

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY BULLETIN



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E D I T O R I A L

During September 1951 the bird-migration will receive more concentrated attention than it has had in any previous season. In addition to the observations being carried out at the several Bird Observatories, - Fair Isle, Isle of May, Monkshouse (Northumberland), Spurn Point, Gibraltar Point, Cley (Norfolk), Lundy, Skokholm and Slimbridge, - other suitable places are being closely watched. Dr. Ian D. Pennie and a few helpers will be at Noss Head, near Wick, Caithness, from September 16th to the end of the month, - an area where there has been some notable bird-movement, including the occurrence of "rarities", in past years. Dr. K.B. Rooke is at Portland Bill, Dorset, which (in theory) ought to be as good a place as any for keeping an eye on cross-Channel migration. Lt. Col. Guy Brownlow is spending most of the month on board O.W.S. "Weather Recorder", in the North Atlantic a hundred miles S. of Iceland, before coming on to Fair Isle in early October. L.S.V. Venables is as usual paying close attention to bird-movements in Dunrossness, the southermost parish of Shetland mainland; Niels Fr. Petersen is carrying on observation at Nolsoy, Faeroes, and it is expected that Major R.F. Ruttledge and others will be watching on Great Saltee.

In addition to these preparations at the "receiving end", so to speak, of the migration, a strong party from Cambridge University is spending the month at Lista, near the SW. tip of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The party includes David Jenkins and David Wilson, who spent a fortnight at Fair Isle last autumn; Michael Plaxton, C.K. Mylne and John H. Hyatt. The last two spent part of September 1950 observing at Utsira, an island off SW. Norway which has rich potentialities as a Bird Observatory. The main task of this party is the observation of outgoing migrants, but a small amount of netting and other equipment has been taken and attempts to trap, weigh and colour-ring migrants will be made. The Cambridge party may justifiably claim to be our first Mobile Bird Observatory, for they have motor-cycles, and so will be able to cover a fairly wide extent of the coastline. It has been arranged that news of any unusual movement during this period should be passed by telegraph between Lista, Fair Isle and Noss Head.

We hope to give a full report of these several attempts to link-up the September 1951 migration watching in a future Bulletin.

Compiled by the Director, Kenneth Williamson,
for the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust,
September 25-30th 1951.

32. The Arctic Skua Study, 1951.

The Arctic Skuas, Stercorarius parasiticus, were less successful in 1951 than in the previous season, due to a higher rate of egg predation for which the Ravens and Hooded Crows were perhaps responsible. The colony, 20 pairs in 1949 and 22 in 1950, increased to 26 breeding-pairs in the present season. A total of 49 eggs was laid - including three repeat layings - and of these 33 or 67.3% were hatched, 23 young (or 46.9% of the eggs laid) being reared to the fledging stage. So far as we know, only one of these came to grief before the colony broke up. Comparable figures for 1950 are 42 eggs laid, 34 or 78.5% hatched, 25 or 59.5% fledged, with two further losses before the island was deserted.

The average fledging-period for 20 young whose period is accurately known was 29 days, as against 31½ days for 23 young in 1950. Two youngsters in 1951 flew after 27 days and the maximum period was 31 days. In 1950 the Vaasetter chick took 28 days but all others were between 30-33 days. It is thought that the greater abundance of "sillocks" - young Saithe or Coalfish - in the waters surrounding the island in July was the main factor in this shorter fledging-period. These fish are the staple food of the Kittiwake Rissa tridactyla, and therefore of the Arctic Skua, which obtains most of its food by forcing Kittiwakes to deliver up their catch. The first "tarrocks" or young Kittiwakes were on the wing during the last two days of July, an early date for Shetland. It would be interesting to make comparative observations on the fledging times of the Kittiwakes and their predators in future years, but there are difficulties owing to the inaccessibility

of the colonies of the former species.

Unfortunately, owing to the drought of the late spring, the Arctic Skuas' bathing-pool at Byerwil, where we had some success clap-netting adults last year, was completely dry during most of the season. Inability to carry on this work was a great disappointment, for last year's colour-ringing of adults bore rich fruit in 1951, as the following records show.

337.736, White-over-blue, dark phase, ringed 29.vii.1950 as a non-breeder. Nested west of Jarm's Cup in 1951, mated with 337.654, Yellow-over-red, intermediate phase, ringed at the pool on 1.viii.50 as a non-breeder.

337.653, Green-over-blue, pale phase, ringed 1.viii.50, was mated with an unringed dark phase bird in 1951. Coition was observed on the evening of June 17th, the pale bird behaving as a female. The pair apparently had no territory, and did not nest.

337.660, Yellow-over-white, dark phase, ringed 18.viii.50, presumed male of the pair nesting on the Byerwil territory. Returned to this territory in early May 1951 but by May 11th had been ousted by 337.658, Blue-over-green, pale phase, ringed 8.viii.50 as a non-breeder.

337.738, Yellow-over-blue, intermediate bird, ringed 29.vii.50, presumed female of the Byerwil nesting-pair. Returned to Byerwil in 1951 but "divorced" her mate in favour of 337.658 (above).

337.655, White-over-red, intermediate bird, ringed 2.viii.50 as a non-breeder.

Observed a number of times in 1951 on a new territory at NE. side of Swey, together with an unringed dark phase bird. No evidence of nesting.

Thus seven out of the dozen birds taken at the Byerwil Pool in 1950 were accounted for in 1951, two of them again being non-breeders. In addition, other non-breeders were about, and among these were a dark x intermediate pair which occupied Eas Brecks SE., where two young were raised last year. On three occasions pale birds in immature plumage were seen at the colony, but in no case was it possible to see if they carried colour-rings.

All those young which reached the age of two weeks were colour-ringed, as in previous seasons, with a special "year-ring" and the combination used each season for their particular family. A brief history of the various families, with some of the more interesting diary notes, follows: in the description of the adults, "D" refers to individuals of the dark phase (with the plumage entirely blackish-brown), "P" to the white-bellied pale phase birds, and "I" to intermediates. The last have the feathers of the underparts white masked by pale brown tips, and have pale lores and buffish collars contrasting with their dark brown caps.

AIRSTRIP EAST A new mating, D x I. They nested late, their single egg hatching July 9th. The chick was last seen alive on its 11th day: no feathers were showing, but the primary quills were about an inch long.

We looked for the chick on July 21st, and the adult on guard did not seem particularly anxious. "July 24th: Searched again for this youngster. Dark bird flew round a little with tchup anxiety note, then settled near east end of airstrip and watched us. Eventually Esther found the chick, but it was dead. As Ross and I joined her the bird flew round brokenly, the legs dangling, and on alighting indulged in lure display. I have not previously seen lure display on behalf of a dead chick. Judging by the smell of decomposition and the chick's fly-blown state death must have occurred at least two days ago. It looked as though it might have been trodden on by a sheep. The growing scapular feathers are entirely blackish-brown." On 25th we took G.T. Kay to this site, wondering if we would again see "injury-feigning", for we had left the dead chick as it lay. Both adults were present, and both gave good lure displays. The next day I went to the site again: the I. phase bird was there and gave lure display when I passed close to the dead chick. Both adults were present on 27th, but I could get no reaction then or on later visits. Thus, the normal parental response to intrusion persisted for some 5 days after all biological need for it had ceased to exist.

AIRSTRIP NORTH. An old-established P. x I. mating. Their two eggs, both with a belt of dark brown round the widest part as in 1950, were found on May 31st. The first chick was just dry at 1930 hrs. June 23rd, and the second chick was at the same stage 24 hrs. later. The elder chick showed I. characteristics when fully-feathered, - narrow

rufous barring on scapulars and coverts; a dark brown head and nape, and dark brown underparts but with the feather-bases white. The younger chick was excessively barred with reddish-brown on the upper-parts and wings, and the belly feathers were white with only very narrow rufous tips, not close enough to mask the white. These, we believe, are pale phase characteristics. Both were flying on July 23rd after fledging periods of 30 and 29 days respectively.

AIRSTRIP SOUTH Old-established P. x D. mating; first seen on territory May 6th. Two eggs were found May 31st. One, slightly fractured on evening of June 17th, hatched early on 20th, but the other proved to be infertile. The Juvenile showed P. characteristics with a wealth of rufous edgings on mantle, scapulars and belly feathers, the last only just broad enough to mask the white. The bird took its first flights after 29 days on a morning of mist and fine rain.

BRAE EAST. An I. pair as in 1949-50, one (believed to be the female) with white markings on belly and lesser coverts. A downy chick with the white markings of the female was found at this site in 1948, a normal I youngster was reared in 1949, a partial albino flew in 1950, and in the present season the single egg produced a normal chick which developed as one of the palest of P. phase youngsters we have seen on the isle! This is the first evidence we have obtained that I. phase parents can produce a P. phase youngster. The bird fledged on July 18th after 28 days.

BRAE MIDDLE. This is the P. x I. pair whose 1950 P. youngster sustained a wing-injury and was sent to Edinburgh Zoo (see Second Annual

Report, 1950). This year the pair had better luck and reared one very pale youngster which figures in the film taken by G.T. Kay. "August 1st: Found this bird crouching on the nesting-ground. Held him up on my hand and after half-a-minute he rose from a crouching posture, standing quite upright, and after a few moments of indecision flew off. The I. adult came over and flew with him. On my going to where he had alighted after a 30-seconds flight he rose again. The third time he ran in front of me for some yards and finally took off with a little difficulty. The crouching instinct seems to have died quite suddenly and completely." Fledging period 30 days."

BRAE WEST. A D. x I. pair as in former years. Last year this female laid two eggs, one a very misshapen specimen which, although first laid, hatched 3 days after the other, producing a healthy chick. This year the only egg laid was similarly assymetrical, and hatched on June 24th. I. type of youngster, fledged 22nd July after 28 days.

BURN OF FURSE NORTH. This important family had very bad luck in 1951. The male is D., the female I. but a partial albino with white patches on belly, chin and lesser wing-coverts, and a white spot under each eye. These albinistic markings she has transmitted in previous seasons, 1949 and 1950, to one of her two chicks, the other being a normal bird. (See First Annual Rep. 1949, p.25; Second Annual Rep. 1950, p. 25). In 1951 she surprised us by producing two youngsters each with the same albinistic markings as herself. The white areas of the down-plumage were succeeded by white feathering

as the chicks grew, except in the case of the eye-spots, which had only been faintly indicated in the elder chick. On the evening of July 17th the younger chick appeared to be very sick: its plumage was clogged with excreta, it obviously had little strength, and was underdeveloped. We cleaned it up in the lab. and returned it to the nesting-ground, but it was dead next morning. A Nematode identified by

Dr. S. Prudhoe as a species of Contracaecum (perhaps C. micropapillatum Stossich, 1890, or a closely related form) was removed from the stomach during skinning. The large intestine was not in good condition, having a number of constrictions along its length. The elder chick flew on July 19th after 29 days, but unhappily it came to grief on or about August 12th, striking the telephone wires which cross the Burn of Furse. An attempt was made to preserve the skin, the head and neck of which were much decomposed when the body was found on 15th, and the remains of the two birds are now in the Royal Scottish Museum collection.

BURN OF FURSE SOUTH There was very nearly tragedy at this site, an old-established one, D. x I. Hatching was complete on June 30th, and on July 13th, when the chicks were sought for colour ringing, the partly-eaten remains of the younger were found on the northern side of the nesting-ground almost on the territory of the Burn of Furse North pair. The elder chick was lively enough, but it had an open wound at the base of the neck and had obviously been attacked by some predatory bird. The Burn of Furse North skuas were under suspicion: they often attacked their southern neighbours - sometimes viciously - when any disturbance caused these adults to fly round overhead. The elder chick survived, the wound healing well, and flew in 32 days, a rather pale I. type of youngster. This fledging period was the longest we recorded in 1951, perhaps a result of the injury. (To be continued)

Weather Notes

August 25th-27th A high over S. Norway and N. Germany on 24th, the barometer falling slowly later in the day as the anticyclone moved farther east. Calms or light winds over an extensive area of Central and Eastern Europe during this period. Wind mod. SE. (Denmark), E (S. Norway) and easterly over northern part of North Sea, on the north side of a shallow low lying to east of Cromarty. At midnight 24th an extensive low had formed south of Iceland and by 0600 hrs. 25th its influence had spread to the North Sea, the wind in E. Fair Isle having backed SE. An occlusion passing up the North Sea intensified the SE. winds over Denmark and S. Norway and some drift of migrants was evident. Common Gulls (200) were dominant; there were Ruffs (14) and small numbers of Garden and Willow Warblers, Pied Flycatcher and Common Sandpiper; also Barred Warblers (3) and an Icterine.

By the evening of 25th this low, now west of Hebrides, had begun to fill and an occluded front moved up the North Sea. The easterly airstream now extended farther south, including the Low Countries, so that migrants over a much wider area of the Continental sea-board were exposed to NW. drift. The 27th was one of our most interesting days, arrivals including Scarlet Grosbeak, Ortolan, Tree Pipit, Red-backed Shrike, Spotted Flycatcher, Willow Warbler (10) Garden Warbler (9), Whinchat (3), Swift (6), Heron (7), Curlew and Corncrake. An Eversmann's Warbler and Barred Warbler were also here.

(see also para. 37)

34. Migration at Fair Isle, August
and early September 1951

In view of the efforts which will be made to co-ordinate migration observations at various points from mid-September onwards (see Editorial for full details), the notes which appear under species headings below are mainly from the earlier phase of the autumn migration.

ROSY PASTOR Sturnus roseus An immature bird, - very sandy-buff in the field, but with a distinctive pinkish tinge on the rump, - was in company with a small party of S. vulgaris in the crofting area on September 3rd.

David Wilson has sent a note concerning a young Rosy Pastor observed near the Pool of Virkie, Dunrossness, on September 1-2nd 1950. He had just returned to Spiggie from a stay at Fair Isle, where a young bird of this species had been in the vicinity of the Bird Observatory from August 22-30th. "The plumage differed only from the Fair Isle bird in that the primaries were slightly greyer and darker." The bird consorted with small flocks of S. vulgaris

REDPOLL Carduelis flammea Two were at Springfield on September 14th. Two which came regularly to the Mires garden to feed among the seeding Chickweed on September 20th and following days were Greater Redpolls, C.F. rostrata or islandica.

SCARLET GROSBEAK Carpodacus erythrinus Females or young birds were seen on August 27th and 31st and September 13th. The bird of Aug. 31st was caught in the Gully Trap and

weighed 20.74 g. (One on Sept. 2nd 1950 weighed 24 g.)

BLACK-HEADED BUNTING. See para. 35.

RED-HEADED BUNTING Emberiza bruniceps

The adult male described in Bull. No. 3, para. 30 was last seen on August 21st, after spending 18 days on the island. Samples of the grass on the seed-head of which it fed were identified by Prof. V.C. Wynne-Edwards as Anthoxanthum odoratum. This bird is not the 5th for the British Isles, as stated in Bull. No. 3, but the sixth, as I understand an adult male was watched on Lundy in early July.

ORTOLAN BUNTING E. hortulana One on

Aug. 27th was succeeded by three next day. These remained in the Springfield corn until Sept. 6th and from Sept. 1-3rd an additional bird haunted the moorland near the Bird Observatory.

LAPLAND BUNTING Calcarius lapponicus.

Five arrived on September 6th and fifteen were counted next day. The highest counts were eighteen on 8th and 15th. The latter almost certainly represents a new influx, for, although these birds range widely over the moorland and are thus very difficult to locate, single birds only had been recorded on the preceding two days.

SNOW BUNTING Plectrophenax nivalis

Single birds were seen on September 14-15th, then nine on 16th and over twenty on 18th, mostly near the summit of Ward Hill. A party of 20 was seen to arrive at Skroo, on the north coast opposite Shetland, on the morning of 20th.

An adult male caught in the Dyke Trap on 17th belonged to the typical race.

TAWNY PIPIT See para. 36

TREE PIPIT Anthus trivialis. Two each day, August 27th, 28th and 31st; three on September 1st and 2nd.

WHITE WAGTAIL Motacilla alba alba. Two for a week from August 9th; fifteen on 20th, building up to over thirty on 23rd, with new arrivals on 25-26th and more than fifty on 31st. Most of these birds were to be seen among the wrack at high water-mark on the stony beaches. There was a decline to twenty on September 1st but twice as many were here next day, and another wave arrived on 7-8th.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE Lanius collurio. Young birds on August 27th and 31st were followed by four each day, September 1-2nd. One of these was an adult male, a rarity here in autumn. We had three juveniles on Sept. 3rd and two on 4-5th.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER Muscicapa striata. Singly on August 27-28th and 30th, also Sept. 1st. There were two on Sept. 3rd and one each day on 10th and 13th.

PIED FLYCATCHER Muscicapa hypoleuccs. The first arrivals were two on August 25th and there were six on 31st, followed by over thirty next day. Only five remained on 2nd, and this number was doubled by further arrivals on 3rd. A few came in on 8-9th and 14th.

CHIFFCHAFF Phylloscopus collybita
One haunted the Mires garden, with Willow-warblers, from August 31st to September 3rd.

WILLOW-WARBLER Ph. trochilus. Two on Aug. 8th were the heralds of the autumn migration, and one of these stayed until 15th. There were no more until three arrived on 25th, but the first real wave did not appear until 27th, increases following on 30th, 31st and September 1st. Few only were seen after this, six on Sept. 8th and seven on 14th representing new influxes. A bird trapped at North Haven at 0945 hrs. on Sept. 9th was retrapped there at 1445 hrs. on 18th, showing a drop in weight from 7.74 g. to 7.26 g. So far as our records show this is the longest stay on the island for a Willow-warbler.

WOOD WARBLER. See para. 40

EVERSMANN'S WARBLER. Ph. borealis. One, - a bird of the year, judging by the grey-green tinge of the upper-parts, - was in a potato rigg near Mires on August 27th. It showed a single whitish wing-bar on the major coverts and a faint touch of white on the median coverts of one wing. It gave good views as it perched on a wire fence, but was very restless, continually turning about or hopping to a new position.

REED WARBLER. Acrocephalus scirpaceus. A 1st winter bird was caught in the Observatory Trap on September 9th, weight 10.6 g., wing 67.5 mm. The colours of the soft parts were: bill, lower mandible flesh-coloured, upper mandible dark brown; iris, dark greyish-brown; gape, orange; tarsi purplish-brown, and toes greenish.

SEDGE WARBLER. A. schoenobaenus. A bird was seen on September 13th.

ICTERINE WARBLER. Hippolais icterina.

For the first time since the Observatory was founded we have recorded this species, - three birds, all taken in the traps. The first appeared to be an adult bird, the others young of the year with less yellow on the underparts. Their weights were: adult, August 25th, 13.43g. (seen again on 28th by its captor, James A. Stout); 1st winter, September 2nd, 13.25 g. (seen again next day); 1st winter, September 5th, 13.36 g. The wing-lengths were 78 mm., 74 mm. and 79.5 mm. respectively; bill 14 mm. Wing-formula: 1st primary equal to primary coverts or 0.5 mm. longer, 3rd longest, 2nd 3-3.5 mm., 4th 1-1.5mm., 5th 4-6 mm. and 6th 8-9 mm. shorter; 3rd and 4th emarginated. Colours of soft parts: bill horn-colour on culmen, cutting-edges yellow, base of lower mandible flesh; inside of mouth orange; iris olive-brown; legs blue on front of tarsi, purplish-flesh at the sides.

BARRED WARBLER. Sylvia nisoria. Three were seen on August 25th, and the first of these, which showed a partiality for a thistle-bed near the Observatory buildings, was caught in a net draped round the plants for its reception. There were two on the island on 26th and one next day, and on Sept. 1st R. Spencer captured another 1st winter bird in the Ward Hill Trap. The trapped birds weighed 19.55 g. and 22.5 g. respectively and had wings of 85-86 mm., the bills 15 mm. and tarsi 26 mm.

GARDEN WARBLER S. borin. Passage began with four on August 25th and increased on 27th, when nine were counted. The best days were 31st with fifteen birds and September 1st with ten. There were five on Sept. 10th and four on 13th.

BLACKCAP. S. atricapilla. Female, Sept. 13th.

WHITETHROAT. S. communis. One on August 28th and three next day; two on September 1st and three on 10th.

LESSER WHITETHROAT. S. curruca. Singly from August 24-29th; three on September 1st; singly on 7th and 10th. The latter was trapped at 1500 hrs. in Vaadal, weight 11.53 g., and returned there after its release then and on three other occasions down to 15th. It showed no appreciable change in weight during its 6-days' stay. The 2nd primary of this bird was equal to the 6th in the left wing and between 6th and 7th in the right, and it may have been of the eastern race Sylvia curruca blythi. A more typical blythi was taken in the Dyke Trap early on 11th, - it was in company with another Lesser Whitethroat, which escaped. An adult caught by James Anderson in the Setter byre next day had the wing-formula of the typical race.

SONG THRUSH. Turdus ericetorum. One, first seen on August 29th among bracken on the moorland was seen again at intervals down to September 14th.

WHEATEAR. Oe. oenanthe. There was a mass movement of Wheatears on August 24th, exactly a year later than the main autumn movement of 1950 (see Second Annual Rep. 1950, pp. 37-44). Forty birds were trapped on this day, mainly in the early morning, and their weights were significantly higher than those of the local birds we had been taking up to that time. Alec Butterfield is making a statistical analysis of our autumn series of weights and measurements in an attempt to help

elucidate the problem of Wheatear migration here and a fuller report on this subject will appear later.

WHINCHAT. Saxicola rubetra. The first appeared on August 25th; there were more on 27-28th and an increase to fifteen on 31st. Thirty were seen on September 1st and there were ten or more until 4th. Two on 9th, seven on 14th and three on 21st represent later influxes.

REDSTART. Ph. phoenicurus. A female was trapped on August 18th and two were seen on 28-29th. There were three on Sept. 1st and single birds on 10th and 14th.

BLUETHROAT. Luscinia svecica. George Stout of Field reported three on Sept. 1st and two were seen on 2-3rd. One caught by James Anderson in the byre at Setter on 2nd was a 1st winter male, wing 77 mm. ("L. s. gaetkei") and weight 17 g.

SWALLOW. Hirundo rustica. Two on September 1st and six on 4th were the only records.

HOUSE MARTIN. Delichon urbica. One, September 9th.

SWIFT. A. apus. The main movement of southgoing Swifts took place as usual at the end of July. One appeared on August 19th, three on 23rd and six on 27th. There were again six on Sept. 1st and a new movement of seven on 4th. A late bird was seen on 14-15th.

WRYNECK. Jynx torquilla. The only three recorded all entered the traps, on August 28th, 30th and September 1st. Their weights were 32.68 g. (wing 91 mm.), 34.22 g. (wing 90 mm.), 39.86 g. (wing 89 mm.) respectively.

SHORT EARED OWL. Asio flammeus One on marshy ground in the village area, September 5th, an unusual date.

MERLIN. Falco columbarius Passage began later than usual, with a single bird for some days from August 27th. There were three on Sept. 13th and five next day, and probably five again on 17th. Birds trapped on 17th at 220 g. and 18th at 200 g. were 1st-winter females.

KESTREL. Falco tinnunculus. One on August 20th, a male on 31st, a female on September 3-4th, two on 5th, three on 14th and two next day, in addition to single birds on various dates.

SPARROW-HAWK. Accipiter nisus. One on Sept. 3rd, one on 10-11th, two females on 14th, single birds on 15-17th. The last trapped as it chased a Twite into the Gully Trap, was a young male weighing 160 g. A female was trapped on 14th at 240 g. and retrapped next day.

GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE. See para. 38.

DUCKS. Mallard Anas platyrhyncha, Teal A. crecca and Wigeon A. penelope were frequent in small numbers. A female Shoveller Spatula clypeata - a rarity on Fair Isle - was here Sept. 13-15th and the first Long-tail Clangula hyemalis arrived on 12th. A Pintail A. acuta was seen on Aug. 28th male Scoter Melanitta nigra on Sept. 13th, and Velvet Scoter M. fusca on August 15th (pair), 19th (drake) and 30th (two drakes). Two Mergansers Mergus serrator appeared on August 31st, there were five on Sept. 13th and again on 18th.

SLAVONIAN GREBE. Podiceps auritus. Single early birds were seen on September 18th and 21st.

TURTLE DOVE. Streptopelia turtur. Three on September 1st, singly from 13-15th and one on 22nd.

A tired 1st-winter bird caught on Ward Hill by Jerome Stout on the 15th weighed 112.5 g.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT. Limosa lapponica.
One on September 13th.

CURLEW. Numenius arquata. Fifteen, August 31st; ten on Sept. 1st and 20th and half a dozen or so on most other days.

WHIMBREL. N. phaeopus. Singly on September 3rd, 11th and 20th.

SNIPE. Capella gallinago. Four on Sept. 5th and again on 19th; one or two on a number of other days.

JACK SNIPE. Lymnecryptes minimus. One, September 19th.

TURNSTONE. Arenaria interpres. Varying numbers since mid-August, with distinct passages on Aug. 26th, Sept. 5th, 9th, 14th and 18th.

KNOT. Calidris canutus. Ten young birds on Aug. 19th and one or two occasionally afterwards.

DUNLIN. C. alpina. Six on August 20th, over twenty on 26th, and smaller numbers during September.

PURPLE SANDPIPER. C. maritima. Six on August 28th and September 8th.

RUFF. Philomachus pugnax. Six juveniles Aug. 19th. Of fourteen birds which stayed from Aug. 25-28th three were adult Reeves. There were eighteen on 31st and six on the next two days.

SANDERLING. Crocethia alba. Small fluctuating numbers from mid-August to mid-September.

REDSHANK. Tringa totanus. There were six on August 4th, two on 10th and a dozen on 16-17th. A new influx of sixteen came in on 23rd, and over twenty were here on 25th. Fifty or more were at the south of the island on August 31st and a similar invasion occurred on Sept. 14th. Otherwise numbers have fluctuated, but increases on Sept. 2nd and 8th seem to represent new arrivals.

GREENSHANK. Tringa nebularia. One on August 4-5th. One of three which were on the island on 17-18th was caught in the Gully Trap (weight 165,5 g.) and remained for at least a week. There were two on August 31st and late birds on September 8th and 13th.

COMMON SANDPIPER. Actitis hypoleucos. Singly from mid-August and at least three on 25th. Eight on 30th and fifteen on 31st, with four or five during the first week of September. One was taken in the Gully Trap on 9th, weight 54.31 g., and it remained in and about the Gully for several days. There were two on 15th.

WOOD SANDPIPER. Tringa glareola. Aug. 23rd.

GREEN SANDPIPER. T. ochrophus. Singly on August 5th, 9th, 15-18th, 28th, 31st and two on September 1st.

GREY PLOVER. Charadrius squatarola. A bird in what appeared to be full breeding plumage was here from August 26-31st. There are very few records for Fair Isle.

CORNCRAKE. C. Crex. Last seen, September 16th.

35. Fourth Occurrence of Black-headed
Bunting at Fair Isle

During observation among crops at Busta on the morning of September 13th 1951, M.F.M. Meiklejohn, T. Yeoman and I. Wallace found a bird which they identified as a female Black-headed Bunting Emberiza melanocophala. The bird was watched for a short time in the afternoon by Miss P. Condliffe, Miss G. Johnstone, Misses D. and P. Campbell, Ian Wallace and K. Williamson. It haunted standing corn close to the croft, with occasional excursions to nearby turnip and potato riggs. When disturbed it flew strongly for a short distance and usually perched on the wooden posts and wire strands of the fences. It did not associate with other birds, although numerous sparrows and twites were foraging in the corn. On a few occasions it perched alongside these birds, and once within a few feet of a Scarlet Grosbeak Carpodacus erythrinus, thus affording excellent views for comparison of size.

The general impression was of a large, pale bunting bigger than either sparrow or grosbeak, and approaching Corn Bunting E. calandra in its size and bulky appearance, - the latter due to a habit of perching with the head sunk into the shoulders. The head and mantle were pale brown streaked with darker brown. A noticeable feature was the large dark eye contrasting with the paler lores, - the prominence of this character was as strongly marked as in a female Black-headed Bunting watched by M.F.M.M. on the Isle of May in September 1949. The ear-coverts were darker brown than the lores. Good views were had of the rump and upper tail-coverts, which were buff with a rusty tinge,

contrasting markedly with the duller mantle plumage. (One observer likened the rump-colour to that of the ripening corn). The wing-coverts appeared to be the same dull brown as the mantle and the major coverts and tertials showed buffish fringes and tips. The remiges and rectrices were blackish-brown, and the latter showed no white, but the outer tail-feathers appeared to be paler brown than the rest. The underparts were a uniform greyish-white with a slight yellowish suffusion in certain lights. The under tail-coverts were noted as "lighter in colour" by one observer, but none of the observers recorded any yellow in this region. The bill was massive and steely-grey, and the legs were pinkish-flesh.

Confusion with a female Red-headed Bunting E.bruniceps is possible, but several points indicate that the bird was not of this species. There was no suggestion of greenish-yellow in the plumage of the upper parts, and the rump was decidedly rusty-buff. M.F.M. Meiklejohn stated that the bird's size, carriage, plumage features (except for the under tail-coverts) and call, - a soft "tchup" sometimes two or three times repeated, - were in no way different from those of the female Black-headed Bunting he watched, and subsequently handled, on the Isle of May on September 22nd 1949 (Scot.Nat. 62: 100-101). He also had considerable experience of this species when in Palestine. The writer, less than four weeks previously, had had a male Red-headed Bunting under frequent close observation (see Bull. No.3, para. 30), and is confident that the present bird was not the same species. It looked decidedly larger and heavier (rather like a Corn Bunting

compared with a Yellow-hammer E.citrinella), adopted a more thick-set posture on perching, whilst the "tchup" callnote was quite different from the sharper, higher pitched "pwip" of the Red-headed Bunting.

The bird had gone the following day. This constitutes the fourth record of the Black-headed Bunting at Fair Isle, the previous occurrences being a female on September 21st 1907, a young male on August 25th 1910, (W.E. Clarke, "Studies in Bird Migration," 1912), and an adult male on May 27th 1929, the skin of which is now in the collection of Leicester Museum. There have been six occurrences of the species in Scotland.

36. Fourth Occurrence of the Tawny Pipit at Fair Isle

A Tawny Pipit Anthus campestris was found on the short grassland of Meoness on the afternoon of September 15th 1951 by George Waterston and Misses D. and P. Campbell and G. Johnstone. Later the same day it was watched by Holger Holgersen, M.F.M. Meiklejohn, Ian Wallace and the writer. It was not seen the following day, but on the 17th what must certainly have been the same bird was found on similar grassy land at the foot of Bunes, two miles to the north. All the watchers then at the Observatory, including T. Yeoman, W.J. Wallace, Miss P. Condliffe and Mrs. Williamson in addition to those named above had splendid views of it at close range. After two hours of continuous observation and gentle "shepherding" in the direction of a clap-net set in its favourite feeding-area, the bird was caught.

In the field it was a strikingly pale pipit of Rock Pipit Anthus spinoletta size, but with a more horizontal bearing; indeed, its carriage as it ran swiftly over the short grass reminded us forcibly of the close affinity of the pipits and wagtails Motacilla, an impression which was enhanced when the bird, alighting after short flights, flicked the tail up and down two or three times in characteristic wagtail fashion.

The upper parts were pale brown with a greenish-olive cast, the head and nape appearing greyer. The head and back were faintly streaked. The wings were pale brown, the secondaries, tertiaries and greater coverts having buffish-white fringes. The median coverts were darker and presented the appearance of a blackish-brown wing-bar, and these feathers were tipped with buffish-white. There was a noticeable black line above the eye contrasting with a pale eye-stripe; the ear-coverts were greenish-olive, and there were white moustachial streaks bordered by dark lines. The throat was white, the breast vinous buff faintly streaked at the sides, the belly and vent whitish and unstreaked. The long tail appeared to have white outer feathers when seen in the field, but these proved to be buffish-white when the bird was examined in the hand.

G. Waterston noted a somewhat lark-like chirrup on the 15th, but during the morning of the 17th the only note heard was a soft "tee-up", sometimes repeated, as the bird made short flights. The note was fuller and lacked the squeaky quality of that of

the commoner pipits. The flight was undulating and rather wagtail-like.

The following additional information was obtained in the laboratory. Age, - 1st winter, there being a small number of white-edged juvenile feathers remaining in the mantle plumage. Measurements, - wing 89 mm., bill 17 mm., tarsus 26 mm., weight 20.21 g. Wing-formula, - 1st primary 9 mm. shorter than primary coverts, 2nd and 3rd equal and longest, 4th 0.5 mm. shorter, 5th 3.5 mm. shorter, 6th 15 mm. shorter, 7th 20 mm. shorter; 3rd - 5th emarginated on outer webs. Colours of soft parts, - bill pinkish-flesh on lower mandible and cutting-edges, dark horn on culmen and at tip; legs flesh-coloured and markedly scutellate (sometimes appearing pinkish in the field).

This bird, in common with the Subalpine Warblers and Red-headed Bunting, is the first of its species to be trapped and ringed in Britain. It constitutes the fourth Tawny Pipit record for Fair Isle, the first having been obtained in spring 1933 by George Stout of Field, who also observed a bird in spring 1943. James Wilson of Schooltown obtained a juvenile moulting to 1st winter on October 8th 1935, the skin of which is now in the Royal Scottish Museum. These are the only previous Scottish records. Ian Wallace made an excellent water-colour sketch of the bird, - and also of the Black-headed Bunting, - and these are in the Bird Observatory's "Notes on Species" record-book.

26.

37. Sudden Storm on August 31st.

During the night of August 30th a complex area of low pressure was situated to the north of the British Isles. SW. winds in the rear of a cold front, prevailed over most of the North Sea and Continental seaboard; ahead of the front, however, winds were easterly from S. Norway across to the Fair Isle sea-area, backing as a vigorous low moved from W. Forties into E. Fair Isle.

This low passed over Fair Isle during the morning of 31st, and a sudden storm of short duration, with heavy rain and strong wind, resulted. During this storm several parties of terns (some recognised as Sterna macrura) were driven inshore and at least two parties were seen flying in a westerly direction across the moor, keeping very low, - a most exceptional occurrence here, where terns are rare at any time.

As the depression moved rapidly northwards the weather cleared, the wind fell and veered to SW. There were larger numbers of drift-migrants here than on any previous day, and although most of them had undoubtedly come in before the storm, Common Gulls - the dominant species - continued to arrive throughout the day, so that by evening over 500 birds were to be seen in the fields. It is possible that they arrived after travelling round the north and west sides of the depression. Other species were Redshank (50), Ruff (18), Common Sandpiper (15), Heron (8), and the dominant passerines were White Wagtail (50), Willow Warbler (30), Garden Warbler (15), Whinchat (15), Pied Flycatcher (6), whilst Chiffchaff and Scarlet Grosbeak were also recorded.

38. First Occurrence of the Greenland
White-fronted Goose at Fair Isle

A grey goose with strikingly orange-yellow bill and legs, dark upper and pale underparts, was observed by G. Waterston, M.F.M. Meiklejohn and T. Yeoman on the morning of September 15th. Later in the day it was shot by one of the islanders, and, since its identity had become a matter of some debate, the body was obtained by the Bird Observatory, and the skin preserved for the Royal Scottish Museum collection.

Examination in the laboratory showed that the bird was a juvenile female White-fronted Goose of the Greenland race, Anser albifrons flavirostris Dalgety and Scott (see Bulletin B.O.C. 68: 109-121), the first record of this form for Fair Isle and Shetland. The plumage was normal for the young bird of this race. The greyish-brown mottling on the breast was a striking diagnostic character in the hand but was not noticeable in the field, even from a range of about six yards.

Confusion with a Bean Goose Anser arvensis was possible, but the bird was too small for this species, with wing 394 mm. and bill 49 mm. from feathers to tip, and 16.5 mm. depth at the base. The latter was completely orange-yellow when the bird was fresh, but began to darken soon after death. The nail measured 14 mm. and was blackish-horn with a greyish-white patch in the middle. The tail measured 107 mm but was very worn, and consisted of 16 feathers. The wing-formula was normal for the White-fronted Goose.

The Daily Weather Chart published by the Meteorological Office shows a high covering the whole of Greenland on September 14-15th, and any birds induced to leave that country in a SE. direction under these settled conditions would encounter very favourable winds for a journey to Ireland and the west of Scotland. They would come within the sphere of influence of a slowly-moving low with its centre between Faeroe and Iceland, giving a northerly airstream over the first part of the journey and subsequently NW. and westerly winds as the British Isles were neared. The conditions for such a journey seem so entirely favourable that it would be of great interest to know if arrivals of Greenland Whitefronts took place in Ireland and west Scotland at that time. It is conceivable that some birds like the stray at Fair Isle, might get a drift to the north of their intended route by travelling closer to the centre of the depression, and so encountering moderate SW. winds on the final stage of the journey.

39. Bird-Ringing Progress.

At the time of preparation of this Bulletin the total number of birds ringed during the present season was just over the 1600 mark. Although this figure is some 240 birds below last year's at the same period, we have 72 different species in the Ringing Book compared with 73 for the whole of last season.

Wheatears provide the biggest individual total with 347 and next in order are Blackbird 250, Starling 175, Meadow Pipit 90, Rock Pipit 86, Fulmar 77, Twite 50, Chaffinch 42, Puffin 40, Robin 33, Oyster-catcher 26 and Arctic Skua 25.

40.

An Aberrant Wood-Warbler

On the afternoon of September 7th Dr. Maeve Rusk, Miss P. Condliffe, Cmdr. T. Yeoman and I watched a Wood-Warbler Phylloscopus sibilatrix in Homisdale. I caught what must have been the same bird in the Dyke Trap an hour or so later. The plumage was normal for a 1st-winter bird of this species (a very rare one at Fair Isle) but the wing was remarkably short and atypical in formula. The measurement, carefully checked, was 66.5 mm.: C.B. Ticehurst, "A Systematic Review of the Genus Phylloscopus" (1936), gives a minimum wing-length of 71 mm. The tail was also short at 42 mm. but the index Tail x 100 divided by wing-length was 63, approximating closely to the figure 64 given by Ticehurst for this species. The bird weighed 9.24 g. Tarsi and toes were a greenish-horn colour, not "pale yellowish-brown" as stated by Ticehurst and "A Handbook of British Birds." The bird's left leg was slightly twisted and deformed, - apparently an old condition, and one which may have affected its development.

The 3rd and 4th primaries only were emarginate in this bird, instead of the 3rd-5th in normal specimens. The 1st primary, characteristically 2-5 mm. shorter than the primary coverts, was in this case 1 mm. longer. The 3rd primary was the longest and the 4th a shade shorter; 2nd 2.5 mm., 5th 4 mm., 6th 8 mm. and 7th 11 mm. shorter.

Another Wood-Warbler was found dead in the Gully on the morning of September 12th. It had been dead too long to make a skin, so it was preserved by injection with 40% formaldehyde. This too was a rather small bird with the wing

72 mm., tail 47 mm. and tail/wing index 65. The 5th primary showed slight emargination and the 1st was 1 mm. shorter than the primary coverts. Both birds had 3 rectal bristles and not 2 as is stated in Ticehurst's monograph.

41. Fair Isle Film

During the late summer Mr. G. Theo Kay of Lerwick stayed at the Bird Observatory for the purpose of making a colour-film of the island and of our activities there. The film shows scenes from the summer-time study of the Arctic Skua colony, as well as the trapping and laboratory examination of Wheatears and other small birds. The film, titled and edited, will run for about 40 minutes, and will be used for lecturing purposes during the winter months.

42. An Appeal for "Bird-bags."

At Fair Isle we find that much the safest and most practical way of transporting birds from the traps to the Laboratory is in linen bags, and all empty flour-bags from the hostel kitchen are snatched up for this higher purpose. However, we never seem to have enough; either they shrink in the wash and ultimately dissolve, or the birds abscond with them, - or perhaps our visitors take them away as mementoes of a happy time! So if our readers can spare their empty flour-bags we can find an excellent use for them, and will be very happy to receive as many as they like to send.

43.

"Fleyging" Fulmar Petrels

Last year Hr. Niels Rein of Torshavn, Faeroe, gave us two Faeroese bird-fowling "fleygs". This implement consists of a large triangular net about 3 ft. long and 2 ft. wide at the base, fixed at the end of a 12 ft. pole: it looks rather like an overgrown lacrosse stick, and is wielded in much the same way with the flying bird playing the unenviable role of ball. Faeroemen show great skill in using it, not infrequently catching 200 Puffins a day at their immense colonies; and they are able by their efforts to lay up a large stock of wild-fowl for winter food.

Our own auk colonies are too small to make "fleyging" profitable as a means of catching Puffins and Guillemots for marking, but during late August and early September some success was achieved in capturing Fulmars Fulmarus glacialis as they flew past selected points on the cliffs near the Bird Observatory. The 77 Fulmars ringed during the present season include 62 adults caught in this way. The most coveted bird, a "blue" phase Fulmar which was first seen on August 24th and flew past the "fleyging" place on several occasions subsequently, was unsporting enough to give the net a wide berth.

Trygve Serck-Hansen gave valuable assistance on several days, and on the best afternoon we netted, weighed and ringed 16 adults. Birds were weighed with a lbs. oz. spring balance, and the reading converted to grammes: as shown in the appended summary, the variation in weight is very considerable. The heaviest birds may be newly arrived at the cliffs from

a period of feeding at sea, for whereas the light birds eject clear oil only when taken in the "fleyg", these "two-pounders" almost always throw up partly digested food (in one case a 6" mackerel) before the amber-coloured stomach-oil appears.

We hope to use the "fleyg" a good deal more intensively in future seasons, and to link its use, if possible, with a study of the habits of "visiting" Fulmars at the cliffs.

Summary of Weights of Fulmars

Two at 610 g. and one at 620 g. were the lightest. Four at 950 g. were the heaviest, and the next in order were three at 900 g. Between 610-660 g. we have 12 birds; 660-710 g. 18 birds; 710-760 g. 11 birds; 760-810 g. 7 birds; 810-860 g. 6 birds. (There was none weighing between 850-900 g.). A juvenile bird, found "stranded" inshore on August 24th, scaled 1036 g. For a note on the weights of juvenile Fulmars when ready to take to the sea, reference should be made to the Second Annual Report 1950, page 29.

44. Visitors from Abroad.

Hr. Holger Holgersen, Konservator of the Natural History Museum at Stavanger (which conducts one of Norway's bird-marking schemes and has a very successful ringing station at Revtangen, Jaeren), visited Fair Isle from Sept. 12-26th. Hr. Trygve Serck-Hansen, a student of Bergen University, was here from August 22nd-September 5th; and the well-known Dutch ornithologist, Dr. W.H. Bierman of Haarlem, who was here in autumn 1949, is paying Fair Isle a return visit from September 26th-October 8th.

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

THE WORK OF THE OBSERVATORY

The purpose of the Bird Observatory is to provide facilities for visitors to carry out scientific research on the island, not only in the sphere of ornithology, but in every aspect of Natural History. Work will be mainly concentrated however on ornithology under the supervision of the Director.

TERMS

Full board, including service, is *Six Guineas per Head per week*. Reduced terms are available for parties of students from schools and universities.

APPLICATIONS

Priority in bookings will be given to "Friends of Fair Isle," and to *bona fide* naturalists prepared to take part in the scientific investigations of the station under the leadership of the Director, and to help with such other duties as may be necessary from time to time in connection with the station or hostel. Anyone else wishing to visit the island will be made welcome, provided room is available. Those who are not keen ornithologists are asked to book for the summer months—June, July, and August—so that more accommodation will be available in the spring and autumn for students of bird migration. Application should be made as follows:—

- (1) *If made between 1st April and 31st October.*
To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory,
by Lerwick, Shetland. Telegraphic address:
"Migrant, Fairisle." Telephone Fair Isle 8.
- (2) *If made between 1st November and 31st March.*
To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory
Trust, 17 India Street, Edinburgh.
Telephone: Edinburgh CENTRAL 4532.

PROSPECTUS

Prospectus giving details of transport to and from Fair Isle, and other information, will be sent on application.

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

0 100yds. 440yds. 880yds. 1mile
 Roads = = = = Bird Trap ← TRAP Boundaries

