

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY.

BULLETIN No. 2, 1950.

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1. Analysis of Spring Migration.

Passage of Summer visitors occurred here in two well-defined phases between May 6-12th and May 19-25th.

The "rush" of May 7th, recorded in Bulletin No. 1, was immediately followed by a rapid decline in numbers, but Redstart, Ring Ousel and Wryneck increased on the 11th, and Lesser Whitethroats and Hirundines peaked on that day. There was no change in the weather to account for this, the wind being light E.NE. and conditions sunny and dry as for the past two days

The second wave began on the 19th with the wind veering easterly from N.NW. at moderate strength. The wind backed to NE. on 20/21st at force 6 and remained in that quarter until the 23rd, when it became northerly and moderated to force 4. As will be seen from the table below, there was a definite increase in many species on this day (which was overcast but dry); Whinchats reached their peak, and Hirundines were again numerous and continued so until the 27th, being fewer to the end of the month.

20

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Species.	First Wave.							Second Wave.							
	MAY	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Tree Pipit.			4		2	3	4	2			1		1		1
Spotted Flycatcher.				1						2	1	3	5	1	
Pied Flycatcher.	1	9	16	4	2	2			1	2	1	1	3	2	1
Willow Warbler.	14	250	50	10	10	1	2			5	5	4	6	5	
Whitethroat.			2	2		2	1				1	2	3	2	
Lesser Whitethroat.	1	3	2	5	4	20	6		1	3	3	5	3		1
Ring Ousel.		11	5	9	1	5	2			5	1		2		3
Whinchat.	1	14	11	4	5	6	1	2	12	10		9	25	9	2
Redstart.	4	100	30	7	7	10	3			7	17	10	14	6	4
Robin.			1	7	3	3	2					1	1		1
Swallow.			6	7	10	12	50	25	6	9	9	9	50	25	50
House Martin.	2						15	2	1	2	6	3	50	30	30
Swift.							5	6	2	1	2	2		1	
Wryneck.			6	8	2	2	6	7	1	2				1	
Common Sandpiper.				2		1	3			10			6	1	2

In addition to the main species shown in the table and those mentioned in subsequent paragraphs, the following were among the more interesting migrants noted.

- Linnet. Two small movements, May 6-7th and 18-23rd.
 Brambling. Two movements, five or six from May 8-10th and two or three from May 22-23rd; with odd birds between.
 Ortolan Bunting. A male or males, May 8-12th, and one on 18th.
 Reed Bunting. Two waves, one or two from May 7-11th, and again 20-23rd, with four on 20th.
 Spotted Flycatcher. One or two to the end of May, and two on June 2nd.
 Red-backed Shrike. Males on May 8-9th and June 4th, females on May 10th and between 24-28th.
 Sedge Warbler. Scarce compared with 1949, - up to four between May 6-9th and singly (once two) from 18-26th. One, June 6th.
 Blackcap. Single males, May 8th and 10th, female 11th
 Garden Warbler. Only one, June 3-6th.
 Fieldfare. Up to five, May 7-12th and again 20-24th; singly to end of month and a late bird on June 5th.
 Song Thrush. Singly May 12th and 14th and from 24-28th one, June 6th.
 Blackbird. Two males trapped in the Gully on May 23rd and a female seen there indicate a small and unusually late movement with the second phase of the migration.
 Wheatear. Increases on May 10th, 14th and 23rd.
 Good Greenland Wheatears (on measurement, weight and colorimeter examination) were trapped between May 26-31st, mainly females.
 Robin. One Continental was trapped May 27th; one seen May 30th.
 Swallow. Six on May 30th, fifteen on June 1st and a few subsequently.
 Sand Martin. Three on May 11th.
 House Martin. Further strong passages took place on June 1st (over a hundred), 2nd and 4th (ca. 75).
 Cuckoo. One or two, May 19-24th; one trapped on 27-28th; two on June 1st. One on 2nd and one on 5th.
 Long-eared Owl. One was reported about May 12th.
 Short-eared Owl. Two on May 9th and 12th, one on 20-21st.
 Merlin. A female from May 16-20th.
 Kestrel. Female on May 6th and from 9-11th; also on 20-21st. A pair together on 22nd, and one on 27th.
 Euzzard sp. One flew high over on June 1st.
 Brent/

Brent Goose. One, believed Pale-breasted, flew over heading NE. on May 27th.

Teal. Four males on May 13th; a pair (of which the duck was trapped) on June 4th.

Curlew. Regular throughout the month, twelve on 10th and eight on 12th at the peak period.

Whimbrel. Regular throughout the month; fifteen or more on May 11th, 13th and from 16-19th, and twelve on 23rd. A few on June 4-5th.

Snipe. Three on May 20th and one on 22nd indicate passage with the second wave.

Dunlin. Regular, six on 18-19th and eleven on 23th.

Turnstone. Four on May 20th and again June 2-3rd.

Purple Sandpiper. Last noted, two on May 19th and one on 22nd.

Reeve. One was reported on May 20th.

Greenshank. One on May 20th.

Golden Plover. Eighteen (Northern race) from May 8-10th and four from 13th for several days. Twelve (? race) on 14th and a few from 22-25th.

2. Interesting Records.

Golden Oriole. One on May 22-23rd supplies the fourth Spring record for the island.

Little Bunting. A male on May 18-19th; there are previous Spring occurrences for 1907-09 and 1936.

Shore Lark. A male on May 13th is the latest by a week of the four Spring records.

Great Spotted Woodpecker. An adult male arrived on May 11th and stayed until 30th, - the first Spring record of the species at Fair Isle.

Dotterel. A very handsome male was present on heath in the village area on May 10-11th. This is the first Spring record, and the third only, for the species, at Fair Isle.

3. Unusual Passage.

Lapland Bunting. W. E. Clarke ("Studies in Bird Migration" 1912) recorded five birds between March 25th and May 2nd. There has apparently been no Spring movement of this dimension since, until this year. Adult males were recorded on April 5th, daily (once three birds) between April 18-29th, and again on May 5th and 18th, whilst females were seen on May 12-13th (two), 15-16th, and 18th (two).

Black Redstart. A survey of past records indicates that there has been no Spring passage comparable with that of 1950, commencing with a female on May 4th, and following with an immature male and female on 7-8th and different birds on 9th, 10th and 12th. The bird of the 10th was trapped and was a male in full breeding dress. Later there was an immature male from May 20-22nd.

4. Duration of Stay of some Migrants.

Jackdaw. A bird with the dark underparts and ill-defined collar of the southern race haunted fields near the Haas from May 20-24th (5 days).

Siskin. A female remained in and about the tiny burial ground, feeding for the most part in a patch of seeding Dandelions, from May 12-23rd (12 days). Last Spring our only Siskin, a male, haunted the Gully from May 1-8th (9 days).

Linnet. A female stayed in and near the burial ground from May 18-23rd (6 days).

Snow Bunting. A female stayed on the cliff-top of Meoness between May 13-16th (4 days). Previously a male, trapped at North Haven, remained four days from April 13th.

Lesser Whitethroat. One ringed on May 12th or earlier was still here on 16th (5 days).

Red-Spotted Bluethroat. A male trapped at the Bird Observatory remained nearby from May 11-18th (8 days). Another male, trapped on the Hestigeo Burn on the evening of May 24th and released two miles away, had returned to the Burn next morning and was last seen there on May 27th (4 days).

Continental/

Continental Hedge-sparrow. A bird with the very pale underparts characteristic of this race stayed in the stack-yard of one of the crofts from May 8-13th (6 days).

Wryneck. One, presumably the same, was observed among rocky outcrops in a certain field between May 26-30th (5 days).

Great Spotted Woodpecker. The male mentioned in para. 2 haunted a limited area of pasture land below Huni, feeding almost exclusively on the ground, during practically the whole of its stay from May 11-30th (20 days).

Pintail. A drake remained at the North end pools from May 30th to June 5th (7 days).

Iceland Gulls. Two first-winter birds, here for some weeks before the Bird Observatory opened on April 5th, were last seen at their usual haunt in the South Haven on April 24th and May 31st respectively.

An interesting feature of "delayed passage" of this kind is that such birds show a definite preference for certain restricted areas where, presumably, they have discovered a congenial habitat. This was especially noticeable in the case of the Siskin, the Woodpecker and the two Bluethroats, one of which, as recorded, actually sought out its preferred haunt after having been transported two miles to the Bird Observatory for ringing and examination.

5. Breeding Activity.

Starling. Brood-size is averaging larger than in 1949. To date the following have been ringed: 2 x B/5; 7 x B/4; 2 x B/3. Comparable figures for 1949 are: 4 x B/4; 3 x B/3; 2 x B/2; 1 x B/1 (from C/4, three eggs being infertile). We began ringing young birds on June 1st, a week in advance of 1949.

Skylarks appear to be more abundant this year than in 1949 and there are more pairs on the hill-ground. First young were hatched May 21st. Clutch-size in this and other small passerines appears to be low this year. Of eight Skylarks' nests none contained more than four eggs, three Meadow Pipits and two Rock Pipits have C/4, and the only Wheatear's nest known is C/3.

Fulmar/

Fulmar eggs were first seen on May 20th and 22nd.

Lapwings are breeding for the first time for a number of years. There were two nests, both C/4, but one was destroyed by a predator. The other is hatching, June 5th.

Bonxies have increased by one pair to five, and the four pairs which have laid have C/2. The first egg of the season was laid on May 20th.

Arctic Skuas were a week later in arriving - on May 3rd - than in 1949, but a week earlier in beginning to lay. Two pairs completed their clutches on May 22nd, and 17 nests (out of a probable 20 pairs) are now known.

Corncrake. Apparently only one pair this year as against several in 1949 and ten or a dozen in 1948.

6. Ringing Progress.

Total birds ringed at June 5th, 680 of 40 different species.

Meadow Pipit F. 0066, trapped as a breeding bird (in heavy head and body moult) on July 18th, 1949, was recaptured in the Yeoman Trap off a C/4 nest on June 1st, 1950. The species is a Summer visitor only to Fair Isle.

Blackbirds ringed as native juveniles in July 1949 were retrapped on the island on March 12th (immature female) and May 20th (first-Summer male) respectively.

7. Trapping Methods.

A new Heligoland-type trap is in course of construction, blocking the western outlet of the deep east-coast Gully at the site of the old mills above the waterfall (see plate 10, Annual Report 1949). There has always been a considerable "escape" of Blackbirds, Redwings and other species from the Gully trapping-area by way of the gap; but the construction of a trap presented some structural difficulties, which, it is hoped, have now been overcome.

The/

The funnel of the Ward Hill Trap (again blown down in the Winter gales of 1949-50) has been repaired and a few birds - including a Cuckoo - have already been taken in it.

The Yeoman Trap, described in Bulletin No. 1 (para. 8) continues to have success when opportunity for using it in the island's ditches occurs. Its captures to date are Grasshopper and Sedge Warblers, two Red-Spotted Bluethroats and two nesting Meadow Pipits which were required to give weight-records for comparison with those of migrant birds. They were weighed in the field and were very soon back on their nests.

8. Ectoparasites.

The ticks mentioned in Bulletin No. 1 (para. 9) and Annual Report 1949, p. 23, have been kindly determined by Dr. F. A. Turk. They prove to be Ixodes turdi (Scop. 1763) var. brunneus Koch, from Blackbirds, Redwings and a Robin in early October 1949; and also from Blackbirds in April 1950. A nymph removed from a Continental Redwing in April 1950 was apparently of the typical form. Specimens of similar ticks have since been taken from Iceland Redwing and Greenland Wheatear.

The only flat-fly (Ornithomyia sp.) seen this season came off a Red-Spotted Bluethroat on May 24th, and, unfortunately, made good its escape!

Fair Isle Bird Observatory,
June 5th, 1950.

K. Williamson.

Reports/

REPORTS FROM OTHER BIRD OBSERVATORIES.Isle of May Bird Observatory.

(Please note that this report is from memory and all information cannot be guaranteed).

Notes on Spring Migration during May.

Despite easterly weather during almost the whole month, few passerine migrants were recorded until the 14th. On this date, 54 birds were trapped and this figure included a Grasshopper Warbler and several Lesser Whitethroats. Next day, no birds at all were ringed. The 18th saw an influx of northern species, - Fieldfares, Ring Ousels, Greenland Wheatears and a Wryneck. Weather conditions at this time were more like a fine day in January than May.

The 20th was an interesting day. There were very few birds on the island during the forenoon but rain set in from the E. about 10 a.m. and by midday many migrants had arrived. Fieldfares, Continental Song Thrush, Ring Ousel, Continental Robin, Whinchat, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Willow Sedge and Garden Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Whitethroats, many Redstarts, 3 Ortolan Buntings, Grey-headed Wagtail, Tree Pipits, etc. (54 birds were ringed). Unfortunately, the rain ceased and the sky cleared before nightfall.

The 21st was marked by a Bluethroat and an Osprey which spent at least 2 hours on the May.

On the 23rd, fog and rain set in about 2 a.m. and continued for about an hour bringing in great numbers of migrants. 60 birds had been trapped by 6 a.m. and the final figure of 133 was a record for a single day on the May.

The most numerous species were, - Willow Warbler, White-throat, Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher, but a fine male Red-spotted Bluethroat was also trapped.

Spurn/

Spurn Bird Observatory.

Ralph Chislett writes (12.v.50): "Mainly strong northerly winds, easterly occasionally. Black Redstarts, April 16-20th, May 1st and 7th; first Common Redstart, April 23rd, others, April 30th-May 2nd and May 6-12th. Pied Flycatchers, May 6-10th. Two Wrynecks, May 10-12th. Tree Pipit, April 20th and 23rd and May 8th. First Willow-warbler, April 7th, main passage April 30th-May 12th. First Lesser Whitethroat, April 22nd and several May 7-8th. One Common Whitethroat, April 22nd, and a number, May 9-12th. Several Ring Ousels, May 9-10th. First Wheatear, April 5th, still passing May 12th. Odd Whimbrel, April 28th, May 1st and 11th. One Knot in breeding plumage, May 11th, but Waders generally very scarce. Greater Blackbacked Gulls were observed passing north in early May, and Swallows still passing south".

G. H. Ainsworth reports Spotted Flycatchers, Garden Warblers, Wheatears, Willow-warblers, Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Wood Warblers and Redstarts there on May 20th.

Cley Bird Observatory.

"A very dull Spring migration to date (11th May), although we had two Avocets on April 17th, a little Ringed Plover on May 3rd, and three Ruffs and two Reeves to-day. Greenland Wheatears started a rush on May 1st which has not yet fully petered out. Our final total of ringed Snow Buntings was 143".