



Isle of Wight Ornithological Group Newsletter



Number 85

March 2020

Recent Reports - The Island News Roundup

Compiled by Jon Sparshott

The reports of national or local rarities, included below, have not all been reviewed by the BBRC or the Joint Local Rarities Committee. Observers of the species in these categories are encouraged to submit description details as necessary, and to submit all of their records to the Bird Recorder, ideally by the end of January 2021.

Overview November '19 – February '20:

Throughout this period the weather was stubbornly persistent as an Atlantic influence produced an almost constant flow of Westerly winds. Daily temperatures too seemed to be doggedly stuck on average and seldom ranged in either direction; seldomly ever near freezing nor ever reaching the 'barmy' mild heights of a year ago when Spring memorably came early. Given February was the wettest ever on record and an obvious dearth of hard weather, the reduction in the variety of winter visitors was quite noticeable. Here is the recap concerning the reports for the period November to February.

Ducks, Geese, and Swans:

The **Barnacle Goose** feral flock at Hersey Reserve tallied 140 on December 12th. **Greylag Geese** numbers reached 26 at Brading Marsh on November 3rd. The peak count of **Dark-bellied Brent** was 1100 at Ryde East Sands on November 10th. Other noteworthy counts were 360 at Newtown NNR on November 5th and 710 at Brading Marsh on January 12th. There were two reports of **Egyptian Geese**, one at Merstone on November 28th and the other at Rofford Marsh on January 2nd. The main count of **Shelduck** recorded at Newtown was 148 on January 19th. On a handful of dates a lone male **Mandarin Duck** was on Dodnor Pond between November 14th – February 12th. Bembridge held the most **Gadwall**

with 61 in and around the Harbour on December 13th whilst the Western Yar Estuary had the record count of **Teal** with 103 there on February 5th. **Pintail** numbers at Newtown NNR peaked with 30 on November 22nd. More unusual, given the time of year, was a female **Garganey** at Brading Marsh on January 16th; and to give some context: a few were recorded nationally during this mild period. The female **Red-crested Pochard** was still at Ryde Canoe Lake on November 7th. A flock of nine **Common Eider** passed Wheelers Bay on November 27th. This winter there were seemingly more sightings of **Long-tailed Duck** off the North coast: a single at Bembridge Harbour on November 10th, followed by one to two regularly seen from Spring Vale up to and including January 20th. **Common Scoter** movements were modest as highlighted by 10 east at Wheelers Bay on November 8th. And a **Velvet Scoter** landed off Seaview on December 14th.

Seabirds and Herons (and their relatives):

Red-breasted Merganser counts were from usual coastal spots and of note was a count of 16 at Newtown NNR on January 10th. Four of the scarcer **Goosander** were at Newtown on December 21st with another 'probable' at Seaview on November 9th. Selected **Red-throated diver** movements were: 42 West at Wheelers Bay on December 28th, 25 East at SCP on January 2nd, and 23 West at SCP on February 7th. Most sightings of

Great Northern Diver were typically attributable to Solent waters (Seaview, Ryde etc) and frequently seen in every month; with no more than two ever recorded. Away from the North coast singles were at Wheelers Bay on November 19th, December 31st, and January 7th. From St. Catherine's Point two singles of **Black-throated diver** were noted on two separate dates January 7th and February 8th, while February 20th saw a small movement of **Fulmar** with 19 West at SCP. The peak count of **Gannet** was 124 at Wheelers Bay on November 24th. At Brading Marsh at least one **Bittern** was there between November 3rd and February 27th. Meanwhile, **Great Egret** remains a regular encounter at Brading Marsh with many singles noted. However, occasionally two birds were seen and most latterly on January 24th. Both Newtown and the Western Yar continuously recorded **Spoonbills** with a high count of 12 at Newtown NNR on November 23rd. The main Solent gatherings of **Great Crested Grebe** never surpassed a count of nine off Woodside on December 3rd. More unusual was a lone **Red-necked Grebe** at Newtown NNR on November 24th. **Slavonian Grebe** numbers peaked with four off Seaview on November 24th and December 15th. Low numbers of **Black-necked Grebe** appeared in the New year, with a single at Ryde Pier on January 4th followed by two at Woodside on January 28th. An **Arctic Skua** passed by Wheelers Bay on November 13th and followed with a 'probable' at La Falaise on January 9th. A couple of selected Auk movements from SCP were: 262 **Auk spp** on February 7th and seven **Razorbills** on January 7th. Most numbers of **Sandwich Tern** were small and associated with the Solent; but there was a 'roost' count of 10 at Bembridge Harbour on November 19th. No single day counts of **Kittiwake** ever exceeded 20 at Wheelers Bay on November 3rd. An adult **Little Gull** was at Brading Marsh on December 15th. In February there were triple figure counts of **Mediterranean Gull**: 200 at Newtown on the 12th; at least 100 at Thorness Bay on the 19th; and lastly 200 at Shalfleet Quay on the 26th. Two singles of **Yellow-legged Gull** were at Whale Chine on the separate dates of November 3rd and February 21st.

Gamebirds, Raptors, and Owls:

News from the **White-tailed Eagle** project, as kindly provided by Jim Baldwin: at least three remain on the Isle of Wight with another in Oxfordshire. The satellite tracking data from the

local birds has shown them to be 'extremely sedentary' and ever faithful to their 'roost' site. There is some suggestion even that two have already shown early signs of 'bonding'. As the project nears its second year, in the coming months more juveniles will be released. The site maxima for **Marsh Harrier** at Brading Marsh was four on December 17th. Elsewhere they regularly featured at the Western Yar with two on January 27th. A few sightings of **Hen Harrier** came in November: a ringtail at Brading Marsh on the 4th and 6th, a male at Whale Chine on the 10th, and another ringtail quartering the fields near the Military Road on the 17th. One was at Western Yar on December 29th. In January and February too, a ringtail was frequently at a south coast location. One of the late Autumn surprises was a female **Great Bustard** in the Merstone area. It was first seen on November 28th and remained in the area until December 16th. Details obtained from the number on its ring revealed it to be one from the Great Bustard Project based in Wiltshire, where it had been reared since May 2019 after originally being brought over from Spain. The peak local movements of pigeons occurred in November: the most prolific was an exceptional **Woodpigeon** count of 24,260 at Blackgang on the 6th. **Short-eared Owl** sightings were few and far between, though two were at Whale Chine on December 4th. A few singles of **Merlin** cropped up at various places in November: Newtown on the 2nd, Culver on the 5th, and Whale Chine on the 18th; and latterly one at Newtown on January 3rd. The main count of **Raven** was 12 at Cheverton Farm on January 18th.

Waders:

There was an interesting report of a 'probable' **Stone Curlew** nocturnally heard over Niton on February 19th. At Western Yar, **Golden Plover** numbers peaked with 867 there on November 17th. A lone **Whimbrel** kept faithful to Foreland, November 13th – February 12th. Newtown NNR had a high count of **Black-tailed Godwit** with a minimum of 120 on November 7th; and just singles of **Bar-tailed Godwit** were recorded at the same site on a handful of dates, December 25th – January 4th. At East Cowes a **Purple Sandpiper** was often seen associating with the turnstones there on many dates. Elsewhere, a single was at the Ventnor revetment on November 7th. From early November, a solitary **Spotted Redshank** was at Mill Copse Scrape. A count of eight **Jack**

Snipe at Thorness Marsh was notable. Otherwise, one was encountered at very close range at Luccombe Down on February 20th. A **Woodcock** was near Bembridge Fort on January 20th and at Western Yar up to 55 **Common Snipe** were seen in flight on November 28th.

Near passerines and passerines:

During the Autumn, passage of **Goldcrest** was highlighted by a count of 50 at SCP on November 4th. The presence of **Firecrest** was far and wide as exemplified by a widespread population of many over wintering birds. Though **Swallow** numbers had aptly reduced, some were still seen into November: with 16 at Luccombe Down on the 5th being the last double figure count. However, the last, a single, was noted at Ventnor on December 2nd. As they departed too, **House Martin** counts dwindled to the final count of seven at Foreland on November 6th. A lone **Pallas's Leaf Warbler** was at Wood Warbler Valley on November 3rd. Autumn arrivals of **Yellow-browed warbler** were few, with singles exclusively noted in November at the following sites: SCP (4th), Ventnor (6th), Rylstone Gardens (7th), and finally Ventnor (11th). In Shanklin a **Dusky Warbler** was an auspicious find visiting a garden on November 25th. Winter **Chiffchaff** numbers were perhaps unexceptional, aside from a count of 15 at Roud Sewage Works on December 2nd. **Eurasian Blackcap** counts were typically small, but numerous were continuously recorded throughout this period and often in gardens. A somewhat tardy **Common Whitethroat** was at Newport on December 2nd. The final **Ring Ousel**, a single, was at Tennyson Down on December 2nd. **Fieldfare** returnees appeared in November followed by a peak count of 100 at Merstone on January 20th. The main count of **Redwing** was 350 at West High Down on November 7th. **Black Redstart** sightings were ubiquitous over the entire period (too many to fully include here), but most appeared to favour the Ventnor area and totalled eight on November 5th. A **Tree Sparrow** at Sandown on November 8th was interesting. **Brambling** passage was limited to a few singles in November; with none that seemingly overwintered. A lone **Crossbill** was at Parkhurst Forest on January 29th. The **Snow Bunting** at Bembridge Down seen in October lingered into this period until the final date of November 2nd.

Annual General Meeting

Following the Government restriction guidelines, the Group's AGM will be cancelled for this year.

Statement of Accounts

The Finance Report for 2019 was audited and signed by W. Petty on 7th February 2020.

Forthcoming Field Meetings

Following the Government restriction guidelines, Field Meetings have been suspended until further notice.

Last Call for 2019 records

If any IWOG members have yet to submit their 2019 records for inclusion in the annual report please can you do so as soon as possible, ideally by **30th April 2020**. Ideally, please submit your records *via* BirdTrack or Going Birding, but if this is not possible, please send the records to me, either electronically (MS Excel or MS Word preferred) or as hard copy. If you would like a copy of electronic templates (MS Word or Excel) please let me know.

Also, as a reminder, local rarities that are asterisked in the listing on rear covers of recent bird reports need to be documented, ideally by photography but otherwise by completing a template which is available from myself. This template is being updated to ensure all relevant information is captured – I will say more about this at the AGM in April.

Many thanks

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New Member

We welcome: Sarah Russell – Selsey

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)

News

In the latest report looking at the size of our bird populations the Wren tops the list with 11 million pairs across the UK.

The latest report, **Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom** shows that the Wren continues to hold the title of our commonest bird – the last report in 2013 also had Wren at the top of the list but with a population of just over 8.5 million pairs. Wren numbers are known to fluctuate according to environmental conditions and it may be that generally milder winters are benefitting one of our smallest birds.

The top five are made up of Wren, Robin (7,350,000 pairs), House Sparrow (5,300,000), Woodpigeon (5,150,000) and Chaffinch and Blackbird share the number five spot at 5,050,000 territories each.

It is estimated that there are around 85 million breeding pairs of birds in the UK altogether, just over one and a quarter pairs for each of us. This is similar to the last estimate calculated in 2013. There are also 20 species whose populations are more than 1 million pairs.

As always there have been winners and losers. One of the most shocking falls in numbers is that seen by the Turtle Dove, down from 75,000 pairs in 1997 to an estimate of just 3,600 pairs in the latest report, and, there are now no breeding waders in the UK that have a breeding population greater than 100,000 pairs, with Lapwing and Oystercatcher falling below this for the first time.

Almost as surprising is the fall in number for one of our most familiar of birds, the Chaffinch. Since the last report, seven years ago, the Chaffinch breeding population has fallen by 1.15 million pairs - the drivers of which are unclear and need further investigation.

On the subject of the Wren, did you know that there are 88 species of wren worldwide? Our wren, the Eurasian Wren, occurs throughout Europe and in a band across Asia stretching as far as Japan. In addition to the nominate species, we have three distinct subspecies in the UK, each

confined to the island/island group from which each takes its name – St. Kilda Wren, Shetland Wren and Fair Isle Wren. The scientific name, *Troglodytes troglodytes* is taken from the Greek word "troglodytes" (from "troggle" a hole, and "dyein" to creep), meaning "cave-dweller", and refers to this species' habit of foraging in nooks and crannies.

Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows (BWWM)

This is a new "one-off" survey taking place between mid-April and late June. At the time of writing the survey details are in the process of being released. Nine sites have been identified on the island, eight which will be covered by the BTO and Brading Marshes RSPB reserve will be covered by RSPB staff. If you would like further details please either contact myself or check the website at <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-waders-wet-meadows>

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

We still have some vacant 1-km squares for this year's BBS. The survey requirements are:

- Two early morning visits (ideally starting between 0600-0700 but must start before 0900) between April and June, along with data entry. Walking two parallel lines in a 1-km square and recording all birds seen and heard.
- Able to identify UK breeding birds by sight, song and call.

The vacant squares are: Freshwater (SZ3486), Norton (SZ3489), Cranmore (SZ3890), Bowcombe (SZ4787), St. George's Down (SZ5186) and Osborne (SZ5294).

If you are interested in taking part or require more details please contact me (details at bottom of article)

Tracking Short-eared Owls

Any day which includes the sight of a Short-eared Owl is a day to be remembered. However, the best evidence that we have suggests that the UK population has declined, perhaps by as much as 50% (at the time of writing I have not seen one at Newtown this winter). The reasons for these changes are poorly understood, but recent advances in technology have presented new opportunities for research. Over the last few years we have been tagging Short-eared Owls, with

astounding results. You can find out more at this link:

<https://www.bto.org/community/blog/tracking-short-eared-owls-notes-field>

Red Sixty Seven book

Red Sixty Seven is a mixture of essays and poems about the 67 birds on the official Red List of the most vulnerable birds in the UK. In the past few years alone the once widespread Wryneck has ceased breeding in the UK altogether and has dropped off the Red List completely. Which species will be next?

The book is a collaboration between 67 authors and 67 artists with a single goal: to raise funds to support conservation work aiming to reverse the declines of our most at-risk birds. Contributors include Chris Packham, Ann Cleeves, Samuel West, Natalie Bennett, David Lindo, Gill Lewis, Darren Woodhead, Carry Akroyd, Jane Smith and Patrick Barkham.

All of the profits from the sale of this book will be donated to BTO and RSPB to further their work on Red-listed birds.

Red Sixty Seven is 67 love letters to our most vulnerable species, each beautifully illustrated by some of the best wildlife artists around, showcasing a range of styles as varied as the birds in these pages. Our hope is that the book will bring the Red List to a wider audience whilst raising funds for the charities working to help the birds most at need.

Priced at £19.99, I can thoroughly recommend it and you can order your copy at <https://british-trust-for-ornithology.myshopify.com/products/red-67-the-book>

Contact details: **Jim Baldwin (BTO Regional Representative)**

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2020 Subscriptions

Those members whose subscription (£12) is still outstanding for this year will receive a final reminder slip with this Newsletter. Please make cheque payable to IWOG and send to Dave Hunnybun. If you would like to receive a Standing Order form to ensure automatic payment in future, please advise.

Looking Back 50 years ago Extracts from the IWNHAS Proceedings for 1970

Red-throated Diver. A remarkable gathering of divers off Chilten Chine, Brighstone on January 3rd-4th. About midday on 3rd a partial count by ALH amounted to 68 and the next morning JS using a 40x telescope counted 163 they were spread singly or in small groups up to a mile on each side of the Chine and as far out to sea as could be seen (perhaps 2 miles). All that could be identified were of this species. By the afternoon of the 4th only about 6 remained. This flock easily surpasses the largest one known to Cohen (*Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* 1963).

Night Heron. One at Alverstone, April 25th-26th (JMC, JCG, JS). The first record for the Island. This bird, and the Little Bitterns below, were part of a remarkable invasion of Britain by these species and other herons, apparently caused by high-pressure weather systems over Iberia (see *British Birds*, 63:143).

Little Bittern. A male at King's Manor, Freshwater, April 23rd to May 4th (AB, DWK, JS). It spent the whole time by a small ornamental pool in preference to the nearby saltings. A male at Alverstone, April 28th-29th (PJB, JMC, JCG). Note the overlapping dates. These were the fourth and fifth records for the Island.

Canada Goose. Nested on Newtown sea wall. 6 eggs were laid, but taken by Herring Gulls (OHF). The first nesting record for the Island.

Coot. Continues to increase at Bembridge- 402 on January 18th (JMC).

Ruff. 19 in pasture SE of Brighstone on March 1st, and up to five in the area until 15th (PJB, JMC, ND, DJH, SL, SMN, JS).

Woodpigeon. Ringing recovery: a nestling ringed (3025454) at Calbourne Bottom on July 27th 1969

(JS) was shot at Brockenhurst, Hampshire on March 21st (JC).

Sand Martin. C.30 holes were occupied in the usual site by Sandown Golf Course.

Mistle Thrush. Has nested in an elm in a Nettlestone garden each year since 1935 (RAH).

Song Thrush. From Christmas onwards regularly feeds on winkles on St. Helens foreshore (RAH).

Reed Warbler. Ringing recovery: one ringed (JA74231) at Alverstone on July 4th (JCG) was trapped near Espinho, Portugal, on October 8th.

Richard's Pipit. Two at S.C.P. on September 29th (DBW) and one there on October 10th (DBW, PJB, SL). The first records for the Island. There was a large influx into Britain in the autumn, totalling some 120 birds (see *British Birds*, 64: 362-3).

Tree Sparrow. More than usual at both ends of the year, including 120+ at Porchfield in December (BJA, HJA).

Looking Back 25 years ago Extracts from the IWOG Bird Report for 1995

Storm Petrel During two nights in the summer tape luring was carried out in Watershoot Bay (SCP) in the hope of ringing this species. Surprisingly two were trapped and ringed on the night of June 30th-July 1st and a further five were trapped and ringed the following night. None of these were re-traps, indicating seven birds were involved.

This is the furthest east that Storm Petrels have been ringed in the English Channel. One was controlled exactly one month later on the Isles of Scilly.

Leach's Petrel An exhausted individual was being harassed by gulls at Ryde Sands on October 25th (DH). This is the first record since the 30-40 that were seen in the Solent following

southwesterly gales in December 1989 (*Wooldridge, 1989A*).

Grey Phalarope At Egypt Point one was watched for three hours as it fed close inshore on September 9th (DJH, MSDH). This is only the second record since 1990.

Long-tailed Skua There were two records of this very elusive Skua, both from SCP. An adult lingered offshore between 11.00-11.15 on October 2nd (DES, BAB, ABa, NAW, BG) and an immature was seen on October 8th (MB).

Sabine's Gull There were two records of this Atlantic migrant. An adult was seen feeding with a flock of over 2000 terns off Ryde on September 5th (DES) and an adult flew west off Fort Victoria on October 3rd (DBW).

Ring-billed Gull First winter birds were seen at Ryde Sands, and also at Wootton Creek (mo) on January 1st. The adult at Ryde Sands continued its stay from 1994 and was last noted on March 20th (mo).

In the latter part of the year at Ryde Sands, a 2nd winter bird was recorded on October 26th (DH), an adult on November 19th (KPL), two adults on December 25th (DH), a 2nd winter on December 26th and finally one adult seen on December 29th (DJH).

Caspian Tern One in summer plumage flew east at SCP on May 15th approximately half a mile offshore (SRC). If accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee* this will represent the first record for the Island.

Ed note: This record was accepted by BBRC.

Radde's Warbler One was present in Wood Warbler Valley (SCP) on October 29th (MB, JCG, DH, KPL, et al). The record has been accepted by *British Birds Rarities Committee* and constitutes the first record for the Island.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak A 1st winter male was present at Ventnor Botanic Gardens from October 30th to November 1st (SJ, DH, et al). The report has been submitted to *British Birds Rarities Committee* and will, if accepted, constitute the first Island record.

Ed note: This record was accepted by BBRC.

IWOG Breeding Bird Survey 2019

Results from the 2019 survey:

21 kilometre squares were covered recording a total of 72 species. The numbers on the following table show the number of kilometre squares in which each species was recorded.

Category A Possible breeding Category B Probable breeding Category C Confirmed breeding
(NB Category A - some species have been recorded in this category when present during the recording period but may not necessarily be possibly breeding in the square eg Little Egret, Grey Heron, Rook).

	A	B	C
Mute Swan	2	1	1
Canada Goose	7	6	4
Shelduck	2	2	0
Mallard	14	11	7
Tufted Duck	4	4	1
Red-legged Partridge	11	9	2
Pheasant	19	16	5
Little Grebe	4	4	2
Grey Heron	1	0	0
Sparrowhawk	5	4	0
Buzzard	12	9	6
Kestrel	8	7	5
Peregrine	1	1	1
Water Rail	3	2	0
Moorhen	9	9	6
Coot	8	8	5
Oystercatcher	2	2	2
Ringed Plover	1	1	0
Redshank	1	1	0
Herring Gull	1	0	0
Feral Pigeon	1	1	1
Stock Dove	12	11	2
Woodpigeon	20	17	9
Collared Dove	9	8	4
Cuckoo	3	3	1
Barn Owl	3	3	2
Little Owl	3	3	2
Swift	1	1	1
Kingfisher	1	1	1
Green Woodpecker	13	10	3
Great Spotted Woodpecker	13	11	6
Skylark	7	6	2
Swallow	5	4	4
House Martin	1	1	0
Meadow Pipit	2	2	2
Pied Wagtail	4	4	2

	A	B	C
Wren	20	19	10
Duncock	18	18	8
Robin	21	20	13
Blackbird	21	21	14
Song Thrush	16	14	6
Mistle Thrush	9	9	5
Cetti's Warbler	5	3	0
Sedge Warbler	3	0	0
Reed Warbler	8	6	3
Blackcap	16	16	7
Garden Warbler	1	1	0
Lesser Whitethroat	4	4	0
Whitethroat	16	16	7
Chiffchaff	16	15	5
Willow Warbler	2	1	0
Goldcrest	11	8	1
Long-tailed Tit	13	11	8
Blue Tit	20	20	12
Great Tit	20	19	11
Coal Tit	6	5	0
Treecreeper	7	6	0
Jay	11	9	2
Magpie	17	12	7
Jackdaw	16	13	10
Rook	7	6	6
Carrion Crow	16	13	9
Raven	2	1	0
Starling	10	8	5
House Sparrow	12	10	8
Chaffinch	19	18	7
Greenfinch	13	10	2
Goldfinch	17	14	7
Linnet	9	9	4
Bullfinch	6	5	0
Yellowhammer	8	8	5
Reed Bunting	3	3	1

Many thanks to the following contributors:

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