

Twitterings

Newsletter of the Manx Ornithological Society

Issue 2 November 2013

Editorial

What a lovely summer this year, but still some poor luck with the boat trips. Let's hope for better next year, as these are very nice on a good day.

Still, there have been some nice events and good talks. Particular thanks to Jodie Craine, who put herself forward and gave a talk to Marown Cubs. Youth groups are asking for more of this kind of thing now, so if you are interested in doing something fun and educational with children please do step forward.

Jodie also spoke to the Society about her work on Australian babbblers, followed by Tim Earl with his experiences as a Travelling Naturalist and his suggestion for a new website. Earlier we had Jenny and Mary from the MSPCA and saw Mary's lovely bird drawings. We saw some out-of-the-way parts of the Falklands with James Robinson, and James Leonard talked about Scottish buzzards, which are now of increasing interest here.

If you come across anything you think might be of interest to other members, please send a note to me for Twitterings, or consider a note for the website.

Richard Selman

Knitters' corner

Ever had a hankering to knit a hen harrier? Well, now you can with a new pattern from the RSPB!

The knitted puppets were designed by two RSPB volunteers and are now being used as part of the RSPB's Skydancer project within schools and communities in northern England, raising awareness of hen harriers and promoting their conservation.

http://www.rspb.org.uk/skydancer/getinvolved/knit_a_hen_harrier.aspx

Manx birds in HD: film completed

On 10th June at the Villa Marina the much awaited high definition film, *The Isle of Man – A Natural World*, was premiered, with an introduction by the Lieutenant-Governor, Adam Wood.

It was produced by Manx BirdLife and Greenlight Television and it has clearly been very professionally put together, with Chris Sharpe and James Leonard doing the camera work, producing 130 hours of usable film and no doubt many long days of attempts in poorer weather.

It succeeds in showing off the island to good effect, using the wonderful light and sky effects and mixing long and short shots of some Manx specialities with some of the more common, but no less spectacular, species to be readily found on the Isle of Man.

With the film-makers' interest in birds it is no surprise that they are the stars, with choughs and ravens making regular appearances. But this is not a film just for birders; it has broad appeal and some of the best sections are of dolphins and sharks. In fact, Chris and James both told me that their favourite experience of the project was filming the basking sharks close up. It clearly made an impression on both of them, despite having seen these sharks fairly close previously.

Another favourite for Chris was getting the chough footage. These characters delight residents as much as visiting naturalists and some really close-up shots give you a chough's-eye view, almost lens to beak. Film work has its frustrations, however. Chris got a tip that bottlenose dolphins were about and was soon aboard the boat, with dolphins leaping around him. Camera at the ready, the motherboard blew! This hasn't stopped them from getting some great footage of a good range of local interest, though.

For those with an eye for the unusual there is an appearance by a rare warbler, but the film is really creating a picture of the more typical larger wildlife that residents and visitors can readily find if they take the interest to look, highlighting the local specialities such as hen harriers and mountain hares.

Funding was provided by the Manx Lottery Trust, the Department of Economic Development, Manx Heritage Foundation, the Gough Richie Charitable Trust, and the Manx Ornithological Society, of course. The film has not been released yet, but members will receive a copy of the DVD, once this becomes available.



Photo: Manx BirdLife, from the film

Calf Manx Shearwater Recovery Project

Kate Hawkins

Since last winter's mammoth baiting effort, the programme to eradicate rats ('longtails') from the Calf has moved into the monitoring phase. In spring the spacing between bait points was increased from 50m to 100m, reducing the number of points from 1050 to 260. Monthly checks of the grid, baited with chocolate wax blocks, have been carried out over the spring, summer and autumn by the wardens and volunteers.

The winter eradication operation was implemented according to plan and the last confirmed sign of rats was in early December 2012. It seemed that freeing the Calf from the rat scourge was within our grasp. However, during a routine bait grid check in early June, a single chocolate wax block was discovered on the northwest coast with rat teeth marks, indicating survivors. A pre-planned emergency baiting and trapping regime was activated and intensive monitoring maintained around the offending site over six weeks to try to pick up any others. However, no further signs were found and we reverted to non-toxic baiting and monthly checking. As we can't be sure the last rat has gone, the project team is planning an intensive monitoring programme over the whole island this winter, involving non-toxic baiting, tracking and trap-setting to try to pick up evidence of any live rats. Depending on the results, we will make a decision around March/April on whether to carry out a second eradication attempt in the winter of 2014/2015. The project can only be declared a success after two years completely free of rat signs, so we are planning our next steps carefully!

The project is coordinated and underwritten by Manx National Heritage under the technical and operational guidance of staff from the Food and Environment Research Agency (UK), with unstinting help from volunteers, logistical and practical help from the Manx Wildlife Trust, DEFA and Manx BirdLife and further advice and financial support from the RSPB. Volunteers for this winter's monitoring programme are still being recruited. Any MOS members who are interested in joining the team are advised to contact Kate Hawkins (tel. 648022, kate.hawkins@gov.im) or Duncan Bridges (tel. 844432, duncan@manxwt.org.uk).

What is a liver bird?

Have you visited the Museum of Liverpool yet? They say that it is the most visited museum in England outside of London.

An exhibit that caught my eye was the 'Which Bird is the real Liver Bird?' case in the entrance hall. In it are a white-tailed sea eagle and a golden eagle (there is an eagle on the medieval seal and it is also the emblem of the Earls of Derby), a cormorant (found atop the Liver buildings and on the seventeenth century silver of the town hall), a spoonbill (known previously as a lofflar and sometimes pronounced 'lever'), a shoveler (previously called a spoonbill, too, and a duck is also on the town hall silver), a lyre (a Manx shearwater), and a grey heron (which looks much more like a liver bird).

But the answer is that no one really knows, and it is probably inspired by a number of species.

Sandstone liver bird from the entrance to the Sailor's Home, now Liverpool 1 shopping centre



Success on the Ayres

Louise Samson reports on the 2013 breeding season on the National Nature Reserve

Little tern: 44 pairs nested on the reserve. Counts this high have not been recorded since the 1980s. A minimum of 28 young fledged but many of these may have been predated by a female sparrowhawk after fledging. The Manx Ringing Group continued with its project to trap and ring adults and is getting some interesting results that will contribute to their conservation. Four adults were trapped that had been ringed as chicks, one ringed at Foulney Island, Barrow-in-Furness, one at Brora, Highland, and two at The Breaches, Wicklow. The Manx Ringing Group intends to colour-ring terns in 2014, which may provide information about nest colony selection.

Arctic tern: 8 pairs nested in the main little tern colony, but only managed to fledge 1 bird. A further 17 pairs nested at the Point of Ayre and these fledged an estimated 12. A total of 32 nests were monitored and 8 of these were presumed to be replacement clutches. Two of the adults trapped on nests had been ringed at the Point of Ayre as chicks and were 11 and 13 years old. An additional trapped bird had previously been trapped on a nest at the Point of Ayre in 2009.

Oystercatcher: 31 nests were monitored on the NNR and adults remained agitated for weeks after hatching, indicating that the chicks had a high survival rate. Towards the end of the season recently fledged young were regularly encountered.

Ringed plover: 47 nests were monitored on the NNR and many of these would have been replacement clutches. Hatching success was good but chick survival appeared to be low and an estimated 10 young fledged.

Curlew: At least 7 pairs of curlew nested on the reserve and they all remained agitated for at least 6 weeks after hatching, indicating that they all managed to raise at least one chick. Two pairs were observed with two well-grown young and another pair was observed with one.

If anyone would like to get involved with wildlife monitoring at the Ayres please contact me at DEFA (Louise.Samson@gov.im).

One of the new information boards at the Ayres NNR



MWT is 40!

Forty years in the making, the Manx Wildlife Trust is looking towards the future with a renewed and revitalised enthusiasm. The Isle of Man's principal voluntary body for nature conservation, it is entering its fifth decade looking to capitalise on its core aim to protect the island's unique wildlife for future generations. Currently the Trust actively manages 21 local nature reserves on the island and 2014 will see the beginning of our ambitious Ramsey Forest Project, a 30-year vision that aims to create a new forest in the north of the island.

With this in mind, we are actively looking to recruit new volunteers and members to help protect and preserve our beautiful natural heritage and are currently offering **a 25 per cent discount to MOS members if you join before the end of the year.** In addition, if anyone is interested in getting involved with helping out at one of our events or reserves, would like to volunteer as a warden at the Visitor Centres at either the Ayres or Scarlett, or feels that they might be able to offer an hour or two to help out in the Wildlife Shop in Peel, then please do get in touch.

Your support could be crucial in helping to keep the island's precious wildlife safe for the future, so if you do feel that you can help, please contact trevor@manxwt.org.uk, or give us a ring on 01624 844432.

Trevor Gibbs, Volunteer and Membership Coordinator, MWT



More rats!

Did you hear 'Rat Eradication – Is It Worth It?' on Radio 4 on 10th September? It was on *Shared Planet* and can still be heard via the radio player on the BBC website.

There are four species that share their lives with humans, sometimes causing problems. These are the brown rat (which we know well), the black rat (extinct on the island but it was an exotic invader that disembarked from wooden ships that were riddled with them), the Polynesian rat (on offshore islands) and the Asian house rat.

The programme reported that approximately 90 per cent of island rat eradications have worked (799 sites!). It took a particular look at the South Georgia rat eradication project, and left us with an enticing mention of trained rat detector dogs. There are certainly some terriers that can do that job. It went on to discuss the issues involved and some of the pitfalls for the unwary project planner. Recommended for half an hour at the ironing board.

Photo: LIPU



International chough workshop and Manx chough census

Allen S. Moore

I attended the 4th International Workshop on the Conservation of the Red-billed Chough in October in Vila Real, northern Portugal. There was a strong representation from Portugal and central Spain, with others from the southwest of the UK, Jersey, and me from the Isle of Man. Of particular note to MOS members was that Bob Haycock, a warden on the Calf in the 1970s, spoke about choughs on the Castlemartin Ranges in Pembrokeshire.

Two of the main themes coming out of the workshop were decreases in chough populations and genetic studies. Chough populations in Scotland, Wales and Portugal have decreased, those in central Spain are about stable, and a bright light has been the recolonisation of Cornwall, with 3 birds turning up in 2001, breeding in the next year and a total of 9 territories in 2013. Choughs died out in Jersey in about 1900 but some are now being released on the northern coast, where suitable habitat has been established, with the help of Manx Loaghtan sheep.

The main chough genetic studies have been carried out in the past 10 years in Spain and, more recently, in Scotland. This is a developing area of research. The Manx Chough Project has been involved in both studies, with help from the Manx Ringing Group in recent years for research based at Aberdeen University. Chough populations in northwest Europe (including the Isle of Man) have been shown to have much less genetic diversity than those in Spain, including the much more isolated population on La Palma in the Canary Islands. There is therefore a risk of inbreeding in the north, though breeding by 2 Welsh birds at Manx sites during some of the past 14 springs shows that there is some movement within the British Isles.

I gave a presentation for the Manx Chough Project on the status of the chough in the Isle of Man, discussing, amongst other things, the effect of the large snowfall in March and habitat requirements for feeding and breeding. Manx choughs are of particular note in these islands in using a wide range of feeding habitats. On 18th September, just before I headed off to Spain and Portugal, it was interesting to see a flock of 31 choughs feeding in a harrowed field at Sound Farm (Shennvalley).

The last IOM census was in 2002, part of an international effort in northwest Europe. Choughs have since been surveyed in Islay, Colonsay, Pembrokeshire and Cornwall. The Manx Chough Project is organising a complete census in 2014. The non-breeding element of the population is difficult to assess, but this will involve some coordinated counts in April, to which members of the MOS are invited to help. It is uncertain when the next chough census in the UK will take place. Nevertheless, the Manx Chough Project is keen to proceed with the Manx census in 2014. If anyone would like to help, please contact me: Allen S. Moore, Lyndale, Derby Road, Peel, IM5 1HH, tel. 843798, or email allen.gobbag@manx.net.

Have you checked news of the Jersey chough reintroduction lately? Have a look at the blog at <http://www.birdsontheedge.org/projects/choughs/>

Mobile gannetry?

LIPU, the Italian bird charity, reported in the LIPU-UK newsletter that a gannet has nested for the first time in Italy ... and in a boat! A pair nested this year in a boat in Portovenere harbour, by the La Spezia Gulf. Luckily the boat owner, Alfredo Puntoriere, allowed them to stay and LIPU volunteers protected them from unwanted attention, resulting in a successfully fledged chick. The MOS supported LIPU with the proceeds of our Christmas raffle last year. It is best known for its fight to protect Italy's birds, and our migrants, from poaching.

Birds in the Sugar Loaf area in 2013

Anne Kaye

Only one MOS sea trip took place this year. The other trips were cancelled because of the weather. We always seem to be unlucky: fine weather before and after but not on the day. In June we went along the coast, called in at South Harbour to deliver the stores for the wardens, went out to the Chicken Rock and then round the Calf. We had good views of Manx shearwaters and of the kittiwakes and guillemots on the Sugar Loaf.

It is my good fortune to go out to the Calf at least once a week, and sometimes almost every day, so I am able to do much bird watching. The Sugar Loaf and the cliffs around it hold the most birds. This year the kittiwakes and guillemots were late to get started but were there in great numbers and do seem to have had a successful season. The kittiwakes have almost abandoned the usual sites on the Calf, although up to 9 birds were seen on Kione Rouayr, but did not raise any young. The Sugar Loaf colony is expanding from the rock itself and the cliffs behind to two sites nearer Port St Mary. The kittiwakes raised many young (a rough count showed about 60 young on the Sugar Loaf, with many more at the other sites). Many pairs had 2 chicks.

We did see one young guillemot on the water but were not there at the right time to see a mass exodus.

One or two puffins were seen at different times but on 13th July we saw a most unusual sight – 9 puffins on the water off Kione ny Ghoggan. They were so well fed they could hardly take off! They were presumably on passage from elsewhere.

Another unusual happening on 19th June was a feeding frenzy off Black Head, with at least 50 gannets diving into the sea with many auks and gulls.

The fulmars at Calloway had 16 occupied nest sites on 17th June and reared 9 young in August. About 20 eider ducklings were seen in Perwick Bay on 15th June. A few black guillemots have been seen in the area but no regular counts were made this year.

In spring and autumn a few purple sandpipers were seen at Black Head and more behind the Calf, but the best place for waders in the winter is at Kallow Point, Port St Mary (so no boat needed), near high tide, sometimes on the flat rocks but more often on the shingle behind the breakwater. This gives easy viewing if you are careful

and counts include up to 15 oystercatchers, 40 turnstones, 60 ringed plover, 30 dunlin and single redshank, grey plover and a juvenile ruff. The best count so far of purple sandpiper was 15 on 8th November.



Photo: Will Hayward, Calf warden



A first for me on the Calf

Anne Kaye

Walking up from South Harbour on June 8th this year, crossing the field to go to the Mill Dub, I rounded the corner by the gate and there sitting on the path about twenty feet away was a pink bird!

I had never seen one before but without doubt it was a ROSE COLOURED STARLING.

I was thrilled, but of course I did not have a phone or a camera. The bird took off and landed on the wall and then flew down, out of sight, into the withy. I hot-footed it back down to the boat and phoned Will, the Warden. Luckily, he was at the Observatory and came down with a camera, found the bird, and was able to get a photo and confirm my identification.

Manx Biodiversity Strategy

The Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) is leading the work under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the first step has been drafting a strategy that identifies what needs to be done at a strategic level.

This year there has been a consultation on a draft strategy, which has now closed but can still be accessed on the gov.im website (see below).

The final strategy is keenly awaited. An implementation plan will follow, with more specific actions, and both government and non-governmental organisations will be involved. There should be plenty of opportunities to get involved, for those who are interested.

<http://www.gov.im/lib/docs/daff/Consultations/enviro/biodiversitystrategyjune2013fina.pdf>

What's this talk of turbines?

On the Isle of Man we have become used to seeing very small wind turbines, and on the ferries we see their monumental brothers. There are likely to be extensions and new developments of turbine arrays in the UK waters just outside of the island's 12-mile limit of jurisdiction, with two major projects currently planned, for which you may have seen details at public exhibitions. These are the Walney and Rhiannan projects, to the east and south respectively.

Discussions continue regarding a possible array to the southeast, and navigation is a key concern as the broad area of consideration lies across a ferry route. In Manx waters turbine plans will be expected once the government has set up a structure and policies for the consideration of marine developments, to feed into the UK grid, using UK government support, and there are, of course, also discussions already occurring regarding turbines on the Isle of Man, which have been reported recently.

So what does this mean for the birds? The MOS committee has no specific policy on turbines but remains concerned that birds should be given adequate consideration in any planning application. An impact assessment is generally necessary for such projects, and many require two years of bird survey data in order to provide suitable evidence of the likely effects.

The science regarding the impacts on birds and methods of mitigation is still developing, therefore good monitoring is essential and data should be made available to researchers for independent assessment and reviews. However, there have now been quite a lot of wind farm developments and there is a fair knowledge of the difference between very damaging and lower risk sites with regard to birds. Potential impacts to consider include direct strike, disturbance, barriers to movement, changes in the availability of foraging habitat and displacement effects.

Whilst not overly worried about many such projects, and generally supportive of sustainable energy generation projects, I am personally in agreement with the RSPB approach, requiring proper assessment and putting the right kind of development in the right place. Real disasters have been few, but with some notable examples of the wrong sites being chosen. In my work with DEFA, I will be seeking to ensure that such projects are sited appropriately.

Rarities texts service ends

Recently members (and others) have benefited from a free text service provided by Manx BirdLife. Rare bird reports were sent out, often resulting in confirmation by other observers, who then experienced the sight of birds that they may never have seen and may report in future. Others used it to keep up to date on bird movements.

Manx BirdLife reviewed this service, which involved sending multiple texts, because there is a limit on the number of people one text can go to. The cost was significant and they decided to discontinue the service earlier this year. Chris Sharpe has looked at a variety of alternatives, which have been discussed by the committee. No alternative service has been agreed yet, but the possibility of an MOS service for members remains under consideration if a viable alternative can be identified, and new MOS member Tim Earl has a web-based proposal which may help.



Manx BirdLife, DEFA and the Ayres Pits

The future plans for Manx BirdLife are keenly awaited but the work continues and messages left at its office in Laxey will still be picked up, even though no staff are currently based there. Records can still be sent to the website and will be reported in the weekly summaries.

A decision is also expected soon regarding the summer birds trends contract that Manx BirdLife undertakes for DEFA, which also contributes towards a resurvey of the island at 10 per cent of the land area per year. Three further years would complete the resurvey and allow a full comparison with the Manx Bird Atlas.

Both organisations have been involved with Island Aggregates (owned by Cemex in recent years) in the development of a bird reserve at the Ayres Pits Area of Special Protection for Birds. It was recently taken over by Northstone and the repercussions are not yet clear.

It is hoped that plans to provide for public access can still be agreed, but the Collister bequest held by Manx BirdLife is fenced off for this purpose, regardless. Public access is not currently possible, except for organised visits, and we await the company's plans with interest.



Another beautiful bright day on the Ayres

The August trip was a walk on the Ayres. Here wind strength and direction is not an issue, unlike the boat trips, and it turned out to be a lovely day, once again, in the sunniest part of the island.

Common gulls bobbed in the shallows and an occasional grey seal popped its head up inquisitively to have a look at the colourful bunch on the beach. Flocks of waders moved along the shore, feeding amongst the weed and wet sand, with many ringed plovers, some sanderling, a few dunlin and a common sandpiper.

Offshore, gannets dived forcefully and sandwich terns dipped and dived more delicately, whilst shags jumped up and dived beneath. There were a few telescopes so everyone got some great views.

See the Ayres National Nature Reserve website at <http://www.gov.im/categories/the-environment-and-greener-living/protected-sites/the-ayres/>.



Red-legged partridge season extended

DEFA has extended the open season for partridge shooting by a couple of weeks at the start of the season, following a consultation.

The Society's view had been that the season should stay as it was (starting 1st October). However, the extension that has now been allowed is not as great as had been put forward originally.

This species has been released since the 1960s, though apparently only established in the 1980s, and is augmented by releases for shooting.

The open season now runs from September 13th to January 31st.

Grant support

The MOS agreed a grant of £700 to the Manx Wildlife Trust for its appeal to buy a new reserve just outside Douglas at Ballacreech. This is a wet grassland with great potential for educational use by groups from Douglas and as a potential sanctuary for wildlife in the urban fringe. The committee recognised the general conservation interest of the site and the educational potential, though a larger grant was not forthcoming because it is not a site of specific importance for birds. We wish the MWT well in developing the new reserve. The Manx Ringing Group was granted £1200 to pay for bird rings from the BTO in their work in 2013. The group has received similar support previously in recognition of its contribution to our knowledge of Manx bird life and the MOS committee is happy to continue this relationship. In 2012 5600 birds of 83 species were ringed. The reports are published in *Peregrine* and online. The funds were provided from the Collister bequest.

Welcome to new MOS members Steve & Ann Beckley, David Bellamy, Sylvia & Bob Constantine, Tim Earl & Liz Charter, Jean Jackson, Pip & Judy Norris, Louise Samson, The Samson Family, Fiona Shimmin, Guy & Janet Thompson, and Stephen Whittaker & Mo Fowler. And sadly we note the passing of members Alan Cleary, Jack Kneen and Cyril Speak, who will be missed. The Society has received a number of generous donations in memory of Cyril Speak.

Stop press

Have you seen the beautiful blue streak of a kingfisher in flight? News is just in that not one but two kingfishers have been spotted at the bottom of the River Neb at Peel Harbour, a rare sight on the Isle of Man. They visit over winter on suitable lowland rivers, such as the Neb and Sulby, usually as individuals and always rare. Often spotted when they are disturbed and dash past at speed, to get a really good view of these mighty blue and orange bullets, it is worth walking the bank while checking out perches along the edge of the water well ahead of you with binoculars. You might even spot one fishing.

A little egret has returned and can be seen now in the Derbyhaven/Scarlett area



Upcoming events

December 3rd: Christmas social. Book with Anne Kaye by 1st Dec please.

January 7th: Kevin Scott – Birding in Iceland.

February 4th: Jackie Hall – Basking shark film followed by questions.

March 4th: AGM/Chairman's evening.

MOS website

You can view the events list and a searchable catalogue of *Peregrine* articles on our website:

<http://manxbirdlife.im/manx-ornithological-society/>

Peregrine

Back issues of the journal *Peregrine*, published by the MOS, are available from the secretary priced £3/issue (volumes 4 to 7) and £7.50/issue (volumes 8 and 9). Volume 10 issue 1 (latest) is sold out. Postage and packing is included for IoM and UK addresses. Editorship has now passed to Richard Selman and the next issue should be printed by the end of the year. The committee apologises for the delay in preparation. Articles are now requested for next year's issue.

Subs

Subs are due on 1st January. Please send 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, tel. 834104 or by post to Lhie ny Greiney, Surby Road, Surby, Port Erin, IM9 6TD.

Publication information

Contributions of news and information for *Twitterings* are always welcome for consideration to the editor:

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Articles and photos are by the editor except where stated.

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