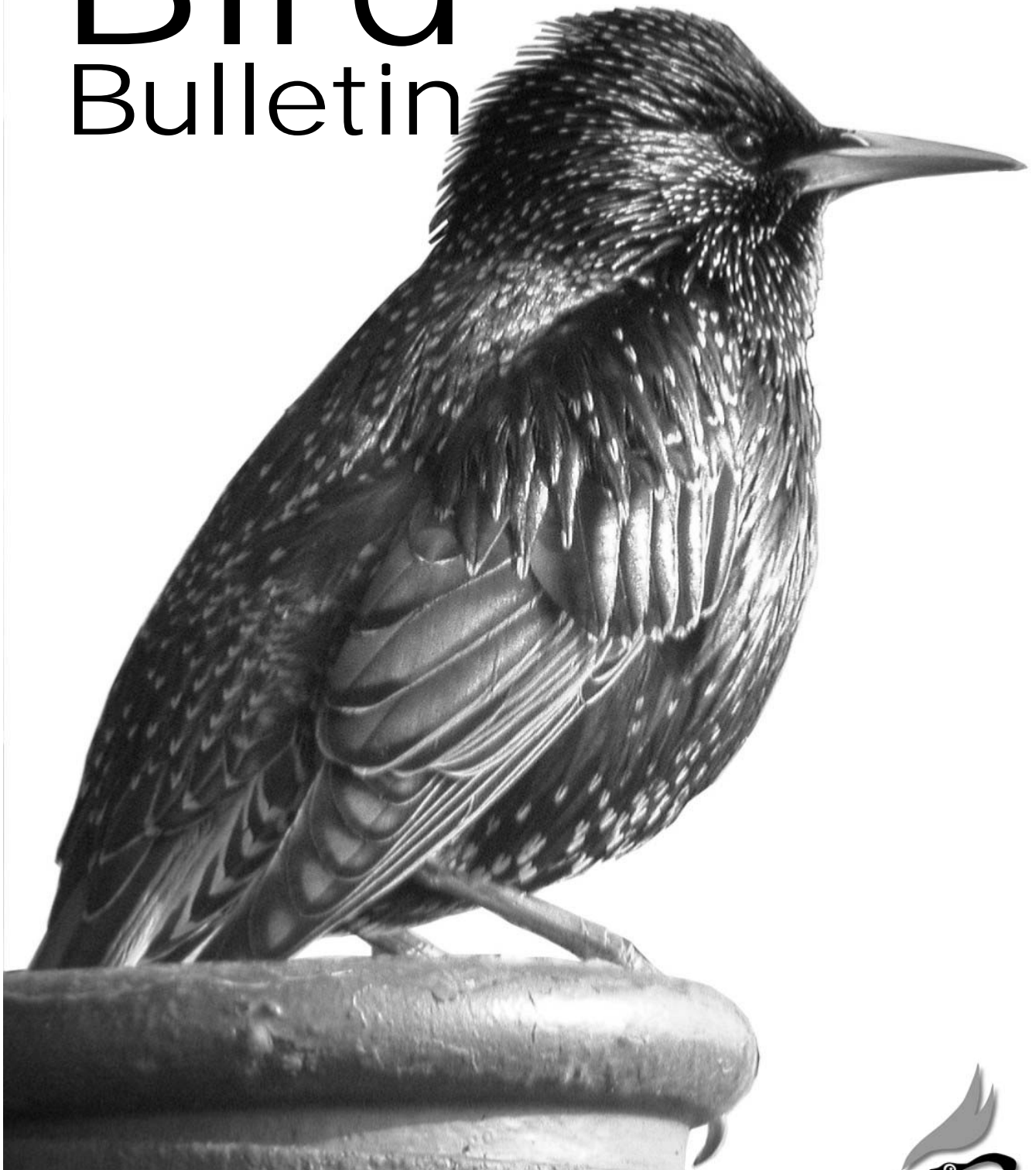


# Lothian Bird Bulletin



The Newsletter of Lothian SOC 2004 : No 3



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# Editorial

Welcome to another Lothian Bird Bulletin. With so many interesting birds around this autumn it's been a struggle finding the time to finish it, but I've finally managed.

Many thanks this issue to Des Loughney for his article on taking part in the BTO Breeding Bird Survey, and to John Pringle and Jacky Robinson for their outing reviews.

***Please think about writing an article for the LBB*** - all contributions are gratefully received. The bulletin is usually sent to HO for printing around 1 month before the mailings are sent out, and articles for the December issue should reach me by the middle of November. If possible, please let me know in advance if you intend to write something, as it helps me to plan the bulletin.

And now what you've all been waiting for - the answer to the question I posed in the last issue: "Where would you find Mealy Golden Plover?". The answer is that, due to a misprint, this *extremely* rare bird can be found on page 1 of the 2001 Lothian Bird Report. (Okay, I lied when I said it was a serious question.)

Finally, the committee would like to thank Roger Tozer for donating a large number of books and bird reports to the club. Roger is leaving Lothian after many years of LSOC membership.



## News

### **Romania Appeal**

LSOC member Liz Barclay recently returned from a birdwatching trip to Romania with an appeal from the local conservationists. They're looking for old or unwanted field guides, binoculars, and telescopes. These will be used to encourage Romanian children to take an interest in ornithology and, in doing so, ensure that the conservation work can be continued in the years to come. See the News page of the Lothian SOC website for more information, or contact Liz by email at [eabarclay@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:eabarclay@blueyonder.co.uk), or via the Lothian Bird Bulletin.

### **2002 Lothian Bird Report**

At the time of writing there are still a few copies of the 2002 Lothian Bird Report left, but they are disappearing fast. The report is available from Charles Frank, Rose Street, Edinburgh for £7.50. If you prefer we can post a copy to you; send a cheque for £8.50 (inc p&p), made payable to *SOC Lothian Branch*, to

*John Hamilton  
30 Swanston Gardens  
Edinburgh  
EH10 7DL*

## Drawing Birds

Budding artists should look out for the new book by local painter and SOC member John Busby. Published by RSPB/Helm.

## Edinburgh Swifts

Andrew Sandeman would like to thank everyone who sent in Swift records this year. I hope to publish some of the results in a later issue of the Lothian Bird Bulletin.

# BTO Breeding Bird Survey

Earlier this year I was invited to participate in the Breeding Bird Survey. I was contacted through the British Trust for Ornithology. The survey is fully described on <http://www.bto.org/bbs/index.htm>. The survey is short of volunteers in Scotland.

I could choose from a number of kilometre squares in the Lothians which had been randomly selected by computer. In the end I chose a square near Kirkliston (NT1475) to survey as it was in easy driving distance of where I live in West Edinburgh.

The survey consists of three visits. The first visit, in early May, was a reconnaissance visit to record the habitat, to work out the two transect routes and, having worked out the most desirable routes find out if access permission was required. Permission was required from two major landowners and this was obtained. The first visit showed that the square was mostly the flood plain of the Almond. It showed that there was a lot of disturbance. It is situated very near Edinburgh airport. It is crossed by the busy rail route from Edinburgh to the north and by a busy 'B' road that links Kirkliston with the A 90. In contrast with this disturbance the square contains a small nature reserve ( Pepper Wood ) and a belt of woods/ hedges along a dismantled railway line. Much of the agricultural land has been set aside.

It is useful to track habitat changes over the years. In addition to the paper form that I filled in for the Survey I took photographs of all the major habitats in the kilometre square. Two examples are shown below.



*Kirkliston A: This was taken in June looking south west. It shows a field of spring cereal and the belt of woodlands on the disused railway track.*



*Kirkliston B: this was also taken in June looking south towards the Wheatlands farm buildings. It shows the farm buildings environment and, in the foreground a set aside field.*

The reconnaissance visit indicated there were points of 'species diversity' which would have to be looked at carefully. These were the ribbon of the dismantled railway (which is now a public footpath/ cycleway); the set aside fields and the two farmyards - Carlowrie Farm and Wheatlands which contained old buildings (barns), gardens, hedges and diverse mature trees.

The second visit was the first proper survey and was carried out on 9th May. It was started at 7 am and completed at 10 am. 26 species were identified altogether. The most interesting part of this first visit was seeing the species that seemed to be particularly associated with the set aside areas. These were Yellowhammers and flocks of Tree Sparrows and Goldfinches and relatively large numbers of displaying Skylarks and Lapwings.

The third visit took place on 16th June. An additional twelve species were seen giving a total of 38 over the two visits. There were no Lapwings seen on the second visit. This may have been because there had been a dry spell and the ground was hard. Vegetation was much taller and denser on the set aside areas where the Lapwings had been seen in May. The most interesting part of the second visit was seeing evidence of a Barn Owl which roosted within the Wheatlands farm buildings.

I was glad I had volunteered to do the survey as it was interesting to see the range of species on lowland farmland. In this case, however, it was noteworthy that the range of species would have been smaller if there had not been within the square old farm buildings and associated mature trees, the wooded disused railway line and the set aside fields. I look forward to repeating the survey next year. I will also, for contrast, consider doing a second square, if one is available, on moorland or one which will incorporate a coastal section.

*Des Loughney, August 2004*

## Shetland: Rain Geese (and Rain)



In June 2004 I headed off to Shetland for a week's birdwatching. Here's a short account of my visit...

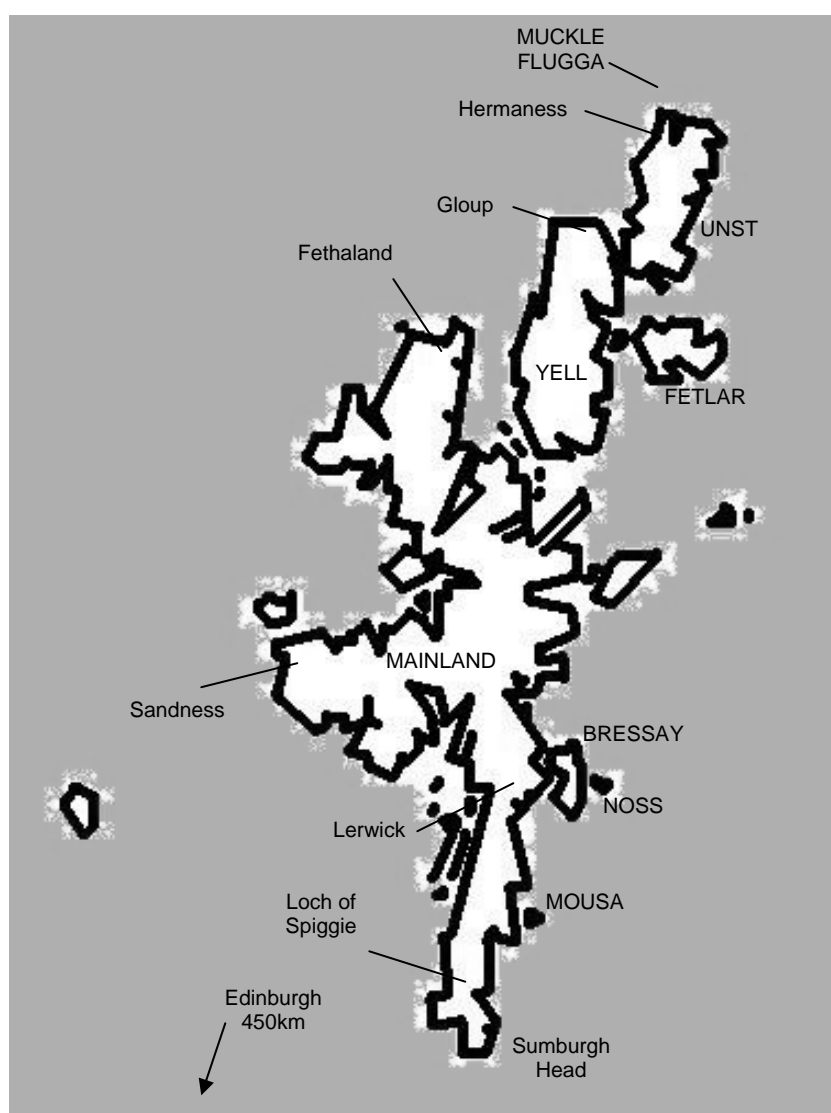
**MONDAY 7th** Being a bit of a coward where flying is concerned, I decided to drive to Aberdeen and catch the overnight ferry to Lerwick. Northlink operate a daily service to Shetland (also calling at Orkney on certain days) with two large, modern ferries. The outward journey was relaxing if uneventful - a pleasant dinner in the large restaurant; a couple of hours on deck birdwatching; some sleep in a reclining chair in the lounge (as I was too stingy to pay for a cabin).

**TUESDAY** Was that a Minke Whale that surfaced briefly as the ferry passed Sumburgh Head? Sadly all I know about whales is that they're big fish, so I'll never find out. We docked in Lerwick harbour at 7am; it was a beautiful day, and I was looking forward to seven days of scenic walks in the Shetland sunshine. First stop for the day was Sumburgh Head at the southern tip of Shetland mainland. This RSPB reserve is home to many thousands of nesting seabirds.

Sumburgh is also a good area for migrants, but I find it much too embarrassing skulking around bushes and peering into gardens, so my rarity hunting was rather limited. Final stop of the afternoon was the Loch of Spiggie, but nothing much of note there. After dinner in Lerwick, I went for a stroll over South Stanley Hill to the west of the town. Birds here included several drumming Snipe (these turned out to be a familiar sight and sound throughout the islands), a Golden Plover, and an Arctic Skua.

**WEDNESDAY** Raining heavily. Oh well. After breakfast I drove up to Sandness on the west mainland, and went for a longish walk along the coast. Birds here included Twite and Sanderling. I then headed back to Lerwick to dry off. That night I was booked on a birdwatching trip to Mousa, a small island inhabited by six thousand pairs of Storm Petrels (or Mother Carey's Chickens if you're an early Spanish sailor). By then the rain had stopped; only to be replaced by thick fog. Much to my relief the trip went ahead, and by the time the boat reached the island shortly before midnight visibility was good. We sat on

the grass in front of an Iron Age stone broch and waited for the petrels to return from their travels. Right on cue these tiny bat-like birds started to flutter in from the sea, circling the broch a few times before disappearing into the cracks in the wall. (I wonder if petrels have poor eyesight, as a few of them bumped into us as we watched them arrive.) If the sight of the Storm Petrels is impressive, their calls are one of the strangest sounds I've ever heard. The birds nest in just about every wall on the island, and when you put your ear up to the stones you can hear the bizarre purring sounds as the birds greet their partners.



**THURSDAY** In the morning I headed north out of Lerwick and caught the ferry to the island of Yell, where I was due to spend the next two nights. (The main islands that make up Shetland are connected by cheap, regular car ferry services.) Later in

the day, after exploring Yell by car, I took another ferry to the neighbouring island of Fetlar - home of the scarce Red-necked Phalarope. One of the best places on Fetlar to see these tiny waders is the Loch of Funzie nature reserve. When I arrived, the warden was photographing them as they walked around the edge of the loch - so tame that he could nearly touch them. Sadly they didn't hang around by the water's edge for very long. Like

most lochs in Shetland, Funzie was home to a pair of Red-throated Divers. While I was there a third 'Rain Goose' arrived on the loch, at which point I was treated to the fantastic sight and sound of the resident pair displaying only 50ft away from me. I didn't get to stay on Fetlar for as long as I would have liked, but I certainly can't complain about the quality of the birdlife. Shortly before my ferry back to Yell, the warden stopped to tell me he'd just seen a Red-backed Shrike less than a mile along the road. The chance to add to my tally of 'Red' birds for the day was too good to miss. After 15 minutes searching I'd nearly run out of time. I was about to admit defeat when up popped a stunning male shrike right next to the car.

Back on Yell, and I spent some time that evening sitting on the seashore watching for Otters. None appeared, but a consolation was the group of Arctic Terns hawking for insects only feet away from where I was sitting. (Sadly, I've since read that they were probably forced to do this due to a shortage of fish.)

**FRIDAY** Raining. Bucket-loads. Despite the weather I decided to head for Unst - the other 'big' Shetland island. Specifically, I wanted to visit Hermaness National Nature Reserve at the north end of the island. This remote area holds 650 pairs of Great Skuas - 5% of the world population - and many other breeding seabirds. For over twenty years it was also the home to Albert the Black-browed Albatross - but Albert moved on a while ago. Unfortunately the torrential rain showed no sign of relenting when I reached the reserve, and I was forced to spend a couple of hours in the unmanned visitor centre. The deluge finally stopped at 3pm, which was just as well as I had read everything in the centre several times, and was in danger of wearing out the buttons to hear the calls of Gannets, Shags, and Guillemots. I immediately headed out on the marked trail across the reserve. I always used to laugh seeing a terrified TV presenter being dive-bombed by Bonxies, but I have to admit to feeling more than a little nervous walking across the moorland surrounded by hundreds of mean-looking skuas. Fortunately my trusty monopod - or Bonxie-pod as it will now be known - seemed to discourage any attacks, and the sight of these birds close up was well worth the risk! Back on Yell that evening, a walk near my B&B on the east coast made me realise just how alive with birdlife Shetland is. Although I didn't leave the public roads, every few feet yet another Golden Plover, Redshank, or Dunlin would take off from the roadside and loudly rebuke me; or a Ringed Plover would limp along in front, feigning a broken wing.

**SATURDAY** Fantastic - a sunny day, and an opportunity to do some proper walking. First, before leaving Yell that morning, I made a short trip to the strangely named Gloop at the north end of the island. For once this wasn't a bird-related visit. I had worked out that I would be able to look out to Muckle Flugga and Out Stack (Britain's most northerly point) from here - and against all odds my calculations proved to be correct. (I had hoped to see these from Hermaness the previous day, but didn't have time due to the weather.) Mission accomplished, I caught the ferry back to the mainland, and drove to Isbister, the starting point for the afternoon's walk. Isbister is a tiny village near the top of Shetland mainland, and the scenic walk took me north to the abandoned fishing village of Fethaland, and the nearby lighthouse at the Point of Fethaland. Birds here included Twite, 'proper' Rock Pigeons, and Ravens.

**SUNDAY** Raining again. I made the short ferry crossing from Lerwick to Bressay, followed by the even shorter crossing to the Isle of Noss by inflatable dinghy. Noss (pictured) is a National Nature Reserve boasting over 100,000 pairs of breeding seabirds. My sightings here included a couple of pale-morph Arctic Skuas; a form I'd previously seen only from a distance. By the time I had finished exploring Noss, the weather had



deteriorated and the island had been closed to the public. Despite this the wardens still managed to get me safely back to Bressay across a very choppy Noss Sound.

**MONDAY** Rain, rain, and more rain. My final day on Shetland was a complete wash-out.

**TUESDAY (POSTSCRIPT)** Driving back to Edinburgh on Tuesday morning, I decided to break my journey with a visit to Vane Farm. I was sitting in the west hide with a couple from

Surrey, when one of them spotted "one of those little swimming waders". To my astonishment, it was a Red-necked Phalarope - as far as I know a first for the reserve! Ever get the feeling you're being followed?

*Stephen Hunter, September 2004*

## Lothian SOC Outings

### Isle of May (sort of) - 6th June

It's probably fair to say that this wasn't the most successful LSOC outing ever. Perhaps some of the regular participants had a premonition that things wouldn't go quite to plan, as only three dedicated souls set out for Fife on a sunny Sunday morning. The fact that the ferry was fully booked when we reached Anstruther was a bit of a setback, but we soon cheered up after sampling the local chips, and it wasn't such a bad day in the end, with visits to St Monans, Kilconquhar, Tentsmuir, and Loch Leven.

### Holyrood Park - 25th July

The third week in July was cool and wet. Graham Checkley, our leader for the day, was himself having cold feet about the idea of visiting his local patch on the Sunday. Could we go to Musselburgh instead?

The day started unpromisingly; a thick mist hung over Arthur's Seat when nine of us met at St Margaret's Loch. Before long however, the mist lifted, the sun broke through, and butterflies and moths spread their wings obligingly on thistles and brambles to soak up the sun's warmth. Well, what did we see? Practically all the species Graham mentioned in his article in the last newsletter – lots of meadow browns to begin with, and brilliant crimson and black burnet moths. A few common blue butterflies, a small tortoiseshell, and a red admiral, some peacock, a single grayling, and a few small copper. Also numerous bees, spiders, ladybirds and other beetles, and many unidentified insects.

I discovered the whereabouts of St Margaret's Loch (slight panic in the morning when I realised it is not the same place as Duddingston Loch), and Hunter's Bog, and the ruined chapel. And we also saw some birds including tufted duck, mallard, greylag and one Canada goose, whitethroat, meadow pipit, dunnock, chaffinch, carrion crow, kestrel and sparrowhawk.



Many thanks, Graham, for leading us round your patch. How about other members doing likewise? If you are willing, please contact Gillian Herbert on 0131 337 0767.

*Jacky Robinson, September 2004*

## **Aberlady: Birds, Beasts, and Botany - 1st August**

For all those who had completed their year's list of bird ticks by 31st July, this visit to Aberlady the following day provided challenges of a different sort - as suggested by the title.

True, flowers and the like stay more stationery than LBJs, but with a reserve list of some 540 plant species compared with 270 birds guidance is welcome. Fortunately we had Ian T aided by Rosemary D to provide this and to help distinguish our angelica from our eyebright. The parade also included frog orchids, felwort (a gentian), fen pondweed (of dubious appeal apart from being a local rarity) and one of my favourites, grass of Parnassus.

Despite a dull start to the day, butterflies gradually came out of hiding and nine species from small copper to peacock - including three dark green fritillaries - were seen. Dragonflies and darters were scarcer with only one of the latter appearing.

The photographers amongst us had a 'field' day - with Graham C either lying face down on the turf macro-shooting a tiny centaury - or lying face up after lunch recovering from the effort of turning over? And how do butterflies take off when lesser mortals are 10 yards off but Sid M can creep up and 'shoot' from 6 inches without a wing twitch? Hopefully we will see the results at one of our indoor meetings.

Despite our eyes-down progression birds were not entirely overlooked. A distant peregrine on the saltings, a stonechat family lining up on a fence, ringed plover chicks on the sand spit, a single bonxie and a red-throated diver off the point. Unusually the only person not to claim this bird made amends by finding a nice whimbrel beside a curlew for comparison on the shore by the carpark.

All in all, a very pleasant and informative change from our usual pursuits.

*John P Pringle, September 2004*

## **Coming Up...**

- 10th Oct: East Coast Migrants
- 14th Nov: Clyde Area
- 12th Dec: Aberlady and Christmas Lunch
- 16th Jan: Scone and Loch Leven
- 20th Feb: Mersehead, Dumfries & Galloway
- 6th Mar: Glen Artney
- 1-3 Apr: Sutherland Weekend

Contact Gillian Herbert on 0131 337 0767 for details.

# Lothian Bird Sightings

## MAY

At *Aberlady*, a **Red Kite** on the 1st; an **Arctic Skua** on the 2nd; a female **Garganey** on the 3rd; a female/immature **Marsh Harrier** (over *Gullane Hill*) on the 7th; a **Raven** on the 9th; a **Curlew Sandpiper** on the 9th and 11th; a **Yellow Wagtail** on the 9th; an **Arctic Skua** and a **Great Skua** on the 11th; a **Wood Sandpiper** on the 16th; a **Quail** on the 29th. At *Barns Ness*, a **Pied Flycatcher** and 7 **White Wagtails** on the 1st; a male and a female **Red-backed Shrike** on the 8th and 9th; a **Reed Warbler** on the 9th.

In the *Lammermuirs*, a pair of **Ring Ouzel** at *Hopes Reservoir* on the 1st; a **Nightjar** at *Hopes Reservoir* on the 3rd; 3 **Dotterel** in the *Faseny* area on the 13th; 2 pairs of **Ring Ouzel** in the *Faseny* area on the 13th.

In the *Moorfoots*, a female **Black Redstart** and a male **Ring Ouzel** near *Moorfoot Farm* on the 2nd.

At *Musselburgh*, a female **Surf Scoter** all month, with a male also present from the 16th; 2 **White Wagtails** and a 2nd summer **Mediterranean Gull** on the 2nd; a **Great Skua** on the 8th; a **Whooper Swan** from the 13th; a **Ring Ouzel** on the 14th; a **Wood Sandpiper** on the 16th and 17th; a male **Garganey** from the 20th-25th; a 1st summer **Little Gull** on the 31st.

In the *Pentlands*, up to 5 (2 female and 3 male) **Dotterels** on *Carnethy Hill* from the 7th-11th; a male **Ruddy Duck** at *Bavelaw* on the 22nd and 30th; 2 **Ravens** at *Bavelaw* on the 30th.

At *Skateraw*, a male **Yellow Wagtail** on the 2nd and a pair on the 8th; a female/immature **Black Redstart** on the 8th; a male **Red-backed Shrike** on the 9th; an **Icterine Warbler** on the 9th and 10th.

At *Tynninghame*, 2 female and a male **Dotterel** from the 6th-8th; a (probable) **Reed Warbler** on *Spike Island* on the 27th.

In *Edinburgh*, a 1st summer **Glaucous Gull** at *Cramond* on the 14th; a **Snow Bunting** on *Arthur's Seat* from the 17th-19th.

In *Midlothian*, a **Nuthatch** at *Vogrie Country Park* on the 7th.

In *East Lothian*, 2 pairs of **Redstart** at *Woodhall Dean* from the 2nd; a female **Black Redstart** at *Torness* on the 9th; a female **Red-backed Shrike** at *Bilsdean* on the 9th; a **Temminck's Stint** on *Seafield Pond, Belhaven* on the 22nd; a **Nuthatch** at *Smeaton* on the 23rd; an **Egret** (presumed **Little Egret**) on *Dunbar East Links* on the 30th; a male **Golden Oriole** at *Woodhall Dean* on the 30th.

In *West Lothian*, a **Red-crested Pochard** on *Linlithgow Loch* on several dates.

## JUNE

At *Aberlady*, an **Osprey** and 4 male **Shovelers** on the 3rd; an **Arctic Skua** on the 20th.

At *Cramond*, a **Little Egret** (pictured) on the 20th and 21st; a **Greenshank** on the 28th; 2 **Common Sandpipers** on the 28th; 2 **Manx Shearwaters** on the 30th.

At *Musselburgh*, 2 1st-year **Little Gulls** on the 10th; 3 **Gadwalls** on the 10th; a **Whimbrel** on the 11th; a female **Ruddy Duck** on the 12th; a **Stone Curlew** on the 26th; 4 **Common**

**Sandpipers** and a **Greenshank** on the 29th and 30th; a **Green Sandpiper** and a **Peregrine** on the 30th.



In the *Lammermuirs*, a **Ring Ouzel** near *Fasenry Cottage* on the 13th; a **Raven** at *Monynut Forest* on the 13th. In the *Pentlands*, a male **Ruddy Duck** at *Bavelaw* throughout; a female and 2 male **Shovelers** at *Bavelaw* on the 3rd.

In *Edinburgh*, a **Lesser Whitethroat** at *South Queensferry* from the 1st-3rd; 4 **Crossbills** over *Bruntsfield Links* on the 20th; 15 **Manx Shearwaters** off *Wardie Bay* on the 21st.

In *East Lothian*, 2 male **Yellow**

**Wagtails** at *Skateraw* on the 16th; 3 **Greenshanks** and a **Peregrine** at *Tynninghame* on the 20th; a **Black Guillemot** off *Dunbar Harbour* on the 20th; a **Black-throated Diver** and a **Great Northern Diver** in *Gosford Bay* on the 26th.

In *West Lothian*, a **Water Rail** on *Bathgate Bog* on the 6th.

## JULY

At *Aberlady*, a male **Lesser Sand Plover** on the 8th and 9th; an **Arctic Skua** on the 8th; a **Short-eared Owl** on the 29th.

At *Barns Ness*, a male male **Blue-headed Wagtail** and 3 juvenile **Yellow Wagtails**, 2 **Great Skuas** and 1 **Arctic Skua** on the 17th.

At *Cramond*, **Greenshank** on several dates; 4 **Common Sandpipers** on the 3rd; 2 **Arctic Skuas** on the 13th; 3 **Whimbrels** on the 13th and 4 on the 14th; 2 male **Scaup** on the 14th; 3 **Black-tailed Godwits** on the 14th and 2 on 21st; a 2nd summer **Mediterranean Gull** and an **Arctic Tern** on the 21st.

At *Musselburgh*, a **Greenshank** throughout, and 2 on the 10th; up to 19 **Black-tailed Godwits**, 7 **Common Sandpipers** and 2 **Whooper Swans** throughout; a **Green Sandpiper** from the 1st-3rd; 55 **Manx Shearwaters** on the 7th; 2 **Arctic Skuas** on the 9th and 1 on 15th; a **Pomarine Skua** on the 10th; up to 8 adult **Little Gulls** from the 11th-30th; a **Great Skua** on the 11th; 2 adult **Pectoral Sandpipers** from the 15th-23rd; a 2nd summer **Mediterranean Gull** from the 17th-18th; an **Arctic Tern** on the 19th; 11 **Sanderlings** on the 19th, 2 on 26th, and 3 on 31st; a **Short-eared Owl** on the 20th and 30th; 5 **Curlew Sandpipers** on the 24th and 25th, and 1 from the 26th-31st; up to 5 **Whimbrel** from the 25th-31st; adult **Mediterranean Gull** on the 29th; a **Garganey** on the 30th and 31st.

In the *Pentlands*, a **Tree Pipit** at *Red Moss* on the 4th; 2 **Crossbills** and 3 **Ravens** in the *Crosswood/Camilty* area on the 21st.

At *Tynninghame/Belhaven*, a **Little Ringed Plover** on the 3rd and 4th; 9 **Greenshanks** on the 17th; 2 **Roseate Terns** (an adult and a juvenile), an adult **Mediterranean Gull**, 7 **Little Terns**, and an adult **Little Gull** on the 31st.

Around *East Lothian*, a **Quail** at *Redcoll* (near *Longniddry*) on the 4th; a **Yellow Wagtail** at *East Barns* on the 5th; a **Black-throated Diver** in *Gosford Bay* on the 28th; 24 **Red-**

**necked Grebes** in *Gosford Bay* on the 28th, and 31 on the 31st; a **Quail** near *Haddington* on the 31st.

In *Edinburgh*, 35 **Manx Shearwater** (E) and 15 (W) at *Portobello* on the 8th; a **Roseate Tern** at *Port Edgar* on the 13th; an **Arctic Skua** at *Hound Point* on the 19th.

In *West Lothian*, a **Quail** at *River Almond Pools* on the 4th; a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at *Blackness* on the 31st.

*Thanks to Eleanor Hurley and everyone who contributed to these records.*

*Eleanor is running a birdwatching trip to Poland (Biebrza Marsh and Bialowieza Forest) from 14th - 21st May 2005, plus day trips to Vane Farm on 2nd Oct and Argaty (for Red Kites) on 16th Oct 2004. Contact Eleanor on 0131-449 552 or email [bird@eleanorhurley.co.uk](mailto:bird@eleanorhurley.co.uk). There is also an 8-week course of half-day trips from 23rd Sep-11th Nov. Contact Balerno High School on 0131-447 7733 for details.*

## Mystery Bird

Identify the species pictured below. The answer will be published in the next issue.



The last mystery bird was a **Pintail**. (The picture was taken at Musselburgh in March, and demonstrates that a monopod is not really suitable for digiscoping.)