

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

FAIR ISLE

3-10 SEPTEMBER 2016

Leader: Craig Round

Guests: Cath Wright, Dorothy Hutchinson, Mike Hems, Gillian & David Smith, Andy Golding, Adam Moan.

Day 1 We meet up with the group at Inverness airport and we are soon flying north to Shetland with some great visibility today giving us lovely views of the Orkney Isles and North Ronaldsay far below us. Landing at Sumburgh airport on Shetland to warm sunshine and light winds, a taxi is waiting to take us around the short distance to Grutness Pier to meet the boat the Good Shepherd over to the island. During our ferry crossing to the Isle we get some great views of many seabirds including Gannets, Fulmars, Great Skuas, Kittiwake, Greater Black-backed Gulls, Razorbill, Guillemot and a single late Puffin.

We also see at least seven Sooty Shearwaters gliding past including one unfortunate Shearwater which is forced down into the sea by a Great Skua at one point! In the fine weather today there are also some signs of visible migration as two Meadow Pipits fly over and around the boat heading for the magic Isle on the horizon!

The ferry finally approaches Fair Isle, and we get our first close views of the island as we steam in under the North Lighthouse and into the North Haven, arriving on the island to some beautiful sunny and warm weather! The Obs minibus is waiting at the harbour to give us a lift up to the Bird Observatory, our base for the week, and after stowing our luggage, sorting out and settling into our rooms we have a welcome talk from Susannah the administrator about the island and the working of the bird observatory.

After, we take a short walk down into the Havens to stretch our legs. The Observatory garden offers welcome shelter to migrant birds and this afternoon is no different as a smart juvenile Pied Flycatcher is fly catching from the fence line around the garden. More migrant birds are evident around the beaches of the havens and a Willow Warbler is seen fly catching from the shingle beach of South Haven in the sunshine! Classic Fair Isle! There are also lots of Wheatear around as well as small flocks of Meadow and Rock Pipits and a Fair Isle Wren is seen flitting along the top of the wall above the beach.

A nice selection of waders are also here including three Ringed Plover and a Redshank on the beach as a flock of three Turnstone fly over.

In the shelter of North Haven several Grey Seals poke their heads out of the turquoise water and watch us inquisitively, and there are also a few Eiders, Black Guillemots and shags dotted about on the water. The sky above is full of calling Great Skuas and we also get good views of two Arctic Skuas an adult and a juvenile that fly over calling, before we start to make our way back to the Observatory for tea. Back at the observatory later a Barred Warbler gives us some brief flight views in the Obs garden and a migrant Kestrel goes over before evening Log call where we catch up with news of birds seen on the island today, followed by some delicious Obs home bakes and hot chocolate, yum!

Day 2

Today, our first full day on the island dawns cloudy but clears later on to a warm and glorious sunny day! Some folk head out for the early morning pre-breakfast trap round via the famous Gully, Double Dyke and Plantation heligoland traps, and see a Golden Plover fly over. Two Wheatears including a stunning male greenland race Wheatear, along with a Reed Warbler and Meadow Pipit are caught and the birds are brought back the short distance to the Observatory for ringing where we get the chance to see these lovely birds up close in the hand, before being released. A Lapland Bunting is seen briefly out on the headland of Bunes, and the Pied Flycatcher and a Willow Warbler are still in the Obs garden this morning and five Grey Heron fly over the Observatory heading south

After breakfast we take a walk south via the Double Dyke and Gully heligoland traps and make a small detour to take a look at the wreckage of a crashed German WWII Heinkel bomber at Vaasetter, the plane was shot down by two Hurricanes from Shetland in January 1941 and forced to make a crash landing on the island. Whilst looking at the wreckage of the plane there are lots of Great Skuas in the air above us and a Common Snipe flies over along with a small flock of Skylark. Around the plantation we find at least six Willow Warblers along with a very smart juvenile Lesser Whitethroat and there are Meadow Pipits and Twite everywhere!

Near the ruined croft at Pund a single Greenshank is seen briefly by the Hill Dyke and we walk past the remains of several Bronze Age burnt mounds in the fields here. At Pund Dave's sharp eyes spot a Common Swift flying over and there are also three Swallows hawking overhead, whilst a Dunlin is feeding with nine Ringed Plover in the fields nearby.

Around the crofts at Barkland and the Chalet there are more Willow Warblers and the wet field nearby at Chathams Land has masses of waders feeding in it with 41 Ringed Plover, six+ Dunlin and best of all a smart juvenile Ruff here.

Walking down towards Stackhoull stores we see more Willow Warblers and also find a single Chiffchaff at the shop. Also here a flock of 10 Black-tailed Godwit fly over before we get a lift back to the Obs in the minibus for a lovely Sunday lunch, yum!

After a delicious Sunday lunch at the Obs we walk south again and cut across via the Hill Dyke up to the West Cliffs and Gunnawark. Just up from the Obs we get fantastic views of a Lapland Bunting that drops out of the sky and lands right by the road, and there are masses of Wheatears and Meadow Pipits lining the drystone walls along the road as we walk. As we follow the Hill Dyke up towards the cliffs Craig spots an Icterine Warbler perched on the wall and we get some lovely views of this scarce passage migrant as it sallies out to catch flies from the top of the wall in the sunshine. After an uphill walk we arrive at the Cliffs and are greeted by stunning views out to sea and the huge cliffs plunging down to the azure blue sea below. It's simply breathtaking up here, and as we follow the cliff top along we find more migrants sheltering on the cliffs with another three Willow Warblers and another Pied Flycatcher here, looking amazing dwarfed by the huge cliffs all around. The cliff top is covered in Meadow Pipits and Wheatears as we walk and take in the stunning views across the island and out to sea, and a small flock of three Lapland Buntings fly over us calling. There is sadly no sign of the Greenish Warbler though, that had been reported from the cliffs here earlier, so we drop back down via the airstrip with beautiful views across the whole island below us.

We pass through large numbers of Great Skuas as we descend, and re-find the flock of three Lapland Buntings feeding just above the plantation, as a flock of 10 Oystercatcher pass high overhead flying south.

Day 3

A different day weatherwise! Today dawns cloudy, overcast and windier from the SSE, and pre-breakfast traps prove quiet this morning with just a single Starling caught!

After breakfast we head south along the road, seeing a few Willow Warblers around the crofts of Field and Chalet and also more waders with nine Ringed Plover and four Dunlin. Adam spots two Black-headed Gulls going over which are new birds for the trip, and three Snipe are seen including one out in the open on the ground, until it is flushed by a sheep!

From here we cut across to the west cliffs and Hjukni Geo and the Reeves, and get great views out to sea of the dramatic cliffs and stacks. We also find at least three Pied Flycatchers on the cliffs and a Swift flies right over and past us hawking insects over the cliffs. Cutting back out to the road via the Meadow Burn we start to walk back north to the Obs for lunch but via an ice cream at the shop of course!

After lunch we get a lift south in the minibus down to the Museum to see some of the fascinating exhibits on Fair Isles history inside including displays on crofting, Fair Isles many shipwrecks and famous knitwear. After a look around the museum we check around Lower Leogh croft for a Greenish Warbler that had been reported here earlier, but sadly there is no sign. We do find a couple of Willow Warblers here though and a female Chaffinch flies out of the thistles here.

Continuing our walk down to the South Lighthouse, it is very windy by now down at this end of the isle but we find good numbers of waders here around the coast including Turnstone, Sanderling, Dunlin, Knot, Curlew, Ringed Plover, Redshank and masses of Gannets passing offshore. Adam finds a single Red-throated Diver in South Harbour before we start to head back north seeing a flock of eight Wigeon going over as well as a single Golden Plover and some Dunlin and Ringed Plover. There are also many Twite, Meadow Pipits and Wheatears dotting the fence lines and a few more Willow Warblers around the crofts.

After dinner at the obs, news that a Wryneck that had been found earlier in the day has been re found filters through, so we hurriedly get a lift south in the Obs van to the Chalet where the bird was last seen. The Wryneck has been very mobile and elusive moving around the crofts and has disappeared again as we arrive, but we walk back up to Upper Stoneybrake croft where the bird was first seen in the hope it may be skulking there. Here after a few tense minutes, Craig somehow manages to refind the Wryneck sitting well concealed in a small hole in the drystone wall at the back of the croft! The bird seems settled and we manage to get some great views of this incredible looking 'cryptic woodpecker' just before the light begins to go. What a great end to the day!

Day 4

Today dawns dry and sunny but still windy from the W/SW, but it proves to be a productive morning for trap round as three Rock Pipits, a Meadow Pipit, Wheatear and Robin are caught, and incredibly a Norwegian ringed Pied Flycatcher, the first ever foreign ringed Pied Flycatcher to be caught on Fair isle in over 50 years of ringing on the island!

After breakfast we take a walk up to the North Lighthouse. It is beautiful and sunny as we make our way north, with Wheatears dotting the moorland and the ever present Great Skuas overhead, and a Snipe flushes from beside the road as we walk.

A check of the Wirvie cliffs and burn produces a Reed Warbler and Willow Warbler on the cliffs and at the top of the burn two cracking Lapland Buntings drop in to feed at the roadside!

We walk on up to the small freshwater pool at Easter Lothar water, and find two very confident Dunlin here and also take in the incredible views out from the cliffs here before continuing on via the pool at Golden Water to the North Light. Here there is simply stunning scenery and views out to sea all around as we have a look around the lighthouse, and a Raven flies over. There are many Wheatears, Meadow Pipits and Twite around the lighthouse as we take in the fine views with a beautiful blue sky overhead and azure blue sea below. The impressive Kirk Stack is still smothered in nesting Gannets as Fulmars glide past at eye level riding the up draughts along the cliff edge, before we start to walk back to the Observatory for lunch.

After lunch the wind has picked up considerably, so we have a little down time at the Obs to relax after our walk this morning. Two Swallows show up hawking insects around the building, and later Craig heads out with some more hardy folk to brave the elements and have a seawatch from the headland of Bunn. There is a good selection of waders on the slipway in the North haven including two Sanderling, Dunlin, Turnstone, Ringed Plover and a confident juvenile Knot, as well as some very smart White Wagtails on the beach. The seawatch proves fairly quiet apart from the masses of Gannets, Fulmars and Great Skuas but we do see a flock of 18 Turnstone and two Redshank flying past and a single late Kittiwake.

Day 5

Today the wind is from the S/SW but moving around finally to the magical E/SE direction through the day! A smart male Wheatear is caught on early traps before breakfast along with a Willow Warbler, Fair Isle Wren and a Rock Pipit.

After breakfast we walk south, seeing a single Golden Plover flying over also heading south, as well as five Teal heading north and three Lapland Buntings fly over calling. In the field behind the Chalet we get some great views of waders including four Golden Plover, seven Ringed Plover and six Dunlin. A few Snipe fly over here along with a flock of five Black-tailed Godwit which circle over us and give us some nice views. Another three Lapland Bunting fly over and there are more waders near the School with 14 Ringed Plover and five Dunlin here. A migrant Small Tortoiseshell butterfly is seen feeding on the scabious flowers by the roadside and a very confident Willow Warbler is seen in the garden at Upper Stoneybrake. Amazingly we also find a single confused Wigeon in with the feral Mallard flock here!

A stop at the shop for ice cream yields more migrants with another two Willow Warbler and a Chiffchaff here and Craig hears a Tree Pipit calling as it flies over. Best of all an amazing flock of 13 Lapland Bunting fly over! From here we call in at the Kirk to have a look at the stained glass windows inside the church, and find a Willow Warbler feeding amongst the Angelica

outside, and the incredible Lapland Bunting influx continues as another 28 fly over whilst here, including a flock of 18!!

From the Kirk we walk further south before cutting across via the Meadow Burn where we find a single Lapland Bunting feeding on the ground amongst some Meadow Pipits and David spots a Whinchat, which is a new bird for the week. Heading back north towards the shop eight Wigeon fly over before we pick up the minibus for a lift back to the Obs for lunch and seeing the Red-throated Diver still in South Harbour and a flock of 10 Black-tailed Godwits in flight as we drive back.

After lunch a newly arrived Goldcrest is found down in the Havens and a Red Admiral butterfly is seen around the Obs garden. We then take a slow amble south via the Hill Dyke and Pund. An elusive Dunnock is skulking in the bushes at the bottom of the gully and a tiny migrant moth the Diamond-back is seen. Fourteen Teal fly south over Pund and we flush three Snipe from the wet ground here before the weather really starts to close in and we walk back in some steady drizzle and a freshening easterly wind!

After dinner we enjoy a talk from David about the life of a Bird Observatory warden.

Day 6

Today dawns sunny, but sadly soon some very thick fog rolls in to hamper things somewhat on a strong SE wind! On early morning traps a Willow Warbler and Wheatear are caught and an Ortolan Bunting is flushed from near the gully, Adam gets some great and very gripping images! Gripping news indeed at breakfast!

After breakfast we take a walk up to Gilsetter to try and relocate the Ortolan Bunting, and Craig hears and spots the bunting flying off calling but we sadly quickly lose it in the thick fog! The pesky Bunting is briefly seen again later but proves very elusive in the thick fog, so we carry on south and head out to the West Cliffs to try and find any birds that may be sheltering here from the strong wind. At The Reeves and Hjukni Geo quite a few Greenland Race Wheatears and White Wagtails are on the cliffs, and a single Swift shoots downwind overhead and out to sea mixing it with the gliding Fulmars!

A flock of 10 Wigeon go over as the mist starts to lift a little, but it's still very windy as we start to walk back north and we only find one Willow Warbler around the crofts on the way back.

After lunch we take advantage of a lift south in the minibus for a demonstration by Holly of Fair Isle knitting at Burkle croft and from here some folk head off to explore the south end of the isle. Three Purple Sandpipers are found on the rocks around the South Light by Adam, and the

Red-throated Diver is still in South harbour. At least three Lapland Buntings are also seen along with a single very mobile Yellow/Flava Wagtail and a Whinchat and House Martin near the croft at Quoy.

Day 7

Its an early start this morning as sadly we have to leave a day early from Fair Isle as the weather is forecast to get much worse on Saturday and the ferry will definitely be cancelled. During the ferry crossing back to Shetland though we get great views of at least four Sooty Shearwaters as well as the usual mix of seabirds with Gannets, Great Skuas, Razorbill, Guillemot, Fulmars and Kittiwakes all seen before we sail in around Sumburgh Head and arrive back in at Grutness.

A taxi is waiting to take us around to our hotel at Spiggie, then after some welcome breakfast and some time settling in at the hotel we get a lift back around to the Sumburgh Hotel for lunch. After lunch some folk take in the sights of Jarlshof whilst the rest of us take a walk up to Sumburgh Head. A Willow Warbler is in the gardens at Grutness, and there are lots of Wheatears dotting the stone walls, along with a migrant Kestrel that is seen hunting the many Meadow Pipits on the hillside above the road.

It's very windy as we arrive at the lighthouse but the views out from the top of Sumburgh Head are spectacular looking out to the cliffs as Fulmars and Great Skuas glide by at eye level, and a Spotted Flycatcher is found sheltering amongst the Rosa bushes below the lighthouse.

Day 8

Some Whooper Swans are seen on Loch Spiggie before breakfast this morning before we get our taxi back to Sumburgh Airport to catch our connecting flight back to Inverness, at the end of a great trip!

Bird of the Trip: Wryneck, Fair Isle Wren, Barred Warbler, Great Skua, Common Snipe.

Place of the Trip: Fair Isle! The havens and harbour, North Lighthouse, The Reevas, Chathams Land, Gilsetter Heinkel

Magic Moment: Stepping of the boat onto the magic isle! Very close Knot, Being attacked by a Great Skua! The Norwegian ringed Pied Flycatcher in the ringing room, Fog at North Light, Watching a Grey Seal off Bunes.

BIRDS

Red-throated Diver	Black Guillemot
Wigeon	Puffin
Mallard	Rock Dove
Common Teal	Common Swift
Eider	Wryneck
Long-tailed Duck	Hooded Crow
Fulmar	Raven
Sooty Shearwater	House Martin
Grey Heron	Swallow
Gannet	Sky Lark
Cormorant	Sedge Warbler
Shag	Reed Warbler
Mute Swan	Icterine Warbler
Greylag Goose	Willow Warbler
Kestrel	Chiffchaff
Moorhen	Barred Warbler
Oystercatcher	Lesser Whitethroat
Lapwing	Goldcrest
Golden Plover	Fair Isle & Shetland Wren
Ringed Plover	Starling
Common Snipe	Blackbird
Black-tailed Godwit	Redwing
Whimbrel	Robin
Curlew	Whinchat
Common Redshank	Northern Wheatear
Greenshank	Dunnock
Common Sandpiper	Spotted Flycatcher
Turnstone	Pied Flycatcher
Knot	House Sparrow
Sanderling	Yellow/flava Wagtail sp
Purple Sandpiper	Pied/alba Wagtail
Dunlin	Meadow Pipit
Ruff	Tree Pipit
Common Gull	Rock Pipit
Herring Gull	Chaffinch
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Twite
Great Black-backed Gull	Common Rosefinch
Black-headed Gull	Lapland Bunting
Kittiwake	
Arctic Tern	Total Birds: 82
Great Skua	
Arctic Skua	
Guillemot	
Razorbill	

MAMMALS

Rabbit

Fair Isle Field Mouse (deceased)

Grey Seal

Addenda/Lepidoptera

Red Admiral

Small tortoiseshell

Diamond-back Moth

Total Species: 88