



Twitterings

Newsletter of the Manx Ornithological Society Issue 3, December 2016

Editorial

There is no shortage of news for this issue, including a new MOS logo, a sold-out Celebration of Manx Birds, a new event on the Calf and plenty of birding going on around the Island, both within and outside of society events.

The eagle-eyed among you will have noticed a two-year gap since the previous issue. Unfortunately a trial editorial delegation didn't work out, but we intend to continue once more with an annual issue every November. Or, if we receive enough articles, this could be more frequent.

Contributions of any kind are always welcome for consideration. We aim to get a report and photo from each outdoor event and would also welcome brief reports of indoor meetings, so if anyone wishes to volunteer on the day please make yourself known to the organiser.

If anyone is interested in taking on editorship of this newsletter, please let me know.

Richard Selman

Photos: Neil Morris



Sold out celebration of birds!

Almost 200 people enjoyed a fascinating day at the sell-out Celebration of Manx Birds organised jointly by the MOS and Manx BirdLife at the Manx Museum on 12th November.

We were honoured to have the Lt Governor, a keen birder, open the event and he expressed a wish for some good news stories. Ollie Padget then provided insights into navigation at sea by Manx shearwaters, one of which has been recorded travelling 7750km in only 6½ days. He included some unique footage from a shearwater cam! Kate Hawkins then gave us a history of shearwaters on the Calf and the recovery project which holds good prospects for a shearwater revival there.



The next pair of talks were about hen harriers. Blanaid Denman (RSPB) runs a LIFE project looking at hen harrier movements around the British Isles. She showed the trace of Aalin, a bird recently tagged on the Island, who has now headed through southern Lancashire and we'll see how far she wanders. The tag was sponsored by the Society for the Preservation of the Manx Countryside and Environment. Louise Samson (DEFA) coordinates winter roost counts and though they no longer appear to use Ballaugh Curraghs, a number of sites are now known across the Island.

After refreshments, Dr Samantha Franks (BTO) provided insights into the causes of change in curlew populations, noting that they fledge more young where there is less forest and they benefit from predator control. They are reacting badly to increasing temperatures but breed more successfully in boggy areas than in dry heather, if rushes are not too thick. Allen Moore talked about the rising chough population on Mann and some different perspectives on chough ecology from La Palma.

To end the day, the keynote talks were from Dr Tim Graham (the recently appointed Chief Executive of the Manx Wildlife Trust), looking across the range of issues and challenges facing birds and conservationists, and finally Dr Martin Harper (Director of Conservation at the RSPB) who gave an enthusing call for conservation where it is most effective and gave us a global perspective, from Hope farm to Henderson Island.

Flycatchers helped by nest boxes

Nest boxes put up in the glens will help reverse the decline in spotted flycatchers, it is hoped.

Spotted flycatchers take readily to open-fronted nest boxes provided that the front is no greater than 60mm from the floor of the box.



Photo: Pete Hadfield

Sean Gray of the Manx Ringing Group assembled nest boxes with timber provided by the DEFA Saw Mill. He and I put up 30 spotted flycatcher nest boxes in Manx glens. The boxes will be monitored and it is hoped that they will aid the recovery of this vulnerable species here in the Isle of Man. The species suffered an 86% decline in its breeding population between 1967 and 2006 and is now on the UK, IoM and CI Birds of Conservation Concern red list. It is a priority species for conservationists and habitat managers. Data collected through nest recording and ringing should help the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to reveal the underlying causes of the decline.

Spotted flycatchers are a migratory species and overwinter on the west coast of Africa down to south of the Equator. They start to return to the UK from mid-April. Females lay four to five eggs which are incubated for 13 to 15 days before hatching. The chicks fledge after two weeks at which time they are spotted, unlike their streaked parents. As their name also suggests, spotted flycatchers feed on flies and a variety of flying insects. They are protected from disturbance while nesting (listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Act 1990).

Louise Samson

Breeding trends

The Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture's breeding bird trends have now run for 10 years, following the publication of the Manx Bird Atlas. Each year 10% of the Island was surveyed by Manx BirdLife, which means that an atlas update is also now possible. The data for the last 2 years has not yet been analysed, but each year has added data that has allowed more species to be assessed. We look forward to the eventual publishing of an update on changes since the Atlas was published.

Changes at Manx BirdLife

There have been changes at Manx BirdLife with Neil Morris, who you may know from the MOS Committee and from his talks, taking over the helm from Dora Querido, and Michelle Storton has just started work as their education officer.

An MOS logo

With the organisation of the recent Bird Day, there was a request for an MOS logo.

We haven't, of course, had a logo, using only the lapwing print on the event cards, the peregrine on the journal and on our headed paper, and the society name in blue, which runs across the top of the paper.

The committee decided to put some thought to a logo which can be used on posters and publications, but there was reticence about wasting a lot of money or time on such a matter, and Neil Morris offered to take this on.

Neil did a fine job running up some ideas based on peregrines, which of course have a historic link to the island, as well as the MOS, as two used to be given to each new Lord of Mann and one therefore remains on the government crest, along with one of Odin's ravens. Logo ideas fell into two groups, 'traditional' badge-style circular/oval logos and those styled 'modern', with a flying bird and more open look to them. Support within the committee was split, but comments were offered and Neil took these on board and refined the drawings.

The committee preferred a traditional design and Alan Harris was contacted about using his Peregrine drawing. He agreed, so we now have a new logo. I hope that you, the members, are happy with the result. It seems recognisably Manx and MOS and should serve us well for now. Many thanks to Neil for his design skills.



On course

Thanks to Tim Earl and Dora Querido we have run two 'Beginners Birdwatching' courses together with Manx BirdLife. These have been much appreciated and enjoyed by the participants.

The courses have consisted of three indoor evening sessions when lots of information was provided, about the best sort of binoculars, books and apps to buy and hints and tips on watching and identifying birds.

There were also three outdoor sessions when we were helped to identify birds by sight and sound and given clear and precise details of their distinguishing features, preferred habitats and migratory patterns. Tim has had many years of experience leading wildlife holidays worldwide and we are very fortunate that he has been able to spare the time to lead these courses. We hope to arrange some more dates in the future.

Janet Thompson

Overnight on the Calf

This year we trialled a new event, with the help of Manx National Heritage, a trip to the Calf with an overnight stay to try to see shearwaters. I wasn't sure whether this would work, with the vagaries of the weather and the shearwaters, but was keen to try it and a date was set for a summer weekend with a dark, moonless night.

Only 8 people could be accommodated but we were set to go on 2nd July in the morning, but the wind stopped play, so we returned in the evening and set off successfully from Port St Mary in fine weather, spotting gannets and auks as we passed the Sugarloaf and crossed the Sound. We were met by the wardens, Richard and Ian, and we walked up to the farmhouse, the base for the Bird Observatory, apparently known amongst observatories for its large movement of grey wagtails. We spotted pipits, linnets and lots of wheatear fledgelings. Later we took an evening stroll and watched the sun setting behind the lighthouses.

The main event started after dark, when we headed down to South Harbour and sat outside the shed, listening to the wind, fingers crossed for the sound of shearwaters coming back to their holes. There was no sign of them at first, but Richard and Ian headed off to a nearby ravine where they had set up nets and calls to try to capture some storm petrels, and at 11.15pm they brought back some of these tiny sea swallows. They seem too delicate for a life on the high sea. We waited a little longer outside and by 11.45 were excited to hear the chortling calls of shearwaters overhead as they dropped into the bracken in search of their nest holes, even though we couldn't see them flying in the pitch black. Richard had a plan, however, and the wardens searched the colony as the birds came in and caught a number of birds to ring and measure them. We therefore all had good views of both of these iconic birds whilst they were measured and ringed.

The next day we relaxed in the morning and took our own walks, spotting peregrines, black rabbits and a hen harrier whilst exploring the island. Turning a corner I was surprised and delighted to spot puffins on a slope, for a second, until I remembered that these are models. Still, it was delightful to sit amongst them. I am sure that this would make a popular art installation on Peel Hill. I knew they weren't real but it still felt good. Hopefully they will result in a future expedition to sit amongst the real puffins, one day.

In the afternoon the wardens led us on a circuit of the island. There were fritillary butterflies and both grey and common seals (commons are rare in the IoM). Marsh thistle and bog pimpernel were in flower. Choughs flew from the Calf over the Sound to fields by the Cregneish road, swifts were seen overhead and puffins were spotted close inshore, the first that I've seen in that area for many years. Joyce even spotted a pygmy shrew.

Richard treated us to a meeting with a 1 ½-week-old shearwater chick from a nest that they checked, mostly a ball of fluff with a beak, and very cute. Only 3 burrows allow checking, as many others are too deep. Claire chatted to us about her work on shearwater counting methods for her MSc at Bangor. A gull pellet that I checked was mostly crabshell but included the beak of an adult Manx shearwater and a couple of bird bones, evidence suggesting predation. Altogether a very successful weekend despite the false start and I ticked a long-awaited experience off my bucket list. We hope to repeat this for another group if there is interest next year.



Photos: Richard Selman

An evening at the Point of Ayre

On a perfect evening on Tuesday 19th July 2016 MOS met at the Point of Ayre for a birdwatching evening with Mark Fitzpatrick.

Some 20 members attended, which included people of all abilities – novices, experienced birdwatchers and bird experts. We began by viewing the shoreline and the first birds that we saw were Arctic terns dancing in the sky and then landing with their mouths full of sand eels.

One intrepid scoper then spotted a lone bird sitting on the beach, which was difficult to identify as it had its back to us. There was much speculation as to what this bird was. A number of theories were put forward, then Neil viewed the bird and identified it as a juvenile dunlin. We continued to view the scene to see how many birds we could spot.

Mark also spoke to us about recording our findings when completing the Garden Birdwatch Survey. We should endeavour to include as much detail as we can, to provide a clearer overall picture.

Mark suggested that we then walk along the coastline for a short distance to do some sea watching and explained the best position to stand whilst sea watching and what we should look out for in terms of birds, landmarks and tidal areas. A number of different seabirds were noted, including small groups of gannets flying low over the water, travelling purposefully north and not interested in feeding, but presumably going home to their roost. Razorbills, guillemots and a number of other sea birds were also seen. Just at the end of the session, the cry went up – basking shark! He was travelling north fairly close to the shore and members thought that he appeared to be a young basking shark. This was a lovely end to the evening.

We then walked back to the car park for a debrief whilst continuing our spotting. It was announced that some 17 species had been noted, which in an area of a few hundred yards is pretty amazing. Everyone agreed that it had been an enjoyable event and gave a big thank you to Mark for his time.

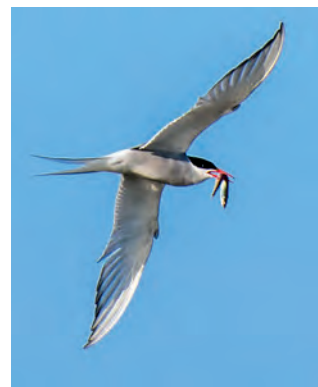
After the session, as it was such a beautiful evening, a few members stayed on, and with a number of birding experts on hand, the opportunity was taken by some of the novices to pick their brains on suitable types of binoculars, spotting scopes and cameras.



Photos: Gill Johnstone

Afterwards, whilst travelling home, I went through Ballabeg. On the outskirts, there were at least 200 corvids, mainly jackdaws and rooks, perched on the electricity wires and the roofs of a couple of houses. The sheer number of birds packed into a small area was striking. We speculated as to the purpose of this, a sitting of 'parliament' perhaps, or a scene from *The Birds* (Hitchcock)? The birds appeared to be silent and we decided that, because it was such a lovely warm end to the day, they were simply sitting, chilling, enjoying the last rays of the sun before going home to roost.

Gill Johnstone



Drenched with the ducks at the Ayres Pits

On 21st February the delayed MOS visit to the Ayres Pits went ahead as a joint event with the IoM Natural History and Antiquarian Society.

Despite rain and flooded roads, 24 people attended in addition to the leaders of the tour, Stephen Smyth of Island Aggregates, Sean Gray and Neil Morris.

Rain settled in but we carried on. On the spoil piles around the pits in the working areas, herring gulls mixed with lesser black-backed gulls, the latter not such a common sight on the IoM, and coots grazed between them and swam in the pools. Some teal took flight as we arrived and a few tufted duck swam at the far end.

Stephen described the extraction operation, with another 12–15 years of planning consent remaining and a few decades of extraction within the site, and there was a discussion regarding the plans for a bird reserve, to be run by Manx BirdLife and opened to the public. We await news from the current parent company, but Stephen was positive about the plan. Stephen said that the larger Second World War structures will be retained at the end of extraction and built into the bunds.

Mute swans swam gracefully in front of us and Sean talked about the ringing, which has shown that Manx mute swans are unusual in how far they travel in winter, reaching as far as Aberdeen.

At a further pit there were a few Canada geese, coots and mallards. Rising up the bund between the working and the extracted pit we viewed hundreds of ducks on the old pit, lots of wigeon and tufted ducks, a few shoveler and goldeneye. Unfortunately the rain continued so binoculars were in and out of jackets, but due to the rain direction we still had to wipe the rain off.

Walking further up the pit we spotted cormorants, a gadwall and pochard before meandering back through the pools flooding the track.

Garden birdwatching

We all like watching the birds in our garden, but did you know that just by keeping simple records you could make a valuable contribution to our knowledge of Island bird life?

All you have to do is to take part in the Garden Birdwatch scheme run by Manx BirdLife. The scheme, which has been running since 2000, has generated a wealth of information on the wide range of birds which visit gardens across the Island. The Manx Bird Report published annually by the Society makes good use of the reports provided.

The Society has therefore decided to support Manx BirdLife by sponsoring the Garden Birdwatch, which is now 'The Manx BirdLife Garden Birdwatch in association with the Manx Ornithological Society'. As well as helping to secure the future of the Garden Birdwatch, we hope the Society's involvement will lead not only to increased participation in the scheme by members but also to more Garden Birdwatch participants joining the Society.

You can find out more about the Garden Birdwatch and how to participate by visiting the excellent new Manx BirdLife website at www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings/garden-birdwatch or by telephoning Manx BirdLife on 861130. We very much hope you will support the Society's sponsorship by participating in the Garden Birdwatch if you do not already do so.

Richard Norris

Fancy doing surveys?

The BTO undertakes frequent bird surveys that feed into their excellent website of bird facts. It is a charity and the principal body organising national surveys in the UK.

If you enjoy bird surveys then please help, ensuring that Manx birds are included and can be seen in perspective with the surrounding areas. Our President, Pat Cullen, is the Isle of Man coordinator and anyone can take part, whether a BTO member or not. Just go to www.bto.org and look for Volunteer Surveys. Here follow many of the Core Surveys, to which Pat has contributed in the past.

Breeding Bird Survey: 1km squares are chosen at random by the BTO. A survey is carried out early in the breeding season and then again later, involving two linear walks, wherein birds are recorded in three zones of distance from the route. About ten squares are allocated to the Island and volunteers would be welcome.

Garden Bird Watch: identical to Manx BirdLife's, with an additional Feeding Survey in October–March.

Heronries Survey: Pat has done this for many years. There are six known heronries – Kentraugh, Balladoole, the railway opposite Brookfield Avenue (Castletown), Ballachrink (Santon), Kirby and Ballamoar (Jurby), though Balladoole and Ballachrink may be extinct. The survey involves counting the nests and those occupied.

Nest Record Scheme: recording the progress of nests. See the website regarding licences, where relevant.

Waterways Breeding Survey: a survey of birds and mammals along waterways, chosen by the observer, of between 500m and 5km in length. Pat did a stretch of the Glass one year and Joyce Stigant did part of the Laxey River for several years.

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS): sites are randomly chosen by the observer. Wildfowl, including rails and waders, are counted on a specified Sunday, mid-month, throughout the year. Over the years, the following have been surveyed: Chapel Bay, Gansey, Strandhall, Poyllvaish, Castletown Bay west, Langness, Derbyhaven, Douglas Bay, Ramsey Harbour and Bay, Peel, Airy, Kionslieu, Kerrowdhoo, Clypse, Bishop's Dub, Ballacain Dubs and meadows, Glascoe and the Point of Ayre Gravel Pits. Currently, Pat is doing Airy, Kionslieu, Kerrowdhoo, Clypse and the Bishop's Dub. Ted Abraham counts the Gravel Pits and Glascoe. It would be great if Derbyhaven to Chapel Bay and Peel, could be covered.

In addition, there are other surveys with Manx involvement, some just for short periods, such as the Non-estuarine waterbird survey (Richard Norris covered Port St Mary to Scarlett last winter), winter thrushes, peregrines, house martins and swans (with the WWT).

Richard Selman & Pat Cullen



Puffins return to the Calf?

I was caught out for a second when I turned a corner on our summer visit and spotted them. Well they looked real enough.

The MOS has contributed to the Manx Wildlife Trust project to return puffins to the Calf, by sponsoring the sound system. Puffins used to breed there in large numbers, many years ago, but have not bred there at all for some time. Now that the Shearwater Recovery Project is showing positive signs, model puffins have been placed on the brooghs and puffin calls are hailed out to passing birds via an automated sound system.

Puffins are showing interest in the Sound area, and we hope that they may go on to nest there once more. Personally I think that the models themselves could prove to be very popular as an art installation. They just make you feel good to sit amongst them, only to be bettered by the birds themselves.

Pelagic trip – 18th August

Eleven of us enjoyed a very pleasant evening out of Port St. Mary harbour aboard Bob Taylor's boat *Gemini*. This was a trip which had been postponed the previous week because of strong winds.



Herring gulls, great black-backs, lesser black-backs, gannets, fulmar and shag were visible throughout our trip. At the Sugarloaf very few birds were on the ledges, most of the chicks having fledged. However, there was a flock of kittiwake on the water and guillemots, some moulting into their winter plumage.

As *Gemini* rounded Spanish Head approaching The Sound a kestrel made a brief flight over the water. From the Kitterland rocks snoozing seals opened their eyes to take note of us. A couple of bull seals used the interruption for a brief skirmish whilst the females and the youngsters were untroubled.

In the lee of Bradda the sea was calm and the evening sun warm. Bob and Sue provided hot drinks, chocolate cake and scones. Port Erin was silhouetted against a striking backdrop of luminous grey clouds, indeed the sky was beautiful throughout the evening. There was some debate about whether a bird that could be seen on the rocks near to the old mine workings was a peregrine.

A report from a fishing boat of dolphin and porpoise off the northwest coast of the Calf had us heading in that direction. We did not see them but as we headed to the Calf across the entrance to the Sound we were rewarded with the sight of a razorbill and at least two Manx shearwaters overtaking us.

Bob and Eunice had, with amazing speed and apparent ease, caught a few mackerel, which were duly



sacrificed to lure gulls on our return via the Chicken Rock. A gannet joined the gulls but was uncharacteristically reticent in asserting itself. We returned to Port St. Mary having enjoyed a wonderful evening afloat.

Thank you to Bob for his seamanship, sharp eyes, local knowledge and hospitality, to *Gemini* for a comfortable ride, to Neil Morris for sharing his considerable knowledge, to Sue for excellent cake and scones and to Janet for organising the trip.

Margaret Kelly



Fifty-six and counting

I have been feeding birds in my garden for years and decided to add up the number of species that have landed in the garden or on a tree overhanging it (not flyovers). I am now up to 56.

I am in a great location on the edge of an estate in Andreas, backing onto farmland. My garden is a reasonable size, about 100' by 60'. I have a mix of habitats: a good-sized pond, fruit trees, vegetable patch, rough grass area, lawn and flower beds and I'm not far away from the coast, curragh-like habitat and the Ayres.

I try to provide a mix of food, attracting many species: my feeders contain peanuts, sunflower hearts and nyger seed, and I spread budgie/foreign finch seed on a piece of bare ground, which is great for house sparrows and finches. In early winter I put apples on the ground for the winter thrushes (redwings and fieldfares), and on my bird station to attract waxwing and blackcap. The local herring gulls even benefit from the occasional remains of a roast chicken! Also, I tend to garden for wildlife so there are plenty of wildflower seeds (or weeds!).

The cold winter of 2012/13 forced common gull and black-headed gull into the garden through sheer hunger. The fairly open nature of my garden, weed seeds and proximity to the Ayres accounts for linnets, twite and meadow pipit. A nearby shoot rears and releases red-legged partridges. The pond attracts mallard, heron and my only grey wagtail. Curiously, my sole moorhen visitor passed through well away from the pond. The budgie/foreign finch seed has been the only food I have seen brambling and tree sparrow take although others have had a different experience.

Highlights

Hoopoe. This bird visited when the garden had just been cleared and turfed and the pond dug, but not lined. Looking out of the kitchen window in May 2007 I saw the distinctive head peeping above the pond edge from the shallow ledge I had made. It hopped onto the lawn and flew up to the back fence before flying off.

Hen harrier. A male ventured into the garden whilst the perimeter fence was temporarily removed. After its replacement, I saw a flurry of wings near the house in December 2014. A female had landed at the base of a shrub by my main feeding station.

Wheatear. Wheatear regularly pass through the adjoining field but I never anticipated a garden visit, however in May 2014 two females were attracted by a weeded patch of bare earth and spent time on the patio.

Waxwing. In March 2013 I was told there were several waxwings in the south of the island. Figuring that they may well have to pass over my garden on their way north I began placing apples on my bird feeder holder, a large piece of dead willow branch stuck vertically in the ground (I prefer this natural way of hanging my feeders). A male blackcap visited the apples on 31st March and daily to 13th April, but on 14th April a waxwing arrived. It was caught, photographed and ringed by Sean Gray the next day. This affected it not one jot: it was back feeding within ten minutes and stayed for five more days.

Great-spotted woodpecker. A female fed from my peanut feeder for about ten minutes in November 2012, but she never returned. I found several references on the internet to 'woodpecker logs' and made one. I selected a log 5" wide and 2' long. A number of holes were drilled in it, deep and wide enough for two or three peanuts and I hung it from the branch of an overhanging ash.

I persisted without success for nearly two years, though it attracted house sparrows, great tits and blue tits, which can reach the outer nuts but not the deep ones. In late summer 2014 I noticed that on a few occasions the holes had been emptied and began to wonder whether woodpeckers were visiting in the early morning, then I saw a male great spotted woodpecker on 17th September. He became a regular visitor, always visiting the log first, but using the feeders when it was empty. Since then a female has visited regularly.

Barn owl. On summer nights I often sit with the lights off as daylight fades and when bats are taking to the night sky. I saw the ghostly figure of a barn owl land in the ash tree that overhangs my garden at 11.15pm on 15th July 2013. It took off but I went outside and there it was, perched on my next door neighbour's TV aerial.

Kestrel. Sparrowhawk attacks are common around bird feeders. On one occasion I saw the birds scatter and was taken aback to see a male kestrel take to the air from beneath the feeders. The attack was unsuccessful. Kestrels often hover over the field next to our garden, especially in autumn.

Twite. Several years ago a neighbour mentioned twite in his garden, but I was sceptical until in November 2014 I saw a large flock of finches in the field adjoining

my garden, in stubble for the first time for many years (usually in winter cereals). They remained in the area, but rarely did I get a good view. I wondered whether they were all linnets, but I couldn't see any males. The possibility of twite then came to mind. It's easy to convince yourself you've got something special, not just immature linnets, so I contacted Sean Gray and Chris Sharpe for tips. A few days later the birds landed in my fruit trees and began calling. The light was poor but the calls were a real clincher. They were indeed twite.

I then had an idea to try to bring them in to feed. I mowed a strip of lawn pretty much to soil level and put budgie seed and nyjer in it: my 'twite cricket wicket'. I haven't yet attracted twite in but I have seen them looking at it from the trees. The chaffinches love it.

Reed bunting. On 27th March a female reed bunting turned up and fed several times daily up to 2nd April.

Hopes

My neighbour has seen a tree creeper, though I don't have mature trees in my garden. Whitethroat breed nearby (the males are audible) and yellowhammers were present in the adjoining field in 1998 but none remain. Ravens have landed on a neighbour's roof and I am tempted to place a road-kill rabbit on the lawn. Maybe even a buzzard may land (they soar overhead and I successfully fed the first buzzard family on the island with rabbit and hare road-kill). I have also considered throwing food onto the lawn when there are lesser black-backed gulls. I am always hopeful of a new species but I am running out of realistic possibilities, though I will not stop looking, hoping and trying.

My garden list

Barn owl, blackbird, blackcap, black-headed gull, blue tit, brambling, carrion crow, chaffinch, chiffchaff, coal tit, collared dove, common gull, dunnock, feral pigeon, fieldfare, goldcrest, goldfinch, great tit, great spotted woodpecker, greenfinch, grey heron, grey wagtail, herring gull, hooded crow, hoopoe, house martin, house sparrow, jackdaw, kestrel, lesser redpoll, linnet, long-tailed tit, mallard, meadow pipit, mistle thrush, moorhen, pheasant, pied wagtail, red-legged partridge, redwing, reed bunting, robin, rook, sedge warbler, siskin, song thrush, sparrowhawk, starling, swallow, tree sparrow, twite, waxwing, wheatear, willow warbler, wood pigeon, wren.

Garry Curtis

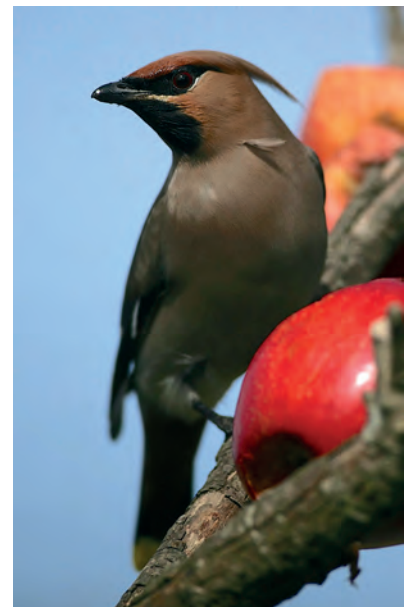


Photo: Sean Gray

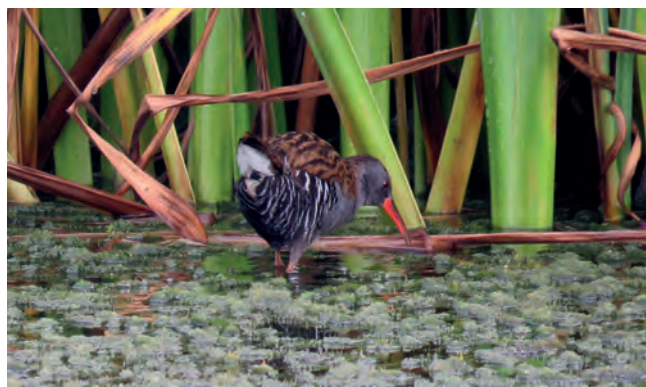
New birding hotspot!

Little more than a decade ago, Ballachurry Wetlands was a damp arable field. Now, thanks to the generosity of Stan and Pam Clucas and their family, it is the Manx Wildlife Trust's newest reserve.

The hard work of numerous volunteers has transformed it into a varied habitat of young woodland, rough grassland, a reed bed, a stream and areas of open water.

Last spring it was alive with birdsong, with willow warblers, chiffchaffs, blackcaps, whitethroats and sedge warblers all present, and, for at least some of the time, grasshopper warblers (above). Reed buntings and siskins were other highlights. Over 60 species have now been seen on or from the reserve, including overflying hen harrier and peregrine falcon.

The reserve includes a hide built by students from Castle Rushen High School under the supervision of their design and technology teacher, using materials donated by our very own Anne Kaye in memory of a family member. Water rails are resident (below), and despite their elusive reputation, they can often be seen from the hide for quite long periods. Other species seen from the hide include teal, moorhen, and grey wagtail.



The reserve is next to Rushen parish church, with access from Old School Road. Why not pay it a visit if you are in the area – it is always open.

Richard Norris

Photos: Sheila Norris

Welcome to new MOS members since the last newsletter:

Trevor Aves, Christine and Peter Baker, Kenneth Bawden, Elizabeth Clegg, Michael & Pauline Coupe, Brian & Christine Cowley, James Duddy, Tara Dunk, Eunice Evans, Marion Green, Maree Harper, Paula Harrison & David Wilson, Michael & Michele Hayler, Lara Howe, Peter Howe, Pauline and Michael Howland, Wyn Hughes, Alan Jackson, Mr & Mrs B K Jackson, Pam & Peter Jackson, Andrew and Kerry Johnston, Gill & Steve Johnstone, Adam & Margaret Kelly, Mr P Kelly, David Kennett, Jimmy Kermode, Chris & Shelley Kilpatrick, Dave King, Sue Kinrade, Charlton Krentz, Jackie Lee & Lloyd Taggart, Susan Leeming, Peter Lillywhite & Carole Melaugh, Robert Loudon-Brown, Christine and John Lowe, Maureen & Peter Masters, Anna Mayall, Neil Morris, Joanne Nolan, Belinda & Lisa Osborn, Leslie Palmer & Valmar Britton, Heather Paterson, Mark Pidgeon, Linda Qualtrough, Mr R D & Mrs J D Quine, Howard Scarffe, Jenny Shanley, Susan Skillen, Caroline & Graham Smith, Steve Smyth, Master Leo Tickle, Jane Tierney, Stephen Whittaker & Mo Fowler.

Sadly we note the passing of:

Thelma Davidson, Peter Duddy and Martin Ellis, who will be missed.

Upcoming events

NEW Dec 11th: Ayres Gravel Pits. Meet at the quarry weighbridge (NX465045). Bring your telescopes!

Jan 10th: Mike Howland – Garden Wildlife & Photographic Technique.

Feb 7th: Dawn Balmer, BTO Head of Surveys – BTO Work, from Local to Global Scale.

Mar 7th: AGM/Chairman's evening – Richard Selman on Ibera to Iguassu, the Wet North-East of Argentina.

Peregrine (MOS journal)

Allen Moore is currently the editor of *Peregrine*. The next issue is expected to be ready for the AGM. If you have any local natural history articles to offer, please send them to Allen by the end of the calendar year.

Back issues are still available. Please see the website for details, and to check the searchable catalogue of *Peregrine* articles, or contact Allen.

Subs

Subs are due on 1st January. Please send them to the treasurer or pay at one of our meetings. If you DO NOT wish to renew, please let him know on richardnorrisiom@gmail.com, telephone 834104 or by post to Lhieny Greiney, Surby Road, Surby, Port Erin, IM9 6TD.

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