NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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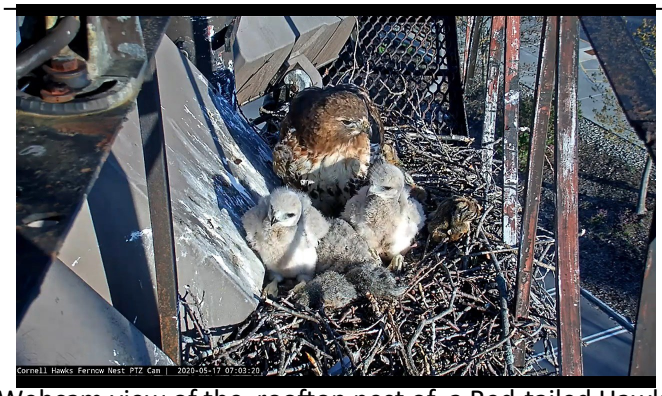

Webcam view of the rooftop nest of a Red-tailed Hawk

Fair Isle : *SVMcC*

Bluethroat at Boulmer: *photo M. Goodall*

BIRDING FROM THE SETTEE

Chairman Richard Poyer admits to having a new addiction, having discovered "the delights of Cornell Universities' web Cams and, more often than not, connecting with them at least once a day". Turn to page 4 for a flavour of this enjoyable but sedentary activity, rather like a 'window' overlooking someone else's bird table with a whole new set of visitors! Beware– you might also become addicted….

BIRD RECORDS for SEPTEMBER

on page 6

FIBO Then and Now

Fair Isle Bird Observatory has gained a wide reputation as one of the most exciting bird observatories in the world. Stewart McCormick highlights its current predicament following a devastating fire last year, with his own youthful memories of a visit to FIBO nearly sixty years ago, on pages 2 and 3.

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE

Phil Hanmer's Ringers Roundup this month will introduce you to a 'rather angry and violent Jay', a Siberian Chiffchaff and a 'YBW' one of an increasing number of these dainty little warblers pioneering a new western migration route. *Always an enjoyable read……..*

WHEN THE WIND IS FROM the EAST..

Sunday 4th October brought a spectacular fall of migrants along the east coast, with **Holy Island** a temporary staging post for such birds as Red-flanked Bluetail, Red-breasted and Spotted Flycatchers, Lesser Grey Shrike, Redstarts. Redwings, Yellow-browed Warblers. Margaret Goodall took this excellent photograph of a Bluethroat at **Boulmer** on the same morning. Many had moved on by the next day……

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS **BAMBURGH PAVILION**

All Indoor Meetings cancelled The Committee continue to monitor and assess the situation and remain in contact with each other via telephone and email. <u>All Members will be contacted by email or phone as and when we can resume our meetings.</u> Meanwhile stay safe and stay well.

M.V. Good Shepherd at the North Haven FAIR

THEN AND NOW– THE APPEAL OF FAIR ISLE

Fair Isle is the most isolated inhabited island in the UK, stubbornly sitting midway between North Ronaldsay, the nearest of the Orkneys 30 miles to the south, and Sumburgh at the southern tip of Shetland, 30 miles to the north. It is a hot-spot for migrating birds and one of the most exciting places to bird-watch in the British Isles. As a young man and keen ornithologist who visited regularly in the 1930s,**George Waterston** had great plans for Fair Isle, which were interrupted by World War II. Indeed, the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust was actually set up and founded during the war by a small group of friends in a POW camp, with George appointed as secretary, a position he held until his death in 1980. The Island was purchased by him after the war, where he founded the world-renowned Fair Isle Bird Observatory (FIBO) in 1948, one of the world's longest-established and best-known bird observatories. Ownership of the Island was passed on to the National Trust for Scotland in 1954 for the same sum and remains under their guidance to this day.

Stewart McCormick first saw Fair Isle while still a schoolboy in the early 1960s from the deck of the M.S. DUNERA on a school cruise round the northern and western islands of Scotland. Indeed, our itinerary promised to *land* on the island if conditions permitted, but that did not materialise, and we had to be content with the views from a circumnavigation. "Inspired to return, I made a solo trip north a couple of years later when I was 16; this involved a lengthy bus journey from my home near Glasgow to Aberdeen, a twelve-hour overnight trip on the M.V. St.. Clair to Lerwick and a further two hours on a bus to the southern tip of mainland Shetland. All that remained was the gut-churning three-hour crossing on the "Good Shepherd" across the turbulent waters to the island just visible on the southern horizon. (N.B. Nowadays most visitors now opt for the 25-minute flight from the Tingwall Airport near Lerwick!)

Waiting to welcome the arriving visitors on the pier at the North Haven was Angela, the wife of **Peter Davis**, the Warden of the Bird Observatory. The observatory, housed in several huts which had served as a wartime naval base, was within easy walking distance of the pier. Besides operating as a year-round base for recording, research, and scientific study of birds, it also offered simple accommodation for visiting birdwatchers. Securing a place to stay during the main migration periods of the spring and autumn could be highly 'competitive', but in July they were happy to accept a young and inexperienced lad like myself from the suburbs and even share his excitement, for example, about seeing his first-ever Wheatear! I stayed there for ten days or so, joining in with the scheduled observatory activities where possible, or exploring the island from North to South with the other guests.

The 'Good Shepherd' at the North Haven, Fair Isle

FIBO Warden Peter Davis ringing a Puffin

One of my first thrills was to accompany the Warden to a nesting area for Puffins where he was checking burrows and ringing the Pufflings. This often involved estimating how far his hand had already reached, dig out an additional access hole and repeat until finding and removing the young bird. Sometimes he would also encounter an adult bird which would also be ringed. Part of the experience for 'helpers' was to discover just how powerful those colourful beaks are when they hold your stray finger or thumb within their vice-like grip, usually drawing blood. This was as nothing compared to crossing the breeding grounds of the Arctic Skuas or the heavy- duty flying machines known as Bonxies (Great Skuas), which strike fear and panic in your heart as they come swooshing in and clip your head. It's almost impossible to avoid ducking or dropping on to your knees. Another memorable outing with the staff was a calm evening boat trip to a Geo to count the nesting Guillemots and Razorbills on the inaccessible ledges, especially those not observable from land."

"Many of the fifty or so folks who live on the island support themselves fishing, crofting, and knitting their beautiful Fair Isle sweaters which they sell to passengers on cruise ships. When the Minister's Wife heard that I played the organ at a church back home, I was invited to the manse one afternoon and plied with delicious scones and cakes in the hope that I might be persuaded to play for their next Sunday Service. (Needless to say, I happily obliged). The Saturday night before, we were all down at the village hall for a Ceilidh- visitors and residents together having a thoroughly good time. At eleven o'clock, of course, 'time' was called on the dancing and revelry so that folks were back home before the sabbath. I remember my short time on this remarkable island nearly sixty years ago with great fondness. I am deeply saddened to reflect on the **double predicament** which now faces this community."

In 2019, the roof of the beautiful new Observatory Building, which was only constructed in 2010, was suddenly on fire. All attempts to contain or suppress the blaze were in vain and the building was quickly reduced to ashes. (Luckily the observatory records were not lost thanks to remote digital storage, but the building and its activity is vital to the viability of the whole community, providing employment for islanders and accommodation for visitors). Now, the ravages of Covid –19 have also put the entire future existence of the **National Trust for Scotland** itself in serious Jeopardy.

There are plans of course to rebuild the Bird Observatory and a substantial part of the cost is already in place, but the Observatory Trust still need to raise at least **£650,000** towards the total cost estimated at £7.4 million.
(see appeal letter attached to page 5)

Stewart V McCormick

Fair Isle Bird Observatory in 1960s.

FIBO destroyed by fire in 2019 *(BBC news)*

Birdwatching from the Settee

I have to admit to becoming addicted to watching birds on webcams. Six months ago, my wife Sue and I would do our daily walks along by the River Coquet to Warkworth - an hour or so there and back. There were birds to see for sure, notably the Black-tailed Godwits, but what to do with the rest of the time – I've no garden and I'm in the running for the prize as the world's worst 'do-it-yourself' type. I blame the media who were making all sorts of suggestions as to "how to watch nature online" and that was how I came across the link to the Cornell University bird webcams.

The university is in Ithaca, upstate New York and it is home to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Within the university grounds is Sapsucker Lake and by the lake a feeding station with a web cam. Another cam is on a sport's field lighting tower. The Lab has feeds from other parts of the USA - a Hummingbird site in Texas for example.

In early spring, the Sapsucker Lake feeder attracted a wide variety of birds. Regular visitors are the Blue Jays. What a bird, with its mass of blue feathers patterned with white! It's high up in the pecking order, seeing off many of the other species. Then there are the woodpeckers. Two species were regular visitors - Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Then one day a "giant" of a 'pecker dropped in, a Pileated woodpecker. What a startling and amazing bird.

It was the colour of many of the birds that I liked. The yellow American Goldfinch, the orange Baltimore Oriole, the grey-and-orange American Robin, the Red-winged Blackbird and the stunning red-orange of the Northern Cardinal. Smaller, less-colourful birds darted in and out of the feeding station - White-bellied Nuthatch, Tufted Titmouse and Black-capped Chickadee. As nesting and breeding started the range of birds visiting the feeders narrowed until it was the bullying Common Grackles and European Starlings along with the more docile Mourning Doves that dominated the feeders in summer.

Now that we are into autumn the Woodpeckers, Cardinals, Titmice, Chickadees and Blue Jays are back. However, the Common Grackles continue to chase the other birds away.
What about the lighting tower? It was the nest site for Red-Tailed Hawks who produced three young. It was interesting to watch them grow and the fledge.
And Texas? - I have never seen Hummingbirds; what aggressive little birds they are! They seem to spend more time chasing each other off the feeders than actually feeding.
The time difference of five hours meant, and still means, that in the evening I can watch what is happening 3,300 miles away without feeling guilty!
I'm looking forward to winter to see what new species may be attracted to the feeders- definitely addicted.

Richard Poyer

Male Pileated Woodpecker

& White-breasted Nuthatch

Blue Jay

American Goldfinch

[Copy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory Appeal (*courtesy of John Lumby)*]

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e-mail: mikewood14@aol.com
website: www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk

22nd Sept 2020

Dear Fellow-Birdwatcher,

You may already know Fair Isle as a hot-spot for migrating birds and one of the most exciting places to bird-watch in the British Isles. Fair Isle Bird Observatory (FIBO) was established in 1948 and is one of the world's longest-established and best-known bird observatories. We record and undertake research into bird migration and the sea-bird colonies on Fair Isle.

On 10th March 2019 the Observatory buildings were completely destroyed by a fire, the cause of which has never been ascertained. FIBO is now appealing to birders round the world to donate money to our Rebuild Appeal, so that the Observatory can be rebuilt during 2021 and re-open for guests and researchers in the spring of 2022.

FIBO has comprehensive records of Fair Isle's breeding sea-birds and migrant birds of many species that have been built up over some seventy years. In this era of climate-change, it is important that this work can continue uninterrupted. We also record cetaceans, marine life, plants, moths & butterflies.

Fair Isle is a tiny island (4m x 2m) located between the Orkney and Shetland islands, off the north coast of Scotland. Fair Isle is UK's most remote inhabited island, with a permanent population of some 50 islanders that is doubled between April and November by guests, researchers and staff staying at the Observatory. FIBO is a vital part of the island economy and the sustainability of this remote and fragile island community is dependent on rebuilding the Observatory as soon as possible.

The estimated total cost of the rebuild is approximately £7.4m, of which £4.5m will come from our insurers, and we hope to obtain financial support from public-sector bodies such as the Scottish Government, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Shetland Islands Council. FIBO will also contribute £0.3m from its own reserves. The gap between the insurance pay-out and the cost of the new observatory is because the new building will be bigger, be a totally-green building with its own solar power, have much-enhanced research facilities and be better-equipped for staff and guests.

FIBO itself needs to raise at least £650,000 from donations, some of which we hope to obtain from private-sector companies and charitable foundations. This leaves a substantial amount that we need to raise by donations from individual members of the public. We aim to do this through thousands of donations from bird-watchers and other nature-lovers across the UK and elsewhere.

I am writing to you in the hope that you are willing to publicise our appeal on your web-site and through your social media channels, so that your members and followers may donate via FIBO's web-site at **www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk** where the different options for making donations are shown.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Wood
Finance Director
Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

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BIRD RECORDS SEPTEMBER 2020

Brent Goose	800 at Fenham Flats on 9th (JPL), 800 on 25th & 6 at Low Newton Scrape on 27th (A&MG).
Barnacle Goose	19 off Cullernose point on 26th & 24 over Branton on 27th (I&KD), 7 at Low Newton Scrape on 27th (A&MG).
Pink-footed Goose	100 at Harper's Heugh on 9th (JPL), 50 over Branton on 10th (I&KD), 350 at Low Newton Scrape on 25th (A&MG).
Ruddy Shelduck	1 (feral bird) at Branton Ponds on 9th (I&KD).
Wigeon	2500 at Fenham Flats on 9th (JPL).
Red-throated Diver	2 off Cullernose Point on 26th & 12 on 27th (I&KD).
Black-throated Diver	1 off Cullernose Point on 26th (I&KD).
Great Northern Diver	1 off Cullernose Point on 26th (I&KD).
Manx Shearwater	1 off Cullernose Point on 26th & 4 on 27th (I&KD).
Great White Egret	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 19th (I&KD).
Little Egret	2 at Budle Bay on 9th (JPL), 3 at Beal Point on 23rd (I&KD).
Gannet	200 flying south off Emmanuel Head on 30th (PS).
Coot	50+ at Branton Ponds on 8th (I&KD).
Golden Plover	400 at Low Newton Scrape on 27th (A&MG).
Ruff	1 at Budle Bay on 13th (I&KD), 5 at Low Newton Scrape on 27th (A&MG).
Curlew Sandpiper	10 at Budle Bay on 13th (I&KD).
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	1 juvenile at Boulmer on 17th (SVM).
Jack Snipe	1 at Holy island on 20th (I&KD).
Spotted Redshank	1 at Budle Bay on 13th (I&KD).
Greenshank	2 at Budle Bay on 13th & 3 at Beal Point on 23rd (I&KD).
Mediterranean Gull	1 at Low Newton Scrape on 27th (A&MG).
Lesser Black-backed Gull	234 at Branton Ponds on 17th (I&KD).
Sandwich Tern	8 near Stag Rocks on 30th (PS).
Arctic Skua	2 off Cullernose Point on 26th (I&KD).
Barn Owl	1 near Branton on 12th & 26th (I&KD).
Swift	1 over Alnwick on 4th (I&KD).
Hobby	1 at Fenham Flats on 25th (A&MG).
Peregrine	1 at Holy Island on 28th (I&KD).
Raven	4 near Wooler on 19th (I&KD).
Swallow	6 over Bamburgh on 29th (PS).
Yellow-browed Warbler	1 at Holy Island on 20th & 2 on 28th (I&KD).
Two-barred Greenish Warbler	1 at Heather Cottages (Budle) on 30th (I&KD). First county record.
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Holy Island on 20th (I&KD).
Wheatear	1 at Beal Point on 23rd (I&KD), 3 at Stag Rocks moving south on 30th (PS).
Lapland Bunting	9 at Holy Island on 20th & 13 on 23rd (I&KD).

Observers Ian & Keith Davison (IB&KDa), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart McCormick (SVM), Paul Snell (PS).

October records: please submit records no later than 2nd November by e-mail, telephone or post to the recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, NE68 7WG.
TEL:01665-720654 e-mail j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk or .com if difficulty. **many thanks.**