



Isle of Wight Ornithological Group Newsletter



Number 88

March 2021

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 their records to the Bird Recorder, ideally by the end of January 2022. In addition, please submit March 2021 to June 2021 records, for inclusion in the next newsletter, to the bird recorder by July 7th 2021.

Overview of the winter and early spring period: November – February

This period included the final autumn passage migrants, winter arrivals, and the odd early summer migrant, producing an eclectic mix. Scarce and rare highlights were reports of **Ring-necked Duck**, **Whooper Swan**, **White-fronted Goose**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Ring-billed** and **Glaucous Gulls**, and ‘**Siberian**’ **Chiffchaff**. However, the most intriguing concerned a gannet species described as showing ID features of **Cape Gannet**, a rare and potential vagrant to our coastal waters. A small number of **Hen Harrier** were seen to roost at one site, which was welcome given how unobtrusive they can be some years. A cold snap early in the year eventually gave way to milder conditions in February and elicited the first summer migrants back to our shores: both **Northern Wheatear** and **Sand Martin**. A ‘booming’ **Bittern** was heard, which represents the fourth consecutive year this species has been audible on the island.

Ducks, Geese and swans:

Two **Whooper Swan**, a juvenile and adult, passed Wheelers Bay on November 21st and settled near Atherfield Point (November 22nd & 23rd); sadly, the juvenile was found deceased on November 24th. **Russian White-fronted Goose** (part of a

national influx) included multiple counts of 30 at Western Yar on November 29th and 40 there on

December 1st, five at Merstone on December 14th, up to 30 at Atherfield Point December 25th – January 10th, 34 at Laundry Lane on January 1st and 21 still there on January 24th. **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** numbers at Ryde Pier peaked to 1000 on November 4th and singles of **Light-bellied Brent Goose** were seen at Foreland on January 15th, St. Helens Duver on Jan 21st, and Bembridge Harbour on February 19th. A count of 13 **Greylag Goose** at Bembridge Ponds on November 13th and several counts of **Egyptian Goose** were two at Brading Marsh on November 12th and February 20th, four at Whale Chine on November 23rd, 10 at Yarmouth on November 30th, and four at Bathingbourne on January 18th. Waterfowl reports of interest were two **Pintail** at Wheelers Bay on November 21st and 10 at the Western Yar on February 20th, a rare **Ring-necked Duck** at The Lakes Rookley December 12th – January 1st; a lone **Scaup** at Brading Marsh on January 7th, several singles of **Eider** plus three at Fort Victoria on December 23rd and two at Ventnor on February 11th; singles of **Long-tailed Duck** at Fort Victoria on November 3rd, Springvale on December 30th, and Puckpool Point on January 8th. **Common Scoter** counts were low,

save 20 at Wheelers Bay on January 1st. The only **Velvet Scoter** was at Ventnor on November 11th. **Goosander** sightings were singles at Wheelers Bay on November 10th and St. Helen's Millpond on November 13th, two at Thorness Bay on December 25th, and one at Wheelers Bay on January 31st. **Red-breasted Merganser** totalled 11 at Newtown NNR on November 7th.

Seabirds & Herons (and their relatives):

Auk species peak day count was 1500 at SCP on December 27th. A potential **Cape Gannet** with 150 Northern Gannets at Wheelers Bay on December 13th. Four **Great Northern Diver** at Cowes on November 4th; elsewhere, one at Bembridge Ledge on November 16th and Wheelers Bay on November 23rd, two at Woodside on January 18th, singles by Ventnor on February 20th and 21st. **Red-throated Diver** day counts, principally at SCP, comprised 77 on December 27th, 65 on January 25th, 70 on January 29th, and 73 on February 4th. In January, singles of **Black-throated Diver** at Wheelers Bay on 4th and SCP on 29th. A raft of 29 **Great Crested Grebe** at Ryde on January 26th. Most sightings of **Slavonian Grebe** typically related to The Solent with a maximum of six at Puckpool Point on December 30th; elsewhere, one at SCP on December 27th was the only report away from the north coast. Just one **Black-necked Grebe** was noted at Ryde Pier on January 22nd and surprisingly no reports of **Red-necked Grebe** during this period. Singles of **Bittern** at Brading Marsh on November 23rd and February 27th with the latter one heard 'booming'. A **Cattle Egret** at Brading Marsh on November 3rd & December 2nd, a possible 10 at Shalfleet on December 3rd, and three at Fattening Marsh on January 3rd. **Great White Egret** peaked with five at Brading Marsh on February 20th, with records elsewhere comprising singles at SCP and nearby Blackgang on November 7th, and a regular individual at Dodnor & Whippingham January – February. Reports of **Glossy Ibis** carried over from the previous period, with a single bird in the Brading area on numerous dates November 4th – Januaryth; elsewhere, one was at Rofford Marsh on December 10th. Regular sightings of **Spoonbill** at Newtown NNR included a high Island count of 11 on January 1st and up to four regularly encountered at the Western Yar, December – February.

Gamebirds, Raptors and Owls:

A **Red Kite** at Ventnor on January 15th was untypical given the early date. The Island's **White-tailed Eagle** juveniles, referred to as the class of '19 and '20, continue to explore far and wide, with data specifically showing the more adventurous individuals navigating their way as far west as Cornwall and as far north as Scotland (and even back again), providing as much interest nationally as locally. Up to three **Hen Harrier** were often seen going to roost at Yarmouth, November 21st – January 15th, with singles elsewhere at Brading Marsh on December 30th, Thorness Marsh on January 2nd, and Newtown NNR on January 7th. **Marsh Harrier** sightings comprised a maximum count of four at Bembridge Ponds on November 12th, one at Thorness Marsh on January 2nd, and up to two regularly at the Western Yar November – December. **Short-eared Owl** reports comprised singles at Brading Marsh and Bembridge Down on November 10th, Yarmouth Mill Copse on November 26th, St. Catherine's Down on December 25th, Newtown NNR December 25th – January 1st, and Werrar on February 19th.

Wading birds:

Two reports of **Avocet** were one at Seaview on December 2nd and four at Newtown NNR on February 23rd. High counts of **Golden Plover** were 210 at Atherfield Point on January 8th and 250 at Western Yar on January 25th. A lone **Whimbrel** lingered at Bembridge/Foreland November – February. A single **Bar-tailed Godwit** at Ryde Sands on February 24th was the only one reported. The maximum count of **Knot** was 150 at Newtown NNR on November 11th. A spate of Island wide reports of **Purple Sandpiper** were singles at Wheelers Bay November 7th – 21st, Bembridge Ledge November 12th – 16th, East Cowes Esplanade November – February, Newtown NNR on November 19th, and a high count of seven at Foreland on January 7th. A **Spotted Redshank** (long stayer) at Western Yar/Mill Copse scrape November – February. Two large counts of **Common Snipe** were 75 at Thorness Marsh on November 26th and 54 at Bembridge Harbour Farm on February 27th; while **Jack Snipe** was seen singly at Thorness Marsh on November 26th and four at Werrar on February 28th. Singles of **Woodcock** at Parkhurst Forest on

November 22nd and Eaglehead Copse on November 29th plus two discovered 'washed up casualties' at Sandown Bay on February 16th had succumbed to the elements.

Gulls, Terns and Skuas:

Singles of **Arctic Skua** at Wheelers Bay on December 4th, **Pomarine Skua** at SCP on December 27th, and **Great Skua** at Foreland on December 27th and Wheelers Bay on January 8th. Up to two **Black Tern** at Fort Victoria November 1st – 3rd, were notably late. The main count of wintering **Sandwich Tern** was 17 at Bembridge Harbour on January 15th and obtained details concerning a ringed bird seen there linked it to the Netherlands. Only modest numbers of **Kittiwake** save a day count of 350 at SCP on December 27th and a storm casualty found at Sandown Bay on February 16th. A lone **Little Gull** at Culver Down on November 7th and a large count of 1747 **Black-headed Gull** at Sandown Bay on January 7th. **Mediterranean Gull** peak counts comprised 500 at IOW Pearl on November 3rd, 180 at Bembridge Harbour on November 21st, and 185 at Whale Chine on January 8th. A juvenile **Glaucous Gull** at Sandown Canoe Lake and **Ring-billed Gull** at Rofford Marsh both seen on December 12th were interesting scarce finds.

Near passerines and Passerines:

Woodpigeon autumn movements were modest represented by 2460 at Gore Cliff on November 4th and 1585 at WHD on November 6th. A **Marsh tit** at Bouldnor Forest on January 11th. The sole report of **Woodlark** concerned two at WHD on November 27th. The first spring sighting of **Sand Martin** was three together at Brading Marsh on February 28th. Autumn's final **Barn Swallow** at Luccombe Down on November 28th and last **House Martin** at Gore Cliff on November 6th. Two singles of **Yellow-browed Warbler** at Appley Park on November 1st and Shanklin (private garden) on November 23rd. Widespread and good numbers of **Blackcap** over-wintered. Singles of **Dartford Warbler** at St. Helen's Duver on November 4th and SCP on November 5th indicated limited autumn dispersal. A '**Siberian**' **Chiffchaff** at Roud Sewage Works on December 30th and January 6th. Passage and wintering **Black Redstart** comprised multiple counts of four at Alum Bay Chine on November 9th, two at SCP on December 6th, and five at Ventnor on December

15th. A final autumn **Northern Wheatear** at Brading Marsh on November 12th plus the first returning summer migrants at Monks Bay on February 25th and St. Catherine's Oratory on February 28th. A final single **Ring Ouzel** at Haddon's Pits on November 28th. Just one report of **Water Pipit**, a single at Brading Marsh on November 6th. Up to 40 **Crossbill** regularly seen at Bouldnor Forest November – February and five at Parkhurst Forest on November 22nd. **Brambling** sightings concerned mostly coastal movers, 10 at SCP on November 4th, 20 at Ventnor on November 8th, and four at Bonchurch Down on November 20th. Two **Lapland Bunting** were seen at Whale Chine on November 24th.

The March of the Rook

Dave Hunnybun

Having been in my current property since 1972 it was not until July 2007 (35 years later) that rooks were included on my GBS form. Numbers gradually increased thereafter with four February 2011, eight October 2012 and ten March 2016. In 2019 a small rookery containing four nests was noted in a large ash tree nearby. By that November the total feeding birds reached eleven. With a successful breeding season in 2020 numbers increased to twenty four in November. Trying to feed smaller birds now is a battle of wills, rooks bounce on the feeders to release food to their waiting mates below, some that are more agile now hover to extract seeds direct from containers and fatballs disappear within minutes, add to this at least fourteen jackdaws at any one time, food is rapidly consumed. As I write, rooks are tearing at ornamental grasses in the garden to line their nests.

Breeding Bird Survey 2021

Those members who participate in this survey will receive the blank forms as usual but it must be stressed that Government guidelines should be adhered to at all times.

2018 Annual Bird Report

A big thank you must go to Mark Buckley for posting the report to all members. If for any reason you have not received a copy by now, please contact Dave Hunnybun direct.

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)
News
BirdTrends Report

The BirdTrends report is a one-stop shop for information about the population status of familiar breeding birds across the UK. The latest report also includes information on breeding performance and survival for a subset of the species, monitored through BTO's avian demographic schemes: Nest Record Scheme and Ringing Scheme. At the local level, these schemes are well supported by the Isle of Wight Ringing Group.

The report covers 121 species and is based on data gathered by the many thousands of volunteers who contribute to BTO-led surveys, highlighting the changing fortunes of UK birds.

While some species have declined, others have increased. Great Spotted Woodpecker has shown the largest increase (up 387% in the last 50 years), thanks in part to increases in the number of people providing bird feeders in their gardens. A recent increase in the Song Thrush population of 15% means it is a candidate for removal from the highest category of conservation concern – the Red List – and the next periodic revision of the list could see Song Thrush move to the Amber List.

The UK Red List highlights those species in most need of conservation help, because of large-scale reductions in breeding or non-breeding numbers or range, or because they are considered threatened at an international level. Two species highlighted in the latest BirdTrends report that are candidates for being moved onto the Red List are Greenfinch and House Martin. A species qualifies for the Red List if there has been a population decline of at least 50% over 25 years, or more. As the latest BirdTrends report reveals, we have lost over one million of our Greenfinches during the last 15 years, largely due to the emergence of the disease trichomonosis. House Martin populations have been in longer-term decline, perhaps reflecting changes in land-use or reductions in the abundance of favoured invertebrate prey.

The full report can be read at the following link:
<http://www.bto.org/birdtrends>

The Curlew Recovery Partnership

Another species mentioned in the BirdTrends report is the Curlew which has lost half of its breeding population in the UK in the last 25 years. A new initiative has been launched to save this iconic species as a UK breeding bird.

The Curlew Recovery Partnership is a new, exciting and transformative initiative, bringing together all those with an interest in Curlew conservation, including land managers, farmers, gamekeepers, policymakers and researchers. This partnership has been set up with financial support from Defra and will explore opportunities to embed Curlew recovery within Defra's new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and the Nature Recovery Network.

The Partnership's Steering Group comprises nine organisations: Bolton Castle Estate, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Curlew Action, Curlew Country, Duchy of Cornwall, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), Natural England, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT). It is the outcome of Curlew Recovery Summits hosted by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales on Dartmoor in March 2018 and at Highgrove in February 2020. It will provide co-ordination and support to those engaged in Curlew conservation, while also providing benefits for other threatened species and habitats and helping people to connect with nature.

The Steering Group has appointed Curlew champion Mary Colwell as chairman and New Forest ornithologist Prof Russell Wynn as Manager.

The partnership is keen to hear from anyone interested in getting involved in saving the Curlew. To get involved, please email hello@curlewrecovery.org or visit the website at www.curlewrecovery.org

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

At the time of writing, we are hoping to be able to run this survey in 2021 while also keeping within the government's Covid guidelines. I will be in contact with our current surveyors shortly to check if you wish to take part this year and any forms required for the coming season.

BBS surveyors can also survey their square later in the summer for the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey. Please contact me if you would like further details.

We still have some spare sites to cover for the BBS. You need to be able to identify the common birds you are likely to encounter on a BBS square near you, by sight **and** sound.

If interested, please contact me for further details.

Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows

This survey is now planned to go ahead in spring 2021 (Covid-19 restrictions permitting), after being postponed in 2020 due to Covid-19.

The survey will involve up to four visits between mid-April and end of June to count and map all waders within allocated sites featuring wet grassland and/or farmland sites containing specific agri-environment scheme (AES) options, including arable Lapwing Plots.

The Isle of Wight has eight sites to be covered by volunteer surveyors (the RSPB will be covering Brading Marshes), mainly in the West Wight. The skills required for the survey are: ability to identify common wader species (Curlew, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Snipe and Redshank) by sight/sound and recognise display/territorial behaviour.

If interested, please contact me for further details.

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

Tel. (01983)721137 (home), 07528 586683 (mobile), email: wightbto@hotmail.com

Annual General Meeting

The Group's AGM can hopefully be held late summer/early autumn, details will be in the next Newsletter.

Statement of accounts

The Financial Report for 2020 has been produced and awaits auditing.

Last Call for 2020 records and Bird Recorder update

If any of you have yet to submit your 2020 records for inclusion in the annual report please can you do so as soon as possible, and by no later than Friday **26th March 2021**. This will enable me to incorporate them into the master list of records that I send to the bird report section writers, which I intend to do by the end of March 2021. Ideally, please submit your records *via* BirdTrack or Going Birding, but, if this is, for any reason, not possible, please send the records directly to me, either electronically (MS Excel or MS Word strongly preferred) or as hard copy. If you would like a copy of electronic templates (MS Word or Excel) please let me know. If you have just a very few records an email is fine.

As always, any local rarities that you have found that are asterisked in the listing on rear covers of recent bird reports will need to be documented, ideally by photography but otherwise by completing a template which is available from myself.

The IWOG breeding bird survey (BBS) was not formally run in 2020 but I am aware that some observers, despite the ongoing Covid-19 situation, were able to perform surveys. I have seen three returns to date (St Boniface Down, St Georges Down and Shalfleet). If any of the other survey squares were able to be covered please can you send a copy of your form(s) to myself and James Gloyn as soon as possible. Hopefully the survey will be able to be run comprehensively in 2021 as it is a very valuable source of long term trend data on our breeding birds.

Very many thanks

Robin Attrill
17 Waterhouse Moor
Harlow
Essex
CM18 6BA

robinattrill@gmail.com

07487 577 103

Bird Report Editor's Update February 2021

Martin Hunnybun

As I wrote the update for the last Newsletter (early Nov 2020), there was still a bit to do on the 2018 report, but the effort gathered momentum and by early December final queries were being chased down and proofing was underway. It was with some relief that the work was completed in December and the report files were sent to the printers before Christmas. A two-week shutdown at the printers meant it was later in January that the printed version became available. Hopefully, many of you will have received your copy by now, although distribution efforts have obviously been hampered by the ongoing 'stay at home' mandate due to the pandemic. Mark Buckley's excellent shot of the Pallas's Warbler won out for the front cover, with the Lapland Bunting looking better alongside the Little Bunting photo in the final plate for comparison purposes.

It was another great team effort to produce the 2018 report. It is no small commitment to try and summarise a year's worth of sightings for some species and to do so without introducing any errors! My thanks again to everyone involved.

Meanwhile, Robin Attrill had been working away on the compilation of sightings from 2019, involving c.40,000 records. We were all keen to make the most of the winter months and the lockdown to make some headway on the 2019 report. The records were circulated to analysts in early January.

Receiving species summaries a few at a time, rather than as completed sections, has worked well over the last two months. I've been able to keep up with editing into the master file and there has been more time to follow-up with queries on certain records (such as a handful of Birdtrack entries accidentally being of the wrong species).

The Island's bird photographers also answered the call for submissions and I've put together another collection of impressive images, which a focus on documenting the scarcer species recorded throughout the year.

The choice of species for the front cover was rather straightforward – there were no challengers to the Great Spotted Cuckoo! It is a challenge picking a favourite shot of it though!



©Andy Butler

There are now only around 40 species to be written up, so it looks likely that the target of having the first full draft of the report completed by end March will be met. On that basis I would expect publication around the end of April.

Work on production of the 2020 Bird Report is also underway. As the last trickle of 2020 records come in, an advanced version of the record compilation has been made available to those analysts who had completed their 2019 summaries of passerines. One section has already been completed! Drafting of that report is unlikely to take quite so long as others recently due to the paucity of records from the breeding bird survey, even though the total number of records submitted for the year is actually already slightly higher than for 2019! I anticipate that we will have the 2020 report completed by early autumn.

New Members

We welcome:

John Barker	-Northwood
Jane Calderin	-Binstead
Rob Harrison	-Gurnard
Warren Payne	-Rookley
Stephen Taylor	-Rookley
Declan Whittington	-Wroxall

The River Medina: then and now

Dave Hunnybun

During the 1960s a walk from Newport Quay to the Folly Inn produced counts of birds which can hardly be believed today. This was a regular haunt of mine, sometimes accompanied by Ron Machin, Norman Davis and Bill Shepard.

From the Quay, **Mute Swan** would be seen moving under the railway bridge and by the time the Folly Inn was in sight over one hundred were noted (e.g. 105 on 24/12/67). On reaching Hurstake, the first **Little Grebe** appeared with steadily increasing numbers until the river widened at East Medina Mill (e.g. 70 on 31/10/64).

The area referred to as Folly Lake was the main site for **Shelduck**, their preference being the west side at Werrar (e.g. 120 on 14/12/65). The shores of Folly Lake held the majority of feeding waders including **Ringed Plover** (105 on 27/1/63), **Dunlin** (260 on 8/2/69), **Common Redshank** (159 on 3/8/69) and **Lapwing** were a common sight roosting on adjacent fields (e.g. 510 on 1/1/66). These specific records have not appeared in print previously – although submitted to the Bird Recorder at the time, the reports of the 1960s, were far less comprehensive than they are today with no specific records included at all for many common species.

Sightings of scarcer species during those years that stand out in the memory included a **Grey Phalarope** (17/10/63), a male **Bluethroat** at Werrar (14/9/69) and five **Waxwing** near the Folly Inn (27/11/65).

An extreme cold spell started on 26th December 1962 and continued into March 1963. The prolonged snow cover and severe frost froze the river to the extent that it was possible to walk across from one side to the other at Hurstake. Bill Shepard made the following observations whilst walking the east bank during this period:

White-fronted Goose: 40 on 17/2/63

Wigeon: 50 on 27/1/63

Pintail: 13 on 17/2/63

Scaup: four on 6/1/63

Tufted Duck: 55 on 6/1/63

Goldeneye: two on 13/1/63

Common Scoter: three on 13/1/63

Coot: 71 on 6/1/63

Curlew: 136 on 13/1/63

Black-tailed Godwit: 68 on 27/1/63.



This is a photograph of a young Phil Barden taken in January 1963 from the east side of the Medina at Fairlee. The sledge was loaded with Curlew, Teal, Lapwing and Shelduck. He recalls seeing a dead Lapwing actually frozen into the ice on the shore.

It is a changing world however. Who could have foreseen **Little Egret** becoming commonplace at the water's edge on both sides of the river: the first record for the Island was in 1963 (one of only three in the UK that year) and the next Island record was not until 1984! Breeding **Peregrine Falcons** would have been unthinkable, let alone a **Great White Egret** appearing at Dodnor Pond!

2021 Subscriptions

Those members who have yet to pay could use Standing Order as an easy option by notifying their bank. Details are NatWest bank, Newport, IW, account number 05530725 sort code 52-30-04 although cash and cheques are acceptable, payable to IWOOG (£12).

