

## ORKNEY BIRD RECORDS

### OCTOBER 2016

In a quite extraordinary month for migrants all up and down the east coast of Britain, three new birds, **Orphean Warbler**, **Two-barred Greenish Warbler** and **Siberian Accentor**, were added to the Orkney list and many other rarities and scarce migrants were seen.

Off Hatston, **Great Northern Divers** built up to 49 by 30<sup>th</sup>. 36 **Slavonian Grebes** were counted on the Harray Loch on 19<sup>th</sup> while other good counts included 14 at Inganess Bay on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10 on the Boardhouse Loch on 20<sup>th</sup>. 10 **Little Grebes** were on the Stenness Loch on 15<sup>th</sup>.

At sea, **Sooty Shearwaters** were seen on many dates with peak counts off North Ronaldsay of 44 on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 46 on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 114 on 30<sup>th</sup>; off Sanday of 45 on 3<sup>rd</sup>; and off Papay of 25 on 30<sup>th</sup>. **Manx Shearwaters** were seen only off North Ronaldsay with a peak of 17 on 1<sup>st</sup>. Two **Storm Petrels** passed North Ronaldsay on 29<sup>th</sup> when one was found dead on Sanday. 6248 **Fulmars** passed North Ronaldsay on 29<sup>th</sup> and, next day, persistence was rewarded with the sighting of a very rare **Fea's Petrel** there. A **Little Egret** was found on North Ronaldsay on 4<sup>th</sup> and it seems likely that it was this bird that was found on Sanday on 6<sup>th</sup> and remained until 26<sup>th</sup>; another was in the Loch of Sabiston/Loch of Banks area on 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>. A **Glossy Ibis** was another rare visitor to North Ronaldsay on 30<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup>.

**Whooper Swans** were noted from several localities with peaks of at least 50 at Sanday's North Loch on 26<sup>th</sup> and 141 on North Ronaldsay on 30<sup>th</sup>. Up to nine **Bean Geese** were on North Ronaldsay after 22<sup>nd</sup> while seven were in Deerness on 29<sup>th</sup>. There was a strong passage of **Barnacle Geese** early in the month with 360 over Sanday, 276 at Bay of Suckquoy and 153 on North Ronaldsay, all between 4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup>. Three **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** were at Mirkady Point, Deerness on 20<sup>th</sup> to be followed by seven coming in exhausted at Papay's Mull Head a few days later.

**America Wigeons** were seen at the Peedie Sea from 8<sup>th</sup> until at least 21<sup>st</sup>, at Birsay Bay on 9<sup>th</sup> and at Westray's Swartmill Loch on 18<sup>th</sup>. Another American duck, a **Green-winged Teal** was on Sanday on 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and on North Ronaldsay from 23<sup>rd</sup>. As our wintering wildfowl began to arrive there were counts of 754 **Tufted Ducks**, 900 **Pochard** and 48 **Scaup** on the Harray Loch on 19<sup>th</sup> and numbers of **Long-tailed Ducks** had built up to 65 in Echnaloch Bay by 11<sup>th</sup>. 12 Common Scoters were on the Stenness Loch on 20<sup>th</sup> with eight at Mirkady Point on the same date and singles on Sanday and off North Ronaldsay. The only **Velvet Scoter** record involved 23 in Inganess Bay on 2<sup>nd</sup> while drake **Surf Scoters** were also there on 2<sup>nd</sup> and in the Bay of Meil on 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup>. Three single **Goosanders** were seen on Sanday on 4<sup>th</sup>, North Ronaldsay on 7<sup>th</sup>, and the Peedie Sea on 29<sup>th</sup> while two were on the Graemeshall Loch on 25<sup>th</sup>.

Astonishingly, last winter's **Northern Harrier**, the American version of our Hen Harrier, returned to North Ronaldsay from 23<sup>rd</sup> and that island also supported up to four **Merlins** with a peak on 8<sup>th</sup>.

Twelve **Grey Partridges** were released by shooting interests on South Ronaldsay during the month. Single **Water Rails** were seen at The Loons and in Rendall and up to five were noted on North Ronaldsay where a much rarer **Spotted Crane** was seen on 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Grey Plovers** were noted on North Ronaldsay (up to six), St. Peter's Pool (up to four) and on Papay. **Golden Plover** numbers peaked at 864 on North Ronaldsay on 1<sup>st</sup> while 800 were on Burray on 19<sup>th</sup>. September's **American Golden Plover** on Sanday remained until 2<sup>nd</sup>.

A **Little Stint** at the Bay of Skail on 23<sup>rd</sup> was the month's only record. **Curlew Sandpipers** were a little commoner with, on North Ronaldsay, up to four early in the month and one on 23<sup>rd</sup> and singles on Sanday on 2<sup>nd</sup> and at Rennibister on 25<sup>th</sup>. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was on Sanday on 3<sup>rd</sup> while one-two **Ruffs** were there on 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> four singles having occurred on North Ronaldsay before 12<sup>th</sup>.

An influx of **Snipe** brought 475 to North Ronaldsay on 1<sup>st</sup>. 13 **Jack Snipe** were there on 4<sup>th</sup> with one –four at seven other localities during the month. 70 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Bea Loch, Sanday on 22<sup>nd</sup> while **Whimbrel** passage continued with one-four in four localities on 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> and the regular wintering bird on Burray seen on 19<sup>th</sup>. October is traditionally the month for **Woodcock** arrivals; 20 were logged on North Ronaldsay on 14<sup>th</sup> while one-three were seen at eight other sites. Late **Greenshanks** were noted on North Ronaldsay on 7<sup>th</sup> and at Dale, Costa on 16<sup>th</sup> while, finally amongst the waders, one-two **Grey Phalaropes** were noted on North Ronaldsay from 1<sup>st</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> with another on 26<sup>th</sup>.

Sea-watching late in the month saw 29 **Pomarine Skuas** pass North Ronaldsay and one pass Papay between 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>. Single **Iceland Gulls** were seen in Sandwick on 22<sup>nd</sup> and on Papay on 26<sup>th</sup> and single **Glaucous Gulls** on North Ronaldsay on 14<sup>th</sup> and Papay on 29<sup>th</sup>. A **Guillemot** apparently feeding happily in the Stenness Loch on 19<sup>th</sup> was an unusual sight. North Ronaldsay recorded up to five **Little Auks** on five dates while other were in Kirk Sound on 17<sup>th</sup> and off Papay on 29<sup>th</sup>.

A **Stock Dove** was a scarce visitor to Howaback, Harray on 9<sup>th</sup>. 150 **Wood Pigeons** arrived at Berstane Wood to roost on the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> while a single passage bird was on Sanday on 5<sup>th</sup> and a maximum of 12 on North Ronaldsay on 12<sup>th</sup>. Only three **Long-eared Owls** were seen; on Sanday on 8<sup>th</sup>, on Westray on 22<sup>nd</sup> and on North Ronaldsay on 23<sup>rd</sup>. A **Kingfisher** was a rare visitor to Whitehall, Stronsay on 25<sup>th</sup> and, staying with the colourful and spectacular, **Hoopoes** were seen on North Ronaldsay and Sanday between 13<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>.

**Skylark** passage on North Ronaldsay peaked at 341 on 16<sup>th</sup>, while a **Shorelark**, a rare visitor nowadays, was on Burray on 16<sup>th</sup>. **Swallows** lingered until mid-month, the last being two at Brodgar on 19<sup>th</sup>. A **Richard's Pipit** arrived on Sanday on 4<sup>th</sup> to be followed by one on Papay on 10<sup>th</sup> and two on North Ronaldsay on 11<sup>th</sup>. One-two **Tree Pipits** lingered on North Ronaldsay until 6<sup>th</sup> while an **Olive-backed Pipit** was found in Birsay on 16<sup>th</sup>. Single **Yellow Wagtails** were on North Ronaldsay on 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> and there were seven widely scattered records of **Grey Wagtails**. Hopes for a **Waxwing** invasion were kindled when one arrived in Kirkwall on 16<sup>th</sup> increasing to 17 there by 24<sup>th</sup>; up to 26 were also seen in Stromness and eight in Tankerness on 22<sup>nd</sup>; one-five were noted in five other localities.

Undoubtedly the bird of the month, and probably the year, was the **Siberian Accentor** found at Sandside, Deerness on 24<sup>th</sup> and remaining until 28<sup>th</sup>. Never seen in Britain before one was found in Shetland earlier in the month, the Deerness bird was one of an influx of about ten into the country, an influx that remains to be explained but probably relates to a high population and a strong easterly airflow produced by a strong anticyclone over Russia and Siberia.

105 **Robins** were logged on North Ronaldsay on 16<sup>th</sup> when 'lots' were also on Sanday and seven were seen as far west as Birsay village. **Bluethroats** were seen on North Ronaldsay on 3<sup>rd</sup>, Sanday on 7<sup>th</sup> and in Deerness from 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>. Once an extreme rarity but now an almost expected migrant, a **Red-flanked Bluetail** was on North Ronaldsay from 7<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>. Three **Black Redstarts** were on that island on 6<sup>th</sup> and two more on 16<sup>th</sup>. **Common Redstarts** were scarce with only one-two at five localities during the month while the only **Whinchat** record was of six on North Ronaldsay on 6<sup>th</sup>. 50 **Wheatears** were on North Ronaldsay on 1<sup>st</sup> but there were few after 18<sup>th</sup>; late birds were on Papay on 29<sup>th</sup> and North Ronaldsay on 30<sup>th</sup>.

There were five sightings of single **Ring Ouzels** up to 18<sup>th</sup> while **Blackbirds** arrived in some numbers on 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, the peak count being 200 on North Ronaldsay on the latter date. **Fieldfares** arrived throughout the month with the peak counts being 312 on North Ronaldsay on 16<sup>th</sup> and 50 at Rackwick, Hoy on 9<sup>th</sup>. The 16<sup>th</sup> also brought 111 **Song Thrushes** and 606 **Redwings** to North Ronaldsay, other Redwing counts including 110 in Harray on 6<sup>th</sup>, 150 at Rackwick on 9<sup>th</sup> and 388, again on North Ronaldsay, on 29<sup>th</sup>. One-two **Mistle Thrushes** were reported from six sites during the month.

However, amongst the larger thrushes it was the **White's Thrush** in a Kirkwall garden on 3<sup>rd</sup> that stole the show. Only the third Orkney record, it was seen and fortunately photographed by the householder; it was identified from those photos at a later date sadly after the bird was long gone!

A **Reed Warbler** was on North Ronaldsay on 24<sup>th</sup> a much rarer **Blyth's Reed Warbler** having been at Lettan, Sanday on 8<sup>th</sup>. **Barred Warblers** were at Stove, Sanday on 5<sup>th</sup>, on North Ronaldsay on 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> and at Sunnybank, Deerness from 21<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>. Seven **Lesser Whitethroats** were on North Ronaldsay on 2<sup>nd</sup> with one-two until 19<sup>th</sup>; six other singles occurred in widely scattered localities with one at Mull Head, Papay on 25<sup>th</sup> considered to be of one of the eastern races. **Common Whitethroats** were typically scarce with only singles at Hestily, South Ronaldsay on 1<sup>st</sup> and on North Ronaldsay on 4<sup>th</sup>. **Garden Warblers** were also scarce with just one-two on North Ronaldsay on three dates. **Blackcaps**, however, were very much in evidence with North Ronaldsay logging peaks of 26 on 6<sup>th</sup>, 49 on 16<sup>th</sup> and 19 on 24<sup>th</sup>; 11 were trapped and ringed at Hestily on 20<sup>th</sup> and there were at least 10 in Rendall next day; up to six were reported from some 20 other localities.

However, amongst the *Sylvia* warblers, it was the **Western Orphean Warbler** trapped and ringed at Crafty, Firth that caused the real excitement. First found on 18<sup>th</sup> and a new Orkney record, it remained until the following day and allowed many local birders to see it.

**Yellow-browed Warblers** break new records every year. The influx that began in September peaked on 2<sup>nd</sup> when at least 255 were present in the county including 86 on Sanday, 53 on

North Ronaldsay, 18 on Papay and ten on Burray; smaller numbers were seen thereafter with the last being singles in Harray on 21<sup>st</sup> and Birsay on 22<sup>nd</sup>. **Willow Warblers** are always scarce in October but one-five were seen at four sites to 7<sup>th</sup> with late birds near Dounby and on North Ronaldsay on 21<sup>st</sup>. October is 'Chiffchaff month' and a peak of 67 was logged on North Ronaldsay on 16<sup>th</sup> with seven still present at the end of the month; elsewhere up to five were seen at about 20 sites. **Siberian Chiffchaffs** were identified on Sanday on 6<sup>th</sup>, South Ronaldsay on 16<sup>th</sup>, Finstown on 23<sup>rd</sup> and Deerness on 27<sup>th</sup> with as many as three on North Ronaldsay on 17<sup>th</sup>. Rare warblers from the east involved a **Greenish Warbler** on Sanday on 8<sup>th</sup>, a **Dusky Warbler** on North Ronaldsay on 22<sup>nd</sup> and a **Radde's Warbler** there next day.

However, it was Papay that stole the *Phylloscopus* warbler prize when a **Two-barred Greenish Warbler** was found at Hundland on 9<sup>th</sup>. This close relative of the Greenish Warbler comes from much further east in central and eastern Siberia and has only been seen in Britain on a couple of previous occasions.

**Goldcrest** influxes brought 149 to North Ronaldsay on 7<sup>th</sup> with 85 there on 16<sup>th</sup> when about 100 were reported from Rousay. The much rarer **Firecrest** was seen in Deerness on 6<sup>th</sup>, on North Ronaldsay between 4<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> and in Finstown on 29<sup>th</sup>. Five single **Pied Flycatchers** were reported between 1<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, a figure just outstripped by **Red-breasted Flycatchers** with singles on North Ronaldsay, Sanday Deerness and South Ronaldsay (two) between 1<sup>st</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>. A **Great Grey Shrike** was seen on Sanday on 16<sup>th</sup> and a **Red-backed Shrike** in Evie on 22<sup>nd</sup> but much rarer was the **Brown Shrike** seen in Burness, Sanday on 6<sup>th</sup>, only the second Orkney record of this Siberian vagrant. A **Blue Tit** was a rare visitor to Hestily between 16<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>. Four **Long-tailed Tits** on Sanday on 17<sup>th</sup> were of the rare Northern race but one at Dale, Costa on 24<sup>th</sup> was probably British.

24 **Bramblings** were on North Ronaldsay on 6<sup>th</sup> while 92 arrived on 16<sup>th</sup>; 30 were in Finstown on 15<sup>th</sup> increasing to 17 two days later and up to 20 were at 12 other sites. **Goldfinches** continue to consolidate their position in Orkney with 36 in Finstown on 19<sup>th</sup>; eight migrants were on North Ronaldsay on 8<sup>th</sup> with one-two on Sanday on three dates. **Siskins** were few with no more than five at seven sites. The largest **Twite** flock was that at Dale where 100 were present on 30<sup>th</sup>. **Common Redpoll** numbers peaked at 25 on North Ronaldsay on 16<sup>th</sup> with up to eight at several other sites. One-two **Lesser Redpolls** were noted on North Ronaldsay and at Hestily while single **Arctic Redpolls** were found at Burwick on 8<sup>th</sup> and on North Ronaldsay on 14<sup>th</sup>.

Up to 10 **Common Crossbills** were in Rendall from 21<sup>st</sup> with singles on North Ronaldsay on 16<sup>th</sup> and one in Tankerness on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Five single **Scarlet Rosefinches** were reported on North Ronaldsay (two), Westray, Costa and Rendall while single **Bullfinches** were at West Heath, Holm and at Langskaill, Tankerness on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Usually more of a spring visitor, one-two **Hawfinches** were seen on North Ronaldsay (two), Sanday, Deerness, South Ronaldsay and Finstown.

A marked influx of **Lapland Buntings** resulted in a peak of 61 on North Ronaldsay on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 50 on Sanday on 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> with singles on South Ronaldsay on 8<sup>th</sup> and in Deerness on 16<sup>th</sup>. **Snow Buntings** peaked at 61 on North Ronaldsay on 2<sup>nd</sup> with a further peak of 30 on 29<sup>th</sup>; only one-two occurred elsewhere. One-two **Yellowhammers** occurred on North Ronaldsay on three

dates between 16<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> while an **Ortolan Bunting** was there on 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. It was a remarkable month for **Little Buntings** with a maximum of six on North Ronaldsay on 6<sup>th</sup>, two in Deerness on 9<sup>th</sup> and singles on Sanday (two) and Hoy between 2<sup>nd</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>.

Eric Meek