

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY.

BULLETIN No. 1, 1950.

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1. Introduction.

At the meeting of the Bird Observatories' Committee at York on February 11th last, when the more frequent exchange of information between bird observatories was discussed, the onus of evolving some such scheme was left with me. This Bulletin is an effort to start the ball rolling. It deals with interesting developments at Fair Isle during the Spring migration (up to May 9th) and notes of interest which I have received from other bird observatories are appended.

Other bird observatories which do not have a resident Director will almost certainly find it impossible to produce a periodic bulletin of this nature. If, however, notes of unusual events, monthly ringing progress etc. are sent to me by postcard, I shall incorporate them in this bulletin as and when it is issued.

Copies will be distributed as follows: Midlothian Ornithological Club, Spurn Point, Cley, Gibraltar Point, Lundy, Skokholm, Severn Wildfowl Trust, British Trust for Ornithology (for circulation Dr. Bruce Campbell, Miss E. P. Leach, W. B. Alexander) and F. I. B. O. Trust Executive Committee; also Fayid Ornithological Club (Egypt) and Niels Petersen a Batni, Nolsoy, Faeroe Islands, who are reciprocating with information on migration in their own areas.

Extracts from Bulletin No. 10 of the Fayid Club are included herewith. It is hoped to send out an account of the Autumn 1949 migration in the Faeroe Islands with the next issue.

2. Interesting records.

A Black-bellied Dipper, here March 19-20th (wind backing from SW. gale through SE. to NE. 5, 18/19th) has been reported to most bird observatories. Second record for Fair Isle and apparently fourth for Scotland (all Shetland).

Iceland/

Iceland Gulls. Two near bird observatory during March-April; one only since April 24th. The past winter in Shetland has been a quite exceptional one for this species.

British Robin. One trapped April 17th was first of this race to be recorded at Fair Isle. Colorimeter readings of mantle and breast plumage were obtained to establish the record.

Grasshopper Warbler. One was caught in a portable "ditch-trap" (see Trapping Methods) on May 2nd. Eighth record for Fair Isle, third for Spring migration.

Gadwall. A pair observed May 3-5th provide fourth Fair Isle record, third for Spring migration.

Gosander. Drake, April 11-12th (found dead and skin preserved 13th). Very rare in Shetland.

### 3. Winter Visitors.

Chaffinch. Big movement March 23rd (see Spurn Bird Observatory) and regular 5-27th.

Brambling. Few mid-April and during first week May.

Lapland Bunting. Cock birds, April 5th and from 18-30th (three on 24th).

Snow Bunting. Odd birds throughout April and first week of May.

Redwing. Few, mid-April and from 22-26th. Iceland birds trapped April 10-11th, 25th, 29th.

Fieldfare. Three, April 25-30th; flock of twenty, May 1st; few daily to 9th.

Cont. Song-Thrush. Party of five, April 26-29th.

Cont. Robin. Few, April 18-19th, and again, 25-29th.

Black Redstart. Female, May 4th.

Whooper/

Whooper Swan. Six, April 3rd.

Redshank. Considerable numbers, April 7-9th; regular to end of April and odd birds since.

Glaucous Gull. One adult, April 22nd.

Water Rail. One trapped, present April 6-11th.

#### 4. Summer Visitors.

Tree Pipit. Singly, April 26th and May 4th.

White Wagtail. From April 26th, but few only.

Pied Wagtail. March 19-20th, April 13-14th.

Willow-warbler. One only, April 18th.

Grasshopper Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. May 2d

Ring Ousel. April 26th, 29th and May 4th.

Wheatear. From April 3rd. Big influx, April 15-18th, also 21st, 28-29th, May 2nd and 4th. Few Greater Wheatears of both sexes on last two dates and over twenty (mostly females) May 5th.

Sand-martin. One, May 1st.

House Martin. One, May 3rd; two, May 6th.

Swallow. First on May 2nd (April 16-17th in 1949).

Lesser Blackback. First, April 9th; three on 15th and five, 16th.

Great Skua. First, April 5th and 14th, visiting regularly since.

Arctic Skua. Returned May 2nd, a week behind 1949.

Guillemot. Visiting ledges since April 6th.

Puffin. Visiting cliffs since April 11th.

5. Breeding Activity.

Meadow Pipit. First fledgling seen May 5th.

Blackbird. Laid C/4 April 15-19th.

Shag. First eggs (in two nests) April 9th, 11th.

6. Ringing Progress.

Total for season (Nov. 1st - April 30th) 520 birds of 20 different species. Starling 224, Blackbird 115, Skylark 27, Chaffinch 24, Robin 15, Redwing 12, Water Rail 8.

7. Recovery.

Only one since those reported in Annual Report 1949 p. 19 is of ARCTIC GRUA ringed as young, July 16th, 1949, found dead in November at LA PARRE, West Flanders.

8. Trapping Methods.

Potter Traps. These (Greenrig make), baited with corn on plough-land, caught 27 Skylarks during March and April, mainly April 11-13th. We hope to develop this method of catching: ring larke, buntings and finches more fully next Winter.

Portable ditch trap. This, set successfully for the Grasshopper Warbler, may be the answer to the problem of trapping ditch-haunting warblers. It comprises a net of  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. mesh made for us by Cmdr. Tom Yeoman, supported tentlike on a wooden framework (see rough diagram attached) and with a catching box set at the business end. The box has no lid, but a "tipping plate" as part of the floor of the upper box, on striking which the bird is dropped through to the holding compartment beneath. It is important that upper and lower windows of this type of box should meet at "X" (the overlap of the lower pane holding the upper in place) so that the bird has nothing to grip when the aluminium plate tips beneath its weight. All our catching boxes are fitted with this device and a number of birds are self-caught as a result.

Dacker/

Dacker Trap. Isle of May have had good results with a new portable trap designed to catch pipits and Wheatears. Details of construction from Herbert Dacker, 7 South Lauder Road, Edinburgh, 9.

#### 9. Laboratory.

The Colorimeter is now installed and has been used in determining the colour-values of mantle and breast of Robins and Wheatears.

Weight records. Good series of Redwing, Skylark and Chaffinch weights have been obtained from the Spring trapping. Also a series of six weighings of an adult male Snow Bunting re-trapped at various times.

Moult. Out-of-season moult has been noted in Skylark and Water Rail.

Parasites. Ticks have been collected from migrant Blackbirds and Redwings and sent to Dr. Turk (British Museum Nat. Hist.) for determination. These ticks, which usually affect the region of gape and eye-rim, are well worth looking for (see our Annual Report 1949, p. 23), can be removed with a pair of tweezers without injuring the bird, and preserved in industrial methylated spirits. Lt.-Col. Brownlow reports finding four ticks on the throat of a male Redstart trapped at Fayid on April 21st. He removed them with a pair of tweezers dipped in Dettol, and preserved them in gin! I wish we had some of his preservative here.

#### 10. Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler.

Lt.-Col. Brownlow (Fayid, Egypt) writes (April 23rd): "I was most interested to see in the February British Birds your article on selected species at Fair Isle, in particular your notes on the Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler. R. W. Crowe and I saw one here on March 14th, 1950. Its plumage and soft parts description tallied exactly with yours except for the tail, of which we could get no good description because the bird had evidently had a narrow escape from a predator and only had, as far as we could see, two rectrices left".

An/

An interesting fact is that PGW. normally winters in India, Burma, Malaya and SE. Asia, so that the Fayid occurrence seems further evidence of a westerly drift last Autumn, some birds reaching Africa, wintering successfully, and returning northwards in Spring. A most interesting record, in view of our ignorance of what happens to Yellow-browed Warblers and other Asiatic Autumn migrants in the British Area.

### 11. Migrant "rush" of May 7-8th.

Since the compilation of the above notes, Spring migrants have begun to arrive in quantity. The wind veered from NR. to E. during the night of May 5-6th, and the weather has been dry and sunny, with light easterly winds persisting, since.

A few birds, mainly Willow-warblers, arrived during the afternoon of May 6th, and a few other Summer visitors were seen for the first time. There was a good old-fashioned "rush" on the 7th, Willow-warblers and Redstarts predominating and being far too numerous to count. Yesterday the numbers had declined, but the quality increased and we recorded a day total of 62 species and sub-species as against 56 of the previous day. During the period, the sheltered cliffs of the west coast have attracted hundreds of migrants, making accurate estimates of numbers impossible. The following are the more interesting species recorded.

Ortolan Bunting. Male(s), May 8-9th.  
 Tree Pipit. Four on 7th, two on 9th.  
 White Wagtail. A dozen birds between 6-8th.  
 Red-backed Shrike. Male on 8th, two males on 9th.  
 Spotted Flycatcher. One on 8th.  
 Pied Flycatcher. Male trapped, 6th; eight males, one female, 7th; fifteen males, two females, 8th; fewer on 9th.  
 Willow-warbler. Innumerable on 7th; much fewer but still abundant, 8th; several on 9th. Possibly includes Chiffchaffs, of which only two have been certainly identified.  
 Sedge-warbler. One trapped, 6th; four seen 7-8th.  
 Blackcap. Male on cliffs, 8th.  
 Whitethroat. One trapped 9th and one seen on cliffs 8-9th.  
 Lesser Whitethroat. One 6th, three or four 7-9th.  
 Song-thrush. Two, 7-8th, browner-looking than the Cont. birds seen and trapped in April.  
 Ring Ousol. Males, 4-5th; eleven of both sexes, 7th; half-a-dozen, 8-9th on Ward Hill.  
 Wheatear/

Wheatear. No increase noted.  
 Whinchat. Male, 5-6th; ten males, four females, 7th;  
 nine males, two females, 8th; fewer, 9th.  
 Redstart. Male, evening of 5th; four males, 6th;  
 innumerable males, two females, 7th; fewer males, 8-9th.  
 Black Redstart. Female, 4th; male and female, 7th;  
 same male and another bird, 8th; one, 9th, a different bird.  
 Robin. One, 7th, and several, 8-9th, those trapped  
 being rubecula.  
 Hedge-sparrow. One, 8th.  
 Swallow. Half-a-dozen daily, 7-9th.  
 Wryneck. Six on 7th; eight on 8th, one, 9th.  
 Cuckoo. One, 6th.  
 Short-eared Owl. Two, 9th.  
 Kestrel. One, 9th.  
 Grey Lag Goose. Three, 7th.  
 Whimbrel. One, 2nd, seven, 5th, five, 6th and one, 9th.  
 Dunlin. Five on 8th.  
 Common Sandpiper. Two on 8th.  
 Golden Plover. Flock of eighteen, 8-9th, altifrons.  
 Black-headed Gull. Party of twelve, 5th; Five, 8th.  
 Corncrake. One, 6th, and one, 9th.  
 Turtle Dove. One, 9th.

## 12. Migrant Insects.

Painted Lady. A single very worn example, May 8th.

Reports/



REPORTS FROM OTHER BIRD OBSERVATORIES.Isle of May.

A. G. S. Bryson writes (April 20th): "Ringing has been very poor - the last three weeks producing 26 birds, or one a day!" Wheatears about March 21st. Tree Pipits in March and April. Meadow Pipits, usual big passages. Willow-warbler, one on April 7th and one, 17th. Ring Ousel, two, April 16-17th. A Blue Tit in March.

Recoveries have been interesting. About 5 winter Robins, 2 Hedge-sparrows, 1 Wren and 1 Brambling, all winter visitors. A Herring Gull ringed by Rev. John Lees last July at Avech, Ross-shire. Five Blackbirds (mainly resident, but some may be winterers only). Five Meadow Pipits, including last year's nestlings.

Baiting the traps with seed has increased the finches and buntings caught. The Dacker Trap has caught a few birds, about 5 Meadow Pipits and 3 Wheatears. Ringing total still below 200.

Spurn Point.

G. H. Ainsworth writes (March 24th): "Flocks of Chaffinches passing up North Sea. All boats putting into Humber mouth have many on decks (vide pilots coming into Hull) March 23rd." (On same day a large influx on Fair Isle. Wind here SE. 4 on 22nd, veering SW. 23rd).

And under date April 25th: "Very, very few summer migrants as yet. Fieldfare, Redwing, Brambling and Jack Snipe at Spurn this week-end. I spent last week there; 5 or 4 Swallows seen moving south, one Lesser Whitethroat and 3 Willow-warblers ringed. Black Redstart, April 21st. Only 350 birds ringed to date chiefly Linnets, Greenfinches, Chaffinches, one Long-eared Owl. About 10 Wheatears seen up to present.

Skokholm/

Skokholm.

Very poor migration up to April 24th. First Tree Pipit, April 6th. Willow-warbler, March 28th (regular from April 4th and ca. 50 on 16th). Chiffchaffs throughout the month. Blackcap, two males, April 15th. Ring Ousel, one, March 26-29th, one, April 6th. Wheatear, March 16th (ca. 60 March 26-28th, the only peak). Sand-martin, few on April 6th. HOOPOE, one from March 25-30th. Bar-tailed Godwit, one from April 10-24th. Whimbrel, first on April 22nd. Jack Snipe, one, April 12-13th. Woodcock, one, April 7th. Common Sandpiper, one or two, April 15-22nd.

Fayid Ornithological Club.

Bulletin No. 10, issued April 24th, reports that 340 birds have been ringed during 1950, making a grand total of 659 since the first trap was erected. Birds trapped on Spring passage include Lesser Whitethroat (101), Redstart (39), Common Whitethroat (37), Chiffchaff (32), Collared Flycatcher (14), Nightingale (12), Pied Flycatcher and Wrenneck (8), Tree Pipit (7), and Willow-warbler (5).

The pattern of migration seems to have been different from last year, when the number of trappings rose to one main peak on April 15th. The birds caught on that day were mainly Redstarts and Flycatchers. This year there have been four main peaks (a) April 2nd, mostly Lesser Whitethroats (34 birds ringed in one day, a record for the traps), (b) April 4th, day after a hot south wind, mostly Common Whitethroats, (c) April 11-13th, Common Whitethroats and Flycatchers, (d) April 21st, day after hot south wind, mostly Redstarts.

No evidence from recoveries that birds have stayed about for the long periods that they did last year. Longest stays are, Lesser Whitethroat, 9 days; Redstart, 8 days.

A hen Olivaceous Warbler B.2000 was retrapped on April 23rd, 1950. She was originally ringed on April 19th, 1949, and was retrapped on April 22nd and September 18, and must have migrated to winter quarters and back since the 1949 trappings.

Winter/

Winter visitors - last dates seen. Starling,  
 last week of March; Spanish Sparrow, April 9th; Skylark,  
 April 19th; White Wagtail, April 16th; Stonechat, February  
 25th; Bluethroat, February 28th; Little Stint, April 9th.

Summer migrants - first dates seen. Ortolan  
 Bunting, March 23rd; Pied Flycatcher, April 9th; Willow-  
 warbler, March 31st; Reed Warbler, April 1st; Blackcap, March  
 21st; Lesser Whitethroat, February 25th; Whinchat, March 22nd;  
 Nightingale, March 23rd; Swift, March 26th; Spotted Flycatcher  
 March 15th; Collared Flycatcher, March 27th; Wood-warbler,  
 March 31st; Sedge Warbler, March 11th; Whitethroat, March 27th;  
 Redstart, March 14th; Sand-martin, February 9th; House-Martin,  
 March 19th; Cuckoo, April 2nd; Gentag's Harrier, April 9th;  
 Ruff, April 9th; Marsh Harrier, April 8th; Hen Harrier,  
 April 9th; Osprey, April 8th.