wheatears peaked on the 10th, 14th, 20th and 23rd, with an increasing proportion of the really large birds of Greenland stock. Meadow Pipits and Twites had their best day on the 12th, and Snow Buntings (present since the 8th) increased to twenty on the 13th. On the 18th, a handsome American wader, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites sub-ruficollis*, spent the morning on Bunes. This was the second record of the species in Scotland.

A Buzzard was seen on the 22nd. Next day, and on the 24th, a few small night-migrants were drifted across the North Sea. Both Rustic *E. rustica* and Little Buntings were caught in Vaadal on the 23rd; the former remained until October 9th. Lapland Buntings reached their best score of the autumn—only seven—on September 25th. The first Redwing came on the 26th, when Snow Buntings first reached three figures.

A further drift of continental birds came in rough southeasterly weather between September 30th and October 6th. Most of the passerines involved gradually built up their numbers to peak on the 5th—Redwings and Chaffinches being the commonest species (up to 150 and 80 respectively), whilst Siskins reached 15 and Blackcaps 10. Other small birds included three Bluethroats (5th), two Petchora Pipits *Anthus gustavi* (30th and 5th), a Richard's Pipit *A. novaeseelandiae* (30th to 4th), and a Little Bunting (3rd to 6th). Late Swifts, Turtle Dove, and *flava* wagtail occurred on the 5th and 6th. About 320 Common Gulls were present on the 3rd. A Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* was caught on the 10th and stayed to the 12th. There was another Richard's Pipit on the 14th, and one or two Northern Chiffchaffs were usually present from October 17th to the end of the month.

From the time of the first big fall of Continental Redwings—over a thousand of them—on October 13th, we were concerned almost exclusively with the passage of winter visitors to Britain; but most of this was delayed until November. Further small falls of 200-250 Continental Redwings came on the 26th and 29th, but Fieldfares and Blackbirds were scarcer than in any previous October. Iceland Redwings were in very small

numbers, (mainly in the last ten days of the month), despite the mainly westerly weather. Snow Buntings passed in quantity on the 13th and 31st. The only notable vagrant of late October was American—a Gray-cheeked Thrush *Hylocichla minima*, second for Fair Isle and Britain, on the 29th. A Black Redstart and a late House Martin were seen on the 30th.

Movement of geese and swans, on the other hand, was stronger than is usual in the cyclonic weather of October. Goose passage had really begun on Sept. 23rd, when twelve Barnacles passed south. There were eight more on October 1st, and one on the 9th. Grey geese passed frequently between October 10th and the end of the month, the greatest number being 32 on the 20th; all those certainly identified were Pinkfeet, but five Grey-lags arrived on November 2nd. Whooper Swans passed almost daily between October 10th and November 3rd; twenty were seen on October 20th.

November was exceptionally mild and free from gales, and more birds were seen and caught in the first week of the month than in the whole of October. November 2nd saw the first big fall of Fieldfares, Blackbirds, and Woodcock, but this was eclipsed on the 5th, when these thrushes both topped the thousand mark and over 200 Woodcock were shot. A few Robins and a Chiffchaff were also present. Up to four Redpolls of indeterminate race were seen from the 4th onwards, and one caught on the 6th was found to be a Mealy Redpoll *Carduelis f. flammea*, a race which had "irrupted" in eastern Europe earlier in the autumn. (Not one Greater Redpoll *C. f. rostrata*, usually much the commonest form at Fair Isle, was identified in 1958). Also seen on the 6th were a Blackcap and, much more exciting, a White's Thrush encountered by James A. Stout at Wirvie. On the 7th our latest records of Red-breasted Flycatcher and Garden Warbler were made. A further big passage of about 600 Snow Buntings followed on the 8th.

The next week was quiet, though a Pale-breasted Barn Owl *Tyto a. alba* was reported on the 12th, and a late Greenland Wheatear and a Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* were with us on the 13th. The latter was our first record since 1925. Snow Buntings peaked again at 400 on the 17th, two Glaucous Gulls were seen on the 18th.

Further moderate falls of Fieldfares, Blackbirds, and Woodcock came on the 19th-20th and 23rd. Lapwing and Skylark showed obvious increase with the first of these two movements; a Waxwing, several Robins, a Woodlark, and four Wood Pigeons also arrived. Odd Blackcaps came with both arrivals, and Sparrowhawk, Long-eared Owl, and a few Meadow Pipits with the second. Yet another peak of 400 Snow Buntings coincided with this influx. A Waxwing seen on the 24th may have

been the same bird as on the 20th. Two Corn Buntings and a Reed Bunting were recorded on the 27th. Other late-November birds included a Shelduck from the 20th to 27th and a Grey-lag which stayed for at least ten days from the 29th. Several hundred Great Black-backs and several thousand Herring Gulls descended on the island on November 25th, and this curious phenomenon was repeated on December 13th; in neither case was there any obvious cause, either in the weather conditions or in the proximity of a fishing-fleet.

Very little movement was recorded in December. Skylarks, Snipe, and a few other birds came in on the 10th, during a cold spell. Another Waxwing was present on the 11th, and a Hedge Sparrow on the 13th. Fifteen Pink-footed Geese passed on the 11th. From the 13th to the 15th a few Fieldfares, Redwings, and Blackbirds arrived.

In all, 175 species were certainly recorded during the year. The Buff-breasted Sandpiper was new to the island list.

Breeding Birds

Arctic Skua. The population study of the Arctic Skua colony made good progress in 1958. An important parallel development began when Mr Peter O'Donald, of the Dept. of Genetics, Cambridge University, embarked on a study of the Genetics of the Colour-Phases. His assistance with the field-work, for five weeks of the summer, was invaluable.

The colony increased from 56 to 61 breeding pairs, and the birds had a most successful season, rearing 89 chicks from 119 eggs. All but one of the chicks were ringed.

Of the 101 breeders colour-marked by the close of the 1957 season, 14 failed to appear in 1958. By the end of 1958, 115 of the 121 breeders were marked, many of them with the new P.V.C. bands, which we hope will last longer than the celluloid type. Only 26.4% of these birds belonged to the intakes of 1954 or earlier; 24% first bred in 1955, 19% in 1956, 13.2% in 1957, and 17.4% were new. Seven of the matings dated from 1954 or earlier (one has endured since 1948), seven more were founded in 1955, sixteen in 1956, eight in 1957, and no fewer than twenty-three were new in 1958. The many changes in matings included three divorces of 1957 pairs—all six partners nesting with new mates. Four birds which bred on the isle in 1956 but not in 1957 returned to nest in 1958.

Four birds ringed as local-born chicks were nesting for the first time, bringing the total of such records to seventeen; of which three birds first nested at five years old, eight at four years, and six at three.

Bonxie. The Great Skua colony suffered a setback in 1958, decreasing from 21 to 17 pairs. For the first time there was ex-

tensive human interference with the nests, and twelve eggs from seven nests are known to have been stolen or broken. In spite of this, the birds had a most successful year, rearing twenty-four young from the twenty-six eggs that hatched.

Other species. Thirty-one species are known to have nested on the isle in 1958, and one other, the *Storm Petrel*, probably did so. Petrels were seen at night in many parts of the west and north coasts, and a number were netted at Malcolm's Head and Wester Lothar. One pair of *Peregrines* reared two young near Gunnawark. A pair of *Quail* nested successfully at Taing, the first certain breeding since the war years. A census of breeding *Oystercatchers* gave 45 pairs. *Lapwings* more than doubled their previous numbers to eight, perhaps nine, pairs. The single pair of *Ringed Plovers* on Bunes was unsuccessful—one bird is believed to have died. A pair of *Snipe* reared at least one chick in Gilsetter. A dawn census of singing *Wrens* in late May-early June located 45 songsters, compared with 48 in 1957. A pair of *Blackbirds* reared at least one youngster.

For further details see *F.I.B.O. Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No 2.

The Traps

No additional traps were built in 1958, but several alterations were made to existing ones. The funnels of the Gully and Single Dyke traps were reshaped. Four new catching-boxes with 45° angle glass were made to a new design by Lt. Col. H. G. Brownlow, and these have proved highly efficient.

Mist-nets were used to a greater extent than hitherto, and accounted for a number of unusual birds which could not have been caught by other means. Fifteen species were caught only in mist-nets.

Ringing

The 1958 ringing total was 4579 birds of 101 species. This was over 1250 birds and 14 species more than in any previous year, and the first time that any British organization had achieved the century of species. The increase was due partly to the excellent migrations, and partly to the new emphasis on sea-bird ringing. Northern populations of sea-birds have been rather neglected by ringers, and much remains to be learned of their movements. Some interesting results are already emerging from this work.

Blackbirds, with a total of 1017 ringed, head the individual scores for the first time since 1954. The Wheatear follows with 523. Other leading scores are Puffin 450, Shag 264, Starling 262, Meadow Pipit 244, Redwing 200, Rock Pipit 172, Fulmar 167, Arctic Skua 115, Robin 102, Chaffinch 84, Twite 81, Gar-

den Warbler and House Sparrow 63, Willow Warbler 60, and Song Thrush 53.

Five species appear for the first time in our lists: Mistle Thrush (4), Petchora Pipit, Yellow-breasted Bunting, Ortolan (2), and Tree Sparrow. Other notable captures were Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruff (2), Pied Woodpecker, Wryneck (4), Gray-cheeked Thrush, Stonechat (3), Thrush-Nightingale, Bluethroat (10), Aquatic Warbler, Icterine Warbler (3), Barred Warbler (4), Subalpine Warbler (2), Yellow-browed Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher (4), Lesser Grey Shrike, Scarlet Grosbeak, Crossbill (2), Rustic Bunting, and Little Bunting.

Totals of birds ringed at Fair Isle.

Season	Total	Number of Species
1948	288	38
1949	1505	63
1950	2366	74
1951	2236	77
1952	1933	74
1953	2552	80
1954	2367	75
1955	2478	82
1956	3313	81
1957	2925	87
1958	4579	101

Recoveries Reported in 1958

The observatory was exceptionally fortunate in the number of recoveries of ringed birds reported during the year. Outstanding results were a Bonxie in Greenland, a Blackbird which returned to Norway after reaching Fair Isle in autumn, the first report of a British-ringed Meadow Pipit in Italy, the first foreign recovery of a Rock Pipit, and a White Wag-tail in Mauretania. In addition, there were two recaptures on the isle, of birds of which had been ringed elsewhere: a Sparrowhawk from the Isle of May, and a Blackbird from Heligoland.

A *Storm Petrel* netted on Malcolm's Head on July 18th 1958 was at Mousa in Shetland three weeks later, and a 1958 *Fulmar* chick was stranded on the isle of Sanday in Orkney in late September.

Five *Shag* recoveries were sent in: two 1957 chicks from Whalsay and Scalloway in Shetland in April and September 1958; and three 1958 chicks, one caught at sea about 30 miles south of Fair Isle in early September, and taken to the Cuxhaven Zoo, another found dead in the same week on

Sanday, and the third on the west coast of Norway in November.

A *Sparrowhawk* ringed on the Isle of May on September 23rd 1957 turned up in the Gully trap on May 7th 1958.

A *Corncrake* caught in the hostel garage on May 11th was found dead in South Ronaldsay, Orkney, on July 30th 1958.

A young *Oystercatcher* of 1957 was in the Wirral, Cheshire, in February 1958, and a 1958 chick at Morecambe in late September.

There was a long-delayed report of a *Ringed Plover*, ringed on August 26th 1954, and killed at Santander, Spain, on May 27th 1956.

The Greenland *Bonxie* was a 1956 chick, found dead at Julianehab Fjord in the south-west of Greenland on July 28th 1958.

A young *Lesser Black-backed Gull* of 1958 was killed near Cadiz in December.

A 1958 *Puffin* chick died (oiled) at Seaton Carew, Co. Durham, on Christmas Day.

Three *Redwings* were reported, all of the Continental form. One ringed in November 1957 was near Athlone, Ireland, in the following January; a bird of October 1956 was in the Gironde, S.W. France, in early March 1958; and one ringed on November 1st 1958 was at Tomintoul, Banffs., twelve days later.

Six *Blackbirds* of the 1958 crop were recovered before the end of the year. Three ringed in the "avalanche" of late March-early April are among them: one from Brae, Shetland, a week after ringing, another from Central Norway in late April, and the third from Nordrhein-Westfalen, West Germany, in July. The latter was presumably in its breeding-area, but all our previous summer recoveries have been from Scandinavia. Probably the big movement drew on a southerly population which is seldom drifted so far north. Three birds caught in November 1958 were recovered as follows: one ringed on the 5th was in Co. Galway in December, another taken on the 21st had crossed to Egersund, S.W. Norway, by December 1st, and one caught on the 26th was near Fort William in late December. In addition to these, a German-ringed bird caught on Heligoland on November 17th 1958 was recaptured on Fair Isle on the 29th; there are strong grounds for believing that it had arrived there on the 19th or 20th.

Two *Wheatears* were found in S.W. France, a local juvenile in the Landes in mid-September, and a September migrant in the Gironde in late October.

The four *Meadow Pipit* returns included two veterans—a

juvenile of 1953 which was near Cadiz in January 1958, and another of 1954 killed in the Basses Pyrenees in early October. A September capture of 1957 died in the Landes in late February 1958. The fourth bird was the first British-ringed Meadow Pipit to be found at any distance from the western seaboard of Europe and Africa. Ringed on September 1st 1956, probably a passage-migrant, it was killed near Venice in November 1957.

A *Rock Pipit* youngster ringed in early July 1956, and recaptured several times until late August in that year, was found dead at Den Helder, Holland, in March 1958. It was known that some of the local *Rock Pipits* leave the isle in autumn, as there have been four earlier recoveries in Orkney and Scotland, and winter recaptures are almost all of birds more than one year old; but this is the first indication of long-distance migration by the local stock.

Finally a migrant *White Wagtail* trapped in August 1957 was killed near Boutilimit (N. of St Louis), French West Africa, in October 1958.

A few recaptures of local birds deserve mention. An *Oystercatcher* ringed as a chick in 1951 was found injured in June 1958. It was apparently one of a pair nesting on Meoness. (One of the breeding *Lapwings* was also seen to be ringed, probably a local chick of an earlier year, but this was not caught). The oldest *Rock Pipit* of the season was a juvenile of 1954, recaptured in each year since then, except 1957. One *Starling* has survived since September 1949, and several others since 1951. A juvenile *Twite* of 1953 was still living at the end of September 1958, and a female *House Sparrow* ringed in early May 1952 was caught in August.

Fuller details of the recoveries and recaptures will appear in the *Bulletins*.

Ectoparasites

The collection of ectoparasites continued, and Peter Hope Jones made a special study of flea-infestation in the *Rock Pipits*, delousing nearly all the season's captures. Fleas were also taken from the bodies of twelve other species of bird, and from the nests of six species. Other ectoparasites were taken from twenty-two host-species. The collections are being submitted as usual to the Hon. Miriam Rothschild and Miss Theresa Clay.

Publications

The Bulletin. There were again publication delays in 1958, due mainly to the pressure of other work in Mr Waterston's office, where the master-sheets for the mimeographed issues were prepared. Happily, it was discovered in the aut-

umn that Messrs Walter Thomson of Selkirk could print the Bulletins and Reports at little or no extra cost to the Trust, and the appearance of Vol. 4 No. 1 (New Series) of the Bulletin, in a new guise, has been generally welcomed. No. 2 will have been despatched to Friends of Fair Isle before appearance of this report, and we can now say with confidence that any future delays should only be the result of a breakdown in the Warden's health, or his typewriter.

Papers and Notes. The following contributions concerned with ornithology at Fair Isle appeared in 1958:

DAVIS, Peter. "Black-throated Thrush at Fair Isle." *Brit. Birds* 51:195-197.

"Thrush Nightingale at Fair Isle." *Brit. Birds* 51:198.

"Serin at Fair Isle." *Brit. Birds* 51:199.

"Rustic Bunting at Fair Isle." *Brit. Birds* 51:199-200.

"Lanceolated Warbler at Fair Isle." *Brit. Birds* 51:243-244.

DAVIS, Peter, and HOPE JONES, Peter. "Thrush Nightingale and probable Nightingale at Fair Isle, and the Problem of Identification." *Brit. Birds* 51:356-357.

"Exceptional Passage of Common Gulls at Fair Isle." *Bird Migration* 1:36-39.

WILLIAMSON, Kenneth. "Bergmann's Rule and Obligatory Overseas Migration." *Brit. Birds* 51:209-232.

"Autumn Immigration of Redwings *Turdus Musicus* into Fair Isle." *Ibis* 100:582-604.

A paper entitled "The Genetics of the Colour-Phases in the Arctic Skua," written by Peter O'Donald with the collaboration of the Warden, has been accepted for publication in the journal *Heredity*.

The observatory has collaborated fully with the Editors of the "Recent Reports and News" feature in *British Birds*, and an account of the autumn migration in 1958 was contributed to the first issue of the new B.T.O. Bulletin, *Bird Migration*.

The Warden took part in the very successful "Bird Observatories Radio Link" broadcast in "The Naturalist" series on the B.B.C. Home Service on October 19th 1958.

STOP PRESS

As a result of the very severe weather on Fair Isle in February 1960 when snow conditions were the worst in living memory, much damage has been done to all the Traps—necessitating considerable expenditure on repairs.

Any donations towards the cost of these would be very much appreciated.

IAN R. PITMAN,
Hon. Treasurer.

