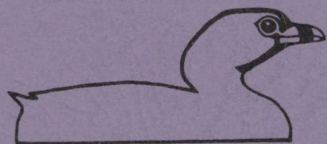


BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY



7

BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

No. 7 | DECEMBER 1974

CONTENTS

- 42 | Preface
- 43 | A review of 1973 *Brian Rabbitts*
- 51 | Midsummer field notes on the birds of coastal south-east
Iceland *Jeffery Boswall*
- 67 | The occurrence and behaviour of Turtle Doves in the
inundation zone of the Niger, Mali *Peter J. Curry.*
- NOTES
- 72 | Another albino Great Crested Grebe *K.E.L. Simmons*
- 72 | Sand Martins nesting in drainage holes by main roads in the
Bristol area *Bernard King*
- 72 | Least Sandpipers using free-floating vegetation as a feeding
platform *Bernard King*
- 73 | Use of recorded predator calls as a field aid to passerine
recognition in wooded areas *Bernard King*
- 73 | Some notes on Mute Swans breeding at Blagdon and Chew Valley
Lakes *Maurice R. Tibbles*
- REPORT
- 75 | *Club Activities, 1973*
- 76 | K.D. Smith — a tribute *K.E.L. Simmons*

PREFACE

Due to a last minute shuffle of papers this issue of *Bristol Ornithology* is somewhat different from previous ones in that the major papers concern observations from overseas. However, both authors have strong associations with the Bristol area and have also been members of this Club since its formation. Since one of the objectives of this journal is to present original work from Club members then both papers are appropriate. The species dealt with are, of course, familiar to us all but we are presented with accounts of their behaviour and status elsewhere in their breeding or wintering areas.

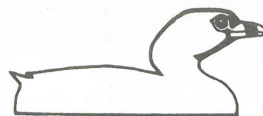
The Review is a different matter and is based firmly on home ground. This is the fourth year that Brian Rabbitts has undertaken the arduous task of preparing this regular feature of the journal. All of you may not be aware of the immense amount of detailed work that he puts into it. Although the Review is based on the monthly lists in *Bird News* he, nevertheless, checks through most of the original record slips to complete or expand certain sections. Also, all records of rare species have to be cleared up to ensure that only those acceptable are included. This tribute to his hard work and enthusiasm is long overdue.

Robin Prytherch

CHAIRMAN	R.J. Prytherch
HON. SECRETARY	Miss W. Dickson
HON. TREASURER	D.G. Haddy
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Mrs. J.F. Copeland

Other members of the General Committee:-

P. Dening	A.D. Lucas
J.T. Eley	B. Rabbitts
D.E. Ladhams	M. Sainsbury
M. Lord	R.B.H. Smith



Bristol Ornithology Editorial Committee:-

D.E. Ladhams R.J. Prytherch B. Rabbitts M. Sainsbury

A REVIEW OF 1973

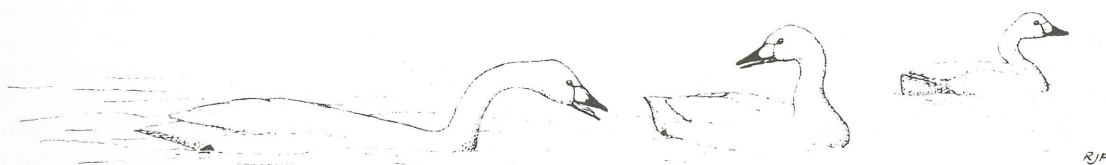
by Brian Rabbitts

This review is again compiled mainly from the information contained in our monthly reports *Bird News* to which 167 members contributed during the year. It contains the main events and trends of bird life observed in the new county of Avon and parts of Gloucestershire and Somerset to a distance of about 30 miles from Bristol. As before most of the records come from the coast and reservoirs, these being of course the most productive areas, so there are many interesting sites that receive few visits or are covered by observers who do not contribute to our monthly reports. The year was exceptional for the number of rarities observed both in the area covered by my review and just outside and only those that have been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee are included here. Of course these deal with only a small number of the total species seen and of the commoner birds where there have been useful comments made in *Bird News* regarding breeding numbers these have been mentioned. Reservoirs, often referred to collectively, signifies those at Barrow Gurney, Blagdon, Cheddar, Chew Valley Lake (CVL) and Durleigh; WT is the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge and the New Grounds refer to the adjacent river bank and estuary whilst the levels refer both to the peat-moors and heaths in Somerset and to the moors which lie to the south of the Polden Hills. When computing totals, especially of the scarcer passage waders, minimum numbers have been used.

The first winter period

The weather during January commenced with high pressure and an anticyclone over Europe which persisted into the second week. There were one or two cold spells but it was generally mild and temperatures were above average as they were again in February. This was rather a mixed month with the main feature being north-west winds at the end of the second week that brought snow to most places. March was generally dry and warm with winds mainly in the west quarter and some migrants arrived during the month (see spring migration).

Numbers of Great Crested Grebes at CVL were low with a maximum of 77 in March. A Fulmar, heavily oiled, was found dead in Weston Bay in February. The usual high numbers of Cormorants occurred on the reservoirs during this period with a maximum of 49 at CVL and this compares with a maximum of 11 ten years ago at the same locality. A Bittern was present here until the 18 March with two on the 20 February, but more unusually one was reported from Litton Reservoir on the 26th of that month. White-fronted Geese at the New Grounds numbered some 3000 on 17 February and elsewhere there were gaggles of between 32 and 90 at Aust, Claverton Down, Sand Point and Uphill. Other geese reported from the New Grounds included up to four Barnacle and single Brent, Bean and Pink-foot while there was also a single of this species (probably only one bird involved) on the reservoirs and Tealham Moor. Two Whooper Swans were noted at Blagdon and five at the New Grounds. Bewick's Swans at this locality numbered 303 (58 immatures) on the last day of 1972 but numbers soon dropped during February. There were small numbers on the coast, levels (maximum 79 on Tealham Moor and Wet Moor) and the reservoirs (maximum 55 at Durleigh). Counts of the commoner wildfowl wintering in our area were about average. Other



Bewick's Swans

duck reported included up to 50 Gadwall, small numbers of Pintail with most (30) at the WT and up to 182 Shoveler at CVL. Diving duck present included two Red-crested Pochard at Cheddar Reservoir, several Scaup, up to five Eiders off Brean Down or Sand Point, several Common Scoter in the channel and a Long-tailed Duck at Barrow Gurney which remained to the late date of 5 May. Counts of Goldeneye reached 26 at Cheddar January/February and 28 at Blagdon at the end of March while a Smew was at the first named locality and remained until the 2 April. Only small numbers of Goosanders occurred but there were two very late birds at CVL on the 29 April and the maximum count of Ruddy Ducks at Blagdon was 70 in February.

Peregrines were sighted at Brean Down, Huntspill, New Grounds and Sand Point while Merlins were reported at eight places, again mainly coastal. Numbers of Coot at Cheddar reached 2000 in January and most had dispersed by mid-March when there was a count of 470. Of the waders reported there was a total of 300 Ringed Plover at three localities in January, including 150 at Sand Bay which is a high count for this month. Between 235 and 550 Golden Plover were present at the Axe Estuary, Burnett and Tealham/Tadham Moors while Grey Plover reached a maximum of 52 at Sand Bay in January. As the winter was mild there were no weather movements of Lapwings but they were present in large numbers with the usual large concentration (9000 in January) on Tealham/Tadham Moors. Dunlin numbers indicated up to 16000 during that month and 19000 in February, rather more than in recent years, and inland there were up to 100 at CVL. Very low numbers of Knot were reported with most (140) at Sand Bay. There were more wintering Black-tailed Godwits than is usual with 76 in the Steart area during January and the majority of Bar-tailed Godwits (55) also occurred in this area. A very large number of Snipe (some 2000) was reported at Tealham Moor on the 16 February which almost equals the large number at Long Load on the 17 February 1970 (see *Brit. Birds* 63(1970):173). There would appear to be an increasing number of waders that mainly pass through our area on autumn passage overwintering in this country and included amongst these were Little Stints at Sand Bay in January and February; 27 Ruff at the New Grounds and 14 on Tadham Moor (see *Bird Study* 20(1973): 245-250 on the increase of wintering birds of this species); a Spotted Redshank at CVL on the 11 March; five Green Sandpipers in January, seven in February and three in March and at least four Common Sandpipers during the first month. Other scarcer wintering waders noted were one or two Purple Sandpipers at Severn Beach; a maximum of 22 Sanderling in Sand Bay; only some four Woodcock but this bird was obviously under-recorded; about 27 Jack Snipe including no fewer than nine at Berrow and the usual Avocet at Steart.



Little Gulls

R.J.P.

There were several Little Gulls at Cheddar and single birds at Bath and Brean Down while an Iceland Gull was at the first mentioned locality on the 2 January and a Kittiwake on the 13 February. Barn Owls were noted at twelve localities in January, Long-eared Owls were reported as having been heard in the Mendip area but there were no later reports of any breeding and one or two Short-eared Owls were seen at several places. Passerines sighted included up to twelve Water Pipits *A.s.spinoletta* at CVL, a Great Grey Shrike here on the 3 January with this or another on Mendip 24 February, about five wintering Blackcaps and one or two Chiffchaffs and there was one Black Redstart in February. 1000 Fieldfare gathered to roost at Stock Hill during the same month was the largest group reported while up to six Bearded Tits remained at Berrow from the previous autumn and three Snow Buntings were at Sand Bay on the 13 February. Brambling were well represented with up to 500 at Steart, 100 at Chittening and between 25 and 55 at several other localities whilst Siskins were also well distributed with between 20 and 50 at a number of places and there were reports of them feeding in gardens (see *Brit. Birds* 66(1973): 91-99).

Similarly to the first winter period last year Twite (maximum of four) appeared at Brean Farm and there were also two at Chittening. Crossbills remained from the irruption of the previous autumn with most (40) at Stock Hill but no records of any breeding were received. Hawfinches were noted at Clifton Down and Emborough Pond.

Spring migration

The weather during April was dominated by a slow moving high pressure area near Ireland which gave north or north-west winds during the period 8th - 21st. Winds then became easterly. Apart from a warmer spell around mid-month when a few migrants arrived it was not until the last five days when there was a change to southerly winds that any appreciable numbers arrived. Average temperatures were below normal. May was unsettled starting with an area of high pressure over north Europe and an approaching low from the south-west which resulted in further large scale arrivals of migrants. After mid-month winds were mainly between south and east. High pressure areas dominated much of June with some thundery outbreaks of rain, mainly at the end of the month.

A Black-necked Grebe was at Blagdon on the 22 March and this or another at CVL at the beginning of April. Fulmars occurred regularly in the channel from the same time with 15 together being the maximum recorded and other sea-birds included up to 14 Manx Shearwaters off Sand Point and a few Gannets. One of the rarest visitors of its family, a Squacco Heron, was discovered at CVL on the 26 May. 214 Teal here at the beginning of April was a high number for the time of year, Gadwall at the same locality and date numbered 146 while Garganey appeared to have been late in arriving although there were no reports from the levels. The Ring-necked Duck reappeared for the third spring in succession at Blagdon on the 16 March remaining until the 16 April and was later seen at CVL to the end of May. The spring influx of Tufted Duck here numbered 491 on the 3 April, a small party of Scaup (11) was at Cheddar from the 11 March to 28 April with seven remaining to the beginning of May, up to 11 Eider were off Brean Down and also in the channel were small numbers of Common Scoter (maximum nine). It was a good spring for rare raptors with an Osprey at CVL on three dates from the 13 April, a Montagu's Harrier on Mendip 26 April, a Marsh Harrier at Steart on the 27 May and a Red-footed Falcon at Frampton on the 25th of that month (one of a number that occurred in this country during the spring). A Hobby was seen at Blackford on the 30 March which is an exceptionally early date.

Dealing now with the waders there was around 1300 Ringed Plover on the 20 May with the abnormally high spring count of 1000 at Berrow. Whimbrel were present from the 14 April and later there were parties of up to 149 while counts of the roost on Steart Island revealed some 2000 birds during the first few days of May (see *Bristol Ornithology* 6(1973): 38-39). Other large or unusual wader numbers included 600 Golden Plover at the beginning of April on Tealham/Tadham Moors with 150 (several of the northern form *P.a. altifrons*) on the 23rd; 120 Grey Plover at Steart 8 April and one inland at CVL 19/20 May; 104 Turnstone at Steart on the 6 May; 4000 Dunlin on the same date and locality; up to 60 Sanderling at Berrow in May and 100 on the 2 June; Common Sandpipers were well represented from the 12 April with up to 38 at Cheddar; 95 Black-tailed Godwits were at Steart at the beginning of April and a maximum of 60 Bar-tailed Godwits here also. Scarce waders on spring passage were six Little Ringed Plover, a Kentish Plover at Berrow 19 May, eight Little Stints, four Purple Sandpipers at Brean Down 15 April, two Curlew Sandpipers in May, some eleven Ruffs, six Spotted Redshanks, eight Greenshanks, five Green Sandpipers and more surprisingly Wood Sandpipers at Portbury Wharf in April and at CVL 19/20 May.

The first Great Skua was off Brean Down on the 26 March and there were nine more (including three together) to the beginning of June. The majority of these were moving high up and all were travelling north. Some 15 Arctic Skuas occurred from the end of April with most of these also moving up channel and more rarely there were three Pomarine Skuas off Brean Down on the 24 May. Some 12 Little Gulls (all immatures) were recorded and an Iceland Gull was identified at CVL on the 11 April and seen again on the 19 May. Most Kittiwakes in the channel were in May including 77 off Brean Down on the 24th and there was a total of 201 from the end of March to the beginning of June and also two inland at CVL. Terns started moving through from the third week of April with a few Black Terns during this month (maximum eight at CVL), but more in May with 15 at Cheddar on the 4th and 20 off Brean Down the following day while maximum numbers of Common/Arctic Terns were in the last week of April with a total of 308 at Brean Down and the New Grounds. Other terns concerned some twelve Sandwich in April and May and six Little during the last month, while rarities were two Roseate on the

6 May and a very rare vagrant, a Whiskered, at Durleigh and Chilton Trinity on the 13/14th of that month. The odd Razorbill and Guillemot occurred in the channel.

Several Short-eared Owls were present at the end of April and there was one at Severn Beach on the 11 May. Once again the cold spring held up large scale movements of migrants but there were some early arrivals including Cuckoo at Iron Acton 21 March; Yellow Wagtail at Cheddar on the 30th; Reed Warbler at CVL on the 24th and Wheatears at Sand Bay on the 7th and at Brean Down on the 10th. Scarcer species reported were two Hoopoes near Hallen 18 May and singles Sand Bay on the 16th of that month and Clewer 6 June; a few Blue-headed Wagtails, *M.f. flava*. at CVL in April and May; a minimum of 30 White Wagtails, *M.a. alba*; four Pied Flycatchers; five Black Redstarts in March, one in April and more surprisingly another on the 13 May; some 15 Ring Ouzels and up to 14 Crossbills remained at Stock Hill. A Cuckoo of the unusual rufous phase was reported at CVL during May.

Breeding species (selected)

Great Crested Grebes bred at Emborough Pond, Litton Reservoir and probably elsewhere but no young were seen at CVL, due no doubt to the low water level. Fulmars were again regular in the channel but due to several factors they do not seem ready to extend their breeding range. Heronries in our area seem to be doing well and of those counted there were 46 occupied nests at Cleeve and 30 at Tadham Moor. Canada Geese bred at CVL and breeding duck here included Shelduck (one brood), Gadwall (22 broods - 142 young), Pochard (one or two broods), Tufted Duck (only three broods, the reason again may have been due to the low water level) and Ruddy Duck (some three broods). Elsewhere Teal probably bred on the levels, Gadwall bred at Litton Reservoir for the first time and at Blagdon (two broods - 17 young), Shoveler (two broods - 18 young) were located here for the first time since 1949 and there were single broods of Tufted Duck at this location, at Durleigh and Newton Park Lake and three broods involving 22 young at Litton Reservoir - the last breeding record here coming in 1932. Sparrowhawks were fairly well represented in May and June and Buzzards were reported from a number of places on the Mendips but in each case no accurate assessment



Hobby and Swifts

RJR

of breeding pairs is possible. Hobbies appear to be doing reasonably well and were sighted at six areas in June. Red-legged Partridge were present at three localities and Quail at four including a maximum of four at Marshfield. No reports were received of Ringed Plover nesting but generally there is a lack of breeding records for this species in the south-west. A number of Redshank bred on the levels, 'roding' Woodcock were noted at Wellow and Snipe seemed to be well distributed in suitable breeding habitat. Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls were reported nesting on buildings in Bath and Bristol.

Turtle Doves were noted in their usual numbers at regular sites in Somerset, Barn Owls were present at six localities in May and June, Nightjars were sighted regularly at Shapwick but there was only one record outside this area and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were reported in six areas May-July. Sand Martins were as usual breeding in the wall drains between Temple Meads and Parson Street Stations, Bristol (see p.72). Yellow Wagtails appear to have been scarce and a pair of Blue-headed Wagtails, *M.f. flava*, bred at CVL. In view of the decline of the Red-backed Shrike throughout most of the country (see *Bird Study* 20 (1973): 103-110) it was encouraging to note that a pair were seen at one locality. Whitethroats have yet to return to their numbers before the drastic crash in 1969. An interesting reason put forward to account for this is a change in climatic conditions. Parts of the sub-tropical belt in the northern hemisphere have become drier, leading to severe droughts in the Sahara and in Ethiopia, Arabia and India. As many of our summer visitors migrate across the Sahara this would lead to further migratory hazards for the species involved and therefore a reduction in numbers of birds reaching this country (see *Bird Study* 21 (1974): 1-14). Lesser Whitethroats were located in fifteen areas during May and it was thought to have been a good season for them. Whinchats were reported at their usual sites and in normal numbers while Stonechats bred at three places (two coastal) and were present at



Redstart

two more. Redstarts were considered fewer in Somerset than the previous year but Nightingales were fairly well spread with the main numbers as usual at Inglestone Common (up to eight) and Shapwick Heath (up to ten). No accurate count of Corn Buntings was made in the Marshfield area but 'good' numbers were reported but once again Cirl Buntings seem to be very scarce with only two records in May. Tree Sparrows were locally distributed on the levels and for the first time for a number of years Ravens failed to rear any young at Brean Down.

Other summer observations

Great Crested Grebe numbers at CVL reached 279 by the end of July and there were up to 31 at Cheddar during the preceding month. Sea-birds in the channel included small numbers of Fulmar (maximum of nine off Brean Down) and small movements of Manx Shearwaters including 200 here on the 10 June, 183 on the 20 July and 97 off Sand Point on the first date and 44 on the 7 August. Other sea-birds, mainly during the high winds of the first week of August, included four Storm Petrels off Sand Point on the 7th of this month, a few Gannets with most (about ten off Sand Point and in the Severn Bridge area) during this week, a Shag at Huntspill and 15 Kittiwakes off Sand Point on the 8th while single immatures appeared inland at Cheddar and CVL around this time. There was an immature Spoonbill at the New Grounds 10-27 June. A Wigeon was present at Cheddar on the 7 July and at CVL on the 16th, one or two Eiders remained in the channel and there were a number of Common Scoter with most (26) at Berrow on the 1 July. Of the waders, Purple Sandpiper at Sand Point on the 19 July (one was present here last year on the

1 August), Ruff at Cheddar 8 June, Greenshank at Portbury on the 2nd of that month and a Wood Sandpiper at CVL on the 28th were all fairly unusual and outside the normal migration times for the various species. Little Gulls (immatures) remained at the New Grounds throughout June and a few terns were present with three Black Terns at Cheddar on the 26th of that month being noteworthy. A most unusual observation concerned a Short-toed Lark at Brean Down on the 16 June, most occurrences of this annual vagrant to the British Isles usually appearing in the autumn.

Autumn migration

The weather during July was unsettled but there were some fine spells and it was also thundery at times. August commenced with some strong west winds during the first week but then an anticyclone became established and it was exceptionally warm for a short time. The start of September was unsettled with several depressions and strong west winds. There was a calm anticyclonic spell around mid-month but the remainder was again unsettled with gales at times. October was characterised by a mainly anticyclonic weather type and temperatures were below average.

Black-necked Grebes were recorded at Cheddar 29 July - 4 August and at Durleigh 23 September - 6 October while numbers of Great Crested Grebes at CVL showed considerable improvement over last autumn with 467 present at the end of September. After the first week of August sea-birds in the channel were few with only a single Fulmar and several Manx Shearwaters and Gannets. A White Stork was seen over Paulton on the 10 August and Spoonbills were present at CVL on the 29 September through to the 10 October and over Emborough during this month. Counts of 1000 Mallard were made at CVL and Steart and Garganey passed through mainly in the first week of August when there were up to 11 at Blagdon and CVL. The Ring-necked Duck (see spring migration) was for the second autumn located at Cheddar and was present from the 28 August to at least the 28 September. Other diving duck included a Red-crested Pochard at CVL in August and another at Cheddar in the following month but one here at the end of October was on date more likely to have been a genuine vagrant, one or two Scaup on the coast and reservoirs, a single Eider in the channel was last seen on the 11 September, small numbers of Common Scoter (maximum eight off Sand Point) and a party of five inland at Cheddar on 2 October while a few Red-breasted Mergansers appeared on the reservoirs during this month. Unusual raptors included an Osprey at Compton Pauncefoot 16 - 21 September, a Hen Harrier at Long Ashton on the 14 October and a Red-footed Falcon at Barrow Gurney on the 4th of that month. Peregrines were present at five localities from the beginning of August, Hobbies were last reported on the 14 October and Merlins were noted at eight places with most during October. There were single Spotted Crakes at CVL in September and October.

Ringed Plover reached a peak of 2400 during the period 24-27 August including a large count of 1200 at Chittinging while inland there were up to 70 at CVL. There was a maximum of 250 Turnstone in the Severn Beach area but once again there were only small numbers of Knot with most (up to 250) at Steart in September. Most Sanderling were present at Berrow at the end of July (111) and beginning of August (76), Black-tailed Godwits peaked at 1200 at the end of this month at Steart and counts of over 500 Curlew were made here and at the New Grounds. It was an exceptional autumn for Nearctic waders throughout the country and we had several in our area and also some of the scarcer passage waders were present in good numbers. There was a minimum of 21 Little Ringed Plovers with 12 in July; Little Stints were present in higher numbers than usual with a minimum of 228 from the end of July to mid-November including counts of 40 at Blagdon and 46 at CVL on the 27 September; Curlew Sandpiper numbers were about average with a minimum of 62 with most (37) passing in September; Ruffs (278) were present in large numbers with the majority in August (85) and September (116); Spotted Redshanks (170) peaked during this month; Greenshanks (202) were also well represented through to well into November; Green Sandpipers (77) were mainly in the first half of August; the highest count of Wood Sandpipers was seven at the New Grounds on 7 August and there was a minimum of 19 to the 5 October and return passage of Whimbrels was recorded from the second half of July with an unusually large number (127) at Sand Point on the 11 August. Of the American waders there was a Lesser Golden Plover at Steart 23/24 September, two Pectoral Sandpipers at CVL 19 September and these stayed to November while Buff-breasted Sandpipers occurred here 3 October, at Blagdon 15-20 September and at Steart on the 25th of that month until the 4 October. Other rare waders were one or two Kentish Plovers at CVL in August and a Temminck's

Stint that was trapped here on the 28th of the same month. Grey Phalaropes were at Durleigh 20-24 September, Weston Bay on the 29th and Cheddar 13-16 October. Yet another rarity for our area concerned a Stone Curlew (once of course a fairly regular autumn visitor) at Steart from the 18 September and was possibly still present at the beginning of November.

There was a Great Skua in August and three in the following month and single Arctic Skuas were at Berrow (found dead) and the New Grounds. Mediterranean Gulls (adults) were at Steart 22 July and Cheddar 8 October. There were some 36 Little Gulls (up to five at CVL and Steart) and an Iceland Gull appeared at Cheddar 25 September remaining until the 30th. To supplement the Nearctic waders there was a Sabine's Gull at CVL on the 27 September. Movement of Black Terns commenced on the 19 July and there was a minimum of 120 with most (66) on the 27 August and there was a minimum of 166 Common/Arctic Terns. Other terns concerned some 21 Sandwich, six Little and a rarity (although recorded annually in our district since 1966), a White-winged Black Tern at Durleigh on the 19 September.

There was a Hoopoe at Steart for several days in August, two Woodlarks flew over Middle Hope at the beginning of this month and there were further sightings in October at Clevedon and Sand Bay. A Tawny Pipit was at Steart on the 4 October and an even rarer visitor a Red-throated Pipit at Blagdon on the 24 September. A Red-backed Shrike appeared at CVL on the 6 July and remained to the 2 August. Aquatic Warblers (two) were at Berrow on the 26 August and Steart on the same day with one on the 27th and in common with other parts of the country this species has shown a marked increase since 1971. A *Hippolais* sp. thought to have been a Melodious Warbler was at Long Ashton on the 6 September; there were some three Pied Flycatchers, only two Ring Ouzels and once again there was a small irruption of Bearded Tits including one at CVL in October. A Lapland Bunting was present at Steart on the 17 October while a Snow Bunting on the Mendips on the 4th of that month was fairly early for our area. A few Crossbills were seen in August but there was no large scale irruption similar to the previous autumn. Late passage birds included a Black Tern at Cheddar on 11 November, Sand Martin at Sand Point on the 18 October, Grasshopper Warbler at Berrow on the 28th of that month and several Whinchats stayed to about the same time. Migration watches produced good numbers of Chaffinches on the 14 October with nearly 5000 at New Passage and well over 1000 at Brean Down and Sand Point. There were also small numbers of Brambling (maximum 25) at coastal stations and parties of Siskins and Redpolls.

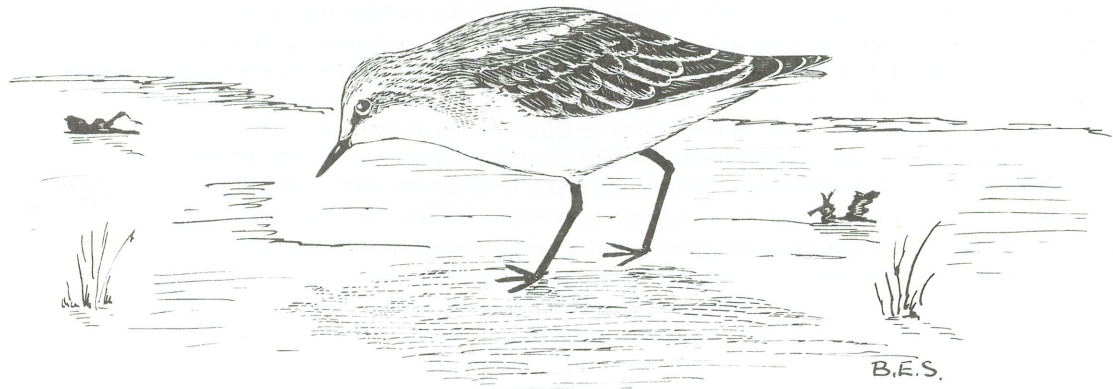
The second winter period

November started with southerly winds and a high pressure area over Europe. It soon became unsettled however and remained so to mid-month being followed by a dry period but further unsettled weather in the last week. Generally it was cold and windy but sunshine amounts were above average. It was very cold at the start of December but a mobile westerly type air pattern influenced the British Isles during much of the month with the result that temperatures were generally near average.

A Black-necked Grebe was at CVL on the 28 December and there was a count of 205 Great Crested Grebes here during the same month. Two Gannets were off Brean Down in the middle of November while counts of Cormorants on the reservoirs reached a maximum of 50 at CVL and the almost usual Bittern here appeared at the end of November. White-fronted Geese were early in arriving being reported at the New Grounds during the last week of September and numbers here had reached 2500 at the end of the year. Small gaggles were seen on the coast (maximum 21 at Steart) mainly during December and inland there were up to eight at CVL. Other geese at the New Grounds included two Barnacle and single Brent, Lesser White-front (from the 9 December), Bean and Pink-foot while three Brent occurred at Steart during December. Whooper Swans were present at CVL in November and there were three at Cheddar on the 7th of that month which is a fairly early arrival date for our area. The first Bewick's Swans arrived on the 22 October and counts in December included 250 at the New Grounds and 58 on Tealham/Tadham Moors. Of the commoner wintering duck there were some good numbers of surface-feeders at Cheddar, due to the low water level, and among these was a maximum of 580 Wigeon. A count of 400 of this species on Tealham Moor in December is also worth mentioning and another interesting observation included up to 20 Tufted Ducks apparently roosting at the Floating Harbour in Bristol. Other duck reported included up to 95 Gadwall at Cheddar, some 33 Pintail here and at Blagdon and up to 600 Shoveler at CVL. Diving duck

included two Red-crested Pochard at Cheddar, several Scaup here, three Common Scoter at Steart in December, a Long-tailed Duck at CVL in the last week of the year while Goldeneye were present from the 13 October. A Smew at Cheddar on the 10 November was exceptionally early and there were three here and two at Frampton in December. Several Red-breasted Mergansers occurred both on the coast and reservoirs while Goosanders were widespread with the exceptionally high count of 55 at CVL at the end of December, with small numbers (maximum nine) elsewhere, and the concentration of Ruddy Ducks at Blagdon reached 96.

At least two Hen Harriers were present at Steart but more surprisingly one flew over Clifton, Bristol on the 4 November. Peregrines were noted at five localities and Merlins at eight. The usual large number of Coot at Cheddar had reached 3500 at the end of December. Dealing now with the waders, largest numbers of Golden Plover were at the Axe Estuary (750) and Tealham/Tadham Moors (600). Grey Plover reached a maximum of 44 at Steart and there were a few inland including nine at CVL in October which is a very high number. A large movement of Lapwings took place at Steart on the 30 December (c.12000) and the usual large concentrations occurred on the levels with c.6000 on Tealham/Tadham Moors. Turnstones at Severn Beach remained around the 100 figure, some high counts of Dunlin were made on the coast in December with up to 11000 at Steart (numbers indicated some 24000 present this month) with high numbers inland (up to 410 at Cheddar and 650 at CVL) while a few Knot were present with a maximum of 250 at Sand Bay. A Little



Little Stint

Stint was at CVL in December and other scarcer wintering waders included two Purple Sandpipers at Steart in November, some 37 Sanderling, up to 18 Ruffs at CVL and a few elsewhere, five Spotted Redshanks, one Greenshank in December, Green Sandpipers were well represented with some eight during this month while up to three Common Sandpipers were reported at their usual wintering place at Sea Mills. Black-tailed Godwits included up to 98 at Steart in December and in the same month 46 were counted inland at Durleigh. Woodcock present included 18 shot at Abbots Leigh and Failand during this month, about 17 Jack Snipe were recorded and up to seven Avocets seen at Steart.

Single Little Gulls (immatures) were at Cheddar and CVL in November, an Iceland Gull was recorded at Steart on the 23 December and there was a compact group of 35-40 Kittiwakes moving up channel off Brean Down in the middle of November. Short-eared Owls appeared at five localities from the first week of October and there was an increase in December with a total of ten at four places. There were three Woodlarks at the beginning of November, Water Pipits *A.s. spinoletta* occurred from the 25 October and up to five were present at CVL while there were at least two Great Grey Shrikes on the Mendips during November. Two or three Blackcaps wintered and there were two Chiffchaffs in November. A Firecrest was seen at Orchardleigh during the same month while three or four Black Redstarts occurred; up to four Bearded Tits were seen at CVL with three at Berrow and one at the New Grounds and there were several Snow Buntings on the coast in November and December with one inland at Cheddar. Bramblings were well represented with the largest number (600) at Chittening and there were small groups of Siskins and Redpolls but no exceptionally large numbers.

MIDSUMMER FIELD NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF COASTAL SOUTH-EAST ICELAND

by Jeffery Boswall, B.B.C. Natural History Unit.

Plates 5-8

Introduction

This paper is essentially concerned with birds seen between 16 June and 3 July 1974 along about 130 kilometres of south-east facing Icelandic coast from Kvisker, 16°25'W 63°58'N in the south-west to Djupivogur, 14°18'W 64°38'N in the north-east (figure 1). Excluded, on the seaward side, is the island of Papey and its satellites, and on the landward side most of the terrain above the 40 metre contour. "In between", the coastal strip comprises the river valleys, the *sandurs* or outwash gravel fans of those rivers, and the small more fertile deltas of some of those rivers all of which are formed inside tidal lagoons (confusingly called in Icelandic *fyrdurs*). There are also the lagoons themselves which in turn are protected from the open sea by shingle bars. In a few places there is a rocky shore. Inside the lagoons mud flats are exposed at low tide. The lagoon called Hornafjordur in particular has a number of small islands, mostly with low cliffs. Some of the valleys well upstream have patches of birch forest (some trees growing to 4 metres). The moorland at the foot of the screes and rocky hills is mostly damp and often boggy and there can be many rocky outcrops. Sheep are grazed from areas of marsh grass liable to flooding by spring tides and up into the hills. There is some cultivated land at low elevations, most of it used to grow hay. The presence of farms, and particularly farm buildings (and also town buildings) appears to be important to some species. There are a number of garbage dumps. Lakes are few, the only sizeable one being Thoeit which is nearly 2 kms. along its longest axis. A preliminary assessment of habitat selection by common species is given in an appendix.

A particular objective was to study Whooper Swans* in the area and this explains why the observations overall are mainly from the coastal lagoons and their surrounds. One day was spent at sea, and half-a-day visiting the birch forest near Hoffell; otherwise the eighteen days were mostly spent observing from the inland side of the lagoons. The more detailed observations made on Whooper Swans will be offered for publication elsewhere (Boswall, in prep.)

Observations on all species seen are summarised in this paper. Supplementary notes on many breeding (or potentially breeding) species were kindly provided by Sigurdur Eymundsson, the local dentist, a cautious and critical observer who has lived all his life (34 years) in Hofn. No attempt is made to deal with species normally found only outside the breeding season, except for a few potential breeding species, i.e. Great Northern Diver, Cormorant, Long-tailed Duck, Gyr Falcon, Merlin, Water Rail, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit, Redpoll.

Where appropriate comparison is made with the observations of Roberts (1934) who in late June and the first half of August 1932 was in part of the area covered by this paper. However, no attempt has been made to compare the few observations made on 27 June along the most south-westerly 13 kms. of coast I looked at, Jokulsa to Kvisker, with the many observations of the Brathay Exploration Group made since 1959. This group has published a number of reports on another major sector of coast and sandur south-west of Jokulsa (Brathay Exploration Group 1959-68, 1969 and 1970), extending well beyond the area covered by this paper.

Wild birds' eggs for human consumption are still collected locally but only on a very minor scale. It is worth noting that feral American Mink *Mustela vison* first appeared in this area only two or three years ago at the eastern end of Skardsfjordur where tracks were seen in winter snow. S. Eymundsson told me he had killed five animals and had found one den.

The four distinctive Icelandic letters Þ, œ, ö and ǿ have been crudely transliterated into th, ae, o and d; also the accents over Icelandic vowels have been dropped. Place names are taken from the 1:250000 scale maps nos 8 and 9; the 1:100000 map no. 106; and the 1:50000 map no. 106 SW.

* For scientific names of species see the systematic list.

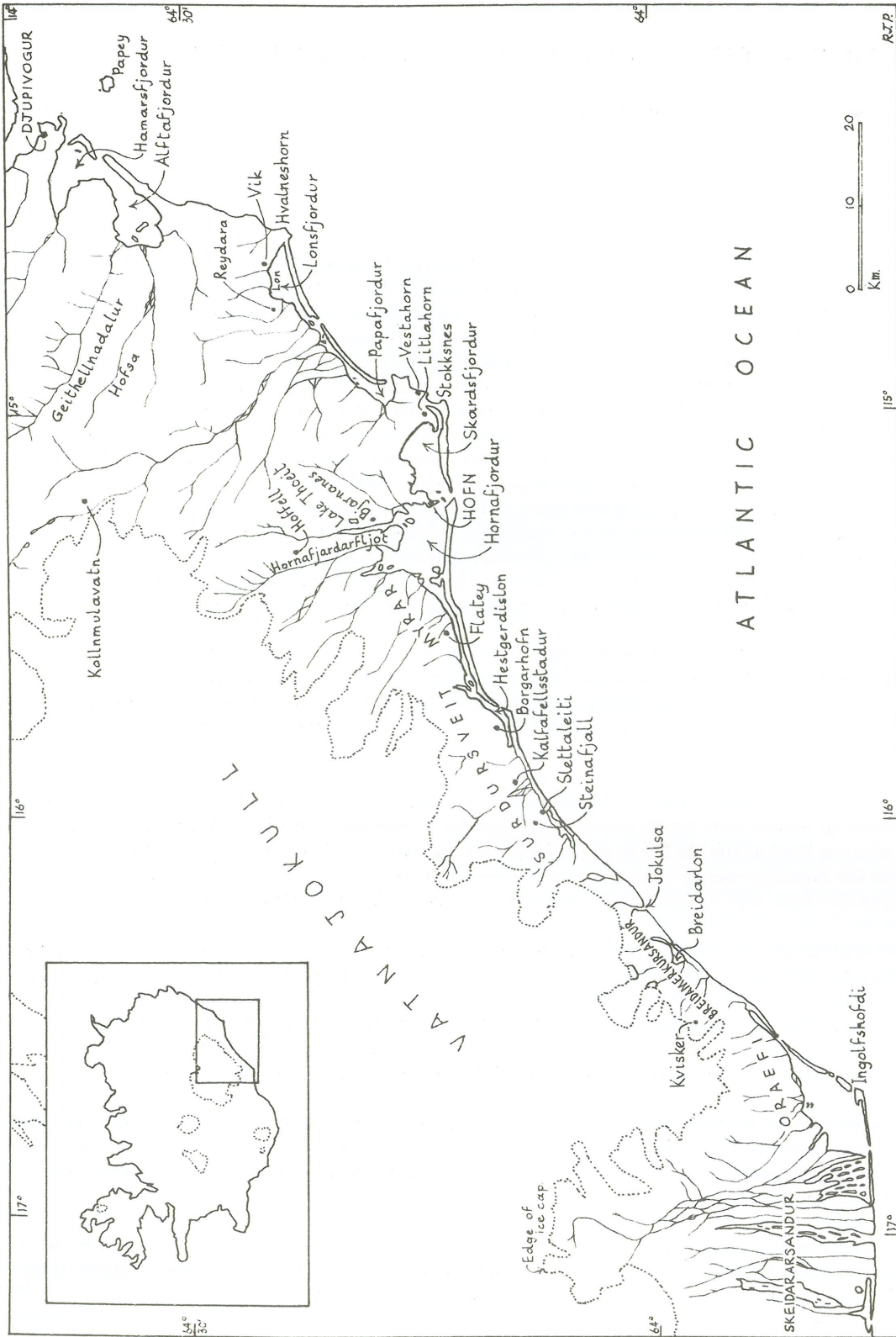


Figure 1. Map of part of south-east Iceland to show localities mentioned in the text. The paper deals with observations made along the coastal areas between Kvísker in the south-west and Djúpi Vogur in the north-east.

The Systematic List

RED-THROATED DIVER *Gavia stellata*. One bird on Lake Thoeit, three on a small lake just east of Kalfafellsstadur and one with a nest and single egg near Kvísker, all on 27 June. One in the Alftafjordur on 29 June. Known to have nested at Rimavatn north-east of Bjarnanes (S. Eymundsson), where I saw two birds on 2 July. Has increased considerably on the Breidamerkursandur during the 1960's (Bjornsson 1970).

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER *Gavia immer*. Not seen. S. Eymundsson believes this species may well have nested at Lake Thoeit but has no proof. Very few lakes that might be suitable for breeding exist within the area covered by this paper.

DIVER sp. *Gavia* sp. Single birds seen near Hofn on 17th and 25 June, and four over the Breidamerkursandur on 27 June were presumably Red-throated *G. stellata*.

SLAVONIAN GREBE *Podiceps auritus*. One on Lake Thoeit on 27 June. Believed by S. Eymundsson probably to have nested in the area.

FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*. The commonest nesting bird. Birds were seen in occupation of low cliffs on Mikley Island (thirty apparently occupied sites) in Skardsfjordur; at Litlahorn (hundreds of sites) and adjacent Rustanof (probably thousands of sites) at the eastern end of the same lagoon. Birds were also occupying cliffs by Lonsfjordur: behind Hlith farm (a dozen sites); on Karlsfjall just east of Hlith; the cliffs of Hraun just east of Reyðara farm (scores of sites); and the cliffs of the Vikurfjall from Vik farm to Hvalneshorn (many hundreds of pairs). Around Alftafjordur the cliffs of Preststeinn just south of the Hofsa River and of the cliffs Mulahts and Gethellar, north of the same river had Fulmars in attendance, as did those round Hamarsfjordur as far as Djupivogur. North of Hofn, i.e. inland, the cliffs of Medalfell, Ketillaugarfjall and Krossbaejartindar on the east side of the Hornafjardarfjot, (the last-named being about 15.5 kms. from the open sea), and those on the opposite side of the sandur called Vidbordsfjall (about 12kms. inland), both had nesting Fulmars, but there were none on equally suitable sites further north on Hoffelsfjall, about 18 kms. from the sea. Much further south-west Borgarhofn was occupied, as was Steinafjall (just inland from Slettaleiti).

Roberts (1934) apparently saw no nesting Fulmars at all. Thus the coast he visited between Vesta Horn and Borgarhofn must have been colonised since 1932. Fisher (1952) gives only three important Fulmar breeding stations between Hofn and Kvísker, none on Roberts' route (for map and description of the route see Beckett (1934)). Steinafjall and nearby Fell to the west, according to Fisher, were both first discovered to be colonised in 1930, and Krossbaejartindar was colonised in 1949 or earlier. East of Hofn nesting Fulmars have been known at Gethellar since 1898 and at Djupivogur since 1903.

Sigurður Eymundsson has noticed a steady increase in the number of nesting Fulmars over the last twenty years. He pointed out to me that grass was able to grow below many Fulmar colonies among rocks and at the tops of screes where formerly there was none. The new areas of grass have created an occasional problem for farmers. Sheep lured by the new pasture get themselves into situations from which they have to be rescued.

Eymundsson has found Fulmar remains at the earths of Arctic Foxes *Alopex lagopus* and believes the mammal could be an important predator on Fulmars. Hundreds of Fulmars were seen bathing in the brackish water of Lonsfjordur and in the fresh water of Lake Thoeit.

During a sea trip from an area approximately 16°00'W, 63°40'N south-east of Ingolfshofdi the Fulmar was easily the commonest bird persistently following fishing vessels and taking advantage of the fish gutted at sea. As many as about 140 birds attended the small two-man boat on which I sailed. See under Great Skua for the competition with Fulmars for the fish livers.

Only one dark-phase Fulmar was seen during my entire visit.

GANNET *Sula bassana*. Four, including three immatures, at sea, 25 June.

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Not seen. Not a local nesting bird, but occurs outside the breeding season. (S. Eymundsson). (Not known to nest on Papey (S.E.)).

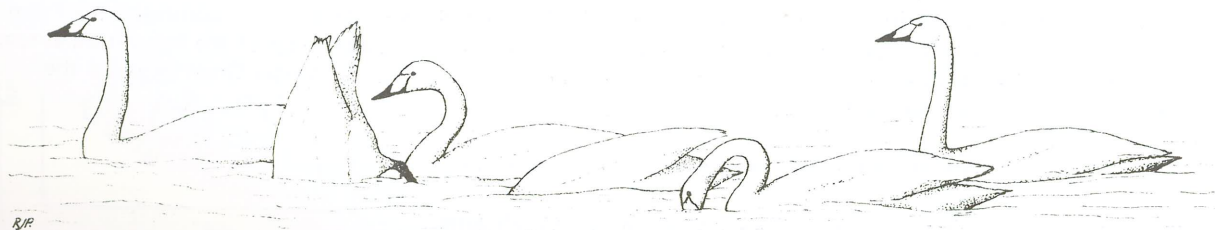
SHAG *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*. Two adults and one immature on Hamarsfjordur on 30 June. Not known to nest in our area (or on Papey) (S. Eymundsson).

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser Anser*. Seen almost daily, usually only in flight, a significant proportion of the birds flying in a north-easterly direction. Sometimes birds were seen grazing on areas of marshland grass, and once a flock at Lon was resting on tidal water. Of 24 sightings over a sample period of eleven days, 18 - 28 June, one lone bird was seen, there were seven pairs, seven flocks of between three and ten birds, four of between eleven and twenty, three between 21 and 30, and two flocks of about 60 birds.

A deserted nest with one smashed and one cold egg was found near Reydara Farm on 21 June. The local farmer expects to find about five nests a year in his area. S. Eymundsson describes the Greylag as a widespread nester particularly on islands in Hornafjordur and on small peninsulas in the lagoon. He had found a nest on 24 June 1974 with four chipping eggs, and two eggs which contained dead goslings. Kear (1964a) deals in detail with the breeding status and moulting areas of this species between Skeidararsandur and Alftafjordur.

The species appears to have increased since the visit of Roberts (1934). According to H. Boyd quoted by Kear (1967) there was a sharp rise in an already steadily increasing Icelandic population as a whole between 1952 and 1965. The increase in the area west of Jokulsa in coastal south-east Iceland has been well documented by Halfdan Bjornsson (see Kear (1964a)), and also by his brother Flosi (Bjornsson 1970). From about 70 Greylags in 1930, the number increased to about 2000 in 1963. The species has also increased in the area west to Alftafjordur (Kear 1964a). That the Greylag is not popular with Icelandic farmers here and elsewhere is well-known (see Kear 1964a, 1964b and 1967).

WHOOOPER SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*. Special attention was paid to this species. Observations appropriate to this paper are given below; others will be published elsewhere (Boswall in prep.). Three pairs of swans were seen with cygnets, and the nest of one of these pairs was found. On 27 June a pair with three half-grown cygnets was seen near Vidbordsfjall in the Myrar district in an area of marsh grass liable to flooding at high tide. On 3 July a pair with a one-third grown cygnet was found on Rimavatn near Bjarnanes. A nest (with one deserted egg) had been built on a small grass-covered island in the lake. On 4 July a pair with half-grown cygnets (probably two) was spotted from an aircraft just after take-off from the Hofn airfield. The family was among other Whoopers to the west of Skogey Island in Hornafjordur in an area of saltings. It is possible that this last pair may have nested by Lake Thoeit where, in the 1960's, S. Eymundsson saw a pair of adult swans with flightless young. Some twenty years ago, the same observer found a nest at Rimavatn on the same island as did the writer, and in 1972 he saw a nest on Flatey only 10 kms. south west of Vidbordsfjall in the Myrar district. Boyd (1963) during a flight along the coast covered by this paper (but excluding Alftafjordur and Hamarsfjordur) saw only one family of swans; this was apparently (from his map) on the east side of the Hornafjardarflojt just to the north-east of Skogey Island. Thorsteinn Giersson, the farmer at Reydara, had never found a swan's nest on his land having lived there all his forty-six years and Kear (1964a) was told by Halfdan Bjornsson of Kvisker that the species was unknown as a nester between Jokulsa and Skeidararsandur. (The latter locality lies outside the area covered by this paper, to the west).



Excluding the families of swans just detailed, the numbers seen at each major locality from north-east to south-west are as follows (all dates in June):

Hamarsfjordur, none on 29th, 2 on 30th; Alftafjordur, 166 on 29th, 185 on 30th; Lonsfjordur, 263 on 21st, 371 on 29th, 535 on 30th; Papafjordur, none on 24th; Skardsfjordur, none on several dates; Hornafjordur and Hornafjardarfliot 56 on 27th; Myrar area, 28 on 27th; Surdursveit area (which includes Hestgerdislon) 61 on 27th; Breidarlon, none on 27th.

With the exception of the figure for Myrar, a difficult area to survey, the observer is reasonably confident that the figures represent most of the swans present in the areas concerned. An implication of this is that the increase in numbers at Lonsfjordur was real. The extent to which birds move around from locality to locality is not known, though they were seldom seen in flight, and numbers at the most-observed site, Holar farm (on the east side of Hornafjordur), varied only as follows: 26 on 17th, 35 on 18th, 24 on 19th, 20 on 26th, 20 on 27th, and 36 on 29 June. The observer's impression is that the numbers seen at different localities can safely be added up with almost no birds being counted twice — certainly the two largest assemblies can be summed since the 185 birds were counted on 30 June, only an hour or so before the 535 at the next lagoon. The sum of the maxima at each locality is 887.

The only previous information on swans in our area of which I have knowledge comes from Kear (1964a) and Boyd (1963). Kear (1964a) reports that swans have been at Lonsfjordur longer than living memory and that they are showing a slow increase. A few stay all winter but large numbers arrive at the end of March and during April. These are unmated birds and stay all summer; they moult and are later joined by family parties from the interior. Swans were not reported as nesting on the farms around Lon. On 15 September 1963, 1230 were counted on the water, no doubt including some birds of the year. In 1963 Boyd flew over the area covered by this paper (but excluding the Alftafjordur and Hamarsfjordur) on a day between 2nd and 6 July (i.e. at the same time of year as I made my observations eleven years later) and found rather similar numbers of swans rather similarly distributed (my figures in brackets):

Lonsfjordur 625 (535); Papafjordur 0 (0); Skardsfjordur 4 (0); Hornafjordur (with which he includes Hornafjardarfliot and Myrar) 124 (84); Slettaleti (which is in my Surdursveit area) 21 (61); and Breidarlon 0 (0). His total is 774 and mine 700.

Roberts (1934) saw no Whooper Swans in either June or August in the coastal region. It seems likely that the species has increased in numbers since then. F. Gudmundsson wrote in 1955 to Bannerman (1957) that there was no indication of a decrease in Iceland of this species and that Whooper Swans were even thought to be increasing in some parts of the country. The Whoopers that winter in Britain are generally supposed to come from Iceland and seem to have increased generally over the preceding fifty years (Boyd and Eltringham, 1962). In 1963 Boyd (1963) put the Icelandic Whooper population at probably 5-7000 birds, and thought that they probably made up almost the entire number of Whoopers visiting Great Britain (3-4000) and Ireland (perhaps 2000) while some remain in Iceland throughout the year. Gardarsson (1967) stated that an increase had been noted in recent years in Iceland. Ruttledge (1974) reported a notable increase and spread of the Whooper Swan in Ireland during the preceding thirty years.

Whoopers are none too popular with local farmers. Fridrik Jonsson of Hraunkot spoke with disapproval of swans among his sheep on an area of pasture marked Lambey on the map, north of Papafjordur. Thorsteinn Giersson had had birds consuming his uncut hay at Reydara in June 1973. At the request of the farmer at Holar, S. Eymundsson frequently scares the swans off his marsh grass by firing a gun into the air. Slater (1901) reported that Icelandic farmers assumed that the swans competed with their sheep for grass. Kear (1964b), however, found the species harmless to agriculture over most of its Icelandic range. Three of the very few complaints she received were from Lonsfjordur (described in her report as Lonsvik).

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*. Seen daily in small numbers. Between 16th and 28 June, fifteen pairs, ten lone drakes, two parties of two drakes and one party of three drakes were seen; also one flock of fourteen Mallard (unsexed). A female with seven small ducklings was seen on 18 June, a nest with seven eggs was found on 19 June, a female with five small ducklings was seen on 1 July and another with nine or ten newly hatched ducklings on 2 July. Eight drakes, in company with two females, on 27 June, were moulting into eclipse plumage.

TEAL *Anas crecca*. Seen on eight dates between 16th and 28 June: four pairs, one drake, two drakes together on three occasions, and one unsexed party of eight. S. Eymundsson has found nests of this species near Hofn.

WIGEON *Anas penelope*. Seven drakes by Lon on 21 June, two there on 24th. Probably nests (S. Eymundsson).

PINTAIL *Anas acuta*. A pair near Bjarnanes on 27 June, and two drakes there the next day. May nest (S. Eymundsson).

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*. (See also under Scaup). Ten drakes moulting into eclipse plumage were seen near Brunnholskirkja in the Myrar area on 27 June. Never proved to nest locally but could do so (S. Eymundsson). Roberts (1934) saw none in our area. The Tufted Duck has increased in Iceland dramatically this century (Gudmundsson 1951).

SCAUP *Aythya marila*. Of 43 ducks on a small lake near Hofn on 17 June most were drake Scaup, the rest being Tufted Ducks, also mostly drakes. Of 28 ducks on Lake Thoeit on 28 June, about half were Scaup, half Tufted. Most of both species were males moulting into eclipse plumage. Never proved to nest locally but could do so (S. Eymundsson).

EIDER *Somateria mollissima*. Easily the commonest anatid. A fairly careful count of birds visible from Hofn on 17 June gave 1040 drakes in adult plumage. The "brown birds" were more difficult to pick out at a distance but probably numbered about 500. Most of these birds were assembled near the exit to the lagoon, i.e. south of Hofn. Near the exit to the Lonsfjordur on 21 June, a total (all plumages) of about 550 Eiders were similarly gathered. A raft of about 1200 birds, most of them drakes (say 9 out of 10) was seen on the sea at Stokksnes on 2 July (see Plate 6).

Of five nests near Hofn on 17 June, one had three eggs and four had four eggs. A further clutch of four was found on 21 June and on 26 June a nest with one chipping egg and one wet duckling was found. Newly hatched ducklings were first seen on 19 June (a pair of adults with three). A female with three was seen on 21 June, five females with eight and one with six on 23rd, twelve with seventeen on 29th, one with five on 30th, and ten with 26 on 1 July. Many birds had ducklings near Hofn on 2nd and 3 July. S. Eymundsson said that at Hornafjordur the Eiders breed mainly on the islands. Down is collected locally, but only on a minor scale.

HARLEQUIN *Histrionicus histrionicus*. Not seen. The Harlequin is known to S. Eymundsson from the Geithellnadalur and Hofsa rivers.

LONG-TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*. Not seen. This species was known to S. Eymundsson's father, now a man of 75, as a nesting species on islands in the Hornafjordur. Nearest known nesting place now is well inland on lakes at Kollnmulavatn (outside the area covered by this paper). This decrease is of particular interest since apart from the well-known decline in numbers of Long-tails at Myvatn, Gudmundsson (1951) says "About the status of the Long-tailed Duck elsewhere in Iceland there is unfortunately no information available" for earlier times.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*. One, two or three birds seen on five dates, all on tidal water near Hofn. One bird at Lonsfjordur on 23 June. Known to S. Eymundsson as a breeding bird; he has found a number of nests.

GYR FALCON *Falco rusticolus*. Not seen. S. Eymundsson has never seen a nest. He sees the bird each winter when it is noticeably rarer now than about twenty years ago.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*. Not seen. S. Eymundsson sees Merlins occasionally outside the breeding season and saw eggs from a nest near Hlith on Lonsfjordur about twenty years ago.

PTARMIGAN *Lagopus mutus*. One bird at sea-level near north shore of Skardsfjordur on 18 June; two or three single birds in hills by road between Alfta - and Lonsfjordur on 22nd and 23 June; one near Hoffell on 28 June.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*. Not seen. According to S. Eymundsson, the species occurs occasionally in autumn; he has no evidence of nesting.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. A common nesting species. A brood of three, three-quarters grown, was seen on 28 June. Maximum flock of apparent non-nesters seen at high tide at Hofn was 38 birds on 17 June. Roberts (1934) saw a total of eleven birds on three days and described the species as "Not common in the south-east". Gudmundsson (1951) reports a very conspicuous increase in this species' numbers in the north and north-east of Iceland during the 20 or 30 years before 1950. There has clearly also been an increase in the south-east.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*. A common nesting species. A three-quarters' grown young bird was seen on 27 June.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*. A common nesting species.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. Not seen. Unknown to S. Eymundsson in this part of Iceland.

PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*. Not known as a nester but occurs in winter (S. Eymundsson).

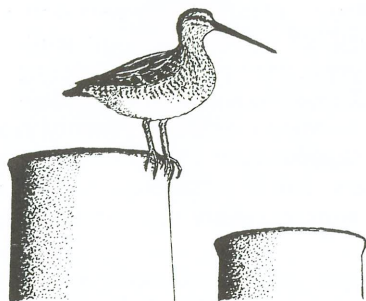
DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*. A fairly common nesting species. A few parties of up to twenty birds seen; presumably non-nesters. No instance of a Dunlin associating with a Golden Plover was observed, a habit well-known elsewhere in Iceland.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*. A common nesting species. A newly-hatched brood of three seen on 23 June. To judge from the remark of Roberts (1934) "Nowhere common", this species must have increased in the area.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*. Not seen. According to S. Eymundsson the species is unknown as a nesting bird in this part of Iceland but has been known to occur, for example, a flock was seen in the spring of 1974.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. A common nesting species.

SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*. A common nesting species. Seen perching on street lamps and house chimneys in Hofn, as well as on fence posts.



GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Although the distribution map of this species in the third edition of the Peterson *Field Guide* shows the bird breeding in south-east Iceland, it is quite unknown in the Hofn area to S. Eymundsson. However, a breeding pair was found on Breidamerkursandur in 1963 and in 1964 (Brathay Exploration Group, 1959 - 68).

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE *Phalaropus lobatus*. A common nesting species mostly seen on standing fresh water though occasionally on running water and once or twice on tidal water.

TEAL *Anas crecca*. Seen on eight dates between 16th and 28 June: four pairs, one drake, two drakes together on three occasions, and one unsexed party of eight. S. Eymundsson has found nests of this species near Hofn.

WIGEON *Anas penelope*. Seven drakes by Lon on 21 June, two there on 24th. Probably nests (S. Eymundsson).

PINTAIL *Anas acuta*. A pair near Bjarnanes on 27 June, and two drakes there the next day. May nest (S. Eymundsson).

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*. (See also under Scaup). Ten drakes moulting into eclipse plumage were seen near Brunnholskirkja in the Myrar area on 27 June. Never proved to nest locally but could do so (S. Eymundsson). Roberts (1934) saw none in our area. The Tufted Duck has increased in Iceland dramatically this century (Gudmundsson 1951).

SCAUP *Aythya marila*. Of 43 ducks on a small lake near Hofn on 17 June most were drake Scaup, the rest being Tufted Ducks, also mostly drakes. Of 28 ducks on Lake Thoeit on 28 June, about half were Scaup, half Tufted. Most of both species were males moulting into eclipse plumage. Never proved to nest locally but could do so (S. Eymundsson).

EIDER *Somateria mollissima*. Easily the commonest anatid. A fairly careful count of birds visible from Hofn on 17 June gave 1040 drakes in adult plumage. The "brown birds" were more difficult to pick out at a distance but probably numbered about 500. Most of these birds were assembled near the exit to the lagoon, i.e. south of Hofn. Near the exit to the Lonsfjordur on 21 June, a total (all plumages) of about 550 Eiders were similarly gathered. A raft of about 1200 birds, most of them drakes (say 9 out of 10) was seen on the sea at Stokksnes on 2 July (see Plate 6).

Of five nests near Hofn on 17 June, one had three eggs and four had four eggs. A further clutch of four was found on 21 June and on 26 June a nest with one chipping egg and one wet duckling was found. Newly hatched ducklings were first seen on 19 June (a pair of adults with three). A female with three was seen on 21 June, five females with eight and one with six on 23rd, twelve with seventeen on 29th, one with five on 30th, and ten with 26 on 1 July. Many birds had ducklings near Hofn on 2nd and 3 July. S. Eymundsson said that at Hornafjordur the Eiders breed mainly on the islands. Down is collected locally, but only on a minor scale.

HARLEQUIN *Histrionicus histrionicus*. Not seen. The Harlequin is known to S. Eymundsson from the Geithellnadalur and Hofsa rivers.

LONG-TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*. Not seen. This species was known to S. Eymundsson's father, now a man of 75, as a nesting species on islands in the Hornafjordur. Nearest known nesting place now is well inland on lakes at Kollnmulavatn (outside the area covered by this paper). This decrease is of particular interest since apart from the well-known decline in numbers of Long-tails at Myvatn, Gudmundsson (1951) says "About the status of the Long-tailed Duck elsewhere in Iceland there is unfortunately no information available" for earlier times.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*. One, two or three birds seen on five dates, all on tidal water near Hofn. One bird at Lonsfjordur on 23 June. Known to S. Eymundsson as a breeding bird; he has found a number of nests.

GYR FALCON *Falco rusticolus*. Not seen. S. Eymundsson has never seen a nest. He sees the bird each winter when it is noticeably rarer now than about twenty years ago.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*. Not seen. S. Eymundsson sees Merlins occasionally outside the breeding season and saw eggs from a nest near Hlith on Lonsfjordur about twenty years ago.

PTARMIGAN *Lagopus mutus*. One bird at sea-level near north shore of Skardsfjordur on 18 June; two or three single birds in hills by road between Alfta - and Lonsfjordur on 22nd and 23 June; one near Hoffell on 28 June.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*. Not seen. According to S. Eymundsson, the species occurs occasionally in autumn; he has no evidence of nesting.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. A common nesting species. A brood of three, three-quarters grown, was seen on 28 June. Maximum flock of apparent non-nesters seen at high tide at Hofn was 38 birds on 17 June. Roberts (1934) saw a total of eleven birds on three days and described the species as "Not common in the south-east". Gudmundsson (1951) reports a very conspicuous increase in this species' numbers in the north and north-east of Iceland during the 20 or 30 years before 1950. There has clearly also been an increase in the south-east.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*. A common nesting species. A three-quarters' grown young bird was seen on 27 June.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*. A common nesting species.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. Not seen. Unknown to S. Eymundsson in this part of Iceland.

PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*. Not known as a nester but occurs in winter (S. Eymundsson).

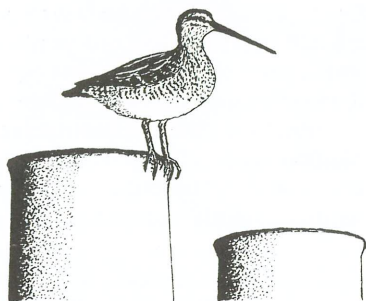
DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*. A fairly common nesting species. A few parties of up to twenty birds seen; presumably non-nesters. No instance of a Dunlin associating with a Golden Plover was observed, a habit well-known elsewhere in Iceland.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*. A common nesting species. A newly-hatched brood of three seen on 23 June. To judge from the remark of Roberts (1934) "Nowhere common", this species must have increased in the area.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*. Not seen. According to S. Eymundsson the species is unknown as a nesting bird in this part of Iceland but has been known to occur, for example, a flock was seen in the spring of 1974.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. A common nesting species.

SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*. A common nesting species. Seen perching on street lamps and house chimneys in Hofn, as well as on fence posts.



GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Although the distribution map of this species in the third edition of the Peterson *Field Guide* shows the bird breeding in south-east Iceland, it is quite unknown in the Hofn area to S. Eymundsson. However, a breeding pair was found on Breidamerkursandur in 1963 and in 1964 (Brathay Exploration Group, 1959 - 68).

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE *Phalaropus lobatus*. A common nesting species mostly seen on standing fresh water though occasionally on running water and once or twice on tidal water.

GREAT SKUA *Stercorarius skua*. Large numbers on the stoney coastal flats north-east from Kvisker on 27 June, across the Breidamerkursandur. From Kvisker, along 16.4 kms. of road, 109 birds were counted within c.200 metres of the road on either side. At one point near the south-west end of the Breidamerkursandur, one 360° sweep with the binoculars showed 78 birds. My *guess* is that 600 birds, plus or minus 200 birds were present between the ice-cap and the sea along the stretch I covered.

Some years ago – and possibly still – the bird nested on Skogey Island in Hornafjordur, where S. Eymundsson found nests. He suspects more recently that a pair may have nested near Hoffell, and that the species nests on the shingle bar that protects Skardsfjordur from the sea. Along the coast to the north-east as far as Lon, occasional birds were seen; up to six together.

At sea on 25 June up to fifteen Great Skuas were around the fishing boat at a time. This species' larger size and greater manoeuvrability give it an advantage over the Fulmar. As a food source fish gut is clearly likely to be of significance to the Great Skua. One was seen to bring down a Gannet.

Gudmundsson (1954) put the Breidamerkursandur population at 1500 pairs (out of an Icelandic population of 6000 pairs, and a North Atlantic one of 7200 pairs). But A.J. Clissold cited by Dickens (1964) found only about 850 (successful) pairs of Great Skuas on the Breidamerkursandur in 1952, and Dickens himself says that in 1961 and 1963 there were probably fewer than half this number. Gudmundsson (1954) thought it likely, though unproven, that the Great Skua population of the coastal plains of south Iceland had increased considerably since trawling started off south and south-east Iceland shortly before 1900. This increase seems to have continued up to about 1930. From then on according to farmers on both sides of Skeidararsandur, a marked decrease of the population of that area has become very conspicuous (Gudmundsson, 1954). Bjornsson (1970) reports from Oraefi county, including the Breidamerkursandur, a considerable increase in the numbers of skuas, as well as locations, during the preceding decade (1960-1970) and it would appear therefore that there has been some recovery during the 1960s and probably continuing to the present day.

ARCTIC SKUA *Stercorarius parasiticus*. One hundred sightings of birds believed to be different individuals, between 17th and 27 June in a variety of localities showed 83 dark phase and 17 light phase plumages.

Evidently nesting all along the coast from Alftafjordur to Breidamerkursandur, and particularly numerous at the latter locality. Distraction display seen five or six times and a nest with one egg found on 20 June. Apparently more numerous on the Breidamerkursandur before and around the turn of the century than today (Bjornsson 1970).

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*. A quite numerous and widespread bird in low-lying areas. A colony of about 25 pairs was nesting on a small island in a tiny lake on Osland south of Hofn. A few pairs were nesting with about 20 pairs of Arctic Terns near Reydara Farm (the only nest found had two gulls' and one tern's egg), and about twenty pairs were in occupation of an island in Rimavatn. S. Eymundsson told me of a nesting colony about 6 kms. north-north-east of Hofn. T. Giersson of Reydara, a man of 46, says this species is a newcomer to the district in his lifetime, and S. Eymundsson has noticed a very real increase in numbers over the last twenty years. Roberts (1934) makes no reference to this species and presumably saw none. Gudmundsson (1951) records that this species colonised Iceland in the 1920's and has increased rapidly since then. Six birds at Alftafjordur on 22 June had black heads but brown feathers in the wings. A more distant flock of forty birds, obviously not nesting, could also have been first summer birds.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*. Except at Hofn where it is outnumbered by the Glaucous immatures, the Lesser Black-back is the second most common of the four large gulls. Up to five adult and three third-year immatures among the gull flock at Hofn. Adults in occasional twos and threes in lagoons east of Hofn and at Djupivogur at least six adults and seven third-year birds. A nesting colony of about thirty pairs on the little Fossnes peninsula 3.5 kms. north of Hofn was pointed out to me by S. Eymundsson. On 26 June only a few empty nests could be found; small young were probably hiding. He believes the species to be nesting in increasing numbers in south-east Iceland. Roberts (1934) makes no reference to this species and presumably saw none. Gudmundsson (1951) shows on his map two nesting localities for the Lesser Black-back at the extreme south-west of the area covered by this paper. One at sea on 25 June attending gutting operations.



Plate 5. Two views of Lonsfjordur, south-east Iceland. Above, looking SSW from about 160 metres above sea level. The shingle bar that protects the lagoon from the sea is visible as a black line and beyond in the Atlantic is the island of Vigur. Vestahorn is in the top right of the picture. Below, looking E across the lagoon towards Vikurfjall, where Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* nest of the cliffs and Snow Buntings *Plectrophenax nivalis* among the screes. Non-breeding Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* congregate at Lonsfjordur in greater numbers (probably) than anywhere else in Iceland. (Pages 51–66.) (Photos: J. Boswall)





Plate 6. Above, rocky coast at Stokksnes, breeding haunt of Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Eider *Somateria mollissima* and a few Fulmars. A raft of about 1200 Eider (nine out of ten drakes) is on the sea between the two 'lines' of rocks. Below, an aerial view of part of the gravel outwash fan (sandur) of the Hornafjardarfljot looking W towards the Flajokull glacier. Some of the slightly higher land is cultivated.

(Photos: J. Boswall)





Plate 7. Above, typical bog nesting haunt of Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (one can be seen on the pool), Eider, Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Redshank *Tringa totanus* and others. Below, marshland grass liable to flooding below Holar farm between Hofn and Bjarnanes being grazed by sheep and Whooper Swans. (Photos: J; Boswall)



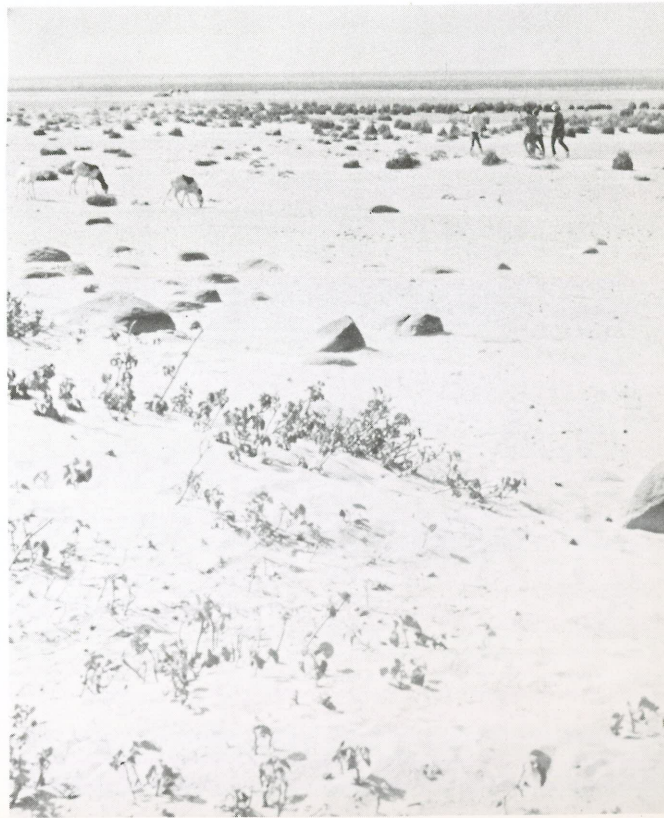


Plate 8. Above, birch forest near Hoffell, nesting haunt of Redwing *Turdus iliacus* and Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*. Below, Lonsfjordur, Vestahorn and Greylag Geese. (Photos: J. Boswall)





Plate 9. Above, Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur* feeding under the fierce mid-day sun in the Niger Inundation Zone, Mali, March 1973. Below, left, Turtle Dove with outstretched wing in sunbathing posture, Kara, Mali, March 1973. (The bird in shaded foreground is a Black-billed Wood Dove *Turtur abyssinicus*.) Below, right, dried up borders of Lake Takadji, near Niafouké, Mali, March 1973. Large numbers of Turtle Doves were observed passing through this area at this season (pages 67-71). (Photos: Peter J. Curry)





Plates 10 and 11. The Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Porlock Marsh, Somerset, October 1973. This bird would allow a close approach and continued with its loafing, above (photo: Kevin Harris), during which it often preened and slept, or feeding, below (photo: B.W. Thomas), providing that the observer was cautious. Note the very long bill and wide dark bars on the uppertail — identification points that help separate this species from the Short-billed Dowitcher *L. griseus*. See *Brit. Birds* 54:343-357 and 61:366-372 on dowitcher identification.





Plate 12. Heron *Ardea cinerea* in alert pose, Mark Moor, May 1973. (Photo: Robin Williams)

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*. The least numerous of the four large gulls – indeed a rather uncommon bird. Three or four adults and some third-year birds at Hofn; three adults at Lon; less than ten birds round Alftafjordur feeding among grass; about 25 adults at Djupivogur and a few adults seen south-west of Hofn on 27 June.

Two or three very anxious pairs with Lesser Black-backs on Fossnes peninsula on 26 June must have been nesting; I suspect they had small young hidden in the grass. A group of about 30 birds seen in the hills south of Alftafjordur on 22 June near Grimshjalli may well have been nesting. Similarly a group of a dozen observed by Sigurdur Eymundsson near Rustanof on 23 June. Eymundsson believes the species to be increasing as a nester. Roberts (1934) saw none and his "careful enquiries brought no evidence of breeding in Iceland". Gudmundsson's 1951 map of the breeding distribution of the Herring Gull in Iceland entirely excludes nesting along the south-east coast.

GLAUCOUS GULL *Larus hyperboreus*. Seen in company with mainly immature Great and Lesser Black-backs and Herring around Hofn. Of 39 carefully examined on 25 June, 29 were presumed first and second-summer birds mottled or blotched with brown, seven were third-summer birds mainly grey on the wings and with immature bill colour, one was a presumed fourth-summer bird with yellow bill but a few brownish wing feathers and one appeared fully adult. Of the 200-250 gulls around the fish factory at Hofn on 25 June, almost certainly more than half were Glaucous Gulls. At Djupivogur on 29 June there were at least nine Glaucous Gulls of which three were adult.

S. Eymundsson believes that one or two pairs of Glaucous Gulls have probably nested on the Fossnes peninsula for a number of years. I found a nest with three newly hatched chicks a few hundred metres north of the Lesser Black-back colony there on 26 June. One very anxious adult called persistently overhead and another was briefly seen flying over the nest area. Two more adult Glaucous Gulls, among the Black-backs, may well have been nesting. S. Eymundsson believes a pair were nesting at Stokksnes in 1974. Not shown as nesting in our area by Peterson and others (1974).

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*. The commonest of the four large gulls. At Hofn immature birds were almost as common as immature Glaucous Gulls; less so at Djupivogur. Adult Great Black-backs, usually singles or pairs, were almost an hourly sight all along the coast, and no doubt most were breeding. A pair at Lon on 21 June had two very small chicks. S. Eymundsson believes they nest on islands in Hornafjordur, and it is likely that they also breed on the shingle bars that divide the lagoons from the sea. Roberts (1934) describes this species as "increasing rapidly in the south-east of Iceland" but over the last twenty years Eymundsson had noticed no continuing increase.

The experience of these two observers is consistent with the statement by Bjornsson (1970) who wrote of the status of this species in the Oraefi county, particularly on the Breidamerkursandur, as follows: "The Great Black-backed Gull increased considerably in numbers about the turn of the century, and the first two or three decades thereafter, in spite of the fact that gull eggs and young gulls were to quite some extent used for



food. This is certainly correlated with their habit of feeding on the edible entrails of fish discarded by trawlers fishing close to the seashore . . . Trawlers disappeared from these locations about 1930, and it became more difficult for the gulls to obtain plenty of easily available food. At present the gulls are fewer on Breidamerkursandur and it also appears more difficult for the birds to rear their young". Two at sea on 25 June attending gutting operations.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*. One adult by Hamarsfjordur on 30 June.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*. One immature and one adult at Hofn on 17 June; one immature at sea on 25 June; five adults and two immatures at Djupivogur on 30 June. Among the Fulmars on Mikley, two Kittiwakes were in occupation of a sheer cliff nest site, and there were three other adults and one immature perching nearby. Mikley is an island east of Hofn. S. Eymundsson saw an occupied nest site at the same place in 1973. The nearest colony is on Papey. It is hazardous to draw an inference from one nest and a few birds but it could be that the nesting of these birds may later be shown to indicate that this species is increasing in Iceland as it is known to be in Britain, Ireland, Norway and elsewhere. One consequence of this increase has been that new colonies have been formed on lower cliffs than formerly used by Kittiwakes (J.C. Coulson in Cramp and others 1974). The Mikley cliff was only about 10 metres high.

ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*. A very common species. Three nesting colonies near Hofn: one on a small islet immediately to the west of the town with perhaps 100 pairs; the second on Osland, south of Hofn, with perhaps 200 pairs and the third on Alogarey (now part of Hofn). This last colony, of about 300 pairs, was nesting inside a strictly fenced area containing two huge petroleum storage tanks. The birds had obviously recognised the sanctuary value of the area. Only seven nests could be found outside the fence. On 2 July, of 113 nests examined inside the fence, thirteen were empty, and of the remaining one hundred, 27 had one egg, 42 two eggs, and 1 three eggs; 10 had one egg and one chick, 12 had single chicks (including four dead), and 8 had two chicks (including two dead couples). Almost all the chicks were newly-hatched or less than two or three days old; only a very few individuals looked four to seven days old. A colony in the marsh at Lon had about twenty pairs on 21 June. A few pairs of Black-headed Gulls shared the area and one nest contained two gulls' eggs and one tern's. It would seem likely that the species also nests on the shingle bars between the lagoons and the sea, and on the *sandurs*, i.e. the outwash gravel pans of the rivers.

During 14 hours at sea on 25 June only occasional Arctic Terns were seen, and only twice was an individual seen to dive for food. This method of seeking prey was being used by a few birds on 21 June, at Lonsfjordur. In the vicinity of Hofn such behaviour was not observed though one or two birds carrying presumed sand eels were seen. Thus the plunge-diving traditionally associated with this *Sterna* and others was only rarely observed. Instead, it would appear the species picks prey from still freshwater and from estuarine tidal water after the manner of a marsh tern, (e.g. Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*) this method being fairly frequently noticed; but much more often, indeed commonly, birds hunted over cultivated or natural grassland. Birds in tens or scores could be seen hovering Kestrel-like about 2 or 3 metres above the greensward. An individual bird would hover, move on a few yards, hover again, move on, hover, and maybe only then drop swiftly into the grass. To the observer afterwards walking through the grass the only noticeable fairly common animal was the small moth *Epirrhoe alternata* (kindly identified by Halfdan Bjornsson), though other invertebrates were also present. See also Roberts (1934) on the "insect" food of this species.

On the night 27/28 June, the only time when observations were specifically made on the point, Arctic Terns were actively feeding over fields and fresh water until at least midnight local time, (i.e. 0100 hours G.M.T.). A small proportion of the terns were supposedly immature birds, one or two years old, showing a white forehead, all-dark bill and short rectrices.

GUILLEMOT *Uria aalge*. A few singles and doubles seen at sea on 25 June. The nearest nesting colonies of this auk and of the Razorbill *Alca torda* are on Ingolfshofdi to the south-west and on Papey.

BLACK GUILLEMOT *Cephus grylle*. One seen near the Hvanney rocks at the entrance to Hornafjordur on 25 June and four birds at Stokksnes on 2 July. S. Eymundsson believes they nest at both localities.

PUFFIN *Fratercula arctica*. A few small parties seen at sea on 25 June; others observed flying into and out of Hornafjordur where they appear to nest on the tiny island of Kexishofdi. They are also known to nest on nearby Borgey, at Stokksnes on the coast, and just north of there at Hafnartangi (S. Eymundsson). Roberts' colony on Alogarey no longer exists as the island is now joined to Hofn by a causeway. He reports the species as nesting at Vesta Horn.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*. A fairly common nesting bird usually found on better-drained cultivated areas or moorland often near sea-level. Particularly common in the birch "forest" near Hoffell on 28 June. Food-carrying observed on 28 June; a fledgling seen on 30th.

WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba*. Seen mainly around human habitations, but also with sufficient frequency well away from houses to suggest that the species is not exclusively attendant on man. A nest at Reydara had fledged young on 21 June, and fledglings were seen in other localities on 24th, 26th, 27th and 28 June (three localities). No fledglings were seen prior to 21 June though one or two adults carrying food were observed. Food-carrying was also seen after 21 June on 25th and 27th.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*. None seen or heard. The birch forest at Hoffell where Roberts (1934) found a Wren produced none. An extremely local nester according to S. Eymundsson who knew of only one nesting locality in recent years. (The species occurs every winter, however.)

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Easily the commonest passerine, found usually in areas of rocky outcrop though also in flatter stoney habitats. Food-carrying on 27 June and 2 July. First fledgling seen on 28 June. On five or six occasions hovering in search of prey was seen, the bird remaining suspended in a distinctive manner for several seconds before repeating the performance. The height above the ground was about two metres.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*. Reliably to be found in the vicinity of all human habitation, township or farm. In Hofn tv aeriels were particularly favoured as singing perches. The species appeared to sing all night. A nest in a barn at Reydara had three eggs on 20 June, four on 22nd and five on 24th and 25 June, presumably an intended second brood since three other nests in the farm buildings had already fledged young between 7 and 14 days before. One adult carrying food near Vik on 24 June. The species seemed particularly numerous in the birch "forest" near Hoffell on 28 June where one bird was carrying food and where an apparently new but empty nest in a bank among the trees was found. S. Eymundsson's experience is that nests in birch forests are on the ground and yet given the opportunity the species frequently builds in introduced trees between 1.50 and 2.00 metres above the ground. That this habit of using ornamental trees and buildings has grown up in the last twenty years or so is confirmed, in effect, by Roberts (1934) who wrote "The distribution of this species seems to be largely influenced by the quantity of birch-scrub forest in the district and as this is very rare in the south-east, Redwings are not often seen. They were recorded only at Hoffell, where there is a small forest".

SNOW BUNTING *Plectrophenax nivalis*. A pair of adults and two very recently fledged young among buildings on Hofn quay, 17 June. One bird seen in area of rocky outcrops near Gethellar on 22 June; a male seen in similar terrain near Reydara on 21 June and one in song on scree east of that farm on 24 June. Also on 24 June six birds including two males in song near Vik farm. On 26 June a female carrying food was seen on the Fossnes peninsula which is moorland with very few rocks — not the most usual habitat. On 27 June a female Snow Bunting was seen about 5 kms. north-east of the Jokulsa bridge, and a male at the bridge. On 28 June a pair was seen near the scree by Hoffell and a fledgling seen near Bjarnanes. On 29th and 30th birds were seen at two localities on Hamarsfjordur. Localities have been listed in some detail for this species because Roberts (1934) described it as "Extremely scarce on the coast. They avoid the low-lying grass-plains and swamps, and only occur high up in the mountains near the ice cap". It is difficult to know whether this species has increased or not.

REDPOLL *Acanthis flammea*. None found in the Hoffell birch "forest" where Roberts (1934) found a bird, nor anywhere else. Unknown as a breeding bird to S. Eymundsson (though it occurs in winter).

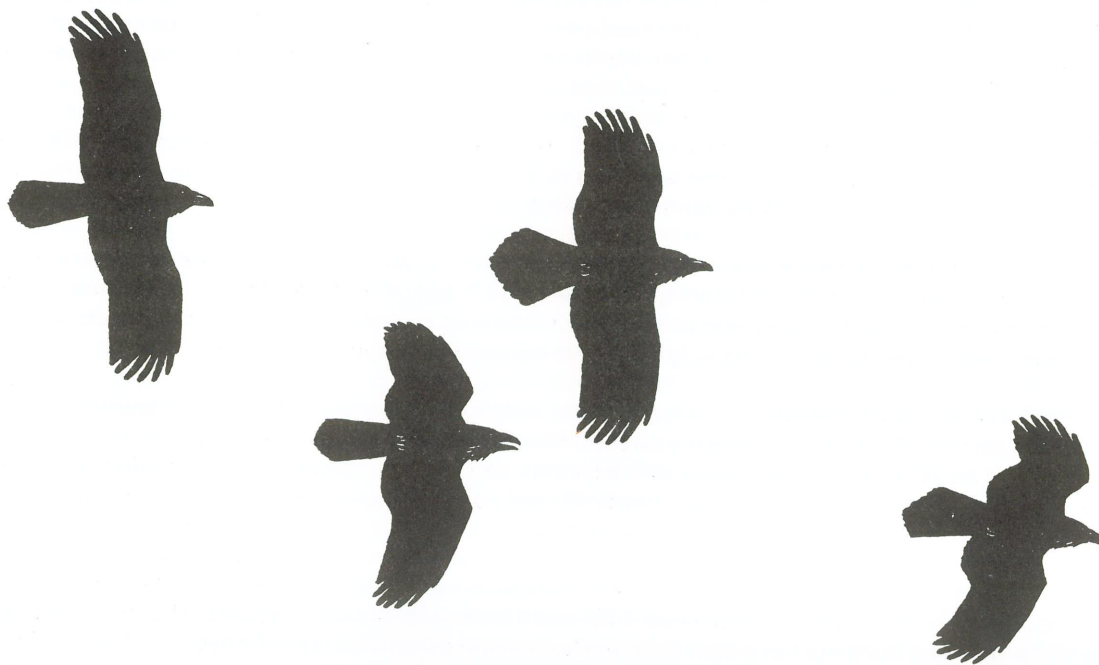
STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*. Only seen at Hofn, where one pair was nesting in a natural site under a tussock of grass on the edge of a small cliff on Alogarey (Hofn). A bird was seen entering the hole on 25 June. A flock of

about forty birds was seen on 19 June, and fourteen on 25 June. In neither case was it possible to positively age the birds, but they were almost certainly not young of the year.

What S. Edmundsson believes may have been the first local nest was found by his father in a natural cliff site in the mid-1930's. Eymundsson himself has found a nest in a cliff on Mikley Island, where the birds have also been known to roost communally in a ruined building.

Roberts (1934) reported no Starlings. Gudmundsson (1951) says that the Starling has bred in Hornafjordur since 1941, this being the first Icelandic area to be properly colonised. Since then it has spread.

RAVEN *Corvus corax*. Seen daily, up to eight birds together. A proportion were birds of the year.



RJR

Acknowledgements

Dr. Janet Kear first suggested that I visit the south-east of Iceland and look at summering Whoopers there. She and other members of the Wildfowl Trust's research unit were most helpful with advance information and advice. Sigurdur Eymundsson of Hofn gave much valuable advice and many data. Thorsteinn Giersson and his wife Vigdis allowed me to make Reydara Farm my home for four nights. The police at Hofn were particularly helpful. Hafsteinn Steffansson and Kristin Gudjonsson kindly took me to sea with them.

My visit to Iceland was made possible by a grace term leave grant from the BBC, and I am particularly grateful to Stuart Wyton, head of the BBC's Bristol network production centre. Wendy Dickson checked the scientific names and undertook the typing. Robin Prytherch drew the map and the ecological profile. R.F. Dickens checked through an earlier draft of the paper and made some useful comments.

References

- Bannerman, D.A. 1957. *Birds of the British Isles*, Vol. 6. Oliver & Boyd.
 Beckett, J. Angus. 1934. *Iceland Adventure*. Witherby.

- Bjornsson, Flosi. 1970. A short survey of changes in the Oraefi-County and the adjacent country. *Annual Report and Account of Expeditions in 1969*. Brathay Exploration Group.
- Boswall, Jeffery (in prep.) Some notes on the Whooper Swan in Iceland.
- Boyd, H. 1963. Whooper Swans seen in aerial surveys of parts of Iceland in early July 1963. Unpublished report of the Wildfowl Trust.
- Boyd, H. and Eltringham, S.K. 1962. The Whooper Swan in Great Britain. *Bird Study* 9:217–41.
- Brathay Exploration Group. 1959–68. *Iceland Bird Reports 1959–68*. Brathay Exploration Group, Brathay Hall, Ambleside, Westmorland.
- 1969 *Expedition Field Study Reports, number 6, Iceland Expedition 1969*. Ornithology. Brathay Exploration Group, Address above.
- 1970. The South-east Iceland Expedition 1970. *Field Studies Report No. 12*. Brathay Exploration Group, address above.
- Cramp, S., Bourne, W.R.P., and Saunders, D. 1974. *The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland*. Collins.
- Dickens, R.F. 1964. The North Atlantic population of the Great Skua. *British Birds* 57:209–10.
- Fisher, James. 1952. *The Fulmar*. Collins, New Naturalist.
- Gardarsson, A. 1967. The Waterfowl Situation in Iceland. *Proc. Second European Meeting on Wildfowl Conservation* pp. 78–80.
- Gudmundsson, F. 1951. The effects of the recent climatic changes on the bird life of Iceland. *Proc. Xth Intern. Orn. Congr.* : 502–514.
- 1954. Islenzkir fuglar. IX Skumur (*Stercorarius skua*). *Naturuffrae dingurinn* 24:132–6.
- Kear, J. 1964 a. The changing status of the Greylag Goose and the Whooper Swan on agricultural land in Iceland. Unpublished report to the Ministry of Agriculture, Reykjavik.
- 1964 b. Final report on the Effects of Wildfowl on Icelandic Agriculture. Privately issued report.
- 1967. Feeding habits of the Greylag Goose *Anser anser* in Iceland, with reference to its interaction with agriculture. *VII Congres de Biologistes du Gibier* : 615–622.
- Peterson, R., Mountfort, G., and Hollom, P.A.D. 1974. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*. Third edition.
- Roberts, B.B. 1934. Notes on the birds of central and south-east Iceland. *Ibis* (13) 4:239–64.
- Rutledge, Robert F. 1974. Winter distribution of Whooper and Bewick's Swans in Ireland. *Bird Study* 21 (2) : 141–145.
- Slater, H.H. 1901. *Manual of the Birds of Iceland*. Edinburgh.

Appendix A: Birds known or believed to breed regularly in the area (for fuller details see systematic list)

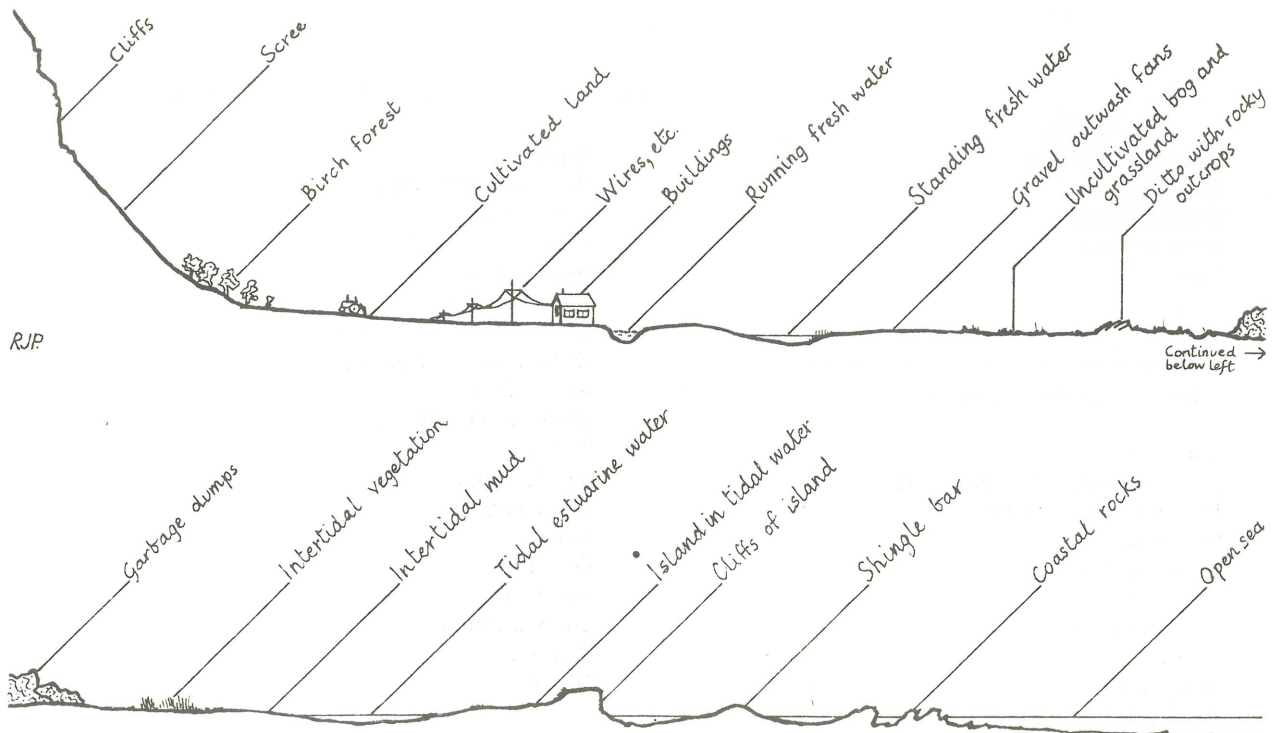
Red-throated Diver	Snipe
Fulmar	Red-necked Phalarope
Greylag Goose	Great Skua
Whooper Swan	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Teal	Herring Gull
Wigeon	Glaucous Gull
(Pintail – possible regular nester)	Great Black-backed Gull
(Tufted Duck – possible regular nester)	(Kittiwake – ?regularly)
(Scaup – possible regular nester).	Arctic Tern
Eider	Black Guillemot
Harlequin	Puffin
(Long-tailed Duck – formerly)	Meadow Pipit
Red-breasted Merganser	White Wagtail
Ptarmigan	Wren
Oystercatcher	Wheatear
Ringed Plover	Redwing
Golden Plover	Snow Bunting
Dunlin	Starling
Redshank	Raven
Whimbrel	

Appendix B: Summary of changes in status or numbers of breeding species in the area (for fuller details see systematic list)

Red-throated Diver — recent increase
 Fulmar — has increased
 Greylag Goose — has increased
 Whooper Swan — has increased
 Tufted Duck — possibly a colonist, almost certainly increasing
 Long-tailed Duck — has become extinct this century
 Oystercatcher — has increased
 Redshank — has increased
 Great Skua — has apparently markedly fluctuated in numbers
 Arctic Skua — has apparently decreased
 Black-headed Gull — a colonist
 Lesser Black-backed Gull — has increased
 Herring Gull — a colonist
 Glaucous Gull — possibly a colonist
 Great Black-backed Gull — increased formerly
 Kittiwake — a colonist
 Redwing — has increased
 Starling — a colonist

Appendix C: A preliminary assessment of habitat selection in south-east Iceland

An attempt is made to group the thirty-one commoner or better-observed species habitat by habitat and to indicate how each uses each habitat in which it is found — whether for nesting, feeding, resting, perching, bathing, roosting or singing (or song-flighting).



*Birds of coastal south-east Iceland**Cliffs, high*

Fulmar — nesting
Raven — nesting (presumed)

Scree

Wheatear — nesting (presumed)
Snow Bunting — nesting

Birch forest

Redwing — nesting and feeding
Meadow Pipit — nesting (presumed)

Cultivated grassland

Snipe — nesting (presumed) and feeding
Lesser Black-backed Gull — feeding
Herring Gull — feeding
Black-headed Gull — feeding
Arctic Tern — nesting and feeding
Redwing — feeding

Wires, lamp standards, posts, tv aerials

Redshank — perching
Snipe — perching
Great Black-backed Gull — perching
Lesser Black-backed Gull — perching
Herring Gull — perching
Glaucous Gull — perching
Arctic Tern — perching
Raven — perching
Redwing — perching and singing
Wheatear — perching
Meadow Pipit — perching
White Wagtail — perching

Buildings

Snipe — perching
Great Black-backed Gull — perching
Lesser Black-backed Gull — perching
Herring Gull — perching
Glaucous Gull — perching
Redwing — nesting
White Wagtail — nesting
Starling — roosting

Running fresh water

Eider — feeding (presumed)
Red-necked Phalarope — feeding

Standing fresh water

Red-throated Diver — nesting (edges and islands)
Fulmar — bathing
Mallard — nesting (edges)
Whooper Swan — nesting (islands)
Red-necked Phalarope — feeding

Gravel outwash fans

Oystercatcher — nesting
Ringed Plover — nesting
Golden Plover — nesting
Redshank — nesting
Arctic Skua — nesting
Great Black-backed Gull — resting
Lesser Black-backed Gull — resting
Herring Gull — resting
Glaucous Gull — resting
Black-headed Gull — resting
Arctic Tern — nesting

Uncultivated grassland and bog

Mallard — nesting
Eider — nesting
Greylag Goose — nesting
Oystercatcher — nesting and (presumed) feeding
Golden Plover — nesting and feeding
Snipe — nesting and feeding
Whimbrel — nesting and feeding
Redshank — nesting and feeding
Dunlin — nesting and feeding
Red-necked Phalarope — nesting
Great Black-backed Gull — nesting
Lesser Black-backed Gull — nesting and feeding
Herring Gull — nesting and feeding
Glaucous Gull — nesting
Black-headed Gull — feeding and resting
Arctic Tern — feeding
Raven — feeding
Redwing — feeding
Wheatear — feeding
Meadow Pipit — feeding
White Wagtail — feeding
Snow Bunting — feeding

Rocky outcrops among grassland and bog

Wheatear — nesting
Snow Bunting — nesting (presumed) and feeding

Garbage dumps

Great Black-backed Gull — feeding
Lesser Black-backed Gull — feeding
Herring Gull — feeding
Glaucous Gull — feeding

Tidally exposed areas of vegetation

Mallard — feeding
Greylag Goose — feeding
Whooper Swan — feeding
Snipe — feeding
Redshank — feeding

Tidally exposed areas of mud

Mallard — feeding
 Greylag Goose — feeding
 Oystercatcher — feeding and resting
 Ringer Plover — feeding
 Redshank — feeding
 Dunlin — feeding
 Great Black-backed Gull — feeding and resting
 Lesser Black-backed Gull — feeding and resting
 Herring Gull — feeding and resting
 Glaucous Gull — feeding and resting
 Black-headed Gull — feeding
 Arctic Tern — feeding

Tidal estuarine water

Red-throated Diver — feeding (presumed)
 Mallard — feeding
 Eider — feeding
 Whooper Swan — feeding
 Red-necked Phalarope — feeding
 Great Skua — bathing
 Great Black-backed Gull — feeding
 Arctic Tern — feeding

Islands in tidal estuarine water

Fulmar — nesting
 Eider — nesting
 Arctic Skua — nesting
 Great Black-backed Gull — nesting
 Arctic Tern — nesting
 Puffin — nesting

Cliffs, low, on small islands in tidal water

Fulmar — nesting
 Kittiwake — nesting
 Starling — nesting

Shingle bars

Eider — resting
 Whooper Swan — resting
 Oystercatcher — nesting (presumed)
 Ringed Plover — nesting
 Arctic Skua — nesting
 Great Skua — nesting
 Great Black-backed Gull — nesting
 Lesser Black-backed Gull — resting
 Glaucous Gull — resting
 Arctic Tern — nesting

Coastal rocks

Fulmar — nesting
 Eider — nesting (presumed)
 Oystercatcher — nesting
 Black Guillemot — nesting

Sea

Red-throated Diver — feeding
 Fulmar — feeding
 Eider — feeding
 Great Black-backed Gull — feeding
 Lesser Black-backed Gull — feeding
 Kittiwake — feeding
 Arctic Tern — feeding
 Black Guillemot — feeding
 Puffin — feeding

Air

Snipe — singing
 Whimbrel — singing
 Redshank — singing
 Dunlin — singing
 Arctic Skua — feeding
 Great Skua — feeding
 Wheatear — singing
 Meadow Pipit — singing

Jeffery Boswall

Natural History Unit, BBC, Whiteladies Road, Bristol, BS8 2LR



THE OCCURRENCE AND BEHAVIOUR OF TURTLE DOVES IN THE INUNDATION ZONE OF THE NIGER, MALI.

by Peter J. Curry

Plate 9

The Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* inhabits a vast breeding range of perhaps 12,000,000 km² from the Atlantic coast of Europe across Asia to about 110°E (Vaurie, 1965). The whereabouts of the species' winter quarters was, until recently, one of the great enigmas of bird migration studies (Smith, 1970). Since few were ever observed in India it was assumed that almost the entire population wintered in Africa, although it was not until the mid 1960s that any large numbers were found south or west of the Sahara. Then Turtle Doves were discovered to be common in northern Nigeria (Elgood, Sharland and Ward, 1966) and in Senegal (Morel and Roux, 1966). In the lower Senegal valley it was found that after small numbers passed through in autumn from July to September, Turtle Doves were absent until February when they suddenly appeared after the rice harvest. Elsewhere, observation from Chad, Cameroon and Congo all added weight to Moreau's prediction (1961) that the major wintering grounds would prove to be the savannah zones south of the Sahara, although the known instances of supporting observation remain surprisingly few. Moreau (1972) did not cite any records from the upper or middle Niger regions between Senegal and Nigeria, although there was one record published of several hundred birds in the Inundation Zone of the Niger during mid-April 1960 (Duhart and Descamps, 1963).

During 1972 and 1973, I made three visits to Mali where I was stationed with the Organisation Internationale contre le Criquet Migrateur Africain (OICMA) at Kara (14°09' N, 5°01' W) on the southern flood plains of the Niger Inundation Zone. During these visits I travelled fairly widely in the region between Ségou and the lake-bed zone to the south of Timbuctoo, and during a total of six months spent in the area (mid-June to mid-August 1972, February to early April and mid-September to early November 1973) made the following observations of Turtle Doves.

Early Autumn period (1972)

From 14 July to 6 August, single birds were present around Kara, sometimes consorting with local Laughing Doves *Streptopelia senegalensis*. This unlikely time of the year for Turtle Doves to be south of the Sahara initially suggested that the birds might be stragglers summering in the region; however it seems relevant to add that during July, Swifts *Apus apus* passed through Kara from the 18th and Melodious Warblers *Hippolais polyglotta* from the 27th. The occurrence of these three palaeartic species in July indicates how early the forerunners of autumn migration may cross the Sahara. In behaviour, these early autumn Turtle Doves differed little from the resident dove species, feeding on bare patches of ground near the village and flying into trees when disturbed.

Late Autumn Period (1973)

The only Turtle Doves which I encountered were in small groups *flying south* at fairly low altitude: on 5 October at Kara and also on 10th in the sahel west of Dogo - in all only about 60 birds.

Late Winter Period (1973)

The months of February, March and April are characterised by an intensifying dry season on the southern side of the Sahara. In the Inundation Zone, the previous winter flood was one of the smallest on record and by February much of the area was reduced to a state of semi-desert, relieved only by small areas of

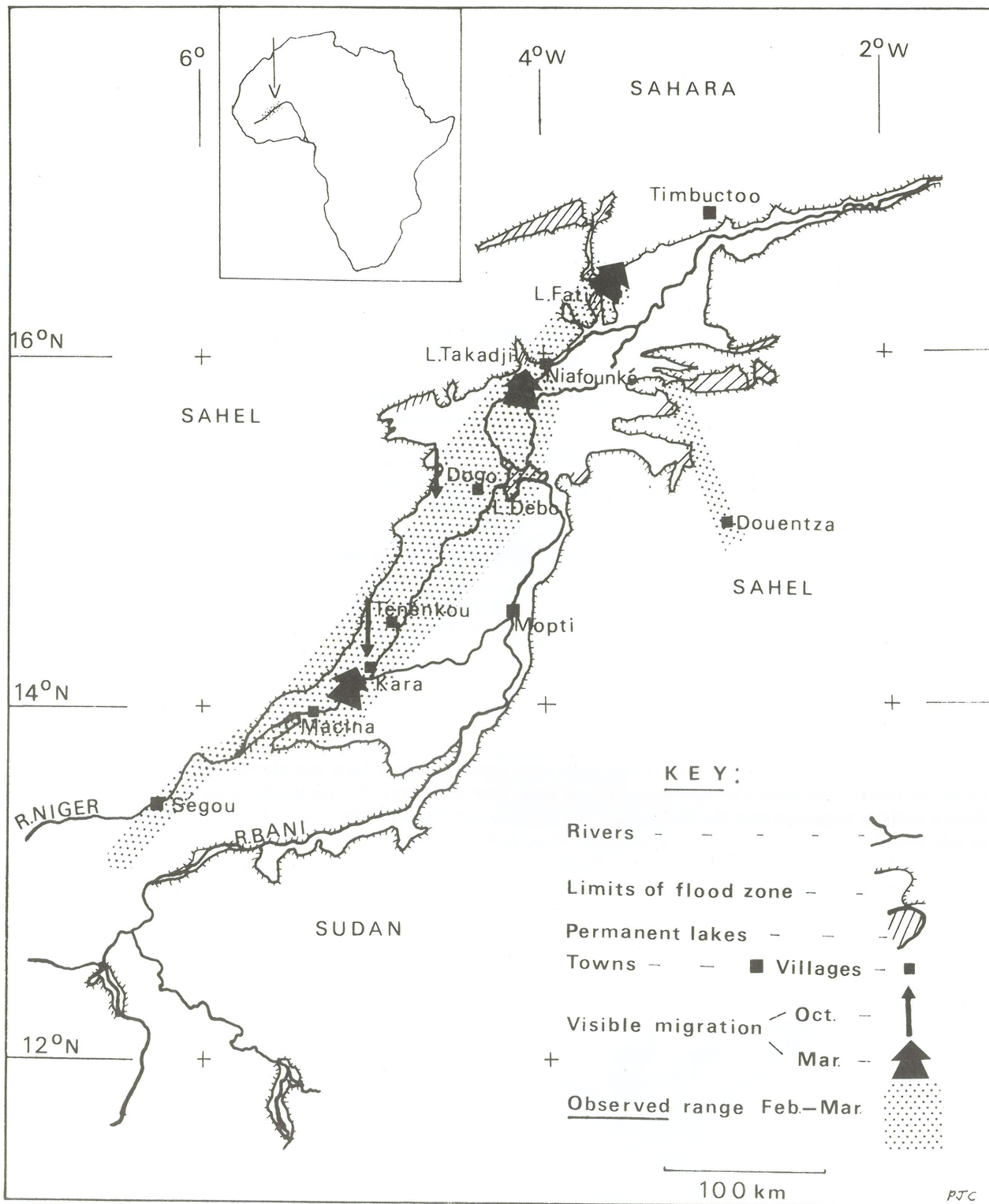


Figure 1. Location (inset) and topography of the Niger Inundation Zone, showing observed range of wintering Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur*.

rapidly disappearing floodwater which were mainly adjacent to the major river beds. Very large tracts of flood plain had thus received no moisture since the rains of the previous summer and much of the savannah was severely desiccated, with the vegetation worn away in the heavily grazed regions.

On 13 February, I travelled from Ségou to Kara and encountered groups of Turtle Doves at the roadside, the flocks becoming larger and more numerous as the journey progressed, and greatly outnumbering Long-tailed Doves *Oena capensis* which was the most abundant dove in the wooded regions further south. To the north-east of Macina, in addition to large numbers flushed at the roadside, there appeared great flocks of Turtle Doves in loose chevron formations flying into the watercourses. During the two hours before sunset many thousands were flying in and out of the riverine area. Many were observed drinking, and it seemed likely that the mass flight was a drinking movement concerning birds flying in from a wide area. Massive flocks of Turtle Doves flying to drink have also been observed in northern Nigeria (near Maiduguri) and in the Benue valley (P. Ward - pers. comm.). Further north in the Inundation Zone I did not encounter drinking movements on anything like so large a scale, presumably because of the more widespread availability of water here than in the vicinity of Macina where there was probably little water available away from the Niger. From the date of these observations, I encountered flocks of Turtle Doves virtually everywhere I went on the western side of the Inundation Zone, where it appeared to be the most common dove between 14° and 16°N. I did not visit the eastern flood plains but it seems likely that the birds were equally common here; J.A. Sayer described them as abundant in the north-eastern sahel and lake-bed region between 15° and 16°N in February 1974 (see Fig. 1.). The total number present in the Inundation Zone during February and March was apparently enormous; flocks of tens, hundreds and occasionally thousands were to be seen all over the plains.

The migrant doves associated little with the resident species, usually inhabiting the most open and least vegetated areas. Their commonest associates were flocks of Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and also Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*; less often Laughing Doves and Mourning Doves *Streptopelia decipiens* mixed with groups which fed close to wooded areas. The flocks appeared to feed throughout the day and examination of the ground on which they foraged revealed only scattered grass seeds as a likely food source. The dominant grasses of the flood plain are perennials; *Vetiveria nigriflora*, *Echinochloa stagnina*, *Panicum*, *Eragrostis* and *Cenchrus* species are the most abundant; rice (*Oryza*) has not been grown extensively during the recent drought years and it is unlikely that much is eaten by more than a small proportion of birds in the region. The Turtle Doves' observed preference for feeding in sparsely wooded or treeless areas of the flood plains appeared to minimise contact and competition with the resident doves, whose habitats at this time of the year are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. The resident species of doves in the Niger Inundation Zone.

Species:	Habitat:
Rock Dove <i>Columba livia</i>	Rocky areas, feral in towns.
Speckled Pigeon <i>Columba guinea</i>	Towns, villages and lightly wooded areas with <i>Borassus</i> palms.
Mourning Dove <i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>	Wooded areas and villages, usually near the rivers.
Vinaceous Dove <i>Streptopelia vinacea</i>	Mixed bush in more open and drier regions than <i>decipiens</i> .
Pink-headed Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> (or <i>roseogrisea</i>)	Arid <i>Acacia</i> areas and dune sahel, always near trees.
Laughing or Palm Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Widespread, rarely far from trees, common in towns and villages.
Long-tailed Dove <i>Oena capensis</i>	Addicted to wooded or bushy areas, mainly south of 14°N during dry season.
Black-billed Wood Dove <i>Turtur abyssinicus</i>	Woods and bushy grassland throughout.
Bruce's Green Pigeon <i>Treron waalia</i>	Mainly fig trees.

Unlike the resident dove species which often sought shade and water during the day, the Turtle Doves remained exposed to the fierce sun on the flood plains throughout the entire daytime. It was only in the sand-dune regions from Niafounké northwards that I came across birds sheltering from the mid-day heat. Here the daily air temperatures reached 45°C or higher during March and April; groups of doves were frequently flushed from trees or found huddled under tiny shrubs in their attempts to escape the relentless sun. In the slightly cooler climate of the southern flood plains, the doves only sought trees (remote areas of *Acacia*) for overnight roosting. The flocks were more sensitive to human presence than the resident species and did not appear amongst the mixed flocks of doves which roosted in the trees at Kara. The Turtle Dove flocks were observed to drink only at dusk before flying to roost, although Ward's observations in Nigeria suggest that they also drink after dawn upon departing from the roost site. I observed daytime drinking on one occasion only, when at 1500 hrs a bird which had flown into the vegetable garden at Kara appeared to take drops from a hose spray. Immediately afterwards the dove spread its left wing out close to the ground and remained motionless in what seemed to be a sunbathing posture (see Plate 9). The air temperature at the time was about 38°C and from the way the bird had positioned itself there seemed little doubt that it was seeking sunshine, possibly for reasons other than body warming (see Discussion).

Throughout this period, parties of Turtle Doves flying fairly high and consistently north to north-east were a frequent sight. The flights could be observed at any time of the day, but were particularly regular before mid-day and towards dusk (before drinking). This "visible migration" in north or north-easterly direction was observed in several areas as far north as Lake Fati, which represented the limit of my observations. How far north the birds were to be found grounded (i.e. not having taken off for trans-Saharan flight) was not ascertained, although at 16°30'N more were seen in the air than on the ground. These northward flights reduced the numbers present on the flood plains during March, with a particularly noticeable exodus at the end of the month; for example between Dogo and Ténénkou I estimated 2,500 at the roadside on the 29th, but only 450 there on 4 April. When I left the Inundation Zone on 7 April, I noted small flocks along the Niger almost as far south as Bamako, but certainly the greatest number had moved north of the soudan zone by the end of March.

Discussion

The studies of Morel (unpublished; see Moreau, 1972), on the feeding of doves in Senegal, have suggested that migrant Turtle Doves feed on the same seeds as the local resident *Streptopelia* species. Large numbers of Turtle Doves present in the Inundation Zone from February to April exhibited very marked preference for feeding in the most open areas of the flood plains, unlike the resident doves which fed mostly in or near wooded areas of various types. By the exploitation of food sources in areas which are not habitually foraged by more than a small proportion of any resident dove, competition between migrant and resident doves would appear to be low during the essential period of feeding from February to April, when the Turtle Doves need to build up fat reserves sufficient to carry them across the Sahara to the palaeartic spring. Differences in the feeding habits of palaeartic migrants from those of closely related species resident south of the Sahara are generally not well known, but have been the subject of much recent interest (see Morel, 1973). For Turtle Doves in Mali, it seems possible that the great numbers of dry-ground feeding Ruffs and various finches (most notably enormous flocks of Red-billed *Quelea quelea*) are more important competitors for seeds on the flood plains than are the resident doves.

The prolonged feeding fully exposed to the sun, observed during the late dry season, indicates that the birds are well adapted to the conditions which they encounter whilst south of the Sahara; Moreau drew attention to the reduction in energy requirements which migrants undergo when experiencing high ambient temperatures in the Sahel Zone. Under these conditions, activity recognisable as sunbathing may indicate that exposing the feathers to sunshine facilitates processes other than body warming, such as those suggested by Goodwin (1967) in the production of vitamin D by the exposure of preen oil to ultra-violet light, or to encourage the movement of any ectoparasites present.

Although the observations given here do not include any period from mid-August to mid-September, or from mid-November to early February, some inferences can be drawn about the pattern of movement shown by Turtle Doves wintering in Mali and elsewhere in West Africa. As in Senegal, the numbers observed in Mali during autumn have been minute compared with early spring. In Nigeria, Elgood *et al.* (1966) said that flocks seen between

12° and 13°N were "apparently stationary" between December and March; they suggested that these were birds forced southwards from the edge of the desert by the advancing dry season. If this were the case, then it at first seems reasonable to suggest that between September and December large numbers could be found between about 15° and 18°N, perhaps in such areas as the northern lake-beds of Mali, around Niger bend and across Chad. Such records from these latitudes are lacking; considering the recent expansion of sub-desert south of the Sahara, caused primarily by years of low rainfall, a desert-edge habitat during the early winter period must now be very unlikely. From the persistently northward direction of movement in the Inundation Zone from February to April, I was given the impression that the birds were moving out of the more southerly soudanese savannah belt which they are known to inhabit further east (in Nigeria and Cameroon). The observation of birds flying south in the Inundation Zone in October adds weight to the probability that Turtle Doves overfly the sahel savannah zone in autumn and reach areas nearer the Equator than known at present, before following an irregularly northward availability of suitable feeding areas throughout West Africa. Such areas may be created as the savannahs are grazed, cut, blown or burnt down from their full height attained after the rains cease (between August and November, depending on latitude). Why so little autumn migration has been noted south of the Sahara may be due to the doves flying very high, but their range between October and January remains largely undiscovered, probably reflecting the unfortunate lack of field work on birds which is apparent for much of West Africa.

Acknowledgements

My grateful thanks are due to Dr. R.F. Chapman, Dr. P. Ward and Robin J. Prytherch for their helpful comments and criticism in the preparation of this paper; also to Mrs. Glenda Colquhoun for producing the black and white plates shown here from my original badly over-exposed colour transparencies.

References

- Duhart, F. and Descamps, M. 1963. Notes sur l'avifaune du delta central Nigerien. *Oiseau* 33: 1 – 107. (No. special).
 Elgood, J.H., Sharland, R.E. and Ward, P. 1966. Palaeartic migrants in Nigeria. *Ibis* 108: 84 – 116.
 Goodwin, D. 1967. Some possible functions of sun-bathing in birds. *Brit Birds* 60: 363 – 365.
 Moreau, R.E. 1961. Problems of Mediterranean – Saharan migration. *Ibis* 103: 373 – 427, 580 – 623.
 Moreau, R.E. 1972. *The Palaeartic – African Bird Migration Systems*. London.
 Morel, G. 1973. The Sahel Zone as an environment for palaeartic migrants. *Ibis* 115: 413 – 417.
 Morel, G. and Roux, F. 1966. Les migrateurs palaeartiques au Senegal. *La Terre et la Vie* 20: 19 – 72, 143 – 176.
 Smith, K.D. 1970. Some African enigmas. *Bristol Ornithology* 3: 118 – 124.
 Vaurie, C. 1965. *The Birds of the Palaeartic Fauna. A systematic reference. Non-passeriformes*. London.

Peter Curry

Centre for Overseas Pest Research, Wrights Lane, London W8 5SJ



NOTES

Another albino Great Crested Grebe

I can add another record to those assembled by Bernard King in *Bristol Ornithology* 6 (1973): 25-28. In 1961, Sir Julian Huxley kindly drew my attention to a letter in *The Field* for 22 October 1938 by J.C.M. Nichols. On 8 October of the same year, this observer saw 'a pure white' Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* at close quarters on Fleet Pond, Hampshire. The bird, which was 'white from beak to tail' apart from 'the faintest tinge of blue-grey along the back', was definitely not just an adult in winter plumage but one still in breeding dress showing 'a considerable crest'.

In return for his information, I told Sir Julian about the specimen of an albino grebe I had seen in the collection of the British Museum (Natural History) while revising the species of world grebes (see *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 82 (1962): 109-116). This evidently was the bird collected at Cleethorps, Lincolnshire, on 29 December 1927, and identified by the late H.F. Witherby as a Red-necked Grebe *P. grisegena* (*Brit. Birds* 21 (1928): 264). As pointed out by Bernard King, however, the specimen was labelled at the museum as a Great Crested Grebe and I must say that I had no reason to doubt this latter identification at the time, though I made no critical examination. It is hoped that the puzzle about this bird will be cleared up without much further delay.

K.E.L. Simmons
Dept. of Psychology, The University, Leicester

Sand Martins nesting in drainage holes by main roads in the Bristol area

P.L. Williams has described the successful nesting of Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* in drainage holes in a brick wall on a B road at Marlborough, Wiltshire, in 1966 (*Brit. Birds* 60 (1967): 167-168). He includes a comment by R.A.O. Hickling and I.J. Fergusson-Lees to the effect that they knew of no comparable record of such a site near a road. However, in the experience of P.J. Chadwick, the writer and others, breeding of Sand Martins has occurred many times in drainage holes within the Bristol area. For instance, P.J.C. recorded 30 - 50 breeding pairs during the summer of 1958 in the drainage holes of the limestone retaining wall of J.S. Fry and Sons at Somerdale, Keynsham (*Proc. Bristol Nat. Soc.* 1958: 453). This wall is by the B4427 road and some 250 metres from the River Avon. I observed Sand Martins nesting there on many occasions between 1935 and 1950. In the initial post war years I also noticed Sand Martins nesting in the drainage pipes of the high limestone wall alongside the busy A4 in Brislington, Bristol (opposite the Ritz Cinema [now rebuilt as a supermarket] but a little nearer to Eagle Road). To my knowledge there was no stream nearby for the use of birds. Some two or three pairs bred in most years but as I thought these observations were rather ordinary, I fell into the trap of not keeping records.

A number of other drainage hole sites have been listed in *The Birds of Somerset* (E.M. Palmer and D.K. Ballance, 1968: 135). These include "Recently, regular only in wall-drains between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street Stations, Batheaston and Keynsham." and "One or two pairs recently in wall-drains and banks, Taunton and Nynehead."

Bernard King
Gull Cry, 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall

Least Sandpipers using free-floating vegetation as a feeding platform

S.G. Madge has described the interesting behaviour at Ndola, Zambia, in 1970 and 1971 of water-birds, waders and passerines using rather thick and bulky free-floating vegetation as feeding platforms (*Bird Study* 19 (1972):

172). I have made observations both in this country and in the U.S.A. which will show that the use of such platforms is, perhaps, quite widespread.

On 17 September, 1950, at Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset, I discovered two Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* using vegetation well away from the waters edge upon which to preen and rest (*Brit. Birds* 64 (1971): 29-30). However, more recently, on 29 March, 1972, at Flamingo in the Everglades National Park, Florida, U.S.A., I found five Least Sandpipers *Eriola minutilla* using an extremely thin layer of free-floating vegetation a little off shore. The birds (which are about the same size as Little Stints *Calidris minuta*) were endeavouring, with some considerable difficulty, to seek food. The floating matter was so thin that when shallow ripples occasionally swamped it the sandpipers were pushed over onto their sides and a stable condition could only be regained with much fluttering accompanied by a great deal of incessant chirruping noises. Sometimes they were compelled to take flight when the vegetation was momentarily swamped, but they were quick to return to the somewhat precarious raft. This fascinating method of feeding lasted about 20 minutes until the birds flew off to join other waders on the nearby mud banks.

Bernard King

Use of recorded predator calls as a field aid to passerine recognition in wooded areas

In recent years in Britain cassettes and records of bird songs and calls have been used increasingly in the field (for example in census work) in order to induce birds to show themselves for recognition. In other words, by playing the song or call of, say, a Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* at an area where the species occurs it usually induces the bird to come forward to inspect the 'newcomer' singing near or in its territory, thus revealing itself, often as it also sings in reply. In some cases birds will even attack the intruding tape-recorder! However, it seems that little use has been made in this country of the calls of predators to achieve similar results. Solely from hearsay it appears that little response comes from passerines when alarm calls of owls are used. Nevertheless it would be interesting to know from members of their experience, if any, when using predator calls in this way.

As an example of the potential that this practice has I would like to describe an experience I had in Florida, U.S.A., in 1972. During my visit in March and April of that year I learnt that the recorded call of the Screech Owl *Otus asio* (a small owl with ear tufts) is widely used in Florida in order to attract down passerines in wooded areas so that they are revealed for identification. On 15 March I visited Juniper Springs in the Ocala National Park, central Florida, with members of the Florida Audubon Society. We entered a wood and the small birds there were keeping well up in the canopy of the tall trees. Difficulty in indentifying them was considerable and we were not helped by the intensely strong sunlight which percolated through the foliage, blinding us somewhat. So, a small cassette recorder was placed on a nearby bush and the calls of a Screech Owl were played at high volume. We stood back in cover and within minutes dozens of birds came from the tree tops to fuss around the recorder, some giving their characteristic scolding calls. Most of the birds stayed nearby for about ten minutes during which time we were able to identify them and so obtain some idea of the numbers and kinds of birds in that part of the wood. The birds indentified were a Carolina Chickadee *Parus carolinensis*, at least three Mocking Birds *Mimus polyglottos*, at least two Catbirds *Dumetella carolinensis*, a few Blue-gray Gnatcatchers *Poliophtila caerulea*, a Black-and-White Warbler *Mniotilta varia*, four Parula Warblers *Parula americana*, many Myrtle Warblers *Dendroica coronata* (the commonest warbler in Florida throughout the year), two Pine Warblers *D. pinus* and a few Palm Warblers *D. palmarum*.

Bernard King

Some notes on Mute Swans breeding at Blagdon and Chew Valley Lakes

During 1972, whilst engaged on filming the Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*, I noted some observations on four pairs that nested at Chew Valley Lake and an additional pair that bred at Blagdon Lake. I have referred to the pairs at Chew Valley Lake by letter.

A. This pair nested in the main reed bed at the Wick Green Point end of the Nature Reserve. Seven eggs were recorded by David Warden and all the eggs hatched on 17 May. The territory held by the cob covered all of the Nature Reserve area on the lake side of Herriott's Bridge and the cob was often seen driving juvenile swans from there. All the young appeared to have survived and were recorded feeding with both adults at Wick Green Point on 28 May.

B. Due to the high water level the pair which normally occupies Herons Green Bay chose the second of its preferred sites. The Birds returned to their territory in mid-March and nest building commenced on 7 April. No exact date was established when the eggs were laid but the pen was seen to turn five eggs on 11 May. A check at 20.00 hours on 23 May found one egg had started chipping, the young bird being heard calling from inside the egg but there were no visible signs of hatching on the other four. At 08.00 hours on 24 May a cygnet was seen outside the nest whilst the pen was still sitting and the cob was also in attendance. At 10.00 hours the cygnet was still outside the nest and appeared wet and weak. The pen eventually drew the young bird back into the nest, pulling it by the foot with her bill, to join another cygnet and three eggs. At 12.30 hours there were three young birds but only one egg. The next check at the nest was at 19.00 hours when all three cygnets were seen to be very active. The following day all the young stayed with the pen at the nest, the weather being extremely bad with high winds and rain which continued throughout the night. On 26 May at 10.30 hours the pen took the three young to the water to feed for the first time and one egg and a dead young bird were found at the nest, the egg being obviously addled to judge by the sloppiness of its contents. The pen returned with the young to the nest after 15 minutes and continued to brood them for the remainder of the day. On 27 May at 12.00 hours a check found both adults away from the nest site with no signs of the young and a search around the the windward banks found no evidence or signs of them. The weather had been extremely bad during the previous night.

C. A further nest was found at Stratford Bay at a usual site and this nest contained six eggs on 20 April. On 14 May the nest was found to have been attacked by vandals, many sticks surrounded the pen who was still sitting. The reed beds had been trampled down and a check at the nest showed that three eggs had been removed. On 27 May the eggs were seen to be hatching and young were seen under the pen at 11.00 hours. At 20.00 hours three young were seen and all were very active with the pen still at the nest site. At 11.00 hours the following day both adults were seen feeding at the bottom of Stratford Lane but there were no signs of the young and further checks established that in fact the adults had lost their young. I should add that the weather the previous evening had been good.

D. The fourth nest was sited on the north side of Denny Island and no close observations were made. The pen was still sitting on 28 May and on the following day I saw the first signs of young at this site. At 10.00 hours on 30 May the adults brought the young across the rough water to feed in Hollow Brook. Six cygnets were seen and the pen was frequently carrying them on her back. At 12.00 hours both adults returned to Denny Island carrying all the young.

A further non-breeding pair of Swans were seen on various dates from 4 May feeding in Villice Bay and Herons Green Pool. Herriott's Pool held seven juvenile birds which were joined on occasions by a further seven. An adult male held territory in the Pool and was often seen driving the juveniles in threat display and 'busking' on many dates. No nest was found in the Pool surrounds or immediate part of the River Chew.



A nest at the Ubley end of Blagdon Lake, reported to me by D.E. Ladhams, was commenced in late April and built amongst reeds, almost floating in the shallow water. During south-west gales the nest was blown some 600 metres to the east where it became entangled in the branches of a partly submerged willow tree. It was observed at this final site being completed on 10 May and the pair continued to add nesting material during incubation so that it became about 3½ metres in diameter. A total of six eggs were seen when the pen was observed turning the clutch on various dates. On 19 May the nest was checked and only two eggs remained, large sticks around the nest area suggesting vandals. These remaining two eggs hatched on 23 May and both young were seen feeding with the adults on 28 May.

Maurice R. Tibbles

Vanellus Cottage, Sutton Wick, Bishop Sutton, Bristol BS18 4XR

CLUB ACTIVITIES, 1973

1973 saw the availability to members of the Club's own tie — a single Pied-billed Grebe motif on a selection of five different background colours. This soon proved to be popular with members.

During the year the Club lost two prominent members. Bill Upton, who had only recently taken over responsibility for the Somerset Duck Counts, died at the beginning of the year. Ken Smith died in August, a tragic loss to ornithology (obituary p. 76). Kevin Standring was appointed as RSPB Assistant Regional Officer, Scotland (Oil and Planning), and therefore the move north caused his premature resignation from the General Committee.

The annual subscription was raised to £1.50 for ordinary members in October and family membership facilities were inaugurated. We held a spring film show in conjunction with the RSPB, in addition to the bigger autumn one at the Colston Hall. A wine and cheese party combined with an exhibition of drawings and paintings by members was again held. All these events were as successful as usual. In late November a third film show was promoted by the Club, this time in conjunction with the Wildfowl Trust.

Field Meetings

The Club organised its first weekend excursion specifically for junior members — to Glan-yr-Afon Field Studies Centre, Brecon — as well as two general weekend trips, and three beginners' meetings. The Christmas Tally Hunt took place on foot, due to the fuel crisis, and even so was extremely successful. A gull survey was started as a Club project and many members continued to take active interest in the Bristol Channel Seabird Survey, mostly by watching from the decks of the White Funnel steamer *Balmoral*.

Indoor Meetings

These were again held at St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple School and were well supported, with about 170 members at the March meeting being the highest attendance.

- 18. 1.73 — Some Mediterranean Bird Spots - John Gooders
- 22. 2.73 — Film Show
- 15. 3.73 — Birds in Finland - J.B. & S. Bottomley
- 11.10.73 — The Private life of the Swan and the Private Life of the Herring Gull - Maurice Tibbles.
- 1.11.73 — Birds of Fair Isle and Scotland - Roy Dennis
- 22.11.73 — Bird Life in the Isles of Scilly - David Hunt
- 13.12.73 — A.G.M. and Christmas Social

Publications

Bird News continued to flourish, thanks to the hard work of a few people under the leadership of Derek Lucas. We now endeavour to publish it to coincide with indoor meetings in order to save some postage charges and this scheme seems to be working. *Bristol Ornithology* 5 was distributed early in the year and despite attempts to catch up with no. 6 this was also delayed and did not appear until early in 1974.

Wendy Dickson
Honorary Secretary

K.D. SMITH — A TRIBUTE

The sad and untimely death of Ken Smith occurred in August 1973. He was a founder general committee member of the Club and compiled the annual review in *Bristol Ornithology* for the first three issues, in 1970 contributing a paper on 'Some African enigmas'. This was probably the only indication to most Club members that Ken's interests were of more than local scope, so modest and unforthcoming was he; in fact he was an ornithologist of international repute and a recognised authority on the birds of Eritrea and Morocco.

Ken spent the 1940's and first part of the 1950's in Africa: in Southern Rhodesia (as it was then) and Abyssinia, but mostly in Eritrea where he had two tours of duty as a member of the British Military Administration Civil Police. In 1954-55 he was in the Aden Protectorate. He made excellent use of his time and many ornithological publications resulted, all in *The Ibis* — the journal of the British Ornithologists' Union to which society he had been elected in 1938. These included his classic paper 'On the birds of Eritrea' (1951), the first important contribution to the ornithology of that country for many years and the first attempt to treat the avifauna ecologically, and the culminative 'An annotated check list of the birds of Eritrea' (1957); other papers dealt with recent records (1955), the winter breeding season of land-birds (1955) and the passage of Palearctic migrants through Eritrea (1960).

After returning permanently to this country, Ken worked for a while from 1961 as Assistant Secretary of the B.T.O., his main duties including the administration of the then Breeding Season Census of Common Birds and of the Peregrine Enquiry; he also helped outstandingly in the field with the latter. October 1962, however, found him back in Africa, this time Morocco, where he worked continuously in the field, in two spells, for 15 months, living in his Bedford Dormobile. This resulted in further publications in *The Ibis*, including papers 'On the birds of Morocco' (1965) and the particularly impressive 'Spring migration through south-east Morocco' (1968). In recent years, Ken had started to draw together his African knowledge, e.g. a zoogeographical discussion of the White Wagtail (*Ibis* 1968), a review of the distribution of the Bald Ibis (*Bull. B.O.C.* 1970), an assessment of the behaviour of wheatear species in winter (*Bird Study* 1971), as well as his paper in *Bristol Ornithology* already mentioned. He helped with the English edition (1967) of *The Birds of North Africa* (translated by P.A.D. Hollom) and wrote a scholarly 12-page Appendix, summarising records of 70-odd Palearctic and Nearctic migrants occurring south of the Sahara that were not treated in the body of the text, for the posthumously published *The Palearctic — African bird migration systems* (1972) by his friend and mentor R.E. Moreau. Ken Smith obviously had much more to give to ornithology and will be greatly missed.

K.E.L. Simmons

(This tribute was previously published in *Bird News* dated September 1973)

Errata - Bristol Ornithology 6

Page 25, line 5, 'only on six' should read 'only on nine'.

Page 27, under Great Crested Grebe, line 4, 'five records' should read 'six records'.

Page 32, five lines from end of first paragraph, insert page number, '38'.

