



Twitterings

Newsletter of the Manx Ornithological Society Issue 4, December 2017

Editorial

It was a surprise to me when Anne announced just recently our 50th anniversary. I think after a while you just stop counting. We need to catch up with this one, though, and at least have a small celebration for members, so please do contact us with your memories, photos, ideas or anything else appropriate towards the AGM evening. Fifty years is a significant achievement for a society like ours and we hope that you will help us celebrate in March.

Sometimes we are scratching around for reports on events, but this year I received three on one very successful visit to the Calf. I could have just picked my favourite but they were such different perspectives and styles that I decided to include all three. It would be great to have a photo to support each event article in future. Thank you to all of the authors and photographers and please continue to send in your contributions. You don't need to wait until the autumn.

Richard Selman

Avian flu

Richard Selman

In December 2016 avian flu was found in pheasants in Lancashire.

UK restrictions were brought into force, with strict rules on keeping hens indoors for a period.

Luckily we were, by then, past the main westward bird movements (barring cold snaps) so DEFA decided on a gentler approach, advising against contact between hens and wild birds. It is not really practical for many hen keepers here to keep them indoors, without requiring different facilities in many cases. A lucky miss.

50 years and still growing!

Anne Kaye

Recently while reading an old newspaper cutting by Felicity Cain written in 1992 following the death of Ted Kerruish I realised that the MOS is 50 years old this year.

Ted was one of the founder members of the Manx Bird Club when it was formed in 1967 on the demise of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society Field Club. Allen Moore, the Editor of *Peregrine*, was present at the first meetings at the age of 10! The name changed to the Manx Ornithological Society in 1975 to reflect the valuable research work being done by the club. At the AGM next March we hope to display memorabilia and talk about the history of the club. If you have any contributions please let us know.

Broad-billed sandpiper – a new species for the Isle of Man

Neil G. Morris

On 6th May 2017 I had the great fortune to discover a summer-plumaged broad-billed sandpiper (*Calidris falcinellus*) at Derbyhaven Bay, the first recorded occurrence of the species in the Isle of Man.

I had risen at 4.30 on a cold clear morning to undertake an ornithological survey of an estate in the south of the Island. Despite a brisk northeasterly breeze keeping temperatures low, the sky was crystal blue and the survey quickly completed. Heading home, I detoured via Derbyhaven. I was keen to scrutinise the flocks of waders that I had noticed accumulating in the bay over the past two mornings. Persistent northeasterly winds across Western Europe were driving northbound migrating waders off their usual more easterly routes and across to the west coasts of the British Isles.



Broad-billed sandpiper



Siberian chiffchaff, Sound of Man, 19th April 2017

Several bird species of easterly origin had already been found in Cornwall, Wales and Scotland. Indeed, two weeks earlier I had found a Siberian chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita tristis*) at the Sound, no doubt carried on the same northeasterlies.

On arriving at Derbyhaven it was close to high tide. On all fours I crept to a location I knew to be good for viewing the roosting wader flocks without disturbing them. After half an hour, I had counted 250 dunlin, 5 whimbrel, 3 sanderling, one knot and many ringed plover. Shivering from the cold air and wet grass on which I was lying, I decided to make one last sweep through the flocks before heading home for breakfast.

At 09.16 during this last search I noticed a small wader facing away from me at no more than 15 yards distance. It had strikingly bold black and white spangled upperparts. It shuffled and turned to look over its shoulder and I knew instantly it was a broad-billed sandpiper. I have watched many in the Middle East and have seen two in the UK.

After that moment of elation that always follows the finding of a rare bird, a calm check of the salient identification features was needed: black and white 'humbug' striped head with forked white supercilia, stark white underparts, black and white upperparts with a hint of bronze in the covert edges, peculiar straight black bill with a teardrop tip; all check!

With the identification clinched, I released the news at 9.19am via WhatsApp, Twitter and text message.



Broad-billed sandpiper (left)

Derbyhaven offers excellent viewing conditions and with the falling tide I knew the dispersing flocks of dunlin would take the broad-billed sandpiper with them into the bay where it could be watched easily by everyone.

It's an amazing feat of modern cameras that in the three minutes between finding, identifying and switching on my phone to report the sandpiper, I had captured 96 images – ensuring I had all the evidence needed! Over three days, the sandpiper stayed faithful to the same small area of Derbyhaven Bay.

It's a thrill to find rare birds, a great privilege to be in their company at close quarters, and an even greater pleasure to know that others have shared in the excitement. During its stay many of the Island's birdwatchers and photographers were able to enjoy this little humbug from the east. It was last reported by Brian Liggins on the evening of 8th May.

Broad-billed sandpipers are strongly migratory. They nest in wet taiga bogs in Arctic northern Europe and Siberia. Their wintering grounds are in easternmost Africa, through south and southeast Asia to Australasia. The species is extremely rare in the British Isles due its southeasterly migration route. This constitutes the first record of in the Isle of Man and one of very few ever to be seen away from the British east coast.

Close encounter

Neil G. Morris

When Janet and I took the group out on a Monday evening in Port Erin looking for swifts, we had a 'close encounter of the peregrine kind'.

We were watching a distant adult peregrine, cruising over the hills to the south of the bay, when it towered high into the air then stooped and powered towards us. Clearly it was in hunting mode. Just as we were enjoying the views of this dashing bird, it came low right over our heads and took a collared dove out of the sky. It was so close that we were showered with a fall of feathers, which exploded out of the dove when the peregrine made impact.

I think everyone was both stunned and elated to witness the drama within touching distance above our heads. The peregrine with its quarry headed back south and disappeared behind the cliffs towards the Sound.

Andreas and Ramsey receive treatment

Richard Selman

Manx Utilities has reported that the new treatment works at Balladoole began accepting sewage from Ramsey on 3rd July.

Although the old outfall pipe is still used, there is no longer any raw sewage discharged through it into Ramsey Bay. The Andreas pump station became active

on 11th July, ceasing the discharge of raw sewage onto Smeale. This will create a more natural situation on the Central Ayres Area of Special Scientific Interest and the Ramsey Bay Marine Nature Reserve, though we expect to lose aggregations of diving ducks at the outfalls.

Pelagic trip 18th August 2017

Neil Hanson

The usual annual MOS trip from Port St Mary took place on a pleasant, if rather breezy, evening with 12 members, including the writer, embarking on Juan Clague's *Scraayl* and a similar number on Bob Taylor's *Gemini*.

The start was slightly delayed due to an outbreak of consternation on *Scraayl* when someone said 'Where's Harley?' and it was realised that Juan's best friend was still on the breakwater! After a quick about turn, Harley was duly collected and handed over and the boat could leave with its full complement, followed closely by *Gemini*.

The highlight of the evening came quickly when, near the Sugarloaf, Bob unloaded fish from *Gemini* prompting a feeding frenzy of gulls, which attracted a Bonxie (great skua), a first for the writer. After this excitement had died down Juan paused at the Sugarloaf. Almost all the auks had left the area except for a few guillemot adults and juveniles, but the ledges were densely populated by kittiwakes; more, said Anne Kaye, than for many years.

Gannets, fulmars, shags, great black-backs and herring gulls were all in evidence throughout the trip, with an occasional cough but fewer than one would normally expect. Seals, both adults and pups, could be seen on the rocks of the Calf and a peregrine was briefly observed near the Burroo. Meanwhile, those on *Gemini* saw lesser black-backs, oystercatchers, curlews and jackdaws.

At the Chicken Rock there were numerous adult and pup seals, and a pause to enjoy Anne's delicious apricot slices at the calmest point of the voyage gave ample opportunity to watch Manx shearwaters close to the boat.

Moving on, Juan started on a semi-circular route from the Chickens back to Port St Mary. Shortly after leaving the Chickens there was a cry of 'Puffins' and we saw two on the surface, which quickly took off. After a rather bumpy area of sea, it calmed down and, with the distance from land increasing, numerous Manx shearwaters could be seen, some of which came very close to the boat. Even further out to sea, three Risso's dolphins were sighted from *Gemini*.

Time passed quickly and we were soon back in Port St Mary after a very pleasant and rewarding evening, which again proved the advantages of the pelagic trip, particularly for seeing large numbers of Manx shearwaters.

Finally, many thanks to Juan and Bob and their respective crews, to Anne for her excellent baking and to Janet for arranging this and the season's other boat trips.

Clear views at the Gravel Pits

Richard Selman

33 people took a walk around the Point of Ayre gravel pits (Island Aggregates) on 11th December 2016, on an event fitted into the calendar shortly beforehand.



Gravel Pits photo: © Richard Selman

In complete contrast to the visit the previous winter, the weather was dry and we enjoyed fine views of a range of duck species. There were lots of wigeon, with their characteristic call and yellow crown stripe on the drakes, quite a few tufted ducks, with the bright white side panels on the drakes, but amongst them were a few immature goldeneyes and a couple of gadwalls. Occasional teal were spotted on various pits, with their beautiful green and red heads. On the northern pit there were half a dozen goosanders (mostly drakes) with their sharp-edged head colouring and a couple of shelducks, another large whitish duck. At the northern end of this pit there was a small number of shovelers, showing rusty flanks, and quite a few pochards. Sean pointed out that most of the pochards were drakes, because the females tend to fly further south in the winter.

A kestrel flew overhead, as did carrion and hooded crows, and there was a magpie stalking the gravel flats. These islets, once the binoculars were focused on them, had 3 lapwings, with their crests blowing around in the breeze, and behind them a heron lurked, still as a statue, under the edge of the willow fringing.

There were plenty of coots and herring gulls, a few great black-backed gulls, but surprisingly few scrub birds were seen, though blackbirds and a wren were heard, a linnet was spotted and on the shore there was a pied wagtail. A solitary mute swan graced a pool in the working area and I believe that a dabchick was spotted, a rare species on the Isle of Man. There were plenty of cormorants, most of them roosting on an island where 20–30 nest each year.

Steven Smyth of Island Aggregates, the owner, said that the plans for a nature reserve were now moving forward again, with the company having agreed the principles, and it is hoped that Manx BirdLife may get a lease on the oldest area shortly, then will work towards

safe public access that avoids disturbance of the birds (there is no public access currently). The site is locally significant for breeding tufted duck, cormorant and coot as well as the wintering visitors. The ducks were very skittish, moving between pits as we moved around the site, so it will be great once agreed access has been settled and provisions made to avoid unnecessary disturbance whilst providing enjoyment for visitors and a first-class bird reserve.

Thanks to Sean and Steven Smyth for taking the group around this interesting site.

Langness 13th April 2017

Chris Lo Bao

A good number of members turned up to this walk. 35 bird species were seen, compared with last year's 44, but last year we had Neil with us, and birds tend to hop out when he's about.

There was a cold north wind, which did not help with the migration. Maybe the walk should be a week or two later? The highlight was 3 red-breasted mergansers, but we also saw skylarks, choughs, willow warblers, linnets, shelducks, white wagtails, gannets, little egrets, redshanks, turnstones, teal, ringed plovers and stonechats.

Watch for woodcock Phynodderee

Richard Selman

Chris Heward of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust visited the Island in March to put a satellite-tag on a Manx-sponsored woodcock.

The Manx Game Preservation Society paid for it, but it was part of a larger project by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. It turned out to be one of the biggest woodcocks they had ever caught, almost 400g.

A partial migrant, Scandinavian and East European birds winter here, joining resident birds, and in hard winters birds may arrive from as far away as western Siberia. Chris gave a good talk about his research on this species. He said that they make long, fast migration jumps of 500–1000m in up to 10 days, until their fat is used up, then stop over and fatten up for a week and move on again.



Phynodderee the woodcock

When breeding the males rode in flying circuits but they may still roost together. This operates like a lek. Wide forest rides are used by roding males, where they can spot females on the ground. On the Isle of Man they nest in dry areas with cover but take the chicks to wetter areas in the wood, so they need to find wet and dry areas in the same wood. The north and west of Britain seem less affected by the breeding population decline than elsewhere.

There was an interesting discussion about the shooting season: if shooting after mid November, we could avoid shooting many residents as the migrants will then far outnumber them. Since the talk, we have seen Phynodderee fly through Sweden and Estonia to spend the summer in northern Russia. It was last reported from the Swedish island of Gotland. Watch out for its next move on woodcockwatch.com.

Waders and seabirds at blustery Derbyhaven

Richard Selman

An extra event was added (after the swift talk was postponed a year) to look at waders and migrants around Derbyhaven on 10th September 2017.

A small group (just four) met in the village and looked out over the bay as big waves rolled behind St Michael's Isle, on the kind of day that makes you feel very alive but not wishing to wander too far from the car in case you get soaked. The rain had stopped before we got there and we made the best of a good break in the weather. Shags, with a few cormorants, lined up along the breakwater and occasional gannets wheeled above them. A few eiders bobbed on the water and a small group of ringed plovers and a dunlin sat on the last of the seaweed in the bay as the tide rose around them. On the shore side was a flotilla of mallards, with the usual lone domestic goose. Two juvenile stonechats then appeared just next to us, when they were disturbed by a dog walker, and perched on the beachhead vegetation.

We then drove to the Madoc Memorial, where three choughs flew overhead before we left the cars. We walked the road past the saltmarsh and, as the light brightened, we saw a flock of 130 curlews, and getting our eyes in we saw a few redshanks and a dunlin. Little egrets were scattered or in small groups (9 in all).

I had spotted what appeared to be a greenshank in the stinking dub as we drove past, though hadn't had an opportunity to look properly, but failed to find it again. We did see small groups of wigeon, some goldfinches and a few rock pipits. At the northern end of the marsh was a flock of about 130 oystercatchers, with 7 sandwich terns, including one juvenile with a dusky cap and forehead and dark-flecked back and wings. There were still many flowers, including sea asters, and a chough threw seaweed around further up the beach amongst the corvids and gulls.

Altogether 24 birds species were seen along the shoreline. A more relaxing alternative to the End-to-End Cycle Race taking place on the same day.

Palace birds

Richard Selman

In March 2017 the Manx Plant and Garden Conservation Society hosted Mark Lane, the head gardener of the 39-acre Buckingham Palace Gardens, at the Studio Theatre, which was decked out with beautiful arrangements of camelias.

This walled expanse in central London is seen only rarely by outsiders, during the twice-a-year garden parties. Amongst the talk of buildings, gardens and plants we learnt that bird surveys have shown that it hosts 67 species of birds, and we saw a slide of a tawny owl fledged in February.

Also surveyed were bees, dragonflies, butterflies and moths. The Palace is self-sufficient in honey from the garden hives. We heard that they have a very rare giant hogweed, only found in Oxford Botanic Gardens, north Norway and the Palace. They used to cut the flowers off to prevent it spreading but now leave the flowers and cut off the seedheads to favour the bees.

Bearded tits at Leighton Moss

Gill and Steve Johnstone

As you pass the footpath entrance to the car park at RSPB Leighton Moss in Lancashire, there is a notice board. On the board is displayed a beautiful picture of a bearded tit. On every one of our many visits to Leighton Moss my husband Steve says, 'That is a bird I want to see, and some day I will.'

Earlier this year on a visit there, we enquired of the very knowledgeable volunteers in the shop when the best time to see them would be. We were told precisely the second week in October. On our return to the Island we booked for Leighton Moss for, yes, you've guessed it, the second week in October.

In case you didn't know, the bearded tit or bearded reedling is not a true tit. Recent research suggests it is a unique songbird and no other living species seems to be closely related to it. The bird itself is particularly attractive, as can be seen from the photographs. They are a sociable, noisy bird and they have a distinctive 'ping' call, which we could hear throughout the reedbeds. They are year-round residents of reedbeds and during the summer months feed predominantly on insect larvae, reed aphids and spiders.

Around autumn time, when this food source becomes scarce, they then swap their diet for reed seeds. However, in order for them to cope with this change in feeding pattern and digest the seeds, they require grit in their diet, which they obtain from the ground, and at Leighton Moss also from the grit trays that have been



Male bearded tit

set up in various areas around the reserve. The grit trays are the reason we can see these birds in numbers at Leighton Moss.

We arrived at Leighton Moss at around 8am on 13th October 2017. As we walked down the causeway towards the spot where the birds are usually seen, we saw birdwatchers everywhere with their scopes, binoculars and cameras. Some had seats, flasks and sandwiches – they were clearly there for the long haul. Speaking with some of the birders, they had come from all over the country, some for just the day in order to get a glimpse of the bearded tits.

We were told the birds usually appeared between 9.30am and 11am. At around 9.20am the first bird arrived on the grit tray. Conversation between the birders was instantly silenced as we all concentrated on the bird, cameras clicking furiously. Further bearded tits appeared and we were delighted to enjoy a lovely display by the birds, darting between the grit trays and amongst the reeds, seemingly not noticing the array of birders avidly watching them. It is a truly lovely bird and the way it perches with legs akimbo on the reeds is so clever and almost comical.



Female bearded tit

Needless to say, we just had to come back the next day, and the next. Steve managed to take many photographs and a couple of these are included here.

You may wonder why I have written this piece on a bird that is not resident or, as far as I am aware, seen in the Isle of Man. Well, apart from them being a delightful bird to watch, you never know, they might make it over here some day, blown across on an easterly wind from England or westerly from Ireland, and end up in the reedbeds at Ballachurry (a favourite reserve of ours). Ah well, we can but dream!

Seriously though, if you get the chance on your birding trips to the UK, look out for the bearded tits. You will not be disappointed. And finally, if you wish to visit RSPB Leighton Moss, there are of course a number of properties available for rent in the area. We stayed in Gamekeepers Cottage, a bijou cottage for two. We booked this through Sykes Cottages. It is a simple, nicely presented cottage, located a few hundred yards from the A6 road in Hale, Milnthorpe, with only a 9-minute drive to Leighton Moss. Ideally placed to visit the surrounding area in Lancashire and Cumbria.

Happy birding.

A tizzy of starlings!

Gill Johnstone

4th November 2017 will remain etched in my memory as this was the day that I witnessed my best wildlife experience thus far.

We (husband Steve and I) had decided to go birdwatching to Langness. At 8am we duly set out and stopped off first at the area between Sandwick and the saltmarshes. It was a typical autumn day with some sunshine peeping through the clouds, but there was a strong wind with the tide fairly high. The sea was rough and we had experienced storms over the last few days which had deposited piles of seaweed ashore.

As we approached the beach via the golf course, the sky was full of birds, with many hundreds more on the

beach enjoying the bounty from the sea that the storm had kindly provided. It seems that there are advantages for some to the windy weather we experience on this Island of ours.

Birds we spotted were herring gulls, black-headed gulls, great black-backed gulls, choughs, oystercatchers, pied wagtails and last, but not least, numerous starlings. There were flocks of gulls and starlings continually passing overhead, traversing the beach looking for a spot to land. The starlings already on the beach were camouflaged by the seaweed and gorging on insects (I think). The sound from the gulls was overshadowed by the chattering of the starlings.

We had walked along the top edge of the beach with Steve taking photographs along the way. I was glued to my binoculars, taking in this wonderful sight and enjoying the voices of so many birds.

Suddenly the sound intensity from all the birds rose and the feeding starlings took to the air. I then spotted a peregrine falcon flying towards the starlings. What happened next was a truly amazing sight. The starlings in the air came ever closer together, forming a large ball of birds as the peregrine falcon swooped towards the ball. We presume that the birds formed this ball in order to confuse the peregrine.

The sight reminded us of the bait balls shown on underwater wildlife programmes, where fish form these tight balls in order to confuse predators, but the intelligent predators work together as a team, bringing the bait balls to the surface and then enjoying the fruits of their labours. Unfortunately, the poor lone peregrine did not have that luxury and his efforts were thwarted that day by the clever starlings.

A murmuration, you may say, but this did not look like a typical murmuration. Research on the internet describes a murmuration as a coming together of birds flying in unison. The birds that day appeared to be panicking, flying in every direction, bumping into each other, feathers and debris flying in the air. The scientific minds amongst you expert birders will have the answers, but, being a simple soul and not one to take matters too

seriously, and also using a degree of poetic licence, I have decided that the phenomenon will henceforth be known (by me at least) as a 'tizzy' as the birds seemed to be in a tizzy.

Steve managed to get a photograph of the starlings forming the ball and then dispersing afterwards. When, on our return home, he looked at the photographs in more detail, he noticed a chough amongst the starlings in the dispersal photograph, its red beak differentiating itself from the starlings.

This marvellous experience was over in a minute but will be remembered by us for a very long time.



Starlings photo: © Steve Johnstone

New Regional Representative for IoM

As many of you will know, Pat Cullen retired earlier this year from the role of BTO Regional Representative (RR) for the Isle of Man, after almost forty years in the post.

He had been looking for someone to take over from him for some time and the subject had often cropped up when I talked with him at MOS meetings. At the Celebrating Manx Birds conference last year he mentioned it again and, having told him I knew a few people at BTO HQ in Thetford, I had previously done a Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) square in Norfolk and (as he knew) was now doing two squares on the Island, I felt that, as the conversation progressed, he might have been thinking I would make a likely candidate! Earlier this year he again sought a volunteer to take over from him but as none was forthcoming I decided to take the plunge and applied to the BTO for the post; I was accepted in August this year.

The BTO

For those of you who are not sure what the BTO is and does (and at the risk of boring those of you who may have already ploughed through my previous letters on the subject) the British Trust for Ornithology was established in the early 1930s and was originally mainly involved with bird ringing, though in 1928 its predecessor had already started a census of heronries.

Over the decades since then it has expanded its activities to include a huge range of surveys and projects looking into the status of birds. It is a charity and the principal organiser of science-based bird surveys across the British Isles, monitoring their breeding success, movements and population changes and investigating the reasons for these changes. A vast amount of data is collected annually by about 40,000 volunteer surveyors, counters and ringers, mostly amateur birdwatchers like us, and analysed by professional ornithologists, ecologists, statisticians and other scientists at BTO's headquarters at Thetford in Norfolk.

Data from other sources, e.g. annual Bird Reports and bird clubs, is also fed into this huge resource. All this information is then available to governments and other bodies when, for example, making local and national planning decisions. Research by the BTO into possible hazards facing birds from on- and off-shore wind farms is already being used when considering future sites. The fact that the BTO is totally independent in providing objective and unbiased scientific facts about birds and their habitats obviously lends great weight to the reliability of the information it can provide.

The RR role

The role of the RR in all of this is mainly to do with co-ordinating and organising volunteers who take part in any of the surveys in the region.

In many of the larger regions in the UK, for example the larger counties, this work is often delegated to Regional Organisers (ROs) responsible for specific surveys, e.g. BBS or WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey). In the Isle of Man the RR is relatively 'lucky' as, although there are about 40 WeBS sites (about 20 of which have been covered in the past with some still regularly monitored), we have only 13 BBS sites and 9 Heronries (BTO figures, maybe only six still active) so the RR can combine both roles.

The RR's other responsibilities include promoting the BTO generally, liaising with other bird groups and communicating with the wider public (and again on the Island we are very lucky in having not only a thriving bird club in the MOS but also Manx BirdLife to help in this). Education is also important, especially with the younger age groups, and the BTO is keen to promote this to encourage children to develop their interest in birds as well as other wildlife. We need to be developing the potential in young people to produce the next generation of birdwatchers.

Over the years the BTO has used a number of slogans to get its message across; an early one was (something like) 'When you are out watching, make it count', and the current message with the latest logo is 'Looking out for birds'; both messages are of course a play on words. A new slogan, which I think we'll see more of, is 'Inspired by birds, Informed by science', which is both brief and appropriate.

This year I attended my first Regional Network meeting in Bristol, in November; it's an annual event designed to bring RRs, ROs and Regional Ambassadors together from around the regions, with a 'meet and greet' on the Friday and a full day of talks, discussions and workshops on the following day. About 40 delegates attended and seven staff, including Dawn Balmer and three others from the HQ, plus one each from the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland offices. It was a very enjoyable weekend, not only for the talks and discussions but also in being able to meet so many other (usually very experienced) RRs and ROs and also to catch up with some of the other BTO staff I had got to know when living in Thetford. One RR, who has been covering North East Wales for 25 years, has 40 BBS squares in her region, which makes my job sound fairly easy!

Some successes in 2017

Earlier this year, and following the circulation by Janet Thompson of a BTO introductory offer, four MOS members joined the BTO, bringing the total membership on the Island to 53 members/non-member volunteers.

In last year's *Twitterings* (issue 3) a piece by Pat Cullen and Richard Selman outlined, in some detail, many of the BTO surveys in which MOS members can take part. Early this year Pat circulated a similar list of the surveys to try



to generate some interest, and finally, following another appeal at the MOS November meeting, three members have said they would like to take on some survey work and a fourth may be re-joining the BBS 'team' to take on a square again. This is great news and hopefully we can get some more BBS coverage in 2018.

When I spoke about the BTO and the RR role at the October MOS meeting, I said that, as someone new in the post, I was bound to make a few mistakes. Well, I've made one already: I said that apart from Pat and myself, the only other person to do a BBS square was Suzanne Slatter. That was incorrect, as from 2004 to 2007 David Evans did two squares, and in 1997 and 1998, Mr P. Ward did one square (though Pat wasn't aware of it at the time). So my apologies to those two volunteers for the error.

Looking forward

Since returning from the Regional Network meeting I have received vast amounts of information, instructions and guidance from the BTO, including a draft of the new Regional Network Handbook, which runs to 42 pages! So I am going to be very busy in the months ahead. I'm fairly happy with BBS now but really need to get to grips with WeBS and find out who is currently doing which sites so that I can get an overall view of things.

In last year's *Twitterings*, Pat mentioned that in the past the River Glass and Laxey River had been surveyed for the Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS) but the BTO does not show any coverage at the moment. Head of BBS, Sarah Harris, is also now responsible for WBBS and, I believe, hopes to include the Isle of Man in the survey again.



Next year 2018 is the 90th anniversary of the Heronries Census and it would be nice to get some more (all?) of the sites covered to mark the event. The census now covers breeding little egret and cormorant as well. I hope to find out who has done them in the past and who would be willing to help fill in the gaps. I can get some information from the Heronries team at BTO but it would be nice to speak to people here to get some first-hand information.

For several years some BBS surveyors have been using their squares to count butterflies as a separate exercise, as part of the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey run in the UK by Butterfly Conservation. Over the years participation has decreased, possibly due to

various factors: a mid-day survey may not suit everybody, unsuitable weather for visits or a general decline in interest. Sarah Harris mentioned this at the meeting and seemed quite keen to get it going again. If any of our BBS volunteers are interested perhaps the records could be available to Garry Curtis for the Butterfly Report. I'll get some clarification from Sarah on this.

Finally BTO is launching a new Project Owl later in 2018 and there may be some work we can do to support this on the Island. More information on this later.

Too early for New Year resolutions?

Well, here are some of mine:

- Must get out with the binoculars much more often.
- I will make more effort to report bird sightings, both to MBL and BTO BirdTrack, more promptly and, hopefully, do some more survey work.
- I also hope to keep in touch with more BTO news items on an occasional basis, or maybe even a quarterly newsletter.

If you have read this far, congratulations! Happy Christmas and good birding in 2018.

Reed warbler – 2nd breeding record for the Island

Sheila Norris

Being totally unfamiliar with reed warblers, I'd heard what I thought must be a sedge warbler singing a slightly different song from usual as I walked round Ballachurry Reserve, Rushen, on 9th June 2017.

A few days later I walked round the reserve with a party of Rushen Scouts who were working towards their Naturalist Activity badge, and heard it again. By chance experienced birder Tim Earl visited the reserve that evening and identified the call for us as a reed warbler. Neil Morris from Manx Birdlife likewise heard it around that time. This was very exciting news for Ballachurry Reserve – a new species record!

I unwittingly took a distant shot of it on 31st July. Neil patiently corrected my faulty identification when I submitted the photo to Manx Birdlife along with the other sightings for the reserve that day. Neil then watched the reeds for a long time and observed adults going in and out, presumably feeding young. It looked very like we had a breeding record for them.

Walking round the reserve on 7th August, I was delighted to have good views of a reed warbler clinging to reed stems. I stood, hardly daring to breathe, half hidden behind a hawthorn bush, and managed to get some record shot photos. Suddenly, just as I pressed the shutter, the parent bird flew in to feed the youngster. I had caught the moment purely by chance! The breeding record was confirmed beyond doubt and this proved to be only the second on the Island.

The presence of the birds was not immediately made public in order to prevent possible disturbance and I withheld the photo from the Ballachurry blog, only adding it much later.

Exciting times indeed for Ballachurry Reserve!

Bird identification courses

Janet Thompson

Thanks to Tim Earl for making time in his busy schedule there have been another two bird identification courses this year.

Tim runs three workshop-based sessions and three field trips per course, although due to the inclement weather on the last course there were four outdoor sessions. This course is greatly enjoyed by the participants and many people sign up for a second time.

Grateful thanks also to Liz Charter who brings her scope (and expertise!) on the field trips so everyone has a chance to see the birds at close range. Tim and Liz give their time freely and all the proceeds from the courses go to Manx BirdLife for the benefit of birding in the Isle of Man. We hope there will be another course next year, so if you are interested, sign up quickly to secure a place. Tim and Liz are also hoping to organise a trip to Leighton Moss and Martin Mere, possibly in February 2018, so if you would like details about this please let me know and I will keep you informed.

FSC field courses

Janet Thompson

Having recently returned from a course run by the Field Studies Council (field-studies-council.org) I thought I would share what a great opportunity this is to further your birding knowledge.

I went to Flatford Mill in Suffolk – not the easiest place to get to from the Isle of Man but well worth the journey. This is a lovely part of the country with excellent birding opportunities. The course I did was entitled 'Siberian Week: Looking at Bird Migration Along the Suffolk Coast' and the leader was Steve Piotrowski. This was a very active few days with early starts and a lecture each evening after supper.

On the first full day we visited Dunwich Heath NT, where there was a ringing demonstration so we were able to enjoy seeing birds in the hand and learn about how they are ringed, measured, assessed and recorded. The reserve manager gave us a talk about how the reserve is managed for wildlife and the work they do to maintain the site. We then had a walk around the heath and were lucky enough to see 17 Dartford warblers; some even perched long enough for us to see them through the scope. There were also large numbers of long-tailed tits (65) and lesser redpolls (12) and we heard a Cetti's warbler. Later we walked along the seaside footpath to Minsmere, where Steve was kept



Wheatear on the Calf: © Sue Leeming

busy identifying the great variety of birdlife, 56 species in total including yellow-legged gulls (3), bearded tits (6) and black-tailed godwits (30). After dinner Steve gave an illustrated lecture on his recent birding trip to Kazakhstan.

The following day we set off early for Landguard Bird Observatory, which is a fascinating area near Felixstowe Docks. The observatory is in part of a WW2 sea defence fort and is elevated from sea level, so an excellent spot for sea watching. We were given a talk about the history of the site and a tour of the area where the mist nets are situated amongst an area of small trees and shrubs. Several birds were ringed including goldcrest and firecrest. It was lovely to see such small birds at close hand and marvel at the distances they migrate. In all, we recorded 40 species at the site.

The following day we recorded 29 species at Flatford Mill before setting off for Hazlewood Marshes for a high-tide wader roost. This was a wonderful spot. As the tide rose we had really close views of a total of 43 species including pintails (39), greenshanks (7), shelducks (188) black-tailed godwits (islandica) (70) and 800 redshanks. From here we went to Bawdsey Hall and East Lane. Bawdsey Hall is a lovely old house in large grounds which is run as a bed and breakfast. There are cameras set up around the site to capture badgers, owls, etc., and these can be watched 'live' from the comfort of the bedrooms. There was a ringing group on the site and once again we were able to see birds at close hand and chat to the ringers about their work.

Our last half day turned out to be too wet for the Flatford Ringing Group to put up their nets so we headed

off to Mistley Quay on the Stour Estuary. Again this was a spectacular spot to be on an incoming tide and we were treated to close views of knots (450), shelducks (492), avocets (150) and black-tailed godwits (850).

The FSC has many residential centres around the UK. Some are in historic buildings usually set in their own grounds. Most run bird identification courses throughout the year and I can highly recommend them.

Overnight on the Calf

Three members tell us about their memorable trip to the Calf on 6–7th May 2017.

A most enjoyable visit

Joyce Quilliam

Saturday 6th May, up at 4.45am, lovely morning, switched alarm off, due to go off 5.30am. No good lying in bed waiting for that. Sunny, but rather a stiff easterly breeze. Hope we will be able to go.



Calf wardens Nathan Wilkie and Aron Sapsford

Despite an early departure, roads full of cyclists, walkers and Parish Walkers, oblivious to everything! Striding out with earplugs masking the sound of cars. Various roads closed, but arrived Port St Mary.

Now which pier? Tried the outer one, nobody there, so round to the inner one, via the loo! Spotted *Scraayl* at the end. Nobody about, then Kerry and Andrew arrived, followed by the rest. So all aboard. Anne said we were sailing, did not know if we could land, but it proved a dry trip, although Anne advised me to stop sitting in the stern and come for'ard where there was shelter. Harley kept us all in order. Juan expertly avoided all the swell, still running further out.

Landed at South Harbour, soon unloaded and took our belongings to behind the boat shed, hopefully to be collected by the wardens later. The wardens soon spotted us on the way to the house. Getting really hot, so glad to sit down at the newly whitewashed mill



Aron examining, measuring and ringing

wheel and chat to the wardens, then inside to see the latest selection of cloth bags, each containing a small creature which had flown thousands of miles. Each expertly handled, classified, measured, weighed, checked for muscle and fat present. Then held up for us all to photograph. Some indoors, some outdoors, all then free to fly off, which they did. Aron and Nathan kept busy all day from early morning till nearly dark, collecting and processing the information.

We were all up about 6am on the Sunday, when the red-footed falcon made its appearance. Fiona, the volunteer, was still fast asleep, but somebody woke her and she came down wrapped in a blanket to see it. A beautiful male bird. After it had been documented, ringed and released, it stayed about the fields for a bit.

The wardens had ringed 116 birds on the Saturday and 8 returned from previous years including a chiffchaff that had been to Spain and back. Aron shared his log for the day and noted down our observations as we all sat round a cheerful wood stove. It had been hot in the sun, then chilly afterwards so the fire was most welcome.

Sunday morning we were serenaded by a charm of goldfinches in the conifer. Aron said they had ringed 600. The female goldfinch does not have the red behind the eye, to tell sexes apart.

We also had a cuckoo calling (but not whilst Janet was about). It was netted later and was a very handsome bird. Aron opened its bill to show us it had not lost the vivid orange gape that the juvenile has. There were three caught and ringed, and surprisingly it fitted into a cod liver oil capsule pot to be weighed. The warblers fit into a pepper pot.

One of the pied flycatchers had a Norwegian ring (Stavanger) on it. The wardens were eager to share their expertise and generous with their time, showing us things like a female blackcap which had a white line across its tail feather, showing where there had been a shortage of food when it was a nestling.

A most enjoyable visit, at an excellent time of year.

Would you recognise a rarity?

Andrew Johnston

I wanted to put pen to paper because my reputation is seriously at risk (read on!). On a wonderful outing to the Calf of Man, it seems I made a remarkable discovery.

Actually, the discovery was not mine but the resident warden's, Aron. Early in the glorious morning of Sunday 7th May, I ventured out of the old farmhouse and within a few metres I saw a cuckoo. As my friend Janet had not yet seen a cuckoo in the wild, I walked back to the old farmhouse to let her know that there was an arrogant cuckoo sitting on a mist pole only a few metres away from where we were staying. Janet, unfortunately, was already out and down at the pond hide. However, I told Aron, who had just come back from a mist net collection. He came with me to see my cuckoo.

On examining the bird in question he told me in a David Attenborough voice, 'My dear boy, that is not a cuckoo. That is a red-footed falcon, which is a real rarity.' My immediate reaction was GREAT! I have found a real rarity, and then it dawned on me what a plonker I had been!

How could I have mistaken a red-footed falcon for a cuckoo? No one would ever believe my sightings again. I will never be able to look at a cuckoo again without questioning whether it is a red-footed falcon. Conversely, should I ever see a red-footed falcon again, will I think it is a cuckoo?

In my defence, I would simply submit that (a) Aron, being a professional, had the benefit of having binoculars (lesson learned!) whereas I didn't, (b) it was very early in the morning and (c) who would have expected a red-footed falcon to turn up on the Calf?

The motto of my story is ALWAYS look carefully, examine every detail of the bird in question, look again



Releasing the real cuckoo

and do the same. What you think you see is not always what you actually see. Finally, it is with regret that although I sighted a red-footed falcon, I cannot take credit for its identification. That was down to a very excited Aron!

An unforgettable weekend

Sue Leeming

With strong winds forecast our departure time from Port St Mary was brought forward to 8.15am to give Juan the best opportunity of landing at South Harbour for our overnight.

It worked out well and our thanks must go to Juan and Anne for getting us there to enjoy what turned out to be an unforgettable weekend. After walking up to the observatory and settling in we then joined the wardens, who this year are Aron and Nathan, as they continued their day of emptying the nets, recording and ringing a vast variety of birds. The highlight of the morning has to be a bird whose call we heard while walking up to the observatory, a cuckoo.

Other notable ringings were a pied and also a spotted flycatcher, a whitethroat, male and female redstarts, a sedge warbler, willow warblers, a grasshopper warbler, chiffchaffs and goldfinches to name a few.

The day cleared and exploration of the Calf commenced with most of us walking around the coastal footpath to begin with. With the bluebells at their best and the thrift just showing, the Calf looked wonderful and it gave us all an opportunity to see not only birds but other wildlife. During the afternoon notable ringings were a garden warbler and a whinchat. The sunset looked promising so a walk up to the lighthouses completed what had been a very special day. The final ringing count of for the day was 116 with some notable species being recorded, including ringed and spotted birds.



Red-footed falcon (or is it a cuckoo...?)

There was an early start on Sunday morning, which soon became our highlight of the weekend. Spotted even earlier by Andrew Johnston, a red-footed falcon was netted. A magnificent bird to see and when Aron checked the records only one has been spotted before and that was in 1978. A siberian chiffchaff was also ringed.

A very busy morning continued for the wardens but with a departure at noon most people went out one last time. A large selection of birds and other wildlife were seen again, with the red-footed falcon staying close by enabling us all to enjoy him. Andrew and Kerry also spotted some porpoises offshore.

With just enough time for brunch we all took a leisurely walk back to South Harbour where Juan and Anne were waiting for us. The return boat trip was in perfect conditions and we were able to enjoy the coastline and all the many birds now nesting on Sugarloaf.

The weekend, with such great hospitality from Aron and Nathan, who shared not only their time but their vast knowledge, was memorable, and with thanks too to Fiona Shimmin, the resident volunteer during our stay on the Calf, we were made to feel very welcome. The whole experience, including the group, the wardens, Fiona, the wildlife and the stunning beauty of the Calf at this time of year has made it, to me, unforgettable.

Huge thanks must go to Janet Thompson for the organisation, Juan and Anne for getting us there and back, when at one point it may never have happened, and the wardens for their very warm welcome and for including us in their busy days.

Peregrine (MOS journal)

Allen S. Moore, Bird Recorder and Editor of Peregrine

***Peregrine* was first published by the Manx Field Club under the title Yn Shirragh ny Ree 76 years ago in December 1941, the month of the attack on Pearl Harbour.**

Publication was taken over in 1976 by the Manx Ornithological Society, with a gratefully received grant for the annual Manx bird reports provided by the Manx Museum and National Trust (Manx National Heritage). The editorial in *Peregrine* 1976 4(4) stated that costs threatened the viability of the publication. These concerns are still with us today, and we would urge members of the MOS and other natural history organisations to support us by purchasing a copy.

Peregrine provides a medium for the publication of articles on any Manx natural history subject. The next issue will be published early in 2018 and, in addition to the Manx bird report for 2015, we hope to include the Manx ringing report and Manx butterfly report, as well as articles on bats and the following birds: red grouse, gannet, Kumlien's gull, chough and rook. *Peregrine* also includes the Manx bird list and a gazetteer of bird sites. This will be the first *Peregrine* since the foundation of the Manx Bird Rarities Committee early in the year.

Peregrine back issues

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



Upcoming events

Jan 9th: Dr Jodie Craine, 'Seabird tracking and conservation'.

Feb 6th: Members' evening. Shelly and Chris Kirkpatrick, 'Bird images, home and away'; Chris Blyth, 'Wildlife in Hawaii and Alaska'.

Mar 6th: AGM and 50th anniversary celebration.

Programme ideas

The programme for next year is being planned, so if you have any suggestions for field visits or speakers please get in touch with Janet (jthompson@manx.net).

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 Lhie ny Greiney, Surby Road, Surby, Port Erin, IM9 6TD.

Welcome to new MOS members since the last newsletter:

Colin and Pamela Kermode, Gillian Bowers, Andrew Brand, Christina Clucas, Nathalie Donegan, Janette and Peter Freeland, Noel and Joan Gibney, Steven Griffiths, Angela Guest, Marie Halliday, Bea Hawkins, Gail Jeffcoate, Nicholas Kaighin, Neal Kelly, Paul and Susan Kelly, Jan Kneen and Rob Wilson, Gill Lockett, Shirley Lotfy, David and Sue Luton, Barry Murphy, Kay Collister, Rhys Shields, Michelle Storton, and Michael Trout.

Sadly we note the passing of:

Dave King and Captain E. Watterson.

Twitterings

Editor: richardgselman@gmail.com.

Layout: Thanks to Margaret Hunter, daisyeditorial.co.uk.

Contacts

Chairman: Richard Selman 877919

Secretary: Janet Thompson 835524

Treasurer: Richard Norris 834104

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

Peregrine: allen.gobbag@manx.net