

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY.

BULLETIN No. 5, 1950.

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1. Spring Migration - Great Saltee Island.

As mentioned in Bulletin No. 4, para. 1B, Major R. F. Ruttledge and Mr. John Weaving spent a ten-day period observing on Great Saltee Island during the Spring migration, with a view to exploring the possibilities of setting up a Bird Observatory there. They were followed by two English ornithologists, Messrs. Pollard and Ellis. Major Ruttledge very kindly agreed to my suggestion that the combined results of these investigations should be circulated among British Bird Observatories, and a summary of the observations has been prepared by John Weaving and appears as an Appendix to this Bulletin.

The Irish observers, perhaps with additional recruits are hoping to make a further stay on the island during September, and it is possible that a Heligoland Trap will be in operation at that time. Needless to say, any assistance of any kind that other Bird Observatories or ornithologists can give to Major Ruttledge's scheme will be greatly appreciated. His address is Cloonee, Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo.

2. Breeding Birds at Fair Isle.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*. Two young birds only flew from the C/5 nest reported in Bulletin No. 3. They were still in the Gully area at the end of August, though neither of the adult birds had been recognised for over a month. Both young were ringed in the nest on July 2nd, and flew on July 8th. One, retrapped 16 days later, weighed 17.62 g., and the other, retrapped on August 13th, weighed 18.05 g.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*. An old nest was found in July on the cliff-face of a geo on the east coast. A male bird was singing in this area during May.

GREAT SKUA *Catharactes skua*. Six pairs nested, an increase of two pairs on 1949. All laid C/2 except a new pair on Ward Hill, C/1. The eggs of one pair were sucked, apparently by Ravens, and they did not lay again. Eight young were reared, and have been colour-ringed.

BLACK/

BLACK GUILLEMOT. *Cepphus grylle*. A small Tystie colony visited July 1-4th by Keith McGregor, R. Zamboni and R. Vernon comprised five pairs, three with C/1 and two with C/2. Two nests were hatching on the afternoon of July 1st and on 3rd one chick, hatched probably on the night of July 1st, weighed 63 g. Another, hatched July 2nd, weighed 50 g. The young at this colony, with one exception, were destroyed by heavy seas during a strong SE. gale in mid-July. The surviving chick was practically fully fledged when ringed on August 2nd, aged 32-33 days, and weighed 16 ozs.

3. The Arctic Skua Study, 1950.

The colony, which numbered 20 pairs in 1949, increased to 22 pairs in 1950. Three new sites were taken up, but in each case the newcomers were unsuccessful. One site on the outskirts of the colony, first occupied in 1949, was not reoccupied this year, although the pair was observed there during May. With one exception the 19 established pairs were partially or completely successful, and so far as is known 23 of the 25 young which survived to the fledging stage have left the island.

The unsuccessful pair was a light x dark mating which nested late, hatching two chicks during the first week of July. One youngster, the palest juvenile I have ever seen, was still "grounded" after about forty days, and an examination revealed that it had sustained an injury to the carpal joint of the right wing which would prevent it ever taking to flight. So the bird was sent off on "The Good Shepherd" on August 16th and went south by air to Turnhouse the same day, arriving that evening at the Royal Scottish Zoological Park, where it is thriving. This youngster showed very pronounced pale phase characteristics in the juvenile plumage, the upper parts being strongly barred with pale brown, the head and neck entirely light brown, and the underparts white with the feathers narrowly tipped down. It will be interesting to follow up the changes of plumage at each moult if the bird survives.

Two of the new pairs were light x dark matings; they laid single eggs, well away from the main colony. In one case the chick died soon after hatching, and in the other the egg was lost to a predator. The third new pair, a dark mating, also lost their clutch of two eggs to a predator, and did not re-lay.

The Homisdale Hillside dark pair lost a clutch of two beautiful pale greenish-olive eggs at the end of May, and had replaced them with two considerably darker eggs on the same site before June 15th. One egg sustained damage in the nest, and the other produced a chick which turned out to be the darkest juvenile we/

we have seen on the island, the entire plumage being blackish-brown. This was the last of the 1950 youngsters to fly, on August 6th.

The five Eas Brecks pairs, nesting on the fringe of a Bonxie territory, again showed a mark tendency to move their families away from the nest in the opposite direction from their rival's ground. The North pair, a light x dark mating, took their chicks a distance of 200 yards, across the road, to a part of the moorland which had been the fledging-ground of their one youngster in 1949. Last year this pair had the bad luck to lose their youngster three weeks after fledging, and again in 1950 they lost the darker of the two juveniles at the same age. The junior chick, which survived, exhibited pale phase characteristics, having white underparts masked by rufous tips and fringes. These two youngsters, hatched 12 hrs. apart, remained very close in development, and took their first flights a few hours apart on July 5th.

In contrast, the two chicks of the Vatstrass dark x intermediate phase mating fledged ten days apart, and the period might well have been longer had we not interfered. The younger chick's backwardness was apparently due to a leg injury which caused it to walk with a marked limp, though the nature of the injury could not be ascertained from a superficial examination. On the 39th day I decided this chick would have to have "flying lessons", which consisted merely of tossing him into the air a few times from a hillside overlooking the nesting-ground! The "lessons" were continued on the next day when, on one occasion, he got under way himself. On the third day he was flying as to the manner born, and was still alive when the skuas' departure from the island began.

Last year the Burn of Furse North pair, of which the female is a dark phase bird with white patches on chin, belly and lesser wing-coverts and a white spot under each eye, hatched two young. One was normal, the other having the same white markings as the parent in both down and juvenile plumages. In 1950 this pair again hatched a normal and a white-marked chick, but unfortunately only the first survived. One of the Brae of Restensgeog pairs, in which the female has rather similar but less pronounced white markings, and lacks the eye-spots, hatched a partly albino chick from the one egg laid, and this youngster has survived in a juvenile plumage very like that of the parent. In 1948 a downy chick with white chin, belly and wing-stumps was found on this site (but apparently did not survive), and in 1949 the single youngster reared by the pair was of normal dark plumage.

On two occasions flat-flies, Ornithomyia fringillina, were taken from young Arctic Skuas, and a third was seen but not captured. The occurrence of this ectoparasite on the skuas may be accidental, the/

the flies transferring from smaller birds taken as prey. Occasion: ally one sees skuas attempting to fly down young pipits, and one half-grown chick, when being handled, disgorged a complete Wheatear, - complete, this is, except for the body feathers, which had been plucked. The only other parasite collected was the mallophagan Saemundssonina cephalus, which last year was taken from the heads of day-old chicks. The very dark Homisdale Hillside youngster, at one visit in the third week, was found to have a mass of blow-fly eggs on his mantle feathers, - testimony, perhaps, of the inactivity of skua chicks!

The position in mid-August, shortly before departure from the island, was as follows, so nearly as could be ascertained. Five of the six pairs which fledged two youngsters still had the full brood surviving. Twelve additional pairs reared single youngsters, so that in all 23 young survived, not counting the one which was sent to the Edinburgh Zoo. This compares more than favourably with the 13 survivors from 20 matings in 1949. The 22 pairs laid a total of 42 eggs, of which 32 duly hatched. Incubation and fledging-period data were obtained for a number of nests, and the development of wing-growth was followed in the case of several youngsters.

All the surviving young are colour-ringed so that it will be possible, should they return to the colony in future years, to identify them with the type of parentage and year of birth. It is hoped, by continuing this study year after year, to gather data from field observation which will throw some light on the heredity of the dark, pale and intermediate plumage-types.

In order to extend the scope of the study of the skuas' breeding-biology, and pave the way for a commencement of work on their social relations during the nesting-period, it seemed desirable to colour-ring as many adult birds as possible for individual recognition. The idea of trapping adults on the nest, while it offered the best chance of success in this respect, was discarded because of the risk of desertion or damage to the clutch. When routine visits to nesting-pairs were over this problem was reconsidered, and it was decided to try taking the adults in a clap-net, worked from a hide a few yards away, at a favourite bathing-pool on Byrewil. The scheme had immediate success, three birds being captured on the first afternoon, and although a number of failures followed through one cause or another (such as cords breaking at critical moments, failure to make allowance for changes in wind-direction, etc.) a dozen birds were taken, described, weighed and colour-ringed before the onset of the Autumn migration brought the Skua study to a close. A stuffed Arctic Skua fledgling, set up in the netfall to act as a lure, was responsible for the capture of a Bonxie/

Bonxie which saw in it the prospect of an easy meal; and of the male Arctic Skua whose territory is next the pool, and who persist: only stooped at the dummy, apparently trying to drive it away. It may or may not be significant that the single youngster reared on this territory had vanished from home a day or two before.

This clap-netting of adults and non-breeders will be continued throughout next summer, for by this means it should be possible not only to capture a high proportion of the breeding birds but also re-trap the young of previous years for plumage examination

4. Ringling Progress.

For the first time since the Observatory opened over 500 birds have been ringed in one month, the August total of 535 bringing the season's total to 1594 birds of 58 different species.

Features of the ringling during July were the increases over 1949 figures in Wheatear, Rock Pipit and Twite, - in each case mainly juvenile birds. The Heligoland Trap at the Observatory, built in August last year, and the extension and improvement of the Gully Trap at the same time, were largely responsible for the improved totals. 16 adult Herring Gulls were captured in the Observatory Trap, - 11 of them at one fell swoop on July 5th!

Of 181 Wheatears ringed in August, 65 were taken at the Lighthouses on the nights between August 22nd-25th, and the remainder were captured in the traps: our 1950 total for this species is now 285, including 40 ringed as nestlings. Other August trappings include Twite 91 (total now 133), Rock Pipit 55 (total now 105), Garden Warbler 37, Willow-warbler 36, Meadow Pipit 29, Pied Flycatcher 20, Whinchat 10.

A small trap built on the North Haven shore has been responsible for the capture of a number of Wheatears and Rock Pipits, 3 White Wagtails and 3 Willow-warblers.

5. Spurn Bird Observatory.

A postcard from Alec Butterfield dated August 16th records the following: Siskin (ringed) July 10th, 2 Barred Warblers (1 ringed) July 31st, Stone Curlew (first Observatory record) August 15th, probable Black Tern August 10th, Great Black-headed Gull, June 24th. "Pied Flycatchers moving as well as hirundines and usual warblers".

6. Autumn migration.

There was much movement through Fair Isle, mainly of Wheatears, Willow and Garden Warblers, Whinchats and Pied Flycatchers during the last fortnight in August. Interesting birds seen during this period include Aquatic Warbler, Barred Warblers, Eversmann's Warblers, Rose-coloured Pastor, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Scarlet Grosbeaks. A more detailed account of the observations during this period will be prepared for Bulletin No. 6.

K. Williamson.

GREAT/

GREAT SALTEE, MAY 1950.

Extracts from the log kept by R. F. Rutledge and J. Weaving 11th to 21st May, 1950, and from the continuation of this log kept by Messrs. Pollard and Ellis.

WEATHER.Forenoon.Afternoon.

Date.	Wind.	Sky.	Visibility Conditions.	Wind.	Sky.	Visibility Conditions.	Previous Night.
1950, May, 10th.	NE 4	b.g.	Bad, foggy haze.	NE 4	B.g.	Poor hazy.	No wind, fog.
11th.	ENE 4	b.	Good.	NE 3	b.	Good.	NE 4, Clear.
12th.	NE 3-4	b.	Good.	NE 3	b.	Good.	NE 2, Clear.
13th.	NE 3-4	b.c.	Good.	NEbyE 4	b.c.	Good.	NE 3, Clear.
14th.	ENE 3	b.	Good.	NE 3-2	b.	Fair.	ENE 2, Clear.
15th.	EbyN 2-3	o.gn.	Moderate, cool.	NE 4	o.g.	Moderate, clearing.	NE to EbyN 2, Clear.
16th.	EbyS to SE 3-2	o.	Cool, Moderate,	EtoNE 2-3	b.	Good.	NE 4-3, Clear cold.
17th.	NEbyN 3-2	b.c.	Moderate, haze.	ESE 1	b.m.	Moderate.	NE 2, Clear.
18th.	NEbyN 2-1	o.p.	Fair.	ESE 2-1	b.c.	Good.	SW1 to NE.
19th.	NE 1	o.r.	Good.	E 2-3	b.c.	Good.	No wind.
20th.	NE 2-3	o.gn.	Moderate.	S 1	o.gf.	Poor.	NE1, overcast!
21st.	EbyS 4	o.g.	Moderate.	EbyS 3	o.gm.	Poor.	NE 1 to EbyS 4, Clear to rain.
28th.	WNW 5	b.	Good.	WNW 5	b.c.	Good.	NW 5, Overcast.
29th.	WNW 4	b.c.	Fair, cool.	WNW 4	b.c.	Fair.	WNW, Cloudy.
30th.	WbyS 3	b.	Good.	WbyS 3	b.	Good.	Clear.
31st.	WSW 1	b.c.	Moderate.	WSW 1	b.c.	Moderate.	Calm Clear.
June, 1st.	WSW 1	b.c.	Moderate.	WSW 1	b.c.	Moderate.	Calm Clear.

RINGING of MIGRANTS.

We attempted to catch migrants in fleu nets, and spent the first/

first four days experimenting with a large net, before we convinced ourselves that the mesh was too large. We then rigged up a very small net, six feet by four, in which we trapped:-

Sedge Warblers 3,
Whitethroats 8,
Garden Warblers 2.

Had we been able to erect a small Heligoland trap on the site occupied by this small net, we could have shown quite impressive ringing figures. Most of the birds we drove escaped over or round our small net. Ten birds were trapped on May 18th and one bird on each day from 13th to 15th.

DAILY SCHEDULE OF SPECIES.

SPECIES.	May														June	
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	23	29	30	31	1
Black-headed Bunting.																m
Reed Bunting.									1							
Yellow Wagtail.			1													
White Wagtail.				1												
Woodchat Shrike.														f		
Spotted Flycatcher.		4	3	2	5	7	3	3	2							
Phylloscopus sp.		1			1											
Willow Warbler.	1	2	7	3	2	4	3	14	2	3		1				
Sedge Warbler.	15	20	20	20	15	15	20	20	15	15	15					
	+	+			+		+	+								
Garden Warbler.		3	1	1	1	1	1	1			1					
Blackcap.		m					m									
Common Whitethroat.	3	10	10	4	7	7	22	35	8	11	16	1				1
							+	+								
Wheatear.	12	25	21	11	6	11	8	10	5	4	2		m	f		
Whinchat.		1	2	1		1			1	2	1					
Redstart.		m	f	f												
Swallow.	30	50	15	6	10	6	22	10	15	30	10	7	7	12	8	6
	+						+				+		+			
House Martin.	8	15	4	10	14	4	1	2	2	9	2			1	2	
Sand Martin.	2	2	2		1	3	2		1	2			1			
Swift.	6	14	5	7	8	5	6	3		3	1			10		
Nightjar.					m											
Cuckoo.				2	1	1		1			1					
Kestrel.											1					
Wood Pigeon.		1								1						
Turtle Dove.		3	2	5	3	3	4	3	4	3	8	4	2	3	2	1
Curlew.		2	1	1	2		1	1		1		1				
Whimbrel.	2	13	6	2	1	2	10	3	3	2	6		2	2	3	1
Turnstone.				25	4	3	3	2	4	4	4		2	3	2	
Dunlin.	1	1	6	14	6	20	10	8	2	1	1					
						+		+								
Common Sandpiper.		5	1	1	1	1	1	1			1					
Sandwich Tern.												3				8
Common and/or Arctic Tern.											3			2		2
Black-headed Gull.						1										
Cornerake.				1				1								

Note: m = male; f = female.

NOTES ON SPECIES.

- RAVEN. One pair nesting, very late. One or two young were killed by a Greater Black-backed Gull Larus marinus, May 29th.
- JACKDAN. Corvus monedula. Breeds: 27 seen in the air at one time.
- BLACK-HEADED BUNTING. Emberiza Melanocephala. The male seen by Messrs. Pollard and Ellis is the only Irish record. (Identification satisfactorily substantiated - R.F.R.).
- SKYLARK. Alauda arvensis. Formerly numerous. One pair possibly breeding, bird in song on several days (R. & W.). Two seen together (P. & E.).
- MEADOW PIPIT. Anthus pratensis. Breeds, fairly plentiful. No estimate of numbers made.
- ROCK PIPIT. Anthus spinoletta. Breeds, plentiful. No estimate.
- WOODCHAT SHRIKE. Lanius senator. Adult f. in garden, May 30th, third Irish record (P. & E.).
- NORTHERN WILLOW-WARBLER. Phylloscopus trochilus acredula. R.F.R. feels sure that a proportion of the Willow-Warblers seen were of this form, and is certain that one seen on 18th was Northern race.
- (WOOD WARBLER. Phylloscopus sibilatrix. On May 12th, R.F.R. had a poor view of a Phylloscopine warbler in a bramble bank. At first glance, from a little distance, he thought the bird was a siskin, so yellow was it on the wings. The superciliary stripe was broad and very yellow, breast very yellow, and belly and under tail-coverts markedly white. It flew off to a bank some distance away and could not be found again.)
- SEDGE WARBLER. Acrocephalus schoenobaenus. Twelve pairs at least breeding (P. & E.).
- GARDEN WARBLER. Sylvia borin. The bird ringed on 15th was still present on 17th.
- BLACKBIRD. Turdus merula. Three pairs nesting; some young on the wing (P. & E.).
- WHEATEAR. Oenanthe oenanthe. Only on three occasions (May 11th, 15th and 21st) was a very grey-backed bird, undoubtedly males of the typical/

typical race, seen)(R. & W.). No proof of breeding, though what appeared to be two pairs were seen (P. & E.).

- HEDGE-SPARROW. Prunella modularis. Four pairs (R.). Probably five pairs (P. & E.).
- WREN. Troglodytes troglodytes. About six pairs (P. & E.).
- SWALLOW. Hirundo rustica. Marked migration: movement was often most pronounced in the afternoon. The flight was NE. or NNE., and the birds usually travelled along the northern shore of the island (R. & W.). Formerly nested. At least six birds frequented the farm buildings up till May 15th, when they left. Four birds were near the buildings daily from May 28th to June 1st. No indication of nesting (P. & E.).
- HOUSE MARTIN. Delichon urbica. SAND MARTIN. Riparia riparia. Direction and time of migration as for Swallow.
- SWIFT. Apus apus. Swifts did not hang about so much as the hirundines and on most days left the island over Sebbur, having come in from SW.
- SHELD DUCK. Tadorna tadorna. Flocks of up to ten seen daily. Most birds were paired. One nest suspected.
- PEREGRINE. Falco peregrinus. Falcon flushed several times near old eyrie.
- MALLARD. Anas platyrhynchos. Parties of up to 24 seen daily, one pair almost certainly breeding.
- RED-BREASTED MERGANSER. Mergus serrator. Nest suspected (P. & E.).
- CORMORANT. Phalacrocorax carbo. Absent for second year in succession.
- SHAG. Phalacrocorax aristotelis. Over 100 pairs breeding (J.W.).
- GANNET. Sula bassana. Breeding. A second nest was occupied this year.
- MANX SHEARWATER. Puffinus puffinus. Breeding, - no attempt was made to investigate the size of the colony.
- FULMAR. Fulmarus glacialis. Great decrease since 1947, when 40 pairs occupied nest-sites. Count of 14 pairs, May 16th-18th (J.W.). Later in month an estimate of 60 birds, of which 20 pairs were thought to be breeding (P. & E.).

ROCKDOVE/

- ROCKDOVE. Columba livia. Several were seen on most days.
- TURTLE DOVE. Streptopelia turtur. One bird, easily recognised by its short tail, was first seen May 17th and was still present June 1st.
- WHIMBREL. Numenius phaeopus. One with easily recognised variation of call-note was present May 11th-19th.
- RINGED PLOVER. Charadrius hiaticula. One pair breeding at the Ring.
- LAPWING. Vanellus vanellus. From 12 to 19 pairs breeding.
- OYSTER-CATCHER. Haematopus ostralegus. Five nests on beach (P) No nests on beach on May 18 (J.W.). One nest in a field, and another field nest suspected. Numbers seen daily, up to 18 in flocks May 11th-21st, several birds in partial Winter plumage.
- HERRING GULL. Larus argentatus. Several large and many small colonies. Population estimated at 1000 pairs in 1943, from nest count; in 1950 appeared to be of the same order.
- BRITISH LESSER BLACKBACK. Larus fuscus graellsii. Nesting in three areas, 39 nests in all (R. & W.).
- GREATER BLACKBACK. Larus marinus. Count of 89 nests (R. & W.).
- KITTIWAKE. Rissa tridactyla. Very large colonies, no estimate of numbers made. Numbers of non-breeders seen daily at the Ring and Sebbur had a proportion of 1st year birds.
- GUILLEMOT. Uria aalge. 3782 birds counted, of which 9 were bridled, or 0.42%. Estimated breeding population between five and six thousand pairs. (W).
- RAZORBILL. Alca torda. In careful estimate W. considers this species more numerous than Guillemot.
- PUFFIN. Fratercula arctica. Colony appears to have decreased (W).