

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

FRIENDS of FAIR ISLE newsletter

No. 1 Autumn 1986

Editor: Liz Riddiford



OUR NEW VENTURE We hope that this Newsletter will help 'Friends' to keep more closely in touch with what is happening at the Observatory, and would welcome your reactions to it.

SPRING 1987

Many new records were established this spring on Fair Isle, including several earliest-ever dates, one or two 'mosts', and two firsts for the isle, while some common species seldom seen here also turned up. A remarkable number of ringed birds were controlled, including a Belgian dunnoek, a German blackbird, a Swedish red-backed shrike and an Icelandic kittiwake, while of British-ringed birds a marsh warbler was easily the most noteworthy.

The spring really started in late March with a rush of robins and dunnocks, both reaching treble figures on many days, followed by black redstarts and good numbers of chaffinches, bramblings, northern bullfinches and assorted thrushes (with a record flock of 22 mistle thrushes), all in April. Earliest-ever dates were of cuckoo, sedge warbler, house martin, arctic tern and little stint. Nearly all the island 'regulars' appeared and surprises were mostly of common birds which rarely reach Fair Isle. In this category were canada goose (a flock of ten!), two great tits and two tree sparrows. Late April was also exciting when the isle's first-ever magpie visited.

In late April and early May the rarer species noted were subalpine warbler (the first of four), rustic bunting (the first of three), tawny pipit, spotted crane and shorelark. Migration then all but ceased, due to a continual run of northerlies, until the wind finally swung to the east in the last ten days of the month, bringing a prolonged fall of common migrants and also bluethroats, rosefinches and red-backed shrikes. The highest count of bluethroat was a dozen and two of the rosefinches were red males. On 29 May a caspian tern flew north, seen only by one person but heard by another from his bed, and on the same day a short-toed lark, a subalpine warbler and an ortolan were all found. A crane and a male rustic bunting (trapped) appeared late on 4 June. Migrants were still moving through well into June, when our other 'first', a superb male lesser kestrel, was followed by the only marsh warbler of the spring and a greenish warbler, both on the same day. Even into July a red-backed shrike and a bluethroat appeared and were promptly trapped. Among the other best records of the spring were osprey, hobby, temminck's stint, long-tailed and pomarine skuas, corncrake, great grey shrike, wryneck, hawfinch and lapland bunting.

Breeding birds seem to be enjoying a bountiful season, with continued expansion of both the gannetries, over 200 arctic terns on Bunness (more than double the 1986 figure) and, pleasingly, the number of singing wrens is up 50% on last year.

Simon Aspinall

'FRIENDS' WEEK, 13-18 JUNE, 1988

A special week has been set aside to celebrate the 40th anniversary of FIBOT (1948-88). 'Friends' are invited to share a week of renewed acquaintance with the island and observatory through a series of activities, including slides and film shows of Fair Isle past and present and a celebration dance in the Community Hall. Bookings should be made as soon as possible please (closing date January 1988). Details and booking forms are available from FIBO, Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU.

1987 has been one of the Observatory's busiest visitor seasons ever, with a projected 445 visitor weeks for the year, compared to the encouraging 414 for 1986. Visitors this year have appreciated last winter's improvements to the building and general facilities, with the new cotton sheets and duvets, flooring, showers and decor receiving especially favourable comment. Our thanks go to the HIBD, SIC and NTS for their help and financial assistance. We would also like to thank the HIBD and Loganair for the success of the Orkney/Fair Isle service during 1986, and the visitors who, by using the service, have ensured its continuation during 1987 and 1988.

LOOKING AHEAD

While the roof repairs and internal improvements were being carried out in 1986 it became apparent to our architect, Ron Galloway, that much more fundamental problems would soon have to be faced. Ron has developed a very real personal interest in FIBO and we are enormously grateful to him for drawing our attention to the fact that the life expectancy of the building (now 18 years old) must be limited if works are not carried out soon to improve its structural stability and its resistance to water penetration. The FIBOT Directors are convinced that the future of the Observatory must be assured and have instructed the architect to prepare detailed plans and proposals, including some improvement options, such as the provision of self-catering accommodation for long-stay research workers.

These works will clearly be costly and far in excess of what can be met from the Trust's limited resources. The Directors have therefore resolved to launch an appeal to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the opening of the Observatory, which occurs in 1988. Full details will be announced shortly. In the meantime we have been enormously encouraged by the early support of one anonymous benefactor whose donation will more than cover the cost of the architect's report. We hope that this is a good omen for the future!

Dougal Andrew, Appeal Administrator.

ON THE SALES FRONT

Vignettes. A number of the vignettes which appeared in recent FIBO Reports are still available for sale. The artists and prices are: Artist: PAUL LEONARD (9 drawings) £10 each. Artist: BILL MORTON (6 drawings) £10 each. Artist: JOHN HOLLOWAY (28 drawings) £5 each. A detailed list is available on request from Liz Riddiford at the Observatory.

T shirt and sweatshirt offer. Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust logo on high quality garments.

Colours: navy, burgundy, bottle green, grey

Sizes: small, medium, large and extra large

Costs: T shirts £5.50, sweatshirts £10.50.

Please send SAE for order form to T Shirt Offer, FIBO, Fair Isle, Shetland.

Guidebook - coming shortly. The National Trust for Scotland plans to produce, during 1988, a 25-page guidebook to Fair Isle, complete with concise text and plenty of colour photographs. The booklet will be available at around £1.50 (plus p&p) on Fair Isle and at other Trust properties.

'Tick' Lists. The SOC Checklist of Scottish Birds is an annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. A5, 32pp, 95p. The SOC Field List of Scottish Birds includes species which occurred annually in 1981-85. A6, 8pp (8 'tick' columns), 50p. Both booklets are available from: The Bird Bookshop, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT. The Bird Bookshop is run by the Scottish Ornithologists' Club for the benefit of Scottish ornithology.

FINALLY, A REMINDER! FIBOT is very dependent upon subscriptions from 'Friends', so we have been delighted to receive a number of generous renewals at (and above!) the new rate, in response to the notice enclosed with the 1986 Report. If you have not already renewed at the new subscription rate, may we ask you please to do so now? Thank you very much for your support. Pat Webster, Membership Secretary.