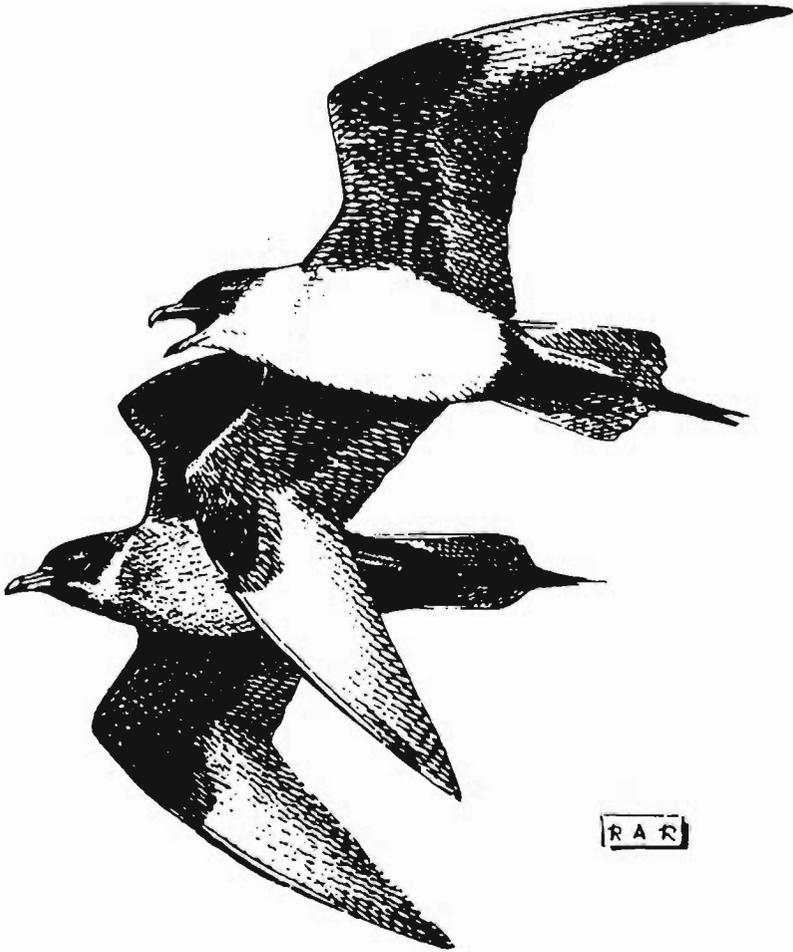


# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

## Report for 1997



50th Anniversary edition



# Fair Isle Bird Observatory

Report no. 50

**1997**

*Edited by Roger Riddington*

## CONTENTS

Chairman's report	Roy Dennis	3
Warden's report	Roger Riddington	5
The National Trust for Scotland, 1997	Alexander Bennett	9
One visit became twelve: visits to Fair Isle 1968–1997	Jack Keiser	11
The Northern Lighthouse Board on Fair Isle: the end of an era	Jim Watt	15
<b>ORNITHOLOGY</b>	Roger Riddington	
Monthly Summary		17
Systematic List		30
Rarities Committee Update		78
Ringing Report		79
Other Wildlife	Mark Newell & Roger Riddington	92
The Fair Isle Weather in 1997	Dave Wheeler	94
Financial Report & Accounts	Mike Wood	98
Fair Isle Endowment Fund		101
The John Harrison Memorial Fund		102

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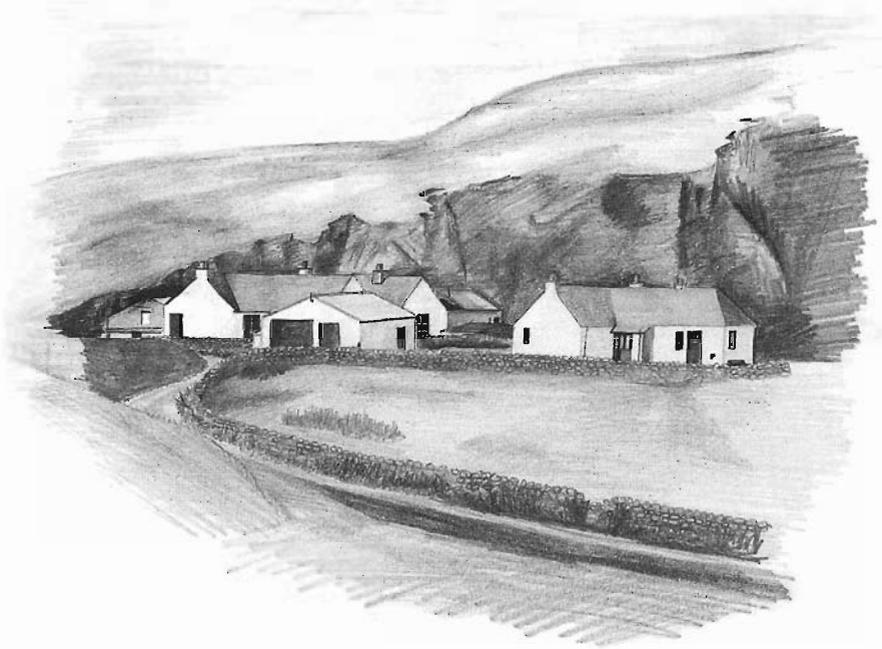
## *Chairman's Report*

Roy Dennis

When this report reaches you, we will be well into our 50th year on Fair Isle. This year, we can all celebrate the wonderful success of George Waterston's vision. Sometimes it has been a challenge for the Trustees to keep the Bird Observatory on the road, but we've made it – and we can look forward with optimism to the next fifty years.

Our next report will describe our anniversary year, but suffice for me to say that the Bird Observatory's success has much to do with the wonderful support received over the years from the Fair Islanders and from the 'Friends of Fair Isle'. And also from its staff. Last year was no different, and it is clear from the Warden's report that the day-to-day success is due to the excellent teamwork of the Observatory staff.

1997 was a good year for the Observatory. The seabirds had a mixed season but fared better than many colonies further south in the North Sea. The Arctic Tern colony is now extremely impressive as one arrives by air, and it is very encouraging that the importance of the seabird research is increasingly recognised. It was a



*SHIRVA and NORTH SHIRVA*

*Andy Smith*

solid year for migration studies and there was a marvellous run of Fair Isle specialities in autumn. It always amazes me to see the steady arrival each year of new species for the Isle, but 1997 broke the trend and none were seen. Maybe they are being saved up for the anniversary year. I'm sure there's still room to book a visit!

During the autumn, a report commissioned by the Fair Islanders, the National Trust for Scotland, the RSPB and the Bird Observatory was published. 'Managing the Sea for Birds – Fair Isle and Adjacent Waters' is part of the debate to secure a better future for the marine environment around the island. For the seabirds this is of great importance, but it is also crucial for the future of the Fair Isle community. Hopefully, the islanders will be able to look forward to harvesting the seas around their isle in a truly sustainable way without over-exploitation by large boats from elsewhere.

This is Roger Riddington's last report. He has been an excellent Warden, and we are very sorry to lose his services. His skills, ornithological knowledge and his ability to encourage strong team-work turned the Observatory fortunes at an important time. The Trustees thank him most sincerely for all his great work and wish him well for the future. At the same time we welcome Paul and Helen Baker who have taken over the reins at Fair Isle. After gaining their PhD's in ornithology at Dundee, they worked on rare birds in Hawaii – Fair Isle will be a challenging contrast to those sunny climes and we wish them success. I hope that many 'Friends' will meet them this year and in following seasons, for to be successful we need more visitors.

## *Warden's Report*

Roger Riddington

Even in these times when more and more people are aware of environmental issues, the variety of individuals and organisations that enquire as to the health of Fair Isle's seabird populations continues to surprise me. Seabirds are considered a barometer of the state of our seas, and it is encouraging to witness this widespread interest. It is a large step from passive interest to positive action, however; and in this context, the recently-born Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative is timely. As Fair Isle Bird Observatory reaches its half-century, arguably our most important long-term target is to contribute to some form of successful and effective protection of our marine environment.

In 1997, Fair Isle's seabirds enjoyed mixed fortunes. In terms of population growth, most species that were censused showed either expansion or stability. Gannets continued their steady increase, Great Skuas also reached record levels, and Arctic Skuas fared well. But the most dramatic changes were among Arctic Terns (with another enormous leap in the size of the island's colony, to 1730 pairs), and Kittiwakes, which continued to decline (over 35% since the last all-island census in 1992). Reproductive success, a more sensitive indicator of the health of the marine environment in any one year, suggested 1997 was mediocre. Most species fledged average numbers of chicks, and although no species suffered a disastrous season, both Fulmars and Kittiwakes had their worst year since 1990 (the height of the 'sandeel crash'), and Black Guillemot productivity was lower than in any other year since monitoring began in 1986.

It is pleasing to report that a new seabird monitoring contract (with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee) was negotiated during 1997, a three year contract which has been substantially expanded to encompass aspects of seabird diet previously covered within a separate contract with Scottish Natural Heritage. In addition, we received contract work from SNH this year to monitor the spread of the Arctic Tern colony at Tirryfield, adjacent to the airstrip, and behaviour of terns in relation to aircraft using the runway. Also on a seabird theme, we welcomed researchers from Durham University during summer 1997, who came to study certain aspects of the foraging ecology of Fair Isle's seabirds as part of a European collaborative project to investigate the impact of fisheries on seabirds.

As ever, a great variety of migrants passed through Fair Isle during the year, to delight those who saw them, and frustrate those who missed the best days! There were no new species for the island list in 1997, and the failure to record at least one first for Britain was a great disappointment to Mark and me in our last year! In fact, the year was short on scarce migrants for Fair Isle in general, and the overall number of species recorded was low, with several notable omissions. However, a spell in late September, which produced every one of the 'Fair Isle specials' at

precisely the right time, did wonders for satisfying visiting birdwatchers. The ringing year was productive, with a combination of the right weather and an enthusiastic team of ringers enabling large numbers of seabirds to be ringed.

Bookings at the Lodge decreased by about 12% on 1996, with a total of 2014 bednights in 1997. We say it every year, but the costs of travelling to Fair Isle surely continue to hamper our operation. We have to compete with an increasing number of exotic destinations that can be reached from major airports for the same cost as coming to Fair Isle. Group visits to the Lodge continue to be an important part of our business, and we were delighted to welcome return visits from 'Natural Habitat Holidays' (two groups) and 'Travelling Naturalists', plus first time visits from 'Speyside Wildlife' and 'Murphy's Wildlife'. On the down side, it was particularly sad that 1997 was the first year for some time that the Young Ornithologist's Club failed to attract enough participants to make a viable course on Fair Isle. It seems that travel costs are a major factor here too, and some form of sponsorship through our own John Harrison Memorial Fund to attract YOC groups back to Fair Isle is currently being investigated.

Work with the Ranger Service, part-funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, progressed well in 1997. In this, the third year of operations, a number of new ventures were introduced, most notably a regular link with the Fair Isle school, and the introduction of 'self-guiding leaflets', a series of short pamphlets designed to increase the flexibility of our approach to information dissemination. 'Flowering Plants' written by Nick and Elizabeth Riddiford, 'Fair Isle's Archaeology and Cultural Landscapes', written by Pat Thomson, and 'Seabirds', written by me, were available during the year, whilst leaflets describing the island's geology and cetaceans should be available by the start of next season. Another new feature was a questionnaire survey, carried out over the summer, which will provide an invaluable assessment exercise and allow future developments to be tailored to demand. At the end of the year, a detailed management strategy for the Service was produced, which forms part of a bid for increased funding from SNH. If successful, we hope this will result in an improved and expanded Service in the coming years.

For the second year in a row, maintenance issues at the Lodge were less dramatic and time-consuming than in 1994-95. There were no major problems with the roof, the boiler, or the plumbing in general, in 1997. The van made two trips to Shetland for servicing during the year, and was plagued by an annoying series of electrical and fuel problems. Nonetheless, it has served well for four years now. One of our generators was serviced on mainland Shetland at the end of the season, to repair the radiator and certain other problems, but apart from this the power supply caused few problems. Diesel, in one form or another, was our Achilles heel this year, with a leaking pipe to the boiler and a ruptured generator fuel tank among our most serious problems. The garages were re-roofed in the spring, which removed

## *The National Trust for Scotland, 1997*

Alexander Bennett

Early in the year, what was due to be one of the more significant events in the Fair Isle calendar, the commissioning of the renewable energy scheme, turned to disaster in March, when we suffered a major component failure. It was maybe not so much the embarrassment, more the disappointment that after all the planning and hard work up to that point, such a failure should occur. However, one year further on I am happy to report that both wind turbines are now operating and they are undergoing rigorous test programmes prior to commissioning in March 1998. In the meantime, the Fair Isle folk as consumers of electricity have had to endure the high unit cost of power produced by diesel generators. The old saying 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' is true to a certain extent, and it was a welcome relief to the Islanders when wind power returned in December. Despite all the problems of the past year, the resolve to be at the forefront of wind power technology is as strong as ever, at least on the part of the Trust and the Fair Isle Electricity Council, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Islanders for their forbearance during this long and tedious installation period. We can now look forward to a more settled period of power production and hopefully achieve our target of producing 95% of the Isle's requirement from a clean renewable source, the wind.

In the autumn, an unwelcome guest appeared on the eastern horizon in the shape of an oil exploration rig, the Borgsten Dolphin operated by Kerr McGee, to prospect the possibilities of oil reserves some 25 miles east of Fair Isle. Despite representations by the Islanders, the Trust and other interested agencies to the Department of Trade and Industry, who licensed this block, exploration took place and as yet no results have been forthcoming. As part of Kerr McGee's PR programme, they invited a group of Islanders and Trust staff to view first hand the whole process, and a day in the life of an oil rig. Whilst everyone was impressed with their attention to safety management and the measures that are in place to ensure that risks are minimised, the prospect of an operational field so close to Fair Isle causes great concern.

Oil exploration and production, together with over-fishing, all point to the need for a more strict control on marine issues. Whilst it would be nice to report on such controls as a result of the 'Braer' disaster in Shetland, and Lord Donaldson's report 'Cleaner Seas, Safer Ships', it is disappointing to note that few of the recommendations have been implemented and we are still at the mercy of the shipping and fishing industries. However, a great deal of progress has been made in terms of a marine protection area designation for Fair Isle. There is no lack of support from various agencies, predominantly those with conservation credentials, but it is still an uphill struggle to convince Government of the need for any sort of marine designation, to say nothing of its policing. In the meantime, the Fair Isle Marine

Environment and Tourism Initiative (FIMETI) is progressing well, gathering data on the seas around the Isle. Much of the work has been undertaken by the Islanders, not least the Fair Isle 'Eco' School which is involved with monitoring and recycling waste. After all, education at the earliest age is an investment for future eco-friendly environmental management. A great deal of effort has gone into this project to date, and with the Trust moving towards its own coastal management policy the work done by FIMETI can only be to our advantage and may even provide the first real opportunity to demonstrate our intentions in practise.

Each successive year on Fair Isle brings with it a few new faces, and this year we would like to welcome Pat and Stewart Wilson from Kirkcudbright. Pat and Stewart are well-known faces on the Isle, having visited and spent holidays there on many occasions, in addition to which Stewart spent his early youth on the Isle. Having retired from the Church of Scotland in Kirkcudbright, he is breathing new life into the Fair Isle Kirk and I feel he will bring care and sensitivity to his parishioners. I would also like to welcome back Michael Stout who has spent a few years in the south, adding to life's experience, and wish him well for his future on the Isle. Also we welcome Oscar David to North Shirva, a son to Karen and Dave, and Harry to Nedder Taft, a son to Emma and Ewen. Finally, I would like to welcome Paul and Helen Baker to the Observatory. I am sure Fair Isle will enrich their lives tremendously, and we wish them well in their task ahead.

I have no doubt that during my thirteen years as Factor for Fair Isle, I can honestly say that no two successive years have been the same. Fair Isle has presented me with many challenges: it is quite unlike any other Trust property, with its very own, quite unique way of life. Regularly, frustrations have turned to joy and it was extremely gratifying recently to hear the accolades given to Fair Isle by the Trust's Executive Committee, regarding their achievements. In my mind, that makes it all worth while.

## *One visit became twelve: visits to Fair Isle, 1968–1997*

Jack Keiser

In June 1968, I took the opportunity to visit Fair Isle for the first time. I understood it to be a remote island, somewhere in the north of Britain, difficult to get to, and a place I was unlikely ever to visit again. I came, and I have been coming back ever since.

It was at Inchriach in August 1963 that George Waterston asked Roy Dennis to be the next warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory, and I happened to be there. The idea of watching birds on a remote island intrigued me, and I promised Roy that I would visit. It was nearly five years however before circumstances allowed me to do so. The Isle proved to be more interesting and fascinating than I expected. The breeding seabirds on the cliffs were completely new to me, and I was intrigued too by the whole process of trapping and ringing birds. An added attraction was to see rarities such as Red-necked Phalarope.

The accommodation was somewhat primitive but adequate; the foghorns were noisy but bearable; the food was good, thanks to Triona's cooking skills; the cliff-climbing was challenging, especially to mist-net Storm Petrels on Stor Boolie; and my hosts Roy, Marina and family did everything to make my stay memorable. The only snag was the return trip to Grutness on Good Shepherd II, which had nothing to do with skipper Jerry – or was it Jimmy? – but all to do with the sea, and the result was that I vowed never to come again. Fortunately the possibility of air travel, when it came, changed my mind.

I regarded my first visit very much as a bird-watching holiday, and the notes which I wrote at the time were for the most part about birds. In them however, there was a passing reference to the fact that the island had a school, a church and a chapel; sheep, cattle and crops; and also 'inhabitants'. I remember well that I found the inhabitants very friendly. Indeed, on my third visit ten years later, some of the inhabitants had become my friends and I wrote at length about life on the island as I understood it. On my fourth visit in 1985, I was persuaded to attend a Saturday evening dance, and a year later I had the rather doubtful privilege of being allowed to clip a sheep! It survived, I believe! In 1990, I received the real privilege of being asked to preach the Sunday morning sermon at the Chapel.

Looking back over the thirty years that I have been coming to Fair Isle, I am surprised at the number and nature of the changes that have taken place. Breeding bird species have come and gone. New buildings have sprung up. Styles of living have changed. The island may still be somewhat isolated geographically, but I sense that life on the island is much more in touch with mainland Britain than it was in 1968.

The bird life now is as fascinating as ever, and the contribution of the Observatory to ornithology is, if anything, increasingly significant. Regretfully the nesting

Peregrines (two pairs in 1968) have disappeared, but the Gannet colony has come to stay and grow. In 1968, if a Bonxie was to be seen it entailed a walk to the north end of the island (about ten pairs nested); now they are widespread across the northern half of the island. Breeding Fulmars were confined to the cliffs. I first saw breeding terns (Common Terns) in 1973 on the North Haven stack; now we have a flourishing Arctic Tern colony. As for the rarities, they are all documented in the annual reports of the Bird Observatory. What is not recorded is some of the activities, and indeed antics, involved in netting, trapping and identifying. There were the two Red-necked Phalaropes that flew over the warden's head instead of into the mist-net in 1968. Another warden in 1978 made a gallant effort to catch a Snowy Owl in his jacket but failed miserably when the owl moved a couple of yards along the cliff face. Also in 1978, a Greenish Warbler made a quick trip to a hostel bedroom, to be shown to an overseas visitor laid low with a bug. And in 1992 the airstrip just about ran out of parking space for chartered aircraft bringing twitchers to look at Britain's first Brown Flycatcher. I could continue, but I will refrain!

Turning to the physical changes, many of them have been for the better. The Lodge, in spite of its problems, is a great improvement on the Nissen huts, and Good Shepherd IV is infinitely better than Good Shepherd II. I seem to remember the island as a somewhat untidy place when I first came, but it has been much improved by putting telephone lines underground and taking rubbish away in a skip rather than tipping it over the cliff or just leaving it lying around. It is clear that most of thecroft houses have been much improved by renovation and in most cases enlargement. The first aerogenerator was a great asset; let's hope that the second one will be too! Congratulations, I am sure, are due to those who have pioneered the diversification of crops, particularly of vegetables (no longer just Shetland cabbage, tatties and neaps), salads and fruit, even if the polytunnels don't blend into the landscape quite like plantigrubs! Stackhoull has been enlarged and has extended enormously the range of its goods, indeed to include some never heard of in 1968. Kirk and Chapel services have lost some of their formality which allows for greater variation in the presentation and proclamation of the Christian message, and for wider congregational involvement. But there has been no diminution in the heartiness of the singing, and the present choir is to be congratulated on the range of its repertoire. The spaciousness of the new community hall, no longer so new of course, always makes me wonder how social activities were carried on in the old one. Small as it is, the old hall makes an admirable museum and a worthy tribute to George Waterston. It is a pleasure to see it so well cared for, and on every visit to see something new on display.

Other changes have been more problematical. For example, fishing boats in the Haven have given way to sailing yachts. It is good to see the yachts. But with fishermen have gone the fish, or more precisely the other way round. On my early

visits I remember seeing fish hung up to dry. And in 1973, I watched Iain Robertson packing some fifty pollock he had caught into a barrel with salt. At the hostel we often enjoyed a meal of fish, bought off one of the visiting fishing boats. All this appears to be at an end. Or will the Fair Isle Marine Initiative come up with a solution?

For obvious reasons, hand-knitted articles for sale have given way to machine-knitted ones. I am therefore glad that I bought my traditional hand-knitted pullover, knitted by Annie, back in 1968. I still wear it. But the Fair Islanders are nothing if not innovators and therefore we ought not to be surprised by the diversification brought about through new and re-newed crafts. At present these include boat-building and the making of model boats, violin and stained glass manufacture; and the making of traditional Shetland spinning wheels and chairs.

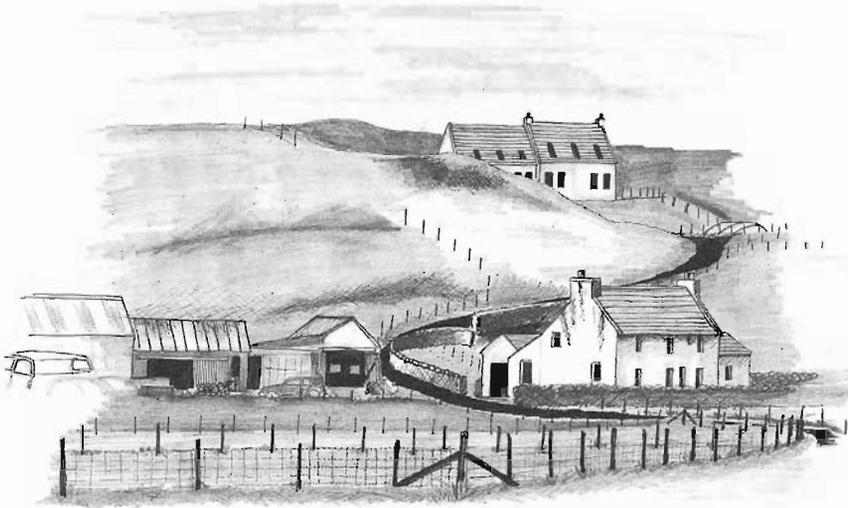
The community as a whole lost a great deal when the six lighthouse families left, but it also has to be said that the several incomers have made their own contributions to the island. It is now impossible to think of Fair Isle without the local builder and the meteorological centre.

Some of my most vivid memories, and memories which bring back a smile, have been connected with transport. In retrospect, though never at the time, one of Fair Isle transport's most endearing features is its unpredictability! Then there are all the little incidents like suddenly catching sight of a cow slung up in the air somewhere above Good Shepherd II and/or the quay. Did I dream it, or did I once see the contents of a torn fertilizer bag conveyed to its new destination in a mailbag? And where was the new community hall to be built? Little piles of breeze blocks deposited up the road from the Haven suggested it might be anywhere. As for the replacement door on one of the lightkeepers cars, it was a delight to behold with its neatly fashioned wooden frame and the use of standard door hinges and handle.

Over the years I have made many friends both at the Observatory and on the crofts. Every time I visit, the local folk extend a warm welcome, offer hospitality and seem willing to answer all my queries about the island's life and activities, past and present. It is always a comfort too, to know that there is a friendly nurse on hand in case of need. I have not been able to do much in return, though I did once carry off the island a consignment of lobsters in my personal luggage for onward delivery!

I shall certainly not easily forget all that I have learnt from those who have now passed on. There was Willie Eunson who was never wrong in his weather forecasts; Jimmy Wilson who was so much better at identifying birds than I; Jerry Eunson who let me into the secret of the water supply's purity; Aggie Stout who set tea and cakes before me as though I was the laird; Edith Stout who whetted my appetite with freshly made pancakes; and above all Alec Stout who taught me what it means to face illness with courage and fortitude.

I came to Fair Isle to study the birds, the ones nesting down the cliffs in their hundreds and the rarities alike. Thanks in large part to a succession of wardens and staff at the Observatory, the birds have been a constant source of enjoyment. But I now know that what turned my one visit into twelve is the Isle in its entirety and totality, and within that more than anything else those who I so rudely referred to as 'inhabitants' on my first trip, and who I now count among my best and closest friends.



*HAA and BURKLE*

*Andy Smith*

## *The Northern Lighthouse Board on Fair Isle: the end of an era*

Jim Watt

1986 was a year for celebration for the Northern Lighthouse Board, since it marked their bicentenary. 1998 brings another milestone: a programme of automation has been advancing rapidly over the past 10-20 years, and March 1998 will see the end of manned lighthouse services in Scotland. The last five manned stations will be automated by this date, and all remaining lighthouse keepers will be made redundant or accept early retirement. Fair Isle South has been chosen to be Scotland's last manned lighthouse, and this occasion will be marked by a ceremony on March 31st, when HRH The Princess Royal (Patron of the Northern Lighthouse Board) will be the guest of honour.

The Fair Isle stations (North and South) were built in about 1891, and the lights at both stations were first exhibited in 1892. There was accommodation for three families at each station, and the normal term of duty was between three and five years before transfer to another station.

The families were withdrawn from Fair Isle North in 1978, when the station assumed 'rock status': in other words, the lightkeepers worked shifts of 28 days, followed by 28 days ashore. There were six lightkeepers in total for this system, with three on duty at any one time. Stromness was the shore station at this point, with two men from the Isle recruited in addition to four Orkney-based men, to make up the full compliment of six 'keepers. In 1983, Fair Isle North was finally demanned, and became automatic. At about the same time, Fair Isle South took on rock status, with the 'keepers from Fair Isle North taking over the manning of the South Light.

My connection with Fair Isle began in 1974, when I requested a transfer from Edinburgh (I was stationed on the Bass Rock at this time). I had asked for posting to an Orkney or (preferably) a Shetland station, since I grew up on Shetland. Only a week later, I was informed that my transfer was official, and we were instructed to pack our effects for Fair Isle! Since my family would soon be starting school, we were to be stationed at Fair Isle South, since that was deemed to be a schooling station.

We arrived on Fair Isle in October 1974, a dull, damp day, and I must admit I wondered if I had done the right thing, bringing our young family to such a quiet, lonely Isle. But as time passed, it proved to be one of our better, if not best, transfers. As a family it suited us well, since I was home all the time, instead of doing duty on a rock station. However, all good things come to an end, and in April 1979 the inevitable happened. Notice of transfer meant another move: one we did not really want, though schooling requirements dictated otherwise. Lisa, my elder daughter, was due to begin secondary school, and moving at this time would minimise disruption. Prior to our departure, it had become increasingly difficult to

attract staff to Fair Isle and other isolated stations, and all other lightkeepers during and after the time of our departure (until Fair Isle South became a rock station in 1982), were single. So we have the distinction of being the last family to stay in lighthouse accommodation on Fair Isle.

Between 1979 and 1995, I served at Ailsa Craig, St. Abbs Head, Bressay and Muckle Flugga. In 1994, with the automation of Muckle Flugga well advanced, news of transfer to Fair Isle South came through. So, with three colleagues, I arrived back at Fair Isle South in 1995. The past three years have flown by, and now the wheel has come full circle, with the automation of Fair Isle South in March 1998.

An occupation and a way of life for decades will come to an end, and my colleagues and I will be made redundant in the name of progress, as have so many other occupations of our times. The reliability and the power of the computer, combined with the ease with which helicopters have access to remote stations, make isolation a relative concept. Some lightkeepers will doubtless not agree with my sentiments, but I am very sad that this stage of our job has arrived. Whilst we sympathised with colleagues who were previously made redundant, it is only now, with a few weeks to go, that the magnitude of it all strikes home. By the time this report is printed, we will have gone our separate ways: will anyone mourn our passing? Time will tell!

# **ORNITHOLOGY**

## ***Monthly Summary***

### **January–February**

The first two months of the year were characterised by predominantly westerly weather, and consequently there was little to report in ornithological terms. Numbers of over-wintering species were generally low, and there were few records of scarce migrants. A flock of Greylag Geese wintered on the Isle (numbers peaked at 45 in early February), but otherwise wildfowl were represented only by sporadic records of common duck species. One or two Peregrines were seen regularly, and on the 17th two were disturbed from a freshly-killed Woodpigeon (no doubt a welcome change from the regular diet of Fulmars!). The usual waders, gulls and passerines over-wintered, with returning migrants of species such as Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Lapwing and Skylark swelling these populations from late February.

In terms of more unusual records, a male Hen Harrier drifted past Leogh on January 6th, and a Coot was around the Walli Burn on January 13th-17th. White-winged gulls were well-represented, with regular sightings of one to three Glaucous Gulls, plus two Iceland Gulls on February 13th and another on February 24th. An unseasonal Puffin was close inshore on January 28th, two Long-eared Owls were at the Plantation on January 9th, and three Mealy Redpolls were seen on January 8th.

### **March**

Early March continued in a similar vein to January and February, with little to swell the pages of the Observatory log. However, from the middle of the month, early spring migrants appeared on cue and provided much-needed impetus to the daily census. Strong south-easterlies on the 17th triggered a moderate arrival of migrants on the 18th, when there were an estimated 400 Blackbirds, together with the year's first Grey Wagtail and Black Redstart. 60 Lapwings were logged the following day, when Jackdaw and Lapland Bunting were new. East or north-east winds veered southerly on the 21st, stimulating more new arrivals. An estimated 50 Woodcocks, seen during a late-winter Hill sheep round-up on the 21st, almost certainly represents a recent arrival, rather than a higher than normal wintering population. The first Northern Wheatears (two) appeared on the 22nd, when 165 Oystercatchers, 300 Skylarks, 30 Fieldfares, and the first Dunnock and Reed Bunting were also recorded. The 23rd brought the first Chiffchaffs (three), along with 35 Curlews, 20 Meadow Pipits, 10 Robins, 60 Redwings, 20 Chaffinches, seven Greenfinches and 65 Snow Buntings. Other indicators of early spring soon followed, with the first Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the 24th, and Great Skua on the 25th. Puffins were offshore on the 29th, and the second Coot of the year appeared on the 31st (staying until April 2nd, and frequenting the lower slopes of Mconess and the Walli Burn).

## April

April was ushered in on stiff westerlies, which ensured that there was little to report in the first week. An Iceland Gull on the 5th was the only record of the month, though Glaucous Gulls were seen intermittently throughout April. Also on the 5th, Puffins were ashore for the first time, and a Black Redstart was seen. Skylarks reached their spring peak on the 6th with a count of 375, the first Rooks were seen on the 7th, then on the 8th mild southerlies brought a few thrushes (50 Redwings, 30 Song Thrushes), four Northern Wheatears and the first Brambling. Meadow Pipits reached 100 on the 9th, when there were at least 10 Rooks.

Winds remained west or north-west throughout the mid-month period, and only a trickle of new arrivals were logged. Two Whooper Swans on the 11th were followed by two Greenland White-fronted Geese on the 12th, together with 150 Meadow Pipits and 120 Redwings (which increased to 150 the next day). Light westerlies on the 15th heralded a better day at last, with a male Tufted Duck, 100 Common Gulls, the first Swallow of the year, nine Alba Wagtails, 40 Northern Wheatears, nine Chiffchaffs and three Siskins. Similar weather on the 16th brought more migrants, during and after the morning Tystie census, most notably three Common Scoters, a male Sparrowhawk, three Arctic Skuas, Sand Martin, Blackcap and Carrion Crow (all new for the year); plus 35 Curlews, two Black Redstarts and 125 Northern Wheatears. The wind veered to a northerly quarter on the 17th, bringing colder weather. The spring's only Jack Snipe on the 17th was followed by 210 Northern Wheatears and 150 Redwings on the 18th, and the first Green Sandpiper on the 19th. A welcome interval of south-westerlies on the 20th was a short-lived respite from the cold, and one which produced three Whimbrels, two Collared Doves and a Ring Ouzel, all new for the year. Cold, north or north-east winds then prevailed until the 26th, denting prospects for our first major arrival. Ten Greenland White-fronted Geese were new on the 22nd, as was a splendid drake Pintail near Burkle. Water Rail, Short-eared Owl and the spring's peak count of five Ring Ouzels were recorded on the 23rd, with 170 Oystercatchers, 140 Northern Wheatears and 30 Bramblings on the 24th. However, the 24th was more memorable for a confiding Shorelark on Malcolm's Head, the first record during what proved to be one of the best springs ever for this scarce visitor to Fair Isle.

South-easterlies on the 26th brought much hope but only the merest glimmer of spring: the year's first Willow Warbler and four Linnets. Cool south-south-easterlies remained with us until the last day of the month, but low temperatures held back many migrants to the south of Shetland. Sightings on the 26th included the only Pink-footed Goose of the spring, plus 43 Golden Plovers, 225 Meadow Pipits, 10 Robins and six Chiffchaffs. The first Tree Pipit of the spring appeared on the 28th, along with 150 Northern Wheatears and four Willow Warblers. The 29th was a better day, bringing the first Arctic Terns, House Martin and Redstart, together with 35 Swallows, Black Redstart and 55 Fieldfares. South-westerlies on the 30th produced

17 Whimbrels, 25 Black-headed Gulls and 75 Fieldfares, though most interest was generated by a delightful group of five Shorelarks at the western end of Wirvie.

## May

May started quietly, with unsettled weather for the first week of the month, but no south-easterlies. The first Common Sandpiper appeared on the 1st, whilst light westerlies on the 2nd brought 95 Golden Plovers, a Short-eared Owl and counts of 275 Meadow Pipits and 300 Northern Wheatears. Light winds again on the 3rd produced a fine drake Scaup in South Harbour, and the year's first Cuckoo. Rain and strong north-easterlies on the 4th grounded a Spotted Redshank, flushed from the Walli Burn, and the first Whinchats. Stiff northerlies on the 5th were at least dry, and struggling north came the year's first Greenshank and Wryneck, whilst other sightings included a late Peregrine, Glaucous Gull and a Shorelark at Wirvie. Fifteen Whimbrel, four Common Sandpipers and 200 Meadow Pipits were recorded on the 6th, but the sporadic snow showers were a poor welcome for the first Grasshopper Warblers! May 7th was at last a little warmer, and marked a week or so of predominantly east or south-east winds. On the 7th, a Shelduck flew north past Bunness and the first Common Terns were back in North Haven. A great variety of migrants were recorded on the 8th, including single Quail and Wryneck, first records of Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and Pied Flycatcher, 10 Tree Pipits, 250 Northern Wheatears, four Lapland Buntings and five Reed Buntings. Best of all, a splendid female Hawfinch arrived at the Observatory for a protracted stay in the kitchen garden, where it delighted many visitors with close views and occasional visits to the bird table! On the 10th, warm conditions, with a light west or south-west wind, set the scene for one of the best days of the spring. Arctic Terns arrived in force, with at least 300 over Tirryfield. A Common Crane flew over the Isle, and headed out of sight towards Orkney, though it clearly had second thoughts and was later rediscovered near Pund. Then, late in the day, a long-overdue rarity was discovered: a smart male Subalpine Warbler at Lower Stoneybreck, then Stackhoull. Other sightings that day included Long-eared Owl, 35 Tree Pipits, five Redstarts, the first Bluethroat, Stonechat, Garden Warbler and Bullfinch, and 15 Reed Buntings. The 11th also produced high quality birding: the highlight was a Hoopoe at the Raevas, briefly, whilst elsewhere the first Yellow Wagtail, ten Redstarts, seven Whitethroats, 15 Willow Warblers, four Pied Flycatchers and a record 50 Carrion Crows were discovered. On the 12th, the female Hawfinch at the Observatory was remarkably joined by a male, and the two remained until the 21st. A new Shorelark was at Kiln o' Skroo, whilst Cuckoo, Long-eared Owl, 40 Swallows, four Black Redstarts, four Ring Ouzels, three Grasshopper Warblers and the first Lesser Whitethroat swelled the day's log. Highlights of the 13th were Quail and Goldfinch, together with five Sedge Warblers and the first Reed Warbler of the spring. The 14th marked a change to light south-westerlies, but as is often the case on Fair Isle, a change in wind direction after a spell of south-easterlies was all to the good. Wirvie was the place to

be, with a Short-toed Lark near Easter Lothar Water, and a bright Red-throated Pipit above Wester Lothar. The beginning of a marked hirundine passage was also noted, with counts of 80 Swallows and 10 House Martins. The following day, the most exciting birds were again in the north of the island, with a trip of six stunning Dotterels on the flat area to the north of the peat banks, and continued presence of the Short-toed Lark. Hirundines numbered 350 Swallows, 15 House Martins and seven Sand Martins, Tree Pipits peaked at 45 and the first Blue-headed Wagtail of the year was seen. The wind backed south-east on the 16th to provide another good day: the highlights were two Quails, a Wryneck, the second Subalpine Warbler of the spring (a dull female near the Gully), the first Red-backed Shrike and the third Hawfinch! Winds backed to the north-east on the 17th, with colder conditions; two Bluethroats and seven Red-backed Shrikes were the main new arrivals.

The wind remained north or north-east until the 24th, and spring migration slowed somewhat, though still with plenty of variety to keep observers on their toes. The 18th brought the first Wood Sandpipers (two), Swift and Spotted Flycatchers, together with two Wrynecks and three Bluethroats, whilst the 19th produced Quail, Common Rosefinch and a Rustic Bunting seen briefly at Midway. Five Bluethroats and seven Spotted Flycatchers represented the most notable arrivals on the 20th, whilst the 22nd brought a pair of Shelducks, three Sparrowhawks, Short-eared Owl, yet another Shorelark, five Bluethroats and two new Common Rosefinches. By the 23rd, the migrant situation was distinctly more static, though a party of four Common Cranes heading leisurely north over the island were enjoyed by many; late sightings of Merlin and Iceland Gull was also reported. However, on the 24th, a shift to very light south or south-westerly winds brought another pulse of migrants to the Isle: a male Goosander, two Quails, Wood Sandpiper, 45 Swallows, Stonechat and 10 Lesser Whitethroats were joined by the second Rustic Bunting of the spring, at Hjukni Geo, and a Thrush Nightingale around the buildings in North Haven. Next day came the first Icterine Warbler, and the log count of Red-backed Shrikes peaked at eight. The 1997 theme, that of multiple sightings of certain scarce migrants, was reinforced on the 26th with the third Coot and fourth Hawfinch of the year, followed by a late Barnacle Goose and the tenth (and final) Shorelark of the spring on the 27th. Three days of south-west or west winds from the 28th were not without interest: the highlight of the 28th was the third Subalpine Warbler of the month (at Busta), backed up by late sightings of Great Northern Diver and Yellowhammer. On the 29th, hirundine passage was evident with 100 Swallows and 25 House Martins recorded, whilst the count of Red-backed Shrikes again reached eight. On the 30th, Tufted Duck, Short-eared Owl and first records of Turtle Dove and Red-breasted Flycatcher were reported, along with two Quails in Da Water, one of them singing. A singing bird remained on the island until July, but there were no positive signs of successful breeding. Finally, on the 31st, three Manx Shearwaters were seen on the crossing to Shetland.

## June

June started slowly, with three days of cold north or north-east winds. Two Red-throated Divers were seen on the 1st, along with 75 Swallows, 25 House Martins and a Bluethroat. A Short-eared Owl and a count of five Red-backed Shrikes were the highlights of the 2nd. Southerly winds on the 4th were instantly more rewarding, producing the first records of Corncrake, Marsh Warbler and Crossbill. The next day marked the start of a week with predominantly south-east winds; but the great potential and high hopes for this spell remained largely unfulfilled. A Bluethroat, a second Marsh Warbler and five Garden Warblers were joined by only the second Turtle Dove of the spring on the 5th. Also, an unstreaked *Acrocephalus* warbler at North Haven was seen well and showed all the characteristics of Blyth's Reed Warbler. Frustratingly, it was not seen quite close enough to determine fine details of wing structure, and it evaded all efforts at capture. On the 6th, one of the biggest surprises of the spring was Fair Isle's second-ever spring Barred Warbler, trapped at the plantation. The 7th produced Icterine Warbler, Common Rosefinch and the second Thrush Nightingale of the spring, at Barkland. Remarkably, another Barred Warbler was trapped at the Plantation on the 8th, whilst a splendid Hobby was seen at Springfield. Then on the 9th, the fifth anniversary of one of Fair Isle's best-ever spring days, a modest arrival of migrants comprised 20 Black-headed Gulls, 30 Swallows, 40 House Martins, and single Marsh and Icterine Warblers.

In a sense, that day marked the end of the spring migration, with the rest of the month characterised by cool, breezy weather, with winds predominantly between north and east, and just isolated migrant records. On the 13th, along with six Swifts



CORNCRAKE

Ben Epstein

and six Crossbills, were a new Common Rosefinch and the fifth Hawfinch of the spring. Crossbills were to feature throughout June and July, with up to 30 on several dates and a peak of 40 on the 24th, making this the best year since the massive 1990 irruption. Two Sandwich Terns were new for the year on the 17th, and a late Glaucous Gull was loafing with local Herring Gulls on Landberg on the 21st. The following day, the third Barred Warbler of an exceptional spring sequence was trapped at the Plantation. A Sandwich Tern on the 24th, an exceptionally late Thrush Nightingale at Lower Stoneybreck on the 26th and an equally out-of-season drake Scaup at Golden Water on the 30th, rounded off the month.

## July

If there was a general feeling that June 1997 had promised much but delivered little, then the reverse was true of July. Inevitably, the first half of the month was 'high summer' and migrants were few and far between. However, a Marsh Warbler was trapped on the 2nd, and the 5th produced an impressive list of migrants: another Marsh Warbler was trapped, and Spotted Redshank, Sandwich Tern and 30 Crossbills were recorded. The last three records all came from the tiny hide set up at the Puffin colony at Roskilie, and in a light south-westerly: a perfect example of Fair Isle's capacity to surprise! Two Red-throated Divers and three Sandwich Terns on the 7th preceded a quiet spell: until mid-month, when returning waders began to feature in the Observatory log. Five Purple Sandpipers, Bar-tailed Godwit and seven Whimbrels were seen on the 13th, whilst the 14th produced another Sandwich Tern and the 15th a Common Rosefinch. On the 17th, there was again a good variety of waders, including 40 Knot, two Ruffs, Bar-tailed Godwit, five Whimbrels, 35 Redshanks and 17 Turnstones. Then in the early evening, we enjoyed one of the best finds of the year: a male eastern Black-eared Wheatear was found at Schoolton (and stayed on the island to complete its first-summer moult, last seen on 8 September). A Leach's Petrel was trapped in the early hours of the 18th, whilst on the 19th, as the dust from the Black-eared Wheatear was still settling, foggy conditions produced another major rarity; a smart male Red-headed Bunting at Lower Stoneybreck. Traditionally, all records of this species are assumed to be escaped cagebirds, but this one showed no signs of captivity, and did its credibility no harm by arriving shortly after an eastern Black-eared Wheatear.

Small numbers of south-bound waders continued to pass through, including 20 Dunlins on the 20th and two Black-tailed Godwits on the 21st. The only Little Grebe of the year was in South Harbour briefly on the 23rd, whilst the 24th saw arrivals of 45 Knot, three Sanderlings and 90 Common Gulls. Another Sandwich Tern appeared on the 26th, whilst eight Whimbrels, and Fair Isle's first-ever summer record of Hobby, came the following day. Waders and gulls dominated the log on the 30th, with a variety of waders (including 12 Sanderlings), 95 Black-headed Gulls, 175 Common Gulls, and the sixth Sandwich Tern of the month.

## August

Light south-westerlies at the start of the month ensured a quiet few days, with 285 Common Gulls on the 1st, Black-tailed Godwit and Cuckoo on the 2nd, Leach's Petrel (trapped) and seven Ruffs on the 3rd, and 12 Herons on the 5th being most noteworthy. A day of light south-easterlies on the 7th had immediate effect, however: an adult Rose-coloured Starling at Busta, and the first Barred Warblers of the autumn (two). Also seen that day were seven Whimbrels, a Wood Sandpiper and 175 Common Gulls. Waders on the 8th included 165 Oystercatchers, three Green Sandpipers and 65 Turnstones, whilst Short-eared Owl and Red-backed Shrike were new on the 9th. The third Leach's Petrel of the autumn was trapped on the 11th, and during the evening of the 12th, there was a small arrival of migrants following a day of light easterlies, including the first Wood Warbler of the year, 20 Willow Warblers and a Common Rosefinch.

A few days of fog and light winds produced little during the mid-month period: Barred Warblers increased to three on the 13th, whilst the 16th brought two Black-tailed Godwits, 40 Curlews and 300 Common Gulls. Seven Herons, four Shelducks and a Wood Sandpiper were new on the 17th, then on the 18th, an almost imperceptible switch from light NNW to NNE winds brought a small arrival of birds. Sixty Golden Plovers, 375 Northern Wheatears, Icterine Warbler, five Barred Warblers, 10 Garden Warblers and Wood Warbler were the notable components of the day's census. Next day, only the second Hen Harrier of the year, a Short-eared Owl and a new Common Rosefinch were logged. The next batch of migrants arrived in a strong southerly wind on the 21st, when 20 Knot, 15 Swifts, 375 Meadow Pipits, an Icterine Warbler and 35 Willow Warblers were recorded. Seawatching during stiff south-westerlies on the 22nd produced six Manx and three Sooty Shearwaters past South Light, whilst waders on the 23rd comprised 30 Ringed Plovers, 25 Dunlins, a Bar-tailed Godwit and 120 Redshanks. Also seen on the 23rd were two Short-eared Owls, whilst the count of Alba Wagtails increased to 90 (mostly White Wagtails), and Barred Warblers reached seven.

A light south-westerly on the 24th backed south-easterly in the evening, the start of one of the best migrant spells of the whole year, as the wind remained east or south-east until early September. Every day produced new arrivals of note. On the 25th, a crisp juvenile Dotterel on Ward Hill was the highlight, whilst other waders included 80 Golden Plovers, 28 Dunlins and a Black-tailed Godwit. Passerines included single Wryneck and Great Spotted Woodpecker (the latter, a juvenile male that clearly decided the island was to its liking, and remained through the winter), 500 Meadow Pipits, 120 Willow Warblers and two Common Rosefinches. On the 26th came the first Merlin of the autumn, the White Wagtail count rose to an impressive 175, and there were three Flava Wagtails, 15 Garden Warblers and a Wood Warbler. A Peregrine, 440 Common Gulls, a new Wryneck and an Icterine Warbler were highlights of the 27th, but the 28th was the best day of this spell, and

one of the really memorable days of the year. Wader numbers and variety were good (including 10 Ruffs, 90 Snipe, single Bar-tailed Godwit and Wood Sandpiper), whilst the count of Common Gulls increased to 450. However, most attention focused on a superb fall of passerines, which included seven Wrynecks, 15 Tree Pipits, five Redstarts, 40 Whinchats, the first Aquatic Warbler since 1994 (in the oats at Upper Stoneybreck), 20 Reed Warblers (a record island count), five Icterine Warblers, eight Barred Warblers, seven Whitethroats, 100 Garden Warblers, 300 Willow Warblers, 10 Spotted Flycatchers, 45 Pied Flycatchers and the only Oortolan Bunting of the year. New arrivals the following day included the only Little Stint of the year, a Spotted Redshank and a Red-backed Shrike, whilst counts of some species increased still further, notably Wryneck to 10 and Whinchat to 70. The only new passerine of note on the 30th was the first Lapland Bunting of the autumn, but also seen that day were more waders (including 14 Ruffs, five Greenshanks, six Common Sandpipers and the first Curlew Sandpiper of the year), and at least ten Manx Shearwaters on the crossing to Shetland. The last day of the month brought the autumn's first Sparrowhawk, counts of 500+ Meadow Pipits, 150 White Wagtails and 230 Northern Wheatears, and the Isle's first Greenish Warbler for two years, flycatching in the Kirn o' Skroo.

## September

South-easterly winds continued where they left off in August, and the 1st was another splendid day, with counts of many common migrants topped up (following a gradual dwindling of numbers since 28 August) and various new arrivals. Top billing went to Greenish Warblers (one trapped at the plantation, presumed to be yesterday's Kirn o' Skroo bird, plus a new individual at Smirri Geo), and an early Little Bunting at Springfield. Good counts of other passerines included four Wrynecks, 15 Tree Pipits, 12 Reed Warblers, four Icterine Warblers, six Barred Warblers, 70 Garden Warblers, 125 Willow Warblers, 25 Pied Flycatchers and two Red-backed Shrikes. South-easterlies continued on the 2nd, and there were counts of 600+ Meadow Pipits and 140 White Wagtails, plus an impressive nine Icterine Warblers, and three Wood Warblers. Pied Flycatchers increased to 30 and there were two Common Rosefinches. Sparrowhawk and Curlew Sandpiper were the main new arrivals of the 3rd, then on the 4th strong southerlies tempted a concerted seawatching effort, which brought good rewards. Fulmars were passing South Light in enormous numbers (up to 2500 per hour) in the morning, but the Manx Shearwater count, 40 in five hours, was outstanding: the previous day-total record for Fair Isle is a mere nine! The 5th marked the start of a long, long period of western-quarter winds, although birds continued to arrive for a couple of days. On the 5th, a Corncrake in Da Water, a Black-tailed Godwit, 150 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, three Wood Warblers and 10 Goldcrests were new, whilst the 6th brought two Bar-tailed Godwits, 10 Swifts and a Grasshopper Warbler, with counts of 600 Meadow Pipits and 425 Northern Wheatears.

But from the 7th, the reality of westerly weather began to hit home, and ten days of very thin birdwatching followed. One exception was the first Red-necked Phalarope since 1991, a moulting juvenile which sought shelter in Hesti Geo from strong north-westerlies and a boiling sea. Also seen that day were two Pintail, four Lapland Buntings and three Greenland/Iceland Redpolls, the first of a substantial passage through the island. On the 14th, a Great Snipe was seen briefly by one lucky observer near North Shirva. During a south-westerly gale the following day, seawatching stalwarts were rewarded by 11 Sooty Shearwaters, 10 Storm Petrels and three Leach's Petrels past South Light. Nine Pink-footed Geese were the first of the autumn, and the count of Common Rosefinches increased to four. But the island remained essentially quiet. Up to seven Lapland Buntings were seen on the 17th, a new Corncrake and the first Jack Snipe of autumn were found on the 18th, and Greenland/Iceland Redpolls peaked at 20 on the 19th, when other Icelandic arrivals included six Whooper Swans and 75 Snow Buntings.

At this point, morale amongst visiting birders was reaching rock bottom, and talk of the 'worst-ever' autumn was rife. The weather forecast produced only gloom, and western quarter winds looked set to continue. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to take into account the wider meteorological situation: and sometimes it pays simply to remember that birding on Fair Isle may be very unpredictable! A light west or north-west wind on the 20th produced Sparrowhawk, Short-eared Owl, ten Goldcrests and the last Arctic Skua of the year. But crucially, a Yellow-breasted Bunting materialised that afternoon at Springfield; whilst the following morning all attention focused on a Paddyfield Warbler in the neaps at Quoy. There were no other passerine arrivals, and the wind remained westerly. Classic Fair Isle! On the 22nd, new arrivals were diverse: Great Northern Diver, 25+ Pink-footed Geese, Turtle Dove, single Marsh and Barred Warblers. An Iceland Gull was the only new find on the 23rd though, and spirits began to dip again.

The wind on the 24th at last moved east of south – almost imperceptibly, with just a light south-south-easterly blowing. But this proved the catalyst for a week of magical birdwatching, one which those who enjoyed it are likely to remember for a long time. The first Red-breasted Flycatcher and Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn were good finds before lunch, although the Yellow-breasted Bunting and Paddyfield Warbler had disappeared overnight. However, in the early afternoon, a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler trapped in the Gully inspired a new attitude amongst visiting birders. After release at the Plantation, the big *locustella* occupied many observers, but those who covered the rest of the island turned up two Barnacle Geese, the first Brent Goose and Richard's Pipit of the year, and there were counts of 600+ Meadow Pipits, two Barred Warblers and 15 Goldcrests. On the 25th, the wind switched back to the west for a day, and new birds were correspondingly modest: eight Barnacle Geese, five Jack Snipe, ten Redwings and a Wood Warbler. But three days of south-easterlies from the 26th produced the pinnacle of the

autumn's birding for many. Almost simultaneously on the morning of the 26th, Olive-backed Pipit, Pechora Pipit and Lanceolated Warbler materialised, truly setting the autumn back on track. The Lanceolated Warbler, in the Wirvie burn, was a star performer, flying through observers' legs and testing the close-focus capacity of binoculars and cameras! Once tired of this, a southward trek was rewarded by the possibility of watching the two star pipits in the same crop at Quoy. A late Marsh Warbler at Bull's Park rounded the day off well. On the 27th, the first hour of daylight produced a new Lanceolated Warbler at the School (later at Lower Stoneybreck), a late Reed Warbler trapped at the Plantation, and a Citrine-type wagtail flying over the trapping area which frustratingly evaded specific identity. A new Olive-backed Pipit was seen briefly near Double Dyke soon after breakfast, and other scarce migrants during the rest of that day included a Corncrake and peak autumn counts of three Richard's Pipits and ten Yellow-browed Warblers. A small arrival of common passerines to match the rarities comprised 30 Blackcaps, five Chiffchaffs, 20 Willow Warblers, 30 Goldcrests and six Pied Flycatchers. This scintillating spell continued through the morning of the 28th. The previous day's mystery wagtail was pinned down at last in Kirki Geo and confirmed as a Citrine Wagtail, whilst a new Yellow-breasted Bunting was found in the oat crop at Springfield. On the way back to lunch, mulling over these new finds, a second Paddyfield Warbler was trapped at the Plantation! Three Velvet Scoters, 30 Redwings, 15 Bramblings and 15 Siskins completed the main additions to the daily log. The wind veered into the south-west for the last two days of the month, and the keen edge of anticipation dulled a little. However, six Jack Snipe, Glaucous Gull and 15 Crossbills were seen on the 29th, then on the 30th, there were 200+ Pink-footed Geese, 110 Golden Plovers, the only Bluethroat of the month, 30 Siskins and only the second Little Bunting of the year, at Quoy.

## **October**

The westerly winds of late September continued to blow until October 6th, and the first few days of the month were comparatively quiet. Two Richard's Pipits were seen on the 1st, Skylarks reached 375 on the 3rd, whilst on the 4th, an arrival of wildfowl included 21 Whooper Swans, 150 Pink-footed Geese, 50 Barnacle Geese and the year's only Canada Goose. More wildfowl featured on the 5th, with seven White-fronted Geese over the Observatory at dawn and a total of eight Long-tailed Ducks. Also seen that day were 125 Golden Plovers, and an adult Long-tailed Skua drifted up the west coast of the island. A moderate south-easterly on the 6th brought new hope, and more wildfowl, this time 200 Greylag and 100 Barnacle Geese; also four Merlins, three Stock Doves, 500 Meadow Pipits and a Grey Wagtail. Light south-easterlies on the 7th triggered a small arrival of passerines, with 50 Song Thrushes, 20 Goldcrests and 15 Siskins. Although the wind reverted to the south-west on the 8th, a larger arrival than the previous day was apparent, with 450 Redwings, 30 Blackcaps, 30 Bramblings, a late Spotted Flycatcher, and a Rustic

Bunting in Hjukni Geo. However, the day's main news concerned the appearance of three Coal Tits, one on Malcolm's Head and two at Kristal Kame. Southern bird-watchers may sniff, but these were only the 4th-6th records for Fair Isle! For those observers who failed to connect with the vagrant *Paridae* on the 8th, the following day was remarkable mainly for a fourth Coal Tit, this one at Klinger's Geo, a close companion of an equally-stunning Yellow-browed Warbler! Also on the 9th, there were five Whooper Swans, Richard's Pipit, the first Mistle Thrush of the year, and counts of 60 Blackcaps, five Yellow-browed Warblers, five Chiffchaffs and seven Reed Buntings.

North or north-westerly winds until the 14th guaranteed a quiet time. A Bluethroat on the 12th and a Richard's Pipit on the 13th were the only birds of note. On the 14th, a light south-easterly, freshening through the day, brought the first substantial arrival of thrushes, 700 Fieldfares and 1000 Redwings. Four Merlins, 70 Golden Plovers, 10 Jack Snipe and five Woodcock contributed to the late autumn 'feel', but real quality was provided by a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler in the ditches south of Pund, a showy bird which offered great opportunities for the few remaining observers to enjoy field views. A fresh south-easterly on the 15th provided the backdrop to memorable late autumn day, crammed with birds. A more substantial arrival of thrushes was estimated at 250 Blackbirds, 1500 Fieldfares, 75 Song Thrushes, 3000 Redwings and six Ring Ouzels. Other passerines included 200 Goldcrests and 30 Bramblings, whilst non-passerines included the year's only Slavonian Grebe, in North Haven, 25 Barnacle Geese, and a second Great Spotted Woodpecker. The day's star bird, however, was a magnificent juvenile Rough-legged Buzzard, the first since 1990, along the west cliffs below Ward Hill. Southerly wind with rain on the 16th brought fewer surprises, but good counts of 100 Snipe, 20 Woodcock and 260 Common Gulls, with single Richard's Pipit and Grey Wagtail. South-westerlies on the 17th gradually veered into the north-west over the following days, and winds then remained north or north-west for a week, bringing a quieter spell. On the 17th, a moderate fall pushed up the daily counts of some species, notably 300 Blackbirds, five Chiffchaffs, 30 Chaffinches and 60 Bramblings. Also seen were the first Little Auks of the year (five), a Great Grey Shrike, and single Jackdaw, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer. On the 17th, three Great Northern Divers were seen close to Fair Isle from the 'Good Shepherd', and highlights of the 19th were 20 Whooper Swans, 175 Greylag Geese, three Short-eared Owls and six Lapland Buntings. The first Moorhen of the year appeared on the 21st, along with three Glaucous Gulls, a Goldfinch and 85 Snow Buntings. The weather on the 23rd was positively wintry, and the day's sightings reflected this, including two Great Northern Divers, six Long-tailed Ducks, 15 Little Auks and a total of nine Greenfinches. An Iceland Gull was seen on the 24th, and 30 Woodcocks on the 25th, as this quiet spell continued.

Light south-easterlies on the 21st freshened through the day, bringing a modest

arrival of passerines, including 150 Blackbirds, 250 Fieldfares, six Chiffchaffs and 40 Goldcrests. However, near-calm conditions the following day brought the best thrush fall of the autumn, with 1400 Blackbirds, 1100 Fieldfares and 200 Redwings. Other passerines were represented primarily by 15 Blackcaps, 15 Chiffchaffs and 30 Bramblings, whilst other new arrivals comprised seven Goldeneye, 40+ Woodcocks and two Long-eared Owls. The 28th brought the only rarity of this spell, with a very late Citrine Wagtail at North Light; also seen were six Jackdaws and three Bullfinches. South-westerlies saw the month out, with few remarkable sightings. There were counts of 50 Woodcocks and 20 Little Auks on the 29th, together with late records of Swallow, House Martin and Whitethroat. Four Merlins and a late Bluethroat were seen on the 30th, whilst 350 Snow Buntings graced the 31st.

## **November**

Regular censusing continued until the 10th, and proved worthwhile with a number of good late-autumn records. Two days of north-westerlies at the start of the month were predictably quiet, but the wind swung to south-easterly during the 3rd, where it remained for the following four days. A modest arrival on the 4th included good counts of certain species, notably 150 Woodcocks and 11 Greenfinches. New thrushes augmented those already on the island, and counts of 400 Blackbirds, 900 Fieldfares and 400 Redwings were recorded. Also worthy of note were four Jack Snipe, Short-eared Owl, Jackdaw, and the first storm-blown Herring Gulls of autumn. On the 5th, Moorhen, ten Little Auks and a late Bluethroat were new, and the count of Greenfinches peaked at 20. The 6th was a thoroughly entertaining day, with good variety of interesting migrants. Numbers of Woodcock were estimated at 150+, Snipe at 125, and there were four Long-eared Owls together at Lower Stoneybreck. Among the passerines, a Siberian Stonechat at Midway, a Great Grey Shrike at the Kirn o' Skroo and a Hawfinch at Utra were the star birds; two Lesser Whitethroats, six Chiffchaffs and a Yellowhammer were also seen. Light northerlies the following day provided the rarity that so often rewards birders on Fair Isle in early November: Fair Isle's ninth Dusky Warbler, in Bull's Park. Woodcock numbers that day were again well over 100, and a new arrival of Snow Buntings numbered 250. The 8th and 9th were largely quiet, with two Bullfinches on the 8th, whilst strong easterlies on the 9th brought 3000+ Herring Gulls and at least four Glaucous Gulls to shelter on the Isle. On the 10th, the first Woodlark since 1993 was discovered near South Light, and other sightings included three Whooper Swans, 120+ Snipe, Mistle Thrush, a late Garden Warbler and six Chiffchaffs.

After the 10th, coverage of the Isle was more sporadic, and consequently, there were fewer records until the end of the year. South-easterly gales characterised much of the remainder of the month, although fine conditions on the 13th brought another star November bird, an adult Little Gull, the first since 1991, which stayed until the 16th. Gales brought large quantities of storm-blown gulls ashore between



*LITTLE GULL*

*Richard Johnson*

the 18th-20th: 6000 Herring Gulls on the 18th-19th, increasing to 7000 on the 20th, together with 1000 Great Black-backed Gulls on the 18th-19th, and at least eight Glaucous Gulls on the 19th-20th. The following day, four Eurasian White-fronted Geese arrived for a protracted stay, whilst other records during the month included Great Northern Diver on the 26th, Shelduck on the 27th and a late Ring Ouzel on the 30th.

## **December**

A quiet end to the year, with little to report from December. Odd days of calm weather provided the opportunity to search the island properly, and most records came from such days. On the 3rd, Great Northern Diver, a female Goosander, Moorhen, Ring Ouzel, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap and Brambling constituted an excellent day's birdwatching, whilst the 4th produced eight Goldeneyes, Water Rail, a different Ring Ouzel and 50 Snow Buntings. The second Brent Goose of the year, appeared on Skadan on the 8th, and the following day 13 little Auks past South Light in just 20 minutes proved that the sea can be worth looking at in the winter. On the 11th, Jack Snipe and three Greenfinches combined with long-staying White-fronted and Brent Geese, and Woodlark, whilst a Black Redstart was new on the 14th. On the 16th, five Common Scoters, Water Rail and Glaucous Gull were seen, and a male Goosander was picked up on the Finniquoy beach.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST 1997

### Notes

#### **Status Categories**

Vagrant	ten records or less in the past 20 years
Rare	11-40 records in the past 20 years
Scarce	averaging 10 records or less per annum
Regular	averaging 11-40 records per annum
Frequent	averaging 41-500 records per annum
Common	averaging more than 500 records per annum

#### **Breeding Categories**

Small Number	on average, less than 100 pairs per annum
Moderate Numbers	on average, 101-1000 pairs per annum
Large Numbers	on average, more than 1000 pairs per annum

Species considered by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) are followed by a statement as to whether records have been accepted or are under consideration.

#### **RED-THROATED DIVER** *Gavia stellata*

##### ***Regular migrant, mainly late spring and autumn***

After a single on March 28th-29th, one or two were reported on ten dates between May 29th and July 7th. Autumn passage was also unexceptional, with three on September 5th, then one or two on six dates between September 11th and November 6th.

#### **GREAT NORTHERN DIVER** *Gavia immer*

##### ***Scarce autumn migrant***

One was seen in spring, on May 28th. In autumn, three were observed from the 'Good Shepherd', close to Fair Isle, on October 18th, whilst one on the sea off South Light on October 20th-24th was joined by a second on the 23rd. In addition to these, there were singles reported on five dates between September 22nd and December 3rd.

#### **LITTLE GREBE** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

##### ***Rare migrant, mostly autumn***

Maintaining its run of annual appearances since 1992, one was seen in South Harbour on July 23rd, the first summer record for Fair Isle.

**SLAVONIAN GREBE** *Podiceps auritiis*

**Scarce autumn migrant**

A poor year, with just one record: one in North Haven between October 15th and 30th.

**FULMAR** *Fulmarus glacialis*

**Resident; breeds in large numbers**

For no immediately apparent reason, the local Fulmars did not have the best of years on Fair Isle. There was a decrease in the numbers nesting at monitoring plots, by 7.2%, which cancels out a similar increase recorded in 1996. Breeding success in 1997 was 0.36 chicks fledged per occupied site at monitoring plots (Fig. 1), the lowest since 1990, and well below the average of the previous 10 years (0.49).

Large numbers of Fulmars pass Fair Isle in autumn (for example, in 1997, birds were moving past South Light at a rate of up to 2500 per hour in the early morning of September 4th), and these presumably involve a large proportion of non-residents.

Dark phase ('blue') Fulmars were recorded occasionally from the Isle, mostly in autumn (with a peak of four past South Light on October 24th). One remained at a breeding site at Hunds Heelor from early March until the end of May, and a different bird spent time at a breeding site at Dutfield in mid-June. Neither bird bred successfully.

**SOOTY SHEARWATER** *Puffinus griseus*

**Frequent autumn migrant**

Most records occurred between August 22nd and October 2nd, when up to six were seen on several dates, mostly during seawatching from South Light, whilst the peak count was 11 on September 15th. One very late individual flew past South Light on November 2nd.

**MANX SHEARWATER** *Puffinus puffinus*

**Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring**

In spring, three were seen during the crossing of May 31st. However, seawatching in autumn produced record counts of this species for Fair Isle. Bearing in mind that, prior to 1997, the most Manx Shearwaters seen in a day from Fair Isle was just nine (on August 16th, 1989), six past South Light on August 22nd was a notable count. At least ten were seen close to Fair Isle from the 'Good Shepherd' on August 30th. However, these records were completely eclipsed by five hours' watching in strong southerlies on September 4th, when 40 flew past South Light. One of the great Fair Isle seawatches! Also in September, two were seen on the 5th, and there were singles on four other dates, the last being on the 16th.

**STORM PETREL** *Hydrobates pelagicus*

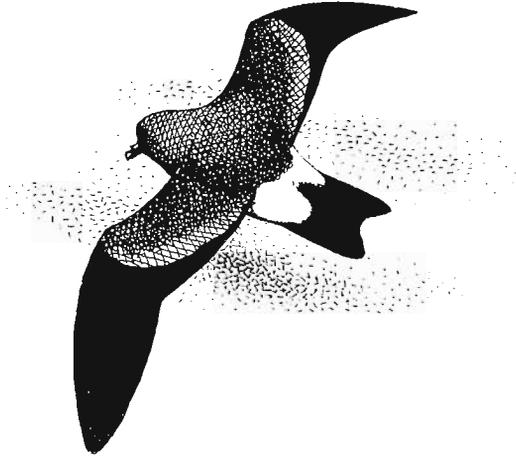
**Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers but non-breeders common**

Few were reported from the 'Good Shepherd' during the summer, but there were sporadic seawatching records in September, notably 10 on September 15th (which was also the last sighting of the year). Tape-luring below the Observatory occurred as usual in July and August, with a total of 1056 new birds ringed.

**LEACH'S PETREL** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

**Scarce migrant, summer and early autumn**

Three were trapped this year whilst tape-luring Storm Petrels: singles on July 18th, August 3rd and August 11th. In addition, three were seen from South Light during seawatching in strong south-westerly winds on the afternoon of September 15th. These appear to be only the 2nd-4th seawatch records of Leach's Petrel from Fair Isle (i.e. excluding records from the crossing), the first being on September 6th 1992.



*LEACH'S PETREL*

*Kester Wilson*

**GANNET** *Sula bassana*

**Breeds in large numbers, seen offshore all year**

The island population continued to expand in 1997, with 1116 apparently occupied nests at the usual colonies in the north-west of the island. In addition, a single pair nested on the south face of Sheep Rock. Breeding success was good, and the 222 nests studied yielded an average of 0.71 chicks fledged per nest (compared to the mean productivity of 0.69 for the previous 10 years; see Fig. 1).

Diet samples were collected at two colonies in 1997. Typically, herring and

mackerel form a major component of Gannet chick food samples, but this year, gadoids and sandeels were the main items, reflecting an apparent lack of large shoals of herring and mackerel in Shetland waters in summer 1997. The gadoids were all fairly large, so they could have been discards from trawlers, or caught by the Gannets themselves.

**CORMORANT** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

***Frequent autumn migrant, less common in winter and spring***

Small numbers were recorded regularly during the winter months, mostly in South Harbour, until April 5th (max. five on January 12th), and again from mid-November (up to three). In addition, autumn migrants were logged on several days between August 26th and mid-October, with peaks of 13 on August 31st and 22 on September 5th.

**SHAG** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

***Resident, breeds in moderate numbers***

After an encouraging year in 1996, counts of nests at monitoring plots were down by over 20% in 1997, almost back to the lowest-ever levels recorded in 1995. Breeding success was below average too, though not drastically (Fig. 1): 1.29 chicks fledged per nesting attempt in 1997, compared to the average of 1.39 for the previous 10 years. Typically, sandeels were the predominant component of Shag diet in 1997.

**Fig. 1. Breeding productivity of Fulmar, Gannet & Shag, Fair Isle, 1986-1997.**

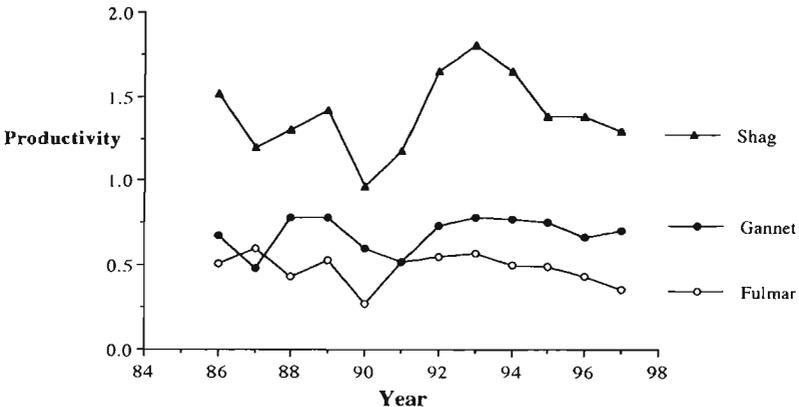


Fig. 1 shows productivity (mean number of chicks fledged per nesting attempt at monitoring plots) of Fulmars, Gannets and Shags on Fair Isle. Fulmars and Gannets are relatively immune to variations in abundance of a particular food

source, and their ability to feed on alternative fish species when necessary means that productivity has been relatively constant in recent years. Fulmars showed a slight dip in productivity in 1990, but not nearly so marked as Shags, which depend heavily on sandeels to rear chicks. Sandeels were extremely scarce in Shetland waters in 1988-1990.

**GREY HERON** *Ardea cinerea*

***Frequent autumn migrant, less common in winter/spring***

Recorded in all months except June, with at least one adult bird wintering at both ends of the year. Sightings were most frequent (almost daily) in August and October, and the peak count was 12 on August 5th.

**WHOOPEE SWAN** *Cygnus cygnus*

***Frequent autumn migrant, scarce in spring***

During a poor spring, there were two adults on March 27th, then two more adults on April 11th-16th.

In autumn, an adult from August 29th to September 14th was the first, then six flew north on September 19th. There were sightings on 12 dates in October (including 21 on the 4th, and 20 on the 18th), up to three daily from November 9th to 15th, and finally sightings on three dates in December (including seven on the 2nd).

**PINK-FOOTED GOOSE** *Anser brachyrhynchus*

***Frequent autumn migrant, scarce in spring***

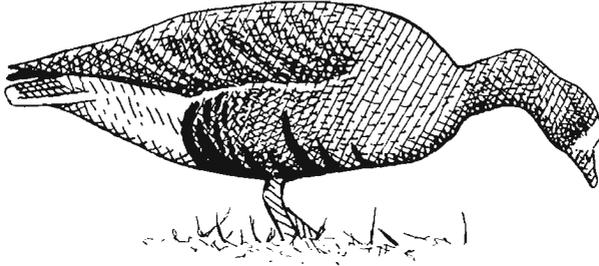
A single on April 27th was the only spring record. In autumn, records occurred between September 15th and October 19th, more frequently in October, when sightings were daily until the 13th. Geese always stimulate great controversy at the log, and counts are, at best, estimates, but there were four days of more than 30: 200+ on September 30th, 100 on October 1st, 150 on October 4th, and 60 on October 5th.

**WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** *Anser albifrons*

***Scarce autumn migrant***

In spring, two adult Greenland White-fronts (*A. a. flavirostris*) were present from April 12th-20th. On the 22nd, a party of ten adult Greenland White-fronts were discovered: ten remained until the 24th, seven until the 28th, and three until May 2nd. One adult among this party of ten was neck-collared, and stayed until April 28th. This individual was ringed as an adult male at Wexford Slobs, south-east Ireland, during the winter of 1992-93. The next winter, it was seen on Islay, then at the Mull of Kintyre, where it has been seen in each subsequent winter (including 1996-97, last seen there in February 1997). In addition, it was seen on Foula with 20 other White-fronts on April 17th-18th 1997, so was clearly wandering around the Northern Isles prior to its main northward journey (A. D. Fox, *in litt.*).

In autumn, seven flew over the Observatory on October 5th (six adults, one juvenile: not assigned to race), and then four adult European White-fronts (*A. a. albifrons*) arrived on November 21st. Four remained until the 30th, with the remaining two staying until at least December 25th.



WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

Kester Wilson

**GREYLAG GOOSE** *Anser anser*

***Common spring and autumn migrant***

A flock over-wintered from 1996, with up to 45 in the first three months of the year, and with the last departures in early May. Two geriatric birds remained to summer on the Isle: one of these has been with us since spring 1995.

Autumn passage spanned the first three weeks of October, starting with 16 on the 2nd. Peak counts were 200 on the 6th and 175 on the 19th. A total of 36 remained to see out the winter on the Isle, and apart from one or two casualties, the flock remained intact until the year's end.

**CANADA GOOSE** *Branta canadensis*

***Vagrant; twelve previous records (24 individuals)***

Not quite the rarity it once was: Canada Geese have now been seen in five of the seven years since 1991. A single on October 4th, with a flock of c. 20 Pink-footed Geese, was the first autumn record for the Isle, and was another large individual of British or Scandinavian feral stock.

**BARNACLE GOOSE** *Branta leucopsis*

***Frequent autumn migrant***

In spring, singles on May 27th-28th, and June 3rd could conceivably relate to the same individual. Between two and eight were recorded daily from September 24th-30th, before the main autumn passage in early October. Fifty arrived on the 4th, increasing to 100 on the 6th. Sightings were daily for a time after that, and six from October 14th-25th were the last of the year.

**BRENT GOOSE** *Branta bernicla*

***Rare autumn migrant***

One flying over the Isle on September 24th was not assigned to race. In December, a first-winter pale-bellied individual (*B. b. hrota*) stayed from the 8th until at least the 26th.

**SHELDUCK** *Tadorna tadorna*

***Scarce spring migrant, rare in autumn***

In May, one flew north past Buess on the 7th, and a pair was in South Harbour on the 22nd. In autumn, four flying over South Light on August 17th were possibly a family party, and one was seen on November 27th-28th.

**WIGEON** *Anas penelope*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant, scarce in winter***

In the early part of the year, one or two were seen on several days in January, and a male was present on March 26th-27th. Later in the spring, one or two were seen most days between May 11th and June 5th.

One on August 18th was the first of autumn, and records continued until early December. Sightings were virtually daily during September and October, with peak counts of 15 on September 20th and 18 on October 16th.

**TEAL** *Anas crecca*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant, scarce in winter***

There were records in every month except December. Spring passage was light, mostly between mid-April and mid-May, with no more than four on any one day. In autumn, sightings were virtually daily from mid-August until early November, with a peak of 18 on October 8th.

**MALLARD** *Anas platyrhynchos*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant; breeds in small numbers***

A pair remained at Field throughout the year, and bred successfully at least twice. One brood of five appeared on May 10th (but survived only a few days), whilst two chicks seen from July 17th survived until the end of the year. One of these was pure white, which caused much debate as to the integrity of the Isle's breeding stock. . . .

There were relatively few records of migrants, and most occurred in January-February (max. eight on January 22nd), and in October (max. 15 on 24th-26th).

**PINTAIL** *Anas acuta*

***Scarce spring and autumn migrant***

A fine drake frequented the south end of the island from April 22nd-24th, and two were seen on September 9th.

**TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya fuligula*

**Scarce spring migrant, rare in autumn**

In spring, a male on Golden Water from April 15th was found dead on the 20th, a pair was seen on May 24th, and a male on May 30th. In autumn, single females were recorded on August 13th, and then on 11 dates between September 1st and 27th. The September sightings were presumed to relate to just one individual.

**SCAUP** *Aythya marila*

**Rare spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, a drake was in South Harbour on May 3rd-5th, then in summer a drake was present on Golden Water from June 30th, found dead on July 4th. These are the first records since 1994.

**EIDER** *Somateria mollissima*

**Resident, breeds in small numbers**

Present offshore all year. The late summer count of moulting Eiders revealed 477 individuals on September 2nd, considerably higher than the 293 in 1996, and the best count since 1990. A similar survey on mainland Shetland recorded marginally lower numbers than in 1996 (M. Huebeck, pers comm.), but the overall stability is an encouraging sign.

As usual on Fair Isle, numbers increased later in the autumn, with a count of 600 off the east/south coast between South Haven and Malcolm's Head on December 11th (which probably encompassed the vast majority of the island's Eiders).

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** *Clangula hyemalis*

**Frequent autumn migrant, less common in spring**

After a male on January 19th, a pair was present from April 22nd-30th, joined by a second female on the 29th. In autumn, one was seen on September 10th, and there were occasional records between October 5th and December 5th. The best counts were eight on October 5th, and seven on November 6th.

**COMMON SCOTER** *Melanitta nigra*

**Scarce spring, autumn and winter migrant**

In spring, there were three off Bunes on April 16th-17th, then in summer, one or two males were seen regularly from July 3rd to 13th. In autumn, occasional records of a pair between October 17th and November 15th probably relate to the same individuals, whilst in December, a group of females was seen regularly off South Light, reaching five in the latter half of the month.

**VELVET SCOTER** *Melanitta fusca*

**Scarce autumn migrant**

Three flew past South Light on September 28th.

**GOLDENEYE** *Bucephala clangula*

**Regular winter, spring and autumn migrant**

Recorded sporadically throughout the winter months, with up to three in the early part of the year (though with four on March 27th), and the last sighting on April 14th. In autumn, reported from October 14th, with peaks of seven on October 27th and eight on December 4th. In addition, there was an isolated late spring record of one on June 9th.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** *Mergus serrator*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

The pattern of sightings was similar to that for Goldeneye, with occasional records during the winter months: one or two until April 20th, and then again from September 17th until the end of the year (with peak counts of four on September 28th, October 14th and 19th). There was one summer record also, on June 24th.

**GOOSANDER** *Mergus merganser*

**Rare migrant in winter, spring and late autumn**

In spring, a male was seen on May 24th-25th. In autumn, a female was in South Harbour on December 3rd-6th (which may have remained for the rest of the month, since one was seen on January 1st 1998), and a male was picked up dead on Finnikyoy beach on December 16th. A good year, and the species has now been recorded annually since 1991.

**HEN HARRIER** *Circus cyaneus*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

A grey male was seen near Leogh on January 6th, and a ringtail (female/immature) drifted about the northern part of the island on August 19th-20th.

**SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*

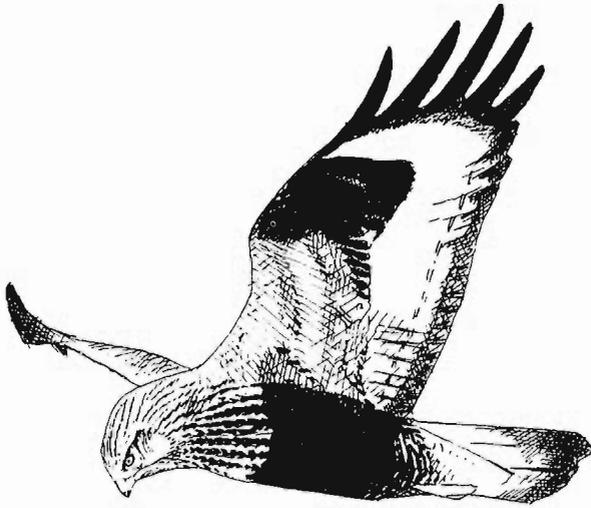
**Regular spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, after the first on April 16th, one or two were seen regularly from April 27th to May 27th, with three on May 22nd, and a late one on June 9th-10th. Autumn was particularly poor, with singles on just eight dates from August 31st to September 28th, then one on November 7th-9th.

**ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD** *Buteo lagopus*

**Vagrant; 37 previous records (of 38-39 individuals)**

A juvenile was found along the west cliffs below Ward Hill on October 15th. An individual, presumed to be the same bird, was seen roaming around the Isle on October 19th-20th and 22nd, although the possibility remains that two birds may have been involved. The first since 1990.



*ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD*

*Richard Johnson*

**KESTREL** *Falco tinnunculus*

***Regular spring and autumn migrant***

Singles were seen occasionally from early February until June 10th, with two on April 28th. One on July 28th-30th is perhaps best termed an early autumn migrant, but autumn passage proper, like the spring, was hardly worthy of the name: singles were seen on 15 dates from September 17th until October 16th.

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*

***Regular spring and autumn migrant***

One or two were seen sporadically from the start of the year until May 23rd. In autumn, there were virtually daily records of one or two from August 26th until mid-November, with four seen on three days during October. One was seen occasionally until the end of the year, and it seems likely that at least one has overwintered on the Isle for the past two years.

**HOBBY** *Falco subbuteo*

***Vagrant; 30 previous records***

A fine adult was seen near Springfield on June 8th, and was also reported the following day. Later in the year, a first-year was discovered at Easter Lothar on July 27th, and it remained around the northern parts of the Isle until at least August 5th (the first summer record for Fair Isle).

**PEREGRINE** *Falco peregrinus*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant; formerly bred**

There were sporadic records of up to three during January-March, then singles on April 16th and 24th, and May 5th. In autumn, there were singles on two dates in August, the first on the 10th, then one or two occasionally from mid-September to early November, the last on the 6th.

**QUAIL** *Coturnix coturnix*

**Scarce spring and summer visitor; has bred**

The best spring for some years began with singles on May 8th and 13th, then two on the 16th. After that one or two were seen regularly throughout the rest of the spring period. A male was singing at Hjukni Geo on May 24th, and possibly the same bird then took up a territory in the Schoolton/Quoy area, and was heard singing most days until at least July 3rd. Sadly, no positive signs of breeding were reported.

**WATER RAIL** *Rallus aquaticus*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant; occasionally winters**

One was seen on about January 23rd, whilst the only other record from the early part of the year was one on April 23rd. Autumn was similarly poor, with singles reported on just six dates between October 5th and December 16th, plus two on October 20th. At least one of these over-wintered, having been ringed in early October and still present in January 1998.

**CORNCRAKE** *Crex crex*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant; formerly bred**

In spring, a well-watched bird was on Skadan on June 4th, and at Lower Leogh on the 6th. In autumn, one in Da Water and Boini Mire on September 5th-6th may have been the same as one reported at Springfield on the 9th. Other birds were at Field on September 18th, and in Bull's Park on September 27th-28th.

**MOORHEN** *Gallinula chloropus*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

The only records came during the autumn, with a first-winter in Meadow Burn on October 21st-24th, then singles around the trapping area on November 5th and December 3rd.

**COOT** *Fulica atra*

**Rare migrant, autumn, winter and spring**

An excellent year, with three records. Singles were around the Walli Burn on January 13th-17th and March 31st-April 2nd, whilst one was in South Harbour on May 26th-June 1st.

**COMMON CRANE** *Grus grus*

*Vagrant; seven previous records (eight individuals)*

One flying south over the island on May 10th disappeared out of sight towards Orkney; however it was re-discovered on the island later that day, and remained until the 13th, favouring the Sukki Mire area. Then on May 23rd, a party of four flew north over the Isle at about midday, and were observed arriving in south Mainland Shetland in the early afternoon. This is the first 'flock' sighting for Fair Isle.

**OYSTERCATCHER** *Haematopus ostralegus*

*Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Also common migrant, spring and autumn*

One or two were seen during January-February, but 46 on February 24th was the first sign of real spring movement. Numbers built up during March-April, with peak counts of 165 on March 22nd and 170 on April 24th. By May, local breeders were well established on territories, but non-breeders or migrants continued to pass through, the peak count of these 'extras' being 140 on May 27th.

No count of breeding birds was made this year, but subjective impressions indicated no marked changes from 1996. Autumn migrants were recorded from mid-July onwards, in rather smaller numbers than the spring. The bulk of autumn passage occurred during August and early September, with peak counts of 125 on August 8th and 105 on August 28th. Small numbers (<10) were recorded until mid-October, after which one or two remained on the Isle until the end of the year.

**RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius hiaticula*

*Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Also frequent spring and autumn migrant*

Singles on four dates in late January (from the 22nd) preceded small numbers in February, increasing to 19 on the 26th. The highest recorded counts of the spring were 37 on March 14th and 41 on April 6th, after which breeders were soon well established on territories. Approximately 17 pairs bred in 1997, the same number as in 1996.

In autumn, records were regular until mid-October, with no large movements observed: the maximum counts were 30 on August 23rd and 28th. One on October 26th was the last of the year.

**DOTTEREL** *Charadrius morinellus*

*Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

In spring, a group of six frequented the area between Geordie's Cup and Dronger (on the north side of Ward Hill) on May 15th, with five remaining the following day. This is the largest flock ever recorded on Fair Isle.

In autumn, a juvenile near the summit of Ward Hill on August 25th was the only record.

**EURASIAN GOLDEN PLOVER** *Pluvialis apricaria*

***Common spring and autumn migrant; has bred***

One was seen on January 15th, and up to six were reported occasionally during March and early April, but the main spring passage was during late April/early May. 95 on May 2nd was the first major arrival, and 100 on May 7th was the peak spring count. Up to five were seen occasionally during late May/early June, with the last on June 14th.

One or two early returning birds appeared in July, from the 13th, and there were virtually daily records from early August through to early November. Counts of 20-60 were the norm, but there were four counts of 100 or more, the highest being 125 on October 5th. One on November 26th, and three on the 30th, were the only records late in the year.

**LAPWING** *Vanellus vanellus*

***Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Also common spring/autumn migrant and regular winter visitor***

Up to 11 were recorded during January and February, but the first real sign of spring movements occurred in late February, with 50 on the 23rd and 27th. March was the main month for spring passage, the peak count being 60 on the 23rd, after which numbers tailed off leaving just the breeding population by the end of April. Seven pairs bred this year, the same number as in 1996.

Small numbers, rarely more than 20, were recorded throughout the autumn, until the end of November. The peak count was just 32, on September 1st.

**KNOT** *Calidris canutus*

***Frequent autumn migrant, scarce in spring***

One on May 15th and two on June 12th were the only records during the spring. Autumn migration began with a flock of 40 at South Light on July 17th, after which sightings were reasonably regular until the end of September. 45 on July 24th (with 24 remaining the next day), and 20 on August 21st were the only other counts of 20 or more. There were no records during October, but late singles on November 5th, 10th and 20th.

**SANDERLING** *Calidris alba*

***Frequent autumn migrant, less common in spring***

In spring, one on March 4th and two on March 7th were exceptionally early: in fact the earliest ever for Fair Isle. The only other record, two on June 12th, was more predictable. As usual, numbers were greater during the autumn, with sightings on most days between July 15th and September 13th, typically of one to four birds, but with 12 on July 30th and nine on August 1st.

**LITTLE STINT** *Calidris minuta*

**Regular autumn migrant**

A very poor autumn, with just a single juvenile on Golden Water, from August 29th to September 2nd.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** *Calidris ferruginea*

**Scarce autumn migrant**

After an absence in 1996, juveniles were seen on August 30th and September 3rd-6th.

**PURPLE SANDPIPER** *Calidris maritima*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant; also over-winters**

Small numbers were recorded through the winter and spring, until May 22nd, with a maximum of 25 on February 10th. Similar counts were reported during autumn/winter, from July 13th onwards, with a peak of just 16 on November 20th.

**DUNLIN** *Calidris alpina*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant. Has bred**

After an isolated single on January 15th, spring migration occurred in two distinct phases: in mid-/late March, when up to 20 were counted (on the 19th and 22nd), then a more protracted period of sightings through May until mid-June, reaching 12 on June 3rd.

Three on July 3rd opened the account for autumn, with regular sightings between mid-July and mid-October. There were nine counts of 20 or more, with the largest numbers being seen in late August, max. 28 on the 25th. One or two were seen occasionally after mid-October, until the end of the year.

**RUFF** *Philomachus pugnax*

**Frequent autumn migrant, rare in spring**

All records were from the autumn, between July 17th and September 27th, with most between mid-August and mid-September. During this spell there were three counts of 10 or more, with a maximum of 14 on August 30th.

**JACK SNIFE** *Lymnocyptes minimus*

**Frequent autumn migrant, less common in winter and spring**

In spring, one on April 17th was the sole record. Autumn sightings were regular from September 18th until November 11th, with a peak of 10 on October 14th. Later in the year, there were singles on November 23rd, and a particularly late one near South Light on December 11th.

**COMMON SNIPE** *Gallinago gallinago*

**Breeds in small numbers. Also common spring and autumn migrant, some over-winter**

Present throughout the year. Up to 30 were recorded during the winter months. Spring migrants were most obvious during April, with a maximum count of 50 on the 19th. Approximately 17 pairs bred, censused mainly by counting drumming males, a similar breeding population to 1996.

Autumn migration was one of the best on record for Fair Isle (reflecting the increasing numbers of Common Snipes passing through Fair Isle in autumn during the last 20 years or more), with three periods of higher than average counts. In late August, there were approximately 90 on the 28th, with 70 the following day. In the early part of October, there were eight counts of 70 or more, including 100 on the 4th and the 16th. Finally, in early November, mirroring large numbers of Woodcocks at the same time, there were 70 or more on at least six dates before regular censusing finished on November 11th, including 125 on the 6th and 120+ on the 10th.

**GREAT SNIPE** *Gallinago media*

**Rare autumn migrant**

Recorded for the third year in succession, one was seen briefly near North Shirva on September 14th. Despite extensive searching, it was never seen again. A number of other claims during the autumn were considered by the BBRC, but these were all seen very briefly, and lacked sufficient documentation to prove the records beyond reasonable doubt.

*Accepted by BBRC*

**WOODCOCK** *Scolopax rusticola*

**Frequent spring and late autumn migrant, occasionally over-winters**

One to three were seen occasionally during January-March, but good coverage of the Hill area during a sheep round-up on March 21st resulted in an estimate of 50. Singles on April 6th and May 25th were the only reports later in the spring.

Autumn passage was better than for many years, typically concentrated between late October and mid-November. Five on October 14th were the first of the autumn, and estimates of 50 were made on October 27th and 29th. However, the largest numbers were in early November, with estimates of 150 on November 4th, 150+ on November 6th and 100+ on November 7th representing our best efforts to census this shy species. Several freezers on the Isle were re-stocked at this time! Isolated records of up to three were received during the rest of the year, though poor coverage of the Hill at this time means that many may have been missed.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa limosa*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

There were no spring records, but a good series of sightings in autumn: two on July 21st, one on August 2nd-5th, two on August 16th-17th, one on August 25th-28th, then singles on September 5th and 21st.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa lapponica*

**Regular autumn migrant, rare in spring**

As for Black-tailed Godwit, all sightings came during the autumn. In July, singles were seen on the 10th, 13th and 17th, then in August on the 23rd-25th and the 28th. In September, one or two were seen daily from the 4th until the 15th, with another on the 24th being the last of the year.

**WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

Spring passage stretched from April 20th to mid-June, with records most days. There were counts of 10 or more on eight dates, with a maximum of 17 on April 30th.

There were sightings of single birds on three dates in late June, but one on July 6th was perhaps the first of autumn. There were reports most days after that until early September, peaking at eight on July 27th. Occasional sightings of single birds occurred during mid-September, and one on September 30th was the last of the year.

**CURLEW** *Numenius arquata*

**Breeds in small numbers. Also frequent spring/autumn migrant, occasionally over-winters**

Present throughout the year, with up to seven during the winter months. Late March and April was the main time for spring migrants, with counts of 33 on March 23rd and 35 on April 16th being the best days. Six pairs bred in 1997, down from the record eight in 1996.

Autumn migrants began to appear from early July, with a count of 30 in addition to breeders on July 3rd. As breeding birds started to disperse, the only other count worthy of mention was 40 on August 16th.

**SPOTTED REDSHANK** *Tringa erythropus*

**Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring**

In spring, one was flushed from the Walli Burn on May 4th, whilst during the autumn, singles were reported on July 5th and August 29th.

**REDSHANK** *Tringa totanus*

**Common migrant in winter, spring and autumn migrant; has bred**

Recorded in all months of the year, although there were sightings on only

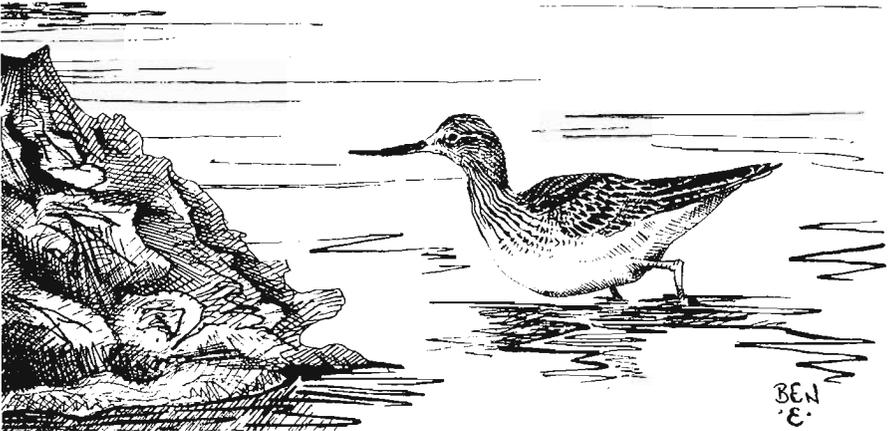
repetition of four dates in June, with no evidence of breeding this year. In the early part of the year, numbers in winter were as high as any during the spring; 55 on February 10th was the peak count, though up to 10 were reported daily until mid-May.

In autumn, returning migrants began to arrive in the first week of July, and 30+ were recorded consistently from late August until early November. 120 on August 23rd, and 75 on October 18th were the highest counts.

**GREENSHANK** *Tringa nebularia*

**Regular autumn migrant, scarce in spring**

Spring passage was confined to three records of single birds, on May 5th, 10th and 29th. In autumn, one on July 4th was very early, and four on July 31st was the next sighting, and the start of autumn proper. Sightings were almost daily from mid-August to the end of October, although one or two long-staying individuals were responsible for many records after mid-September. Five on August 30th represents the highest count of the year, and the one on November 3rd was the last record.



GREENSHANK

BEN  
E.

Ben Epstein

**GREEN SANDPIPER** *Tringa ochropus*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant**

Spring sightings were few and far between: just singles on April 19th, May 7th-9th and May 19th-20th. Autumn passage was an improvement on the spring, with one or two seen regularly from July 25th to September 7th. During this period, there were three on August 8th and 28th, whilst one on September 20th was the last sighting of the year.

**WOOD SANDPIPER** *Tringa glareola*

***Scarce spring and autumn migrant***

In spring, there were two along the Walli Burn on May 18th, one remaining until the 21st, with another on May 24th. In autumn, there were singles on a number of dates from August 7th, and two on September 8th, which were the last of the year.

**COMMON SANDPIPER** *Actitis hypoleuca*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

In spring, one to four were recorded most days between May 1st and June 7th. In autumn, one on July 11th was particularly early. Most were reported during late August/early September, the maximum being 11 on September 1st. One on September 27th was the last of the year.

**TURNSTONE** *Arenaria interpres*

***Common winter, spring and autumn migrant***

Recorded in all months of the year, but with few sightings during late June and early July. There were 10 counts of 100 or more, mostly during the autumn and early winter, with a max. of 140 on December 25th.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** *Phalaropus lobatus*

***Vagrant; 16 previous records, involving 17 individuals***

The first since 1991 was discovered in Hesti Geo on September 9th. A juvenile, which was feeding well, no doubt appreciating the respite from heavy seas and a strong north-west wind. Considering the relatively late date, this is much more likely to have been of Icelandic origin than from the more local Shetland population.

**ARCTIC SKUA** *Stercorarius parasiticus*

***Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Frequent passage migrant***

The first of the year was back on the Hill on April 16th, whilst one on September 20th was the last. The island's breeding population enjoyed a good season, with the first increase in number of occupied territories since 1992 (up by 14% on 1996, to 98 territories), and good breeding success (with 0.82 chicks fledged per occupied territory, better than the average 0.69 over the previous eight seasons; Fig. 2).

**LONG-TAILED SKUA** *Stercorarius longicaudus*

***Rare migrant, spring, summer and autumn***

An adult was seen flying leisurely north past Linni Geo on October 5th.

**GREAT SKUA** *Stercorarius skua*

*Summer visitor, breeds in moderate numbers. Frequent passage migrant*

Present on the Isle between March 25th, when the first bird arrived back on the Hill, and November 7th. Passage migrants were recorded during the autumn – e.g. 35 past South Light in five hours on September 4th.

Like Arctic Skuas, Bonxies fared relatively well in summer 1997. The number of breeding territories reached a new all-time high, at 152 (up from 120 in 1996), whilst despite a very late season, nesting pairs reared an average of 0.76 chicks per occupied territory, to fledging. This is slightly lower than the average of 0.89 for the previous eight seasons (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2. Breeding productivity of Arctic Skua & Great Skua, Fair Isle, 1989-1997.**

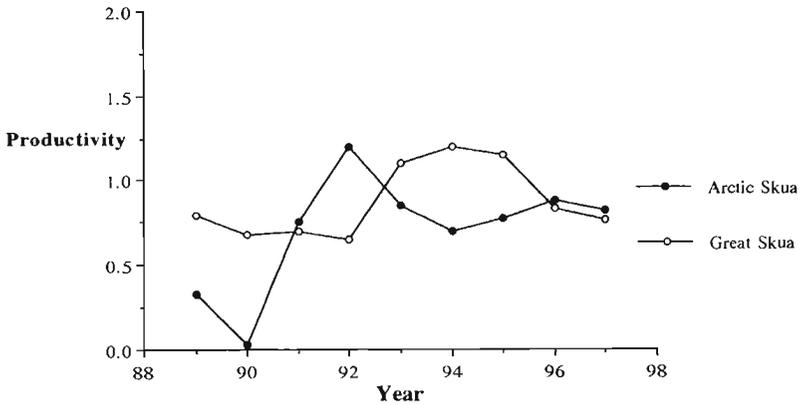


Fig. 2 shows productivity (mean number of chicks fledged per occupied territory) of Arctic Skuas and Great Skuas on Fair Isle. Great Skuas show relatively constant breeding success, but Arctic Skuas were hard hit when sandeels were extremely scarce in 1989-90.

**LITTLE GULL** *Larus minutus*

*Vagrant; 10 previous records*

In November, an adult frequented the south end of the Isle, between Shirva and South Harbour, from the 13th until the 16th. The first record since 1991.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** *Larus ridibundus*

*Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

One on February 23rd and two singles in early March preceded the main spring passage, from mid-March to mid-June. Most daily counts were in single figures, but maxima of 27 on March 24th, 25 on April 30th-May 1st, and 30 on June 9th were recorded.

In autumn, there were sporadic records during early July, with the main autumn passage in late July/early August. Peak numbers were 95 on July 31st and 75 on August 2nd. There were no counts in excess of 20 after early August, but almost daily records continued until mid-October. After that, one or two were seen occasionally until the end of the year.

**COMMON GULL** *Larus canus*

***Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Also, common spring and autumn migrant, small numbers in winter***

Recorded in all months of the year, though with large numbers confined to spring and autumn migration. In spring, numbers were greatest during mid-April, peaking at 100 on the 15th. Approximately five pairs nested in 1997 (compared to six in 1996), and at least two fledged young were observed in late summer.

As usual, autumn passage was heavier than spring, with good numbers in August and early September. There were 15 days when 100 or more were recorded, the main arrivals being 285 on August 1st, 300 on August 16th, and 400 on August 27th, increasing to 450 on the 28th. One isolated large arrival later in the year involved 260 on October 16th.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus fuscus*

***Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Also frequent spring and autumn migrant***

Five on March 24th were the first of the year, and breeding birds were seen regularly from then on. In autumn, small numbers of passage migrants augmented the breeding population from August onwards; sightings were regular until the last two on October 12th. Counts were almost solely of less than 20, but 150 (predominantly adults) were logged on September 5th.

**HERRING GULL** *Larus argentatus*

***Resident, breeds in moderate numbers. Also hard-weather migrant, autumn and winter***

Present throughout the year. Large flocks of storm-blown birds were recorded during autumn and winter as follows: 500 on February 1st, 550 on November 3rd, 1000+ on November 4th, 3000+ on November 9th, 6000+ on November 18th-19th, increasing to 7000+ on November 20th.

**ICELAND GULL** *Larus glaucooides*

***Scarce migrant, winter and spring***

There were four records in the early part of the year: an adult and a 2nd-winter on February 13th, a 1st-/2nd-winter on February 24th, a 1st-winter on April 5th, and a 1st/2nd-winter on May 23rd.

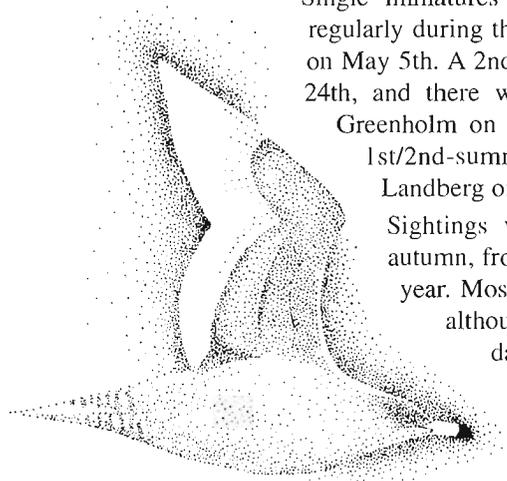
In autumn, single 1st-winters were seen on September 23rd and October 24th, to complete a reasonable year.

**GLAUCOUS GULL** *Larus hyperboreus*

**Regular migrant in spring, late autumn and winter**

Single immatures (mostly 1st-years) were reported regularly during the early months of the year, the last on May 5th. A 2nd-winter was identified on February 24th, and there were three 1st-winters together on Greenholm on January 12th. Later in the year, a 1st/2nd-summer was with Herring Gulls on Landberg on June 21st.

Sightings were again fairly frequent during autumn, from September 29th to the end of the year. Most involved 1st- or 2nd-winter birds, although adults were recorded on eight dates. Counts of one or two were the norm, but three were seen on October 21st and December 17th, four 1st-winters on November 9th, and a minimum of eight on November 19th-20th (a mixture of adult, 1st-winter and 2nd-winter), with large concentrations of other big gulls.



GLAUCOUS GULL

Steve Votier

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus marinus*

**Resident, breeds in moderate numbers. Also hard-weather migrant, autumn and winter**

Present throughout the year. Gatherings of storm-blown birds swelled the local population in winter, the largest counts being 500 on November 4th, and 1000+ on November 18th-19th.

**KITTIWAKE** *Rissa tridactyla*

**Summer visitor, breeds in large numbers. Common autumn passage migrant**

Recorded daily from March until the end of October, though the majority of breeding birds had abandoned the cliffs by late August. Large numbers of migrants passed close to the island during autumn gales, e.g. 150 past South Light in just 20 minutes on September 16th. Isolated records from seawatching occurred during the mid-winter months.

Over-winter survival of colour-ringed adults at the Goorn colony was good, with over 91% of those known to be alive in 1996 returning in spring 1997. A whole-island census of Kittiwakes was carried out in 1997, updating the last such survey,

in 1992. The belief that a substantial decline in the island's Kittiwake population is occurring was borne out by the results: down by almost 36% from 18159 to 11650 apparently occupied nests. The decline was reasonably uniform around the island, and there seems little doubt that increasing predation by Great Skuas is contributing to this decline. Correspondingly, it was also a poor year for Kittiwake breeding success (Fig. 3): 0.66 chicks fledged per active nest, the worst year since 1990. 71 diet samples were collected from adults and chicks at various colonies during July, and over 95% were composed predominantly of sandeels.

**Fig. 3. Breeding productivity of Kittiwake, Fair Isle, 1987-97.**

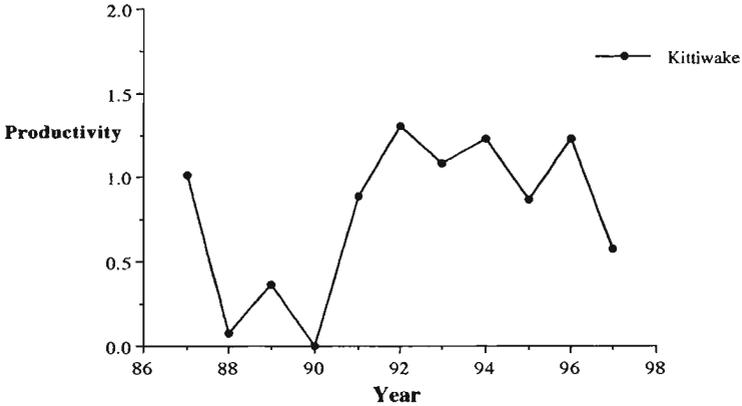


Fig. 3 shows productivity (mean number of chicks fledged per occupied nest at monitoring plots) of Kittiwakes on Fair Isle. Kittiwakes and terns are surface-feeders, and are vulnerable to variations in their preferred food supply (sandeels, in Shetland waters). The poor performance of Kittiwakes in 1988-1990, at the height of the sandeel shortage, is very striking.

**SANDWICH TERN** *Sterna sandvicensis*

**Scarce summer migrant**

1997 was a good year for this species, with the first (two) on June 17th, singles on June 24th, July 5th, 14th, 26th and 30th, and a peak count of three on July 7th.

**COMMON TERN** *Sterna hirundo*

**Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers**

Present on the Isle between May 7th and August 27th (though see entry for Arctic Tern, below). At least seven pairs were estimated to have bred in 1997 (two on Bunes and five at South Light). Although precise counts are difficult to achieve with this species due to their nesting habitat and, (on Bunes), the mixed colony of Common and Arctic Terns, this represents the best year since nine pairs bred in 1993. Breeding success was good, with approximately seven chicks fledged.

**ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*  
*Summer visitor, breeds in large numbers*

Ten were seen around Tirryfield on April 29th, but these quickly moved on, and 15 on May 7th marked the beginning of regular sightings. 300 on May 10th was the first large-scale arrival. Local birds were recorded daily until August 26th, after which there were singles reported on August 31st and September 16th. An unidentified Common/Arctic Tern was seen passing South Light on October 18th.

The island's breeding colony continues to go from strength to strength, with a substantial increase in the breeding population this year to 1730 apparently incubating adults, an increase of over 38% on 1996. Once again, Tirryfield formed the core of the colony, though the spread across the airstrip road to Byerwall was consolidated, and for the first time pairs nested in Sukki Mire and south of Hill Dyke. The colonies at Eas Brecks and Bunes increased too. The overall increase may to some extent reflect continued desertion of certain colonies on mainland Shetland. However, a dead adult found this year in the colony had been ringed as a chick on Fair Isle in 1992, suggesting that recruitment from the large numbers of chicks fledged in that year may also be an important factor.

In 1997, breeding success was only moderate (with approximately 800 chicks fledging successfully, productivity of 0.46). However, only three seasons have bettered this on Fair Isle in the past ten years (Fig. 4), whilst breeding success of Arctic Terns on mainland Shetland in 1997 was substantially lower.

**Fig. 4. Breeding productivity of Arctic Terns, Fair Isle, 1988-1997.**

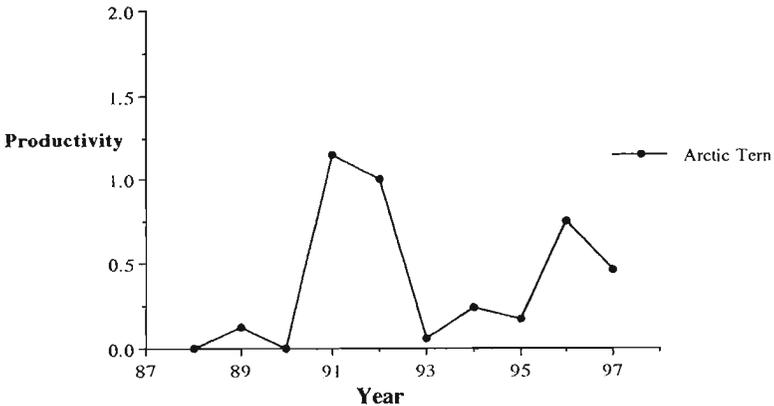


Fig. 4 shows productivity (mean number of chicks fledged per incubating adult) of Arctic Terns on Fair Isle. This species shows wide fluctuations in breeding success. Note the very low productivity in 1988-90, but also poor productivity in 1993-95, when Arctic Terns were vulnerable to temporary food shortages.

## **GUILLEMOT** *Uria aalge*

### **Summer visitor, breeds in large numbers. Common autumn passage migrant**

Recorded on fine days during January, and regularly from at least early March, except during rough weather. Most of the breeding population had left the colonies by the end of July, with just a handful of stragglers into August.

Numbers at the five monitoring plots increased significantly in 1997, cancelling out the declines of the past two seasons. Breeding success was also good (Fig. 5), with average productivity at two study sites being 0.74 chicks per site, close to the average since 1988, of 0.75. Typically, sandeels were the main component of chick diet in 1997, samples collected having a mean weight of 7.9g, and mean length of about 130 mm.

## **RAZORBILL** *Alca torda*

### **Summer visitor, breeds in large numbers**

Like Guillemots, Razorbills were ashore on fine days during January and February, and were seen regularly from March onwards. Most had departed for the open sea by the end of July.

Breeding success at the Easter Lothar colony was estimated to be 0.61 chicks fledged per occupied site (Fig. 5), close to the average productivity at this site since records began in 1990 (0.63). Like Guillemots, sandeels were the main fish species brought to chicks: the much smaller size of fish (mostly less than 100 mm) reflects the fact that loads often contain more than one item. Mean load weight was 5.9g.

## **BLACK GUILLEMOT** *Cepphus grylle*

### **Resident, breeds in moderate numbers**

The east coast from North Light to South Light, was censused for breeders in mid-April. The maximum count was 254, an increase of 13.4% on the 1996 count, and the highest since 1989. This suggests that, despite poor productivity in recent seasons (at least at monitored nest sites – see below), Tysties are still holding their own on Fair Isle.

Breeding success of 23 monitored nests was very poor in 1997, with an average of only 0.43 chicks fledged per active nest, the worst since monitoring began in 1987. As in 1996, performance varied around the island: sites in the south-east corner failed en masse, whilst those further north were more successful.

## **LITTLE AUK** *Alle alle*

### **Frequent late autumn/winter visitor**

Recorded only during the autumn, from October 17th onwards. Counts were modest, with maxima of 15 on October 23rd, and 20 on October 29th. Although most records occurred during late October/early November, 13 past South Light in 20 minutes on December 9th suggests that good numbers are currently wintering in Fair Isle waters.

**PUFFIN** *Fratercula arctica*

**Summer visitor, breeds in large numbers**

One was seen close inshore on January 28th. The first breeders were seen offshore on March 29th, with birds ashore at colonies from April 5th onwards. Most had departed Fair Isle waters by mid-August, though seawatching produced a few records in September, the last on the 24th.

Colour-ringed adults at the Roskilie colony survived the 1996-97 winter well, with 89% of those seen in 1996 returning in summer 1997. Puffins also enjoyed good breeding success in 1997, with monitored burrows on Greenholm and at Easter Lothar showing that 0.79 chicks fledged per occupied burrow, slightly above the mean in the previous ten years of 0.75 (Fig. 5).

Food samples were collected from 44 Puffins in 1997, and analysis of almost 450 individual fish showed that around 40% were sandeels, and almost 40% were gadoids (predominantly haddock, whiting or saithe). This is a lower percentage of sandeel than usual, and points to a temporary shortage of sandeels in early July.

**Fig. 5. Breeding productivity of Guillemot, Razorbill & Puffin on Fair Isle, 1987-1997.**

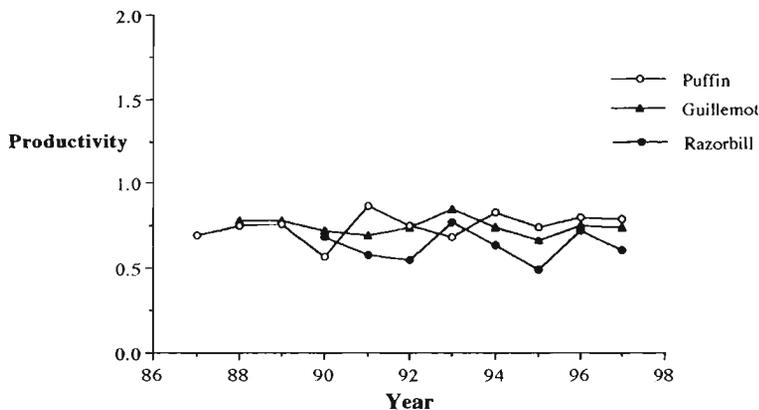


Fig. 5 shows productivity (mean number of chicks fledged per nesting attempt at monitoring plots) of Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin. Note the relatively constant productivity over the past ten years, compared to, for example, Kittiwake and Arctic Tern. This suggests that these species, which dive for their prey, are better able to cope with food shortages than surface-feeders.

**ROCK DOVE** *Columba livia*

**Resident, breeds in small numbers. Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

Present throughout the year. The maximum count was just 45 on April 22nd.



*PALLAS'S GRASSHOPPER WARBLER*

*Roger Riddington*



*LANCEOLATED WARBLER*

*Tim Loseby*



*PADDYFIELD WARBLER*

*Tim Loseby*



*MARSH WARBLER*

*Roger Riddington*



*BARRED WARBLER*

*Roger Riddington*



*GREENISH WARBLER*

*Roger Riddington*



GREENLAND REDPOLL (*Carduelis flammea rostrata*)

Tim Loseby



YELLOW-BREASTED BUNTING

Tim Loseby

**STOCK DOVE** *Columba oenas*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, singles on March 7th, 10th and 18th-19th probably relate to just one individual. Autumn records were more frequent than in many recent seasons. Two or three were seen daily from September 27th to October 8th, then one on October 11th-18th, and one on October 23rd, together thought to involve five different individuals.

**WOODPIGEON** *Columba palumbus*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

Early in the year, two Peregrines were discovered feeding on a freshly-dead Wood-pigeon, at Dumlin's Sink on January 17th. In spring, there were records most days from March 18th to June 15th, with a peak of eight on May 15th. One was also seen in mid-summer, on July 9th-10th. In contrast to the spring, Woodpigeons were very scarce in autumn, with singles on just eight dates between October 9th and December 4th, plus three on October 25th.

**COLLARED DOVE** *Streptopelia decaocto*

**Frequent spring migrant, less common in autumn**

Two on April 20th were the first, and following sightings on three more days in April, records were virtually daily throughout May and the first half of June, with a maximum count of six on May 14th-16th. Four on June 22nd marked the end of spring passage, before a series of regular summer/early autumn records, of one to three birds, from July 8th until August 25th. One on October 10th was the sole record later in the autumn.

**TURTLE DOVE** *Streptopelia turtur*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant**

A desperately poor spring, with singles on May 30th and June 5th. Autumn was much the same, with one on September 1st, and one on September 22nd-23rd.

**CUCKOO** *Cuculus canorus*

**Regular spring migrant, scarce in autumn**

Spring passage was restricted to singles on four dates between May 3rd and 21st. A juvenile, seen most days between July 22nd and August 3rd, was the only record from the autumn.

**LONG-EARED OWL** *Asio otus*

**Regular autumn migrant, scarce in spring**

Two were in the Plantation on January 9th, there were singles on three dates in late March, and one on May 10th-12th. In autumn, one or two were seen daily between October 27th and November 9th, with four together at Lower Stoneybreck on November 6th, still present the following day.

**SHORT-EARED OWL** *Asio flammeus*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, there were occasional records of single birds from April 23rd until June 4th. After one on July 19th, autumn followed a similar pattern to spring, with isolated sightings from August 9th until November 6th. Two were seen on August 23rd-25th, and three on October 19th.

**SWIFT** *Apus apus*

**Frequent spring, summer and autumn migrant**

In spring, one on May 18th was the only record of the month, whilst in June there were up to six seen most days between the 7th and 16th. Numbers were somewhat greater through the summer and early autumn: intermittent records occurred in July and early August, with a maximum of 15 on July 17th. Daily sightings from August 21st to September 8th also peaked at 15, on three days. Finally there were late singles on three dates between September 27th and 30th.

**HOOPOE** *Upupa epops*

**Vagrant; at least 33 previous records**

On May 11th, one was seen briefly near the Raevas by one lucky observer.

**WRYNECK** *Jynx torquilla*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, singles were seen on six dates between May 5th and 19th, with two on the 18th, a sequence that comprised approximately four different individuals.

Autumn passage was impressive, with the first on August 25th, then seven on the 28th increasing to ten the following day. Numbers gradually declined from the 29th, and one long-stayer extended the season until September 18th. Approximately twelve individuals were involved.

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** *Dendrocopos major*

**Rare (and irruptive) migrant, mostly in autumn**

A juvenile male that arrived on August 25th stayed over winter (the second time that one has wintered on the Isle), apparently subsisting largely on animal fat around the crofts during the mid-winter period. This long-stayer was joined briefly by a second on October 15th-16th. The first records since 1994.

**SHORT-TOED LARK** *Calandrella brachydactyla*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

A relatively poor year, with just a single record: one between Easter Lothar and Wirvie Brecks on May 14th-17th.

**WOODLARK** *Lullula arborea*

*Vagrant in recent years; about 42 records since 1948, though formerly more numerous*

One frequented the Skadan and Utra land from November 10th until the end of the year. The first record since 1993.

**SKYLARK** *Alauda arvensis*

*Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Also common spring/autumn migrant, small numbers over-winter*

Present throughout the year. Small numbers over-wintered, the largest mid-winter count being 45 on December 4th. Spring migrants began to arrive in small numbers at the end of February, gradually increasing to a peak in early April (350 on the 4th and 375 on the 6th).

Counts of autumn migrants were greatest in early October, with 375 on the 3rd and 350 the following day.

**SHORELARK** *Eremophila alpestris*

*Rare spring and autumn migrant*

One of the best springs ever on Fair Isle commenced with a confiding individual on Malcolm's Head on April 24th, which moved to Wirvie the following day and remained until the 26th. A party of five were seen at the west end of Wirvie on April 30th, whilst there were sightings of four more individuals in May: on the 5th, 12th, 22nd-23rd and 27th.



SHORELARK

Steve Votier

**SAND MARTIN** *Riparia riparia*

*Regular spring migrant, less common in autumn*

One on April 16th was particularly early, and the majority of spring migrants were seen in mid-May: up to seven most days from the 12th. One or two were seen on three dates in June, the last on the 15th. Two seen on September 25th was the only autumn record.

**SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica*

*Common spring and autumn migrant; occasionally breeds*

The first was seen on April 15th, and there were occasional records during the second half of April, including 35 on the 29th. Sightings were then virtually daily

from late April until mid-June. Peak counts were 80 on May 14th, increasing to an exceptional 350 on the 15th (the highest-ever count for Fair Isle), 100 on May 29th, and 75 on June 1st.

Up to five were seen fairly regularly from the end of June to late September, with peak counts of 12 on July 31st and August 23rd. There were no apparent attempts to breed, however. Late individuals were seen on October 7th and 29th.

**HOUSE MARTIN** *Delichon urbica*

***Frequent spring migrant, uncommon in autumn. Has bred***

After the first on April 29th, there were sightings most days until mid-June, with a maximum of 40 on June 9th. There was one mid-summer record, a single on July 4th. Autumn records were rare indeed, with singles seen on just eight dates between August 5th and October 29th.

**RICHARD'S PIPIT** *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

***Scarce autumn migrant***

One on September 24th was the first of the year, and the first of a series of daily records until October 1st, including three on the 27th and two on October 1st. After that, there were singles on October 9th, 13th and 16th (possibly relating to the same individual). A minimum of five different birds were seen during the autumn.

**OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT** *Anthus hodgsoni*

***Rare autumn migrant***

One was in the Schoolton-Quoy area from September 26th until October 1st, whilst a second was seen briefly around the trapping area on September 27th.

*Both accepted by BBRC*

**TREE PIPIT** *Anthus trivialis*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

In spring, recorded almost daily from April 28th until June 2nd, with two weeks (from May 10th) when daily counts were consistently in excess of 20, peaking at 45 on the 15th.

Numbers were less impressive in autumn. Recorded from August 22nd, with up to 15 in late August/early September. There were only occasional sightings from mid-September onwards, and the last was seen on October 22nd.

**PECHORA PIPIT** *Anthus gustavi*

***Rare autumn migrant***

A typically bright individual was discovered near the School on September 26th, and stayed on the Isle for four days, latterly favouring the Taft/Lcogh area.

*Accepted by BBRC*

**MEADOW PIPIT** *Anthus pratensis*

**Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Common spring and autumn migrant**

One or two were recorded in the winter months at both ends of the year, but spring migrants started to appear in late March. Spring passage peaked in late April/early May, with three counts of 200 or more, including 275 on May 2nd.

Large numbers of autumn migrants passed through between mid-August and mid-October. Numbers were greatest in the first half of September, with 600+ on the 2nd and 6th (and again on the 24th), but there were 500 as late as October 6th.

**RED-THROATED PIPIT** *Anthus cervinus*

**Rare spring and autumn migrant**

Recorded again on the Isle after a surprisingly long gap of four years. On May 14th, a bright individual spent much of the day at the western end of Wirvie, above Wester Lother, in the company of a group of Meadow Pipits.

*Accepted by BBRC*

**ROCK PIPIT** *Anthus petrosus*

**Resident, breeds in small numbers. Also frequent spring and autumn migrant**

Present throughout the year. An attempt to count the coastal population on September 2nd resulted in an estimate of 300, which equals the highest count for the island of this notoriously difficult-to-census species.

There were no confirmed records of Scandinavian Rock Pipits (*A. p. littoralis*) during 1997.

**YELLOW WAGTAIL** *Motacilla flava*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant**

In contrast to 1996, the spring passage was very weak, with one or two on only nine dates between May 11th and 31st. Of these, Yellow Wagtails *M. f. flavissima* were identified on four dates, there was one record of Blue-headed Wagtail *M. f. flava* on the 16th-17th, but no confirmed sightings of Grey-headed Wagtail *M. f. thunbergi*.

In autumn, one to three were seen on five dates between August 25th and September 5th, then a late sighting on September 27th, possibly relating to one of the eastern races.

**CITRINE WAGTAIL** *Motacilla citreola*

**Rare autumn migrant**

One flying over the Double Dyke area on September 27th was not positively identified until the following morning, when it settled in Kirki Geo. It remained in the South Harbour area until October 1st. Then, on October 28th, an exceptionally late individual was found at North Light. It stayed until November 1st, latterly moving to Kenaby, and is the latest ever Citrine Wagtail on Fair Isle.

*Both accepted by BBRC*

**GREY WAGTAIL** *Motacilla cinerea*

***Scarce spring and autumn migrant; has bred***

One on March 18th was the only record during the early part of the year. Autumn was little better, with singles on four dates between October 6th and 20th.

**PIED WAGTAIL** *Motacilla alba*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant; occasional breeder***

Singles on March 2nd and 8th were the first records of the year, and sightings were regular from mid-March onwards. These early records all refer to Pied Wagtails (*M. a. yarelli*); the first White Wagtails (*M. a. alba*) were seen on April 13th, but sightings were not regular until the end of the month. Spring numbers peaked in mid-May, with 20 on the 18th, composed more-or-less equally of *alba* and *yarelli*. Few White Wagtails were seen after the end of May, but Pied Wagtails summered, and bred successfully once again.

Autumn passage was concentrated in late August and early September, and as usual featured mostly juvenile White Wagtails. Numbers were exceptionally high in 1997, with five daily counts of more than 100 between August 24th and September 2nd, and a peak of 175 on August 26th (the second-highest count for the Isle). Numbers dwindled quickly through September with single figure counts most days in October, and the last on November 13th.

**WREN** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

***Resident, breeds in small numbers. Also scarce spring and autumn migrant (status unclear)***

Present all year. The breeding population was censused by counting singing males, which suggested a minimum 37 breeding attempts, probably closer to 40. Fair Isle's Wren population has therefore remained effectively stable over the past three seasons.

**DUNNOCK** *Prunella modularis*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant. Has bred***

Light spring passage lasted from March 22nd until May 25th, with low single-figure counts most days. Dunnocks were more scarce in autumn, with singles recorded on just three dates in September (from the 7th). One or two were recorded most days from October 11th to 29th (with six on the 17th being the year's highest count), and singles were seen on November 7th and 30th.

**ROBIN** *Erithacus rubecula*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

There were regular sightings in all months, with up to four individuals successfully over-wintering at both ends of the year. During spring, there were daily counts

from late April until mid-May, though the peak count was a mere 10, on April 27th and May 16th.

One or two were recorded on several dates in mid-June, whilst one that arrived at Barkland in early July spent the rest of the summer there. Autumn passage, mostly from mid-September to mid-November, was particularly poor. The peak count in the latter part of the year, a mere nine, occurred as late as December 4th and therefore conceivably involved mainly wintering birds.

**THRUSH NIGHTINGALE** *Luscinia luscinia*

***Rare spring migrant, vagrant in autumn***

There were three records in spring, the best spring passage since four in 1989. An adult arrived on May 24th, and remained around the sheds in North Haven until the 30th. A first-summer was found at Barkland on June 7th, and remained on the island for four days, and finally one was at Lower Stoneybreck on June 26th, the latest spring record for the Isle. All three were trapped and ringed.

*All accepted by BBRC*

**BLUETHROAT** *Luscinia svecica*

***Regular spring and autumn migrant***

The first was on May 10th, and during a rather low-key spring there were daily sightings from May 17th to 25th, reaching a peak of five on the 20th and 22nd. After that, there were singles on several dates until the last on June 5th. At least 11 different individuals were estimated to have been seen.

Autumn was very poor, and the first record was not until September 30th. After that, there was one from October 12th-20th, and one from October 30th-November 10th.

**BLACK REDSTART** *Phoenicurus ochurus*

***Regular spring migrant, scarce in autumn***

Recorded occasionally throughout the spring, from March 18th until June 14th, most regularly in May when there were four on the 12th.

In autumn, singles were recorded on a number of dates from October 6th until November 11th. One frequented the Houll on December 14th-16th at least, and may have over-wintered.

**REDSTART** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

In spring, the vast majority occurred between May 5th and 28th (max. 10 on the 11th), with an early female on April 29th, and late singles on June 9th and 25th. During a very modest autumn, there were up to eight from August 28th into early September, then singles on a number of dates until the last on October 30th.

**WHINCHAT** *Saxicola rubetra*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

Recorded virtually daily in spring, from May 4th until June 2nd, but with a peak of just six. Whinchats were much more in evidence on autumn passage; after the first on August 12th, there were daily records from August 21st to early October. There was a good arrival in late August, with 40 on the 28th increasing to 70 on the 29th. Many of these birds stayed on the island, and provided the foundation for good counts (30+ most days) throughout the first half of September. One or two individuals were recorded through the latter part of October and early November, with the last on November 11th.

**STONECHAT** *Saxicola torquata*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, single females of one of the western races were recorded on May 10th (at Field), and May 24th (trapped).

The only record of the autumn was an individual showing characteristics of one of the eastern races, *S. t. maura/stejnegeri*, at Midway on November 6th.

Accepted by BBRC

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

**Summer visitor, breeds in small/moderate numbers. Also common spring and autumn migrant**

The first record in spring was on March 22nd, but sightings were only daily from April 12th. Forty on April 15th was the first significant arrival, with 125 the next day and 210 on the 18th. There were six counts of 200 or more in the first half of May, when passage was strongest, with 300 on the 2nd being the highest spring count.

Autumn passage was most marked from mid-August to early September, with peak counts of 375 on August 18th and 425 on September 6th. Sightings tailed off rapidly as October progressed, with the last on the 24th.

**BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe hispanica*

**Vagrant; five previous records**

A first-summer male, undoubtedly one of the star birds of the year, was discovered at Schoolton on July 17th. It was already heavily in moult when first discovered, and continued its moult on the island. It was seen daily until July 25th, after which it was presumed to have left. However, it was re-discovered in the Busta Geo/Da Soonds area on August 26th, fully moulted into adult finery, and was then seen most days until September 8th! Identified as belonging to the eastern race, *O. h. melanoleuca*, this is the sixth record for Fair Isle, and the second record of *O. h. melanoleuca*.

Accepted by BBRC

**RING OUZEL** *Turdus torquatus*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

Light spring passage involved sightings of one or two most days from April 20th to May 27th. There were four on April 23rd and May 12th, and five on April 24th.

In autumn, most sightings were in mid-October, between the 8th and the 19th, with a peak of seven on the 18th. Later, one or two were seen on October 27th-29th, a female on November 30th and December 3rd, and a male on December 4th.

**BLACKBIRD** *Turdus merula*

***Common spring and autumn migrant. Has bred, small numbers over-winter***

Small numbers were present during the winter months, with up to 35 in January-February. Spring passage was greatest from mid-March, with peaks of c.400 on the 18th, and 300 on the 22nd, but there were no counts of more than 50 throughout April or May. One or two were seen during mid-June, with isolated mid-summer records on June 30th and July 12th.

One or two appeared during September (from the 6th), but the first sizeable fall was typically not until mid-October, with 250 on the 15th increasing to 300 on the 17th. 150 on the 26th, preceded 1400 on the 27th, the largest arrival for ten years; 800 remained on the 28th. Smaller arrivals occurred in early November, with 400 on the 4th and 500 on the 6th. A combination of some of these birds lingering on Fair Isle, together with further small arrivals meant that numbers remained relatively high until the end of the year: there were still 400+ on November 30th, whilst the December maximum was 125 on the 4th.

**FIELDFARE** *Turdus pilaris*

***Common spring and autumn migrant, often over-winters***

Up to 10 were recorded during January, February and March, with 30 on March 22nd being the only arrival during this period. The last week of April produced the bulk of spring migration, with 45 on the 24th, then 55 on the 29th increasing to 75 next day. Counts in May were mostly in single figures, with the last on June 1st.

In autumn, one or two arrived in September, (from the 2nd), but October was the main month. 700 on the 14th was the first major fall, increasing to 1500 the following day. A secondary arrival occurred on the 18th, when the log count was 800. Then after a quiet few days, 250 were recorded on the 26th, increasing to 1100 on the 27th-28th. From then, numbers on the island generally dwindled, but there were still further arrivals, notably 900 on November 4th. Counts of 100+ on November 30th and 120 on December 25th are also above-average for the mid-winter period.

**SONG THRUSH** *Turdus philomelos*

***Common spring and autumn migrant; has bred***

Numbers in the early part of the year were low, with records not daily during spring migration, and all counts in single figures apart from 10 on April 25th. One on May 20th was the last of the spring.

The autumn passage was similarly unimpressive. After the first on September 15th, sightings were daily from late September to mid-November: the two main falls were 50 on October 7th, increasing to 60 the following day, then 75 on October 15th, 60 still remaining on the 17th. One or two were seen occasionally until the end of the year.

**REDWING** *Turdus iliacus*

***Common spring and autumn migrant. Has bred and sometimes over-winters***

The pattern of Redwing movements followed those of Fieldfares quite closely. Up to 20 were present during January-March, with arrivals of 60 on March 18th and 23rd. April was the main month for spring passage however, with highest numbers in mid-month: 120 on the 12th increased to 150 on the 13th, with 150 recorded again on the 18th. Few were seen after the first week of May, with the last two on the 24th.

In autumn, recorded daily from September 25th, with mid-October the time of peak passage. 450 on October 8th was the first main arrival, followed by 1000 on the 14th, increasing to 3000 on the 15th. 1000 were still present on the 16th, but these soon moved on, and there were no more sizeable falls during the rest of the month. 400 on the 4th was the best November arrival, but up to 100 were on the Isle for most of that month. Present throughout December too, with a max. of 50 on the 25th.

**MISTLE THRUSH** *Turdus viscivorus*

***Scarce spring and autumn migrant***

After such a good year in 1996, Mistle Thrushes were more typically scarce in 1997. There were no records at all during the spring, but in autumn there were singles on October 9th, November 10th-11th and December 3rd-4th. It is possible that the last individual may have remained on the Isle throughout December, since one was seen on January 1st 1998.

**PALLAS'S GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** *Locustella certhiola*

***Vagrant, autumn; ten previous records***

Two were seen in 1997, during an autumn when there were at least three others recorded in the UK. This is only the second year when more than one has been seen on Fair Isle (following three in 1988). On September 24th, a first-winter was trapped in the Gully, whilst on October 14th, one was observed in the small ditches south of Pund (the latest ever record for Fair Isle). These are only the 18th and

22nd records for the UK, and continue Fair Isle's current good run, with records in three of the last four years.

*Both accepted by BBRC*

**LANCEOLATED WARBLER** *Locustella lanceolata*

***Rare autumn migrant***

Matching its larger relative, there were two in autumn 1997. One in Wirvie Burn on September 26th delighted observers by its approachability, whilst on September 27th a different individual was seen at the School, then Upper Stoneybreck.

*Both accepted by BBRC*

**GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** *Locustella naevia*

***Regular spring and autumn migrant***

In spring, one to three were seen daily from May 6th until May 14th, with further singles on May 22nd-23rd and 27th. The species was typically less numerous in autumn, with singles on five dates between August 28th and September 6th.

**AQUATIC WARBLER** *Acrocephalus paludicola*

***Vagrant, autumn; 35 previous records***

In August, a first-winter was discovered in the oat crop at Upper Stoneybreck on the 28th. It was rediscovered in Boini Mire on the 30th, where it remained until September 5th. Only the second since 1989, following one in 1994.

**SEDGE WARBLER** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

***Regular spring migrant, less common in autumn***

Spring passage lasted from May 8th to June 13th, with low single-figure counts most days, and a peak of six on May 14th-15th. A late spring record was one on June 30th. In autumn, one or two were seen occasionally between August 7th and October 1st.

**PADDYFIELD WARBLER** *Acrocephalus agricola*

***Vagrant, spring and autumn; 12 previous records***

The remarkable run of recent records continues: two more this autumn, and now recorded annually since 1992. One found in the neaps at Quoy on September 21st remained until the 23rd, whilst one trapped at the Plantation on September 28th, moved to the Shirva-Leogh area and remained until October 3rd.

*Both accepted by BBRC*

**MARSH WARBLER** *Acrocephalus palustris*

***Scarce spring migrant, rare in autumn***

Five were seen in the spring: one on June 4th-5th (with a second individual trapped on the 5th), one on June 9th, then two singles trapped on July 2nd and 5th.

In September, there was great debate surrounding the identity of certain unstreaked *acrocephalus* warblers, but the consensus settled on one Marsh Warbler around Shirva on the 22nd-23rd (possibly from the 21st; trapped on the 22nd), and one at Bull's Park on the 26th. Two in an autumn is above average for Fair Isle.

**REED WARBLER** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

*Scarce spring migrant, regular in autumn*

In spring, there was one on May 13th-15th, and one on June 9th-12th, the latter joined by a second on June 10th. Following this rather paltry spring passage came the best autumn on record. One or two seen most days in August (from the 8th), paved the way for a marked arrival late in the month: an estimated 20 on the 28th is the largest count for Fair Isle. There were still 16 the following day, and 12 on September 1st. The species was recorded daily through the first half of September, but after that there was just one on the 19th-20th, and one (trapped) on the 27th.

**ICTERINE WARBLER** *Hippolais icterina*

*Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

In spring, there were singles on May 25th, June 7th and June 9th-11th. Autumn passage was rather more substantial, with sightings most days between August 18th and September 7th. Peak counts were five on August 28th, then four on September 1st, increasing to a particularly high count of nine on the 2nd. It was estimated that at least 16 different individuals were seen during the autumn.

**SUBALPINE WARBLER** *Sylvia cantillans*

*Rare spring migrant*

Another good spring, with three records of single birds during May. A bright male showing characteristics of the eastern race *S. c. albistriata* was at Lower Stoneybreck and Stackhoull on the 10th, a very dowdy female was around the Gully area on the 16th, and one seen at Busta on the 28th-29th was either a dull male or a very bright female.

*All accepted by BBRC*

**BARRED WARBLER** *Sylvia nisoria*

*Regular autumn migrant*

Usually strictly an autumn migrant, there has only been one previous sighting of a Barred Warbler in spring on Fair Isle, on 28 May 1992. The three spring records in 1997 were therefore quite exceptional. All three were trapped at the Plantation: one on June 6th, one on June 8th (present until the 9th), and one on June 22nd (present until the 23rd). Although this species is difficult to age and sex in spring, the first two were believed to have been 1st-year males and the third to have been a 1st-year female.

In autumn, there were daily records from August 7th until September 3rd, with peaks of seven on August 23rd and eight on the 28th. Later in September, one or two were seen each day from the 22nd to the 29th. Approximately 20 individuals were seen during the autumn.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia curruca*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

Spring passage occurred predominantly during May, from the 12th, with a peak of 10 on the 24th. Singles were reported on four dates in June, the last on the 25th.

Autumn was more protracted, but numbers were even lower. Recorded intermittently from August 19th until November 9th, the best count was just five on September 1st.

**WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia communis*

***Frequent spring migrant, less common in autumn***

The first of the year was on May 8th, and an arrival of seven on May 11th-12th was the highest count of the spring. Sightings continued most days in May, and sporadically in June, with the last on the 16th.

In autumn, recorded regularly between August 25th and September 14th (with a peak of seven on August 28th), after which there was a late record of one on October 29th.

**GARDEN WARBLER** *Sylvia borin*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

Spring passage was very poor, with one or two seen intermittently between May 10th and June 22nd, and a peak of just five on June 5th.

In contrast, autumn passage was well above average. Records were regular through August and September (from August 7th), with a fall of 100 on the 28th being the third-best recorded on the Isle. 80 were still present on the 29th, but numbers dropped to 30 on the 30th-31st, before another sizeable fall on September 1st took the daily count up to 70. After 50 on the 2nd, small numbers were seen during the rest of September. In October, one to three were seen on five dates, with a late migrant at the Plantation on November 10th.

**BLACKCAP** *Sylvia atricapilla*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

The first records were single males on April 16th and 22nd, before more frequent (though not daily) records during May and the first half of June. Five on May 29th was the best count, and the last of the spring was on June 23rd.

In autumn, one or two were seen from August 30th, but sightings were not regular until the third week in September. A number of small falls were noted during the

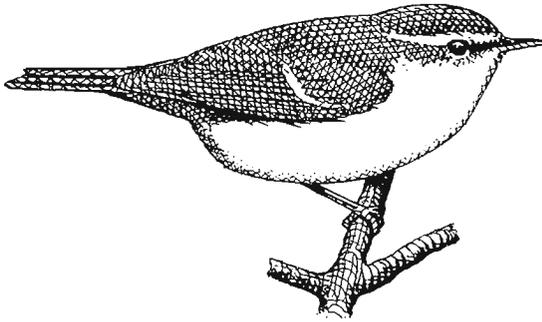
latter part of the autumn, with 30 on September 27th, 30 on October 8th increasing to 60 on the 9th, then 15 on October 17th and 27th-30th. Five on November 10th were the last of autumn, but there was also one mid-winter record, a male on December 3rd.

**GREENISH WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

*Vagrant, mostly autumn; 27 previous records*

There were two records in autumn this year, the first since 1995. One at Kirn o' Skroo on August 31st was presumed to be the same as a first-winter trapped at the Plantation the following morning. Also on September 1st, an unringed one was seen at Smirri Geo and on Shalstane.

*Both accepted by BBRC*



*GREENISH WARBLER*

*Kester Wilson*

**YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

*Regular autumn migrant*

After singles on September 24th-26th, there was an arrival of 10 on September 27th, with six remaining next day, and two on the 29th-30th. The only other record was an isolated arrival of five on October 9th.

**DUSKY WARBLER** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

*Vagrant; eight previous records*

One found in Bulls Park on November 7th was still present the following day. The first record since 1993.

*Accepted by BBRC*

**WOOD WARBLER** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant*

Absent from the spring, but in autumn there were singles on August 12th and 18th, one to three seen most days between August 26th and September 7th, and finally a late one on September 25th.

**CHIFFCHAFF** *Phylloscopus colybita*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

The spring opened with three on March 23rd, but the bulk of spring records occurred between mid-April and the end of May, when sightings were almost daily, with a peak of nine on April 15th. One or two were seen in June, the last on the 18th.

In autumn, an early Chiffchaff was at the Plantation on August 11th, but most records were between late September and mid-November. The peak count was 15, on October 27th and 29th, with five or six most days in early November. Many of the later records relate to individuals of the eastern races, *P. c. abietinus* and *P. c. tristis*.

**WILLOW WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

One on April 26th was the first of an unremarkable spring passage. Sightings were regular during May, with a peak of just 15 on the 11th. One or two were seen in June (the last on the 15th), and there was a mid-summer record on July 12th, presumed same on the 14th.

Autumn was considerably better. After the first two on August 3rd, there were up to 20 on most days in mid-August, before two substantial falls in late August. 120 arrived on August 25th, with 70 still present the following day. The biggest fall of the year came on the 28th, with an estimated 300, and 175 still present on the 29th. Numbers were down to 80 by the 31st, but September 1st produced another wave, with 125 logged that day. There were 50-80 each day until the 5th, after which there were predominantly single-figure counts for the rest of the month. Twenty as late as September 27th-28th were noteworthy. In October, one or two were recorded most days until the 18th.

**GOLDCREST** *Regulus regulus*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

Spring passage was very light, with just occasional reports of up to six in early spring, between March 9th and April 27th.

In autumn, there were virtually daily sightings from August 30th until November 10th. Counts were generally less than 20, with notable exceptions being 30 on September 27th, a substantial arrival in mid-October (with 200 on the 15th, and still 100 on the 17th), and finally 40 on October 26th.

**SPOTTED FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa striata*

**Frequent spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, seen most days between May 18th and June 18th, though more regularly in May, when the peak count was seven on the 20th.

The first autumn migrant was seen on August 26th, and the peak count was 10 on August 27th-28th. One or two were seen occasionally in September, with a late one on October 8th being the last of the year.

**RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER** *Ficedula parva*

*Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring*

A relatively poor year. In spring, one at Wester Lothar on May 30th may have been the same as one near North Light on June 2nd. Then in autumn, one was in North Raeva on September 24th and 27th; again possibly just one individual was involved.

**PIED FLYCATCHER** *Ficedula hypoleuca*

*Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

Very few were seen in spring: sightings occurred on just 10 dates between May 8th and 24th, with a peak count of four on the 11th.

Autumn was an improvement with, like many passerines, greatest numbers at the end of August. The main arrivals were 45 on August 28th (with 25 on the 29th), then 25 on September 1st, increasing to 30 on the 2nd. The extreme dates of autumn passage were August 18th and October 9th.

**COAL TIT** *Parus ater*

*Vagrant; three previous records*

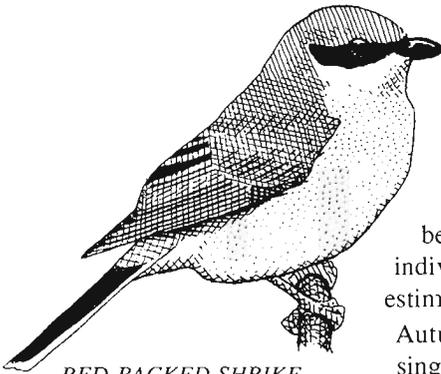
Statistically-speaking, the four Coal Tits seen in 1997 were perhaps the most notable ornithological event of the year! On October 8th, one on Malcolm's Head and two at Kristal Kame were discovered virtually simultaneously, but all three were enjoyed just by their respective finders. The following day, what was assumed to be a fourth individual, probably a male, stayed rather longer at Klingers Geo, though not long enough to be twitched from Shetland.

**RED-BACKED SHRIKE** *Lanius collurio*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant*

A really excellent spring brought daily sightings from May 16th until June 11th. Four or more were seen on 15 dates, with a peak of eight on May 25th and 29th. After this main period, one was seen on June 15th. It is difficult to be precise about the number of different individuals involved, but up to 25 is a realistic estimate.

Autumn was correspondingly poor, with singles on August 9th-17th, then one or two from August 29th to September 8th.



RED-BACKED SHRIKE

Kester Wilson

**GREAT GREY SHRIKE** *Lanius excubitor*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

Two were seen during the autumn, one on October 17th-19th, and one on November 6th-8th.

**JACKDAW** *Corvus monedula*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, two or three were present between March 19th and 23rd, with one also recorded on March 28th. In autumn, one or two were seen most days in the latter half of October, from the 17th to the 30th, but with six on the 28th. One on November 4th was the only other record.

**ROOK** *Corvus frugilegus*

**Regular spring migrant, less common in autumn**

In spring, there was a small arrival in mid-April, with at least five seen daily between April 7th and 13th, including 10 on the 9th-10th. One or two were seen occasionally in May, the last on the 24th, with four on the 13th the best count. There were no records during the autumn.

**CROW** *Corvus corone*

**Hooded Crow (*C. c. cornix*) resident, breeds in small numbers; Carrion Crow (*C. c. corone*) frequent spring migrant, less common in autumn**

Hooded Crows (*C. c. cornix*) were present all year. There were few records of birds thought to be migrants, but four with a large group of Carrion Crows on May 11th almost certainly were.

Carrion Crows (*C. c. corone*) were recorded as follows. One or two in the latter part of April (after the 16th) and early May were overshadowed by exceptional numbers in mid-May. After eight on the 10th, there were 50 on the 11th, the best count so far recorded on the Island. There were still 40 on the 12th, but most moved on after that. Five on May 24th were the last of the spring; and indeed the last of the year, since there were no autumn records.

**RAVEN** *Corvus corax*

**Resident, breeds in small numbers. Also regular spring and autumn migrant**

Present all year. No census of the breeding population was undertaken.

**STARLING** *Sturnus vulgaris*

**Resident, breeds in moderate numbers. Also common spring and autumn migrant**

In 1997, Starlings nesting on Fair Isle enjoyed one of their best-ever seasons since detailed records began in 1980. First broods were monitored at 77 nests, 93% of which produced viable young. In these 77 nests, 343 eggs were laid (mean clutch

size 4.45), 294 young hatched (mean brood size 3.82), and 259 young survived until time of ringing at 12/13 days old. If the latter statistic is taken to approximate numbers fledged, then breeding success (number of young fledged/ number of eggs laid) was 75.5%. Relatively mild weather during the spring was undoubtedly one of the major reasons why breeding success was so good (P. G. H. Evans, in litt.).

There were no days with particularly heavy passage in spring or autumn, and a count of 600 on April 1st was the largest of the year.

**ROSE-COLOURED STARLING** *Sturnus roseus*

***Vagrant; at least 28 previous records involving 29 or more individuals***

A fine adult, possibly a male, was discovered at Busta on August 7th, and remained on the Isle until August 9th.

*Accepted by BBRC*

**HOUSE SPARROW** *Passer domesticus*

***Resident, breeds in small numbers***

Present all year. The best count of nesting birds in spring was 135 on April 28th, slightly higher than the maximum counts in 1995 (125) and 1996 (124).

**CHAFFINCH** *Fringilla coelebs*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

One or two were seen occasionally during January-March, with regular records from mid-March. Twenty on March 23rd was the highest count of the spring, and up to six were seen most days through April until mid-May, the last on May 21st.

In autumn, there was an isolated single on September 2nd, then records most days between October 6th and November 10th. The two best arrivals were 30 on October 17th (with 25 still present on the 18th), then 15 on the 27th.

**BRAMBLING** *Fringilla montifringilla*

***Common spring and autumn migrant***

Records in spring occurred between April 8th and May 28th; sightings were daily during late April/early May, when the highest count was 35 on April 27th.

In autumn, there were almost daily records between September 25th and November 10th, with peak arrivals as follows: 30 on October 8th, 30 on the 15th increasing to 50 on the 17th-18th, and 30 on the 27th. A late female was seen on December 3rd.

**GREENFINCH** *Carduelis chloris*

***Regular spring and autumn migrant***

One or two were recorded occasionally during the spring, between March 14th and May 12th. In addition, seven were seen on March 23rd (a good spring count for Fair Isle).

Greenfinches were reported most days in autumn between October 15th and November 19th, with a maximum of 20 on November 5th, and 15 still present the following day. Three roosting at the Plantation on December 11th were the only records during the winter.

**GOLDFINCH** *Carduelis carduelis*

***Rare spring and autumn migrant***

The good spring sequence continues (now seven years in a row), with an elusive individual seen around Schoolton and the Houll on May 13th.

In autumn, one was seen at Field on October 21st.

**SISKIN** *Carduelis spinus*

***Frequent autumn migrant, less common in spring***

There were just sporadic records during the spring, beginning with six on March 21st, which was the highest day total. However, records continued through the summer, with regular sightings during mid-July, including eight on the 11th.

Autumn passage lasted from September 13th to November 6th, with most in late September/early October. Peak counts at that time were 15 on September 28th, increasing to 30 on the 30th, then 15 on October 7th-8th.

**LINNET** *Carduelis cannabina*

***Regular spring migrant, more scarce in autumn***

Spring passage was reasonable, with up to three seen most days between April 4th and May 24th, and a peak of four on April 26th. In contrast, one at Field on November 8th was the only record of the autumn.

**TWITE** *Carduelis flavirostris*

***Summer visitor, breeds in small numbers. Common spring and autumn migrant, small numbers over-winter***

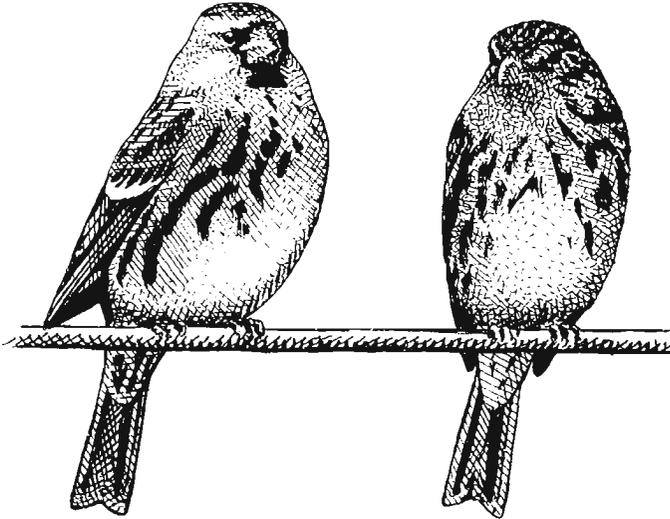
Present all year. Numbers in spring and autumn were again low, with a spring peak count of 60 on May 19th and an autumn peak of 185 on September 26th, very similar to the numbers recorded in 1996. In December, a count of 50 along the cliffs from Sheep Rock north to Wirvie on the 12th suggests that Twites wintering on Fair Isle prefer the coastal strip; the next best winter count was just 26.

**REDPOLL** *Carduelis flammea*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

One on January 6th, and three on the 8th were the only records during the winter months. Spring passage was very light, with just one or two on several dates between April 24th and June 14th, mostly in mid- to late- May, when there were three on the 20th. There were also singles on July 9th and 26th. All of those assigned to race (approximately half) were Mealy Redpolls (*C. f. flammea*).

In September, there was a marked invasion of Greenland/Iceland Redpolls (*C. f. rostrata/islandica*), beginning with three on the 9th and increasing to at least 20 on the 19th. Many of these were trapped, and field identification was confirmed by measurements in the hand. Up to two Lesser Redpolls (*C. f. cabaret*) were also present at this time. Most of the individuals associated with this arrival left in late September, but there were smaller arrivals of Redpolls during October, which (on the basis of those trapped) were predominantly Greenland/Iceland birds. A few Mealy Redpolls were seen in late October, and one or two Lesser Redpolls completed a fine spread of variation, and much for observers to ponder. The peak count in October was nine, on the 21st and 28th. One to three were seen in November, until the 10th.



GREENLAND REDPOLL AND TWITE

Kester Wilson

**CROSSBILL** *Loxia curvirostra*  
*Scarce/irruptive autumn migrant*

The summer of 1997 proved to be the best for Crossbills since the huge irruption of 1990. Two on June 4th were the first to arrive, there were up to nine during mid-June, whilst the largest flock of the year was 40 by Fieldy's Hol on June 24th. Crossbills were seen virtually daily throughout July, usually on the heather in the northern half of the island, with peak counts of 30 on the 5th and 20th. None was trapped during this time, and we have no real estimate of turnover. Two (possibly the same two) were recorded on four dates during August, the last of the 'summer'. Later in the year, one or two were seen most days between September 28th and October 13th, plus 15 on September 29th.

Crossbills were therefore the most noticeable of several irruptive or semi-irruptive species recorded during the year (including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Coal Tit, Rose-coloured Starling, Northern Bullfinch and Hawfinch).

### **COMMON ROSEFINCH** *Carpodacus erythrinus*

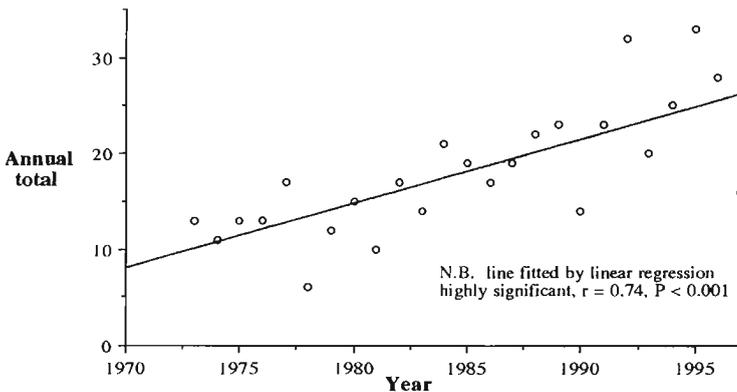
#### ***Regular spring and autumn migrant***

After some recent bumper years, 1997 was not exceptional for Common Rosefinches. In spring, the first was a smart red male on May 19th-22nd, joined by two brown (female/immature) birds on the 22nd, one of which stayed until the 25th. In June, a first-summer male stayed from the 7th until the 11th, whilst there were further singles on the 13th and 16th. Approximately five different individuals were recorded. In mid-summer, another immature male was present on July 15th-17th.

In autumn, one or two were seen most days in August, from the 12th. Up to four were seen virtually daily through September, with the last one of the year on October 7th. However, the turnover of individuals was relatively low, and it was estimated that only ten different individuals occurred during August-October.

Even with a below-average year in 1997, the overall trend in the past 25 years is for a steady increase in records: Fig. 6 shows the change in number of individuals recorded annually since 1973.

**Fig. 6. Common Rosefinch, annual totals recorded on Fair Isle, 1973-1997.**



### **BULLFINCH** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

#### ***Scarce autumn migrant, less regular in spring***

A male on May 10th was the only record of the spring. The autumn showing was typically rather better, with one to three seen most days between October 17th and November 9th, involving approximately seven individuals. As usual, all sightings referred to the large nominate race, *P. p. pyrrhula*, 'Northern Bullfinch'.

**HAWFINCH** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

**Rare spring migrant**

One of the best years ever, with five spring records and another in autumn. In May, a female arrived at the Observatory on the 8th, and was joined by a male on the 12th. Both stayed until the 21st, dividing their time between the Observatory garden and Mavers Geo. In addition, there were further singles on May 16th (a female near South Harbour, later found dead), on May 26th (seen briefly at Shirva), and on June 13th (a male near the Observatory). At the opposite end of the year, a male found exhausted at Utra on November 6th later died in captivity. This is only the third year in which Hawfinches have been seen in autumn on Fair Isle, and this is the latest ever.

**LAPLAND BUNTING** *Calcarius lapponicus*

**Frequent autumn migrant, less common in spring**

In March, a male was seen on the 19th-24th, followed by two on the 29th. After a blank April, there were further sightings in May, with records almost daily between the 7th and 18th, and a peak count of four on the 8th.

As usual, autumn passage was more pronounced than spring. In 1997, there were reports most days between August 30th and October 27th. Typically, up to four were seen, but there were seven on September 17th, five on September 21st-24th and six on October 19th. A little after the main autumn passage, two were seen on November 7th, one staying until the 10th.

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

**Common spring and autumn migrant; often over-winters**

Small numbers over-wintered, the peak count in the early part of the year being 44 on February 12th. Although recorded regularly through the spring (with eight on May 27th being the last), there were no large flocks, with 63 on March

**Fig. 7. Snow Buntings, counts of passage migrants in autumn, Fair Isle, 1968-1997.**  
(counts are mean daily log counts for November, ignoring all counts of 20 or less)



23rd being the best count. In mid-summer, an isolated record of one was received on June 19th.

Autumn passage involved much greater numbers than spring. There were daily records from September 11th, with 75 on the 19th being the highest in that month. However, the bulk arrived somewhat later, with 350 on October 31st–November 2nd, and 250 on November 7th–8th. There were still 90 on November 23rd–24th, and up to 50 during December.

Although not comparable with the very large numbers seen in the early 1970's, November 1997 was one of the better years for Snow Buntings during the past three decades (Fig. 7).

**YELLOWHAMMER** *Emberiza citrinella*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant**

Spring brought just one record, a dull female on May 28th–29th. Autumn proved to be little better, with a female on October 17th–20th, one on November 6th, and two on November 9th.

**ORTOLAN BUNTING** *Emberiza hortulana*

**Scarce spring and autumn migrant**

After the splendid spring of 1996, 1997 was a major disappointment: there were no records in spring, and just a very flighty female or immature in autumn, present from August 28th to September 1st.

**RUSTIC BUNTING** *Emberiza rustica*

**Rare spring and autumn migrant**

In spring, one was seen very briefly near Midway on May 19th, whilst another frequented Hjukni Geo on May 24th–27th. In autumn, to complete a fairly typical year, one at Hjukni Geo on October 8th may also have been seen the previous day. *All accepted by BBRC*

**LITTLE BUNTING** *Emberiza pusilla*

**Scarce autumn migrant; rare in spring**

A rather poor year for this species, usually one of Fair Isle's most reliable eastern rarities, with no records in spring. In autumn, one seen briefly at Springfield on September 1st was the earliest ever autumn record for the Isle, whilst the only other record was one around Midway from September 30th until October 4th.

**YELLOW-BREASTED BUNTING** *Emberiza aureola*

**Rare autumn migrant**

Two September records, a standard year. One, discovered on September 20th with Twites on the Brecks o' Busta, soon transferred to the nearby oat stooks at

Springfield, and remained until the 23rd. A few days later, on September 28th, a different individual appeared at the same site.

*Both accepted by BBRC*

**REED BUNTING** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

***Frequent spring and autumn migrant***

Although scarce during the early spring (with one on March 22nd-24th, and one to four on April 24th-27th), there were almost daily records during May, with peak counts of 15 on the 10th and 13th, and the last on the 29th.

Autumn, like early spring, was poor. Following a blank September, there were records of up to seven on 10 dates between October 7th and 21st, two on November 6th, and the last of the year on November 10th.

**[RED-HEADED BUNTING** *Emberiza bruniceps*]

***Vagrant; 48 previous records, all assumed to have been of captive origin***

A male discovered at Lower Stoneybreck on July 19th remained on the island until August 19th. Although residing in Category D of the British List, there seems little doubt that there must be some records of this species that constitute genuine vagrancy. Although formerly very popular as a cagebird, numbers kept in captivity have decreased dramatically in the past 20 years, and consequently the number of records (on Fair Isle and elsewhere) has fallen too. There is, of course, no way of proving the origin of this individual but for the record, it was unringed, showed no obvious signs of captivity, and arrived two days after an eastern Black-eared Wheatear.

## *Update of British Birds Rarities Committee Decisions*

**1995**

Black-eared Wheatear	14 September	Rejected by British Birds Records Committee
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## FAIR ISLE RINGING REPORT 1997

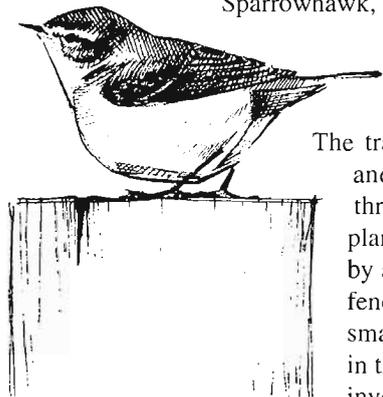
A total of 9701 birds, of 104 species, were ringed in 1997, the most productive year's ringing since 1992. Table 1 below gives the ten most frequently ringed species: as usual, dominated by seabirds.

Table 1. The ten most commonly ringed species, with totals, on Fair Isle in 1997: 1996 totals in parentheses.

Guillemot	2310	(1740)
Arctic Tern	2083	(1383)
Storm Petrel	1056	(1021)
Blackbird	522	(159)
Razorbill	508	(437)
Starling	403	(506)
Fulmar	350	(76)
Shag	292	(394)
Puffin	234	(182)
Kittiwake	207	(130)

No new species were ringed in 1997, and the year was not remarkable for its rarities. Shelduck (5th ringed), Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler (7th) and Paddyfield Warbler (8th) constituted the most unusual captures, whilst other rarely-ringed species included Greenshank (10th-11th), Hawfinch (12th-14th) and Little Auk (14th). Record annual ringing total were achieved for three species: Gannet (41), Greenshank (2) and Arctic Tern (2083), whilst several species (including Sparrowhawk, Woodcock, Guillemot, Razorbill, Pied Wagtail,

Thrush Nightingale, Red-backed Shrike and Common Rosefinch), were ringed in numbers well above average in 1997.



CHIFFCHAFF Ben Epstein

The traps wintered well during the 1996-97 winter, and relatively minor patching work saw us through the season. In the early spring, the small plantation at the base of the Gully was extended by approximately half as much again, stock-proof fencing replaced, and extra cover planted. This small area of trees is surprisingly productive, and in the longer term, this should prove a worthwhile investment of time and effort.

*Table 2. Numbers of birds ringed and recovered/controlled on Fair Isle in 1997, together with cumulative totals from 1948*

<i>Species</i>	<i>Ringed as:</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Recovered/Controlled</i>	
	<i>Juv/Ad</i>	<i>Pullus</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>
Red-throated Diver	–	–	–	1	–	–
Little Grebe	–	–	–	10	–	–
Great Crested Grebe	–	–	–	1	–	–
Red-necked Grebe	–	–	–	1	–	–
Slavonian Grebe	–	–	–	3	–	–
Fulmar	28	322	350	15869	4	151
Storm Petrel	1056	–	1056	23619	25	873
Leach's Petrel	3	–	3	46	–	1
Gannet	5	36	41	344	–	7
Cormorant	–	–	–	7	–	–
Shag	39	253	292	20363	10	521
Grey Heron	–	–	–	20	–	–
Whooper Swan	–	–	–	33	–	6
Bean Goose	–	–	–	1	–	–
Pink-footed Goose	–	–	–	11	–	1
White-fronted Goose	–	–	–	3	–	1
Greylag Goose	–	–	–	20	–	7
Barnacle Goose	–	–	–	3	–	–
Shelduck	1	–	1	5	–	–
Wigeon	–	–	–	16	–	1
Teal	1	–	1	46	–	2
Mallard	–	–	–	12	–	1
Pintail	–	–	–	1	–	1
Shoveler	–	–	–	1	–	–
Pochard	–	–	–	3	–	–
Ring-necked Duck	–	–	–	1	–	–
Tufted Duck	–	–	–	16	–	–
Scaup	–	–	–	4	–	–
Eider	–	–	–	138	–	1
Long-tailed Duck	1	–	1	16	–	1
Velvet Scoter	–	–	–	2	–	–
Goldeneye	1	–	1	18	–	1
Red-breasted Merganser	–	–	–	3	–	–
Goosander	–	–	–	3	–	1
Marsh Harrier	–	–	–	1	–	–
Hen Harrier	–	–	–	2	–	–
Goshawk	–	–	–	2	–	–

<i>Species</i>	<i>Ringed as:</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Recovered/Controlled</i>	
	<i>Juv/Ad</i>	<i>Pullus</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>
Sparrowhawk	13	–	13	311	1	19
Red-footed Falcon	–	–	–	1	–	–
Kestrel	–	–	–	45	–	8
Merlin	2	–	2	179	–	11
Peregrine	–	–	–	6	–	1
Quail	–	–	–	7	–	–
Water Rail	1	–	1	290	–	3
Spotted Crake	–	–	–	17	–	–
Little Crake	–	–	–	1	–	–
Baillon's Crake	–	–	–	1	–	–
Corncrake	–	–	–	38	–	2
Moorhen	1	–	1	92	–	3
Coot	–	–	–	14	–	1
Great Bustard	–	–	–	1	–	–
Oystercatcher	2	10	12	1378	1	68
Little Ringed Plover	–	–	–	1	–	–
Ringed Plover	6	3	9	565	–	6
Dotterel	–	–	–	4	–	–
Eurasian Golden Plover	–	–	–	20	–	–
Grey Plover	–	–	–	1	–	–
Lapwing	2	–	2	303	–	6
Knot	1	–	1	90	–	2
Sanderling	2	–	2	92	1	1
Western Sandpiper	–	–	–	1	–	–
Little Stint	–	–	–	74	–	–
Temminck's Stint	–	–	–	2	–	–
White-rumped Sandpiper	–	–	–	1	–	–
Baird's Sandpiper	–	–	–	1	–	–
Pectoral Sandpiper	–	–	–	5	–	–
Curlew Sandpiper	–	–	–	5	–	–
Purple Sandpiper	1	–	1	152	–	1
Dunlin	6	–	6	503	–	7
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	–	–	–	1	–	–
Ruff	–	–	–	33	–	1
Jack Snipe	2	–	2	125	–	3
Snipe	8	–	8	394	–	4
Great Snipe	–	–	–	1	–	–
Woodcock	15	–	15	384	–	19
Black-tailed Godwit	–	–	–	1	–	–
Bar-tailed Godwit	–	–	–	9	–	2

<i>Species</i>	<i>Ringed as:</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Recovered/Controlled</i>	
	<i>Juv/Ad</i>	<i>Pullus</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>
Whimbrel	–	–	–	15	–	–
Curlew	–	3	3	129	1	6
Spotted Redshank	–	–	–	3	–	–
Redshank	9	–	9	255	–	2
Greenshank	2	–	2	11	–	–
Green Sandpiper	–	–	–	56	–	1
Wood Sandpiper	–	–	–	17	–	–
Common Sandpiper	2	–	2	51	–	1
Turnstone	–	–	–	73	–	–
Red-necked Phalarope	–	–	–	6	–	–
Grey Phalarope	–	–	–	3	–	–
Pomarine Skua	–	–	–	1	–	–
Arctic Skua	–	56	56	3595	–	65
Great Skua	13	99	112	1866	2	27
Black-headed Gull	1	–	1	46	1	2
Common Gull	1	–	1	182	–	3
Lesser Black-backed Gull	–	11	11	1384	1	31
Herring Gull	12	9	21	4080	–	93
Iceland Gull	–	–	–	1	–	–
Glaucous Gull	1	–	1	36	–	1
Great Black-backed Gull	5	7	12	2761	3	96
Kittiwake	77	130	207	6519	–	35
Common Tern	–	8	8	472	–	3
Arctic Tern	–	2083	2083	9002	–	20
Guillemot	293	2017	2310	28008	15	826
Razorbill	119	389	508	7811	7	201
Black Guillemot	–	10	10	1581	–	19
Little Auk	1	–	1	12	–	–
Puffin	131	103	234	12038	–	29
Rock Dove	–	–	–	25	–	–
Woodpigeon	3	–	3	65	–	2
Collared Dove	18	–	18	280	–	3
Turtle Dove	–	–	–	71	–	2
Cuckoo	–	–	–	101	–	1
Snowy Owl	–	–	–	1	–	1
Long-eared Owl	3	–	3	230	–	13
Short-eared Owl	–	–	–	17	–	–
Nightjar	–	–	–	4	–	–
Swift	–	–	–	17	–	1
Hoopoe	–	–	–	3	–	–

<i>Species</i>	<i>Ringed as:</i>		<i>Total 1997</i>	<i>Total 1948-97</i>	<i>Recovered/Controlled</i>	
	<i>Juv/Ad</i>	<i>Pullus</i>			<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>
Wryneck	5	–	5	204	–	–
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	–	1	26	–	–
Short-toed Lark	–	–	–	7	–	–
Woodlark	–	–	–	2	–	–
Skylark	3	5	8	811	–	3
Shorelark	–	–	–	5	–	–
Sand Martin	–	–	–	8	–	–
Swallow	3	–	3	243	–	2
House Martin	–	–	–	140	–	1
Richard's Pipit	–	–	–	10	–	–
Blyth's Pipit	–	–	–	1	–	–
Tawny Pipit	–	–	–	3	–	–
Olive-backed Pipit	–	–	–	9	–	–
Tree Pipit	5	–	5	620	–	–
Pechora Pipit	–	–	–	9	–	–
Meadow Pipit	132	–	132	9399	–	45
Red-throated Pipit	–	–	–	7	–	–
Rock Pipit	111	–	111	8999	–	29
Yellow Wagtail	–	–	–	10	–	–
Citrine Wagtail	–	–	–	5	–	–
Grey Wagtail	–	–	–	28	–	1
Pied Wagtail	29	–	29	653	–	4
Waxwing	–	–	–	37	–	–
Dipper	–	–	–	13	–	–
Wren	16	–	16	755	–	–
Duncock	22	–	22	2184	–	6
Robin	45	–	45	7563	–	36
Thrush Nightingale	3	–	3	29	–	–
Nightingale	–	–	–	27	–	–
Siberian Rubythroat	–	–	–	1	–	–
Bluethroat	3	–	3	252	–	2
Red-flanked Bluetail	–	–	–	2	–	–
Black Redstart	5	–	5	145	–	–
Redstart	12	–	12	1713	–	1
Whinchat	13	–	13	589	–	2
Stonechat	1	–	1	55	–	–
Northern Wheatear	134	4	138	15740	1	73
Pied Wheatear	–	–	–	1	–	–
Black-eared Wheatear	–	–	–	3	–	–
Rock Thrush	–	–	–	1	–	–

<i>Species</i>	<i>Ringed as:</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Recovered/Controlled</i>	
	<i>Juv/Ad</i>	<i>Pullus</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>
White's Thrush	–	–	–	1	–	–
Hermit Thrush	–	–	–	1	–	–
Grey-cheeked Thrush	–	–	–	2	–	–
Ring Ouzel	3	–	3	468	–	8
Blackbird	522	–	522	21030	–	317
Eye-browed Thrush	–	–	–	1	–	1
Dusky Thrush	–	–	–	1	–	–
Black-throated Thrush	–	–	–	1	–	–
Fieldfare	1	–	1	619	–	1
Song Thrush	20	–	20	2596	1	31
Redwing	151	–	151	8204	–	71
Mistle Thrush	–	–	–	22	–	–
Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler	1	–	1	7	–	–
Lanceolated Warbler	–	–	–	26	–	–
Grasshopper Warbler	2	–	2	106	–	–
River Warbler	–	–	–	7	–	–
Savi's Warbler	–	–	–	3	–	–
Aquatic Warbler	–	–	–	22	–	–
Sedge Warbler	6	–	6	407	–	–
Paddyfield Warbler	1	–	1	8	–	–
Blyth's Reed Warbler	–	–	–	5	–	1
Marsh Warbler	4	–	4	102	–	–
Reed Warbler	15	–	15	212	–	1
Great Reed Warbler	–	–	–	6	–	–
Thick-billed Warbler	–	–	–	1	–	–
Olivaceous Warbler	–	–	–	1	–	–
Booted Warbler	–	–	–	7	–	–
Icterine Warbler	6	–	6	97	–	–
Melodious Warbler	–	–	–	11	–	–
Subalpine Warbler	–	–	–	24	–	–
Sardinian Warbler	–	–	–	1	–	–
Barred Warbler	12	–	12	377	–	1
Lesser Whitethroat	12	–	12	621	–	1
Whitethroat	12	–	12	890	–	–
Garden Warbler	87	–	87	3211	–	3
Blackcap	91	–	91	4531	–	19
Greenish Warbler	1	–	1	21	–	–
Arctic Warbler	–	–	–	32	–	–
Pallas's Warbler	–	–	–	2	–	–
Yellow-browed Warbler	1	–	1	108	–	–

<i>Species</i>	<i>Ringed as:</i>		<i>Total</i> 1997	<i>Total</i> 1948-97	<i>Recovered/Controlled</i>	
	<i>Juv/Ad</i>	<i>Pullus</i>			1997	1948-97
Radde's Warbler	–	–	–	1	–	–
Dusky Warbler	–	–	–	4	–	–
Bonelli's Warbler	–	–	–	1	–	–
Wood Warbler	–	–	–	101	–	–
Chiffchaff	36	–	36	1013	–	3
Willow Warbler	49	–	49	3296	–	6
Goldcrest	22	–	22	1419	–	2
Firecrest	–	–	–	1	–	–
Brown Flycatcher	–	–	–	1	–	–
Spotted Flycatcher	9	–	9	704	–	3
Red-breasted Flycatcher	–	–	–	54	–	–
Collared Flycatcher	–	–	–	1	–	–
Pied Flycatcher	15	–	15	888	–	–
Coal Tit	–	–	–	1	–	–
Blue Tit	–	–	–	2	–	–
Great Tit	–	–	–	9	–	–
Treecreeper	–	–	–	1	–	–
Golden Oriole	–	–	–	8	–	–
Isabelline Shrike	–	–	–	2	–	–
Red-backed Shrike	15	–	15	193	–	–
Lesser Grey Shrike	–	–	–	6	–	–
Great Grey Shrike	–	–	–	111	–	1
Woodchat Shrike	–	–	–	13	–	–
Jackdaw	–	–	–	4	–	–
Rook	–	–	–	5	–	–
Crow	–	4	4	48	–	–
Raven	–	–	–	26	–	–
Starling	128	275	403	23954	1	187
Daurian Starling	–	–	–	1	–	–
Rose-coloured Starling	–	–	–	3	–	–
House Sparrow	10	–	10	1406	–	3
Tree Sparrow	–	–	–	99	–	1
Chaffinch	25	–	25	2374	–	11
Brambling	50	–	50	3057	–	13
Greenfinch	10	–	10	201	–	1
Goldfinch	–	–	–	6	–	–
Siskin	7	–	7	345	–	1
Linnet	2	–	2	141	–	1
Twite	63	–	63	5398	–	5
Redpoll	25	–	25	614	–	1

<i>Species</i>	<i>Ringed as:</i>		<i>Total 1997</i>	<i>Total 1948-97</i>	<i>Recovered/Controlled</i>	
	<i>Juv/Ad</i>	<i>Pullus</i>			<i>1997</i>	<i>1948-97</i>
Arctic Redpoll	—	—	—	19	—	—
Two-barred Crossbill	—	—	—	1	—	—
Crossbill	2	—	2	457	—	2
Parrot Crossbill	—	—	—	37	—	—
Common Rosefinch	8	—	8	153	—	1
Bullfinch	3	—	3	101	—	—
Hawfinch	3	—	3	14	—	—
Tennessee Warbler	—	—	—	2	—	—
Savannah Sparrow	—	—	—	1	—	—
Song Sparrow	—	—	—	3	—	—
White-crowned Sparrow	—	—	—	1	—	—
White-throated Sparrow	—	—	—	2	—	—
Lapland Bunting	—	—	—	45	—	—
Snow Bunting	3	—	3	524	—	3
Pine Bunting	—	—	—	2	—	—
Yellowhammer	—	—	—	55	—	—
Ortolan Bunting	—	—	—	18	—	—
Cretzschmar's Bunting	—	—	—	1	—	—
Yellow-browed Bunting	—	—	—	1	—	—
Rustic Bunting	—	—	—	14	—	1
Little Bunting	—	—	—	33	—	1
Yellow-breasted Bunting	—	—	—	6	—	—
Reed Bunting	—	—	—	402	1	3
Pallas's Reed Bunting	—	—	—	2	—	—
Black-headed Bunting	—	—	—	3	—	—
Corn Bunting	—	—	—	3	—	—
Red-headed Bunting	—	—	—	5	—	—
Chestnut Bunting	—	—	—	1	—	—

## Ringed recoveries/controls reported to FIBO during 1997.

The co-ordinates of Fair Isle are 59°32'N, 01°37'W.

### *Part I. Birds ringed on Fair Isle.*

**FULMAR.** Four recoveries were reported during 1997. An adult ringed in June 1982 was found on Auskerry, Orkney in July 1997; a full-grown bird ringed in June 1974 was found in Lothian in March 1997; a chick ringed in August 1963 was found at Druridge Bay, Northumberland in June 1997 (476 km, 180°, 12355 days, close to 34 years old and the oldest known Fair Isle-ringed Fulmar); whilst the sole foreign recovery was from Terschelling, the Netherlands, an adult ringed in July 1982 and found in July 1996 (803 km, 149°, 5111 days). All birds were found dead on the shoreline.

**STORM PETREL.** 31 individuals ringed on Fair Isle and controlled elsewhere were reported during 1997. These are summarised in the following table:

*Table 3. Storm Petrels ringed on Fair Isle and controlled/recovered elsewhere; reports received during 1997.*

Foula, Shetland	8	Priest Island, Highland, Scotland	1
Auskerry, Orkney	2	Wick, Highland, Scotland	1
North Ronaldsay, Orkney	4	Filey, N. Yorks, England	1
South Ronaldsay, Orkney	3	off Mykines, FAROES	1
Burray, Orkney	1	Vagsoy, Sogn og Fjordane, NORWAY	1
Eday, Orkney	3	Heroy, More og Romsdal, NORWAY	1
Mainland, Orkney	3	Faro, PORTUGAL	1

A fairly typical spread of controls. Most were controlled by other ringers, with two exceptions: one of those reported from Auskerry was merely a ring found in a Great Black-backed Gull pellet, whilst the Faroes record was found dead on a ship 30 miles off Mykines. The Portuguese control is the sole long-distance record: of a bird ringed on Fair Isle in July 1996, and encountered on its northward journey in Portugal in June the following year, (2549 km, 192°). With two exceptions, all the above records relate to birds ringed in the past three seasons: one controlled on Foula was ringed in 1991, and one on Eday was ringed in 1992.

A number of individuals ringed on Fair Isle in previous years were retrapped in 1997. Most of these were ringed in the past three seasons, but three had been ringed more than five years earlier, suggesting that these may be local breeders.

**SHAG.** Ten recoveries were reported during 1997, all of birds ringed as chicks. Four were found on Shetland (at Hillswick, West Burra, Quarff and Cunningsburgh), and four in Orkney (Shapinsay, Rousay, North Ronaldsay, and near Stromness). Most of these were less than three years old, but the one recovered in July 1997 near Stromness was ringed in July 1985. In addition to this local dispersal,

two foreign recoveries came to our attention. One to Jylland, Denmark, was particularly noteworthy, having being ringed in June 1961, and found dead in March 1993 (793 km, 129°, 11580 days: the oldest-known Fair Isle-ringed Shag), whilst one found dead in fishing nets off the Norwegian coast (at Flekkefjord, Vest-Agder) in September 1996 was born in the same year (483 km, 106°, 74 days).

A total of 47 adults ringed on Fair Isle were recaptured during 1997, seven of which were more than 10 years old (the oldest ringed as a pullus in July 1980). 25 were ringed as pulli, and were sexed when retrapped. Of these, 18/20 males (90%) were at their natal colony, whereas only 2/5 (40%) females remained at their birthsite.

**SPARROWHAWK.** A juvenile female ringed in August 1992 was found freshly dead at Saint Jansteen, the Netherlands, in November (985 km, 159°, 1528 days).

**OYSTERCATCHER.** An adult ringed in March 1996 was found dead at the Keen of Hamar reserve on Unst, Shetland, in July 1996. The cause of death was sheep's wool tangled round the legs of the bird: an innocuous-sounding problem, but one that causes the death of several Oystercatchers every year on Fair Isle.

**SANDERLING.** One ringed as a juvenile, on autumn passage in September 1985, was controlled fit and well in May 1996 at Gullbringu, Iceland (1214 km, 294°, 3918 days). This is the first recovery involving a Fair Isle-ringed Sanderling.

**CURLEW.** A chick ringed in June 1996 was found dead on Benbecula, Western Isles in October of the same year (400 km, 235°, 137 days); only the sixth recovery of a Fair Isle-ringed Curlew.

**GREAT SKUA.** Two controls of chicks ringed on Fair Isle were reported: one ringed in July 1990 was controlled on St. Kilda in June 1996, whilst one ringed in July 1995 was taken into care (later released) at Muros, Coruna, Spain in January 1996 (1930 km, 195°, 184 days).

An adult ringed in May 1974 was retrapped on Swey in July 1997, the only retrap known to be more than 20 years old.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL.** An adult ringed in August 1992 was found dead near Uppsala, Sweden, in August 1996 (1074 km, 087°, 1483 days), the second recovery of a Fair Isle-ringed Black-headed Gull.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL.** A chick ringed in July 1996 was found exhausted on the Claymore Alpha Oil Platform, off Aberdeen, the following month (144 km, 147°, 27 days).

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL.** Three reports of birds ringed as chicks between 1992 and 1995 were received in 1997: one to Cunningburgh, Shetland, one to Boulogne sur Mer, Pas-de-Calais, France (998 km, 168°, 1128 days) and one to Hanstholm Havn, Jylland, Denmark (654 km, 114°, 419 days). Clearly, it is

important for ringers to fit the rings 'right way up': the last two controls concerned individuals where the ring number was read in the field!

**KITTIWAKE.** No recoveries away from Fair Isle, but a concerted effort to catch adults yielded 47 retraps. Of these, seven were recaptured more than 10 years after being ringed, the oldest ringed as a pullus in July 1979.

**GUILLEMOT.** Fourteen reports of birds ringed as chicks were received, which are tabulated below. In addition, one ringed as an adult in June 1996 was reported the following winter from Finistere, France. Causes of death of the 15 birds involved were: five caught in fishing nets (four from Norway, one from Sweden), two shot (both from the Iceland), three oiled (one from Denmark, two from France), with five simply found dead, or in unknown circumstances. Most were recovered in their first five years of life: two exceptions were chicks ringed in 1979 (recovered in France in 1997) and 1983 (recovered in Sweden in 1996). Of many adult Guillemots retrapped at breeding colonies on the island, three known to be more than twenty years old were handled: two at Lericum (ringed as adults there in 1968 and 1976), and one at South Ramnigeo (ringed as an adult there in 1977).

*Table 4. Location and age of Guillemot recoveries from Fair Isle: birds ringed as chicks.*

Age at recovery (years)	1	2	3	4	4+	Total
Shetland			1			1
Eire				1		1
Norway	5					5
Sweden					1	1
Denmark				1		1
France	1				1	2
Iceland	2					2
Spain		1				1

**RAZORBILL.** Eight reports of birds ringed as chicks were received during the year, which are tabulated below. Three were oiled, the one in Devon still alive, but badly oiled and subsequently destroyed. One was shot (from Faroes), and three more simply found dead on the beach; but the remaining one was controlled (presumably breeding) on Bardsey Island, Gwynedd, Wales in 1996, having been ringed on Fair Isle in 1983 (779 km, 195°, 4722 days). Among those adult Razorbills retrapped at breeding colonies on the island, three known to be more than twenty years old were recaptured: two at Easter Lother (ringed as an adults there in 1975 and 1976), and one at North Naaversgill (ringed as an adult there in 1975).

*Table 5. Location and age of Razorbill recoveries from Fair Isle: birds ringed as chicks.*

<b>Age at recovery (years)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4+</b>	<b>Total</b>
Orkney				1		1
Fife					1	1
Dorset	1					1
Devon				1		1
Wales					1	1
France	1					1
Norway	1					1
Faroes	1					1

**PUFFIN.** No recoveries away from Fair Isle, but 27 birds were retrapped. Of these, five were more than 10 years old, the oldest ringed in July 1981.

**WHEATEAR.** A fledged juvenile ringed in September 1996 was captured, then released, near Casablanca, Morocco, in March 1997 (2939 km, 189°, 198 days).

**SONG THRUSH.** A first-winter ringed in April 1994 was shot near Lumbier, Navarra, Spain, in November 1995 (1876 km, 179°, 580 days).

**STARLING.** A first-winter ringed on October 1995 was found dead on Foula, Shetland, in January 1997.

**REED BUNTING.** A first-winter female ringed in September 1996 was controlled in Northumberland the following month (448 km, 180°, 23 days), the third recovery of a Fair Isle-ringed Reed Bunting.

*Part II. Birds ringed elsewhere and recovered/controlled on Fair Isle.*

**STORM PETREL.** The details on 65 controls were received during 1997, which are tabulated below. All these were trapped during regular mist-netting sessions below the Observatory during July and August. All the records concern birds controlled within five years of being ringed. Virtually all the Storm Petrels we ring are full-grown birds, which cannot be reliably aged after their first autumn. It was therefore good to receive two records of birds ringed as youngsters: a chick ringed at the Mousa colony on 03.09.95 was controlled on Fair Isle on 06.08.97, whilst a first-year ringed on North Ronaldsay on 31.10.95 was controlled on Fair Isle on 03.08.97.

Table 6. Storm Petrel controls/recoveries on Fair Isle: reports received during 1997.

Foula, Shetland	2	Kintyre, Strathclyde	1
Whalsay, Shetland	1	Highland	7
Yell, Shetland	9	Collieston, Grampian	1
Ramna Stacks, Shetland	1	Calf of Man	1
Mousa, Shetland	1	Flamborough, Yorkshire	1
North Ronaldsay, Orkney	22	Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear	1
South Ronaldsay, Orkney	2	Sunderland, Tyne & Wear	1
Mainland, Orkney	2	Copeland, Northern Ireland	1
Sule Skerry, Orkney	1	Vagsoy, Sogn og Fjordane, NORWAY	1
Burray, Orkney	1	Heroy, More og Romsdal, NORWAY	1
Auskerry, Orkney	1	Utsira, Rogaland, NORWAY	3
Sanday, Orkney	1	Oygarden, Hordaland, NORWAY	1
Isle of May, Fife	1		

**SPARROWHAWK.** A first-winter ringed on 16 October 1995 at Faversham, Kent, was controlled on Fair Isle on 26 May 1996 (926km, 350°, 223 days).

**ARCTIC TERN.** A chick ringed on Foula, Shetland, in July 1981, was recovered on Fair Isle in May 1996 (only leg and ring found). Like a similar recovery from Whalsay in 1995, this suggests that Fair Isle colonists are perhaps predominantly from Shetland.

**ROBIN.** A first-winter ringed at Klepp, Rogaland, Norway in September 1995 was controlled on Fair Isle in May 1996 (418 km, 281°, 252 days).

**WILLOW WARBLER.** One ringed as a first-year at Eastern Wangerooge, Mellum, Germany, was found on Fair Isle in May 1996 (869 km, 318°, 270 days). The bird was found impaled on a barbed wire fence, the larder of a migrant Red-backed Shrike!

**STARLING.** A Finnish-ringed Starling, ringed as a chick in June 1995 at Hyvinkaa, Uusimaa, was taken by the North Leogh cat in January 1996 (1483 km, 265°, 226 days). Also, a first-winter female ringed near Wick, Highland, in February 1992, was controlled on Fair Isle in May 1996.

**SISKIN.** Two Siskins ringed in Highland Region, Scotland, were recorded during spring 1997 on Fair Isle. A fledged juvenile male ringed at Loch Eye in August 1996 was controlled in April 1997 (237 km, 035°, 249 days), whilst an adult male ringed near Kildary in March 1993 was eaten by the Schoolton cat in May 1997 (244 km, 036°, 1526 days).

## ***Other Wildlife***

Mark Newell & Roger Riddington

At the Observatory, records are kept of most forms of wildlife (as well as birds), and all visitors are encouraged to report any sightings at the daily log or to the warden. Daily records of butterflies and cetaceans are kept, and moth trapping is carried out at the Observatory on suitable nights during the summer months. In many years, Fair Isle sightings by themselves are rather sparse, but a more accurate picture of events in the Northern Isles can be achieved by reference to the annual reports published by relevant organisations on Shetland (to which Fair Isle reports are always submitted). The interested reader is directed to the following:

**Shetland Entomological Group** (includes records of butterflies and moths on Fair Isle).

Membership costs £5.00, this includes annual report. Contact Mike Pennington, 9 Daisy Park, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland. Tel. (01957) 711307.

**Shetland Sea Mammal Group** (includes records of cetaceans from Fair Isle, and also the records from the crew of the Good Shepherd, on the crossing to and from Shetland).

Membership costs £5.00, this includes annual report. Contact Howard Loates, Windrill', Exnaboe, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JS. Tel. (01950) 460648.

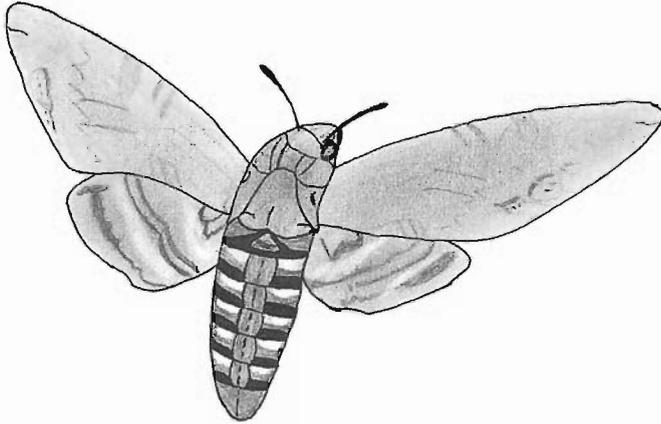
### **Summary of butterflies and moths, 1997.**

At least 214 'butterfly-days' were recorded in 1997, one of the highest annual totals on record, but still only a third of the 1996 total. Four species were recorded in 1997, though sightings were predominantly of one species. This year it was Red Admiral that was most frequently recorded, with sightings in every month from 10th May until 26th September. The peak was in late August/early September, with at least 30 on 30th-31st August.

Following the unprecedented numbers of Painted Ladys in 1996, a total of 13 in 1997 is a return to more typical numbers. Except for two in May (3rd and 30th), all sightings coincided with the Red Admiral influx between August 21st and September 2nd. Only seven Small Tortoiseshells were recorded, between 17th and 26th August. Peacocks were recorded on five days, though probably only two individuals were involved, between 18th August and 2nd September.

Moth trapping at the Observatory was far more frequent this year due to suitable weather, and it resulted in many interesting captures. A Burnished Brass (July 27th) was an overdue first for Shetland, whilst three Great Brocades (August 14th) were a notable multiple occurrence on the same night as Fair Isle's first Saltern's Ear, thought to be of the race *fucosa*, and a potential first for Britain. A Scarce Bordered Straw (August 29th) and a Pearly Underwing (September 29th) were also firsts

for the Isle. The insect with the largest wingspan in the UK was also recorded, a Convolvulus Hawkmoth, which was picked up in a weak condition on September 1st at Pund by Neil Thomson, who took it home to Lower Stoneybreck in an attempt to revive it. Though not as rare as the other species mentioned above, the sheer size of this creature made it the most impressive!



*CONVOLVULOUS HAWKMOTH*

*Mark Newell*

### **Summary of cetaceans, 1997.**

There were very few reports of cetaceans seen from Fair Isle in 1997, which probably reflects a real scarcity of sea mammals in Fair Isle waters (since more effort than usual was devoted to seawatching by Observatory staff in 1997). Killer Whales were again the highlight of the year for many, with three pods seen close to the island: eight on July 6th, 10 on August 8th and four on November 7th. The only other species recorded, apart from seals, were White-beaked Dolphins (three on September 19th and six on September 22nd) and Harbour Porpoises (seen occasionally in autumn, max. 20 on September 26th).

A count of Grey Seal pups took place in October, and a record count of 125 was made on the 28th. Common Seals were seen regularly in South Harbour, with a max. count there of 20 on April 6th.

## *Fair Isle Weather, 1997*

Dave Wheeler

### **January**

Normally a very stormy month, this was Fair Isle's calmest January on record. The monthly mean wind speed of 14.0 kt is a value to be expected only during the summer months. Dry, sunny and (unlike the rest of the UK) mild, this was not at all a typical winter month for Fair Isle! Despite having little over half the normal rainfall for January, the 11th was the wettest day of the year, with 27.0mm of rain. Fair Isle: Rain 57.6%, sun 148.5%, mean temp. +1.0°C, mean sea temp. +0.4°C (compared with the 1974-1996 average).

UK: A cold month in places, especially southern Britain. Exceptionally dry everywhere. Unusually calm, with a notable absence of gales.

### **February**

February on Fair Isle is often cold, settled and the calmest of the winter months. In 1997 it was quite the opposite: mild, unsettled and very windy. This reflected the winter as a whole: mild and snow-free. Gales were more frequent than for any previous February, with the year's highest gust of 72kt recorded late on the 19th, and again early on the 20th. Despite being very wet, sunshine totals were slightly above average.

Fair Isle: Rain 186.4%, sun 103.8%, mean temp. +0.8°C, mean sea temp. +0.3°C.

UK: Mild and often windy. Wet in many areas, but dry in the east. Dull in the south, quite sunny in the north.

### **March**

With predominantly south-west winds, the month was very mild, dull and wet.

Fair Isle: Rain 145.9%, sun 84.7%, mean temp. +1.1°C, mean sea temp. +0.8°C.

UK: Mild, dry and virtually snow-free. Quite sunny, except in the far north and west.

### **April**

April was dull and wet, with near average temperatures. Though rainfall was well above average, this reflected a few very wet days rather than a persistently wet month. After mid-month it turned unsettled and decidedly chilly, with snow, sleet and hail. On the 19th, Fair Isle, together with Lerwick, was the coldest place in the UK, with a daytime maximum of just 5.9°C. The daytime max. was even lower on the 22nd, at 3.3°C. On the 23rd-24th, a vigorous depression crossed Scotland, producing Fair Isle's wettest day of the month on the 23rd (21.6mm) and a north-easterly gale on the 24th. The next few days saw the Azores high extending north and bringing a mild, foggy end to the month.

Fair Isle: Rain 149.7%, sun 63.8%, mean temp. +0.2°C, mean sea temp. +0.4°C.

UK: Dry virtually everywhere, very dry and sunny in parts of the south, though dull in the north. Rather warm right across the British Isles.

### **May**

A dull, wet month on Fair Isle, in marked contrast to Lerwick (a mere 50 miles to the north) which reported a dry, sunny month! Both places recorded a slightly cooler than average month, with mean temperatures of 7.5°C for Fair Isle. Under the influence of a cold northerly airstream, the lowest temperature of the year was recorded on the 5th, with a minimum of -0.8°C.

Fair Isle: Rain 156.7%, sun 87.1%, mean temp. -0.3°C, mean sea temp. 0.0°C.

UK: Wet in many areas, though dry in the south-east. Temperatures and sunshine near-average everywhere.

### **June**

The month was one of short periods of contrasting weather types, with frequent north or easterly winds accompanying the cyclonic spells. Although a relatively dull month, with only six days having sunshine totals in double figures, the 4th was the sunniest day of the year with 15.8 hours of bright sunshine.

Fair Isle: Rain 98.8%, sun 88.6%, mean temp. -0.1°C, mean sea temp. +0.4°C.

UK: The south and east of Britain were wet, whilst many parts of northern and western Scotland were dry. Dull almost everywhere, with near-average temperatures.

### **July**

With fog reported at some time every day except the 27th, this was the foggiest month ever recorded on Fair Isle! During the month, visibility was less than 1000m for a total of 282 hours. It was a dry, rather cloudy month, with near normal temperatures. The 22nd was the warmest day of the year, when a maximum temperature of 17.0°C was reached.

Fair Isle: Rain 54.9%, sun 85.6%, mean temp. +0.8°C, mean sea temp. +1.1°C.

UK: Temperatures close to normal, sunny across most of Britain. Many areas were dry.

### **August**

The warmest and sunniest, yet also the foggiest August on record for Fair Isle! The first three weeks were dry, but two nights of heavy rain at the end of the month produced 28.6mm, increasing the monthly total by 50%.

Fair Isle: Rain 101.1%, sun 142.5%, mean temp. +1.8°C, mean sea temp. +1.7°C.

UK: Very warm right across the British Isles, with locally record-breaking warmth. Exceptionally wet in the south-west, where it was dull. Otherwise, sunny over much of the country.

## **September**

A mild and dry month in the Northern Isles, despite the winds being predominantly westerly. Temperatures reached as high as 15.1°C as late as the 24th.

Fair Isle: Rain 59.6%, sun 105.8%, mean temp. +0.7°C, mean sea temp. +1.0°C.

UK: Rather warm and sunny over most of Britain. Generally dry, except in a few hilly areas.

## **October**

Although mean daily temperatures were close to average, this masks a wide variation, with temperatures varying from 3°C above to 5°C below average. Winds were lighter than normal for October, and there was a high frequency of both mild south-west and cold north-west winds, contributing to the temperature variation recorded. Although a little wetter than September, October was another dry and sunny month.

Fair Isle: Rain 74.7%, sun 111.4%, mean temp. -0.2°C, mean sea temp. +0.7°C.

UK: Rather wet in the south-east, but otherwise generally dry. Cold over England and Wales, but milder than average in Scotland. Sunny everywhere except Ireland.

## **November**

A very dull month, 20 minutes of sunshine away being from the dullest ever November on Fair Isle! Quite often during a Shetland winter no sunshine will be recorded despite blue sky overhead, since a little cloud on the southern horizon will hide the low sun. This month, with average daily cloud amount at 90% (the highest ever recorded here in any month), blue sky was very much at a premium. The month was mild, with a high frequency of south-easterly winds due to a persistent anticyclone over Scandinavia. Due to the 'blocking' effect of this system, most of the weather systems that reached Fair Isle were rather weak, and so it was a dry month despite the cloud. The month ended one of the mildest and driest autumns on record for Fair Isle, with record high sea temperatures and only one ground frost in the period September-November.

Fair Isle: Rain 75.7%, sun 45.3%, mean temp. +1.6°C, mean sea temp. +1.6°C.

UK: Warmer than average, wet in many places and very dull except in the south-east.

## **December**

The mild autumn continued into winter, with December being another unseasonably mild month. Although rainfall was about average, it was a sunny month. Winds were lighter than normal, with gales recorded on only four days, and the year ended on a quiet note in the Northern Isles, in marked contrast to the south of Britain.

Fair Isle: Rain 101.5%, sun 138.9%, mean temp. +1.6°C.

UK: Generally mild and wet, sunny in the south but dull in the north.

### Meteorological Data, Fair Isle 1997.

Temp. (°C)	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	YEAR
Mean	5.4	5.0	5.6	5.8	7.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	11.2	8.7	8.3	6.8	8.3
Maximum	10.3	10.0	10.3	10.5	11.9	13.8	17.0	18.9	15.2	13.7	12.0	10.8	(7.5)
Minimum	0.6	0.0	-0.2	-0.6	-0.8	5.1	7.4	8.2	5.6	2.0	2.8	1.5	
Rainfall (mm)													
Monthly	58.6	119.1	120.7	73.6	61.3	40.6	28.0	61.5	55.0	80.1	88.5	104.7	891.7
Max. daily fall	27.0	16.5	16.6	21.6	17.0	15.1	5.8	14.5	9.6	24.6	13.3	18.2	(909.2)
Sunshine (hours)													
Total	38.4	61.0	81.5	95.1	172.8	149.1	119.6	205.9	124.9	79.7	16.8	23.8	1168.6
Max. daily	6.8	5.4	7.9	12.6	14.8	15.8	14.7	15.5	10.7	8.7	3.1	4.6	(1221.4)
Wind speed (knots)													
Mean	14.0	24.0	19.3	15.9	14.4	13.4	9.2	9.3	15.0	13.9	19.4	15.9	15.3
Max. gust	51	72	67	64	52	46	48	44	61	63	61	55	(16.1)
Number of days													
Hail	7	15	10	5	6	0	0	0	0	2	3	4	52
Snow/sleet	4	10	8	7	6	0	0	0	0	4	1	4	44
Rain, > 0.1mm	20	26	24	17	15	10	13	10	18	25	25	23	226
Wet, > 0.9mm	13	23	22	12	11	5	10	7	14	15	21	17	170
Ground frost	8	2	3	4	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	27
Wind (direction at 0900)													
North	3	1	3	4	4	8	1	1	1	6	1	2	35
North-east	2	1	1	3	6	5	2	0	0	1	2	5	28
East	1	0	2	3	5	1	4	6	0	2	2	1	27
South-east	1	2	4	2	1	6	11	8	5	1	18	7	66
South	8	7	5	3	5	2	1	6	3	3	3	5	51
South-west	7	7	10	4	4	0	5	5	7	8	2	4	63
West	5	7	5	6	3	6	7	2	10	6	0	6	63
North-west	4	3	1	5	3	2	0	1	4	4	2	1	30
Calm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2

(Figures in brackets are the mean for the period 1974-1996)

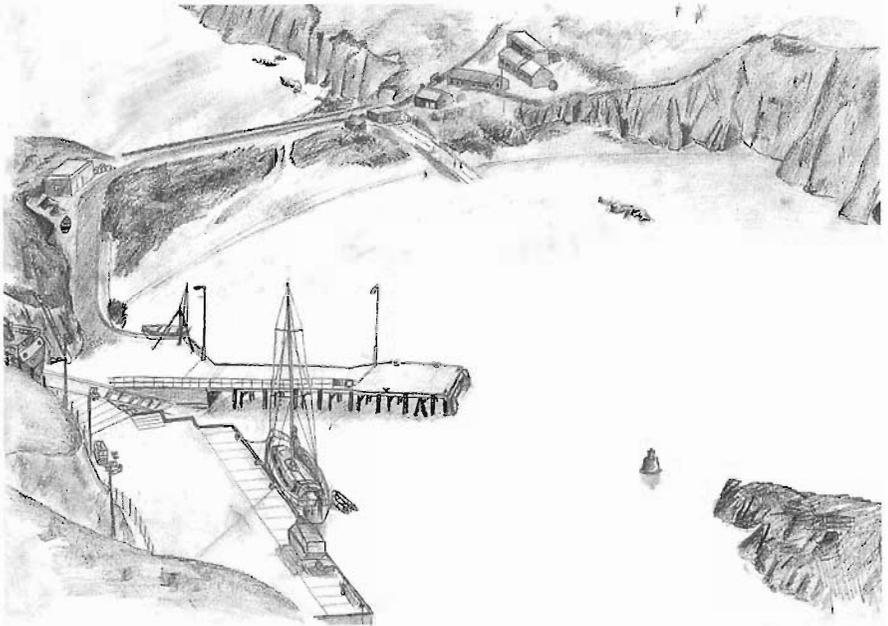
# *Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust Financial Report and Accounts, 1997*

Mike Wood

A summary of the Trust's accounts for the year ended 31 October 1997 appears on the following pages. The full statutory accounts and independent accountant's report can be inspected at the Bird Observatory on Fair Isle.

The numbers in 1997 were slightly down on 1996, with September showing the greatest month-on-month decrease. The excellent management of Roger Ridington, Mark Newell and all the staff contributed to a satisfactory financial performance despite this reduction in visitors. Advance bookings for 1998 are already at an encouragingly high level so prospective visitors should ring Helen Baker on 01595 760258 as soon as possible.

Although the Balance Sheet is reasonably healthy, it is likely that significant expenditure will be necessary over the next few years to maintain the Observatory buildings and fittings, particularly the roof and windows. We continue to rely in part on donations to help fund such expenditure and should any reader wish to make a further donation of any size, either for a specific purpose or generally, this would be extremely welcome. It should be sent to the Warden, at the Bird Observatory, Fair Isle. Any Friends of Fair Isle whose New Year resolutions included making a Will may also wish to consider leaving a bequest to FIBOT.



*NORTH HAVEN*

*Andy Smith*

**Income & expenditure account for the year ended 31 October 1997.**

	1997	1996
	£	£
<b>Turnover</b>	<b>58,520</b>	<b>54,584</b>
Cost of sales	(48,937)	(46,518)
<b>Gross trading profit</b>	<b>9,583</b>	<b>8,066</b>
Net operating expenses	(46,390)	(45,525)
<b>Operating deficit</b>	<b>(36,807)</b>	<b>(37,459)</b>
Subscriptions and other income	27,514	33,725
<b>Deficit for the year</b>	<b><u>(9,293)</u></b>	<b><u>(3,734)</u></b>

**Statement of accumulated surplus**

<b>Accumulated surplus b/fwd</b>	<b>100,490</b>	<b>95,147</b>
Deficit for the year	(9,293)	(3,734)
Release from appeal reserve	9,077	9,077
<b>Accumulated surplus c/fwd</b>	<b>100,274</b>	<b>100,490</b>

## Balance Sheet as at 31 October 1997

	<b>1997</b>	1996
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Fixed assets</b>		
Tangible assets	147,248	163,499
Investments	10,857	10,857
	<b>158,105</b>	<b>174,356</b>
<b>Current assets</b>		
Stocks	6,169	6,707
Debtors	12,718	9,218
Cash at bank and in hand	51,745	48,140
	<b>70,632</b>	<b>64,065</b>
<b>Creditors: amounts due within 1 year</b>	<b>(74,879)</b>	<b>(69,815)</b>
<b>Net current liabilities</b>	<b>(4,247)</b>	<b>(5,750)</b>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>	<b>153,858</b>	<b>168,606</b>
Creditors: amounts due after more than 1 year	(10,045)	(15,500)
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>143,813</b>	<b>153,106</b>
<b>Representing:</b>		
Accumulated surplus	100,274	100,490
Appeal reserve	43,539	52,616

**Fair Isle Endowment Fund: accounts for the year to 31 October 1997**

	<b>1997</b>	1996
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Revenue Account</b>		
Investment Income (Gross)	288	417
Investment Income (Net)	134	132
Deposit Interest (Gross)	128	24
Tax Refund	33	37
Total	583	610
Management Fees	323	264
Balance due to FIBOT	260	346
Total	583	610
<b>Capital Account</b>		
Investments at cost		
£2, 593 10% Treasury Conversion Stock 1996	0	2,749
£2, 875 5.5% Treasury Stock 2008/12	2,497	2,497
Henderson Administration – 960 High Income Units	638	638
Total	3,135	5,884
Balance at Debit of Capital	2,497	(95)
Total	5,632	5,789
Represented by:		
Balance at beginning of year	5,789	5,789
Gain/loss on redemption	(157)	–
Total	5,632	5,789

## **The John Harrison Memorial Fund.**

This fund is administered by the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust. John Harrison was a young birdwatcher from Norfolk, who visited Fair Isle three times, but whose life was tragically cut short. The fund was established in his memory at the instigation of the late Richard Richardson. Grants are given each year to help young people, between the ages of 15 and 21, with the cost of travel and their stay at the Observatory.

Successful applicants are responsible for making their own travel arrangements and booking at the Observatory, where they must stay for a minimum of one week. They are strongly encouraged to visit during July or August, to experience seabird and/or migration work, and to assist with Observatory work. Application forms are available from the Warden at the Observatory.

### **The John Harrison Memorial Fund: accounts for the year to 31 October 1997**

	<b>1997</b>	1996
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Revenue Account</b>		
Interest Received	868	890
Grants Paid	400	600
Transfer to Capital	235	114
Management Expenses	233	176
	868	890
<b>Capital Account</b>		
Investments at Cost		
£90013.25% Treasury Stock 1997	0	870
£1,400 9.5% Treasury Stock 1999	1,435	1,435
£6, 400 9% Treasury Conversion Stock	6,411	6,411
Total	7,846	8,716
Cash	2,494	1,361
Total	10,340	10,077
Represented by:		
Balance at beginning of year	10,077	9,963
Transfer from Revenue	233	114
Gain/loss on redemptions	30	-
Total	10,340	10,077

## NOTES

## NOTES

## NOTES

# Fly To Fair Isle

Direct flights to Fair Isle from Lerwick (Tingwall).

6 flights per week (November - April) • 7 flights per week (May - October).

Also flights every Saturday from Sumburgh (May - October).

For more details, or to book, telephone 0345 222 111 or 01595 840246.

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# Fair Isle

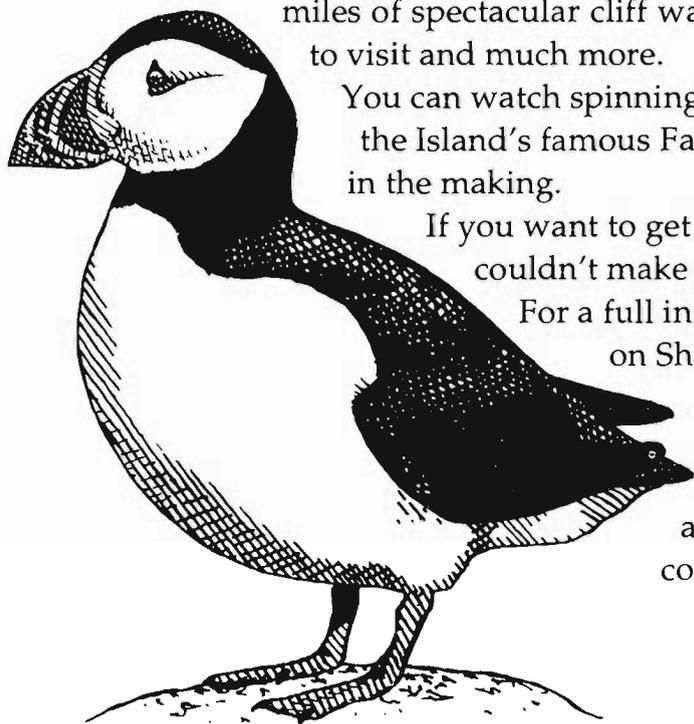
The Island that loves visitors

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**Shetland Islands Tourism**

Market Cross, Lerwick, Shetland, ZE1 0LU

Tel: (015 95) 69 34 34 Fax: (015 95) 69 58 07

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Sunday 12.30pm to 2pm

## **Bar suppers**

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## **Restaurant**

Nightly 7pm to 9pm (bookings required)



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## **SUMBURGH – SHETLAND**

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*For further details contact  
Peggie Gordon, Abertarff House, Church St, Inverness IV1 1EU  
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## ISLESBURGH COMMUNITY CENTRE

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