

# Fair Isle Bird Observatory

## REPORT

1959



*PETER E. DAVIS*

*Warden*

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PRICE 5/-

# Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

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## Trustees

Dr James W. Campbell; Dr John Berry; Mr A. G. S. Bryson; Dr F. Fraser Darling; Mr James Fisher; Col. W. M. Logan Home; Cmdr. Sir G. Hughes-Onslow, R.N.; Mr G. T. Kay; Professor M. F. M. Meiklejohn; Col. R. Meinertzhagen; Mr E. M. Nicholson; Mr Peter Scott; Dr A. C. Stephen; Sir A. Landsborough Thomson; Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards.

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*Hon. Secretary*:—Mr George Waterston, 21 Regent Terr., Edinburgh 7.

*Hon. Treasurer*:—Mr Ian R. Pitman, 48 Castle Street, Edinburgh 2.

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

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

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

*Bankers*:—The Bank of Scotland, 64 George Street, Edinburgh 2.

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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 1959****FOREWORD**

**T**HE work on Fair Isle has, in the year under review, gone on steadily and well under the enthusiastic regime of Peter and Angela Davis. Each year brings further interesting migrants to the Isle, and this year was no exception—in fact it continued the trend of recent years of even more American birds crossing the Atlantic and being recorded at Fair Isle.

The long-term study of the Arctic Skua colony is now yielding information of first-rate importance, and the data collected should shortly be sufficient for a full and fascinating study on this colony.

Outside the Isle, the event of the year was a gift by an anonymous donor of £4,000 to establish a Scottish Centre for Ornithology and Bird Protection. A property was purchased at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, and vested in the name of the Fair Isle Endowment Trustees and therefore forms an addition to the Endowment Trust Funds. The property has been leased to the Scottish Ornithologists' Club on a full repairing lease and with an obligation on the S.O.C. to keep it properly maintained. The S.O.C. covers any necessary annual expenditure by renting two rooms to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the first and second floors as private accommodation for Mr and Mrs George Waterston. The entire ground floor has been converted into offices—the S.O.C. occupying a large room as an Office and Library. The value to Scottish ornithology as a result of this handsome gift is immeasurable. The Centre is now also the headquarters of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust.

It is indeed very flattering that the importance of the F.I.B.O.T. as a mainspring of bird study in Scotland is thus recognised; and it must be a reassurance to all our generous supporters, and to all who are contemplating further assistance to our Endowment Fund.

ARTHUR B. DUNCAN,  
*Chairman.*

*FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST*

**TREASURER'S REPORT**

*Hostel Account.*

Last year I pointed out that we had cut our expenditure to the basic minimum consistent with keeping Friends of Fair Isle reasonably in touch with affairs through the medium of the Bulletins, and that we were dependent upon the Hostel showing a profit, or at least breaking even, if we were to avoid an annual financial loss. This is borne out by the 1959 figures and will, I am afraid, remain true until we have managed to build up the Endowment Fund very considerably.

In 1958 the true profit on the Hostel was £197 of which £105 was not paid in until after the close of the Account and is accordingly reflected in the present year's figures. You will see from the Account that in spite of this and in spite of a small rise in wages and fuel the Hostel has again shown a profit of over £100 (£208 less £105).

I would once more emphasize our indebtedness to Peter and Angela Davis for the hard work and good management which has achieved a profit on the Hostel in each ensuing year. Without the Hostel profit we would have to rely upon donations from Friends of Fair Isle or from others who wish us well, to avoid an over-all loss.

*Trust Revenue Account.*

There is not much to comment on in the Revenue Account, the final figures being much the same as last year. The difference in the profit carried to the Balance Sheet, £199 as against £440, being largely accounted for by the fact that we only received £25 in 1959 by way of donation and legacy as against £250 in 1958. We spent a little more on Bulletins in 1959 and also on travelling expenses. Apart from these two items the only two points calling for comment are the figures for 1959 of interest paid, £45 as against nil in 1958. This is in fact not a true entry since a proportion of it should have been entered in the 1958 Accounts, but was not charged up until after the close of the Account. The figure represents interest payable to Messrs J. & F. Anderson on the running debit balance in their books. This balance is largely covered and could be liquidated by the sale of £642, 3% Savings Bonds 1960/70 shown in the Balance Sheet, but so long as we continue to make a reasonable profit every year it has been thought better to hold these to redemption in 1970.

The second point is the increase in Income Tax recovered. This is due to recovery of tax on the increased income from the Endowment Fund.

In 1958, excluding legacies and donations and the Hostel profit, our annual income was £1,047 as against an expenditure of £949. On the 1959 figures it was £1,141 as against £1,174.

This is not as satisfactory a position as last year, and I would once again emphasize that until the Endowment Fund has been substantially built up we are very dependent on the continued support of Friends of Fair Isle, preferably through seven year Covenants, with their tax advantages.

Once more I would remind you that the immediate future of the Bird Observatory Trust depends on the subscriptions of Friends of Fair Isle, but that the ultimate future depends on substantial increase in the Endowment Fund by donation or legacy.

#### *Balance Sheet.*

In past years we have written down the value of the buildings, furniture and scientific equipment to what we regard as a reasonably accurate assessment of their true value. You will also see that the cash in hand as at 31st December, 1959, is £542, which more than balances the sum due to the Agents on their debit Account. A large part, however, of the cash in hand is required in the spring of each year for stocking up the Hostel, the remainder being available for reducing the debit balance.

#### *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 is shown in the Trust Revenue Account below, and the market value of the Fund as at 30th June, 1960, was £3,801, 13s 9d as against £3,949, 3s 2d at 30th June, 1959. The Fund consists of the following: £4,300 3% Savings Bonds 1960/70; £70 Whitbread & Co. Ltd. "A" Ordinary Stock; £10, 18s 9d in Bank Savings Account; and as already mentioned the Fund also holds the Heritable Property, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. Additions to this Fund are badly wanted.

Subscribers to the Endowment Fund 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, 1959

## 1.—Hostel Revenue Account.

		<i>Expenditure</i>		1958	1959
Stores at 31st December	... ..	£95	0 0	£100	0 0
Food Stuffs, Supplies, etc.	... ..	667	7 6	635	15 6
Telephone	... ..	30	15 1	25	12 8
Wages and National Insurance	... ..	194	12 2	213	11 6
Sundry Payments	... ..	46	5 9	46	8 7
Insurance of Huts	... ..	68	10 0	68	10 0
Fuel	... ..	96	12 6	116	13 8
Profit as at 31st December	... ..	92	11 11	208	11 7
				<u>£1291</u>	<u>14 11</u>
				<u>£1415</u>	<u>3 6</u>
				1958	1959
		<i>Income</i>		1958	1959
Board and Booking Fees	... ..	£1150	4 6	£1308	17 9
Miscellaneous Receipts	... ..	41	10 5	16	5 9
Stores as at 31st December	... ..	100	0 0	90	0 0
				<u>£1291</u>	<u>14 11</u>
				<u>£1415</u>	<u>3 6</u>

## 2.—Trust Revenue Account.

		<i>Expenditure</i>		1958	1959
Wages and National Insurance	... ..	£515	18 9	£552	7 6
Rents, Rates, Taxes, Insurance, etc.	... ..	22	10 1	11	4 0
Printing, Stationery, etc.	... ..	174	16 2	247	18 8
Subscriptions	... ..	2	0 0	0	0 0
Interest Paid	... ..	0	0 0	45	10 8
Travelling Expenses—Hostel	... ..	50	0 0	120	9 0
Repairs and Renewals—Hostel	... ..	94	0 2	118	12 8
Expenses of Administration	... ..	90	1 9	78	14 0
Profit carried to Balance Sheet	... ..	440	2 1	199	16 2
				<u>£1389</u>	<u>9 0</u>
				<u>£1374</u>	<u>12 8</u>

	<i>Income</i>			1958	1959	
Subscriptions, etc. ... ..	£612	5	7	£583	18	0
Income Tax Recovered ... ..	293	18	5	357	11	4
Interest on Savings Bonds ... ..	11	1	6	11	8	9
Income from Endowment Fund ... ..	129	11	7	142	7	3
Legacy Received ... ..	100	0	0	0	0	0
Donations Received ... ..	150	0	0	25	0	0
Profit on Hostel ... ..	92	11	11	208	11	7
Lecture Receipt ... ..	0	0	0	45	15	9
	£1389	9	0	£1374	12	8

### Balance Sheet as at 31st December, 1959.

#### *Liabilities*

Capital Account—						
Balance per last Balance Sheet ... ..				£866	19	1
Profit from Trust Revenue Account	£199	16	2			
Add: Received from Howden Trust	600	0	0			
				799	16	2
				£1666	15	3
Sundry Creditors—Endowment Fund ... ..				6	6	11
Balance due to Messrs J. & F. Anderson ... ..				413	17	11
				£2087	0	1

#### *Assets*

Buildings, Traps, etc., as written down ... ..				£200	0	0
Furniture, Furnishings, etc., at Fair Isle						
as written down ... ..	£500	0	0			
Less: Sold ... ..	15	0	0			
				485	0	0
Scientific Equipment as written down ... ..				150	0	0
Investment—£642, 3% Savings Bonds, 1960/70 ... ..				619	1	3
Consumable Stores—						
Food Stuffs ... ..	£10	0	0			
Live Stock ... ..	40	0	0			
Fuel ... ..	40	0	0			
Cash in Bank—				90	0	0
Trust Account ... ..	£18	16	5			
Hostel Account ... ..	498	0	7			
	£516	17	0			
Cash in hand ... ..	26	1	10			
				542	18	10
				£2087	0	1

EDINBURGH, 12th July 1960.—Examined and found correct.

LINDSAY, JAMIESON & HALDANE, C.A.

## WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 1959

The 1959 season began on February 18th and ended on December 31st. Between May 1st and December 4th, 154 people were accommodated in the hostel for a total of 199 "visitor-weeks," a slight improvement on the previous record of 1957. Visitors came from as far away as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, South Africa, Finland, France, Germany and Sweden. Apart from ornithologists and island-lovers, they included entomologists and botanists. University workers engaged on special projects included Peter O'Donald (skua genetics), Colin Pennycuick (the flight of the Fulmar) and Brian Armitage (geographical studies); they stayed for periods of five to nine weeks. A B.B.C. party under Archie P. Lee came in July to make recordings of the islanders and bird observatory staff, and a group working for the Rank Organisation came in October to make a short film, now generally released in the "Look at Life" series (No. 39).

My wife and I were very glad to retain the services of Miss Pat Adams as cook; the assistant warden was Roy Dennis, a proficient field worker.

### *Island Events*

The year saw a number of changes in the island community. The Till family departed from the shop in early October, and later the same month the Stouts of Shirva (the Post Office) made their long-planned emigration to New Zealand. The Post Office was taken over by the Thompsons from Springfield, whilst the shop was transferred to Alex. Stout of Upper Stonybrake and his bride, Miss Margaret Isbister of Lerwick. Their marriage on November 23rd was the major social event of recent years, and their decision to make their home in the island gave great pleasure and encouragement.

The Rev. and Mrs R. M'Connell, the missionary and school-teacher, also left the isle in October, after a decade of service to the community. The school remained open, under a temporary teacher, until the arrival of their successors, Mr and Mrs G. Cornish, in the early spring of 1960.

The M.V. "Meteor" returned to Fair Isle during the National Trust for Scotland's Islands Cruise on May 7th, and on the same day the new pier at North Haven was officially opened by George ("Dodie") Stout, the skipper of the "Good Shepherd."

On the economic side, the "Meteor" visit and the increased number of visitors to the hostel were very helpful to the island woollen industry; and the lobster fishing by three boats from May to August was both congenial and profitable. Some



extra work was provided by the reroofing of the house at Utra and the construction of a new Coastguard look-out on Malcolm's Head.

### *Acknowledgments*

We are again indebted to the islanders for their perennial friendliness and their help in many ways.

Two of our visitors, Andrew Macmillan and Patrick Sellar, each made us the welcome gift of a bicycle. Any further offers would be most gladly received!

Dr Barrie Juniper provided us with a long list of identifications of mosses collected by him in May. These are being incorporated in a new card-index intended to cover all aspects of the island's fauna and flora.

### *Co-operation*

There were further exchanges of information between the observatory and Dr W. R. P. Bourne of the Edward Grey Institute, in connection with the radar observations on migration in Scotland. This liaison is being extended to cover simultaneous watches at a second Scottish radar base in 1960.

The observatory also furnished regular reports to Kenneth Williamson, the Migration Research Officer of the B.T.O., for the "Bird Migration" bulletin and for the recent reports section of "British Birds." We would like to express our appreciation of his ready help with aids to identification and information from literature not accessible at Fair Isle.

The observatory entered into full co-operation with the new "British Birds" Rare Birds Committee, after negotiations which resulted in our exemption from providing descriptions of certain rarities which occur regularly on the isle.

We participated in three B.T.O. Enquiries, the national censuses of the Fulmar and Kittiwake, and counts of Bridled Guillemots.

A trap-line for catching the local field-mice was maintained from May to October at the request of M. J. Delany of Southampton University, who is making a study of *Apodemus* populations.

### *Breeding Birds*

ARCTIC SKUA. The population-study continued during a most interesting season, and a full report will appear in the Bulletin. The colony increased from 61 to 65 pairs, and by the end of the season 121 of the surviving 126 breeders carried colour-rings. The new P.V.C. colours introduced in 1958 proved satisfactory—none were lost in the first year.

It was a season of many changes in matings, including as

usual an excessive proportion of those established only in the previous year. An analysis of the age-groups of birds which have failed to reappear over the past three seasons indicates that 19.1% of breeders with only one year's experience did not return, compared with only 10.8% of those which had bred more than once. Perhaps there is a loss of these less-experienced birds to other Shetland colonies, and we hope to encourage a search for colour-ringed birds with the support of the B.T.O.

Watchers will also be asked to look for skuas marked as chicks on Fair Isle, and to catch them if possible. It is now evident that some of these do not return to their native colony as breeders. The intake of the first generation of chicks with durable rings, that of 1954, was probably completed in 1959, but only five have bred at Fair Isle. However, ten of the 1955 generation have already returned to breed, which must be a substantial proportion of those surviving. Nine of these joined in 1959, when twelve of the new breeders (half the year's new intake) carried rings given when they were chicks on the island.

Breeding-success was low in 1959; the 65 pairs reared only 69 young from 125 eggs. Losses were due mainly to predation and to disturbance by a greatly increased Bonxie population in the egg stage.

**BONXIE.** Although the Bonxies' breeding population increased by only two pairs, to nineteen, the non-breeding population was at least as numerous, following an influx in May. The settlement of a large area on the west side of the Arctic Skua colony by these non-breeders had disastrous consequences for some of the smaller skuas, and the encroachments are likely to continue in 1960. Their effects in 1959 are discussed in a forthcoming Bulletin.

The Bonxies had a poor breeding year, rearing only 14 young from 37 eggs. Losses were mostly caused by man.

One of the new breeders had been ringed as a chick on the isle in 1955.

**OTHER SEA-BIRDS.** Roy Dennis was responsible for much of the census work. The Fulmar had increased from an estimated 3000 sites in 1949 (James Fisher) to occupy about 5000 in 1959. The number of Kittiwake nests was about 2750. The breeding population of Shags amounted to some 1200 pairs. Great Black-backs numbered about 40 pairs, Lesser Black-backs 20 pairs, and Herring Gulls about 140 pairs. The twenty-three Guillemot colonies had about 2080 adult birds on the ledges during visits in June, and the population is estimated at between 1500 and 2000 pairs. Counts of Bridled Guillemots indicated that 9.8% of the population was of this form.

LAND-BIRDS. The less common species included single pairs of Peregrine and Snipe, one, probably two, pairs of Ringed Plover and Blackbird, and three pairs of Ravens. The Corn-crake made a welcome return; two, perhaps three pairs bred. The Lapwing colony continued to prosper, reaching ten or eleven pairs.

### *Migration in 1959*

The spring of 1959 was poor by comparison with that of 1958, owing to the prevalence of westerly winds. The migration began with diurnal movements of Skylarks and Snow Buntings on fine days in late February and early March. A few Stonechats occurred between March 3rd and 20th, a Linnet on the 10th. The first Meadow Pipit appeared on the 17th, and two *alba* wagtails on the 19th. With sporadic southerly or south-east winds in the last ten days of March, there were small movements of Blackbirds, Robins, Hedge Sparrows, Chaffinches, and some other continental migrants, but these never attained any great strength—the highest Blackbird score was only 50, on the 25th. Sub-rarities at this period included a Woodlark 23rd and a Black Redstart from the 25th. Several Pied Wagtails were resident for two weeks from the 27th. The first Wheatears arrived on March 28th, and the local Twites began to return on the 31st.

A trickle of Robins and Hedge Sparrows, presumably on re-determined passage, continued for much of April. A Great Grey Shrike stayed from the 2nd to the 7th, and an aggregation of ten Yellowhammers, by the 3rd, was exceptional for Fair Isle. Other continental birds were few, but several of the summer visitors came unusually early. Two Swallows on April 14th were the earliest ever recorded, and there has only once been an earlier Whitethroat than the one on the 15th. The first Chiffchaff was on the 14th, followed by Redstart and Blackcap 18th, two Greenshanks on the 19th, different Yellow Wagtails on 21st and 24th, Willow Warbler 25th, House Martin and Tree Pipit 29th, Corncrake and Cuckoo on the 30th. The only sizeable movements at any time in April were falls of 120-140 Common Gulls on 12th and 15th, and a good passage of Meadow Pipits and Greater Wheatears on the 28th and 29th. A male Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* was present from April 27th to May 10th, the first record of this common American bunting in Europe. Odd Lapland Buntings were seen on several days in late April, and there were three by May 1st.

May opened quietly, but by the 6th there was another big arrival of Greater Wheatears and Meadow Pipits, with White Wagtails and a Greenland Redpoll. A Grey-headed Wagtail appeared the same day, the first of three immaculate males seen during May. Between the 7th and the 11th fresh south-

easterlies brought moderate numbers of the commoner warblers and other small continental night-migrants, but most of these took shelter on the west cliffs. They included several Wrynecks, Bluethroats, and Ortolans from the 9th and 10th onwards, and a second Grey-headed Wagtail on the 11th. Most of these birds remained until the 14th, and some until the 17th or 18th. A very well-marked Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* was seen on the 16th and 18th. Hirundines were in fair numbers from May 8th to 12th, and again from 22nd to 24th. The only other feature of the second half of May was a curious passage of Bluethroats, with up to five birds daily between the 20th and 26th, and seven ringed in the week. An Icterine Warbler stayed from 24th to 26th, and the only Red-backed Shrike occurred on the last day. The third Grey-headed Wagtail was on the 28th.

Several interesting vagrants came to the isle in June: Marsh Warblers were trapped on the 12th, 13th, and 30th, a Red-necked Phalarope on the 18th was only the third recorded from Fair Isle, as was an Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* on the 27th and 28th. A Glaucous Gull passed on June 11th, a Red-backed Shrike stayed 24th to 30th, a Green Sandpiper from the 27th, and a Quail was reported on the 29th.

July was quiet, with the early wader passage on a rather small scale. A Wood Sandpiper was seen on the 8th, and a Ruff on the 14th. Different Glaucous Gulls were present on the 11th and 12th, and one again on the 18th. A Crossbill irruption began on the 12th, the first big arrival being 50 on 21st, followed by 41 August 1st, and small numbers until mid-September.

In August and September most of the commoner waders were in better numbers than usual, particularly those which breed in Greenland and Iceland. The Knot may be especially mentioned as it is often scarce; there were peaks of 35-40 August 20th and 24th. Rarer species included Spotted Redshank on August 9th and September 8th, four Grey Plovers September 13th. Common Gulls had maxima of 200-250 August 9th-10th, and 550-700 on 14th-15th. The north-western passerines began their main movements with a fall of White Wagtails and Iceland Wheatears on August 23rd, followed by a larger arrival of these species, with many Atlantic Meadow Pipits, three Merlins, and two Greenland Redpolls on the 26th. Wheatears and pipits increased further on the 27th, with two Great Northern Divers, thirty Wigeon, two Pintail, and the first Lapland Bunting, and the passerines peaked again on 30th and 31st. Greenland Redpolls numbered at least five by 31st, and Lapland Buntings at least ten, increasing to 26 by September 4th. Further waves of Wheatears, Meadow Pipits, and White Wagtails passed on September 7th-8th and 12th. A

second arrival of Greenland Redpolls began with four September 9th and built up to about twenty by the 16th. Snow buntings were first seen on the 12th and increased on the 16th. All these earlier movements were overshadowed by large arrivals of Meadow Pipits with Wheatears on September 19th, 20th, culminating in a rush of over 1000 Greenland Wheatears on the 21st, when 62 were trapped. A third influx of Redpolls followed on the 22nd and again there was a gradual build-up to over twenty, by October 2nd. Lapland Buntings increased similarly from four September 23rd to 17 October 2nd. Twenty-two small grey geese passed south on September 27th and a tired Greenland Whitefront was caught next day.

Turning to the continental species, the features of the early autumn were the scarcity of such common birds as Whinchats, Redstarts, Willow and Garden Warblers and Tree Pipits, and the relative abundance of less familiar birds. The Barred Warbler was often the commonest warbler on the island; over thirty were seen between August 18th and September 29th, and eighteen trapped. Six or seven different Icterines occurred between August 12th and 29th, and a Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* from 29th to 31st was only the second for Fair Isle and Britain. Two Scarlet Grosbeaks appeared on August 29th, four by the 31st, and one or two were seen frequently until September 25th. Different Arctic Warblers *Phylloscopus borealis* were caught on September 1st, 8th, and 17th, and there were Red-breasted Flycatchers September 12th, 13th, and 17th. Bluethroats were present from the 16th and 18th.

The four weeks of south-east wind began on September 24th, and successive large falls of European migrants made this the busiest mid-autumn period for many years. The Redwing was by far the commonest bird from the first arrival on September 25th until the last week of October, with peak numbers exceeding 1000 October 5th-7th and 11th-13th, over 3000 14th, and 1000-1200 18th to 20th. Blackbirds were later and in smaller numbers, peaking at 300 14th; Fieldfares were few until the 14th, when about 300 came in, and a similar number followed on the 20th. The main Song Thrush arrival was c.70 October 5th; Chaffinches and Bramblings had similar scores of c.50 on the 5th, but whereas Chaffinches did not increase again, Bramblings had a much greater maximum of over 250 on the 18th. An arrival of at least 50 Woodcock on October 13th was exceptionally early. These species are all expected in fair numbers in a normal October, but the special interest of October 1959 lay in the large-scale arrivals of species that are usually scarce or even absent. Robins, after a fall of c.50 October 5th, peaked impressively at over 400 on the 14th, whilst Goldcrests arrived in hundreds on the 5th, many of them remaining until they died. Chiffchaffs, Hedge

Sparrows, Siskins, Greenfinches, Yellowhammers, and Reed Buntings all passed in better numbers than for several years. Blackcaps and Redstarts were always about in small numbers. The rarer birds included four or five Red-breasted Flycatchers on September 26th, and at least five further birds at intervals to October 20th. Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* occurred on September 26th, October 2nd to 5th, 12th, and 14th; Bluethroats September 25th, October 5th, 9th, and 15th; a Shorelark *Eremophila alpestris* and three Richard's Pipits *Anthus novaeseelandiae* October 8th, at least two Great Grey Shrikes between the 13th and 20th, a Great Tit from the 13th, which was still present at the end of the year; a Hen Harrier September 28th; a Rough-legged Buzzard October 13th and 14th, Grasshopper Warbler and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* on the 15th, different Little Buntings *E. pusilla* on the 17th and from the 19th onwards; and a Northern Tree Creeper on the 17th.

The fine weather ended abruptly on October 18th, and was followed by the stormiest late autumn for several years, with gusts up to 100 m.p.h. in two gales, and up to 60-70 in several more. At rare intervals, usually with overnight southerly winds, there were small arrivals of winter migrants from Europe, mainly Woodcock and the thrushes. The best of these were on October 27th and 30th, November 2nd, 18th, and 21st. There were few other continentals, though representatives of several irruptive species came through. About half-a-dozen Northern Bullfinches passed between October 22nd and November 7th, with a late straggler December 10th; one or two Waxwings on most days between October 31st and November 18th; and up to eight Mealy Redpolls between November 7th and 21st. Up to twenty Siskins stayed through November, and up to three in early December. A Hen Harrier was reported on October 21st and 24th, a Common Buzzard seen November 7th, another Rough-legged Buzzard on the 10th, Shorelark 12th, and two different Short-toed Larks of the very grey eastern form *Calandrella cinerea longipennis* on November 21st and 24th. Up to three Lapland Buntings of a very pale type, thought to be of eastern origin, were present from November 16th until the first week of December. The last Chiffchaff was on November 2nd, but one or two Blackcaps were seen frequently until the 27th. A late arrival of c.20 Robins on November 22nd did not pass on; the survivors were still resident at the end of the year.

North-western species reappeared in late October, after a month with virtually no arrivals from that quarter. Up to thirty Whooper Swans passed on most days from October 18th to November 12th, and Grey Lag Geese were in similar numbers in the same period, with a few Pink-feet. A Bar-

nacle Goose was seen October 26th. Grey Lags came again in smaller numbers, with odd Greenland and European White-fronts, and a ringed Pink-foot, in the last week of November. Iceland Redwings had probably passed us by; the best score was only c.150 on November 10th. Odd Wheatears, apparently of the Greenland form, were seen until November 19th, four days after the previous latest record. Snow Bunting passage was well up to normal standards, with peaks of 500-800 November 3rd, 7th and 10th, and 400 21st. Glaucous Gulls came frequently between late October and early December, with a maximum of ten on November 17th, and several Iceland Gulls were identified in the same period. Most of these records coincided with big settlements of Great Black-backs and Herring Gulls, at the approach of storms. The greatest of these aggregations was on December 6th, when over 5000 Herring Gulls and over 1500 Great Black-backs came ashore.

Birds of 172 species were certainly identified during 1959, three fewer than in 1958.

### *Ringing*

The observatory's ringing total in 1959 was 4761 birds of 116 species, an increase of nearly 200 birds and 15 species over the previous records of 1958. The introduction of single-panel mist-nets, which can be used in windy weather, and greater use of the technique of dazzle-netting at night, improved the variety of the catch. Over 68% of the species seen during the year were also trapped, compared with 57% in 1958.

The sea-bird ringing programme started in 1957 was intensified, and is already yielding some remarkable results, as can be seen from the summary of recent recoveries which follows this report.

The leading scores in 1959 were Wheatear 539, Shag 496, Blackbird 491, Puffin 345, Starling 337, Meadow Pipit 275, Rock Pipit 214, Robin 212, Twite 152, Redwing 136, House Sparrow 128, Fulmar 111, Goldcrest 92, Arctic Skua 83, Guillemot 73, Great Black-back 68, Hedge Sparrow 48, Razorbill 45, Tystie 39, Herring Gull 37, Blackcap 36, Redpoll and Brambling 35, and Wren 30. Eleven species were new to the Fair Isle ringing list: Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, White-fronted Goose, Coot, Short-toed Lark, Hooded Crow, Great Tit, Tree Creeper, Booted Warbler, Corn Bunting, and Song Sparrow. Other interesting captures included Whooper Swan, 5 Jack Snipe, 22 Purple Sandpipers, 2 Glaucous Gulls, 2 Wrynecks, a Rook, 2 Stonechats, 11 Bluethroats, 3 Marsh Warblers, 4 Icterines, 18 Barred Warblers, 2 Wood Warblers, 2 Yellow-browed Warblers, 3 Arctic Warblers, 5 Red-breasted Flycatchers, Grey-headed and Blue-headed Wagtail, Waxwing, 2 Great Grey

Shrikes, Greenfinch, Linnet (both of which had been ringed only once before on the isle), Northern Bullfinch, 4 Scarlet Grosbeaks, Little Bunting, and 8 Lapland Buntings.

The annual ringing totals since the observatory began its work in 1948 have been as follows:

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
1959	4761	116

GRAND TOTAL: 31303 birds of 166 species.

The Johnston family at the Old Haa made a valuable contribution to the ringing work by trapping some 280 birds in 1959, including the Tree Creeper and the Corn Bunting.

### Recoveries

Fifty-six recoveries of birds marked at Fair Isle were reported during the year. Outstanding returns include a Fulmar in Spain, a Shag in the Baltic, a Puffin in Greenland, and a Bluethroat in Belgium.

A *Fulmar* chick ringed in August 1958 was killed on October 10th 1958 off Fuenterrabia in N. Spain, at the southern limit of the species' normal range. An adult of July 1958 was caught and released on a fishing vessel 12 miles E. of Scarborough, Yorks., on February 22nd 1959.

Three young *Shags* of 1958 and five of 1959 were reported, all in their first autumn and winter. Four of these had moved north to Shetland (two as far as Yell), and two others had wandered south, to Helmsdale in Sutherland and Loch Alsh in Inverness. Another was at Rekefjord in S.W. Norway in October. A more surprising return came from a 1958 chick caught off the Baltic coast of Schleswig-Holstein in late March 1959.

An *Arctic skua* chick of 1954 was found injured near Boddam, Dunrossness, Shetland, on May 30th 1959. It was in the vicinity of a small skua colony, and may have been a member of it.

A *Great Black-back* chick ringed on the Sheep Craig in 1959



was caught about 25 miles off Loch Inchard, Sutherland, in early December.

Three young *Razorbills* ringed in early July 1959 were shot off S. Norway; one in Oslofjord on September 25th, and two near Haugesund (almost due east of Fair Isle) in the first week of October. A fourth 1959 chick was caught near Baracaldo in N. Spain on November 23rd.

Three *Guillemot* chicks, all ringed on July 8th 1959, were also killed in S. Norway; two in the Skagerrak in early October, and the third on the North Sea coast in late November.

Two young *Puffins* ringed on successive days in July 1958 moved to widely-separated winter quarters. One was shot in the Julianehab district of S.W. Greenland on November 28th 1958, the first British auk known to have joined the enormous winter sea-bird concentration in that area. The second bird was found at Plaistow in Essex about January 14th 1959.

A *Song Thrush* ringed during the great avalanche of migrants on March 31st 1958 was shot near Poitiers in west-central France on January 1st 1959.

Two *Redwing* recoveries both concerned birds of the Iceland form. An adult trapped on November 8th 1957 was killed at Queyrac in the Gironde on November 1st 1959, and a first-winter bird of October 29th 1956 was at Castlebar, C. Mayo, on December 29th 1959.

There were twenty-two returns of *Blackbirds*. Fourteen of these fall into the normal pattern of direct passage from Norwegian breeding area to winter quarters in Scotland and Ireland. Four others were summer recoveries in the presumed breeding areas, three in S. Sweden and one in Denmark; it was interesting to note that three of these had been involved in the abnormal arrivals of late March and early April 1958, as had a bird recovered in Bedfordshire in January 1959, well south of the normal wintering area of the passage-migrants at Fair Isle. Another *Blackbird* outside the usual area of winter Germany in January 1959; and a second capture of the same period of 1957 was in S.E. Finland in April 1959, the most easterly recovery-point for any British-ringed *Blackbird*. The remaining recovery was the most curious: a first-winter bird marked on October 14th 1959 and recovered north of Bergen only two days later.

*Wheatears* marked as passage-migrants in August 1956 and August 1958 were reported respectively from Weisdale in Shetland in July 1959 and from the Mediterranean coast of France, between Marseilles and Toulon, in April 1959. The latter was well east of the usual recovery-areas for British-ringed *Wheatears*.

Perhaps the most extraordinary of the year's returns was

that of a female *Bluethroat* trapped on May 24th 1959 and found exhausted on the sea-front at Ostende (over 600 miles S.S.E.) only four days later. Males seen and trapped at this period were all of the northern Red-spotted form.

A *Meadow Pipit* ringed September 3rd 1958 was shot at Seville, Spain, in early November 1959.

Four *Starlings* were recovered in their first and second winters in Shetland, Orkney, and Caithness. A juvenile of June 1956 was caught exhausted on a ship about twenty miles south of Iceland at the end of February 1958. The lack of a precise recovery-date for this astonishing bird makes it difficult to know if it could have been a storm-driven vagrant, but it seems more likely that it had joined a north-bound ship in the vicinity of Shetland.

Further details of these recoveries and of the local recaptures will appear in the Bulletin.

### *Publications*

The Bulletin Vol. 4 No. 2 appeared in June 1959, and No. 3 was ready in December. The Annual Report for 1958 was unfortunately delayed by circumstances outside our control, and did not appear until the beginning of 1960.

The following notes and papers dealing with work at Fair Isle were published during the year:

DAVIS, P.: "How a British Bird Observatory Works." *The Ring*, 2: 125-127.

"A Second Gray-cheeked Thrush at Fair Isle." *Brit. Birds*, 52: 316.

(Spring Migration 1959 at) "Fair Isle." *Bird Migration* 1: 41-43.

(Autumn Migration 1959 at) "Fair Isle." *Bird Migration* 1: 97-100.

DAVIS, P. & DENNIS, R. H.: "Song Sparrow at Fair Isle, a bird new to Europe." *Brit. Birds*, 52: 419-421.

FITTER, R. S. R.: "Addenda to the Flora of Fair Isle." *Proc. Bot. Soc. B.I.*, 3: 172-173.

KIKKAWA, J.: "Habitats of the Field Mouse on Fair Isle in Spring 1956." *Glasg. Nat.*, 18: 65-77.

O'DONALD, P.: "Possibility of Assortive Mating in the Arctic Skua." *Nature*, 183: 1210-1211.

O'DONALD, P. & DAVIS, P.: "The Genetics of the Colour Phases of the Arctic Skua." *Heredity*, 13: 481-486.

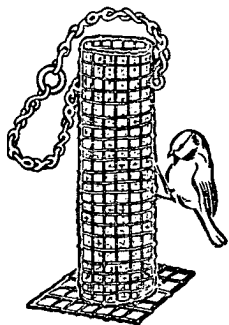
WILLIAMSON, K.: "Changes in Mating in a Colony of Arctic Skuas." *Bird Study*, 6: 51-60.

The Warden took part in three B.B.C. broadcasts during the year, in the "Birds in Britain," "Naturalist," and "Birds and Beasts" series.

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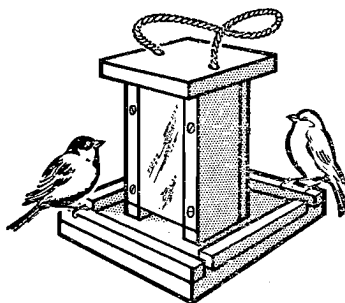
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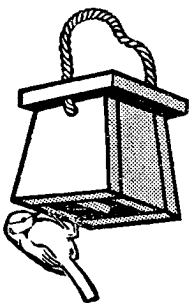
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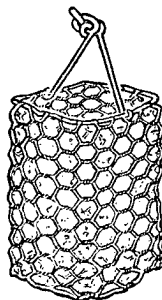
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