

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

BULLETIN



Edited by
PETER E. DAVIS

Vol. 4 No. 2 (New Series)

PRICE 5/-

(Issued free to "Friends of Fair Isle")

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FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY BULLETIN

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JUNE, 1959

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14. A third Thrush Nightingale at Fair Isle

As already fully reported in *British Birds* 51:356-7, a first-summer Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*, the fourth for Britain and the third for Fair Isle, was caught in the Double Dyke trap on May 15th, 1958. This was the 47th anniversary of Eagle Clarke's first British specimen from the isle, and just over a year after the second capture of the species (*antea*, Vol. 3, p. 163).

This 1958 bird, identified by wing-formula, was less striated on the breast and rather warmer brown on the mantle than the 1957 specimen; after watching it in the field during the two days following its release, we realised that it might well have been mistaken for a Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* in other circumstances. For this reason, a sight-record of a supposed common Nightingale on May 7th-8th 1958 (which would have been the second occurrence for the isle) was given "square brackets" in our records.

P. D.

15. Subalpine Warblers at Fair Isle

A male Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* was taken by Peter Hope Jones in the Joint Schools trap at 0615 G.M.T. on June 12th 1958, and a female by Pat Adams in the Observatory trap at 1500 on the following day. The latter was seen again at North Haven on the 14th. The flight-feathers of both were very heavily abraded and the primaries and their coverts paler brown than the rest of the wing. This, coupled with the lack of any pink on the under-parts of the female, suggests that they were first-summer birds.

The entire upper-parts of the male were grey, tinged brown; the wing and tail-feathers darker and browner, the outermost tail-feathers white. The chin and throat were deep terracotta, the upper breast and flanks had a paler brown-pink wash, and the belly and under tail-coverts were off-white. There was a good crimson orbital ring, but the white moustache was rather indistinct. Eye pale ochreous-brown, bill dark horn with pinkish-yellow base to the lower mandible; legs and feet yellow-brown. Wing (straight) 63 mm.; tail, 55; bill 12.5; and tarsus 20. Weight 12.6 gm.

The female was a much drabber bird, browner on the upper-parts, duller white on the outer tail-feathers, pale buffish on the throat and breast, deeper buff on the flanks. The eye-ring was less bright, the moustache very indistinct. Her measurements included: wing 58; tail 50; bill 12, and tarsus 19 mm. Weight 11.1 gm.

When seen briefly in the field, she was drabber and darker

than a Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*—the only familiar common warbler of similar shape and size—and without the contrasting dark ear-coverts. She was a notable skulker, effacing herself in the shadows of a complicated barrier of posts, planks, and tangled wire on the cliff-edge of North Haven.

The weight of both birds was greater than that of two males trapped at Fair Isle on May 23rd and June 9th 1951, which were at 10.1 and 9.3 gm. respectively; whilst a female on the Isle of May in July 1958 weighed only 8.3 gm. on the 22nd, after at least a week on the island (*Scot. Birds*: 1:41-2). The latter, however, died a few hours later. The situations in which our 1958 birds were found, and also the weather-conditions at this period, suggested that they were newly-arrived, despite the good weights. Perhaps they had been in Britain or Northern Europe for some times; one was at St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, as early as May 3rd 1958.

The records are the fourth and fifth for Fair Isle (all in spring), and the seventh and eighth for Scotland.

P. D.

16. A Spring Red-throated Pipit

A Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* was seen by George Stout of Field and others at Stackhool, Fair Isle, on the evening of May 18th 1958. G.S., who has long acquaintance with the species, described it as a particularly handsome specimen, unusually red at the throat. We failed to find it next day, but on the 20th Mrs J. Watts, a visiting bird-watcher, had good views of what was presumably the same bird near the Kirn of Skroo, over two miles to the north. She described the throat and upper breast as being almost rose-pink, deeper in the centre, with striations breaking the colour at the sides. We searched the area diligently that evening and next day, but the pipit was not seen again.

There are three previous spring records for the isle, where the bird is more familiar as an autumn migrant.

P. D.

17. Lesser Grey Shrike at Fair Isle

Pat Adams found a Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* at the Bull's Park on the early afternoon of May 30th 1958. It was still there when Peter Hope Jones and I arrived on the scene, and despite the pouring rain we had good views down to twenty yards range. The black forehead, and the pinkish flush on the under-parts (particularly the flanks and sides of breast), and the size and distribution of the white wing-marks, were well seen.

We tried to drive it to the nearest trap, at Vaadal, but it proved wild and uncooperative both then and on the 31st; never allowing us nearer than twenty yards or so, and breaking back over our heads when driven away from its chosen field. One remarkable feature of the bird's behaviour was the way it hovered, with rapidly-beating wings—presumably to get a better view of us—when no suitable perches were at hand. Occasionally it dropped to the ground to catch some small prey.

It was not until the afternoon of June 1st, when the wind was light enough for us to use a mist-net, that we came to terms with the shrike. The net was erected at the corner of a favourite fence; whereupon the bird departed, and only returned after two hours of careful shepherding! In a further half-hour it avoided the net with studied care, and we were about to leave, when it suddenly swooped to catch a beetle, and quite unexpectedly flew on into the lowest panel of the net.

We decided the bird was a female, from the rather brown-black (as opposed to "jet-black" in males) of the face, and the slightly brown-tinged grey of the upper parts. The wing (st) measured 115.5 mm., the tail 90, and the weight was 44.4 gm. The bird was not seen after its release at North Haven.

There are ten previous records of *L. minor* at Fair Isle, five in spring and five in autumn. The last spring record was in 1943.

P. D.

18. Early Spring Passage at Fair Isle, 1958

PETER DAVIS

For long periods in the first three months of 1958, the weather was bitterly cold, and the isle was often deeply covered with snow. There were few bird movements before late March, and the summer visitors were late to return. In February, only Snow Buntings *Plectrophenax nivalis* had large fluctuations in numbers; there was a big northward passage, involving over 500 birds, on the 14th, and over 600 arrived on the isle on the 28th. In both cases a spell of mild weather had just commenced, interrupting the arctic regime. On another such day in February, the 23rd, a few Skylarks *Alda arvensis* passed north to Shetland. The first Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus*, apart from one flying over in the night of the 11th, arrived on February 25th, and this species increased on the 28th. The first Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* was seen on the 27th.

The first days of March were mild, and a few larks again

passed on the 1st; but these early migrants may have been driven south again by renewed cold weather, for both larks and Snow Buntings (250) reappeared on the 10th, the second day of strong northerly winds with driving snow.

The wind went easterly on March 12th, and remained in this half of the compass until April 6th—surely one of the longest east-wind spells the isle has known. These winds were light-moderate until the 23rd, strong till the 25th, and of gale force from the 26th to the 31st. It was cold and dry until the 29th, and few birds arrived until the advance of an occluded front in the last days of the month.

One interesting feature of mid-March was a passage of Stonechats *Saxicola torquata*, which have been very scarce in recent years. One was caught on the 16th, there were three on the 17th, and some were seen almost every day until April 13th. Thirty Lapwings *V. vanellus* came in on the 17th, there were nearly fifty on the 22nd, seventy on the 26th, increasing to 300 by the 29th. The first Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* appeared on the 21st, and several parties of larks came in from the east. A White Wagtail *Motacilla a. alba* on the 22nd was followed by three, and the first two Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*, on the 23rd, while Oystercatchers increased markedly on the 24th. On the 26th, apart from the Lapwing movements, there were at least four Mistle Thrushes *Turdus viscivorus*, and the first Lesser Black-throated Gull *Larus fuscus*. By the 29th there were at least five Mistle Thrushes, as well as eight Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* and a blue-naped Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*.

On March 30th the long-awaited front arrived, and with it the birds; the start of what several islanders described as the biggest spring bird-rush within living memory!

There were only a few extra Blackbirds *T. merula* in the trapping-area before breakfast; afterwards the place suddenly became alive with these and Song Thrushes *Turdus ericetorum*, Robins *Erithacus rubecula*, with a sprinkling of other migrants including three Ring Ouzels *T. torquatus* and a Wheatear *Oe. oenanthe*. The thrushes and Robins were everywhere by afternoon, but all rushing to the shelter of the west cliffs, or skulking in the lee of the walls, for the gale was armed with huge, stinging raindrops. I found the west cliffs swarming with birds, Song Thrush and Robin predominating, and the fields on that side of the island held many Skylarks and Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, with more Lapwings than before. The Blackbirds, though there were many in the cliffs, were taking more advantage of the walls and ditches. Another Ring Ouzel and Wheatear were seen in the south, and other arrivals included fifty Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and a Dunlin *Calidris alpina*; and surprisingly few

Fieldfares *T. pilaris* and Redwings *T. musicus*. Fifty-three birds were trapped.

We were out early on the 31st, and with reason. There were twenty or thirty Blackbirds at the hostel, nearer seventy at Duttfield, and so it was all over the isle. Heavy rain overnight had fortunately ceased, and even the showers died by mid-morning, though the wind remained at force 9 or 10. It was obviously a pure Blackbird rush—the other species were virtually unchanged in numbers, and mainly in the west. We worked the traps steadily, and had caught 77 birds by breakfast, 202 by lunch, and 253 by nightfall. Of these, 197 were Blackbirds, and 34 Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs*—this species arrived in good numbers during the day, and Peter Jones found over 200 during a quick survey of the south. Most of the males caught seemed to be of the Central European form *F.c. hortensis*. The other birds recorded included a few Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, about 100 Black-headed Gulls, 3 Hedge Sparrows *Prunella modularis*, several Meadow Pipis, a Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, and a Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*. The only sub-rarity was a Woodlark *Lullula arborea* at Lunna Geo.

On April 1st there had been little overnight change in the numbers of Blackbirds, thrushes, Robins, Starlings, or Lapwings, but Skylarks and Chaffinches had increased greatly. Other records included three Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, six Herons *Ardea cinerea*, a Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, and three Wheatears. We worked the traps actively, but with the falling-away of the wind the birds spread out over the pastures to feed, and the traps became less effective. The day's catch was 106, including 72 Blackbirds and 24 Chaffinches.

Blackbirds had increased greatly on the 2nd, and many Lapwings and Starlings left by nightfall; these, and the other birds moved out rather gradually during the following week, but many of the thrush tribe suffered from a food shortage during the cool unsettled weather at this time, and the casualty rate among the weaker individuals was high. Chaffinches became so tame that they freely entered the hostel kitchen in search of food, and Blackbirds were fed at the open window.

The effects of this great avalanche of birds were felt for many weeks after. Several ringed Chaffinches remained till early May, and one or two till the second week of June—they might have nested had suitable cover been available. Several cocks sang, and one seemed to be mated to a hen, but lost his mate in mid-May. Hedge Sparrows trickled through steadily until late May, an unprecedented passage, and more were ringed than in the whole of the previous ten years. Several Moorhens were present all April.

There were small arrivals of Blackbirds and other thrushes

on April 11th-12th and 19th-20th, perhaps redetermined passage of birds which had entered Britain further south; but otherwise the last three weeks of April were quiet.

The nearest thing to a rarity, in the tail of the rush, had been a Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* on April 4th; there was a Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* on the same day. Odd Pied Wagtails *M.a. yarrelli*, as well as a few Whites, occurred from the 3rd onwards, and there was an early Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, with both Long-eared and Short-eared Owls *Asio otus* and *flammeus* on the 5th, a Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* on the 6th. A few of the local Wheatears and Twites came in on the 10th, and some Meadow Pipits on the 18th, but it was not until the 22nd that the main body of these birds arrived. Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochruros* were noted on the 11th, 23rd, and 25th, a Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* on the 13th—the only April warbler. The first Swallow *Hirundo rustica* was on the 22nd, and the first House Martins *Delichon urbica* on the 28th.

Tailpiece. Three of the 500 Blackbirds ringed during the "rush" have so far been recovered. One caught on March 31st was at Brae, in the north of the Shetland Mainland, eight days later; and another, taken on April 9th, was found at Lygra (Hordaland) in central Norway on April 24th. More unexpected was the recovery of another March ringing, at Eschenbruch (Nordrhein-Westphalen) in West Germany about July 11th. This bird was presumably in its breeding-area, and since all our previous breeding-season recoveries of Blackbirds have been in Scandinavia, the record is of special interest. Taken with the predominance of *hortensis*-type Chaffinches in the movement, it suggests that many of the birds were derived a more southern stock than usually reaches Fair Isle. I heard later from Dr David Lack (*in litt.*) that he had seen large movements on the radar screen, of birds passing in a south-easterly direction across the North Sea, in the days that followed this immense drift-movement into eastern Britain. White-spotted Bluethroats *Cyanosylvia svecica cyanecula*, another Middle European form, appeared with the rush in England, and even as far north as Orkney (see page 64).

19. The Late Spring of 1958 at Fair Isle

PETER DAVIS

In May and early June 1958 the weather was very changeable with an almost uninterrupted succession of depressions moving in from the west. Fair Isle had its fair share of overnight south-east winds, and with them a good number of Continental birds. Sedge Warblers *Acrocephalus schoena-*

baenus, Garden Warblers *Sylvia borin* and Whitethroats *Sylvia communis* were more numerous than usual, particularly in the second half of May; there was an unprecedented passage of Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*, and notable rarities included a Thrush Nightingale *L. luscinia*, a Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*, two Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans*, and a Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*. The trapping record, in the six weeks following May 1st, was over 400 birds of more than 50 species, better than in any previous late spring.

In the first days of May, an anticyclone was over the North Sea, and most of the birds that passed through the isle were of local or north-western species, moving N. out of Britain in mainly fine conditions with light southerlies. A small wave of Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe*, including some large individuals, arrived on the 1st, and with it a few Snipe *Capella gallinago* among which two *C.g. faeroensis* were trapped. Eight Golden Plovers *Charadrius apricarius* and a few Common and Black-headed Gulls *Larus canus* and *ridibundus* also passed, and the first Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. There were at least 19 Golden Plovers on the 2nd, also ten White Wagtails *Motacilla a. alba* and probably more Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*, besides six Swallows *Hirundo rustica* and a handsome male Blue-headed Wagtail *M.f. flava*. Most of these had moved on by the 3rd, when only a few Teal *Anas crecca*, Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula*, and Dunlins *Calidris alpina* were new.

The 4th saw the first small influx of Continental night-migrants with light S.S.E. winds in the North Sea. A Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*, two Robins *Erithacus rubecula*, a Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, a Sedge Warbler, a Goldcrest *R. regulus*, at least 6 Hedge Sparrows *Prunella modularis*, and a female Grey-headed Wagtail *M.f. thunbergi* were seen. Two Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*, some ten Dunlins, and a few male Greater Wheatears also arrived overnight, and during the day odd Swallows, House and Sand Martins *Delichon urbica* and *R. riparia*. On the 5th a few more continentals came in; three Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*, a Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*, an *acredula* (Northern) Willow Warbler, two Tree Pipits *Anthus trivialis*, four Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* and two Reed Buntings *Emberiza schoeniclus*; but also a number of short-winged (probably local) Wheatears, and some extra Meadow Pipits, with at least twenty Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima*.

High pressure over the North Sea receded on the 5th, and a weak depression moved into Scotland overnight. Its warm front passed up the North Sea, bringing light easterlies with rain to northern areas by dawn on the 6th. A sizeable inflow

of Greater Wheatears resulted, and other immigrants included Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, seventeen Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*, a few Curlews *Numenius arquata* and Whimbrels *N. phaeopus*, a Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, three Wood Pigeons *Columba palumbus*, a Carrion Crow *Corvus c. corone*, at least seventeen Fieldfares *Turdus pilaris*, two Redwings *T. musicus*, three female Ring Ouzels, two Redstarts *P. phoenicurus*, three Whinchats, a Robin, two Whitethroats, two *acredula* Willow Warblers, five male Pied Flycatchers *Muscicapa hypoleuca*, a Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*, and a Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*.

There was little change in numbers during unsettled weather, with mainly N.W. winds, from May 6th to 10th. On the 7th Peter Jones saw a probable Nightingale *L. megarhynchos* (see para. 14), and the first Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*, six Pintails *Anas acuta*, two Shovelers *Spatula clypeata*, and three Song Thrushes *T. ericetorum* were added to the list. One of three Willow Warblers was of the typical form; six Pied Flycatchers were seen, and two Linnets. The local Twites *Carduelis flavirostris* increased to full breeding-strength. The Sparrowhawk was caught, and proved to have been ringed on the Isle of May on Sept. 23rd 1957 (i.e., during the "September rush" of that autumn). By the 8th we had found an adult female Ortolan *Emberiza hortulana*, besides the first Spotted Flycatcher *M. striata*; and Willow Warblers numbered five, Tree Pipits at least four. Redshanks *Tringa totanus* and Purple Sandpipers showed a marked increase on this day.

A slight decrease in some species, and disappearance of others, on the 9th and 10th, was followed by a further small arrival with the establishment of a col. and light easterlies, across the northern part of the North Sea, by the 11th. Two Corncrakes *Crex crex*, nine Whimbrels, eight Carrion Crows, at least six Hedge Sparrows, a Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*, and probably a few more Redstarts and warblers had come in on the 11th. Most of these remained on the 12th, when two Sanderlings *Crocethia alba* were new, but many had departed by the 13th, when a Siskin *Carduelis spinus* was the only additional record.

The morning of May 14th was very quiet, but our afternoon survey showed that many "night-migrants" had arrived from noon onwards. These birds had probably come from the southern part of the North Sea in light southerly winds with cloud and rain, ahead of a depression centred in St George's Channel. This would explain their late arrival, and also the presence of an immaculate male Yellow Wagtail *M. f. flavissima*, one of the rarer forms of the species, at Fair Isle. About twenty Whitethroats were seen by nightfall, and two Lesser

Whitethroats *S. curruca*, three Sedge Warblers, a Garden Warbler, a Merlin *Falco columbarius*, three Whinchats, a Spotted Flycatcher, two Tree Pipits, a new Ortolan, and two Reed Buntings; but a flock of thirteen Tree Sparrows was most unusual. During the 14th-15th a warm front passed up the North Sea, and further arrivals came overnight. White-throats numbered at least thirty on the 15th, Sedge Warblers seven, and Spotted Flycatchers five; and a Blackcap and four Willow Warblers were added. Two Little Buntings and the spring's first major rarity, a Thrush Nightingale (see para. 14) added spice to the day.

Most of these birds passed on during the 16th and 17th—on the second day there were three Merlins (an unusual number for spring) and four Golden Plovers—but the 18th brought a few more drift-migrants in easterlies ahead of a north-moving occluded front; several Whitethroats, with three Lessers, a Brambling, and a Red-throated Pipit (para 16), with throat "almost Robin-red", according to one observer. This stayed until the 20th. A south-west gale followed, but as it faltered on the 21st there was another passage of north-western species, probably drifted north-east after leaving N.W. Scotland in clearing weather behind a cold front. Redshanks, Turnstones *Arenaria interpres*, with a few Purple Sandpipers, Golden Plovers, and a Knot, were commonest, but eight Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*, thirteen Black-headed Gulls, a few Greater Wheatears, and four White Wagtails, also arrived in the isle. Big female Wheatears increased again on the 22nd, when there were at least ten Swallows and twenty House Martins (probably from Scotland), in calmer conditions.

A further influx of continental birds began on the afternoon of May 23rd, and continued on the 24th and 25th. The first arrivals had probably made a lengthy crossing in the complementary airstream between a Low off S.W. England and a High over Scandinavia, winds being light southerly in the North Sea with cloudy skies in the Low Countries. By early on the 24th an occlusion was moving into the south of the North Sea, and with associated south-east winds it moved slowly north until the 25th. Sedge (11) and Garden Warblers (4) achieved their best totals on the 24th, but Whitethroats (20) and Willow Warblers (5), Spotted Flycatchers (6) and Tree Pipits (at least 8) were more common on the 25th. Several Whinchats, Redstarts, Blackcaps, and Pied Flycatchers also appeared, and among the less common species, a Corncrake, a Bluethroat *Cyanosylvia svecica* and a Red-backed Shrike *Lanius cristatus collurio* on the 23rd; a Kestrel, two Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, a male Red-spotted Bluethroat, and a Swift *Apus apus*, on the 24th. This was the first Swift of the year, and there were three next

day. About twenty-five Swallows passed on the 23rd and 25th. A general decrease followed by the 26th, but hirundine passage was strong, in fine calm conditions; over forty Swallows and thirty House Martins were seen, also a Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, a Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, and a Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*.

The 27th and 28th were quiet days, but one of the biggest drifts developed overnight on the 28th-29th, in a col connecting a High over Middle Europe with another centre north-west of Scotland. There were light offshore winds on the European coasts, easterlies in the North Sea, and almost calm weather in N. Scotland. Our census on the 29th gave at least twenty-five of Whitethroats and Sedge Warblers, six Gardens, two Northern Willows, six Spotted Flycatchers, a Black Redstart, two Red-backed Shrikes, several Tree Pipits, and a Brambling. Six Tree Sparrows were probably new, and two (perhaps four) of these were to remain all summer. Hirundines again peaked, with over thirty Swallows and at least forty House Martins. Many of these migrants moved on next night, but on the 30th we found a Lesser Grey Shrike (para. 17), which stayed until it was netted on June 1st.

This drift was given fresh impetus by May 31st, with a weak trough moving up the North Sea, and on this day we saw a Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, which remained for at least three weeks; another Cuckoo, two Wood Pigeons, two Bluethroats, at least fifteen Whitethroats and a few other warblers, two Hedge Sparrows.

The last wave of continental summer migrants came between June 3rd and 6th, on mainly light south-east winds associated with slow-moving fronts in the North Sea. Most of the late May species reappeared, and up to four Garden Warblers and four Spotted Flycatchers, ten Whitethroats (6th), odd Cuckoos, Redstarts, Pied Flycatchers, etc., were seen each day. Red-backed Shrikes reached their best spring numbers since 1951—two males on the 3rd were joined by three females on the next day. An adult male Black Redstart, a Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, and a late Siskin were present on the 5th, and an Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* on the 6th. A Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* was in the south on the 6th, and one was trapped on the 7th (one was seen again as late as the 26th). Hirundines again reached high numbers (by Fair Isle standards) in these days, with forty House Martins on the 3rd and as many Swallows on the 4th. There were a few Swifts, but the biggest movement of that species was deferred until the 16th (twenty-five).

A late Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and a last Red-backed Shrike came on the 10th, and on the 12th and 13th there were odd Robins, Garden Warblers, and Whitethroats with

two final rarities, a male Subalpine Warbler on the 12th and a female on the 13th, both caught (para. 15). The 13th also saw the first of the Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, which were to summer, and breed, for the first time in recent years.

20. The Arctic Skua Study in 1958

PETER DAVIS

The population-study of the Fair Isle Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus* continued for a tenth season in 1958. An important parallel development commenced when Mr Peter O'Donald, a research worker at the Cambridge University Dept. of Genetics, began a study of the nature and inheritance of the colour-phases. His assistance in the field, for five weeks of the season, was invaluable.

There was another small increase in the colony, from 56 to 61 pairs. Both figures require some qualification, as the 1957 total included one pair—at Peerie Brae West—which did not lay, but incubated a stone and later a hard-boiled hen's egg (they came back in 1958, but did not repeat the performance or breed); and the 1958 figure includes one bird which bred with two different mates at Byerwall North, producing a second clutch with a new partner after losing both mate and eggs early in the season.

The colour-ringed breeders numbered 101 at the end of the 1957 season (including the two "pseudo-breeders"), and of these fourteen (13.85%) failed to return in 1958, a proportion slightly higher than in the two previous years. By the end of the 1958 season, 115 of the 121 breeding birds had been marked, many of them with experimental P.V.C. colours which we are hoping will last longer than the old celluloid type, and so reduce the number of birds which must be re-captured each year.

The bounds of the colony contracted a little in the north, with the vacation of the so-called West Hill Cups territory (actually a misnomer by 1957, as the nest-site had been shifted half a mile to the east of the Cups). The surviving bird of the 1957 pair joined a neighbour to breed at Brae West. A new and isolated territory was established on the ridge above Johnny's Peats, at the N.E. side of Vaasetter, by a pair consisting of one new bird and one that had nested unsuccessfully in the overcrowded east end of Swey in 1957. Their nearest Arctic neighbours, at Vatstrass, were a good half-mile away, but with the Vaasetter Bonxies near at hand they moved their chicks four or five hundred yards to the foot of the North Park of Thione.

AGE-GROUPS WITHIN THE COLONY

The age-group composition of the colony becomes better known as the older birds, already nesting when colour-marking began in 1954, gradually fail to return. In 1958 only some 32 of the 121 breeders (26.4%) remained from the class which began to breed in 1954 or earlier; 29 (24%) began to breed in 1955, 23 (19.0%) in 1956; 16 (13.2%) in 1957), and 21 (17.4%) were new in 1958.

The age-groups of some of the pre-1954 birds are known, from their distinctive appearance and behaviour, and the fact that a change is usually betrayed by a late laying-date. We now have only one pair which has remained unbroken since 1948, at Homisdale Springs, for neither bird of the equally old Eas Brecks North pair of 1957 returned in 1958. Four other pairs survived from 1950—Mire of Vatnagard, Tarryfield, Airstrip East, and Brae Middle.

The following table shows the age of the present matings in the colony.

<i>Continuance of Matings Established in</i>					
1954 or before	1955	1956	1957	1958 (new)	Total
7	7	16	8	23	61
<i>Percentages</i>					
11.5	11.5	26.2	13.1	37.7	

In 1957 as many as two-thirds of the matings were no more than two seasons old, but in 1958 this proportion dropped to half, as the effect of the big re-shuffle of 1956 persisted.

CHANGES IN THE MATINGS

The 1957 season had been uncomplicated, with no "divorces" and only two former breeders returning after a non-breeding year; but the situation in 1958 was more complex.

There were three "divorces" of 1957 pairs: one bird from Airstrip Middle moved to Eas Brecks East, one from Brae West to Brunt Brae West, and one from Swey Roadside North to Johnny's Peats. In each case, the second bird of the original pair remained and bred on the 1957 territory, with a new mate.

No fewer than four birds which had nested in 1956, but not in 1957, returned to breed again in 1958. Two of these "intermittent breeders" had been mates, at the remote Busta Brecks site in 1956. The female mated in 1958 with a first-time breeder at Brae Hilltop, whilst the male paired with a third intermittent breeder—the pale Thione female of 1954-6—at Byerwall North. This site was an eventful one, for the female died about two weeks after the eggs were laid. They were

soon lost to predators, but the male remated with a new bird, and another egg was laid some three weeks after the fatality.

The fourth intermittent breeder was an intermediate which had nested at Airstrip Middle in 1956. This reappeared to fill a vacancy at the nearby Airstrip South-east site, where one of the 1957 pair had failed to return.

Twenty-one birds bred for the first time in 1958—four of them ringed as chicks in earlier years. Eight of these twenty-one formed entirely new pairs; the rest filled spaces left by death or absence at older sites.

TERRITORIAL CHANGES

The bounds of the great majority of 1957 territories were virtually the same in 1958, but there were a few interesting changes.

In his report of the 1957 season (Bull. 3:177) Kenneth Williamson described the developments at the Plantacrubs and Homisdale Circle sites. Here the 1955 Plantacrubs territory was split into two smaller ones (Plantacrubs and Homisdale Circle) following a divorce in 1956, but expanded again in 1957 when the pressure of neighbouring pairs was relieved, allowing the Circle pair to nest some 150 yards to the west. This move may have been accelerated by the arrival of a pair of Bonxies, which occupied an enclave in the Arctics' ground immediately to the east of the two territories. The Bonxies did not reappear in 1958, and the Circle pair moved back to nest in their 1956 ground at the head of the valley. Their nest and that of the Plantacrubs birds were barely 30 yards apart. However, there was no undue friction between the pairs, since the Plantacrubs birds now had plenty of room to move their chicks to the east or south, and the Circle pair removed theirs uphill towards the 1957 nest.

In one area, the eastern half of Swey, the overcrowding of 1957 was relieved in logical fashion by a merger of the two minute Swey Roadside territories, enforced presumably by the earlier return of one "North" bird; and followed by the establishment of an entirely new territory on the hitherto unoccupied country to the north, by the survivor of the "South" pair.

Two other districts became overpopulated in 1958, the southern part of the Brae of Restensgeo, and the south side of the Airstrip; and some readjustments are to be expected here in 1959.

On the Brae, a new pair occupied the "Brae Hilltop" ground—the upper slopes and summit of a steep northern outlier of Swey—with the established pairs of Green Path and Brae South below them on more level ground to the south-east and north-east. After these pairs had laid, a fourth, called Brae

South-east, somehow gained a footing in the centre of this triangle, and nested no more than fifty yards from any of the other pairs. This was probably one of the smallest territories ever recorded, and the chicks were never moved more than ten yards from the nest. The adults were bickering continually with their neighbours, but contrived to rear both youngsters.

Immediately south of the airstrip, the presence of a pair of Bonxies—the long-established birds of Byerwall—restricts the Arctics to a strip some 250 yards long by 100 deep. This area, bounded by the Byerwall West territory to the west, and the Airstrip East ground to the east, contained three pairs in 1957. These were Airstrip Middle and Airstrip South-east, close to the neutral ground of the airstrip, and Airstrip South, holding the southern half, a shallow depression inclining to the east. One of the Airstrip South pair failed to come back in 1958, and by the time the survivor had remated, a new pair—Byerwall North—had seized the eastern half of the depression. This became one of the most restless and noisiest parts of the colony, and two of the pairs were unsuccessful.

RETURN OF YOUNG BIRDS

Four birds ringed as chicks in the colony returned to breed for the first time in 1958, three of them at four years old, and one at three.

1. AT 19837, a dark bird which was the only child of the new Green Path pair in 1954, nested with the former Busta Brecks female at Brae Hilltop, adjacent to the territory of its birth. This was an interesting recovery, since the bird was believed to have died before fledging, and so makes necessary an adjustment of the "breeding success" figures for 1954.
2. AT 19782 nested with an unringed bird at the new territory of Brae North-east. This was ringed as a "dark intermediate" chick at Homisdale West in 1954, the elder of two. It was a very dark adult, but is probably a heterozygote with dark plumage. (One of Mr O'Donald's tentative conclusions is that some apparently dark individuals are really intermediates, and this may have some expression in the juvenile plumage).
3. AT 19786, another dark morph, ringed at Homisdale East in 1954, bred in 1958 at Brae South-east with a new bird as mate. One of their two chicks this year had several pure white feathers in the centre of its belly—it was otherwise a "dark intermediate"—and it was most interesting to find that its dark grandmother (AT 19738) at Homisdale East also had a white patch in the same place. AT 19786 did not show this feature.

4. AT 26686. This bird was yet another dark individual, the elder chick at Eas Brecks East in 1955. It mated with the survivor of the 1957 pair at Brae North, and two young were reared. The special interest in this recapture lies in the fact that the mother of AT 26686 was 337.789, the first Fair Isle chick ever to be recovered in the colony, and breeding for the first time in 1955 at four years old.

Seventeen birds ringed as chicks on the isle have now been recovered as first-time breeders. These recaptures are listed in the following table.

Return as breeders of local-born chicks

	AGE AT FIRST BREEDING		
	5 years	4 years	3 years
1955	1	2	2
1956		2	3
1957	2	1	
1958		3	1
Totals	3	8	6

BREEDING SUCCESS IN 1958

This season was one of the most successful that we have known. Out of 119 eggs laid, 101 hatched, and 89 chicks were reared. All but one of these were ringed.

The table presents the detailed figures for each year since 1949:—

Season	No. of Pairs	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Young Reared	% reared of Eggs Laid
1949	20	36	30	14	38.9
1950	22	42	34	25	59.5
1951	26	49	35	23	46.9
1952	32	55	49	45	81.8
1953	31	60	56	54	90.0
1954	34	62	47	44	71.0
1955	44	75	60	53	70.7
1956	51	96	76	69	71.9
1957	55	99	88	55	55.6
1958	61	119	101	89	74.8

Every pair that hatched eggs contrived to rear at least one chick in 1958, and most of the casualties among the young were the result of predation by corvids or Bonxies, chiefly late in the fledgling period and after the colony had begun to thin out, giving easier access to the predators.

The weather was exceptionally favourable from late May until the third week of July. There was little rain, no strong wind, and, in late June, the highest temperatures recorded

in Shetland since continuous records were first kept over thirty years ago.

It was obviously also an exceptional year for sea-bird food. "Sillocks" (the fry of Saithe) and sand-eels were visibly teeming in the inshore waters. The Kittiwakes, the main source of the skuas' food, seem to have had a very good year; a high proportion of the nests seen had two well-grown chicks, and there were few empty nests. There was also a unique occurrence in the recent Fair Isle records, when a concourse of up to sixty Arctic and Common Terns, with a few Sandwich Terns, took up residence at the south end of the isle from mid-July until early August, feeding in the tide-race. There have been no more than casual records of a few terns offshore in any other year since the Bird Observatory was founded, despite their abundance in Shetland.

21. The Fair Isle Bonxie Population in 1958

PETER DAVIS

The population of Great Skuas *Catharacta skua* dropped to 17 pairs in 1958—four fewer than in 1957, and the same as in 1956. In spite of this, more young birds were reared than in any previous year.

Observations were complicated to some extent by nest-robbing, for at least twelve eggs from seven nests were stolen or broken during the season, most of them by human agency. Three two-egg clutches which were lost early in the incubation period were quickly replaced, though at one site the replacement was only a single egg.

In all, 38 eggs were laid, and the 26 that were unmolested all hatched. Twenty-four chicks were fledged, and in terms of "young reared per pair breeding", 1958 takes second place only to 1955, when 13 pairs reared 20 young.

The table shows breeding-success in the years for which complete data are available.

Breeding-success in the Bonxies

Season	No. of Pairs	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Young Reared	% Success
1953	9	15	9	8	53.3
1954	8	16	10	10	62.5
1955	13	26	21	20	76.9
1956	17	29	26	22	72.4
1957	21	39	34	15	38.5
1958	17	38	26	24	63.2

Two of the 21 pairs nesting in 1957 disappeared without

trace. These were at Ward Hill Summit and at Homisdale, both new sites in that year. The other two vacancies were on Vaasetter, where the colony dropped to four pairs by the loss of "Vaasetter East" and "Thione". In each case, one of the 1957 birds may have survived (the one at Vaasetter East bore a ring probably given in 1957), but both failed to obtain new mates until the season was well advanced.

The other established territories, three at Dronger, three at Vatnagard, two on Sukka Mire, and singles on Burrashield, Byerwall, Eas Brecks, Lerness, and the Brae of Restensgeo, were maintained in 1958. Apart from the two non-breeding pairs on Vaasetter, there were others at Sukka Mire, Wirvie Brecks, and Dronger.

Eas Brecks is the oldest territory on the isle, and the 1957 pair had probably been unchanged for several years, since the eggs were consistently laid early. I walked over the ground on May 13th 1958, expecting to find the nest, but instead discovered the female in a weak condition, and unable to fly. On the 20th she was freshly dead, and the corpse was despatched to the Veterinary Laboratory at Lasswade. Mr R. H. Duff's report was as follows: "Post mortem examination showed that the bird had died in fair condition, and that it was going off the lay. One of the ovules had passed into the oviduct, and had not been shed from the ovary. There was septic egg material in the oviduct and throughout the abdomen. The liver was toxic and the left lung congested. A bacteriological examination has shown the presence of paracolon bacilli. This will be associated with the egg peritonitis". This bird was soon replaced, and there were two eggs on Eas Brecks by June 8th.

Another bird, perhaps one of the Vaasetter breeders, was found dead near the Hesswalls in June, by George Stout of Field. This, too, had met a singularly unpleasant end, for it had swallowed a fish-hook; and about three feet of line with a small wooden float inscribed "John Johanson LL178" trailed from the bill.

22. Some Fair Isle Breeding Birds in 1958

PETER DAVIS

STORM PETREL *Hydrobates pelagicus*. This year, as in 1957, we failed to find direct evidence of breeding, but birds were seen at night in places so widely separated as Malcolm's Head, Troila Geo, South Naaversgill, Wester Lother, and Duttfeld. Ten adults were netted at Malcolm's Head and four at Wester Lother; a dead bird was found at Springfield in July.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*. One pair nested, at the west-coast eyrie near Gunnawark. Two young were fledged by June 26th.

QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*. A pair bred at Taing, rearing at least six young. This is the first definite breeding record since 1943, though at least one bird was present through the summer in 1948. The first bird of the 1958 season was seen by Peter Jones on Skaddan on June 13th, and there was one in Middle Leys during the next ten days. In late June and through July birds were frequently heard at Busta-Kennaby, as well as at Taing and the marshy ground north of the kirk; and there were also isolated records from Lower Leogh and the Gilsetter marsh. George Stout of Field first saw young birds at Taing in mid-August, and up to eight birds were frequently seen there through September and into the first week of October.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. A census of breeding pairs was made in 1958. We found 45 pairs, locating nests or chicks of 35, and assuming breeding from the behaviour of ten others, including pairs on the Green Holm and Sheep Craig. It is unlikely that more than two or three pairs were missed. No fewer than 38 of the 45 sites were north of the Hill Dyke; and ten of these were on Bunes, which is covered with the very closecropped sward most favoured by Oystercatchers. On the hill, only two nests were in ground wholly occupied by the Arctic Skuas, though seven others were within the large peripheral territories of the colony. There were no nests within the enclosed land of the crofts; the seven sites in the south were all on the coast, except for one on the east side of Hoini. The birds seem to have had a very good season, and 44 well-grown chicks were ringed.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. The breeding population was more than doubled in 1958, when eight, possibly nine, pairs nested. Four of these were in the North Park of Thione, two in the South Park, and two in the Tarryfield, with the possible ninth somewhere at the head of the Gilsetter marsh. The birds had a satisfactory season, at least ten young being fledged.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*. One pair again nested on Bunes, but the eggs were deserted and there was no evidence of a second attempt. It is thought likely that one bird died in late May or early June.

SNIPE *Capella gallinago*. A pair bred in the Gilsetter marsh, rearing at least one chick, which flew in the last week of July.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*. A slight increase in numbers this year, for in addition to the usual small colonies at the South Gavel (about ten pairs) and at Goorn (about five) there were three nests at the east kletts of the Rippack.

RAVEN *Corvus corax*. Several birds were killed during the winter, and the breeders were reduced to two pairs, one at Gunnawark and one at West Lother. At least six young were reared.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*. At least one pair bred, in the vicinity of the Reevas; a fledged juvenile was seen. Other single birds were near the Haa and on Ward Hill during the breeding season.

23. The Fair Isle Wren Population in 1958

PETER DAVIS

Following the success of the dawn census of singing Wrens, *Troglodytes t. fridariensis*, made by Kenneth Williamson in June 1957, it was decided that this survey should become an annual feature of the Bird Observatory's work.

The 1958 census promised to be of particular interest, for it would demonstrate the effect of an unusually severe winter on the small and isolated population. There were four prolonged spells of bitter weather, with much snow, between mid-January and early March, though there was also a remarkable absence of gales.

In the event, we located 45 singing birds, compared with 47 in 1957. This confirmed Kenneth Williamson's view (expressed in a correspondence published in *British Birds* in 1953) that hard winters have little adverse effect on the Wren populations of small islands, provided that their main feeding area, the shore, is not denied them by gales and heavy seas.

The 1958 counts were made, by Peter Jones and myself, on May 23rd and June 4th, two windless days with no extraneous noise to obscure the Wren-song, between the hours of 0230 and 0500 G.M.T. Some areas where we had expected to find Wrens, but had failed to do so, were visited twice, and were also examined in the course of other work in the late spring, but no birds were added by this means. It is unlikely that more than one or two were missed.

The distribution of Wrens in 1957 was described in detail in the Bulletin 3:184-7. Although the totals for the two years were so similar, there was a considerable change in the distribution in 1958. The east-coast count of singing-stations, 21 in 1957, declined to 17 in 1958, whilst the west-coast count

increased from 17 to 21. On the north coast there were 7 stations instead of 8, one at Millins-Houllan being vacant; and the single 1957 territory at South Harbour was unoccupied.

On the east coast, seven 1957 territories were not taken: two in the Bay of Furse. There were three new sites, at one at Clingers Geo, one at the South Mila Hesslands (all of which are exposed to the south-east), one at Fanniquoy and two in the Bay of Furse. There were three new sites, one at Swartz Geo, North Mila Hesslands, and North Haven (two pairs instead of one), all of which are to some extent sheltered from the south-east. At the Geo of Sheep Craig, which was not examined in 1957, but which has held Wrens in earlier years, none was seen or heard during a visit in June.

The west-coast survey showed that only four 1957 sites were unoccupied this year (Loangie, Gray Geo, Troila Geo, and one on the north cliffs of Malcolm's Head), whereas eight new ones were taken. Four birds instead of three sang in the high cliffs of South Fellsigeo and Guithicum, under Ward Hill; and one of these was near the cliff-top, some 400 feet directly above another. A further new site was at Mila Brett Stack Alands, the cliff facing Brett Stack; and there were three additional birds at the south side of Hoini, two at the deep narrow geo inside Hundi Stack, and one at Gorsens Geo. The South Reeva was occupied, and also the south side of Lunna Geo, both places where Wrens had bred before 1957, though not in that year. In all, no fewer than ten singing-stations were crowded into the deeply-indented coastline between Hoini and Fugli Stack. The last, and most unexpected, of the new sites was at Sley Hillier, four-square to the elements on the south-west side of Malcolm's Head, an area with well-fissured rock but sparse vegetation.

How to explain this curious redistribution of the island Wrens, which brought nearly half the population to the weather coast, with its narrower beaches, fiercer wave-action, and often sparse and stunted plant-life? The answer may lie in the weather-conditions of late winter and early spring, at the time when the Wrens are still mobile but will soon be obliged to select their breeding-grounds. After the clearance of the snow in early March 1958, there was a long period of unpleasantly cold and fresh easterly winds, which lasted without a break from March 12th until April 6th. This period culminated in one of the worst gales of the winter, a real south-easterly which blasted the isle for the last six days of March, and brought gigantic seas into all the east-side geos. Many of these must have been untenable for the Wrens, and since the land was at its barest and least hospitable, some birds must surely have crossed to the west. April was exceptionally calm, and there were no strong westerly

winds until a moderate gale on May 7th, by which time the west-coast songsters would be well-established.

24. Migrants in Shetland, Spring 1958

Compiled from notes by CHARLES INKSTER (Mid Yell), MAGNUS SINCLAIR (Haroldswick, Unst), with the addition of May-June records by Dr J. EGGELING (mainly Unst), L. BROWN and L. S. V. and U. M. VENABLES (mainly Dunrossness, S. Shetland). (Scientific names are given only when they have not previously appeared in the Fair Isle spring notes).

As at Fair Isle, the prolonged cold weather of late winter delayed the return of the earlier summer visitors to the North Isles. Snow Bunting increases in Unst on February 20th and 24th, and on March 3rd, correspond fairly well with observations at Fair Isle. Oystercatchers were first seen at Haroldswick on February 15th and 20th, four by the 24th. Skylarks were not seen in Mid Yell until March 4th, and the first noticeable arrival at Haroldswick was on the 8th. The Red-throated Diver *Colymbus stellata* returned to Yell on March 4th, but the first pair noted at Haroldswick was as late as the 25th. One winter rarity, a Little Gull *Larus minutus* stayed at Mid Yell from January 22nd to April 13th.

The first big immigration in Shetland was the Blackbird "avalanche" of March 30th-31st. When I telephoned Tom Henderson of Spiggie (Dunrossness) on April 1st, to tell of the rush at Fair Isle, he informed me that the south Mainland was swarming with the same species as were dominant on the isle—Blackbirds, and other thrushes, Lapwings, Skylarks, and Robins—and that innumerable birds were to be seen all along the 20 miles of the road north to Lerwick. Later I learned that a male Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe leucomela* had been seen at Virkie on the 30th (para. 25). At Mid Yell, fifty miles north, Blackbirds appeared in "abnormal numbers" on the 31st, and Fieldfares, Redwings, Chaffinches and Bramblings were numerous. On April 1st several Robins were seen, but Lapwings and Oystercatchers did not appear in numbers until the 8th. A Moorhen, one of the species associated with the rush at Fair Isle, appeared in Yell on the 9th. At Haroldswick the Blackbird increase was noted on April 2nd: several Fieldfares, Redwings, and Robins, with up to nine Chaffinches, were seen there in the first ten days of the month. two Song Thrushes on the 12th and a Brambling on the 17th.

A White Wagtail reached Haroldswick on April 2nd, and a Grey Lag-Goose *Anser anser* on the 3rd. Wheatears were first seen there on the 6th and 15th, but the main arrivals (or passage-movements) were delayed until May 4th and 6th.

At Mid Yell, the first seen were several on April 17th, a very late date. An increase of Redwings was noted at both places on April 21st, and a further small movement, with some Fieldfares and Chaffinches, probably occurred at Haroldswick on the 23rd. On this day the first Whimbrel was there, though the species did not appear in numbers until May 9th. A Wood Pigeon was at Mid Yell on April 24th, and a Kestrel at Haroldswick on the 26th. The first Bonxie reported from the Unst colonies was on April 12th; Arctic Skuas were not seen on April 26th, but a few pairs present by May 4th. (The earliest dates at the Fair Isle colonies were April 2nd and 21st respectively).

Most of the early May records are from Haroldswick. There is a definite correspondence with the movements of north-western species at Fair Isle in the early days of the month. Apart from the Wheatears of May 4th and 6th, two Golden Plovers passed north on the 2nd, and a Grey Lag which arrived at about this time remained until the 27th. Odd White Wagtails occurred from the 1st onwards, with a maximum of four on the 10th, when a flock of 24 Turnstones was also present. (White Wagtails continued to appear until the 28th, with a straggler on June 10th).

A Buzzard was seen on May 8th—this may have remained for several weeks, as there was one at Saxavord as late as July 11th. The first Swallow was on May 7th, and birds were seen frequently in the rest of the month; there were two House Martins on the 11th, one on the 16th; a Sand Martin on the 11th. Single Redwing and Redstart came, with the first Arctic Terns *Sterna macrura* on the 12th, a Willow Warbler on the 15th, and a Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* on the 21st. (The last species has been extremely rare in Shetland in recent years).

From Dunrossness, a record of 5 Knots on the 2nd, and of three Gadwall *Anas strepera* and a party of at least 26 Great Northern Divers *Colymbus immer* on the 4th may fit in with the passage of Iceland-Greenland breeders at this period. A Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps caspicus* and three Brent Geese *Branta bernicula* were at Weisdale Voe (central Mainland) on the 17th, and a singing Ring Ouzel and a Scaup *Aythya marila* were at nearby Tingwall on the 22nd (two Scaup were on Loch Spiggie on the 24th). Meanwhile one of the rarer spring birds, a Golden Oriole *O. oriolus* had been recorded in Dunrossness on the 18th; this may be linked with the arrival of continental species at Fair Isle on the 15th.

For the last ten days of May, and in June, the available Shetland records of continental migrants show a marked correlation with movements at Fair Isle. The influx of May 23rd-25th was immediately reflected in Dunrossness, 30 miles north, by records of two Willow Warblers and White-

throats on the 24th, two Spotted Flycatchers and two Garden Warblers (the other birds still present) on the 25th and 26th, a Whinchat 26th, and a Blackcap and five Tree Sparrows on the 27th. (The return of Tree Sparrows to Fair Isle and Shetland, after a virtual absence of 25-30 years, is especially interesting. I understand that two were also seen by Mrs Holbourne in Foula, some time in May). From Unst there are records of a Willow Warbler on May 24th, a Redstart 26th, and two Redwings, a Black Redstart, and a male Blue-headed Wagtail on the 27th, a Fieldfare and a Wood Pigeon on the 30th. In Mid Yell, a Blackcap was seen on the 26th, a Black Redstart on the 27th, and a Lesser Whitethroat on the 28th.

The further arrivals at Fair Isle on May 28th-29th and 31st were again matched in Dunrossness. The first Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* arrived on the 28th, and a Spotted Flycatcher was seen; on the 29th, a Blackcap and a Goldcrest, on the 30th a Garden Warbler, three Willows, and on the 31st a Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, and a Pied Flycatcher. June 1st was the best day, with seven Cuckoos, eight Garden Warblers, and five Whitethroats seen, and on the 2nd a Sedge Warbler and a Redstart were again noted.

The last considerable arrivals at Fair Isle, between June 3rd and 6th, took the form of the strongest of these late-spring passages, in Dunrossness. Two Cuckoos, a Red-backed Shrike, and an Icterine Warbler on the 3rd were followed by a big fall on the 4th. Garden Warblers, Whitethroats, and Lesser Whitethroats were "widespread", and four Blackcaps, a Sedge and a Willow Warbler, and three Redstarts were recorded. Most exciting was a Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, the first for Scotland, singing in the willows beside Loch Brow. Most of these birds remained on the 5th, when a late Chiffchaff was also seen; but most had gone by the 6th. A Robin was noted on the 8th.

In Mid Yell, a Willow Warbler was seen June 3rd-6th, and a Cuckoo was calling on the 13th. Up to three Cuckoos were at Norwick, Unst, in the last days of May and in early June, and one at Haroldswick on the 8th. Various migrants reached Baltasound, Unst, during Dr. Eggeling's stay, between June 6th and 18th; many of them in the little wood at Halligarth. A female Blackcap and a Willow Warbler were there on the 6th, single Golden Warbler, Whitethroat, and Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* on the 7th, Redwing, Robin, and Hedge Sparrow on the 8th. Magnus Sinclair saw a male Blackcap at Haroldswick on the 9th, when Garden Warblers increased to three at Halligarth; there was one at Haroldswick on the 11th. The 13th was an interesting day: a Dark-breasted Barn Owl *Tyto alba guttata* was seen at Halligarth, a Wood Pigeon and a Whitethroat at Haroldswick, a female Stonechat (a

Shetland rarity) and a Lesser Whitethroat between there and Norwick. Wood Pigeons were at both Halligarth and Haroldswick on the 16th, and three Willow Warblers appeared at the former place as late as the 17th. Dr Eggeling saw a Black Redstart on the isle of Noss on June 22nd.

At least one Iceland Gull *Larus glaucooides* summered in Unst. Dr Eggeling saw two different birds at Baltasound on June 7th and 11th—the latter bird was said to have been present for two weeks previously. At Haroldswick, Magnus Sinclair first saw an immature (probably 2nd summer) bird on June 17th, and it was noted at intervals until August 15th. Another northern bird, a Great Northern Diver, stayed at Haroldswick throughout June.

We return now to the movements of Swifts and hirundines, which were strongest in Fair Isle on May 25th-26th, 29th, and June 3rd-4th. In Dunrossness Swallows are first mentioned on May 24th, House Martins and Swifts on the next day, when all three species were in plenty. There was renewed passage on the 29th, when a Sand Martin was also seen, and from the 31st (one Sand Martin) to June 3rd the three commoner species were again plentiful. A few House Martins were present from the 5th to the 9th. At Haroldswick, May 25th-28th was the best period for Swallow and House Martin, though both species occurred sporadically until late June. A Sand Martin was there on the 1st, but the only Swift reported from Unst was one on the 14th. In Mid Yell, Swallows appeared on May 29th, and House Martins on June 1st and 3rd.

Quails had arrived at Baltasound a full week before the first was seen at Fair Isle. A pair was established by June 6th, and one called frequently till late July, though breeding is not confirmed. At Haroldswick a bird called between June 18th and 26th. C. Inkster received a dead bird from the north Mainland on the 23rd.

25. Pied Wheatear in Shetland

A bird that can only have been a male Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe leucomela* was seen by Wm. Horne of Virkie, Dunrossness, on March 30th 1958, and described in a letter to Tom Henderson of Spiggie. The relevant part of the letter reads as follows: "...where it differed from our ordinary Wheatear was the much greater preponderance of black in its plumage. The middle of its back and its wings were black, and also it had a black throat and mask (to the level of the centre of the eyes); but the most noticeable difference from our Wheatears was the distinctive black-and-white plumage".

There are three other species of Palearctic Wheatears in which the males have black mantles: *Oe. moesta* (Algeria to N. Arabia), *Oe. lugens* (Algeria to Palestine and Arabia) and *Oe. monacha* (Egypt to N.W. Pakistan), but all are non-migratory and none is on the European list. The Pied Wheatear breeds from E. Romania, S. Russia, Cyprus, and Persia to Mongolia, and winters in N.E. Africa. There are three British records, two from Scotland (Orkney, Isle of May), and one from England (Portland). All were females, and occurred in October-November.

(Information supplied by L. S. V. VENABLES).

26. Song Thrush and White Wagtail Breeding in Shetland

Mrs R. D. Winton informed L. S. V. and U. M. Venables that a Song Thrush arrived at Kergord plantations on April 1st. It sang daily in April, and less regularly in early May, when it was seen with a second bird. Later the birds were seen with four fledged young. This is the first recorded breeding of the species in Shetland since 1953, though no information is available for 1954 and 1955. No birds appeared in another former breeding-place, at Lerwick, this summer.

Mrs Winton also reported that a pair of White Wagtails nested in the bank of the Upper Kergord Burn in 1958.

27. Migrants in Orkney, Spring and Early Summer 1958

E. BALFOUR

The spring and summer of 1958 was perhaps the best in the past few years for the numbers of migrants occurring in Orkney:

The great Robin rush at the end of March and the beginning of April was remarkable for its great numbers; there must have been many hundreds all over the county; almost every farm had its quota. With the Robins were many Blackbirds and Chaffinches, and smaller numbers of Bramblings, Black Redstarts and Bluethroats. A number of Great Grey Shrikes, and at least one Red-backed Shrike also occurred in April.

Throughout May and June smaller numbers of migrants passed through; mainly Swifts, Swallows, and martins, with a scattering of Redstarts and warblers, etc.; but it was the

appearance of two or more Rollers that caused the greatest interest among bird-watchers and others.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*. One male on Harray Loch on April 13th. (Uncommon in Orkney).
- SMEW *Mergus albellus*. One male (consorting with GOLDEN-EYES) on Steness Loch from March 15th (the first I have seen).
- BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*. One seen on Heng Moors, June 3rd.
- GYR-FALCON *Falco rusticolus*. One reported from Burness, Firth, in late June. Thought to be of the Iceland form.
- CORNCRAKE *Crex crex*. First heard on April 27th.
- WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. First heard on May 7th; and small parties seen and heard throughout May, tailing off into June.
- PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*. About thirty with TURNSTONES at Evie on April 22nd.
- LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*. First seen April 12th (two birds).
- ARCTIC TERN *Sterna macrura*. First arrivals on May 10th.
- CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*. One seen arriving in Sanday, with other migrants, on June 1st.
- SWIFT *Apus apus*. Several (with SWALLOWS and MARTINS) passing over Sanday, and a few seen at Holm, on June 1st. A few seen in Hoy in June 7th.
- ROLLER *Coracias garrulus*. One made a brief stay in my garden at Isbister House, Rendall, on May 27th. One was first observed in Deerness on June 5th or 6th, where it stayed for several days and was quite tame. Later, one stayed at Wideford Brae, near Kirkwall, for about three weeks, until well into July. (This may well have been the Deerness bird).
- SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*. Several passing over Sanday on May 23rd and 24th and June 1st.
- HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*. As SWALLOW; also a few over Hoy on June 7th.
- SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*. One seen over Burness Loch, Westray, on June 19th.
- GOLDEN ORIOLE *Oriolus oriolus*. One reported from Holm at the end of June or early July.
- REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. A few arriving at Sanday, May 31st and June 1st.
- BLACK REDSTART *Phoenicurus ochruros*. A few seen with the Robin rush in St Ola and Westray on or about April 1st.
- BLUETHROAT *Cyansylvia svecica*. A few with the Robin rush

(White-spotted form, *C.s. cyanecula*). One was caught in a barn at St Ola.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*. The great rush of March 31st and the first days of April was quite remarkable for the great numbers of these pale-breasted birds; reported to be in hundreds throughout Orkney; almost every farm sheltered from two or three up to twenty or thirty birds. Many entered farm outbuildings such as barns, byres, and poultry houses; upwards of a dozen together in such buildings was not uncommon.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenabaenus*. Heard singing on breeding-ground on May 12th.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*. One seen in Sanday on June 1st.

WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*. Two seen at Isbister, Rendall, on May 31st.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Several in Sanday on June 1st.

PIED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa hypoleuca*. A male seen in Bin-scarth Wood, June 5th.

WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulus*. A few reported from Kirk-wall in late May.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*. Four or five reported from Sanday in April.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE *Lanius cristatus collurio*. One in Sanday on April 22nd, an uncommonly early date.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*. Many seen during the Robin rush.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*. About thirty seen in Westray about the time of the Robin rush.

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CORRIGENDUM

The Editor wishes to thank those readers who expressed interest in the records of *Alca impennis* given on page 33 of the last issue. The writers of the Butt of Lewis notes were in no way responsible for the inclusion of this species in their list; the auks referred to were not specifically identified, and there is no recent record of *Alca impennis* in the area.

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

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

