

ISLE OF WIGHT NATURAL HISTORY AND
ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BIRD REPORT for 1971

by J. Stafford, M.A., M.B.O.U.

ALSO

BIRD COUNTS AT BEMBRIDGE, 1966-72

by J. M. Cheverton

AND

"OPERATION NIGHTJAR"

by R. J. Machin



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BIRD REPORT FOR 1971

By J. STAFFORD

The number of species recorded in the course of a year falls far short of telling the whole story, but nevertheless it is a rough and ready measure of the variety and interest of the year's observations. By this criterion 1971 was a good year. 196 species were recorded – only 4 short of the highest ever recorded, in the totally exceptional circumstances of 1963.

The rarity of the year was an American Robin (or possibly three of them), not previously recorded here. Shore Larks paid a second visit. Some other species which had not often been seen here before were Sooty Shearwater, Goshawk, Glaucous Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Serin. Details of these occurrences are to be found in the Systematic List.

As usual, the report is based on records submitted by many observers. Their names are listed below, and my thanks are due to them all.

Annually since 1965 I have had occasion to refer to the sterling work of Miss V. R. Prior. She has done most of the clerical work necessary to maintain the record files, which are used not only for the annual Bird Report but for various other purposes. Sadly, she has now been obliged to give up this task, and her help will be greatly missed.

Listing Sequence

Since 1883 it has been one of the responsibilities of the British Ornithologists' Union to maintain and publish a semi-official check-list of British birds. From time to time it has been necessary to revise the list; its fourth edition¹ was published in 1952, using the Wetmore sequence² of orders and families, and the Hartert sequence³ of genera and species within families. This was fortunately in time to be used in our Bird Report for 1953, which was the first of the series of annual reports in the present format, and we have happily been spared the inconvenience of a subsequent change in sequence.

The 1952 check-list has become generally accepted as the basis for local bird reports throughout the country, but is now very much out of date, for several reasons:

- (i) About 60 additional species have been recorded.
- (ii) Certain species have been deleted – in particular the Hastings Rarities⁴.
- (iii) The classification of certain groups has been revised.

Accordingly the B.O.U. prepared the fifth edition⁵ (containing much additional information and therefore no longer called a check-list).

While the fifth edition was being prepared, it was learned that the B.O.U. was intending to abandon the Wetmore sequence it had used in its 1952 list and to adopt the sequence used by Peters⁶. This change would have caused so much inconvenience, with little apparent gain, that those present at the 1967 Report Editors' Conference passed a unanimous resolution asking the B.O.U. to retain the Wetmore sequence. The next Conference,

in 1971, was informed that the B.O.U. had disregarded the resolution (and in fact the book was published later that year⁵, mainly in the Peters sequence). The Conference therefore asked the British Trust for Ornithology to prepare an alternative list, retaining the Wetmore sequence as far as possible while incorporating the other changes listed above.

The alternative list was published in the B.T.O. Guide series⁷, and is the basis of the Systematic List below. It keeps to the familiar Wetmore sequence, with the following small differences:

- (i) The *Procellariiformes* (petrels and shearwaters) have been revised⁸.
 - (ii) Arctic Skua has been moved forward two places⁹.
 - (iii) Meadow Pipit has also been moved forward two places⁹.
 - (iv) Corn Bunting has been moved backward one place⁹.
 - (v) Bearded Tit has been transferred from the *Paridae* to *Timaliidae*¹⁰.
- The above changes (apart from the last) may all be detected by inspection of the species numbers in the Systematic List.

1. "Check-List of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland". British Ornithologists' Union. 1952.
2. A. Wetmore, "A systematic classification for the birds of the world". 1930.
3. E. Hartert. "Die Vogel der Palaarktischen Fauna". 1903-12.
4. E. M. Nicholson and I. J. Ferguson-Lees. "The Hastings Rarities". *British Birds*, 55 (1962): 299-384.
5. "The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland". British Ornithologists' Union. 1971.
6. J. L. Peters. "Check-List of Birds of the World". 1931-65.
7. R. Hudson. "A Species List of British and Irish Birds". British Trust for Ornithology. Guide No. 13. 1971.
8. W. B. Alexander *et al.* "The families and genera of the petrels and their names". *Ibis*, 107 (1965): 401-5.
9. *British Birds*, 46 (1953): 1-3. Editorial.
10. C. Vaurie. "The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna: *Passeriformes*". 1959.

Abbreviations, etc.

The sequence, numeration and nomenclature follow the British Trust for Ornithology's *Species List of British and Irish Birds* (1971). All dates refer to 1971 unless stated otherwise. ♂: male. ♀: female. S.C.P.: St. Catherine's Point. Other initials in the Systematic List denote the observers concerned in certain categories of record (see *Report* for 1969).

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SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1 **Black-throated Diver.** 2 flew W. past S.C.P. on February 12th. 10 flew E. there between March 23rd and April 20th – 2 on April 14th but otherwise singly.
One at Ventnor on December 1st and one at Quarr on December 4th.
- 2 **Great Northern Diver.** 2 at Quarr on January 29th. 1 at Sandown on February 4th. Between March 30th and April 28th 7 flew E. past S.C.P. None recorded after April.
- 4 **Red-throated Diver.** Between March 18th and April 25th 18 of this species and 78 unidentified divers flew E. past S.C.P. There were 3 there on December 5th and 11 on 12th.
Elsewhere only 1 at Bembridge on February 13th-14th and 1 at Quarr on March 30th.
- 5 **Great Crested Grebe.**
- 6 **Red-necked Grebe.** One off Bembridge on January 31st (VGS). One flew E. past S.C.P. on April 3rd (PJB, SL, DBW).
- 7 **Slavonian Grebe.** At Quarr, 3 January 29th-31st (PJB) and 1 March 3rd-8th (FEH). One at Bembridge on January 31st (VGS). One at Newtown, April 25th to May 2nd (PJB, JMC, ND, JMG, DJH, SL).
- 8 **Black-necked Grebe.** One at Bembridge on January 23rd (PJB, SL) and 26th (VGS).
- 9 **Little Grebe.** Largest count was 60+ on R. Medina on December 30th.
- 26 **Fulmar.** Numerous spring movements past S.C.P., including 47 to E. and 20 to W. on April 24th, and 5 to E. and 29 to W. on 25th.
Several records of up to 9 at Main Bench throughout summer. Birds were thought to be prospecting at Shanklin Chine on May 7th (JMC), and at Gore Cliff, Blackgang, in May (TS) and on June 22nd (BWR). Others which may have been prospecting were in Upper Gills Cliff Road, Ventnor, on June 9th (PJS), at Coomb Bottom, Ventnor (near the old railway station) on June 13th (TS), and at Culver Cliff also on June 13th (PJB, JMC, DJH).
- 16 **Manx Shearwater.** At S.C.P., 1 flew W. on February 13th, 2 E. on June 20th, and 1 E. on August 28th.
- 21 **Sooty Shearwater.** 4 flew E. past S.C.P. just before midday on June 20th (BWR). The fourth record for the Island. The observer has contributed the following comments on the occurrence.

Although the date of this record appears early for British waters, much greater numbers of the species have been occurring in recent years and earlier than formerly. Phillips (*British Birds*, 56: 197-203) gives June as the earliest normal date in the north-east Atlantic and suggests that the ocean crossing from the western Atlantic is probably rapid.

The weather on the 20th June was overcast, brightening to sunny conditions in the afternoon; fresh-to-strong S.W. wind and good visibility. A ridge of high pressure followed by a trough had moved east across the British Isles on 17th June, producing a severe S.W. gale

in the Channel on the 18th; on the 19th the wind lessened to fresh-to-moderate with warm and sunny conditions. The weather prior to this period would seem to allow such a rapid movement of Shearwaters from the western Atlantic, if they were not already on the east side.

Unfortunately the Point was not manned on 18th June.

Oliver (*British Birds*, 64: 56-60) indicates that the species tends to appear in the Channel – at least in autumn – after, rather than during, gales.

- 14 **Storm Petrel.** One dead at S.C.P. on October 17th.
- 27 **Gannet.** The passage of 312 to E. past S.C.P. on April 24th was the largest spring movement yet recorded, and was only exceeded in the autumn of 1963 (see *Report* for 1963 and 1964). No more than 18 were seen there on any other day.
Also seen frequently off Ventnor in May, June and July.
- 28 **Cormorant.** 52 on St. Helens Fort on August 10th (RAH).
- 29 **Shag.** Up to 3 at Main Bench during the breeding season. 6 at Culver Cliff on May 14th (JMC).
- 30 **Heron.**
- 45 **Mallard.** Largest flocks were at Bembridge – 298 on September 12th and 271 on October 17th.
- 46 **Teal.** Largest flocks were 172 at Bembridge on March 14th and 275 at Newtown on September 19th.
A pair on sea just off Quarr on March 10th. Teal are unusual there.
Small passage to E. noted at S.C.P. – 2 on March 30th, 4 on April 3rd, 2 on 13th.
- 47 **Garganey.** In Brading Marsh, a pair on March 20th, 2 ♂ and a ♀ on May 1st, a pair on 2nd, a ♀ on 9th, and 1 on June 26th.
A pair flew E. past S.C.P. on April 3rd.
- 49 **Gadwall.** One at Bembridge on January 26th and 3 on October 14th (VGS).
- 50 **Wigeon.** C. 500 at Newtown in January.
- 52 **Pintail.** Spring movements E. past S.C.P. – 8 on March 30th, 2 on April 3rd, 1 on 20th.
First autumn arrivals at Newtown were 2 on September 19th. By October 16th there were 73, reducing to 25 by November 28th. Elsewhere only 2 at Bembridge on January 16th.
- 53 **Shoveler.** Numerous records from Bembridge – maximum 30 on February 27th.
Spring movements E. past S.C.P. – 20 on March 31st, 2 on April 3rd, 1 on 14th.
- **Mandarin.** 2 ♂ ♂ at Alverstone on May 13th (PJB) and 2 at Newchurch on June 13th (VGS).
- 55 **Scaup.** A ♂ at Bembridge from January 2nd to February 14th (JMC, RAH, DJH, VGS).
At S.C.P., 3 ♂ ♂ flew E. on March 30th and 1 ♀ E. on April 20th (SL, DBW).
- 56 **Tufted Duck.** Largest flock was 28 at Bembridge on February 14th. A pair on R. Medina until February 10th.

- 57 **Pochard.** Largest flock was 89 at Bembridge on February 6th. None recorded elsewhere.
- 60 **Goldeneye.** At Newtown, 5 on January 24th and 3 on November 28th. On R. Medina, up to 9 from beginning of year until March 12th, and 1 on December 2nd. One in Wootton Creek, November 23rd-25th. At Bembridge, 1 or 2 from beginning of year until March 27th, and 1 on November 21st. 6 flew E. past S.C.P. on April 19th.
- 61 **Long-tailed Duck.** 3 flew E. past S.C.P. on April 13th.
- 62 **Velvet Scoter.** Recorded only flying E. past S.C.P. – 2 on April 13th, 13 on 14th, 2 on 20th and 8 on 23rd.
- 64 **Common Scoter.** A total of 3497 flew E. past S.C.P. between March 1st and April 28th. The largest numbers were 450 on April 2nd, 360 on 16th, 630 on 20th, 376 on 23rd and 325 on 25th.
Elsewhere, 1 off Bembridge on February 27th, 15 flying E. past Freshwater Bay on April 2nd, and 5 flying E. past Ryde on August 4th.
- 67 **Eider.** The ♀ at Bembridge since April 1970 (see *Report* for 1970) remained until March 20th. A ♀ there again from October 16th to end of year was joined on November 21st by 2 other birds, which apparently did not stay.
Flying E. past S.C.P. – 2 ♀ ♀ on April 12th, 8 birds on 16th, 1 ♀ on November 7th.
A ♀ at Quarr from September 25th to end of year. Others there from November 8th onwards – 1 or 2 frequently, 16 on November 11th, 4 or 5 from December 21st. Most were ♀ ♀, the others immature ♂ ♂, no mature ♂ ♂.
An immature ♂ at Newtown on November 13th.
2 ♀ ♀ at Woodside on December 4th-5th.
- 69 **Red-breasted Merganser.** Regular in winter at Newtown (maximum 47 on November 28th) and Quarr (maximum 20 on January 31st).
Many more than ever before passed S.C.P. Between April 2nd and 26th, 135 flew E., including 49 on 13th and 63 on 16th.
- 70 **Goosander.** A ♀ in Bembridge Harbour and offshore on January 28th and 30th (VGS).
- 73 **Shelduck.**
- 75 **Greylag Goose.** One flew E. past S.C.P. on April 13th.
- 76 **White-fronted Goose.** 11 in the Atherfield area on February 6th (DF) and 7th (JS). Local residents said they had been there for about a week previously.
- 80 **Brent Goose.** Frequent at Newtown in January and February – maximum 177 on January 24th. During the same period recorded at Thorness Bay – maximum 63 on January 10th. On December 18th 39 at Newtown and c. 35 at Thorness Bay. The same birds are likely to be seen at the two places.
At S.C.P., 13 flew E. on January 17th, 38 E. on March 30th, 13 arrived from S. and flew N.W. on April 12th, and 3 flew E. on April 13th.

- 82 **Canada Goose.** 90 at Newtown on January 9th, and several counts of 70-80 there and at Thorness Bay in January and February. 23 arrived at Newtown from S. on August 30th; 56 there on November 20th.
 On April 13th 1 flew E. past S.C.P., and on 16th 3 E. past Thorness Bay. 3 at Quarr on April 20th (FEH).
 One by Yarmouth Mill on April 28th (JMG) and May 1st and 26th (WL). One in Yarmouth Harbour in heavy fog on May 22nd flew N.E. when visibility improved (DJH).
 One at Gatcombe Mill on September 26th (JMC).
- 84 **Mute Swan.**
- 86 **Bewick's Swan.** An immature bird being cared for in the R.S.P.C.A. Animals' Home on March 25th (PJB) was said to have been found at Lake some time earlier.
- 91 **Buzzard.** One at Calbourne on June 5th.
 Between August 25th and November 28th, several records of 1 at Cridmore, Quarr, Newtown, Rowborough (usually 1 but once 2), Alum Bay, Ventnor and Bembridge.
- 93 **Sparrowhawk.**
- 94 **Goshawk.** A juvenile at Luccombe on August 25th (PMA, EH) and several times into September (FWA). It spent much time soaring in the upcurrents over the cliffs. This is the fourth record for the Island.
- 99 **Marsh Harrier.** One at Shorwell on January 31st (SMN). A ♀ arrived at S.C.P. from the sea on April 21st.
- 100 **Hen Harrier.** A ♀ at Leechmore on March 3rd (TS). One in the Rowborough Valley on March 7th (SMN), and a ♀ there from November 14th to December 30th (PJB, ND, SL, JS).
- 102 **Montagu's Harrier.** A ♀ at King's Quay on May 6th was quartering a young conifer plantation (PB, RG).
- 103 **Osprey.** One at Newtown, November 13th-14th.
- 104 **Hobby.** A ♂ arrived at S.C.P. from S.W. on April 29th.
- 105 **Peregrine.** A ♂ at Newtown on January 24th. One killed a small bird in a Shanklin garden and took it under an ornamental conifer to pluck, but was then disturbed and flew away with the prey (RAS, LS).
- 107 **Merlin.** Single birds at Niton on February 8th, Chale on October 16th, Brading Marsh on November 6th, and Newtown on November 13th.
- 110 **Kestrel.**
- 116 **Partridge.**
- 117 **Quail.** Heard at Apse Moor on October 24th (EMN).
- 118 **Pheasant.**
- 120 **Water Rail.** The only breeding season records were near Centurion's Copse, Brading, on May 9th and in Yaverland Marsh on May 22nd (JMC).
- 125 **Corncrake.** 3 were flushed during the harvesting of 280 acres of corn near Chillerton – about the usual number there (TA).
- 126 **Moorhen.**

- 127 **Coot.** The customary increase at Bembridge (see previous *Reports*) did not occur this year, but the 358 on February 14th (JMC, DJH) had only been exceeded in 1970.

Elsewhere, 25 at Yarmouth on January 27th, 2 at Shalfleet on February 22nd (SL), 1 at St. Mary's Hospital on March 16th (PB, RG), 3 at Dodnor Pond on July 15th, and c. 25 on R. Medina on December 30th.

- 131 **Oystercatcher.**

- 133 **Lapwing.**

- 134 **Ringed Plover.**

- 139 **Grey Plover.** One at Quarr on January 1st and August 19th. One by R. Medina on January 7th. One at S.C.P. on March 31st, and 60 flew E. there on April 26th.

Winter flocks at Newtown were smaller than usual, and largest numbers there occurred in autumn – 45 on August 22nd and 19 on September 19th.

- 140 **Golden Plover.**

- 143 **Turnstone.** The largest flock was 56 at Quarr, April 6th-11th.

- 145 **Snipe.** Largest numbers were 102 at St. Helens on January 20th (during stormy weather) and 115 in Brading Marsh on November 27th.

Again nested in Brading Marsh (see *Reports* for 1967 and 1968); 2 small young found on May 9th.

- 147 **Jack Snipe.** At Thorness Bay, 3 on January 10th and 7 on February 21st. One at St. Helens on January 26th. In Brading Marsh, 1 on February 14th and November 14th and 2 on November 27th.

- 148 **Woodcock.** One at S.C.P. on January 9th (PJB, SL), and 1 flew E. there on April 13th.

- 150 **Curlew.** A small spring passage past S.C.P. Between March 18th and April 26th 38 flew E. on 9 days, then 105 E. on April 28th. Also heard at the Lighthouse during the night of April 5th/6th.

A small increase at Quarr in autumn – 100 in July, 115 on August 15th, 127 on October 17th.

- 151 **Whimbrel.** A heavy spring passage past S.C.P. – many more than Curlew. Between April 14th and 28th 681 flew E., including 464 on 20th.

- 154 **Black-tailed Godwit.** 324 at Newtown on January 30th (PJB) exceeded the previous largest flock (see *Report* for 1965).

C. 60 by R. Medina on October 3rd.

Recorded in two new localities – 15 in Thorley Marsh on January 17th (DGC) and 1 in Morton Marsh on March 13th (PB, RG).

- 155 **Bar-tailed Godwit.** Between April 6th and 28th 420 flew E. past S.C.P., including 170 on 21st and 169 on 28th.

Largest number elsewhere was 17 in Brading Marsh on February 14th. Also several records of up to 3 at Ryde, Quarr, Woodside, King's Quay, R. Medina and Newtown.

- 156 **Green Sandpiper.** Recorded in January and February at Merstone, Alverstone, Sandown Waterworks and Niton, in April and May at

- S.C.P. and Quarr, in August and September at Quarr, Brading Marsh, Newtown, Sandford and Gatcombe Mill, and in November at Quarr. No more than 3 together, and usually singly.
- 159 **Common Sandpiper.** Late birds by R. Medina on November 4th and Wootton Creek on December 23rd.
- 161 **Redshank.**
- 162 **Spotted Redshank.** Single birds at Newtown, January, February and August to November, by R. Medina on February 10th, and at Bembridge on August 23rd and November 14th.
- 165 **Greenshank.** 7 at Newtown on January 24th. 1 in Brading Marsh on April 14th. Up to 8 at Newtown from August to end of year, and a few at Quarr and R. Medina in September.
- 169 **Knot.** Recorded only at Newtown. Numerous in January and February, with c. 160 on February 7th. Also 3 on September 18th.
- 170 **Purple Sandpiper.** At Bembridge, 2 on December 7th (PJB) and 1 on 12th and 19th (PJB, SL).
- 178 **Dunlin.** Largest flocks were c. 1000 at Newtown on November 13th, over 500 by R. Medina on December 30th, and 452 at Bembridge on January 15th.
- 179 **Curlew Sandpiper.** One at Bembridge on December 18th (JMC).
- 181 **Sanderling.** Many records from Bembridge, January-February and October-December, the largest flock being 140 on December 29th. The only ones recorded elsewhere were 2 flying E. past S.C.P. on April 26th.
- 184 **Ruff.** 48 in damp pasture near Thorncross Farm, Brighstone, on February 28th (JS). Otherwise fewer than usual. 3 by R. Medina on January 10th, 6 at Bembridge on February 7th, and single birds at Porchfield on January 17th, Bembridge on February 13th, Yarmouth on August 24th, Newtown on August 27th and September 3rd, and R. Medina on November 21st.
- 194 **Great Skua.** Flying E. past S.C.P. in April – 1 on 6th, 1 on 11th, 4 on 25th and 1 on 27th.
- 195 **Pomarine Skua.** One in light-phase plumage flew E. past S.C.P. on April 26th and 27th (SL, DBW).
- 193 **Arctic Skua.** Between April 2nd and May 5th 24 flew E. past S.C.P. One flew E. past Bembridge on October 7th (PB, RG).
- 198 **Great Black-backed Gull.**
- 199 **Lesser Black-backed Gull.** 86 flew W. along Main Bench in an hour on October 24th (PJB, JMC, DJH, SL).
- 200 **Herring Gull.** One flew W. past S.C.P. on October 30th with a can dangling from a leg. On November 20th what appeared to be the same bird, still carrying the can, was at Newtown. (PJB).
- 201 **Common Gull.**
- 202 **Glaucous Gull.** 3 adults at Bembridge Lifeboat Station on April 16th were observed at close quarters by a boat party of 10 people including RAH. The fifth record for the Island.
- 205 **Mediterranean Gull.** One off Culver Cliff on February 27th (VGS).
- 207 **Little Gull.** An immature at Quarr on October 17th and 30th and

November 7th, and probably the same bird at Woodside on October 21st (PB, RG).

An immature at Bembridge on October 29th and 30th (PJB, SL, VGS).

208 **Black-headed Gull.**

211 **Kittiwake.** C. 20 nests at Main Bench, in the same site as 1969 and 1970 (*antea*, vol. vi, pp. 357-8).

Spring passage at S.C.P. was again in both directions. Between March 18th and May 8th 120 flew E. and 93 W. Also 3 flew W. on June 17th, 42 W. on 20th, and an immature W. on August 22nd.

One at St. Helens Fort on June 19th (RAH). 6 off Whitecliff Bay on August 24th; one of them was bold enough to take bait from a fishing line before the bait sank (RAH).

212 **Black Tern.** At S.C.P. 2 flew E. on April 23rd and 1 E. on May 5th (PJB). One over R. Medina on May 6th (PJB). One at Gurnard on August 12th finally left to E. (SL).

215 **Gull-billed Tern.** At S.C.P., one fishing on April 18th (DBW) and one flying slowly W. on June 19th (BWR). The fourth and fifth records for the Island.

217 **Common Tern.** First on March 30th and last on October 23rd, both at Quarr.

Movements (Common and Arctic combined): between April 16th and 26th 374 flew E. past S.C.P., including 318 on 26th; 270 flew W. past Sconce Point in an hour on August 28th.

218 **Arctic Tern.** The only birds definitely distinguished from Common were 1 at Newtown on August 22nd (PJB, SL) and 2 at Bembridge next day (JMC).

222 **Little Tern.** First 2 on April 16th at S.C.P. (the only ones recorded there in the year). Last 5 at Newtown on September 9th.

223 **Sandwich Tern.** First 2 on March 30th at Quarr, and last 1 on October 21st at King's Quay (PB, RG).

More than usual on spring passage, but not many in autumn. Between April 1st and 27th 570 passed S.C.P., all to E.; most was 180 on 21st.

224 **Razorbill.** Very few seen at the Main Bench breeding colony this year. 3 on March 7th and only 1 or 2 later.

227 **Guillemot.** 153 at Main Bench on March 7th, and largest count there later was 65 on May 9th. The birds are less difficult to count early in the season, when they spend most time on the sea.

230 **Puffin.** Largest number at Main Bench was 4 on June 22nd.

One at S.C.P. on April 6th, 14th and 20th.

A few seen singly during a fishing trip off Whitecliff Bay and Shanklin on June 10th (RAH).

232 **Stock Dove.** Largest flocks were 100 at Lower Knighton on February 13th, 112 S.W. of Carisbrooke on February 22nd, 50 at Fairlee on May 3rd, 100 on October 30th and 60 on November 27th in Brading Marsh, and 50 at Gore Cliff, Blackgang, on December 5th.

6 flew over S.C.P. from S. on April 2nd.

- 234 **Woodpigeon.** Many were seen leaving Southsea towards the Island on December 19th.
- 235 **Turtle Dove.** First on April 16th at Luccombe, and in several other places in next two days. Last at Brook on September 25th (BWR).
- **Collared Dove.**
- 237 **Cuckoo.** First at Quarr on April 13th, and last at Newtown on September 19th.
- 241 **Barn Owl.**
- 246 **Little Owl.**
- 248 **Long-eared Owl.** Heard on April 4th and 11th near the 1969 nest site at Combley (see *Reports* for 1969 and 1970) (PJB, JMC, SL).
A pair nested in Parkhurst Forest. One adult and up to 4 young were seen or heard often in June and July, and the vacated nest was found on June 7th, 30 feet up a Scots Pine. (PJB, JMC, ND, DJH, SL, JS).
For comments on the rediscovery of this species see the *Report* for 1969. As it is now known to be breeding in two localities, it may be worthwhile to search other coniferous woods at a suitable season and time.
- 249 **Short-eared Owl.** One disturbed at S.C.P. on April 20th flew away to W. (RG). One carrying rat at Ninham, Shanklin, on June 6th (JMC).
- 252 **Nightjar.** Last at S.C.P. on September 22nd.
- 255 **Swift.** First 2 over Brading Marsh on April 21st (SMN), and last at Brighstone on September 12th (JS).
- 258 **Kingfisher.**
- 261 **Hoopoe.** Single birds at Chessel on April 17th, St. Helens Duver on April 28th and May 2nd, and Quarr on August 18th.
- 262 **Green Woodpecker.**
- 263 **Great Spotted Woodpecker.**
- 264 **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.** Single birds at St. Helens Duver on June 8th (RAH) and at Smallbrook Cross on July 28th (SMN).
- 265 **Wryneck.** Single birds at Fairlee on April 26th and 27th (PJB) and on Headon Warren on September 11th (PJB, SL).
- 272 **Skylark.** Movement to S. or S.W. over Quarr, January 8th-10th, in mild weather; heaviest on 9th.
At Alum Bay on October 24th 236 left to W. or S.W. in an hour.
- 273 **Shore Lark.** On High Down 2 (♂ and ♀) on October 22nd (SL, VGS). They were still there on the morning of the 24th (PJB, JMC, ND, DJH), and had increased to 3 by the afternoon (PJB, SL). They fed in the turf and loose chalk at the top of the Main Bench cliffs. This is the second record for the Island, and is strikingly similar to the first one (see *Report* for 1969).
- 274 **Swallow.** First on April 1st, at S.C.P. and Bembridge. Last on November 24th, at St. Helens and Bembridge.
A roost by R. Medina held c. 2500 birds on September 10th and c. 10,000 on 11th (PJB).
- 276 **House Martin.** First at Quarr on April 12th, and last at St. Law-

rence on November 22nd.

One was found dead in a nest hole of Sand Martin at Sandown on June 20th (JMC).

On August 27th at Shanklin 700-800 were hunting insects and sunning themselves on bungalow roofs (LS, RAS).

277 **Sand Martin.** First over R. Medina on March 28th, and last 2 at Alum Bay on October 24th.

279 **Raven.** A pair evidently bred at Main Bench. The 2 adults were seen frequently. On May 9th one of them took food to a concealed part of the cliff face. 3 juveniles were seen from May 31st onwards, and all 5 birds were seen together on June 20th. On June 12th 4 of them were feeding on a dead sheep.

May also have bred at Culver Cliff. One bird on March 13th, April 17th, May 18th (RG), and December 12th (PJB, SL). The one in March performed a display flight, while the one in May seemed to be a juvenile.

One at Whitwell also performed a display flight on March 13th (TS), but was not seen there again.

2 on Limestone Down on August 1st (PB) and 3 at Rowborough on November 21st (PJB, SL). Had these birds come from Main Bench?

Also seen at S.C.P. – 1 on March 21st and October 16th, and 3 on October 30th.

280 **Carrion Crow.**

281 **Hooded Crow.** One at Quarr, March 21st to April 13th (PB, RG, FEH). One at Woodside on March 31st (SMN) may have been the same. One arrived at S.C.P. from S. on April 12th. One flew S.E. from Main Bench on October 24th (PJB, SL).

282 **Rook.** 283 **Jackdaw.** 284 **Magpie.**

286 **Jay.** 288 **Great Tit.** 289 **Blue Tit.**

290 **Coal Tit.** A nest in Parkhurst Forest was 9 inches below ground level, under the roots of a pine stump (PJB).

292 **Marsh Tit.**

293 **Willow Tit.** Seen and heard in Swanpond Copse, Ryde, on September 2nd (JMC, JS).

294 **Long-tailed Tit.** Some fairly large flocks in autumn: 60+ at Shanklin on August 8th; c. 20 at S.C.P. on October 2nd; c. 30 near Needles on October 9th; c. 50 moving W. at Alum Bay on October 24th.

296 **Nuthatch.** One at Upton Farm, Ryde, on December 25th (GT).

298 **Treecreeper.**

299 **Wren.**

301 **Mistle Thrush.**

302 **Fieldfare.** The largest flocks were 300 at Newchurch on January 8th and 250 in Brading Marsh on November 6th. The last spring bird was at Godshill on April 19th, and the first of the autumn was on Mersley Down on September 20th.

303 **Song Thrush.**

- 304 **Redwing.** The largest flocks were 300 in Brading Marsh on October 16th and 150 at Quarr on November 29th. The last 6 spring birds were at Brook on April 14th, and the first one of the autumn was at Headon Warren on October 9th.
- 307 **Ring Ouzel.** Only a few in spring, March 29th to April 2nd, but more numerous in autumn, September 2nd to October 31st. 6 on St. Boniface Down on September 19th and 10 on Headon Warren on October 16th, but otherwise no more than 4 together.
- 308 **Blackbird.** A nest was built inside the radiator grille of a car parked at St. Mary's Hospital, Newport. A Blackbird was seen going under the car on Thursday and Friday, June 10th-11th, and on Monday 14th the ♀ was discovered on the completed nest, which was then removed for the bird's safety. The car was at the hospital (always in the same position) only on Monday to Friday mornings. (DA).
- **American Robin.** One in a Cowes garden on July 9th (FH), in a Shanklin garden on September 1st (RAS), and on the playing field at Godshill on October 29th (JS). The plumage details of the Shanklin and Godshill birds suggested that they were females. There are no previous records for the Island, and only about 16 for Britain. It is not easy to interpret these records; possibly they all refer to the same bird, but the movement from Cowes to Shanklin and then to Godshill is erratic. The July record is inconsistent with the pattern of previous British occurrences. All records of this species are open to the suspicion that the birds have escaped from captivity. The bird may also have travelled all or part of the way across the Atlantic on a ship.
- 311 **Wheatear.** First S. of Thorley on March 10th. The largest party of the spring was 20 at S.C.P. on March 31st.
50+ at S.C.P. on August 21st was the only autumn record of more than 2. Last one at Main Bench on November 7th (PJB, ND, DJH, SL).
- 317 **Stonechat.** In January, 5 birds were inside a large greenhouse at Newchurch, feeding on flies as they hatched from a heap of manure (JH).
- 318 **Whinchat.** Recorded on passage only. So few records that they can all be listed.
2 at Yarmouth on April 1st. At S.C.P. a ♂ on April 19th, 6 on 23rd and a ♂ on 27th. 3 in Brading Marsh on May 2nd.
One at S.C.P. on August 22nd, 2 on September 19th and 1 on 20th-25th. 1 at Headon Warren and 4 on High Down on August 29th. 1 at Newtown on September 5th. 5 on St. Helens Common on September 9th. 17 in Brading Marsh on September 12th. 9 at Main Bench on September 18th, and 1 there on October 3rd.
- 320 **Redstart.** First on April 3rd at S.C.P., and several other spring records until May 1st.
The autumn passage started on August 3rd. The last was a ♀ which stunned itself against a house in Ventnor in the evening of November 9th. It was kept overnight and flew away strongly next

morning. (TW).

- 321 **Black Redstart.** Several records of up to 4 at S.C.P., April 1st-27th. Other April records at Yarmouth, Quarr and Seaview.
In autumn only single birds at Alum Bay on October 16th, Bembridge on 25th, and St. Helens Duver on November 6th.
- 322 **Nightingale.** First at Quarr on April 22nd. None recorded in autumn.
- 325 **Robin.**
- 327 **Grasshopper Warbler.** First at Thorness on April 16th. Heard in May or June at Norton Green (DGC), East Afton (PJB), Corfheath Firs (PJB), St. Boniface Down, Alverstone and Brading Marsh.
- 333 **Reed Warbler.** First at S.C.P. on April 19th. Last 4 in Brading Marsh on September 12th.
- 337 **Sedge Warbler.** First at S.C.P. on April 20th. Last 2 in Brading Marsh on September 12th.
- 343 **Blackcap.** A ♀ at Shide on January 1st (SL).
- 346 **Garden Warbler.** First at Quarr on April 10th. Last at Headon Warren on October 24th. (*Cf. Report* for 1970).
- 347 **Whitethroat.** First at S.C.P. on April 19th, and widespread by 22nd. Breeding numbers still seemed much below normal (see *Reports* for 1969 and 1970). Last at S.C.P. on September 25th.
- 348 **Lesser Whitethroat.** First at S.C.P. on April 13th. Last on Headon Warren: 5 on September 18th and 1 on 23rd.
- 352 **Dartford Warbler.** A pair seen on September 5th and October 10th in an area where nesting was reported in earlier years. On October 12th the gorse was destroyed by controlled burning and the birds could not be found until 1 on November 28th.
- 354 **Willow Warbler.** First at S.C.P. on April 1st. Last at Alum Bay on September 26th.
- 356 **Chiffchaff.** First at S.C.P. on March 13th. Last at Alum Bay on November 20th.
- 357 **Wood Warbler.** Single birds at Quarr on April 28th and May 8th, and between Shide and Blackwater on September 2nd.
- 364 **Goldcrest.** One found in a Nettlestone garden on April 17th was in poor condition due to fog. A pair stayed there for the following week. They were the first seen in that spot for 20 years. (RAH).
- 365 **Firecrest.** One at Bembridge on January 31st and February 13th and 14th. One at S.C.P. on March 1st, 4 on 28th, and 1 on April 3rd, 12th and 27th. 4 at Watchingwell on March 6th. One at Quarr on March 19th.
One at S.C.P. on September 20th and 24th and October 2nd, and 2 on 31st. One on Headon Warren on October 16th and 31st. One at Shide on December 31st.
- 366 **Spotted Flycatcher.** First at Ashey on April 29th.
Autumn passage more marked than usual. At S.C.P., 70 on August 21st, 30 on 22nd, 10 on 30th. At Headon Warren, 23 on August 21st, 18 on September 11th, 16 on 18th, 10 on 19th; last one there on October 9th.

- 368 **Pied Flycatcher.** The only spring records were single birds at S.C.P. on April 19th and at Totland, April 26th-28th.

In autumn, more numerous records of up to 6 between August 8th and September 24th, at High Down, Headon Warren, S.C.P., Shide, Fairlee, Quarr, Shanklin and Bembridge.

- 370 **Red-breasted Flycatcher.** 3 by St. Radegund's Footpath, Whitwell, on October 2nd (DGC, YMAC).

- 371 **Dunnoek.**

- 373 **Meadow Pipit.** Numerous movements recorded in both spring and autumn.

From March 1st to April 20th birds were arriving at S.C.P. from S. Largest numbers were 200 on March 30th and 100 on 31st, 500 on April 1st, 200 on 2nd, 350 on 12th and 300 on 13th.

On March 18th, after a S.W. gale, c. 40 were in a field at Quarr. C. 250 there on April 2nd (*cf.* S.C.P.) mostly left to N.W.

On October 2nd 146 flew E. past S.C.P. At Main Bench 300 present on October 3rd and 100 flew W. on 24th; also on 24th at Alum Bay 49 in an hour flew S.W. out to sea.

- 376 **Tree Pipit.** First on Sandown Golf Course on April 4th (JMC), and only a few other spring records.

Rather more in autumn, August 22nd to October 24th, at Main Bench, Headon Warren, S.C.P. and Ryde. On September 2nd 15 flew W. along Main Bench in an hour, and the last bird of the year also flew W. there on October 24th.

- 379 **Rock Pipit.**

- 379 **Water Pipit.** One at Quarr on April 12th and 13th, and 2 on 15th (PB, RG). One at East Medina Mill on April 18th and 19th (PJB).

- 380 **Pied Wagtail.** Reed-bed roosts: 50+ at Yarmouth on November 6th (JMC), and more later (JMG); c. 40 at S.C.P. on December 19th (PJB).

- 381 **Grey Wagtail.** Nested in Shanklin Chine (JMC, JEC). Also present in June at Newport Quay (DGC) and Watergate Farm, Newport (SL).

- 382 **Yellow Wagtail.** First 2 at S.C.P. on April 6th. Last on September 30th at Quarr and Ryde. The largest parties were 45 by R. Medina on September 1st and 29 in Brading Marsh on 12th.

- 389 **Starling.**

- 392 **Greenfinch.** Movements: 16 E. past S.C.P. on October 2nd; on October 24th 42 W. along Main Bench and 11 to S.W. from Alum Bay out to sea.

- 393 **Goldfinch.** Movements: 30 E. past S.C.P. on April 21st; 60 W. past Quarr in an hour on October 18th; 44 S.W. from Alum Bay out to sea on October 24th.

- 394 **Siskin.** 8 at Quarr on January 1st, and 20 on 3rd. 2 in Marvel Copse, S. of Newport, on January 11th (SL). C. 20 at Alverstone on March 20th. 50 flew W. past S.C.P. on April 25th.

On September 26th 30 flew W. past S.C.P. At Bembridge, 2 on October 7th, 5 on November 11th and 16 on 14th. Up to 25 at Quarr

from October 10th to end of year. 25+ on October 23rd was the largest of many parties seen between Shide and Blackwater. 4 flew W. along Main Bench on October 24th. C. 10 in Parkhurst Forest on December 27th.

- 395 **Linnet.** Main movements at S.C.P.: 220 arrived from S. on April 11th, as did 200 on 12th and 100 on 13th; 150 flew E. on 21st and 200 W. on 25th; 277 flew E. on October 2nd.

Smaller movements at Headon Warren in autumn: 46 on October 16th, 52 on 24th, 32 on 30th, all to W.; also on 24th 50 flew S.W. out to sea from High Down.

- 396 **Twite.** One at Porchfield on January 17th (PJB, JCG, DJH, SL).
397 **Redpoll.** One at Porchfield on January 17th (PJB, DJH). One arrived at S.C.P. from S. on April 12th, and 1 present next day. At Quarr 14 passed to W. between April 14th and 19th, while on 15th 2 moved W. through Firestone Copse (PB, RG). One at Bembridge on April 29th.

One at Main Bench on September 19th. On October 24th on Headon Warren 11 flew W. and 4 E., and 6 flew S.W. out to sea from High Down. C. 60 by R. Medina on October 28th (PJB). 6 left S.C.P. to S.E. on October 31st. C. 10 at Blackwater on December 22nd.

- 400 **Serin.** One at S.C.P. on April 1st, and a pair on 10th and 11th (PJB, SL, JS, EJW). The fifth record for the Island.

- 401 **Bullfinch.** One was found dead at Chale on April 5th, clinging to a branch of an apple tree (MEP).

Autumn movements: 10 to S.W. from Alum Bay on October 24th, and 6 to S.E. from S.C.P. on 31st.

- 407 **Chaffinch.**

- 408 **Brambling.** One at Porchfield, January 16th to February 21st (PJB). 2 at East Medina Mill, February 19th to March 6th (PJB).

At Headon Warren, 8 flew W. on October 16th, and 8 W. and 1 E. on 24th. 1 flew W. past Quarr on November 3rd. At Mersley, 4 on November 14th and 1 on 27th. 2 at Rowborough on December 4th and 1 on 11th (PJB, JS).

- 410 **Corn Bunting.** More than usual recorded in summer, and possibly breeding, at Compton (SL), Atherfield, Afton, Thorley, St. Catherine's Down (RG), Appleford (PJB) and East Medina Mill (PJB).

- 409 **Yellowhammer.**

- 415 **Girl Bunting.** A pair at Castle Haven, Niton, on June 1st (DGC).

- 421 **Reed Bunting.**

- 424 **House Sparrow.**

- 425 **Tree Sparrow.** At least 150 at Porchfield on January 16th and 17th (PJB, JCG, DJH, SL, JS). Otherwise no more than 6 together, and the records can be separated conveniently by season. Winter: between Shide and Blackwater in January, February and December (SL). Spring: at S.C.P. (PJB), Binstead (PB, RG) and St. Helens (PJB) in April and May. Autumn: at Alum Bay (JMC, DJH) and Headon Warren (PJB) in October. None in summer.

BIRD COUNTS AT BEMBRIDGE, 1966-72

By J. M. CHEVERTON

I - WILDFOWL

Since the summer of 1966 monthly counts of ducks, geese and swans, organised by the Wildfowl Trust¹, have been carried out between September and April in Bembridge Marsh and Brading Haven. These winter counts have been supplemented by the Trust's summer survey of breeding wildfowl². After six years the time seems ripe to report on the numbers of various species that have been counted and on any trends that can be discerned in the populations.

The area has been covered by walking from the Royal Spithead Hotel along the side of the eastern fresh water pond, through Home Farm (with the kind permission of Mr. R. Thornycroft), around the western pond, straight across the marshland to meet the Yar near Brading Cement Mill, returning along the river to the road bridge on the embankment near St. Helens; thence across St. Helens Mill Pond on the causeway to the Duver. The return to Bembridge is made around the perimeter of the harbour. The total distance is about six miles.

Great care has been taken not to count flocks of birds more than once, and when there was any doubt the largest number seen together at any time was taken as the number present. Hence the numbers reported may well be pessimistic.

Mallard. Winter flocks start to build up in late August when the birds are in eclipse, and reach a peak of from 200 to 300 around mid-October. 1969 was a good year with over 500 present. By early March the birds have dispersed in pairs to breed, several breeding regularly in the area. The counts indicate that there has been a slight decline in numbers since the peak years of 1969 and 1970.

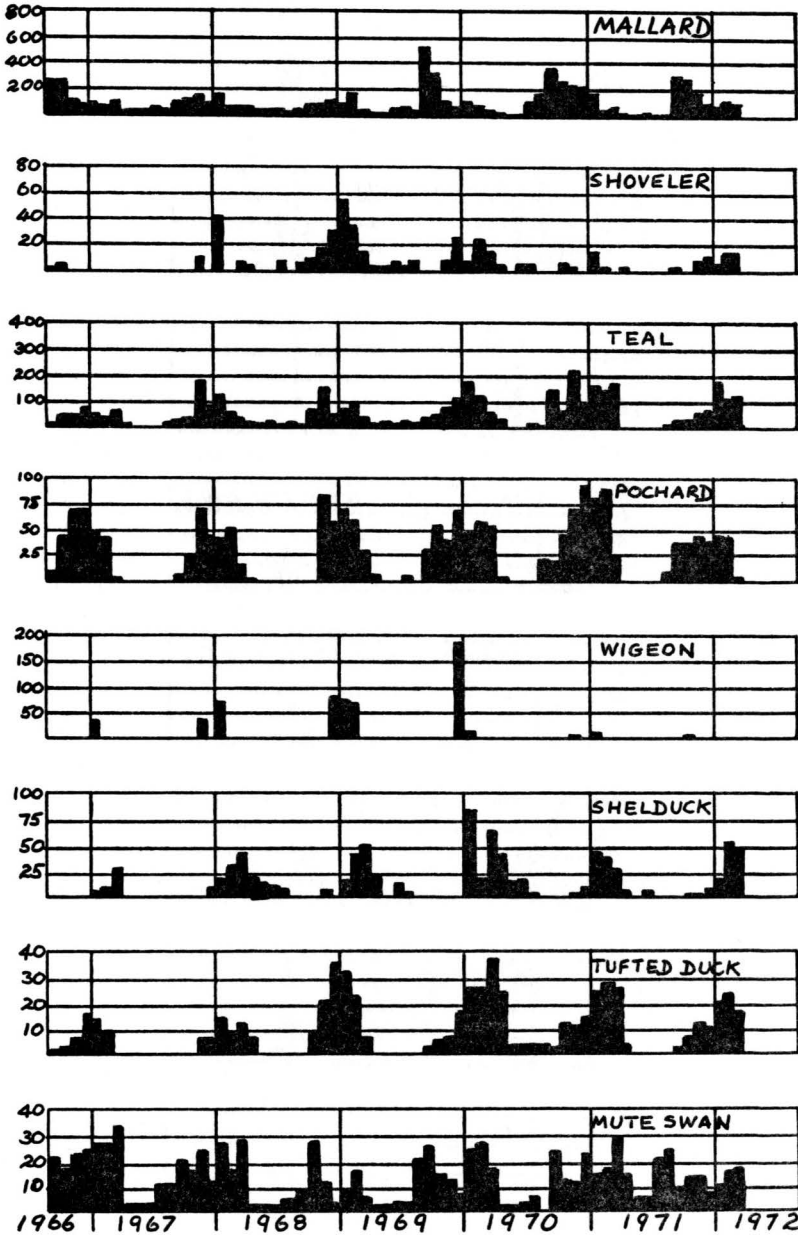
Teal. Winter flocks build up in much the same way as those of Mallard, but reach a peak a little later. By April only a few breeding pairs are left in the area. The winter population appears steady at 150 to 200.

Wigeon. Appears in mid-winter, staying for a short period only. Numbers have declined drastically since the winter of 1969-70.

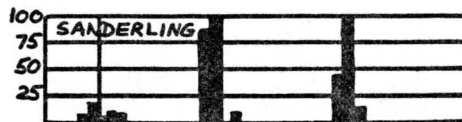
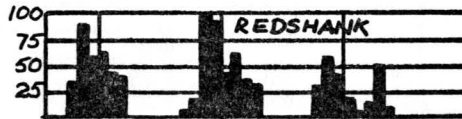
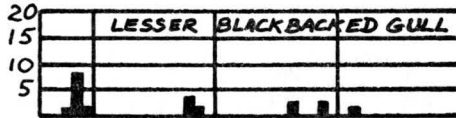
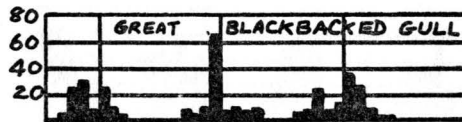
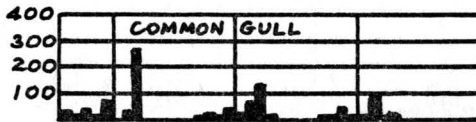
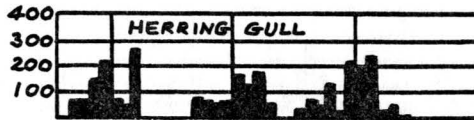
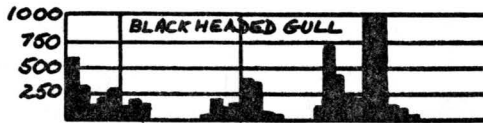
Shoveler. Apart from the winter of 1968-69 this has not been a common duck. It appears to be declining in numbers, 20 being the average winter count. A pair bred in the area in 1966 and 1967, and two pairs in 1969.

Tufted Duck. Mainly a winter visitor, with flocks of up to 38 inhabiting those parts of the fresh water ponds where they have sufficient depth of water to dive for food. Females are commoner than males. A pair bred in 1970, producing three ducklings.

Pochard. The winter flocks start to arrive in early September, build up to around 50 by November, and disperse completely by April. This diving duck is confined to the fresh water ponds, mainly the eastern one. Loss of the ponds or of sufficient depth of water in which to dive would probably mean the loss of this species as a visitor to the Island.



WILD FOWL COUNTS



1969 1970 1971 1972

ESTUARY COUNTS

Shelduck. These ducks seldom arrive in any number before December and, apart from a few breeding pairs, leave by June. 50 is the usual maximum count, and the population remained steady from year to year.

Mute Swan. The winter population has been between 20 and 30, but there is evidence of a decline quite recently. In April the birds disperse to breed, leaving only three or four pairs in the area.

Less Frequent Visitors

The following species have been seen on a few occasions:

Pintail. One in December 1968, and two in January 1971.

Mandarin. One in November 1970.

Scaup. One in January and February 1971.

Goldeneye. One in March 1968, one from December 1970 to March 1971 and one in November 1971.

Long-tailed Duck. One female juvenile in November and December 1969.

Eider. A female was resident from April 1970 to February 1972. She was joined by two more for a short time in November 1971.

Red-breasted Merganser. Two in February 1971.

Brent Goose. One in April 1968 and April 1970.

Barnacle Goose. Two in January 1972 may not have been wild, as some had recently been released at Newtown.

Canada Goose. One in January 1967.

Whooper Swan. Two in November 1968.

Bewick's Swan. Two in December 1966, two with four juveniles in January 1967, one in January 1970, October 1970 and November 1970.

II – GULLS AND WADERS

Since the summer of 1969 counts of estuary birds have been carried out at Bembridge monthly from August (or July) to April. These counts were undertaken for the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry organised jointly by the British Trust for Ornithology and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds³. Although it is too soon to discern trends in populations, the following reports on some species are given for information.

The counts were generally started about two hours after high water, when the mud was newly uncovered. The observer walked from the beach to the east of the Royal Spithead Hotel around the perimeter of the harbour to St. Helens Duver, making the count in the Harbour and also on the land immediately inside the embankment. The total distance is about two miles. Again care was taken not to count individuals more than once, although great difficulty was experienced with the gull species.

Great Black-backed Gull. Generally present in small numbers. The count in December 1970 produced over 60.

Lesser Black-backed Gull. Very uncommon; a few mainly in late autumn.

Common Gull. Small flocks build up in the autumn with a peak of about 100 in February, after which the birds disappear, presumably to breed elsewhere.

Herring Gull. Common, with 100 to 200 present throughout the winter.
Black-headed Gull. The commonest gull in the area, with peak counts of from 750 to 1000.

Sanderling. A winter visitor to the sandy beaches on either side of the harbour mouth, particularly at high tide. At low tide the birds often disperse to the beach at Foreland. Seen usually from November to February, with peak counts of 100.

Dunlin. Another winter visitor not present in any numbers until mid-winter, when flocks of up to 450 have been counted. Much smaller numbers were recorded in 1971-72.

Redshank. A noisy resident that is difficult to count as weather conditions alter the numbers drastically, because the birds fly inland to feed when the marshes are flooded. 50 appears to be the average winter population, with occasional peaks of 100.

Turnstone. Present in small numbers on St. Helens shore, 12 being the maximum seen so far.

Ringed Plover. Up to 88 have been recorded on the shore of the north side of the harbour mouth. The average winter count, however, is about 35.

Curlew. Largest number seen was 15.

Black-tailed Godwit. Up to 6 have been seen on the shore to the east of the Royal Spithead Hotel.

Bar-tailed Godwit. Often seen in the sea, at the edge of the water, to the east of the Royal Spithead Hotel. 16 in January 1970.

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"OPERATION NIGHTJAR"

By R. J. MACHIN

This paper by our late President well illustrates his keen powers of observation and his happy combination of patience and enthusiasm.

When Ron Machin wrote this account it was not intended for inclusion in these Proceedings. He wrote it rather for his own enjoyment and that of his friends who helped in the search – hence the chatty style. It has been given the minimum of editing. O.H.F.

For several years my friend Bill Shepard and myself have made a study of the nests of birds in the Isle of Wight, but although the Nightjar is fairly common in the Island we had neglected this species until a forester

showed us a nest on the top of Brighstone Down in June, 1956.

The Handbook of British Birds says that the Nightjar nests "on heaths, commons, bracken-covered hillsides, open glades in woodlands and occasionally on sand-hills or shingly beaches." In other words, the indication is that the nesting site is usually on open ground. The nest on Brighstone Down was on Forestry Commission land that had been cleared, and apart from some undergrowth was quite open and in accordance with the book, and this together with the information in the *Handbook* set the pattern for our future searches for the nests of these birds, but actually led us astray for some considerable time.

In June, 1957 we heard the bird churring in Parkhurst Forest near Marks Corner, and on two occasions made a thorough search of an adjoining open area which appeared to be most suitable, but without success.

In both 1958 and 1959 we spent a great deal of time on St. George's Down, on an open area of ground which was bracken covered with some low scrub, and even used a long rope to drag between us in order to flush the birds, but these efforts brought no results at all although the birds were hawking there in the evening hours. (We have realised since that we were searching the wrong area, and the nests were probably situated in an adjoining ground which was well grown in with gorse and scrub, but which we did not then consider suitable.)

Thus we had gone three years without any success whatsoever.

On the 27th May, 1960, I had been attending an evening meeting at the office and arriving home about 8 o'clock had decided that I needed some fresh air, and jumped in the car and went to Clamerkin, over which I had the shooting rights, to walk through an area of scrub and trees on the chance that I might see a Nightjar. I was walking a path through this area when I put up a bird that I hardly saw, but went away so silently that I thought it might be my quarry and stepped off the path to investigate further, and immediately put up the female from a nest of two eggs. The beautifully marked eggs were on a bare patch of ground, only about two or three feet from the path, but in quite heavily wooded ground with thick and high undergrowth. This gave me the clue that we had previously been looking in the wrong places.

Shortly afterwards, on the 4th June, 1960, Bill and I were taking some students to Hamstead on the first day of our Society's annual Whitsun Natural History Survey of the area, when a Nightjar was heard in a forestry plantation which looked a good habitat, and we lined up with the students to cover the ground in the hope of flushing the birds. We instructed the students that if the bird was seen to mark precisely the spot from which it rose, and it was not long before we flushed the male, the white spots on wings and tail being most conspicuous, and very shortly afterwards up went the female in front of one of the students who saw the exact spot from which she rose. There were no eggs, but we marked the spot and on our return in the evening we found a single egg. This site was in a plantation of trees about six feet high with fairly dense undergrowth.

We were now doing well as we had two nests under observation, and

from a hide erected at the second nest, obtained some good coloured cine films to include in the bird film we made at this survey.

In June, the following year, 1961, we were in Parkhurst Forest one evening when we saw Nightjars hawking over a cleared site, but a subsequent thorough search of this ground gave no result. I visited the area a few evenings later and saw two birds hawking over an adjoining area where the trees were some twelve feet or more high, and the undergrowth so dense that it was difficult to get through. This ground did not appear at all suitable, particularly as there were two areas adjoining of quite open ground from which old trees had been felled and removed, but as we had already searched these open spaces without result, I felt sure they were in this particular densely wooded area.

Three of us made a thorough search of this area without success, but I felt so sure that this was the right spot that on the 29th June I went alone and searched the plantation systematically and eventually found a single egg laid on the dead leaves on the ground. Eighteen days from that day the young would be due to hatch and it was then that I visited the nest again and one of the two eggs had hatched, but the camouflage of the youngster against the ground was so perfect that it could not be distinguished without kneeling down and making a close inspection.

By now I think we had established that these birds do not favour open ground for nesting territories, at least not in the Isle of Wight, but prefer quite wooded ground with fairly dense undergrowth.

In June, 1962 Bill had arranged an evening walk in the forest for members of the Society to observe both the Nightjars and Woodcock. The walk was most successful as both species were seen, and Bill marked down three areas where Nightjars were operating with the intention that we should endeavour to find the nests of these three pairs.

On the 10th June we visited the first site and walked through an area which had been cleared of sweet chestnut trees where there were many bare patches of ground between the old stumps of the trees with side shoot growths rising up to six or seven feet. It was not long before we flushed the male, but we both agreed from past experience that the nest was more likely to be in the plantation adjoining which contained substantial conifers and sweet chestnut trees up to twenty feet high with the undergrowth fairly dense. Norman Davis, our photographer friend, was with us, but decided to go back to the car to change from plimsolls into boots as he is not very fond of adders, but before he returned Bill had found the nest. We had systematically quartered the small plantation and it was not long before Bill had beckoned me over and showed me the bird sitting on a bare patch of ground. The camouflage of the bird crouched down on the two eggs was remarkable and Bill did well to spot it. We erected a hide at this nest some six or seven yards away, and over a series of visits gradually brought the hide nearer until we were within four feet. This gave us the opportunity of observing and photographing the birds and nest.

On the 22nd June we visited the second site which was a very similar plantation to the previous site and on walking through we flushed a bird from a nest containing two eggs. This was now easy and the nest in the

third site should surely be no trouble.

This particular site was beside a gravel forest road and had a ten yard strip of trees alongside the road, which looked a very suitable area but yielded nothing, but beyond that there was quite a large area of fairly open ground containing conifers about five feet high with plenty of undergrowth but some bare patches here and there.

We both suggested that, judging from our previous experience of the other nests, these trees were not sufficiently high, but nevertheless the presence of the birds over the area in the evenings seemed to indicate that the nest was there. We searched the area thoroughly on three occasions, but never saw either bird, but felt certain that the nest must be in the near vicinity. On the other side of the road there was another plantation but the undergrowth was so thick that it was difficult to get inside at all. However, a little lower down the gravel road there was a small scraggy open space with a few trees at one end which looked a possible area, so we decided to try it and it was not long before we flushed the male from amongst the trees, but could not find the female or the nest, but we decided that we had now located the correct site and a further visit would be successful. Jim Cheverton, a friend of ours who is also interested in nests had never seen the nest of a Nightjar, and asked if we could show him those we had found, and we took him up on the 24th June for that purpose, but on the way decided to make a further search for the nest on the third site, and it was not long before I flushed the female from the nest containing two eggs.

Jim was highly delighted with this early success and within half an hour he had seen three nests of the Nightjar each containing two eggs.

Thus we had achieved what we had set out to find, the nests of three pairs of Nightjars operating in their respective areas.

On the 17th July we went to the forest to remove the hide, and the forester showed us a fourth nest which was in a similar habitat, but the actual nest was beneath an eight foot conifer which was leaning over and almost touching the ground and formed a complete canopy under which the nest was situated.

When we visited the first nest to remove the hide, the male bird and the two young flew up from the front of the hide, but there was no sign of the female and so it was quite possible that she was sitting on a second clutch in the near vicinity.

The eggs in the nest of the second site were hatched, but there was no sign of the young.

At the third site there was one young bird about three days old and one unhatched egg which apparently was not fertile.

According to the *Handbook* the Nightjar has two broods, so we decided to see if we could find the second nest of any of these birds.

On the 21st July we went to the first site where we had erected a hide and flushed the male with another bird, but were not sure whether it was one of the young or the female. Soon after, we caught one of the young which had gone under some dead sticks.

What a tremendously large gape this bird has. We took some photographs of the bird in hand to show this, and although the picture is not

first class, nevertheless, it shows the gape quite well. On being released the bird flew away quite strongly and we continued our search but without success.

We then visited the second site and after a thorough search flushed a female from two eggs. This nest was situated in the same territory about sixty paces from the first nest and I am confident that it was a second brood of the same pair.

On the 28th July we again went to the site of the first nest, but were unsuccessful. We continued our search in an adjoining area where the conifers were only about five or six feet high but from past experience decided that this ground was not suitable, but beyond this area was another small area of conifers and chestnut up to twenty feet high which we decided must be the site and within a minute we had flushed the female from two eggs. This nest was about ninety paces from the first nest and again I felt sure that this was the second brood of the same pair.

On subsequent visits to the sites of the third and fourth nests we found there was no sign of either the parents or young birds, and we concluded that, as these first broods were rather late, no second brood was in fact reared.

We had now really weighed up the Nightjar and their nesting habits and felt confident that we shall have no problem in finding the nests of this bird in the future.

Thus by trial and error over a period of six years, with plenty of sweat and energy, and many acquired thirsts which were well and truly quenched, we had enjoyed a most interesting study and learnt a great deal about this truly remarkable bird.

When *The Handbook of British Birds* was published in 1938 it seemed unknown for Nightjars to nest in dense cover in the way described above. Yet in 1944 nine nests were found among the trees in chestnut plantations in Kent – four of them in very thick cover and none in the adjacent cleared areas (H. J. Hoffmann, *British Birds*, 40: 117-8).

Ron Machin's observations demonstrate that a similar habit is well-established among the Nightjars of the Isle of Wight. In three separate years (1960-62) in three separate areas (Clamerkin, Hamstead and Parkhurst Forest) nine nests in all were found among well-grown trees with dense undergrowth, and in all cases except one (Hamstead, 1960) there was an adjacent open area. In 1957-59 too, although the nests were not found, there was the same combination of wooded and open areas, at Parkhurst Forest and St. George's Down. Nesting in such sites appears to afford the Nightjars the advantages of both habitats – the greater protection and concealment among the trees and undergrowth, and the greater ease of catching food over the open areas.

J.S.

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