



Dear Garden  
Birdwatch Participant,

Welcome to this winter edition of  
your *Garden Birdwatch* update.

It's been a bumper year for  
birdwatchers, for birds and for the  
Manx BirdLife office.

### Thank you!

Firstly, thank you for sending in  
your sightings. As I write, we have posted a staggering  
**29,458** of your garden birdwatch records to the Manx  
National Bird Database! We are greatly indebted to you  
for these records – and to our small band of regular  
volunteers, Carolyn Rawson, Jenny Shanley and David  
Dunn, for their dedication to the huge task of processing  
all these records.

### From elsewhere around the island

As well as garden birdwatch records, we have received a  
terrific **8,124** records from sites around the island. These  
have been submitted via the online form on the Manx  
BirdLife website, where frequent updates are posted on the  
sightings noticeboard ([www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings](http://www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings)). In  
this update we have provided an analysis of the top ten  
most popular birdwatching sites around the Island.

### New birds for the Isle of Man

During 2017, two species of bird were recorded on the  
Island for the first time. And during the autumn, we  
enjoyed significant influxes of continental visitors such as  
thrushes, robins and woodcock. Also among these were  
Crossbills, which have been reported from a number of  
plantations – including a couple of birds resembling Parrot  
Crossbill, another potentially new species for the Island.

### Education in full swing

I am greatly enjoying the challenge of running the garden  
birdwatch scheme as well as managing Manx BirdLife's  
education programme. Aimed at children of primary  
school age, the aim of the programme is to inspire the  
next generation to discover more about Manx birds and to  
learn how they can help protect and save them.

Our thanks to the Scheinberg family for enabling the  
programme to continue for a further three years.

On behalf of the team, I'd like to wish you a very merry  
Christmas and a happy bird-filled New Year!

Michelle Storton

## Garden Birdwatch Top Ten

Position Period 3 2017		Species	Position Period 3 2016
1=	↑	Robin	2
1=	↑	Blackbird	3
3	↓	House Sparrow	1
4	↑	Blue Tit	5
5	↑	Chaffinch	7=
6=	↑	Great Tit	7=
6=	↔	Collared Dove	6
8=	↓	Jackdaw	3
8=	↓	Magpie	9=
9	↔	Goldfinch	9=

Perhaps as a result of the autumn's influx of continental  
birds into the British Isles, Robin and Blackbird moved to  
the top of the table. Associated with them were good  
numbers of migrant Redwing, Fieldfare and Song Thrush.



Greenfinch © John Donnelly

Sadly, Chaffinch and  
Goldfinch are the  
only true finches to  
appear in the top  
ten. We remain  
deeply concerned  
about the fate of our  
Greenfinches, which  
continue to succumb

to the nasty, highly contagious *Trichomonosis* disease.

To combat this and other avian diseases, it's important to  
regularly clean and, ideally, wash with disinfectant your  
bird feeders – and the ground beneath your feeding area  
where seed shells and other debris accumulates.

A few lucky observers recorded Treecreeper, Brambling  
and Great Spotted Woodpecker on their garden lists this  
year. While the rarest of all was a  
Siberian Lesser Whitethroat!

## Garden Birdwatch sponsorship

Our renewed thanks to the Manx  
Ornithological Society for its support  
and continued sponsorship of the  
Garden Birdwatch scheme.



## Identification challenges!

Many of our local birds are under threat, none more so than two species which historically have featured regularly in Garden Birdwatch reports. As both Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer become ever rarer – the latter possibly already extinct as a Manx resident – records of these species become increasingly important.

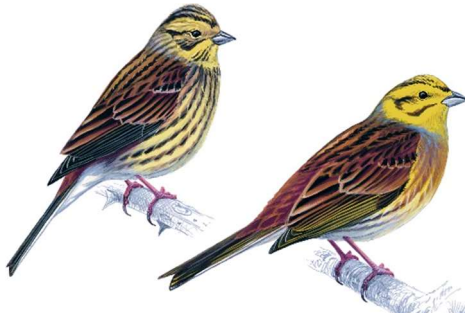
We are aware that identifying Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer can sometimes be a challenge, so here are some helpful tips and comparisons with look-a-like species that you can expect to see on your bird table and feeders:

### Challenge 1 – yellow birds



Siskin (male left, female/immature right)

Blue Tit size with short tail. Colour is a combination of greys, greens and yellows with no warm rufous tones. Male has blacker plumage especially black cap and bib. All have obvious broad yellow wing bars. Especially fond of peanuts in red hanging bags. **Increasingly frequent garden visitor.**



Yellowhammer (female left, male right)

Larger and longer tailed than a Sparrow. Note the brick red rump and triangular blue-grey bills of both male and female, and intensely yellow head of the male. Body colouration is warm reddish brown lacking pale wing bars. Tail has white sides. **Extremely rare, possibly extinct, in the Isle of Man.**



Greenfinch (male)

Stocky sparrow-sized with stout bill. Overall green with greyer face and wings. Yellow wing panel and bases to outer tail feathers. Female and immature similar but duller. Males can appear very bright almost yellow but lack Yellowhammer's rufous browns. **Scarce and rapidly declining.**

### Challenge 2 – sparrows



House Sparrow (male left, female/immature right)

Male plumage consists of blacks, greys, rich browns with diagnostic extensive grey crown, plain whitish or pale grey cheek and chestnut colour behind the eye and on back of the head. Female and immature drab, lacking male's head and face pattern. **A common garden resident.**



Dunnock

Non-descript drab brown with plain dark grey face and underparts. Jerky and shuffling gait, almost always feeding on the ground. Shy and dives for cover when disturbed. Both sexes and all ages similar. Note the almost needle-like thin black bill and pink legs. **A common garden resident.**



Tree Sparrow

Often confused with male House Sparrow but note the white cheek with black 'ear' spot. White extends round back of neck. Also, diagnostic all-brown/chestnut head without grey crown or pale eye spot. Male and female look alike. **Now a very rare and fast declining Manx bird.**

All illustrations above by Mike Langman (Courtesy of rspb-images.com)



## Manx Hen Harrier *Aalin* continues to thrive in Wales!

You might recall that *Aalin* was satellite-tagged in the Isle of Man as a nestling in the summer of 2016. After leaving the Island and crossing the Irish Sea, she eventually took up residence in the Welsh hills.

The latest tracking data shows her making forays across her new Welsh homeland as she feeds and roosts each day. *Aalin* appeared to partner with a Welsh male Hen Harrier in the summer of 2017 but did not nest.

We'll bring you more news as we get it. The Manx BirdLife office is now taking bets on whether *Aalin* will stay in Wales to nest in 2018 or return to the Isle of Man! Our thanks to RSPB's Life+ Hen Harrier Project team.



## Top ten birdwatching sites

We have received a whopping 8,124 records from birdwatchers around the Island this year.

You can check these out on the online noticeboard at [www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings](http://www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings) (though please note we do not publish records of rare nesting species). If you aren't in the habit already, you can report your sightings using the online reporting form on the website at [www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings/submit-your-sightings](http://www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings/submit-your-sightings).

We've analysed the reports we've received to find out where everyone has been birdwatching. See the summary below of the top ten most popular sites.

Rank	Location	Records
1	Derbyhaven Bay	944
2	Ballachurry MWT Nature Reserve	677
3	Langness and environs	633
4	Agneash Valley	380
5	Peel Harbour and Bay	358
6	Ballaghennie (and The Ayres)	344
7	Point of Ayre	282
8	Castletown Bay and town	262
9	Douglas Bay and town	219
10	Ramsey and environs	202

## Bird ID courses

In 2017, Tim Earl led two sell-out bird identification courses – one in spring, the other in autumn. These built on the success of courses that had run in 2016.

Each course featured a series of evening classes and field trips. Participants learned about bird structure, behaviour moult and more – as well as how to identify some of the more tricky species to be found around the Island. Field trips enabled participants to 'put theory into practice' at some of the best birdwatching sites.

We hope to be able to run further courses with Tim in 2018. They are bound to prove popular so do get in touch if you'd like to be put on the shortlist. As soon as we have dates and venues arranged, we'll let you know.



Would you know a Common Gull (above) from a Herring Gull? (© Neil G. Morris)

## Two new birds for the Isle of Man

### From long legs...

In May 2017, Sean Gray found a female Black-winged Stilt on the private gravel pits near the Point of Ayre.

Black-winged Stilt is a wetland bird of Mediterranean and more southern and eastern countries. However, the species has been arriving with increasing frequency in the last few years as a spring 'overshoot' to the British Isles.

This increasing occurrence is possibly a result of climate change. Sometimes these wanderers arrive in groups and settle to breed in the UK. Possibly it's only a matter of time before we are treated to the sight of nesting Black-winged Stilts here on the Island!



Adult Black-winged Stilt, Qatar (© Neil G. Morris)

### ...to broad bills

May was proving to be a good month for spring migration with a long period of persistent easterly winds.

Arriving at the same time as the Stilt was a Broad-billed Sandpiper, found by Neil Morris in the high-tide roost in Derbyhaven Bay. This charismatic 'humbag' of a wader would have been on its way to Arctic breeding grounds in Scandinavia or Russia, but presumably was blown off course by those easterly winds.

While the Stilt made only a brief stop, the Sandpiper was seen over a number of days. Better still, it spent most of its time feeding in an accessible public place – in the middle of the bay, meaning many local birdwatchers and photographers managed to get to grips with it.



Broad-billed Sandpiper (© Neil G. Morris)

## Save our seabirds, send us your stamps!



The world's seabirds are in grave danger. Amongst the fastest declining species are the albatrosses. The main threat to these majestic ocean travellers is death on a hook at the end of a fishing line.

It's estimated that an incredible 100,000 albatrosses are killed every year by long-line and trawl fishing vessels in the southern oceans.

Fifteen out of the 22 albatross species are threatened with extinction, but you can help. We've been collecting stamps in the Manx BirdLife office for many years; now we are asking you to send us yours too for this special cause. You can drop them into our office or post them to us at 35 New Road, Laxey IM4 7BG.

We'll collect as many stamps as we can and send these onto our friends at the RSPB. You can read about the RSPB's 'Save your stamps' for albatrosses campaign at: [www.rspb.org.uk/join-and-donate/other-ways-to-help/save-your-stamps/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/join-and-donate/other-ways-to-help/save-your-stamps/).

## Become a friend of Manx BirdLife



The Friends of Manx BirdLife scheme has been relaunched.

As a friend, you will be directly supporting our conservation work to save the island's wild birds and their habitats. There is much work to be done!

For more about becoming a friend, please call Neil Morris or Michelle Storton on 01624 861130. Thank you.

## Education update



Since 2016, the Manx BirdLife education programme has worked with 2,530 young people

and visited twenty different schools. These visits can be as short as 20-25 minutes, for example delivering a whole-school assembly. Or they can run to an all-day workshop visiting different classes or working with a single class on a specific curriculum topic.

**We are pleased to announce that we can now provide every school on the Island with a FREE 'Feed the birds' pack including a RSPB Children's Guide to Birdwatching book and a bird feeding station with two bird feeders.**

If you work in a school or know someone who does and you think they'd welcome a visit from Manx BirdLife, ask them to email Michelle at [education@manxbirdlife.im](mailto:education@manxbirdlife.im).

## Wishing you a merry Christmas!



Robin in the snow © [www.cardaid.co.uk](http://www.cardaid.co.uk)

On behalf of Neil and Michelle, our trustees, friends, volunteers, sponsors and our partners, we wish you a wonderful Christmas and a very happy bird-filled New Year.

**Good birdwatching!**

**PS. Don't forget to join in the Christmas Bird Race. Details at [www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings/christmas-bird-race](http://www.manxbirdlife.im/sightings/christmas-bird-race)**

## Please make a contribution

"In order for us to cover all the costs associated with the Garden Birdwatch Scheme, we ask participants to donate just £5.00. This covers, for each Garden Birdwatch participant for one year, those costs in addition to printing that are not met by the kind sponsorship of the Manx Ornithological Society.

I have added the donation form below and would be most grateful if you would return this with your £5.00 annual contribution. (Please make cheques payable to 'Manx BirdLife'). Thank you, Michelle."

☐ I enclose a £5 contribution to help to cover the costs of the Garden Birdwatch Scheme

☐ I also wish to make a further donation of £\_\_\_\_\_ towards the conservation work of Manx BirdLife

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for helping to conserve the Isle of Man's wild birds and their habitats**

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