Birds new to Britain and Ireland

J. T. R. SHARROCK and P. J. GRANT

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Original accounts from the monthly journal *British Birds*
updated by J. T. R. Sharrock and P. J. Grant

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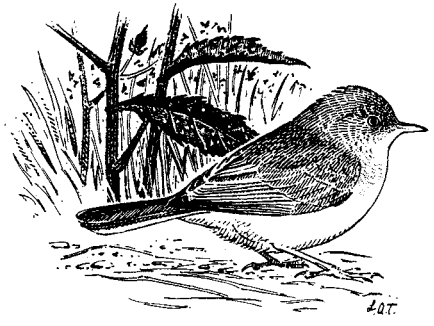

T & A D POYSER
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First published 1982 by T & AD Poyser Ltd
Print-on-demand and digital editions published 2010 by T & AD Poyser,
an imprint of A&C Black Publishers Ltd, 36 Soho Square, London W1D 3QY

www.acblack.com

ISBN (print) 978-1-4081-3846-5
ISBN (epub) 978-1-4081-3845-8
ISBN (e-pdf) 978-1-4081-3844-1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Editor's Introduction

There is something special about a 'first': we all know that Armstrong and Aldrin were the first men on the Moon, that Hillary and Tenzing were the first men to conquer Everest and that Bannister was the first man to run a mile in under four minutes. The same is true in ornithology: although it was more than ten years ago, many people will remember that the first Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* was at Portland Bill in winter 1970/71, but I doubt if more than a handful of birders could name the sites of the—how many?—subsequent ones. So there we have one reason for this book: to collect together in one place all of the most memorable, sensational and exciting moments in the past 35 years of rarity hunting.

A first record is, however, rather more than just the one that came before the second. Special attention is given to a bird never before seen in Britain and Ireland. Not only is it watched and examined closely and for a long time, with detailed notes being taken to establish its identity beyond question, but, afterwards, these details are scrutinised in minute detail by expert committees to ensure that no error has been made. Apart from a pair studied in a breeding or other biological study by a scientist, perhaps no bird in the world is looked at so thoroughly or for so long—or, given the chance, by so many birdwatchers—as is a 'first' in Britain and Ireland. Details of plumage, structure, stance, behaviour, voice, and so on, are usually recorded in more detail in the documentation of such an occurrence than ever appear in print before or afterwards. Thus, as well as being of mere nostalgic interest, the accounts of the 83 species included in this book provide valuable reference material for the bird identifier.

The accounts of the bird species observed in Britain and Ireland for the first time since the Second World War have been published in the monthly journal *British Birds*. This book is compiled from those accounts, which appear here under the names of the original authors. To retain the flavour of the period, almost no changes have been made to the original texts (even the maiden names of ladies who have subsequently married are retained), except that, to avoid confusion, scientific names have been corrected to accord with current practice.

The accounts of the 83 species are arranged in date sequence of discovery. In most cases, the observers at the time realised that they were watching a bird new to Britain and Ireland. Sometimes, however, an earlier claim has subsequently been found to be unreliable so that what was regarded at the time as a second or third record has now become the first (e.g. Calandra Lark). Conversely, there are instances where an earlier record has subsequently come to light, so that what was regarded as a first has become a second or third (e.g. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater). This book includes the actual first genuine record or the one which, at the time, was thought to be the first, since those are the ones which received the greatest attention; occasionally, both are included (e.g. Olive-backed Pipit) and, in a few cases, where the first record was rather meagre in field-identification details (e.g. a corpse), a second record is included, as well as the first, to provide adequate reference material.

As noted already, the documentary evidence supporting records of birds new to Britain and Ireland is scrutinised very thoroughly. In Britain, the details are assessed first by the relevant county bird records committee, then by the national *British Birds* Rarities Committee and finally by the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union. In Ireland, records in Northern Ireland are considered by the Northern

Ireland Bird Records Committee, and those in the Republic of Ireland by the Irish Records Panel. All accepted records of major rarities in Britain and Ireland are published in the monthly journal *British Birds*; those in Ireland are also published in the annual journal *Irish Birds*.

To bring this book wholly up to date, the original species-accounts have been augmented by the inclusion of three new items. First, the current status (as at 31st December 1980) has been summarised in a short paragraph. Some species (e.g. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Siberian Thrush) have remained as 'super-rarities', with only two or three ever being seen here; others (e.g. Collared Dove and Cetti's Warbler) have passed out of the rarity class and become familiar components of our breeding avifauna.

Secondly, to provide a quick and easy reference to the origin of each species, maps have been added to show breeding distributions. These are intended only as rough guides to the general area from which the species has come: this book is not a distribution guide and the maps are not intended as anything more than a quick aide-memoire (they have been compiled from standard works of reference and do not contain original material). The inclusion of these maps has allowed world distribution details to be removed from the texts.

Thirdly, Peter Grant has provided a final paragraph for each species, drawing attention to identification details which were not included in the original accounts, either because the sex or age of the first individual did not call for such discussion or because subsequent research has revealed new information.

The majority of the authors, artists and photographers whose work is included in this book have waived their royalties or fees in favour of the monthly journal *British Birds*, which is published for the benefit of ornithology and not for profit. Thanks are also due to Dr Colin Harrison and Ian Dawson, who assisted with several of the distribution maps; Michael J. Rogers and Robert Hudson, who helped to trace details of some old records; and Mrs Sheila Cobban for much willing administrative assistance.

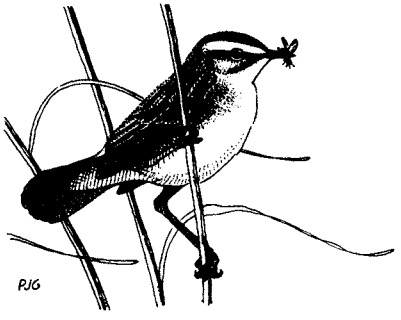
JTRS
Blunham, December 1981

Moustached Warbler Acrocephalus melanopogon, *Cambridge, 9th August 1946; from a painting by E. A. R. Ennion.*

AUGUST 1946

Moustached Warblers in Cambridgeshire

R. A. Hinde and A. S. Thom



The first recorded breeding of the Moustached Warbler (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*) in the British Isles occurred in Cambridgeshire in 1946.

On 3rd August 1946, D. E. Sergeant and R.A.H. noticed an unfamiliar warbler in a sallow bush on the edge of a large reed-bed. Only a few short views of the bird were obtained, but it was seen to have a very dark crown and a very conspicuous white superciliary stripe. After a few minutes it flew out over the reed-bed and did not return within the half hour for which the watchers were able to remain.

On the morning of 4th August both birds of the pair were watched for two hours by C. C. Rose, A.S.T. and R.A.H. They spent most of their time in the reed-bed, but brought food at frequent intervals to a very thick bramble hedge about ten yards from the water's edge. The area between the brambles and the water was thickly carpeted with Coltsfoot, and contained two sallow bushes and a wild rose bush in which the adult birds alighted on their way to the bramble. As they did so, clear views were obtained at a range of less than ten yards. The most conspicuous feature was the superciliary stripe, which, starting from the base of the bill, where it was off-white in colour, became pure white and broadened considerably as it curved over the eye and came to a square finish at the side of the nape. The appearance of this stripe was made even more startling by the almost black crown and the very dark stripe through the eye. This, together with the contrast between the dark chestnut-brown back and white under-parts gave the birds a much more striking appearance than any warbler with which the observers were familiar. Although the two adult birds were clearly very similar, close inspection revealed small differences, and one (which was assumed for purposes of reference to be the female and is referred to as such throughout this paper, although of course no direct proof of sex exists) was seen to have a superciliary stripe which was just off-white throughout. The differences between the two adult birds were such as could easily have been caused by abrasion.

As they perched in the bushes the birds called with a soft but penetrating 't-trrt, t-trrt, t-trrt,' which all observers agreed was less harsh than and readily distinguishable from that of the Sedge-Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*). Each syllable was uttered separately. When the birds were approached too closely they called with a rather harsher 't-chik', which was repeated rapidly with the syllables sometimes run together.

The adults brought food to the bramble at intervals which seldom exceeded two or three minutes. The two birds always used different approach paths, the male approaching on every occasion by a sallow bush opposite the centre of the bramble and the female by a rose bush some eight yards distant. Thus they entered the bramble at two separate points, which were several yards apart, and it seemed from the very dense nature of the hedge and the very short time which the birds spent in it

Originally published in *British Birds* 40: 98–104. Heading drawing by P. J Grant

that the two adults must be feeding young birds which were some distance apart in the hedge and which must therefore have been already out of the nest.

During the afternoon of 4th August the birds were again watched by R.A.H. for several hours. Further details of the plumage were noted (a full description compounded from those of all who watched them is given at the end of this paper). On one occasion the female was seen at the same time as a Sedge-Warbler in the field of the glasses. The crown was very much darker than the Sedge-Warbler's, the superciliary stripe larger, whiter and more conspicuous and the back and mantle more rufous. It was quite clear to this observer that the birds were not Sedge-Warblers. Later the male bird, which had just entered the hedge with food, was heard to give the alarm 't-chik, t-chik' very loudly and persistently. A few seconds later this bird was seen near the top of the hedge displaying vigorously with vibrating, half-raised wings and fanned tail. The tail was seen spread for only a few seconds, but was clearly rounded. After about two minutes of continuous calling the male bird left the hedge, and the observer went up to investigate. A young bird was found near the top of the hedge. This bird was in general similar to the adults, but the forehead, crown and nape were a very dark brown and the mantle was lighter than the adults. The superciliary stripe was the same shape as those of the adults, coming to a square finish near the nape, but was very slightly cream in tone. The young bird flew to the top of the hedge, where it perched for about a minute, and then flew down the hedge for over ten yards. This bird gave the impression of being able to fly several yards with ease, but a bird seen by A.S.T. at dusk on 7th August appeared to have very limited powers of flight. On 8th August however, A.S.T. saw three young birds, two of which were quite strong on the wing, though the third could fly only short distances.

The observations made up to this point seemed to correspond only with the Moustached Warbler, but in view of the fact that this species had been recorded only once before in the British Isles [and even this was subsequently rejected], the conclusion that a pair was actually breeding appeared fantastic. To establish the identity of such an obviously difficult bird two courses were possible—to obtain a specimen, which was decided against, or to invite as many expert ornithologists as possible to give their opinion.

On the morning of 5th August, Dr and Mrs W. H. Thorpe, the Rev. E. A. Armstrong and Dr R. W. Butler came to see the birds. All had excellent views, as the birds at this time were reasonably tame and it was possible to watch them from five or ten yards range as they perched in the bushes. All rapidly formed the opinion that these birds were of a species with which they were unfamiliar, and all noticed the characteristics of crown, superciliary stripe and mantle which have been mentioned above. Both Dr and Mrs Thorpe remarked independently that the birds were like a warbler with the head of a Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), and Dr Thorpe also emphasized the 'dark cheeks and pure white throat and lower cheeks, which gave quite as sharp a contrast as in the Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*).' Skins of both Moustached and Sedge-Warblers and the appropriate volume of Dresser were brought into the field. All were agreed that the birds had much darker crowns, very much whiter and more conspicuous superciliary stripes and more chestnutty mantles than had any of the Sedge-Warbler skins which were available, and that the birds appeared to correspond with the Moustached Warbler, although it seemed so exceedingly unlikely that this species should be nesting in the British Isles.

During the remainder of the day the adults continued to feed the young at intervals of about two minutes for periods of ten minutes to an hour, followed by breaks of ten to thirty minutes when they disappeared over the reed-bed.

The territory seemed to be bounded by the bramble hedge on the west side, by clumps of willow on the north and south sides, and to extend over the reed-bed to the east. On the far side of the bramble hedge was another large area of shallow water without reeds, but the birds were never seen to fly in this direction. Invasion of this area by Reed-Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) and Garden-Warblers (*Sylvia borin*) produced on several occasions on this and subsequent days a display consisting of fanned tail and spread wings accompanied by the harsh, rapidly repeated 't-chik, t-chik.' Sedge-Warblers, on the other hand, though seen in the area on only two occasions, were ignored. At 20.10 hours occasional high sweet notes were heard from a bird believed to be preparing to roost. When it was almost dark one of the birds was disturbed from one of the sallow bushes near the border of the reed-bed.

On the morning of 6th August, Prof. C. E. Raven and Dr W. H. Mills watched the birds. Prof. Raven stated that though he had formed the definite expectation of seeing nothing but very strongly marked Sedge-Warblers, he was 'entirely convinced that the bird was not *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Its very dark crown and blackish moustache contrasted with the white eystripe and white throat. The deep red-brown of the back looked much darker than a Sedge-Warbler . . . Its note, heard several times, seemed less harsh and shrill.' Dr Mills also noticed the conspicuous features noted by the previous observers and described above and commented 'It was certainly a warbler which I have never seen before.'

Later in the day James Fisher watched the birds, and in his field description emphasized the very dark crown and the very prominent superciliary stripe, which he described as not quite white but very pronounced. He also emphasized the rufous flanks.

Up to this time the weather had been fine, with at most 4/10th cloud, and little wind. During the rest of the period during which the birds were under observation, however, the weather deteriorated somewhat, and with the increasing wind the birds, which had previously come out into the open freely, tended to skulk under the leaves of the coltsfoot. The plumage of the adults, which had seemed to be in good condition before, seemed to deteriorate in the heavy rain which fell. A watch was kept on them for at least several hours every day. Although the young were seen to catch flies for themselves from at least 7th August onwards, the adults continued to feed them as frequently as they had done previously. The young became even more spread out than they had been before, and spent more of their time in the coltsfoot than in the bramble.

The only occasion on which any approach to a song was heard was at 05.32 hours on 6th August. The male was in one of the sallow bushes when a Reed-Warbler appeared in a neighbouring bush. The bird gave one sweet fairly high note followed by lower notes not unlike the normal call, and then chased the Reed-Warbler, displaying as described above. It then returned to its original bush and gave three of the high notes followed by the low notes as before, thus 'Trt, trt, trt, rdl, rdl, rdl.' Both of the adult birds, when flying for short distances seemed to carry the tail in a rather elevated position, and on several occasions they cocked the tail to an almost vertical position, especially when excited. A slight cocking of the tail was an invariable accompaniment to the uttering of the alarm note.

On 9th August, Dr H. B. Cott and Dr E. A. R. Ennion watched the birds. Dr Cott stated that they differed from Sedge-Warblers in the supericiliary stripe, which was 'whiter, broadened out behind the eye, extended for a considerable distance behind the eye and came to an abrupt finish.' Dr Ennion stated in his field description that the upper-parts were darker and redder than a Sedge-Warbler, and that the

'superciliary stripe was very much whiter and broader than any Sedge-Warbler that I have ever seen, contrasting so strongly with the blackish forehead and crown border above, and with the dark brown cheeks plus ear-coverts below, that it was strongly suggestive of a cock Whinchat; it did not taper towards the nape as in a normal Sedge-Warbler, but ended bluntly. . . .'

On 10th August, James Fisher and J. A. Gibb watched the birds. J. A. Gibb had previously observed the Moustached Warbler in Malta and had a very clear description of the single bird which he had seen there which emphasized the very broad white superciliary stripe broadening behind the eye, the black forehead and almost black crown, the white chin and throat and the rich dark chestnut brown of the back and wings. He was satisfied that the Cambridgeshire bird was identical with the Malta bird in all these particulars, and stated that 'I feel justified in maintaining the identity of the Cambridgeshire birds as *Acrocephalus melanopogon* in default of any other species with major characteristics identical with those of the Malta bird.'

A. Darlington also watched the birds on several days and made a long and careful description of them in the field. This description agreed in all points with those made by previous observers, and A.D. stated that 'I am myself satisfied that these birds are not Sedge-Warblers in any condition.'

The birds were watched for several hours every day until 20th August, which was the last day on which they were seen.

The facts of the case had been reported by Dr Thorpe to Mr B. W. Tucker, who is familiar with Moustached Warblers in Southern Europe, but unfortunately Mr Tucker was on holiday in Scotland. On his return he immediately came over to Cambridge and spent part of the afternoon of 26th August and the morning of 27th August watching the territory and searching the reeds and likely spots in the vicinity in the hope of finding the birds, but without success.

The complete evidence in the form of the individual descriptions of each observer, together with the paintings made by Dr Butler, Dr Ennion and A.S.T., was submitted to Mr Tucker. After a detailed analysis he replied that although Dr Butler's account stood somewhat apart in being distinctly more suggestive of Sedge-Warblers than any of the others, 'the evidence as a whole, and even the two or three fullest and most careful descriptions taken individually, seem to make the conclusion almost inescapable that the birds were Moustached Warblers'; but he pointed out the desirability of making a search for the nest. This seemed particularly important in view of the fact that the parents had first been seen feeding young, evidently recently fledged, amongst brambles some yards from the nearest water. This might have been held to suggest that the young had come from a nest in those brambles rather than in the reed-bed and so to constitute a weak point in the evidence, since all accounts show that the Moustached Warbler normally always breeds over water. It was therefore obviously important not only to search the neighbouring parts of the reed-beds, so far as possible, but also to determine what nests, if any, there were in the brambles or adjacent vegetation. Accordingly a careful search was made of the whole area, including the brambles, the sallows, willows, coltsfoot, and the reed-bed up to a distance of about five yards from the shore. All the bushes which were too thick to be properly covered thoroughly otherwise were cut down. It is quite certain that there was no nest in the bramble or anywhere in the vicinity that could possibly have been that of a Sedge-Warbler (as being the only other species with which a Moustached Warbler could possibly be confused) and this taken with the evidence given above that the young were already out of the nest when the birds were first seen, seems to make it probable that the nest was in some inaccessible part of the reed-bed.

The following is a description of the birds compounded from those of the various observers:

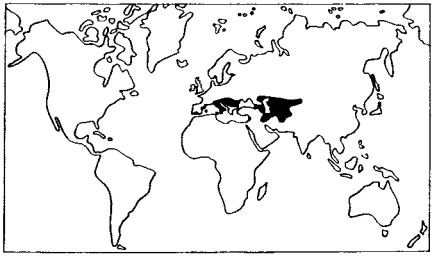
Assumed Male Forehead, crown and nape very dark brown, almost black, darkest in front and at sides, with a thin warm brown longitudinal line along each side of centre of head. Mantle and scapulars darkish chestnut brown, with four dark brown or black longitudinal lines through mantle, well defined from nape, but continuity becoming lost in posterior area. Back, rump and upper tail-coverts, rufous. Very conspicuous superciliary stripe starting from nostrils, where it was off-white, becoming pure white and broadening as it curved over and behind the eye to finish abruptly and squarely near edge of nape. Very dark brown stripe passing from gape through and under the eye, continuing behind the eye to the ear-coverts. Ear-coverts dark brown, becoming dull brown on the sides of the throat. Chin, throat and breast white, with chin and throat conspicuously so. Breast becoming suffused buffish posteriorly. Flanks reddish-buff, becoming more intense in posterior area. Tail feathers brownish-black with indistinct, badly worn lighter margins. Primaries and secondaries black-brown with yellow-buff margins. Greater and median coverts as secondaries. Lesser coverts brown with dark centres. Bill dull brown: gape vivid orange; legs straw-brown; iris brown.

Assumed Female Like male, but crown and nape slightly less black. Superciliary stripe off-white throughout. Mantle a slightly colder brown. Flanks and under tail-coverts, rather less rufous and more light warm brown in colour. Bill as male but lighter at base.

Juvenile Like adults. Forehead, crown and nape very dark brown with longitudinal less dark streaks. Superciliary stripe the same as in adults, but slightly cream in tone. Mantle rather lighter than adults. Feathers of wing-coverts with dark brown centres. Under-parts faintly suffused pale buff, with faint reddish-brown on posterior region of flanks. Bill nearly white.

It was impossible to identify with certainty the food which the adults brought to the young. The latter were most frequently fed with small Diptera, but the adults were also often seen carrying adult Odonata, Coleoptera and caterpillars (probably Lepidoptera). On two occasions an adult was seen carrying a white moth, one of which was identified as a Gold-tail Moth (*Euproctis similis*) and once a greyish Tettagonid grasshopper.

In the above résumé of observations and opinions an endeavour has been made to include all that is pertinent for the establishment of the identification. That the birds were not Sedge-Warblers is clearly established: that they were Moustached Warblers seems inescapable.



Despite the eminence of the observers involved, this extraordinary record of breeding seems doomed to be disbelieved by those who have not examined the evidence, but is completely accepted by all those who have. Not long ago, the British Ornithologists' Union's Records Committee included a number of doubters, so all the evidence—notebooks, sketches and colour paintings, as well as the published account set out above—was re-examined. As announced in the BOURC's sixth report (Ibis *113: 423*), *the record was unanimously accepted.*

18 August 1946

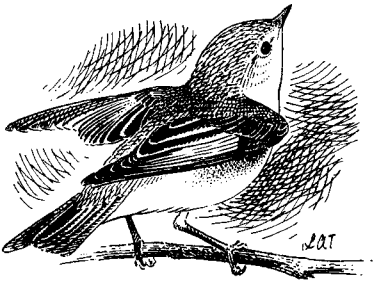
The Moustached Warbler remains one of the rarest of vagrants. There have been only four subsequent records, involving five individuals: two at Totton, Hampshire, on 13th August 1951 (Brit. Birds *45: 219–220*), *one at Cliffe, Kent, on 14th April 1952* (Brit. Birds *45: 412–413*), *one trapped at Wendover, Buckinghamshire, on 31st July 1965, and one at Angmering, West Sussex, on 18th August 1979.*

The best-known characters for distinguishing a Moustached Warbler from a Sedge Warbler (the only likely confusion species) are the obvious rufous coloration on the upperparts and flanks, and the rather uniformly blackish forehead and crown (sometimes with a slightly paler area down the centre) contrasting sharply with the broad, square-ended, white supercilium. On first-winter and typical adult Sedge Warblers, the crown has an obvious, diffuse paler area down the centre, the supercilium is off-white and diffuse at the rear, and the upperparts (except the rump) and flanks are generally rather sandy-olive, lacking any obvious rufous tones. Strong caveats are necessary, however, in relation to some adult Sedge Warblers, especially worn and faded individuals in summer and autumn, which not infrequently show an almost wholly blackish crown (due to abrasion of the pale tips of the central crown feathers), and a supercilium which is decidedly whiter and better demarcated than on the perhaps more familiar juveniles and first-winters. Such individuals, seen briefly or in lighting conditions or surroundings which give an impression of rufous coloration to the plumage, provide an obvious identification trap. Thus, for a firm identification of a vagrant Moustached Warbler, attention to other confirmatory characters is advisable. The best plumage marks among these are the rather heavy and well-defined blackish streaking on the mantle and scapulars (these areas being only faintly streaked darker, if at all, on adult Sedge), and generally darker ear-coverts with, especially, a usually distinct darker moustachial streak (from which the species gets its name) which is lacking on Sedge Warbler. With good views, differences of wing structure should be discernible in the field: the length of the wing-point to tertials is about half the length of the exposed tertials (almost equal on Sedge); the wing-point is usually formed almost jointly by the 4th and 5th primaries (3rd on Sedge); the 2nd primary falls well short of the wing-point (usually almost equal to wing-point on Sedge); and the first primary extends well beyond the primary coverts (always shorter than the primary coverts on Sedge). The shorter wings of Moustached Warbler make the tail appear longer, and when fully closed the tail is noticeably expanded at the tip, often giving a blob-ended appearance, whereas on Sedge the fully closed tail narrows evenly from base to tip.

Moustached Warbler inhabits extensive beds of reeds Phragmites *during the breeding season. The song, usually delivered from a reed-top perch, combines characteristics of both Sedge and Reed Warblers, but usually includes a diagnostic section in which a single, sweet 'pee' note is repeated, recalling the introductory phrase of the typical song of Nightingale* Luscinia megarhynchos.

AUGUST 1948

Bonelli's Warbler on Skokholm

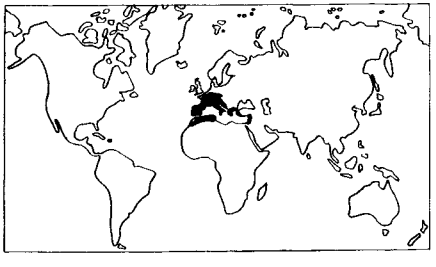


P. J. Conder and Joan Keighley

At 19.30 B.S.T. on 31st August 1948, a warbler was caught in the Garden trap on Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire. After a long examination that evening and again on the following morning it was decided to kill the bird. The specimen was sent to Mr R. Wagstaffe, Director of the Yorkshire Museum, who identified it as a female Bonelli's Warbler (*Phylloscopus bonelli*). Very little was seen of the bird in the field before it was caught, but J. K. records that the rump and tail were noticeably yellowish green, and that the white under-parts, grey head, and pale legs were also striking when seen from about two or three yards. It called 'hooeet' once or twice when flying into the trap. This is the first record of this species in Great Britain.

Mr Wagstaffe, in his report to the List Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union on 15th December 1948, says that, after having examined a large series of *P. b. bonelli*, and *P. b. orientalis*, he came to the conclusion that the specimen matched more closely the majority of specimens of *orientalis* in coloration, but that the wing measurement 60.5 mm, with the primaries straightened—the method used by Ticehurst—was smaller than the average wing measurement recorded by that authority in his *Genus Phylloscopus*. Moreover, the 2nd primary fell between the 6th and 7th primaries. This is an almost 80 per cent characteristic of *bonelli*, as against a 2 per cent characteristic of *orientalis*. 'Nevertheless, it could be argued, on the basis of pure taxonomics', said Mr Wagstaffe, 'that the bird is still assignable to *orientalis*, but as I have been unable to find an undoubted specimen of *orientalis* with wing as small as 60.5 mm, and of wing formula 2 = 6/7, I am prepared to believe, for the time being at least, that the bird is probably, but by no means certainly, a specimen of *bonelli bonelli*.' In this belief he was partly influenced by the geographical distributions of the two forms and by the fact that some examples of the typical race are much greyer than others.

At the previous meeting of the Committee it had been suggested that the first example of any addition to the British List should be treated binomially until such time as subspecific assessment could be based on more than one specimen. This was agreed to in the present case.



Originally published in *British Birds* 42: 215–216. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

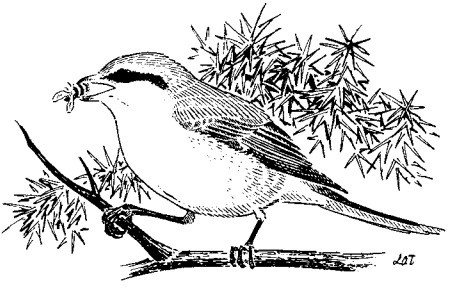
Although still a rare vagrant, Bonelli's Warbler has become almost regular. At least one was seen in every year in the 1970s, and no fewer than 11 were reported in 1976. By the end of 1980, there was a grand total of 68 British and Irish records.

Bonelli's Warbler is between Willow Warbler P. trochilus *and Chiffchaff* P. collybita *in size. The whole underparts are strikingly silky white, the upperparts plain, pale grey-brown, and the tail feathers and secondaries are fringed with bright yellowish (the latter forming a distinct bright panel on the closed wing). The yellowish-green rump contrasts with the generally drab upperparts, but this feature is often difficult to observe. Compared with most other* Phylloscopus *warblers, the head is rather featureless, lacking a defined dark eye-stripe or pale supercilium, giving a rather plain face in which the dark eye stands out. Typically, the leg colour is light brown, not so bright as on most Willow Warblers. The call (at least of the western race* P. b. bonelli) *is a rather deep, full 'pweeoo'. The song is distinctive, consisting of two subtly different phrases which are usually uttered alternately: the first is a 1 to 1½ second trill or rattle, made up of seven to ten rapidly repeated notes; the second is a slightly slower and lower pitched version of the same. When seen well, Bonelli's Warbler is one of the most distinctive species in a notoriously difficult genus.*

SEPTEMBER 1950

Isabelline Shrike on the Isle of May

W. U. Flower and M. I. Kinnear



On 26th September 1950, while observing migrant birds on the Isle of May, Fife, we saw a shrike fly into a walled garden near the lighthouse. The bird was about the size of a Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) and of strikingly pale colouring.

The shrike was watched for a total of about 1½ hours, mostly in very good light, at a range down to 20 feet, through coated lens binoculars 9 × 35. Description: *Upperparts*: narrow black line across forehead. Crown pale rufous (matching withered burdock on which it perched), paling to warm buff at nape and hind neck. Mantle and back pale greyish-buff, scapulars pale buff, rump and upper tail-coverts rufous, of a deeper tone than crown. *Sides of head*: lores, feathers round eye and ear-coverts intense black, continuous with forehad line. Supercilium cream. *Chin and all under-parts* conspicuously white, tinged pale pinkish buff on upper part of flanks. *Tail-feathers* appeared uniformly russet. *Primaries* pale brown, with outstanding white patch at base, forming prominent bar when wing spread. *Secondaries* pale brown with lighter edges. *Bill and legs* appeared black or dark grey.

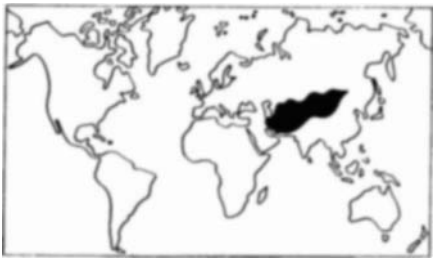
There were no crescentic bands or any other markings on the upper or under surfaces, and no black or white on the back, rump or tail.

Originally published in *British Birds* 44: 217–219. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

Behaviour The bird's carriage and movements were typical of a shrike. When not resting with head sunk between shoulders, or turning watchfully from side to side, it made repeated hops to the ground from its burdock perch, or short sallies from the wall. It was seen to take food from the ground, including a large earthworm. The bird could be watched easily, since it was unperturbed by a fairly close approach. No sounds were heard.

A south-east wind on 24th September had changed to a northerly gale on the 25th, and diminished to a milder north-west wind on 26th September. Very few migrants were on the island on 23rd September, but a few came in on both 24th and 25th September, including a Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) among other warblers.

We were unable to identify the shrike while on the island, since its colouring was different from any plumage of the shrikes described in *The Handbook*. Comparison of field notes and sketches with skins in the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, and with the plate and description in Dresser's *Birds of Europe*, leads to the conclusion that the bird we saw was an adult male, in full winter plumage, of the Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*).



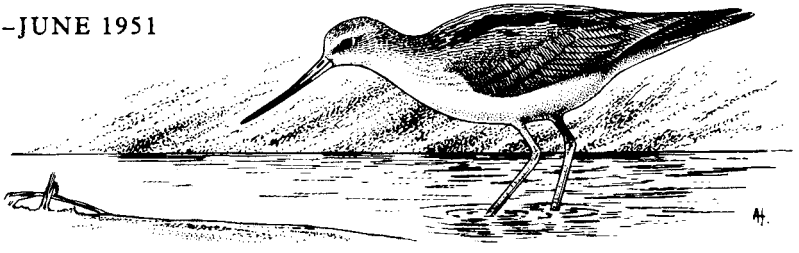
In the subsequent 30 years, this species mustered a total of 14 further records in Britain and Ireland, but its progress was far from smooth. For two decades, until general acceptance in 1978 of the views of Prof. Dr K. H. Voous (Ibis *119: 381*), *the red-tailed shrikes of the* phoenicuroides-isabellinus-speculigerus-tsaidemensis *group were regarded as races of the Red-backed Shrike* L. collurio *or as races of one species,* L. cristatus, *incorporating some 11 races which are now separated as Red-backed, Isabelline and Brown Shrikes. The*

Isabelline Shrike Lanius isabellinus, *Isle of May, 26th September 1950; from a field sketch by Miss W. U. Flower.*

overlap zones between these species/groups of races lie within areas of the USSR where there are few ornithologists, and it seems likely that we have not heard the last of the complicated taxonomic questions and arguments involved (for recent discussion, see Brit. Birds *72: 573–578; 74: 534–536). Nevertheless, these rufous-tailed shrikes will doubtless continue to straggle westwards and reach the British Isles, mostly in late autumn, regardless of how human beings classify and reclassify them.*

Adult Isabelline Shrikes, like the Isle of May individual (which was a male, probably L. i. phoenicuroides), *are distinctive. First-winter shrikes are ageable by the subterminal dark barring on the wing-coverts and tertials. The striking features of a first-winter Isabelline are its obvious generally pale grey-brown appearance, and contrasting gingery or rufous rump and tail. The breast-sides and flanks are only faintly marked with grey crescents, the crown, nape, mantle and scapulars are plain, pale grey-brown, and the bill has an extensive pale base. Red-backed Shrikes often show a reddish tail, but it matches the general coloration of the upperparts, the underparts are usually more strongly marked, and the bill is wholly or predominantly blackish.*

MAY–JUNE 1951



Terek Sandpiper in East Sussex and Suffolk

A. H. Betts and G. B. G. Benson

When at the Midrips, near Camber, Sussex, on 30th May 1951, A.H.B. saw a bird working along beneath the foot-high mud bank and noted the following details: general size and build of a Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) with similar bobbing action, but uniform ashy-grey above with perhaps a buffish tinge; there was a pale stripe through the eye, and throat, breast and under-parts were white. The outstanding features were, however, a long, slender black bill with (as I jotted it down on the spot) 'a definite slight upturn'—not so pronounced, that is, as in an Avocet (*Avosetta recurvirostra*)—and legs somewhat longer than a Common Sandpiper's and bright yellow.

In flight, skimming the water from bank to bank, the impression given was that of a ghostly Common Sandpiper with that bird's characteristic shallow, 'flicking' wing action. The bird was watched for some fifteen minutes steadily feeding, usually

Originally published in *British Birds* 45: 36–37. Heading drawing by Alan Harris

dipping the morsels obtained from the mud into water before swallowing. Owing to the low bank it was most convenient to watch from across the stretch of water, but views within 25 yards were obtained with 8 × 30 binoculars and ×25 telescope under excellent light conditions, though a high wind was troublesome.

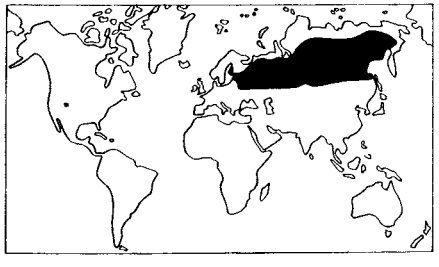
On checking over the details of the observations with *The Handbook*, and after examining skins at the British Museum, A.H.B. was convinced that the bird was a Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*).

On the evening of 2nd June 1951, W. E. Rowe saw a strange wader on a marsh near Southwold, Suffolk. In better light next day he was able to identify it as a Terek Sandpiper. It remained until about 16.30 G.M.T., 6th June and was seen by a number of observers including Mr F. C. Cook, Chairman of the Lowestoft Field Club.

In general appearance it was a conspicuously light-coloured wader, intermediate in size between a Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and a Curlew-Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*), with which birds it was momentarily in close company, grey (brownish not bluish) above and white below. The two dark streaks on the back converging slightly towards the tail, the bright yellow legs, and the dark, slender, upturned bill were very obvious characteristics. A small dark patch was clearly visible at the carpal joint of the folded wing. The neck and upper breast were slightly greyed. There was a small white stripe from the base of the bill to the eye. The base of the bill was rather lighter than the remainder but this could only be seen at close range.

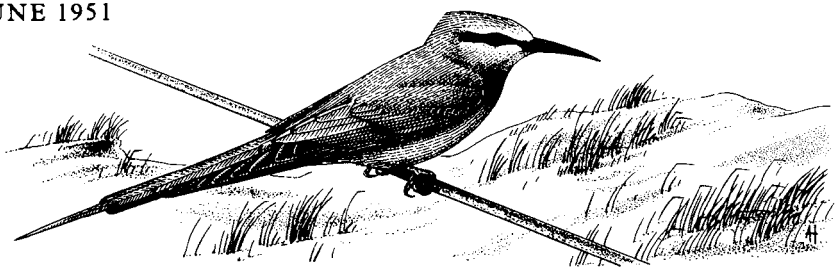
The bird was seldom seen in flight, but the fore-wing appeared rather dark and the secondaries to have white tips; but there was nothing like the contrast of a Redshank's wing.

It 'bobbed' in sandpiper fashion, but not so constantly as a Common Sandpiper. It waded about the shallow pools often up to the belly feathers, and appeared to feed almost exclusively from the surface—once or twice only was the bill totally immersed. Normally it remained apart from other birds. It was once put up by a Redshank and once by a Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*). On the evening of the 5th it appeared restless and called repeatedly, a note which G.B.G.B. wrote as a sweet, quick 'wee-wee-wee' (occasionally 'wee-wee'), undoubtedly *The Handbook's* 'dü dü dü.' It is possible that these two records refer to the same individual.



This elegant and distinctive wader is still a major rarity. Since the first in 1951, it has averaged less than one every two years, the grand total by the end of 1980 being only 18.

The Common Sandpiper-like actions on the ground and in flight, the rather long, upcurved bill, the yellowish or bright orange-yellow legs, and the prominent white trailing edge on the secondaries (the latter reminiscent of a Redshank, but not so broad) give this wader a totally distinctive appearance. The converging dark lines on the scapulars are a feature only of summer adults.



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater in Scilly

Hilda M. Quick

On 22nd June 1951, having a visitor staying with me on St Agnes (Isles of Scilly), I went up the lane before breakfast to get the morning's milk. Something skimmed across the path which registered as strange . . . only a glimpse, but it was definitely odd. I wondered if it could have been a Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) looking greener than usual, or a pale Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) with a light sheen on it (the flight suggested something of the Swallow tribe). However, I had to go back and get breakfast for my guest, and leave the mystery for the moment.

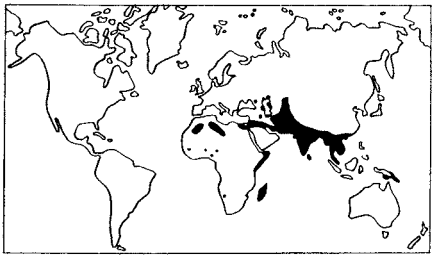
While we were breakfasting, a neighbour came into say that Mr Lewis Hicks had seen a strange and most wonderful bird. So we left breakfast standing and rushed out; collected Mr Hicks and went with him to the fields where he had seen it. (He told me afterwards that at first he could not believe his eyes, and went to fetch his wife to 'come and tell me if you see what I see!') Fairly soon we saw our quarry afar off, and presently it perched at some distance, but in good view. There was no doubt that it was a bee-eater (*Merops*); one knew it from pictures, and the curved bill and elongated tail-feathers could be clearly seen. It seemed to be returning fairly regularly to one spot on the telegraph wires, so I stalked gently up the lane to a position within 20 feet or so of where it came back to perch. It made frequent sallies after insects and brought them back to the wire to eat. ('Sitting there eating up my bees as fast as it can!' said Mr Hicks, who has hives . . . but we could not be sure that they were truly bees that it was catching.) Once, its prey escaped from its bill, and it did a lightning dive and turn to re-capture it and bring it back to the wire.

It seemed to me about the size of a Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) of a most beautiful irridescent green with rather darker primaries. They was a dark copper spot at the throat, a black line through the eye, and the forehead and crown looked pale blue. I noted the plumage carefully, not because I doubted that it was the European Bee-eater (*M. apiaster*), but because I was anxious if possible to report its sex and age. When the bird finally changed its hunting ground, after giving me a good exhibition for about ten minutes, I ran home, scribbled down the details, and turned to *The Handbook* . . . to find that the European Bee-eater is russet on head and mantle, with a yellow throat patch, whereas this bird was green all over, with a chestnut throat-patch. A hasty glance at the description of plumage suggested that the juvenile might be greener than

Originally published in *British Birds* 45: 225–227. Heading drawing by Alan Harris

an adult. I hurried back again to see more of it. No more close-ups were granted, but we all had excellent views of the bird in flight, when a particularly noticeable feature was the copper colour of the underside of the wing. Against the dark wind-break hedges, the shining green body, with flashes of russet as the wing rose, was very striking. In flight at a distance it was still a recognizable silhouette, rather like a Swallow with the body much prolonged before the forking (as it looked at a distance) of the tail. No sound was ever heard from it. About four hours after it was first seen it disappeared, and a party of bird-watchers, hastily summoned from St Mary's by 'phone, spent the afternoon searching St Agnes in vain.

On sitting down to meditate further on this plumage question, two facts stuck out: one, that if the bird were a juvenile *Merops apiaster*, it had no business to have such complete and conspicuous tail-streamers; and two, that it was incredible that *The Handbook* should omit all mention of the remarkable copper under-wing, one of the most noticeable of the field characteristics. So I wrote to *British Birds* about it, and was assured, from the description supplied, that the bird was of the species *Merops superciliosus*, the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater.



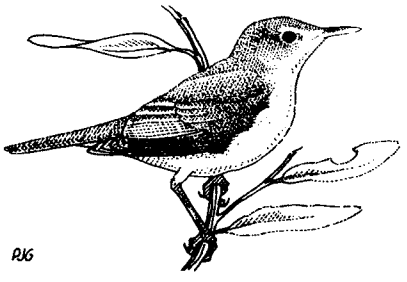
This exotic and beautiful species has not been reported in Britain since this 1951 observation. An earlier occurrence, also in Scilly, has, however, come to light. In June 1962, J. L. F. Parslow was examining the bird collection in the Isles of Scilly Museum when he discovered that a 'Bee-eater' shot on St Mary's on 13th July 1921 was in fact an adult Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl. *92: 57–59*).

The almost entirely bright green plumage is an immediate distinction from the more variegated Bee-eater. The black eye-stripe is bordered above and below by whitish; the chin is yellow with a brick-red throat-patch; and the underwing-coverts are wholly coppery. Although juvenile Bee-eater is generally greener above than the adults (lacking, especially, the bright chestnut on the mantle and wing-coverts), at least it shows their diagnostic bright chestnut crown, yellow chin and throat, and bluish underparts, features never shown by Blue-cheeked Bee-eater at any age.

SEPTEMBER 1951

Olivaceous Warbler on Skokholm

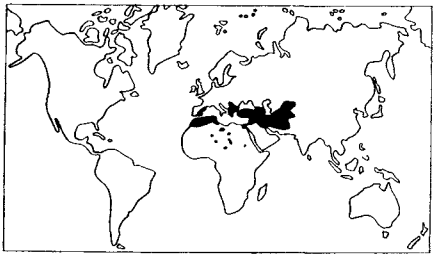
P. J. Conder



An Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais pallida*) was caught in a trammel-net on 23rd September 1951, on Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire. It remained on the island until the Observatory was closed on 3rd October. On 23rd September it was watched in the South Haven bracken for about 90 minutes, and the field-description which follows has been compiled from the notes of W. G. Bridges, David Boddington, P. J. Conder, Margaret Dun and John Peake. Superficially it resembled a Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*), but was rather smaller. The upper-parts were a pale uniform grey-brown, with tail and wings slightly darker. The under-parts were a pale greyish-white, except for the chin and throat and under tail-coverts which, in the sunlight, appeared pale greenish-yellow. At about 10 yards, also in the sunlight, it was possible with binoculars to see the pale yellowish-green lores and a superciliary stripe which extended a short distance behind the eye. The pale brown bill was obviously large, and the fact that it was broad at the base was noticed at close quarters. The legs appeared bluish-grey. Under more cloudy conditions later in the day the yellowness of the chin and throat was not so noticeable, and the bluishness of the legs not so pronounced.

On examination in the hand this bird was judged to be an adult. At 1300 hours B.S.T. on 23rd September its weight was 12.3 grammes. The wing measured 66.0 mm when in natural curve, and 67.0 mm when straightened. The first primary was 8.0 mm longer than the primary-coverts; the second primary was 3.0 mm shorter than the third and fourth, which were equal and the longest; the fifth was 1.5 mm shorter than the third and fourth; the sixth was 2.5 mm shorter and the seventh 3.0 mm shorter. The wing-formula can be seen in the photograph (Photo 1) showing the spread wing and tail of this bird. The photograph also illustrates quite well another character of the species—the outer tail-feathers shorter than the others.

During the first day or two on the island the bird was not shy, perhaps because it was tired, and occasionally it allowed observers to approach within two yards. It



Originally published in *British Birds* 46: 191–192. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

perched very often on the top of the bracken, where its habit of raising its crown and nape feathers was easily and frequently observed. After it had been about a week on the island, however, it was less easily approachable. It was heard by W. G. Bridges to use a note similar to the 'churr' of a Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*), but shorter and harsher. During the later days of its stay on the island it was more frequently heard to call 'yilp', a sound very similar to a call of the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), although quieter and higher pitched.

Despite Heligoland traps, mist-nets and the greatly increased number of observers in recent years, the Olivaceous Warbler remains a major rarity. Up to the end of 1980, only a further 11 had been discovered here.

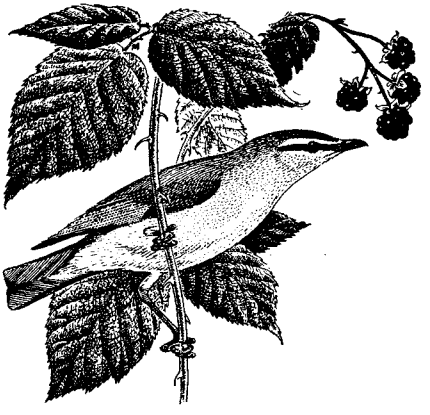
Satisfactory identification of a vagrant Olivaceous Warbler calls for lengthy and most careful observation, preferably backed by thorough experience of Hippolais *and other confusable warblers. The first stage in the identification of any* Hippolais *is to establish genus-diagnostic features such as the long, broad-based bill; pale flesh or yellowish lower mandible and cutting edges and tip of upper mandible; pale lores (without obvious dark line from eye to bill) giving a pale-faced look in which the dark eye stands out; ill-defined supercilium extending to or only just beyond the eye; bluish or grey-toned legs; and square-cut tail and short undertail-coverts (not graduated or long respectively as on* Acrocephalus *warblers). In combination, these features will rule out all the confusion species.*

Olivaceous Warbler has strikingly greyish upperparts and wings (the latter with whitish fringes on the tertials, secondaries and primaries, forming a pale wing panel, not as prominent as on a typical Icterine Warbler H. icterina), *and whitish underparts from chin to undertail-coverts, washed (perhaps especially on first-winter individuals) grey-buff on the breast-sides and flanks. At all ages, it lacks any greenish tones on the upperparts or yellow wash on the face and underparts; in the latter respect the identification of the Skokholm individual is apparently contentious. The short wings (primary projection half the length of the exposed tertials) and wing formula are similar to Melodious Warbler, and special care is needed to avoid the confusion of a pale individual of that species; although it would never totally lack the green and yellow tones, the effects of distance and different light conditions need to be taken into account. Further confirmatory differences are the presence of obvious and defined whitish fringes and tips to the outer pair (often two outer pairs) of tail feathers; the outer two or three pairs of tail feathers are graduated (tail corners almost square-cut on Melodious); and the bill, at least of the western race* H. p. elaeica, *is noticeably longer than that of Melodious Warbler. The smaller eastern race* H. p. opaca *is confusable with Booted Warbler* H. caligata, *which, however, at least has a bill and head structure recalling a* Phylloscopus *rather than a* Hippolais.

OCTOBER 1951

Red-eyed Vireo at Tuskar Rock

Robert F. Ruttledge



On 4th October 1951, a Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) was found dead at Tuskar Rock, off Co. Wexford, where it had evidently been killed by striking the lighthouse. Many other migrants became casualties in the same night.

Identification was kindly confirmed by Mr J. D. MacDonald at the British Musuem (Nat. Hist.) and the occurrence was reported in *B.O.C. Bull.*, vol. 72, p. 37. Captain C. H. B. Grant also carefully examined the specimen and informed me that the plumage showed no trace of the bird's having been in captivity. A study of the weather charts shows how very suitable conditions were at the time for a west to east crossing of the North Atlantic. It is significant that during the week in which the Vireo occurred at Tuskar Rock an American Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta rubescens*) was observed at Great Saltee which is within sight of Tuskar Rock (*Brit. Birds*, vol. xlv, pp. 325–328). Careful consideration of the facts points to the probability that the bird was a genuine vagrant.

Since the first record was a corpse, details of the next are also included here.

Red-eyed Vireos in Scilly

Between the afternoon of 30th September and the early morning of 4th October 1962, single individuals of Lesser Golden Plover (*Charadrius dominicus*), White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*) and Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) arrived on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly. With a huge and remarkably circular depression centred over the middle of the North Atlantic on 29th September, and considering the exhausted state of the first two birds, there can be little doubt that they had all initially been blown off course and then aided in their trans-oceanic flight by gale-force winds from the west.

This remarkable procession of Nearctic waders did not, however, do anything to prepare the observers concerned for the last arrivals in this period. During the afternoon of 4th October, R. E. Emmett, I. J. Ferguson-Lees and my wife and I were combing the bulb fields and wooded gardens in the centre of the island when, at about 3.45 p.m. B.S.T., a large warbler-like passerine was seen darting about in a tamarisk. A moment or two later my wife and I got the first clear view, immediately noting a heavy bill, a striped head and greenish upper-parts. This combination of characters prompted me to shout, 'Vireo!' The other two observers were quickly clear of cover but not before the bird had begun a series of rapid and lengthy flights. Eventually,

Originally published in *British Birds* 46: 378–379; 56: 462–464. Heading drawing by Robert Gillmor

however, a prolonged watch inside the adjacent parsonage garden gave all four of us excellent views at a few yards in both shadow and sunlight. The bird was then quickly identified, with field reference to Roger Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds* (1947), as a Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*), only the second to be recorded in the British Isles and Europe and the first to be seen alive.

A full description and sketches were made and even when it was not in view, its progress through the leaf-canopy could be traced by its frequent calls. The note might be written as *tchay* and, with its pronounced nasal twang, was remarkably like that of a Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*). The size and total length were similar to those of a Great Tit (*Parus major*) but with a correspondingly short tail and heavy, blob-like bill. Our first impressions were of a fairly bright greenish bird moving boldly through foliage, showing a dark cap, black and white head-stripes recalling a Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*), and whitish under-parts. The following detailed description was obtained between about 3.45 p.m. and 5.30 p.m. in a series of short views from fifty yards down to a few feet:

Upper-parts: crown grey, looking faded or quite bright blue-grey (and even black when feathers raised) according to angle of light; supercilium conspicuous, pure white bordered with lines of black above and below (the lower line passing through the dark eye); rest of upper-parts, including wing-coverts, pale but fairly bright olive-green (greenish in dull light) with a lighter and silvery grey-green panel on inner half-dozen secondaries, recalling the panel of an Icterine Warbler (*Hippolais icterina*); primaries and tail-feathers browner green (but tips of latter paler). *Under-parts:* chin, throat and centre of chest clean off-white; ear-coverts and cheeks washed with olive-green, this extending to sides of chest and flanks; under-tail coverts washed with yellowish-green (appearing yellow in sunlight). Bill dark blackish; legs greyish in sunlight and dark blue-grey in shadow.

The actual colour of the eye was not seen on 4th October, but on the next day, with the bird sometimes in more open surroundings, we frequently caught a glint of red from mid-day onwards.

During the early afternoon of 5th October, I. J. Ferguson-Lees and I were again in the parsonage garden when suddenly not one, but two Red-eyed Vireos appeared within a foot of each other in the same bush. The fact that there were two cleared up some variations in the plumage details which we had noted on the 4th and also probably accounted for the vociferous calling which we had all thought unusual for such a bird on its own. The second one differed from the first in the following respects:

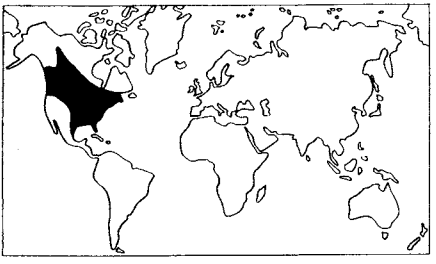
Generally duller with greyer crown (never showing blue) and less intense black borders to the supercilium. Upper-parts less green and wing panel not so obvious. Under-parts duller white. Eye apparently blackish in all lights and at all angles.

For the rest of the 5th, we were able to study the two birds at varying ranges and in all lights, and concluded that we were looking at one adult and one immature. Both remained fairly secretive, taking cover at any movement, but nevertheless they were watched as they worked their way through the leaves of ivy, elm, pittosporum, apple and other trees and shrubs. They picked insects off foliage, both when perched and in hover-flights, and once one was seen fly-catching. They both flicked their tails frequently and clearly kept in contact by calling; at one time a prolonged duet of *tchay, tchay* was heard.

It seems very probable that both were present on the 4th and we saw them regularly up to the 7th, our last full day on the island. On the 6th we were joined by G. J. Harris, R. Khan, N. R. Phillips and B. P. Pickess, all of whom also saw at least one of them during the next few days. They last saw the immature on the 9th and the adult

on the 10th, when K. H. Hyatt was also present. Finally, the last-mentioned observer, together with B. S. Milne and F. H. Waters, had a brief view of the immature on the 17th.

D. I. M. WALLACE



Including the two in Scilly in 1962, ten more Red-eyed Vireos have occurred between the first one in 1951 and the end of 1980. All have been in southern Ireland or southwestern Britain, and all have been within a three-week period from the last week of September to mid October, the classic pattern for Nearctic passerine vagrants.

Red-eyed Vireo is about the size of a Garden Warbler Sylvia borin. *Adults in autumn are almost wholly silky white below, and the iris is obviously red; first-winter individuals (the most likely age of vagrants to Europe) have an obvious yellow or yellow-buff wash on the flanks and vent, and a brown or chestnut iris which, in sunlight, may glint red.*

OCTOBER–NOVEMBER 1952

American Robin on Lundy

Peter Davis

An American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) was present on Lundy, Devon, from 27th October to 8th November 1952. It was probably first seen on 25th October, by one of the islanders.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

On the morning of 27th October I found a strange thrush in a gully choked with sallows and brambles, on the terraced eastern slopes of the island. It was feeding avidly on blackberries, and tolerated my approach to within ten yards, remaining

Originally published in *British Birds* 46: 364–368. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

motionless when a few Redwings (*T. iliacus*) flew out of the bushes. With its blackish head, dark olive-brown upper-parts, pale brick-red under-parts, rather rotund build, and upright stance, the bird somewhat resembled an oversized cock Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*). There was an incomplete white ring around the eye. When disturbed the thrush gave a low 'tchook, tchook, tchook' call hardly distinguishable to my ears from the notes of an uneasy Blackbird (*T. merula*).

Dislodging the bird from the gully proved a difficult task, but eventually it flew southwards along the main terrace, and was taken in one of the Heligoland traps. After examination and ringing at the Old Light, the Robin was shown to the other resident bird-watchers, F.W. and Miss Mary Gade, and John Ogilivie. Later, photographs were taken by Kenneth Monk (one of these is reproduced on Photos 2 & 3), and the bird was afterwards released near the Hotel.

The bird had returned to the terraces, half a mile from the Hotel, on the 28th, and remained there on the 29th, but subsequently it was seen only on the top of the island, near Quarterwall Pond. Here it sought food on the close-cropped sward, with Redwings and Blackbirds. Earthworms seemed to be the main attraction. Though not confiding, the American Robin seldom flew as far as the other thrushes when people passed along the track. On one occasion F. W. Gade saw it join a party of Fieldfares (*T. pilaris*) flying away over the airfield, but soon it dropped out and returned to the Quarterwall.

Another note was heard several times, a low 'tseep' or 'sssp,' given in flight or from a vantage point on one of the stone dykes.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The following description was taken from the bird in the hand:

Upper-parts: Head very dark brown, feathers with olive-brown tips; a short patch above, and another below and behind the eye, white. Rest of upper-parts dark olive-brown, slightly greyer on the rump. *Wings:* dark brown, outer edges of primaries, secondaries, primary and greater wing-coverts pale greyish. *Tail:* dark brown, the two outer feathers on each side with small white tips. *Under-parts:* chin and throat white with dark striations, particularly at the sides. Upper breast, sides of lower breast, flanks, axillaries and under wing-coverts pale brick-red, rather paler on under-wing coverts; feathers with pale greyish tips on upper breast and flanks, whitish tips on sides of breast. Centre of lower breast and belly white; under tail-coverts white, feathers with grey-brown bases forming a patch in the ventral area. *Soft parts:* bill dark brown with yellow gape; eyes dark brown; legs and feet dark brown.

Wing-formula: 1st primary 6 mm shorter than primary coverts; 3rd and 4th longest, 2nd 7 mm shorter 5th 2 mm shorter, 6th 9 mm shorter, 3rd to 6th emarginated on outer web.

The outer rectrices were 5 mm shorter than the other ten.

Measurements: Wing 130 mm; tarsus 33 mm; bill from feathers 18.5 mm; weight 69.8 gm at 12.30 hours.

Judging from the colour of the upper-parts, the paleness of the breast, the ill-defined white orbital ring, the smallness of the white tips of the outer rectrices, and the colour of the bill, the bird was in first-winter plumage.

The dark brown, but not blackish tail, suggests that this specimen was of the Eastern race (*T. m. migratorius*) rather than of the Northern (*T. m. nigrideus*).

THE METEOROLOGICAL POSITION

I am indebted to Kenneth Williamson (personal communication, 1952) for his comments on this aspect of the occurrence. He has stated that 'the present case, arguing on the concept of migrational drift—a drift downwind across an inhospitable zone—seems . . . just about as clear-cut a case as one could hope to get.'

32 *October–November 1952*

On 21st and 22nd October, the eastern two-thirds of North America were dominated by two major pressure systems—a great anticyclone covering the United States, and a rapidly-developing depression centred over Hudson's Bay. During these two days the pressure-systems were contiguous in the Great Lakes–St Lawrence region, and a complementary south-westerly airstream flowed through this area to the Atlantic coasts. This airstream could well have drifted migrants out of Upper Canada into the Maritime Provinces.

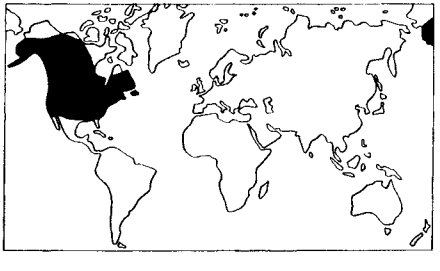
For a lucid summary of the situation on 23rd and 24th October, I quote Williamson's remarks: 'The mid-day weather-map of 23rd shows the Hudson's Bay depression's warm sector sweeping across the estuary of the St Lawrence, the wind westerly ahead of the cold front. This is exactly the kind of set-up which, with depressions moving in the opposite direction up the North Sea (which is not much bigger than the mouth of the St Lawrence) deposits hundreds of migrants from the Continent at Fair Isle. This "low" may well have been important in the present case. The picture in the Atlantic itself is simple enough from 23rd to 25th, a vast depression centred about 500 miles south of Iceland governing the weather across the whole width of the ocean on 23rd, and over the eastern two-thirds on 24th. Any bird which got adrift to sea beyond Newfoundland would be in the eastwards-flowing airstream on the south side of this depression, with force 6 to 8 winds to help it, and no complications until it reached the British Isles.'

THE TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT

The distance from the St Lawrence estuary to Lundy by this down-wind route is about 3,200 miles, with an actual sea-crossing of 2,800 miles from Cape Race. The average wind-speed along this track, on 23rd–25th October, was in the region of 35 m.p.h. To this must be added the flight-speed of an American Robin, which would be about 35–40 m.p.h. It seems reasonable to postulate an average ground-speed in excess of 70 m.p.h., so that the Atlantic crossing could have been made in less than forty hours.

There is no reason to believe that such a flight would be beyond the powers of a bird of this size, though undoubtedly its condition would be critical by the time a landfall was achieved.

The weight-losses sustained by migrating birds have been the subject of much work in recent years by Williamson (1952) and others, and it has been shown that small Passerines may lose 20–30 per cent of their initial weight on long sea-crossings, without any apparent ill-effect. Such losses are rapidly made good when suitable feeding-places are found. A bird's condition only becomes critical when the muscle and liver glycogen and accumulated fat have been consumed, and inroads are made upon the protein of the muscle-tissue.

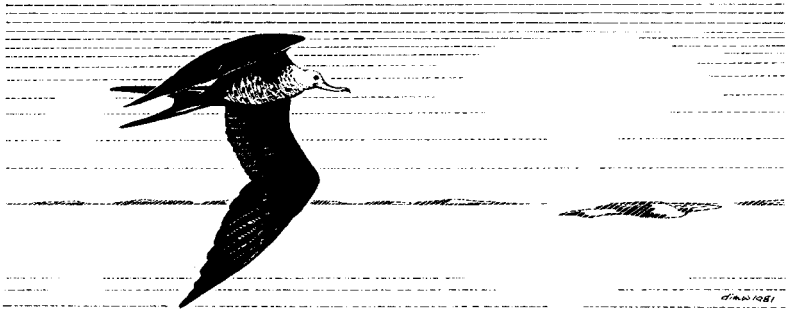


The weight of a Blackbird of similar size and build to this American Robin and passing through Lundy in the autumn is usually in the region of 90 to 100 gms. The actual weight of the Robin when trapped, two days after the probable time of arrival on the island, was, however, only 69.8 gms. Making due allowance for recuperation, the weight-loss undergone may have been as great as 40 per cent. These figures are in themselves very strong evidence that the bird had recently completed a flight of very long duration.

With an accumulated total of 23 records, the American Robin now ranks as the commonest Nearctic passerine and the second-commonest Nearctic landbird vagrant to Britain and Ireland, exceeded only by the Yellow-billed Cuckoo Coccyzus americanus. *Until the early 1950s, very few ornithologists believed that it was possible for landbirds to fly across the Atlantic, and records were always dismissed as referring to escaped cagebirds. Now that transatlantic vagrancy is accepted, some past records have been reassessed; among those now retrospectively added to the British and Irish list is an American Robin at Shankill, Co. Dublin, on 4th May 1891* (Ibis *122: 565*).

Both sexes of this distinctive Blackbird-sized American thrush are similar: first-winters (like the Lundy individual) are best aged by the smaller, whitish or buff tips on the outer tail feathers (larger and white on adults), but other features, such as the more olive-brown (rather than greyer) upperparts, less black lores and ear-coverts, and pale (rather than rich) brick-red underparts are, in combination, further clues to age.

JULY 1953



Magnificent Frigatebird on Tiree

John Graham

In July, 1953, another new species, the Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*), was added to the British list. The account which follows was compiled with the

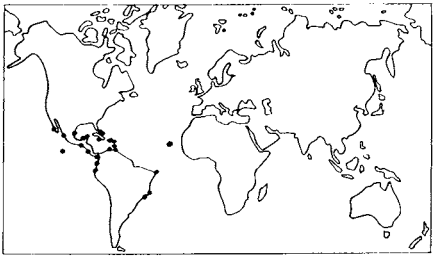
Originally published in *British Birds* 47: 58–59. Heading drawing by D. I. M Wallace

assistance of Mr Iolo Williams, Sir Norman Kinnear, Dr A. C. Stephen and Prof. V. C. Wynne-Edwards.

On 10th July 1953, at Loch a' Puill, a freshwater lochan near the south-west corner of the island of Tiree, Inner Hebrides, I caught in a landing-net what I described as 'a big bird with an all white head and an albatross beak'. I noted that the whole of the back and tail were a brown colour and the tail was deeply forked. There was quite a lot of white on the under-parts, and freckled black and white feathers down the legs to the toes. It was in an exhausted condition when found at 10.30 a.m. (B.S.T.) and it died at 8 p.m. on the same day. The remains were sent to the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, and there made into a cabinet skin, which has now been incorporated in the Museum's collection through the kindness of His Grace the Duke of Argyll. At the British Museum (Natural History) Sir Norman Kinnear identified it as a Magnificent Frigatebird of the Caribbean race (*F. m. rothschildi*).

The bird was an immature female (not a male, as reported in *The Times* of 25th July 1953), with, according to Dr Stephen, a wing-span of 6 feet 6 inches and a length of 33 inches.

Mr David R. R. Burt of St Andrew's University examined the body and reported that a number of tape-worms of the genus *Tetrabothrius* were found, but that these could not be more fully identified owing to the state of decomposition. One specimen of the hippoboscid fly *Olfersia spinifera* Leach, and three species of Mallophaga—*Edmaniella aurifasciata* (Kelly), *Colpocephalum angulaticeps* Piaget and *Petinopygus crenatum* (Giebel)—were identified respectively by Mr H. Oldroyd and Miss Theresa Clay at the British Museum (Natural History).



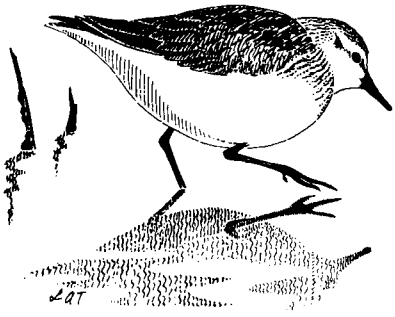
No fully identified Magnificent Frigatebird has been observed here since the first, unfortunate, moribund individual in 1953. There have, however, been two frigatebirds, possibly but not certainly of this species: off Forvie, Grampian, on 20th August 1960 and off Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 24th August 1973.

Frigatebirds are huge, fork-tailed, tropical seabirds which obtain food either by snatching from the surface in flight, or by skua-like harrying of other seabirds. During the day, they neither come to land nor settle on the sea (their plumage is not waterproof), and at night they use prominent perches, which aid take-off. The Magnificent Frigatebird has a wing-span of between six and eight feet (females larger than males). Males have all-black plumage, with a bare, red throat patch; females and immatures have a white patch on the belly and flanks.

JULY 1953

Semipalmated Sandpiper at Cley

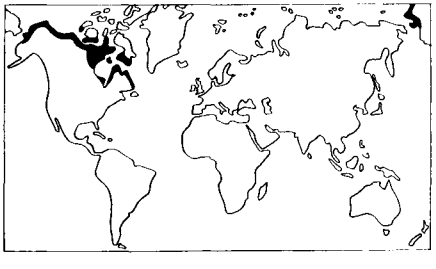
A. H. Daukes



On 19th July 1953, an unusual wader was observed on Arnold's Marsh, Cley, Norfolk, by P. R. Clarke, who pointed it out to P. D. Kirby and R. A. Richardson. It was subsequently watched for some hours at a few yards range by these three observers, myself, Mrs R. F. Meiklejohn and W. F. Bishop, the official watcher of Cley Marsh. We all came to the conclusion that it was a Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*).

Attention was first drawn to the bird by its predominately grey colouring and its peculiarly leisurely method of feeding, rather after the manner of a Knot (*Calidris canutus*). In size the bird was slightly, but definitely, larger than a Little Stint (*C. minuta*), one of which was present for comparison, and in colour rather paler and more grey: the light backward pointing V mark on the back, which is a conspicuous feature of the Little Stint, was entirely lacking; the breast was streaked with grey and the under-parts were pure white. There was a noticeable black line from the top of the upper mandible to a point just behind the eye, where the line broadened into an irregular grey black band extending along the top of the ear-coverts, and there was a light superciliary stripe. The wing-coverts were much abraded, pointing to its being an adult bird in the last of its summer plumage. The bill was black, shorter and noticeably stouter than that of a Little Stint, and seemed to broaden at the end. The legs, when wet, appeared to be black, but when dry, were seeen to be very dark olive green. The usual note was a husky, throaty 'churup' and an occasional very faint 'chit', the latter only audible at a few feet. On the wing the bird looked very uniform grey, with an almost imperceptible wing bar: tail pattern much as Little Stint.

Every endeavour was made to catch the bird, which was quite tame, and to identify its footprints, but the mud was too liquid for this to be done. A small hide was erected by R. P. Bagnall-Oakeley and 100 feet of colour cine-film were obtained at very short range, together with several 'stills' down to a distance of six feet, two of which are reproduced here (Photos 4 & 5). Copies of these were sent to Roger Tory Peterson,



Originally published in *British Birds* 47: 131–132. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

the well known American ornithologist, who wrote to say that the bird was quite definitely a Semipalmated Sandpiper. The colour film has since been seen by many people including other New World ornithologists and all are agreed on the identification.

The field characters separating Semiplamated Sandpiper from the confusingly similar Little Stint C. minuta *and Red-necked Stint* C. ruficollis *are still being investigated, but the 12 formerly accepted British records of Semipalmated Sandpiper were recently reviewed (see* Brit. Birds *72: 264–274) and seven of them discarded because the evidence did not completely prove the identification. As a result, the accepted total for Britain and Ireland up to the end of 1979 stood at 20 (14 in Ireland and six in Britain), but autumn 1980 brought no fewer than six more, five of them in Ireland.*

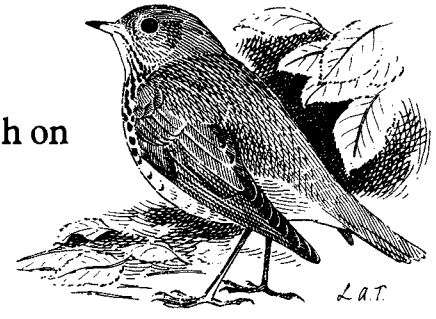
Structural features and call are among the best distinctions of Semipalmated Sandpiper, because they are valid at all ages. On average, it is slightly larger than Little Stint, and the bill is shorter, blunt-tipped in profile, and slightly spatulate when viewed head-on. The toes are partially webbed, more extensively between the outer and middle than between the middle and inner toes, and this is usually easy to see at close range on dry ground; Western Sandpiper C. mauri *(see pages 87–89) is the only other small sandpiper with webbed feet. The call is a low, husky 'chrrp' or 'churrup', subtly distinct from Little Stint's sharp, clipped 'tit' or 'chit'.*

An important first step in the identification of a suspected Semipalmated Sandpiper is to establish its age, so that comparisons can be made with the equivalent plumage of Little Stint. In winter, there are few, if any, really tangible plumage differences. Adults in summer plumage lack Little Stint's obvious rufous tones on the upperparts, head and breast, and are generally more ochraceous-brown; they lack the two prominent white lines at the sides of the mantle. Beware of adult Little Stints, however, in transition from summer to winter plumage: partial acquisition of winter plumage can give them a generally greyish appearance and obscure the whitish mantle lines. Juveniles (in autumn, from fledging to October) have a generally fresh, scaly appearance like other juvenile stints; they differ from Little Stints in their generally greyer, less rufous appearance (but beware variant pale Little Stints) and lack of prominent whitish lines or Vs at the sides of the mantle and on the scapulars. The supercilium on average appears whiter and more prominent (largely through greater contrast with the darker ear-coverts and more uniformly-coloured crown) and typically lacks the fork over the eye which is usually obvious on Little Stint when viewed head-on.

OCTOBER 1953

Grey-cheeked Thrush on Fair Isle

Kenneth Williamson



A Grey-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*) occurred at Fair Isle, Shetland, on 5th October 1953. The credit for capturing the bird belongs to Mr William Eunson of Fair Isle, who saw it feeding in front of the Observatory Trap in the late afternoon. With the aid of Peterson (1947) I identified it as the Grey-cheeked Thrush on the evidence of its dark grey loral region and ear-coverts and the indistinct eye-rim. As there is also in North America a sibling species, the Olive-backed [Swainson's] Thrush (*C. ustulatus*), in which the lores and eye-rim are buff, I decided to keep the bird overnight in one of the roosting-boxes and make identification doubly sure. Since there was no taxonomic literature concerning American birds in our library I telephoned to Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards, who very kindly gave me additional information, including weights and measurements, from works in his possession. Being completely satisfied with the identification as *C. minimus* I released the bird next morning, after checking the measurements and assisting Mr. Harry A. Craw to photograph it (see Photo 6).

The bird was a dwarf thrush, hardly bigger than a Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), with the upper-parts a uniform olive-brown colour—more greenish-olive than in the British thrushes and nearer the colour of a Robin, but darker. The under-parts were white except on the breast, which was suffused with buff and heavily spotted with black. I should like to emphasize the buffish tone of the breast, since the only British bird-identification book yet dealing with this species (Peterson *et al.*, 1954) considers the *absence* of buff a diagnostic character. Certainly specimens of *C. ustulatus* show a deeper colour, but examples of *minimus* in the British Museum and Colonel R. Meinertzhagen's collections have buffish breasts which is apparently characteristic of the Newfoundland population.

The Fair Isle bird was in its first winter, having white spots at the tips of the greater coverts and the innermost and second tertials. The chord of wing measured 99 mm, tail 68 mm, bill from skull 15 mm, and tarsus 28 mm. Its weight soon after capture was 24.92 gm, but overnight loss reduced this to 21.60 gm. Professor Wynne-Edwards gave me 30–33 gm as the normal weight of autumn migrants in eastern North America. A larva of an American tick, *Haemophysalis leporis-palustris* Packard, was taken from the bird's chin and was identified by Dr Owen Evans and Mr E. Browning of the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), where the specimen—the first recorded in Britain—is deposited.

Two races of this bird are at present recognized in eastern North America. The Northern Grey-cheeked Thrush *C. m. minimus* ranges across Canada from Alaska to Newfoundland and Bicknell's Thrush *C. m. bicknelli* breeds in Nova Scotia and the mountains of New England and New York State. Bicknell's Thrush is the smaller of the two, but there is a considerable overlap in measurements and the Fair Isle bird

Originally published in *British Birds* 47: 266–267. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

cannot be assigned to either race. Dr Charles Vaurie and Dr Dean Amadon kindly measured the series in the American Museum of Natural History and sent me the following data:

C. m. minimus wing: ♀ ♀ 100–107 mm; ♂ ♂ 103–112 mm.
C. m. bicknelli wing: ♀ ♀ 90–96 mm; ♂ ♂ 89–101 mm.

Dr Vaurie adds: 'As you say, your bird is somewhat intermediate, and as these races are at best rather slight we feel that there is no point in trying to identify it subspecifically. Naturally, one might assume that the Northern race would be the one to reach the British Isles, and it is perhaps worth mentioning that this is one of the few American song-birds which has established itself in north-east Siberia.'

The weather situation on the eastern seaboard of North America immediately prior to the occurrence of this thrush was similar in many respects to that which preceded the arrival of the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) at Lundy in late October, 1952.

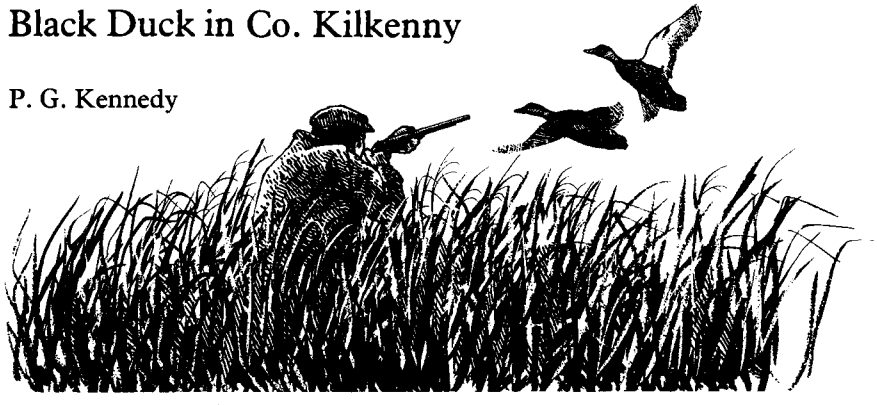
The grand total up to the end of 1980 was 12 records, all in Britain and five of them in just eight days, between 14th and 21st October 1976, in Scilly and west Cornwall.

The five American thrushes with spotted breasts are all small, Wheatear-sized species. They are typically more skulking than their familiar European counterparts, feeding under cover or within foliage, or never venturing far from undergrowth on paths or clearings. All, except Wood Thrush C. mustelina, *have already occurred in Britain—Hermit* C. guttatus (*page 193*), *Swainson's* (*page 85*), *and Grey-cheeked Thrushes, and Veery* C. fuscescens (*page 174*).

The greyer, less olive-brown general coloration of Grey-cheeked Thrush is a good distinction from the brighter Swainson's, which usually also has obvious orange-buff tones on the upperparts, head and across the breast (coloration thus resembling a washed-out Song Thrush Turdus philomelos). *The breast of Swainson's is slightly more distinctly spotted than that of Grey-cheeked. On some individuals, or in difficult light conditions, however, these distinctions are sometimes subtle, so that perhaps the most reliable distinction is in the detail of their facial pattern. Swainson's has a complete, prominent, pale buff eye-ring which is extended forward in a pale line above the lore, between the eye and bill. Grey-cheeked has at best only a thin, usually incomplete whitish eye-ring, and an indistinct pale line from eye to bill, if at all. The common call of Grey-cheeked is a soft 'veer', quite unlike the diagnostic call of Swainson's, which is a liquid 'wink' like dripping water.*

Black Duck in Co. Kilkenny

P. G. Kennedy



On 12th February 1954 a duck, which had been forwarded by Mr Frank Hudson, Carriganore, Waterford, was received at the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. Mr P. E. Dunn and I identified it as a Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*), a native of Eastern North America and a species hitherto not recorded in Europe. Owing to its condition the taxidermist was unable to sex it, but the skin was sent to Mr Peter Scott, who confirmed the identification and stated that it was an adult female.

The credit for this addition to our list of birds goes to Mr Hudson. On a visit to the poulterer's shop of Messrs M. J. Flanagan, 18 Broad St, Waterford, he noticed the unusual plumage of this supposed 'Mallard', and wishing to purchase it he was told that it had already been sold to a customer. However, an interchange was made and he secured the duck for presentation to the Museum. He was informed that the bird had been shot by a farmer named Croke, who lives at Listrolin, a village about three miles west of Mullinavat, Co. Kilkenny. From an examination of the shop register he found that the duck was received on 5th February 1954 from Croke himself by Harry London, an assistant in the shop. London, who has had many years' experience in handling wildfowl, realized that this duck was not an ordinary 'Mallard' and pointed out the fact to Croke.

Mr. Hudson also paid a visit to Croke in Listrolin and was shown the marsh, adjoining a stream, where the duck had been shot. Croke informed him that two ducks, which he considered to be of the same colour, rose together from the marsh and that he brought down both, but one was only winged and escaped in the stream.

As the Black Duck is not found in our handbooks, a brief description may be of interest. It is of the same size as the Mallard, and is not unlike a female Mallard, but it is darker. The name 'Black Duck' is less appropriate than 'Dusky Duck', another but infrequently used name, for it is not black like a Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), but dusky brown above and paler below. Two outstanding and diagnostic features of this otherwise drab duck are the speculum, which is purplish blue framed in velvety black, without any visible white, and the under-surface of the wing, which is white. The crown is blackish with pale brown streaks; the neck, lighter than the crown, is greyish-brown with dark streaking; the back is dusky with lighter edging to the feathers; the bill is olive and the feet orange-red with dusky webs.

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 341; 54: 324–325. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

Since the first was dead, details of the second occurrence are also included here.

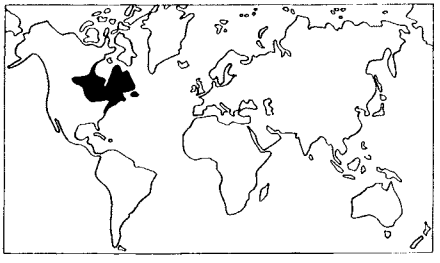
Black Duck in Co. Wexford

On 18th February 1961, I discovered a strikingly dark Mallard-type duck, which I immediately recognised as a Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) of eastern North America, on the west channel of the North Slob, Co. Wexford. Other ducks present at the time included about a thousand Wigeon (*A. penelope*) and a few Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*), Teal (*A. crecca*), Pintail (*A. acuta*) and Shoveler (*A. clypeata*). The Black Duck soon flew off over Wexford Harbour, but fortunately it was seen again in almost the same place (between Begerin Bridge over the channel and the pumping station on the seawall) on at least the next three days. Major and Mrs R. F. Ruttledge were able to confirm my identification on 20th February and I last saw the bird on the 21st, after which I left the area. Observers who looked for it on the 25th, and subsequently, were unable to find it. The following description is based on details I wrote down at the time and on notes later supplied by Major Ruttledge.

At rest, the sooty-brown back, wings, under-parts and tail made it easy to pick out from the other ducks. In size it resembled a Mallard, though its dark colour perhaps made it look a little larger. In contrast to the rest of the body, the head and neck were pale buffish, except for the crown and nape and a stripe through the eye, which were dark. The bill was similar in shape to that of a Mallard and yellow in colour with a slight greenish tinge. Even when the bird was on the water, it could be seen that the deep blue speculum did not have broad white margins as in the Mallard. In flight this feature was particularly noticeable, though the white tips of the secondaries did form a narrow band along the hind edge of the wing. Another striking feature in flight was the contrast between the sooty belly and the silvery-white linings on the under-sides of the wings.

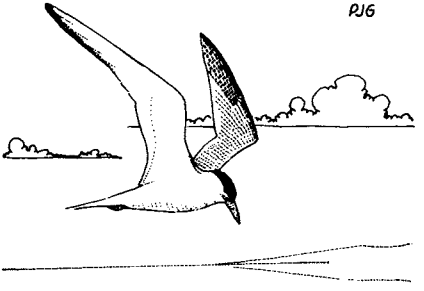
This is the second Irish and European record of the Black Duck, the first being a specimen shot on 5th February 1954, near Mullinavat, Co. Kilkenny (*Brit. Birds*, 48: 341). In view of the unusually disturbed weather conditions over the North Atlantic during the autumn, with numerous eastwards-moving cyclones, and the fact that a number of Nearctic vagrants occurred in Britain as a result, it seems reasonable to believe that the Wexford Black Duck was not an escape from captivity. It certainly seemed wild and was easily disturbed.

C. J. CADBURY



Including Dr James Cadbury's North Slob individual, a further ten Black Ducks have occurred since the first, ill-fated bird. A female—one of two which arrived on 27th October 1976—has taken up residence on Tresco in the Isles of Scilly, paired each year with a male Mallard and reared hybrid young in both 1978 and 1979. These two species are closely related and hybridisation is not uncommon in the USA; the Tresco offspring present potential identification pitfalls for the unwary.

In size and general appearance, both sexes of Black Duck resemble a female Mallard, but with sharply contrasting dark or blackish body. Unlike Mallard, the purple speculum lacks the prominent white leading and trailing edges (although a fine white line may be present on the trailing edge); the tail is brown, not white; and in flight the wholly white underwing-coverts flash strikingly against the dark body. Sexes are distinguishable when adult, males having blackish body (females blackish-brown), yellowish bill (females dull greenish), and red or orange-red legs (female dull orange). The bill is never marked with orange as it is on some female and immature Mallards. The incidence of dark variants of Mallard, and the possibility of hybrid Mallard × Black Duck, require that all the distinctions are checked before a firm identification as Black Duck can be made.



MARCH 1954

Royal Tern in Co. Dublin

P. G. Kennedy

On 24th March 1954 Mr R. G. Wheeler picked up the remains of a tern on the shore of the North Bull Bird Sanctuary, Dublin; they were partly covered by sand at the high tide line. The bird had been dead for a considerable while; most of the body feathers had gone, but the head, wings, legs and feet were intact. The wings were somewhat oiled. The bird was sent to Mr Kenneth Williamson, who identified it as a Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*), the first record for the British Isles and Europe.

The editors of *British Birds* have commented as follows: 'Though the kindness of the Rev. Fr. P. G. Kennedy, S.J., and Miss Geraldine Roche of the National Museum of Ireland, we have been able to examine the specimen, and we are very grateful to Mr R. W. Sims of the British Museum (Natural History) for comparing it with skins in the National collection. In view of the fact that the bird had obviously long been dead when it was found, and because it was picked up on the tide-line, it was thought possible that it might have died in mid-ocean and been carried across the eastern Atlantic by the Gulf Stream, thence into the Irish Sea. The body of the bird had been eaten away and it was suggested that this was due to the attentions of small marine animals during a long immersion in the sea. In view of these possibilities it was thought desirable to get expert advice, and we therefore submitted the remains to Mr G. M. Spooner, of the Marine Biological Laboratory, Plymouth. He discussed them with his colleagues, and with members of the National Institute of Oceanography, and has written as follows:

'In the first place—a negative point—there is nothing whatever against this bird

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 116–117; 61: 559–561. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

having died on the eastern Irish coast and having reached its present condition amongst beach litter. Most of the eating away would have been done by *Orchestia*, or by *Talitrus* on sandy ground; these always feed under cover and will ignore feathers. Secondly—and more postively—there is everything to be said against its having travelled across the Atlantic or indeed for a part of the way.

'The beak, wings and legs seem in much too good a condition for this to have happened. During the sea passage the soaking and bacterial action would have loosened the attachment of the feathers and softened the ligaments and tendons. The mandible would not have been able to stiffen up as it has. All feathers remaining on the body would have readily come away on handling. The plumage and the two wings would not have survived almost intact. (These are not statements based on the result of experiment, but are fair assessments of our experience of the action of sea water.) Further, it is unlikely that a floating body would long escape the attentions of scavenging gulls and fish. Incidentally, if the bird had come far across the ocean, it would presumably have passed through a region where small sharks may be rather numerous; these operate at night and snap indiscriminately at anything floating. Finally, objects drifting for any time in the North Atlantic or in coastal waters are apt to get settled on by marine organisms with calcareous shells, but there is no trace of such a settlement on the beak or legs. This further suggests that the body had not been floating long, even in coastal waters.

'At the same time, the position where it was found—Dublin—is of significance. Dr H. P. F. Herdman, of the National Institute of Oceanography, tells me that he would not expect objects carried to our shores from the open ocean to fetch up at this place, and points out that the experiments being carried on now with plastic envelopes dropped at different places out to sea are instructive. I understand that numbers are being recovered, but none anywhere near the Dublin coast. I do not want to conclude that a fortuitous combination of favourable winds could not combine to steer flotsam to Dublin, but the probabilities are very heavy against it; and a glance at the weather maps fails to suggest that the conditions in March 1954 were in any way peculiarly helpful. In general, one would expect objects carried up on the main Gulf Stream, or near it, to fetch up between N.W. Ireland and Shetland; while objects coming up from farther south, by a more erratic and chancy route, would get trapped on our south-western coasts before reaching the Irish Sea.'

'In view of Mr Spooner's report, we consider that there is a sufficiently strong case to dismiss any suggestion that the bird drifted here as a corpse, and that, therefore, there is every reason to treat it as a genuine vagrant to the British Isles.'

Since the first one was a corpse, details of the second occurrence are also included here.

Royal Tern in Kent

On the afternoon of 28th July 1965 Ola Tunander, a Swedish ornithologist staying at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Kent, returned from Shellness Point, some four miles away, to report the sighting of a Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*. P. Newbound and M.D. went back immediately with him and watched it for over an hour. The following description is compiled from field notes taken by these three observers that day and by J. Websper and J.N.H. on the 29th when the bird was under observation for a further 3½ hours:

Size: a little larger than accompanying Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandviscensis* and nearer to that of Common Gull *Larus canus*. *General appearance:* at rest looked bulkier than the Sandwich Terns, with much wider closed wings and very much larger head; stance with body well off ground

recalled Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* (with which both O.T. and J.N.H. were familiar); folded tips of wings approximately equal to tail in length; tail long and deeply forked like Sandwich Tern's and quite unlike Caspian's; in flight had the shape of a typical large tern, but heavy bill very conspicuous; flight thought to be like Sandwich's, but a little slower and a little less buoyant than Caspian's. *Soft parts:* bill longer and heavier than Sandwich's, approximately equal to length of head, very slightly decurved, and brilliant orange in colour; legs and feet black or very dark and longer than Sandwich's; eye dark. *Upper-parts:* head large with jet black cap covering entire crown and noticeable crest; neck pure white; mantle and back light grey; rump, upper tail-coverts and tail pure white; closed wings light grey and secondaries paler; in flight dark patches on tips of at least three primaries between 3rd and 7th. *Under-parts:* chin, breast, belly, flanks and under tail-coverts pure white; under-wing also white with dark patches on tips of at least three primaries corresponding to those on upper-wing.

The most important features were the shape and brilliant orange colour of the bill, the long and deeply forked tail and the small amount of dark coloration at the tips of the primaries, all of which helped to distinguish it from a Caspian Tern. It was always

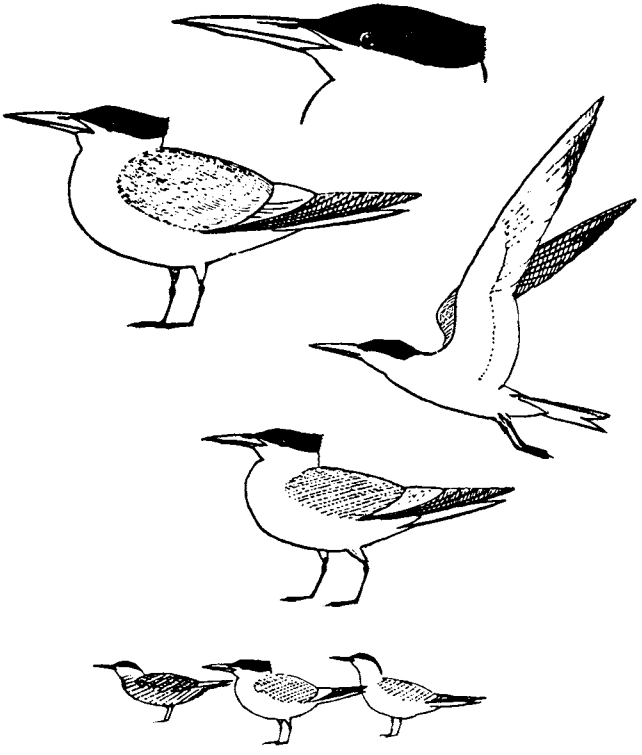


Fig. 1 Royal Tern Sterna maxima, *Sandwich Bay, Kent, 28–29th July 1965. Drawings by J. N. Hollyer copied from his field sketches show, top: head and bill shape; upper centre: shape on ground and in flight; lower centre: active stance; bottom: scale comparison with Common Tern* S. hirundo *on left and Sandwich Tern* S. sandvicensis *on right. Note that tail of Royal Tern was made slightly too short in the field sketches and has not been altered in the finished drawings; its tail was, in fact, approximately equal to the tips of its folded wings* (British Birds *61: 560*)

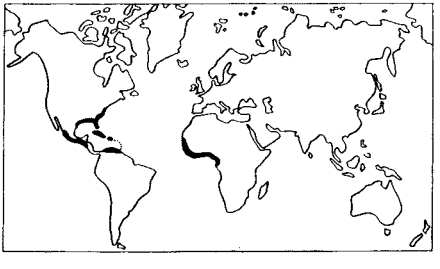
in the company of Common Terns *S. hirundo* and Sandwich Terns and it flew only when the flock was disturbed. It was very active on the ground, preening and walking about and sometimes lifting its wings. It was seen to hold its head up in the wind and also to strut about with breast thrust forward like a pigeon. It was aggressive towards the other terns at times, but was not heard to call.

The publication of this record some 3½ years after the observation is possible only as a result of a great deal of involved correspondence and research. All the observers were aware at the time that several features were not in full agreement with the descriptions to be found in the European literature. In particular, the bird seemed to be slightly too small and, more important, it had a completely black forehead whereas in the Royal Tern this is normally white except at the very beginning of the breeding season. It was not until November 1967, in fact, that Dr Edwin O. Willis, of the American Museum of Natural History, put into words what others had been thinking by suggesting that a Royal Tern 'that has straggled when heaving reached breeding plumage, and is thus not able to breed, could perhaps retain its black forehead longer than a "normal" bird'. J.N.H. had always referred to it as a 'wandering misfit' and Sir Hugh Elliott wrote of it as one which was 'inhibited from nesting'. Since then it has been confirmed that some Royal Terns retain their black foreheads well into the breeding season (see Time-Life book on *The Birds*: 24–25).

In the course of the correspondence already mentioned all other possible species were considered. The Lesser Crested Tern *S. bengalensis* (of eastern Africa, southern Asia and Australia) and the Swift Tern *S. bergii* (of comparable range, but extending to South Africa) were ruled out as a result of detailed notes received from J. A. Bailey, Dr C. S. Clapham and Sir Hugh Elliott. The white forehead of the Swift Tern is diagnostic at all times and this species has 'a pale yellow bill . . . never with any red-orange' while the Lesser Crested Tern 'does not look larger than Sandwich Tern, has a bill colour that is not "brilliant" and has a tail that is visibly greyish and so lacks contrast between the back and the tail'. The Elegant Tern *S. elegans* (of the Pacific coast of America) was thought from the first to be unlikely on geographical grounds and, in fact, Pierre Devillers, R. Guy McCaskie, Dr Willis and others in California stressed that the bird at Sandwich Bay was 'definitely not an Elegant' on account of its lacking a black nape and having a bill that was too 'strong' ('the bill of the Elegant Tern is extremely, almost incredibly, long and slender'), in addition to the detail of the fork of the tail being wrong.

This is only a brief summing up and the file on the Royal Tern is a mass of valuable information. In conclusion, we wish to record our gratitude to those already mentioned, to R. A. Richardson, to R. Wagstaffe (who gave a great deal of time to a most interesting questionnaire) and to all the members of the Rarities Committee for their patience, time and trouble.

M. DAVENPORT and J. N. HOLLYER

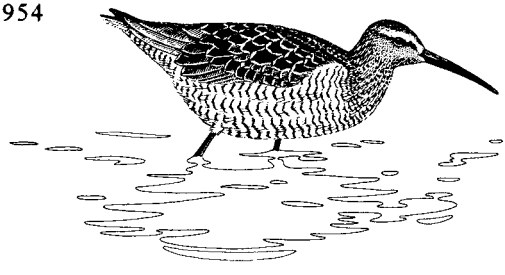


The somewhat contentious inclusion of Royal Tern on the British and Irish list solely on the basis of a long-dead, incomplete, tideline corpse was vindicated by the well-documented Sandwich Bay individual. Since these, however, there have been only two more: at St Ives, Cornwall, on 2nd September 1971 and at Hilbre Island, Merseyside, and Point of Air, Clwyd, on 8th and 22nd September 1974.

Royal Tern is smaller than Caspian, with a slightly slimmer bill. On adults, the bill is wholly 'carrot orange' (scarlet with small dark subterminal mark on Caspian), and the tail is more deeply forked. Royal lacks the extensive blackish area on the underside of the outer primaries which is prominent on Caspian; instead, the outer primaries are tipped dusky, forming a dark trailing edge on the outer underwing. The black cap is complete for only a few weeks at the beginning of the breeding season; at other times, the black is reduced to a rather thin mask from eye to nape, whereas the winter cap of Caspian is mainly black, with white on only the forehead and forecrown. First-winter Royal Tern (like Caspian, ageable as such by dark bars on the coverts of the inner upperwing, dark secondary bar, and dark-edged tail feathers) has a yellowish bill (pale red on first-winter Caspian) and often yellow-ochre legs (always blackish on Caspian); head pattern, bill pattern, and underwing distinctions are the same as those described for adults.

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1954

Stilt Sandpiper in Humberside



Ralph Chislett

On 31st August 1954 Peter Waterton and Edward E. Jackson, who were staying at the Spurn Bird Observatory, noticed an unusual wader on marshy land north of Kilnsea, Yorkshire [now Humberside]. The descriptions they gave did not fit any bird ever known to have visited the area. The same afternoon, about 1½ hours later, when they visited the place again, accompanied by G. H. Ainsworth, R. F. Dickens and myself, the bird could not be found.

On the following day the two boys, to whom full credit is due, again located the bird feeding in the same area; and on 2nd September R. F. Dickens went with them, saw the wader and immediately contacted G. H. Ainsworth and H. O. Bunce, the latter of whom made a special journey to see the bird the same evening. E. C. Dickinson and L. T. Wright also saw the bird on 2nd September. On 3rd September it was seen by Mr and Mrs W. A. Butterfield; and on 4th September by J. Cudworth, J. K. Fenton, R. V. Jackson, P. C. Quin, D. L. Robinson, E. S. Skinner and Misses F. E. Crackles and A. E. Leach, and again by R.F.D. and H.O.B. It was not seen after 4th September. I revisited the area on the 5th, but again failed to see the bird.

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 18–20. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

Stilt Sandpiper Micropalama himantopus, *Spurn Yorkshire, August 1954; from sketches by John Cudworth*

The following details are summarized from the notes and sketches that each of the above observers was asked by R. F. Dickens to make separately and to send to me before discussing the bird with anyone else or seeing their descriptions. The bird was seen at ranges down to twelve yards. The site was open but lighting varied.

Size Slightly larger than Curlew Sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*), smaller than Redshanks (*Tringa totanus*) and Ruffs (*Philomachus pugnax*) and slightly smaller than the Reeves in whose company it was seen. Other species present for comparison were Dunlin (*C. alpina*), Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*), Little Stint (*C. minuta*), Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) and Greenshank (*T. nebularia*).

General appearance Compared with any of the above it was a noticeably dark grey bird from a distance. At close quarters the plumage had traces of buff and brownish. It was a tall bird for its (body) size.

Head Crown dark grey-brown, browner towards nape. Nape, cheeks and sides of neck paler. J.C. says nape and hind-neck pale grey streaked darker. A prominent

pale-greyish, broad superciliary stripe extended only very slightly behind the eye. Lores blackish.

Upper-parts Boldly patterned on back with general effect rather like a grey Ruff. Scapulars and wing coverts blackish, edged light buff; some feathers, especially on left wing, brownish edged light buff. Primaries dark, brownish, extending slightly beyond tail when folded. Tail and coverts, dirty white, centre of tail darker. P.C.Q. noticed light barring on the tail, the outer tail-feathers being very pale but not white. J.C. says rump, upper tail-coverts and tail, pale greyish with darker barring, the sides of the tail white, graded to grey in centre. E.S.S. says whole tail-area whitish with grey barring.

Under-parts Throat, foreneck and upper breast—buffish-grey, finely streaked. Paler around throat. Lower breast, belly and vent—*strongly barred* dark grey on pale brownish-grey or grey ground. Barring continuous on flanks and belly and through to tail, slightly more strongly marked on flanks.

The line of demarcation between the striations of the upper breast and the barring of the lower breast gave a suggestion of a gorget. Underwings pale. Pinkish tinge on secondaries (F.E.C.).

Soft parts Eye—dark (?blackish). Legs—long, spindly, frequently flexed in an almost stilt-like manner (R.F.D.). Proportionately slightly longer than Redshank's giving the bird a tall appearance when seen on land (R.V.J.). All descriptions agree that in flight the *feet projected clearly beyond the end of the tail.* The legs usually appeared blackish but in bright sunlight a quite different impression was formed (H.O.B.). Dark, but in a good light, brownish-green (J.C.). Greenish-grey (E.S.S.). Leaden green (J.K.F.). Blackish with suggestion of dark greenish at top (R.F.D.). Not dark but a grey or ochre-shade (P.C.Q.). Bill—All agreed that the bill was blackish, long, slender and straight with a slight down-curve at the end. Slightly longer than Redshank's (R.F.D.). 1½ times as long as the head (F.E.C.). J.C. says equal in length to Ruff's bill, but for size of bird proportionately longer.

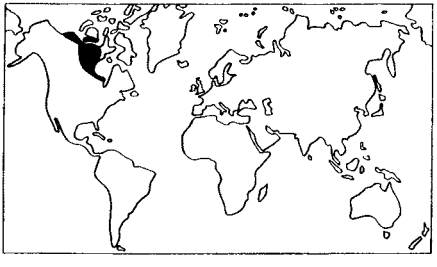
Behaviour Flight rather like Redshank's. Trailing edge of wing which was slightly paler, and whitish tail were only noticeable markings in flight. Trailed legs before landing and after take-off. Once when taking wing the bird called 'tchoowk, tchoowk, tchoowk-tchoowk' rather like a Knot (*C. canutus*) (R.F.D.). When landing wings were held above back and several times in the course of feeding the bird raised its wings showing the pale underwing. On mud, picked at surface but did not probe deeply. Preferred to feed in deep water, often up to belly and swam frequently. Immersed whole of bill and frequently the head also, when feeding. Horizontal carriage of the body was noted by two observers, more like the carriage of a small slim Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) than that of a Redshank. The bird did not 'tip or nod'. When alone, or in company with a single Dunlin, the bird was very tame, allowing approach to within about twelve yards.

The strongly barred under-parts, which everyone mentioned, suggested Grey-rumped Sandpiper (= Wandering Tattler) (*Heteroscelus brevipes*), or Stilt Sandpiper (*Micropalama himantopus*). As the notes and drawings came in I began increasingly to suspect the latter. At the dates concerned an adult bird was likely to be in partial moult, and the barring suggested a remnant of breeding plumage.

R. T. Peterson—*A Field Guide to the Birds* (of North America), A. C. Bent—*Life Histories of N. American Shorebirds* pt. 1, and P. A. Taverner—*Birds of Canada* were all consulted. Some of their descriptions of appearance and behaviour of Stilt Sandpiper fitted the bird very aptly. Taverner says 'the spring bird with its heavily barred underparts is very distinctive.' This was autumn but many adult waders have

some breeding plumage until a later date, especially on breast &c. W. Rowan (in Bent) says 'when wading the bird prefers to be belly deep—the carriage of the head makes the species unmistakeable. The bill is always held and thrust beneath the surface perpendicularly. This necessitates a straight neck.' And Taverner again 'a longer bill than any other sandpiper of similar size'; 'in feeding may plunge its whole head and neck underwater'. The only respect in which the bird appeared to differ somewhat from the available descriptions of Stilt Sandpiper was in the tail-coverts and tail, which might be due to moult, for I have no doubt that the bird was in a transitional stage from summer to winter plumage, which often increases difficulties of identification. As a result of examining over 50 skins of Stilt Sandpiper in the British Museum (Natural History) R. F. Dickens has no doubt that the bird was in almost complete breeding plumage, lacking only the rust colour on the cheeks.

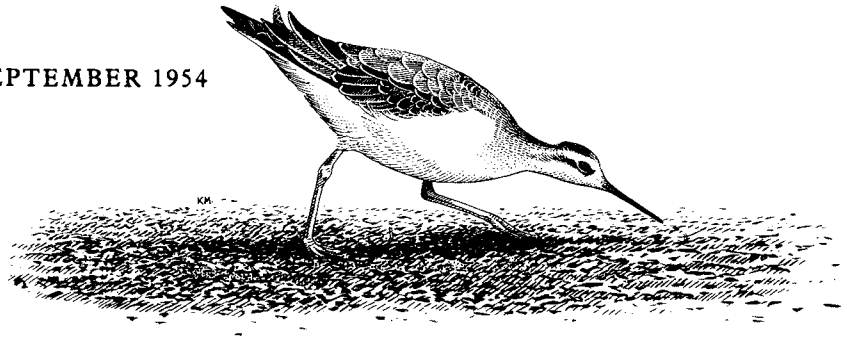
Later, through the medium of Dr J. D. Craggs and the generosity of Mr R. Wagstaffe, we were able to inspect a skin of the Stilt Sandpiper. Bill, legs, barrings on under-parts and general plumage conformed to the descriptions made without access to picture, book or specimen other than the bird the observers watched, in a way I can only describe as remarkable. The skin was as I imagined it would be. The notes sent to me constitute the most complete description of the Stilt Sandpiper I have yet seen. I have no doubt that Mr Wagstaffe's skin and the bird R. F. Dickens, H. O. Bunce and their friends saw were of the same species, and I congratulate them on the care they took to establish it.



Although, since the early 1950s, many Nearctic waders have become regular and it is taken for granted that several—or, in some cases, dozens or scores—may occur in western areas, the Stilt Sandpiper remains a real prize. Only 12 have been discovered since the first in 1954.

Stilt Sandpiper recalls Curlew Sandpiper in its elegant proportions, but it is slightly larger, even longer-legged, and its bill is noticeably more blunt-tipped and slightly stouter. The greenish or yellowish legs, the white or whitish rump, and the pale trailing edge on the secondaries are jointly diagnostic at all ages. The barred underparts make summer adults unmistakable. Juveniles have neat scaly upperparts and warm buff breast-wash, features highly reminiscent of a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper, and they could easily be overlooked as such in Britain, especially if the pale, not black, legs are not apparent.

SEPTEMBER 1954



Wilson's Phalarope in Fife

Frank D. Hamilton and Keith S. Macgregor

On the afternoon of the 11th September 1954 we were birdwatching on an area of reclaimed ground between North Queensferry and Rosyth Dockyards, Fife, where there are two shallow fresh water pools. The two pools are separated from each other by a raised bank, and it was whilst watching from behind this bank that we came across a noticeably pale wader which was feeding beside a party of Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*).

The bird immediately excited our curiosity and, at first, due to the general pale colouring and method of feeding we suspected a phalarope (*Phalaropus*) in winter plumage. After a few moments, however, we realized that the bird had yellow legs, and when it fluttered a few yards, saw that it had no wing-bar. It also had a white rump and tail. We then knew that this was something most unusual and the following description is compiled from notes taken on the spot by ourselves and others, especially D. G. Andrew, Dr W. J. Eggeling, Miss M. I. Kinnear, Prof. M. F M. Meiklejohn and George Waterston.

Size approximately that of Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) which was also present. General appearance of a very white bird, with longish neck and small head. Bill black, straight, needle-like and slightly longer than the length of the head. Throat, breast and under-parts, pure white. Forehead, white with ashy-grey crown and nape. White eye-stripe, separated from white of under-parts by pale greyish line through eye, which continued down side of neck to join with grey of shoulder; the line on the right-hand side was more noticeable than that on the left, but it became less distinct during the time the bird stayed. Mantle, ashy-grey as crown, scapulars and coverts darker, with faint buff edges, giving a scaly appearance at close quarters. Primaries, dark brown. Rump, white, as in Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*). Tail, white very faintly barred grey at tip. Underwing, white. Legs rather long and slender, colouring varying according to light conditions, appearing orange-yellow in bright light, and ochreous yellow at other times. Colour of feet similar.

From this description it is clear that the bird was a Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) and it was first identified as such by D. G. Andrew from R. T. Peterson's American work *A Field-Guide to the Birds*.

During the first few days the bird fed at the edge of the pool in a very energetic manner, running fast after insects, and picking these off the tops of the weeds and off the ground, with quick side to side movements of the head and it was not seen to

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 15–17. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

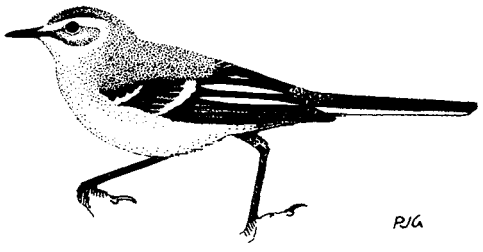
probe at any time. Whilst it was feeding the legs were flexed and the head and neck were held close and parallel to the ground, with the tail raised. Latterly, however, the bird spent a great deal of its time swimming and apparently obtained its food from the bottom of the pool. On several occasions the Wilson's Phalarope was seen to spin very fast in one spot on land, 15–20 times, which is a characteristic habit of this species. The bird was always silent, both on the ground and in flight, except on one occasion when it was heard to give a loud, nasal 'aangh' when threatened by a Redshank (*T. totanus*). The flight was fast and purposeful, often with Redshanks and Dunlin (*C. alpina*), with which it kept in perfect formation, but on occasions it would break off and land on its own. When flying it appeared very much a grey bird, having rather a bullet-shaped body, whilst the legs projected slightly beyond the tail.

The meteorological conditions for the ten days before the bird was first seen show that it might have reached Scotland via New York and the Quebec-Newfoundland region, thence across the Atlantic with a following wind of up to 40 m.p.h. A detailed discussion is not given owing to the uncertainty of the date of the bird's arrival. The appearance in late August or early September of a Stilt Sandpiper (*Micropalama himantopus*) in Yorkshire and of three or more Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) on the south coast of England also prove the existence of conditions permitting a transatlantic crossing.

The Wilson's Phalarope at Rosyth was last seen on 5th October and, during its stay of three and a half weeks, was watched by at least 60 different people, including, apart from those already mentioned, Miss E. V. Baxter, Dr John Berry, A. G. S. Bryson, A. B. Duncan, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, Len Fullerton, P. A. D. Hollom, John Hoy, J. H. B. Munro, Dr R. S. Weir and Tom Weir. We would like to express our gratitude to Admiral Robson for his courtesy in allowing various observers to spend so much time on the dockyard land.

It now seems extraordinary that no Wilson's Phalarope—a distinctive and not-easily-overlooked bird—was reliably reported here before 1954. Even the astounding total of 13 in 1977 alone was exceeded in 1979, when 15 were discovered in Britain and Ireland, and almost equalled again in 1980, with 12; the grand total by 1980 was 129.

The remaining scaly scapulars and wing-coverts of the Fife individual identify it as a juvenile moulting to first-winter plumage; nearly all autumn records in Europe involve birds of this age. Adults in summer plumage are unmistakable; in winter plumage, they are ageable as adult by the uniform grey, not scaly, wing-coverts.



Citrine Wagtails on Fair Isle

Kenneth Williamson

Two 1st-winter examples of the Yellow-headed Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*) [now known as the Citrine Wagtail], a Siberian species not previously recorded in the British Isles, were captured at Fair Isle, Shetland, on 20th September and 1st October 1954.

The first, ringed B 88594, was caught in the Gully Trap at 17.45 hours and was examined in the laboratory in a failing light by H. G. Alexander, Miss M. Haydock, H. Mayer-Gross, Mrs A. W. Thom, Miss V. Thom and myself. It appeared to be a young Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*, but atypical in that the mantle was apparently pure grey. However, the light was so poor that I decided to postpone a detailed examination until the following day, so the bird was put into one of the roosting-boxes in the laboratory.

Next morning the impression gained the previous evening was confirmed: the mantle was altogether too grey for *M. f. flava* or the British *flavissima*, and this and other features of the plumage suggested *M. citreola*. Since the comparable plumage of the Grey-headed Wagtail (*M. f. thunbergi*) is not described in *The Handbook*, this identification could only be regarded as provisional, despite the general agreement of our bird with descriptions of 1st-winter *citreola* in Hartert (1910), Dresser (1871–81) and Gätke (1895). A detailed note on the plumage (see below) was made after the bird had been re-weighed, and it was then released.

It was not seen again on the 21st, but early on 22nd September H. G. Alexander found it on Buness, within 200 yards of the Observatory, and was able to study it closely in the field. He later told me, 'Had I seen the bird in India, I should have had no hesitation in calling it *citreola*.' Later, returning disconsolate from an hour's fruitless quest on Buness, I found the bird feeding on the grass immediately behind the laboratory. I had it under observation in bright sunlight, at a range of down to 20 yards, for a long time, and wrote down: '*Flava* wagtail from in front, *alba* wagtail from behind. The blue-grey of back uniform and pure, contrasting with darker rump and black tail-feathers. The bird often carried the wing-tips below the level of the tail, showing the rump well. More sedate than an *alba* wagtail, with less tail-flicking and head-movement. Considerable white showed in the outer tail-feathers and secondary wing-feathers; the tips of greater and median wing-coverts made a striking double white wing-bar. The breast was distinctly buff and a buffish wash was noticeable on face and superciliary stripe. The fore-part of the crown and forehead appeared brownish. There was a noticeable grey wash along the sides of the under-parts from breast to flanks.'

That night a new party arrived on 'The Good Shepherd', consisting of W. Conn, W. J. Eggeling, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, G. Mountfort, D. I. M. Wallace and W. J. Wallace. They were all out searching for the bird early next morning, but were unable

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 26–29. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

to find it because one of the hostel staff had caught it in the Observatory 'Heligoland' and put it in the laboratory pending my return from the traps! All were able to examine the bird, and after it had been photographed (Photos 7 & 8) by Guy Mountfort it was set free. It was seen on several occasions later that day and on the 24th, and the excellent sketch reproduced here was made by D. I. M. Wallace.

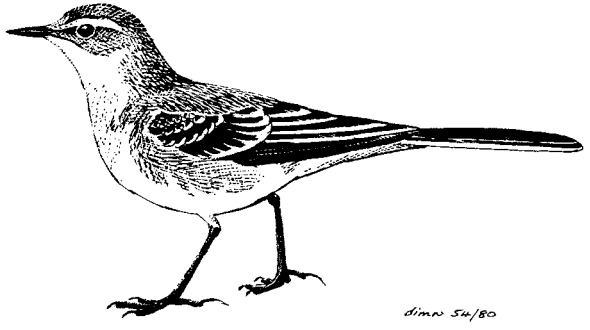
The laboratory description which had been taken down on the 21st was discussed and slightly modified, so that there was unanimity of opinion on exact shades of colour, at the evening conference on the 24th. The revised version reads as follows:

Nape and mantle slate-grey with a few warm brown feathers remaining from the juvenile plumage. Upper tail-coverts blackish. Crown and forehead grey tinged brownish, becoming yellowish-brown above the bill. Short black streak above the superciliary stripe, and a thin black malar stripe from gape to ear-coverts. The long white superciliary stripe was broadest behind the eye, and tinged with buff above the eye. Chin white, ear-coverts greyish flecked with white. Breast pale buff and greyish markings especially at the sides of neck. Belly whitish with a faint yellowish-buff wash, vent and under tail-coverts white. Sides of breast down to flanks greyish with a few warm brown feathers. Tail black, the outermost pair of feathers white, the penultimate pair with long white wedges. (The tail showed irregular moult.) Wing-feathers brownish-black with clear white margins to inner secondaries and broad white tips to median and greater coverts, these forming a prominent double wing-bar. Legs blackish-brown, bill blackish, gape orange-yellow with pink centre, iris brownish-black.

Structural details are given in Table I. It was noted that the hind claw was straighter than in specimens of *M. flava* (including *thunbergi*) kept in the laboratory. When captured on 20th the bird's weight was 18.09 gm, and this had dropped to 16.76 gm at 0540 hours on the 21st. When re-captured at 0700 hours on 23rd it showed a good gain to 18.78 gm.

The second bird was first seen on the afternoon of 1st October feeding on a beach at the south end of the isle, and occasionally hawking flies above the wrack. The observers who gathered to watch it were H. A. Craw, W. Craw, W. J. Eggeling, I. J. Ferguson-Lees and myself. As we tried to get closer views the bird left the shore for a grassy field behind, and very soon flew to a marshy area beyond. This ground seemed much to its liking, and on a number of occasions when we disturbed it the bird took shelter in drainage ditches, remaining in them to continue feeding. As there seemed a good chance of catching it in one or other of these ditches the Yeoman apparatus was erected over the deepest drain, and within a few minutes we had walked the bird into the trap.

The chief differences from wagtail B 88594 were a less strongly marked superciliary



Citrine Wagtail Motacilla citreola *in first-winter plumage (D. I. M. Wallace)*

TABLE I—STRUCTURAL DETAILS OF CITRINE WAGTAILS (*Motacilla citreola*) TRAPPED AT FAIR ISLE

Character	B 88594	B 88633
Measurements in mm		
Chord of wing	85	80
Bill from skull	16.5	15
Tarsus	27	26
Tail	82	78
Hind claw	11	11
Hind claw with toe	20	20
Wing-formula		
Longest primary	2nd and 3rd	2nd
3rd shorter by	—	0.5
4th shorter by	1	0.5
5th shorter by	3	3.5
6th shorter by	12	11
7th shorter by	17	15
Emargination on	3rd, 4th, 5th	3rd, 4th, 5th

stripe, a suggestion of greenish-brown in the mantle, and a less pure grey wash on sides of breast and belly. The plumage of upper- and under-parts was not so contrasting in the field, and the eye-stripe was only obvious at a moderate distance as a pale mark behind the eye. The bird's manner when on open ground was very similar, and again we had the impression that there was less movement of the tail than with other wagtails. The following description was made in the laboratory.

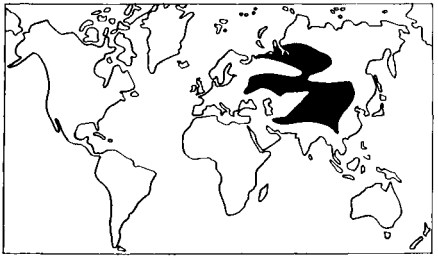
Mantle grey, but with a greenish-brown wash. Rump purer grey, and upper tail-coverts blackish edged with grey. Central tail-feathers black with a faint brownish tinge. Outer tail-feathers mostly white and penultimate pair with a broad white wedge extending to about half-way down the inner web. Head and nape as mantle, former becoming more brownish-olive towards the forehead. Ill-defined buffish superciliary stripe, narrow and incomplete in front of the eye, not reaching the base of the bill, and broader but short behind the eye. Lores greyish-white, ear-coverts grey with blackish streaks, and bordered posteriorly with whitish feathers extending downwards in the form of an ill-defined half-collar to meet the white chin. Breast pale buff with a pectoral band of grey clouding. Belly and under tail-coverts white, vent suffused with pale buff. Flanks greyish, washed at sides of breast with some buff. Distinct double wing-bar formed by prominent white tips to the median and greater coverts; outer edges of greater coverts brownish-white, and edges of the white-tipped inner secondaries also whitish.

When the underwing was examined it was seen that the basal half of the 5th to 10th primaries and all the secondaries had a white wedge extending from the base to approximately half the length of each feather. This feature was not apparent from above, and unfortunately it was overlooked in examination of the first bird, although it is well shown in the photograph (Photo 8). Measurements and wing-formula are given in the table, under its ring-number B 88633. Its weight was only 15.35 gm.

From each of these birds a single flat-fly was taken during examination with chloroform vapour for ectoparasites. Gordon Corbet has kindly confirmed the identity of these flies as ♂ ♂ *Ornithomyia fringillina* Curt. and reports that both specimens show abnormality in the form of the large thoracic bristles. B 88633 was also seen by K. Allsop and J. Chillingworth, the last occasion being on 5th October.

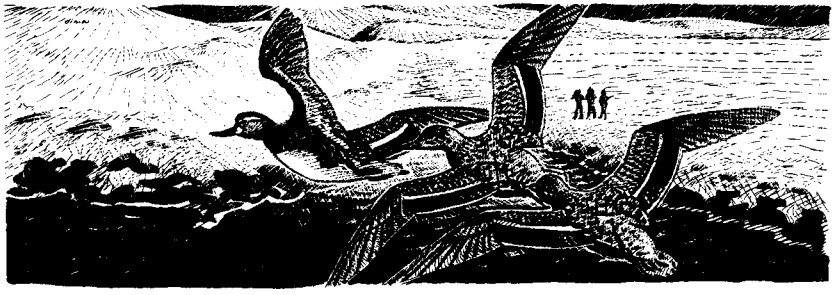
The call-note, often heard, struck us as being different from that of the *flava* wagtails: there was general agreement that it was a slurred monosyllabic note best expressed as a high-pitched 'sweeip".

By arrangement H. G. Alexander, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, Guy Mountfort and myself met at the Bird Room of the British Museum (Natural History) on 26th November and, after a careful examination of skins of 1st-winter *M. citreola* and *M. f. thunbergi*, were unanimous in the conclusion that the Fair Isle birds were referable to the former species.



Once the first is firmly identified and, through publication, the field-characters become known to competent observers and the possibility of future occurrences is recognised, even species which are only subtly different from closely related birds are far more likely to be distinguished, documented and reported. When a flow of such records commences, one must suspect that the species was formerly overlooked. A total of 24 records of Citrine Wagtail was accepted during the 23 years from 1958–80. A review of all the accepted records and assessment of some still pending is, however, needed, since the identification is perhaps not so clear cut as was thought at first.

Adult Citrine Wagtails—especially males—present no identification problem. The current debate involves individuals, like the two on Fair Isle described above, in first-winter plumage. It is now thought possible that some first-winters of some races of Yellow Wagtail may match the previously held classic characters of Citrine. Briefly, these are the wholly cold grey upperparts, the whitish underparts completely lacking any yellow tones, and bold white wing-bars and tertial edgings. Current research is aimed at proving that some young Yellow Wagtails can look that similar, and (if they can) establishing further criteria to distinguish Citrines with certainty. Perhaps the most promising possibility so far is in different facial pattern details: Citrines have a complete pale surround to the dark, 'hollow-centred' ear-coverts, whereas Yellows have more solidly dark ear-coverts which merge with the dark nape.



Baikal Teal on Fair Isle

D. I. M. Wallace

The long-established practice of adoring captive, imported wildfowl holds a permanent veil across the occurrence of extralimital species; and no duck has ever struggled harder to become accepted as a wild British bird than the Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*. In *The Handbook*, it featured only in a footnote and was treated as a frequent escape, along with the Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* and the Mandarin *A. galericulata*. Such an attitude was mirrored in ten other European countries from Finland and Sweden in the north to Italy and Malta in the south, although no less than five were obtained in the Saône Valley, France, in November 1836, before any known introduction to Europe (Cramp & Simmons 1977).

One British record, of a duck (or immature) on Fair Isle, Shetland, in late September 1954, was clearly associated with an influx of other Siberian species; and the long persistence of its observers, particularly the late Kenneth Williamson, in arguing its case was clearly a factor in the inclusion of the Baikal Teal in the new category D of the British list (BOU 1971). There, six recent records were displayed for Britain and Ireland, all dated since 1927 and in late autumn and winter. They were a tantalising lot and might have remained so but for the arrival and long stay of an adult drake at Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway, from mid February to early April 1973 (*Brit. Birds* 73: 530). The close observations made on this bird clearly demonstrated in wildness—it preferred goose and swan droppings to subsidised corn!—and, once again, the species went the rounds of review committees. In 1980, after due deliberation (including a survey of all known European records), the BOU Records Committee accepted not only that wild vagrants could reach Britain, but also that both the 1954 Fair Isle and the Caerlaverock birds were such, so, eventually, following the opinions of the Wildfowl Trust and the late Dr J. M. Harrison (Harrison 1958). The rest of this paper tells the tale of the first individual and adds some general information on the species.

DISCOVERY AND SUSPICION

The birdwatchers present on Fair Isle in the third and fourth weeks of September 1954 enjoyed some classic drift weather and some (then) astonishing Siberian

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 321–326. Heading drawing by D. I. M. Wallace

vagrants. The first of these was Britain's original Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (see pages 51–54) and most of the observatory's work from 20th to 23rd was devoted to its identification. On 24th, wide searches of the isle resumed, and that night the log listed three duck (or immature) Teal *Anas crecca* seen at Hestigeo by the late W. J. C. Conn, my late father W. J. Wallace and myself. On 25th, we flushed the same birds from a small pool near the geo and enjoyed excellent flight views at about 20 m. The leading bird looked odd, being 'slightly larger' and showing 'a Wigeon-like pattern on the underbody' and 'a distinctly lighter white line above the speculum'. At the time, we were all junior students of migration and identification and had never heard of the Baikal Teal. Thus, our mention of an 'odd teal' drew little attention from our seniors, whose talk was still largely of the magic wagtail and other passerines, and we let the matter rest. It was not, however, ended.

REDISCOVERY, IDENTIFICATION AND AGEING

No sooner had we sailed away on 30th September than the 'three teal' at Hestigeo were rediscovered by H. A. Craw, W. Craw, Dr W. J. Eggeling, I. J. Ferguson-Lees and Kenneth Williamson. As we had on the 25th, they immediately spotted the odd and wilder bird in the trio. Its larger size in flight again aroused suspicions and the greater extent of white above the speculum soon had them following the trio around the coast. Poor light prevented full observations on 30th, but an afternoon watch on 1st October allowed a close comparison of the odd bird with the two certain Teals (settled on the sea) and the following description (condensed from Williamson 1954) was obtained: 'obviously a female "teal" but bigger and brighter in plumage than the others . . . decidedly broader in the beam . . . had a bigger head, with a high forehead and very fine (apparently greyish) bill—the whole presenting a marked retrousée effect in profile . . . top of the head and nape warm brown, richer than in the Common Teal . . . feathers of mantle and scapulars appeared longer and had the outer webs edged with buff, these forming a pattern of "V" markings on the back . . . breast brown, mottled darker, and the belly white, and when the bird rose up in the water to

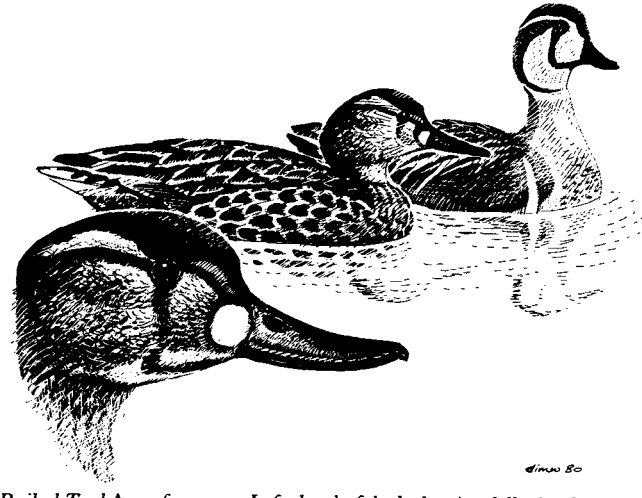


Fig. 2 *Baikal Teal* Anas formosa. *Left: head of duck showing fully developed throat bridle (15% of individuals); centre: juvenile; right: adult drake in breeding plumage (D. I. M. Wallace)*

wing-flap . . . there was a distinct line of demarcation between the two . . . flanks more heavily marked than in Common Teal, this being due to close dark brown blotching . . . tail blackish-brown, darker than the mantle, and . . . undertail-coverts . . . white. The closed wing showed a green speculum bounded on the inside by a narrow white line, and when the bird was flying this white was more extensive than in the Common Teal. When the bird swam towards us the face showed two conspicuous white marks on the lores; the sides of the head were greyish-white, and there was a narrow dark line through the eye.'

The bird's character and appearance were discussed on the telephone with Hugh Boyd (then of the Wildfowl Trust) on both dates and all the senior observers considered the identification established and unquestionable. It was not until December that the next issue of the observatory bulletin appraised the original observers of the rich sequel to their puzzle; and, although a letter 'connecting' the events was immediately sent to Williamson, no revised account was then published nor fully considered until the BOU Records Committee review of 1979. Even then, the bird's definition was not quite complete, for it now falls to me to make one small correction to the original account. As will be seen in the following section on field characters, adult duck Baikal Teal show rufous upper borders to their specula. The Fair Isle bird had a noticeably white one and so must have been in juvenile plumage.

ASSOCIATED OCCURRENCES OF OTHER EURASIAN VAGRANTS

Although the account of the Baikal Teal properly noted the possibility of its being an escape from captivity, Williamson also commented that 'it seems doubtful if [the species] will ever present better credentials to British ornithology than in this case.' The bird was present on Fair Isle in a period of intermittent, cyclonic easterly winds that brought not only Britain's first Citrine Wagtail, but also the second from 1st to 5th October, at least two Lesser Whitethroats *Sylvia curruca* of the Siberian race *blythi* on 21st and 22nd September, an Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* and three Scarlet Rosefinches *Carpodacus erythrinus* on 20th. All these are common in areas of Siberia adjacent to and overlapping the range of the Baikal Teal, as is the Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*, of which the first British individual appeared on the Isle of May, Fife, on 2nd October 1954 (see pages 59–61). The occurrence of the last is particularly telling, since its trans-Eurasian vagrancy was the then longest recorded (and accepted) for any bird. No non-passerine Asian rarities were found in late September 1954, but four species of Siberian waders were obvious in south Shetland from 19th to 21st. (In passing, it may be noted that the autumn of 1954 was one of the very wide-flung dispersals in Holarctic birds, with two new Nearctic waders appearing ahead of the above birds and two rare wheatears *Oenanthe* coming after them. Omens of 1975 and 1976!)

FIELD IDENTIFICATION

An adult drake Baikal Teal in breeding plumage is unmistakable; no other small to medium-sized *Anas* has such an intricately patterned, pale yellow and green-black head, long rufous-and-white-edged scapulars, narrow vertical lines fore and aft of dark grey flanks and an all-black undertail. At all other ages and in all other plumages, the Baikal Teal is subject to confusion with Teal, Blue-winged Teal *A. discors* and Garganey *A. querquedula*. This is particularly so with settled birds (hiding their wings) and separation must then be based on comparisons of size, strength of plumage pattern and, above all, facial pattern. The last varies in all duck, eclipse drake and immature *Anas*, but the following basic differences exist:

TEAL
Facial pattern usually indistinct in *A. c. crecca*, with little contrast between crown and rest of head and no pale or dark spots and lines obvious; more distinct in *A. c. carolinensis*, with crown and eye-stripe darker and thus more obvious than in *A. c. crecca*, but still lacking pale loral spots.

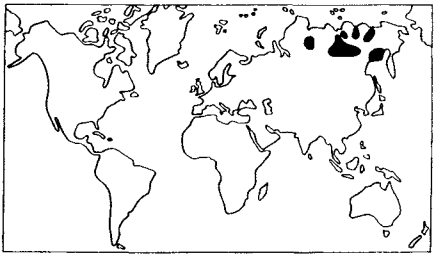
BLUE-WINGED TEAL
Usually distinct, with crown darker than rest of head, fairly well-marked eye-stripe and noticeably pale, even almost white spot at base of upper mandible.

GARGANEY
Distinct, with whole head laterally lined by dark crown, eye-stripe and cheek bar, all contrasting with pale supercilium and line under eye-stripe; last abuts base of upper mandible, but does not form isolated bold mark.

BAIKAL TEAL
Distinct, with very dark crown, dark eye-stripe, dark vertical line (or smudge) below eye and prominent, dark-outlined, almost-white spot at base of upper mandible, all visible against pale whitish-grey to grey-brown cheeks; supercilium narrow and incomplete, reddish-buff before eye, paler (lacking red tone) behind. About 15% of females show a very distinct set of dark 'bridles' on the sides of the otherwise pale throat (Harrison 1958).

In general terms, size and bulk range downwards from Baikal Teal, through Garganey and Blue-winged Teal to the Nearctic race and lastly the Palearctic race of the Teal. The most obvious size difference is in wing-length, with that of the Baikal Teal about 20% greater than that of the Teal. As with facial patterns, body-plumage marks vary (most in the Teal), but the feather centres of the back and flanks of the Blue-winged and Baikal Teal are noticeably dark. The back feathers of the latter are also visibly longer and more lanceolate than those of the other teals.

In flight, differences in the upperwing patterns of teals show well. All the species discussed here exhibit green specula, but the pale blue and lavender-grey forewings respectively of the Blue-winged Teal and the Garganey are very distinctive, leaving the Baikal Teal and Teal to share similar grey-brown forewings and pale borders to their specula. Of the latter, the upper (or foremost) is the more obvious and is coloured rufous on adult Baikal Teal, pale buff (distally) to white (proximally) on adult Teal and virtually white on immatures of both species. It is formed by the visible tips of the greater coverts, which are wider in drakes than in ducks (M. A. Ogilvie *in litt.*). With field study of the Baikal Teal incomplete, it is impossible to analyse precisely the differences in the greater-covert bar (and it may be that its prominence on the Fair Isle bird was a function as much of size as of colour). So, it is important to recognise a further difference in flight appearance. This stems from the pattern of the underwing, often very obvious on ducks. On the Teal, the dark grey lesser underwing-coverts are very broadly tipped white or whitish (often to nearly half the visible feather length) and they create on the leading edge a mottled dark, narrow band. In contrast, the same feathers on the Baikal Teal have no more than very



narrow whitish tips (if any) and the leading edge is therefore considerably darker and broader. The difference is striking in skins and should show in the field. An excellent coloured plate of the Baikal Teal by Sir Peter Scott can be found in Hollom (1960, 1980), but no detailed plumage description exists in current identification texts. See also Fig. 2 and title drawing to this paper (for underwing of Baikal Teal), and Wallace & Ogilvie (1977).

The drake Baikal Teal utters a distinctive, far-carrying clucking or chuckling note variously written 'klo-klo', 'wot-wot' and 'proop'.

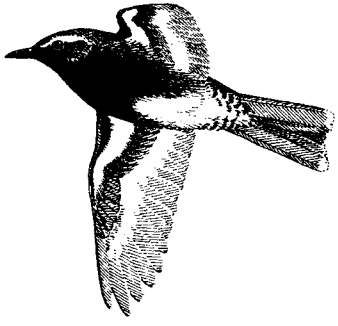
The one on Fair Isle in 1954 is now regarded as the first record of a wild Baikal Teal in Britain and Ireland, but, as well as that individual and the one in 1973 at Caerlaverock already noted, eight others are known to have occurred in Britain and Ireland up to the end of 1980: Essex in January 1906, Hampshire in about 1915, Sussex in November 1927, Norfolk in December 1929, Suffolk in November 1951, Morayshire in February 1958, Co. Fermanagh in January 1967 and Dorset in January 1969.

An adult drake will not escape attention for long, but detection of a female or immature Baikal Teal is most likely to be achieved by an observer who habitually checks the head patterns of female-type teals and is aware of the significance of one with a vertical dark bar below the eye or a full 'bridle': the mark of a classic Baikal.

OCTOBER 1954

Siberian Thrush on the Isle of May

D. G. Andrew, J. A. Nelder and Mary Hawkes



On 2nd October 1954 an adult male Siberian Thrush (*Zoothera sibirica*) was trapped on the Isle of May. It had been glimpsed, but not positively identified, shortly before dusk on the previous day and was still present on the island when we left on the 4th. It had gone by the 7th. Two photographs of the bird, taken while it was being examined in the hand, are reproduced in Photos 9 & 10. The following notes are based on the detailed description taken down at the time.

The general body colour was slate-black, against which the long, pure white eye-stripe stood out in brilliant contrast. The feathers on the centre of the belly and the under tail-coverts were broadly tipped off-white, but in the case of the under

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 21–25. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

tail-coverts these whitish tips were not long enough to cover the blackish bases of the feathers and the resulting pattern was one of alternating black and white crescents.

The general colour of the wings was again slate-black with blackish flight-feathers. The complex pattern on the underwing can be seen in Photo 10. The rectangular white panels on the inner webs of the primaries and secondaries (absent on the four innermost secondaries and decreasing in extent on the outer primaries until practically non-existent on the second primary) combined with the white tips of the under greater coverts to form a broad white band running almost the whole length of the under-wing. A narrower, shorter band at the base of the wing was formed by the white bases of the under median coverts and the white tips of the under lesser coverts.

The tail had 12 rectrices, the feathers ending in a fine spike at the tip. The two central pairs were blackish: the remainder, with the exception of the outer pair, were blackish with small pure white wedges at the tips which were most extensive on the outer feathers. The outer pair were sooty, with the outer web narrowly tipped white as in the other feathers but with the inner web broadly tipped off-white. This feature can be seen in Photo 9 where the left hand outer tail-feather has been turned out of position to show the pattern.

Measurement and structure: wing 125 mm; tarsus 30–31 mm; bill: upper mandible 21 mm, lower mandible 5 mm shorter. The lower mandible had been broken off just short of the tip and the upper mandible had grown over this and was strongly decurved at the tip (just apparent in Photo 9). The weight when trapped about midday on 2nd October was 59.7 gm. It was retrapped first thing next morning when it weighed 61.6 gm. The top of the skull was noticeably flat and lacking in 'forehead', giving the bird's head a much less rounded outline than is shown in the illustration in *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*.

Soft parts: Gape orange-yellow; bill black, except for tip of upper and base of lower mandible which were horn; legs and feet—front of legs and top of toes purplish horn, back of legs, soles and joints dirty yellow; iris dark brown.

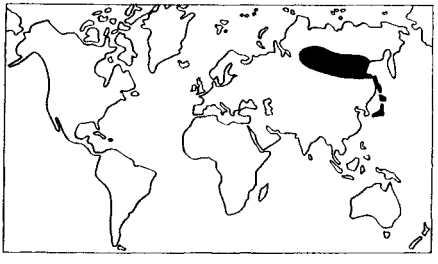
Field-characters: In stance, build and behaviour the bird was a typical thrush. In behaviour it most resembled a Blackbird (*Turdus merula*), tending to skulk under huts and other cover. It was not unduly shy. The white on the under-parts hardly showed up at all in the side view, and the bird appeared almost uniform slate-black with a pronounced bluish tinge except for a paler patch on the flanks (caused by white shafts to the flank feathers) and an appreciably darker colour on the head (caused by black centres to the crown feathers). Viewed from the front, the white belly merely showed up as a narrow whitish stripe between the legs. The white eye-stripe was always a most conspicuous feature. In flight the white tips to the tail-feathers showed up most strikingly as a row of disjoined white spots. The white band along the underwing immediately caught the eye and, when the wing was fully extended, we also had the impression of a narrower white line along the upper surface of the wing. The bird fed normally in spite of its deformed bill. The only call-notes heard were a gruff squawk when suddenly flushed at close quarters and a short 'zit', very much like that of a Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) but softer and perhaps purer, but it was a rather silent bird.

The arrival of this bird on the island coincided with a brief spell of south-east wind and drizzle which started during the night 30th September to 1st October and continued for most of the following day. Some Goldcrests (*Regulus regulus*) (apparently of the Continental race) came in during the small hours of the morning, but otherwise there was no sign of immigration until midday, when the first Redwings (*Turdus iliacus*) of the autumn began to be seen (those trapped were of the Continental

race, *T. i. musicus*). By the end of the day about 75 of these birds were on the island but the only other arrivals were a Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*), at least 3 Bramblings (*Fringilla montifringilla*) and a Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*), and it is rather remarkable that such a small-scale influx should have brought with it a migrant from Siberia.

An examination of the synoptic charts for September 1954 casts little light on the wanderings of this bird. Throughout the month pressure was generally high over south-east Europe and south Russia, with light winds, while a continuous stream of depressions passed eastwards across the Atlantic, then north-east across Europe. The south-east wind which brought this bird to the island was localised over the northern North Sea and the east coast of Britain, suggesting a Scandinavian starting point for the flight across the North Sea, but the meteorological situation further east at that time does not allow any obvious interpretation of the bird's movements.

The typical race of the Siberian Thrush, *Turdus s. sibiricus*, breeds in central Siberia. In spite of the remoteness of its breeding grounds, this species has been recorded in most European countries and its appearance in Britain is not therefore very surprising.



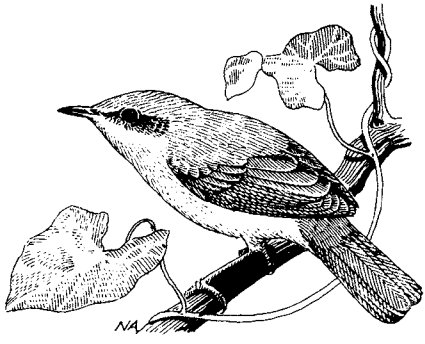
Few birds on the British and Irish list can rival the appeal of the superb Siberian Thrush: a spectacular bird, which is seldom seen by European birders even now that foreign trips are almost commonplace, and which remains a great rarity. Only two more have been reported: in Hampshire on 28th December 1976 (Brit. Birds *72: 121–122*) *and at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, on 25th December 1977* (Brit. Birds *72: 122–123*). *Both were males. Surely females occur occasionally?*

Female Siberian Thrushes are brownish above, paler below, with a distinct buff supercilium. Fortunately, they share the male's boldly black-and-white barred underwing, so that in flight, at least, they should grab attention.

NOVEMBER 1954

Yellowthroat on Lundy

Barbara Whitaker



On 4th November 1954 a first winter male Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) was trapped on Lundy Island, Devon, detained overnight, and released the following morning after being ringed. It had not been seen before it was caught, but may well have been present on the island for a few days, as it did not appear to be exhausted and, in fact, seemed in good condition.

When first glimpsed flying into the trap, it was thought to be a Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*). A more adequate view showed that it was a bird quite unfamiliar to us, the most striking feature being a brilliant canary-yellow chin, contrasting sharply in the malar region with the ear-coverts and lores, which were black, mottled with grey.

It was taken to the laboratory, where measurements and a full description were obtained, as follows:

Plumage. Crown, olive-green to olive-brown. Nape, hind neck, mantle, back, rump and upper tail-coverts, all greenish-grey to olive-green. Primaries and secondaries: inner webs, greyish-black; outer webs, olive-green. Wing coverts, olive-green. Tail, olive-green-grey, with greenish-yellow tint on outer webs. No eye-stripe. Feathers of ear-coverts, lores, and immediately below the eyes were black, tipped with grey, giving a mottled effect. Chin, canary-yellow. Throat, canary-yellow, grading into a paler cinnamon-yellow at the sides of the neck. Across the throat was a faint cinnamon-tinted band. Breast, pale yellow, grading into fawn-yellow beneath wings. Flanks, pale fawn. Belly, pale cream-yellow. Under tail-coverts, yellow tinted with cinnamon.
Soft parts. Bill, horn-coloured, with cutting edge of both mandibles and the centre ventral surface of the lower mandible pinkish. Legs, pale pinkish-brown. Iris, dark brown.
Measurements and structure. Total length about 120 mm; wing 57 mm; tail 51 mm; tarsus 23 mm; bill 11 mm.
Wing formula. 1st primary 2.5 mm shorter than the longest; 2nd, 3rd and 4th equal and longest; 5th 2.5 mm shorter; 6th to 9th, each decreasing by 1.5–2.0 mm. 2nd, 3rd and 4th emarginated.
Tail. 10 feathers approximately equal in length, each sharply pointed and abraded.
Weight. (at 1300 hours on 4th November) 11.7 gm.

It was in general appearance like a small round-winged *Phylloscopus*, though some of its movements when released in cover were reminiscent of a Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), as it moved just above the ground in thick bramble and grass cover. When released on the window-sill of the laboratory it frequently flitted its wings, most movements being accompanied by a monosyllabic 'chat'; at the same time it half raised the feathers of crown and forehead. When released in the cage of the Heligoland trap, it soon disappeared from view in the cover available, but continued to 'chat' while I was near the cage.

The bird was shown to F. W. Gade, and an attempt was made by Fred Jones, of the South Light, to photograph it. We were at the time quite unable to name it, and a full description, together with specimen feathers from various parts of the body, was sent

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 145–147. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

to W. B. Alexander, who identified it. The specimen feathers were quite sufficient to confirm the identification, when compared with skins in the British Museum (Natural History).

The editors of *British Birds* have commented as follows. The end of October and the beginning of November would not, as might at first be thought, be phenomenally late for a migratory bird like a Yellowthroat to be in the United States at a latitude sufficiently far north for it to be possible for it to be drifted across the Atlantic to the British Isles. Mr Kenneth Williamson has made an analysis of the weather conditions and this shows that these were ideal for a crossing between 31st October and 4th November, but here it should be added that the bird's condition and more particularly its high weight of 11.7 gms suggest that it had probably been on Lundy, or at least in the British Isles, for some time before it was trapped.

The occurrence of this bird, and also of a Myrtle [Yellow-rumped] Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) near Exeter, Devon, between 5th January and 10th February 1955, have forced us, in conjunction with the B.O.U. Records sub-Committee, to consider the whole question of the occurrence of American Passerines in Britain. Neither of these species is at all likely to have escaped from captivity (we are grateful to Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith, Mr Derek Goodwin, and Mr A. A. Prestwich for confirmation of this point), and so the only reason that could possibly be put forward for either of these birds not to be regarded as genuine candidates for the British list, is the possibility of the so-called 'assisted passage' by boat. Whether or not small insectivorous birds are capable of surviving a trans-Atlantic passage on a boat (necessarily a much slower crossing than if they were swept over by high wind), does not concern us here, for in consultation with the B.O.U. Records sub-Committee we have come to the conclusion that the possibility of 'assisted passage' should not necessarily deny to a bird the right of admittance to the British List. Consideration of the following points led to this conclusion, which obviously applies more particularly to American Passerines.

(a) Small Passerines migrate regularly between Greenland and Europe. Recent work suggests that a direct crossing from the N. American mainland is not inherently impossible under exceptionally favourable conditions.

(b) Ships are an ever-present feature of the N. Atlantic and their influence on birds and bird distribution should not be regarded as more unnatural than any other man-made object or alteration to the land or sea-scape, nor indeed do they in effect differ from flotsam, on which a bird might rest.

(c) There is no possibility whatever of knowing whether or not *any* bird that reaches Britain has settled on a ship nor, if it did so, the length of time it remained there. To deny American Passerines a place on the British list on the ground that they had not made or could not have made the journey unaided in this way is to imply that all of the

American birds already included in the list have had an unaided passage. With this implication we are not prepared to agree. Whether or not the passage was unaided should be regarded as irrelevant in the light of (b) above.

(d) Consideration of meteorological reports may be of considerable value, but the weather prevailing immediately before a bird's discovery is not necessarily of great significance, for the bird may have been in this country for some time before it was seen.

(e) With the sub-Committee we are prepared to accept for admission to the British list as a genuine wild bird any that in our opinion has reached Britain *in a free state.* Each case must be carefully considered on its merits; the possibility of escape from captivity must be judged; the status of a bird, whether migratory or sedentary in its own country, must have weight in forming a decision.

The quarter of a century since the first Yellowthroat has not produced a second, even though recent analysis (Robbins 1980) has suggested that this is the thirteenth most likely Nearctic passerine vagrant to Britain, potentially more likely to occur than, for instance, American Robin Turdus migratorius *or Northern Oriole* Icterus galbula, *which have amassed a combined total of 35 records.*

To some extent, the Yellowthroat is the American habitat-counterpart of the Acrocephalus *warblers of the Old World. Perhaps its rather skulking behaviour is the barrier to its establishing its 'proper' British status: how many have lurked, unseen, in the marshes of sedge* Carex *and bulrush* Typha *on, for example, the Isles of Scilly? Only the male has the black mask (in both summer and winter), but in first-winter plumage it is veiled to a variable extent by grey feather tips (thus, the Lundy individual was a first-winter male). Females are plain olive green above and wholly yellow below. The short, rounded tail, whirring flight-action, and short, harsh calls enhance the comparison with* Acrocephalus *warblers.*

Yellow-rumped Warbler in Devon

F. Raymond Smith

On 4th January 1955 a blizzard swept over southern England and covered the Exeter area of Devon with three inches of snow. At the School House, Newton St Cyres, four miles from Exeter, Mrs D. Cook placed food on her bird-table for the benefit of the Blue Tits (*Parus caeruleus*) and other birds which regularly visited the table. She recollects hearing an unusual bird-note on the afternoon of this date. On 5th January her son, David Cook, noticed on the table a strange bird which he was unable to identify. This bird frequently gave the call note which Mrs Cook recollects having heard the previous day. On 8th January David's father, Dr D. Cook, rang me up to say that his son had drawn his attention to this bird and I asked him for a more detailed description. On 11th January he again telephoned and gave me further details; as a result, accompanied by my son, A. V. Smith, I went to see the bird.

It was visiting the bird-table regularly and could be watched without glasses at distances down to less than three feet as the table was touching the wall immediately beneath the dining-room window. It was at once apparent to us that the bird was of an unfamiliar species as it had areas of bright lemon yellow on each side of the body as well as a bright yellow rump and crown, while the fanned tail showed considerable areas of white. It was thought possible that it might be an American warbler. Full details were therefore taken and sketches made and, later the same day, my son and I paid a visit to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, where through the kindness of Major A. B. Gay ready access was given to the excellent collection of skins of American warblers and also to a copy of Audubon's *Birds of America*. By means of the coloured plates in the latter it was possible to identify the bird as a Myrtle Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*) [now known as Yellow-rumped Warbler]. The identification was afterwards confirmed by examination of the fourteen skins of this species in the collection and from these it was possible to pick out a male bird in winter plumage which was almost identical with the live bird feeding at the table four miles away. The

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 204–207. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

following details had been taken of the bird in bright sunshine.

General impression. Size appreciably more than a Blue Tit and rather less than a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) also present; estimated to be 5¼ to 5½ inches in length. General appearance a large warbler with pale under-parts and brown upper-parts, lemon yellow sides of body, and yellow rump visible in flight at a considerable distance.
Head. Crown dull brown with an area of lemon yellow in the centre which the bird appeared to disclose when in pursuit of the tits and which at other times was almost invisible. Nape and cheeks a dull mouse-brown; white rims above and below the eye, the upper one being continued as a pale buff stripe for a short distance behind the eye; the area behind the bill and below the eye blackish merging gradually into the brown cheeks.
Upper-parts. Mantle and back dull brown, the back being streaked with darker brown in four roughly parallel lines; rump a very distinctive lemon yellow edged with black on each side; upper tail-coverts brown. The yellow rump was normally concealed by the folded wings when the bird was at rest, but showed up prominently when the bird took flight.
Wings. Primaries black, showing bluish in good light, with very narrow pale edgings; secondaries blackish with pale edgings and a bluish tinge; greater wing-coverts similar but tipped with white or buff thus forming a wing-bar shading from white at the front to buff towards the back; a similar wing-bar was formed by the tips of the median wing-coverts which were otherwise brown; the lesser wing-coverts were brown speckled with bluish-grey spots forming a shoulder patch.

Tail. When closed, the tail was blackish showing a bluish tinge; when it was spread as the bird took flight, a large triangular area of white could be seen at the base on each side, and this was found to consist of a large oval of white on the inner web of each outer tail-feather, together with a smaller area on the second feather and a very small area on the third feather on each side; these feathers were tipped with black.
Under-parts. Chin and upper throat were white merging into dull white of lower throat and breast, streaks of dusky colour were visible on the upper breast; on each side of the breast was quite a large area of lemon yellow a portion of which was visible when the wing was closed; the remainder of the under-parts were dull white streaked with dark brown forming an irregular line on each side with a number of less obvious streaks below; the under-tail coverts were off-white.
Soft parts. Bill, legs and feet black and glossy, the bill being of a warbler type but rather deep at the base; the eye was dark and large.

On arrival in the area the Myrtle Warbler had established a defined territory based on the bird-table from which it ranged for distances of up to about twenty-five yards in very swift flight, returning immediately if any Blue Tits ventured down to the table, driving them away unmercifully; in fact, on 11th January it was seen to pull out a small feather from one, and on two other occasions actually to bear one to the ground. It took no interest in the several House Sparrows and only occasionally in the local Robins (*Erithacus rubecula*), but at different times it was seen by David Cook and others to chase away Great Tits (*Parus major*), Dunnocks (*Prunella modularis*), Chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*) and also a Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) and a Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*).

I again watched the bird on 12th January, this time being accompanied by R. F. Moore. On 13th January a further fall of snow to a depth of four inches took place, but Mrs Cook was at pains to keep the bird-table clear of snow and to put out food in order to encourage the bird to stay. It was on this day that Mrs Cook placed on the table a piece of bread and butter on which marmalade was spread; to her astonishment the Myrtle Warbler immediately took to the marmalade which it frequently sipped off the bread by bending down its head sideways; this affinity for marmalade persisted throughout its stay but to a diminishing extent, as with the onset of milder weather it began to obtain most of its food in a more natural manner from the ground while later still it spent a lot of time at a compost heap. At other times it was also seen to eat suet and the fat from bacon-rind and on one occasion to take a small white moth.

At first the bird showed considerable yellow on the crown, but on 11th and 12th January it was noticed that it could control the brown feathers of the crown, covering the yellow when at rest or feeding and exposing it in variable amounts when chasing the Blue Tits or when otherwise on the alert. On 15th January when the Myrtle Warbler was watched by P. A. D. Hollom, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, R. G. Adams and myself during wet weather, the yellow on the crown was completely exposed until the head began to dry off and it was apparent that the brown feathers were flattened aside in the open position by the moisture. On this date far more dark streaking was apparent on the breast no doubt due to a similar displacement of the feathers when wet.

It was noticed that the bird assumed a plumpish appearance when at rest, but when on the alert it appeared slender and these two postures are well illustrated in the excellent photographs taken by E. H. Ware (Photos 11–14). A short length of colour film was also taken by H. G. Hurrell. In dry weather the bird was seen by many observers to take insects in the air after the manner of a flycatcher, returning to the same perch or near-by. The bird was always easily located as it frequently uttered a distinctive clear 'chick' and this note was recorded by C. Rockett on a portable recorder. When in the vicinity of the table the Myrtle Warbler frequently held its wings partially spread probably in threat display towards the Blue Tits and when it took flight it immediately fanned the tail exposing the two traingular areas of white to the full. On 16th January it was seen two or three times to flatten itself into a horizontal straight line and to bob its head up and down for about 15 seconds.

As time progressed the bird extended its range up to about fifty yards from the table and David Cook was able to watch the bird go to roost, usually in a small holly tree about eighty yards away; here again it was seen to chase the Blue Tits out of the same tree before retiring to roost.

Although the bird latterly reduced its visits to the bird-table it always regularly paid a visit in the early morning. On 10th February when it paid this visit David noticed that it looked a little 'off colour' and later in the morning it was noticed that the Blue Tits were visiting the table in force without molestation giving rise to the impression that the bird had gone. A search in the garden in the afternoon revealed the Myrtle Warbler lying dead underneath a tree only a few yards from the bird-table. The bird was outwardly in perfect condition and had clearly met its death from some internal cause and not from external injury. It was skinned and set up and is now on view at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. An examination of the body after skinning by Prof. L. A. Harvey disclosed no apparent cause of death. There had been ten degrees of air frost on the previous night after a mild spell and it may well be that death was due to a combination of some diet deficiency due to the bird being out of its normal element followed by a lowered resistance to withstand the sudden recurrence of a sharp frost.

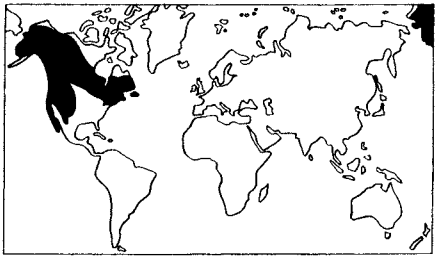
It is of interest to note that a detailed description of the bird taken by C. H. Fry on 5th February disclosed more grey-blue colour on the lower back, tail-coverts and median and lesser coverts than was visible in early January; furthermore, an examination of the bird after death disclosed that this blue-grey then extended from the lesser coverts down to the rump and it is therefore evident that it was in the process of changing into summer plumage at the time of its death.

It was noted that the outer toe of the left foot was missing, but this injury did not appear to be of recent origin. It could also be seen that the bluish tinge of the wings was mainly due to a shade of blue-grey in the pale edgings.

One possible explanation of the intense antipathy of the Myrtle Warbler to the

resident Blue Tits may be that a colour reaction was set up by the blues and yellows being of similar shades to those of male Myrtle Warblers in full plumage.

It seems certain that the arrival of the bird at Newton St Cyres was brought about by the spreading of snow conditions to southern England and that it had in all probability arrived in this country some time before, when conditions existed which were suitable for a transantlantic crossing. Mrs Cook lost count of the number of observers who watched the bird but at least sixty must have seen it, many of whom travelled considerable distances. On behalf of all these I should like to express our gratitude to Mrs Cook for her kindness in welcoming all and installing them in her warm dining-room where they watched the bird in comfort for many hours.

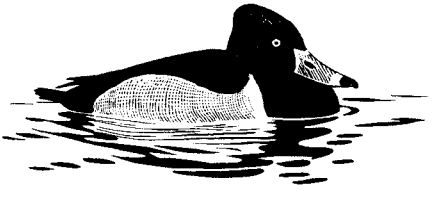


There have been another six records of this delightful American warbler: on Lundy in November 1960, in the Isles of Scilly in October 1968 and October 1973, on Cape Clear Island and on the Calf of Man in October 1976 and on Fair Isle in May 1977. The late autumn pattern of occurrences is typical of Nearctic passerine vagrants to Europe.

This is a typical American warbler—flashy and full of field marks. As with most of the others, correct identification is a fairly straightforward matter of noting the salient plumage features. For Yellow-rumped Warbler, the combination of yellow rump and white throat alone eliminates all other possibilities, but the white 'mirrors' on the tail feathers and the yellow or yellowish patches on the breast-sides are obvious supporting characters.

MARCH 1955

Ring-necked Duck at Slimbridge



Philippa Scott

On the afternoon of 12th March 1955, while sitting in the studio of my house at the Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, I saw an adult male Ring-necked Duck

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 377–378; 52: 427–430. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

(*Aythya collaris*) settle on the pond about 15 yards from the window. On the following afternoon the bird reappeared and was watched by my husband, Peter Scott, and by Hugh Boyd. On the morning of 14th March it was seen in flight over the Orchard Pen, but it did not return after that. We later learnt that the bird was also seen on 12th March by Bernard King.

Its rapid departure was not anticipated and so unfortunately no photographs were taken. The possibility that this bird was an escape is very remote. The species is so rare in captivity that no one keeping them would allow their specimens to fly and young have never, so far as is known, been successfully reared in any collection in Europe. It seems far more probable that the bird was a genuine straggler which had made the passage from eastern North America.

In view of the brief details noted for the first occurrence, the account of the second record in Britain and Ireland is also included.

Ring-necked Duck in Berkshire

At Burghfield gravel pits to the west of Reading, Berkshire, on the morning of 19th April 1959, one of us (J.T.R.S.) noted an unusual duck in a flock of 15–20 Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) and identified it as an adult male Ring-necked Duck (*A. collaris*). R.A.F.G. was informed by telephone and then collected by car, and we returned together to the pit where the party of duck, including the Ring-necked, was still present. About 10 minutes later, however, sailing boats disturbed the birds which made off to the west, towards Theale New gravel pit, about two miles distant. We immediately left for this pit and the whole flock was there when we arrived. For the next 50 minutes J.T.R.S. took full field notes while R.A.F.G. made sketches. At lunch time a number of people were informed, and during the afternoon and evening the bird was watched at Theale by H. M. Dobinson, P. A. D. Hollom, K. E. L. Simmons and Dr E. V. Watson, as well as ourselves.

The following description is compiled from field-notes obtained during the day:

Stockier than Tufted Duck and slightly larger. Upper-parts black (though this less extensive than in Tufted Duck) with a greenish gloss. Breast, neck and head black, the last with a marked purplish gloss. Brown ring round neck (very difficult to discern, except in ideal conditions at less than 40 yards when neck stretched up at the alert). Belly dusky and not the pure white of male Tufted Duck. Under tail-coverts black, this extending further down to the belly than in any Tufted Duck. Flanks a warm silver-grey, the fore portion white extending up in front of the wing in the form of a crescent; grey sharply divided from anterior white portion and apparently paler along the top (though this could have been an optical illusion), with a white hind border, widest at the base; grey flanks tapered off at the back more than the white flanks of a Tufted Duck, which end squarely. The less extensive black back, and consequently larger 'panel' of the flanks, made the bird appear to be sitting higher in the water than a Tufted Duck. Head 'peaked'—the highest point at the back—with puffed-out cheeks. Head appeared to be almost 'two-domed'—especially from directly in front or behind. No tuft. Line of bill and forehead straighter than Tufted Duck, and back of head almost flat. Eye yellowish-orange (or even red, in some lights) and always distinctly redder than accompanying Tufted Duck. Bill noticeably longer than Tufted Duck, mainly a cold steel-grey with a thin white line round the nostril and two rings round the bill—one in front (the broader of the two) and one at the base (broadest at the top); tip of bill (all that in front of the first white ring) black. Extensive grey wing-stripe. 'Pied' bill very obvious, even in flight.

Neck frequently stretched up in attentive attitude and occasionally 'nodded' like a Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) when extended in this manner. Tail held 'cocked' nearly all the time, in a manner reminiscent of a Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*). Display to a female Tufted Duck by flicking the head straight back on to the back was likened to the display of a Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) by R.A.F.G. (see Fig. 3). In flight, especially, the bird seemed stockier

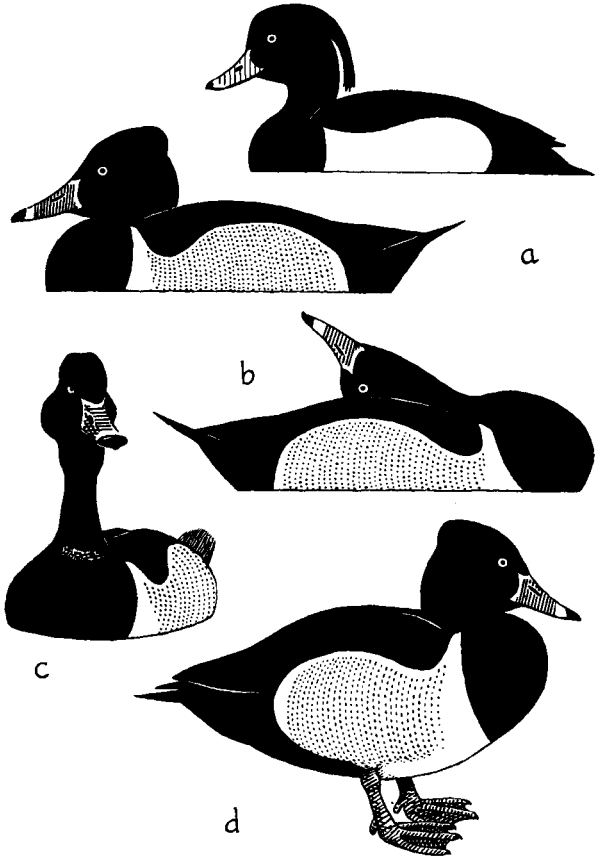


Fig. 3 Male Ring-necked Duck Aythya collaris, *Berkshire, April 1959. (a) Comparison with drake Tufted Duck* A. fuligula. *(b) Display to Tufted Duck females: head thrown back with rapid jerk, bill at an acute angle (c) Attitude when alert, the only time when the brown neck-ring was definitely seen. (d) On land, showing extent of grey, white and black on flanks and belly (Diagrammatic drawings by Robert Gillmor)*

than accompanying Tufted Duck and the wing-span was, perhaps, slightly greater. In front view appeared particularly thick-set compared with Tufted Duck. Always more alert than Tufted Duck, giving the impression of being wilder, though it was led by the flock it accompanied.

The duck stayed in the vicinity until at least 27th April. From the 20th to the 23rd it was at Burghfield, flying to Theale New on the afternoon of the latter day, but returning to Burghfield by the 24th. It was seen at Theale New again on the 25th, but on the 26th and 27th it had moved to Cranemoor Lake, Englefield Park, about two miles to the north-west of Theale New gravel pit. It was last seen (at Englefield) by David Bradley at 6 p.m. on 27th April.

In the nine days that it stayed in the Reading area we both had many opportunities to study it under ideal conditions and R.A.F.G. made numerous field-sketches which formed the basis for those reproduced here. During this time, the bird was seen by well over a hundred observers, including Dr Clive Balch, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, D. D. Harber, Bernard King, H. P. Medhurst, Dr J. F. Monk, J. L. F. Parslow, C. W. G. Paulson-Ellis, Kenneth Williamson and D. R. Wilson.

From our experience of this one bird, we would list the following points as the most important field-characters (in order of importance) when compared with male Tufted Duck:

(1) Grey flanks with white patch at front extending up in front of wing.
(2) Dark grey bill with two white rings (very striking).
(3) Head shape.
(4) In flight, broad grey wing-stripe.
(5) Grey flanks tapering off at posterior end and not ending squarely like the white flanks of a male Tufted Duck.

The 'cocked' tail and yellowish-orange eye were found to be useful pointers (especially the former, which enabled the bird to be picked out from amongst Tufted Duck at distances when other characters could not be seen), but these may only have been individual characteristics.

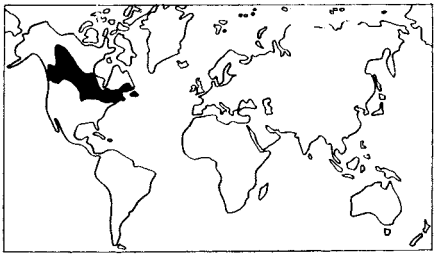
In his notes on the species, accompanying the first British record of this species—in Gloucestershire from 12th to 14th March 1955—Peter Scott wrote that 'the "panel" of the flanks comes to a white peak at the forward end and shades to a soft vermiculated grey at the after end' and this is borne out by his painting (published as plate I in vol. xlix). In our bird, however, the white and the grey were quite distinct and their borders quite sharp. At the same time, the grey of the bill was darker than in Scott's painting, so that the white rings were more distinct.

The possibility of the Reading bird being an escape seems to be very remote. Peter Scott (*in litt.* to I. J. Ferguson-Lees, April 1959) wrote, 'In my opinion there is very little doubt that this is a wild bird'.

An adult male Ring-necked Duck was present at Wassenaar, a suburb of the Hague, Holland, from 15th to 23rd March 1959. The possibility that the Reading bird was the same individual cannot, of course, be entirely ruled out, but the Dutch bird had a 'thin white (or light) margin to the tail' (Dr W. H. Bierman, *in litt.* to I. J. Ferguson-Lees, April 1959) which was entirely lacking in the adult male at Reading.

The Reading bird is thus the third European and the second British record of this North American duck.

J. T. R. SHARROCK and ROBERT GILLMOR



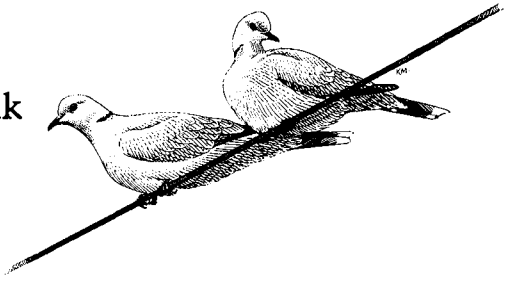
In the 21 years since the first two in 1955 and 1959, there have been another 120, including 24 in 1977, 25 in 1979 and 29 in 1980. The male Ring-necked Duck is a conspicuous bird, standing out as clearly different from a male Tufted Duck even at long range and when in the midst of a mixed flock of Tufted Ducks and Pochards A. ferina. *Perhaps the occasional individual was overlooked prior to 1955, but it seems inescapable that there has been a genuine, great increase in vagrancy by this species in recent years.*

The female, like other female Aythya *ducks, is generally drab grey-brown, and thus likely to be overlooked. She has a less exaggerated version of the male's distinctive peaked head-shape, and shares his extensive grey wing bar, but has only one white band on the bill, near the tip. The pale eye-ring-and-spur is a diagnostic mark of adult females; immatures, however, may lack the spur. Hybridisation with Tufted Duck has already been recorded in Britain, so a careful check for anomalous characters is advisable before a firm identification as Ring-necked Duck can be made.*

APRIL 1955

Collared Doves in Norfolk

R. A. Richardson, M. J. Seago and
A. C. Church



On 3rd July 1956, M.J.S. was attracted by the unfamiliar trisyllabic cooing of two doves, one of which was seen, in the trees of a large walled garden near the sea in north Norfolk. Later, on consulting published descriptions and an illustration (Frugis, 1952; Fisher, 1953) of the Collared Doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*), he found they tallied very favourably with his field-notes.

In the weeks that followed either R.A.R. or A.C.C. were able to visit the site for varying periods almost daily and their observations, necessarily restricted owing to the very public nature of the site, are summarized below. Meanwhile, reports of similar birds were received from a locality a mile and a half away on the outskirts of a small coastal town, all of which proved to be *S. decaocto* and not the domesticated Barbary Dove (*S. risoria*) that resembles it to some extent.

Intensive enquiries within the county and an appeal for information in the regional press have so far failed to produce evidence of 'escapes' or liberated birds and there seems no reason to suppose that these Norfolk specimens are anything but genuine wild colonists from the Continent.

It is now known that birds were present at two of the sites in 1955 and that young were reared at one of them. By the end of the 1956 breeding-season at least sixteen

Originally published in *British Birds* 50: 239–246. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

birds, adults and young, were known to have been in the area. One pair wintered during 1955/56, and up to twelve birds during 1956/57.

SITE A

A large walled garden near the sea with extensive lawns, shrubberies of laurel and privet, evergreen oaks, pines, Spanish chestnuts, etc., and a poultry-run.

1955: Two or three doves resembling *decaocto* are reported independently by two reliable local people (though with limited ornithological knowledge) to have been present in 1955, but it is not known whether breeding took place or if any birds wintered.

1956: After initial 'discovery' on 3rd July it became apparent from frequent visits to the garden that there were at least two males and one female in residence. Sexual and territorial pursuits occurred several times daily and cooing 'song' by both males could be heard at almost any time of the day, though falling off somewhat in the early afternoon. Suspicion that the female was in fact paired with one of the males was confirmed on 29th July by the appearance with them of a fully-fledged juvenile.

On 12th August the male of the breeding pair was heard cooing from the depths of a *Cupressus macrocarpa* and was found to be incubating 'hard set' eggs on a nest of typical dove construction about 25 feet from the ground. Both eggs hatched, the nestlings were ringed by A.C.C. for Cley Bird Observatory on 26th August and safely fledged.

Early on the morning of 14th September, while Eric Simms and G. F. Wade of the B.B.C. were making sound recordings of the birds, the existence of this pair's third nest was suspected when the male was seen to call the female from the nesting tree. It was not until the afternoon of the 20th, however, that the male was heard cooing in the *macrocarpa* and the slight rhythmical movement of his white-tipped tail betrayed the location of a very well-concealed nest about five feet above that in which the second brood was reared.

Both the third-brood nestlings reached the flying stage, thus bringing to five the total of young birds reared by this pair during the year. Four birds wintered, and two pairs and one odd bird were in residence in April 1957.

SITE B

1956: At the end of March a pair arrived in a garden on the eastern outskirts of the town; the nest was found in early April, 25 feet up in one of the belt of pines that flanked the garden on two sides and the shells of hatched eggs were later picked up beneath the tree.

Two young were reared before the site was deserted and it is possible that their parents were the birds which later nested a few hundred yards away at Site C.

(N.B.—We did not hear of this pair until after it had left Site B.)

SITE C

1955: A pair first appeared in a small garden in April and is known to have reared two young. Two birds wintered (1955/56) and in snowy weather came down to the lawn to feed on grain supplied for them by the lady of the house.

1956: One pair bred again in a 50-foot umbrella-shaped ilex tree and reared at least one youngster. An egg, near hatching, was found beneath the tree after a gale in August.

(N.B.—The presence of birds at this site was not made known to us until the third week of September.)

Within half a minute's flying time of sites B and C is a small poultry run in the middle of a new Council housing-estate where, despite the presence of numerous dogs, cats and children, up to eight Collared Doves were seen feeding together on many occasions, in early September. Seven were still present on 1st December, and twelve were counted in early February 1957.

CLEY

1955: One day during the late summer P. R. Clarke saw a 'fawn'-coloured dove on an electric cable beside the coast road and understandably dismissed it as a *turtur* × *risoria* hybrid which had been at large in the neighbourhood a couple of years before.

1956: On two occasions during the late summer an unmistakable *decaocto* was seen in exactly the same place: firstly on 15th August by T. C. Smout and secondly on 9th September by Miss E. McEwen, both of whom had seen the breeding pair at Site A.

It seems likely that these bird were Norfolk-bred juveniles perhaps spreading along the coast from Sites A, B or C, rather than newly-arrived birds from overseas.

FIELD-NOTES ON THE NORFOLK COLLARED DOVES

Habitat Gardens in residential outskirts of coastal town, well-timbered with evergreen trees such as ilex, pines, etc. Proximity of poultry-runs for feeding purposes apparently essential and presence of prominent 'look-out' perches such as telegraph-poles, electric cables and television-aerials seems important.

Field-characters and general habits A sandy grey dove, somewhat larger than Turtle Dove (*S. turtur*), with a narrow black half-collar, edged white, round back of neck; dark primaries and black and white under-tail surface, particularly striking in flight (Fig. 4). A distinctive cooing 'song' (see 'Voice').

Tolerably approachable by following daily human routine of particular area, but wary of unaccustomed movements. Feeds on ground but spends long periods preening or dozing in trees. Fond of perching on vantage points such as dead branches, power-cables, telephone-poles and television aerials. Typical pigeon flight, swift and powerful. Usual waddling walk on ground.

Voice 'Song' of male is a pleasant tri-syllabic cooing 'coo, *coo*-co' with emphasis on

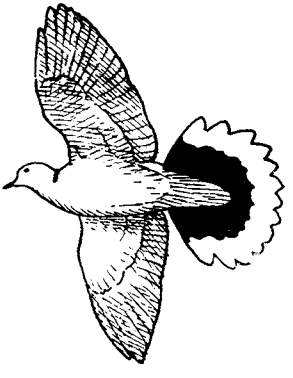


Fig. 4 Display-flight of male Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocta. *When the bird is flying, particularly during display flight, the black and white under-surface of the spread tail is very conspicuous (R. A. Richardson)*

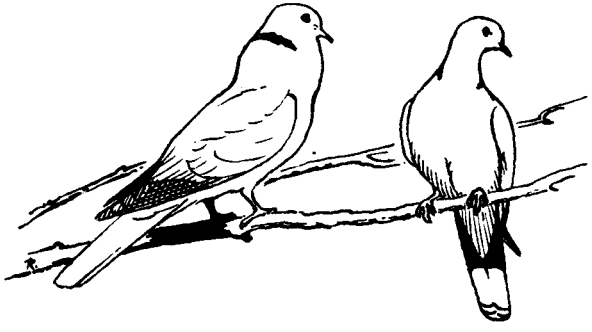


Fig. 5 Male Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocta *displaying to female. Immediately before coition, or when greeting the returning female, the male (on the left) faces her with swelled neck, and coos and bows in unison (R. A. Richardson)*

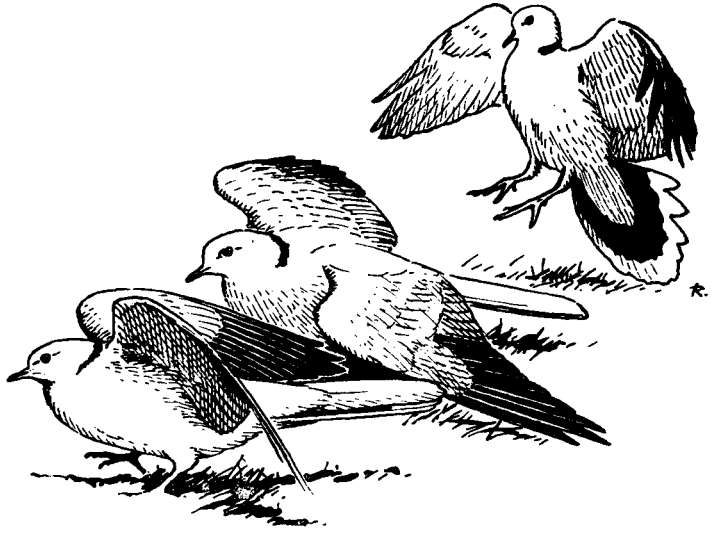


Fig. 6 Male Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocta *chivying his mate away from potential rival. In the presence of a rival the male drives his mate in the opposite direction, using the threat note as he does so (R. A. Richardson)*

middle syllable. This is uttered up to a dozen times in succession, also used when displaying to female, though in rather quicker tempo. In territorial pursuit and threat-display a forceful, angry-sounding note is used, perhaps best rendered as 'kwurr, kwurr, kwurr' and is not unlike a phrase used by a displaying Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*). Young birds appeal for food with a shrill and feeble 'weeep'. On no occasion was an adult female heard to utter any note. The recordings obtained by Eric Simms are now in the B.B.C. Records Library on one disc (No. 25013) and include the songs of at least two different males, the alighting call, the characteristic sound of the bird's wing-flaps on taking off and returning (together with other general

habitat noises), and the note of the young birds appealing for good.

Display and posturing Display-flight resembles that of *S. turtur* during which black and white lower surface of fanned tail is very conspicuous (Fig. 4). Immediately before coition and when greeting female returning after long absence (e.g. incubation duties) the male faces her with swelled neck, coos and bows in unison several times. The tail or wings are not spread or dropped but carried normally (Fig. 5).

In the presence of a rival the male chivies his mate in the opposite direction (Fig. 6), using the threat note described above, and while in sexual pursuit he follows her with a rather weak, draggling flight. Young birds, when soliciting for food, work their wings with varying degrees of intensity.

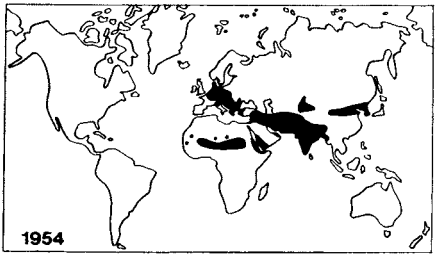
Breeding All known nesting-sites were between 25 and 50 feet up in pines or *Cupressus macrocarpa*. Nest more substantial than Turtle Dove's and rather like small Woodpigeon's (*Columba palumbus*). Eggs: presumably 2; white; none measured. Incubation- and fledging-periods not known owing to difficulty of observation and access.

Triple-brooded in one case. Season apparently April–September. Male incubates during day, from soon after sunrise to late afternoon; female at night. Male seems to take initiative in nest-relief, calling the female to the nest when his spell of duty is over and calling her off in the morning before flying to the nest himself.

Food Very little is known except that grain fed to poultry is extensively taken. The crop of one half-grown nestling contained a few grains of wheat. Birds also seen pecking about on newly-ploughed land, but whether feeding or seeking grit is not known. Drinks freely from bird-baths, rain-water butts, etc.

Plumage description Adult: Entire body-plumage sandy-grey strongly washed with blue-grey on the outer wing-coverts and under tail-coverts, and less so on the crown. A black half-collar round back of neck, narrowly edged with white. In fresh autumn plumage the breast is flushed with an exquisite vinous tinge. Primaries dark sooty, almost black at certain angles, but the exposed tips and edges bleach to light brown during the summer and caused us some anxiety over the identification in the early days of watching the birds. Tail-feathers sandy-grey on the upper surface, but black with bold white tips below. Outer feathers have white outer webs. Iris wine red; bill blackish; mouth rose-pink; feet 'pigeon pink'.

Juvenile: Apparently variable; one being distinctly washed with cinnamon and another of same parentage almost mousy-fawn. Dark neck ring present, though incomplete and usually very faint. Fawn body plumage and wing coverts have narrow plae fringes and blue-grey bases giving a two-tone and faintly patterned effect. (N.B.—The female of the breeding pair at Site A was in similar plumage and it was thought possible she was in first-summer plumage. Adults seem to undergo a complete moult in September.) Primaries and tail-feathers as adult. Iris olive-brown; feet lead grey.



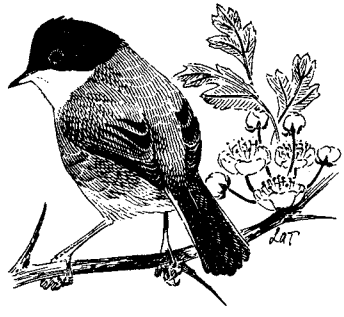
Collared Doves are now to be found commonly in almost every part of Britain and Ireland; their monotonous cooing must be one of the most familiar (and irritating!) of bird noises. Yet, only just over a quarter of a century ago, no Collared Doves had even been seen here. The excitement and secrecy surrounding Britain's first Collared Doves seems rather comical nowadays; but which of today's rarities will be widespread in 25 years' time? Serin Serinus serinus *is perhaps the best candidate, but, after a rapid northwesterly spread in Europe, the English Channel seems to have provided a greater obstacle than was expected. Other current rarities which may colonize include River Warbler* Locustella fluviatilis, *Thrush Nightingale* Luscinia luscinia *and Scarlet Rosefinch* Carpodacus erythrinus, *all of which have expanded their European breeding ranges westwards in recent years, but none is likely to emulate the spectacular success of Collared Dove.*

Barbary Dove, a popular cagebird which may escape from captivity, is the only possible confusion-species. It is slightly smaller than Collared Dove, lacks any blue-grey coloration on the wings and tail, and is generally creamy-buff without obviously darker primaries.

MAY 1955

Sardinian Warbler on Lundy

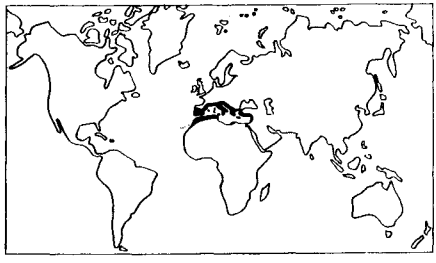
Barbara Whitaker



An adult male Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*) was trapped on Lundy at 0905 hours G.M.T. on 10th May 1955. After being examined, measured and photographed, it was shown to F. W. Gade and then released about mid-day. It was not seen again.

The forehead, crown, lores, and ear-coverts were glossy black, the remainder of the upper-parts sooty-grey, with a brown tinge on the upper tail-coverts. The tail was blackish-brown except for the tip and outer web of the outside feather on each side, which were off-white. The primaries, secondaries, and wing-coverts were blackish-brown; chin and throat, white; breast and belly, greyish-white; flanks, dove-grey; under tail-coverts, grey. The mandibles were black, except for the base of the lower which was pale horn. Legs were light-brown, and the light-brown iris was surrounded by an orange-red orbital ring. Its weight when captured was 10.6 gm. Soon after it was released it disappeared into thick cover, but during the brief time we had it in view its movements were reminiscent of a Dartford Warbler (*S. undata*), the tail being held upright at an angle to the body.

Originally published in *British Birds* 48: 515. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker



None of the Mediterranean Sylvia *warblers strays northwards frequently, and Sardinian—the most sedentary of them all—remains a very rare vagrant here. It was 12 years before the second was discovered, on Fair Isle in May 1967, and there have been only six more since: on Skokholm in October 1968, at Dungeness and at Waxham in Norfolk in April 1973, on Beachy Head from August to October 1976, at Gibraltar Point from June to September 1979 and on Tresco in September and October 1980.*

Like other Sylvia *warblers, Sardinian is a skulker. Although only brief views may be enough to clinch the distinctive, black-hooded adult or first-winter males, females—especially first-winters—may be difficult to tell from female Subalpine Warbler* S. cantillans. *The best distinctions are Sardinian's generally darker grey-brown upperparts, dull brown-washed breast and flanks (creamy, pale buff or faintly pink-washed on Subalpine) which contrast more sharply with the white throat, proportionately slightly longer but distinctly more round-ended tail (almost square-cut or only slighly rounded on Subalpine), slightly longer bill, and slightly less slim and less dainty general build.*

Thick-billed Warbler on Fair Isle

Kenneth Williamson, Valerie M. Thom, I. J. Ferguson-Lees and H. E. Axell

An example of the Thick-billed Warbler (*Acrocephalus aedon*), a bird from south-east Asia and apparently the first of its species to be recorded in Europe, was captured at Fair Isle, Shetland, on 6th October 1955.

In the fleeting glimpses we obtained of this bird in the field its large size and long, rounded tail at once attracted attention. The rufous rump, contrasting with the uniform olive-brown of the mantle and wings was a conspicuous feature, much more striking in the field than in the hand. In all these characteristics the bird strongly resembled a Great Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*). When flushed from the turnip rig in which it was found the bird immediately dived again into cover, and on next being disturbed flew to a dense growth of reedy grass and hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* on the banks of a near-by burn. Its skulking behaviour as it crept between the stems suggested that an attempt to trap it at this site might prove successful, so the Yeoman net with a portable catching-box was assembled, giving a trap with an entrance less than 3 feet wide. With great caution the bird was moved from the turnips to the ditch, where it threaded its way through the vegetation until finally it was fluttering against the glass of the box.

The bird was taken to the laboratory for examination: there it was seen that the resemblance to a Great Reed Warbler was purely superficial, and confined to size and plumage. There was no eyestripe; the bill was very different from that of any familiar *Acrocephalus*, being shorter and deeper, with the culmen distinctly down-curved; and the wing-formula too was quite different, particularly in the shape of the 1st primary which was unusually long and quite exceptionally broad. The bird was identified as a Thick-billed Warbler with the aid of Dresser's *Manual of Palaearctic Birds* (1902) and Hartert's *Die Vögel der Paläarktischen Fauna* (1910).

The upper-parts were bright olive-brown, the rump having a decidedly rufous tinge. The chin and throat were yellowish-white, and the breast, flanks and under tail-coverts washed with buff. Lores greyish. Wing dark brown, the primaries fringed

Originally published in *British Birds* 49: 89–93. Heading drawing by D. I. M. Wallace

olivaceous, the secondaries with rufous edgings. Axillaries and under wing-coverts buffish-white. Tail of 12 feathers, the outer pair 18 mm shorter and the penultimate pair 8 mm shorter than the longest feathers. Upper mandible dark brown, the lower flesh-coloured; 4 rictal bristles. Legs bluish, inclining to purplish on the sides of the tarsi, toes blue. Iris olive-brown, eye-lid plumbeous.

Measurements: Chord of wing 79 mm. Bill from skull 16½ mm, and 6 mm in depth at the nostrils. Tarsus 29½ mm. Tail 78 mm. Weight 22.84 gm.

Wing-formula: 3rd primary longest, 4th slightly shorter, both emarginate. Next in order of succession were the 5th, 6th, 2nd, 7th and 8th, shorter by 3, 6, 7, 9 and 12 mm respectively. Broad 1st primary 8 mm longer than longest primary-covert.

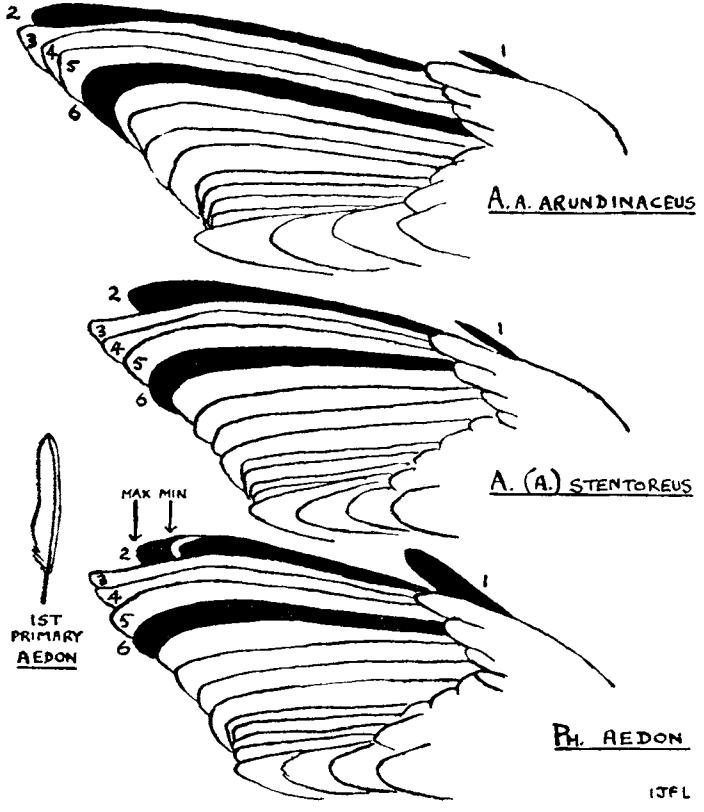


Fig. 7 Wing-formula of three similar warblers: Great Reed Acrocephalus arundinaceus, *Clamorous Reed* A. stentoreus *and Thick-billed* A. aedon. *The Thick-billed Warbler's important characters of a much larger first primary and shorter second primary are shown in black and the length of the latter in each species is indicated by its relationship to the sixth primary which is also blacked out. In the Thick-billed Warbler the second primary may be as long as the sixth or as short as the eighth. These diagrammatic sketches are slightly smaller than natural size (I. J. Ferguson-Lees)*

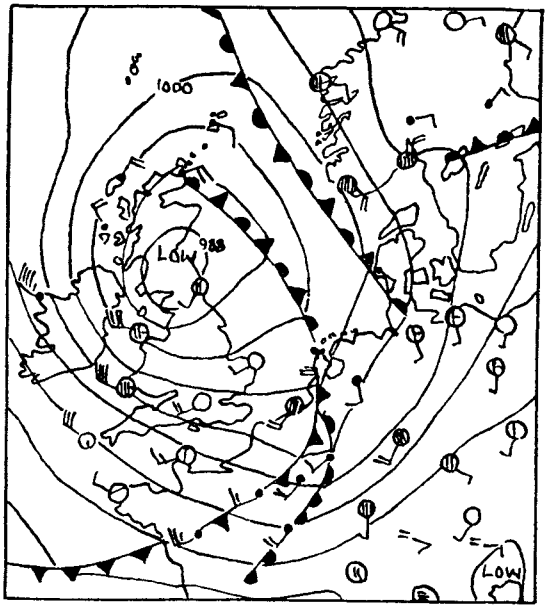
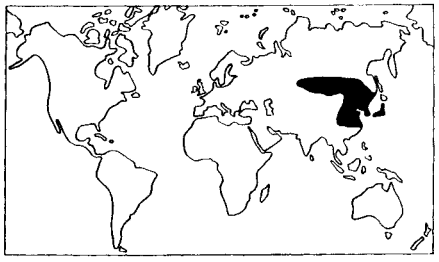


Fig. 8 Weather conditions over western Europe at midnight on 5/6th October 1955, the night before the capture of the Thick-billed Warbler Acrocephalus aedon *on Fair Isle.*

No ectoparasites were found on examination with chloroform vapour. The bird was ringed and after photographs had been taken by Dr Maeve Rusk, William Eunson and K.W. it was released. For a short time it skulked in the garden in front of the Observatory 'Heligoland,' and then flew low and swiftly—a very rufous-looking bird—to some crags on the hillside above.

As we have already remarked, the Thick-billed is in the field very similar in size, shape and coloration to the Great Reed Warbler and though it has a deeper and shorter bill, a tail longer in proportion, a redder rump, blue legs and lacks an eye-stripe, it would, in our opinion, often be very difficult to distinguish. In the hand, however, the bill-shape is distinctive, while the proportionate lengths of tail and wing and the very long, broad, rounded first primary are quite diagnostic (see Fig. 7).

The Thick-billed Warbler was part of a considerable drift-movement which involved a 'rush' of Turdidae and *Fringilla* spp., in addition to a small number of departing summer visitors among which Whinchats (*Saxicola rubetra*) and Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) were dominant. A vigorous depression moved quickly eastwards across southern Scotland into the North Sea, its occluded front and associated rain-belt extending south-eastwards from Caithness to the Hook of Holland at midnight (Fig. 8). The bulk of this drift must have taken place off the continental coast-line from Holland and the Frisian Islands north to the Heligoland Bight, between this occlusion and a quasi-stationary front across the entrance to the Skagerrak. Farther than this it is quite impossible to trace the migration of this warbler, but it is worth while noting that an extensive belt of high pressure had been established across eastern Europe and central Asia for the fortnight before 6th October.

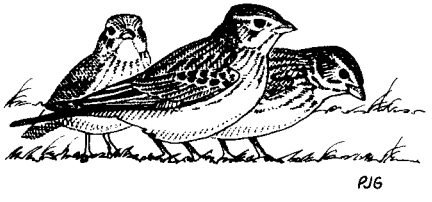


It would not have been surprising if this far-eastern warbler had never occurred in western Europe. One more has, however, been found in the 25 years since the first: on Whalsay, Shetland, on 23rd September 1971.

Dr Irene Neufeldt (Brit. Birds *60: 239–243) considered that the resemblance to Great Reed Warbler is purely superficial, but that, instead, Thick-billed Warbler recalls a large Garden Warbler* Sylvia borin *rather than an* Acrocephalus *warbler. This impression is no doubt a joint function of the short, stout bill, more rounded crown, blue-grey legs, and rather plain face without an obvious pale supercilium. Confirmatory characters, such as the more rounded wings than Great Reed Warbler (thus short projection of the primaries beyond the tertials on the closed wing), and even the rounded, long first primary which extends well beyond the primary coverts (vestigial on Great Reed) may be discernible in good field views.*

JANUARY 1956

Lesser Short-toed Larks in Ireland



Frank King, P. D. Nolan,
F. O'Gorman, R. G. Pettitt,
R. G. Wheeler and R. F. Ruttledge

A highly interesting addition to the list of the birds of Britain and Ireland is the Lesser Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella rufescens*). Since 1956 there have been four records in Ireland, in Cos. Kerry, Wexford (twice) and Mayo, involving a total of over 40 birds.

The first record was of a flock of 30 birds seen by Frank King at Derrymore Island, Co. Kerry, on the curious date of 4th January 1956. He was unable to identify them at the time, but he took the following detailed notes:

Originally published in *British Birds* 53: 241–243. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

A compact party of 30 small larks feeding in fairly close-cropped grass in an area consisting of a mixture of grazing and salt marsh. Very small for a lark, almost as small as a Twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*), but in contour identical with Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) seen on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford. They differed from the latter species in being a shade darker on the upper-parts, in having the upper breast evenly ticked with short dark brown streaks on a pale buff ground, and in being without any dark patches on the sides of the neck. The ticking extended down either side of the breast with decreasing intensity, and was only just discernible on the flanks of some birds, though more pronounced on others. There seemed to be some slight variation in the intensity of markings between one bird and the next, but the general features were the same on all. The crown was finely streaked dark brown, the streaking becoming less defined on the nape; brown-streaked 'cheek-patches' were rather accentuated by being bordered above by pale superciliaries and below by a pale line which ran along the lower edge of the ear-coverts. The back was finely speckled and marbled dark brown and light brown. Two very thin buff wing-bars were formed by pale tips to the greater and lesser wing-coverts. The tail was dark brown with white outer feathers. The belly was off-white (appearing white in flight), becoming palest buff on the breast; the chin was buff and unstreaked. The bill was lark-like (i.e. exactly as Short-toed Lark), greyish-horn in colour. The shortish legs were light brown. The voice, heard chiefly in flight, was reminiscent of the call of a Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), but weaker and more metallic—though not quite as metallic as that of the Short-toed Lark. A second note was not unlike the 'rick-kick-kick' of a Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), but sharper; this was sometimes delivered as a single call and at other times repeated fairly rapidly (possibly by more than one bird). The larks ran and walked about on the grass and frequently crouched behind tussocks, often stretching up their necks to obtain a better view when they found they were being stalked. When disturbed they flew only short distances, and they were often disturbed as they were repeatedly followed up and seen many times as close as 9 or 10 feet and less. The day was very sunny and mild.

By a happy coincidence Frank King was on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford, with P. D. Nolan, F. O'Gorman and R. G. Pettitt when a party of five small larks identical in appearance and voice with King's Derrymore birds was found on 30th March 1956. Next day four were still present. They were identified as Lesser Short-toed Larks. Full details and sketches are in the Saltee Bird Observatory record-books.

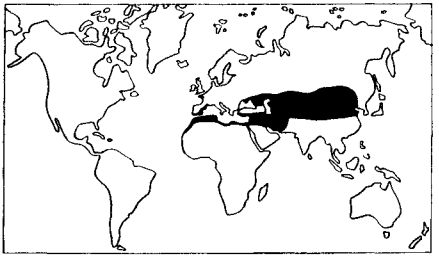
Then on 21st May 1956 Frank King, this time in company with R. G. Wheeler, encountered two Lesser Short-toed Larks on a short grassy stretch in a marshy area near Belmullet, Co. Mayo. They showed all the characteristics which had been noted in the birds at Derrymore in January and at Great Saltee in March, i.e. small size, streaked crowns, pale buff superciliaries, pale line surrounding brown-streaked ear-coverts, speckled and streaked upper-parts, two thin pale wing-bars, pale buff-washed breast and pale belly, vertical ticking across upper breast and down either side to fade out on the flanks, legs honey-brown, bills stout and grey. They spent much time preening or quietly feeding but one bird flew up once or twice to a height of nine or ten feet and sang a brief snatch of song—a rather jangling mixture of clicking and sweetly musical notes. Otherwise they remained silent. There were many Skylarks in the area for size-comparison.

Finally, two years later, in March 1958, R. G. Pettitt and Major R. F. Ruttledge found another small party on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford. Five were seen on 22nd March 1958—three together and two others which occasionally joined them. Excellent views were had from behind a low bank at a range of about 30 feet. The next day, 23rd March, only one could be found in spite of a careful search, but it was seen several times and once at a distance of less than 20 feet. On 24th March, however, two were again seen and on the 25th four. The following is a summary of the main points noted:

On the ground they were more reminiscent of large Redpolls (*Carduelis flammea*) or Linnets (*C. cannabina*), but in flight they proclaimed their true relationship by their general similarity to

small Skylarks with their white outer tail-feathers and pale wing edgings, and by their calls which, however, were lower, weaker and more melodious than those of Skylarks. In size they were much less than the Skylarks which were also present (though the two species did not associate either on the ground or in flight) and when both were in the air the difference was very striking. Apart from size, the most noticeable feature was the finely streaked gorget which in some of the birds ended in an abrupt line across the breast, contrasting with the creamy colour of the rest of the under-parts. The chin and throat also showed up lighter against the finely streaked breast, though the birds normally fed quickly with a stabbing action, holding their heads low in a hunched position, so that these areas were invisible. No neck marks such as those in Short-toed Larks could be detected. In general the colour above was rather like that of darker examples of the Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*), though somewhat warmer, and the upper-parts were thus darker than those of the average Skylark. One bird on the 22nd, however, was much lighter and more hoary above than the others; this bird's crown also had noticeable dark markings. On the 24th, when the best view of all was obtained, it was noted that the two birds seen then had a golden tinge to the upper-parts, a faint and narrow whitish or yellowish wing-bar and pale tips to the secondaries. None of the birds showed any sign of a crest; their bills were noticeably small and neat and relatively fine; and their legs were yellow-brown. On the whole they were very nondescript.

R. G. Pettitt considered these birds to be identical in their main characters with those seen by him and others on the same island in March 1956.

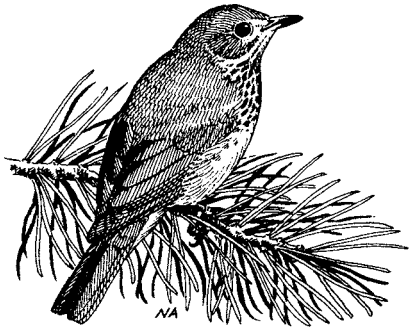


There have been no further records since these four flocks, totalling 42 individuals, in 1956 and 1958.

As long as the small size has been correctly assessed (preferably by comparison with other familiar species nearby), the only confusion species is Short-toed Lark, from which the obvious and chief difference is the complete, wide pectoral band of neat, fine streaks, which often extend onto the flanks. Short-toed Lark typically has only a few indistinct streaks and often a small dark patch on the breast-sides, but occasionally there may be a complete narrow gorget of sparse streaks bordering the throat. Lesser Short-toed Lark has generally drab greyish upperparts and wings (lacking the rufous tones which are apparent at least on the crown of Short-toed Lark), lacks Short-toed's prominent bar of dark-centred median coverts (its wings and upperparts are more regularly marked with dark), has a less distinct supercilium, and a proportionately shorter and stubbier bill. On the closed wing of Lesser Short-toed Lark, the primaries extend well beyond the tips of the tertials, whereas on Short-toed the tertials wholly cloak the primaries or fall just short of their tip.

MAY 1956

Swainson's Thrush in Co. Mayo



On 26th May 1956 a freshly dead Olive-backed Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* [now known as Swainson's Thrush] was found at Blackrock lighthouse, Co. Mayo, by W. P. Roche, assistant keeper there. It is now preserved in the National Museum, Dublin, but it was first of all sent to the American Museum of Natural History where it was assigned to the race *C. u. swainsoni* which breeds from north-central Canada to western Virginia (see *Irish Nat. Journ.*, xii: 172–173, 270).

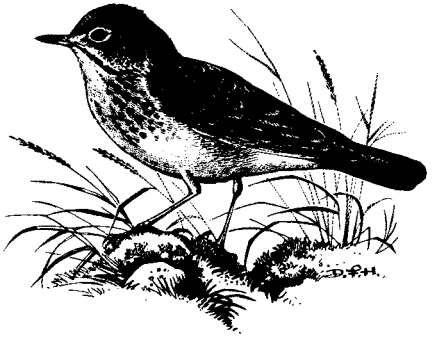
Since the first record was a corpse, details of the fourth—a particularly well-documented and illustrated record—are also included here.

Swainson's Thrush in Kent

After a spell of southwesterly and westerly winds, 27th October 1976 was mostly overcast and completely calm at Sandwich Bay, Kent. When checking the mist-nets at about 11.30 G.M.T., I noticed a small thrush in the bottom panel. Having had some very small Song Thrushes *Turdus philomelos* in the previous week, I initially ignored it in order to deal with a Blackbird *T. merula* that seemed about to escape. I could not, however, take my eyes off this extraordinary small creature. When extracting it, I opened out the wing to look for the rufous tips to the wing-coverts and the orangey underwing-coverts of a Song Thrush; it was at this point that I realized that it was indeed something different. On examination at the observatory, it was identified as a Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*. The following details were noted:

Measurements Wing 96.5 mm; tail 65.0 mm; tarsus 28.0 mm; bill (to skull) 16.0 mm; total length about 160 mm; weight 25.4 g.
Bare parts Eye: pupil black and iris dark brown, almost black. Bill: upper mandible horn-coloured; lower mandible yellow-pink at base and horn-coloured from half-way to tip; black rictal bristles. Leg: tarsus pinkish-grey at front and yellowish-grey at back; feet pinkish-grey on top and yellowish-grey on soles.
Head Forehead, crown and nape dark greyish-olive; darker centres to the feathers which, on close inspection, made the top of the head look slightly speckled. Cheeks and ear-coverts buffish-olive, with no grey tinge. Lores greyish-olive. Prominent buff eye-ring. Supercilium faint buff, reaching from the top of the eye to the bill.
Upper-parts Neck, back, rump, uppertail-coverts and tail all uniformly olive with a tinge of grey. Closed wings fawny-brown.
Open wing Lesser coverts and median coverts with olive-grey edges to feathers and greyer centres, giving a scalloped effect. Bastard wing, primary coverts and greater coverts with outer edges to feathers fawny-brown and inner edges grey-brown. Primaries with tawny-brown outer edges and brownish-grey inner edges. Secondaries and tertials with fawny-brown outer edges and brownish-grey inner edges. All except the first two or three primaries and all the secondaries had a white rectangular patch on the inner side of the shaft, starting at the edge of the primary coverts and extending on average for about one third of the feather. This feature could be seen

Originally published in *British Birds* 53: 99; 70: 550–552. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott



Swainson's Thrush Catharus ustulatus *(D. F. Harle)*

only with the wing fully extended, and made a type of wing-bar, but this would not have been noticed in the field, as on the Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus*, where it is obvious only in the hand or possibly when flying overhead. These patches became longer and fainter towards the outer primaries. Marked emargination on the 3rd and 4th primaries: extending for 23 mm on 3rd and 15 mm on 4th.

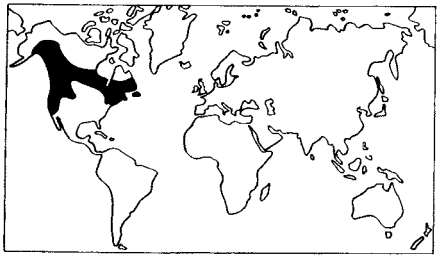
Underwing The white wing-bar started at the tips of the underwing-coverts. Underwing-coverts dusky-white with light brown-grey tips and some edges also; some had buff-yellow tips; over the secondaries, the basal halves of the feathers were light grey and the rest buff-white; over the primaries they were light grey all over. Bend of wing: small mottling of white, yellowish and grey.

Under-parts Chin buff-white, with grey moustachial streak on each side. Throat and breast yellowy-buff with dark grey spots, heavier and more marked on throat than breast. Lower breast and belly silvery-white, lower breast marked with large, faint olive-grey spots, becoming more spaced out towards the belly. Flanks spotted like lower breast, fading to uniform olive-grey towards the tail. Undertail-coverts silvery-white. Tail narrow and very square-ended.

Brief field notes Size half-way between a Robin *Erithacus rubecula* and a Song Thrush. Hopping gait similar to a Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, but feeding behaviour more thrush-like. Although it was slender in the hand, when perched it fluffed out its feathers, which made it look very plump—the one seen on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, in 1968 was described by Dr J. T. R. Sharrock (1969, *Cape Clear Bird Obs. Rep.* 10: 39) as 'very rotund, with the shape of a "Christmas card Robin" '. It remained on the ground or in lower branches of hawthorns *Crataegus monogyna*. Appeared a lot browner in the field than in the hand, presumably owing to the brown edges to the wing feathers. Although the yellow-buff (Song Thrush colour) of the throat and breast were obvious, the under-parts appeared dusky-white (as opposed to silvery-white in the hand). The cheeks looked uniformly buffy-olive. The bill was short, narrow and sharp. The eye-ring and moustachial stripe were clearly visible. I did not hear its call, but some other observers described it as a monosyllabic, fluty 'whirrip' or 'chirrpt'.

This is the fourth record in Britain and Ireland, the previous three being at Blackrock Lighthouse, Co. Mayo, on 26th May 1956, on Skokholm, Dyfed, on 14th to 19th October 1967, and on Cape Clear Island on 14th to 16th October 1968. There are also records from Austria, Belgium, France, Italy and West Germany.

J. H. VAN DER DOL



Eleven years elapsed before the second was found, on Skokholm in October 1967. The third was discovered the following year—on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, in October 1968—but it was another eight years before the fourth: that at Sandwich Bay in October 1976, documented above.

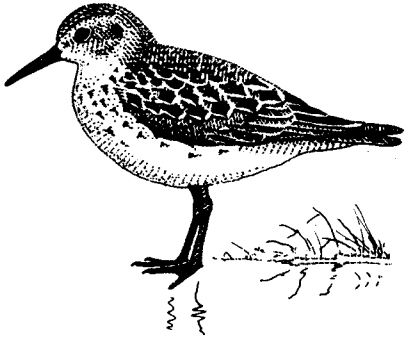
Having established its great rarity here, Swainson's Thrush then—in 1979—appeared three times in the space of four days: in Cornwall and on St Mary's and Tresco in Scilly during 20th to 23rd October. The eighth record followed in 1980, with one at Scatness, Shetland, again in late October.

The main distinctions from Grey-cheeked Thrush are described on page 38.

MAY–JUNE 1956

Western Sandpiper on Fair Isle

I. C. T. Nisbet



PJG

Williamson and Alexander (1957a) reported the occurrence of a Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) at Fair Isle from 28th May to 3rd June 1956. After studying their detailed description, however, I have come to the conclusion that the bird was in fact a Western Sandpiper (*C. mauri*), and should be considered as the first British record of that species. Many reference books do not emphasise sufficiently strongly the difficulties which can arise in distinguishing some individuals of these two species, and the Fair Isle bird appears to have been one of the more 'difficult' examples. The webbing of the toes, in conjunction with other characters, suffices to exclude all other species but the two mentioned above. Specific identification is based on the following points from Williamson and Alexanders' full account.

Measurements The bill-length (19.5 mm) was measured from the feathers and so cannot be compared with those given in standard American reference books. I have therefore measured 50 specimens of each species from the collection of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, and give the results in the following table:

Bill-length from feathers (millimetres)

	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
C. pusilla	3	11	14	9	8	3	1	1	–	–	–	–	–
C. mauri	–	–	–	–	2	6	11	12	4	4	7	3	1

Originally published in *British Birds* 56: 55–58. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

It will be seen that 19.5 mm is just below the minimum of this sample of *mauri*, and it was doubtless for this reason that the Fair Isle bird was identified as *pusilla*. However, the difference is much too slight to be conclusive.

The wing chord (97 mm) might also be taken to support identification as *pusilla*, for it is longer than that of any short-billed example of *mauri* in my sample: the longest wing on a bird with a bill of 20 or 21 mm was only 94 mm, the shortest-billed bird with a wing of 97 mm having a bill of 22 mm. However, 97 mm is too long for *pusilla* also (range of 50 measurements: 86 to 96 mm, mean 92.5). Thus, on the basis of wing- and bill-length alone, the Fair Isle bird could have been either an unusually long-winged *pusilla* or an unusually short-billed *mauri*, and identification must be based on other features.

The tarsus (23 mm) is typical of *mauri* and unusually long for *pusilla*, but I found a few specimens of the latter which were equally long.

Head-colour The Fair Isle bird had 'ear-coverts reddish-brown . . . crown-feathers were blackish-brown edged with grey, more rufous on the sides of the crown and nape', these rufous areas being striking in the field as well as in the hand. The reddish ear-coverts are diagnostic of *mauri*, and are *never* found on *pusilla* (Ridgway 1887, Witherby *et al.* 1941, etc.); I have confirmed this by examination of over 150 skins, including many in full breeding plumage.

Upper-parts The Fair Isle bird was in moult to breeding plumage, having 'longest tertiaries dark brown with some sepia and warm whtitish edgings, the new feathers being black edged with orange-brown and tipped with white. There were similar new feathers in the scapulars and mantle'. Together with those on the crown and nape, these orange-brown feathers on the back are also diagnostic of *mauri*, these areas in *pusilla* never being brighter than 'pale buffy cinnamon' (Ridgway 1887) or 'pink buff or pink cinnamon' (Witherby *et al.* 1941). In one or two exceptional skins of *pusilla* in the Harvard collection the edgings of the scapulars were brighter than this, approaching the colour of those of *mauri*, but even on these birds the edgings of the mantle and crown feathers were buffy, much too dull to fit the description of the Fair Isle bird.

Bill-shape The field description of the Fair Isle bird—'black bill, slightly decurved at the tip, was slender and rather long for a stint and just about as long as the head'—could not possibly apply to *pusilla* and is typical of the appearance of a short-billed *mauri*. It is most unfortunate that the bill-shape was not mentioned in the laboratory description, but the more flattened bill-tip of *pusilla* should have attracted attention in the hand.

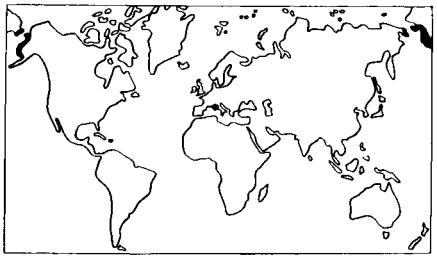
Voice The *chirr-rr-rr* note mentioned by Williamson and Alexander fits neither the *chrüp* flight-note of *pusilla* nor the shriller *chiet* of *mauri*, and was probably a form of the twittering note common to many small waders. I myself have never heard a Western Sandpiper call in spring, but I have heard both species twitter on autumn passage.

Other field-characters The warm tone of some feathers on the upper-parts doubtless helped to cause the confusion with Baird's Sandpiper (*C. bairdii*) when the bird was first seen. However, the 'upright' stance and relatively long legs which Williamson and Alexander (1975b) later quoted as distinctions of their bird from *bairdii* are not characteristic of *pusilla*, but are in fact useful subsidiary field-characters of *mauri*. Furthermore, the fact that the Fair Isle bird's wings were distinctly shorter than the tail-tip when at rest shows that it must have been very large-bodied, for its wings were in fact unusually long for either species (cf. Browne 1958). Williamson and Alexander's direct estimate of size—one inch shorter than a Dunlin (*C. alpina*)—confirms that the bird was too large-bodied for *pusilla*.

In short, Williamson and Alexander's description is an excellent and unmistakable account of a small-billed example of *C. mauri*, and shows conclusively that the bird could not have been *C. pusilla*.

The Western Sandpiper, although breeding only in northern Alaska, migrates down the Atlantic coast of North America and winters quite commonly in the southern United States, occurring in hundreds north to North Carolina. Its spring migration must carry it mainly overland, for it is rare on the coast north of its wintering range. However, it is far more numerous on the Atlantic coast than some other species (e.g. Baird's Sandpiper) which are accepted as having occurred in Great Britain in spring.

I am greatly indebted to the curators of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, and the American Museum of Natural History, New York, for permission to examine their extensive collections.



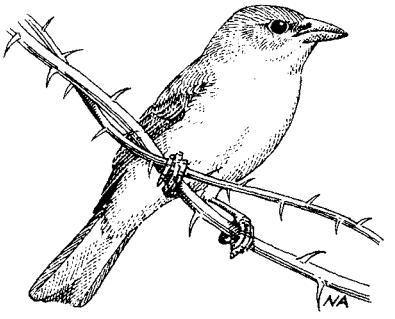
This, the last of the Nearctic peeps to be recorded here, is still the rarest. The total is only six, compared with 188 White-rumped Sandpipers C. fuscicollis, *86 Baird's Sandpipers* C. bairdii, *26 Semipalmated Sandpipers* C. pusilla *and 23 Least Sandpipers* C. minutilla. *The five recent Westerns were in Co. Wicklow in October 1960, Co. Kerry in September 1961, Essex in July 1973, Devon in September 1973 and Cheshire in September 1975.*

Partially webbed toes—readily visible at close range on dry ground—eliminate all other small sandpipers except Semipalmated (see page 35). *Western Sandpiper is between Little Stint and Dunlin* C. alpina *in size, and its rather long, fine-tipped and slightly decurved bill, and rather long legs jointly give an impression of a miniature Dunlin rather than a stint: these structural differences are among the best—if subtle—distinctions from Semipalmated Sandpiper. In adult summer and juvenile plumages, bright rufous-orange feather-edgings on the crown, ear-coverts and scapulars are obvious further distinctions from Semipalmated; some individuals may show remnants of this coloration even in first-winter and adult winter plumages. Like Semipalmated, Western lacks juvenile or adult summer Little Stint's two* prominent *whitish lines at the sides of the mantle. Adults in summer are extensively rufous on the head and upperparts, and the breast-streaking extends as black arrowhead-shaped marks on the flanks. The call is a short, high-pitched 'cheet' or 'jeet', subtly different from that of Semipalmated Sandpiper and Little Stint. A small-looking, lone Dunlin partially moulted from juvenile to winter plumage, which could resemble a summer-plumaged Western, is perhaps the major stumbling block. Careful size comparisons with Dunlins nearby, accurate age-diagnosis, call, and—ideally—a sight of partially webbed toes are thus important.*

SEPTEMBER 1957

Summer Tanager on Bardsey

R. W. Arthur



At 7.20 a.m. on 11th September 1957, on Bardsey Island, Caernarvonshire, R. Moss and R. Stjernstedt had brief views of a bird resembling a large, bright male Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*) without the wing and tail patches. Unfortunately it dived into cover and was lost, but at 12.15 p.m. on the same day it was caught by J. D. Gay in the Lane heligoland trap and then examined in the hand by M. R. Buckley, R. V. Collier, E. R. Corté, A. Cumber, R. C. Lee, A. Morley, the three observers already mentioned, and myself. The following detailed description was taken:

Upper-parts: forehead olive, slightly yellowish, with some rusty-red feathers; crown and nape similar, with two reddish feathers at front of crown; sides of head also similar, but lores appearing darker; mantle, scapulars and upper rump less yellow, with three large red feathers; lower rump similar to head, with four paler reddish feathers. *Under-parts:* chin and throat deep yellow mixed with orange feathers; breast, belly and under tail-coverts similar but without orange feathers (these parts were stained with fruit juices, though this possibly happened while the bird was being carried to the laboratory in a bag). *Tail:* upper-side olive, darker at tips, outer webs slightly yellowish; under-side dull, tinged olive. *Wings:* primaries and secondaries brown-black, broadly fringed olive on outer webs (less distinctly on 2nd primary); inner secondaries with whole outer webs olive; primary coverts similar to primaries but with less distinct fringes; greater coverts similar to inner secondaries; median coverts olive with dark shafts; lesser coverts mainly olive, with one reddish feather among those on right wing; under wing-coverts pale, tinged olive-yellow; axillaries olive-yellow. *Soft parts:* upper mandible dark horn on culmen, paler in centre and very pale horn at sides; lower mandible very pale horn; gape-flange yellowish; legs and feet bluish-slate; iris dark brown. *Measurements:* wing 99 mm (primaries straightened), tarsus 20 mm, bill from nostrils 14 mm, bill from hinge 22 mm, bill depth at forehead *c.* 10 mm; weight 24.6 gm. *Wing-formula and tail structure:* 3rd primary longest, 4th 1 mm shorter, 2nd 2.5 mm shorter, 5th 4 mm shorter, 6th 13 mm shorter, 7th 18 mm shorter, 8th 21 mm shorter, 1st 11 mm shorter than longest primary covert; 3rd, 4th and 5th emarginated; 12 tail-feathers, all slightly abraded but still showing pointed tips; no obvious damage to shafts of wing or tail feathers.

On being released, the bird immediately flew to cover among brambles at the foot of a wall. It was caught again on 15th and 20th September, when its weight had increased from 24.6 gm to 26.6 gm and 36.7 gm respectively, and it was last seen on 25th September.

It had, on the first day, been provisionally identified as a Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) and on 20th September it was compared in the hand with a male specimen of this species which, in the meantime, had kindly been lent by R. Wagstaffe of the City of Liverpool Public Museums; it was found that the scattered red feathers in various parts of its plumage very closely resembled those on the specimen.

In the field it was noted as smaller than a Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) and all observers were struck by the resemblance, already remarked, to a very large male

Originally published in *British Birds* 56: 49–51. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

Greenfinch without the yellow flashes. The upper-parts appeared olive-green with darker primaries and secondaries, the under-parts deep yellow. The bill looked pale, blunt and heavy, and with the steep forehead gave a distinctive shape to the head. The legs appeared darkish and very short for the size of the bird. The tail, blunt but slightly forked, extended well beyond the wing-tips. The shapes of bill and tail, and the proportions of the latter in relation to the wings, are well illustrated in the photographs (Photos 16–18) as are the uniformity of the body-feathers and the darker wings with their pale-edged inner secondaries.

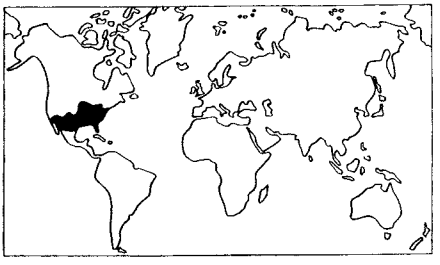
During its stay of 15 days the bird spent most of its time in an area which included much bramble and gorse, and some small willows and plum trees, in addition to the laboratory buildings. Normally, when undisturbed, it perched openly in a rather upright, shrike-like manner, but as soon as it was alarmed it generally flew to some adjacent cover; occasionally it crouched in an almost horizontal position. Its flight was rapid, low and undulating, variously likened to that of a woodpecker or heavy finch, and it arrived at a perch with an upward sweeping curve. It was seen to make flycatcher-like sallies on two occasions, and occasionally to flick its wings like a flycatcher; it also cocked its tail and raised its crown-feathers from time to time. On 12th September it uttered a double note *chic-chic* as it took flight on being disturbed, and then a similar but single *chic* when it reached cover.

Blackberries were apparently its main food. These it often merely chewed, seeming to take only the juice, but it passed seeds in the laboratory on 20th September. On the 13th it was seen to pick a blackberry, place it on a fence post and then peck at it. W. M. Condry once watched it take a small fly in the air.

Observers who saw the bird, apart from those listed at the beginning as being present on the first day, included W. M. Condry, D. Condry, B. Griffiths, B. Little, R. C. Pratt, M. P. M. Richards, A. Soper and W. B. Workman.

Dr Charles Vaurie and Dr Eugene Eisenmann, both of the American Museum of Natural History, supplied comments to the Rarities Committee. Dr Vaurie wrote: 'I believe your bird is a Summer Tanager. These documents and photos have been pored over by a number of good field men and, of course, some of these and myself have looked at skins. Everyone decided that, on the basis of the photos, it was impossible to be certain of whether the bird had been a Summer or Scarlet Tanager. The coloration, including the wings, varies individually, and if the bird had been immature the identification was even more uncertain. However, one measurement in your documents offered a chance to be diagnostic, namely the length of the bill measured from the nostril, which you said was 14 mm. Mr Paul Buckley was kind enough to measure 40 mixed specimens (♂, ♀ and imm) of each and found that in *rubra* the bill measured 12–15 and in only one was the bill as short as 12, against 10–12 in *olivacea* with only 4 birds measuring as much as 12. As your bird measured 14, the chances are therefore greatly in favour of *rubra*.'

Mr Eisenmann later wrote, however: 'Banders can separate the immatures of the two species by the larger bill of the Summer and the richer, more orange (or sometimes buffy) tone of the yellowish underparts. The Scarlet is a more greenish yellow below. These are fine points, but are discernible by those familiar with these species and are obvious in skins. In addition, young *male* Scarlets have black lesser (and sometimes also middle) wing-coverts; adult and moulting males have the wings wholly or largely black.' Thus, while the scattering of red feathers on the head, mantle and rump of the Bardsey bird showed it to be a male, the fact that the lesser coverts were mainly olive (and even had one reddish feather on the right wing) showed that it was not a male Scarlet Tanager.



This is still the only Summer Tanager seen in Britain and Ireland.

Both of the tanagers of eastern North America—Scarlet (page 172) and Summer—have now occurred here. Identification of adult males in summer is straightforward: Summer Tanager is entirely red, whereas Scarlet Tanager is red with black wings and tail. Males of both species acquire a female-like green-and-yellow plumage in winter. Adult females of both species are always greenish above and slightly orange-yellow or buffy-yellow (Summer) or lemon or greenish-yellow (Scarlet) below; Scarlet has a variable number of blackish wing-coverts, reflecting the male's pattern. First-winter individuals (perhaps the most likely age of vagrants to Britain) of both sexes resemble adult females; first-winter male Scarlet invariably has diagnostic black wing-coverts, but first-winter females are plain-winged like female Summer, so the actual tone of the yellow underparts, as for some adult females, is then one of the best guides. As on the Bardsey individual, the larger bill of Summer Tanager may be a useful, if rather subjective, feature for identifying tanagers in 'difficult' plumages. First-summer males acquire a variable amount of adult plumage, and are usually patchy green and red; first-summer male Scarlet Tanagers retain the brownish primaries and secondaries of juvenile plumage, and are not wholly black-winged like the adults.

NOVEMBER 1957

Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Co. Antrim

H. Dick and A. J. Tree

A Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheuticus ludovicianus*)—a North American species not previously recorded in Great Britain or Ireland—was seen at Shane's Castle, Co.

Originally published in *British Birds* 53: 149–152; 58: 440–441. Heading drawing by Robert Gillmor

Antrim, on 24th November 1957, and recorded in the *Irish Bird Report* for 1957 (pp. 21–22). It was an adult male and we noted the following particulars:

Head, throat and upper-parts black, the last seeming to be tinged with brown. Rump and large part of tail white, rest of tail black. Breast bright red and most conspicuous; rest of under-parts white. Wings barred black and white, very striking in flight. Bill shortish and stout, appeared whitish.

Size about that of a Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*). When perched it gave a very full-breasted appearance. It was extremely wild and the plumage showed no heavy wear or damage. It was essentially a black and white bird with a conspicuous white rump area and a red breast. It was seen perched at 30 feet and in flight from 30 to 60 feet.

The plumage description above might seem more appropriate to a male in spring than in autumn, which led the editors of *British Birds* to consult Dr Charles Vaurie, Assistant Curator of the American Museum of Natural History, New York. He kindly examined the series of skins there and wrote, "The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is one of our most individually variable species, so it is possible to find a November bird without brown mottlings below, though it would be unusual. Birds at this time of the year have brownish edges to the feathers of the back which would account for the statement from your correspondent that 'the upper-parts seemed tinged with brown'."

Since the first was seen only briefly, details of the second are also included.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Co. Cork

At 13.30 hours G.M.T. on 7th October 1962 we discovered a first-winter male Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* in a clump of bushes above Trawkieran on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork. We had it in view for only about three minutes at a distance of some 30 yards before it disappeared, but at 16.45 hours we found it again, in exactly the same spot, and were then able to watch it at ranges down to ten yards almost continuously for the next hour and a quarter as it moved to Cummer and eventually into the Waist, between Trawkieran and Ineer. It spent the whole of the next day, 8th October, in a field overgrown with brambles in the Waist, but was not seen subsequently.

It was very large, almost as big as a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, and heavily built, rather like a Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. A large belly gave it a pear-shaped appearance when perched. In a rear view, it strongly resembled a huge Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* with the mantle buff, strongly striped with dark brown, and very prominent pale superciliaries meeting on the nape. There was also, however, a buff crown stripe, which did not quite join the superciliaries on the nape. Its actions were very reminiscent of those of a shrike *Lanius sp.*, with strongly undulating flight on rounded wings and the habit of constantly wagging the tail both up-and-down and side-to-side while looking alertly around. In addition, there were three prominent white bars on the wings and a good deal of white showed in the tail in flight, which made us think particularly of comparing it with a Woodchat Shrike *L. senator*. The secondaries were all broadly tipped with white, while the upper tail-coverts had pale buff tips which formed a line of pale spots. A diamond-shaped orange-red patch on the breast was brightest on the chin and there was a very conspicuous white collar and a crescentic buff spot under the eye. The most striking feature, however, mainly visible in flight or when the bird flicked its wings, was the *brilliant crimson under wing-coverts* which were almost exactly the same colour as the red on a Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*.

The grosbeak kept mainly to brambles and fed voraciously on blackberries, which it did not swallow but slowly munched, throwing the remains to one side with a flick of its head. When first seen, the huge conical bill was bright pink with greyish patches, but by the late afternoon it was stained a deep purple with blackberry juice. From this we concluded that the bird had probably not long arrived when we first found it.

The following detailed description is compiled from the field-notes which we made independently:

Upper-parts: crown dark brown, tinged olive, with pale buff central streak not quite reaching nape; broad creamy superciliaries extending right round on to nape and completely cutting off the crown, but becoming fainter and more buff towards rear (the crown streak did not quite join the superciliaries); lores and ear-coverts dark brown, with large pale-buff crescent under eye; nape and mantle buff, very heavily striped dark olive-brown; rump dark buff, unstreaked; upper tail-coverts dark buff, with pale buff tips on outer feathers showing as line of pale dots; tail dark brown, the inner webs of at least the three outer feathers tipped white (this showing only in flight or when tail fanned); wings dark brown; three wing-bars formed by white median coverts, white tips to greater coverts (largest on innermost) and white bases to primaries; secondaries all broadly tipped white, producing effect of series of dots; under wing-coverts bright crimson, extremely conspicuous in flight or when wings raised; sometimes a small amount of crimson showing at the carpal joint even at rest. *Under-parts:* chin bright red; yellowish-red diamond-shaped patch on centre of throat, fading out on lower breast; sides of throat white, forming conspicuous white collar under ear-coverts, but not meeting on nape; dark line under this white collar extended right round lower throat, passing through the red of the centre of the throat (presumably this was the first signs of the black head of the adult male developing); sides of breast and flanks distinctly tinged yellowish-buff with prominent dark olive-brown streaks; belly and under tail-coverts off-white. *Soft parts:* eye dark; bill very large and heavy, stained with blackberry juice so true colour not seen; feet and legs grey, latter rather weak for size of bird.

It may be worth mentioning that when the Rose-breasted Grosbeak was first seen, a Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and a Red-backed Shrike *L. collurio* were also present in the same small clump of bushes!

This constitutes the second Irish and European record of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, an adult male having been seen in Co. Antrim in November 1957 (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 149–150).

M. P. L. FOGDEN and J. T. R. SHARROCK

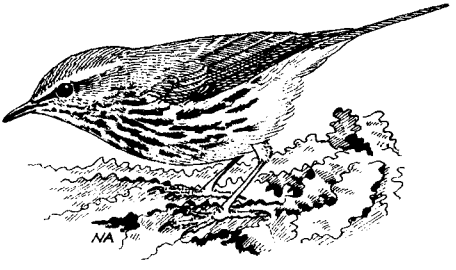
Seven more Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have been found here since the first two in 1957 and 1962. Apart from one which frequented an Essex bird-table in December 1975 and January 1976, all have been in the west in October: four in the Isles of Scilly, a second on Cape Clear Island and one on Skokholm

Few adult males in winter are as colourful as the Antrim individual, but they are always

distinguishable from first-winter males at least by the basically black, rather than brown, wings and tail. First-winter males have red underwing-coverts (yellow or orange-yellow on all females) and sometimes also some red on the sides of the throat, but otherwise resemble females. Females and first-winter males may be less strikingly colourful than the adult male in summer, but their generally brown plumage, with complex pattern of whitish head-stripes, wing markings and dark-streaked breast, makes them equally unmistakable.

SEPTEMBER 1958

Northern Waterthrush in Scilly



G. J. Harris, J. L. F. Parslow and R. E. Scott

On the morning of 30th September 1958, G.J.H. and R.E.S. discovered at Covean, on the eastern side of St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, a small ground-feeding bird which they identified as a Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*). A single-panelled mist-net was erected on the shore and the bird caught with little effort. After examination at the observatory it was photographed in colour and then returned to Covean and released. It remained there until 12th October and during its stay was seen by several other observers including J.L.F.P., R. E. Emmett, B. S. Milne, P. Z. Mackenzie and R. Symons. This is the first record of the species in Great Britain and Ireland; though it has occurred in Europe once before, a female having been trapped on Ushant, France, on 17th September 1955 (Etchécopar 1955).

In the field the first impression was of a small, plump, pipit-like bird, dark olive-brown above with a well-marked yellowish-buff superciliary stripe and yellowish below with heavy, dark brown streaks. In size it was noticeably smaller than Rock Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*) near-by and its plump appearance was very marked, more so than in the illustration in Peterson (1974). For most of its stay it tended to frequent one corner of a small cove, where rotting seaweed had been piled up at the foot of a tamarisk hedge, but latterly, when the weed had been washed away by high tides, it sometimes resorted to adjacent bulb fields where more seaweed had been spread in readiness for ploughing in as a fertiliser. On the shore it found an abundant food supply in the larvae and flies in and around the seaweed. Here it fed rather in the manner of a Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) with frequent runs, hops and leaps into the air to catch flies, and also regularly bobbed its tail after the fashion of a Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*). In the hand, after it had been extracted from the mist-net, it seemed a much smaller bird than field observations suggested and this was

Originally published in *British Birds* 53: 513–518. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

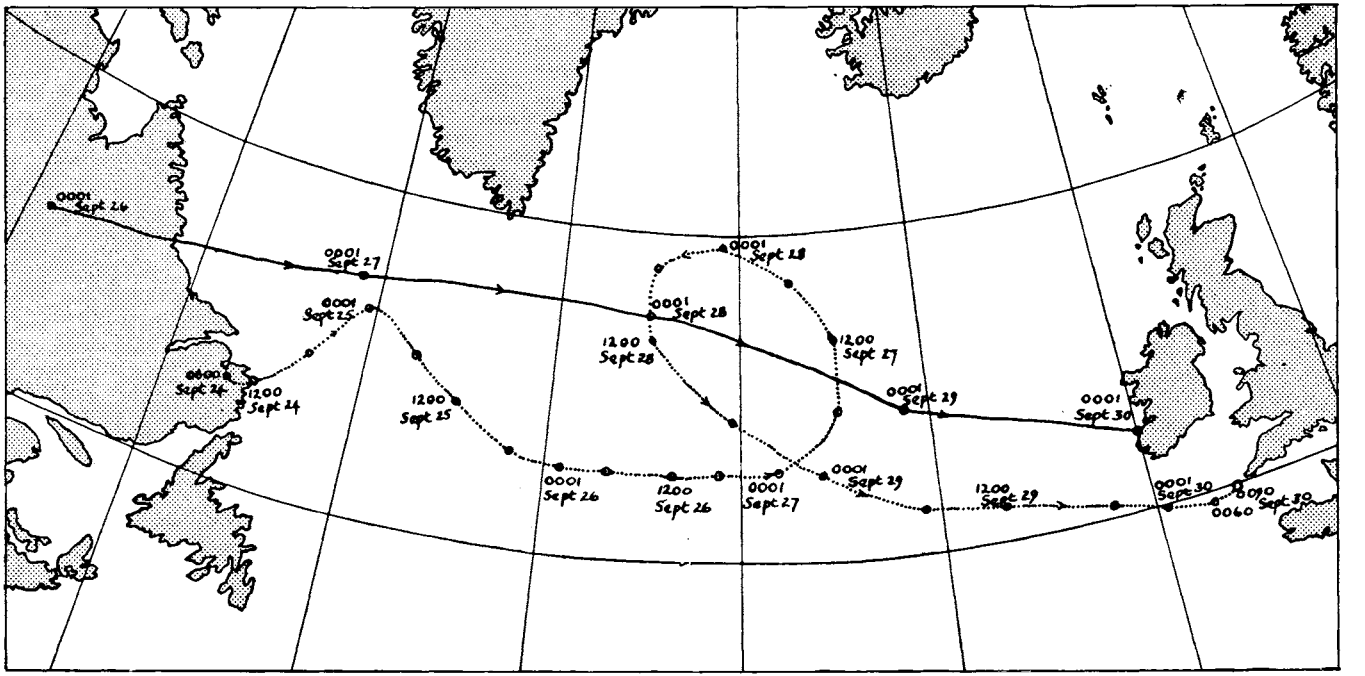


Fig. 9 Atlantic weather preceding the observation of a Northern Waterthrush Seiurus noveboracensis *on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, 30th September to 12th October 1958. The continuous line shows he track of the centre of a depression which moved eastwards from Labrador towards the end of September. The trajectory of the air at sea-level across the Atlantic which reached the Isles of Scilly at 0900 hours on the 30th is shown by the dotted line. The loop is explained by the fact that the air moving more quickly than the centre of the depression became caught up in the cyclonic circulation of the low pressure system (Compiled by F. E. Lamb and Miss J. M. Oliver of the Meteorological Office, with permission, and drawn by Mrs R. E. Parslow)*

confirmed by measurement. A small snail which was removed from its flank feathers was identified by S. P. Dance at the British Museum (Natural History) as *Vitrina pellucida*. This snail has a wide distribution on both sides of the Atlantic and specimens have been found attached to birds on several occasions (Williamson *et al.* 1959).

DESCRIPTION

Plumage The whole of the bird's upper-parts were dark olive-brown, except that the lesser wing-coverts were only shaded with olive and the two longest scapulars were lightly tipped with buff. The chief feature of the head was the yellowish-cream superciliary stripe which was straight and extended back about 25 mm from the nostril; it did not cross over the base of the bill. A dark olive-brown stripe passed through the eye. The ground colour of the under-parts was whitish, heavily suffused with yellowish-buff. The throat was lightly speckled with olive-brown, these spots continuing down the breast and flanks as very heavy streaking; the belly and vent lacked markings. The basal three-quarters of the under tail-coverts were olive-brown, the tips being white; these coverts extended to within 6 mm of the tip of the tail.

Soft parts Bill straight and even; upper mandible and tip of lower a very dark horn colour, remainder of lower mandible pearl-pink; gape flesh-pink. Feet and legs dirty flesh-pink; hind claw strongly curved. Eyes dark brown.

Wing-formula and measurements Third and 4th primaries equal and longest, both emarginated on outer web; 2nd shorter by 1 mm; 5th, 6th and 7th shorter by 2.5, 7 and 10.5 mm respectively; 1st primary minute, 8 mm shorter than longest primary covert. The following measurements were taken:

Wing (chord)	75 mm	Bill (from skull)	16.5 mm
Tail	*c.* 55 mm	Bill (from feathers)	11.5 mm
Tarsus	19.5 mm	Hind claw	6 mm

Total length approximately 5½ inches

Age and sex The bird showed no white tipping to the inner webs of the outer two to four rectrices. Lack of this tipping is considered by Eaton (1957) to be characteristic of birds in first-winter plumage. The sexes are alike at all times of the year. In size, females tend to average smaller than males but there is a considerable overlap, within which the measurements of the St Agnes bird fall. The question of subspecific identification is discussed below.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

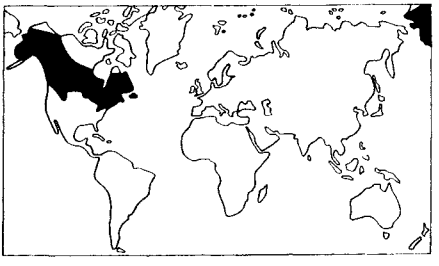
On St Agnes the wind had been westerly and strong for some days preceding the bird's arrival. Virtually no migration was recorded and, apart from the Waterthrush, the only fresh arrivals on 30th September were two Lapland Buntings (*Calcarius lapponicus*). The chief feature of the Atlantic synoptic charts at this time was a deep depression which moved slowly eastwards from Labrador to Ireland, giving rise to the westerly winds which were especially strong in the 30 hours before the bird's arrival. Fig. 9 shows the track of the centre of the depression as a continuous line; the dotted line is the trajectory of the air at *sea-level* which reached Scilly at 0900 hours on 30th September (and which, incidentally, would have been the bird's track had it been transported passively down-wind). This trajectory clearly shows that the existing weather conditions gave the bird considerable assistance if it did fly the Atlantic unaided. Beyond this, however, it is impossible to reach any firm conclusions regarding the bird's crossing.

Baird *et al.* (1959) have shown that during the autumn of 1958 Northern Waterthrushes were more numerous on the eastern sea-board of the United States than in the previous year, but that, in common with other migrants, they were scarce or absent during 26th–28th September when the whole coast was under the influence of a cloud belt and high winds associated with the hurricane "Helene". Drift from the

United States coast in this period seems to have been improbable, and in the unlikely event of the bird making the crossing in less than 30 hours or more than four days—necessary if it left later than the evening of the 28th, or earlier than the 26th—we must assume that it started its journey further north, perhaps fromNewfoundland. Ship-assisted passage cannot be ruled out. Indeed, if the bird did leave the United States coast before the 26th it must have boarded, and found sufficient food on, an eastward-bound ship to have survived. In this respect it is perhaps not without interest to mention that liners from both New York and Montreal passed St Agnes the night before the bird was found.

FIELD-CHARACTERISTICS

The Northern Waterthrush is distinctive in appearance and cannot be confused with any European bird. Confusion may, however, be possible with another New World species, the Louisiana Waterthrush (*S. motacilla*), which has not been recorded in Europe, and which has more whitish under-parts and eye-stripe and an unspotted throat (see Hollom 1960). Although actually one of the American warblers (Parulidae), the Northern Waterthrush bears a superficial resemblance to a diminutive Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), while its general behaviour, coloration and size recall a pipit (*Anthus* spp.). In fact, both Rock Pipits on the shore and Robins (*Erithacus rubecula*) in the fields showed aggressive behaviour towards the St Agnes bird. At all times this individual was extremely tame, frequently approaching to within five or six feet of sitting observers and enabling photographs to be taken down to this range (Photos 19–21). When alarmed it normally flew into the lower part of a dense tamarisk hedge, but otherwise it was seen only on the ground or in the air, when its flight was straight and direct. The uniformly dark upper-parts appeared almost blackish in flight. The heavily striped under-parts, especially the flanks, and the striking eye-stripe were noticeable features on the ground, and the regular bobbing action of the tail quite characteristic. A call-note, frequently uttered, particularly in flight, was a loud explosive *spik*, with some resemblance to that of a Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*).



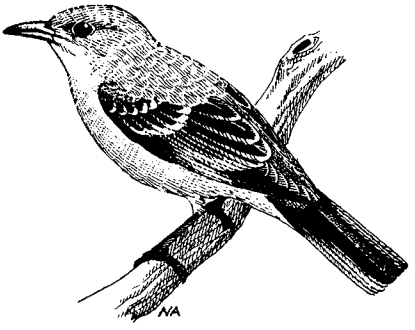
There has been only one further Northern Waterthrush recorded here since the first. The second was also in Scilly, on Tresco from 3rd to 7th October 1968 (Brit. Birds 65: 484–485).

The St Agnes individual described here was perhaps unusually easy to observe. The one on Tresco lurked in more typical fashion in the mangrove-like sallows surrounding the Great Pool, and most observers had to be content with only hearing its frustratingly frequent, Grey Wagtail-like 'spik' call and a brief glimpse of its fleeting, shadowy silhouette.

OCTOBER 1958

Northern Oriole on Lundy

W. B. Workman



At 2.30 p.m. on 2nd October 1958 R. H. Dennis flushed an unfamiliar bird from an open grass field on Lundy, Devon, where it was keeping company with a flock of Meadow Pipits (*Anthus pratensis*). It was noticeably larger than the pipits and its flight was heavy, but what particularly attracted attention were its black wings with white bars, its bright orange-yellow under-parts and its yellow tail. It landed on the side of a dry stone wall and hung there for a few minutes with its tail fanned and pressed against the stone, before flying down into some bracken and starting to search for food. R.H.D. fetched me and together we watched the bird for the next half hour. It appeared exhausted and whenever flushed would immediately drop into the next clump of bracken to continue feeding. We had excellent views of it and managed to obtain full field notes. It was slightly larger and heavier than some Pied Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) with which it was associating on the ground. The upper-parts appeared brownish-olive and the wings were black with two very conspicuous white wing-bars; the tail was dull orange and the rump similar but lighter, both being very conspicuous in flight. The under-parts were orange-yellow, especially bright on the throat and under tail-coverts. The bill was large, pointed and appeared blue-grey in colour, as did the legs. The flight was heavy and direct, low over the ground. Although the bird was fond of perching in conspicuous positions on the tops of walls, where it would frequently hop from stone to stone, it would also skulk in the undergrowth looking for food (apparently insects). It was reminiscent in size and shape of the Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) which I had seen on Bardsey the previous September, but its head was noticeably flatter (less humped) and its bill slimmer and more pointed. No call was heard.

The bird avoided a mist-net which we erected, but was finally caught in the Garden Trap. It was taken to the laboratory for detailed examination at 3.15 p.m. and the following description noted:

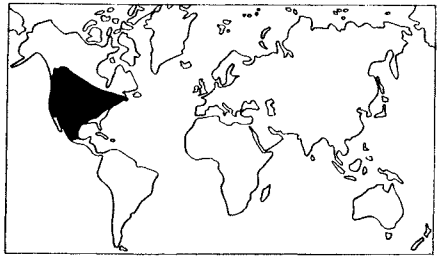
Upper-parts: forehead orange-yellow slightly tipped grey-brown; crown and nape grey olive-brown, with dark centres and grey tips; ear-coverts slightly yellower than crown; no supercilium; mantle and back grey-brown with wide tips of olive-grey and darker centres; rump and upper tail-coverts deep orange-yellow tipped greyish; tail slightly rounded, three outer feathers on each side dull orange-yellow with outer webs tinged brown and inner webs tipped pale yellow, central feathers darker and more brownish; primaries black with outer webs fringed whitish and large white margins on inner webs; secondaries black with outer webs thickly edged white; primary coverts black slightly fringed brownish; greater coverts blackish with large white tips on outer webs, forming conspicuous wing-bar, and inner webs slightly tipped white; median coverts black with large white tips on both inner and outer webs, forming thicker wing-bar, and dark shafts; lesser coverts black fringed pale olive-grey; bastard-wing black. *Under-parts:* throat and upper breast bright orange-yellow with pale yellow tips; chin and lower breast similar but paler; belly rich cream washed yellow; flanks buff-grey tinged yellow; under tail-coverts bright

Originally published in *British Birds* 56: 52–55. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

orange with slightly paler tips; under-tail pale brown washed bright yellow (more noticeably yellow than dorsal surface); under-wing white washed pale yellow; axillaries bright yellow. *Soft parts:* feet and legs blue-grey, soles brownish-grey; upper mandible slate with paler cutting edges, lower mandible pale bluish-white; gape flesh-pink with very slight pinkish, soft flange; iris dark brown. *Measurements:* wing 90 mm (normal) or 91.5 mm (flattened), tail 74 mm, tarsus 24 mm, bill from feathers 17 mm, bill from base of skull 19.5 mm, depth of bill at base 7.5 mm; weight 26.95 gm at 16.00 hours. *Wing-formula:* 3rd and 4th primaries equal and longest, 5th 2 mm shorter, 2nd 3 mm shorter, 6th 6 mm shorter, 7th 10.5 mm shorter, 8th 14 mm shorter, 9th 17.5 mm shorter, 10th 19 mm shorter, 1st primary minute; 3rd, 4th and 5th deeply emarginated, 6th slightly; tips of primaries slightly abraded.

During handling, the bird occasionally uttered a short, soft squawk. In addition to R.H.D. and myself, a number of other people saw it in the hand and these included Miss B. Bizzel, Mr and Mrs F. W. Gade, F. G. Lyall, John Ogilvie, J. M. R. Reakes Williams, and Mr and Mrs V. Squires. After being photographed and ringed, it was released at 5.30 p.m. in Stoneycroft garden, where it flew into low cover and remained near the ground.

From the above description we concluded that the bird was an immature female Baltimore oriole *Icterus galbula* [now known as Northern Oriole]. It stayed on the island for the next seven days and was last seen on 9th October. It was trapped a second time at 8 a.m. on the 7th and it then weighed 29.58 gm (an increase of 2.63 gm). When released on this occasion it flew off quite strongly and perched on top of a wire fence.



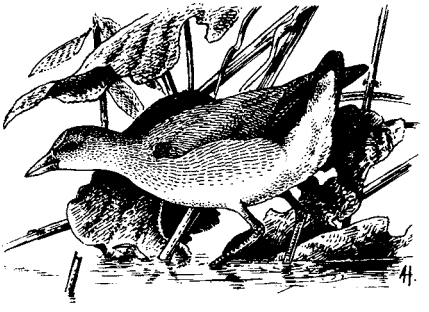
Eleven more Northern Orioles have occurred, all but two in September or October and all but two in the southwest, from the Isle of Man to Devon and the Isles of Scilly. Nine of the 11 occurred in a surge of records in the seven years from 1962 to 1968, including four in just a fortnight, from 5th to 18th October 1967. None has been found since one on Fair Isle in September 1974, which was atypical in being not only the farthest north, but also the earliest of all the autumn records.

Adult Northern Orioles have only one moult each year: a complete one in late summer. Juveniles moult only the head and body feathers to acquire first-winter plumage. Thus, apart from a few pale fringes on the mantle and scapulars, adult males retain their striking black, white and orange coloration throughout the year. First-winters of both sexes resemble the adult female, except that the male shows obvious blackish on the throat, head and upper-parts. First-winter females are distinguishable from adults by their more uniformly olive-grey, less blackish, head, mantle and scapulars.

NOVEMBER 1958

American Purple Gallinule in Scilly

J. L. F. Parslow



A strange bird, in size and shape not unlike a Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) though with rather longer legs and feet, was picked up in an exhausted state in the gutter of the High Street, Hugh Town, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, late in the evening of 7th November 1958. It was bronze-green above and buff below, with white under tail-coverts; its legs and feet were dull orange-yellow, its iris was light brown, its bill was yellowish-green with reddish-brown at the base, and it had a dull green facial shield.

The finder was Miss Margaret Hughes, on her way to night duty at the telephone exchange. She took the bird with her and it remained at the exchange until the following evening when P. Z. Mackenzie, a local ornithologist, was contacted. He soon realised that it was a species of gallinule not described in the European bird-books. Taking it home, he fed it on earthworms which it ate avidly, but it was in too emaciated a condition and died on the 9th. The corpse was sent to me in London, where I identified it as an immature American Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*). The specimen is now preserved at the British Museum (Natural History) (Regd. No. 1958/27/1). The following description and measurements were taken:

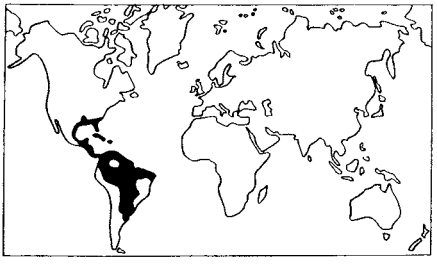
Upper-parts: crown and nape tawny-brown; hind-neck partly washed olive, becoming completely olive on lower neck; mantle and long scapulars brownish-olive, becoming olive-brown on lower back; rump rich dark brown with nigger brown tips to the feathers, these forming longitudinal streakings; upper tail-coverts and rectrices brown, rather lighter than rump, with faint olive wash. *Under-parts:* sides of head ashy-buff, becoming tawny-buff on sides of neck and olive-buff on sides of breast; chin and throat off-white; under tail-coverts white; rest of under-parts creamy-buff, lighter on belly, darker and faintly washed olive on breast, and warmer on thighs. *Wings:* primaries black-brown on inner webs and olive-green on outer (except silver-grey narrow outer web to first primary); secondaries olive-brown; coverts mainly brownish-olive, but bluish-green on primary coverts and some lesser coverts, becoming turquoise on a few feathers near carpal; under wing-coverts slate-grey tinged olive on outer coverts and tipped white; axillaries slate tinged with brown. *Measurements:* wing 173 mm, tail 67 mm, tarsus 60 mm, middle toe (excluding claw) 63 mm. *Wing-formula:* 2nd primary longest, 1st 21 mm shorter, 3rd 3 mm shorter, 4th 11 mm shorter, 5th 20 mm shorter.

This is the first record of the American Purple Gallinule in Europe and it is also, incidentally, the furthest north it has ever been reported. It should be added that this bird bears little resemblance to the European Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) which belongs to a different genus and is much larger.

This 1958 record is still the only one in Britain and Ireland.

Because of its Moorhen-like size and habits, there is a real danger that an American Purple Gallinule could be overlooked in a quick or distant view. At all ages, however, it lacks

Originally published in *British Birds* 53: 145–149. Heading drawing by Alan Harris



Moorhen's white flank stripe, the whole vent and undertail-coverts are white (without the dark central division as on Moorhen), and the longer legs and toes are yellow or yellowish. Given a closer view, however, the comparatively lurid colours of the adult will not be missed—green-glossed upperparts, purple head and underparts, and pale blue frontal shield above the Moorhen-like yellow-tipped, red bill. Juveniles are generally paler and more sandy-toned than juvenile Moorhen, and the bill is mainly yellowish. The similar Allen's Gallinule P. allenii *of Africa (one British record) is smaller, has red or reddish legs, dark central division to white vent and undertail-coverts, and adults have no yellow bill-tip.*

APRIL 1959

Song Sparrow on Fair Isle

Peter Davis and Roy H. Dennis

On the evening of 27th April 1959, R.H.D. found an unfamiliar small bird—'like a cross between a Hedge Sparrow [Dunnock *Prunella modularis*] and a bunting'—skulking in a tangle of rusty barbed-wire near the derelict radar-station on Ward Hill, Fair Isle. He came down to the Observatory to report this find, and it was still present when we returned to the hill an hour later. It proved difficult to get an adequate view of the stranger, since it was very shy and kept closely to the cover, but we saw it well enough to know that it was one of the North American 'sparrows' (Emberizidae). The size, generally drab coloration and skulking habit were reminiscent of a Dunnock, but the bill and head-pattern suggested a bunting. At 10–15 yards, in different light, we

Originally published in *British Birds* 52: 419–421. Heading drawing by Alan Harris

made out a chestnut crown with a greyish central streak, grey superciliary, a brown stripe through the eye, and pale grey and black moustachials. The under-parts were seen to be whitish, with heavy dark streaking on the flanks and on the breast, coalescing into a conspicuous dark smudge in the centre. The upper-parts were mottled grey-brown, the wings sandier brown, the tail apparently uniform mouse-brown. The bird hopped when moving slowly, but broke into a rapid run when disturbed outside the cover; when flushed, it flew rapidly into cover, but sometimes emerged near the top to watch us.

Within half an hour it was caught in a single-panel mist-net and was then identified in the laboratory as a Song Sparrow (*Zonotrichia melodia*), with the aid of Peterson (1947) and Forbush and May (1939); being distinguished from Lincoln's Sparrow (*Z. lincolnii*) by the broad, not fine, streaking below, and the lack of a buff band across the breast. The following description was made:

Head: crown chestnut with narrow grey central streak; superciliary pale grey; eye-stripe (obvious only behind eye) chestnut; ear coverts and lores greyish brown; moustachial pale grey, bounded above with a narrow chestnut stripe and below with a narrow brown-black one. *Upper-parts:* all feathers blackish-centred with a varying amount of chestnut outside the black, and with more or less pale grey edgings. *Wing:* Coverts similar to upper-parts, but more foxy in general colour due to smaller black centres and paler red-brown webs; tips of median and greater coverts whitish, forming two rather indistinct wing-bars; flight-feathers dark brown with sandy-brown edgings; axillaries and under wing-coverts washed greyish-brown. *Tail:* grey-brown, rather warmer towards the base; slightly rounded in shape. *Under-parts:* white basically; feathers of breast and flanks (not chin or belly) with blackish centres bordered by slight chestnut streaks; the black breast-spot so obvious in the field was not very apparent in the hand; under tail-coverts washed buffish, with grey-brown centres. *Soft parts:* eye dark brown; legs brownish-pink; bill dark grey on upper mandible, pale grey on lower.

The measurements taken (apart from wing-formula) were: wing (maximum) 65.5 mm; bill (from skull) 14; tarsus 24; and tail 69. The tips of the primaries were rather abraded, the tail less so. The weight was 24.5 gm at 19.45 G.M.T; this had fallen to 22.9 at 06.30 on the following day, when the bird was photographed by Angela Davis (see Photos 22–25), and released at the Observatory, bearing ring K81690.

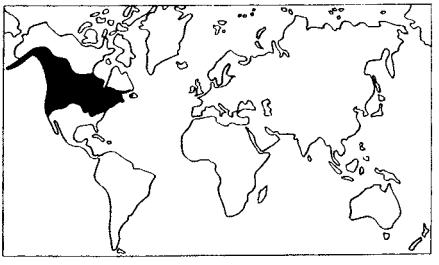
Kenneth Williamson kindly despatched to us a copy of Mrs Nice's celebrated study of this species (Nice, 1937), which includes a long series of weights and measurements. In a sample of 137 males and 123 females Mrs Nice found only four females with wings as long as 65–66 mm, and only twelve males with wings shorter than 65 mm. In the same sample no female had a tail more than 66 mm long, whereas males ranged up to 72 mm. It would therefore have been fairly certain that the Fair Isle bird was a male, had not this already been shown in a more striking way; for early on 1st May the Song Sparrow was heard singing from a low wall outside the hostel kitchen, and on most early mornings until 7th May (also on two occasions in the evening) this performance was repeated. The song—a sweet note repeated three times and followed by a short jingle—was tape-recorded by David Bradley on the 7th, and one sequence is now in the BBC Record Library (DBS 14826). No other note or call was heard at any time.

The Song Sparrow lived near the Observatory until 8th May, apart from a brief half-mile excursion to the Gully trap early on the 6th, whence it was quickly retrieved (weight 24.0 at 06.30). On 9th and 10th May it was by the stream at Vatstrass, a few hundred yards away, and after that it was not seen again. During its stay the bird was usually shy and often difficult to locate; when found, it would elevate the crown feathers, and then vanish in a singularly accomplished manner. The usual refuge was a cliff in South Haven, where it was occasionally seen feeding in the short turf at the

cliff-edge. On 7th May, however, when the island's human population was swollen to about five times its normal size by the arrival of the National Trust for Scotland's 'Islands Cruise' and also an excursion-steamer from Shetland, the Song Sparrow unaccountably lost its shyness and showed itself throughout the day to scores of visitors, including such well-known names as those of Irene Waterston, Kenneth Williamson, W. J. Eggeling, Seton Gordon and Jeffery Boswall, with our 'resident' bird-watchers, William Crawford, David Bradley, Barrie Juniper and Terry Brown acting as guides and controlling the crowds!

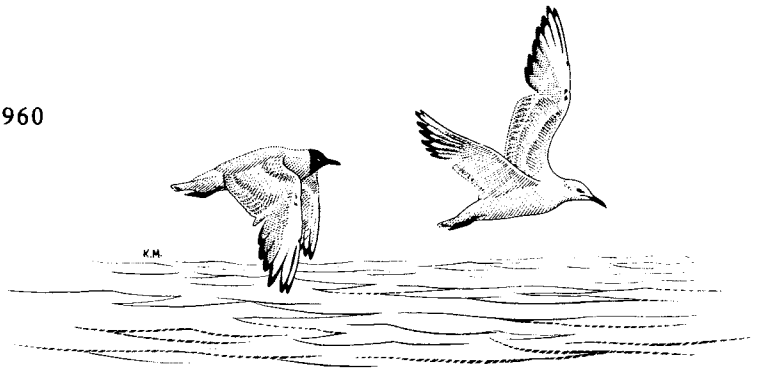
To several American bird-watchers on the cruise, this attention was a source of restrained amusement, for in eastern North America the species is numerous and widespread. The northern population is migratory, but the spring return appears to be very early (by March in New England, according to Forbush and May), and it is unlikely that the Fair Isle bird was freshly arrived on 27th April. This is supported by the high weight of the specimen; Mrs Nice gives the mean weight of 63 males in April as 22.4 gm (19.6–25.8).

Kenneth Williamson and I. J. Ferguson-Lees investigated the possibility of escape from captivity in Europe, but were informed by leading aviculturalists that the species is not imported as a cage-bird, and is not known to be kept alive on this side of the Atlantic. There appears to be no previous record of *Z. melodia* in Europe, though the closely allied *Z. lincolnii* has been found once, in Germany.



There have been another four records, all in April or May, in 1964, 1970, 1971 and 1979. They have all been in the northern half of Britain, in Gwynedd, Humberside, Isle of Man and Shetland.

Roy Dennis's apt 'cross between a Dunnock and a bunting' comparison for Song Sparrow might equally be applied to two other North American sparrows which could conceivably reach Britain in the future—Swamp Sparrow Z. georgiana *and Lincoln's Sparrow* Z. lincolnii. *All three have generally Dunnock-like upperparts, tail and wings, and bunting-like bill and striped head pattern. The coarse breast-streaks coalescing (on adults at least) into a central spot, basically whitish underparts, grey supercilium and crown stripe, and chestnut lateral crown stripes, are, together, diagnostic of Song Sparrow. Lincoln's Sparrow has a similar head pattern, but the breast and flanks have neat, fine dark streaks (with faint, if any, central coalescence) over a noticeably warm buff ground colour; it has a distinctive nervous, 'twitchy' disposition when alert, and the crown feathers are often raised: its behavioural jizz thus recalls Little Bunting* Emberiza pusilla. *First-winter Swamp Sparrow has a Song Sparrow-like head pattern (but crown wholly chestnut on adults), but the breast is strongly grey-washed without any distinct streaking, and the whole wing—especially the coverts—is strongly chestnut.*



Slender-billed Gull in East Sussex

D. D. Harber

On 19th June 1960, at the sewage outlet in the sea off Langney Point, Sussex, I saw among Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) an immature gull of about the same size as these but with a markedly longer bill. On this occasion the bird was seen only quite briefly and no other details were recorded, my attention being focused on the remarkable bill. On 22nd June 1960, however, I saw the bird again, in the same place, and pointed it out to R. H. Charlwood who was equally struck by its unusual appearance. On this occasion it was present during the whole of the afternoon, feeding off the sewage outlet, and was watched by us at ranges down to thirty feet, on and off for two to three hours. The description which follows was recorded by us jointly at the time.

The plumage differed little, if at all, from that of a Black-headed Gull moulting from first summer to second winter, except that the browns were paler than in any individual of that species present; there were also greyish markings on the side of the head behind the eye and on the nape. But structurally the bird differed so noticeably that it could at once be picked out at any reasonable range from the first-summer Black-headed Gulls which were with it. The bill was about one third longer than that of a Black-headed Gull and certainly no thinner; in fact, if anything, it was slightly thicker. It had a definite downward curve at the end before coming to a sharp point (this is, of course, the typical shape of a gull's bill, but it was more noticeable in this bird than in the Black-headed Gulls). In colour it was obscurely reddish with a black tip. The neck was distinctly longer and slightly slimmer than that of a Black-headed Gull. That tail also appeared longer, the extra length being approximately that of the (narrow) dark bar at its end. The bird spent most of the time we watched it feeding or looking for food on the surface of the water at the sewage outlet, and the extra length of neck and tail gave it a different outline from that of the Black-headed Gulls which were doing the same thing; in particular, it appeared to have both ends more depressed. The legs were dark with the under-sides of the feet greenish-yellow.

The structural differences were such that the possibility at once occurred to us that this might be a Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*), a species with which neither of us was familiar. But, on reference to the *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*, we

Originally published in *British Birds* 55: 169–171. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

found it stated that the bill is '*noticeably more slender*' than that of the Black-headed Gull. Nevertheless, I at once wrote to P. A. D. Hollom describing the bird. A correspondence then ensued, as a result of which I learned that the *Field Guide* was incorrect in this respect, and I began to realise that our bird could indeed be of this species.

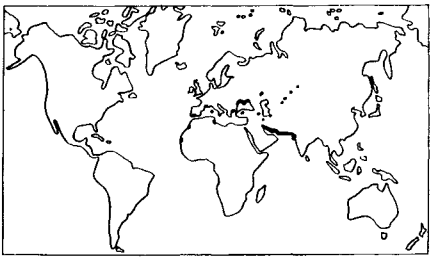
Meanwhile I had found it twice more, at the same place and under similar conditions, on 6th and 10th July 1960. On the first of these dates I saw it only quite briefly, but on the second I again had long, close views during at least two hours, and was once more struck by the way it stood out among the Black-headed Gulls, still more of which were now present. I also observed that the flight was slightly more buoyant than in the other species. As on previous occasions, the bird was seen only in flight, but for as long and as near as could be wished.

I then visited the British Museum (Natural History) in London and examined six skins of Slender-billed Gulls and also some of Black-headed Gulls. The bills of the former seemed to me to correspond very closely with that of the Langney Point bird in shape and size. The same applied to the length of the neck, allowing for the fact that this is very much affected by the way a skin is prepared. I did not observe any extra length of tail, however. A couple of the skins of immature *genei* had greyish markings on the head in the same places as in the Langney Point bird, though these were distinctly more obscure. On the other hand, there was no skin of a Slender-billed Gull in precisely the same stage of plumage, first-summer, as the Langney Point bird.

By now I was convinced that our bird was a first-summer Slender-billed Gull, but in view of the paucity of available field descriptions, particularly of immatures, I wrote to H. P. Medhurst who has seen many of this species at Aden. In his reply he gave the features by which he distinguishes them in the field. In brief, these consist of the bill 'longer and not slimmer than in *ridibundus*', with a 'downward curve' at the end; the 'head protruding further than in *ridibundus* when in flight'; and the tail 'appearing longer than in *ridibundus*', although it is uncertain 'whether it is the tail-feathers which are longer or whether it is the actual hind portion of the body which is longer'. He also described the tail as 'distinctly wedge-shaped, far more than in *ridibundus*'. This last feature we did not notice, perhaps because the contrast with the shape of the tails of the Black-headed Gulls was obscured by some of these being in moult. Otherwise, of course, the structural features identifying the Slender-billed Gull in the field are precisely those which we noted in the Langney Point bird. Medhurst also mentioned the paleness of the markings of immature *genei* (compared with those of *ridibundus*) and added that the dark patch behind the eye varies greatly, being absent in some and prominent in others.

In fact, every feature by which the Langney Point bird differed in plumage and structure from Black-headed Gulls is an identification feature of the Slender-billed Gull. The identification was rendered all the more conclusive by the fact that neither Charlwood nor I had any idea of this at the time when we recorded these features, some of which, so far as I am aware, have never appeared in print before. I have since learned that I. C. T. Nisbet has seen a Slender-billed Gull similar to ours in Greece in August, and that every detail of a first-year bird which I. J. Ferguson-Lees saw in Rumania at the end of May 1961 corresponded with the description which we have given of ours, including the colour of the soft parts.

This rather strange gull is still a great rarity here and only two more have been discovered since the first. The second was also in East Sussex, at Rye Harbour on 28th April 1963

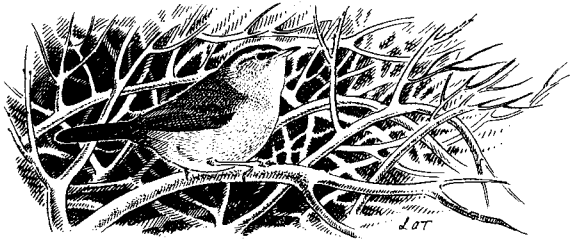


(Brit. Birds *57: 81*), *and then one appeared intermittently at nearby Dungeness, Kent, from July to September 1971, and once took a trip up the English east coast to appear at Minsmere, Suffolk, on 15th August* (Brit. Birds *65: 395–396*).

Adult Slender-billed Gull is white-headed in summer and usually has strongly pink-flushed underparts; otherwise—at all ages—it closely resembles Black-headed Gull, if only in its plumage patterns. The very long neck (especially obvious when alert or alarmed) and the long, sloping forehead and long bill do, however, give it a strikingly 'different' shape, and this, combined with the all-white head or lack of an obvious blackish ear-spot, should make Slender-billed stand out in any crowd of Black-headed Gulls. Confirmatory features are the pale iris (always dark on Black-headed) and, on first-years, the generally paler brown markings on the wings, and the paler bill (with little or no dark at the tip) and legs.

MARCH 1961

Cetti's Warbler in Hampshire



C. Suffern and I. J. Ferguson-Lees

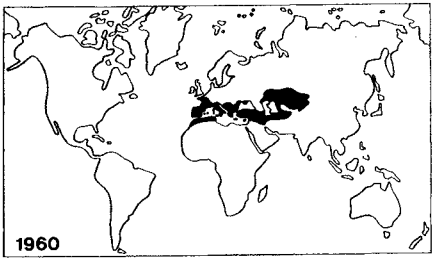
On 4th March 1961, at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire, C.S. heard a rich, fruity song-phrase from a bird which remained hidden in the reeds; it was strange to him and, although it was repeated a few times at intervals of two or three minutes, he was unable to identify it. The next day the bird was still singing irregularly and it continued to be very skulking, but C.S. glimpsed it briefly and so did D. Price, M. H. Terry and S. L. White among others. During the following fortnight it was seen briefly or heard by countless observers, including H. G. and W. B. Alexander, Dr J. S. Ash, D. F. Billet, R. H. Charlwood, D. D. Harber, P. A. D. Hollom,

Originally published in *British Birds* 57: 365–366. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

D. I. M. Wallace and I.J.F.-L., and it became increasingly clear that it was a Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*, a species with which several of those concerned were familiar abroad. Any remaining doubts were finally resolved on 19th March when the bird was trapped in a mist-net by M. J. Carter and P. R. Colston, ringed by J. A. Miller and seen in the hand by about 25 people. The following description is based on a detailed examination made by I.J.F.-L.:

Upper-parts: crown and nape dull chestnut-brown with olive wash; mantle and back also chestnut-brown but more rufous; rump and upper tail-coverts as mantle and back but slightly brighter. *Sides of head:* very narrow buffish-white superciliary in front of and over eye, but fading out behind; greyish patch just above superciliary and buffish-white line immediately below eye; lores dark grey; ear-coverts pale brownish-grey. *Under-parts:* chin white; throat white tipped with grey; upper breast white with grey wash; lower breast and belly white; under tail-coverts dark brown with broad off-white tips and distal fringes; flanks as under tail-coverts, but browns darker and off-whites slightly greyer; under wing-coverts greyish-white and pale brown. *Wings and tail:* primaries and secondaries dark brown with chestnut fringes to outer webs, particularly towards bases of feathers and more striking on secondaries; greater coverts with similar fringes, these becoming broader towards inner wing; median and lesser coverts even more conspicuously fringed with chestnut; rectrices black-brown with chestnut outer webs and only ten in number, right-hand one of central pair not fully developed. *Soft parts:* bill black-brown, lower mandible pinkish-horn at base; inside mouth varying from pinkish to orange-yellow; iris dark brown; legs and feet flesh-brown with dusky yellow soles; claws grey. *Measurements:* wing 63 mm, tail 68 mm (outermost feathers 15 mm shorter than the full-grown one of the central pair), tarsus 23.5 mm, bill from skull 15 mm, bill width at nostrils 5 mm. *Wing-formula:* 4th primary longest, 5th fractionally shorter, 3rd and 6th −1.5 mm, 7th −5 mm, 10th −9 mm, 2nd −9.5 mm, 1st 11 mm longer than primary-coverts; 3rd (not 2nd) to 6th emarginated, the last only slightly.

After it had been examined, the bird was returned to the area of reeds and brambles which it had been occupying and it remained there until at least 10th April.



The controversy surrounding this occurrence provided both an object lesson in mass hallucination (it was at first considered possibly to be a Moustached Warbler Acrocephalus melanopogon *and characteristics of that species were 'seen' by some observers) and entertainment for uninvolved observers reading the sometimes heated subsequent correspondence* (Brit. Birds *58: 225–227, 516–520). Events in the next 20 years have been equally interesting, for this species has continued to expand its breeding range within Europe and it now nests (and overwinters) in much of southern and eastern England, with well over 100 pairs by the end of the 1970s.*

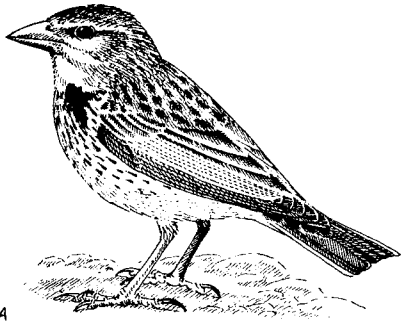
The explosive, rather short, and totally diagnostic song is almost invariably the first clue to the presence of a Cetti's Warbler. An emphatic introductory 'chip' is followed by a usually double or treble repetition of a variable, richly warbled phrase, typically something like

'chi-chip-er-chip'. The combination of uniform rich chestnut-brown upperparts, wings and tail (the latter strongly rounded and often nervously flicked or cocked), short, whitish supercilium, greyish ear-coverts, and contrasting wholly silky greyish-white underparts is just as distinctive as the song, given that this classic marsh skulker shows itself long enough. A check of any suitable habitat—wet marsh areas, especially with dense bramble and sallow cover—is worthwhile, so that its hoped-for continued spread can be fully monitored.

APRIL 1961

Calandra Lark at Portland Bill

J. S. Ash



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A Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*) was under observation at Portland Bill, Dorset, for much of 2nd April 1961. I first heard it calling at 11.30 G.M.T., and then saw it circling overhead with Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*). Its large size and dark underwing, combined with an absence of any pale wing-patch, confirmed its identification. R. J. Jackson soon joined me and we were able to obtain good views of the bird in flight and on the ground. During the course of the day it was seen by at least 23 observers, and the following description is culled from detailed notes made by F. M. Gauntlett, R. J. Jackson, Dr K. B. Rooke, M. Terry and myself:

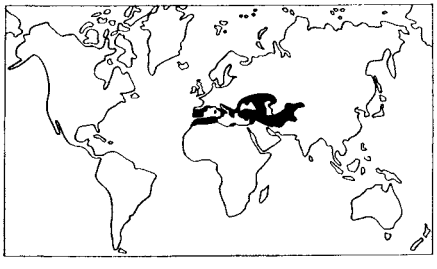
Size and build: when flying looked twice as big as Skylark, partly due to large expanse of open wing, and on ground approximately corresponded to Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) with which it was directly compared; bulky, and plump like Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*), usually with short-necked appearance. *Upper-parts:* crown dark with some streaking; nape pale grey with no obvious streaking; mantle dark greyish-brown streaked with darker brown or blackish, as in juvenile Mistle Thrush (*T. viscivorus*) (i.e. feathers had dark brown centres with pale grey fringes), and lacking brownish-buff or olive-buff tinge of Skylark; rump warmer and more buff than mantle, with fewer streaks. *Sides of head:* grey-brown with pale off-white or greyish-white supercilium starting a little in front of eye and travelling round behind ear-coverts (not broad, but quite conspicuous at a distance, even in flight); darker line through eye angled back at posterior edge of ear-coverts. *Under-parts:* throat off-white; very conspicuous and almost horizontal patch of dark blackish on each side of neck, about 2½ times as long as broad, sometimes looking blunt-ended and sometimes more pointed at centre of upper breast where the two patches almost met: shadowy area between these and a few distinct spots of brownish below; remainder of under-parts whitish and unstreaked; under tail-coverts pure white. *Wings and tail:* wings generally dark with two lines of pale buffish tips to coverts forming indistinct bars, and one line of dark centres (to the median coverts?) producing dark bar in front of these, as in Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*); in flight there was marked contrast between remiges and rest of

Originally published in *British Birds* 55: 44–46. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

upper surface of open wing, as in Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*): underwing blackish with prominent white trailing edge, this white being most conspicuous near body but probably extending as far as inner primaries; tail very short and dark brown with whitish outer feathers. *Soft parts:* bill pale horn or pale yellow with darker tip, short and heavy and reminiscent of finch or Corn Bunting (bill and facial pattern together distinctly bunting-like): gape pale orange; eye dark; estimates of leg colour varied from pink (in strong sun), salmon-pink, flesh-pink and bright flesh to light pinkish-straw and yellowish-orange.

When first seen the bird was calling with a succession of loud notes which I rendered as *prrrruuup*, but which were impossible to describe adequately. After circling for four or five minutes at a height of 50 or 60 feet, it dropped like a stone, uttering a rather long *trrrreeeep*, and alighted about 20 yards away in one of two small adjoining fields which had recently been drilled. Here is spent most of the rest of the day. It was not heard to call any more and, in general, seemed rather shy and nervous, often flying off and climbing high in a vigorous manner; after circling in typical lark-like flight, it would then plunge steeply with nearly closed wings down almost to ground level, finally planing to earth on outstretched wings. It would crouch for long periods in hollows and often stood still, sometimes on a small ridge or stone, apparently doing nothing. When alarmed it would stand upright with outstretched neck, and it sometimes flew with its neck extended. It hopped, walked and ran. It could usually be picked up fairly readily against the rather dark soil. At times it looked a very grey bird compared with Skylarks; this was very marked in the overcast light of evening when the head especially seemed grey and the streaking on the mantle appeared as black striations. It left with some Skylarks at dusk and was not seen again.

To sum up the sailent features, this was a large lark with a very short tail and broad, rounded wings, the undersides of which were black with white trailing edges; it had mainly unstreaked and almost white under-parts with conspicuous blackish neck patches; it had greyish-brown upper-parts, a bunting-like bill, white outer tail-feathers and no crest. This is the first known occurrence of this species in Britain.



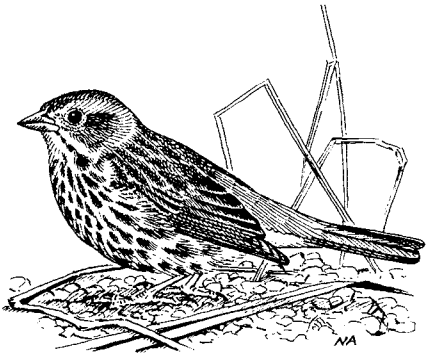
It was another 17 years before the second Calandra Lark was discovered here: on Fair Isle on 28th April 1978.

The occcurrence in Britain of the similar Bimaculated Lark M. bimaculata *prompted the analysis of the differences between the two species on pages 118–119.*

JUNE 1961

Fox Sparrow on Copeland Island

John Wilde



On 3rd June 1961 I was showing some visitors round the buildings of the bird observatory on Copeland, Co. Down, when I noted a bird rather larger than a Rock Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*) mobbing a Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) which was perched on a small sapling about a hundred yards away. Unfortunately it was almost directly into the sun and I was without my binoculars; by the time I had fetched them the bird had disappeared. Later that day, however, what was presumably the same bird was seen with the Cuckoo near our largest Heligoland trap, this time by Miss E. K. Addy who, failing to recognise it, managed to drive it in and catch it with the assistance of D. Barr and others.

Our drill in cases such as this is to have the bird examined by two teams, each of which weighs, measures and describes it. The two descriptions are then compared and any differences resolved by reference back to the bird. In this instance the teams consisted of Miss M. P. Macmillan and D. Barr, and Miss E. K. Addy and myself. The agreed description was as follows:

Crown, nape and sides of neck grey with specks of warm brown where the tips of some feathers were not abraded. Cheeks chestnut, this colour extending up to the ear-coverts; there was a vague whitish fringe to this cheek patch, running backwards from the bill. Mantle olive-brown slightly blotched with chestnut and dark brown. Rump and upper tail-coverts bright chestnut. Outer webs of tail-feathers chestnut, inner webs darker and duller brown; the outer webs of the two outermost feathers, though much abraded, showed a hint of light buffish edging. Chin silvery-white with a few small speckles of brown. Throat and breast also silvery-white but with larger, longer and heavier spots of chestnut, these becoming darker and duller brown on the sides and flanks. Belly greyish-white with a few small dark brown speckles. Under tail-coverts light buffish with brown spots. Outer webs of primaries and secondaries dark chestnut, inner webs dark brown becoming lighter, almost grey, at edges; primary-coverts uniform dark brown; greater and median coverts light to rich chestnut on outer webs, with whitish edges near tips, and dark brown on inner webs; lesser coverts largely rich chestnut; under wing-coverts silvery-white with greyish-brown markings. *Soft parts:* bill stout and strong with minute bristles around base, upper mandible greyish-brown and lower pinkish-grey; iris dark brown; legs and feet brownish-pink. *Measurements:* wing 86 mm, tail 70 mm, tarsus 26.5 mm, bill 15 mm, total length 173 mm; weight 40.28 gm. *Wing-formula:* 3rd and 4th primaries equal and longest, 5th 2 mm shorter, 6th 4 mm shorter, 2nd 4.5 mm shorter, 1st minute (barely perceptible); 3rd to 6th emarginated.

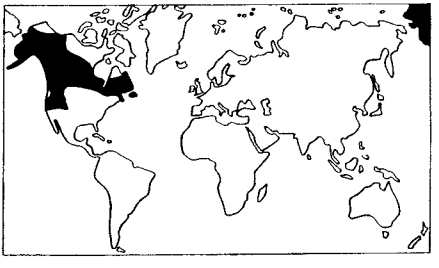
The bird's short, stout bill gave it all the appearance of a bunting. From the side its coloration produced a momentary impression of a much undersized female Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*), while from above it looked more like a very large Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*).

The bird was duly released, but neither then nor the next day, 4th June, when it was seen briefly on a wall and later found again in the trap, were any good views of it obtained in the field. It was noticed that it had a very upright stance, however, and all

Originally published in *British Birds* 55: 560–562. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

observers commented on its slimness. Its weight on the second day showed a negligible change.

From the laboratory description it appeared to be a Fox Sparrow (*Zonotrichia iliaca*), one of the largest of the North American buntings. But I was worried by the fact that in all the books to which I could obtain access the crown and nape were given as rufous or brown, whereas our bird was mostly grey on these parts. Since then, however, Kenneth Williamson has been good enough to check the description against skins in the British Museum (Natural History) and has written to say that it seems to be only fresh plumage which is generally described in the literature; the specimens in the British Museum show that by April and May most individuals have the rufous feather tips almost entirely abraded, with the result that the head, nape and sides of the neck become a 'Dunnock-grey'. The wing-formula of the Copeland bird falls within the range of variation of six Fox Sparrows which he measured.



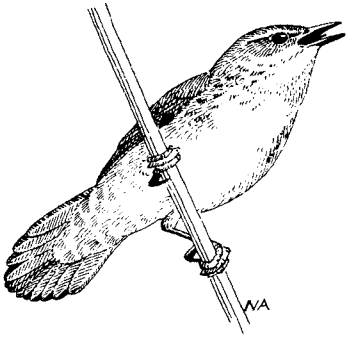
This still stands as the only record of the species in Britain and Ireland.

Fox Sparrow is distinguished from all other American sparrows by its bright chestnut tail and rump. After the post-juvenile moult, all ages, and both sexes, are similar.

SEPTEMBER 1961

River Warbler on Fair Isle

Peter Davis



A first-winter River Warbler (*Locustella fluviatilis*) was trapped at Fair Isle on 24th September 1961, and seen again on the following day. This is the first record of this east European species in the British Isles.

Originally published in *British Birds* 55: 137–138. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

The bird was found shortly after noon on the 24th, in the incomparable 'warbler-ditch' at Lower Leogh, by G. J. Barnes, R. M. Nedderman, P. J. Slater and the writer. It was skulking in tussocky grass in a shallow and open section of the drain; as we watched, it flew up to the lowest wire of the adjacent fence, and gave us a brief but unimpeded view from behind. It was obviously a *Locustella*, but one we had not previously seen; it was larger than a Grasshopper Warbler (*L. naevia*) and had dark olive-brown, unstreaked upper-parts. We were not able to see the underside, but noted an indistinct pale supercilium. Its fan-shaped tail appeared noticeably long and broad. Its legs and feet were seen to be pink, and seemed large and strong for its size.

A short single-panel mist-net was erected in the ditch, and within ten minutes of its discovery the bird was in the hand. It was taken to the laboratory, and was now seen by some fifteen other observers. The following description was made:

Entire *upper-parts*, wings and tail dark olive-brown, with a rather rufous tinge, especially on the scapulars, wing-coverts and upper tail-coverts; feathers of crown and forehead indistinctly tipped darker brown, otherwise no streaking or barring above. Lores, cheeks and ear-coverts greyer brown; very indistinct buffish supercilium. *Under-parts* whitish, washed yellowish-buff, with blurred and indistinct grey-brown streaking on chin, throat and upper breast; flanks and sides of breast washed grey-brown with yellowish overlay; centre of lower breast and belly whiter than rest of under-parts, unstreaked; under tail-coverts grey-brown with broad whitish tips; axillaries and under wing-coverts washed pale grey-brown, with pale yellow tinge on outermost coverts, near carpal joint. Outer web of 2nd primary dirty-white; shafts of tail feathers dark above, whitish below; flight-feathers in good condition, tail slightly chipped; twelve rectrices. *Soft parts:* upper mandible horn-coloured with slight flesh tinge, especially near cutting-edge, and lower mandible pale flesh tinged dark towards tip; gape pale yellow; legs and feet clear flesh-pink, paler behind and on the soles; eye dark grey-brown. *Measurements:* wing 73 mm, bill 16.5 mm, tarsus 23 mm, tail 52 mm; weight 17.1 gm at 1255 G.M.T. *Wing-formula:* 1st primary 5 mm less than primary coverts; 2nd longest, 3rd −2.5 mm, 4th −5.5 mm, 5th −8 mm, 6th −11 mm, 7th −13 mm, 8th −16.5 mm; no emargination; no notch on inner web of 2nd.

No method of ageing River Warblers is given in K. Williamson's *Identification for Ringers:* 1 (1960), but according to H. E. Dresser's *A Mannual of Palaearctic Birds* (1902), p. 136, 'the young bird has the upper parts more rusty in tinge, the under parts tinged with ochreous, and the throat is also indistinctly striped'. Our warbler showed these characters. In several other species of this genus the first-winter birds are said to be more rufous above, and in all they are more yellow below.

The warbler was photographed in colour by several of the visitors, and in black-and-white by my wife. The monochrome reproduction on plate 26 shows the general appearance, the blurred streaking of the under-parts, the stout bill and the indistinct supercilium. Towards the end of the photography it escaped from my hand and flew away; but about ten minutes later it entered one of the observatory buildings and was recaught. It was then transported to more congenial surroundings at the Gilsetter Marsh. Here we had excellent views as it crept among the sedges; the streaked breast seemed a good field-character on the occasions when a front or side view was possible.

None of the visitors nor I saw the River Warbler on the 25th, but it spent the day creeping about the stone dykes at Lower Stonybreck, and the occupants of that croft pointed it out to our cook, Pat Adams, during the afternoon. She watched it at close range through a window and saw that it was the ringed bird. It had disappeared by the following day.

We had to distinguish the Fair Isle bird from Gray's Grasshopper Warbler (*L. fasciolata*) and from Savi's Warbler (*L. luscinoides*), particularly the less rufous form *L. l. fusca*. Neither of these species has streaked under-parts, however, so that

field-identification would probably have been possible even if we had been unable to catch it. The differences of size, wing-formula and coloration were readily available to us in Williamson's invaluable guide already mentioned.

Although the breeding range of River Warbler is expanding westwards in north-central Europe and this species is, perhaps, a potential coloniser to follow Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocto *(see pages 72–76) and Cetti's Warbler (see pages 109–110) from vagrancy status to established resident, there were still only three records in Britain and Ireland up to the end of 1980. The other two came in the space of two days, eight years after the first: on Fair Isle, again, on 16th September 1969* (Brit. Birds *66: 312) and on Bardsey on 17th September 1969. Twelve years later, in 1981, two more came, this time in spring: one on Fair Isle and one, much-televised, in Norfolk.*

The plain upperparts and diffuse, soft breast-streaks of this rather large, robust Locustella *warbler are diagnostic. Although the song of River Warbler is basically a prolonged cricket-like reeling, akin to that of Grasshopper* L. naevia *and Savi's Warblers* L. luscinioides, *it has a striking gushing quality and a definite rhythm, so that it is often likened to the distant chuffing of a steam train.*

APRIL 1962

Fan-tailed Warbler on Cape Clear Island

J. T. R. Sharrock

On 23rd April 1962, by East Bog on Ballyieragh, the western part of Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, an unfamiliar call attracted my attention. I traced it to a small warbler in some sedges and during the next 20 minutes was able to watch the bird continuously. It remained motionless in the sedges, occasionally calling 'tew', until approached within about 15 metres when it either fluttered weakly to another clump or flew to a height of about three metres and then, with a bouncing, hovering action (somewhat similar to that of an agitated Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*), uttered a repeated 'chip chip chip . . .' before dropping almost vertically into the sedges. After watching it for several minutes in good light (though no sun) and completely calm conditions, I strongly suspected that it was a Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis*, a species I had seen in Spain seven months previously, and further observation confirmed this.

Stationary in a sedge clump, it was hunched and looked rather like a Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, this resemblance being enhanced by the cocking of its tail. Climbing about in sedges, it appeared more like a small, short-winged, short-tailed *Acrocephalus* warbler. Flying from one clump to another, it looked dark rufous and its short tail seemed very narrow, but as it dived into the next clump its tail was widely fanned and sometimes also cocked; in the bouncing song-flight it was always fanned. The bird looked smaller than a Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* seen a few minutes earlier, but the only direct comparisons were with Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* and a Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*.

The most conspicuous plumage characters were a rufous-buff back heavily streaked with dark brown—rather reminiscent of an Aquatic Warbler *A. paludicola* but with a less sandy base colour—and a bright buff crown with dark rufous streaks. From the side there seemed to be a narrow, faint, pale creamy-buff supercilium, wider behind than in front of the eye, but a view from above showed that this was just one of several pale lines running the length of the crown. The wings looked rounded, both in flight

Originally published in *British Birds* 65: 501–510. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

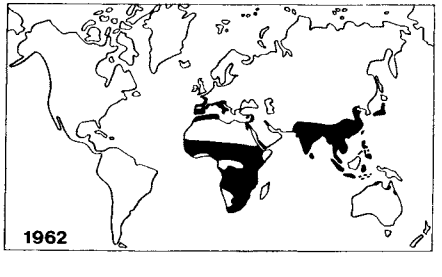
and at rest; the primaries, secondaries and coverts were all orange-buff-brown, each feather edged slightly paler, but without distinct wing-bars or panels. The rump was unstreaked buffish. At rest the bird usually held its rufous-brown tail tightly closed, but when it dived into sedges whitish tips showed on at least two or three of the outer feathers, and all the feathers were increasingly dark from base to tip, being darkest immediately before the whitish spots. The underparts were whitish with a noticeable orange-buff wash on the breast and flanks. The eyes were dark, with a complete pale creamy orbital ring, the legs pale pinkish-fawn and the bill short, weak and pale—the upper mandible fawn and the lower pale pinkish. (A full account, including an exact transcript of my field notes, was published in *Cape Clear Bird Obs. Rep.*, 11: 38–39.)

Having obtained a field description, I decided to fetch other observers. When I returned 40 minutes later with my wife and Robert Gillmor, however, we could not relocate the bird, nor was it found during intensive searches of this and adjacent areas later in the day. Thus I was, unfortunately, the only observer. The bird had arrived with light south-easterly winds and coincided with a small influx of Willow Warblers *P. trochilus*, Chiffchaffs, Swallows *Hirundo rustica*, Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* and House Martins *Delichon urbica*.

IDENTIFICATION

There was no doubt that the bird was a grass-warbler *Cisticola*, but it was with some horror that I later realised that Lynes (1930) had recognised 40 species and 154 races within this genus. Two species are about the size of a Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*, however, and a further 23 are larger than a Whitethroat *S. communis* or a Garden Warbler *S. borin*. This leaves 15 ranging in size from a Pallas's Warbler *P. proregulus* to a Willow Warbler, but four of these have plain backs, two more have bright red tops to their heads, another has a plain black upperside to its tail without the whitish spots at the end, and a further five have very short tails (three-fifths of the wing length or less) as well as, in four cases, plain red or black tops to their heads. Thus the identification was narrowed on plumage and structure alone to three species—*juncidis*, *cherina* and *haesitata*—all with backs patterned, head tops strongly brown-streaked, and tails three-quarters of the wing length or longer and tipped with white on both uppersides and undersides.

Turning to voice, the song flight of the bird on Cape Clear Island closely resembled those of *juncidis* and *cherina*, but was quite different from that described for *haestitata*. It was also quite different from those of *aridula*, *brunnescens*, *ayresii* and *exilis*—four species which, although already eliminated on at least one plumage feature, are sufficiently similar in appearance to merit reconsideration. Lynes noted that the habits of *cherina* are 'like *juncidis* and the "call" so similar that the bird has the same onomatopoeic vernacular name *Tin-Tin* as *juncidis* has in Spain'; *cherina* is closely allied to *juncidis* and 'season for season and sex for sex, differing from that bird by



little more than its colder coloration in summer, brownish not reddish rump and relatively shorter and more rounded wing'. It is, however, confined to Madagascar, where it is sedentary, and *haesitata* is similarly found only on Socotra. White (1960) has even suggested that *cherina* and *haestitata* may merely be well-marked insular races of *juncidis* rather than distinct species. Thus the bird on Cape Clear Island can be positively identified as either *C. juncidis* or *C.(j.)cherina* and the latter may be eliminated on geographical grounds.

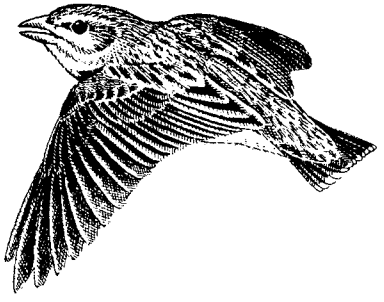
This is yet another species which has expanded its range within Europe in recent years. Following mild winters, breeding has spread from northern Spain northwards up the French coast and even into Belgium and the Netherlands; colonisation of Britain seemed imminent at one stage (Sharrock & Ferguson-Lees 1977), but there have been only two further records: at Cley and Holme, Norfolk, on 24th August and 29th August to 5th September 1976, and at Lodmoor, Dorset, on 24th June 1977 (Brit. Birds *71: 275–277; 73: 37–38*).

The rather extrovert song-flight—with a sharp, incisive 'stit' uttered at the top of each undulation, and sometimes maintained for long periods—is the most likely feature to draw attention to this otherwise rather difficult-to-observe tiny warbler of marshes and overgrown damp fields.

MAY 1962

Bimaculated Lark on Lundy

Michael Jones



On the afternoon of 7th May 1962 I noticed an unusual bird feeding with a flock of Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* on Lundy, Devon. It was clearly a lark, but it attracted my attention because of its large size, heavy build and light sandy colour. It was fairly tame and allowed a reasonable view, but I was unable to identify it and so quickly fetched Richard Carden, my assistant warden, for a second opinion. We returned straight away to the spot, but it was by then very misty and raining, with the result that we caught only short glimpses of the bird, usually in flight. However, it stayed in the same area until 11th May and during those next four days we spent several hours watching it at close ranges and in both bright and dull lights. Unfortunately, it carefully avoided all attempts to mist-net it, but we kept very full field notes from which the following detailed description has been compiled:

Originally published in *British Birds* 58: 309–312. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

Upper-parts: crown dark brownish-grey (no crest); nape sandy-brown or pale fawn, unstreaked or very lightly flecked with darker brown; mantle and back sandy, streaked with darker brown; rump sandy or fawn and unmarked; tail like rump at base but shading into golden-brown with a narrow tip of white or whitish (produced by a light spot at the end of each feather). *Sides of head:* sides of face pale buff with a dark line through the eye and a broad pale supercilium; ear-coverts outlined in dark brownish-grey, this forming a continuation of the eye-stripe (see Fig. 10); sides of neck as nape. *Wings:* coverts sandy with darker brown tips to the lesser and median forming two brown bars; primaries each had one web light and the other dark brown, producing a contrasted longitudinal striping (see Fig. 10). *Under-parts:* throat pale; breast pale with a sandy tinge spreading round from the neck; distinct black half-collar in the form of two crescents meeting in a point in the centre, also a roughly circular dark splodge on a sandy area below (see Fig. 10 inset); rest of under-parts uniformly pale buff. Bill stout and yellowish; legs yellow-brown.

For the first day or two the bird was always feeding voraciously on short pasture cropped by sheep, often with Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur*, and when disturbed would fly fairly low in a circle and quickly return to the same spot. It was frequently chased by Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* and was easily distinguishable from them, both on the ground and in flight and even at a distance with the naked eye, by its larger size, plumper build, much stouter bill and lighter colour. Its tail was also much shorter and broader than a Skylark's and this, combined with its heavy build, gave it a distinctive silhouette in the air. The general impression was of a sandy-brown lark, boldly marked with darker brown stripes on the back and with barring and striping on the closed wing; but the conspicuousness of this pattern varied with the intensity of the light, and in very bright sun the whole bird appeared an almost uniform light sandy-brown.

The very short tail combined with the prominent black marks on the upper breast and the heavy bill made us think that the bird must be a Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*, but several characters seemed wrong. In particular, the black collar, perhaps the most prominent single feature, was continuous round the front half of the neck and, when the bird stood erect, a front view showed that it consisted of two crescents joining below the throat rather than a uniformly broad band. At the same time, we could see no sign of white at the sides of the tail, though the whitish tip was very noticeable in flight, and there was no white trailing edge to the wing.

The lark was always on the ground and was never seen to perch on walls or bushes, although these were at hand. It flew very little and never very high or far and it always started feeding again as soon as it had landed. Worms were the only food it was seen to eat. It walked with a rather bold and rolling swagger which was reminiscent of a Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, but was never observed to hop. It was once seen to take a dust-bath. It often crouched and at first it uttered most of the song or sub-song that we heard from this position. Whenever we flushed it, it uttered short calls not unlike those of a Skylark but more mellow and subdued—generally 'prrp' or 'chirrp' but occasionally 'prrp-cheewit-chewit'. By the third day it had begun to sing regularly, particularly when it was startled, and it then did so both from the ground and in flight. The song was a rather chirpy trill with more of a rattle than a Skylark's and rising and falling very little. It seemed abrupt, monotonous and subdued, each phrase disjointed and as though squeezed out with an effort, which may have meant that it was still not the full song. Individual sounds we noted in the song were written as 'prrp', 'cheewit', 'che-wit-che' and 'chirp'.

Although the bird was on the island for a total of five days, it was seen only by Richard Carden and myself because no other ornithologists were present. Neither of us had any experience of the Calandra Lark and so, in spite of the discrepancies in the description, we concluded that this was what it must be. However, when the details

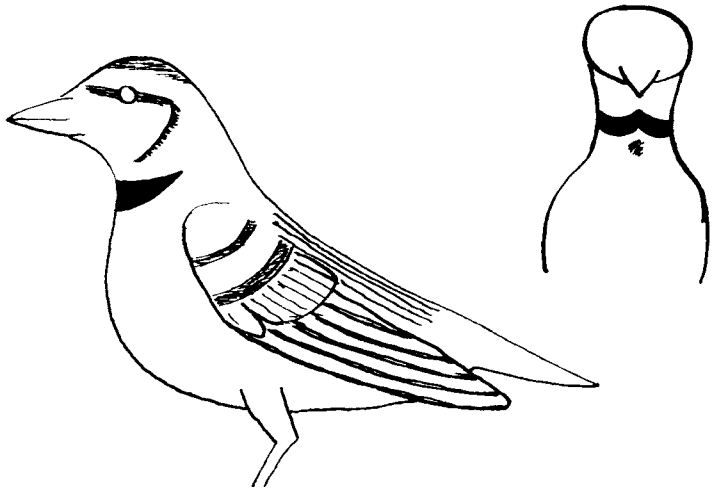
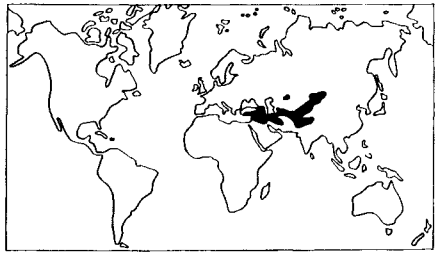


Fig. 10 Diagrammatic sketches of Bimaculated Lark Melanocorypha bimaculata, *Lundy, Devon, 7–11th May 1962, to show the prominent marking on head and wing and (inset) the shape of the black collar and the dark splodge below it (Michael Jones)*

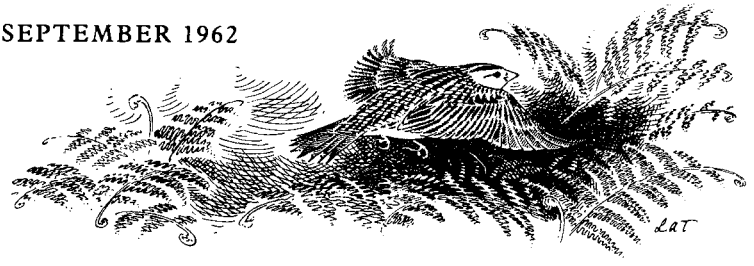
were submitted to the Rarities Committee, they had no hesitation in identifying it as a Bimaculated Lark *M. bimaculata*, an eastern species of the same genus as the Calandra which had not previously been recorded in Britain. Our thanks are particularly due to Kenneth Williamson who kindly made a detailed comparison of our notes with museum specimens of the Bimaculated Lark and all other possible species of *Melanocorypha*. The editors of *British Birds* commented that: 'Apart from the continuous pectoral band of black with a brownish area below (the two dark crescents may or may not meet in the middle like this) and apart from the lack of white in the outer tail and on the rear edges of the wing, all of which the observers particularly noted as apparent discrepancies, there are several other features in their description which show that this bird was a Bimaculated Lark and not a Calandra. These include the very sandy colour; the whitish spot at the tip of each tail feather, giving the appearance of a white band in the spread tail; the uniform-looking nape and rump and the brighter, more golden-brown tail; the appearance of a double wing-bar; the broad, pale supercilium separating the darker crown and dark eye-stripe; and the dark brown 'outline' to the ear coverts.'



There have been only two more since: on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, from 24th to 27th October 1975 (Brit. Birds *70: 298–300*) *and on Fair Isle on 7th June 1976* (Brit. Birds *72: 462–463*). *It may seem strange that, of the* Melanocorypha *larks, the eastern Bimaculated has occurred more often than the closely related Calandra* M. calandra, *which breeds in western Europe. It is likely, however, that all five records have involved individuals from eastern Europe or Asia.*

The details of Britain's first Calandra Lark (*pages 109–110*) *complement the comparisons with the similar Bimaculated Lark made here.*

SEPTEMBER 1962



Bobolink in Scilly

J. L. F. Parslow and M. J. Carter

In the early morning of 19th September 1962 F. H. D. Hicks discovered an unfamiliar, bunting-like bird in an area of bracken and small grass fields on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly. Realising that it was something unusual he immediately ran back to the observatory where he found M.J.C.; together they returned to the spot and quickly located the bird again. After watching it for about half-an-hour they were joined by J. A. Burton. A mist-nest was then erected and soon afterwards the bird was trapped and taken back to the observatory for examination and ringing. In the hand it was also seen by M. J. Cowlard, J. Cooke, P. Lever, T. H. Levere, Miss H. M. Quick and all interested islanders. It was kept overnight and released next morning, but was not seen again. It subsequently proved to be a Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, a North American species not previously recorded in Great Britain and Ireland. Indeed, apart from two undated and generally unaccepted records from Heligoland (Alexander and Fitter 1955), this is the first occasion on which the species has occurred in Europe.

LABORATORY DESCRIPTION

Plumage In the field the bird's most marked feature had been its striped head pattern. This

Originally published in *British Birds* 58: 208–214. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

was also very apparent in the hand and comprised a yellow central crown stripe, 4 mm wide, running from the bill almost to the nape, bordered on each side of the crown by a broad black band (the individual feathers of which were narrowly edged with yellow), a broad yellow supercilium , and a dark line which extended for 8 mm behind the eye. The nape was brownish, very finely streaked. The generally yellowish-brown upper-parts were very streaked with blackish-brown and buff. Individual feathers of the mantle were olive-yellow with blackish mesial bands, those of the back and scapulars being similar but with the former narrowly fringed ginger and the latter broadly edged ginger-olive. The feathers of the rump were olive (again with black centres), becoming olive-brown with narrow black mesial streaks on the upper tail-coverts. These latter, like the under tail-coverts, extended to within 25 mm of the tip of the tail. The bird's under-parts were predominantly yellowish, brightest on the throat and breast, much paler on the chin, and palest on the belly which was really whitish and only faintly washed with yellow. There were faint buffish streaks on the upper breast, forming an indistinct pectoral band. Darker streaks on the sides of the breast and particularly the flanks and under tail-coverts were formed by black centres to some of the feathers, the amount of black on each becoming progressively greater towards the under tail-coverts. On the upper wing, the primary coverts were dark brown, narrowly fringed with lighter brown or buff. The remiges were of a similar but rather paler colour, except for the innermost secondaries, the centres of which were almost black. The wing coverts and alula were very dark, almost black; the greater coverts were bordered yellowish on the outer webs, the median coverts were tipped yellowish, and the bastard wing was narrowly edged whitish. The surface of the under wing was silver-grey.

Soft parts Pointed, conical bill, with upper mandible reddish-horn tipped dark, and lower mandible pale horn: gape pink. Feet and legs pinkish-brown. Eyes dark brown.

Structure and measurements Second and 3rd primaries equal and longest; 4th shorter by 4 mm; 5th, 6th and 7th shorter by 9, 14 and 19 mm respectively; 10th shorter by about 30 mm; 1st primary minute. Third and 4th primaries emarginated. Tail rounded, the outer retrices being 7 mm shorter than the central pair; each tail feather sharply pointed at tip. The following measurements were taken: wing 94.5 mm, bill 16 mm (width 6.5 mm at nostrils), tail 67 mm, tarsus 25.5 mm, hind claw 12 mm. The weight was 39.5 gm.

FIELD NOTES AND IDENTIFICATION

The Bobolink was found in an area close to the Pool on St Agnes where it frequented some small grass fields, much overgrown with bracken and bordered by low dry-stone walls. Here it seemed quite at home and during the period it was under observation it remained either in the bracken or perched on a stone wall or rock. Apart from a brief spell of sunbathing, its only activity was catching flying insects, which it did by sallying upwards from its perch on the wall or from the top of a bracken frond, on which it appeared rather ungainly and unstable. Other passerine species, such as Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, were also flycatching, though not in the same area.

The observers' first impressions were of a bunting-like bird, predominantly yellow in bright sunlight but seeming rather browner above when the sun clouded over, appearing heavier than a Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra* and slightly bigger than a large Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* alongside which it once perched. Its body seemed disproportionately long compared with the wings and head, and the tail looked short in flight, when it was always fanned. At rest, the closed wings did not reach to the tips of the upper tail-coverts and the diagnostic pointed tail-feathers were clearly visible at moderate ranges. It had a short, bunting-like bill which merged with the forehead to form a straight profile. The most distinctive feature was its striped black and yellow head pattern, described earlier, which was somewhat reminiscent of that of an Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*. Owing to the yellow and black streaking of the wing coverts and scapulars, and the yellow then black lines (formed by the longer scapulars) which extended down each side of the mantle, the general appearance of the upper-parts was very streaked, like that of a Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*.

Its under-parts were mainly yellowish or yellowish-buff with a brownish tint on the breast caused by a faint pectoral band of buffish streaks, and there were a few dark streaks on the flanks. The bird uttered a soft sparrow-like call-note, 'cheep' or 'chuck', when flushed.

The question of identification posed quite a problem since the female Bobolink, which the autumn and winter males resemble, is not clearly described or illustrated in Peterson (1947)—the only American reference book available at the time. Moreover, the bird's general appearance was so similar to a bunting that it was thought to belong to the genus *Emberiza*, the striped head pattern and yellowish under-parts suggesting a female or immature Yellow-breasted Bunting *E. aureola*. However, it was soon realized that its large size and the pointed tail-feathers, as well as the lack of white in the wings and tail, precluded this possibility. After returning to the mainland a few days later, M.J.C. was able to examine several reference books and realised the bird had been a Bobolink; this was confirmed on 25th September when he and J. A. Burton examined skins of this and other species at the British Museum (Natural History).

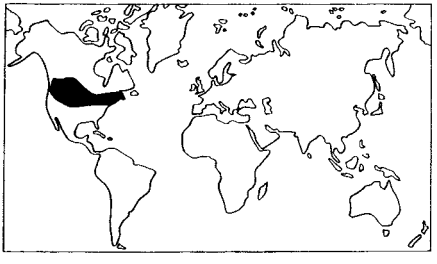
All Bobolinks in autumn, regardless of sex or age, have a similar streaked buffish plumage. Males, however, are larger than females and the mesurements of the St Agnes individual show that it was a male. Ridgway (1902) gives the average measurements of 20 adult male and eight adult female Bobolinks as, respectively, wing 97.5 and 87.4 mm, tail 65.3 and 61.0 mm, and bill 15.5 and 15.0 mm. His small sample of females showed the following maxima: wing 89.7 mm, tail 64.5 mm and bill 15.5 mm, all of which are smaller than the measurements of the St Agnes bird. First-winter birds are more yellowish beneath than adults. Also, according to Dwight (1900), adult male Bobolinks in winter plumage have a few black feathers, usually yellow-tipped, irregularly scattered on the chin and breast. The St Agnes individual lacked this character and was also very yellowish on the under-parts, and it is concluded that it was in first-winter plumage.

WEIGHT AND CONDITION ON CAPTURE

At the time of its spring and autumn migration through North America, the Bobolink characteristically deposits a remarkable amount of subcutaneous fat. For example, all of the 17 adults killed at a television tower in Illinois during nocturnal migration in the second half of September 1958–60 were extremely fat and averaged 46.2 gm, the ten males in the sample having a mean weight of 50.7 gm (Graber and Graber 1962). These figures compare with an average fat-free weight of 24.04 gm calculated for ten male Bobolinks by Connell *et al.* (1960), and with an average weight of 28.5 gm for ten unsexed autumn migrants at a coastal netting station in New Jersey, where most migrant passerines come in from over the ocean and have very little fat on arrival (Murray and Jehl 1964). In mid-afternoon, shortly after its capture, the St Agnes bird weighted 39.5 gm and this relatively high weight strongly suggests that it had not just completed a long oceanic flight across the Atlantic. The fact that it appeared strong and healthy and showed no sign of fatigue in the field supports this view. Further, the synoptic situation immediately preceding its appearance was clearly unsuitable for unaided crossing of the Atlantic (other birds trapped on St Agnes the same day included two eastern species, a Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and a Red-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa parva*) and it must be presumed that either the Bobolink was not newly arrived from America or that it had made all or part of its journey on a ship where it found considerable sustenance.

Migrant Bobolinks deposit a remarkable amount of fat (so much so that the species

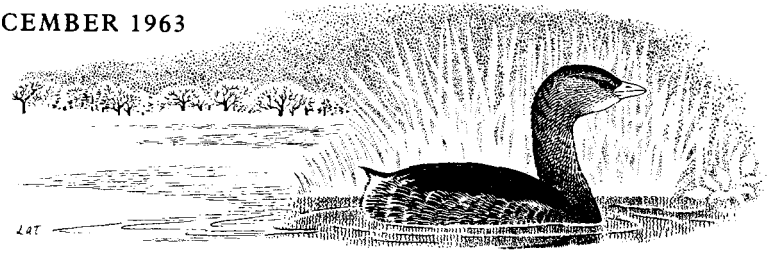
is known as the Butter-bird when it passes through Jamaica) and Odum *et al.* (1961) have shown that October migrants on the Gulf coast of Florida carry sufficient reserves to enable them to make a continuous flight of 80 hours or even longer. It is therefore scarcely surprising that the Bobolink can now be numbered amongst those American passerines which have successfully crossed the Atlantic to appear in Europe.



Another six Bobolinks have been found in the 18 years since the first, all between mid September and mid October and four of them in Scilly (two on St Mary's, one on Tresco and a second on St Agnes); the other two were at Hook Head, Co. Wexford, and on Out Skerries, Shetland.

First-winters (like the individual described here), adult females and adult males in winter are all similar in appearance. Adult males in summer are wholly blackish except for a dull yellowish patch on the nape, and white scapulars and rump; this plumage is acquired by a complete moult in winter quarters, and lost by another in late summer.

DECEMBER 1963



Pied-billed Grebe in Avon

Robin J. Prytherch

At Blagdon Lake, Somerset [now Avon], during the afternoon of 22nd December 1963, H. A. Thornhill drew my attention to a small grebe on a patch of open water at

Originally published in *British Birds* 58: 305–309. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

the edge of the otherwise almost completely frozen lake. It was swimming quickly among Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Wigeon *A. penelope*, Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula* and Coots *Fulica atra*. It did not seem to fit any of the European grebes described and illustrated in *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Roger Peterson, Guy Mountfort and P. A. D. Hollom (1954) and after three-quarters of an hour I had still not identified it.

COMPARISON WITH EUROPEAN GREBES

Size Comparing the grebe with the Coots and ducks, I estimated it to be only slightly larger than a Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and so there was no question of its being either a Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* or a Red-necked Grebe *P. grisegena*.

Shape and stance When I first saw it, I immediately thought of a Black-necked Grebe *P. nigricollis* or a Slavonian Grebe *P. auritus* because of the way it held its head high on its long (but not thin) neck with its body low in the water. However, when it also held its head low, this and the puffy effect of the flank feathers suggested a Little Grebe, though it did not really look like one. It always held its body low in the water while I was watching it.

General coloration It was not 'black-and-white': no part of the plumage was black or even blackish, and the only white visible was a very small area on the chin. This lack of contrast seemed to rule out Black-necked and Slavonian, and the general pattern of the head also appeared to exclude these species and Little Grebe. Its head was almost entirely pale grey-buff, being dark (dark grey-buff) only on the forehead and crown with a slightly darker stripe through the eye and a small white area on the chin. The darker and white areas merged into the pale grey-buff, which extended to the neck.

Bill The bill was completely 'wrong' and out of all proportion to the bill of any grebe seen previously by me or described in the *Field Guide*. It was short and stubby, being very thick at the nostrils with the culmen decurved to the tip. It was dusky grey (looking pale, not blackish) with a very slight dull yellow-greenish tinge. It was far too thick and short for Black-necked, Slavonian or Little.

Eyes The dark reddish-brown eyes seemed closest to those of a Little Grebe.

BEHAVIOUR

The nervous actions of the grebe indicated its concern at our presence. The Coots and ducks had made off across the ice or flown away within ten minutes of our arrival, leaving it on its own. It then started trying to disappear. It would dive at the edge of the ice and allow just its head to appear above the surface of the water with its body under the ice. However, it was apparently forced up each time within about three-quarters of a minute by the buoyancy of its body. It did this many times, also by some reeds which it used as extra cover. It also sometimes stayed at the side of the ice with its head down just above the water and its body so low that only the rear half of its upper-parts and flanks were showing; it would remain like this for periods of half a minute or more when it was as far away as the free water would allow (about 35 yards). When diving it had a trick of disappearing head last, with the obvious effort of thrusting itself down breast first. However, in most dives the whole bird quickly sank below the surface as it thrust its head down. It did not jump up to dive, nor did it disappear tail last.

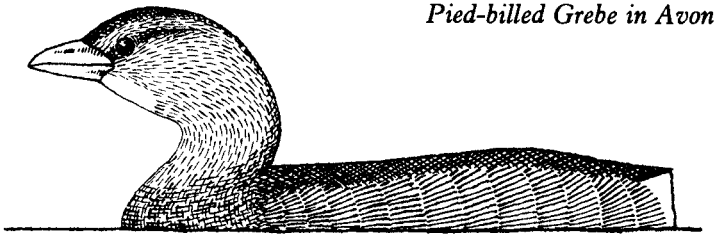


Fig. 11 First-winter Pied-billed Grebe Podilymbus podiceps, *Blagdon Lake, Somerset, 22nd December 1963 (Robin J. Prytherch)*

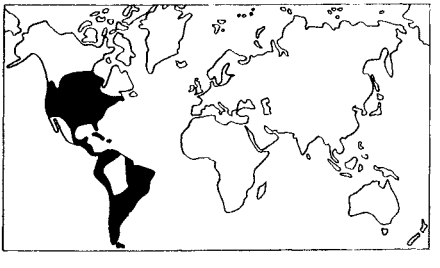
DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The forehead and crown were dark grey-buff. The nape and back of the neck were fairly pale grey-buff, darkening on the back which was very dark grey-brown. The sides of the face (from well above the eye round to the nape and throat) were pale grey-buff, except for a very slightly darker stripe through the eye (ending approximately half way to the nape) and a small white area on the chin at the base of the bill. The light and darker areas on the head merged together and were not sharply contrasted. The paleness of the face extended to the throat and long neck, with the back of the neck slightly darker. The lower part of the neck was also slightly darker, being grey-buff, and this colour darkened still more on the breast which in turn merged into dark grey-buff on the flanks; the latter often had a puffed appearance. The bill was short and thick, the depth at the base appearing to be more than half the length of the culmen, which was decurved at the tip; it was dusky grey with a very slight dull yellow-greenish tinge. The eyes were dark reddish-brown.

CONCLUSION

H.A.T. and I left the bird without knowing what we had been looking at. A fortnight later I was still so puzzled by it that I decided to investigate further. After reference to *The Handbook* I felt sure that it was not a British grebe. I therefore looked at books referring to other parts of the world and, after only a quick glance through the *Field Guide to the Birds of the West Indies* by James Bond (1947) and *The Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* by G. A. C. Herklots (1961), I realised, with much surprise, that it was an American Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*. Subsequent reference to the *Handbook of North American Birds*, vol. 1, edited by Ralph S. Palmer (1962), showed that it was in first-winter plumage.

Fortunately, when H.A.T. first saw the grebe he took a short ciné-film of it in colour. It was apparently not so alarmed then as when I watched it and there are short sequences revealing a white 'ear end' (under-tail), which I did not see. Fig. 11 is based on sketches made at the time and on my notes, but the shape and stance have been corrected from the film. I should like to express my sincere thanks to H.A.T., not only for asking me to look at the bird in the first instance, but also for making his film available to those concerned with the acceptance of the record. It confirmed the identification.



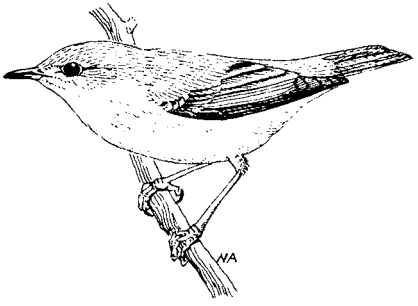
What was assumed to be the first Pied-billed Grebe kept on turning up year after year on Blagdon Reservoir and Chew Valley Lake (also Avon): in August to October 1965, May and July to November 1966, May to October 1967 and May to June and July 1968. In this same period, there were occurrences in North Yorkshire, in June to November 1965, and in Norfolk, in November 1968; the last of these might have been one of the earlier two. There was, however, then a gap of six blank years before the next ones: three during 1975–77, in Dumfries & Galloway in October 1975, in Grampian from January to March 1977 and in North Yorkshire from April to May 1977. The seventh (or perhaps sixth) occurred in Dorset during January to April 1980.

In winter plumage, the general coloration of Pied-billed Grebe resembles that of immature Little Grebe, but the stout bill and slightly larger size are the best distinctions. In summer, both sexes have a clear-cut black band on the bill and a black 'bib' on the chin and throat.

AUGUST 1964

Yellow Warbler on Bardsey

George H. Evans



During the afternoon of 29th August 1964, at approximately 15.30 hours G.M.T., my newly arrived assistant H. Miles was conveying his belongings from the boathouse to the observatory on Bardsey Island, Caernarvonshire. Halfway between the boathouse and Ty Pellaf, his attention was attracted by a small, bright yellow, warbler-like bird which appeared suddenly and briefly atop a hedgerow at close range. Only very general impressions were obtained, but the sheer vividness of its coloration rendered it quite unlike any species with which he was familiar. In his encumbered state, and lacking binoculars, H.M. made no attempt to pursue it. Though puzzled by its identity, he assumed it was probably a variant Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*.

Some two hours later a small party of visitors led by R. F. Durman left the observatory to undertake a short spell of mist-netting before the day's light faded. A net sited in Cristin withy bed was duly erected and the surrounding area driven. During this drive R.F.D. observed what was manifestly the same bird seen by H.M. earlier in the day. I was summoned and obtained good, if fleeting, views with comparative ease.

My first response was one of incredulity. Though palpably of warbler species, it possessed a vivid coloration quite different from anything I had seen before—the entire head, breast, belly and vent being a pure primrose-yellow. The mantle was very

Originally published in *British Birds* 58: 457–461. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

greenish and noticeably darker than the crown. The wing feathers were dark and prominently edged off-white. No superciliary could be discerned nor any sign of breast markings (though some faint reddish-brown streaks were seen on the breast when the bird was later in the hand). The eyes appeared black and rather large; the bill was pale horn and the legs somewhat darker. Its demeanour was not strikingly different from that of a *Phylloscopus*. When undisturbed it moved actively and usually at or just below canopy level, appearing in full view briefly before darting out of sight. Its movements were agile and fast. No fly-catching sallies were observed nor wing-flicking and it remained quite silent. There were no indications of nervousness or excessive timidity, but it was not confiding.

At first I was of the opinion that it was probably a xanthistic variant (see *Brit. Birds*, 53: plate 44; and *Bird Notes*, 27: plate xxx), but it was soon judged not to be an aberrant Willow Warbler, for, whilst approximating very closely in size, it lacked the slender lines typical of that species and was more compactly built with a relatively shorter neck and tail, rounder head and distinctly heavier bill. It succeeded in evading the net on several occasions, but was eventually caught at 18.20 hours G.M.T. Once it was in the hand, even a cursory examination of the remiges precluded the possibility of its being any Old World species (see *Brit. Birds*, 57: 252 and *Fair Isle Bird Obs. Bull.*, no. 4 (1951): 29–30). Its weight was 9.0 grams. Whilst photographs were being taken (Photo 27), it was also seen in the hand by Dr P. M. Driver, R. C. Pratt and all visitors staying at the observatory. Lighting conditions in the laboratory were by this time such that a thorough examination could not be entertained; it seemed likely that our bird might be an American Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*, but the only reference work available, L. A. Hausman's *Field Book of Eastern Birds* (1946), proved inadequate for our purpose. It was therefore decided to keep the bird overnight. Unfortunately, soon after dawn on the 30th, it died in the hand; there had been an overnight weight loss of exactly one gram. The following description was taken by H.M., R.F.D. and myself:

Upper-parts: forehead and crown bright yellow, tinged green; hind neck, mantle and scapulars bright greenish-yellow; back, rump and upper tail-coverts bright yellow with faint greenish tint; loral region vivid yellow. *Under-parts:* chin, throat, breast, belly, flanks, vent and under tail-coverts uniform vivid yellow, breast feathers faintly streaked reddish-brown forming indistinct gorget. *Wings:* primaries and secondaries dark brown, outer webs narrowly edged bright yellow; 6th to 10th primaries and all secondaries tipped yellowish-white; tertials paler than primaries, particularly outer webs; primary coverts dark brown with suggestion of greyish, outer webs a shade paler; lesser, median and greater coverts all dark brown edged bright yellow, especially outer webs; bastard wing dark brown, outer web narrowly edged bright yellow; bastard wing-coverts also dark brown with wider pale yellow fringes on outer webs; under wing-coverts bright yellow; axillaries yellowish-white. *Tail:* pale brown outer and pale yellow inner webs; penultimate pair with slightly darker outer webs; central pair dark brown slightly edged pale yellow. *Soft parts:* upper mandible horn with slight purplish suffusion; lower mandible pearl, distal half rather darker: gape light pink; tarsus medium horn with suggestion of pale purplish; toes lighter and soles pale flesh; iris jet black. *Measurements:* wing 63.0 mm; bill (from skull) 12.0 mm, depth (at nostrils) 3.5 mm, width (at nostrils) 4.0 mm, distance from centre of nostril cavity to tip of upper mandible 8.0 mm; tarsus 20.0 mm; tail 42.0 mm. *Wing-formula:* 4th primary longest, 3rd −0.5 mm, 2nd −1.0 mm, 5th −2.0 mm, 6th −5.5 mm, 7th −8.0 mm, 8th −9.5 mm, 9th −11.5 mm, 10th −14.0 mm, 3rd and 4th clearly emarginated on outer webs, 5th less so; 1st minute, 7.0 mm shorter than longest primary covert.

The skin was preserved by R.F.D. The carcass was examined and later dissected by P.M.D. following his return to the mainland. He reported on the post-mortem inspection as follows:

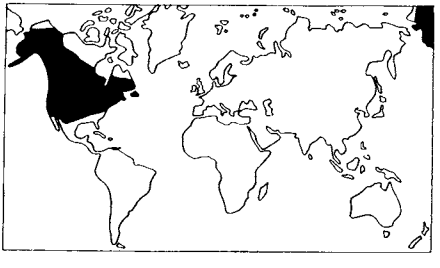
'This bird had no observable signs of disease or parasitic infection, and seemed

generally to be in good condition. There was, however, no sign of the usual fat deposits found in fall migrants—not even in the pelvic and pygidial regions or in the peritoneum—which suggests that it had recently exhausted its food stores. There was no obvious sign of muscle wastage. There was no sign of any food remains in the gut, though this is to be expected in a small passerine after a night's rest from feeding. Features of interest concerning the viscera were well-developed gizzard and kidneys, and apparently normal liver and pancreas. The gut was approximately 12 cm in length. With the aid of a × 10 lens a small pair of testes was obvious, in addition to the more diffuse and somewhat larger adrenal glands. The size of the testes suggests that the specimen was a bird of the year, rather than a breeding bird with post-breeding regressed sex organs. These immature male characteristics would seem to be borne out by the plumage features. The condition of the bird would seem to support a supposition that it had reached this country by means of an 'assisted passage'. In the field and in the hand, it was quite active, suggesting, with the post-mortem conclusions, a healthy state. Yet there were no food stores. Such might well be the case with a bird which had crossed much of the Atlantic on board ship with a limited amount of insect food, and had recently arrived here—so recently that it had not been able to re-stock its food stores.'

On 3rd September 1964, R.F.D. conveyed the skin to the British Museum (Natural History) where Derek Goodwin had no hesitation in confirming the identification as *Dendroica petechia*. The species has a variety of races in America and a decision on the subspecies involved proved impossible. It was deemed to be in first-winter plumage.

In conclusion, some remarks are warranted concerning the part played by the weather in this event. The report by P.M.D., though favouring the idea of assisted passage, certainly does not exclude the possibility that this mite crossed the Atlantic unaided except by the wind. *If* its first point of landfall was Bardsey, however, its weight on arrival would tend to suggest that perhaps it did not cross without some form of assistance and that it succeeded in obtaining meagre sustenance *en route*. It is very doubtful if it was on the island before the day on which it was first seen and caught. Furthermore, an examination of the Daily Weather Report covering the week prior to 29th August does not show weather situations likely to permit a bird of this size optimum conditions for drifting non-stop from America. On the day of its appearance on Bardsey an anticyclone was centred to the west of Ireland and a light north-westerly airstream affected all parts of Britain.

This is the only American warbler which is all yellow. Others are yellow below, but none is so yellow on the back, wings and tail; with the exception of the female American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, this is also the only American warbler with yellow edges to the tail feathers. Adult males have chestnut-red streaks on the breast, but these are faint or lacking in females and immatures.



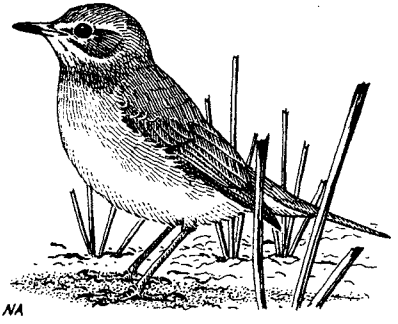
This is still the only Yellow Warbler ever to be discovered in Britain and Ireland.

No other American warbler is so extensively yellow or has yellow tail flashes. The chestnut breast-streaking is absent on first-winter females, faint on adult females, adult winter and first-winter males, and prominent on adult males in summer.

OCTOBER AND DECEMBER 1964

Eye-browed Thrushes in Northamptonshire, Western Isles and Scilly

J. L. F. Parslow



Although the Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* had been recorded as a vagrant in several other countries in western Europe, it was not until 1964 that it was first identified in Britain. In that year three were recorded in different parts of the country. The first was found, somewhat unexpectedly, in a garden at Oundle, Northamptonshire, on 5th October. But the next two ran truer to current vagrant form, each being on small islands well off, though at opposite ends of, the British mainland. One was on North Rona, Outer Hebrides [now Western Isles], on 16th October and the other on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, on 5th December. I am grateful to the observers concerned (named in the sections which follow) for allowing their notes to be used collectively in this way; and to Dr T. Royama who kindly translated a Japanese reference.

THE BRITISH RECORDS IN 1964

(1) *Northamptonshire* This first one was watched by Mrs Winifred Smith and her son, Martin Smith, between 14.15 and 15.00 hours on 5th October in the garden of their home at Oundle. An influx of Song Thrushes. *T. philomelos* had occurred that afternoon, and the Eye-browed Thrush was first noticed feeding with them on the berries of a clipped yew hedge and a yew tree near-by. It was about the same size as or slightly smaller than the Song Thrushes, and had a rather stocky appearance. It was also seen bathing and drinking at a pool in the garden, as well as perched in a tree and on the ground. The light was good with a bright sun behind the observers, who watched the bird from the windows of the house with 10 × 50 binoculars at distances of 17 to 35 yards. This description was taken:

Entire upper-parts olive-brown with a narrow pale line on the folded wing, probably formed by the tips of the greater coverts. Sides of head greyish-brown; conspicuous pale, almost white,

Originally published in *British Birds* 61: 218–223. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

superciliary, and a shorter, thicker stripe running from the gape or chin to just below the eye; white chin; pale grey throat. M.S. described the flanks as apricot, this colouring 'extending on either side to the pectoral band which was pale grey, as was the fore-neck'; W.S. described this region as 'flanks and sides of breast (joining at front) strong peachy-buff; belly white, extending forward in a point between the buff to the region of the clavicle'. No spots or striations on under-parts. Bill dark.

(2) *Outer Hebrides* At 15.00 hours on 16th October N. Picozzi found a thrush, slightly smaller than a Redwing *T. iliacus*, in a south-facing geo on the remote Scottish island of North Rona. It appeared to be very tired and for the next hour and a half was watched at ranges down to a few feet. It spent most of its time feeding and would take short, quick runs and hops, often holding its head to one side before pecking in the damp grass. It held its wings rather low along its flanks, but when anxious would flick them after taking a few hops. If flew only short distances when flushed and on one occasion was heard to utter a soft 'tchuck'. The following is a summary of the plumage notes that were taken:

Upper-parts: crown, nape and neck grey-brown; mantle, back, rump and tail olive-brown. *Wings:* same colour as back, but greater coverts and two of scapulars tipped buff. *Sides of head:* lores dark brown; white supercilium, broader behind eye. *Under-parts:* chin and throat white, streaked with black; upper breast orange-buff, separated from throat by very narrow pale grey band; flanks orange-buff, lower breast and belly white. *Soft parts:* bill brown, but base of lower mandible yellow; legs yellow-brown.

(3) *Isles of Scilly* On 5th December, at about 13.00 hours, J. A. Burton and S. D. G. Stephens discovered a 'peculiar small thrush', similar in size and general appearance to a Redwing, feeding in a grass field near the centre of the island of St Agnes. They watched it at distances down to about ten yards. After a short while it flew off, uttering a call-note similar to that of a Redwing, but rather more liquid and less rasping. Later that afternoon it had returned to the same field and was seen by F. H. D. Hicks as well as the first two observers. It was described as follows:

Upper-parts: head, mantle, back and tail grey-brown, appearing similar in colour (both on the ground and in flight) to juvenile Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*; tail looked relatively short in flight. *Sides of head:* greyish, with very marked white supercilium and another area of white anteriorly below the eye. *Under-parts:* throat and upper breast pale with no sign of any streaking; upper flanks orange-red, this colouring extending well round to the breast; belly and under tail-coverts white.

IDENTIFICATION

Of the thrushes already on the British and Irish List, the Eye-browed most closely resembles the Redwing. The two species are similar in size, and their uniform olive-brown upper-parts are almost identical in shade (though some Eye-browed Thrushes, like the one on North Rona, have the head and neck greyer than the rest of the upper-parts). Both species show rich, reddish colouring on the flanks, though this is always more intense and extends to the under-wings in the Redwing; and both have conspicuous pale superciliary stripes. The Redwing is always streaked on the breast and sides, however, and the absence of this streaking, besides other features, was sufficient to distinguish the three Eye-browed Thrushes identified in 1964.

Of the various Asiatic thrushes that have not been recorded in Britain, the Eye-browed may be confused with the few examples of the closely related (and perhaps conspecific) Japanese Brown (or Red-bellied) Thrush *T. chrysolaus* which show a (buffish) superciliary stripe. But most individuals of the latter species lack a pale supercilium, and in any case, although a partial migrant, it is unlikely on geographical grounds to occur here. The male Grey-backed Thrush *T. hortulorum* of

east Siberia also shows a combination of unstreaked blue-grey breast and rich chestnut flanks (richer than in the Eye-browed), but is much greyer above and lacks a supercilium; females are browner above and show some spots or streaks below. Although this is another species that is unlikely to occur here, it is worth pointing out that in several respects, notably in the paleness and extent of the blue-grey on the upper-parts and upper breast, the illustration on plate 53 in Peterson *et al.* (1954) more closely resembles a male of this species than the Eye-browed Thrush that it is intended to portray.

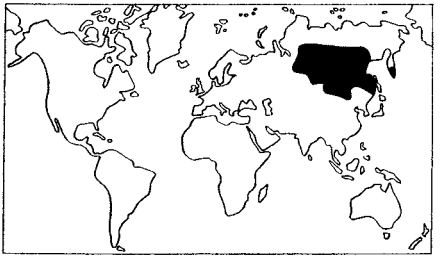
The description of the Eye-browed Thrush in Peterson *et al.* is one of the few to be found in present-day British textbooks. As well as the white eye-brow, it emphasizes as identification features the grey upper breast and orange-buff sides of breast and flanks; females are said to be duller. In fact, as indicated by the differences in the descriptions of the under-parts of the three seen in Britain, the distribution and intensity of the grey and the warm buff colouring of the under-parts is variable. This was confirmed by examination of a series of skins at the British Museum (Natural History). Many skins showed no trace of any grey band across the breast, and in those in which it was present (probably all males) it was sometimes indicated only as a faint narrow line, as in the one seen at North Rona. The intensity of the colouring of the flanks and sides of the breast varied from little more than brownish-buff in some females to rich rusty-orange in some males, and was usually richer on the flanks than the breast in individual specimens; in both sexes the colouring usually met across the front of the breast, as it did in two, and perhaps all three, of those recorded in Britain.

N. Picozzi, who made an independent examination of the skins, found that the colour of the crown, nape and neck was also variable, ranging from the same as the back in most individuals to brownish-grey in a few males. A pale patch at the tip of the inner web of the outermost tail-feathers was apparent on the skins, though it was not noticed on any of the three seen in the field and is of doubtful value as a feature. It was mentioned as a character 'for some birds' by Caldwell and Caldwell (1931), but Yamashin (1961) emphasized the fact that, unlike the Pale Thrush *T. pallidus*, this species does not show it in the field.

J. A. Burton also examined the British Museum series of skins (within 48 hours of having seen the bird on St Agnes) and one feature that struck him, as it did in the field, was the whiteness of the under tail-coverts compared with those of a Redwing. But, again, this feature is rather variable and can have only limited application as an identification mark. The presence of pale tips to the (greater) wing-coverts, noted in the birds on North Rona and Oundle, is said to be characteristic of immatures (Seebohm and Sharpe 1902, Robinson 1927), though it seems possible that, as in the cases of several other members of the Turdinae, this character may be retained by some individuals in adult plumage. Immatures otherwise tend to resemble females and have the same white chin and throat, streaked at the sides with dark grey. Males appear not to achieve full adult plumage in at least their first year, though there is little doubt that they breed, as Seebohm and Sharpe (1902) put it, 'in hen-like dress'.

Despite its easterly range, the Eye-browed Thrush has wandered to western Europe surprisingly often. Several have been recorded in Italy and southern France, single ones in the Netherlands and Belgium, and no fewer than 20 in Germany, though none more recently than 1904. An immature male captured in south-west Norway on 2nd November 1961 was the first to be recorded in Scandinavia (Holgersen 1962). All dated west European records have been between late September and early December, but they have involved both immatures and adults of both sexes. The frequency and pattern of vagrancy of this species in Europe is in fact rather similar to that of the

northern race *eunomus* (Dusky Thrush) of *Turdus naumanni*, with which species it shares similar, but slightly more southerly, breeding and wintering ranges.



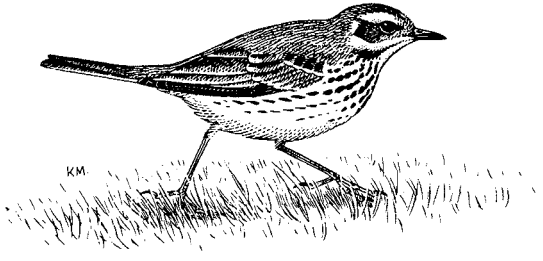
It was another 14 years before the fourth Eye-browed Thrush was discovered here, by a lone, observant, lucky observer at Lochwinnoch in Strathclyde on 22nd October 1978 (Brit. Birds *74: 527–528*).

The preceding accounts thoroughly cover the identification features of Eye-browed Thrush. The chance to use them will most likely come to the observer who habitually and systematically checks through thrush flocks in late autumn and winter.

OCTOBER 1964

Olive-backed Pipit on Fair Isle

Roy H. Dennis



At midday on 17th October 1964 my wife and I heard a pipit calling from the cliffs of the Landberg, a headland beside the Bird Observatory on Fair Isle, Shetland. We were unable to find it or identify it from the call. A few hours later, however, Miss P. Adams saw a strange pipit near the Double Dyke trap about half a mile from the Observatory. E. J. Wiseman and I then searched this area and heard the same unfamiliar call when we flushed a small pipit from the cliff top at the mouth of the Gully. This call was a loud 'tseee' or 'tseeet', rather like that of a Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, but louder and more strident, resembling to some extent the 'reep' of a Richard's Pipit *A. novaeseelandiae*. The bird landed at the top of a 200-foot cliff, where it searched for food in the short grass. On the ground it was silent and rather wagtail-like, striding along and wagging its tail more often than our common pipits. We were able to approach within thirty yards and compile a field description (see below).

Originally published in *British Birds* 60: 161–166; 72: 2–4. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

The pipit was very partial to these high cliffs and only with difficulty did we next persuade it to go towards the traps. We missed catching it in the Gully by inches, but a few minutes later caught it in the Single Dyke trap as it followed the line of a stone wall. We showed it to G. J. Barnes, who had by then arrived on the scene, and afterwards carried it back to the Observatory where we ringed, weighed and measured it and took a full description. The bird was also seen in the hand by Miss P. Adams, Bernard Hardy and my wife. It was released early next morning at the Observatory and flew off to the cliffs. On 19th October it was frequenting a rocky area on Buness, a few hundred yards from the Observatory.

Nearly a year later, on the afternoon of 29th September 1965, A. Heath and L. Tucker found a very greenish-looking pipit haunting the banks of the small gully leading to the Vaadal trap on Fair Isle. They walked it into the trap and then brought it back to the Observatory where I examined it. It was identical with the one trapped the previous year. A description was recorded and the bird was ringed, weighed, measured and photographed (Photos 28–29). It was seen in the hand by G. J. Barnes, Miss W. Dickson, M. Kristersson, D. Putman, R. Rhodes, E. Salholm, E. J. Wiseman and my wife. It was kept in a roosting box overnight and released early the following morning.

FIELD DESCRIPTION

Only the 1964 bird was observed well in the field and the following notes were made on that occasion. It was a small pipit, about the size of a Tree Pipit *A. trivialis* or Meadow Pipit *A. pratensis* and with a similar stance. The first impression was of a strikingly contrasted pipit, the upper-parts being greenish-olive lightly streaked with blackish and the under-parts very white for a pipit and boldly spotted with black on the breast. The spotting on the breast seemed nearly as bold, in fact, as that on a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*. The spots and streaks coalesced on each side of the neck to form a noticeable black mark. The short supercilium was broad and obvious, being white behind the eye and orange-buff in front of the eye. There was some white on the outer tail-feathers and the bill appeared heavy.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The recorded descriptions of the two birds in the hand were so similar that the following is a combination of both, the minor differences indicated by the ring numbers (N32349 in 1964, and AS88363 in 1965):

Upper-parts: crown, nape, mantle and back greenish-olive, rather lightly streaked blackish; finer blackish mesial streaks on crown more pronounced at sides of crown to form a blackish stripe above the supercilium (N32349 less heavily streaked on crown); rump and upper tail-coverts uniform greenish-olive with no noticeable streaking; supercilium broad and distinct, short and white behind eye and orange-buff in front; blackish mark through eye; ear-coverts olive-brown with dark rear edge. *Under-parts:* chin and throat yellowish-white with blackish moustachial streaks (N32349 more orange-buff on throat); upper breast buffish-white tinged yellowish and with large black mesial spots; lower breast white and with similar streaks, these coalescing at each side of neck to form blackish mark; belly pure white; under tail-coverts white with slight buff tinge; flanks white with buffish tinge and some blackish shaft streaks; axillaries yellowish-buff (N32349 greyish with yellowish-olive tinge). *Tail:* tail-feathers blackish fringed and tipped green on outer webs, centre pair browner; outer pair with whitish on outer webs for two-thirds of length from tip and large white wedges on inner webs at distal end; penultimate pair with small white wedges on inner webs and small white marks on outer webs (N32349 with slightly more white on outer webs and small white tips to next pair of feathers). *Wings:* flight-feathers dark brown with greenish edges to outer webs of primaries (except 2nd on both, and possibly 3rd on AS88363, which were more yellowish-green); greater and median coverts blackish, tipped and

broadly fringed on outer webs yellowish-green (N32349 tipped creamy-olive); lesser coverts blackish with greenish fringes; primary coverts and bastard wing with slight green fringes on outer webs. *Soft parts:* upper mandible and tip of lower dark horn, rest of lower flesh; iris dark brown; legs and feet pinkish (N32349) or flesh (AS88363), rather yellowish from behind.

MEASUREMENTS AND STRUCTURE

The measurements (in millimetres) and weights (in grams) of the two birds were as follows (time G.M.T.):

	Wing	Bill	Tarsus	Tail	Hind toe	Hind claw	Weight	Time
N32349	82	15	21.5	60	10	7	20.7	15.00
AS88363	86	15	21	68	8	7.25	20.9	15.00

Their wing-formulae were very similar (length of each primary expressed as number of millimetres less than longest):

	2nd	3rd and 4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
N32349	−2	Longest	−2.5	−11	−16	−19
AS88363	−1.5	Longest	−2	−11	−15.5	−19

In both, the 3rd to 5th primaries were emarginated on the outer webs; and the 1st primary was minute. The longest tertial was 6.5 mm shorter (N32349) or 5 mm shorter (AS88363) than the longest primary; the secondaries were equal to the 7th primary (N32349) or fell between the 6th and 7th (AS88363). The tail was slightly forked; and the distance between wing-tip and tail-tip was 38 mm. The bill was larger and wider than that of a Tree Pipit, being 5 mm wide at the feathers in each case.

IDENTIFICATION

On 17th October 1964 G.J.B., E.J.W. and I were certain that the bird we had caught was not a Tree Pipit of the typical race *A. t. trivialis* because of the greenish coloration, the heavily spotted under-parts, the unusual supercilium, the call and the fact that the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th primaries were rather similar in length. We handle Meadow and Tree Pipits regularly. In the Observatory collection we had skins of Red-throated Pipit and Pechora Pipit *A. gustavi* and it was clearly neither of those species. We decided that it either belonged to an unfamiliar race of the Tree Pipit or else was an Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni*. Hodgson's Pipit *A. roseatus* is also greenish, but this was ruled out by the measurements and lack of lemon-yellow axillaries.

We could find little information in the Fair Isle library. Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom (1954) described the Olive-backed Pipit as smaller than a Tree Pipit, more olivaceous above with softer streaking, and more heavily streaked on the breast. We were fortunate to have Hall (1961), but this work is designed for use in the museum rather than for the identification of a single pipit in the wild. The wing formula of our bird suited both *A. hodgsoni* and eastern race(s) of *A. trivialis*. As, however, we could find no mention of any field characters and we did not have a criterion to judge the greenness of the upper-parts, we decided to regard it as some eastern race of *A. trivialis* until it was proved otherwise.

In early 1965, through the generosity of the Royal Scottish Museum and Ian H. J. Lyster of the bird room there, we were able to examine some skins of *A. hodgsoni*,

A. trivialis (various races) and *A. roseatus*. All three of us immediately identified our bird as an Olive-backed Pipit on account of the greenish upper-parts, the distinctive breast markings, the unusual supercilium, the large bill and the wing-formula.

The first Olive-backed Pipit to be recorded in Europe outside Russia was shot at Utsira, Norway, on 8th October 1937. The record was published by Schaanning (1939) and, through the good offices of George Waterston, we received a photocopy of his paper from the library of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Girvan MacKay, the missionary on Fair Isle, very kindly translated this paper and I was then able to compare it with our notes; I was surprised how similar to two descriptions were. Another Oliver-backed Pipit was found on Heligoland, Germany, on 8th May 1961 (Gräfe, Requate and Vauk 1962).

Our capture of a second individual on 29th September 1965 finally confirmed our belief that the bird we had trapped the previous year was the first Olive-backed Pipit for Fair Isle and Britain. The fact that we were so certain that the one in 1965 was almost identical with the one in 1964 indicates that this species is easier to identify in the field than might be expected. I suggest that the combination of the rather lightly streaked greenish-olive upper-parts, the clean but heavily spotted breast, the neck smudge, the pure white under-parts and the unusual supercilium are diagnostic in the field. The call also appears sufficiently different to distinguish the bird from other European pipits. The habitat preference for gullies and cliffs may be distinctive; Tree and Meadow Pipits at Fair Isle tend to frequent longer grass and marshy areas. The Norwegian one lived in the only coniferous plantation on Utsira and foraged by itself in the surrounding fields; the Fair Isle birds were also solitary.

DISCUSSION OF WING-FORMULA

In the hand, the relative length of the 5th primary is important. For *A. trivialis* Hall (1961) gave the 2nd, 3rd and 4th primaries as equal and longest, and the 5th about 5 mm shorter in western birds and 1–2 mm shorter in eastern ones. *The Handbook* put the 2nd to 4th about equal (greatest difference 1 mm) and the 5th 2.5–5 mm shorter. For *A. hodgsoni* N 32349 had the 3rd and 4th longest and equal, the 5th 2.5 mm shorter and the 2nd 2 mm shorter; AS88363, had the 3rd and 4th longest and equal, the 5th 2 mm shorter and the 2nd 1.5 mm shorter. The fact that the 2nd primaries were 1.5 mm and 2 mm shorter than the longest primaries suggests that this may also be a distinctive feature of the Olive-backed Pipit.

The 5th primaries at 2 mm and 2.5 mm shorter are outside the range of nominate *trivialis*, but within the range of the eastern race *haringtoni*. According to Hall, this race of the Tree Pipit (which breeds in Turkestan and the north-western Himalayas) has heavier markings on the head, mantle and breast and, in any case, does not undertake vast migrations.

In *A. trivialis* the 3rd and 4th primaries are distinctly emarginated on the outer webs and the 5th is less well marked. Both our birds had distinct emargination on all three of the primaries; the Norwegian one was similar in this respect.

WEATHER AND ASSOCIATED MIGRANTS

In 1964 a southerly wind at Fair Isle backed to south-east on 15th October and continued from this general direction until the 18th. The 17th was a fine sunny day, after a hazy start, and the wind was light and south to south-east. The second Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor pallidirostris* to be recorded for Fair Isle and Britain arrived on the 17th, but was not trapped and identified until the 18th. Other newly arrived migrants included a Richard's Pipit, a Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus*

inornatus and 175 Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla*. It is also interesting that an Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* was recorded on North Rona, in the Outer Hebrides, on the 16th. The arrival of the Steppe Grey Shrike, Eye-browed Thrush and Olive-backed Pipit in northern Scotland was probably due to a large anticyclone over northern Europe, which was producing strong and sustained easterly winds across Europe from the ranges of these birds in Asia.

In 1965 the wind at Fair Isle was south-easterly from 24th September, reaching gale force on 25th and 26th. On the 28th it backed to north-east and in these conditions the second Olive-backed Pipit was found on the 29th. We recorded a Yellow-browed Warbler on the 25th, an Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* on the 26th, and a Great Snipe *Gallinago media* and many thrushes on the 27th. Newly arrived on the 29th with the Olive-backed Pipit were a Yellow-browed Warbler and a Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*. In this connection, it is interesting that on the same day as Schaanning shot the Olive-backed Pipit on Utsira on 8th October 1937, he also shot a Marsh Warbler, the first for that island.

There have been another 15 Olive-backed Pipits since these two on Fair Isle in 1964 and 1965, and some detective work has also led to the discovery of an earlier one, on Skokholm, Dyfed, in April 1948:

Olive-backed Pipit on Skokholm

On 14th April 1948, Joan Keighley (now Mrs Joan Jenkins) and I caught a pipit *Anthus* in the Garden Trap on Skokholm, Dyfed. It was clearly none of the species known to us and, even after consulting *The Handbook*, we could not identify it. We recorded details in the bird observatory's log (now no longer available), which J.K. summarised in her diary as follows:

Wind N3. 12.30 B.S.T. Pipit caught in Garden Trap. Back greyish olive-green. Head dark markings. Breast almost white with dark markings. White eyestripe. Whitish outer tail feathers. Pink legs. Short hind claw. Losing its feathers badly. Weight 23.5 g. Wing 87.5 mm. Bill 12.0 mm. Tarsus 22.0 mm.

I photographed the bird (Photo 30), which stayed on the island until at least 18th April; it was extremely exhausted and on 16th I almost caught it by hand.

At the end of the season, I visited the British Museum (Natural History) and examined pipit skins. I decided that the bird had almost certainly been an Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni*, but hesitated to submit such an unusual record: not only a first for Britain and Ireland, but of a little-known species and at what seemed an extraordinary time of year for an Asiatic vagrant.

When thoroughly documented records of Olive-backed Pipits on Fair Isle, Shetland, in October 1964 and September 1965 were published in 1967 (*Brit. Birds* 60: 161–166) and I saw the accompanying photographs (Photos 28–29), I became certain that my Skokholm pipit was the same species. I sent the photograph and notes to I. J. Ferguson-Lees, who was then executive editor of *British Birds*, and the Rarities Committee was consulted. Its view was: 'Probably, but not sufficient evidence'.

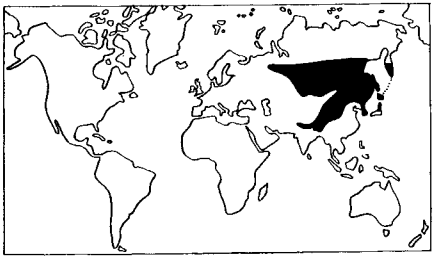
Ten years later, in April 1977, Dr J. T. R. Sharrock was sorting through the *British Birds* files when he came upon the photograph, which he recognised as showing an Olive-backed Pipit. The only writing on the back, however, stated merely 'Skokholm pipit'. Knowing nothing of the previous history, but aware that no Olive-backed Pipit had ever been recorded on Skokholm, he wrote to Dr Christopher M. Perrins, who was likewise unaware of any such occurrence, and who commented that it must relate to a period before he was associated with Skokholm. At C.M.P.'s suggestion,

therefore, J.T.R.S. wrote to me, and thus successfully tracked down the photograph's source. In the meantime, I had seen Olive-backed Pipits in India and no doubts remained in my mind; it was with enthusiasm, therefore, that I complied with J.T.R.S.'s suggestion to resubmit the record, this time to the BOU Records Committee (the Rarities Committee now considers only those records since 1958; the BOURC considers all British 'firsts'). With a background of detailed notes on nine British records during 1964–76, and advice from Alan Kitson who has recently studied the species in Mongolia, assessment is far easier now than it was in 1967 when I first submitted the record (and incomparably easier than in 1948): the BOURC unhesitatingly accepted 'the Skokholm pipit' as an Olive-backed, which, thus, became the first for Britain and Ireland.

The main diagnostic characters shown by the 1948 photograph (Photo 30), are, to quote Alan Kitson (*in litt.*), the 'short, startling supercilium, bordered above with black; the black ear-spot; and black breast-spotting'. The similarity to the 1965 Fair Isle bird (Photo 29) is such that they could almost have been the same individual; the photograph of the 1976 Fair Isle example (*Brit. Birds* 70: plate 117) showed the same features.

The month of the Skokholm occurrence does not seem so strange now as it did in 1948; there has, for example, been a British record of Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in May (*Brit. Birds* 64: 361), and one of the other nine British Olive-backed Pipits was also in spring.

P. J. CONDER

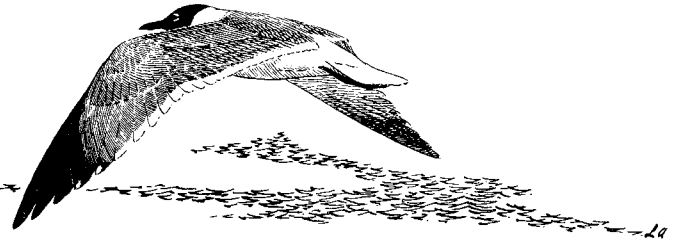


Of the 18 records up to 1980, two were in spring (Skokholm 1948 and Portland Bill, Dorset, 1970) and 16 in autumn (September to November), with six on Fair Isle, six in the Isles of Scilly, two in Norfolk, one in Lincolnshire, and one on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford.

The several records since the first three described here have established two important further characters of Olive-backed Pipit. First, the pale mark on the upper rear corner of the ear-coverts (just discernible in the Fair Isle and Skokholm photographs) can be a striking feature of some individuals, at a distance appearing as a distinctive drooping continuation of the supercilium. Secondly, Olive-backed Pipits will habitually fly into the canopy of trees or bushes when flushed, quite unlike the usual behaviour of other pipits.

MAY 1966

Laughing Gull at Dungeness

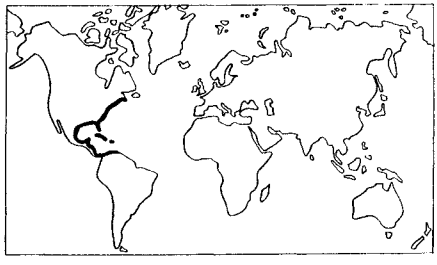


W. F. A. Buck and D. W. Taylor

On the morning of 11th May 1966 we discovered an unusual gull at rest in one of the gravel diggings at Lade Pits near Dungeness, Kent. We had initially passed it over as another Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, but a closer look revealed characteristics not associated with that species. Detailed notes were made during some five minutes of observation. We then disturbed the bird and in flight it bore little resemblance to any British gull. It was not seen again, but was subsequently identified from our field notes as an adult Laughing Gull *L. atricilla*, a North American species not previously authenticated in Britain or Ireland. The following description is compiled from those notes:

Size: larger than Black-headed Gull. *Head and neck:* head entirely black, with white eye-lids giving the impression of a white eye-ring; neck pure white. *Upper-parts:* mantle, scapulars, back, wing-coverts and secondaries all slate grey; a slight white crescent in the closed wing formed by the white tips of the secondaries; primaries black; tail pure white. *Under-parts:* throat, breast, belly and under tail-coverts all pure white. *Soft parts:* bill deep red; legs appeared reddish.

At rest it was similar to the Black-headed Gulls present, though slightly larger and its bill also appeared to be bigger. It had a black rather than brown head, with a noticeable white 'eye-ring' and its immaculate slate-grey mantle contrasted sharply with black primaries. When it flew, any similarity with Black-headed Gulls ended. It was noticeably larger, more like a Common Gull *L. canus* in size, and its flight seemed more leisurely. Its mantle and wings appeared dark grey (with the primaries showing darker still) and were similar in colour to those of a Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*. A white trailing edge to the wings was distinctive and there were no white tips or mirrors on the leading primaries.



It seems probable that Laughing Gulls were overlooked in the past, for, since this one in Kent in 1966, there have been another 25 records, including no fewer than seven individuals in 1978, and two earlier occurrences have been unearthed: in East Sussex in July 1923 and in Essex in December 1957 (Brit. Birds *61: 213–214, 415–416*). *Thus, the Dungeness*

Originally published in *British Birds* 60: 157–159. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

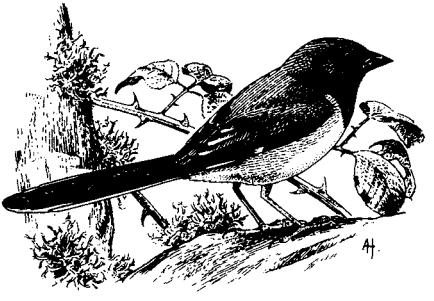
record described by W. F. A. Buck and D. W. Taylor was actually the third for Britain and Ireland, and not the first as was thought at the time.

Laughing Gull is slightly larger than Black-headed Gull, with proportionately longer wings, bill and legs. In winter, the head is white, with a dusky patch on the ear-coverts (not a defined spot as on Black-headed). In first-year plumages, the best field marks are the greyish tail with complete, broad, black subterminal band, the dark-grey mantle and scapulars, and the greyish breast, as well as the structural differences. Second-years resemble adults, but the black wing-tip extends onto the primary coverts, and the tail often has small black marks near the tip, forming a narrow or broken tail band. In immature plumages, Franklin's Gull (page 167) is the only likely confusion-species.

JUNE 1966

Rufous-sided Towhee on Lundy

C. S. Waller



During the morning of 7th June 1966 I was informed that an unfamiliar bird had been seen by residents in the garden of the Manor Farm Hotel, Lundy, Devon. Miss J. Mundy and I soon located it in a near-by garden much over-grown with shrubs and weeds and bordered by stone walls. Our first impression was of an enormous warbler, the bird's shape and carriage reminding us of a very large Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, even to carrying its tail in the same half-cocked attitude; its bill, however, was noticeably heavy and finch-like. On the ground it behaved more like a thrush, hopping about on long, strong-looking legs, scratching amongst the dead weeds and rummaging noisily under the bushes. The rufous flanks contrasting with the white belly were most distinctive, and the red eyes were quite striking even from a range of 20 yards. The wings were short and somewhat rounded, and a white patch at the base of the outer primaries and white tips to the inner secondaries showed up well against the dusky brown plumage. When disturbed it would fly jerkily away and perch on a fence or wall, landing on one occasion near some Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* against which it appeared half as large again, probably due to the very long tail and heavy-looking head. In flight it looked rather shrike-like with its long, rounded tail which it spread just enough to show the white spots at the tips of the outer feathers. It uttered a loud 'cheweek, cheweek' several times.

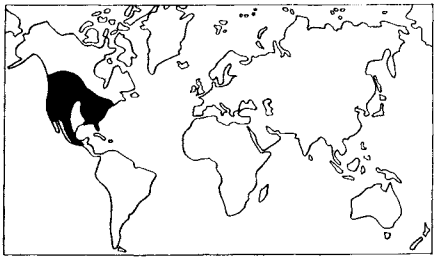
After watching the bird for about half an hour we decided that an attempt should be made to trap it. On returning to the observatory for mist-nets, we identified it from Peterson (1947) as an adult female Rufous-sided Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*, the first European record (*Brit. Birds*, 60: 322). Shortly afterwards we trapped it and took

Originally published in *British Birds* 63: 147–149. Heading drawing by Alan Harris

it back to the observatory to examine, ring and photograph. We also compiled the following detailed description:

Plumage: Forehead, crown and nape dark reddish-brown; ear-coverts redder brown than the rest of the head with the feather-shafts showing as pale streaks; lores pale pinkish-brown; mantle, back and rump brown, tinged red. Chin pinkish-brown; throat dark gingery-buff; bright chestnut-red contrasting with the white breast and belly; under tail-coverts rufous-buff; axillaries greyish-white, tinged buff; wing-linings greyish-white turning to a warm brown on the outer edge. Tail blackish-brown, outer pair of feathers with distal half white, penultimate pair with distal third white on outer edge only, pre-penultimate pair with a small white patch at the tip of the inner web, central pair paler than the rest. Primaries and secondaries dusky-brown, 3rd to 6th primaries with a white outer edge and 3rd to 8th with a white patch just below the coverts; greater coverts warm brown, a little darker on inner side of shafts; median coverts reddish-brown; lesser coverts similar but paler; bastard-wing dark brown; tertials dark brown, two with large white tips. *Soft parts:* Bill heavy, finch-like, with upper mandible blue-grey/horn and lower mandible similar but greyer at the base and along the cutting edge; legs flesh-pink; feet mauve; eyes pale claret-red. *Wing-formula:* 4th to 6th primaries equal and longest, 2nd −9.0 mm, 3rd −1.5 mm, 7th −3.5 mm, 8th −5.0 mm, 9th −5.5 mm; 1st minute; 3rd to 6th clearly emarginated, 7th slightly. *Tail:* Rounded, the outer rectrices being 15 mm shorter than the central pair. *Measurements:* Wing 78 mm, tail 84 mm, bill 15.5 mm, tarsus 28 mm, weight 40 gm.

The identification of such a distinctive species, especially an adult in spring plumage, was no problem. The male differs only in being black where the female is brown. The juvenile has a brown iris and is rich brown above and buffy below, streaked all over with darker brown which it loses by early autumn; its tail is like the adult female's.

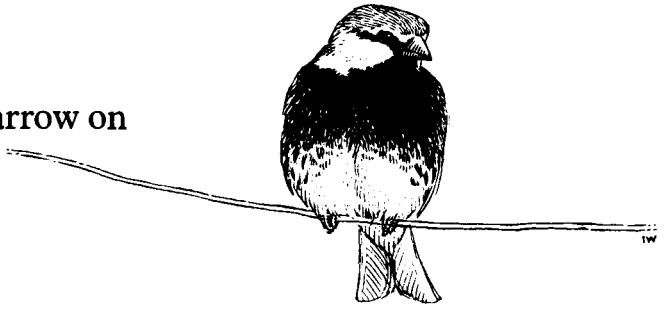


One other Rufous-sided Towhee has been seen in Britain since the first on Lundy. It was discovered caught in a mist-net, at Spurn Point, North Humberside, on 5th September 1975, and it stayed in the area until 10th January 1976, being seen by hundreds of birders during its four-month sojourn (Brit. Birds *72: 291–293*). *Investigations suggested, however, that it was an escaped cage-bird, perhaps part of a consignment imported from Canada to Heathrow and thence to Leicester; in April 1975, 'Arctic Towhee cocks' were being advertised for sale here, in* Cage and Aviary Birds, *at £12.00 each. Thus, the Lundy record is still the only fully accepted occurrence in Britain and Ireland.*

The combination of black (on the male) or brown (on the female) plumage with white belly and vent, rufous flanks and white-bordered tail render a Rufous-sided Towhee unmistakable at all ages.

JUNE 1966

Spanish Sparrow on Lundy



C. S. Waller

At about 11.20 G.M.T on 9th June 1966, on Lundy, north Devon, I was on my way to make a late morning drive of the traps in the course of my duties as observatory warden, when my attention was attracted to a bird uttering a sparrow-like 'cheep' which seemed less harsh than that of a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. It was sitting on a fence near Quarter Wall facing me and was about the size of a nearby Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*; its most striking features were white cheek patches, which contrasted with its chocolate crown and its black breast almost as much as do the cheeks of the Great Tit *Parus major*. The chin and upper breast were black, as was the lower breast, but the white of the belly extended up into it, almost forming a shallow inverted V. The flanks were heavily streaked with black and, on this occasion, at a range of 30 m, appeared almost solid black.

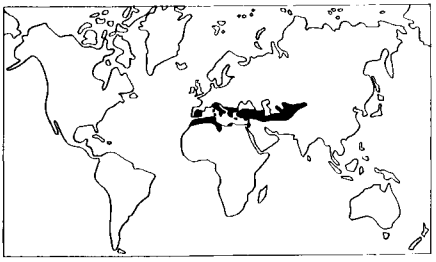
I called John Ogilvie over and we watched the bird for about five minutes before accidentally disturbing it as we tried to get around to the rear to have a look at its back. The features observed were clearly those of a Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*. The bird was located again, at about 14.50 hours by the late F. W. Gade in the Tent Field, but, by the time that I was informed, it had gone. The bird was seen by various people over the next two days, but I did not see it again until 12th, when I rediscovered it at the spot where I had first seen it and had good views of it through 10×50 binoculars at ranges down to 6 m. The following description was taken:

Forehead, crown and nape chestnut, extending from nape around into white of cheek patch. Lores blackish, extending below and behind eye to form eye-stripe, with short, narrow white supercilium above. Cheek clear, striking white. Throat and breast black, with silvery white extending from belly up into centre; flanks heavily striped black. Back black, with some faint buff and white edges to feathers. Rump tawny brown. Tail brown. Wings light brown, but flight feathers darker brown, looking blackish in flight; lesser coverts chestnut, with much white on tips, forming conspicuous wing-bars; other coverts tawny, with paler tips. Legs brown. Eye dark. Bill blackish, heavy and finch-like.

The Spanish Sparrow kept to itself, not associating with any other species except on one occasion when it flew off with a flock of Linnets *Carduelis cannabina*, which were noticeably smaller. Although it was present on the island for about ten days, it was always difficult to locate and when disturbed would fly a great distance, never landing nearby. It showed a preference for perching on fences, never on the old buildings which were in the vicinity. I. G. Reynolds reported seeing what may have been the same bird on 8th, one day before my first sighting.

The only subsequent records have also both been in the southwest: on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, on 21st October 1972 (Brit. Birds *74: 150*) *and on Bryher, Isles of Scilly, from 22nd to 24th October 1977* (Brit. Birds *74: 150–151*).

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 109–110. Heading drawing by Ian Willis

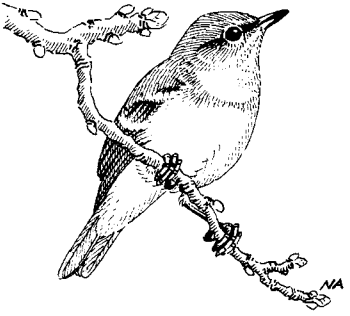


The adult male Spanish Sparrow is distinctive, but will a female or immature male ever be identified here? Both show longitudinal streaking on the breast-sides and flanks, extremely faint and diffuse on the female, whereas female House Sparrow has plain underparts. Some of their calls are distinctive to some ears: sparrow-like, but with a nasal quality reminiscent of Brambling Fringilla montifringilla. *Doubtless this advanced identification problem is one which will confront British observers within a decade or two!*

OCTOBER 1966

Parula Warbler in Scilly

Bernard King and David B. Hunt



Just after dawn on 16th October 1966 B.K. discovered an unfamiliar bird among some *Phylloscopus* warblers and Goldcrests *Regulus regulus* which were feeding in the topmost branches of the scrub willows by the Great Pool, Tresco, Isles of Scilly. Despite the poor light, he could discern rather dark upper-parts with contrasting white double wing-bars, a brilliant daffodil-yellow throat and breast and white crescentic marks above and below the eye almost forming an orbital ring. B.K. realized that the species was new to him; nevertheless he was reminded of the Myrtle Warbler *Dendroica coronata* which he and many others saw at Newton St Cyres, Devon, in January and February 1955 (see pages 65–68) and so it seemed that this might be another American warbler. It soon moved away, however, into an inaccessible area where it was hidden by the glare of the rising sun and he decided, with some misgivings, to leave the Great Pool and return when the light improved.

Nearly an hour later, B.K. again located the bird with its original companions, but this time in good light and not more than twelve feet away; it was even more beautiful than he had at first realised. Occasionally it would hover momentarily over the path just in front of him, catching insects on the wing. After some 15 minutes he went to find D.B.H., and later that morning we both had intermittent but close views of it for

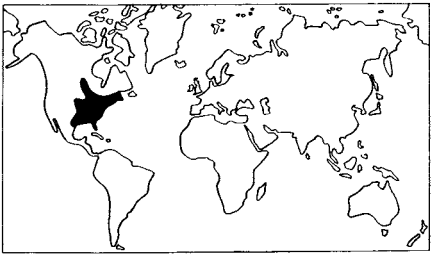
Originally published in *British Birds* 63: 149–151. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

nearly an hour. On consulting Peterson (1947), we soon identified it as a Parula Warbler *Parula americana*, the first British and Irish record (*Brit. Birds*, 60: 329). The only previous European records are of three (possibly four) in Iceland, but Durand (1963) mentioned a ship-assisted crossing from New York to Southampton (date unspecified); the latter bird eventually died on board and the skin was sent to the Liverpool Museum.

D.B.H. located the Parula Warbler in the same place very early next morning, and on that day the following observers saw it under ideal conditions: R. H. and Mrs M. E. Charlwood, C. F. Farkell, P. R. Holness, R. J., R. S. and Mrs A. M. Johns, D. and Mrs P. Totty and D. B. Wooldridge. It could not be found subsequently. The following is a compilation of the descriptions taken:

General characters: Although no longer than a Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, it was decidedly more robust and heavier bellied, with a slightly heavier bill. Its wings were rather rounded, and the tips of the folded primaries extended to the base of the tail which was more notched than that of a Chiffchaff. Its plumage provided excellent camouflage, and when it kept quite still for some time it 'merged' with the discoloured green and yellowing autumn leaves of the willows and could be very difficult to find. It did not flick its tail and was not heard to call. In its undulating flight it looked thick-set. *Plumage:* Forehead and crown pale bluish-grey, in some lights with a hint of yellow-green gloss. Lores bluish-grey with clear white crescentic marks above and below the eyes. Nape, shoulders and wings bright bluish-grey, with very prominent double wing-bars formed by broad white tips to median and greater coverts. Paler shafts to the primaries occasionally revealed when wings were partially opened. Mantle and upper rump bluish-grey; yellow-green suffusion varying with the angle of light, more apparent when seen from above. Rump and tail dark bluish-grey; central tail-feathers darker than outer feathers, especially obvious in flight. Chin, throat and most of breast brilliant daffodil-yellow; a faint and rather indistinct rusty band across the upper breast with faint rusty streaks down sides of the upper flanks. Lower breast, belly and under tail-coverts to extreme tip of tail white. *Soft parts:* Upper mandible brown, lower mandible paler (R.J.J. reported it as pink in some lights); eye dark; legs pale pinkish to flesh-brown; feet paler than tarsi.

The breast-band of males in summer, blackish spotted with reddish-brown and tinged with chestnut at the sides, is very much restricted or entirely absent in females (Godfrey 1966). In winter, adult and young males lack the breast-band and are indistinguishable (Bent 1953) and tinges of chestnut on the under-parts of females of any age are considered unlikely. The Tresco bird, therefore, appears to have been a male assuming winter plumage.



Very rare birds are often called vagrants and their occurrences referred to as vagrancy: words perhaps suggesting haphazard wanderings. The records do, however, usually form striking patterns, and are far from random. The periodic appearance of small spates of vagrants was pointed out in relation to Lanceolated Warblers Locustella lanceolata (Brit. Birds *69: 109–110*), *and the Parula Warbler provides another splendid example. After this one in*

1966, a second came in 1967 (Cornwall in November) and a third in 1968 (Dorset in October)—making three in three years—but there has been none since! It seems likely that such clumps of records (and peaks in the numbers of commoner rarities) coincide with and reflect high population levels in the areas of origin, but such a link is still hypothetical so far as transatlantic vagrants are concerned.

The combination of yellow throat, two white wing-bars, and bluish-grey upperparts with a greenish patch on the mantle is diagnostic of Parula Warbler at all ages.

OCTOBER 1966

Penduline Tit at Spurn

R. J. Raines and A. A. Bell

On 22nd October 1966, on the Spurn peninsula, Yorkshire [now Humberside], our attention was drawn to a group of birds that were uttering alarm calls from an isolated bush of elder *Sambucus nigra* in a large clump of sea-buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*. We found later that the excitement was caused by a Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. The birds included a Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, a number of Reed Buntings *Emberiza schoeniclus*, a Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* and what R.J.R. immediately recognized as a Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*, being familiar with the species in several countries.

We watched this Penduline Tit through binoculars at 30 yards' range for five to ten minutes, during the whole of which time it was in full view as it moved about among the outer twigs of the bush, constantly jerking its tail from side to side in characteristic fashion. The following is a summary of the notes we took independently at the time:

Size about that of the Blue Tit, but slimmer and with slightly longer tail. Head and neck pale grey, paler on forehead and throat; narrow black eye-patch, extending well back, jet black in front of eye but flecked with whitish behind. Back and wing-coverts red-brown; flight feathers dark, broadly edged with whitish; upper tail appeared grey-brown. Under-parts warm buff with pinkish tinge on flanks. Bill short, fine and sharply pointed; legs dark.

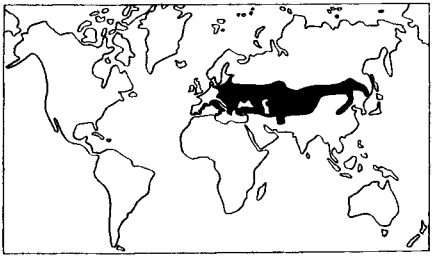
The general effect was suggestive of a diminutive and very pale male Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, though A.A.B. was at first glance reminded of a Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*. Having made certain of the identification, we decided to inform other observers in the area. Unfortunately, although this took only about ten minutes, the bird could not be found on our return in spite of a most extensive search.

On 28th October, however, what was presumably the same individual was found by B. Banson, M. Densley and S. Kenyon in a different area about two miles to the north on the other side of Kilnsea. On this occasion it attracted attention by calling from a

Originally published in *British Birds* 60: 517–520. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

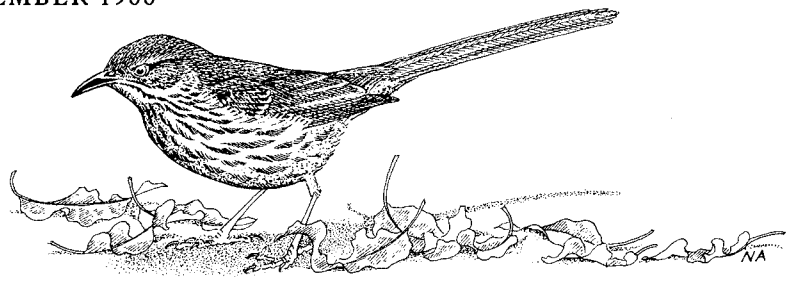
patch of sea-buckthorn in an extensive area of reeds *Phragmites communis*. Both M.D. and S.K. were familiar with the call of this species and immediately recognised it before they saw the bird. B. R. Spence and C. Winn were fetched and the Penduline Tit was then kept under observation for about four hours, during which time it was also seen by D. Barraclough, P. Bonham, R. F. Dickens and G. Wallis. Attempts were made to catch it in a mist-net, but on two occasions it bounced out and on a third it found a small hole and escaped. During the period of observation it flitted about from one area of buckthorn to another, occasionally went into the reeds and once alighted on a barbed wire fence, but always returned to the first patch of buckthorn. In flight it kept very low and quickly disappeared into cover when it landed.

The flight was similar to that of a Blue Tit, though more fluttering, the wings being noted as short and rounded. Once, when it hesitated before disappearing into a bush, it flicked its tail up and down, but it was not seen to jerk it from side to side as on the original occasion when it had been agitated by the Fox. The call was a thin, drawn-out plaintive 'tsee' which was uttered fairly frequently from perches and occasionally in flight. The description compiled during the longer period on the 28th was similar in essentials to that which we took on the 22nd. The head, however, was considered to be blue-grey or powder blue with a more whitish forehead and there seemed to be a narrow whitish line separating the eye-patch from the crown; the lesser coverts appeared greyish with a conspicuous dark brown smudge near the carpal joint; the rump was noted as grey-brown (B.B.), the primaries pale grey (B.R.S.) or dark broadly edged with whitish grey (P.B.) and the under-parts off-white with pinkish-buff on the flanks.



Although the species seems to be in the process of expanding its European breeding range, there have been only two further records: on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, on 25th October 1977 (Brit. Birds *72: 483–484*) *and at Stodmarsh, Kent, on 18th May 1980.*

Juvenile Penduline Tit lacks the adult's extensive black mask, and may acquire it only partially in first-winter plumage.



Brown Thrasher in Dorset

C. S. L. Incledon

At 09.30 on 18th November 1966, on Durlston Head, Swanage, Dorset, my attention was attracted by an unusual call, a sudden and explosive 'chat'. On investigating a wooded area above the cliffs, I soon located a strange thrush-sized bird feeding on the ground at a range of not more than 25 feet. It was uniformly reddish-brown above, with no white in the tail but two white bars on the folded wing; the under-parts were very strongly streaked, the irides yellow and the beak darkish. The tail seemed to be as long as the body and was kept slightly cocked. After consulting several books at home, including Oliver L. Austin and Arthur Singer's *Birds of the World* (1961), I decided that it was almost certainly a Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*, a view which was supported by Mrs W. G. Teagle to whom I described it over the telephone. Other observers were informed and the identification was confirmed the next day by Dr J. S. Ash and M. F. Robertson. This is a North American species not previously recorded in either Britain or Ireland; indeed, apart from an insufficiently authenticated report from Heligoland in 1836 (see *Brit. Birds*, 48: 9), it has not been recorded anywhere else in Europe. At 16.15 on 23rd November the thrasher was caught in a mist-net, ringed by F. R. Clafton and photographed by Dr D. J. Godfrey. Over the next 2½ months it was seen by a great many other people—including D. I. M. Wallace who is familiar with the species in America—and it was last observed by P. Mays on 5th February 1967.

DESCRIPTION IN THE HAND

I am indebted to F.R.C. for the following details noted when the Brown Thrasher was trapped on 23rd November. Unfortunately, it was examined rather late in the day and so it was possible to record only the salient characters before releasing it.

Plumage All the upper-parts were uniformly rufous (except for the forehead which was a shade darker) and richer in colour than those of a British Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos clarkei*. The sides of the head, however, were greyish with paler flecking. The chin was white; the throat, breast and belly were white with bold brown streaks; and there was a buff suffusion on the flanks. The outer webs of the primaries and secondaries were rufous and the inner webs blackish; the primary coverts were similar and some of the greater and median coverts had buffish-white tips which

Originally published in *British Birds* 61: 550–553. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

formed the two whitish wing-bars; the feathers of the bastard wing were uniformly blackish with a wedge of buff near the tips of the outer webs. The tail was also uniformly rufous.

Soft parts The bill was not really decurved, although it gave that impression in the field and is illustrated thus in Roger Tory Peterson's American book *A Field Guide to the Birds* (1947). The wholly black upper mandible actually curved down quite markedly, but the lower mandible, which was black with a pinkish base, was virtually straight along its lower edge and indeed curved up a little at the tip. The legs were greyish and the irides strikingly yellow.

Measurements and structure The following measurements were taken: wing 98 mm (flattened chord); bill 20 mm (from feathers); tail about 130 mm; and weight 81 grams at 16.30 hours. The 4th and 5th primaries were longest and equal; the 3rd and 6th equal and 3–4 mm shorter; and the 1st primary about 20 mm longer than the longest primary covert. The outer webs of the 3rd–6th primaries were emarginated. The outer rectrices were about 20 mm shorter than the longest and the penultimate pair about 6 mm shorter, but there was considerable abrasion of the tips.

FIELD NOTES

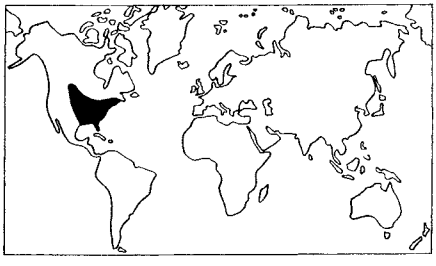
This section is a summary of my own field notes and those of J.S.A. and D.I.M.W. The Brown Thrasher looked similar in size to a Song Thrush, but at the same time it was slimmer and had a much longer tail. The whole of the upper-parts, including the tail, were uniformly bright reddish-brown. The under-parts were noted by me as white with bold brown streaks and this accords with the description taken in the hand, but J.S.A. and D.I.M.W. both considered the ground colour to look pale or greyish rather than pure white with the bold streaks of dark brown most marked on the flanks and less well-defined on the sides of the breast. The sides of the head were obviously greyish, the ear-coverts with dark margins, and the two pale wing-bars were conspicuous. The bill looked darkish and I entirely agree with the comments of F.R.C., quoted above, about its shape. At close quarters the noticeable yellow eye appeared as a light circle with a dark outer circle and the pupil forming a central spot. The long tail was constantly cocked, jerked upwards or flicked sideways.

All observations were within a radius of 60–100 yards of the original sighting, but the thrasher might easily have passed unnoticed in the dense cover of holm oaks *Quercus ilex* near-by. On some occasions it was extremely skulking at the edge of this cover, but on others it took little notice of parties of observers and could be watched at close ranges as it fed on the ground under trees or on a wide path that ran through its territory. Attention was usually drawn to it by its two characteristic and often repeated call-notes. One was a rather chat-like, metallic 'tchec' or 'tschack' and the other a harsh 'husky-throaty' 'tsch-aak' with almost the quality of a Jay *Garrulus glandarius* or Magpie *Pica pica*. Once it called repeatedly when it joined a group of Blackbirds *Turdus merula* and Song Thrushes which were apparently mobbing an unseen predator. Once, too, it was noted pulling worms out of the soil like a Song Thrush, but it was more usually observed feeding on the acorns of *Quercus ilex* at which it hammered with much vigour, throwing its head right back with each stroke and bringing its bill down vertically.

IDENTIFICATION

Thrashers bear a certain resemblance to some of the babblers in the mainly Old World family of Timaliidae, but these could be ruled out for a variety of reasons, including their lack of wing-bars. The Dorset bird was clearly a thrasher and it

remained to decide to which of the eleven North and Central American species it could belong. Only the Brown Thrasher, the Sage Thrasher *Oreoscoptes montanus* and the Long-billed or Sennett's Thrasher *Toxostoma longirostre* have the necessary combination of wing-bars and streaking below. The Sage Thrasher was ruled out because it is smaller and darker and has white tips to the tail, and the Long-billed Thrasher (which is more like the Brown) because it is less rufous and its streaking is clearly blackish.



This species is not particularly likely to occur as a vagrant in Europe: see, for instance, Chandler S. Robbins's (1980) predictions. It is, therefore, not surprising that this remains the sole record in Britain and Ireland.

After the moult from the streaky juvenile plumage, all ages and both sexes of Brown Thrasher are alike.

JUNE 1967

Cretzschmar's Bunting on Fair Isle

Roy H. Dennis

Late on the evening of 10th June 1967, on Fair Isle, Shetland, W. N. Landells, M. Kristersson and I flushed a roosting bunting from a field of rye-grass and, as it

Originally published in *British Birds* 62: 144–148. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

flew to land on a stone dyke, I gained the impression that the 'jizz' was wrong for an Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*. It was very like that species, but the wings seemed rather uniform and the head bluish, and there was no trace of yellow or green in the plumage. We failed to get close to it before it disappeared into a field of oats and my companions were unable to confirm my tentative suspicions that it might be a Cretzschmar's Bunting *E. caesia*.

Despite a thorough search, this bird was not seen again until the afternoon of 14th June, when I flushed it from a ditch about 20 yards from where we had found it on the 10th. It landed further along the ditch and from there flew back to a stone dyke about 100 yards away. In flight, it appeared slightly smaller than an Ortolan and the call-note, which I wrote down as 'styip', was different. I was able to approach it fairly closely because it was less shy than most Ortolans and from a distance of 20 yards I wrote a field description and firmly identified it as a Cretzschmar's Bunting. I watched it for about 15 minutes and then left, but returned in the evening with G. J. Barnes and W.N.L. to catch it. We found it in the same field, where we noted that it preferred to settle on patches of bare earth or the stone walls rather than on fences or telephone wires, and about 20 minutes later trapped it in a mist-net. We took it to the observatory, made a detailed description and weighed, measured and ringed it. Darkness had fallen by this time and so we roosted the bird overnight. Early next morning, after photographs had been taken (Photo 31), we released it and it flew to the cliffs near-by.

We did not see the Cretzschmar's Bunting for the next three days, but early on 18th June I flushed it from beside the observatory; it flew to land on a patch of bare earth about 30 yards away, calling 'styip . . . styip'. We saw it several times that day and on the 19th and 20th, by which time it had been on the island for eleven days and had been watched by many people. It appeared to be feeding on seed heads.

FIELD AND LABORATORY DESCRIPTIONS

In the field, the Cretzschmar's Bunting was rather like an Ortolan, but slightly smaller and more dumpy. Its habits were similar, except that it was tamer and certainly easier to catch; Meinertzhagen (1954) and Etchécopar and Hüe (1967) both referred to the tameness of this species. The most obvious differences from an Ortolan in spring plumage were the blue-grey head and breast, orange throat, more uniform brown wings and faint eye-ring. The upper-parts were generally browner, the mantle was streaked with darker brown, and the rump and upper tail-coverts were more rufous. The blue-grey breast was finely streaked with black and there was a finely streaked moustache; the lower breast and belly were rufous-orange, the flanks and under tail-coverts more buff and the tail brown with noticeable white outer feathers. The eye was dark, the bill pink and the legs flesh-pink.

The following detailed description was taken in hand:

Upper-parts: forehead, crown and nape blue-grey sparsely marked with fine black mesial streaks; mantle, back, rump and upper tail-coverts brown with long dark brown mesial streaks (greyish wash on mantle, paler and more rufous on rump and upper tail-coverts); ear-coverts greyer than crown; above eye orange-buff; thin orbital ring light buff, not very noticeable. *Under-parts:* lores, chin and throat orange with thin moustache of fine blue and black streaks; upper breast blue-grey sparsely marked with fine black streaks; rest of under-parts rufous-orange, deepest in colour on lower breast and marked with some brown shaft-streaks on under tail-coverts and finer streaks on flanks; axillaries and under wing-coverts dirty-white flecked with grey. *Tail:* rectrices mainly dark brown; central pair paler and pointed; outer-most pair with central half of outer web and most of distal half of inner web white, and tip of outer web pale brown; penultimate pair with large white patch on distal end of inner web. *Wings:* flight-feathers mainly dark brown;

primaries paler than secondaries with slight buff fringes to outer and inner webs; secondaries with wider buff fringes on outer webs; tertials with wide buff fringes on distal half of outer webs and pale buff fringes on inner webs; greater coverts brown thinly fringed and tipped buff; median coverts dark brown with broader whitish-buff tips; lesser coverts brown with greyish tips; bastard-wing brown. *Soft parts:* bill similar to Ortolan's, but smaller, more pointed and pinkish-brown with culmen brownish-horn; iris brown; legs and feet flesh-pink. *Measurements:* wing (flattened) 81.5 mm, wing (straightened) 83, tail 64, bill (from skull) 12.5, bill (from feathers) 10, bill depth 6, tarsus 18, hind claw 5.5; weight (at 19.15 G.M.T.) 23.0 grams. *Wing formula:* 1st, minute and hidden, 9.5 mm shorter than primary coverts; 2nd and 3rd longest, 4th −1 mm, 5th −5, 6th −10.5, 7th −14, 8th −16.5, 9th −18.5, 10th −21; 3rd to 5th emarginated on outer webs (less so on 5th); longest tertial 10.5 mm shorter than longest primary; distance from tip of wing to tip of (square-ended) tail 38 mm.

WEATHER AND ASSOCIATED MIGRANTS

The wind was south-west with clear skies on 9th June, but changed to east, force 2–3, with overcast by the following morning; then the wind decreased and the skies cleared during the day, and the Cretzschmar's Bunting was first observed that evening. A Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* also arrived on the 9th and a Rustic Bunting *E. rustica* and seven Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* were new on the 11th.

Although the Cretzschmar's Bunting did not coincide with a large fall of Continental migrants, it did form part of an unusually strong and varied influx of southern and south-eastern vagrants in the Northern Isles throughout May and June. At Fair Isle these included unprecedented numbers of Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina* (maximum of eight on 27th May), two Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans*, the first Scottish record of a Sardinian Warbler *S. melanocephala* (*Brit. Birds*, 60: 483–485), and a Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*.

ESCAPED CAGE-BIRD OR NOT?

Investigations were carried out by M. D. England, on behalf of the Rarities Committee, into the possibility that the Cretzschmar's Bunting might have been an escaped cage-bird. These enquiries revealed that a few of this species are imported into Britain. The occurrences of Red-headed Buntings *E. bruniceps* and other escapes at Fair Isle and elsewhere invalidate the argument that cage-birds are most likely to be seen near urban areas and not on islands (see *Brit. Birds*, 61: 41–43). In view of my previous experience with escaped cage-birds, however, I examined the Cretzschmar's Bunting carefully in the hand for evidence of captivity and I had no hesitation in regarding it as a wild vagrant. The escaped Red-headed Buntings, Black-headed Bunting *E. melanocephala*, rosefinch *Carpodacus sp.* and Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* on Fair Isle have all had broken remiges and rectrices, soiled feathers on the side of the neck, bruised bills and unhealthy-looking feet, or at least some of these symptoms, which must indicate a period of captivity. None of the feathers of the Cretzschmar's Bunting was broken although the plumage was old and worn, the primaries showed a natural sun-bleached pattern where they overlapped at the tips, and the sides of the neck, the bill and the feet were clean and not soiled.

NOTES ON IDENTIFICATION

Cretzschmar's Bunting is rather similar to an Ortolan and, especially in autumn, extra-limital vagrants are likely to be identified only in the hand or when carefully examined in the field. The sole description readily available to British ornithologists is that in Peterson *et al.* (1954) and I have been unable to find any published details of

measurements and wing formula up to the standard of those for other species in Witherby *et al.* (1938–41). I am therefore very grateful to I. H. J. Lyster for lending me three specimens of Cretzschmar's Bunting from the Royal Scottish Museum (adult male and female from Smyrna and immature male from Skynos) and to Mrs George Waterston for searching the library of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club for references. (Adult male and immature Ortolans are in the skin collection on Fair Isle and we have details of eight ringed on the island; I also know that species well on spring and autumn migration.)

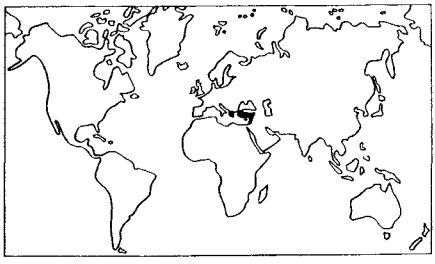
After examining this material, I noted several characters which appear to be of value in the identification of a vagrant Cretzschmar's Bunting. The adult male and female are rather similar and should present no difficulty in the hand or if seen well in the field, but the immature in summer or autumn is difficult to separate from an Ortolan in similar plumage. Even so, the whole plumage of the immature I examined was more buffish-chestnut than an Ortolan, which has a decidedly olive cast to the mantle and head, contrasting whitish tips to the greater and median coverts and an obvious yellow eye-ring; the chin and throat of this Cretzschmar's Bunting was orange-buff and striated, whereas the Ortolan has a yellow chin. The colour of the axillaries and under wing-coverts also appears to be a useful distinguishing feature at all ages: in the Fair Isle Cretzschmar's Bunting and the three skins these areas were dirty white, with traces of chestnut in the adult male, whereas the axillaries and under wing-coverts of the Ortolan are pale yellow. This was also noted by Svensson (1964).

Turning to structure, the data in table 1 seem to show that Cretzschmar's Bunting is the smaller of the two species, that its longest tertial is nearer in length to its longest primary and that its wing to tail measurement is greater. The last two differences were noted in a very small series of specimens, but, if correct, would be useful in the identification of immatures in the hand. The differences in wing length and wing to tail indicate that Cretzschmar's Bunting is relatively shorter-winged and more dumpy, and this was noticed in the field on Fair Isle before the bird was caught. The wing formulae of the two species are rather similar, although Cretzschmar's Bunting appears to show less emargination on the 5th primary and relatively longer 6th to 10th primaries. The combined wing formulae of the four Cretzschmar's Buntings which I examined (Fair Isle and three specimens) were: 1st minute and hidden, 8–10 mm shorter than primary coverts; 2nd and 3rd equal and longest (with 4th also equal in one case), 4th up to 1 mm shorter, 5th 3–5 shorter, 6th 9–10.5 shorter, 7th 13–14.5 shorter, 8th 16–16.5 shorter, 9th 18.5–20 shorter, 10th 20.5–23 shorter.

Table 1. Measurements (in millimetres) of Cretzschmar's Bunting Emberiza caesia *and Ortolan Bunting* E. hortulana

The 'Tertial to primary' shows the amount by which the longest tertial was shorter than the longest primary, while the 'Wing to tail' is the distance between the tip of the folded wing and the tip of the tail

	Cretzschmar's	Ortolan
Wing length (live)	81.5	81.5–88.5 (eight, average 84.5)
Wing length (skins)	79, 81, 84 (three)	86.5, 88 (two)
Bill from skull	12.5 (four)	13–14 (ten)
Tail length	62–65 (four)	62–70 (ten)
Tertial to primary	9–10.5 (four)	14, 19 (two)
Wing to tail	37–39 (four)	31, 32 (two)



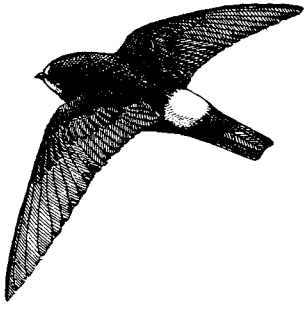
A second Cretzschmar's Bunting occurred, also on Fair Isle, 12 years after the first: on 9th and 10th June 1979 (Brit. Birds *74: 532–533*).

Roy Dennis's complete analysis remains the standard reference for distinguishing between Cretzschmar's and Ortolan Buntings.

JUNE 1967

Little Swift on Cape Clear Island

J. T. R. Sharrock



NA

On the evening of 12th June 1967, on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, I was sitting on top of a steep ridge overlooking Cummer, a narrow col situated between the north and south harbours. The soft evening light was directly behind me and it was perfectly calm. I was casually watching five or six Swallows *Hirundo rustica*, a House Martin *Delichon urbica* and five Swifts *Apus apus* which were hawking for insects through the col, when I spotted a swift with a gleaming white throat, contrasting with black under-parts. This bird passed several times about ten feet above and 30 yards away from me. Other features distinguishing it from the Swifts were its shorter wings and less deliberate, more 'fluttery' wing-beats. The bird then flew lower, passing 30 feet below me and 60 yards away, and I saw that it had a very marked, square, white rump and that its upper-parts were a glossier black than those of the Swifts. I watched it for about five minutes as it hawked back-and-forth, sometimes below me and sometimes above me, but it apparently departed (along with the Swifts) while I was busy writing field-notes, for only the hirundines were present when I tried to relocate it.

DESCRIPTION

The following details are derived from my field-notes and sketches. *Upper-parts:*

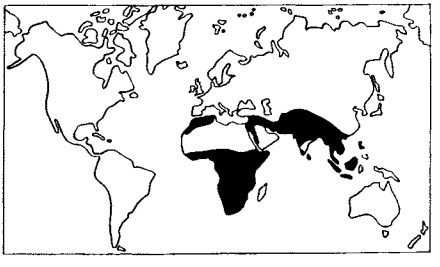
Originally published in *British Birds* 61: 160–162. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

forehead appearing paler than rest of head, probably greyish-white; rump white, a large, square, gleaming patch like that of House Martin; rest of upper-parts less sooty, glossier and blacker than those of Swift. *Under-parts:* chin and throat white, a clear-cut gleaming patch larger than in Swift (the pale chins of the Swifts were not showing up in the same light conditions); rest of under-parts blackish, except for paler under-wing. *Shape:* wings less pointed and shorter than those of Swift; tail square-ended and held more splayed. *Size:* smaller than Swift (difficult to determine with the birds flying at different heights and ranges, but particular attention was paid to this point). *Behaviour:* did not associate particularly with the Swifts and came lower, sweeping over the ground at about 20 feet; wing-beats less deliberate than those of Swift and more fluttery.

IDENTIFICATION

The bird was clearly no swift on the British and Irish list and I suspected that it was *Apus affinis*. But the only reference to that species (under the now obsolete name of 'White-rumped Swift'), which was available at the observatory, was in the *Field Guide* (1964 edition), where there was the bald statement, 'Smaller than common Swift, which it resembles except for almost square tail and *white rump*'. Since there was no reference to the very conspicuous white throat patch and I knew that there were various other white-rumped swifts to be taken into account, I immediately sent my notes to Major R. F. Ruttledge so that comparison with the literature could be made. In the event, however, certain identification as a Little Swift (this name superceding 'White-rumped Swift' for *A. affinis*) came through discussion with I. J. Ferguson-Lees when I returned to England a fortnight later. The field-characters of this and similar species have since been described in detail by Ferguson-Lees (1967).

My field-notes and sketches have been examined by M. P. L. Fogden, Dr C. H. Fry and D. I. M. Wallace (all of whom are familiar with this and other white-rumped species of swift), in addition to I. J. Ferguson-Lees, Major R. F. Ruttledge and the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union. All are agreed that the Cape Clear Island bird was *A. affinis*. The three species of swifts with white rumps most likely to occur in Britain and Ireland are the Little Swift, the White-rumped Swift *A. caffer* and the Horus Swift *A. horus*. The latter two are both larger than *affinis* and both have very deeply forked tails (often appearing pointed in flight), whereas *affinis* has a short square-ended tail. The broad white rump patch is also diagnostic of *affinis*. All these differences have been dealt with in more detail by Ferguson-Lees (1967) and by Fry and Elgood (1968).



On 6th November 1973, an exhausted Little Swift was found on a school playing-field at Llanrwst, Gwynedd, was roosted overnight and then released the next day. This was the

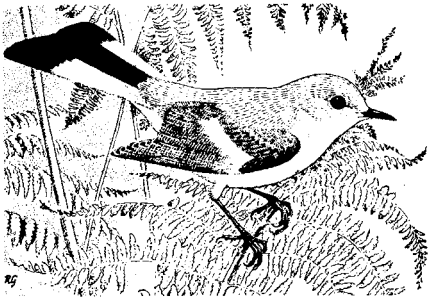
only other Little Swift recorded in Britain and Ireland, until two appeared in May–June 1981, in Cornwall and Dyfed.

There are three other white-rumped Apus *swifts: Fork-tailed Swift* A. pacificus, *White-rumped Swift* A. caffer, *and Horus Swift* A. horus. *Little Swift is the only one with a square, not deeply forked tail; it is also the smallest, has blunt wings and a 'wrapped around' white rump-patch.*

OCTOBER 1967

American Redstart in Cornwall

E. M. P. Allsopp, K. Allsopp and K. L. Fox



During the afternoon of 21st October 1967 K.A. obtained a few brief glimpses of a totally unfamiliar warbler-like bird flitting beneath the close canopy of a distant clump of willow bushes in boggy moorland above Porthgwarra, Cornwall. He immediately informed B. Pattenden, N. J. Phillips and E.M.P.A. who were close by. They were shortly joined by Bernard King and K.L.F. Initial observations at long range afforded only a few brief views, so K.A. and K.L.F. approached closer. They found that by standing quietly inside the bushes they could watch the bird adequately, apparently without disturbance, even when it was perched a few feet away. A complete field description was taken and then the other observers (by now including R. M. Curber) obtained excellent views by the same technique; the observations were made in good light for about three hours up to sunset. The bird was not present on the following day. Later examination of Peterson (1947) and Robbins *et al.* (1966) proved it to be an immature or female American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* (*Brit. Birds*, 61: 356), the first record for Britain and Ireland and the second for Europe, the first having been on the Ile d'Ouessant (Ushant), France, on 10th October 1961. The following is a condensation of the field notes that were taken:

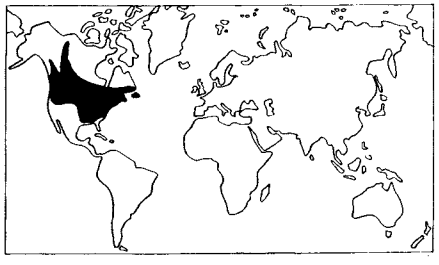
General appearance: Distant flight views showed a warbler/flycatcher with dark upper-parts and wings contrasting with bright yellow wing-bars and tail patches, these being larger and more noticeable than those of the Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* and accentuated by the habitually fanned tail. Perched at close range, its blue-grey head, white orbital ring and orange-yellow breast-patches were prominent features. The clean neat appearance of the plumage with its colour variations made the bird strikingly beautiful. *Behaviour:* When feeding, almost exclusively underneath the canopy, it fluttered adroitly catching insects on the wing, perching for only a few seconds and never appearing to hover. When perched, its carriage was horizontal with tail raised and spread and wings slightly drooped. It occasionally called in flight, a fairly loud high-pitched 'sweet' or 'sweet-sweet', or a thin soft 'tchwik' sometimes repeated

Originally published in *British Birds* 63: 151–153. Heading drawing by Robert Gillmor

several times. *Structure:* The head and body were similar to a Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* in shape but larger, and the bill was longer and thicker at the base. The tail was broad and long in proportion to the body. The wings were short and, when closed, the tips projected just beyond the base of the tail. *Plumage:* Forehead, crown, nape and hind neck uniform blue-grey; mantle, back, rump, upper tail-coverts and scapulars greyish-brown, tinged green. Blue-grey cap extended to eye-level then gradually shaded into the under-parts. Chin, throat, centre of upper breast, lower breast, belly and under tail-coverts white, tinged grey; at sides of upper breast a nearly circular orange-yellow patch, shading through yellow to white around the edge. Tail as back, but with broad daffodil-yellow patches on the outer retrices extending well down from the base. Primaries, secondaries and coverts as back except for slightly darker shading on primaries and a daffodil-yellow patch forming an uneven wing-bar at the bases of the inner primaries and secondaries. *Soft parts:* Eye black with clear white orbital ring; legs and bill black.

The yellow patches on the tail and wings distinguish this species from all other American wood warblers. Ageing and sexing of individuals other than fully adult males depend upon the intensity and extent of the colour markings; in general, the breast-patches of immature and adult females are pale yellow and less extensive than the deep chrome-yellow patches of first-winter males, but some females are said to resemble closely immature males. This indicates that the Cornish bird was probably a first-winter male. Incidentally, the male's first-summer plumage is like the first-winter except for a few black feathers on the head; the full adult male plumage (black, with orange patches and white underside) is not acquired until the second autumn, after the July moult.

There are two subspecies, but the only field-character for separating them is that the mantle of the immatures and females of the northern race *S. r. ruticilla* is somewhat darker and washed with duller green than that of the southern *S. r. tricolor*, which is described as olive-green in the first-winter male and browner in the female. Determination of the race of any individual of this species in Europe would help to assess the origin and causes of transatlantic vagrancy.



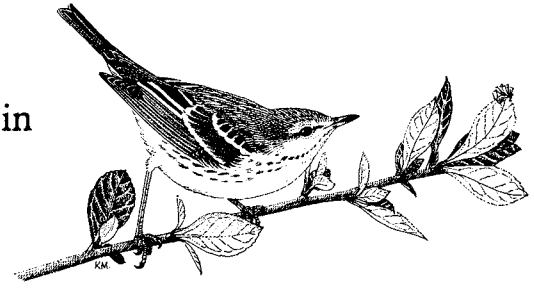
The second came a year later, to Cape Clear Island in Co. Cork on 13th and 14th October 1968. This most elegant and charming of American wood-warblers has not, however, occurred since.

The jizz and general proportions of American Redstart may recall those of an elongated and graceful Red-breasted Flycatcher, but the yellow (on immatures and females) or orange (on second-winter or older males) tail-patches, breast-sides and wing-bars are unmistakable.

OCTOBER 1968

Blackpoll Warbler in Scilly

P. J. Grant



At about 12.30 B.S.T. on 12th October 1968 P. W. Burness, R. J. Burness, R. J. Buxton, P. A. Dukes and I were walking near the Post Office on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, when R. J. Buxton drew our attention to a small bird feeding in the top of a hedge about 25 yards away. Suspecting that it might be an American warbler, and aware of the difficulties in separating some members of this group in the field, we undertook a critical examination of the bird, checking its field-characters amongst ourselves. It proved fairly easy to watch, giving us some good views in bright sunshine, and after some five minutes we had noted what we thought were its main field-characters. I returned to my cottage and produced a sketch and notes which I then compared with descriptions in Peterson (1947) and Robbins *et al.* (1966), concluding that the bird was almost certainly a Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata*. Both books, however, point to the similarities between autumn Blackpoll and Bay-breasted Warblers *D. castanea*, stressing that particular caution is necessary with some individuals. Although this first set of notes appeared to eliminate Bay-breasted (and also the rather similar Pine Warbler *D. pinus*), the points of separation clearly had to be double-checked. I returned to the others, and we continued to watch the bird for about two hours. Excellent views were obtained, often at very close range, and we were able to note additional details which put its identification as a Blackpoll Warbler beyond doubt. It remained on the island at least until 25th October and was seen by many other observers including J. R. H. Clements, R. E. Emmett, Miss J. M. Glibbery, F. H. D. Hicks, D. J. Holman, R. J. Johns, Miss J. H. Parker, B. Pickess, Miss H. M. Quick, Miss C. M. Thomas and N. J. Westwood. A summary of the descriptions taken follows:

Behaviour: Moderately easy to observe, usually feeding very actively and quite openly in the hedgerows of tamarisk, *Pittosporum* and *Escalonia*. Actions sometimes reminiscent of *Hippolais* warblers when 'thrashing' through foliage, but also very agile on the wing, with frequent fly-catching sallies and prolonged hovering to pick insects off foliage like a *Phylloscopus* warbler. Call, uttered infrequently and usually in flight, a thin 'ssts', very reminiscent of the equivalent flight call of the Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*. *Size and plumage:* Slightly larger and more heavily built than the largest Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Crown olive-green streaked dark; suggestion of paler supercilium above thin dark eye-stripe and lores; ear-coverts lemon-yellow with dusky clouding; mantle olive-green, similar to that of a Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* in fresh plumage, with soft dark streaking obvious even at quite long range; rump clearer olive-green, very finely streaked down centre of each feather; last line of upper tail-coverts blue-grey, with very fine dark streaks mesially. Throat, upper breast and flanks lemon-yellow, with obvious fine dark streaking along flanks forming two lines which continued up sides of breast to join dark moustachial streaks; lower breast, belly and under tail-coverts virtually pure white. Wing-feathers all dark, but median and greater coverts with white tips forming two wing-bars; inner three secondaries broadly edged white; most of remaining secondaries finely edged white; primaries finely edged brighter. From above, all tail-feathers finely edged white,

Originally published in *British Birds* 63: 153–157. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

but outermost more broadly with white tips forming white corners to tail; from below, a broad white patch on the inner web of each outermost tail-feather formed white panels at the sides of the tail. *Soft parts:* Bill dark with yellow base to lower mandible; eye dark; legs orange-flesh, brighter than those of most Willow Warblers.

Although this is the first accepted record of this species in Europe, Durand (1963) mentioned a Blackpoll Warbler which stayed aboard R.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* in the Ocean Terminal, Southampton, after a transatlantic crossing in autumn 1961. It finally died half way across the Atlantic on the return journey.

Blackpoll Warblers are among the most abundant of the large New World family of wood warblers. They are common summer visitors to the vast coniferous forests extending from southern New York State northwards and westwards across virtually the whole of Canada and Alaska, in places to within the Arctic Circle. In autumn they migrate south-eastwards through the eastern United States, where they are among the commonest migrant warblers, on an ever-narrowing path to the Florida peninsula. The vast majority then take the direct route across the Caribbean via Cuba to winter in northern South America as far south as Brazil; some must therefore travel more than 5,000 miles to reach their winter quarters. They are comparatively late migrants, stragglers remaining in Florida well into November.

It is, of course, impossible to say whether individual birds have arrived in Europe with or without the assistance of ships crossing the Atlantic. In the present case, however, there is some evidence for a ship-assisted crossing. The meteorological maps for the period do not show any weather systems suitable for a small passerine to make an unaided crossing. Moreover, Blackpolls have been recorded on transatlantic liners at exactly the same time of year as the St Agnes occurrence. For example, at least ten were present at the start of R.M.S. *Mauretania's* remarkable voyage in the second week of October 1962, though none survived (Durand 1963).

The New World warblers present at first sight a seemingly impossible series of identification problems. In fact, most species have strikingly diagnostic plumage features and identification appears to be purely an exciting exercise in detailed observation. A few cases, however, are more difficult, and among these is the separation of Blackpoll, Bay-breasted and Pine Warblers in autumn plumage when adults of both sexes and immatures appear similar. Now that the Blackpoll has occurred in Europe this problem should be considered in some detail, especially as the other two species could also occur here, though the Bay-breasted is less abundant than the Blackpoll in North America and the migration routes of the Pine (inland rather than coastal) make it less likely to drift out over the Atlantic. With the help of comments by Dr Kenneth C. Parkes, of the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, I have compiled a list of the reliable differences between these species in the autumn from the literature and from skins at the British Museum (Natural History):

Leg colour: The pale orange-flesh of Blackpoll, as against black in both Bay-breasted and Pine, is diagnostic. *Streaking on upper-parts:* Present and usually obvious to a variable degree in both Blackpoll and Bay-breasted; back colour uniform in Pine, although a very few specimens show hair-line streaks which would not be visible in the field. *Colour of breast and flanks:* Clean lemon-yellow in Blackpoll and buffish or buffish-yellow in Bay-breasted; Pine varies from uniform buff in immature females to bright yellow in many adult males. *Streaking on flanks and sides of breast:* Clear-cut streaking present to a variable extent in both Blackpoll and Bay-breasted, although some Bay-breasted lack this marking entirely; among autumn Pine Warblers only adult males have this marking, diffused rather than clear-cut, but still obvious in the field. *Under tail-coverts:* Silky-white in Blackpoll and buffish in Bay-breasted. *Throat colour:* The Bay-breasted has a whitish throat usually contrasting somewhat with a buffish band across the

breast; the throat of the Blackpoll does not contrast with the breast, but is of the same basically yellowish colour.

Details of the second, which came only ten days after the first, are also included here:

Blackpoll Warbler on Bardsey

At midday on 22nd October 1968, on Bardsey, Caernarvonshire, after an exceptionally busy morning during which nearly 500 birds had been ringed, Keith Redshaw and Hugh Miles trapped a small warbler-like bird in a mist-net in Nant withy-bed. It was clearly a rarity, K.R. being convinced that it was American, but as neither could put a name to it they immediately brought it back to me. On taking the bird from the bag, I noticed that structurally it was closely akin to the Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia* trapped on Bardsey during autumn 1964 (see pages 126–128), but apparently somewhat larger; its wing-formula, too, was very similar, featuring a minute first primary (difficult to locate), while the tips of the second, third and fourth primaries were of nearly uniform length. Its general coloration was a combination of grey-green and yellowish-white, and a general resemblance to some exotic pipit *Anthus sp* was most marked. As we hurried to the observatory we had already provisionally ascribed it to the genus *Dendroica*. On consulting Peterson (1974) we soon found that our bird resembled the illustrations on plate 51 more closely than any other; it was either a Bay-breasted *D. castanea*, Pine *D. pinus* or Blackpoll Warbler *D. striata* and, as it had pale legs, white under tail-coverts and streaked upper-parts (excepting the rump and upper tail-coverts), it was evidently a Blackpoll. Its plumage was in mint condition and the under-parts were extensively suffused with yellowish, suggesting an immature, but its sex could not be determined. After these preliminaries the following detailed description was taken down by K.R. while I examined the bird thoroughly:

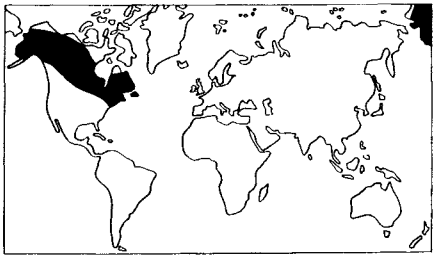
Plumage: Forehead, crown and ear-coverts yellowish-green; lores an admixture of yellowish and blackish; faint pale yellow supercilium; nape bright grey-green; numerous rictal bristles, blackish, short and rather weak. Mantle, scapulars and back bright grey-green, most feathers with thin blackish centres producing a markedly streaked effect; rump uniform bright grey-green; upper tail-coverts very greyish, tipped greenish. Chin and throat yellowish; breast brighter yellow, with faint dark striations; flanks off-white, with very pale yellow tips; belly whitish; under tail-coverts white; under wing-coverts and axillaries greyish. Central pair of tail-feathers blackish-brown, inner webs fringed white; outermost pair paler, distal third of inner web whitish; penultimate pair as outermost, but whitish area reduced; pre-penultimate pair as outermost, but with small whitish fleck on each inner web just short of tip; all rectrices slightly worn and bleached at tips. Primaries blackish, 5th to 10th with broad white tips to outer webs; secondaries blackish, all with broad white tips to outer webs; tertials blackish-brown, 7th and 8th with broad off-white fringes to outer webs; primary coverts blackish-brown; greater coverts blackish, with broad whitish tips to outer webs; median coverts blackish, outer and inner webs with much whitish; lesser coverts blackish, with pale green fringes; bastard-wing blackish-brown; bastard wing-covert blackish-brown, with pale yellow fringe; primaries, secondaries (square-tipped) and tertials very slightly worn at tips. *Soft parts:* Upper mandible medium olive, lower mandible yellowish, darker at tip; iris blackish; orbital ring yellowish-white, notably below eye; tarsus pale yellowish-brown (straw); toes pale orange-yellow, brighter than tarsus; gape pale flesh. *Wing-formula:* 3rd primary longest, 2nd −0.5 mm, 4th −2.5 mm, 5th −6.5 mm, 6th −11.0 mm, 7th −14.0 mm, 8th −16.0 mm, 9th −18.5 mm, 10th −23.5 mm; 1st minute, 9.0 mm shorter than primary coverts; 3rd and 4th clearly emarginated, outer web of 2nd also much reduced (graduated) towards tip. *Measurements:* Wing (maximum) 77.0 mm (both measured); tail 52.0 mm, distance between longest and shortest feathers 4.0 mm; bill (from skull) 14.5 mm, width (at nostrils) 5.0 mm; tarsus 21.0 mm; weight (at 14.05 G.M.T.) 11.4 gm.

It was ringed as a first-year Blackpoll Warbler, photographed by Hugh Miles (Photos 32 and 33) and others, and viewed by a number of enthusiasts, before being released. It flew away quite strongly and rested for a few moments on the sheer face of

a wall some 15 feet above the ground; as it did so it called several times, a quite loud 'chik', reminding us of the well-known anxiety note of breeding Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*. By the following day, it had returned to within a few yards of where it was caught.

Its time of arrival is in some doubt; K.R. is of the opinion that a bird he saw very briefly a few days previously may just possibly have been this one. His impression was of a large Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, but further detail is entirely lacking. With so many migrants on the move, it can never be known precisely when landfall was made. The weather was settled, if rather cloudy; winds were light and variable, visibility mainly poor, and the barometer rising very slowly. The picture in the North Atlantic, however, was utterly different, and had been so for some time. The coincidence with the St Agnes bird (found only ten days previously) is remarkable.

GEORGE H. EVANS



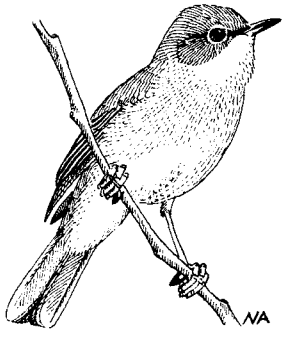
Although it was the eighth species of American wood-warbler to be discovered in Britain and Ireland, the Blackpoll Warbler has quickly become the commonest, with 15 records up to 1980, more than twice as many as any other species, constituting 36 per cent of the total. Ten of these 15 came in the space of only 33 days, between 18th September and 20th October 1976.

Bay-breasted and Pine Warblers (the immatures and females of which resemble Blackpoll Warbler) have not yet been recorded in Britain and Ireland, but the arrival of both is possible in the future. So a check of leg colour is the essential starting point if a Blackpoll-type warbler is encountered.

OCTOBER 1968

Spectacled Warbler at Spurn

John Cudworth and
B. R. Spence



On 19th October 1968, there was a fairly large arrival of passerines at Spurn Head, East Yorkshire (now Humberside), associated with south-easterly winds. The main species involved were thrushes *Turdus*, Robins *Erithacus rubecula* and Goldcrests *Regulus regulus*, with a scattering of various warblers, including a Greenish *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and a Pallas's *P. proregulus*. On the next day, with fresh southerly winds veering to the southwest, there was a general decrease, and by 21st, with fog and very light variable winds, most of the grounded migrants had moved on. By late morning, the mist-nets at the point were catching no birds, so B.R.S. and F. C. Gribble began furling them. All except the last were empty; that one, set on the east side of the peninsula, held a small *Sylvia* warbler which neither B.R.S. nor F.C.G. was able to identify immediately. It was taken back to the bird observatory, where a full description, measurements and photographs (Photos 34 & 35) were taken.

Plumage: Forehead, crown, nape, mantle, rump and uppertail-coverts grey, washed brown; lores grey, with slight orange-brown mark between lores and crown; cheeks grey, faintly washed brown; fairly broad white moustachial stripe; orbital ring off-white. Lesser coverts grey, tipped very pale brown; median and greater coverts faded brown, broadly edged rufous on outer webs; bastard wing brown, with outer web broadly fringed pale buff; primaries and secondaries faded brown, broadly edged rufous, with tips of inner primaries pale fawn; tertials faded brown, with paler brown fringes. Chin off-white; throat and upper breast white, tinged grey-buff, with richer buff at sides of breast; lower breast, belly and undertail-coverts off-white; flanks warm buff; under-wing-coverts white, washed buff. Tail feathers (left half) all old, outermost dirty-white, with proximal two-thirds of inner web pale grey-brown and the rest faded grey-brown, with paler tips to penultimate and next innermost; (right half) penultimate and next innermost new, being dark grey-brown, with narrow white fringes to outer webs and broad white tips; rest of feathers old and same as equivalent ones on left.
Bare parts: Eye pale brown. Bill: upper mandible dark horn, with cutting edge pale horn; lower mandible greyish-horn, with darker tip. Tarsus dark flesh; soles of feet dull ochre, tinged green.
Measurements: Wing 60 mm, tail 54 mm, tarsus 18 mm, bill 11.5 mm and weight 8.5 g at 12.00 G.M.T. Wing-formula: 1st 2.5 mm longer than primary coverts, 3rd and 4th longest, 2nd −2.5 mm, 5th −0.5 mm, 6th −2.0 mm, 7th −4.0 mm, 8th −6.0 mm; 3rd, 4th and 5th emarginated and 6th indistinctly; notch on inner web of 2nd primary 14 mm from tip.

By reference to Williamson (1964), the bird was identified as either a Subalpine *S. cantillans* or a Spectacled Warbler *S. conspicillata*; the broad rufous edges to its flight feathers showed that it was the latter, a species new to Britain and Ireland.

When released in a sallow *Salix* near the observatory, the warbler moved quickly through and flew to some teaplant *Lycium* growing on a bank, where it perched in the open, facing away, but looking over its shoulder. It was watched by B.R.S., F.C.G., J. R. Collman, M. Densley, G. Hainsworth, R. D. Hind, C. W. Holt, R. Kaye, J. S. Kenyon, C. E. Lynch, R. J. Rhodes, T. Stevenson and Mr and Mrs K. Wilson. It

Originally published in *British Birds* 71: 53–58. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

resembled a small Whitethroat *S. communis*, with greyish head, white throat and rufous patch on the wing. After a while, it turned round, cocked its tail briefly, and dropped out of sight. On the following day, it was seen 2 km south of the observatory and, on 23rd, at Chalk Bank, about 1 km farther south. On 26th, it was found again, in a tangle of scrub sea-buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* still farther south, where it remained until last seen on 31st.

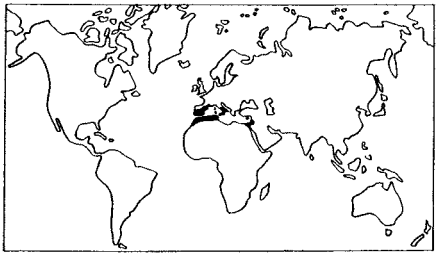
On 26th, J.C. gained the impression of a dingy Whitethroat: the upper-parts were fairly dark grey-brown, greyer on the head; the underparts were greyish-white, washed brownish on the lower breast and flanks; and the outer tail-feathers were conspicuously white in flight. The bird's small size was shown by the fact that, when first seen from the front, it was thought to be a *Phylloscopus*: this resemblance was remarked on by Sharrock (1962). On 30th, B.R.S. had good views again: at first sight, it looked very much like a Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca*, with grey head (but not darker cheeks), grey-brown back with a rufous patch in the wings, and dark tail with prominent white outer feathers. The bird's habits, however, were more like those of a Subalpine Warbler: it often kept its tail cocked. On 27th, C. Massingham had also likened the bird to a Lesser Whitethroat and noted its habit of raising and cocking its tail.

DISCUSSION

Considering its restricted and local range well to the south of Britain and its normally short-distance movements, the species seems an unlikely one to occur in Britain. But are its movements longer than suspected? Species with wider distributions often have leap-frog migrations, the populations breeding farthest north tending to winter farthest south. If Spectacled Warblers behave in a similar way, the birds breeding in, for example, southern France will be the ones frequenting the Saharan oases in winter, thus undertaking journeys of up to 2,000 km. Movement by the western Mediterranean populations appears to be north to south. So, accepting the hypothesis of reversed migration as put forward to explain the vagrancy of various eastern species in northwest Europe (Rabøl 1969), the occasional Spectacled Warbler is to be expected in northwest Europe in autumn.

The wing-length of the Spurn bird (60 mm) was just outside the theoretical range (49–59 mm) given by Williamson (1964), but within that (53–62 mm) for those in the Camargue (Swift 1959). In addition, the tail:wing ratio of the Spurn bird (90 per cent) is more likely to refer to one from the north of the species' range than from the south (mostly 98 per cent or over in North Africa) (Williamson 1964).

There had been high pressure over France and the western Mediterranean since 17th October and, by midday on 19th, this had moved northeast to Germany and combined with a high over southern Scandinavia. From early on 20th, it formed a large area of high pressure over central Europe and, by late on 20th, was giving



southerly winds along its western edge, over France and extending into the southern North Sea. The low weight of the Spurn individual (8.5 g), compared with those breeding in Cyprus (9.0–10.0 g, for birds with wing-lengths of 52–55 mm: Jeal 1970), suggested that it was a new arrival.

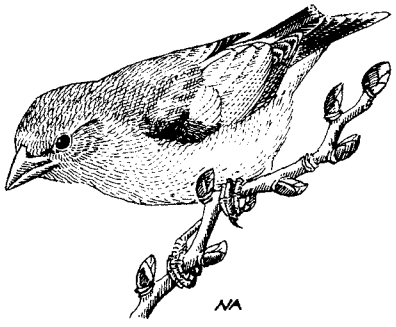
A second was identified one year later, at Porthgwarra, Cornwall, on 17th October 1969 (Brit. Birds *71: 84–85*), *but it was another ten years before the third: a male on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 4th and 5th June 1979.*

Recent occurrences of first-winter female Subalpine Warblers have drawn attention to their potential confusion with Spectacled Warbler, and all records of Spectacled Warbler are currently being reviewed by the Rarities Committee. The main distinction between the two is Spectacled's bright rufous, Whitethroat-like wing-panel (formed by broad, clear-cut, rufous fringes to the secondaries, inner wing-coverts and blackish-centred tertials). Subalpine Warbler has ill-defined rufous-buff fringes which can produce a misleading, bright wing-panel at times.

MARCH 1969

Evening Grosbeak on St Kilda

N. Picozzi



At 10.00 hours on 26th March 1969, in the old village on Hirta, St Kilda, I heard an unfamiliar call, which I noted as a metallic 'jink'. It came from a small bird perched on a dry-stone dyke and even at a range of 200 metres, using 8× binoculars in excellent light, I was impressed by its dumpy appearance and conspicuous white wing-patch. It soon set off strongly with an undulating flight towards the army encampment, where it perched on an overhead cable; from a range of twelve metres I saw that it had a very heavy, pale lime-green beak and a predominantly dull yellow body. It dropped down to the ground, then fluttered against a Nissen hut window while attempting to perch on the narrow ledge; shortly afterwards it landed on the bucket of a diesel truck, although the engine was running noisily and the bucket vibrating. Next it flew a short distance to a wooden landing platform, where I was able to approach within five metres and take a colour photograph; I noticed that some feathers on its crown were missing and that its body feathering was very 'loose', giving the impression that it was in poor condition. It landed on the grass, but did not feed, and then flew off through the encampment; it was not seen or heard again.

Originally published in *British Birds* 64: 189–194. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

In size and shape, the bird closely resembled a Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. The head, nape and breast were rusty brown apart from a broad, yellow superciliary stripe (which extended around the forehead immediately above the base of the upper mandible) and a black crown (some of the feathers of which, as already noted, were missing). The back was mottled rusty brown and grey, and the belly and flanks were dull yellow. The primaries were black and the secondaries and tertials white, these forming a conspicuous patch; the rump was bright yellow and the tail black. The legs were red-brown and the heavy conical beak pale lime-green. From these details I identified the bird as a male Evening Grosbeak *Hesperiphona vespertina*, the first record of the species in Europe, and this was afterwards confirmed by the colour photograph.

The adult male Evening Grosbeak cannot be mistaken for any other species; the first-winter male can usually be distinguished from it by black or dark inner margins to the white tertials. (The St Kilda bird, with entirely white tertials, was therefore probably an adult.) The adult female is much duller, though still unmistakable: the upper-parts are mostly smoky grey, darkest on top of the head and palest on the rump; the back of the neck is tinged with greenish-yellow and the cheeks are grey (similar to the top of the head); the throat, belly and under tail-coverts are off-white with a dusky streak down each side of the throat; the breast and flanks are buffy grey with a tinge of yellow; the wings are mainly dull black, but the primaries (except the three outermost) are white at the base, forming a small white patch, and the tertials are grey, edged or tipped with white; the tail is black with the inner webs broadly tipped white. The juveniles resemble the female, but they are browner and their under-parts are paler and more buff with less sharply defined markings. The sexes can be distinguished even at this age: males have plain black tail-feathers, black primaries and a prominent whitish patch on the inner secondaries, while the females have a series of white spots near the tips of the rectrices, black and white primaries and no whitish area on the secondaries; also, the body colour of young males is a yellow tan and that of young females is a grey tan (Speirs 1968). The first-winter plumage follows a partial post-juvenile moult of body-feathers and wing-coverts; the juvenile flight-feathers and tail are retained, though the tertials may be shed in some cases. The first breeding plumage is assumed by abrasion, supplemented possibly by a slight spring moult about the head and neck. The adult winter plumage is produced by a complete post-nuptial moult when the bird is more than one year old (Forbush 1929, Godfrey 1966).

In winter 1968/69, immediately preceding my observation on St Kilda, a quite unprecedented movement occurred and Dr I. C. T. Nisbet stated (*in litt.* to Dr J. T. R. Sharrock) that Evening Grosbeaks were more numerous than ever before in eastern North America. Some idea of the scale of this movement may be gained from the regional reports in *Audubon Field Notes* (June 1969):

Nova Scotia	Sensational numbers
Newfoundland	Remarkable numbers
New Brunswick	Much greater numbers than usual
New England	Almost universally abundant in early winter
Quebec	Major movement
New York and Connecticut	Generally distributed October to January
New Jersey and Virginia	Unquestionably the best year yet
North Carolina—Georgia	Tremendous numbers throughout
Florida	Thousands (no previous records of the species)

The northward return continued to early May, which is unusually late (*Audubon Field Notes*, August 1969).

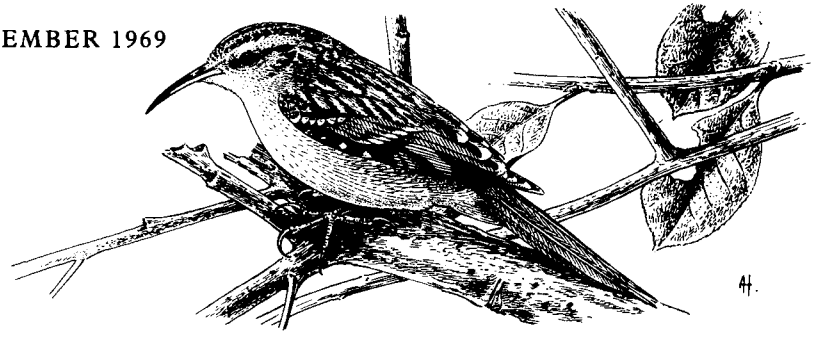
Escaped cagebird or genuine vagrant?

The tameness of the Evening Grosbeak on St Kilda and the feathers missing from its crown immediately suggested that it might have been an escape, but M. D. England and Derek Goodwin, who kindly pursued this possibility, knew of no instance of the species having been offered for sale in Europe for nearly 40 years. In irruption years Evening Grosbeaks depend to a large extent on food put out by man, very often on window-ledge feeders, and this could explain the behaviour of the one on St Kilda at the Nissen hut window. These grosbeaks are very tame and, when crowded at feeders, the males in particular become aggressive and their fights involve much pecking of head feathers. They are also susceptible to colliding with windows and 'scalping' themselves on wires (such as those put over bird-feeders to keep out Grey Squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis*). A Massachusetts ringer, Mrs Dorothy W. Briggs (*per* Dr I. C. T. Nisbet *in litt.* to Dr J. T. R. Sharrock), has seen Evening Grosbeaks lose head feathers in such ways 'many times'; also in spring she has handled individuals with all the old crown feathers moulted and the new feathers in pin, which would look bare in the field.

When all the evidence is considered, particularly the fact that no Evening Grosbeaks are offered for sale in Europe, and not forgetting the unprecedented southward and eastward movements in North America in winter 1968/69 and their unusually late return in the following spring, it seems very probable that the one on St Kilda in March 1969 was indeed a genuine transatlantic vagrant.

There has been only one subsequent record: an adult female at Nethybridge, Highland, from 10th to 25th March 1980.

Female Evening Grosbeak lacks the male's yellow supercilium and body plumage, but the yellowish, Hawfinch-like bill and large white wing-patches make it equally unmistakable.



Short-toed Treecreeper at Dungeness

R. E. Scott

The question of identification of treecreepers *Certhia* has been reviewed by C. J. Mead and D. I. M. Wallace (*Brit. Birds*, 69: 117–131; Sharrock 1980). In their introduction, they mentioned the first accepted British record of Short-toed Treecreeper *C. brachydactyla*, trapped at Dungeness, Kent, on 27th September 1969 and retrapped there on 30th September. The purpose of this note is to place the details of this occurrence on record.

Between 1952 (the year that the bird observatory began its operations there) and 1970, only four treecreepers were recorded (all of them trapped) at Dungeness. The first, on 10th October 1957, was examined in the hand by H. E. Axell, who recorded on the description card that the bird was 'Too grey for British. Possibly *C. f. familiaris* (or *macrodactyla*).' It is possible that this individual may have been *brachydactyla*. Two others, both examined by me, on 8th October 1969 and 17th October 1970, were identified as Treecreepers *C. familiaris*.

The bird subsequently identified as the first British Short-toed Treecreeper was trapped in a mist-net at dusk on 27th September 1969. After examination, it was roosted overnight and released on the morning of 28th September, weighing 7.5 g (08.00 hours). Two days later, on 30th September, it was retrapped, weighing 8.1 g (09.00 hours). The following details were recorded. Wing 59 mm, bill 17 mm, tarsus 17 mm, hindclaw 6.5 mm. Wing formula: 1st primary 9 mm longer than primary coverts, 4th and 5th primaries equal and longest, 3rd shorter by 2 mm, 2nd by 9 mm, 6th by 1.5 mm, 7th by 5 mm, 8th by 8 mm, 9th by 9.5 mm and 10th by 10.5 mm.

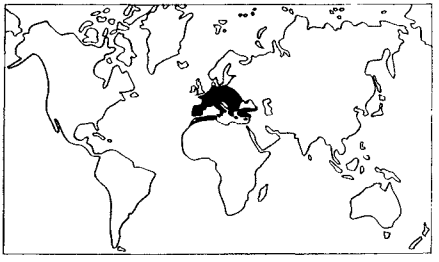
Separation of the two treecreepers in the hand is dependent upon hindclaw and bill measurements; although Dr J. M. Harrison (*Ibis*, 77: 437–438) recorded that the largest alula feather has a complete pale margin in *brachydactyla*, Mead and Wallace showed that 17 per cent of *familiaris* could be wrongly assigned on this character alone. The description card of the trapped bird does not mention this feather, but an examination of a colour transparency taken at the time shows a thin, but complete, pale margin.

L. Svensson (1965, *Identification Guide to European Passerines*) separated the two species with the formula: bill × 0.456, greater than hindclaw = *brachydactyla*, less

Originally published in *British Birds* 69: 508–509. Heading drawing by Alan Harris

than hindclaw = *familiaris*; but Mead and Wallace showed this not to be completely sound and produced an improved formula that was 95 per cent efficient: 0.14 × bill + 5.6, greater than hindclaw = *brachydactyla*, less than hindclaw = *familiaris*.

On all of these criteria, the treecreeper first trapped at Dungeness on 27th September 1969 was clearly *brachydactyla*, while the other three Dungeness examples were either *familiaris* or fell in the area of overlap between the two species, so that their identities will probably never be conclusively established.



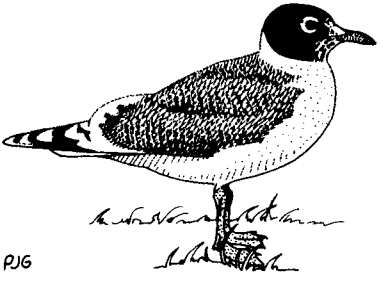
The difficulty of identifying this species—unless it is either singing or examined in the hand—has undoubtedly led to its being greatly underrecorded. Despite this, another six have been identified and accepted: four in Kent, one in Essex and one in Humberside. Potential identifiers be warned, however: of the seven to date, only one was not trapped.

The paper by Mead & Wallace (1976) referred to above remains the standard reference for distinguishing between the two species of treecreeper.

FEBRUARY 1970

Franklin's Gull in Hampshire

D. F. Billett and P. J. Grant



At 16.40 on 21st February 1970 J. T. Smith and D.F.B. were at the southern tip of Farlington Marshes, Hampshire, when a small, dark-winged gull approached low along the shore and settled immediately in front of them about 100 yards away. They were able to watch it for about ten minutes before it circled and flew off. During this time it made several short flights of a yard or two when harassed by Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* near-by. Several features suggested that it was something

Originally published in *British Birds* 64: 310–313. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

unusual. It was slightly smaller than the Black-headed Gulls and its mantle was rather dark grey. Its bill was short, stout and blackish; its dark red legs were also short and this accentuated a hunched appearance. The bird had an incomplete black hood and was presumably acquiring summer plumage. In flight its tail appeared pale grey down the centre, contrasting with a pure white rump. Most startling of all, however, was its wing pattern in flight: a rather small black tip, with a white terminal spot or spots, separated from the dark grey of the remainder by a broad white area across the primaries which joined a continuous white border along the trailing edge.

Both observers had previously seen the first-winter Laughing Gull *L. atricilla* which stayed in the Weymouth area of Dorset from 17th February to 6th October 1969 (*Brit. Birds*, 63: 279, plate 50) and at first they thought that this might be an adult or near-adult of that species. These suspicions were quickly dispelled, however, when they both remarked on the evident structural differences of the bird at Farlington. The Laughing Gull had been nearer in size to a Common Gull *L. canus*, certainly larger than a Black-headed, and because of its long legs had stood higher than either species. Its bill, too, had been noticeably long and stout. Unless there was an improbably great variation in structural features of Laughing Gulls, they were certain that this must be a different species. The conditions for observation and comparison with other gulls were ideal and the observers were confident that they would be able to make an identification from the appropriate literature. Albrektsson and Lindberg (1967) briefly described the field-characters of the adult Franklin's Gull *L. pipixcan* and this appeared to fit precisely; more detailed works of reference, particularly Dwight (1925), confirmed this identification and it was possible to determine the age as second-winter or older. This was the first record of the species in Britain and, indeed, anywhere in the Old World.

The Franklin's Gull was not located again until 1st March, but it was then seen regularly in the area of Farlington Marshes until 16th May. News of its presence soon spread and Farlington quickly became an essential destination for birdwatchers from all over Britain: during the following weeks many hundreds must have gone there, including P.J.G. who was able to make very detailed sketches and notes. The bird seemed to establish a regular pattern of movement during the daytime: with other local gulls it would visit a marsh lagoon during the early morning, then move a short distance inland to a feeding area of playing fields, rough pasture and adjacent factory sites, and in the evening again visit the lagoon where it would bathe and preen before flying off in a south-westerly direction. Where it roosted was never discovered.

IDENTIFICATION

J. B. and S. Bottomley's excellent photographs (Photos 36–38), which were taken on 19th March, should be compared with their shots of the first-year Laughing Gull in Dorset (*Brit. Birds*, 63: plate 50) and with those of adult and immature Laughing Gulls by Allan D. Cruickshank and Peter Lindberg (*Brit. Birds*, 60: plates 17–19). The smaller size and shorter bill and legs of the Franklin's have already been referred to: these structural differences would be particularly important in the separation of immatures, which are more difficult to distinguish on plumage features alone. The adults of the two species have more striking distinctions. The pale grey centre to the otherwise white tail, just visible in Photo 36, is not shared by adult Laughing Gulls and, indeed, is unique among adult gulls, but by far the best feature for separating the adults in the field is the upperwing pattern. The dark grey of the Laughing Gull's inner wing shades evenly to the black wing tips, and the only white areas are a prominent white line along the trailing edge and some small white terminal spots on

the primaries, the latter often missing in worn plumage. In Franklin's Gull the white trailing edge to the wing leads into a white band extending across the primaries and separating the black wing tips from the dark grey of the inner wing; this distinctive pattern can be seen in the photos. Dr Kenneth C. Parkes of the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has however stated (*in litt.* to P.J.G.) that a good series of skins of breeding Franklin's Gulls from Saskatchewan shows that the actual extents of the white area across the primaries and of the black on the wing tip are extremely variable and that this apparently has no correlation with age among individuals in their second summer and older. He has also noted that the white terminal spots on the primaries, though usually more extensive in this species than in the Laughing Gull, are subject to substantial wear in spring. This latter point is of interest because, when discovered in February, the Franklin's Gull at Farlington clearly showed white tips to the outer primaries and, although these were still present at least until 8th March, they had disappeared by the 19th when the photographs were taken. This alteration in the wing pattern through wear continued and by 16th May even the black ends to the wings had almost completely vanished, apart from a very small tip to one primary on each side.

The wings, as noted in the field, were rounded at the tip and rather broad, like those of a Common Gull, but the flight action appeared weak and rather faltering, with quick beats and angled wings rather reminiscent of a Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*. It has been suggested that this action may have been purely the result of sickness or the abraded state of the wings rather than a true field-character of the species.

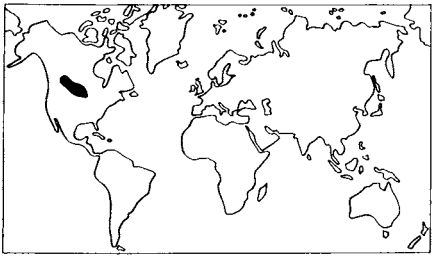
MOULT

At the beginning of March the Franklin's Gull began to show an uneven line to the trailing edge of the midwing, suggesting that it might be undergoing a moult of the outer secondaries, and at the same time two whitish patches appeared on the upper surface near the carpal joint, presumably caused by moult of some of the median coverts. By early April the mantle and wing coverts were in heavy moult. These observations were of particular interest as Franklin's is the only gull (with the possible exception also of Sabine's Gull *L. sabini*) known to have a *complete* moult twice yearly, in spring and autumn (others moult the wing and tail feathers once a year only, usually in autumn). No further signs of moult were noted, however, and the bird did not appear actually to renew any wing or tail feathers during its stay, the wings becoming more and more abraded. Incidentally, Photo 37 clearly shows that the tip of the upper mandible was damaged; this injury seems to have been sustained after the bird arrived as J.T.S. and D.F.B. clearly noted a hooked tip to the bill when they first saw it on 21st February.

ARRIVAL IN BRITAIN

Any discussion under this heading can, of course, be no more than speculative. In itself the occurrence of a Franklin's Gull in Britain is remarkable enough, considering its comparative rarity on the Atlantic coast of North America. The fact, however, that the one at Farlington apparently arrived in winter suggests that it had originated from further south, perhaps from the parts of its winter range in the Caribbean or Gulf of Mexico. Also, vagrancy would be more likely at that time of year as a result of the natural tendency of gulls to wander widely during the winter months. It is possibly no more than coincidence that there were strong south-westerly gales along the British south coast in the week preceding the first sighting of the bird at Farlington, although these could well have contributed to its arrival. Another sighting of a Franklin's Gull

in Britain 55 miles [88 km] to the east at Arlington Reservoir, East Sussex, on 4th July 1970 (*Brit. Birds* 65: 81–82) was no less remarkable; it was in fresh adult plumage, with full black wing tips and white terminal spots; its bill was undamaged, showing that it was a different individual.



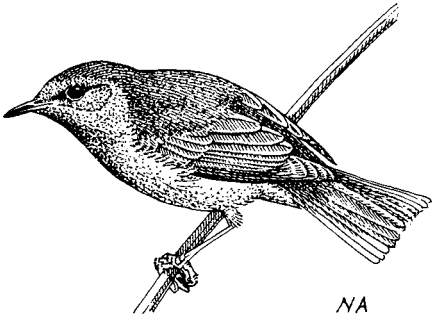
After these first two in 1970, no more were found until another small spate of three during 1976–77: in Norfolk on 29th October 1976, in Cleveland on 24th July 1977 and in Suffolk—a much-watched bird—from 13th November 1977 until 30th March 1978 (Brit. Birds *72: 476–482*). *A sixth occurred at Irvine, Strathclyde, from 2nd to 6th July 1980.*

Franklin's is the only gull which at all ages in winter shows such extensive black on the head, forming the distinctive 'half-hood' evident in the photographs of the Hampshire individual. Further research into Franklin's Gull plumages has shown that it was an adult in winter plumage: a second-winter would have had more black and less white on the wing-tips.

SEPTEMBER 1970

Hooded Warbler in Scilly

K. D. Edwards and K. C. Osborne



At about 16.00 hours on 20th September 1970, Clive Totty and P. G. Williams flushed a green and yellow warbler-like bird from the sedge around the Pool, St Agnes, Isles of Scilly. It immediately dived back into cover, but they flushed it twice more before it finally disappeared in a thicket of gorse and bracken. They were at a loss to identify it, though they agreed that it looked rather like a large *Phylloscopus* or a *Hippolais* but behaved more like an *Acrocephalus*. They told G. W. Edwards and K.D.E. of it, but later searches then and during the following morning proved fruitless.

Originally published in *British Birds* 65: 203–205. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

K.C.O., who was staying on St Mary's during this period, visited St Agnes on 21st. At about 15.00 hours he was walking round the Pool when by chance he disturbed a very green 'warbler' with yellow underparts, which at first he took to be a large *Phylloscopus*. He flushed it three times, since it seemed extremely reluctant to show itself on the sedge tops; it had rather short wings and a long tail, and its flight and general behaviour seemed more typical of *Acrocephalus* than *Phylloscopus*. At 15.45 he lost it in near-by bracken. Half an hour later, on his way to the quay, he met G.W.E. and K.D.E. and informed them of the bird. They then proceeded to the Pool and sat on an adjacent seawall in the hope of sighting it, but with no success. At 17.00 hours, therefore, they began quartering the sedge. Eventually they flushed a large, relatively small-bodied, long-tailed and short-winged warbler; the upper-parts were olive-green and the under-parts bright yellow. They flushed it twice more at close range; both observers remarked on the fact that the tips of the tail-feathers were pointed, and noted a well-defined yellow supercilium. The flight was low, direct and fairly fast, and the bird re-entered cover by veering to one side and diving in. After giving further brief views, it perched on a bracken frond 15 yards away for about two minutes, being clearly visible in full sunlight. It was somewhat similar to a rather green and yellow Melodious Warbler *H. polyglotta*, but it had a noticeably long tail and its bill was large, heavy and quite unlike that of any European warbler. The closed wings appeared to reach only to the tips of the uppertail-coverts. It constantly flicked and spread its tail, and K.D.E. noticed that white patches were momentarily revealed (at this stage G.W.E. had been concentrating on the head and body). K.D.E. could think of no European warbler that fitted, and his mind then turned to the possibility of an American warbler. From Peterson (1947), he tentatively identified the bird as a female or immature Hooded Warbler *Wilsonia citrina*.

The bird was not seen at all on 22nd, owing to adverse weather. At 10.40 hours on 23rd, G.W.E. and K.D.E. met K.C.O., Mrs Ann Robinson, C.T. and P.G.W. at the Pool; K.D.E. did not reveal his suspicion of the bird's identity. At 10.50 it was flushed from the sedge, and during the following one and a half hours a number of views were had, some better than others, but as before it proved very reluctant to settle in the open for more than a few seconds. Eventually it perched in full view in the bare branches of a small dead bush, where it stayed for about seven minutes. Excellent views were obtained at a range of some eight yards, with the sun behind the observers. They remarked on the large, heavy bill and white tail patches; except when preening, the bird was constantly flicking up and fanning its tail, showing these spots on the inner webs which, however, were visible only when it was fully flexed. An unsuccessful attempt was then made to trap it. On three or four occasions, while being driven through the bracken, it was seen running along the ground with frequent pauses, in a manner recalling a pipit *Anthus sp.* Twice it left the area and flew across open ground, at a height of about ten feet, to a hedegrow of tamarisks 150 yards away, each time diving into the base of the trees about three feet above ground level. At 13.40 hours a break was called. The warbler was located again at 16.05 hours and watched by all observers at distances of 15 to 25 yards while it fed among the tamarisks, moving about clumsily in the foliage like a *Hippolais*, but now and then flying out, hovering and fly-catching in the manner of a *Phylloscopus*. It was finally lost to view at 16.20.

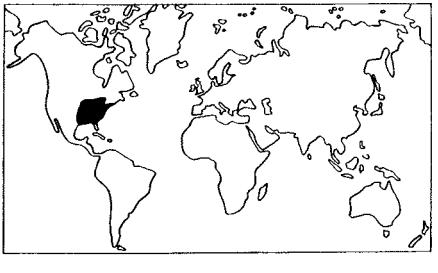
The following details are taken from the full description compiled on 23rd from field notes made at the time of observation:

Size and shape: Appeared about same size as, but smaller-bodied than, Sedge Warbler *A. schoenobaenus* (seen within eight feet) or Melodious Warbler, or a quarter as large again as

Chiffchaff *P. collybita* (seen within five feet). In flight resembled long-tailed Sedge Warbler, with short rounded wings, but when perched looked 'deep-bellied' like *Hippolais*. Bill large, thick and heavy, very similar to that of Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*; a third of total length of head. Forehead fairly steep, with peak above eye. Exposed primaries formed only a quarter of length of closed wings, which appeared to droop far more than those of Chiffchaff; primaries reached to tips of uppertail-coverts. Tail rather square-ended, with rounded corners, forming about a third of total length; when spread, tail-feathers pointed at tips. *Plumage:* Forehead olive-green, with small yellow area at base of bill; crown and nape olive-green; supercilium bright yellow, extending from yellow at front of forehead over eye and curving down to just behind eye; ear-coverts patchy, yellow tinged olive and merging into supercilium at rear; lores olive; mantle and scapulars olive-green; rump and uppertail-coverts olive-green, slightly paler; chin, throat, breast, belly and flanks bright yellow; undertail-coverts yellow, slightly paler; wing-coverts olive, slightly darker than mantle; no wing-bars; primaries and secondaries grey-brown, edges of outer webs olive. Tail grey-brown, edges of outer webs olive; tips of inner webs of outer three feathers grey-brown, but rest of inner webs white reaching two-thirds of distance to uppertail-coverts and forming three large, distinctive patches on each side, invisible when tail closed but very obvious when fully fanned; when hovering, tail spread and white patches visible on undertail as far as coverts. Central tail-feathers slightly darker than rest. *Soft parts:* Upper mandible dark horn; lower mandible horn, paler at base; eye dark; legs and feet flesh-coloured.

By the evening of 23rd all the observers concerned were agreed that the bird was very probably a female or immature Hooded Warbler, but the only American books available at the time were Peterson (1947) and Robbins *et al.* (1966) and their text and plates for this species differ in some respects; there were also a number of slight discrepancies between each of them and this particular individual. It was decided, therefore, not to submit the record until skin examinations had been carried out. After their return from the islands, K.C.O., G.W.E. and K.D.E. made separate visits to the British Museum (Natural History), and P.G.W. visited the Liverpool Museums; all four independently confirmed the identification. A full account of the occurrence was then submitted, and the record was finally accepted as the first of the Hooded Warbler in Britain and Europe. In the course of circulation it was forwarded to James Baird, of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, who commented as follows:

'The attached adds up to a very convincing record of a Hooded Warbler. Aside from the more obvious plumage characters, the white in the tail is important in separating the Hooded from the smaller but similarly coloured Wilson's Warbler [*W. pusilla*]. Especially critical was the observation that the tail was fanned (flicked open). I would not say that the skulking is usual in the Hooded. It is a bird of low growth and underbrush, but is not particularly shy. I think that its shyness was due to the exigencies of the moment. All in all, a good record.'



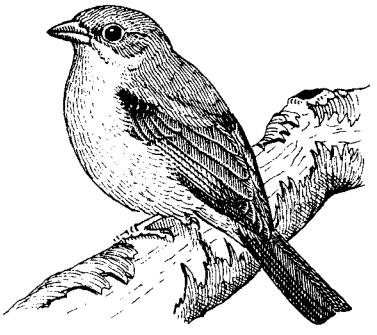
Regarded by Chandler S. Robbins (1980) as one of the most unexpected of transatlantic vagrants to reach Britain and Ireland, it is hardly surprising that this remains the only report of the species in Europe.

This individual was in fact a female, because males acquire the adult-like black-hooded plumage in their first winter. Female Yellowthroat Geothlypis trichas *(pages 62–64) is perhaps the only likely confusion-species, but has a white belly and lacks the white tail-flashes of Hooded Warbler.*

OCTOBER 1970

Scarlet Tanager in Scilly

B. D. Harding



At about midday on 4th October 1970, in the Porth Hellick area of St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, I noticed an unfamiliar bird perched at the top of a dead tree at about 25 yards' range. I called over D. J. Holman and R. E. Turley, but by the time they had arrived the bird had worked its way down into foliage. It soon flew out, however, and during the following ten minutes we and several others watched it at distances varying from 20 to 50 yards, both perched and flying. After this it could not be found again despite a thorough search. We decided that the bird was a member of the tanager family (Thraupidae), and from Peterson (1947) concluded that it was a first-winter male Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*. D.J.H. and R.E.T. subsequently confirmed this identification by examination of skins in the British Museum (Natural History). The bird was also seen by Professor J. D. Craggs, J. H. Johns, N. J. Phillips, E. J. Phillips-Jones, G. H. Price, Dr R. J. Raines and C. W. Westwood. The following is a condensation of field notes taken at the time:

General appearance and behaviour (largely from notes by D.J.H. and R.E.T.): Nearly as big as Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra* but rather more dashing, having a relatively shorter and squarer tail and fairly long, broad, powerful wings. When perched upright it recalled a large finch with a long, stout bill. Once, when it adopted a rather horizontal stance with wings held loosely and drooping slightly, it appeared somewhat like a stocky *Sylvia* or *Hippolais* warbler. It usually perched motionless, eventually moving down into cover with a heavy, warbler-like action. The flight was fast and fairly direct, the bird dropping down from foliage, flying along a few feet above the ground, then sweeping up into a bush or tree. On two occasions it was seen to fly-catch—once from the top of a tree, and once from a hedgerow over a field when it covered a distance of 25 yards before returning to its perch. In these performances it was very agile, twisting and turning erratically, hovering and almost looping the loop. *Plumage:* Generally similar to Greenfich *Carduelis chloris* but without the yellow flashes in the wings and tail. Head, nape and back rather bright olive-green; lores and ear-coverts darker and greyer (R.E.T.); rump and uppertail-coverts paler and yellower than back; tail dark, greyer than back, 'blackish' (R.E.T.), 'basically greenish' (D.J.H.), very slightly forked. Whole underparts bright lemon-yellow. Wings gave general impression of being greenish-grey, with black patch at carpal joint (lesser coverts); R.E.T. noted blackish outer greater coverts, becoming paler and greener on inner ones, black bastard wing, blackish primaries (as tail), and dark greyish-green secondaries

Originally published in *British Birds* 65: 155–158. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

and tertials edged yellow, the edges on the secondaries suggesting a small wing-panel. *Soft parts:* Bill rather long, stout and conical, slightly rounded at the tip, differently described as greyish or horn-coloured (B.D.H.), flesh-pink (D.J.H.), orange-pink to horn (R.E.T.) and pale or yellowish (R.J.R.); this variation was considered by some observers to be due to reflection of the surrounding colours in the shiny surface of the bill. Eyes and legs dark.

The determining factor in identifying the bird was the black lesser coverts which contrasted with the paler wings both when flying and when perched. In flight it appeared green above, yellow bellow, with greenish-grey wings and tail.

The only previous records of tanagers in Europe are of an adult male Summer Tanager *P. rubra* trapped on Bardsey, Caernarvonshire, on 11th September 1957 and present until at least 25th (see pages 90–91); and a female Summer or Scarlet trapped on Copeland Island, Co. Down, on 12th October 1963 (*Copeland Bird Observatory Report for 1963*: 2–3; see also *Ibis*, 113: 144). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* was seen in another part of St Mary's on the same day as the Scarlet Tanager, and two days later the first Veery *Catharus fuscescens* to be recorded in Europe was found at Porthgwarra, Cornwall (see pages 174–177).

COMPARISON WITH SKINS

On 5th December 1970 D.J.H. and R.E.T. examined skins of Summer, Scarlet and some other tanagers in the British Museum. The first-winter Summer Tanagers were very orange-yellow below and orange-green above, whereas the Scarlets resembled the bird on St Mary's in being lemon-yellow below and olive-green above and in having the black carpal patch that the other species lacks. One Scarlet Tanager in particular, a first-autumn male taken in the USA in September, was identical in plumage to the bird on St Mary's.

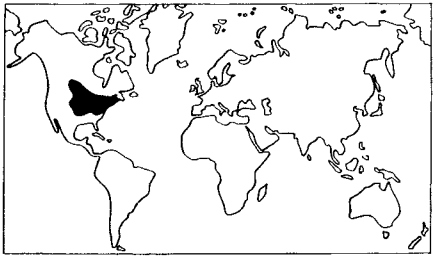
TANAGER IDENTIFICATION

The tanagers are a New World family of more than 200 species, but only four occur north of Mexico—Hepatic *P. flava*, Western *P. ludoviciana*, Summer and Scarlet. The Hepatic Tanager is unlikely to perform a transatlantic flight due to the restriction of its breeding range to the south-western United States and its short migrations. The Western Tanager exhibits wing bars in all plumages (whereas the Summer and Scarlet do not, though a small percentage of Scarlets have been recorded with wing bars). These two, therefore, are not considered further. Adult male Summer and Scarlet do not present an identification problem: in breeding plumage the latter is bright scarlet with black wings and tail, whereas the Summer Tanager is dull red all over; in autumn and winter the adult male Scarlet is yellowish olive-green with black wings and tail, while the Summer retains its typical dull red plumage throughout the year. Adult females of the two species are somewhat alike in breeding plumage but there are a few differences: the Scarlet is olive-green above and dull yellow below, with *dark* greyish-brown wings and tail, while the Summer's upper- and under-parts are deeper yellowish and its wings and tail paler brownish, tinged olive-green.

Juvenile tanagers are heavily streaked below, but this plumage is rarely illustrated in the literature. This streaking is lost during the post-juvenile moult before migration, giving way to what Humphrey and Parkes (1959) called the 'First Basic Plumage'. Birds of both sexes in this plumage, and also adult females in autumn and winter, are very similar. Scarlets have a greenish-olive head and back, greyish-brown wings and tail and pale lemon-yellow under-parts; immature males have, in addition, black coverts and sometimes black scapulars. Summer Tanagers have an olive-brown to warm orange-brown back, dull orange-yellow under-parts and brownish-green

wings; young males, which are generally more richly coloured than females, do not have black coverts.

The underwing-coverts are also useful as a guide to identification: the Western and Summer Tanagers have yellow ones, while those of the Scarlet are white. (Data in this section are taken mainly from Godfrey 1966 and Davis 1971.)



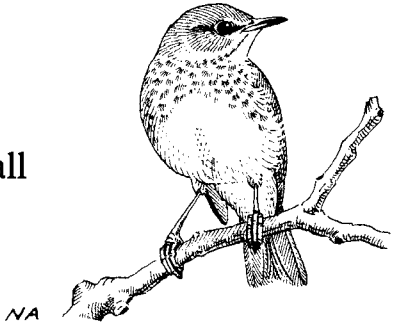
This, the more likely of the two North American tanagers to reach Europe, was surprisingly the second to be found here, but, unlike the Summer Tanager P. rubra (*pages 90–92*), *has reappeared. The second was also in the Isles of Scilly, on Tresco on 28th September 1975* (Brit. Birds *70: 300–301*).

The separation of Scarlet and Summer Tanagers is discussed further on page 92.

OCTOBER 1970

Veery in Cornwall

E. M. P. Allsopp



The village of Porthgwarra lies in a small secluded valley at the south-westerly tip of Cornwall. At 09.30 hours on 6th October 1970 G. E. Dunmore was watching a Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* in the sallows in the lower part of the valley when a bird flew across his field of view and landed low down in the bushes about six metres away. Seen from the side, it gave him the impression of a plump thrush about the size of a Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, but when it turned to face him he saw streaking on the upper breast sharply demarcated from uniform whitish below. It was obviously something unusual and he drew it to the attention of H. P. Medhurst who, from a side view of the upper-parts, gained the immediate impression of a large

Originally published in *British Birds* 65: 45–49. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*. Both observers then had reasonable views for two minutes while it was low in shadow under the bushes. It was a dumpy bird noticeably smaller than a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, but larger than a Robin, with rich warm brown upper-parts and rather long, thin legs for its size, but with no supercilium or distinct orbital ring. G.E.D. thought it might possibly be an Olive-backed Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* or a Grey-cheeked Thrush *C. minimus*, as these were the only small American thrushes previously recorded in Britain and Ireland, though neither name-character was evident.

The bird was left to settle for 15 minutes while D. Barker, P. Pearce, K. Pellow and L. P. Williams were informed of its presence. It was rediscovered on the edge of a large elderberry bush, where it was watched for a further 15 minutes in good light at ranges down to ten metres. At this point K. Allsopp and I arrived, but the bird promptly disappeared from view. G.E.D. and H.P.M. then consulted Peterson (1947, 1961) and Robbins *et al.* (1966): from the very warm brown coloration of the back, sparseness of spots on the breast and lack of eyestripe or orbital ring, they concluded that it was a Veery *C. fuscescens*. H.P.M. held up a copy of Robbins *et al.* open at page 233 (the *Catharus* thrushes) with the names covered up; looking at it through binoculars from about five metres, D.B., K.P., P.P. and L.P.W. all independently selected the Veery.

About two hours later K.A. found the bird again among the bushes and all eight of us watched it for half an hour. During that period it moved slowly about the vegetation with long pauses between each move, occasionally feeding on elderberries, but at other times entering tamarisks and dead bushes. Although skulking and generally inactive, apart from a characteristic lowering of its head into its collar, the bird sometimes flicked its wings and tail. It allowed fairly close approach, once down to two metres. When it was felt that no more details could be obtained in the field, it was trapped and photographed by K.A. in colour. Photos 39 & 40 are monochrome reproductions of two of the transparencies. It was in very good condition, with no detectable weakness and with none of the plumage spoiled. In the hand it was strong and aggressive, its excreta indicating a diet of elderberries, and it flew off strongly into the large elderberry bush when released. The bushes were then left undisturbed so that it could feed, and it was not seen subsequently. Descriptions were taken both in the field and in the hand, and these are summarised below. Together they clearly establish the identification as a Veery, the first to be recorded in Europe.

DESCRIPTION IN THE FIELD

Plumage: Crown and nape rich warm brown; mantle, scapulars, rump and uppertail-coverts also warm brown but less rich. Loral region grey-brown, with indistinct orbital ring; ear-coverts warm brown, paler than upperparts, shading into brown sides of neck. Chin and upper throat noticeably white, clearly bordered on each side by a thick brown moustachial streak and merging with colour of lower throat, this and upper breast being rich buff-brown (tinged golden in sunlight), paler in centre, with darker blotches forming ill-defined spots; charp contrast with lower breast, belly, vent and undertail-coverts which were off-white with faint grey wash in subdued light and faint buffish wash in sunlight; centres of tips of lower breast feathers faint grey. Sides of breast and flanks uniformly white washed grey, with slight buffish tinge in good light. Uppertail brown, a shade darker than mantle, slightly warm brown in good sunlight; undertail darker. Primaries and secondaries brown; on closed wing inner primaries appeared slightly paler, tips darker; outer primaries darker. Bastard wing long, brown, paler in bright sunlight. Upperwing-coverts as mantle, with buff tips to central greater coverts giving impression of slight wing-bar. Underwing grey-white. *Soft parts:* Bill thrush-like but relatively fine; upper mandible grey-brown, lower pale except for terminal quarter. Legs pale brown, tinged pinkish or purplish. Iris black-brown.

DESCRIPTION IN THE HAND

Plumage: Crown, nape, mantle and scapulars warm brown (very warm brown in sunlight); rump and uppertail-coverts also warm brown. Lores grey, some rictal bristles; ear-coverts brown edged buff, with whitish centres. Sides of neck brown. Chin and upper throat white washed buff, with dark moustachial stripes; lower throat and upper breast white, each feather tipped centrally with broad grey wedge bordered orange-buff; feathers of middle breast white edged brown-grey; lower breast, belly and vent white; undertail-coverts white, outer ones with faint grey-buff tinge. Sides of breast and flanks white suffused brown, terminal halves of feathers washed grey. Tail colder brown than rest of upperparts, but outer webs edged warm brown except on outermost feather. Outer web of second primary pale buff, of others warm brown; inner webs grey-brown; secondaries dull brown. Bastard wing pale brown-buff on outer web, dark brown on inner. Primary and greater coverts warm brown on outer webs, dark brown on inner, 5th–7th greater coverts each with buff wedge at tip; median and lesser coverts warm brown. Underwing-coverts white, terminal halves washed grey-buff; basal centimetre of undersides of remiges whitish (forming bar across underwing), rest grey-buff. *Soft parts:* Upper mandible very dark brown-black; lower mandible with flange edged yellow, basal half pale horn with violet tinge, tip plain horn; gape bright yellow. Legs horn-white at back, tinged purplish at front. Iris black-brown. *Wing-formula:* 3rd primary longest, 2nd −3.0 mm, 4th −1.5 mm, 5th −9.0 mm; 3rd and 4th clearly emarginated on outer webs, 5th slightly. *Measurements:* Wing 106 mm; bill (from feathers) 13 mm; tarsus 33 mm.

COMPARISON WITH SKINS

On a visit to the Bird Room at the British Museum (Natural History) on 24th November, I consulted two trays of the nominate subspecies of the Veery and one of the western form *C. f. salicicola*, and trays of other American wood thrushes. These clearly confirmed that the bird at Porthgwarra had been a Veery, but I found that the rather broad grey wedges, bordered orange-buff, at the tips of the breast feathers

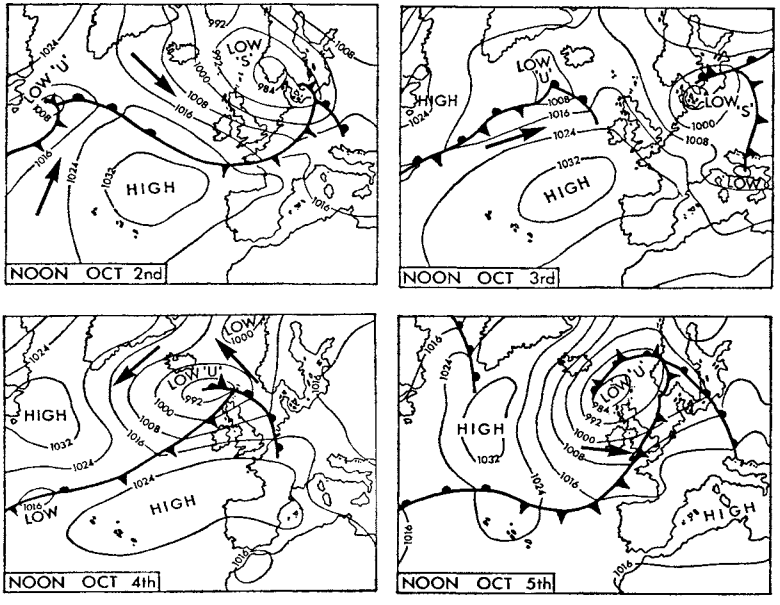


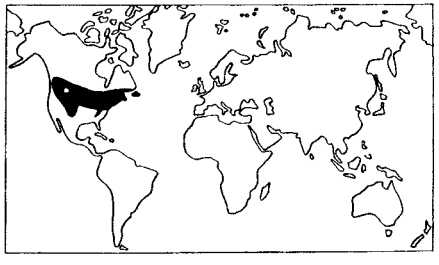
Fig. 12 North Atlantic weather system 2nd–5th October 1970, showing rapid movement of low 'U' from Newfoundland to the Faroes

occurred in only a few skins of *salicicola*. Those of nominate *fuscescens*, as a rule, had narrow red-brown arrow-shaped markings at the tips, and no general colour suffusion. Unfortunately all the skins of this species in the British Museum were of adults collected during May.

Assuming that the pale tips to some of the greater coverts indicated a first-year bird, as in *Turdus*, I consulted Bent (1949) only to find the statement that the tips of the greater coverts in juveniles, which are not moulted in their first winter, are dark. According to Ridgway (1907), however, the markings were quite correct for a first-year bird. The wing and tarsus measurements were both 1 mm over the maxima given by Ridgway, but his were all taken from skins. Neither book was very helpful on racial differences, Bent giving a Newfoundland race (*fuliginosus*) as well. While *salicicola* is generally darker above than nominate *fuscescens*, and the Porthgwarra individual tended towards the former, I found the skins too variable for this to be a positive indication.

ASSOCIATED RECORDS AND WEATHER CONDITIONS

On 4th October a Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* and a Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea* were found on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly. The weather maps (Fig. 12) show how low 'U' moved from Newfoundland to the Faroes in just two days, and it seems likely that all three vagrants crossed the Atlantic in the strong following wind on its southern flank, the Veery remaining undetected for a day or two after landfall.



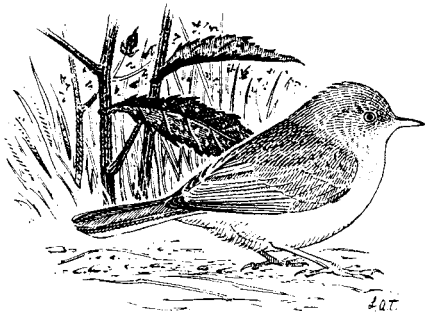
This is still the sole record for Britain and Ireland.

The distinctions of Veery from the other four spot-breasted American thrushes are fully covered in this account of the Cornish individual.

DECEMBER 1970

Desert Warbler on Portland

F. R. Clafton



Early on the afternoon of 16th December 1970 Grahame Walbridge left his home at Weston, Portland, Dorset, intending to walk to the bird observatory at Portland Bill, some 3 km distant. Within minutes, as he skirted a weed-grown patch of ground on a building site, he came across a small umber-coloured *Sylvia* warbler flitting busily in the low vegetation. He watched it for long enough to assimilate its salient features and then hurried to the observatory where he reported his discovery to my wife and me. The three of us returned to the site by car and after about half an hour's search we rediscovered the bird.

The weather at the time was mild and reasonably calm during a lull between a procession of Atlantic low pressure systems. The afternoon was heavily overcast and the light far from good. This was, however, compensated by the bird's approachability. For most of the time it remained either actually on the ground or in low weeds, mostly bristly oxtongue *Picris echioides*, allowing us within five metres without showing undue alarm. On one occasion we watched it hopping along newly laid kerbstones and, when some children approached, it darted into a stack of land-drain pipes and the group passed within a metre or so of it.

We failed to add significantly to the field description already obtained by G.W. The upper-parts were uniform tan-brown, the under-parts greyish-white There were no salient facial features and no sharp demarcation between the throat and the face. The bill was yellow with a black tip, and the legs pale flesh with a faint greenish tinge. There was no significant orbital ring, but the iris was yellow, although this could be seen in the field only at very close range. White was visible on each side of the brown tail in flight.

We quickly realised that it was necessary to capture the bird if we were to solve the problem of its identity. We erected a single-panel mist-net and caught it with little difficulty, but by this time the light was failing quickly, so we carried it back to the observatory. After a detailed description and measurements had been taken, it was roosted at room temperature in a darkened box, since it was clearly too late for it to feed. The following is a transcript of the description:

Upper-parts: forehead, crown, nape and mantle uniform pale earth-brown with ashy tinge; rump and uppertail-coverts noticeably more russet; sides of head without distinguishing features, the ash-brown merging imperceptibly into greyish-white; no orbital ring apparent, although faint whitish flecks visible in some lights in region of eye-sockets; ear-coverts pale grey, no different from remainder of facial region. *Under-parts:* pearly grey, due to grey feather fringes (bases being whiter), with no particular paleness on chin or throat, but buff suffusion on flanks and undertail-coverts. *Wings:* primaries black-brown with ashy wash and very faint pale buff fringes; secondaries similar, but less dark and with broader pale buff fringes; outer webs of tertials grey-brown and inner webs pale chestnut, separated by noticeable blackish shaft streak; outermost tertial darker brown with paler fringes on both webs; greater and median coverts

Originally published in *British Birds* 65: 460–464. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

ash-brown; lesser coverts distinctly more greyish; alula mainly blackish, contrasting with the brown coverts, but outer feather with slender rim of pale buff, median with broad fringe of pale buff, and inner mostly pale with blackish centre. *Tail:* outermost feathers on right side just breaking out of pin, showing white; outermost on left side mostly greyish-white but basal half of inner web with narrowing blackish streak; penultimate on left side in pin; other feathers brown and centre pair more russet. *Bare parts:* upper mandible pale yellow with black tip, culmen and area around nostril; lower mandible entirely yellow with very slight darkness towards tip; tarsus creamy flesh (greenish tinge noted in field not discernible in hand); iris chrome-yellow. *Wing-formula:* 3rd and 4th primaries equal and longest, 5th −0.5 mm, 6th −2.0 mm, 2nd −3.5 mm, 7th −4.5 mm, 10th −9.0 mm; 1st 2.5 mm longer than longest primary covert; 3rd, 4th and 5th emarginated on outer webs, 6th with possibly a trace. *Measurements:* wing 58.5 mm; bill (from skull) 11.5 mm; tarsus 18.5 mm; tail 50 mm with no more than 3 mm difference between shortest and longest feathers.

After some hours of consulting the literature, we were able to satisfy ourselves that the bird was a Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*, but we did not disturb it from the time of our detailed examination until first light on the following day. Unfortunately the morning dawned wet and windy, with appalling light conditions, and as a result our hopes of photography were dashed. Some photographs were taken with the aid of photo-flood illumination, but because I was anxious that the bird should have an opportunity to feed as quickly as possible I released it shortly after 09.00 hours. It flew out of the observatory garden into an adjoining field of sprouting barley. At the time of release it weighed 9.45 gm.

Soon after midday the weather cleared and the bird then appeared in the observatory garden. It established a pattern of behaviour which enabled a great many other observers to see it in the course of the next two weeks, spending periods of between a few minutes and an hour or so feeding on the ground in the barley shoots (then about 15 cm in height) and in the meantime preening on bushes near-by, most frequently in large elder in which it could be seen easily and well. During wet weather it became bedraggled very quickly (presumably through constant contact with the lush cereal shoots) and preening was much more frequent and prolonged. A feature which then became noticeable, and which could be seen even when the bird was a mere speck some 150 metres away, was its habit of bobbing, head up and tail down, then tail up and head down, almost as if pivoting through the centre of the body.

The bird was present daily until 25th December when a spell of severe weather with frost, snow and icy east winds made it very difficult to locate. It was seen briefly on 27th, but it then disappeared and we imagined that it had succumbed. At dusk on 1st January 1971, however, G.W. and I discovered it again, our attention being attracted initially by a sharp 'wee-churr' call with something of the rhythm of that of a Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*. Neither of us had heard this note before, although we had both heard the bird utter a faint sub-song. On 2nd January it had reverted to its old habits (the weather by then becoming milder), but early on 3rd ploughing operations started in the barley field and diligent searches that day and subsequently failed to reveal it.

IDENTIFICATION

The problem of identification was perplexing, both in the field and initially in the hand. The bird was assumed to be one of the Mediterranean *Sylvia* warblers, perhaps in first-year plumage, and a quick check through Williamson (1964) soon revealed that on measurements and structure it could be Spectacled *S. conspicillata* or Subalpine *S. cantillans*, or even Ménétries's *S. mystacea* or Tristram's *S. deserticola*. Quite obviously it bore no resemblance to adults of these species as depicted in the

Field Guide and in Etchécopar and Hüe (1967). Furthermore, the plumage descriptions given by Swift (1959) and Sharrock (1962) for juvenile Spectacled and Subalpine revealed that it could not be assigned to either of those species. In size and shape, however, it closely resembled a Subalpine Warbler and this similarity of structure made me certain that it was a *Sylvia*.

I had discounted the possibility of its being a Desert Warbler at first, since I thought that this species was so pallid in general coloration as to be unmistakable, a conception heightened by the illustration in Etchécopar and Hüe showing *S. nana deserti* to be of an almost ethereal pallor. My wife and I worked systematically through Williamson attempting to match the bird with every species in the genus and the process reached fruition when we discovered that not only did it fit *S. nana* on measurements but also on certain plumage features, particularly the russet rump, the dark-shafted tertials and the coloration of the soft parts. The only points of divergence were the colour of the under-parts, quite clearly greyish rather than creamy as given by Williamson (see below), and the lack of white on the third outermost tail-feathers.

FIELD CHARACTERS

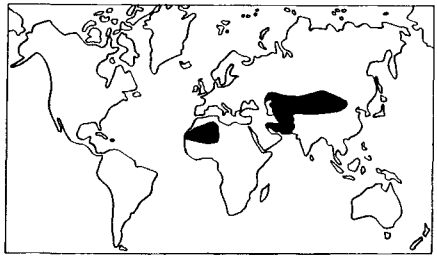
Once the possibility of vagrancy in this species has been realised, its identification in the field is not difficult, since it is quite obviously a *Sylvia* warbler and no other species exhibits the same uniform tan-coloured upper-parts without distinguishing features in the facial region. The Portland bird had an obvious predilection to feed on the ground, but showed no reluctance to skulk in the manner of a *Locustella*. The black-yellow-black patterning of the bill and the pale leg coloration were striking, but the yellow iris and black alula could be seen in the field only at very close range and these characters were most apparent in the hand. To what extent the bobbing, pivoting action when perched is typical of the species is not known.

DISCUSSION

Through the courtesy of the British Museum (Natural History), I was able to examine an extensive series of skins while the details of the bird were still fresh in my mind. One glance was sufficient to confirm that it was of the nominate race of *Sylvia nana*. The difference between skins of this race, with its plain brown mantle, and of the golden sand-coloured *S. n. deserti* of north-west Africa was stark.

The majority of the specimens of the nominate race in the British Museum were taken in winter in northern India: all of these exhibited the bright, creamy white under-parts noted by Williamson. I noticed, however, that a few collected in Somalia in winter showed a trace of greyness below, though none so markedly as the Portland bird.

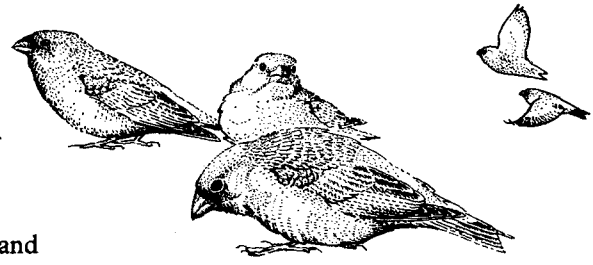
Desert Warblers had been recorded twice previously in western Europe, at Ottenby, Öland, Sweden, on 20th October 1961 and near Turku, Finland, on 26th October 1963 (Williamson 1968). It seems unlikely that the one at Portland arrived in Britain in mid-December, particularly as the weather conditions then were predominantly westerly, and it would probably be safer to assume that it had already been in the vicinity for some time, perhaps weeks; its ability to maintain itself unobtrusively in a small area was amply demonstrated after its release, and its presence on some rarely visited part of the Isle of Portland could well have been missed. It was able to recall an occasion during the preceding autumn (precise date not noted) when I had had a fleeting glimpse of an unfamiliar *Sylvia* warbler in the fields near Southwell, Portland, but this vague impression by no means detracts from the credit due to the young observer whose alertness and careful observation led to this first record for Britain and Ireland.



Three more Desert Warblers, all showing the characters of the eastern race S. n. nana, *have occurred: at Spurn, Humberside, from 20th to 24th October 1975* (Brit. Birds *70: 168–169), at Frinton-on-Sea, Essex, on 20th and 21st November 1975 (72: 123–124) and at Meols, Merseyside, from 28th October to 22nd November 1979.*

Subsequent discussions on the field characters of Desert Warbler have stressed that, on some individuals at least, the uppertail-coverts and tail are strikingly rusty, contrasting sharply with the greyish-sandy upperparts. These features, together with the conspicuous white outer tail feathers, plain head (or with faint pale supercilium and slightly darker ear-coverts), prominent pale yellow iris, pale legs and small size, make Desert Warbler one of the most distinctive members of its genus.

MAY AND JUNE 1971



Trumpeter Finches in Suffolk and Highland

D. I. M. Wallace, F. K. Cobb and C. R. Tubbs

There can be few European birds more associated with arid habitats and hot climates than the Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*. It had never been expected in Britain or Ireland and when, in late spring 1971, reports were heard of one in Suffolk and another in Sutherland, most listeners shared the initial incredulity of the observers: surely the birds had escaped from captivity? The submission, however, of both records to the Rarities Committee and the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union encouraged research into the status of the Trumpeter Finch in Iberia and elsewhere. It became apparent that this species had successfully crossed the Mediterranean from northwest Africa and was showing signs of unusual dispersal.

Originally published in *British Birds* 70: 45–49. Heading drawing by D. I. M. Wallace

Eventually, in January 1974, it was accepted for category A of the British and Irish list. This paper publishes the details of the two British records and summarises the background to them. It also describes the first record for the Channel Islands in October 1973.

THE BRITISH RECORDS IN SUFFOLK AND SUTHERLAND

At about 10.00 hours on 30th May 1971, F.K.C. and Mrs A. E. Cobb were birdwatching among the sand dunes about 1½ km south of Minsmere cliff, Suffolk. A.E.C. spotted a small, dull passerine feeding on bare ground behind the dunes. When she drew F.K.C.'s attention to it, he recognised it immediately as a Trumpeter Finch, a species which he had previously seen in Morocco. Joined by Miss A. J. Towns, F.K.C. and A.E.C. observed the bird for four to five minutes, obtained brief notes on it and then watched it seemingly suddenly disappear, as the species so often does. Although F.K.C. was not aware of any caged Trumpeter Finches, the unlikelihood of a natural origin caused him to dismiss the bird as an escape.

News of the record spread, discussion of the bird's origin waxed and interest grew dramatically when it reappeared on the sand dunes at Minsmere about ten days later. On 12th June, it was found there independently and closely observed by D. J. Holman and R. E. Turley. On 15th June it was rediscovered, on the cliff top to the north, by R. J. Johns and other observers. The following description of its habits and appearance is based on D.J.H.'s full notes on 12th June:

Dumpy finch with heavy bill; large, round head and plump body; rather larger than accompanying Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* on the ground and recalling a Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothruastes*, both in flight silhouette and action; stance on ground upright; gait a rather springy, bouncing hop. Noticeably short, rounded wings and short tail, both contributing to the dumpy appearance. Plumage pale sandy-brown (but pinker to R.E.T.), except for duller, less sandy, plainer brown flight feathers and tail and noticeably bright pink rump, similar in tone to that of male Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*. Under-parts perhaps slightly geyer than upper-parts. No sign of wear on wings or tail. Bill large and stumpy, with more gently rounded tip than that of Hawfinch, and strikingly bright pinkish-red; legs pale pink; eyes rather small and dark brown. Kept exclusively to bare, stony and sandy cliff top or shore path, ignoring nearby grass fields. Approachable to 10 m; escape flight sudden and high.

Relating the brief notes by F.K.C. and A.J.T. to D.J.H.'s description is difficult. To F.K.C., the bird appeared generally 'pinkish-buff' and its bill (in a brief glimpse) 'yellowish'; to A.J.T., the chest was 'rosy-pink', this colour indicating a male.The most marked discrepancy is in bill colour and this has led F.K.C. to suggest that there may have been two birds. D.J.H., however, feels that only one was involved in the various reports. The most economical explanation of the differences is that the bird was a male, probably in its first summer, and still in the process of developing its bare part colours. Just how long this Trumpeter Finch stayed at Minsmere is not known, but, though reports continued into July, the last confirmed sighting was by J. Docwra on 19th June.

Meanwhile, 800 km to the northwest of Minsmere, a second bird appeared. At about 11.00 hours on 8th June, C.R.T. and Mrs J. M. Tubbs found a dull, ground-feeding finch in an area of eroded shell-sand dune on Handa Island, Sutherland. They were unable to identify it immediately, but, since it remained on the island until 18.00 hours on the 9th, they were able to write notes from which the following description is culled:

Small, rather dumpy finch, with conically shaped bill and short tail, approximately size of accompanying Twite and with flight silhouette and action recalling Woodlark *Lullula arborea*;

gait hopping; habitual posture a crouch. Plumage unstreaked sandy buff, paler below, with dusky-brown around bill base and eye (visible only at close range) and dark (perhaps black) primaries and tail feathers; some secondaries also showing black with pale edges. Bill pinky-orange; legs flesh. Approachable to 5–10 m. silent.

The problems of the reviewing committees did not stem from the process of identification. Descriptions of uniformly coloured birds are necessarily brief, but there was no doubt about either of the birds. What had to be explained was their origin. As is usual in these cases, M. D. England pursued the question of escapes and concluded that, as the only three known captives in Britain were secure in their cages, the two records should be regarded as referring to wild birds. His expert opinion satisfied most committee members, but it was felt necessary to explore the status of Trumpeter Finches in southern Europe in the hope of finding other records indicative of northward vagrancy.

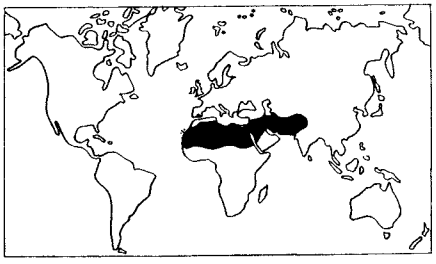
THE INVASION INTO SPAIN

Vagrant Trumpeter Finches are known to have been reaching southern Spain since the end of the 19th century and, in April 1961, April 1964 and November 1964, single ones appeared in the vicinity of San Lucar de Barrameda and La Talona, in the province of Cadiz (Hidalgo 1961, 1965). Meanwhile, there had been a single observation in the province of Almeria in 1963, and in that area records then mounted rapidly from 1968. In February 1969, no less than 60 were netted from a flock at a drinking pool at La Canada (Cano 1968) and, following exploration in the same year of the whole wasteland between the city of Almeria, Sierra Alhamilla and Cabo de Gata, Cano (1971) concluded that the species was abundant there. These birds had also become a prime target for trappers. Breeding was first presumed in 1968 (George 1969), such comment being repeated in 1969 and 1970 (Dorka, Pfau and Spaeter 1970, Cano 1971) and finally proved in 1971, the year of the British records (Cano and König 1971, Rodriguez 1972); the last reference includes photographic proof of a nest with five chicks. The province of Almeria contains much desolate and arid terrain, with rock slopes and ravines interspersed with scrub-covered or bare levels, and offers the Trumpeter Finch a biotope virtually identical to that occupied by it in parts of North Africa (George 1969). There is no doubt that by 1971 the Trumpeter Finch had become a potentially numerous breeding resident in southeast Spain. It is sad that it was greeted by large-scale trapping. The race involved is presumed to be *zedlitzi* (northwest Africa and the Sahara), to which the one caught in April 1961 was ascribed by the British Museum (Natural History) (Hidalgo 1961).

In addition to the mounting records for mainland Spain, on 29th October 1973, one was discovered by M. J. Lee on Alderney, Channel Islands, feeding in open fields with House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* and three other finch species. The details of this record follow:

Short, stubby finch, with bill like that of Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*; about the size of accompanying House Sparrows. Plumage generally pink-buff, with pinkish-red face mask like that of a Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, slightly darker crown, grey nape and wings, paler rump and pale cream undertail-coverts; primaries darker grey than rest of wing; outer tail feathers pale. Bill thick and heavy, pinkish-red; legs as bill. Approachable to under 20 m; when flushed in alarm, perched high. Silent.

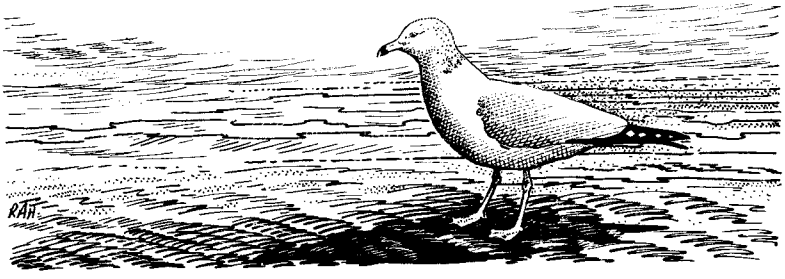
Once again, no doubt arises about the identification of this bird (it was clearly a male), which provides a connecting link with the two British records.



None has been found here since these first two.

The extraordinary and unique nasal, buzzing call-note of Trumpeter Finch (from which it is named) has apparently yet to be heard in Britain. The female lacks the greyness on the head, has no more than a hint of the male's rosy plumage tones, and has duller bill and leg coloration.

MARCH 1973



Ring-billed Gull in West Glamorgan

R. A. Hume

At 13.10 hours on 14th March 1973 I scanned a flock of several hundred gulls which were resting on the beach at Blackpill, Swansea Bay, West Glamorgan, using a telescope from a range of about 250 metres. The flock, part of a regular high-tide gathering, consisted almost entirely of Common Gulls *Larus canus*, all facing one way and consequently presenting a very uniform overall appearance. The discovery among them of a single paler bird was therefore clearly of interest.

Originally published in *British Birds* 66: 509–517. Heading drawing by R. A. Hume

A brief inspection revealed a paler mantle than those of the Common Gulls, with no obvious white on the scapulars and virtually none on the secondaries. The very dull, flat light served to emphasise the tonal difference to some extent. As I approached closer, a dark tip to the bill was apparent. The gull ran about 50 metres through the flock with a plover-like gait reminiscent of a Mediterranean Gull *L. melanocephalus*. Its legs were relatively long and dull grey-green. Unfortunately the whole flock took flight due to disturbance, and the pale bird was lost to sight as it landed several hundred metres further along the beach. I was able to relocate it later, but again the gulls took flight (the presence of a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and numerous corvids in the area causing their unrest). Finally I found it once more at about 150 metres' range. At 13.40 M. Davies arrived and I informed him of my suspicion that the bird might prove to be a Ring-billed Gull *L. delawarensis*. We then watched it for almost an hour, in very dull light which made the leg and bill colours hard to distinguish. A small pale tip was visible beyond the dark part of the bill but was not very obvious. Two small white spots were seen on the black of the closed wing-tip; our flight views were poor, but the strong contrast between very pale wings and extensive black tips was striking.

We then left to check the few relevant books which were available. Later we returned to Blackpill with P. G. Lansdown and D. R. Waugh; at 17.00 hours M.D. relocated the bird, enabling the others to confirm most of the points noted, though the brief views in bad light were unsatisfactory.

A search by up to nine observers over five hours on the following day proved fruitless. On 16th, however, I located the gull again and this time had excellent views, along with D. J. Fisher. We watched it from 100 metres in good light. Many other observers visited Blackpill during the weekends of 17th–18th and 24th–25th March, and the majority, often after long and patient waiting, saw the bird. It was observed on most days until at least 31st March.

Seven independent sets of field notes and sketches were later submitted to the Rarities Committee by M.D., D.J.F., P.G.L, D.R.W., P. J. Grant, K. E. Vinicombe and myself, and the record was accepted by them and by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee as the first of the Ring-billed Gull for Britain and Ireland. The only previous European record is of an adult near Brunswick, Germany, in January 1968 (see Grant 1973).

SIZE AND STRUCTURE

The bird was almost exactly the same size as Common Gulls, though P.G.L. noted that the wing-span was a little greater. It had a deeper-breasted, squarer-headed and generally stockier appearance, a thicker bill and a much less prominent eye than that species, all features which gave it more the character of a Herring Gull *L. argentatus*. The legs were slightly longer than those of Common Gulls and the wings tended to look a little broader and straighter, though they were more pointed at the tips.

PLUMAGE AND BARE PARTS

The head was white, with a few rounded mottles of buffish-grey on the nape (scarcely visible at long range); the whole of the under-parts, tail and rump were white. The mantle was pale grey, paler even than that of an adult Herring Gull when directly compared in favourable light, more like that of an adult Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus* in colour. Except in the brightest of lights, this gave an obvious distinction from Common Gulls. There was very little white on the scapulars; the white tips to the tertials and secondaries were very narrow and not clear-cut, merely forming a

small whitish area on the lower edge of the bunched tips when the bird was at rest. The tip of the closed wing looked black, with two small white spots (and perhaps traces of a third) visible at close range. In flight these showed as white tips to the third and fourth primaries, the outer two appearing all black. The black extended in a narrow wedge along the leading edge. However, when alighting or preening, so separating the outer primaries, the outermost feather showed a white mirror, probably confined to the inner web. K.E.V. considered this white spot to be more obvious and visible in normal flight. The underwing was whitish, with a dark patch at the tip corresponding to the black above.

The eye was hard to see well, but was clearly not dark like that of an adult Common Gull. While that species showed prominent, blackish eyes, the Ring-billed Gull had pale eyes like a Herring Gull. The legs were grey-green in poor light but bright yellow-green in strong sunshine. The bill was stubbier than a Common Gull's, being equally long but decidedly thicker and blunter. It was bright pale yellow, with a very pale straw tip and a clear-cut black band around the region of the gonys. At any distance it was hard to see the pale tip beyond the black band and the bill looked pale with a dark tip.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER GULLS

There seems to have been some confusion with both Common and Herring Gulls. The easiest method by which the bird could be picked out from the hundreds of Common Gulls with which it associated was to look for the pale mantle and black wing-tips virtually unrelieved by any white markings. In particular, the lack of a prominent white crescent on the secondaries differentiated it from almost all of the Common Gulls. The bill pattern could be misleading, since several Common Gulls had quite prominent bill marks. Again, immature Herring Gulls with dark bill rings caused some problems, especially as most observers expected a larger bird, though as the Ring-billed Gull was fully adult there should have been no great difficulty there. Some second-year Common Gulls had a similar wing-tip pattern, but the various other differences precluded problems here. P.G.L. and I later watched an adult Common Gull with an exceptionally pale mantle, but again there was no difficulty once the normal bill pattern and eye colour were seen.

DISCUSSION

On 14th March the only books available were Alexander (1955) and Peterson (1941 and 1947). Since we had not had very close views in good light at that time, these references proved rather inconclusive; the pale mantle and lack of white on the wings were not given as important features, nor were they brought out in the illustrations. Peterson showed the mantle colours of Ring-billed and Common Gulls as almost identical, and his statement that Common showed more white in the wing-tip was not very evident in his plates. It was therefore difficult to find any real differences between the species other than the bill, which on the first day had not been seen very clearly. Later that evening P.G.L. obtained more heartening news from P.J.G., who had watched large numbers of Ring-billed Gulls in Canada in September 1972, in particular regarding the paleness of the mantle. He pointed out the importance of eye colour, though this was not noted with any certainty until 16th. On 17th P.J.G. saw the bird himself and was able to show other observers the proofs of his paper on the identification of Ring-billed Gulls (Grant 1973).

Some points required further clarification and P.J.G. subsequently obtained information from Kenneth C. Parkes of the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsyl-

vania. Having examined 28 adult specimens of Ring-billed Gulls, he had found that the white tips to the tertials are proportionately narrower than those of the Herring Gull, and that there is some overlap with Common Gulls in the width of white, but this is less obvious due to its blending with the paler grey of the mantle. Paying specific attention to the wing-tip pattern, he found that nine of the specimens (32 per cent) had a white mirror only on the outer primary, and in three of these (11 per cent) this was confined to the inner web. His analysis was as follows (the two outermost feathers being termed p1 and p2):

White subterminal spot on both webs of both p1 and p2	6
White subterminal spot on both webs of p1, inner web only of p2	7
Similar to above, but spot on inner web of p2 tiny	2
White subterminal spot on both webs of p1, none at all on p2	6
White subterminal spot on inner web of p1, none at all on p2	3
Large white spot on both webs of both feathers, so little black on tip of p1 that whole tip would look white in the field	3

In the 28th bird p1 had a spot covering both webs, while p2 had a tiny white spot on the inner web of one wing and none on the other.

The lack of white on the tertials of the Blackpill bird, so striking in the field, may have been heightened by wear. From the above analysis, the lack of white in the wing-tip (except for a small spot on the outermost primary) is not unusual, though not typical of the majority of individuals. If more adult Ring-billed Gulls are discovered here, it should be borne in mind that a similar lack of white may not be found.

Details of the second bird are also recorded here:

Ring-billed Gull in West Glamorgan

Less than three months after the first recorded British occurrence of the Ring-billed Gull, an adult at Blackpill, Swansea Bay, Glamorgan (see above), D. W. Evans and I found a first-summer bird of this species at the same locality. We first saw it at 19.45 hours B.S.T. on 3rd June 1973, roosting on the calm sea with Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* and Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*. We watched it at ranges of 200 to 300 metres for 55 minutes, until it flew off across the bay towards Swansea. We had both seen the adult earlier in the year, so this second bird, although in first-summer plumage, created no problems. We were able to check our notes against Peterson (1947), Godfrey (1966), Robbins *et al.* (1966) and, especially, Grant (1973), and were satisfied with our identification, which was subsequently accepted by the Rarities Committee.

Despite daily coverage at Blackpill, the gull was not seen again until the evening of 13th June when I found it on the beach at high tide and watched it at ranges down to about 35 metres for 1 hour 35 minutes. It reappeared the following evening, being first seen at 19.40 as it flew in across the bay. It remained on the beach for an hour, during which time it was also seen by D.W.E., M. Davies, P. G. Landsdown and A. Sztypuljak, but it could not be found on subsequent dates.

SIZE AND STRUCTURE

The bird was noticeably larger than the Common Gulls on the beach, but even more obviously smaller than the Herring Gulls. It was considered to have been about a third of the way between Common and Herring in size, and it stood about one to two centimetres taller than a Common Gull on the ground. It was similar to the latter in

shape and structure, though several differences were noted. The body had a similar, slender, tapering appearance, but when standing next to a Common Gull it seemed slightly longer and fatter, though noticeably less bulky than Herring Gull. The head was less rounded than a Common Gull's, having a flatter crown and forehead, and the back of the crown was slightly peaked, producing a less 'gentle' appearance, but the bird also lacked the more 'aggressive' look of a Herring. When feeding, the neck looked longer, though the gull appeared rather 'neckless' on the water. The bill was obviously different, being longer and heavier, and lacking the slenderer, more delicate appearance of a Common Gull's bill as well as the thick, heavy-ended look of a Herring Gull's. All these structural differences are illustrated in Fig. 13. In flight the wings were probably slightly longer and broader than a Common Gull's, though this was rather difficult to judge.

PLUMAGE AND BARE PARTS

The bird was superficially similar to a Common Gull, but we were immediately struck by its uniformly pale mantle* and the noticeable black ring around its bill. In flight it was quite striking, its contrasting wing pattern eliminating any possible confusion with Common Gulls. Fig. 13 shows the most obvious differences. The following description was compiled from our field notes:

At rest: Head white, crown with pale grey streaking, usually visible only at close range, but from a distance looking slightly more off-white than neck and under-parts. Bill pale yellow with noticeable clear-cut black band near tip; tip itself (perhaps slightly paler yellow) sometimes invisible against background, producing black-ended appearance to bill. Eye dark. Neck and under-parts white, slightly cleaner-looking than Common Gull. Back and scapulars pale grey, very obviously paler than Common and probably a shade similar to Black-headed Gull. Upperwing-coverts slightly whiter, but difference noticeable only at fairly close range; at a distance, whole mantle appeared uniform pale grey, similar to the spring adult. Some brownish feathers visible around carpal region when preening, but normally no sign of these at rest. Secondaries dark brown with noticeable white border, similar to first-summer Mediterranean Gull. At a distance, primaries looked black, and this coloration seemed to extend further along bottom of closed wing than on Common Gull. At closer range, primaries dark brown, similar to Common's but looking slightly darker at times. Very inconspicuous pale tips visible in strong sunlight. Legs usually appeared a dull flesh colour, possibly less grey than those of first-summer Common Gull; in certain lights could look somewhat greenish or yellowish, and P.G.L. described their colour as 'greenish-flesh'.

In flight: Leading primaries usually appeared black, but looked dark brown at close range; primary-coverts same but with pale tips. Clear-cut thick black bar across secondaries, and white tips to these formed narrow pale trailing edge to wing. Rest of wings and back uniform pale grey, but with some brownish visible at close range across median coverts. No black markings visible on area of inner primaries, which seemed slightly whiter than rest of wing. Underwing pale greyish-white with brownish under-primaries, bar across secondaries showing through as thick pale brown line, probably more conspicuous than on Common Gull. Tail had thick, prominent, dark brown subterminal band, leading edge not clear-cut; basal part of tail, especially at sides, rather greyish, giving generally dingier appearance than on Common Gull.

FURTHER COMPARISONS WITH COMMON GULLS

During June detailed field notes were also taken on the first-summer Common Gulls present at Blackpill, so direct comparisons could be made between the two species. At rest, the Common Gulls had pale creamy-brown wing-coverts contrasting with darker grey back and scapulars. Some individuals had dark brown carpal areas,

* In many recent publications, authors have used the word 'mantle' as meaning the upper back, but in this paper it is taken as meaning the back, scapulars and upperwing-coverts together, as defined on pages 827–828 of *A New Dictionary of Birds* (1964).

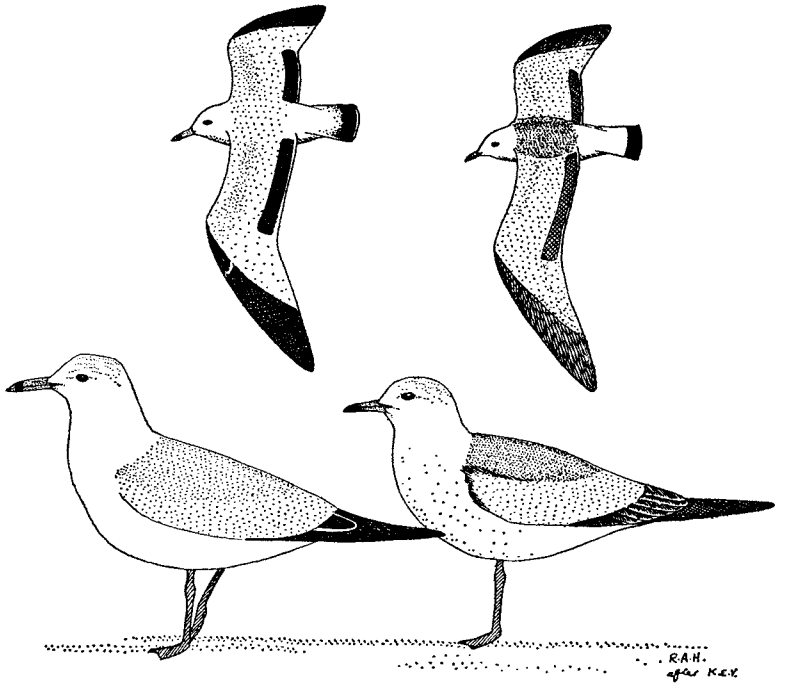


Fig. 13 First-summer Ring-billed Gull Larus delawarensis *(left, flying and at rest) and first-summer Common Gull* L. canus, *Glamorgan, June 1973. Note former's paler mantle, black ring round stouter yellow bill, and more contrasting plumage in flight (R. A. Hume)*

while some showed dark along the lower edges of the scapulars, this whole pattern producing a more varied appearance than on the Ring-billed. As with adult in March, the fairly uniform pale grey mantle was the most obvious difference from Common Gulls at rest, this being particularly useful at a distance when other features, such as bill colour, were not so obvious. The clear-cut black band around the bill was another diagnostic feature, being obvious at all times, even in flight at long range. All the first-summer Common Gulls present had completely black bill-tips, and all had a greenish-grey base to the bill except one which showed pale yellow. The differences in the size and structure of the bill were noticeable, especially when the two species were standing alongside.

In flight the Ring-billed Gull was very distinctive, its wing pattern being strikingly more contrasting than the browner, dingier plumage of a first-summer Common Gull. Many of the Common Gulls present were very drab and abraded, the bar across the secondaries often being brownish and rather inconspicuous, while some had a distinctly creamy appearance to their primaries. The leading primaries of the Ring-billed were dark and clear-cut, and the bar across the secondaries was much more conspicuous than those of the Common Gulls but, surprisingly, this feature could sometimes be rather obscure at long range. The rest of the wings and back were pale grey, the Ring-billed lacking the contrast between the pale creamy-brown coverts

and the darker grey 'saddle' (back and scapulars) of the Common Gulls. Another important feature in flight was the rather dingier tail, the greyish tinge towards the base being noticeable at close range but less so at longer distances.

BEHAVIOUR

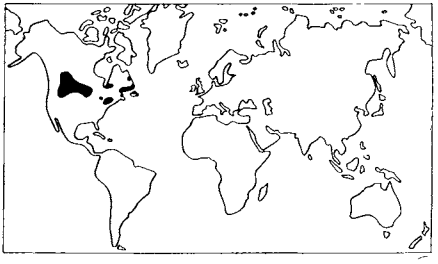
The bird's behaviour pattern seeemed similar to those of the other gulls present in the bay, flying in to roost at high tide and dispersing over the mud to feed as the tide receded. It associated with Common and Herring Gulls, mingling with both species when feeding, but seemed generally to prefer the company of the former. On its final day it was seen standing only about a metre from a Mediterranean Gull.

When feeding, it walked about like the Common Gulls (it was less 'haughty' than Herring), but it seemed to cover a larger area of ground in its search for food. It often stabbed at the surface of the mud more violently than other gulls, while at times its behaviour was remarkably plover-like, walking a few steps and then pecking at the ground. Several times I saw it eat what I presumed to be cockles, and it seemed to be very efficient at finding these, digging them out of the mud with a sideways turn of the head. At one stage it became interested in an area of mud which had been disturbed by bait diggers, and on another occasion, while eating one of the shellfish, it was threatened by a first-year Herring Gull; it immediately went on its way across the mud, leaving the larger bird to devour the remains of the food.

OCCURRENCE IN BRITAIN

The occurrence at Blackpill of two Ring-billed Gulls within three months is certainly notable, but one must obviously conjecture that this species reaches the eastern side of the Atlantic more often than the records suggest. The Ring-billed Gull is less striking than some of our other vagrant gulls, the problem lying as much in its initial location as in its identification.

K. E. VINICOMBE



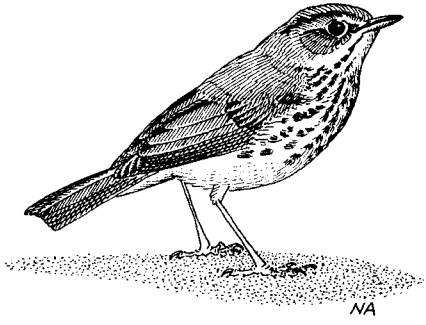
Familiarity with the relatively subtle differences between Ring-billed and Common Gulls is obviously necessary for detection of the occasional vagrant among large flocks of gulls. Ring-billed Gulls have been discovered every year since the first, and after eight years the total has reached 37. Although this was the fourth species of Nearctic gull to be added to the British and Irish list, it has now achieved the highest total and, during the period since the first occurred, the number has exceeded the combined total of the other three. It seems probable that many were overlooked in the past.

The main differences between adult and first-year Ring-billed and Common Gulls are fully covered in the descriptions of the Glamorgan individuals. Second-year Ring-billed resembles the adult, except that the black on the wing-tip extends along the leading edge of the outer wing onto the primary coverts; also, it often shows a narrow or broken tail band whereas second-year Common Gull usually has an all-white tail.

OCTOBER 1973

Ovenbird in Shetland

Iain S. Robertson



On the afternoon of 7th October 1973, while looking for migrants on Out Skerries, Shetland, I saw an unfamiliar bird run behind a dry-stone wall. I crept up, peered over and saw it searching for insects ten metres away at the base of the wall. It seemed to be of the waterthrush genus *Seiurus* and, as it had no supercilium, I thought it probably an Ovenbird *S. aurocapillus*. It ran among the fallen stones at great speed and hopped through gaps in the wall with surprising agility. It was about the size of a Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* and its stance, with tail erect and wings drooping on either side, was also reminiscent of that species. In colour, however, it was similar to a Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, and the main field-marks of a pale eye-ring and dark crown-stripes were very conspicuous.

I took a few brief notes, then set up a mist-net through a gap in the wall and began to drive the bird towards it. It ran at great speed straight under the net, despite the fact that the bottom shelf was weighted down with stones. On the second drive I flushed it at the last moment and it flew into the net. I took it back to my house where my wife and I were able to confirm the initial identification from Peterson (1941).

After taking a detailed description and measurements I photographed the bird, unfortunately in poor light, and released it in a nearby cabbage patch. As the light was going fast, we left it to find shelter undisturbed. The following is a summary of the description, from which we concluded that it was in first-year plumage:

Head and upper-parts: crown warm olive-brown (the feathers being orange-tan completely obscured by greenish tips), edged on either side by dark, wavy stripes from base of upper mandible to nape; lores mottled dusky; conspicuous orbital ring cream, tinged slightly buff around outer border; sides of face darker olive-brown than crown, bordered by broad, creamy stripe from base of bill to below eye; black moustachial stripe from base of bill to just below this white border; rest of upper-parts warm olive-green, brighter on rump and uppertail-coverts. *Underparts:* throat creamy-white; breast heavily spotted with black tips to white feathers, the spots forming lines of streaks on upper breast and becoming scattered below; belly white; flanks buffish with long dark streaks; undertail-coverts white, reaching to within 16 mm of tip of tail, central feathers with dark brown bases. *Wings:* lesser coverts as mantle; median coverts same, but with golden-olive outer webs; greater coverts olive on outer webs, greyish on inner; bastard wing and primary coverts olive with outer fringes golden; primaries greyish-brown, with narrow olive margins to outer webs becoming broader on secondaries; tertials similar but inner webs more olive; bend of wing golden; underwing buffish-grey; axillaries lemon-yellow. *Tail:* feathers with broad olive outer webs and greyish inner webs, central pair olive on both webs, outer pair slightly paler than rest, and all feathers with small hooks at the tips. *Bare parts:* upper mandible dark horn with flesh-coloured cutting edge; lower mandible pinky horn, pale yellowish-flesh at base; gape pink; iris very dark brown; legs and feet bright flesh-pink, slightly yellowish at rear of tarsus and darker on upper surface of feet; rictal bristles five, very weak. *Wing-formula:* 1st and 2nd primaries equal longest, 3rd −0.5 mm, 4th −4.5 mm, 5th −8.5 mm, 6th −11.0 mm, 7th −14.5 mm, 8th −15.5 mm, 9th −17.0 mm, 10th −18.0 mm; 2nd and 3rd emarginated on outer web, 4th slightly. *Measurements:* wing 78 mm; bill (from skull) 15.5 mm; tarsus 23 mm; tail

Originally published in *British Birds* 68: 453–455. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

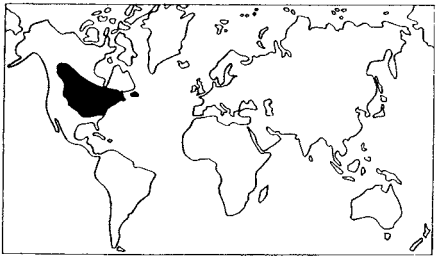
51.5 mm; total length 135 mm; wing point to tip of tail 26 mm; wing point to longest secondary 12.5 mm; weight 20.4 gm.

The following day, 8th October, D. Coutts, J. H. Simpson and R. J. Tulloch came to the Skerries to see the bird. After a long search, it was found feeding along a grassy bank on the shore-line, but it quickly flew off to a point about 500 metres away on a rocky, open hillside. It continued to feed in this area and was seen well by all of us. After about an hour it went behind a small hillock and we were unable to relocate it.

All observers commented on the resemblances to a Nightingale and a giant Goldcrest. It was a striking bird in the field, the bright green upper-parts contrasting with the very heavy black streaking on the otherwise white under-parts. The head pattern, with the tan crown-stripe bordered by two black lines, was conspicuous despite the fact that in the hand the tan feathers were obscured by greenish tips. The huge pale eye-ring gave it a slightly comical look. It was far brighter than depicted in Peterson (1941) and Godfrey (1966). These guides also state that the species is more often heard than seen, though this was certainly not the case with the Skerries bird, which was not heard to call.

An interesting sequel to this record took place on 12th October. I had not seen the bird since 8th, despite searching, and I had assumed that it had left the isles. On the night of 11th October, however, a Whalsay fishing boat stayed at the Skerries pier, and on leaving the following morning the crew noticed an unusual bird in a fish basket on the deck; later the skipper of the boat, the M/B *Heather Bell*, described the bird to J.H.S. and his description left no doubt that it had been an Ovenbird. Unfortunately the crew did not notice if it was wearing a ring, and it left the boat some distance from Fetlar.

The record was accepted as the first fully authenticated for Britain and Ireland by both the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union and the Rarities Committee; indeed, it was the first for Europe. It must be added, however, that the species had previously been included in category D on the strength of a wing found on the tideline at Formby, Merseyside, on 4th January 1969 by R. Wagstaffe (*Brit. Birds* 63: 289; *Ibis* 113: 422); category D of the British and Irish list is a holding category intended as a means of collecting together records of species which are not yet full additions because it is considered that they need further proof of natural occurrence, and tideline corpses (or parts) are included in it.



The tideline wing in 1969 and the live bird in 1973 remained the only reports of this species in Britain and Ireland until a freshly dead corpse was found in Lough Carra Forest, Co. Mayo, on 8th December 1977.

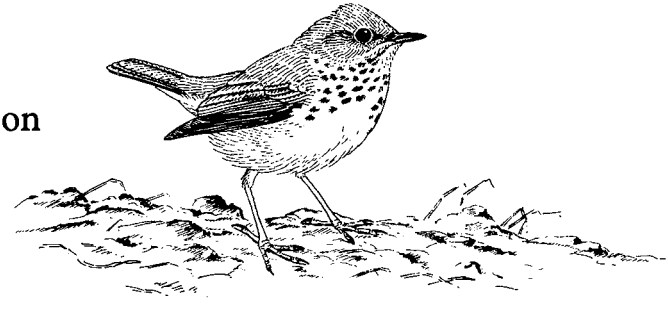
On some Ovenbirds the orange crown is completely obscured, and the blackish lateral

crown-stripes are reduced to a short, narrow streak above each eye. Even so, the prominent creamy eye-ring, white underparts with bold black streaks or stripes, warm olive-green upperparts, and pale pinkish legs leave little chance for confusion, provided that this creeping skulker shows itself for long enough.

JUNE 1975

Hermit Thrush on Fair Isle

Roger A. Broad



At about 09.00 G.M.T. on 2nd June 1975, Stephen Rumsey and Harold Nash were walking through Field Croft on Fair Isle, Shetland, when they observed a small thrush-like bird with a well spotted breast and a prominent red tail feeding in the open on newly ploughed land. Realising that it was a North American thrush, they made careful note of the salient features and then attracted the attention of a number of other observers, including Tom Francis, R. A. Richardson, P. J. Roberts and me. S.R.'s initial impression were quickly confirmed, and we variously likened the bird to a small Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* with a red tail or a Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* with a heavily spotted breast. The bird proved to be both obliging and approachable, and for the rest of the day it remained around the same, small ploughed field where many observers were able to watch it quietly as it fed unconcernedly at ranges down to 9 m.

Its habits, stance and structure were typically thrush-like and, although appearing smaller, it basically resembled a Song Thrush. The upper-parts were fairly uniform medium olive-brown and the under-parts were clean white, boldly marked across the throat and upper breast with large blackish spots. The most distinctive feature was the tail, which was bright reddish-brown along its whole length, this colour extending onto the uppertail-coverts, where it contrasted noticeably with the brown tones of the rest of the upper-parts. From some angles, the reddish colour of the uppertail-coverts appeared to extend downwards on either side around the base of the tail. The wings were a similar brown to the upper-parts, but an area on the primaries and perhaps some of the outer secondaries was a warmer, more reddish hue, and there was a suggestion of a faint wing-bar on the closed wing, formed by small pale tips to the greater coverts. The face lacked any distinctive features, although, at close range, there was a suggestion of a short, pale supercilium. Field notes were taken by several observers and, having watched the bird for upwards of an hour, we sought to identify it by referring to Godfrey (1966), Peterson (1947) and Robbins *et al.* (1966). We

Originally published in *British Birds* 72: 414–417. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

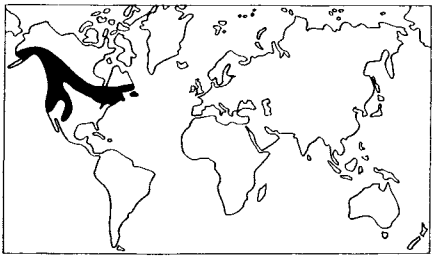
quickly established that our notes tallied virtually word for word with Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*, and that there were no similar species showing a combination of reddish-brown tail contrasting with an olive-brown back.

When the bird was originally located in the morning, the viewing conditions could be described only as reasonable; there was a moderate to strong northeast wind blowing and the cloud cover was complete. Later, however, the clouds cleared and we were able to watch in good sunlight. During the afternoon, an unsuccessful attempt was made to mist-net the bird. Additional notes were collected on its behaviour by several observers, some of whom photographed it from the cover of a nearby stone wall (Photo 41), and, just before dusk, P. Jackson, watching from this same vantage point, saw the bird tower up into the sky, gaining height until it was lost from sight; it was not seen subsequently.

During the day, the following characters were recorded and agreed by all observers. It appeared to be similar in proportion to a Robin *Erithacus rubecula* or a dumpy Song Thrush and, on the number of occasions when it was chased by Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe*, which had been feeding nearby, a direct size comparison indicated that the two species were of similar size. It is quite likely, however, that some of the Wheatears were of the large Greenland form *O. o. leucorrhoa*. During these sorties, it would, when pressed, anxiously flick its wings and occasionally raise its crown feathers. Short flights from place to place were invariably low over the ground and would almost always be followed by the bird alighting with a very upright stance, bill held a little above the horizontal and tail and wings held very low, after which the tail would be slowly raised above the level of the wings. Its general feeding habits were thrush-like, taking either a series of hops or a short run, followed by a brief stop to stand upright before stooping to pick up something from the ground. At other times, it would pick up an item after making a short rush with head and neck extended, before resuming its characteristic erect stance. Although it favoured the edge of the roughly ploughed field and the bordering short-cropped grass, it also spent much time feeding between the ridges turned up by the plough and was not averse to feeding out in the open on the top of the ridges. The following description was taken in the field:

Upper-parts: Forehead, nape, mantle, scapulars and lower back all medium olive-brown, with faint greenish tinge in some lights (similar to Song Thrush). Crown similar to mantle, but a little darker and redder and apparently lacking greenish tinge. Lower rump, uppertail-coverts and all tail feathers reddish-brown, in brightness judged to be between red of tails of Thrush Nightingale and Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Lores and ear-coverts perhaps a little paler and more mottled than mantle, especially around eye. Supercilium indistinct, short and pale. Eye-ring incomplete and whitish. *Under-parts:* Chin and moustachial region white and unspotted. Throat, upper breast and anterior flanks clean white, with clear, well demarcated, large blackish spots. Lower breast, belly and vent region clean white. Lower flanks and towards base of tail washed buff. At some angles, reddish colour of rump appeared to extend downwards onto lateral undertail-coverts as patch. *Wings:* Coverts similar to mantle, but greater coverts with narrow, pale tips, giving faint wing-bar on closed wing, which also visible in flight at close range. Primaries and secondaries darker than coverts; primaries and perhaps some outer secondaries with reddish tinge. Tertials similar to inner secondaries, but edged a little paler. *Bare parts:* Bill thrush-like in structure, light brown, but paler at sides and towards base. Eyes large, dark and prominent. Legs long and pale pinkish, recalling Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* in coloration. *Voice:* No calls heard.

The Hermit Thrush is the fourth member of the genus *Catharus* to be identified in Britain and Ireland: the three previously recorded species being the Grey-cheeked Thrush *C. minimus*, Swainson's Thrush *C. ustulatus* and Veery *C. fuscescens*. Some general notes on these four species have been given by Allsopp (1972, and see pages 174–177) and Harding (1979).



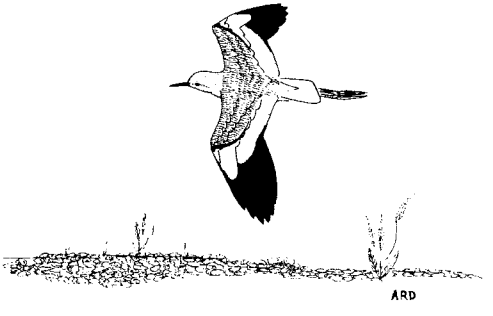
This is still the only record in Britain and Ireland.

The habit of lifting (or cocking) and slowly lowering the tail, with every major movement, is characteristic of Hermit Thrush; this, and the contrasting rusty tail, are its two best distinctions from the other four spot-breasted American thrushes.

JULY 1975

White-tailed Plover in Warwickshire

A. R. Dean, J. E. Fortey and E. G. Phillips



The excavation of sand and gravel at Packington, Warwickshire, has created a system of freshwater pools which regularly attract migrating waders. At 13.30 G.M.T. on 12th July 1975, J.E.F., Mrs E. Green and E.G.P. were searching the area for migrants when a medium-sized wader of remarkable appearance flew past them and landed on an area of thinly-vegetated sand and shingle about 30 m ahead. In flight, a striking black-and-white wing pattern and a uniformly white tail were the predominant features, but when the bird landed it revealed primarily sandy body plumage, a pale greyish-white head, and long, bright yellow legs.

The general shape and character, particularly the broad and rounded wings, indicated a *Hoplopterus/Chettusia/Vanellus* plover. The body colour initially suggested a Sociable Plover *C. gregaria*, but the leg colour and the lack of discrete head- and tail-markings clearly precluded that species. The area of white in the wing was also unusually large, extending from the secondaries on to the greater coverts and showing as a white bar along the lower edge of the folded wing. The only reference book available at the time was Peterson *et al.* (1965), but, from the brief description which

Originally published in *British Birds* 70: 465–471. Heading drawing by A. R. Dean

it contained, the observers concluded that the bird was a White-tailed Plover *C. leucura*, the first to be recorded in Britain and Ireland.

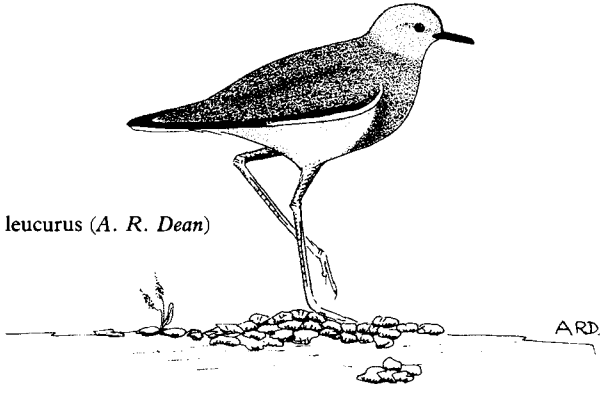
By chance, A.R.D. arrived in the area at 16.00 hours and was informed of the discovery. Other observers, including A. R. M. Blake, R. A. Hume, P. D. Hyde, P. J. Milford and J. H. W. Ridley, were contacted and before dark a comprehensive series of notes, sketches and photographs (Photo 42) had been obtained. Subsequent comparison of plumage details with Dementiev and Gladkov (1966), Etchécopar and Hüe (1967) and Heinzel *et al.* (1972) suggested that the plover was an adult male. It remained in the area until 18th July and was seen by several hundred observers from all over Britain. Independent descriptions by A.R.D., R.A.H., E.G.P., M. R. Seaman and others were later examined and accepted by the Rarities Committee and by the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union.

SIZE AND STRUCTURE

The White-tailed Plover appeared a little smaller than Lapwings *V. vanellus* in the vicinity, although it was not possible to compare the two species directly. The general proportions were also reminiscent of Lapwing, the full-breasted character of that species being in evidence and the girth conspicuously greater than that of a nearby Redshank *Tringa totanus*. At rest, the wings cloaked the tail, but extended little beyond it; in flight, they were revealed as broad and rounded at the tip, and this contributed further to an impression of sturdiness. Nevertheless, owing to its smoothly contoured head, relatively longer bill and, particularly, its much longer legs, the White-tailed Plover possessed a distinctly more graceful character than that of a Lapwing. The bill was about three-quarters as long as the head, compared with one-half in the Lapwing. The legs were decidedly long, being approximately one-and-a-half times the maximum body-depth: more closely comparable with *Tringa* sandpipers than with typical plovers.

PLUMAGE AND BARE PARTS

Head greyish-white, distinctly paler than mantle, but, at close range, fine sandy streaking visible on crown and ear-coverts. Absence of streaking immediately above eye resulted in off-white supercilium running back towards nape. Mantle, scapulars and inner wing-coverts grey-brown with pink or mauve suffusion, which varied in intensity with light conditions: basic colour similar to, but a shade warmer than, nearby Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius*. Throat off-white, and neck and breast sandy-grey, becoming progressively warmer in colour and



White-tailed Plover Chettusia leucurus (*A. R. Dean*)

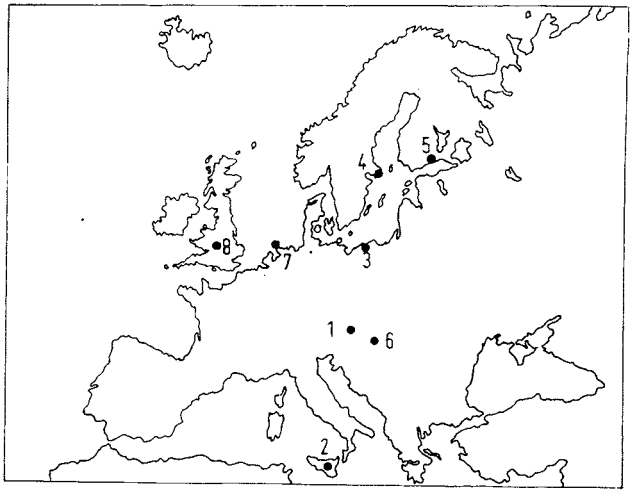


Fig. 14 European records of White-tailed Plovers Chettusia leucura *during 1975, numbered chronologically: 1 Illmitz, Austria, 29th March to 17th July; 2 Sicily, Italy, 19th April; 3 Koszalin, Poland, 30th April; 4 Mörkö, Sweden, 10th May; 7 Texel, Netherlands, 9th to 12th July; 8 Packington, England, 12th to 18th July*

culminating in copper-brown across lower breast. Belly, flanks and vent off-white, with orange-pink flush, latter particularly apparent when bird stooped to feed with tail towards observer. Largely black primaries and tips to outermost secondaries formed extensive black tip to spread wing and dark margin to point of folded wing. Inner secondaries, tips of greater coverts and carpal region white, combining to form broad panel across spread wing from tips of tertials to carpal joint; at rest, this feature reduced to narrow white bar along lower edge of wing. Subterminal blackish line across outer secondary coverts separated white from grey-brown areas of wing. Underwing-coverts white, contrasting with black primaries; tail and tail-coverts uniformly white. Difficult to determine exact colour of iris, but it always appeared dark and was considered by at least some observers to be deep red. Bill black. Legs bright yellow.

GENERAL FIELD-CHARACTERS AND BEHAVIOUR

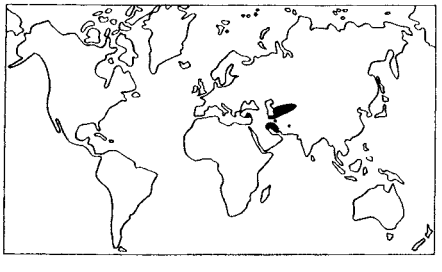
The black-and-white wing pattern, unmarked white tail, pale, basically uniform head, and very long, bright yellow legs make the White-tailed Plover a relatively distinctive species. The remarkable, if rather complex, wing pattern recalled that of Sociable Plover or Spur-winged Plover *H. spinosus* (with which some observers were familiar), although the area of white in the wing was considerably more extensive. The combination of black primaries, predominantly white secondaries and grey-brown coverts prompted comparisons with Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini* by several observers. Compared with most other closely related plovers in full plumage, the under-parts displayed relatively little contrast. The darkest zone of colour, at the boundary of breast and belly, occasionally suggested a discrete band when the bird rested in a hunched-up position, but became poorly defined during active feeding.

The very long legs were perhaps the outstanding character when the bird was at rest and, in flight, the degree to which they extended beyond the tip of the tail was impressive. When the bird squatted, thus hiding its legs, it could be surprisingly difficult to locate against a background of sand and stones.

The plover fed on dry ground and in water up to several centimetres deep; prey items were taken from the surface of the water, but not infrequently the whole head was submerged. On dry ground, the gait, although more mobile than that of a Lapwing, conformed to the usual plover pattern of three or four steps followed by a stoop-and-peck action. Occasionally, the plover would bob its head in the manner of a Redshank, sometimes before taking flight.

EUROPEAN RECORDS IN 1975

Until 1975, White-tailed Plovers were regarded as extreme vagrants except in southwest Asia and northeast Africa, the only European records outside Russia being from Austria (1968), France (1840), Greece (1958 and 1966) and Malta (1864, 1869 and 1973). Not surprisingly, therefore, the occurrence of one in central Britain was initially greeted with some incredulity. Although P. J. Stead and M. D. England (*in litt.*) established that some had been imported into Britain by dealers, inquiries by the review bodies indicated that the likelihood of escape was small; on the other hand, investigations revealed that there had been no less than eight European records during 1975 (Fig. 14). The closeness of some of the dates suggests that the number of birds involved in this remarkable incursion may have been less than eight. Nevertheless, the combination of these records and their geographical spread strongly indicate a genuine influx of White-tailed Plovers northwestwards into Europe from their Asiatic breeding grounds. The reasons for such an influx remain obscure, but, if recent developments in Transcaucasia and Turkey reflect a phase of range expansion, then a certain amount of extralimital movement might be expected. In the USSR west of the Caspian (Azerbaydzhan SSR), nesting was first suspected in 1954 and confirmed in 1961 and 1963 (Vinogradov 1963). In May 1970, a displaying pair was seen in southern Turkey, and breeding was confirmed in 1971 in two well-separated parts of Anatolia: two pairs were present and one nest found on the Goksu delta (south coast) and nine pairs present (two nests found) on wetlands near Yarma on the central plateau; before 1970, there had been only one record for Turkey, and that as long ago as 1910 (Kumerloeve 1971, Ornithological Society of Turkey 1975). Thus, a westward expansion may be in progress, although it has yet to be ascertained whether this represents permanent colonisation or irruption due to desiccation farther east.



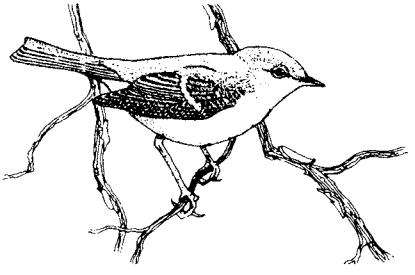
The only other White-tailed Plover to be observed here was seen (and filmed) at Chesil Beach, Dorset, on 3rd July 1979 (Brit. Birds *74: 228*).

First-winter White-tailed Plovers may retain juvenile features, such as pale-tipped scapulars, pale-fringed wing coverts, and faintly dark-tipped tail, until as late as January of their second calendar-year.

SEPTEMBER 1975

Tennessee Warblers on Fair Isle

Roger A. Broad



On the morning of 6th September 1975, C. D. R. Heard and G. Walbridge were walking along the side of a dry-stone wall at Finniquoy, Fair Isle, Shetland, when G.W. flushed a bird from near the mouth of the Double Dyke trap. It flew overhead between them giving a frequent 'zit, zit' call which was very much like that of a Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* or a Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*; when it alighted on the clifftop, however, it was obviously a very bright warbler. The whole breast was bright yellow while the upper-parts were a bright lime green. They watched it for about two minutes as it dashed about the hillside. Once, when it perched briefly on a roadside fence, its undertail-coverts were seen to be pure white, and a broad but indistinct wing-bar was noticed. It also showed a neat yellow supercilium joining a distinct yellow eye-ring; darker flight feathers contrasting with the remarkable green of the mantle and coverts; and dark grey legs. Unfortunately, it was rarely still and did not stay for long, soon flying off towards the south of the island. Extensive searches until dark failed to rediscover it and their brief views were insufficient to identify it with certainty.

Early the following morning, C.D.R.H. and G.W. relocated it in a small potato patch, where it proved to be far less elusive. Both observers immediately realised that it was an American warbler and a little research showed that the combination of yellow under-parts, pure white undertail-coverts and presence of a wing-bar was diagnostic of Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina*. Later, it was well seen by many observers including R. A. Broad and P. J. Roberts, who were able to corroborate the original field observations and, after consultation with several reference works, all agreed with the initial identification: a Tennessee Warbler, a species previously unrecorded in Britain and Ireland.

The bird frequented the crofting area of the island, where it was seen daily until 18th September, feeding mainly in the standing crops. During this period, it provided many observers with the opportunity for extended observations, but little extra was added to the comprehensive field notes compiled by C.D.R.H. and G.W.:

Size and shape: Shorter but much stockier than Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus:* a dumpy little warbler. *Plumage:* Generally rather yellow-faced, with neat yellow supercilium extending short distance beyond eye and joined to equally distinct yellow eye-ring. Green lores and ear-coverts, forming obscure eyestripe. Upper-parts uniform, bright lime green, appearing even brighter on rump, particularly noticeable in flight. Wing-coverts same colour as upper-parts, but tips of greater coverts broadly tipped paler, forming broad wing-bar, rather poorly demarcated on inner feathers, but striking on outer feathers, where it contrasted with darker dusky-olive flight feathers; median coverts edged paler yellowish-green and forming indistinct upper wing-bar, visible in dull flat light, but not apparent in strong sunlight; thin green fringes on outer webs of primaries, which had distinct whitish tips forming obvious row of spots on folded wing; tertials with broad, poorly defined, green fringes. Tail with green fringes, similar to flight

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 90–94. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

feathers and contrasting with bright rump. Under-parts: breast bright yellow becoming paler on belly and contrasting with pure white undertail-coverts. *Bare parts:* Bill broader based and slightly longer than Willow Warbler's, but fine-tipped, dark greyish with paler pinkish tinge near base of lower mandible. Legs dark grey. *Call:* Consistent, repeated 'zit, zit' most like a Firecrest's, but more penetrating.

C.D.R.H. and G.W. also noticed that the bird had the peculiar habit of wagging the whole of its body from side to side while the head was held angled downwards.

On 18th September, the bird was mist-netted at Field Croft and a thorough examination confirmed the original identification. It was seen in the hand by many observers at the observatory, where it was ringed, measured and the following detailed plumage description recorded:

Upper-parts: Forehead to rump including scapulars bright olive-green, brightest on lower mantle and rump, in some lights feathers showed yellowish caste and silky appearance. *Tail:* All feathers sharply pointed, dark grey-brown with olive-green sheen, inner webs with white fringe, most noticeable on outer and penultimate feathers. *Wings:* Primaries blackish-grey with distinct white crescents at tips particularly on inner primaries; secondaries similar to primaries but broad olive-green fringes on outer webs forming panel on closed wing; tertials as secondaries but fringes broader and feathers with general greenish caste; alula and primary coverts as primaries but with narrow olive-green fringes and alula covert with narrow, pale olive tip; greater coverts similar to primary coverts but fringes much broader, almost yellow-green and extending over most of outer web, six outermost feathers with distinct pale yellow dot at tip of outer web; median coverts as greater coverts but bright green fringes on inner webs and tips without yellow dot; lesser coverts as scapulars; underside of flight feathers pale, soft grey; underwing coverts off-white, paler lemon-yellow at tips. *Face:* Supercilium more yellow than upper-parts, greenish-yellow extending from top of upper mandible to just posterior to eye, greyish line from bill to eye; eye-ring pale creamy-yellow touching supercilium above eye; ear-coverts similar to mantle but more dingy, greyer above and yellower below. *Under-parts:* Chin, feathers with white bases and bright yellow tips; neck, upper breast and anterior flanks very bright yellow; posterior flanks greyish, with greenish tone at base of wings and yellowish-buff wash extending around base of legs and towards vent; belly silky, off-white with some yellowish streaks; under-tail-coverts long, similar to belly but separated by yellowish-buff wash just posterior to vent. *Bare parts:* Bill dagger-like, graduated to a fine point, dark grey, a little paler at tip and cutting edge, lower mandible generally a little paler than upper and with yellowish tinge. Eyes very dark brown. Legs and feet medium grey, paler laterally; soles almost flesh-coloured; claws rather stubby, a little paler than legs. *Measurements:* Wing 66 mm; bill 12.5 mm; tarsus 18 mm; tail 43.5 mm; weight 11.5 g. *Wing formula:* 1st primary 6 mm shorter than primary coverts; 3rd and 4th longest; 2nd −2 mm; 5th −1.5 mm; 6th −7 mm; 7th −10.5 mm; 8th −12.5 mm; 9th −13.5 mm; 10th −16 mm; 3rd, 4th and 5th primaries emarginated, and shallow notch on 2nd, 3rd and 4th primaries.

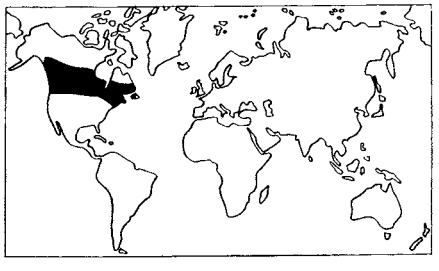
After it had been photographed (Photos 43 & 44), it was released and it was not subsequently seen until the afternoon of 20th September, when it was observed at Field Croft for the last time.

At 12.15 G.M.T. on 24th September 1975, I was in the Fair Isle Observatory garden, where I saw what I at first took to be a *Phylloscopus* warbler, flitting low down among the cabbages. The light was poor and it was raining lightly, but, nevertheless, as it flew across a gap, I was immediately struck by the brightness of the plumage, although I was unable to discern any detail. It then flitted up and over the observatory, giving a familiar, repeated 'zit, zit' call and I was convinced that it was a Tennessee Warbler. The bird had flown directly into the mouth of the Observatory Trap, where I succeeded in catching it and where, to my complete surprise, I found the bird to be a new individual. It was seen in the hand by many observers, some of whom had also seen the previous individual. After release, it was last observed, later the same day, on Buness.

In the hand, comparison with the notes of the first individual showed that the wing formula was almost identical and the measurements within 1 mm. The weight (8.6 g) reflected its recent arrival, being 2.9 g lighter than the first bird which was trapped almost two weeks after it was first seen. The detailed plumage descriptions were broadly similar, but the following differences, which might have been in total sufficient to distinguish the two birds in the field were recorded:

Generally duller, colours less intense, particularly the yellows on under-parts. Forehead a little yellower than crown. Eye-ring pale lemon yellow above and below eye, but incomplete, interrupted by greyish eye-stripe extending from base of bill to a little way posterior to eye. *Under-parts:* yellow of upper breast less intense, lemon yellow: flanks more grey, belly white with yellow streaking virtually absent. *Tail:* feathers a little less pointed. *Wings:* white crescent-shaped tips to inner primaries and outer secondaries, although showing up as distinct spots, less extensive; tips to greater coverts forming wing-bar, but colour of spots less intense, more diffuse, extending on outer webs as fringes.

Browne (1960) drew attention to the possibility of the Tennessee Warbler crossing the Atlantic where, in autumn plumage and appearing superficially like a *Phylloscopus* warbler, it might easily be overlooked. He listed the call, which he rendered as 'zi' or 'zi-zi' and more resembling the call of a tit *Parus* than of any other European warbler; the grey legs; and one or two wing-bars as the best distinguishing features. Peterson (1947) described the Tennessee Warbler as a dull fall warbler in its usual range, but, for a vagrant in a European situation, this comment would be misleading. Clearly, if the Fair Isle individuals are typical of the species in autumn plumage, the general brightness, both the green upper-parts and the yellow of the upper breast, may in many European situations be sufficient to pick it out as something different. The brightness coupled with the frequent distinctive call make this species less likely to be overlooked than might initially have been supposed.



These two remain the only records in Britain and Ireland.

First-winter males and females are similar: the blue-grey crown, whitish supercilium and underparts of the adult male Tennessee Warbler are not acquired until its first summer.

SEPTEMBER 1975

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Scilly

David B. Hunt

At about 12.00 G.M.T. on 26th September 1975, D.B.H. and a small group of other birdwatchers, including Mr & Mrs J. H. Chinnery, Mr & Mrs V. Dobson, D. J. Lewis and H. W. Oliver, found a small woodpecker (Picidae), which no one could immediately identify, among scrubby sallows *Salix* at the southeast corner of Tresco Great Pool, Isles of Scilly.

Suspecting a Nearctic species, since the weather during the previous 48 hours had been westerly, with gale-force winds and torrential rain, an attempt was made to get a detailed field description, though this was hindered considerably by poor light conditions, with hazy sunshine from behind the trees in which the bird was being viewed. By piecing together the collected observations of the group during the few minutes that it was in view, however, a good enough picture of the bird emerged for a tentative identification to be made after consulting the generally available American field guides. It was judged to be an immature Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*. This was later confirmed by D.B.H. and many other ornithologists who saw the bird and photographed it (Photo 45) during the days until it was last seen on 6th October. It was further considered to be an immature male in transitional plumage. The details observed were as follows:

Size: Small squat woodpecker roughly equivalent in size to Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*. *Plumage:* Crown flecked greyish, with distinct scarlet tinge on forehead. Nape paler grey, merging into dirty-white barring and mottling in centre of mantle. Facial pattern: dark line from forehead through eye broadened into indistinct greyish mottling of neck. Another dark line ran from base of lower mandible, also merging into mottling of neck. Broad whitish eyebrow contrasting with darker crown began above eye and merged with mottling of neck to give capped appearance in some views. Another broader white line ran from above base of bill, below eye and also merged with mottling of neck. When viewed head-on, apparent conjunction of these markings above base of bill, to give narrow white forehead topped by dark line, above which was a touch of bright scarlet. Chin similarly tinged with scarlet on diffuse grey background, becoming darker grey on throat, in band linked with lower dark neck mark to form gorget. Upper breast mottled paler grey, finishing suddenly to give roughly triangular area of

Originally published in *British Birds* 72: 410–414. Heading drawing by R. A. Hume

lemon-yellow on lower breast and belly. Sides of breast and flanks dirty-white with olive tinge, and variety of dark flecks and notches. Undertail-coverts streaked dirty-white. Wings: secondaries and coverts black, contrasting with creamy-white primary coverts, giving broad longitudinal wing-bar along front edge of closed wing. Primaries black, with creamy-white spots and edges. Tertials black, scalloped with creamy-white edges. Scapulars broadly barred white on black. Rump white. Outer tail feathers black, with white edging. Central tail feathers shorter than pointed outers, with black-and-white barring. *Bare parts:* Bill greyish-horn, with tip and lower mandible darker; comparatively long and heavy for small woodpecker. Legs greyish. Iris black.

BEHAVIOUR

Although the sapsucker spent some of its time among the sallows in which it was first seen, it did not appear to be drilling for sap in them, though, on the first day, it was seen and heard tapping on more than one occasion. This was perhaps before it discovered the nearby elms *Ulmus*, where it was most frequently watched during its stay on Tresco. It was here that the bird seemed to find the right kind of tree-trunk to work on, and the rings of holes which it made (Photo 46) are still clearly visible three years later.

The sapsucker worked the trees methodically, normally starting less than 1 m from the ground, moving up the trunk gradually until reaching a height of 5–6 m before flying low again to start on the next tree. After a few days, the marks of the bird's activity became visible, with the appearance of rows of holes drilled horizontally at varying heights, but especially at around 4–5 m, where the bird spent most of its feeding time. The holes were fairly evenly spaced, in rows of six to eight, 1–2 cm apart, but occasionally were closer spaced vertically as well as horizontally. Holes were visited approximately hourly in rotation, and the bird rarely spent more than a minute or two in one spot while apparently feeding, though at times it would remain motionless for several minutes against the trunk, either as a concealment tactic or simply just resting.

Little sap appeared to be reaching the mouths of the holes during the sapsucker's period of absence, but wasps *Vespula* and flies (Diptera) were attracted and might have formed part of its diet. On one occasion, it was seen to withdraw and swallow a white object at least 1 cm in length, which could have been an insect larva of some sort.

The sapsucker normally moved upwards in short, jerky progressions, though on a few occasions it was seen to move diagonally down the trunk a short distance, tail-first. Once, it was seen to perch rather awkwardly among slimmer branches in the manner of a typical passerine. On the few brief occasions that it was seen on the wing, it appeared to have the undulating flight typical of the familiar European woodpeckers. No recognisable calls were heard.

STATUS

In North America, this is a common species, sometimes considered a pest in areas of concentrated horticulture and silviculture. It has occurred as a vagrant in Bermuda and Greenland. In Europe, the only evidence of vagrancy is an unpublished record from Iceland based on a skin in the Museum of Natural History in Reykjavik, for which few data are available (A. Petersen *in litt.*). This is therefore the first record for Britain and Ireland, and the first published record for Europe.

ASSOCIATED OCCURRENCES

Autumn 1975 is now widely accepted as having been an exceptional period for the

occurrence of Nearctic species in Britain, including several landbirds in addition to the now annually expected long-distance wader migrants.

In Scilly alone, a total of at least 20 individuals representing no less than 12 North American species was recorded, including a Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* (*Brit. Birds* 69: 354) and a Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea* (70: 300–301), both of which had occurred within 48 hours of the sapsucker.

Nearctic landbird vagrants were observed not only in Scilly during September 1975, but throughout Britain (strangely, there was none seen in Ireland). The build-up to the climax at the end of that month (arrival dates only, of passerines and near-passerines) was as follows:

6th Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina*, Fair Isle, Shetland
18th Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, Out Skerries, Shetland
23rd Black-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*, Redcar, Cleveland
24th a second Tennessee Warbler on Fair Isle
25th Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, Aberdaron, Gwynedd
26th Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, Sark, Channel Islands
26th Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Tresco, Scilly
27th Black-and-white Warbler, St Mary's, Scilly
28th Scarlet Tanager, Tresco, Scilly

This remarkable series of occurrences was followed by an interval of several days before the next Nearctic passerines were found: a Bobolink on St Mary's, Scilly, on 9th October and a Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata* on St Agnes, Scilly, on 19th October.

WEATHER

Following a prolonged spell of unsettled weather in mid September, the effects of which were felt mostly in northern Britain, with westerly gales, torrential rain and birds to match, a vigorous and fast-moving depression, originating over Newfoundland on 22nd, arrived in western Britain by 24th and rapidly spread northeast across the country. The winds in the warm sector between the warm and cold fronts to the south of the centre of this depression provided ideal conditions for a very rapid transatlantic flight, possibly as short as 48 hours, and it seems likely that the sapsucker and other Nearctic landbirds discovered during the period 25th to 28th September all arrived in association with this depression.

DISCUSSION

In his comment on this record, D. I. M. Wallace (*Brit. Birds* 69: 343) expressed surprise that a sapsucker rather than a Yellow-shafted Flicker *Colaptes auratus* should have been the first Nearctic woodpecker to reach Britain or Ireland, and referred to Durand (1963), who reported a flicker surviving a lengthy transatlantic crossing in October 1962. Later, Durand (1972) gave further support to the probability of a flicker being first to reach Europe, citing encounters with no fewer than 21 flickers at sea, as opposed to only one sapsucker. The sapsucker is, however, the only American woodpecker known to undertake oceanic voyages regularly, crossing the relatively short distance from Florida and other southern states to Cuba and other West Indian islands each autumn. Thus, it is probably better adapted for oceanic crossings and more likely to arrive in Europe unassisted, given favourable weather conditions.

The likelihood—or otherwise—of assisted passage has been much argued in the literature already cited and also by Nisbet (1963). The possibility cannot be ruled out, but the appearance at the same time in Scilly of two other Nearctic species, both of

them seemingly less likely to withstand a shipboard voyage, favours the probability of a non-assisted passage for all three. Furthermore, the wide scatter of other vagrants through Britain at the same time also points towards this alternative.

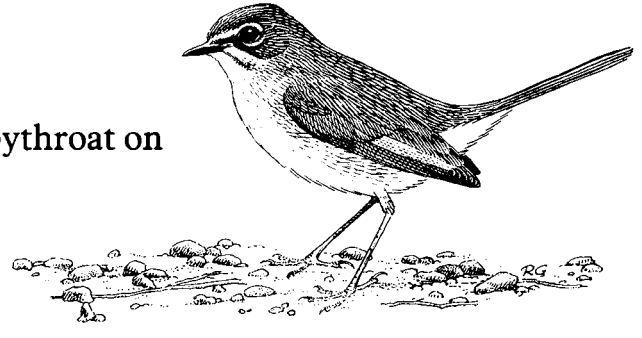
A Yellow-shafted Flicker Colaptes auratus, *one of ten or more which landed on board RMS* Mauretania *on 7th and 8th October 1962, during a crossing from New York, USA, to Southampton, Hampshire, survived and was watched flying ashore just inside Cobh Harbour, Co. Cork, at 08.00 G.M.T. on 13th October 1962* (Brit. Birds *56: 157–164*), *but that and the 1975 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker are still the only Nearctic woodpeckers ever to be observed in Britain and Ireland.*

Female Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers of all ages lack red at least on the throat (they may show some on the crown), and adult males have a neat, defined pattern of black, white and clear red on the head.

OCTOBER 1975

Siberian Rubythroat on Fair Isle

A. R. Lowe



On the morning of 9th October 1975, P. J. Roberts, S. G. D. Cook and I were returning to the bird observatory from the south end of Fair Isle, Shetland, when we came across a bird at the North Grind that was unfamiliar to us. It had the upright stance, long legs and chat-like shape of a Robin *Erithacus rubecula* or a Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*, but appeared to be nearer to the size of a Nightingale *L. megarhynchos*. It fed on the ground and, as it ran about, its wings were held drooped and its longish tail was sometimes flicked up and held cocked. After several moments,

Originally published in *British Birds* 72: 89–94. Heading drawing by Robert Gillmor

we realised that the only species it could be was a Siberian Rubythroat *L. calliope*.

The upper-parts were mid-brown, similar in colour to those of a Robin or a Nightingale. There was a noticeably more rufous panel on the remiges of the closed wings. The rump was also slightly rufous, contrasting with the brown of the back and tail. The breast and flanks were a warm creamy-buff, but the belly and vent were paler and whiter. There was a very noticeable whitish throat which contrasted with the buff upper breast. The head pattern was striking: a distinct pale supercilium stopping just behind the eye, and a distinct eye-ring. The cap and the ear-coverts were the same colour as the back, but the lores appeared darker, and there were dark moustachial and malar stripes. The legs appeared pinkish and the bill dark.

After we had been watching the bird for some time, R. A. Broad arrived; he observed it closely for some minutes and could also think of nothing else it could be except a Siberian Rubythroat. After one unsuccessful attempt, we trapped the bird in the nearby Plantation Trap. In the hand, the identification was verified beyond doubt when we saw that the white throat patch had faint, smudgy traces of red which had not been visible in the field.

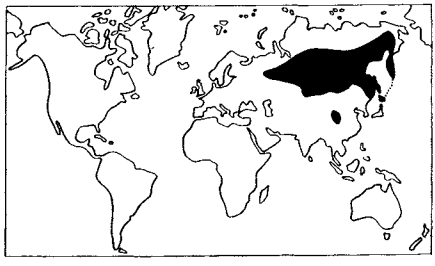
At the observatory, the bird was examined, described, photographed (see Photos 47 & 48) and then released in the observatory garden, where Dr B. Marshall, D. Coutts, I. Sandison and others who flew across to Fair Isle from Mainland were able to see it in the late afternoon. It remained in the garden all the next day, and was last seen at Setter on 11th October.

The following details were noted in the hand and recorded in the Fair Isle Bird Observatory log:

Upper-parts: Forehead and crown mid-brown, feathers with paler tips. Crown cut off by supercilium giving capped appearance. Mantle and scapulars warm mid-brown: uppertail-coverts rufous and rump slightly paler. Uppertail-coverts more rufous at tips and most feathers with some darker barring similar to fault barring. Tail rounded, grey-brown with rufous tinge, especially at bases of outer webs, similar in colour to Thrush Nightingale *L. luscinia*, but less intense; all feathers rather abraded, but showing paler central tip. Primaries, secondaries and tertials as tail, but slightly greyer, with broad rufous fringes: fringes almost absent on tertials. Primary and greater coverts: outer webs markedly rufous-chestnut, similar to fringes of primaries and secondaries. Small, pale, wedge-shaped tips to all greater coverts and pale tips to longest two primary coverts. Primary coverts with narrower and less rufous fringes than greater coverts. Alula as primary coverts, but with paler fringes to outer web. Median and lesser coverts showing more rufous tips. *Head:* Supercilium yellow-buff, becoming white above eye; quite broad and distinct from base of bill to above eye, indistinct, short, greyish-white continuation behind eye. Eye-ring almost complete. Malar region and lores rather speckled, grey-brown. flecked paler, especially towards base of bill. Ear-coverts as crown, contrasting with broadish, indistinct continuation of supercilium. Distinct dark khaki moustachial stripe, contrasting with throat and cutting off pale line in malar region. *Under-parts:* Clear white semicircular area from chin to upper breast, with a few brown feathers and tips to a number of feathers at sides of throat showing pink similar to colour of breast of Redpoll *Carduelis flammea* of nominate race. Broad area of deep yellow-buff across lower breast. Belly almost silky-white, bases of some feathers showing greyish. Flanks dark olive-buff, contrasting with belly, and extending well down onto base of legs. Undertail-coverts off-white, with yellow-buff wash to all feathers, especially around vent. *Underwing:* Greyish underside to flight feathers; coverts greyish, with yellowish wash. *Bare parts:* Bill typical *Luscinia*, with strong rictal bristles. Upper mandible blackish-grey; lower mandible similar, but pinkish-grey at base. Gape pale pinkish inside lower mandible, whitish inside upper mandible, although greyer at tip. Eye large; iris very dark brown-black. Legs tinged pinky-purple on sides, paler at rear; soles flesh-coloured; claws greyish. *Measurements:* Wing 74 mm; wingpoint to tip of tail 53.5 mm; wingpoint to longest secondary 14.5 mm; bill 15.5 mm; tarsus 30 mm; tail 57 mm; weight 20.0 g. *Wing formula:* 1st primary 10 mm longer than primary coverts. 3rd and 4th longest; 2nd −7.5 mm; 5th −2 mm; 6th −5 mm; 7th

−7.5 mm; 8th −10.5 mm; 9th −11.5 mm; 10th −13.5 mm; 3rd, 4th and (faintly) 5th emarginated. Notch on 2nd 17.5 mm; on 3rd 17 mm; on 4th 13 mm.

Siberian Rubythroats are not uncommon in captivity in Britain (per Tim Inskipp). The Fair Isle individual, however, with the general appearance of a female, but traces of red on the throat, and pale tips to all the greater coverts, was probably a first-winter male (rather than an adult female) and, therefore, unlikely to have been an escape from captivity. The autumn of 1975 produced a record number of other vagrants from Siberia in Britain and Ireland. Excluding the two commonest species—Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* and Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*—there was a total of 57 individuals of probable or certain Siberian origin reported in autumn and winter 1975 (Dymond *et al.* 1976; O'Sullivan *et al.* 1977). There were 29 Pallas's Warblers *P. proregulus*, four Lanceolated Warblers *Locustella lanceolata*, three Radde's Warblers *P. schwarzi*, three Stonechats *Saxicola torquata* of one of the Siberian races *maura* or *stejnegeri* and one or two records of each of 13 other species (including the Siberian Rubythroat). Baker (1977) carried out an analysis of some of these occurrences. A putative Yellow-browed Bunting *Emberiza chrysophrys* (still under review) in Norfolk and a Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* in the Channel Islands (Rountree 1977)—neither of which is included in the foregoing totals—were, with the Siberian Rubythroat on Fair Isle, the highlights of this exceptionally large influx.



Two years later, on 14th October 1977, a Siberian Rubythroat was seen at Donna Nook, Lincolnshire (Brit. Birds *73: 108–109). These two remain the only records in Britain and Ireland.*

Siberian Rubythroat is probably the epitome of the ultra-rarity for most birdwatchers, and the distinctive facial pattern of the female or immature is probably engrained in the minds of the most avid. For the one-in-a-million lucky enough to see it, however, it is necessary to exclude the slight chance of an ex-cage female or immature White-tailed Rubythroat L. pectoralis *(also known as Himalayan Rubythroat), which is closely similar except mainly for its contrasting black-brown and obviously white-tipped tail. Siberian Rubythroat is not infrequently imported for the cage-bird trade, so it is advisable to check for signs of captivity should one be encountered, perhaps especially if it is a ruby-throated adult male.*

American Kestrel on Fair Isle

A. M. Taylor

Between 19th and 25th May 1976, wind conditions on Fair Isle, Shetland, were light and variable, mainly from the southeast, bringing a Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* on 24th and Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Bluethroats *Luscinia svecica* and Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* on 25th. Then, on the afternoon of 25th, several observers had brief views of a small falcon, similar to a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, but 'not quite right'. Dark wings were mentioned in one case and reddish coloration in another. R. A. Broad and I discussed these reports and, bearing in mind the weather conditions and recent arrivals, thought they might refer to a Red-footed Falcon *F. vespertinus*—a species which neither of us had seen. So, in the evening, we set out to cover the general area where the sightings had occurred.

At about 18.30 G.M.T, in dull, overcast conditions, with a hint of drizzle, I noticed Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* at South Reeva giving alarm calls suggesting the presence of a predator. As I approached, I flushed a small falcon, but saw no plumage details. I noted where it landed on a cliff face and moved to a vantage point about 70 m from it. It was perched upright, facing me, with only the head and upper half of the body visible. Using 8 × 40 binoculars, I could see a pinkish-buff breast, a slate-coloured leading edge to the wing and a very conspicuous head pattern: a dark cap with a rufous central patch and, below it, two dark vertical bars and a dark spot. After ten minutes, I decided to circle around the bird in the hope of seeing its back and tail. It took off, however, and flew round into Linni Geo. In the few seconds for which it was visible, it revealed its striking, contrasting coloration: the wings were dark blue-grey, while the rest of the upper-parts were rich rufous-brown, with a dark sub-terminal band to the rufous tail. Its flight seemed agile and rather erratic, recalling that of a Merlin *F. columbarius*.

At this stage, I was puzzled about the bird's identity. I knew that I had seen illustrations of the head pattern, but could not place it. It had not occurred to me that it was a non-European species, so the only possibility seemed to be Red-footed Falcon. Nevertheless, I had doubts that it could be one, partly because I recalled that Red-footed Falcon looked long-winged, while the bird I had been watching seemed comparatively small and compactly built, and because its head pattern was so distinctive.

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 199–203, 227. Heading drawing by A. M. Taylor

I was then joined by R.A.B., J. N. Prescott and W. Tunnicliffe. We did not see the bird perched, but had brief views of its upper-parts when we flushed it in Linni Geo and then in Steensi Geo, where it circled below us before flying off around the cliffs. J.N.P. and W.T. saw it again in fading light in North Reeva.

On our return to the Observatory, I wrote full notes on what I had seen. I then consulted Witherby *et al.* (1940) and quickly ruled out Red-footed Falcon. Having established that it was not a European species, I looked in Peterson (1947) and immediately identified the bird as a male American Kestrel *F. sparverius*.

On the following two days, it was seen by a number of observers, mainly rather briefly or distantly, although on 26th R.A.B. had good views of it perched on a fence post, feeding on a Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*; and later K. Bailey, Mrs P. Bailey, Miss S. Baldry the late R. A. Richardson and I watched it soaring and gliding directly overhead in bright sunlight (see Fig. 15). Notes from these sightings supplemented the initial observations and fully confirmed the identification. Throughout its stay, it remained in the area of the cultivated land in the south of the island. The following details were noted during its stay:

Small, compactly built falcon, appearing slightly smaller than Kestrel and with proportionately shorter wings and tail. Flight fast and agile, recalling Merlin. *Head:* Crown, down to top of eye, dark slate, with dark rufous central patch. Chin and sides of head white, with two dark vertical bars extending down from crown, one below and one behind eye. Dark spot, surrounded by reddish buff, on side of nape. *Upper-parts:* Rich rufous-brown, with narrow black barring on mantle and scapulars. Tail rich rufous-brown with conspicuous black subterminal band and narrow white tip. *Wings:* General appearance on perched bird and from above in flight, slate-blue with blackish speckling and bars. When well spread, primaries and secondaries

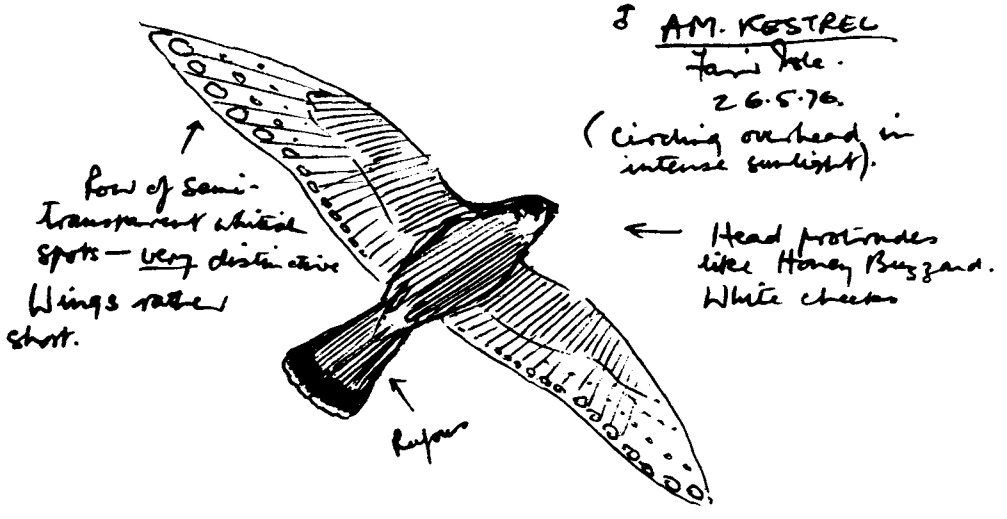


Fig. 15 *Male American Kestrel* Falco sparverius, *Shetland, June 1976. 'Circling overhead in intense sunlight. Head protrudes like Honey Buzzard* Pernis apivorus. *White cheeks. Row of semi-translucent whitish spots*—very *distinctive. Wings rather short. Rufous undertail.' From a field sketch in ballpoint (R. A. Richardson)*

showed conspicuous white spots on inner webs, particularly noticeable from below. *Under-parts:* Breast and flanks pinkish buff. Belly pale, creamy or greyish. *Bare parts:* Legs, feet and cere yellow, perhaps with orange tinge; iris dark.

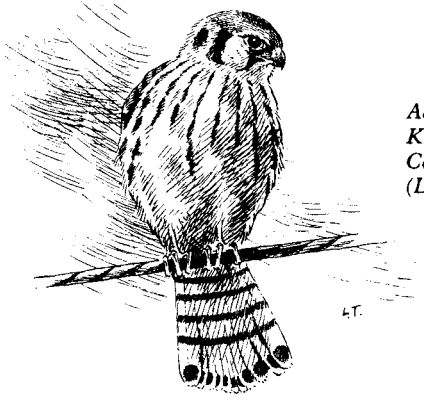
This constitutes the first accepted record of American Kestrel for Britain and Ireland. It was followed closely by another at Bearah Tor, Cornwall, from 13th June 1976 (see second account below). One was present in the area of Dungeness, Kent, in 1966–67, but this individual was extremely tame and had clearly escaped from captivity. There are two previous European records, from Kalundborg, Denmark, in 1901 (Alexander & Fitter 1955) and Malta in October 1967 (Sultana *et al.* 1975); and also one in the Azores in February 1968 (Bannerman & Bannerman 1968).

Although the Fair Isle individual arrived when local weather conditions appeared unsuitable for a recent Atlantic crossing, Robert Hudson (*in litt.*) has pointed out that circumstances were in fact favourable. A front, followed by cloud and rain, moved out to sea over Newfoundland on 23rd May. The bird could have been caught up in this and then, over the next two days, carried in westerly airstreams, first on the northern fringes of an extensive high-pressure area centred over the Azores and later around the south of a depression between Scotland and Iceland.

The possibility of escape from captivity was considered. The bird showed no signs of tameness, however, and when viewed from below in good light the tips of all flight feathers appeared to be in perfect condition. Between 1st July 1970 and 31st December 1976, only one American Kestrel was imported into Britain under licence and the only known captive individuals in Britain in 1976 were at Edinburgh Zoo (T. P. Inskipp *in litt.*).

IDENTIFICATION

In all plumages, American Kestrels are identifiable by their distinctive head patterns. The male's plumage is as described above; two further details which were not noted in field descriptions of the Fair Isle bird are black spots on the breast and flanks, and black and white bars on the outer tail feathers, although there is considerable variation between individuals regarding the latter feature. The juvenile male is similar to the adult male, but has a barred tail with rufous tip, a duller crown patch and dark streaks on the breast. Females of all ages differ from adult males in having rufous upperwing-coverts and secondaries. These, together with the uppertail-



Adult female American Kestrel Falco sparverius, *Cornwall, June 1976 (Laurel A. Tucker)*

coverts and tail, are barred black. The breast, flanks and belly are streaked with brown and the pale spots on the primaries are rufous, not white (Cramp & Simmons 1980).

Details of the second bird, which occurred less than a month after the first, are also recorded here:

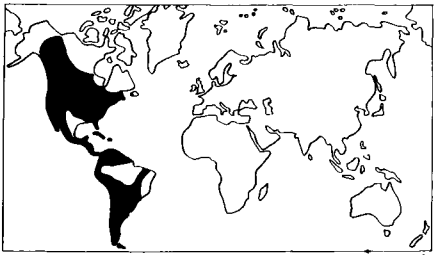
American Kestrel in Cornwall

On 13th June 1976, together with H. A. Deal and R. Lee, we were casually walking along the hillside at Bearah Tor, Cornwall, when B.K.M noticed what appeared to be a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* approaching at a distance of about 70 m. We all raised our binoculars to watch it fly past, as it came closer, it soon became apparent that it was not a Kestrel, although superficially like one. It was paler and more agile, with longer, more pointed wings and had a very distinct head pattern which did not seem to fit any of the European falcons. The bird was kept under observation for the next hour at a range of about 75 m through binoculars and telescopes and the following description was taken.

Size and jizz: Smaller, more compact and more agile than Kestrel, with proportionately longer wings and short, square-ended tail, suggesting small Hobby *F. subbuteo*. When perched, primary tips fell about an inch (2½ cm) short of tip of tail. Plumage generally bright rufous on upper-parts, with whitish, lightly streaked under-parts and striking head pattern. *Upper-parts:* Head, forehead, front of crown and supercilium to just behind eye pale, soft grey. Top and rear of crown bright rufous, with narrow blackish streak running down centre of nape to top of mantle. Lores black, running into short, narrow, black malar streak; between this and dark nape centre, area of yellowish wash (fading to almost white at base) with darkish centre forming inverted 'U'. Mantle, wing-coverts and secondaries all bright rufous (brighter than Kestrel's) with narrow, but heavy, black barring. Primaries blackish. Rump as mantle, but less streaking. Upper tail bright rufous with ten to 12 narrow black bars and broad black terminal band, which blended slowly into rufous. *Under-parts:* Chin, throat and cheeks white. Breast and belly down to tibia off-white, lightly streaked gingery (streaking heavier on flanks). Lower belly and undertail-coverts off-white with no streaking. *Bare parts:* Legs and cere bright, pale yellow. Eye and bill dark.

While studying the bird, we both realised that we had seen a picture or photograph of a falcon with such a distinct head pattern somewhere before; the only species which came to mind was American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*. After leaving the area, we all four drove to H. A. Deal's house and consulted Peterson (1947, *A Field Guide to the Birds*), which confirmed our suspicions that the bird was an adult female American Kestrel. The first British and Irish record of this species had come less than a month previously: a male on Fair Isle, Shetland, from 25th to 27th May 1976 (see above). The Cornish female stayed until at least 28th June and was seen by large numbers of observers.

BRIAN K. MELLOW and PETER A. MAKER



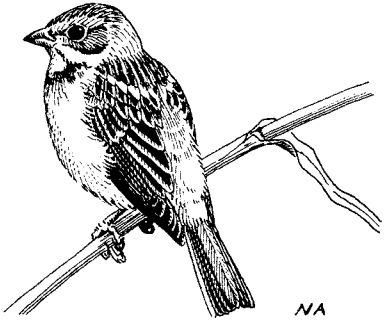
The Fair Isle and Cornish records noted here are still the only ones for Britain and Ireland.

The row of semi-translucent spots near the tips of the primaries (well shown in the late Richard Richardson's field sketch of the Fair Isle individual) is a distinctive feature of all plumages of American Kestrel, and provides an extra identification clincher, which is perhaps especially useful for the rather more Kestrel-like females and first-year males.

SEPTEMBER 1976

Pallas's Reed Bunting on Fair Isle

Roger A. Broad and W. E. Oddie



At about midday on 29th September 1976, near Skerryholm on Fair Isle, Shetland, R.A.B. glimpsed a small, dull-coloured passerine as it flew low, from the weedy margin of a narrow potato crop, some 15–20 m before diving back in again. It was followed and the whole performance was repeated several times without any satisfactory views being obtained of the skulking bird. Eventually, it was seen at the junction of the crop and the adjacent bare ground, at approximately 15 m range, as it crept mouse-like through the vegetation. It was striking for its total lack of noteworthy features. During the next 15 to 20 minutes, it was observed briefly in flight and occasionally on the ground, where it invariably kept well concealed in the vegetation. Once, it was seen side by side with a Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*, which appeared to be almost identical in size. The initial impression was of a small, nondescript, totally unfamiliar bunting (Emberizidae). At close range, it appeared to have a bill typical of that group and it occasionally flicked its tail in a bunting-like fashion, showing a little white in the outer feathers. It lacked, however, any obvious head pattern, and the upper-parts seemed to be relatively uniform dark brown, although it showed some streaking on the mantle. Owing to the bird's skulking nature, its under-parts were poorly seen, but the impression was of greyish uniformity. Twice, two small, dark triangular smudges were seen on the sides of the lower throat or upper breast. No wing bars or panels showed on the closed wing or in flight. The bird was once heard to give a single unfamiliar call, which at the time was not written down.

This combination of characters was puzzling; the bird was apparently a bunting, but R.A.B. was unaware of any Palearctic bunting as small as a Twite, with the exception of Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, which it clearly did not fit. At this stage, the possibility of its belonging to the New World sparrows was also considered, but lack of experience of this group prevented any further thoughts on its identity without a literature search.

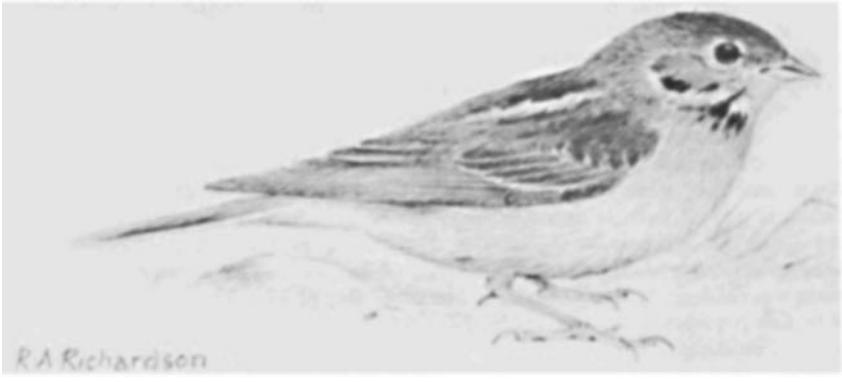
Originally published in *British Birds* 73: 402–408. Heading drawing by Norman Arlott

Fortunately, while R.A.B. still had the bird under surveillance, J. Watt arrived and, during the next 15 to 20 minutes, he was independently able to confirm all the points previously noted, although the bird continued to give only frustrating, fleeting glimpses. Having resigned themselves to the fact that, in the circumstances, they were unlikely to add anything further to their observations, they decided to enlist the help of other observers on the island and then return as soon as possible to attempt to catch the bird. It seemed particularly loathe to leave the area or even to come out into the open, and they were satisfied that there was little likelihood of its moving to a different area. R.A.B. returned to the Observatory, where he described what he had seen, and the bird became the topic of discussion over lunch. A brief search of the literature quickly eliminated the possibility of its being an American sparrow, since none was sufficiently small and drab. The possibility of its being an escaped cage bird was also considered, but again, in the light of the nondescript plumage, this too seemed unlikely.

After lunch, R.A.B. and J.W. returned to Skerryholm with A. R. Lowe and several others and thoroughly searched the area, but without success. During the next few days, there were no further sightings and hope of satisfactorily identifying the bird faded: the views and notes obtained had been brief and frustrating and, so it seemed, inadequate. Despite many observers searching the area daily, the bird remained undetected until 5th October, when S. D. Cook. A.R.L. and W.E.O. had fleeting glimpses of a small bunting in a large and dense crop of rape at Taing. Their observations confirmed all the characters previously noted and they were able on one occasion to make direct comparison with a nearby Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus*, which was noticeably larger. That evening, A.R.L. and W.E.O. applied themselves afresh to considering the possible identity of the bird. Nearctic sparrows were again considered. W.E.O. was familiar with the only member of this group to show white in the outer tail feathers, Vesper Sparrow *Pooecetes gramineus*, but this was quickly eliminated on size and plumage. They decided to work on the theory that the bunting was of Siberian origin and consequently sifted their way through Dementiev & Gladkov (1954). The illustrations are poorly reproduced in the translation available and they were forced to examine painstakingly the rather verbose descriptions. Most species were eliminated on size alone and the comment 'lacks moustachial stripes' drew attention to Pallas's Reed Bunting *E. pallasi*. By the end of the evening, A.R.L. and W.E.O. felt confident enough to suggest tentatively that the bird was indeed a female of this species.

During the next few days, the bird was seen in the same place by several people, but observations continued to be hampered by its skulking habits. It was difficult to flush and, when it did appear, it tended to dip and dive into cover in the manner of a Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, in contrast to the behaviour of nearby Reed Buntings. Everyone agreed that it was extraordinarily featureless, but, little by little, the following description was pieced together in the field:

Female Pallas's Reed Bunting Emberiza pallasi *(from a painting by W. E. Oddie).*



Adult female Pallas's Reed Bunting Emberiza pallasi, *Shetland, October 1976 (from a painting by R. A. Richardson, courtesy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory)*

Size and jizz: Smaller than Reed Bunting and about same length as Twite; rather scrawny, like Reed Bunting, and not stocky like Little Bunting. *Plumage:* Duller and darker than Reed Bunting, completely lacking any warm brown or chestnut tones. Upper-parts generally dull brown, likened to colour of Redwing *Turdus iliacus:* mantle quite strongly streaked with blackish-brown and showing paler braces similar to many buntings, but these not very bright; faintly greyish tinge on nape gave slightly collared effect: rump appeared a little greyer than rest of upper-parts, but not easily seen. Facial pattern very indistinct, with faint darker streaks on crown; no clear supercilium, but greyish-white half-supercilium behind eye; orbital ring dull, off-white; ear-coverts dull brown, with dark smudge on cheeks, which lacked any dark edgings; moustachial pattern totally lacking. Wings: primaries dull brown, a little paler than secondaries; coverts with no obvious paler or warmer edgings and all looked heavily worn. Tail dark brownish-grey, with white in outer feathers. Under-parts: from throat down, generally dull, greyish-white, becoming cleaner white on belly and undertail-coverts: a little streaking on sides of upper breast formed into two small triangles on either side, otherwise only a few very faint streaks across pectoral area and only very faint greyish striations along flanks. *Bare parts:* Bill small, conical and mid greyish-horn. Legs pale greyish-brown. *Call:* Heard on several occasions, a soft 'chi-weep', recalling House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, but not as thick or low-pitched; once or twice, this call was more explosive and recalled Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*.

In an effort to establish its identity beyond doubt and rule out the unlikely possibility of its being a runt or aberrant Reed Bunting, several attempts were made to trap the bird before it was finally mist-netted at Taing late on 10th October. It was examined in the hand at the Observatory, where it was seen by several observers, most of whom had also seen it in the field. These included R.A.B., S.D.C., H. Gilston, R. J. Johns, A.R.L., W.E.O., the late R. A. Richardson, Dr A. G. G. Thomson and J.W. It was ringed, measured, photographed in poor light (Photos 49 & 50) and a detailed plumage description taken before it was roosted overnight. During the evening, R.A.R. completed a water-colour sketch of the bird. The following morning, it was released back at Taing, but was not seen subsequently.

The following details were taken in the hand:

Upper-parts: Forehead and crown, feathers with dark brown centres and paler, fawny-brown fringes, a few feathers, especially on forehead, appeared a little warmer; nape a little greyer than crown and feathers without dark centres, but some of the longest, lowest feathers with dark central streak; mantle feathers with broad dark brown centres and whitish-buff fringes (where not too heavily abraded) giving impression of dark bird with paler streaks; rump very pale grey,

especially at base of tail, considerably greyer than mantle, feathers greyish-white with narrow darker, slightly gingery central streaks, many feathers heavily abraded and with exposed grey bases. *Head:* Eye-ring indistinct and incomplete, off-white, paler than rest of head; ear-coverts gingery-fawn, a little darker posteriorly and generally a little browner and paler than nape; lores mottled, similar to ear-coverts, although perhaps marginally greyer; no moustachial stripe. *Tail:* Extremely abraded, very dark brown; central feathers browner; outer feathers with diagnonal line of demarcation between white and dark brown crossing shaft 28 mm from tip and giving mainly white outer web and white wedge distally on inner web; penultimate feather with narow white wedge on inner web extending 9 mm along shaft from tip, *Wings:* Primaries and secondaries much abraded, dull medium brown, with very narrow gingery-brown fringes a little broader on secondaries and innermost two primaries; tertials heavily abraded, a little darker than secondaries, fringes with suggestion of warmer tinge, innermost heavily abraded, but showing buff-white outer web where protected by coverts; primary coverts and alula similar to primaries; greater coverts with darker centres than secondaries and narrow buff-white only at tip; lesser coverts grey, centres a little darker than fringes; underside of primaries and secondaries greyish-brown, with silvery tone; underwing-coverts dusky off-white, and axillaries a little darker. *Under-parts:* Chin off-white, surrounded by feathers with brown centres, paler, warmer fringes and rusty-brown tips, these extending upwards nearly to bill on each side, rather more strongly marked in lower throat region, forming partial gorget at sides of neck, and, when viewed head-on, these gave impression of two distinct patches, recalling Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*, darker towards bill; belly, vent and undertail-coverts off-white, with greyish wash; flanks greyer than belly, probably partly due to severe abrasion and exposure of feather bases; thighs a little warmer and browner. *Bare parts:* Bill, upper mandible dark greyish-black, lower mandible a little paler, with greyish-pink tinge at sides and towards gape. Eye dark brown-black. Legs dull fleshy-brown; claws grey. *Measurements:* Wing 67 mm (abraded); bill 11 mm; tarsus 17 mm; tail 56 mm (abraded); weight 14.2 g. *Wing formula:* 1st primary 7 mm shorter than primary coverts; 3rd and 4th longest; 2nd −2 mm; 5th −2.5 mm; 6th −3 mm; 7th −6.5 mm; 8th −9 mm; 9th −9.5 mm; 10th −12 mm; emarginations on 3rd, 4th, 5th and slightly on 6th.

While in captivity, it often uttered a single anxiety note which was rendered as a cross between the calls of House Sparrow and Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*.

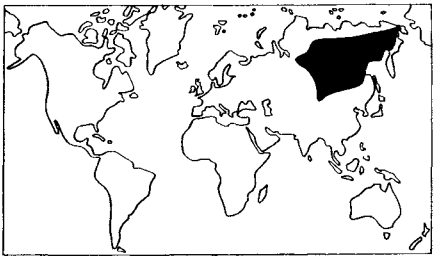
In the hand, all the plumage was found to be exceedingly heavily worn, which suggested that the bird was an adult that had delayed its moult. The feather wear was normal except for the degree, and there were no obvious signs that the bird had recently been in captivity. Comparison of the details with Dementiev & Gladkov (1966) indicated that the wing formula was theoretically correct for both Pallas's Reed and Reed Bunting; all the measurements, however, were consistent with the former, and the plumage details compared favourably with the only details at our disposal of a female Pallas's Reed Bunting. Confirmation of its identity was found in Svensson (1975): the Reed Bunting appears to be the only species from which it needs separation; together with size, the lack of chestnut brown in the lesser wing-coverts, the practically unstreaked dusky or buffish-white rump and the unstreaked or very nearly unstreaked under-parts are given as diagnostic.

Shortly after their return to the mainland, W.E.O. and R.J.J. visited the British Museum, Tring, where they were able to examine skins of Pallas's Reed Buntings. Among the skins, there were a number which—when allowance had been made for the abrasion—closely resembled the Fair Isle bird. Clearly, the original identification had been correct: it was an adult female Pallas's Reed Bunting which had delayed its moult. This record constitutes the first for Britain and Ireland.

OTHER SIBERIAN SPECIES AT FAIR ISLE IN SEPTEMBER 1976

D. I. M. Wallace, in O'Sullivan *et al.* (1977), drew attention to the complex fall of Siberian and Asiatic species at Fair Isle and on the British east coast between 25th and

27th September 1976. On Fair Isle, however, vagrants with such easterly origins arrived throughout the second half of the month (Broad 1976). The first was a Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* on 14th, followed by another on 17th and a Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*. Then came a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *L. certhiola* on 20th, a Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* on 22nd, the first of several Richard's Pipits on 23rd and a Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* showing the characteristics of one of the eastern races *maura* or *stejnegeri* on 27th, when there was also a Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* at the southern tip of mainland Shetland. Owing to its extremely skulking behaviour, it is a matter for conjecture how long the Pallas's Reed Bunting had gone undetected before the first sighting on 27th September and where exactly its arrival fits in a calendar so full of eastern rarities.



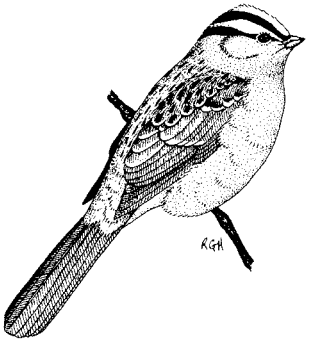
Up to the end of 1980, this was still the only record, but a second was reported, again from Fair Isle, in September 1981.

Pallas's Reed Bunting is a miniature version of Reed Bunting, with a basically similar appearance for both sexes at all ages. Ash-grey (on adult males) or buffish grey-brown lesser coverts (not chestnut-brown as on all Reed Buntings), practically unstreaked whitish (on adult male) or grey-buff rump, and underparts unmarked or finely streaked, are the best distinctions at all ages.

MAY 1977

White-crowned Sparrows on Fair Isle and in Humberside

Roger A. Broad and Ray G. Hawley



The White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*, previously unrecorded in Britain and Ireland, occurred twice during May 1977. The first was at Fair Isle, Shetland, and the second, just eight days later, at Hornsea Mere, North Humberside. The two records are complementary; in the first case, trapped within moments of its discovery, the emphasis was placed on the description of the bird in the hand, while the second relied entirely on field observations.

FAIR ISLE INDIVIDUAL

At 10.00 G.M.T. on 15th May 1977, J. Potter came upon a strange, large, bunting-like bird with a prominent black-and-white striped head pattern, at the mouth of the double dyke trap on Fair Isle, Shetland. It was quickly driven into the catching box, which was secured while R. A. Broad and M. A. Peacock were called from the bird observatory nearby. They returned together to collect the bird. A brief glimpse in the catching box confirmed what had been anticipated from J.P.'s description, and the bird was tentatively identified as one of the Nearctic sparrows. It was taken back to the observatory, where it was thoroughly examined and positively identified, with the aid of Godfrey (1966), as a White-crowned Sparrow. It was ringed, measured, photographed (Photo 51) and a full description recorded before it was released at Shirva. In the hand, and later, at moderate ranges in the field at Shirva, it was seen by many observers, among whom were R.A.B., Miss A. D. Cook, M.A.P., J.P., J. Watt and D. Bell, who had also seen the species previously in California and Washington, USA. The bird remained around Shirva for much of the day, feeding in the open on recently cultivated and seeded ground, in the company of several House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. Side by side, the White-crowned Sparrow was considerably larger and more bulky and had a proportionately longer tail than the House Sparrows. The following day, it was relocated in the same general area, when it was observed for the last time.

The following description was taken in the hand:

Upper-parts: Strongly contrasted head pattern; bold white central crown stripe from base of bill broadening towards nape where a few silvery grey feathers admixed; wide glossy black lateral crown stripe from nostril to nape; broad white supercilium from just anterior to eye to nape and meeting lateral crown stripe in front of eye; nape mainly warm dove-grey, but a few feathers with brown tips; mantle strongly striated, feathers with broad mid-tan shaft streak and greyish white fringes; rump uniform olive-brown; uppertail-coverts similar to rump, but longer feathers a little warmer and browner. *Tail:* Central feathers longest, all feathers grey-brown, with warmer light

Originally published in *British Birds* 73: 466–470. Heading drawing by Ray Hawley

brown fringes, especially on central pair, most narrowly tipped white and outer pair sullied brownish white on outer web and tip of inner web. *Wings:* Primaries and secondaries mid brown; 3rd, 4th and 5th primaries narrowly edged white on outer web; inner primaries and secondaries narrowly tipped off-white; tertials a little darker than secondaries, with pale chestnut-brown fringes to outer webs and whiter fringe at tip of inner web; primary coverts as primaries; greater coverts a little warmer than secondaries, with bold white tip to outer web forming a wing-bar; median coverts as greater coverts, but white tip continued narrowly onto inner web of inner feathers forming second wing-bar; lesser coverts greyish brown; scapulars as mantle, but a little warmer; underside of flight feathers silvery grey; underwing-coverts off white; narrow tract of white feathers from carpal joint along leading edge of wing. *Under-parts:* Narrow line of white feathers forming incomplete eye-ring below eye and extending up as far as eye-stripe; ear-coverts and lores uniform grey; chin greyish white; throat, upper breast and anterior flanks uniform dove-grey; posterior flanks above thighs buff-brown; belly silky white, merging into greys of breast and anterior flanks; vent region ochre-buff; undertail-coverts more buff than around vent, and longest feathers with darker centres. *Bare parts:* Bill pinkish orange, a little darker at tip of upper mandible. Eyes dark brown. Legs dark straw-brown; toes and soles a little darker; claws grey. *Measurements:* Wing 88 mm; bill 13 mm; tarsus 23 mm; tail 75 mm, central feathers 8.5 mm longer than outer feathers; weight 28.1 g. *Wing formula:* 1st primary 10.5 mm shorter than primary coverts; 4th longest, 2nd −3.5 mm; 3rd −0.5 mm; 5th −1 mm; 6th −3 mm; 7th −6.5 mm; 8th −10 mm; 9th −11 mm; 10th −12.5 mm; emargination on 3rd, 4th, 5th and slightly on 6th.

HORNSEA MERE INDIVIDUAL

At about 14.15 G.M.T. on 22nd May 1977, R. G. Hawley, I. G. Howard and D. P. Sharp were observing birds at the southwest end of Hornsea Mere, North Humberside, when D.P.S drew attention to an unfamiliar bird. It was perched about 2 m above the ground on the lowest branch of a black poplar *Populus nigra*, one of a belt of trees with reedswamp and mere behind and rough, permanent pasture in front. At first, the bird was watched for about 15 seconds, preening and apparently sunning itself, before it flew down to the ground, where it was hidden from view by grasses. After a few moments, it returned to the poplar, from which, after a few more seconds, it flew away low through a gap in the trees and was not seen again by the above observers.

In full sunlight, and at a distance of about 20 m, the following main features were apparent. In size, it was thought to be a little larger than a Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* and the head and bill appeared bunting-like. When perched, it sat rather upright, and the loose plumage of the under-parts gave the impression of a body slightly too large for the size of the head. It appeared weak and fluttering in flight, with short, broad wings and a tail that was a little more than ample, but the most striking feature was the head, which was mostly white with black crown and eye-stripes and a pinkish bill. The under-parts were pale grey, except on the belly and vent, which were white. The upper-parts, including the tail, were grey-brown, and the wings, which were of a similar colour, showed reasonably striking, double white wing-bars.

A little later, about 15.00 G.M.T., the bird was seen by R. J. Walker and G. C. M. Yates in a group of crack willows *Salix fragilis*, on the edge of a reedswamp some 100 m from the original position. It was observed down to approximately 8 m as it moved about in the vegetation, and was continuously in view for over one minute, although, for part of the time, it was in light shade. During the following minute or two, it was seen briefly on two occasions before it was finally lost to view in the vegetation. Several subsequent attempts to relocate it were unsuccessful.

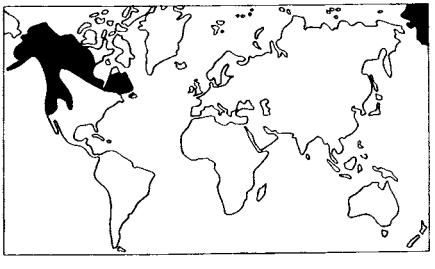
The field notes from the two independent sightings were generally in agreement, although during the second, closer encounter it was possible to add some finer details. The following description is a summary of the individual notes:

Head: All white, except for black stripe through eye, faint in front of eye, narrow immediately behind eye, then broadening towards nape; very narrow black band at forehead forming start of two black head-stripes, one on each side, narrow close to eye but lifting and broadening to rear of eye; at nape, black crown and eye-stripes apparently not meeting in any precise way, although this feature seen only briefly and feathers may have been ruffled. *Under-parts:* Throat, cheeks and ear-coverts pale grey (R.G.H.) or brownish-grey (G.C.M.Y.) grading into paler grey on breast and flanks; belly and undertail-coverts white; small dark patch (probably a feather gap) at vent noted on one occasion. *Upper-parts:* Mantle pale grey tinged brown, with dark streaks a little broader than shaft (R.G.H.) or honey-brown, streaked black or blackish (G.C.M.Y.); scapulars similar to mantle although a little browner, feathers with broad dark central area, G.C.M.Y. noted these formed a noticeable feature: a bold, open-ended, V-line, reminiscent of an immature Little Stint *Calidris minuta*; feathers with dark centres and pale honey or buffish fringes; lower back, rump and uppertail-coverts unstreaked, uniform earth-brown, with warmish tone. *Tail:* Uniform earth-brown, a little darker than rump. *Wings:* Similar to tail, but tips to median and greater coverts almost white and forming striking double white wing-bars, clearly visible in flight; at close range, tips to tertials had dark centres and light buffish edges (G.C.M.Y.). *Bare parts:* Eyes dark; bill with pearly lustre or sheen, pink, tinged orange-yellow, darker at base; legs pinkish-brown.

The bird was totally unfamiliar to the five observers, but, after discussion, they all agreed that it was one of the New World 'sparrows'. Only on reaching home was it possible to check the literature and positively identify the bird as a White-crowned Sparrow.

OTHER NEARCTIC PASSERINES IN BRITAIN IN SPRING 1977

In the week between the discoveries of the two White-crowned Sparrows, two other Nearctic passerines were recorded in northern Britain: a male Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata* on Fair Isle on 18th May and a Slate-coloured Junco *Junco hyemalis* in Inverness-shire on 19th May (Rogers *et al.* 1978). Later, in mid June, a Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina* was discovered in song at Paisley, Strathclyde (see next account). The meteorological conditions at the time of this exceptional spring arrival have already been discussed by Elkins (1979).



After two in eight days . . . none. These are still the only records. The closely related and very similar White-throated Sparrow Z. albicollis, *which was first found here in 1907, has now mustered a total of a dozen records, 11 of them before the first White-crowned.*

Adults of both sexes are alike throughout the year: their black-and-white striped head pattern is acquired in their first summer. First-winter individuals have chestnut (instead of black) lateral crown-stripes, buffy (instead of white) crown-stripe, whitish supercilium, and are less grey, more buff, on the ear-coverts and breast, but otherwise resemble adults.

JUNE 1977

Cape May Warbler in Strathclyde

T. Byars and H. Galbraith

Paisley Glen comprises an area of ornamental parkland and mixed woodland on the outskirts of Paisley, about 15 km from Glasgow. While birdwatching there at 14.00 G.M.T. on 17th June 1977, T.B.'s attention was attracted by an unfamiliar song in an overgrown part of the glen. On locating the singer, he was immediately impressed by its combination of exotic coloration and warbler jizz, a combination which suggested to him that the bird was a species of American wood-warbler (Parulidae). T.B. kept the bird under observation until 15.30 hours, while he took field notes, and then left to fetch tape-recorder and photographic equipment. Twenty minutes after returning, he relocated the bird, again by song, and at 16.30, after taking photographs and recording its song, he informed H.G. of the bird's presence.

From 17.30 to 18.30, we kept the bird under observation while taking field notes; during this time, viewing conditions were excellent, with little wind and low, flat sunshine. On comparing our notes with the text and plates in Peterson (1947), we quickly became convinced that the bird was a male Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina* in breeding plumage. The bird was confiding and allowed itself to be approached down to $4\frac{1}{2}$ m while it fed and sang among the trees and scrub. So frequently did it sing at this stage that we were both of the opinion that it had taken up territory and would probably stay for some time; unfortunately, this was not to be. At 19.00, there was the rather enthusiastic arrival of a group of local birdwatchers; with their arrival, the warbler became noticeably shyer and allowed only rather unsatisfactory glimpses of itself in the fading light; the following day it had gone.

This record constitutes the first for Britain and Ireland; indeed it appears to be the only reported occurrence, so far, outside the New World. The meteorological situation at the time has been described and discussed by Elkins (1979).

DESCRIPTION

First impressions were of a medium-sized warbler with dark upper-parts contrasting strongly with bright yellow under-parts, rump and half collar, the yellow of the breast, belly and flanks being broken by conspicuous black longitudinal stripes. The crown appeared black and the cheeks and ear-coverts red-brown.

Size and shape: Appeared somewhat larger than Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, probably about size of Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*, though only former present for comparison. Same shape as Willow Warbler, but tended to perch in more upright position. *Head and upper-parts:* Forehead and crown black or very dark brown. Obvious yellow supercilium from base of upper mandible to slightly behind eye, where it merged with prominent red-brown patch covering cheeks and ear-coverts. Faint dark line through eye. Chin, throat, sides of neck and area between ear-coverts and nape bright yellow and, apart from throat, unmarked. Dark of crown extended down sides and back of head to meet supercilium, cheek patch, yellow behind ear and dark nape. Nape, mantle, back and scapular area grey-brown, but noticeably paler than crown, with

Originally published in *British Birds* 73: 2–5. Heading drawing by Keith Brockie

conspicuous black streaking forming distinct stripes extending from lower nape down over back, but not on to rump. White patch on otherwise dark closed wing formed by white tipping on median and greater coverts; at close range, this formed diffuse double wing-bar, but at greater distances it faded to a single patch: this feature, while not as obviously white as, for instance, wing patch of Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, nevertheless very noticeable. Rump unstreaked, yellow and conspicuous both in flight and at rest. Tail notched and uniformly dark; no white seen, though no tail-flicking observed. *Under-parts:* Chin, throat, breast and belly bright canary-yellow fading into off-white undertail-coverts. Black streaking on breast, belly and flanks formed prominent continuous lontigudinal stripes. *Bare parts:* Eye, bill and legs very dark. Bill finer and more pointed than that of Willow Warbler.

SONG AND BEHAVIOUR

During over two hours of observation, no vocalisations other than song were heard. The song consisted of one phrase of four notes repeated intermittently. Each phrase lasted from one to two seconds and can best be described as a flat 'swee-swee-swee-swee', repeated fairly quietly and with a slight nasal intonation. This song was delivered both from prominent tree tops and from deep in low-level scrub.

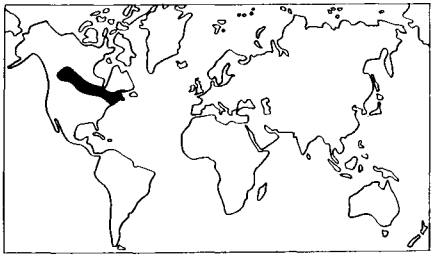
Throughout the period of observation, the bird frequented a small area of open mixed woodland and scrub-filled clearing, feeding mostly in spruce *Picea*, Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* and rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*. Most food items appeared to be taken from the leaves of those trees, but the warbler was also observed flycatching on a few occasions.

POPULATION CHANGES

Morris *et al.* (1958) and Kendeigh (1947) have shown that population levels of the Cape May Warbler rise—at times dramatically—during outbreaks of infestation by the spruce bud worm *Choristoneura fumiferana*. Hussell & Ridley (1978) concluded that one such infestation in Quebec and Ontario during the period 1969–77 resulted in significantly large increases in Cape May populations in these areas, resulting in turn in a greatly increased incidence of sightings at Long Point Bird Observatory on Lake Erie. Indeed, at Long Point, an increase of roughly 300 per cent occurred between 1965 and 1975, with the Cape May becoming one of the most frequently recorded migrant warblers at the observatory. It may prove that a continuance of this high population will result in further occurrences in the Old World.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Interestingly, the ornithologist who first discovered the species, Alexander Wilson, was born and spent his youth in Paisley; in fact, his birthplace could be seen easily from Paisley Glen.



No other Cape May Warbler has been found here since this spring singer.

Adult female Cape May Warbler is a slightly duller version of the male, but lacks the chestnut ear-coverts. First-winter individuals, especially females, are among the drabbest of American warblers, with plain upperparts and ill-defined breast-streaking. In combination, the yellow rump, the sometimes faint yellowish patch on the neck-sides (just behind the ear-coverts), and the usually rather broad white bar on the median coverts (broader than the white bar on the greater coverts) are diagnostic.

AUGUST 1977

Eleonora's Falcon in Merseyside

A. Copleston and K. W. Horton

Cabin Hill at Formby Point is part of the old southwest-Lancashire dune system, now in Merseyside. Contained in the area is a pool which evaporates in summer to become a damp patch in which insects breed, thus attracting birds.

On 8th August 1977, K. W. Horton was viewing the 'pool' from a dune roughly 400 m to the north. Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and hirundines hawked insects in hot, windless conditions. At about 15.00 G.M.T., he noticed a large, dark bird flying towards him on drooping wings. Thinking it to be an Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*, which would have been unusual in the calm weather, he attempted to obtain better views. He then realised that the bird was a very dark falcon resembling in size a male Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, but having a much longer tail and longer, more sharply pointed wings. A nearby Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* offered useful comparison for size, wingspan, flight-style and plumage. The larger, darker falcon had slow, deep, relaxed wingbeats in contrast with the rapid 'winnowing' action of the Kestrel. It did not hover, but repeatedly flew back and forth over the pool, sometimes hanging in the air with tail fanned and feet extended to catch insects. It frequently glided on lowered wings.

Only general plumage features were discernible, the upper-parts being a dark sooty-brown, with the tail and rump slightly paler and warmer, the malar stripes dark, and the cheeks and under-parts a lighter brown. The underwing-coverts were

Originally published in *British Birds* 73: 328–332. Heading drawing by Anthea Copleston

very dark. Lack of strong tonal contrasts created a blackish appearance, especially at longer range. In the process of identification, juvenile and melanistic Hobbies *F. subbuteo* were eliminated because of the bird's greater size, proportionately longer tail and relaxed flight-style. Red-footed Falcon *F. vespertinus* was also too small and compact. Species popular with falconers were considered, but Lanner *F. biarmicus*, Lagger *F. jugger* and Saker *F. cherrug* were all discounted mainly on plumage differences and feeding habits. Dark-phase Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae* was the only bird which seemed to fit: a species which was unfamiliar to K.W.H.

When, after an hour, the falcon became distant, K.W.H. returned home to study field guides and consulted Porter *et al.* (1974). The description of the slow 'foraging' flight of Eleonora's fitted that of the Formby bird, and the dark underwing-coverts were also a major identifying feature.

The following day, A. Adams, A.C. and M. Garner accompanied K.W.H. to Cabin Hill, and, at approximately 09.30 hours, the falcon was seen flying towards a copse, with a Kestrel in pursuit. All observers were impressed by the distinctive differences between the two birds at 300–400 m. The Eleonora's Falcon was more powerful and well able to outfly the Kestrel, despite the latter's quicker wingbeats. The Eleonora's disappeared behind the copse, but was relocated on a branch facing the observers. Views through binoculars revealed considerable detail at 115 m in good light. K.W.H. then advanced to test the bird's approachability and to obtain views of it in flight. At about 50 m it became alert, then rose and turned briefly sideways in a horizontal position, showing that its wings reached to the tip of its tail. It then took off and began hawking insects overhead.

The following details were noted:

Size, proportions and general characters: Very dark falcon, size of male Peregrine, but slimmer and less muscular in build, with wings proportionately longer and more finely pointed. Slightly rounded tail, of Kestrel-like proportions, about one-quarter as long again as width of wing base, looking narrow when folded: more rakish outline than Hobby, Peregrine or Red-footed Falcon. Flight silhouette very angular, not bowed, with characteristic sharp bend at carpal joints. No moult apparent. *Upper-parts:* Forehead to nape dark sooty-brown, without pale nape patches. Mantle and upperwing slightly darker and unmarked. Uppertail and rump paler and warmer-toned, with rufous tint in direct sunlight. *Head:* Malar stripes dark sooty-brown, between those of Hobby and Peregrine in width. Cheeks and ear-coverts cinnamon brown, clearly rounded in outline. *Under-parts:* Chin, throat and rest of underside, including undertail, uniform cinnamon-brown. Darker brown streaking from upper breast to belly, prominent, but less heavy than on Hobby. Tail finely barred darker brown, with dark terminal band. Undertail-coverts and tibial feathers apparently unstreaked. *Underwing:* Flight feathers darker shade of body colour, darkening further towards tips of primaries. K.W.H. detected marginally paler area between coverts and hindwing, but no strong dark trailing edge. Flight feathers marked by several rows of darker spots, including extreme trailing edge, forming finely barred pattern. Coverts dark sooty-brown, mottled darker. Lack of strong contrast in plumage accentuated general darkness at long range. *Bare parts:* Bill light steely-blue; eye dark brown; eye-ring dull white; cere bluish-white; legs and feet bright butter-yellow. *Flight and behaviour:* Although capable of considerable speed, sought insects in leisurely fashion for about 1½ hours. Flight pattern same back-and-forth of previous day, with slow, deep, relaxed wingbeats interspersed with long, slow glides on lowered wings angled sharply at carpal joint. During glides, rump feathers sometimes raised, head lowered and tail twisted in the pronounced manner of Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. This peculiar 'slow-motion' flight recalled that of larger raptors. Circling and soaring not employed. On sighting insect, falcon made accelerated dash, often at downward angle, on deep—but more rapid—wingbeats. Some zig-zagging, twisting and turning, the occasional stoop, and a complete side-roll were noted. Insect transferred from talons to bill in flight as falcon paused with fanned-out tail. Aerobatics less vigorous than Peregrine's, and lack of stiffness and tension in wing-action presented graceful flight characteristics. Distance covered was within a 400 m radius, with the falcon frequently low overhead.

First-summer Eleonora's Falcon Falco eleonorae, *hunting and perched, Merseyside, August 1977; note sharp, angular outline, and tail-twisting (A. Copleston)*

When the falcon went to rest, at approximately 11.15 hours, all observers were fully agreed that it was an Eleonora's Falcon, probably dark phase, although the smaller Sooty Falcon *F. concolor* had also been considered. A.C. had made sketches which were later used in the production of colour and monochrome drawings. The questions of age and plumage phase, however, remained unresolved. Literature and illustrations proved confusing, as the plumage did not exactly fit any picture or description studied. There was doubt as to its origins, and escape from captivity was suspected. The falcon was not seen on subsequent days.

ESTABLISHING AGE AND PLUMAGE-PHASE

In order to clarify the age and plumage questions, A.C. sent colour sketches to Dr Hartmut Walter, who ascertained that the mantle, upperwing-coverts and tertials were as an adult's, lacking pale markings, while the immature spotting and barring on underwing and tail were still present. He considered it to be a dark-phase approaching a sub-adult plumage of a type noted by him in Moroccan individuals, a hint to its possible origin. The BOU Records Committee deduced that it was in first-summer plumage (R. Hudson *in litt.*).

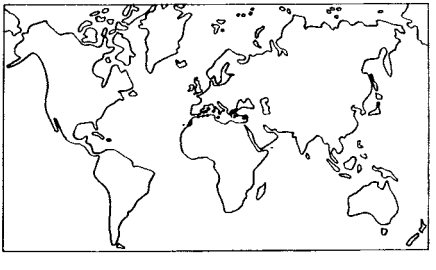
ESCAPE LIKELIHOOD

Captive Eleonora's Falcons were traced to the Midland Falconry Centre, Northamptonshire. A pair bred there in 1975, the young being exported to Canada. Both adults later died, the male having escaped shortly after the Formby sightings. The Centre pronounced the species unsuitable for falconry, and its hunting methods and insectivorous habits certainly render it unpopular.

No other legal or illegal imports or sales in Britain have emerged since the introduction in 1970 of the licensing system for importing birds of prey, and a licence issued in 1975 is not thought to have been used (T. P. Inskipp *in litt.*). This does not eliminate secretly kept, illegal imports yet undiscovered, nor suppressed zoo escapes. Lack of reference to the species in the International Zoo Yearbooks of 1971–79 suggests, however, that it is not commonly kept in zoos. Escape abroad was widely investigated, but no lost Eleonora's Falcons could be traced in any European country during 1977. The species is now protected in many countries. Since numbers of immatures routinely summer north of their home colonies (Dr H. Walter *in litt.*), it seemed reasonable to suppose that the Formby bird was a genuine vagrant.

VAGRANCY ELSEWHERE

Vagrants have occurred in Corsica, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel and Libya. There have been 20 records in southern France, mostly since the 1950s, including three in 1977. They fall into two groups: May/June and August (and one in early October); Carp & Cheylan (1979) concluded that those in autumn were non-breeders or failed



breeders and also that occurrences in southern France of light-phase Eleonora's Falcons were probably overlooked due to misidentification as Hobbies or Peregrines. One ringed in Morocco (Bernis 1966) was recovered in central Spain in 1970, and one ringed in Crete was discovered on the Black Sea coast of Turkey in June 1970 (Ristow 1975). There is also a Hungarian record of a dark-phase shot on 12th August 1964 (Ferenc 1978). According to Gätke (1900), one was caught in Heligoland, but the claim has been rejected (Glutz *et al.* 1971), partly on the grounds that it was too far north. The Formby bird is thus the northernmost accepted record.

This is still the only record.

Immature, female and light-phase adult male Eleonora's Falcons resemble Hobby or Peregrine in the basic pattern of their plumage. The all-blackish dark-phase adult male is confusable only with adult male Red-footed Falcon. In all cases, however, the combination of large size and insect-hawking feeding habits is diagnostic.

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1977

Rüppell's Warbler in Shetland

Rodney P. Martins

Although previously admitted to the British and Irish list on the strength of two males said to have been shot in an old stone quarry at Baldslow, near Hastings, East Sussex, on 5th May 1914 (*Brit. Birds* 8: 93–96), Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli* was subsequently removed when the 'Hastings rarities' were discredited (*Brit. Birds* 55: 281–384, where the date is given wrongly as 6th May 1914). The time has now come for its reinstatement.

At 18.15 G.M.T. on 13th August 1977, I noticed a greyish *Sylvia* warbler disappearing into the cover of a small willow *Salix* in a garden between Skelberry and Boddham, Dunrossness, on Mainland, Shetland. Raising my binoculars, I saw the

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 279–283. Heading drawing by Paul Sterry

bird's head and underparts before it vanished once more. I noted a blackish head, chin and throat, conspicuous white moustachial stripes, a red orbital ring and a similarly coloured iris. Clearly, it was an adult male Rüppell's Warbler.

It remained in the willow for a further five minutes, affording only brief views when it broke through the leaf canopy, and usually remaining obscured. It then flew several metres, but perched in full view on a neaby rose *Rosa* for an instant before vanishing into cover. There followed a series of brief glimpses as the bird fed in a thick tangle of undergrowth. After a while, it remained still for about 20 minutes, while perched almost completely out of view. Having obtained an acceptable description, I summoned D. Coutts who, together with J. D. Okill, arrived in time to have reasonable views before dusk.

The Rüppell's Warbler remained in the area until 17th September and was seen by at least 40 other observers, many of whom had journeyed from southern England to see it. On 15th August, it was trapped and ringed by J.D.O. Photographs were taken of the bird in the hand, but, regrettably, the results proved unsuitable for reproduction. The following description is composite, based on my own field notes and J.D.O.'s observations of the bird in hand.

Size and structure: Fairly robust *Sylvia* warbler, slightly larger and bulkier than Whitethroat *S. communis*, with weight of 15.6 g when trapped. Compared with other *Sylvia* warblers, bill appeared exceptionally broad along most of its length, the mid-crown high (accentuated by occasional raising of crown feathers), and tail long and markedly full in flight. *Plumage:* Forehead, crown and lores appeared black in field, but in hand a few crown feathers found to be tipped grey, ear-coverts and sides of neck very dark grey, while nape slightly paler. Chin (apart from a few feathers tipped white below base of lower mandible) and throat black, forming extensive 'bib' with lower edge curving upwards towards sides of breast. Bib bordered by broad white moustachial stripes, extending from base of bill to sides of throat. Breast, belly and undertail-coverts greyish white, palest on last. Greyish tone progressively darker towards sides of breast and belly, becoming entire on flanks. In good light, pale pinkish flush apparent on centre of breast, and, in hand, also on undertail-coverts. Mantle, rump, scapulars and uppertail-coverts uniform smoky-blue-grey, paler than nape, which appeared slightly darker still, in hand. Primary and secondary coverts black with pale grey fringes to outer webs and tips, the latter palest on primary coverts. Other wing-coverts black with some pale edges; in heavy moult. Primaries blackish brown tipped white, with outer web fringes pale grey. Secondaries dark brown, paler than coverts. Tertials black with very broad whitish fringes to outer webs and tips. Closed wings presented contrast between black feather centres of coverts and tertials and more uniform paler fringes of flight feathers. Underwing very pale grey. Tail length 59.9 mm, black, with outer tail feathers white on distal half, second and third outer tail feathers white on distal third and broadly tipped white respectively. Central tail feathers longest, feathers becoming progressively shorter outwards, thus producing 'full' appearance of tail in flight, especially when partially fanned. White on outer tail feathers showed as conspicuous white corners to tail in flight. *Bare parts:* Orbital ring brownish red, iris butterscotch colour in hand, though often appearing red in field. Legs appeared orange in field, though dark flesh in hand; soles of feet yellow; tarsus 20.1 mm. *Bill:* length (from base of skull) 15.3 mm, very slightly decurved at tip, black with greyish-brown base to lower mandible. *Voice:* Three individual calls: (1) soft subdued 'tuc-tuc', repeated two or three times, recalling (to my ears) Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*; (2) harsher, more strident 'tac-tac' or 'tchak-tchak', also repeated two or three times, typical of genus *Sylvia*; and (3) rapid series of harsh notes similar to chatter of Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, often delivered from within cover. Additionally, full song heard on at least two occasions: series of harsh notes in quick succession, rising to and falling from peak of intensity; song considered typical of genus *Sylvia*, recalling Whitethroat in particular.

The bird frequented the vicinity of three gardens, where dense stands of willow and rose provided patches of thick cover. These were interconnected by a system of dry-stone walls, used by the bird as lines of communication. This environment did not present the kind of constraints frequently met by migrants in unfavourable

surroundings and this individual, perhaps accordingly, displayed behaviour typical of the genus *Sylvia*.

At times, especially when singing, it was confiding, usually choosing the top of a willow bush as a conspicuous perch. Furthermore, its habit of foraging among the heavy growth of lichen on the walls meant that often no attempt was made to keep to cover (Photo 52). Under these circumstances, the bird would feed while moving systematically along a wall in one direction. Upon reaching a garden, a dive for cover was often instantaneous. Once out of sight, reappearance elsewhere several hours later, or a glimpse of a wing or tail after a few minutes were events typical of the bird's unpredictability. Sometimes, it was not to be found in any of the favoured gardens for several days, despite intensive searches.

In general, the Rüppell's Warbler was least wary during the earlier part of its recorded stay, especially during long periods of sunshine. Later, deteriorating weather conditions in combination with trapping and heavy pressure from observers probably resulted in its increasing secretiveness.

Flight was always low and direct, carriage being noticeably rigid. The most conspicuous feature in flight was the marked contrast between the blue-grey upper-parts and the black tail: this was visible at 100 m, even in poor light. When feeding in the open, the wings and the tail were frequently flicked.

As a vagrant elsewhere in Europe, the species has occurred in Italy, Sicily, and once in Finland (Williamson 1976). In Britain and Ireland, a second record was to follow closely the first: one occurred on Lundy, Devon, from 1st to 10th June 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 74: 528–530).

MOULT

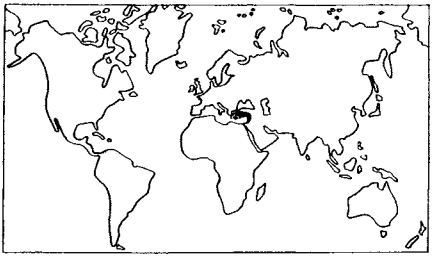
Considering only the locality and date of the record, it might reasonably have been assumed that the bird's arrival was recent. An examination of its state of moult when trapped, however, strongly suggests that this was not so. Details of moult were as follows:

1st primary	Old
2nd primary	In pin (moult score 1)
3rd primary	New, growing feather (moult score 2)
4th primary	New, growing feather (moult score 3)
5th primary	New, growing feather (moult score 4)
6th primary	Complete (new)
Other primaries	All new
Secondaries	Four old
Tertials	All new
Tail	New, outer tail feathers nearly full grown.

There was active moult on forehead, crown, nape, chin, breast, belly, flanks, mantle, primary and secondary coverts and both uppertail- and undertail-coverts. (Due to the state of moult a wing formula was not possible.)

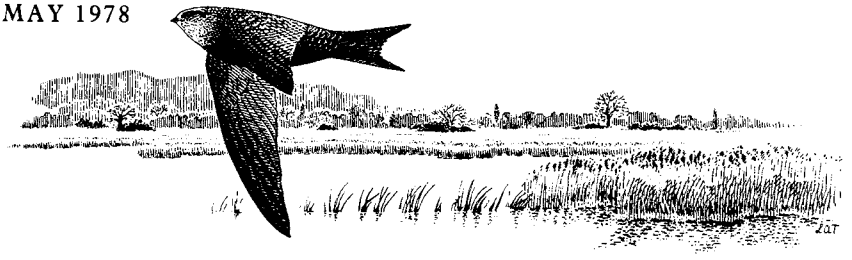
Thus, the Rüppell's Warbler was in full active moult of both body and flight feathers with only its first pirmary to fall, and moult must therefore have been in progress for some weeks. Since it would be highly unusual for a passerine to migrate in active moult, and assuming moult had not been suspended at any stage (unusual in warblers), it seems very probable that the bird had been present for some time before its discovery. Considering the length of its recorded stay, which indicates sufficient availability of food and shelter, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the bird had

spent the summer in Shetland, having arrived in spring. Interestingly, an adult male Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* trapped at Sumburgh, Shetland, on 15th August 1971 (*Brit. Birds* 65: 343) was in heavy moult and may also have summered. As already noted, Britain's second Rüppell's Warbler came in spring.



The phenomenon of small 'spates' of records within a few years, followed by a blank spell before another spate, perhaps reflects periods of high population levels or modified migration patterns by a proportion of the population. As already noted, a second Rüppell's Warbler came (to Lundy, Devon) less than two years after the first. These are still the only two British and Irish records.

The problem of identifying a female or immature Rüppell's Warbler has yet to confront observers in Britain. In these plumages, individuals can lack all trace of the male's black head and throat coloration, but nonetheless invariably show at least a hint of its distinctive white submoustachial stripe. This, and a combination of such features as bright reddish brown iris, orbital ring and legs, and paler and cleaner greyish (rather than brownish) upperparts and underparts, will probably be the first clues to distinguish one from the females and immatures of other similar Sylvia *warblers.*



Pallid Swift in Kent

W. G. Harvey

In east Kent, 13th May 1978 began cold and damp with a light north-westerly wind and intermittent rain. At dawn, D. Raine and I embarked on a Kent Ornithological Society sponsored bird count through the Stour Valley east of Canterbury. When we reached Stodmarsh at mid morning, there was a perceptible rise in temperature and signs of a break in the clouds which encouraged us to put aside earlier doubts and continue. As we walked along the Lampen Wall across reedbeds and lagoons of the National Nature Reserve, it was obvious that there was a substantial passage of Swifts *Apus apus* moving low WNW up the Stour Valley.

Shortly after passing three other birdwatchers (M. Marsh, M. Morley and P. Murphy) at about 10.30 G.M.T., we noticed a decidedly paler swift with a more deliberate flight. As we watched, it began feeding up and down the Wall, along a flight path of about 200 m, regularly passing us within 2 m. We watched it for about 15 minutes, made field notes and then walked back to the others who had been joined by C. Clark. They had also been watching the bird and we all agreed that it was probably a Pallid Swift *A. pallidus*. We watched it together for the next 40 minutes down to 2 m and from all angles, in dull light using a variety of binoculars. It was in company with up to 30 Swifts throughout.

The main features were the milky brown plumage, with dark brown primaries contrasting with paler secondaries and wing-coverts, the extensive pale face and throat, and the more deliberate flight, with shallower wing beats, more gliding and less agility than shown by its commoner companions. We were all conscious of the difficulties of field identification in view of the warnings given in current field guides and the fate of earlier, claimed British records. When we felt we had sufficient details to make identification certain, D.R. and I walked on to Grove Ferry to telephone the news as widely as possible. As the bird was easily watched from a footpath with no risk of disturbance, we were anxious that as many people as possible should see it. In the event, over the next nine days many hundreds saw it, and several photographs were taken (Photos 53–59). It appeared regularly with Swifts at about 07.30 hours and moved off, generally westwards, at about 16.30 hours, although on some days it was absent (or high out of sight) for long intervals. It was apparently never seen away from Stodmarsh. The last documented sighting was by Dr P. M. North on 21st May, although there were unsubstantiated reports up to 24th May.

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 170–178. Heading drawing by Laurel A. Tucker

DESCRIPTION

Although this was known to be probably the first acceptable record in Britain and Ireland of a notoriously difficult species, only four descriptions were submitted to the Rarities Committee or the KOS apart from those of the original six observers. These came from R. E. E. Collins, Dr P. M. North, D. W. Taylor and R. E. Youngman, and the following summary of the identification features draws on their notes as well as those of the original observers. My drawings are based on field sketches made on 13th May (see Figs 16 and 17).

General appearance: Appeared about size of Swift, though rather bulkier, with larger head, blunter wing-tips, broader wings and blunter tail fork. Generally paler, milkier brown, similar to Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, but looking rather patchy, almost 'moth-eaten' compared with matt velvet, sooty brown of Swifts (impression well shown in photographs). *Wings:* Outer primaries dark brown, contrasting with paler brown secondaries and coverts; contrast apparent from above and from below. Swifts showed contrary contrast, with primaries appearing lighter than rest of wing. Feathers of wing-coverts with distinct pale edges, giving mottled or scaly appearance in best views. Pale wing-bars apparent in some photographs not noted in field. *Mantle, rump and tail:* Mantle darker brown than wing-coverts, rump and crown, but still paler than those of Swift: not striking in field, but consistent in most lights and noted by Robert Hudson (*in litt.*) on skins (in Photo 56, and in *Brit. Birds* 71: plate 135, shows as saddle effect). In close views, some mottling discernible. Rump and uppertail-coverts also mottled and paler brown than dark tail. Some observers thought tail points blunter and fork shallower than on Swifts. *Head:* Head pale, milky brown, with extensive paler area over forecrown, forehead and throat: not white and not so well demarcated as on Swifts, but very obvious since it extended further around neck and down onto upper breast. In contrast, shadowed area around eyes appeared very dark: striking feature in most lights. Paleness of head particularly noticeable in head-on views and probably contributed to impression of larger head than that of Swift. *Under-parts:* Breast and belly appeared dark brown in most lights and contrasted with underwing-coverts, secondaries and throat: seemed as dark as mantle, although more often in shadow (perhaps not real plumage characteristics, since Hudson did not notice it on skins). Showed scaling in close views, particularly on flanks (I gained impression this created by dark borders to feathers, although others noted pale borders similar to those on wing-coverts and mantle). *Bare parts:* Eyes and bill dark, probably black. M. Marsh noted orange gape. Feet not seen. *General characters:* Almost all observers commented on striking flight: steadier, more deliberate, heavier and less manoeuvrable than that of Swift. Wings appeared broader, blunter and more blade-shaped, giving impression of shallower wing beats from the shoulder (reminding me of the larger swifts, Alpine *A. melba* and Mottled *A. aequatorialis*). Method of feeding while beating up and down dyke or embankment was more systematic than that employed by the numerous Swifts always present. After initial contact at close range, it could be picked up with naked eye at 100 m, on flight style alone, even when among many Swifts. No call heard.

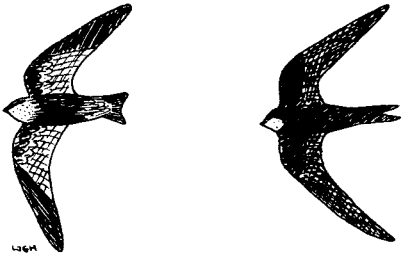


Fig. 16 Pallid Swift Apus pallidus *and Swift* A. apus, *Kent, May 1978, from field sketches (W. G. Harvey)*

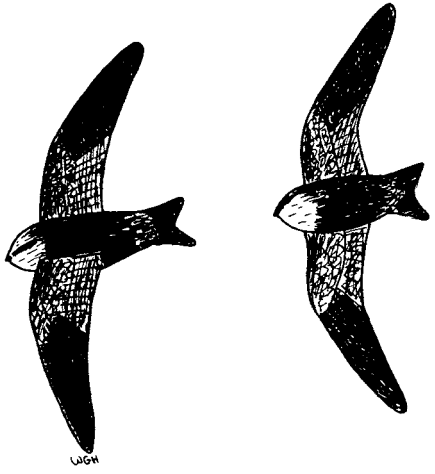


Fig. 17 Pallid Swift Apus pallidus *from above (left) and below, Kent, May 1978, from field sketches (W. G. Harvey)*

All observers with whom I discussed the bird were struck by its distinctive 'jizz' (indeed, it was a matter of concern that it was so distinctive!) and this was clearly a particularly striking individual in exceptional circumstances which allowed very close views in a variety of light conditions over quite a long period.

LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES

In Kent, the first half of May 1978 was relatively cool and wet with frequent northerly winds, inhibiting migration by Swifts. The first major influx occurred on 13th May, after winds had moved from light northerly on 9th and 10th to fresh ENE on 11th and light northwesterly on 13th. The passage of a cold front on the morning of 13th encouraged Swifts to move quickly through Kent. Over the following week, the winds were variable and light, moving to northeast on 20th and 21st, when the Pallid Swift was last reliably recorded. At Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory (15 km ESE of Stodmarsh) Swift passage peaked on 13th–14th and 20th–23rd May, with only small numbers on 24th–26th (Martin Sutherland *in litt.*). Thus, the Pallid Swift arrived with the first peak and left with the second. If it was of the west Mediterranean race *brehmorum*, it seems likely that it joined a build-up of northward-bound Swifts in the Mediterranean. Its striking paleness, however, at least admits the possibility that it was from farther south, and of the Saharan/Middle-Eastern race *pallidus*. With supremely aerial birds such as swifts, the possibility of distant origins for vagrants is greater than for most species, and the full range of subspecific characters must be borne in mind when attempting to identify a vagrant.

Vaurie (1965) described three Palearctic races: *brehmorum* in the western Mediterranean, the darker *illyricus* in the eastern Mediterranean, and the paler *pallidus* in the Sahara and the Middle East. He considered that two further races, *niansae* of East Africa and *somalicus* of Somalia, may be conspecific, but White (1970) and Brooke (1978) considered these to be races of the Nyanza Swift *A. niansae*, forming a superspecies with *A. pallidus*.

IDENTIFICATION PROBLEMS

A Pallid Swift at Bath, Zeeland, Netherlands, on 8th August 1979 was the first Dutch record (G. J. Oreel *in litt.* to Dr J. T. R. Sharrock). Interestingly, Bath is on almost exactly the same latitude as Stodmarsh (about 51° 20′ north). Since 1960 there have been at least nine other reports of Pallid Swifts in seven counties of southern and eastern England, west to Avon and north to Humberside, but none has afforded such conclusive views as the Stodmarsh individual. To date, this remains the first and only accepted record for Britain and Ireland. The unusually favourable circumstances of this sighting should not obscure the difficulty of separating Pallid Swifts from Swifts in the field. Light conditions have a variable effect on the apparent coloration, since the differences are largely matters of degrees of shade. Wind conditions affect the mode of flight. Young Swifts are often paler than adults, show a more extensive pale throat patch and some mottling or scaling. There is also the possibility of unusual plumage variants and leucistic Swifts may be particularly misleading (e.g. Vinicombe 1978).

The Central Asian race of the Swift *A. a. pekinensis* is intermediate in coloration between the nominate race and the darker races of the Pallid Swift. It has a larger throat patch than the nominate race and may show pale tips to the breast and belly feathers. Its primaries are darker than its secondaries. In an examination of skins at Tring, Robert Hudson could find no single plumage character which consistently separated all *pekinensis* from all Pallid Swifts. Since this subspecies ranges west to Turkey and the Levant, its occurrence in western Europe is possible, and it is necessary to exclude it in the field identification of suspected vagrant Pallid Swifts. This may not always be possible, particularly with distant views of single birds. Lack (1956) discussed the differences between Swifts and Pallid Swifts, and also noted that most features are a matter of degree, with some overlap between the two species in most characters. He found that on most Pallid Swifts the first and second primaries were equal or almost so, while on Swifts the second was usually longer. P. R. Colston (*in litt.*), however, in a more recent examination, found that the overlap is considerable, although there is a tendency for *Apus apus* to have longer second primaries (Table 1). Lack (1956) confirmed Hartert's findings that the tails of Pallid Swifts are

Table 1. Differences in lengths of 1st and 2nd primaries of Swift Apus apus *and Pallid Swift* A. pallidus

Totals of 40 of each species in British Museum (Natural History), Tring collection, measured by P. R. Colston

	Relation of 1st primary to 2nd primary					
	+3–4 mm	+1–2 mm	1st = 2nd	−1–2 mm	−3–4 mm	−5–6 mm
Swift	0	5	10	12	11	2
Pallid Swift	2	12	8	14	4	0

generally less forked than those of Swifts, and this was further confirmed by Colston (Table 2).

On the basis of the comments of Lack (1956) and Robert Hudson (*in litt.*), and the available descriptions of the Stodmarsh individual, I suggest that the following are the

Table 2. Differences in depth of tail fork of Swift Apus apus *and Pallid Swift* A. pallidus

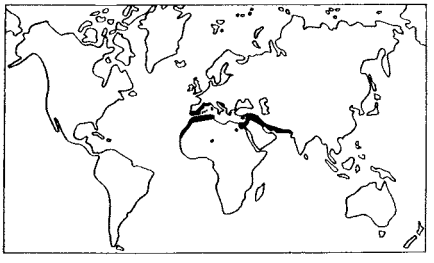
Totals of ten of each species in British Museum (Natural History), Tring collection, measured (in mm) by P. R. Colston. S.D. = standard deviation

	Longest tail feather			*Shortest tail feather*			*Difference*		
	Range	Mean	S.D.	Range	Mean	S.D.	Range	Mean	S.D.
Swift	72–78	74.6	±2.2	38–45	41.1	±2.1	30–38	33.5	±2.4
Pallid Swift	65–72	69.2	±1.9	40–45	42.5	±1.8	23–30	26.7	±2.3

main identification features of Pallid Swifts when compared with Swifts in the field:

1. Paler, milkier brown plumage
2. Dark brown outer primaries contrasting with paler secondaries and wing-coverts (compare with the contrary effect on Swifts)
3. Breast, belly and especially mantle appear darker than wing-coverts, head and rump. The darker mantle can create a saddle effect and seems to be a consistent feature independent of light conditions, whereas the dark underparts may only be a factor of shadow
4. Pale, whitish throat extending farther down breast, to sides of neck and onto forehead
5. Distinct mottling or scaliness on contour feathers, most noticeable on wing-coverts and flanks
6. Dark eye shadow mark often showing clearly on pale head. Although a factor of light conditions, this can be a striking field mark
7. More blade-shaped wings, broader based and, usually, with blunter wingtips. Less obviously, the tail points look blunter and the fork shallower
8. Less agile, more deliberate flight, with more gliding

It is likely that most, if not all, of these characters need to be clearly seen in good light conditions and at close range, preferably in direct comparison with Swifts, if certain identification of vagrants is to be established.



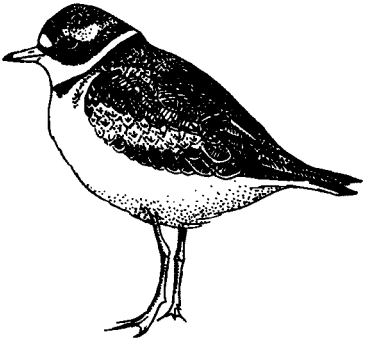
Although there have been a number of claims of Pallid Swifts in Britain, both before and since the one in 1978, and some are still under consideration by the British Birds *Rarities Committee, none has yet been accepted, and the occurrence documented here remains as the sole record on the British and Irish list.*

It is purely the highly mobile nature of swifts which has blighted some of the earlier claims of Pallid Swift. They just did not stay around long enough for the real possibility of a leucistic

or pale-looking Swift (especially one in its scaly juvenile plumage), or the slight chance of the pale Asian race A. a. pekinensis *to be totally excluded. The Stodmarsh individual provided the much-needed opportunity for knowledge of the tangible distinctions of Pallid Swift to be sharpened. At least we know now on which features we should concentrate the next time that one offers fleeting views!*

OCTOBER 1978

Semipalmated Plover in Scilly



Paul A. Dukes

At about midday on 9th October 1978, near Porth Killier, St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, F. H. D. Hicks and I heard an unfamiliar wader call: a plaintive, disyllabic 'che-wee', not unlike the 'chewit' note of the Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, but softer and without a sharp upward inflection on the second syllable. We were unable to see the bird responsible, and, as the sound of further calls receded into the distance, we could only speculate as to its identity. Ten minutes later, I heard the calls again, this time much closer and apparently originating from a small wader which flew rapidly across Porth Killier towards the west of the island. These brief views increased my confusion for, while the bird looked like an immature Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, the calls were clearly not typical of that species (see Fig. 18).

Despite an extensive search, the odd plover was not relocated on 9th, but, on the following day, several other observers saw and heard the bird as it flew over and were similarly perplexed by its combination of strange call and familiar plumage. It seemed unlikely that a Ringed Plover could have such a distinctive aberration of voice, and we began to consider the possibility that it might be the closely related Nearctic Semipalmated Plover *C. semipalmatus*, which we knew to be very similar to the Ringed Plover. Reference was made to Peterson (1947) and Robbins *et al.* (1966); the call of the Semipalmated Plover was described in the former as a plaintive 'chi-we' or 'tooi', second note higher, and in the latter as 'chur-wee', thus conforming to our description of the call of the St Agnes bird. The literature, however, did not promote optimism at confirming the identification, as it implied that the two plovers were indistinguishable in the field unless the partial toe-webbing (from which the Semipalmated Plover derives its scientific and vernacular names) could be discerned.

During 11th October, the bird was heard and seen several times among about 70 Ringed Plovers on Periglis Beach, but it could not be isolated from the flock and the views were again frustratingly brief. The problems we had experienced with this puzzling wader had been communicated to the many birdwatchers staying on the nearby island of St Mary's, and, during the day, over 50 observers managed to see the

Originally published in *British Birds* 73: 458–464. Heading drawing by Bryan Bland

plover, albeit distantly or in flight. After eluding critical examination in this manner, the bird finally moved away from the Ringed Plover flock in the late afternoon and began to feed near seaweed deposits in a small cove below St Agnes Church. A. Dean, P.A.D., J. Gregory, M. Parker, J. Ridley and D. & J. Sykes watched it until dusk, at ranges down to a few metres, and noted a number of differences from nearby juvenile Ringed Plovers, which are discussed in detail later. The plover eventually flew to an area of rocks adjacent to the beach, where the diagnostic palmations between the toes were clearly visible as the bird stood with its toes spread on a rock. With good timing, F.H.D.H. and W. Spencer arrived at this moment and were able to see this detail which confirmed our earlier suspicions. Thereafter, the Semi-palmated Plover was invariably to be found on Periglis Beach whenever tidal conditions permitted, and remained in this area until at least 9th November, entertaining hundreds of birdwatchers during this period (Photos 60–63).

Initially, the American wader was subjected to constant harassment from the local Ringed Plovers. Possibly as a result of these frequent attacks, it began to inhabit an area near the top of the beach, feeding on and around mounds of decomposing seaweed. The Semipalmated Plover would assume a crouching posture when approached by a Ringed Plover, and utter a piping 'chip chip' call, quite different from the usual flight call, but equally distinctive. An attack by a Ringed Plover usually resulted in the Semipalmated flying to another part of the beach, but, on at least one occasion, a brief fight ensued, with the combatants rolling over the sand. Later in October, the Semipalmated seemed to have established a small feeding territory in the western corner of Periglis Beach, and had become noticeably pugnacious in defending this area, driving off all intruders, including Ringed Plovers. The approach of a Ringed Plover into its territory evinced the same vocal response, but, instead of adopting a submissive posture, the Semipalmated would rush at the intruder in a very aggressive manner, with tail fanned and inclined to one side. Like all waders on Periglis Beach, its feeding pattern was regulated by tidal movements; at high tide, it associated with Ringed Plovers at a communal roost above the high water level. The Semipalmated Plover appeared to have identical feeding behaviour to the Ringed Plovers. It was an extremely confiding bird and could be approached to within a few metres, preferring to run away rather than fly. The following details were noted:

Plumage: Crown greyish-brown, with profuse, silvery-white feather fringes visible at very close range. Lores dark brown, meeting in narrow line above bill, broadening to form patch around and below eye, this narrowing to extend as thin collar contrasting with paler crown. Small creamy-white patch on forehead, merging into narrow supercilium which broadened slightly to end as buffy smudge just behind eye. Throat and lower cheeks white, narrowing into thin band around nape, dividing crown from mantle. Below this white collar, thin dark brown line widened at sides of breast, then reduced to just meet in centre of breast. A few silvery-white feather tips visible on breast band. Remainder of under-parts white. Mantle greyish-brown, slightly darker than on nominate Ringed Plover *C. h. hiaticula*; close examination revealed scattering of feathers with silvery fringes and thin blackish sub-terminal crescents. Coverts brown centred, each fringed silvery-white, creating effect of paler panel contrasting with brown mantle, making latter appear as darker saddle. Primaries blackish. Wing tips projected a few millimetres beyond tail tip. I was unable to distinguish any striking difference in flight pattern from Ringed Plover, but some observers noted generally darker appearance, with thinner, neater wing-bar, which contrasted more with darker primaries and secondaries. *Bare parts:* Bill black, with very small area of dull pink at base of lower mandible. Legs dull greenish-brown at front, orange-yellow at rear. Narrow, dull yellow orbital ring visible at close range.

FIELD CHARACTERS

The long stay of the Semipalmated Plover and close proximity of many juvenile,

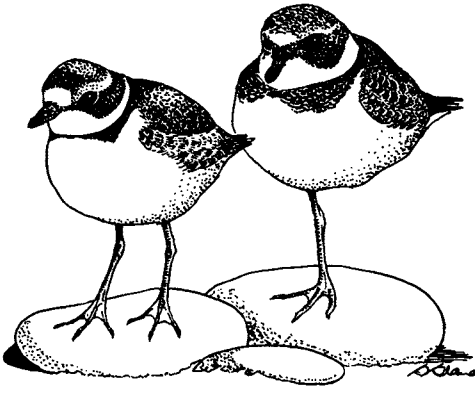


Fig. 18 Immature Semipalmated Charadrius semipalmatus *(left) and Ringed Plovers* C. hiaticula, *Isles of Scilly, October 1978. Bill of Semipalmated: blackish with small areas of dull pink at base of lower mandible, smaller than on Ringed Plover (Bryan Bland)*

first-winter and adult Ringed Plovers provided excellent opportunities for comparison. It is evident that a number of characters displayed by the St Agnes individual will be of value in providing criteria for the identification of Semipalmated Plover, but it would be premature without further research to suggest that all the differences set out below are completely reliable and applicable to every individual.

Call The distinctive 'che-wee' call of the Semipalmated Plover on St Agnes was an infallible means of locating the bird; indeed it is unlikely that it would have been discovered among the numerous Ringed Plovers if it had not been so vocal.

Observers with experience of Semipalmated Plovers in the USA confirmed that the calls were typical, and it is clear that the difference in voice is one of the best means of distinguishing Semipalmated from Ringed Plover. The usual call of Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* could be confused with the Semipalmated Plover's 'che-wee', but it is generally louder and fuller in tone, reflecting the larger size of the bird.

The piping 'chip chip' anxiety call often drew attention to the Semipalmated when it was involved in a confrontation on Periglis Beach, and was unlike any call in the vocabulary of Ringed Plover, although not dissimilar to the alarm note of Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius*.

Size The St Agnes Semipalmated Plover was noticeably smaller than Ringed Plovers, its neat proportions and less robust build leading to comparison with Little Ringed Plover. Such comparison was further enhanced by the American bird's rather rounded crown-shape. Wing-lengths listed by Prater *et al.* (1977) indicate that juvenile Semipalmated Plover is on average 13 mm shorter than the nominate race of Ringed Plover, and 6 mm shorter than the smaller eastern race, *C. h. tundrae*; wing-length of juvenile Little Ringed Plover is several millimetres shorter than that of Semipalmated Plover. Thus, the American species fits neatly in size between its two European relatives.

Palmations The partial webbing was more extensive between the middle and the outer toes than between the middle and the inner. Although extending to no more than one-quarter of the length of the toe, the palmations were on occasions surprisingly easy to see in the field, even at ranges of 50 m or more. The feature was most noticeable when the toes were spread, for example when the bird stood on a rock

or a mound of seaweed. It was often difficult to see the palmations as the plover ran over the sand, and many photographs taken in such situations failed to convey the actual prominence of the webbing. It should be noted that some Ringed Plovers may show vestigial webbing between the middle and the outer toes.

Breast band It was noticeable that the incomplete dark brown breast-band on the Semipalmated Plover was thinner than those on most juvenile Ringed Plovers, forming a narrow crescent, with no substantial increase in width at the sides of the breast. Photographs of adult Semipalmated Plovers on the breeding grounds show that the thinner breast band is also characteristic in adult plumage, and would therefore provide a useful indication of identification in conjunction with the other features described.

Bill The bill of the Semipalmated Plover was shorter than those of the Ringed Plovers, but about the same depth at the base, giving a stouter general appearance. The bill-length measurements given by Prater *et al.* (1977) show that Semipalmated is on average 1 mm shorter than Little Ringed Plover and 2 mm shorter than nominate Ringed Plover. The area of dull pink at the base of the lower mandible was smaller than on juvenile Ringed Plovers.

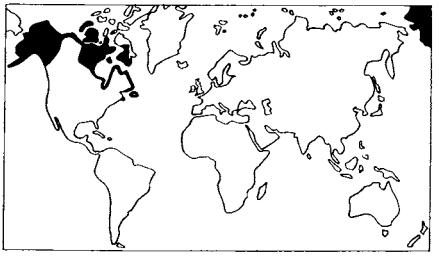
Leg colour The dull greenish-brown legs with orange-yellow on the rear were duller than those of typical juvenile Ringed Plovers.

Collar The narrow white collar between the crown and the mantle was thinner than on the juvenile Ringed Plovers, but, on both species, the apparent width of the band can vary with changes in posture. Characteristically, the Semipalmated had a rather hunched posture when standing; in this attitude, the thin collar was a means of picking it out from the Ringed Plovers.

Supercilium The majority of juvenile Ringed Plovers showed a broader, whiter supercilium extending farther behind the eye than on the Semipalmated. This, however, is a variable character, and a few Ringed plovers had very similar head markings.

Covert-patch The paler feathering and silvery fringes of the wing-coverts formed a distinct panel which contrasted with the darker mantle. The tone of the latter was darker than on the local Ringed Plovers (apparently *C. h. hiaticula*), although the darker *C. h. tundrae* would perhaps show similar coloration. Examination of many immature Ringed Plovers revealed some with noticeable contrast between coverts and mantle, but on none was the contrast as marked as on the Semipalmated.

Wing-bar Prater *et al.* (1977) stated that the wing-bar of Semipalmated Plover is slightly shorter and narrower than that of Ringed Plover, with the inner secondaries darker and, usually, the inner webs entirely brown. I was personally unable to discern any difference in the field, but many observers commented that a subtle difference in flight pattern was apparent.



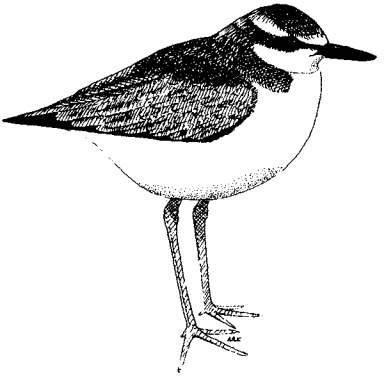
The close similarity between Semipalmated and Ringed Plovers inevitably increases the likelihood of a vagrant Semipalmated being overlooked. It seems unlikely that the St Agnes individual in 1978 was the first to occur; none, however, has been found since . . . yet.

There has unfortunately been no further chance in Britain to test the field characters shown by the Scillies individual, but some juvenile Ringed Plovers do show the pale panel on the wing-coverts, so the value of that feature is limited. Call and semipalmations seem the best clinchers if a Semipalmated Plover is suspected.

DECEMBER 1978

Greater Sand Plover in West Sussex

A. R. Kitson, B. A. E. Marr and R. F. Porter



On 9th December 1978, a *Charadrius* plover was found on the mudflats of Pagham Harbour, West Sussex. At first, it was considered to be a Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*, but B.A.E.M., when shown the bird in failing afternoon light, realised that it was too big for that species, and the possibility of a sand plover occurred to him. We went to the site the following morning and located it in a tidal creek running through saltmarsh. At a range of about 120 m, through 25 × 'scopes in fairly good light, A.R.K and R.F.P soon considered it to be a Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii*, both having experience of the species from abroad. But, aware of the similarity of Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus*, which R.F.P. had seen in Baluchistan in 1972 and B.A.E.M. in Australia in 1977, we watched the bird until sure of its relative size, size of bill and length of legs; finally, it called, leaving us in no doubt that it was indeed a Greater Sand Plover, the first for Britain and Ireland.

The Greater Sand Plover was watched for one hour and 40 minutes on 10th December before it flew out to the centre of the harbour and was lost to sight. It turned up again the next day and thereafter daily until 1st January 1979, when it was last seen. During its stay, it showed great site-fidelity, almost always frequenting the same creek at low tide at the northwest corner of the harbour near Sidlesham Ferry. Over the period, it gradually came farther up the creek, closer to the sea-wall, allowing observation from as little as 6 m in the end, and was seen by well over 1,000 observers. It was twice seen roosting with other waders (Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*) at high tide on a shingle spit in the southwest of the harbour at Church Norton. Photographs were

Originally published in *British Birds* 73: 568–573. Heading drawing by Alan Kitson

taken at its more confiding stage (Photos 64–66). Towards the end of its stay, it showed signs of succumbing to the freezing weather, and by 1st January it appeared moribund. When it could not be found thereafter it was thought likely that it had died.

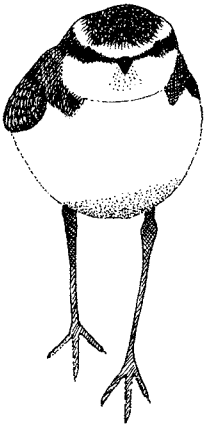
DESCRIPTION

First impressions were of a typical plover in shape and actions, with plumage similar to female Kentish Plover, but larger than Ringed Plover, about the size of Turnstone, and with rather long legs (which were not black) and strikingly heavy black bill. The following more detailed description was obtained:

Size and shape: Compared directly with Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lappinica*, Oyster-catcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Ringed Plover and Dunlin: larger than last two, smaller than the other species, and thought to be about size of Turnstone, or perhaps very slightly smaller. Against Ringed Plover, clearly larger, by about 25 per cent: longer, taller, plumper, more barrel-chested. Shape like Kentish Plover, but legs proportionally longer. Head typically sunk into shoulders, presenting squat, neckless appearance, although occasionally neck extended. Crown domed, peaking just behind eye. Wings and tail seemed to come to common point, although photographs indicate that wing tips may have fractionally over-reached tail tip. Legs long in comparison with Ringed Plover. On 23rd December, seen side by side with Dunlin and legs judged to be 1½ times length of the Dunlin's, which, taking average Dunlin tarsus measurement as 25 mm (Prater *et al.* 1977), gives absolute tarsus length of 37.5 mm (within the range for Greater but outside that for Lesser Sand Plover: Prater *et al.* 1977). In flight, feet projected fractionally beyond tail tip. Bill conspicuously large: longer and deeper than Ringed Plover's. Length of bill estimated to equal the distance from base of bill to behind eye, about two-thirds of head-length. Bill deep, particularly at base, running to blunt point and usually appearing cleanly dagger-shaped, but, at some angles, indication of distended gonys. *Head:* Forehead and supraloral area white, merging through pale buff to dun-coloured crown. The white and pale buff continued backwards over the eye in very narrow supercilium (so narrow that overlooked initially), widening again behind eye and over ear-coverts as buffish-white flash. Crown feathers with minute pale buff fringes. Nape slightly paler and sandier than crown and mantle. Lores and ear-coverts dun, joined under eye, about same colour as crown, though appearing darker with distance and at acute angles, clearly demarcated from white of chin and cheeks, the latter continuing onto sides of neck as partial collar. *Upper-parts:* Back dun. Jump dun with whitish sides. *Upperwing:* Two-tone: pale coverts, dark primaries and secondaries. Lesser, median and greater coverts buffy, slightly paler than back, with small dun centres. Tertials dun fringed buff. Primaries and secondaries dark brown. In flight, showed fairly conspicuous wing-bar, extending along base of secondaries and broadening onto base of inner primaries. Scapulars dun, appearing on 10th December marginally darker than back and darker than neighbouring coverts (Plate 64), presenting a barely discernible V from behind, but appearing on subsequent dates (in brighter light) to be concolorous with back (Plate 65). *Underwing:* White. *Under-parts:* Dun pectoral patches, neat and rather square-cut, joined across upper breast by barely perceptible line. Rest of under-parts white. *Tail:* Dun, darker sub-terminally, with whitish outer feathers and sides of uppertail-coverts, latter running into whitish sides of rump. (These features were not observed clearly in the field, but show on a photograph by C. R. Janman.) *Bare parts:* Legs greyish flesh or greenish flesh, fairly pale (even paler than those of juvenile Ringed Plover alongside). Eye appeared black. Bill black. *Call:* Heard several times in flight: a short, dry trilling, usually repeated twice, 'prrr prrr' or 'trrrt trrrt', reminiscent of Turnstone.

BEHAVIOUR

The Greater Sand Plover frequented the higher, drier parts of a muddy creek which was partly covered with an alga *Enteromorpha* and which ran through a saltmarsh of cord-grass *Spartina* and sea-purslane *Halimione portulacoides*, bordered by glasswort *Salicornia*. It often stood motionless for several minutes at a time, but was often also seen feeding, stopping, starting and pecking at the surface of the mud in typical



Greater Sand Plover Charadrius leschenaultii, *West Sussex, December 1978/ January 1979 (A. R. Kitson)*

plover fashion. It evidently found no shortage of food in the early days and was noted to catch ragworms (Nereidae) on several occasions, a tiny crab (Decapoda), and other undentifiable items. The ragworms were usually washed in the tidal stream at the bottom of the creek: the Greater Sand Plover, having taken one in its beak, would run rapidly down to the water's edge and dunk it vigorously a few times before swallowing it. When walking or running (which it did with long, fast steps and horizontal carriage) it was noted to wag its tail-end slightly. It was seen occasionally in flight, when disturbed by, for instance, an aggressive Grey Plover or a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*.

IDENTIFICATION

The Greater Sand Plover is a member of a group of five Palearctic plovers in the genus *Charadrius* which share certain structural and plumage characters, among them a red breast-band in summer plumage (Nielsen 1975). Between us, we have seen all of the four others: Lesser Sand Plover, Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus*, Oriental Plover *C. veredus* and Dotterel *C. morinellus*. The Pagham bird was at no time considered to be a Dotterel (which has, for example, an extensive breast-band broken by a white crescent), or a Caspian Plover, or an Oriental Plover (which have, besides other features, a more attenuated build, strong supercilia, much reduced wing-bars and brown underwings), and the only problem lay in elimination of Lesser Sand Plover.

At the time, all of us knew Greater Sand Plover and two of us had seen Lesser. Since then, we have all gained fresh experience of Greater (A.R.K. as soon as March 1979 in Turkey), and two of us (B.A.E.M. and R.F.P.) have seen Lesser (January 1980 in Thailand). Drawing on these experiences, and referring to the literature, we are able to qualify the identification of the Pagham individual as Greater rather than Lesser Sand Plover, based on the following criteria:

(i) *Size:* Greater is larger than Lesser in all respects, there being virtually no overlap in measurements (Prater *et al.* 1977), although there is a cline in size of Lessers, those from the eastern part of the range being largest and those from the western part being smallest. A similar cline occurs in Greater. Notwithstanding, most Lessers are barely larger in bulk than Ringed Plover, whereas Greater is considerably larger. We judged the Pagham bird to be 25 per cent larger than Ringed Plover: a size expected for Greater, but not for Lesser.

(ii) *Tarsus:* As stated above, the observed tarsus length is in agreement with Greater, not Lesser.

(iii) *Bill:* Our estimation of the bill length as equal to the distance from its base to behind the eye is in accord with that of Greater, whereas the bill of Lesser is equal in length to the distance from base of bill to the eye (Sinclair & Nicholls 1980). The great depth of the bill, particularly at the base, also fits Greater, not Lesser.

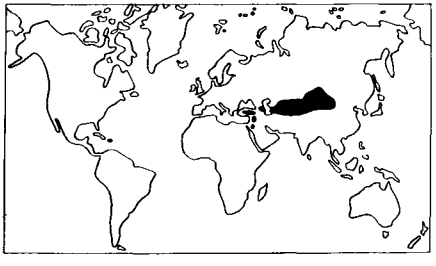
(iv) *Ear-coverts:* Sinclair & Nicholls (1980) stated that 'Lesser sometimes shows a darker, contrasting feathering from just in front of and below the eye and extending back to include the ear-coverts; Greater never shows this character.' We have been unable to verify this. Greater Sand Plovers (including the Pagham bird) have lores and ear-coverts which look darker than the crown—even blackish, at a distance and at acute angles—whereas, at close range, these areas usually become concolorous with the crown, or very nearly so. The illusion is probably due to the dominating large black bill and eye.

(v) *Tail:* We have not noticed a difference in the tail pattern of the two species, but P. J. Hayman (1978), in his meticulous paintings, depicted Greater with more white on the sides of the tail than Lesser. A photograph of the Pagham bird by C. R. Janman shows a tail pattern similar to that of Greater, not Lesser.

(vi) *Call:* We unfortunately do not know the call of Lesser Sand Plover. Sinclair & Nicholls (1980) likened it to that of a Turnstone, while merely mentioning that Greater 'utters a trill'. We know the call of Greater well and have repeatedly likened it to that of a Turnstone. One of us (A.R.K.), in Mongolia in August 1979, also likened Greater's call to that of a Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*. The call we heard from the Pagham bird was the call we have learned to associate with Greater Sand Plover.

AGEING

Greater Sand Plovers may be aged by the extent of pale fringing on their wing-coverts (Prater *et al.* 1977): adults in winter plumage have narrow and relatively inconspicuous pale fringes to their coverts; juveniles have broad buff fringes to all their coverts, some of which are retained into first-winter plumage. Since the Pagham bird had all its coverts fringed buff, collectively forming a panel which was pale relative to the mantle, particularly noticeable in the early part of its visit, it was most probably a first-winter.



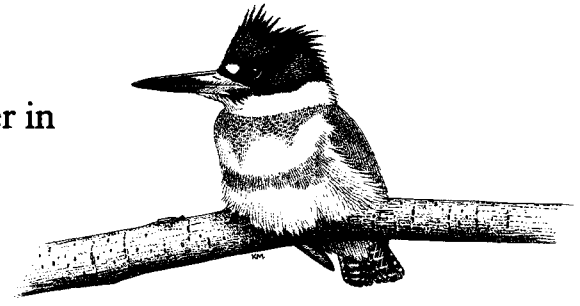
The second and third Greater Sand Plovers were discovered less than a year after the first: at Sandside Bay, Orkney, from 9th to 14th June 1979 and at Chew Valley Lake, Avon, from 17th November 1979 to 10th February 1980 (Brit. Birds *73: 583–586*).

Recent attention to the subject of sandplover identification has unearthed unexpected complexities rather than produced clarification. Perhaps the best distinction for individuals in other than full summer plumage will prove to be the larger bill of Greater (longer than the distance from the base of the bill to the back of the eye, whereas the bill of Lesser is shorter). The general structure of Greater recalls a small Grey Plover, whereas that of Lesser recalls a large Kentish Plover.

DECEMBER 1978

Belted Kingfisher in Co. Mayo

Killian Mullarney



At about 1600 G.M.T. on 10th December 1978, John Donnelly was walking by the River Bunree, Co. Mayo, when he noticed a strange looking bird about 40 m away perched in a tree overlooking the river. As it was quite unlike anything that he had ever seen before, he made a note of its main characteristics. He did not have binoculars with him, but could see that the bird had a dark head, conspicuous white collar, long bill and bluish grey upper-parts. It remained in the same area for about 20 minutes, flying short distances from branch to branch and occasionally uttering a harsh grating call which he likened to that of a Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*. He deduced that it was some kind of kingfisher (Alcedinidae), but could not find anything resembling it in any of the bird books which he consulted that evening. He saw the bird again the following day and also on 16th December, when he obtained slightly better views and noticed that it had a somewhat crested appearance.

In due course, he wrote to J. E. Fitzharris, secretary of the Irish Records Panel, with full details of his observations. His description and sketches were enough to convince J.E.F. that the bird described was a Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon*.

J.D. saw the bird again on several dates throughout January and kept J.E.F. informed of his observations. It was not until 3rd February 1979, however, that a small party of birdwatchers from Dublin, including J.E.F. and the writer, was able to make the journey over to see the bird. Soon after arriving at the spot where the kingfisher had most frequently been seen by J.D., it was located perched in a willow *Salix* overlooking the river—a magnificent bird! The following is a summary of the description compiled from notes and sketches made on the spot.

General appearance: Large, bulky kingfisher with long, stout bill and rather long, full tail. Roughly size of Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*. Forehead and crown feathers elongated, giving spiky outline to head and often bunching to form double crest. *Plumage:* Head above line from gape to nape deep blue-grey, appearing quite dark at long range. Most of head feathers with fine, dark shaft streak, coarsest on forehead and crown. Orbital and loral areas dark blackish grey, with conspicuous white spot in front of eye and narrow whitish orbital crescent below eye. Small patch of untidy dark feathering at base of lower mandible. Broad white collar separated head from blue-grey upperbody, rump and wings. Collar complete except for thin line of dark-centred feathers running down middle of hind-neck. Collared effect heightened by blue-grey breast band running from shoulders. Breast band widest in middle of chest, where lower edge formed point. Several isolated clusters of dull coppery feathers within breast band. Blue-grey of upperbody and wings lighter shade than head, and only back and inner scapular feathers prominently dark-centred. Under-parts below breast band clean white, with broad band of rusty orange across upper belly, fading into slightly paler shade of orange on flanks. Diffuse panel of white along upper flanks separated light orange from closed wings. Vent and undertail-coverts white. Wing-coverts and secondaries uniform blue-grey, with tiny white tips to outer greater coverts. Tertials same colour, with darker inner webs. Primaries black, tipped thinly with white from about fifth inwards. In flight, large tracts of white revealed across primaries. These white

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 242–245. Heading drawing by Killian Mullarney

patches quite large on splayed primaries, but seemed more or less restricted to inner webs, and therefore not visible when wings closed. Tail usually fanned slightly; round-ended; mainly dark grey, with well-spaced white spots on both webs of rectrices, forming series of discontinuous, thin, white bars. Some rectrices edged blue-grey (same shade as upper-parts). *Bare parts:* Bill long and stout; mainly dark blackish, with pale horn base and tiny, light tip. Eyes dark chestnut brown. Legs short; dirty red.

The bird behaved in much the same way as a European Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, sitting around a lot of the time, with occasional bouts of fishing activity. When at rest, it usually chose a perch about 10 m above the water, but would come down lower when fishing. Every now and then, particularly when feeding, it would become very raucous, uttering a loud rattling call, reminiscent of Mistle Thrush. It flew strongly and directly, often with rather flappy, measured wing-beats which prompted comparison with Hoopoe *Upupa epops*. Throughout its stay, it favoured a small stand of willow trees along the water's edge, close to where the Bunree runs into the River Moy.

When we left the bird at around 15.00 G.M.T., it seemed content and, as it had already been around for almost eight weeks, there seemed every likelihood that it would remain for some time. Later that afternoon, however, a local man, who had heard of the bird's presence and who had an interest in taxidermy, shot it. This outrageous act was reported to the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, which pursued a successful prosecution. The mounted specimen is now on display in the National Museum, Dublin.

This was the first accepted record of this Nearctic species in Britain and Ireland. It has, however, since been predated, with the acceptance by the British Ornithologists' Union of an old record of a female Belted Kingfisher shot in Cornwall in November 1908. The following details were published in February 1919 (*Brit. Birds* 12: 216):

BELTED KINGFISHER IN CORNWALL

To the Editors of British Birds

SIRS,—One day in November 1908, the date of which I am not now certain, my attention was called by my neighbour at Sladesbridge, near Wadebridge, to a peculiar bird perching on the telegraph wires just outside my house. I took my gun and went out, but on my appearance it flew from the wires, alighting in a bush on the bank of the River Allen, which flows close by, being a tributary of the River Camel.

I endeavoured to stalk it, but it again flew off, alighting a little further up the river, where I successfully stalked and killed it.

I sent the bird to a taxidermist in Plymouth, who stuffed it for me, but on making enquiries failed to ascertain its name until in September of this year (1918) when visiting Wadebridge I made the acquaintance of Mr G. Thorne Phillips, of Polmorla Villa, who identified it as a Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*).

I handed the bird to Mr Phillips, who sent it to the British Museum, and it was exhibited at the meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club on October 9th, 1918. This is the first recorded occurrence of the bird in England.

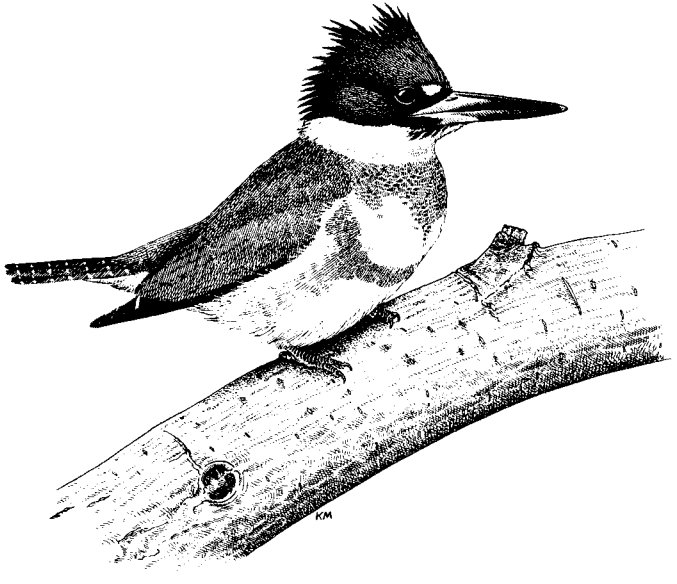
Thinking this may interest your readers.

F. G. STEVENSON.

NEWTON FERRERS.

[We applied to Mr Stevenson for the name of the taxidermist who set up the bird, but he regrets his inability to give the name, as his friend, who was formerly resident in Plymouth, is now in America.—EDS.]

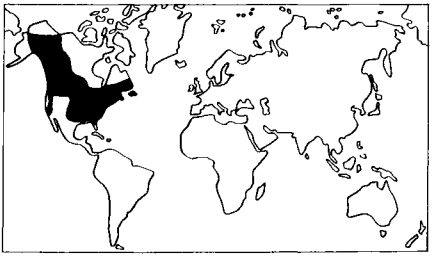
The specimen is no longer available, probably having been destroyed by a bomb in 1940. The BOU Records Committee has, however, considered the written evidence—including correspondence at the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, in the



Belted Kingfisher Ceryle alcyon, *R. Bunree, Co. Mayo, February 1979 (K. Mullarney)*

'Dead Files' (filed under 'Phillips, G. Thorne')—during four circulations between October 1974 and June 1979. The Committee's formal acceptance was notified in October 1980 (*Ibis* 122: 564).

Two records based on specimens, said to have been collected in Ireland in the autumn of 1845, were recently removed from the Irish list when critical examination of the skins—in 1974, by Derek Goodwin, Robert Hudson, Dr David Snow and the late Kenneth Williamson—produced evidence that the birds had either been killed earlier in the year than had been claimed or had been held in captivity (R. F. Ruttledge, 1975, *A List of the Birds of Ireland*). The only other European records are of an adult male shot at De Steeg, Gelderland, Netherlands, on 17th December 1899, and one 'obtained' on the Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland, in September 1901.

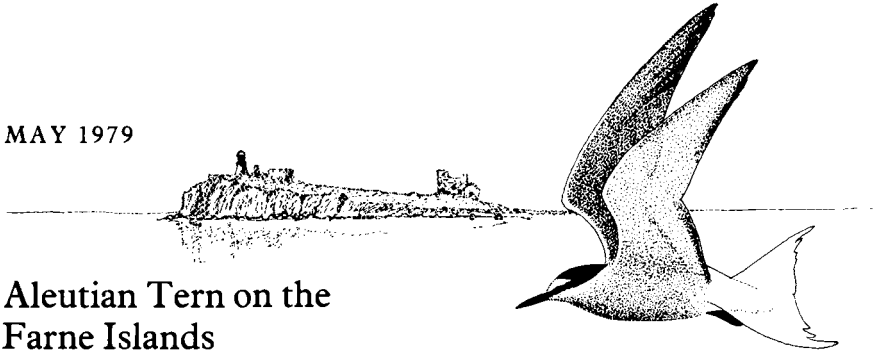


The Cornish 1908 and Mayo 1978/79 records have now been followed by a third and fourth. By an extraordinary coincidence, a first-winter male was discovered in November 1979 (though it had probably been present since 2nd October) at Sladesbridge, precisely the

same site as the one 71 years earlier; it stayed near there, and was then also seen elsewhere in Cornwall, until at least late autumn/early winter 1981. A second one in Ireland unfortunately met the same fate as the first: it was shot, in Co. Down on 12th October 1980.

Male Belted Kingfishers always lack the female's extensive rusty orange flanks and band across the upper belly. Juveniles and first-winters of both sexes have rusty feathering within the grey breast-band (the breast band is clear grey on adults). The Co. Mayo individual was thus a first-winter female.

MAY 1979



Aleutian Tern on the Farne Islands

A. E. Dixey, A. Ferguson,
R. Heywood and A. R. Taylor

On 28th May 1979, at 13.30 G.M.T., R. Heywood heard a soft wader-like call, on Inner Farne in the Farne Islands, Northumberland. On turning, instead of the expected wader, he saw a dark tern with a sharply defined white forehead, unlike any of the other terns on the islands at that time (Arctic *Sterna paradisaea*, Common *S. hirundo*, Roseate *S. dougallii* and Sandwich *S. sandvicensis*). After several minutes' observation, the other wardens, A. E. Dixey, A. Ferguson, D. E. Mole and A. R. Taylor, were contacted and field notes taken.

The bird's flight was distinctive, with slower, much deeper wingbeats than Arctic or Common Terns, the emphasis very much on the down beat. It was agreed this was a most striking bird with very distinct features. On consulting the available European field guides, it was established that the bird did not fit any description; the closest was the Bridled Tern *S. anaethetus*, but it was a much lighter and greyer bird than that. The sharply defined white 'V' on the head also eliminated any 'portlandica'-type tern. A.R.T. then found the only possibility, in the literature available, in Tuck & Heinzel (1978): an Aleutian Tern *S. aleutica*. This, however, seemed completely improbable, the species' range being so far away, on the coasts of Alaska and eastern Siberia. The remaining time that day was therefore utilised taking more notes and checking them, with A.F. ahd A.R.T. attempting to obtain photographs. Unfortunately, Tuck & Heinzel (1978) made no mention of the call, a feature even more distinctive than the plumage.

Originally published in *British Birds* 74: 411–416. Heading drawing by P. J. Grant

The bird was seen frequently during the day, mainly in flight, rarely on the ground, flying over, even when visitors were present, down to 4 m at one time, but landing only when all was quiet. The next day, it was seen less and less frequently during the morning, and then reappeared in the early evening, the final sighting being at 17.30 G.M.T. On 28th and 29th May, and on previous days, the wind was SSW force 3–4. The 28th was fair to start with, but deteriorated during the afternoon, with frequent drizzle; the 29th was fair throughout, with good visibility. Cloud cover was 6 oktas on 28th; 3 oktas on 29th.

First impressions were of a dark, *Sterna*-type tern approximately the same size as Arctic or Common, noticeably darker above, with white forked tail and tail-streamers, white forehead, black bill and black feet. The following more detailed description was obtained:

Size and shape: Sterna-type tern, slightly larger than Arctic, with wings projecting slightly beyond tail streamers at rest. *Head:* Black crown and nape with black eye-stripe from bill, through eye and to crown above ear-coverts. White forehead extending back to above rear of eye, contrasting strongly with the black crown; from front, white forming sharply defined 'V'. *Upper-parts:* Mantle, scapulars, back, tertials and upperwing-coverts pale slate-grey. Rump, uppertail-coverts and tail white. *Upperwing:* Generally pale slate-grey, but variously described as uniform or with darkening to the trailing edges of the primaries (A.E.D. noted lighter patch behind carpal joint). Leading edge of wing white, and faint white trailing edge to secondaries. *Underwing:* very pale grey, with black subterminal line on trailing edge of primaries and secondaries, except for small light gap opposite carpal joint. *Under-parts and tail:* Chin and throat white; breast, belly and flanks very pale grey; undertail-coverts and tail-streamers white. *Bare parts:* Bill and legs black; R.H., D.E.M. and A.R.T. noted that legs appeared longer than those of Arctic Tern. *Call:* Very distinctive, frequently uttered, likened to wader: soft, far-carrying, staccato, polysyllabic whistle.

The bird was generally seen in flight, often flying high out over the sea and then returning to fly over the island, when it would usually be calling, very much as the other terns do on arrival after migration. It was often harassed by Arctic and sometimes Common Terns, which seemed to chase it away from their territories. It did, however, settle occasionally among red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* in one particular spot where there were few other terns nesting nearby. Rarely, however, did it stay there longer than five minutes, as the nearest other terns became aggressive and chased it away.

The flight was distinct from Arctic and Common Terns, the wingbeats being slower and much deeper, the accent being very much on the down beat. Occasionally, it would give a strange double wingbeat at the top of the stroke, almost a flicker.

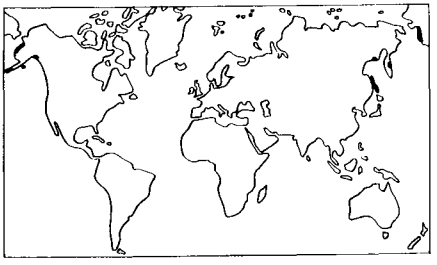
DISCUSSION

Buckley & Buckley (1979) noted that nest-sites in Alaska are in long grasses, and Leonovitch (1976) went further, saying that, on the Sea of Okhotsk, Aleutian Terns always nest on grassy areas, never on sand or shingle. They nest either in pure colonies or together with Arctic Terns or Common Terns. Thus, Inner Farne at the end of May might well have looked like a home-from-home.

The migratory movements are unknown. Cramp & Simmons (in prep.) state that there are no confirmed winter records anywhere, and the species may yet be found to winter far to the south, as does the sympatric Arctic Tern. There is no evidence of coastal migration, birds apparently arriving at and departing from their nesting areas directly from and to the high seas (Kessel & Gibson 1978).

The Farnes are at a very similar latitude to many of the Aleutian Islands, Kamchatka and part of Sakhalin, and the date of the sighting corresponds to the time

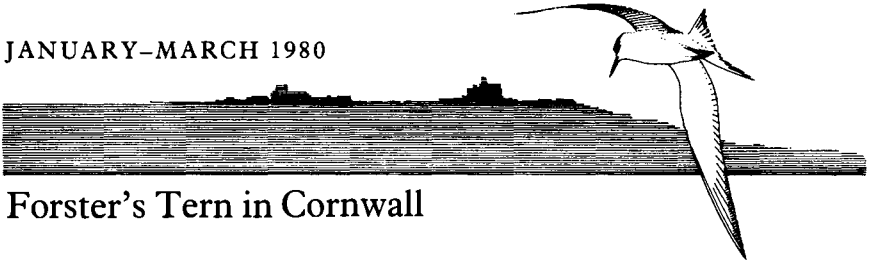
given by Kessel & Gibson (1978) for the arrival of Aleutian Terns in the Aleutian Islands. Thus, if Aleutian Terns do winter far to the south, as suggested by Cramp & Simmons (in prep.), the possibility arises that the Northumberland individual may have migrated south with other Aleutian Terns, perhaps in the company of Arctics, and returned north the next year, only it was exactly 180° out!



It is amazing that even one ever got to Britain, so it is hardly surprising that there has not been a second. Now, however, observers are alert to the possibility, so . . .

A second-summer Common or Arctic Tern often has extensive white on the forehead and dark bill and legs, but the white will never form a sharply demarcated V as on Aleutian Tern, and the bill and legs will show at least some red at close range. Darker grey upperparts, pale grey underwing (always white on Common and Arctic Terns), dark trailing edge to the inner wing (absent on second-year and adult Common and Arctic Terns), and the soft, wader-like whistling call are other features which combine to eliminate the possibility of one of the highly variable immature plumages of other Sterna *terns.*

JANUARY–MARCH 1980



Forster's Tern in Cornwall

B. Cave

At about 12.00 G.M.T. on 29th January 1980, I was surprised to notice a tern feeding well offshore in the bay at Swanpool, Falmouth, Cornwall. Its lean proportions and plunge-diving habits recalled a Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*, but after a few minutes the bird disappeared and its identification remained inconclusive. On 20th February, from the same position, I saw the bird again at closer range for about five

Originally published in *British Birds* 75: 55–61. Heading drawing by Brian Cave

minutes. Its general structure, behaviour and coloration again recalled a rather diminutive Sandwich Tern, but further thoughts of this species were dispelled by a sight of orange-red legs. The upperwing showed an interesting pattern—grey mantle and coverts leading into a pale area which extended in a short wedge down the dusky-grey primaries—and the tail had dark tips to the outer feathers. Its most striking feature, however, was a defined blackish patch around the eye. Later reference to Tuck & Heinzel (1978) and Robbins *et al.* (1966) raised the possibility that the bird was a Forster's Tern *S. forsteri* in winter plumage: both mentioned the importance of the dark eye-patches, but the first described them as 'large' and the second as 'narrow'. They also emphasized the extreme similarity between Forster's and Common Terns *S. hirundo*, a comparison which had not occurred to me. Also, confusingly, the primaries were stated to be 'silvery grey' or 'paler than the rest of wing', and the tail 'pale grey' or 'grey with white outer margin'.

I felt that the discrepancies could be accounted for by the fact that the bird may have been an immature Forster's Tern, whereas these brief descriptions referred to adult plumage, but at this stage there was also the nagging possibility that it might be one of the commoner species of tern in an aberrant plumage, or a winter plumage with which I was unfamiliar. Clearly, further confirmation was needed, and to this end I informed several observers of the presence of the strange tern. Despite extensive coverage, however, it was not until 9th March that I eventually relocated it, off Gyllyngvase, Falmouth. After a few minutes, the tern settled among gulls *Larus* on the rocks, and I was able to obtain my first good views and confirm my initial tentative identification: the bird's small size and stunning black eye-patches were clearly seen. Atypically, the bird obliged many hundreds of observers by remaining in the area until it was last seen on the evening of 18th March. Subsequently, it was aged as an individual in first-winter plumage. Reports of a medium-sized *Sterna* tern in the area from mid December 1979 may also have referred to this bird.

The following description is compiled from my own notes and those of S. C. Hutchings (taken on three dates in March) and P. J. Grant (taken on 15th March).

Robbins *et al.* (1966) described Forster's Tern as a marsh tern 'common in fresh and salt marshes, rare on coastal beaches'. It has a patchy and widespread distribution in North America. It winters in the west from California south to Guatemala and in the east from Virginia south into the Gulf of Mexico.

Considering the Falmouth bird's initially elusive appearances, it seems unlikely that it arrived in British waters at the end of January 1980. It is possible that it was a victim of the severe gales of December 1979, or it may have arrived in the previous autumn along with other Nearctic vagrants, remaining undetected until the following January.

This record has been accepted by the Rarities Committee and by the BOU Records Committee as the first for Britain and Ireland. The only previous European record was of a male, probably an adult, taken in the Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland, on 22nd October 1959 (A. Petersen *per* Robert Hudson *in litt.*).

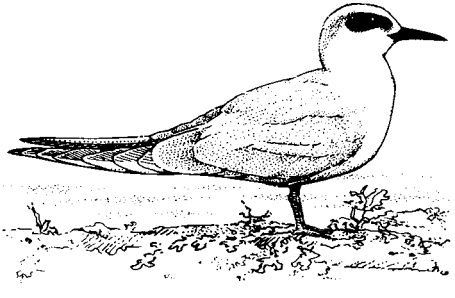
Size and general characters: About size of Common Tern, but general paleness of plumage, plunge-diving habits, and rather long, blackish bill often recalling dainty Sandwich Tern. Tail deeply forked, but looking short in flight. When perched, primaries extending clearly beyond tip of tail. *Head:* Forehead and forecrown white at distance, but at close range lightly speckled with grey. Sides and rear of crown and upper nape grey, extending down to point in centre of nape; at some angles at long range, grey nape appeared as dark extension of black eye-patches. Ear-coverts and spot in front of and around eye black, forming prominent, clear-cut mask, broken by intrusion of white below eye and by thin white eye-ring. Remainder of head white. *Upper-parts:* Pale grey; when perched at close range very faint buffy wash visible. Rump white.

Under-parts: White. *Upperwing:* Inner wing grey with thin subterminal darker bar and thin white trailing edge on inner secondaries; outer secondaries mainly white. Fringes of outer greater coverts and inner primaries white. Outer wing pale grey with ill-defined dark trailing edge to outer primaries and dark leading edge on outermost primary. Broad, frosty or whitish panel across primaries and their coverts, extending outwards from white trailing edge of inner wing; prominence of whitish panel varied in different light conditions, but most obvious in bright sunlight. When perched, closed primaries darker than rest of upper-parts, and at close range dusky centres visible on two exposed tertials. *Underwing:* White, with broad, ill-defined dusky trailing edge to outermost primaries (pattern similar to Common Tern). *Tail:* Outer web of outer feather white, remainder of tail pale grey except for smudgy dark grey tips to outer two or three pairs of feathers. Pale grey coloration virtually impossible to detect, and dark grey tips visible only at close range, thus, at long range, tail appeared all-white. *Bare parts:* Bill black, with small area of reddish or brownish at base of lower mandible. Evenly tapering from thick base to tip, giving dagger or chisel shape (recalling Arctic *S. paradisaea* rather than Common Tern in shape, but longer). Mouth red. Eye black. Legs orange-red, long and sturdy, slightly longer than on Common Tern. *Voice:* Tim Pinfield (*in litt.*) noted call as soft, descending 'jeeeet', but with trilling or guttural quality like that of other terns.

Godfrey (1966) gave the following measurements (all in mm): mean length of exposed culmen, Forster's Tern 39.4, Common Tern 37.1; mean tarsus length, Forster's Tern 24, Common Tern 20.8. These measurements support the field impression of long bill and legs.

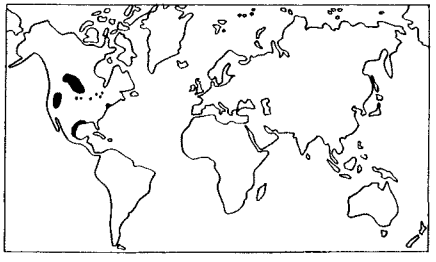
Throughout its stay, the Forster's Tern fed by plunge-diving, mainly after sandeels, usually, but not always, close inshore. Bent (1921) mentioned that the species will also hawk for insects and (curiously in view of the Falmouth bird's feeding behaviour) that 'it sometimes makes a diving plunge but more often it drops down lightly or swoops gracefully along the surface picking up its food without wetting its plumage.' On several occasions, the Falmouth bird settled on the sea among gulls, sometimes for long periods.

P. J. Grant has examined skins of Forster's Tern at the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, and has provided the following comments. Juveniles resemble other medium-sized *Sterna* terns in general appearance, with ginger-brown coloration of varying strengths on head, mantle and inner wing-coverts. First-winter plumage is acquired by a moult of head and body feathers after fledging, during the late summer and early autumn; the juvenile wings and tail are retained throughout the first year. The Falmouth bird was aged as first-winter by the dusky-centred tertials, the dark tips to the outer tail feathers, the fact that the pale wing panels were not as prominent as on adults, and the thin subterminal dark bar on the inner secondaries: these are all features which would not be shown by an adult at any time of year. In juvenile and



Forster's Tern Sterna forsteri, *Cornwall, March 1980 (B. Cave)*

first-winter plumages, perhaps the best specific differences from Common and Arctic Terns of the same age are: (1) black eye-patches and (first-winter plumage only) grey nape; (2) rather long bill, evenly tapering from thick base to tip giving dagger or chisel shape; (3) upperwing pattern like Common Tern except for frosty or whitish panel across outer greater coverts, primaries and primary coverts, and faint dusky (not prominent blackish) carpal bar on leading edge of inner wing; (4) underwing pattern like Common Tern, with ill-defined dusky trailing edge to outer primaries; (5) tail grey with white outer web of outer feather and dusky terminal spots on outer three or four pairs of feathers; and (6) legs noticeably long when perched, longer than on Common Tern. The adult shares the same bill-shape and leg-length differences, and throughout the year has white under-parts, a striking white panel on the primaries (much more prominent than on first-years), and grey tail with white sides. The cap is black in summer, but a black mask and a grey nape is acquired in winter. Adults acquire winter plumage by a complete moult in autumn prior to their southward migration; summer plumage is acquired by a head and body moult in spring.



Although the popular field guides were of little help in showing what it would look like when it did occur, this species had long been expected as an addition to the British and Irish list. Considering how relatively conspicuous it is in comparison with Common and Arctic Terns (at least in winter plumage), it took a surprising amount of searching before the first was discovered. It seems likely, however, that others will soon follow, now that the characteristics are widely known.

Any tern in British waters in winter shouts for attention, but it will take very sharp eyes indeed to pick out an immature Forster's Tern amongst the masses of the common Sterna *terns in summer. The flashing, chalky-white primaries of an adult will render it less tricky.*

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Editor's Summary

It is hardly surprising that I grew up with an interest in rarities. Although I had read occasional issues of *British Birds* since 1949, it was in autumn 1953 that I first took my birdwatching seriously enough to subscribe to that journal. The following autumn brought an unprecedented flood of major rarities—not reached before, nor exceeded since—with seven species new to Britain and Ireland in the space of a mere six months. With avid schoolboy enthusiasm, I read the exciting tales of the discovery of Stilt Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Citrine Wagtail, Baikal Teal, Siberian Thrush, Yellowthroat and Myrtle (now Yellow-rumped) Warbler.

This spate of rare birds did, I believe, inspire a generation, and boost the fortunes of the then expanding network of bird observatories. Other 'good' years have come since (see Fig. 19), the highest being six new birds in 1966 (following none in 1965);

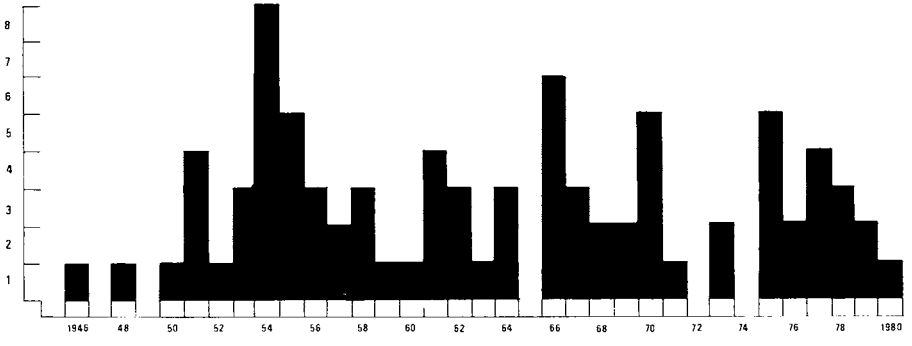

Fig. 19 Distribution by years of 83 species new to Britain and Ireland recorded during 1946–80

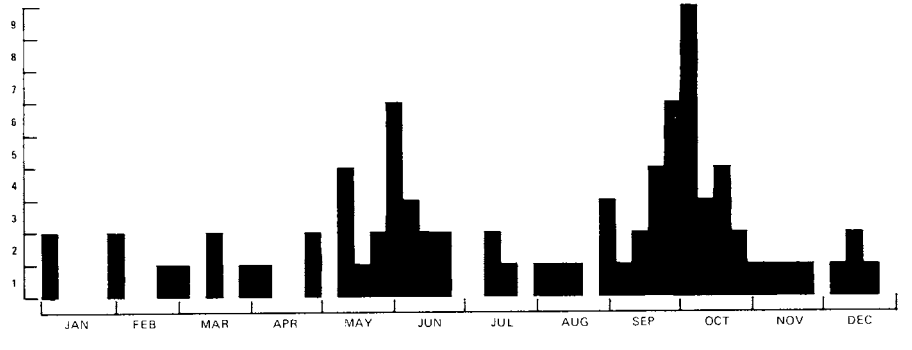

Fig. 20 Seasonal distribution by seven-day periods of 83 species new to Britain and Ireland recorded during 1946–80

but will that remarkable 1954 total of eight ever be exceeded? The number of candidate species falls as each one is added to the list of those which have occurred, so the likelihood of a string of additions becomes less and less. Influxes of North American vagrants are annual; varying numbers of Siberian vagrants also come every year. In years with a period of westerly winds in September/October, to bring Nearctic birds across the Atlantic, and an area of high pressure stationary for a long period over the Continent and extending into Asia during sometime in August to November, to bring Siberian birds, we have a bumper year for rarities. The new birds most likely to reach us from North America have been predicted by Chandler S. Robbins (*Brit. Birds* 73: 448–457) and potential new vagrants from Europe and Asia have been listed by D. I. M. Wallace (*Brit. Birds* 73: 388–397). One year, perhaps, we shall get whatever weather pattern is needed to bring rarities such as Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* pouring northwards to us from the deserts of North Africa.

It would not be surprising if vagrants occurred most often in the migration periods. This is indeed the pattern shown by our 83 new species (Fig. 20), with 25 per cent in

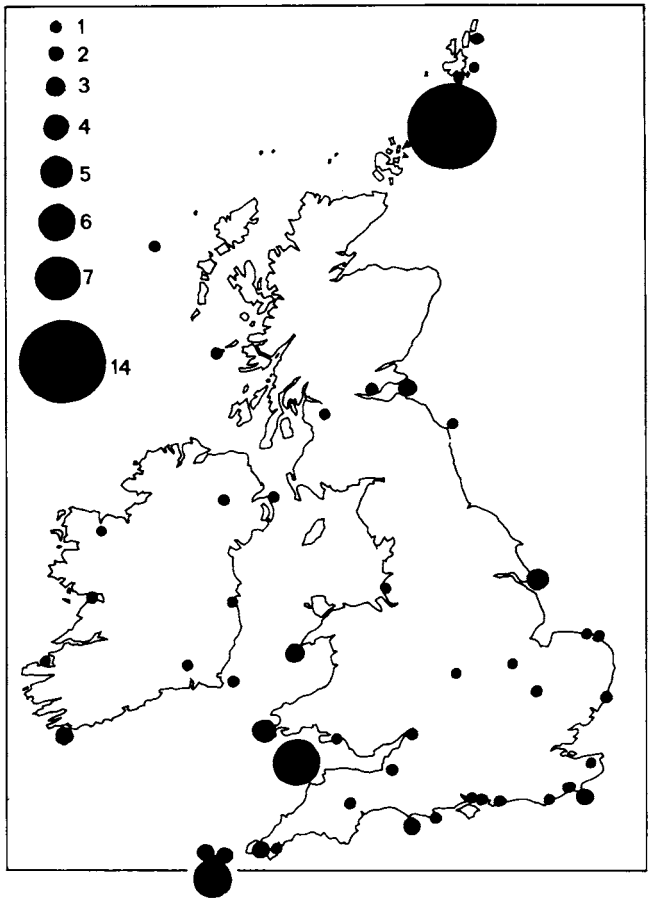

Fig. 21 Geographical distribution of species new to Britain and Ireland during 1946–80

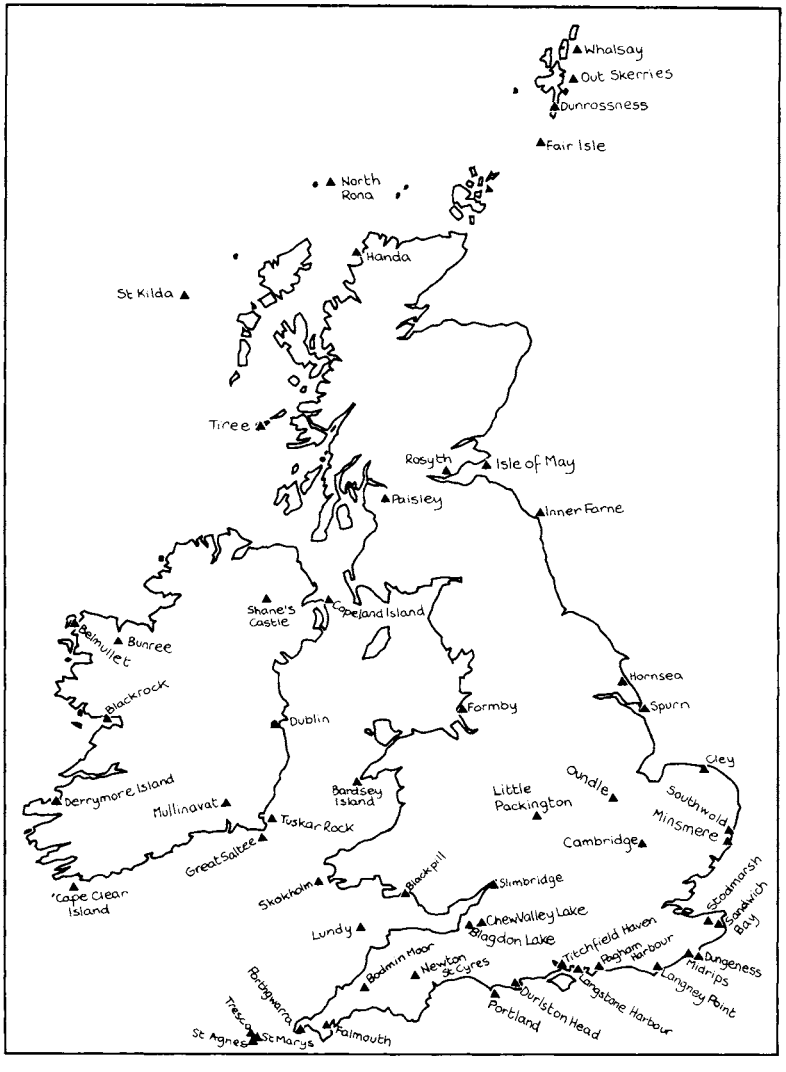

Fig. 22 Locations of sightings of species new to Britain and Ireland during 1946–80

the seven weeks from 7th May to 24th June and 38 per cent in the seven weeks from 10th September to 28th October. The main spring and autumn migration months are, however, March to June and July to October, so it is notable that the major rarities occur mostly in the latter parts of the migration seasons. One could surmise that, generally coming from far afield, their initial wanderings in the 'wrong' direction are time-consuming and the journeys from their breeding areas to us take a matter of weeks rather than days (though the last stage—such as across the Atlantic Ocean—

may of necessity be quick). The majority, of course, are young birds: juveniles or first-winter individuals in autumn and first-summers in spring. Their vagrancy is perhaps in some cases due to nothing more than ineptitude due to inexperience; others are perhaps abnormal individuals which must occur in every population, but which do not survive beyond their first disastrous migrational error.

Falls of migrants are always most obvious on the coast, but even there there are favoured localities (hence the siting on islands and headlands of our bird observatories). The distribution of the major rarities is, however, even more uneven (Figs 21 and 22). Three places, all well out to sea, so drawing in incoming migrants from a wide wedge of ocean, have reigned supreme during 1946–80. Tiny Fair Isle, midway between Shetland and Orkney, has claimed twice the number of any other place; and those haunts of hundreds of twitchers, the Isles of Scilly, collected between them almost as many. Lundy, in the Bristol Channel, always underwatched because of its inaccessibility, is perhaps surprisingly a close rival to the top two.

One can, from these items of information, recommend a would-be adder of a new species to the British and Irish list to visit Fair Isle, the Isles of Scilly or Lundy in either the last week of May or the first week of October. Once every ten years or so, he or she should be successful. . . .

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THE PHOTOGRAPHS

All of the photographs which follow are of the individuals seen or trapped in Britain or Ireland and photographed at the time. Inevitably, the quality of the photographs is variable. In some cases it is, perhaps, remarkable that a photograph exists at all.

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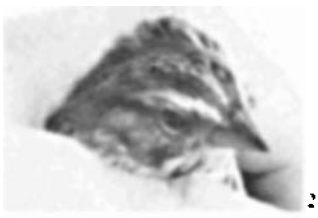

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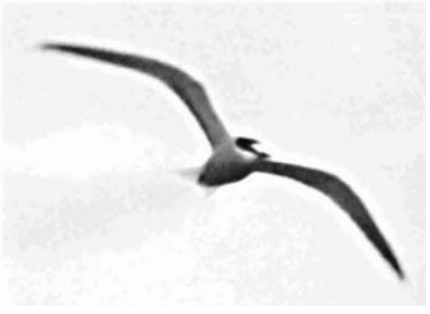

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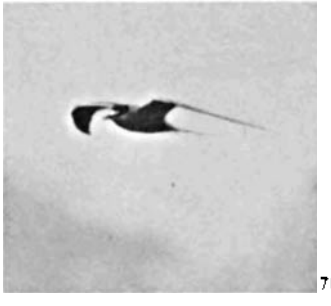

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