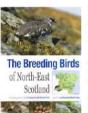
in 2021 another similar publication does not say that the findings of publications of 1997, 2002 and 2009 have still not been actioned. There are several simple, common sense actions, many identified in the text, which if taken forward over all of Scotland would have a very substantial positive impact on our biodiversity, possibly enough for us to reach the 2020 EU Biodiversity target or at least get pretty close. All these actions are in various case studies that have been produced for at least the last 20 years. One key one for biological recording would be the support and liaison with volunteer recorders and many chapters make this point, albeit indirectly.

I would like to reiterate that this is an excellent publication and I would urge everyone to have a look through it if they possibly can. Its chapters are available for free download at <a href="http://www.tsoshop.co.uk/bookstore.asp?FO=1159966-Action=Book&ProductID=9780114973599&From=SearchResults">http://www.tsoshop.co.uk/bookstore.asp?FO=1159966-Action=Book&ProductID=9780114973599&From=SearchResults</a>. It is full of interesting papers on a wide variety of subjects and if read closely it suggests a way forward to tackle some of the key biodiversity issues that all this surveillance has identified.

Jonathan Willet



Francis, I. & Cook, M. (editors) (2011) The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberdeen. ISBN 978-0-9561126-3-7 Hbk £25 +p&p

This splendid book is an atlas of the breeding birds of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray, including part of the Cairngorm National Park. Almost 150 years ago, A G More published a paper in *Ibis* "On the

distribution of birds in Great Britain during the nesting season" based on lists supplied by correspondents from each county. It was a brave attempt at a comprehensive account, but it rested on how well his correspondents knew their counties and, indeed, he obtained no information from many counties. Furthermore, it was based on his correspondents' accumulated knowledge rather than a programme of up-todate fieldwork. A century passed before a systematic survey was organized (by C A Norris on behalf of the BTO) that asked observers to record what they actually found when they went out specifically to record what they observed in squares of the National Grid. Only 30 species were included but even so coverage of the 5x5km squares chosen as the recording unit was incomplete. Nonetheless, the seeds of modern "atlas-ing" were sown. In the 1960s, the West Midlands Bird Club pioneered the use of the methods that, with minor changes, we use today. This, and the publication of the Atlas of the British Flora in 1962, encouraged the British Trust for Ornithology to conduct the first nationwide atlas survey in 1969-72. Since then, hundreds of bird atlases have been produced around the world, covering areas ranging from single cities to entire

The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland covers an area that comprises 11% of Scotland's land, probably the largest area ever surveyed at the scale of 2x2km (tetrads). The scale of the survey is matched by the lavishness of the book, which is superbly laid out in full colour, with many photographs and maps. Most species are presented in a double-page spread, with a large map presenting the distribution as black dots on a

background that is coloured to show topography, water-bodies and rivers. A super-imposed 10km grid makes it easy to locate the individual tetrads. Additional small maps show the distributions at 10x10km (hectad) scale in all four atlases (local and national) that have covered the area, so that one can see the changes. More difficult has been the comparison at scales smaller than the hectad because *The Birds of North-East Scotland*, the previous atlas for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, was based not on tetrads but on units defined by topography and habitat, which averaged about 20km² rather than the 4km² of a tetrad. To allow comparisons, the team behind the current atlas have ascribed every tetrad to one of the previous units, allowing them to present maps of both the 1990 and the current distributions in these units.

The maps are accompanied by photographs of the species and by text that discusses changes in distribution and describes habitat and breeding biology in the region, status and distribution at both Scottish and local level, and estimates of population and trends.

Importantly for a full understanding of the results, and for those who organise future surveys, the methods and the data analysis are described in an introductory chapter. with more details in an annex. Another most useful chapter reviews the bird habitats, landscape and land-use of the region, including recent changes, with abundant photographs to illustrate the comprehensive text. Interspersed within the species accounts are descriptions of 20 special places, such as Fowlsheugh and the Forest of Birse, which add particularities to the general review of habitats in chapter 2. After the species accounts, there is a chapter reviewing species richness, both of the entire avifauna and of various groups of species defined taxonomically, by habitat or by conservation status. Another chapter covers overall changes in distribution and numbers. There is a comprehensive review of the conservation of breeding birds in the region. Annexes provide further details, including more on population estimates and status. Most usefully, a gazetteer is

This book should be on the shelves of every birdwatcher in N E Scotland but they are not the only ones who will find it useful. The information provided on the species is relevant to ornithology across the country, that on the habitats to any Scottish naturalist, and that on the changes recorded and their possible causes to anyone interested in the management and future of the nation's biodiversity. I cannot recommend it too strongly.

Jeremy Greenwood

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# The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland

lan Francis and Martin Cook (Eds). £25. SOC. ISBN 978 0 9561126-3-7
For the serious fan of Scotland's birds, this mighty reference work will be essential. It has a familiar layout with generally small, but good quality and useful photographs and maps. It is not an identification handbook, rather the text is stuffed with background information such as habitat and breeding requirements, population trends and distribution.

# Birds magazine Summer 2012

BRISC Recorder News 85, April 2012









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# Review The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland, edited by Ian Francis & Martin Cook

When I was first presented with a copy of The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland, I was asked to hazard a guess at the associated price tag. Holding the rather splendid-looking (and weighty!) 500-page hardback copy in my hands, my mind was toying with all sorts of figures between £50, £100 and beyond. Naturally, I was quite astonished when the true cost was revealed - at a mere £25, it is an understatement to say this is a steal. And what a glorious steal it is...

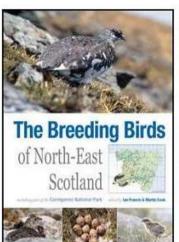
This encyclopaedia details the 189 species that were deemed to have at least possibly bred within Aberdeenshire and Moray over the atlas period of 2002-06. In addition to the obligatory atlas maps, the vast majority of species are also represented by colour photographs, information on breeding biology and habitat preference, current national and regional status and population. as well as trends/changes that have occurred over the past 30 years, thus making it a complete and essential guide to northeast Scotland's birdlife. The detailed inclusion of regional specialities such as Parrot and Scottish Crossbills as well as national scarcities such as Red-backed Shrike helps to render it of interest to birders

from all four corners of the British Isles, and not just the treated region.

The word 'complete' is often an unsubstantiated claim in publications. This book goes much further than simply offering detailed species accounts; before this, there are almost forty pages of text, colour images, maps and tables that outline the vast range of habitats that the region possesses, as well as the survey methods employed. Furthermore, chapters 4-6 discuss changes in population and distribution patterns, as well as suitable conservation methods that can be employed to give many of those species at risk a lifeline. Such intricately written and presented extras add strong context to the species accounts, thus entirely justifying the labelling of this book as 'complete'.

Picking faults with the book is nigh on impossible. I did notice one mistake in my search through the species accounts; the photograph used to illustrate Shoveler actually shows a hefty-billed female Mallard with ducklings, rather than the former species. However, given the superhuman quantities of time and effort invested in editing the publication, a minor mishap like this is easily forgiven.

The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland is a superb reference for local and visiting birders alike; at £25 it is a phenomenal bargain that will undoubtedly provide countless hours of informative reading. The abundance of premium-quality images coupled with a modernistic layout also makes the presentation of the book aesthetically pleasing, which greatly enhances the already fantastic textual content. This publication is the product of an estimated 17,000 hours of observer coverage, with text written by 60 authors and illustrated by images from 62 photographers. The result is, quite simply, superb - a true reflection of the incredible effort put into its creation.



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OVER 100 ARTISTS BREATHING LIFE BACK INTO THE BIRDS WE'VE LOST.



Josh Jones

# **BOOK REVIEWS**

The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland. Ian Francis & Martin Cook (eds.), 2011. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberdeen, ISBN 978-0-9561126-3-7, hardback, 528 pages, £25.00.



When fieldwork for the first national breeding bird atlas began in 1968, the limited number of local birders available in Aberdeenshire (I was one of them!) little realised that would eventually

become a whole new way of life for countless birders. Local atlases had hardly made their mark, and north-east birders were the earliest to take the plunge in Scotland, publishing their first atlas in 1990. This was an all-year round project covering Aberdeenshire only and was a novel habitatbased survey, since coverage of the 1,700 tetrads was considered to be unworkable. How much more surveying was necessary, then, to cover all the 2,340 tetrads in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Moray for this atlas between 2002 and 2006?

This stunning volume is one for which the editors and all others who were involved should be justly proud; and at such an affordable price! It begins with a foreword by Adam Watson followed by a short summary and introduction. The first chapter describes the survey methods and data analysis. One problem common to all atlases is variation in observer coverage and an innovative map shows that almost a quarter, mainly in upland and remote areas were visited for fewer than three hours. The significance of this may be lessened by the lower species richness in such

areas and therefore detracts little from the results. Analysis of the huge amount of data generated has been made so much easier since the first atlas, given the advances in electronic processing. One just has to glance at the book to see that design and production methods have also progressed enormously.

Chapter 2 is a comprehensive and fascinating portrayal of the habitats that make up northeast Scotland. It describes land cover and the changes that have occurred in the last few decades. Eighteen habitat accounts are accompanied by lists of the main species breeding in each and illustrated by many striking photographs.

Chapter 3 is the meat of the book with 190 species described by 60 authors. It begins with a useful example page labelled to demonstrate the salient points of the breeding maps. Each species account is accompanied by a tetrad map in full colour, except that sensitive species are mapped at the 10-km level or not at all. The conventional dot sizes of confirmed, probable and possible breeding are shown in black with a presence (breeding unlikely) dot in vellow. Virtually my only criticism of the book is that these yellow dots are difficult to discern. Photographs are excellent, and the texts are short and succinct, describing habitat, breeding ecology, distribution, status, population and trends. Some have updates beyond the fieldwork period. Smaller maps show distribution in previous atlases at the 10-km level, giving a valuable measure of change since the late 1960s, despite slight differences in methodology across the years. Indeed, maps demonstrating comparisons between the two regional atlases at the tetrad level needed some nifty manipulation to counter this.

Chapters 4 to 6 cover distribution, conservation and the changes in both birds and habitats revealed by this atlas. That on conservation is particularly topical and thought-provoking. There are maps showing distribution patterns for a variety of bird groups and of species with a conservation designation, such as those on Schedule 1 and biodiversity lists. References, annexes and indices follow and I particularly liked the end-papers, showing an Ordnance Survey map and satellite image of the region.

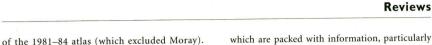
In all, this atlas is as comprehensive as one could imagine, without any superfluous content. It would be disingenuous to point out the few minor errors and therefore I cannot fault the book in any meaningful way. Together with The Birds of Scotland, it shows the extremely high standard that SOCpublished works can achieve. For anyone with an interest in the birds of the north-east of Scotland, this is an absolute must for the bookshelf.

#### Norman Elkins

On Rare Birds. Anita Albus, translated by Gerald Chapple, 2011. Saraband, Glasgow, ISBN 978-1887354-80-6, hardback £19.95.

Anita Albus is a German author who has written a really interesting and fascinating book. It is basically in two parts. Firstly, dealing with a few extinct birds, including the Great Auk and Passenger Pigeon and secondly, six threatened and endangered species including the Waldrapp (Bald Ibis), Comcrake, Nightjar and Hawk Owl. Each

# Scottish Birds





The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland

Edited by Ian Francis and Martin Cook Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 2011 Hbk, 518pp; many colour photographs and maps ISBN 978-0-9561126-3-7 Subbuteo code M21148 BB Bookshop price £25.00

My first impressions of this book were good. It's a large, solid hardback, with an attractive dust jacket

on which the Ptarmigan Lagopus muta features prominently. Near the beginning is a useful one-page summary, which informs us that during five breeding seasons (2002–06), 348 observers surveyed 2,340 tetrads covering Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray – an 8,700-km² area that includes some of the UK's richest bird habitats. The editors claim that this may be the largest tetrad atlas ever undertaken, and it was, of course, undertaken almost entirely by volunteers.

Following a brief introduction is a description of survey and analytical methods. This includes a justification of the fact that effort was concentrated solely on defining breeding range, with no attempt to estimate bird numbers. By keeping the methods simple, the organisers aimed to attract as many contributors as possible in order to achieve complete coverage. This objective was met but, interestingly, they recommend that birds should be counted in any future survey.

Next is a copiously illustrated overview of habitats, landscape and land use, before we come to the meat of the book – 189 species accounts, compiled by 60 authors. These accounts, each illustrated by several photographs with emphasis on breeding activity, cover all possible, probable and confirmed breeders. Except for sensitive species, every account has a large map showing tetrad-based distribution in 2002–06. For most species, there are also six smaller maps providing comparisons through time. On two of these, the results of the current atlas – which constitutes the first repeat local atlas in Scotland – are compared with those

Unfortunately, rather than tetrads, the first atlas used 395 recording units of varying shapes and sizes. To compare them, each tetrad surveyed in 2002-06 had to be allocated to one of the 1981-84 units, with less than 100% accuracy owing to overlapping boundaries. Unquantified variation in observer effort between the two surveys created additional difficulties, which are discussed fully. The remaining four maps provide comparisons on a 10-km-square basis, bringing in data from the two published BTO atlases. There is no space here to go into detail about the changes identified, but several of the usual suspects are involved, such as on the negative side of the equation - Northern Lapwing Vanellus vanellus, Common Redshank Tringa totanus, Eurasian Curlew Numenius arquata, Yellowhammer Emberiza citrinella and Corn Bunting E. calandra. On the other hand, there are some spectacular range increases as well as interesting additions or presumed additions such as Bearded Tit Panurus biarmicus and Parrot Crossbill Loxia pytyopsittacus.

All these maps – which are without exception clear, attractive and easy to interpret – leave relatively little space for words. The species texts are thus concise but also clear and authoritative, with some additional information from 2007–09 being incorporated. In part, their brevity reflects the simplicity of the methodology, which, as stated above, ignored bird numbers. Nevertheless, there is an estimate of the breeding population for each species.

Towards the end of the book, the editors take a look at overall distribution patterns and species richness before going on to analyse changes and discuss conservation issues. I found these sections,

which are packed with information, particularly interesting. I also enjoyed the experience of reading a text free of typos and suchlike (not always guaranteed these days), and I could find very few errors, though I did notice two seemingly contradictory statements about Garganey *Anas querquedula* breeding at Loch of Strathbeg in 2008.

The overall quality of the photographs is high, but there are one or two unfortunate exceptions. In addition, while nearly all bird images are captioned with location and date, location is not always included for those taken in places outside North-East Scotland. More than a quarter of the photographs were taken outside the atlas area, some as far afield as Finland and Canada, and in at least two instances, involving Shore Lark Eremophila alpestris and Wren Troglodytes troglodytes (p. 433), the bird illustrated is not of the local subspecies. And while on the subject of subspecies, nothing is said about which race of Redwing Turdus iliacus breeds in the area. These are minor quibbles, however. This publication fulfils its mission admirably in providing readers with a clear, up-to-date picture of bird distribution in North-East Scotland - if only for the moment. The current national atlas took over almost as soon as this project left off, of course, with more than a quarter of tetrads being revisited and data on bird numbers collected. Inevitably, this new information will add significantly to the findings presented in this book. In the meantime, however, anyone with an interest in the avifauna of North-East Scotland should, and probably will, buy this volume, which at £25 is reasonably priced by today's standards. It is an impressive achievement.

Tristan ap Rheinallt



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753

Francis, I. & Cook, M. (eds) The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland. An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray Including Part of the Cairngorms National Park. x + 518 pages, with many colour photographs, maps, figures and tables. Aberdeen: Scotlish Ornithologists' Club, 2011. Hardback, £25.00 + £7.00 p&p from RSPB Scotland Office, 10 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB10 1YP; ISBN 978-0-9561126-3-7. Website (including for overseas orders): http://www.nescotlandbirdatlas.org.uk.

This is the result of five summers' research, from 2002 to 2006. An earlier volume, *The Birds of North-East Scotland* (Buckland, Bell & Picozzi 1990; briefly noticed in *Ibis* 132: 629), covered the short-lived 'Grampian Region' (less Moray District), thus including the former counties of Aberdeenshire (with Aberdeen City), Kincardineshire and part of Banffshire. It covered the whole year, and boldly attempted to break the tyranny of the tetrad, by dividing the area into habitat sections of unequal size, while retaining the  $10 \times 10$  km grid of national atlases. The new work extends the territory by adding present-day Moray (though not the Nairnshire part of the current Recording Area) and inevitably, though to my disappointment, returns to the tetrad con-

vention, an artificial chessboard. Like the recent Norfolk work (Taylor & Marchant 2011; reviewed in *Ibis* 153: 911), its issue five years after the end of the recording period carries a risk of its being regarded as a historical document rather than a statement of current distribution, though the authors have tried to update important breeding information.

It is a fine volume, covering 2340 tetrads, more than any other bird atlas, at least in the British Isles. This area includes much of the highest parts of the Cairngorms, the Lochnagar massif, the rich straths of the Don and the Dee, wide areas of heather moorland and forest, much arable farmland, a varied coastline of cliff and dune, notable lowland lochs and 70 golf courses. Among this diversity, 153 species were found breeding. The 350 observers spent an average of 7.7 h in each tetrad, a high total for such work.

In general, birds have prospered over the last 20 years: Common Goldeneye Bucephala clangula have arrived on Deeside; Northern Gannets Morus bassanus have multiplied at Troup Head, and both Great Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo and European Shag P. aristotelis have greatly increased. Red Kite Milvus milvus has been reintroduced; Northern Goshawks Accipiter gentilis and Common Buzzard Buteo buteo have spread; Blackcap Sylvia atricapilla, Goldfinch Carduelis carduelis and Siskin Carduelis spinus have multiplied. By contrast, most waders have declined (and Greenshank Tringal nebularia has gone), and the persecution of large raptors

remains a problem. The Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* continues to decline in Moray, and remains vulnerable even on Deeside.

The large and clear maps are excellent and effectively show change as well as current distribution. Drawings, which have become part of atlas convention, are not used, but there are many fine photographs, among them admirable full-page habitat shots, which are used to break up the species list. A few extraordinary pictures contrive to show species against their landscapes, as in the Curlew *Numenius arquata* in Glen Clunie and the nest of a Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* in a snowy Deeside pine.

The work has been well sponsored, so the price is modest for such a weighty book.

David Ballance