

The Broadwing



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July 2023

Montclair, NJ
Volume LXIX, Number 11

Message from the Editor July 2023

Dear Members and Friends,

In June, I indicated that the Broadwing would return in September, but with over 70 entertaining pages at hand, a July issue seemed like a very necessary idea.

Rick Wright shared Jewels of the Coastal United Kingdom. The pictures and descriptions will tempt you to be there.

We also have stories about big cities and small birds.

Sandy

In This Issue

New York City.....	2
Science Articles.....	3
MBC Bird of the Year.....	4
New Club Members	4
2023–2024 Officers.....	5
Migrant Trap VI	6
Field Trip Reports	7
Upcoming Field Trips	14
Virtual Bird Walks	15
Montclair Bird Club Meetings.....	16
Jewels of the Coastal United Kingdom.....	17
Birds in This Issue.....	76

Next club meeting: Wednesday, September 13, 2023
Virtual Bird Walk: Thursday, September 21, 2023

As rising oceans threaten NYC, the city is sinking.

Bobby Caina Calvan

If rising oceans aren't worrying enough, add this to the risks New York City faces: The metropolis is slowly sinking under the weight of its skyscrapers, homes, asphalt, and humanity itself.

New research estimates that the city's landmass is sinking at an average rate of 1 to 2 millimeters per year.

Subsidence happens everywhere when the ground is compressed, but a study published this month in the journal *Earth's Future* sought to estimate how the massive weight of the city itself is hurrying things along.

More than 1 million buildings are spread across the city's five boroughs. The research team calculated that all of those structures add up to about 1.7 trillion tons of concrete, metal, and glass—about the mass of 4,700 Empire State buildings—pressing down on the Earth.

The full story: [Phys.org](https://www.phys.org)



Smallest species shifting the fastest: Bird body size predicts rate of change in a warming world.

University of Michigan

Birds across the Americas are getting smaller and longer-winged as the world warms, and the smallest-bodied species are changing the fastest.

That's the main finding of a new University of Michigan–led study published May 8 in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The study combines data from two previously published papers that measured changes in body size and wing length in a total of more than 86,000 bird specimens over four decades in North and South America. One study examined migrating birds killed by colliding with buildings in Chicago; the other looked at nonmigrant birds netted in the Amazon.

Though the two datasets are nonoverlapping in both species composition and geography, and the data were collected independently using different methods, the birds in both studies displayed similarly widespread decreases in body size with concurrent increases in wing length.

Full article: [Phys.org](#)



Montclair Bird Club
2023 Bird of the Year
Belted Kingfisher



Photo by Ric Cohn
Garret Mountain Reservation

New Montclair Bird Club Members 2023

January

Monica Cardoza	Ridgewood, NJ
Susan & Michael Monaghan	Montclair, NJ
Anil & Seema Nerurkar	Wayne, NJ

February

Karen Nikeson	Edgewater, NJ
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March

Grace Friend	Montclair, NJ
Camille Gutmore	Nutley, NJ
Christie Morganstein	Randolph, NJ

April

Hillary Leonard	Montclair, NJ
Kathrine McCaffery	Maplewood, NJ
Kathy & Bob Wilson	Newton, NJ

May

Michael Yellin	Montclair, NJ
Amanda & A. J. Tobia	Rockaway, NJ

2023-2024 Officers elected at the June 2023 Members Meeting

OFFICERS

President	Donna Traylor
Vice President	Evan Cutler
Secretary	Pat Sanders
Treasurer	Sandy Sorkin

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Bill Beren
Ric Cohn
Wayne Greenstone
Don Traylor
Rick Wright

Migrant Trap
By Æneas Faber

VI

Phoebe had been right about one thing, of course, and sunrise found me in the woods, shivering slightly from the early morning chill and the lack of sleep. Almost immediately, I ran into Tuck, who looked only slightly worse than I felt; but where I was still catatonic, Tuck was raving, pumped full of caffeine and anticipation of a good fallout. "Rosy-fingered dawn, my right ear! Red-eyed dawn, maybe, infernal flaming dawn—Cape May—comes at you out of the east like a Bolshevik Mongol horde—there's a Tennessee—tanager, up—I'm writing my congressman, you know, forget daylight saving time, we need nighttime saving time, set the clocks ahead three hours first of May every year, let us birders get some sleep for a change—you hear blue grosbeak over there?"

It was a good morning, and we were close to a hundred species by lunchtime, when Tuck and I headed out to the settling ponds to see if the bittern Les Ospina had found yesterday was still there. There was only a thin screen of cattails along the water in one corner of the last pond, and they were still short enough that just a few minutes' search was enough to convince us that, unsurprisingly, the bird was gone; but there were enough newly arrived shorebirds to keep us busy for hours.



Cape May Warbler

Soon it occurred to me that poor Dorothy was at the store alone, and I called her on Tuck's cell phone to tell her that I wouldn't be in before my meeting with Phoebe. Our conversation was cut short by a jubilant shout from Tuck, who had found not just a Wilson's phalarope but three red-necks as well. "We should have been here yesterday," I muttered, still disappointed to have missed the bittern. Tuck responded with a snort and the observation that if yesterday were today we'd be in Australia and have another twenty-four hours of sleep before we'd have to get up this morning. It was a clear sign of just how tired I really was that I not only agreed but thought that I understood him.

To be continued

Montclair Bird Club Field Trip Reports

June 3, 2023

Negri-Nepote Native Grasslands Preserve

Benita Fishbein

Grasslands are among the most endangered ecosystems in the country, and grassland birds have experienced some of the steepest declines of any. So it was wonderful that on National Prairie Day—coincidental but true—eight of us visited this beautiful native grassland preserve in Somerset County. Highlights of the day included several singing grasshopper sparrows, including one giving its flight song atop a nest box; a bunch of willow flycatchers emphatically “fitz-bewing”; multiple orchard orioles, including one young male singing from a treetop; and many field sparrows announcing their presence with their bouncing ping-pong ball song—we even managed to get a good look at a few.

A total of 45 species were seen or heard:

Canada goose	Eastern kingbird	American goldfinch
Mourning dove	Blue jay	Grasshopper sparrow
Chimney swift	American crow	Chipping sparrow
Killdeer	Northern rough-winged swallow	Field sparrow
Double-crested cormorant	Tree swallow	Song sparrow
Great blue heron	Barn swallow	Eastern towhee
Black vulture	House wren	Bobolink
Turkey vulture	European starling	Orchard oriole
Osprey	Gray catbird	Baltimore oriole
Cooper’s hawk	Northern mockingbird	Red-winged blackbird
Red-tailed hawk	Eastern bluebird	Brown-headed cowbird
Red-bellied woodpecker	American robin	Common grackle
Downy woodpecker	Cedar waxwing	Common yellowthroat
Northern flicker	House sparrow	Yellow warbler
Willow flycatcher	House finch	Northern cardinal









May 13, 2023

South Mountain Reservation

Alex Bernzweig

South Mountain Reservation, a 2100-acre nature reserve in the Watchung Mountains, has long been my favorite local hotspot to visit during spring migration. An early morning walk in late April or May will often yield an impressive array of migrants, and this particular day was no exception. Beni and I met at 7:30 am in the main parking lot at Crest Drive, where we were immediately greeted by a flurry of warblers moving through the tall oak trees, and we observed more warblers flying up the ridge to join them. American redstarts and northern parulas were the dominant species, but we also picked out a few blackpolls, chestnut-sided warblers, and bay-breasted warblers. We slowly walked onto Summit Field, hoping to find some of the more difficult skulking species in the underbrush, such as a mourning warbler or Lincoln's sparrow—to no avail. Following the distant songs of more warblers and thrushes, we continued to a trail skirting the border of a large deer enclosure. Here we were rewarded with the best concentration of birds we would encounter, and we were able to add many more species to the list, including Wilson, hooded, Tennessee, and Nashville warblers, as well as a singing black-billed cuckoo.



At 10:30 am, we decided that we had covered this section of the park to the best of our ability, so we drove north to briefly check two more spots where we could

tack on a few more species. At Tulip Springs Boy Scout Area, we were able to hear a white-eyed vireo that had been present for at least a week. Next, we birded Orange Reservoir, hoping to find swallows or a lingering duck or grebe. Unfortunately, the swallows were mostly absent, and there were no ducks aside from the resident mallards, but we picked up a singing pine warbler and a common raven. We wrapped the trip up just before noon to join Wayne and other MBC members for the Big Sit at Mills Reservation. Quite an enjoyable day all around

71 species observed:

Mallard	Tufted titmouse	Ovenbird
Mourning dove	Tree swallow	Black-and-white warbler
Black-billed cuckoo	Barn swallow	Tennessee warbler
Chimney swift	White-breasted nuthatch	Nashville warbler
Ruby-throated hummingbird	Blue-gray gnatcatcher	Common yellowthroat
Double-crested cormorant	House wren	Hooded warbler
Great blue heron	Carolina wren	American redstart
Turkey vulture	European starling	Northern parula
Broad-winged hawk	Gray catbird	Magnolia warbler
Belted kingfisher	Veery	Bay-breasted warbler
Red-bellied woodpecker	Swainson thrush	Blackburnian warbler
Downy woodpecker	Wood thrush	Chestnut-sided warbler
Hairy woodpecker	American robin	Blackpoll warbler
Northern flicker	Cedar waxwing	Black-throated blue warbler
Eastern wood-pewee	House sparrow	Pine warbler
Least flycatcher	American goldfinch	Yellow-rumped warbler
Great crested flycatcher	Chipping sparrow	Black-throated green warbler
White-eyed vireo	White-throated sparrow	Canada warbler
Yellow-throated vireo	Song sparrow	Wilson's warbler
Warbling vireo	Eastern towhee	Scarlet tanager
Red-eyed vireo	Baltimore oriole	Northern cardinal
Blue jay	Red-winged blackbird	Rose-breasted grosbeak
Common raven	Brown-headed cowbird	Indigo bunting
Black-capped chickadee	Common grackle	



Upcoming Field Trips

Mill Creek Marsh

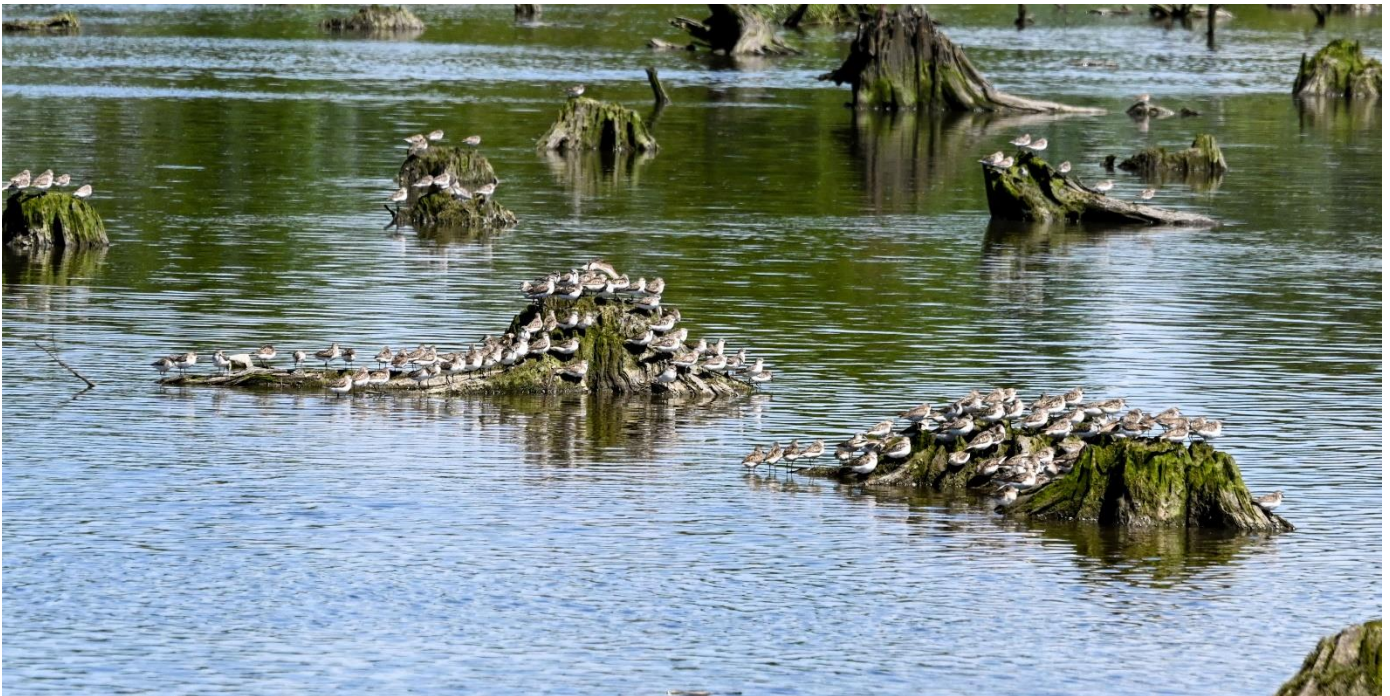
3:00 pm, Sunday, July 30

with Rick Wright

In the event of rain, this trip will be canceled; please check the website the evening before.

Less than a month after the last northbound semipalmated sandpipers have left us, the first returning birds appear. Their numbers slowly increase through July, then explode in the last days of the month, when many thousands of adult semipalmateds gather at high tide on the ancient cedar stumps of Mill Creek Marsh. Presenting the most impressive wildlife spectacle in our area, these birds are often joined by smaller numbers of least sandpipers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, solitary sandpipers, and short-billed dowitchers, and there is always the possibility of a surprise rarity.

Meet in the parking lot at Bob's Discount Furniture, Secaucus, at 3:00 pm (directions at MontclairBirdClub.org). We will walk a leisurely mile on wide, level trails, finishing before sunset. The shorebirds are often very close to the path on the rising tide, but binoculars or a spotting scope will give you the best views. If you want to bone up on your shorebird identification in advance, we recommend the *Stokes Beginner's Guide to Shorebirds* or O'Brien et al., *The Shorebird Guide*.



Dress for what may well be hot and humid weather; a broad-brimmed hat and sunscreen are de rigueur. Insects are rarely a problem here, though there may be a mosquito or two if the day is unusually calm. Bring plenty of water and a snack; restrooms are available in the adjacent strip mall.

Virtual Bird Walks

2020

July	1	Local Birding
August	2	Backyards and a Marsh
September	3	Backyards and Trips
October	4	Member Birding
November	5	Member Birding
December	6	Member Birding

2021

January	7	International Birding and New York City
February	8	International Birding
March	9	Member Birding
April	10	Shore Birds
May	11	Local Birding
June	12	Member Birding
July	13	Birding, Costa Rica
August	14	Identify a Bird by Its Eyes
September	15	Birds and Water
October	16	Birds with Masks
November	17	Winter Birds

2022

January	18	Personal Choice
February	19	Color
March	20	Signs of Spring
April	21	Birds Eating or Black & White Birds
May	22	Local Birds
September	23	My Summer
November	24	Bird Pairs
December	25	A Trip

2023

January	26	Winter
February	27	A Month in a Birder's Life
March	28	Egrets, Herons, and Wading Birds
April	29	Woodpeckers
May	30	Small Birds
June		Members Meeting, no Virtual Bird Walk
July		Summer vacation, no Virtual Bird Walk
August		Summer vacation, no Virtual Bird Walk
September		Theme: What I Did on My Summer Vacation

Montclair Bird Club Meetings

2020

May	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
June	A Walk on Pipeline Road, by Sandy Sorkin.
July	The Real James Bond, by Jim Wright.
August	An Online Quiz, with Rick Wright.
September	Manakins and Microbes, by Jennifer Houtz.
October	Bizarre Breeding Behaviors of Tropical Cuckoos, by Christine Riehl.
November	Dispersal in Young Peregrine Falcons, by Elise Morton.
December	An MBC Story Slam, by Pamela Olsen.

2021

January	Modern-Day Exploration in the Tropics, by Dan Lane.
February	Winter Raptors, by Giselle Smisko.
March	Damselflies and Dragonflies: The Other White Meat, by George Nixon.
April	Wolf Natural History and Tourism in Yellowstone, by Paul Brown.
May	Sandhills and Saw-whets, by Matthew Schuler.
June	Magnificent Namibia, by Linda Woodbury.
September	Raptors, by Wayne Greenstone.
October	Watershed, by Hazel England.
November	Build-a-Bird, with Rick Wright.

2022

January	A Tale of Many Penguins, by Ardith Bondi.
February	Oh! Canada, by Chris Sturm.
March	Tracking the Migration of New Jersey Birds Using the Motus Network, by Cailin O'Connor.
April	Spotlighting Voices in Bird Conservation, by Mardi Dickinson.
May	101 Great Birds from Around the World, by Mark Garland.
June	Member's Meeting.
September	Exploring the Big Bend in Southwest Texas, by Donna Traylor.
October	Build-a-Bird, with Rick Wright.
November	On Safari: Botswana and South Africa, by Ric Cohn.

2023

January	America's Iconic Birdman: Frank Chapman, by James Huffstodt.
February	A Bird Club in San Diego, by Rick Wright.
March	The peregrine project, by Wayne Quinto Greenstone.
April	Piping Plovers on the Rockaway Peninsula, by Chris Allieri.
May	Basic Ornithology, by Phil Echo.
June	Members Meeting

Enjoy this account of a cruise to the islands and coastal refuges of England, Wales, and Scotland. In 2024, VENT will be exploring many more of the UK's wonderful wild places in the next of this series of comfortable and relaxed cruises: Wild Scotland, aboard the 132-passenger *Greg Mortimer*. See tinyurl.com/ventscot for more details.

Jewels of the Coastal United Kingdom

May 3–17, 2023

On board the *Greg Mortimer*

with Rick Wright



Atop the Atlantic Puffin colonies of Fair Isle, the *Greg Mortimer* waiting patiently below. Photo Rick Wright

Long considered one of the most “civilized” countries in the world, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—comprising the distinct states of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland—is also the site of some of the wildest landscapes anywhere. Sheer cliffs, lush gardens, quiet harbors, and wave-battered subarctic islands are home to an amazing array of plants and wildlife, among them breathtaking numbers of birds, from comically self-important Atlantic Puffins to noisy Song Thrushes and noisome Northern Fulmars. The observation of these and so many other species takes place against a rich background of history and culture, reaching back to the Bronze Age and beyond—and continuing in ancient traditions still observed today.



Our tour began in London on the eve of the coronation of a new monarch. Photo Rick Wright

London, the venerable capital of the UK, was all abustle with visitors hoping to be part of the coronation of a new king. But the birds of Hyde Park and the London Wetland Center had more important things on their mind: migration was still underway for some, while others were building nests and establishing pair bonds, and still others were already busy with the newly hatched next generation.



Egyptian Goslings and their parent in Kensington Gardens. Photo Rick Wright

To the interested eye, those sites and others around the capital recalled great events in the history of ornithology: a statue of Peter Scott watched over one of the finest preserves created by his Wildfowl Trust, and Edward Jenner, more famous perhaps for his introduction of vaccination into western medicine, looked out across urban ponds occupied by nesting Great Crested Grebes and European Coots. We took full advantage of the chance to visit the city's parks and the Wetland Center, where a Little Ringed Plover was among the highlights of an impressively long bird list.



A Willow Warbler sings from an unusual perch at Loch Gruinart. Photo Rick Wright

Our drive to Portsmouth the next morning took us tantalizingly past another important locality in the history of natural history, Selborne, where Gilbert White made the observations that determined for the first time the distinctness of the Willow Warbler from its lookalike, the Common Chiffchaff. The historic Portsmouth dockyards were less ornithologically suggestive, though the remains of Henry VIII's *Mary Rose* and Nelson's *Victory* were powerfully impressive reminders of other episodes in the long history of Great Britain.



Bluebells at Heligan. Photo Rick Wright

A dismal drizzle had greeted us in Portsmouth, but by the time we were ready to board the *Greg Mortimer*, our seaborne home for the next two weeks, the sun was out, and there was excitement in the warm air as we joined our fellow travelers for our first evening meal together. We met our expedition staff and much of the ship's crew, and fell asleep knowing that we would be more than well taken care of during our cruise.

We awoke the next morning in the harbor at Fowey, an ancient and picturesque port city on the Cornish peninsula, and the introduction to our three days in Cornwall and the Scillies.

Our first Zodiac landing was easy and smooth (as were almost all of them in our time together), and that trip and our quick bus rides through town took us past Daphne DuMaurier's harborside home and a summer house frequented by Virginia Woolf, whose *To the Lighthouse* was inspired by the shores and islets of Penzance. Our bus took us to Gorran Haven, the starting point for a pleasant walk along the coast; afterwards, we visited the nearby gardens of Heligan, abandoned a hundred years ago and brought back to their original glory in the 1990s. In addition to some imaginative and slightly creepy art installations, the woods and flowerbeds here produced our first good views of a number of common passerine species, including Eurasian Wrens, European Blackbirds, and Common Chaffinches, all of which would seem like old friends by the end of our tour; the only Firecrest of the tour delighted its watchers as it worked the tangled vines creeping up a venerable oak trunk. The gardens of Tresco were even more lavish, and the brief walk from our Zodiac landing site to the abbey entrance was slowed dramatically by a pair of Ring-necked Pheasant cocks engaged in earnest combat, virtually unaware of their human observers as they posed and postured.

Lundy, named long ago for its most famous feathered inhabitants—"lundi" was the Norse name, and is still the modern Icelandic name for the puffin—greeted us with an atmospheric light mist, the perfect conditions for an exploration of what felt like our first genuinely "northern" destination. Fittingly, alcids were everywhere, large numbers of Common Murres and Razorbills mixed with rafts of Atlantic Puffins. Eurasian Oystercatchers piped frantically from the rocks, and Black-legged Kittiwakes, Manx Shearwaters, and European Shags never let us forget that we were in the north.



A glorious portrait of an Atlantic Puffin. Photo Toni Lenstra

The next morning, the Principality of Wales welcomed us with sunny skies and strong winds, too strong, indeed, for us to land on the Pembrokeshire islands of Skokholm, Skomer, and Grasholm. Like Lundy, the names of those wild ocean rocks are a reminder of their nordic past: the Normans arrived there not long after the Conquest, and dominated not only these wild offshore islands but all of western Wales for more than half a century. Our own circumnavigation of all three islands was focused on the birds rather than territorial aggrandizement: it was impossible to know whether the murrelets, Razorbills, and puffins should be accounted in the hundreds or the thousands as we cruised from seacliff to cliff, and even the landbirds had a distinctly maritime feel, among them a dashing Peregrine Falcon hunting in the cover of the ship and Rock Pipits striding along the rugged shores.

Holy Head, gateway to Snowdonia, was the first of our actual landings in Wales. South Stack, the world-famous RSPB preserve at the northern end of the island, lay under threat of rain when we arrived, but neither the weather nor the 400 steps out to the lighthouse proved a deterrent to the seabirds or to those of us who watched the many Razorbills, Common Murrelets, and others flying busily to and from their nesting ledges; a few Atlantic Puffins were there, too, but the finest performances by that species would wait a day or two. Our guide here turned out to be none other than Ruth Miller, who with her husband, Alan Davies, set a world big year record in an effort commemorated in their aptly titled *Biggest Twitch*, published in 2014 after an epic journey highlight by the sighting of no fewer than 4,300 species.



Staffa. Photo Rick Wright



Black Guillemots on the Isle of Man. Photo Rick Wright

Our senses overwhelmed by so many seabirds, we set out after lunch for Caernarfon Castle, historically the site of investiture of the princes of Wales. After a quick look at the imposing fortress, a warm breeze and sunny sky tempted some of us to explore a nearby park. It was here that we found our first newly fledged European Robins, their odd green-brown, streaked and spotted plumage so different from the slightly scraggly but still bright Christmas-card orange of their harried parents. We had heard European Nuthatches in London, but now at last we saw that large, noisy species, a pair in attendance on a cavity nest right next to the path. The birding was so enjoyable that the incoming drizzle caught us almost by surprise; the

only solution, we determined, was to walk back into town and wait the storm out over some very nice ice cream.

Our approach to the Isle of Man early the next morning revealed a lovely cityscape as Douglas came into view. On the harbor rocks were Common Eiders and Eurasian Oystercatchers, entertainment enough as we waited for the Zodiacs to take us ashore. We were met by another pair of excellent local guides, who took us first to enjoy the Black Guillemots nesting in the stone walls beneath Peel Castle; large numbers of Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwakes were

feeding close at hand, giving us some of the best looks yet at these captivating birds. Then it was off to the ineloquently named Sound, the tiny but treacherous channel dividing the Isle of Man from its Calf. A Little Bunting had been seen on the Calf over the days preceding our visit, but we were more than content watching the first Great Skua of our cruise. Even if we would see many more of these enormous brown predatory “gulls” as we proceeded north, their obvious power and boldness took our breath away each time.

Lunch was in a golf course restaurant in Port St. Mary, both the food and the birding that followed much better than that description might suggest.



A European Stonechat stakes his claim to a gorse bush. Photo Toni Lenstra

Common Ringed Plover and Dunlin were loafing on the beach, both species remarkably hard to see against a pebbly brown background. Linnets and European Goldfinches, two of the most endearing of Europe’s enviable variety of finches, flitted through the gorse. We were fortunate to catch a glimpse from the bus of a brown Hen Harrier, a species suffering considerable persecution in much of Britain—so much so that we saw not a single other during the entire tour.



The Scottish primrose blooms in spring and again in late summer in its extremely limited range. Photo Rick Wright

Islay was the first site in Scotland on our itinerary. There were many reasons to look forward to the visit, from the world-famous Ardbeg distillery and the island's venerable woolen mill to Loch Gruinart, another gem in the crown of the RSPB. Our Zodiacs brought us to shore through an unpromising fog, almost tempting us doughty birders to join those of our fellow passengers seeking shelter and warmth and other pleasures in the distillery. But our resolve paid off when we found the other side of the island warm and bright and calm, the perfect setting for an exciting day's birding.



Lesser Redpoll. Photo Toni Lenstra

Loch Gruinart is headquartered at a working farm, a model of how extensive agricultural practices can contribute to the preservation of both the cultural and the natural heritage. Barn Swallows and Western Jackdaws haunted the farmyard, while Willow Warblers sang from the hedge-lined roadside. We walked slowly down onto the marshes, where Common Redshanks, Northern Lapwings, and Meadow Pipits abounded much as they must have 150 years

ago. A small flock of lingering Whooper Swans joined the familiar Graylag Geese and Common Shelducks, but even more exciting was a lingering look at a Common Cuckoo flying low and close over the fields. Hard as it was to tear ourselves away from the comfortable blind, we strolled back up the hill to enjoy the lunch the ship's staff had packed for us; we ate under the watchful eyes of Blackcaps, Willow Warblers, and Lesser Redpolls, while a constant stream of Rooks from the nearby rookery kept the blue skies busy.

When it came time to return to the harbor and our waiting Zodiacs, we were amazed to find that the fog had never lifted on that side of the island, making the hours at Loch Gruinart seem that much more magical. Our stop at the Islay Woolen Mill, purveyor of garments of sheeply origin to



Birding Loch Gruinart. Photo Kay Forte

all sorts of apparently famous people, was a delightful surprise in spite of the dull mist: Gray Wagtails, the only ones we would see, were wagging their tails on the rocks in the middle of the rushing mill race, and a single White-throated Dipper—sadly, not seen by all of us—shot up the river from beneath the pedestrian bridge. The feeders just outside the shop door were busy with Eurasian Siskins, Coal Tits, and Greenfinches, close enough to the well-traveled path that even some of the other, non-birding passengers paused to enjoy them. We returned to the *Greg Mortimer* in time for a barbecue dinner; the skies cleared to make it a wonderful evening to enjoy on deck as the ship resumed its journey north.

Fog and light rain were the order of the day at Iona next morning, a fitting atmosphere for getting to know an island so steeped in history and mystery. While the famous abbey gets all the attention—it was in the scriptorium here that the Book of Kells was most likely produced more than a millennium ago—our visit to the ruins of the island’s nunnery was at least as evocative, and the sight of Great Tits nesting in the ancient stone walls and the sound of

Common Cuckoos from the nearby woods made the scene complete. Corn Crakes, now so rare over most of their range, were singing from the nettly fields at the abbey, but remained, as usual, no more than a scratchy voice.

A rising wind drove away the rain and cleared the skies, making our afternoon landing on Staffa adventurous, but it was more than worth it to have braved the swell as we climbed the steep stairs above the basalt columns that have made the island such an attraction over the centuries. Fingal’s Cave, named for a figure in the Ossian epics forged by James McPherson 250 years ago, was on full display, though the tide did not allow us to enter that space that Felix Mendelssohn would find so inspiring. Atop the island, Atlantic Puffins were nesting in abundance, and the birds we had come to be familiar with from a relative distance were suddenly at our very feet, going about their reproductive business in the grass on the vertiginous edge of the cliffs.

The same wind that had made our time on Staffa pleasantly dry and clear rocked us quite vigorously asleep as the ship made its way to the renowned archipelago of St. Kilda, and our landing on Hirta the next morning was an exciting one. The few minutes aboard the Zodiacs was exactly the time chosen by the skies to open with hard, cold drizzle, but once we were on shore, the skies cleared again. St. Kilda, always a remarkably desolate place to live, was finally evacuated almost a hundred years ago, but the cottages, church, school, and rough storehouses built by its hardy inhabitants out of the coarse local stone still stand, some in ruins, some more nearly intact,

still stand, providing homes for the St. Kilda Wren—a strong candidate for an eventual “split”—and Northern Fulmars. The wrens are cheerful, welcoming little sprites, but the fulmars more suspicious of visitors, whom they tend to greet by vigorously regurgitating a substance that smells exactly like what it is.



Hirta. Photo Rick Wright

The small museum in the derelict schoolhouse provided a moving story of the fate of the human residents of St. Kilda and their necessarily close reliance on the resources offered them by the sea. A drawer of Common Murre eggs reminded us powerfully of the importance of the archipelago’s famous seabird colonies, and a bit less directly, of the fear and suspicion with which St. Kilda’s last Great Auk was met: the weird bird was thought to be a supernatural being, and when the weather turned bad, it was killed to keep it from bringing an even worse storm to the islands. The literature on this species and its extinction at the hands of hungry and ignorant man is vast, but see the account here of interviews with the last people to have killed the birds: biodiversitylibrary.org/item/258389#page/422/mode/1up.

Even more remote than St. Kilda, Orkney and Shetland would be our destinations on the last full day of what had been two weeks full of new experiences. We were introduced to the birdlife of Papa Westray by a local ornithologist, who took us through the wind to high fields where European Golden Plover showed off their stunning breeding plumage and Parasitic Jaegers (there called Arctic Skuas) dashed through the skies in search of anything smaller and slower than themselves. Here, too, we were in what was once Great Auk country, and a modest cliff-top monument commemorates the shooting of the island’s last in 1812; it now resides in London’s

Natural History Museum, the only complete specimen known to still exist from the United Kingdom (see www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/worlds-collide-great-auk.html).



Landing on Fair Isle. The bird observatory buildings, still under construction, are in the background. Photo Rick Wright

Our afternoon at Fair Isle was less melancholy. In a familiar pattern, on our Zodiac ride to shore we were pelted by a few minutes of drizzle, but our time on land was more clement. Great Skuas rode the winds overhead, while hardy little Shetland sheep grazed what grass could grow in so harsh and exposed a setting. Normally, we would have paid a call to the bird observatory, the most famous in all of Britain, but construction was still underway after the 2019 fire there, and only a female Eurasian Kestrel was there for us to pay our respects to.



Common Murre eggs are among the most variable of any. Photo Rick Wright

It seemed that last evening as if we had just started our journey, yet here we were preparing to say our goodbyes. Dinner on board our ship was more festive even than usual, followed by a wonderful presentation of the images taken by our photographers over the course of the voyage. We arrived in Aberdeen early the next morning, and before we knew it, we were back in one of the most civilized countries in the world, its marvelous wilds behind us until our next expedition.

- *Rick Wright*



The eradication of smallpox was no mean feat, but birders know Edward Jenner as a pioneering student of the foster parenting system of the Common Cuckoo. Photo Rick Wright

May 3: official start of the tour with arrivals in London for those not already there. Noon assembly at the Sheraton Grand, followed by a walk in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. Warm, clear, breezy.

May 4: 9:10 am assembly at the Sheraton Grand, followed by the taxi ride to the London Wetlands Center. Wetlands Center 9:40–3:35 pm, with a short break for lunch in the Kingfisher Café; meat pies were tried. At hotel 4:20 pm for check-in with Aurora. Variably cloudy, breezy, 60s F, no rain. Dinner 7:20–8:35 at Artiste musclé; very good food.

MAY 5: breakfast 6:30 am in hotel. Cloudy, 60s F. Left hotel for the drive to Portsmouth; occasional light rain. Old Dockyard Portsmouth; brief drizzle. Drive up hill and around Portsmouth. Arrive harbor to board *Greg Mortimer*. Partly cloudy, 60s F. Clearing. Boarding formalities, briefings, dinner. Mostly clear night.

MAY 6: arrival at Fowey, Cornwall, overnight. Breakfast on ship 7:00 am. Fog, light mist, calm, 50s F. Zodiacs to Fowey 8:20 am; occasional light rain. In Fowey 8:30; buses left at 9:05 am for Gorran Haven. Coastal trail 9:55–12:30; mostly cloudy, calm, 50s F. Lost Gardens of Heligan 12:40–3:15 pm; partly cloudy, light breeze, 50s F. On ship 4:25 pm. Clearing, warmer, light wind.



Horticultural art in the Lost Gardens of Heligan, Mevagissey. Photo Jamie Alexander

MAY 7: arrival at the Scilly Isles overnight. Light fog and mist followed by clearing and dry; 50s, partly cloudy when we left the ship at 8:20 am. 6:15–7:30, on deck for seabirds. Tresco and Tresco Abbey Garden. Lunch on ship. Zodiacs to St. Mary's; birding the Garrison. Back at ship 5:20 pm. Clear, breezy, 60s F. Clouding over, light mist.



A remarkably friendly Song Thrush on St. Mary's. Photo Rick Wright

MAY 8: arrival at Penzance in the late evening of May 7. Low clouds, light rain, moderate wind. Overnight in harbor, then left ship at 8:40. Very short Zodiac ride to Penzance, then a drive around Cornwall by way of St. Ives in light rain. Lunch at Queens Hotel. Rain steady and heavy starting at 2:00 pm. 2:00–3:50, bus trip to mining areas with two very wet stops. On ship, the rain becoming much lighter, at 4:30 pm. Wind calm.

MAY 9: light breezes and fog, with sprinkles early, followed by variable cloudiness with bits of blue sky punctuated by light mist. 50s F. On Lundy Island 9:30–1:00; light mist, calm, 50s F. Cruising on the Zodiacs 3:00–4:35; weather clearing, light winds, 50s F.



A banded European Robin brings food to its young on Lundy. Photo Rick Wright

MAY 10: cruising to Pembrokeshire and its islands, arriving between Skomer and Skokholm 9:30 am; sunny, 60s F, but the winds too strong for Zodiacs. Circumnavigation of Skomer, Skokholm, and Grasholm and their huge seabird colonies.

MAY 11: arrival in Holy Head harbor; sunny at first, then cloudy, calm, then windy, 50s F. On deck 6:35–7:25 am to see our first Black Guillemots. Drive from harbor to South Stack; dim, occasional light mist, 50s F. Walk from visitor center to alcid colonies. After lunch, to Caernarfon Castle and Coed Helen Park. Clear, then light drizzle, but calm, 60s F; Marshfield ice cream as the rain grew heavier.

MAY 12: beautifully clear, up to the high 60s, breezy to windy. Arrival in Douglas harbor, Isle of Man. On deck 6:35–7:25 am; bus to Peel Bay and then to the Sound, separating Isle from Calf; golf course and surrounding area in Port St. Mary. Back on ship 4:35 pm.



A male Barn Swallow on Islay. Photo Rick Wright

MAY 13: dense fog, 50s F, breezy on arrival in Port Ellen, Islay; Zodiacs landed at 8:45 am. Taxi ride through the fog to Loch Gruinart, sunny, breezy, and 60s F. Woodland and estuary trails; remainder of group arrived in bus mid-afternoon. Woolen mill bird feeders and the town of Bowmore. Still foggy on our return to the other side of the island, with light mist; return to ship 5:40 pm. Barbecue dinner on ship as the weather quickly improved; left Islay and Port Ellen harbor at 8:45 pm.

MAY 14: arrival at Iona at 7:30 am, dense fog, breezy, light rain, 50s F. Birding around the abbey from 9:00 am; partly cloudy, breezy, dry. Heavy swell on our return to ship and on our Zodiac trip to the Isle of Staffa, where the sky was clear and the winds strong; clouds and light rain had returned by the time we were back on the ship at 5:00 pm.



The ruins of the Iona nunnery. Photo Rick Wright

MAY 15: arrival at Hirta, St. Kilda, after a night of notable swells; mostly clear, breezy, 50s F, then drizzly sleet for the zodiac ride, followed by mostly clear and breezy weather. Walk on Hirta to 12:30 pm. Lunch on ship, followed by windy cruise around seastacks and their colonies of fulmars and gannets. By suppertime on ship, overcast and windy.



Sheep are the only permanent residents of the St. Kilda archipelago now. Photo Rick Wright

MAY 16: arrival at Papa Westray 6:30 am; blue skies, 40s F, windy. Cold drizzle on Zodiac ride, then windy, 40s F, mostly clear on island. Walked to north end and back, returning to Zodiacs at 11:00 and on ship 11:15. Immediate departure for Fair Isle. Wet landing in drizzle, then partly cloudy, windy, 40s F. Fair Isle 3:00–5:50 pm. Farewell dinner followed by slide show.



Shelter from the winds of Papa Westray. Photo Rick Wright

MAY 17: arrival in Aberdeen at 5:30 am, and 8:00 transfer to Aberdeen Airport for flights home.



A windswept Shetland pony in Shetland. Photo Rick Wright

For precise localities and counts, see ebird.org/tripreport/124446.

WATERFOWL—ANATIDAE

Graylag Goose, *Anser anser*: this species is now common as a breeding bird across much of Britain, from London parks to the wilds of Orkney; some pairs in southerly regions are probably the descendants of feral birds. The UK's breeding birds are of the nominate subspecies, *A. a. anser*; because “lag” means “goose,” the English and scientific names together translate as “gray goose goose goose,” unequalled in the ranks of tautonymy. Goslings hatch with gray tarsi, while adults have bright orange feet; several of the birds in London's Hyde Park showed apparently anomalous pink tarsi, toes, and webs. The name of the Icelandic legal codex *Grágás*—the “graylag laws”—has never been thoroughly explained.

Brant, *Branta bernicla*: a single late lingerer on a gravel bar at Tresco in the Scillies, May 7. This bird was an adult of the expected nominate subspecies, *B. b. bernicla*, known as the Dark-bellied Brant; the taxonomy of these small, dark geese is notoriously complex, and some authorities treat this, the Atlantic Brant *hrota*, the Black Brant *nigricans*, and the mysterious Gray-bellied Brant of the western Arctic as distinct at the species level. The species epithet *bernicla* means “barnacle,” a hint at the confusion that has reigned in the classification of the *Branta* geese for centuries (according to some sources, the “true” barnacle bird of the Scots was in fact a scoter and not a goose at all; see academia.edu/43596958/Wright_The_Name_of_the_Scoter).

Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*: widely introduced and established in England and, less pervasively, Wales and Scotland. We saw small numbers—generally ones and twos—in the early days of our tour, in London, Portsmouth, and Cornwall. The introduced birds are large, long-necked, and long-billed; genuine vagrants to the British Isles tend to be of the mid-sized subspecies.

Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*: of the nearly four dozen seen in the course of our travels, nearly half were in urban habitats. We found birds on nests at several sites, including Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on May 13. Bizarrely, it is still true that the reigning monarch has the right to claim ownership of any wild birds of this species not owned by one of three “companies” permitted to own swans.

Whooper Swan, *Cygnus cygnus*: these handsome northern swans are usually gone from Britain by mid-May, but at least seven were still present at Loch Gruinart May 13. We were fortunate to hear the low-pitched humming hoots as birds passed over in flight.

Egyptian Goose, *Alopochen aegyptiaca*: originally restricted to Africa and, historically, portions of southern Europe and the Middle East, this attractive species has been widely introduced around the world, and is now a common breeder in England. Our largest numbers were in London parks and at the Wetlands Center, where we found adults caring for large broods (or perhaps combined broods, “creches”) of startlingly patterned young. In spite of its name, this species is not a genuine goose but rather a close relative of the shelducks; the scientific genus name *Alopochen* means “foxy goose,” often said to be a reference to the rusty plumage tones of adults but, I suspect, having more to do with the practice of their shelduck relatives of nesting in burrows.

Common Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*: these handsome waterfowl were present in pairs at several coastal sites, with the largest numbers around Port St. Mary in the Scillies. Though commonly thought of as beach birds, shelducks also breed inland in northwestern Europe, placing their nests in hollow trees, large nestboxes, or rabbit holes; their fossorial habits probably lurk behind the origin of the name *Alopochen* for their close relative the Egyptian Goose.

Mandarin Duck, *Aix galericulata*: common but local in England, where it was introduced long ago; we saw birds representing an established population only in Hyde Park, with many semi-captives present at the London Wetland Center. The only other species sharing the genus *Aix* is the equally striking Wood Duck of North America.

Northern Shoveler, *Spatula clypeata*: several lone drakes and at least one hen at Loch Gruinart, where this very widespread species nests. Like several other “puddle ducks,” Northern Shovelers are common in both North America and northern Eurasia; their populations are probably increasing thanks to wetland conservation and restoration in the breeding range.

Gadwall, *Mareca strepera*: another Holarctic duck, this species was uncommon just fifty years ago, but has become one of the most familiar puddle ducks in Europe and North America. We found them only in London, where a pair in Hyde Park allowed remarkably close approach, obviously feeling itself safe on the Round Pond. The English name is inscrutable, but the scientific species epithet *strepera*, “noisy,” refers to the male’s almost constant eructating grunt during the mating season.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*: one of the most familiar waterfowl, and the forebear of almost all domestic ducks. We saw pairs and at least one young family from London to Orkney. City parks and the captive populations at the London Wetlands Center presented a mix of birds of barnyard ancestry, some resembling wild birds, others showing traces of the often bizarrely patterned plumages produced by millennia of selective breeding. While this species is notorious for its willingness to breed with virtually any other species of duck or goose, true hybrids are actually scarce; most odd-looking mallard-like ducks are in fact mongrels produced by the mating of different domestic breeds; the best way to come to an educated guess about their parentage is to consult the illustrated websites of poultry dealers.

Common Teal, *Anas crecca*: conservative taxonomies still list this bird as conspecific with the American Green-winged Teal, but most authorities now “split” the two, naming the American bird *Anas carolinensis*. Each occurs as a scarce visitor in the range of the other, especially in winter. We detected about ten in the dense marsh vegetation at Loch Gruinart, and a pair was grazing with sheep on Fair Isle on May 16.



Common Teal, their bellies sullied, as usual, from feeding in mud. Note the male's strongly outlined face patch and lack of a vertical breast bar; the female's wing shows considerable white. Photo Rick Wright

Common Pochard, *Aythya ferina*: closely related to North America's Redhead and Canvasback, this attractive diving duck resembles both in its black-breasted, rusty-headed plumage. We found birds—mostly males—on quiet waters in Hyde Park and at the London Wetlands Center.

Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula*: over most of Europe, this is the most common urban duck after the ubiquitous Mallard. Our total of nearly 50 birds came from Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, and the London Wetlands Center. Uncommon on the west coast of North America, this species remains very scarce on the east coast anywhere south of Newfoundland.

Common Eider, *Somateria mollissima*: we saw this huge sea duck at every site from the Isle of Man north, with a small family of two adults and two young eiderlings on Papa Westray Mary 16. Almost circumpolar in the arctic, this species comprises half a dozen subspecies. The nominate subspecies, breeding across the shores of northwestern Europe, has a narrow bill extension onto the forehead; unfortunately, we did not have lingering looks at the birds we saw in Orkney and Shetland, which were most likely of the much less widely distributed subspecies *faroeensis*. As the scientific species name suggests (“extremely soft”), this is the duck that provides us with down for pillows, coats, and featherbeds.

PHEASANTS AND GROUSE—PHASIANIDAE

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*: one of the most widely and most successfully introduced birds in the northern hemisphere; native to scattered areas of central and western Asia. We encountered almost 30 individuals, most impressively two spectacularly colorful roosters engaged in an earnest and prolonged dispute at the gates to Heligan. The loud honking call of displaying males is a familiar sound in agricultural habitats.



Engorged with rage, this Ring-necked Pheasant was intent on driving all rivals away from his territory. Photo Toni Lenstra.

Lady Amherst’s Pheasant, *Chrysolophus amherstiae*: first introduced to Britain almost two centuries ago, this incredibly beautiful bird has declined dramatically over the past thirty years. The male we found in the gardens at Heligan represented a substantial percentage of the species’ entire English population. The story of this species’ discovery and description by western science

offers an almost unparalleled encapsulation of the interconnection between ornithology, diplomacy, and imperialist impulses in the early nineteenth century. The first two males known to British naturalists came from western China; they were gifts of tribute from the defeated king of Ava to Archibald Campbell, commander of the British armies in the first Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–1826. Campbell in turn presented them to Sarah Elisabeth Archer Amherst, who brought them with her to England on her return with her second husband, William Pitt Amherst, at the conclusion of his service as Governor General of occupied India. The pheasants were a small part of the collection of nearly 500 bird species Amherst had acquired during her time in south Asia; in recognition of her collecting zeal and of her generosity in granting access to the specimens, Leadbeater named the pheasant in her honor. There are very few clearer illustrations of the ways in which British science and British imperialism were interwoven.

Golden Pheasant, *Chrysolophus pictus*: one or two males in the Heligan gardens; it is likely that these birds were free-ranging semi-domesticated individuals rather than representatives of the rapidly dwindling English population, first introduced in 1845.

GREBES—PODICIPEDIDAE

Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*: usually common on wetlands large and small, urban and rural, Great Crested Grebes become somewhat more difficult to detect during the period of nest-building. We found birds, some of them on nests, in London and elsewhere. In addition to its startling beauty, this species played a historic role in the development of ornithological ethology as a science; it was one of the first European birds to be subjected to rigorous behavioral study, conducted by Julian Huxley and famously published in 1914 in his work on sexual selection; see www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/31855761#page/41/mode/1up.



A Great Crested Grebe in London. Photo Rick Wright

PIGEONS AND DOVES—COLUMBIDAE

Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia*: birds of feral origin were common in the larger towns and cities, with smaller numbers in less populous and more remote settlements. Even on northern islands and sea cliffs, it is virtually impossible to determine whether a given individual is a “pure” Rock Pigeon, without feral or domestic ancestry, but the small numbers of wild-plumaged birds near Mull, on Fair Isle, and on Papa Westray were as likely to be members of an aboriginal, naturally occurring population as not.

Stock Dove, *Columba oenas*: this beautifully colored medium-sized columbid is easy to overlook as just another feral pigeon, but its slightly smaller size, brighter bill, and distinctive wing pattern identify it nicely. Unlike the Rock Pigeon—wild or feral—Stock Doves nest in cavities, in holes in trees or, locally, in niches in stone buildings and walls. We encountered these attractive birds in Hyde Park, prospecting for nest sites, and at the London Wetlands Center, feeding on the ground beneath the blinds.

Eurasian Collared Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*: this now familiar bird was unknown in western Europe until the 1930s, when the populations in Turkey and the Balkans increased massively and began to explosively expand their range to the north and west, eventually reaching Iceland. Strikingly, birds released in the Bahamas in the 1970s adhered to the same compass reading when they began their rapid march across the North American continent: rather than spreading in all directions, they have rapidly moved northwest, such that this species is more

abundant by orders of magnitude in Anchorage than in North Carolina; see birdnote.org/listen/shows/eurasian-collared-doves-sense-direction. The strange species epithet means “eighteen,” and may have its origin in ancient Middle Eastern narratives; see <http://birdaz.com/blog/2013/07/10/the-eighteen-pigeon>.

CUCKOOS—CUCULIDAE

Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*: as one of the most famous of Middle English songs reminds us, May is the classic arrival time in the British Isles for this charismatic but usually invisible species. We heard the insistent and thoroughly horological song twice, at Iona and Islay, and had a remarkable opportunity for a rare good look at a gray male at Loch Gruinart, flying past at close range as we stood in wonder.

SWIFTS—APODIDAE

Common Swift, *Apus apus*: a famously late spring arrival, this species was just beginning to appear in numbers during our time in London; Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens were haunted by more than a dozen swirling, screaming birds, and twice that were encountered at the London Wetlands Center. In contrast, north of the Scillies we found swifts only on the Isle of Man and in western Wales. One of the major publishing events of this year will be the eagerly awaited appearance of Mark Cocker’s *One Midsummer’s Day*, an account by Britain’s foremost nature writer of the cultural and ecological meaning of this familiar but rapidly decreasing species.

RAILS—RALLIDAE

Corn Crane, *Crex crex*: this large terrestrial rail is among the most secretive birds in Europe; its rapid population decline makes it even more challenging to see. Some of its last strongholds are in the western islands of Scotland, and we heard the monotonous song, “crex crex,” in weedy fields on Iona and at Loch Gruinart. As usual, the vocalizing birds declined to emerge from their densely vegetated fastnesses, but it was encouraging all the same to know that some of these birds continue to survive in the face of the ever-greater intensification of agriculture across their range.

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*: common on any body of water and even on lawns in London, but less conspicuous in wilder, more remote habitats. This red-billed rail has been considered conspecific with the Common Gallinule of the Americas, but was re-split some years ago at the species level; the voices of the two species differ, but apart from subtle differences in the shape of the forehead shield, they are visually virtually indistinguishable.

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*: common in city parks and, less so, on rural wetlands. Birds in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens were already on nests, some of them remarkably close to restaurants and other human activities. Coots around the world are much of a sameness, but this species is easily distinguished from its most similar congener, the American Coot, by its large and pure white forehead shield and the absence of any white on the under tail coverts; Eurasian Coots are scarce but almost regular visitors to the Canadian Maritimes, and may be overlooked elsewhere in eastern North America.



Far from the placid birds they sometimes seem, Eurasian Coots and their congeners are fierce fighters. Photo Rick Wright

OYSTERCATCHERS—HAEMATOPODIDAE

Eurasian Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus*: the most frequently encountered shorebird on our tour, present on virtually every rocky beach and seaside pasture. Their loud piping whistles as they engaged in everyday squabbles quickly became a familiar part of the sonic background, but the dramatic appearance of birds screaming overhead—at us, at gulls and skuas, at each other—never became commonplace. One peculiar and recurrent sight was of trios walking together on the shingle, heads bowed and bills nearly scraping the ground.



Even by oystercatcher standards, the Eurasian is a strikingly beautiful bird. Photo Toni Lenstra

PLOVERS—CHARADRIIDAE

Eurasian Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*: the largest of the three golden plover species, this is one of the classic high-latitude breeding species in Britain and Scandinavia, at home on moors and pastures. We found three on a grassy field on Papa Westray in Orkney, two in black-breasted breeding plumage.

Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*: Britain has lost some 80% of its population of what was once a familiar and abundant farmland breeder. We were fortunate to see reasonably good numbers at several sites, beginning with the London Wetlands Center, where one member of a pair—apparently the male—repeatedly crouched and settled on a gravel bar with tail raised to reveal the orange under tail and vent. The largest numbers were found at wonderful Loch Gruinart, where the sight and sound of flashy black and white lapwings swooping across the sky giving their weird, unbirdlike calls evoked the countryside of forty years ago.



A spectacular Northern Lapwing at Loch Gruinart. Photo Rick Wright

Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*: the most abundant European representative of a familiar genus, common ringed plovers were encountered in small numbers at several sites. The largest flock, of at least thirty birds, was on a Papa Westray beach May 16. The striking plumage pattern, with a broad black breast band and bold head pattern, is surprisingly cryptic against the stony background these birds prefer, a fine example of what the American painter Abbott Thayer described more than a hundred years ago as disruptive coloration.

Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*: this small, neatly marked plover is a fairly recent addition to Britain's breeding avifauna, first colonizing southern England no more than eighty-five years ago—a story charmingly told in Kenneth Alsop's *Adventure Lit Their Star*. The bird remains quite uncommon, but we were so fortunate as to see a single adult at the London Wetlands Center May 4.



Boldly marked and tame, this Common Ringed Plover nevertheless disappears against its background. Photo Toni Lenstra

SANDPIPERS—SCOLOPACIDAE

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*: at the very end of its northbound migration, this species was seen only twice. The white back of this mid-sized curlew is very different from the brown upper parts of its New World counterpart, which is now widely recognized as a distinct species, the Hudsonian Whimbrel.

Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata*: both the genus and the species name refer to the long bill of this rapidly declining species: *Numenius* means “crescent moon,” *arquata* “bowed downward.” We had ample opportunity to admire these outlandish appendages on Papa Westray, where two pairs were busy mobbing the Parasitic Jaegers intruding on their pasture. As in most sandpipers, the female is slightly larger and significantly longer-billed.

Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*: small numbers, totaling about 27, on rocky beaches, where their intricate patterns often made them hard to pick out against the pebbly background. This arctic-breeding shorebird is one of the most widespread species in the world, occurring at one season or another on every continent but Antarctica.

Sanderling, *Calidris alba*: another extremely widespread sandpiper, this chubby “peep” was seen only at Staff, where a flock of some 35 flew past.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*: breeding across the high latitudes of the northern hemisphere, this is probably the commonest of migrant sandpipers in western Europe, wintering in huge flocks on washes and estuaries in Britain. Like the ringed plovers, this species has a boldly patterned plumage that serves as surprisingly effective camouflage against the rocks and seaweed of its preferred habitats.

Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*: this is the Old World counterpart of the American Wilson's Snipe, with which it has been considered conspecific in the past. After a quick flyby at Loch Gruinart, we were delighted to see several individuals at once singing over the pastures of Papa Westray. The wind kept us from hearing the song, but we could clearly see the birds spreading their outer tail feathers high in the air; those feathers are modified in shape to produce the characteristic "winnowing" sound of displaying birds.

Common Redshank, *Tringa totanus*: like a small, brightly patterned and brightly colored yellowlegs, this is still a fairly common breeding bird on marshes and damp fields in northern Europe, its cheerful piping a familiar sound in many places. We had good views of birds on the ground only at Loch Gruinart, where several pairs kept busy chasing each other and any other bird that dared enter their territories.

JAEGERS AND SKUAS—STERCORORIIDAE

Great Skua, *Stercorarius skua*: this imposing predator has suffered high mortality from avian flu on its British breeding grounds, but we were still able to admire good numbers on several of the more northerly islands, where they prey on anything and everything they can catch with their massive hooked bills. Ian found the first on the Isle of Man; our highest counts were on Fair Isle May 16, when as many as half a dozen at a time could be seen soaring or flapping, falcon-like, among the seabirds. The Norse name "skua" is used in Britain to apply to all members of the genus *Stercorarius* ("dung bird"), while in North America we call the smaller species jaegers.



Great Skuas on Fair Isle, one of them a lovely "blond" bird. Photo Rick Wright

Parasitic Jaeger, *Stercorarius parasiticus*: a medium-sized jaeger, but dwarfed by the huge and powerful skuas. We saw this dashing bird only on Papa Westray, where at least three adults were terrorizing curlews and golden plover on a pasture. Like the Pomarine and Long-tailed Jaegers, this species occurs in several color morphs; we saw both light and dark adults, easily identified by their relatively large white primary flashes and pointed, protruding central tail feathers. The British call this species the Arctic Skua, an uninformative name if ever there was one. "Parasitic" in its North American English name and in the scientific species epithet is a reference to the jaeger's boldly piratic behavior, chasing smaller seabirds and forcing them to disgorge their prey; Parasitic Jaegers are also opportunistic predators, eating birds and mammals whenever they can catch them. This is probably the world's most common *Stercorarius*, but in North America, it is perhaps the least often seen, especially inland, where most migrant jaegers turn out to be Long-tailed or Pomarine.



A dramatically dark Parasitic Jaeger on Papa Westray. Photo Rick Wright

AUKS—ALCIDAE

Common Murre, *Uria aalge*: impressively, breathtakingly abundant on the seabird cliffs and open waters, where hundreds and thousands could reliably be seen, often at very close range. We saw them almost constantly from the ship and from land, and quickly learned to distinguish them even in flight at some distance by their cold brown upper parts and narrowly white, faintly streaked flanks, so different from the dapper black and white of the Razorbill. This species was historically a very important food source for the human inhabitants of high latitudes, who took eggs, chicks, and adults from the breeding cliffs; in the early twentieth century, the extremely beautiful eggs were also collected for the purification of sugar. See birdaz.com/blog/2013/08/08/murres-eggs-and-bullocks-blood. The British know this bird, unhelpfully, as the Guillemot.



Common Murres crowd together on their breeding cliff. Photo Rick Wright

Razorbill, *Alca torda*: the closest relative of the greatly lamented Great Auk, this natty alcid was common at sea and in the cliffside breeding colonies, where it tended to cluster apart from the more abundant murres. The cocked tail and odd bill with white markings identify the bird nicely at sea; in flight, the upperparts are decidedly black, the flanks extensively and conspicuously white.



Razorbills are slightly more private in the breeding season. Photo Rick Wright

Black Guillemot, *Cepphus grylle*: this nattily plumaged little alcid is rarely seen far from shore, preferring to breed and winter in protected harbors. The nests are placed in rock crevices and beneath piers and docks; nesting boxes have been installed for them in some harbors, but have so far gone unused. The black body, large white wing patches, and crimson feet and gape are distinctive in breeding adults; winter birds are very different, the black replaced by gray in southern breeders and nearly white in the most northern. At any season, Black Guillemots are often first detected by their high-pitched, slightly raspy whistles.

Atlantic Puffin, *Fratercula arctica*: this curious and comical little auk is the star of any visit to the north Atlantic. The islands off west Scotland hold the largest colonies in the world. We saw birds at sea, floating on the water or fluttering high through the air. Our visits to nesting sites were rewarded with extremely close views of birds at their nesting burrows, where they loafed apparently unconcerned by our presence, their upright posture and neat black and white plumage fully justifying the humorous genus name *Fratercula*, “little brother.” At this season, the bills are huge and bright, the facial rosette and eye ornaments prominent, and the feet and toes bright orange; winter birds, especially first-cycle individuals, are rather duller, with smaller, darker bills, dusker faces, and variably grayish pink feet and webs. The nests are placed in burrows—typically dug by European rabbits, then tidied by the puffins themselves—on the grassy edges of dizzying cliffs, where the bird’s chainsaw-like roar is unforgettable if it can be heard over the wind and surf.



Everybody's favorite, and seen in abundance on our cruise. Photo Rick Wright

GULLS AND TERNS—LARIDAE

Black-legged Kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla*: we saw this elegant little gull nearly every day we were at sea, and often in large numbers, as the Xs in our eBird checklists suggest. Nearly all the birds were adults; non-breeding birds presumably spend the entire year far offshore and away from the breeding colonies. Large chicks, known as tarrocks, were once an important food source in coastal Scotland. The name “kittiwake” is echoic of the call, as is a wide range of other, less savory folk names.



Black-legged Kittiwake at the Isle of Man. Photo Rick Wright

Black-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*: this familiar species was most common in urban habitats, in London and in Portsmouth, but we also found small numbers in Anglesey, on Islay, on Hirta, and on Papa Westray. On the tangled mess that is gull names, see birdaz.com/blog/2006/07/02/whos-laughing-now.

Mediterranean Gull, *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*: this gorgeous gull, the closest relative of the equally stunning Pallas's Gull, has undergone remarkable population growth in the past fifty years, and its breeding range continues to spread north in Britain and on the continent. The only two individuals we saw were unfortunately "front-seat-only" birds near Farlington Marshes in Portsmouth.

Common Gull, *Larus canus*: until recently often classified as conspecific with the Short-billed Gull breeding in Alaska and western Canada and with the Kamchatka Gull breeding in Siberia and the Russian Far East; genetic studies suggest that the Short-billed Gull is more closely related to the Ring-billed Gull than to either of the other two, which are sister taxa. All three of these former "Mew" Gulls are northerly breeders, and our daily tallies increased modestly as we moved from Wales into Scotland and the Scottish islands.



Suddenly it is obvious why the Common Gull always looks so neat and clean. Photo Rick Wright

Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*: this was the commonest gull observed on our trip, present in good numbers virtually everywhere from London to Orkney and Shetland. Herring Gull taxonomy remains vexed, and many authorities now recognize the American Herring Gull and the European Herring Gull as two distinct species; young birds are especially distinctive, messy and brown in the American species, neat and frosty in the European.

Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*: also common at nearly every site; the eBird total is artificially depressed by the somewhat desperate use of X on many of our checklists. This is an especially attractive gull at every age, from the neatly checkered juveniles to the elegantly black and white adults.



A fiercely handsome adult Lesser Black-backed Gull. Photo Rick Wright

Great Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*: the largest gull species in the world is fairly common on the Atlantic coasts of America and Europe; we saw small numbers, up to a dozen, every day, but these enormous birds were always far outnumbered by Herring and Lesser Black-backed.

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*: this species tends to be a late arriver in spring over its entire vast breeding range, and we definitively identified only two: one on Isla May 13 and one on Iona the next day.

Arctic Tern, *Sterna paradisaea*: a total of seven felt low for this generally abundant northern breeder.

Sandwich Tern, *Thalasseus sandvicensis*: the smallest of Europe's "large" terns, this species was encountered in small numbers at Caernarfon, on Saint Mary's, and on Papa Westray; that last locality is the northernmost in Britain where this species is regularly found. Recent progressive taxonomies treat the European bird and the extremely similar North American counterpart as two species, naming the latter Cabot's Tern, *Th. acyflavidus*; Caribbean and South American representatives of the complex, with yellow-orange bills, are Cayenne Terns, *Th. eurygnathus*.

LOONS—GAVIIDAE

Common Loon, *Gavia immer*: an adult on the water, seen from the zodiacs at Islay May 13. A large "black-headed" loon flying north over South Stack two days earlier was probably a Common

as well, but May is the classic season for Yellow-billed Loons to pass through (or by, or over) northern Britain.



Huge, colorful, and abundant, the Wood Pigeon is one of the UK's most attractive birds. Photo Toni Lenstra

SHEARWATERS AND PETRELS—PROCELLARIIDAE

Northern Fulmar, *Fulmarus glacialis*: probably the second most abundant bird species of our trip, second only to the tens of thousands of Northern Gannets we saw. In addition to the many seen at sea, Hirta, Papa Westray, and Fair Isle housed huge loose colonies of birds nesting on cliffs, beneath rocks, and in sea walls. Fulmars are notorious for their fragrant response to human intruders, and we managed inadvertently to surprise one on the nest at Fair Isle; it promptly spat up, vomiting a good foot and a half away from the bird and in our direction—happily, it missed, but even so, the odor was an effective deterrent had we wanted to get any closer. The episode added new and noisome depth to an Icelandic poem attributed to Hallfred, in which a rival is described as lumbering off to the marriage bed like a fulmar, a distasteful prospect indeed for his bride. The English name “fulmar” has been explained in a number of implausible ways, but is certainly the reflex of a Norse phrase meaning “stinky gull,” “ful” cognate with the English “foul” and “mar” with the English “mew.” See britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/article_files/V47/V47_N10/V47_N10_P336_339_A075.pdf for a fuller discussion.



Northern Fulmar, *Hirta*. Photo Rick Wright

Manx Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus*: we found this small shearwater quite common on four of our days at sea—but somehow managed to see not a one at the Isle of Man. Though most were seen in flight, we had several opportunities for close study of small flocks on the water as our ship approached. All of the black and white shearwaters were once thought to make up a single species, but newer studies have resulted in numerous species-level splits; current classifications recognize three in Europe alone: the Manx in the narrow sense, the Yelkouan, and the Balearic. The genus name *Puffinus*, a perennial favorite of the writers of birding quizzes, is derived from the English name “puffin,” known from as early as the fourteenth century as a trade name for the chubby young of shearwaters stolen from the nesting burrow and salted for use as winter food; the name’s transfer to the bright-billed auk is attested no earlier than the late seventeenth century.



Northern Gannets. Photo Rick Wright

GANNETS AND BOOBIES—SULIDAE

Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*: one of the most awesome sights and smells in the natural world is a sea rock covered with the nests of Northern Gannets. We visited several almost inconceivably huge gannetries, looking at a distance like nothing more than snow-capped mountains rising from the sea; up close, the rocky ground could be seen to be densely covered with birds on nests, spaced just far enough apart to avoid the angry bill jabs of their neighbors. As familiar as this northernmost of the boobies is to many of us, it was a novel experience to watch birds bringing great gobs of seaweed into the colonies for nest construction; our wondering about their method of collecting the material was answered when we saw birds scooting forward on the waves, heads and necks submerged, and coming up with a beakful of kelp and other slimy plants. While the gannets of the North Sea are said to have been badly affected by the past year's outbreak of avian flu, numbers appear stronger in the Irish Sea. A recent paper, [biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2023.05.01.538918v1](https://doi.org/10.1101/2023.05.01.538918v1), posits a link between surviving avian influenza and blackish irides in gannets; coincidentally, the ship's photographer photographed just such a black-eyed bird in the course of one of our visits.



A Northern Gannet collects nesting material from the sea. Photo Toni Lenstra

CORMORANTS—PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*: we saw small numbers, only rarely reaching the double digits, at fifteen of the sites we visited; many adults were still in high breeding plumage, with extensive white filoplumes on the head and neck and conspicuous white thigh patches. This is a very widespread species in the northern hemisphere, least common, probably, in its narrow North American range.

European Shag, *Gulosus aristotelis*: far outnumbering its larger relative, this slender, glossy cormorant was seen in numbers every day we were at sea; our high single-site count was a minimum of 92 individuals in a loafing flock at Tresco, in the Scillies. Close looks at many revealed the proud crests, shiny green neck plumage, and narrow yellowish throat patch characterizing adults in breeding condition.



An Atlantic Shag among the flowers. Photo Rick Wright

HERONS—ARDEIDAE

Gray Heron, *Ardea cinerea*: singles and small concentrations could be counted on in any habitat with relatively quiet water, including Hyde Park, where several pairs breed. This species is often said to closely resemble its congener the Great Blue Heron, but the Old World species is considerably smaller and stockier, with shorter legs and a shorter bill; it also lacks the conspicuous rufous wing and thigh markings that are distinctive of the Great Blue. Nevertheless, Gray Herons are almost certainly overlooked on the Atlantic coast of the United States and in the Canadian Maritimes.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*: once thought of as a classic Mediterranean specialty, this small, rather stout heron has staged a remarkable range expansion, and is now common at many places in northwestern Europe and Britain. We saw three, a single bird near Mevagissey and two feeding quietly together on St. Mary's in the Scillies. The increase in this species' range and populations has seen individuals regularly occurring in the West Indies and on the Atlantic coast of the United States and Canada; the key identification features are the color of the bare facial skin and the structure of the crest in breeding birds.

HAWKS—ACCIPITRIDAE

Hen Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*: now very rare in most of its British range, due in part to habitat loss and in part to direct persecution; we saw a single adult female on the Isle of Man May 12.

This Old World species has been lumped and split repeatedly from its American counterpart, the Northern Harrier.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus*: a fast flyover by a male at the London Wetlands Center May 4 was followed by a roadside bird May 11 on Anglesey.



A White-tailed Eagle in St. Kilda. Photo Rick Wright

White-tailed Eagle, *Haliaeetus albicilla*: like its North American relative the Bald Eagle, this imposing scavenger has recovered surprisingly quickly and surprisingly well after many decades of persecution and poisoning, helped in part by re-introduction programs. We had a very brief view of an adult at Loch Gruinart May 13; an immature bird gave excellent and prolonged views overhead May 15 on Hirta, where it drew the relentless and unwelcome attention of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Great Skuas.

Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*: surprisingly uncommon during our days together. We saw single birds May 6 at Heligan, May 11 at Caernarfon, and May 12 on the Isle of Man. In many parts of Europe, this is by far the most frequently encountered raptor, large, abundant, and given to conspicuously perching and hunting on roadsides.

WOODPECKERS—PICIDAE

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major*: With only three breeding species, Britain is the most woodpecker-impooverished nation in Europe. The Great Spotted is a common garden and feeder bird in much of the United Kingdom, but we saw only a single individual, flying away and high overhead in Caernarfon May 11.

Eurasian Green Woodpecker, *Picus viridis*: one, or perhaps two, laughing away at the London Wetlands Center May 4 provided our only encounter with this common species; unfortunately, we only heard the yaffling and did not get to see this large and bizarrely colorful bird.



Eurasian Kestrel, Fair Isle. Photo Rick Wright

FALCONS—FALCONIDAE

Eurasian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*: seen on 8 days, mostly from the road, but we had some splendid views of birds hovering near at hand. A female on Fair Isle May 16 was banded.

Eurasian Hobby, *Falco subbuteo*: amazingly good looks at two hunting the London Wetlands Center May 4.

Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*: one adult over Hyde Park May 3, and a juvenile

dashing past our ship near Grasholm May 10.

OLD WORLD PARROTS—PSITTACULIDAE

Rose-ringed Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri*: this Asian species has been widely introduced across Europe, and is now abundant and conspicuous in many cities, including London, where it is impossible to overlook. We also saw at least four in Portsmouth May 5.

JAYS AND CROWS—CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius*: one seen in Hyde Park May 3, with two more the next day at the London Wetlands Center. This big, colorful bird is often surprisingly shy, especially in the breeding season.



A pensive Eurasian Jay in London. Photo Rick Wright

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica*: common and reliably conspicuous from London to Portsmouth to Port St. Mary, but then not seen again until we arrived in Aberdeen May 17.

Red-billed Chough, *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax*: one of Britain's rarest birds, this little crow with an outsize personality was seen at South Stack and at the Sound dividing the Calf of Man from the larger island. Their acrobatics and shrill calls make them unmistakable at any distance; at close range, the orange feet and slender, decurved bill are distinctive. "Chough" is thought to be ultimately echoic, cognate with the name of the bird in a number of other European languages; the scientific name refers to the fiery color of the soft parts.

Eurasian Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*: common as far north as Iona, inhabiting towns, villages, and pastures. The strange scientific species name, apparently meaning coin-eater, remains inscrutable, efforts to attach it to the greed of Arne of Thrace notwithstanding.

Rook, *Corvus frugilegus*: abundant on fields north as far as Iona; we saw a number of active (and noisy) rookeries at various sites. These extremely social crows are a characteristic feature of many European landscapes; in *Wild America*, James Fisher recorded how much he missed them on his visit to the New World.

Carrion Crow, *Corvus corone*: common north as far as Wales, then not seen again until Aberdeen. This and the next species have been lumped in the past because of their habit of hybridizing where their ranges touch, but nearly all modern authorities treat them as distinct species.

Hooded Crow, *Corvus cornix*: the most handsome of the black corvids, this species was common from the southern Isle of Man all the way to Fair Isle. The Hooded Crow's global range is quite unusual, concentrated in the breeding season in northern and eastern Europe, Asia from the Balkans east to Siberia, and the Middle East from Cyprus to Jordan. Recent occurrences in the eastern United States probably represent birds that hitched a ride on a ship for at least part of their transatlantic journey.

Common Raven, *Corvus corax*: found all across the cooler regions of the northern hemisphere. On our tour, we saw small numbers on most of the islands in the Irish Sea.

TITS—PARIDAE

Coal Tit, *Periparus ater*: heard and briefly seen at Heligan, but that encounter was entirely overshadowed by the excellent views of at least two visiting the feeders at the Islay textile mill.

Eurasian Blue Tit, *Cyanistes caeruleus*: this is a common and widespread species, but often reclusive in the breeding season. We saw a dozen individuals over six days, the northernmost at the feeders at the Islay textile mill. Like the Coal and Great Tits, this species was notorious in the middle of the last century for stealing cream from milk bottles left on front porches; that habit has probably gone the way of milk bottles left on front porches. See britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/article_files/V42/V42_N11/V42_N11_P347_357_A059.pdf.

Great Tit, *Parus major*: the commonest and usually most conspicuous member of the family in the UK, encountered almost every day; the familiar rasping song, heard virtually wherever there is a tree with a hole in it, gave this species its old folk name of “saw-whet,” a name later given very different application in North America.

LARKS—ALAUDIDAE

Eurasian Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*: once one of the most abundant birds of the British countryside, this dull-plumed aerial singer has declined drastically with the intensification of agriculture. We were fortunate to see it at a dozen different localities—and more fortunate still to hear it at most. The average song lasts two to four seconds, but some birds may sing for almost half an hour, floating so high as to be nearly invisible to the human eye before descending. Popular wisdom to the contrary, Skylarks, of both sexes, also sing from the ground.

REED WARBLERS—ACROCEPHALIDAE

Common Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: seen and, especially, heard in London May 3 and 4. This is a very secretive species, but its loud, rhythmic “talking” song gives it away.

Sedge Warbler, *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*: typically much more demonstrative than its more furtive congeners, this noisy warbler of thickets and tangles proved unusually difficult to see during our trip. Of half a dozen heard at Loch Gruinart May 13, only one or two gave even the most fleeting of views.

SWALLOWS—HIRUNDINIDAE

Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia*: the tiniest hirundinid in the northern hemisphere, this brown swallow is common in both Europe and North America wherever vertical banks of friable soil are available. We saw birds on four days, with the largest number by far at the London Wetlands Center, where an artificial “bank” offers nesting sites. In the Old World, this species is sometimes known, less aptly, as the Sand Martin.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*: common throughout, with many birds obviously on territory for the breeding season even as others were passing through on their way north; migrants were seen at sea and over and around islands with no obvious nesting opportunities. While this and the North American Barn Swallow are at present considered conspecific, the two differ consistently in plumage: European birds are paler below, with a better-defined breast band, and males have very long tail streamers. Only in North America do male Barn Swallows share in incubating the eggs, a behavior correlated with that population’s shorter streamers.

Common House Martin, *Delichon urbicum*: in most places, this species is even more closely dependent on the human presence than the Barn Swallow; almost all House Martins long ago adopted the eaves of buildings as the preferred nest site, with only a few still resorting to cliff faces or caves.

LEAF WARBLERS—PHYLLOSCOPIDAE

Willow Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochilus*: seen on three days, north to Iona. The abundance of Wood Warblers was the perfect evocation of an older Britain when we arrived at the farmhouse of Loch Gruinart May 13, and their sad springtime piping reminded us each time we heard it of Gilbert White, who in the mid-eighteenth century was the first to settle the question of whether this species and the look-alike Chiffchaff were different birds.

Common Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus collybita*: seen or, more often, heard every day north to Caernarfon. The dark legs and generally duller plumage helped distinguish this species from the Willow Warbler, but the song is entirely diagnostic, a clanging “chiff chaff chiff chaff” resembling a lanyard striking a metal flag pole or a tiny bank teller counting coins—the species name *collybita* is a translation of a French folk name meaning “money changer.”

BUSH WARBLERS—SCOTOCERCIDAE

Cetti's Warbler, *Cettia cetti*: a relatively recent colonizer of southern England, this noisy and usually invisible bird was heard repeatedly in Hyde Park and at the London Wetlands Center. The history of this species' discovery, and the matching of the loud song to the demurely plumaged bird, is briefly summarized at birdnote.org/listen/shows/cettis-warbler.

BUSHTITS—AEGITHALIDAE

Long-tailed Tit, *Aegithalos caudatus*: seen only at Heligan and on the Isle of Man. Usually encountered in flocks of a dozen or more, at this season Long-tailed Tits are more likely to be seen in pairs. Their squeaks and rattles give them away as they feed at the tips of twigs, often hanging upside down, or as they fly past in hesitant single file. The European species is the closest relative of the American Bushtit, and the two build similarly lavish nests out of plant down and fuzz.

SYLVIID WARBLERS AND BABBLERS—SYLVIIDAE

Eurasian Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla*: one of the most conspicuous and characteristic voices of springtime woods in northern Europe, heard on eight days of our tour. Once the leaves have attained full size, actually seeing this stocky warbler is another matter, and our best views were of a pair at Loch Gruinart May 13.

Greater Whitethroat, *Curruca communis*: this attractive warbler of roadside thickets and farmland hedges was heard on five days, with particularly good views of singing males on the Isle of Man. The genus name *Curruca*, meaning “cuckold,” probably refers to the frequency with which this species serves as foster parent to the Common Cuckoo.

KINGLETS—REGULIDAE

Common Firecrest, *Regulus ignicapilla*: one giving prolonged views as it worked its way through a viny tangle at Heligan May 6. This species, the Eurasian Wren, and the Goldcrest are the smallest birds on a continent lacking hummingbirds.

NUTHATCHES—SITTIDAE

Eurasian Nuthatch, *Sitta europaea*: heard in Hyde Park May 3, then a busy pair attending at least one chick in a nest at Caernarfon May 11. This is a large, colorful nuthatch, common in parks and gardens in the UK and on the continent, but always a treat to see well.

WRENS—TROGLODYTIDAE

Eurasian Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*: high on the list of Europe's most abundant birds, and we saw wrens at most sites we visited; their long series of varied tremolos and buzzes quickly became a familiar and attractive part of the landscape for us. This species was long lumped with the Pacific and Winter Wrens of North America, but the three were restored to full species status some years ago. Further splits among the Old World populations seem appropriate; one of the best candidates for renewed species-level status is the St. Kilda Wren, *Tr.* [*tr.*] *hirtensis*, which we saw and heard in abundance May 15 on Hirta, where birds were darting in and out of the ruins and stone walls where they nest. The preliminary recognition of this bird as a full species in the 1880s “led to a frenzy of collecting activity” (Kroodsma), but the population today comprises at least 200 pairs. Unfortunately, we did not manage to see the Fair Isle Wren, another candidate for splitting.



The St. Kilda Wren. Photo Rick Wright

DIPPERS—CINCLIDAE

White-throated Dipper, *Cinclus cinclus*: a mere flash beneath the bridge at the Islay textile mill. This bird was presumptively of the subspecies *hibernicus*, but a far better view would have been required to confirm its racial identity.

STARLINGS—STURNIDAE

European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*: one of the UK's most beautiful birds is also one of its commonest, and we saw European Starlings every day, with shrill juveniles apparent by the end of our tour. This is the species successfully introduced into the United States in the nineteenth century by sentimental immigrants; there is no truth, however, to the chestnut about the desire to introduce “all the birds of Shakespeare,” a fiction apparently concocted in the third or fourth decade of the twentieth century.

THRUSHES—TURDIDAE

Mistle Thrush, *Turdus viscivorus*: single birds on only two occasions, one at the gardens of Heligan and another, seen from the bus window, in Anglesey May 11. As its names suggest, this large gray thrush happily eats mistletoe fruits in winter, its droppings helping spread that plant from tree to host tree.

Song Thrush, *Turdus philomelos*: sometimes a bit shy in the breeding season, but our experiences put the lie to that circumstance. We found this medium-sized brown thrush at nine sites, with the highest tally a conservative 8 at Loch Gruinart. Of the two dozen total we saw, several were astonishingly brash, especially one singing almost incessantly from a telephone pole, fences, and rooves on St. Mary's May 7, and one feeding at our literal feet in Caernarfon May 11. We lingered long over that individual, hoping it might lead us to the "anvil" stone where it crushed its snail prey; it did not, but the views were amazing.

Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula*: seen every day, as far north and as far from the "mainland" as Fair Isle. The English word "thrush" is probably related to "throat" and "throttle," that latter the violent action that could be imagined to produce this species' choking, gasping song.

CHATS—MUSCICAPIDAE

European Robin, *Erithacus rubecula*: seen at twelve sites, north to Islay. This beautiful little bird is far more confiding in Britain than on the continent, where it can be difficult to see as it skulks in dark thickets. Robins like to nest in holes in the ground among twisted tree roots; we saw freshly fledged juveniles, so different from their parents, in Caernarfon.

European Stonechat, *Saxicola rubicola*: another very attractive member of the chat family; we saw birds on four dates, usually quite well as they perched high, apparently curious, in bushes and atop heather.



Northern Wheatear, Iona. Photo Rick Wright

Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*: a champion migrant, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa and breeding from Greenland across Eurasia and into Alaska and northwesternmost Canada. This is decidedly a bird of open country, nesting in holes in the ground and the crooks and crannies of stone walls. Notoriously, the English name has nothing to do with ears or wheat.

ACCENTORS—PRUNELLIDAE

Dunnock, *Prunella modularis*: this most widespread member of its Old World family was seen at ten locations, north to Iona. “Dunnock” means simply “dark bird,” just as the European robin’s former name “ruddock” means simply “reddish bird.” We had excellent views of this species feeding, singing, and flying, providing ample opportunity to ponder some of its more bizarre reproductive peculiarities. See [nature.com/articles/302334a0](https://www.nature.com/articles/302334a0), a classic in the literature of bird behavior.



A Dunnoek at Caernarfon. Photo Rick Wright

PASSERIDAE—OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*: after seeing not a single one in London, it was gratifying to find good numbers in town and countryside over the rest of our tour. Nevertheless, the species is in serious decline over most of its British range, and it may yet come to the point that birds from the introduced populations in North America are “deported” to strengthen the populations in parts of its native range. A fine illustration of how politically fraught ornithological science can be is provided by Otto Kleinschmidt’s World War One-era analysis of House Sparrow taxonomy; see birdaz.com/blog/2015/06/20/hostile-birds.

birds.

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS—MOTACILLIDAE

Gray Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea*: two eventually seen well as they fed in the turbulent waters of the Islay textile mill May 13. This is the longest-tailed of the UK’s breeding wagtails, and the one most closely bound to watery habitats.



A Gray Wagtail on Islay. Photo Rick Wright

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*: common throughout, seen at 21 sites north even to Fair Isle. The British breeding subspecies, *yarrellii*, is much blacker than the continental bird, and is usually

called the Pied Wagtail in English, “pied” referring to its black and white pattern, as in “magpie” or “Pied Piper.”

Meadow Pipit, *Anthus pratensis*: common on the islands, in upland heath and grassland. This is a neatly marked, rather small pipit, with orange tarsi and an alert expression; it is one of the most frequent foster parent species for the Common Cuckoo.



A Meadow Pipit on Islay. Photo Rick Wright

Rock Pipit, *Anthus petrosus*: this rather large, blurry-plumaged pipit is strictly limited to the immediate shoreline in its UK range, where it can often be watched closely feeding in the wrack. At times in the past, this species, the Water Pipit, and the Buff-bellied (or American) Pipit have been considered conspecific, but they differ in plumage and vocalizations.

FINCHES—FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*: common north to Islay, but more often heard than seen at this season. Some of our best views were at Loch Gruinart, where males and females posed patiently for photography. The scientific species epithet *coelebs* means “bachelor,” Linnaeus’s humorous allusion to the tendency of this finch to winter in sex-segregated flocks.

European Greenfinch, *Chloris chloris*: easy to hear, its popping calls and buzzy song conspicuous over much of the year, but harder to see in spring, when its color and size closely match the newly emerged leaves. We had our best views at the feeders at the Islay textile mills, but recorded the species on half a dozen days otherwise.

Eurasian Linnet, *Linaria cannabina*: a very common little finch with the very ill-obliging habit of darting past giving its diagnostic calls and very little else. We eventually had good looks at the strawberry-breasted males as they sang from low perches.

Lesser Redpoll, *Acanthis cabaret*: another common fringillid usually detected more often overhead than perched at close range, but we had outstandingly good views at Loch Gruinart, where birds even settled on the telephone wires above our heads. Redpoll taxonomy is in ceaseless flux, but it seems likely that the Lesser, Hoary, and Common Redpolls will be re-lumped as a single species; see [nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27173-z](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27173-z).

European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis*: common virtually throughout. The bubbling calls quickly became familiar, helping us find feeding or loafing birds we might otherwise have overlooked. Goldfinches at Caernarfon were already gathering nesting material; unlike the American Goldfinch, this species does not wait for the late summer availability of thistle down to breed. With its red face and fondness for thorny perches, the European Goldfinch is one of the most iconographically important birds in western art; see the standard work on the matter at archive.org/details/symbolicgoldfinc0000frie.



A Eurasian Siskin at a Scottish feeder. Photo Rick Wright

Eurasian Siskin, *Spinus spinus*: seen only at the Islay textile mills, where half a dozen were visiting the feeders. This is a bright siskin, appearing every few winters in the Canadian Maritimes and occasionally elsewhere in eastern North America; “green morph” Pine Siskins can be similar to the females.

OLD WORLD BUNTINGS—EMBERIZIDAE

Reed Bunting, *Emberiza schoeniclus*: two quickly glimpsed at the London Wetland Center, then a pair well seen at Loch Gruinart May 13. This is a generally common bird in its marshy habitat, but at this time of year, they are busy breeding and the males sing less often.

MAMMALS

Roe Deer

Brown Hare

European Rabbit

Gray Seal

Common Porpoise



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Sandy

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Panama	Fall at the Canopy Tower	October 21–28, 2023
Israel	Birds and Culture in the Holy Land	November 3–15, 2023
Nebraska	Sandhill Cranes and Prairie Chickens	March 15–22, 2024
Texas	Totally Texas Solar Eclipse	April 5–11, 2024
Alabama	The Gulf Coast and Dauphin Island	April 15–21, 2024
Greece	The North of Greece	May 5–20, 2024
Scotland	Wild Scotland	May 26 – June 7, 2024
Colorado	A Summer Stay in Estes Park	June 17–23, 2024
Colorado	Northeast Colorado	June 23–26, 2024
Spain	Birds and Art in Asturias	August 28 – September 6, 2024

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In This Issue

- Page 1: Willow flycatcher, by Sandy Sorkin (SS)
- Page 2: New York City (SS)
- Page 3: Golden-crowned kinglet (SS)
- Page 6: Cape May warbler
- Page 8: Grasshopper sparrow, by Fred Pfeifer (FP)
- Page 9: Red-winged blackbird (SS), red-winged blackbird (f) (FP), orchard oriole (SS)
- Page 10: American goldfinch (SS), willow flycatcher (SS)
- Page 11: Common yellowthroat (SS), chipping sparrow (SS)
- Page 12: American redstart (f)
- Page 13: Blue jay (SS)
- Page 14: Semipalmated sandpipers (SS)



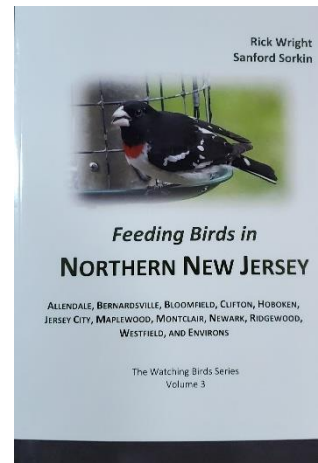
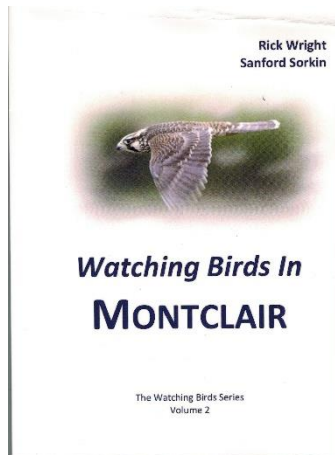
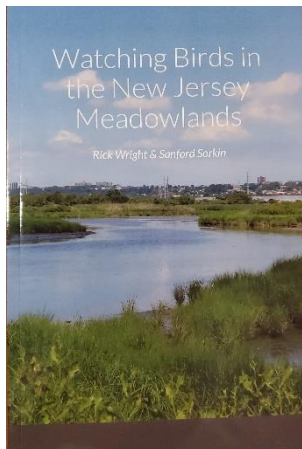
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The MBC Bulletin Bird

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