

Spring at the Observatory

For those involved in the daily recording of birds on the island, spring this year somehow seemed to never fully get going. Numbers of common summer migrants, the bread and butter of observatory work, have been well below par; there have been few 'falls' of warblers and no lighthouse attractions of any size. At times it all seemed rather disappointing, but now, in mid June, looking back over the last few months it is clear that it was certainly not all bad. There have been one or two pretty fantastic birds and a selection of island scarcities that have almost made up for the lack of commoner species.

The beginning of April was all very uneventful, although a Black Redstart on 4th, a Red-throated Diver on 5th and a Great Skua the following day provided a little interest. The arrival of calm weather on 7th brought one of the better days of the entire spring, with 125 Willow Warblers, 44 Chiffchaffs, 239 Meadow Pipits providing a taster of the spectacle of mass migration. The first Yellow Wagtail and Grasshopper Warbler of the year were found and a scattering of other migrants included 12 White Wagtails, four Redwings, three Wheatears, seven Goldcrests, a Black Redstart, two Merlins two Buzzards and a Jack Snipe.

The 9th of April was another good day. A couple of Great Northern Divers flew past, a Firecrest appeared in a mist net at Nant and three new species were added to the yearlist: Common Redstart, Tree Pipit and Hen Harrier. The next day brought a little excitement culminating in a Tree Sparrow (a scarce bird on Bardsey), a Crossbill and a Tree Pipit, as well as 90 Chiffchaffs and 87 Willow Warblers.

Excitement for listers

Numbers of migrants remained steady over the next few days. On the 12th a good variety of species was recorded including a Short-eared Owl, a Black



Meadow Pipit with a 'nesting material moustache'
© Richard Brown



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Guillemot, a Yellowhammer, a Greylag Goose and the first Ring Ouzel of the year. The following day provided some real excitement for those islanders who are dedicated to accumulating big island lists. The warden in particular could hardly contain himself after ticking both Corn Bunting and Mute Swan in the same morning, although other observers were less thrilled with these common birds.

More Redpoll debate

A steady passage of Redpolls began, resulting in much debate and confusion over their identity: were they unusually grey Lesser Redpolls from the UK, or unusually dull Common Redpolls from the continent? The questions have still not been resolved, and I will refrain from mentioning them from here on in as I can't bear to talk about that frustrating topic any more.

A varied mid-month period brought an influx of Greenland Wheatears and the first Common Sandpiper of the year on 15th, a Canada Goose, a Greenshank and eight Whimbrels on 16th, a House Sparrow, a Hen Harrier, three Wheatears and the first Pied Flycatcher on 17th and a Red Kite on 18th. The latter date also saw a Yellow Wagtail, a Tree Pipit and the same House Sparrow, which found its way into a mist net.

The 19th was quite a good day. The count of Willow Warblers came to 160 birds – the highest total of the spring – and fair numbers of other migrants included 87 Wheatears, half a dozen Grasshopper Warblers and 17 Blackcaps along with a Common Redstart and a Hooded Crow. The following day saw a remarkable flock of four Hooded Crows arrive and the first Cuckoo of the year was found on the 21st.

A Firecrest was seen on 22nd, the next day Willow Warblers increased again to 100, and the rising count of Wheatears reached 97 on 25th. 200 Swallows passed through on 27th, the first double figure count of the year, and the day after produced a Bar-tailed Godwit, 31 White Wagtails, and a new bird for the Bardsey list: a Yellow-legged Gull was picked out amongst a large flock of Herring Gulls in Solfach. The month drew quietly to a close, with a couple of Turtle Doves on 29th the only really noteworthy sighting.

May brings mix of migrants

May began with a calm and pleasant day and the belated arrival of the first Garden Warblers of the year, a Yellow Wagtail and a Turtle Dove. The next day both Whinchat and Lesser Whitethroat were added to the year list and a Great Skua was seen flying high above the mountain ridge. A selection of migrants was present for the first few days of the month, albeit in small numbers, and highlights

included a Little Egret, a Greenshank and the year's first Spotted Flycatcher on 3rd.

Gorse bushes bristling

Things picked up considerably on 6th when one of the best days of the spring brought an arrival of 126 Sedge Warblers, 62 Whitethroats, 80 Willow Warblers, 22 Blackcaps, nine Grasshopper Warblers, two Garden Warblers, a Lesser Whitethroat, 127



Lesser and Common Redpolls

© Steve Stansfield

Wheatears, eight Spotted Flycatchers, two Whinchats, a Common Redstart, a Tree Pipit and a very smart summer plumaged Golden Plover. The South End gorse bushes were bristling with migrants and a very enjoyable day was had.

Ringed Plovers breeding

The next couple of days were much quieter as the influx of warblers tailed off to leave just small numbers. Wheatears were just about the most conspicuous birds on the island with up to 140, mostly large, bright birds of the Greenland race, seen daily. A couple of pairs of Ringed Plovers took up residence on the Narrows and we were pleased to find that they were both soon sitting on eggs – the first time the species has bred on the island for several years. A single Yellow Wagtail and Whinchat were found on the 7th and yet another Hooded Crow appeared on the 8th.

Three Whinchats were the highlight of the 9th, arriving along with a smattering of warblers and Spotted Flycatchers, and a Black-tailed Godwit and a Sanderling were discovered on Solfach. Continuing a remarkable series of records was another Hooded Crow on the 10th, and a fly-over Marsh Harrier the following day was a very good sighting.

Flypast of hirundines

A Pomarine Skua, probably the best seabird of the spring, flew north early in the morning of the 12th



© Steve Stansfield



Wheatear

© Steve Stansfield

and an Orange-tip butterfly later the same day was an unusual sight on Bardsey. The next few days were very quiet, although a Pied Flycatcher was seen on the 13th and Spotted Flycatchers increased to 25 on 14th and then to 31 the day after. The 15th also saw a welcome surge of hirundines, with 950 Swallows, 58 House Martins and 18 Sand Martins passing through.

Another Hooded Crow, perhaps the same bird lingering in the area, flew by again on the 17th. A few small migrants including 22 Sedge Warblers, six Whitethroats, 17 Spotted Flycatchers and a Tree Pipit were brought in by misty conditions on 19th and similarly murky conditions delivered 21 Dunlins and a Sanderling the next day.

The mist disappeared to leave a hot and sunny day on 21st. A small number of passerines had arrived



© Richard Brown

Ringed Plover bred on the island for the first time for several years

again: 34 Sedge Warblers, six Whitethroats, a Garden Warbler and six Spotted Flycatchers being the most interesting. Further hot weather the following day brought the first Reed Warbler of the year and yet another Hooded Crow sighting.

Avian event of the spring

Now we come to the 23rd of May – and the most remarkable avian event of the spring. A male Eastern Subalpine Warbler was found singing enthusiastically in the back garden of Cristin and, after watching it for some time, the reason for his enthusiasm became apparent: incredibly there was a female Subalpine Warbler lurking in the same patch of bushes! Having flown thousands of miles off course to wind up on Bardsey and still have the unbelievable good fortune to find a mate of the same species, the pair wasted little time in beginning to build a nest in the Damson bushes. The male remained actively holding territory until the end of the month, although the female became extremely elusive. Unfortunately this unprecedented extralimital breeding attempt appeared to have failed by the last day of the month, with no further sign of either bird from then on.



Common Rosefinch

© Steve Stansfield

A Turtle Dove also arrived on 23rd and was joined the next day by another. At least one of them remained until the 30th. A Black Redstart was seen on the 25th and 26th, and a Black-tailed Godwit appeared on 27th.

Some nice birds were seen on the 28th. A Golden Oriole was found in Cristin Withy but somehow managed to avoid capture in the mist nets all day. Two male Yellow Wagtails were present: one of the British race *flavissima*; the other a continental *flava* (Blue-headed Wagtail).



Must be Christmas - two Turtle Doves!

© Steve Stansfield

A Reed Warbler on the 29th was the highlight of a very quiet couple of days, but there was more excitement on the last day of the month when a male Common Rosefinch was found singing at Nant and a male Pied Flycatcher was seen nearby.

June's slow start hides excitement to come

June began slowly. The highlights of the first few days were Yellow Wagtails on 1st and 2nd, a Firecrest on 2nd, a Turtle Dove and a Cuckoo on

3rd and a Black Redstart on 4th. The following period was even quieter and, with a Reed Warbler on 9th and an Arctic Skua on 10th being easily the best sightings, you could have been forgiven for thinking that the spring had drawn to an uninspiring close. Certainly, we were not expecting what happened next.

East meets West

The 11th of June appeared to be another quiet and birdless morning with little potential for anything remarkable. Until, that is, a stunning White-throated Sparrow popped up at Nant in front of its astonished finder before disappearing into the dense foliage of the plantation. An exciting throng of observers was soon assembled, but the bird was not in the mood to show itself again. An unfamiliar birdsong from the nearby withy attracted the attention of the group: it was not the sparrow, but a second unexpected rarity in the form of a Greenish Warbler!

The mist nets were opened and incredibly both birds were caught and were shown to the visitors side by

side in the hand: an extraordinary avian east-meets-west situation involving vagrant birds from North America and Asia.

The next day was very uneventful, with neither sparrow or warbler remaining and just a Cuckoo of note. The 13th brought the bizarre sight of a female Ring-necked Parakeet flying around high above the island before settling in the pines at Ty Nesaf: another addition to the island list, albeit a slightly unnatural visitor.

And that brings us up to date. Although it had its dull periods, the spring undoubtedly produced some very memorable events and certainly finished on an exciting high. Migration will now take a short break for the summer, but it will be back soon enough: we await, with eager anticipation, whatever surprises the autumn will bring.

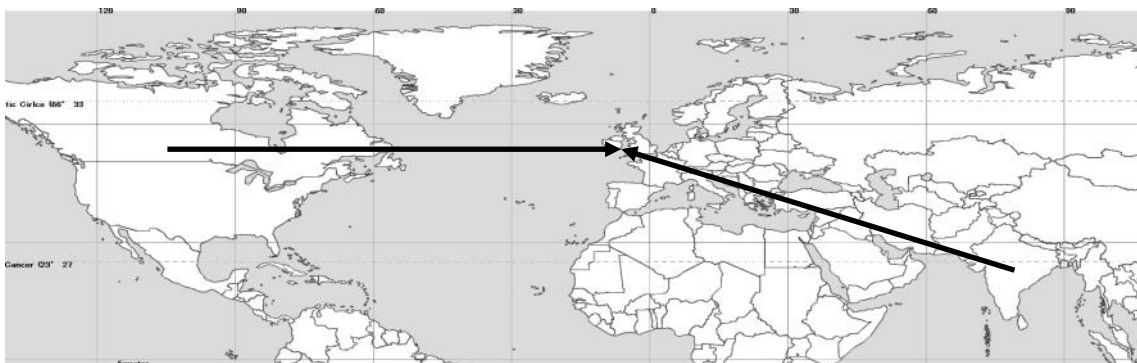
Richard Else



White-throated Sparrow from North America
© Richard Brown



Greenish Warbler from Asia
© Richard Brown



Warden's report

Hi all. After what was the longest Warden's Report I have ever written in the last edition of 'The Beacon', this is almost certainly going to be the shortest. The main reason is that I (along with Peter Howlett, Mike Archer and Mark Grantham) have been working hard on the forthcoming 'Bird Observatories of Britain and Ireland' book. For more on this exciting project see p. 9.

Jim and Elaine Lennon who stayed on the island over winter were still in Cristin upon our return to the island after our winter on the mainland (no it wasn't a break nor a holiday!) and stayed until early April, helping get the Obs. ready for the new season. Jim and Elaine not only got the Obs. clean and sorted for our return but also cleaned down and de-cobwebbed our house. It was a great pleasure not to have to remove all the mouse 'stuff' from the work surfaces before being able to move back into our house. A big thank you to you both.

Richard Brown returned for his third year as Assistant Warden and Rich E as Manxy Assistant, his fourth year on the island.

Also I must thank Liz James, who for the second year running came back to the island with us for the start of the season. Getting the Obs. up and running did take a little longer than expected, as much of the



'touch-up' painting that we were going to do actually meant that we needed to do whole walls if not entire rooms (eg the dining room and kitchen, boot room and some of the bedrooms (twice!!)). Even the 'wall of death' has almost given up and been beaten! So after getting the place tidy we needed some new furniture...

Gifts of furniture transform dining

Emma and I were invited once again to Tony Bianchi's warehouse in Macclesfield to choose some new furniture for the Obs. The biggest change is in the dining room. The old, uncomfortable benches have now been removed and replaced with good solid wood and leather chairs, the wood-worm infested old trestles have been replaced with very nice modern extendible solid Plum wood state of the art tables (.....Yes I know they had character and nostalgia, but can you remember Cristin in 1998 when I first arrived, with the squeaky army bunks and scabby looking kitchen?). I won't then, even mention the leather sofas in the boot room and common room! It has to be said the place looks absolutely FANTASTIC, and all down to the very generous nature of one of our Vice Presidents to whom I will say a collective thank you on behalf of all our guests who will enjoy the comfort that is now at the Obs.

Eventually the Obs. was ready to take our first guests of the year. This year we had Kevin and Alison Woodbridge and their two children, Heather and Gavin. Kevin is the Chairman of the Bird Observatories Council and Alison the Warden of North Ronaldsay Bird Obs. And both good friends of Emma and I (being our former employer). It was very good to see them, and many of you will remember them from the Obs. 50th birthday party, where Kevin gave a speech about the first 50 years of the Obs. So the season was under way, and we were off for the start of my 13th year as warden of BBFO!

Much achieved with all the help

It has been a rather hectic season, and with as many as ten seasonal/part time staff (myself, Emma, Connor, Rich B, Rich E, Gwyn Stacey, Steve Hinde, Dan Dawson, Liz James and Mike Archer) much has been achieved.

The spring summary has been written (very well) on my behalf by Rich E as I have been rather pushed for time with other things...(though I did manage to jam into finding a few nice birds this year on my rare trips out of the office, including Corn Bunting, Common Rosefinch and Greenish Warbler!). Rich B got the best bird in the shape of a White-throated Sparrow, and Rich E a close second with Ring-necked Parakeet (which was new for the island!).

Final stages reached of Observatories book

For those of you who have visited the island this year you will have noticed a distinct absence of the Warden in the field looking for birds and around the Obs. The reason is the aforementioned Bird Observatories book, which has taken a great deal of work to get through its final stages. The first edition of the book, written in 1976 was edited by the former Secretary of BBFO Roger Durman, so it seems quite fitting that three of the editorial team of this second edition are heavily involved with BBFO: Pete Howlett being on BBFO council and chairing the Bardsey Scientific Committee, and Mike Archer heading the ringing data team that have been diligently entering and checking all the BBFO ringing data for the past nine years, and me! We are now just putting the final bits together to get the book on the market for the Bird Fair in August (we hope). It is being published by T & A D Poyser. The book will be for sale at the Obs, and anyone wishing to order a copy at £50 each should contact me or Peter Howlett. Hopefully I will see more of you all in the Autumn ...

Steve Stansfield

Secretary's Bit June 2010

A Council meeting was held at Criccieth in February with good attendance by Council Members. Of high importance, was a detailed discussion led by our Chairman, Patrick Davies, regarding the necessity for a full review of the Constitution and Rules of the Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory. Of prime importance was the consideration of whom on Council should also be appointed as Trustees of the BBFO, definitions of the responsibilities of their role as Trustees and that the Election of Officers and their period of service should be better defined and understood. Following this discussion, it was agreed that a small sub-committee be formed to consider all detail and present a draft document for comment to the full Council via electronic mail, and that a final document be ready for presentation to an EGM which was to be held after the Council Meeting and before the AGM on 3rd July 2010. This has gone forward more slowly than planned, with considerations towards meeting the requirements of the Charity Commissioners giving some concern. At this time, we are unable to present the draft document for comment etc. but we still hope that the delays will soon be resolved and that we can move forward to presenting a document for consideration and acceptance at an EGM in the not too distant future.

The modifications to the LSA Hut at the Lighthouse complex have progressed well and should soon be completed ready for its use as a bird ringing and rest facility for our staff on Bardsey. The Treasurer submitted her account summary to date, she sees no problem with our finances at present, though the continual expense of maintaining our 'Cristin' complex along with the Wardens accommodation needs careful control. Alicia, Bookings Secretary, said that bookings for this year to date were 110 visitor weeks, which includes 2 courses.

The 2008 Annual Report received high praise for both presentation and content. Well done to all involved.

Our Warden, Steve Stansfield, Emma his lady wife and son Connor, along with our two Assistant Wardens, are to be thanked for all their efforts in support of the aims and objectives of the Observatory. The 'Bardsey Blog' continues to be very popular, keeping everyone up to date with the

Thanks to all

The Observatory seems to have acquired a large band of enthusiastic staff and volunteers. The photograph shows ten of the dedicated long term staff and volunteers from the first half of the year (with the key exceptions of Jim and Elaine Lennon).

In the absence of the Warden during his long hours hidden away with Mike Archer whilst working on their new book, and as the Obs. continues to grow, the two Richards have stepped up and taken on more work and more responsibility. We are extremely grateful for their commitment and resourcefulness during this time.

Mammoth tasks undertaken

Mike Archer, as always over the last twelve years, has been reliable and steadfast in his continuing work for the Observatory's primary purpose: entering 50 years of data from the old record sheets onto the computer so that it can be analysed, as well as his coordination of the mammoth task of producing the new observatories book. All this is undertaken without a hint of reluctance and without any monetary recompense, we can never thank you enough Mike.

Dan Dawson has spent many hours working in the LSA hut by the lighthouse, preparing it for the Assistant Warden to use, in order to continue to monitor the lighthouse attractions. Steve Hinde took several weeks out of his schedule to assist Richard Else with the Manx Shearwater census, as well as helping with general upkeep and maintenance jobs

wonderful birds arriving on 'Enlli' and the photographs taken by Steve, the 2 Richards (Assistant Wardens) and Ben Porter are truly wonderful, all to be congratulated on their skills.

Once again, thank you all for your continued support

Mike West



Staff photo: Top row from left to right: Dan Dawson, Connor Stansfield, Richard Brown, Steve Stansfield, Emma Stansfield and Gwyn Stacey

Bottom row: Mike Archer, Liz James, Steve Hinde and Richard Else

around the Obs. Liz James is mentioned in Steve's report and continues to help us out in lots of ways.

Successful guided walks

Gwyn Stacey arrived in May and has become our latest member of staff and a great asset. Unfortunately CCW were not able to fund his post as an interpretation officer, so he and Rich B came up with ways that he could try to fund himself. He now runs regular and very successful guided walks around the island to both day and week visitors educating them about the observatory, the wildlife and the island. He has also been working on the displays in the shop designing some stunning posters explaining about Bardsey's birds, among the many other jobs that he does.

Many other jobs done

Other short term volunteers from this year include

Joan James who has been helping Mike Archer to check both Observatory data and the appendices for the new book, Beth Else and Helen Cain who have been clearing and chipping excess scrub from around the Obs., Ruth Edwards helped Mike with data checking, Bevan Healey, Tod Chater and Mike Barker all came in early June to re-roof the LSA hut and install the new drainage pipe at the back of our barn, all of them worked really hard and achieved a great deal in a short time, Ian Wright and Judith Read both helped out greatly with ringing.

The people listed above have all contributed considerably to the running and development of the Observatory in different ways, and without exception they have freely given their time and efforts above and beyond what might have been expected, a fantastic team, thank you so much to you all. Other visitors too numerous to mention, and although on their holidays, have also given generously in many different ways and contributed to the wonderful atmosphere at the Obs.

Emma Stansfield

‘Bird Observatories of Britain and Ireland’ book nears completion

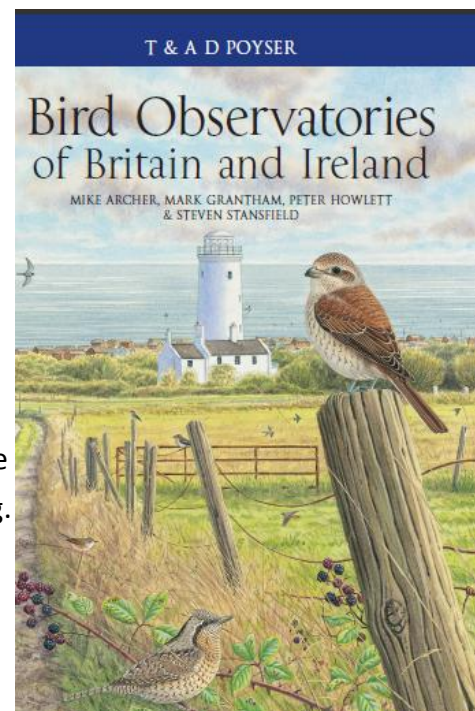
This exciting book is in the final stages of preparation. With Mike Archer, Peter Howlett and Steve Stansfield as authors, alongside Mark Grantham, the book’s publication will be great for Bardsey Obs. as well as for all the other Observatories featured. Here is the book’s description:

Bird Observatories have been recording and monitoring the migration of birds at coastal watch points around the British Isles since 1933. Today, a total of 18 Observatories count and record this phenomenon which has captured the interests of millions of amateur and professional bird watchers alike.

The **Bird Observatories of Britain and Ireland** brings together in one book sections describing the work undertaken at each observatory, a comprehensive description of the site, checklists of all the birds recorded at Observatories, and detailed personal accounts by wardens, staff and volunteers of the excitement of discovering a rare bird or watching thousands of nocturnal migrants attracted to a lighthouse after dark, finding the first returning trans-Saharan migrant after a long winter, the peace and tranquillity of offshore islands and the pleasure and experiences that working at some of the country’s most remote and beautiful locations can bring.

Get your copy

The book’s RRP is £50. Contact the Observatory if you would like a copy.



Growing up with Bardsey

Kathryn Pollard visited first as a baby and now is bringing her own children to discover Bardsey's delights



Kathryn as a baby with her mother outside the Chapel, in 1977.

I've always known Bardsey, I've grown up with it. I first visited in 1977 with my pram strapped down to the deck of the fishing boat which did the crossing at the time. I grew up with 3 hour crossings each way from Pwllheli with the sea sickness that came with them. Up until I went to University I was proud of the fact that I'd only missed 2 years of my life of not going there.

Since then I've only made it every other year partly due to the arrival of our own children.... Our daughter Hannah is now 6 years, and has been across 4 times (she managed to arrive a week after the 50th anniversary celebrations so sadly I didn't make those) and our son Andrew, aged 5 years, has been 3 times. Over the years of bringing them along, I've been meaning to write something about our family and growing up with Bardsey and never quite got down to it so I thought I'd attempt it for this Beacon.

Its funny how as a child you take it all for granted. The long drive to the boat and then the crossing,



Kathryn and her brother Adam on top of Carreg

the ordering of vast quantities of food for a large group to cover at least 10 days given the length of the crossing back then. Even the rocky pools we used to go to - going back now as an adult, with my own children, I realise all sorts of things such as the fact that the rocky pools we went to were always right by the hides..... how convenient for birdwatching while we were occupied with mum doing that!

Different adventures through the years

I've gone through umpteen wardens living in all sorts of different places around the island – I have a vivid childhood memory of an Assistant Warden with a big bushy beard living in Carreg Bach. One year we became friendly with the lighthouse keepers who went swimming with the seals in Solfach and they invited us back to the lighthouse and we got to climb to the top of the light and look out over the island. We brought many different friends with us over the years who've also enjoyed the Island. I remember one of my friends in particular who spent many hours happily talking to Jane Strick's ponies.

Now my children are bottle feeding lambs

Some things remain the same, some things change subtly. Last year my kids got the chance to bottle feed the lambs at Ty Pellaf. I remember doing the same in Jane and Arthur's time with my brother. The rocky pools remain as good as ever, and the children are just starting to appreciate them too. The garden has become a much better place for football over the years though.... there used to be a massive hump in the middle of the garden which made it more

challenging – not to mention the huge gap under the gate which meant that balls too easily went careering off down the hill to the track and had to be retrieved.

‘Home’ improvements

As for the electricity, that took me a long time to get used to... but is such an integral part of the Obs. now. Even as late as 1992 I can remember sitting on October evenings with the fire going in the lounge and the gas lamp hanging from the ceiling. Even the water heater was a thing to get used to, and the hot water in the kitchen now still seems a lovely luxury to me after all those years of boiling the HUGE kettle. The best and most wonderful improvement over the years though has to be the lovely new ladies loo, and although we haven’t seen the new gents that too.. Thank you to those involved for putting those in.

Magic of Manxie-ing in the dark

Wildlife wise, there are so many memories of things I’ve done and then also the things which we’re doing these days with the children as well. Manxies are the most obvious of these, all my life there’s been that magical cry in the air when going outside the Obs. in the dark. Then there was the excitement of being put to bed early and got up to be taken out Manxie-ing. My favourite place as a child was going down to the south end, I think probably due to the joy of walking all that way in the dark by torchlight.

Last time we were over we took the kids out Manxie-ing for the first time to the North End, their excitement about the whole experience was fantastic.

Other then and nows are remembering my brother and me as kids getting up at first light with great excitement to go on the rounds round the nets, carrying the empty bird bags and then with time carrying the bags with the birds in them. Hannah and Andrew have reached the age now of huge and fascinated excitement at net rounds, it’s lovely to see



Andrew with his sand car on Solfach, 2009

them and my dad, their Grandad, as they do the rounds together. They’re fascinated by all the birds and trying to learn the different species. I wonder whether they’ll get like me of recognizing common Bardsey birds in the hand but not necessarily other ones..... As a child (and even now!) I always enjoyed being allowed to write in the records as well when the ringing was happening. I’m sure it’ll not be long until Hannah at least is interested in doing that too, I’ll have to give that up to her.....

Other bird memories are of one year as a teenager when Paddy started teaching me to ring, sadly I never took it further, but I still remember a couple of Stonechats that he let me ring under his very close scrutiny. Other memories are of some amazing lighthouse attractions over the years and the sheer amount of birds needing ringing the next day, and some amazing birds which have appeared along the way, I’m sure there’s plenty more but my most memorable are a Golden Oriole and a Lanceolated Warbler. And somewhere along the way I picked up a real love of Wood Warblers in the hand.

Getting a record for the log

My final shared wildlife memory is of seal counting.

I've always struggled to get decent numbers of anything for Call Over so I started counting seals a good few years ago. This is something that we are now doing as a family every day and helps the children to feel involved a little in the process of recording the wildlife.

There's so much more that I could say... that's the problem of so many years of history with a place and so many memories.

Kathryn Pollard (nee Hughes)



Kathryn and son greet the boat

Catering at the Obs.

When staying at the Obs. huge appetites are guaranteed but take some planning for. Tasty meals with simple ingredients that are easy to throw together after a day out in the sea air are what is needed.

More favourites please

When Bevan Healey produced this magnificent twist on bread and butter pudding he had two pairs of large eyes looking appealingly at him — and that was before the Assistant Wardens had arrived!

I would be glad to include more favourites recipes - just send them to my address on the back of the Beacon.

Bevan's Croissant Pudding

Ingredients:

4 croissants, 2 eggs, 1 pint milk, handful of sultanas, sprinkling of demerara sugar



Cut croissants in half. Spread with a generous helping of jam or marmalade (lime or orange is recommended). Put a layer of croissants in the base of a flat ovenproof basin. Cover with sultanas. Add the next layer of croissants, jam side down. Sprinkle with demerara sugar. Beat the egg into the milk and pour over the croissants. The liquid should just come level with the croissant layer. Bake for 45 minutes at 180°, gas mark 3.

Bird feeding station attracts new visitors

The feeding station that many of you generously contributed to is continuing to attract new visitors as well as the old regulars. A family of Blackbirds have been collecting food from the table to feed their young. Siskin and Goldfinch have made use of it .

The Ring necked Parakeet that you may have heard about on the 'Bardsey wildlife' web site has also been consuming various pieces of fruit that visitors have been putting out on the bird table — pineapple, tomatoes etc! It also enjoys peanuts from the feeders. A Herring Gull has also begun to partake in the offerings! Many thanks to all those of you who continue to supply us with bird seed and peanuts to keep the feeders full.

Emma Stansfield



Early years at the Observatory

In the second of two articles, Martin Richards remembers huge lighthouse attractions

In 1956 it was the autumn that was most memorable – an unparalleled passage with a number of heavy falls of migrants with much of the movement coinciding with the August and September new moons, and spectacular lighthouse attractions. During that year more than a thousand birds – over a third of the year’s total ringing – came from the lighthouse.

Night after night (or so it seems to me now) we went up to the light as soon as supper (an Obs. cook was an innovation that year and she was very strict about meal times) and call-over finished and we remained there until dawn when we trudged back with boxes of birds to ring. And once that was done we were out to go on rounds of the Heligolands. Not quite sure when we slept, but many new species for my life list and my ringing tally.

Perhaps stretching Health and Safety rules

The usual routine at the lighthouse was, if there were birds in the beams, we would get the okay from whoever was on duty and two of us would go up onto the balcony with boxes for the birds we would take as they fluttered on the glass. If birds were settling on the dome we would go up the ladder and catch any in reach (more Health and Safety!?). The others would patrol around the tower and buildings, or outside the compound where you could often find birds under the walls. We would ring Shearwaters on the spot, leaving them in a box for release in the morning, but everything else we took back to the ringing room.

But, of course, there were not always birds. On big nights you could see birds in the beams with binoculars from Cristin but, if the weather/moon

seemed possible, we would go down anyway and we might end up lying behind one of the walls staring up in the beams waiting for birds.

No LSA hut to shelter in:

then it still contained life

saving equipment. Indeed, as I later discovered,

a perk for Assistant Wardens in those days was that they could join residents for life saving practices, earning, I think, ten shillings a time.

Hundreds of birds wheeling round

I think the view from the balcony in a big attraction is one of the most extraordinary of all sights – and sounds – of birds. Hundreds of birds of many species wheeling round with some periodically illuminated by the beams of lights. Identification is very challenging – the light washes out most of the colour. Shapes and flight patterns often seem quite unlike what you see in day light in other situations. And the species are out of context: waders with warblers, swifts and song thrushes. Once people used to distinguish day and night migrants but birds at the lighthouse usually defied any such categorisation with plenty of ‘day’ migrants on big nights.

Our star bird none could identify

And I remember individual birds – a Wryneck which was picked off Reg’s shoulder, an Ortolan crouching on the window sill of the Keeper’s cottage. A Knot that spiralled down in a puff of feathers having hit the wind vane, and the awful thud of a Water Rail flying straight into the tower. One night I picked up a Wheatear and noticed a ring on its leg. In the torch light I could read the words Mus. Nat. Reykjavik.



A ‘pet’ Little Owl

And there were recoveries of lighthouse birds too: a juvenile Ring Ouzel which was killed (and, I assume, eaten) in the Dordogne a month later. But our star bird was something none of us could identify at the time. Was this the bird which would really put Bardsey on the map? It proved to be a Pagoda (Brahminy) Starling and, despite the lack of direct evidence, it was discounted as an escape. Was it really so impossible? We had to wait another year for our five star bird. That was a first for Europe and the Bardsey bird is responsible for a three page account in *Birds of the Western Palearctic – Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra**.

Experiments to reduce fatalities

In those early years, the lighthouse with its spectacular attractions, and as a source for rarities and ringing, seemed to dominate the migrant bird scene. Many Obs. visitors fixed their visits by the time of the new moons. But, of course, the attractions came with casualties, though in that memorable autumn of 1956 these had been relatively low given the numbers of birds present, possibly because winds had been light on the big nights (121 killed on the worst August night and 47 (16 species) on the



Will Evans on hay rake



Eddie Roberts and Will Evans cutting hay

worst one in September). There have been continuing attempts to reduce casualties.

In the early 1950s the RSPB had provided ladder perches to fit on lighthouse domes, including Bardsey. While birds could sometimes be seen perching on them on calm night, they projected beyond the dome and a more common experience was to see birds fly into them. they were removed in 1957. Following trials at Dungeness and elsewhere the RSPB supported the fitting of tower floodlights. Paraffin ones were installed in late 1957. After a couple of years experience it was far from clear that they hadn't in fact increased casualties by illuminating the white square and providing further points for fatal attraction. Later red filters were fitted to these floodlights. Later there were experiments with distraction lights on the outside of the compound. These certainly can bring passerines down into the gorse etc. but waders which tend to circle high around the dome don't usually respond.

Comparisons are very difficult because of the vagaries of migration and changing bird numbers but it would seem that the use of distraction lights has reduced those major kills for which Bardsey had been infamous. In 1959 I wrote an account of lighthouse attraction for the Report for the 6 years for which there were records. And in fact that year broke the record with at least 1,075 birds killed.

Martin Richards

Gannets for younger Bardsey fans



By Connor Stansfield

Five children who visit or live on the island told me their five favourite things about Bardsey. Before you read them can you guess what they are? Quiz an adult and see how many they get. Are yours the same? Just reading their lists makes me smell the sea and itch to be back on the island. Thank you to all five of you for sharing your favourites.

Our five best things about Bardsey

Colin's boat
 I love going Manxie-ing
 It's a nice place
 I like the lambs, particularly
 bottle feeding them at the farm
 Seeing the sheep boat by the harbour

Andrew Pollard, 5 years

The sunsets
 Going to Connor's House
 Reading 'the Lighthouse Keeper's
 Lunch'
 Hedwig
 The boat

Felicity Bithell, 7 years

Wildlife
 Friends I have made
 Peace
 Carole
 Playing until late

Niles Bithell, 10 years

Living on Bardsey
 Having lots of friends
 New chickens (including
 Hedwig, my favourite)
 No cars
 Wildlife

Connor, 8 years

Sound of silence
 Going for walks by myself
 Wildlife
 The lighthouse
 Playing till late

Robin Bithell, 12 years

An egg in the bed

Connor Stansfield introduces us to his new chickens

"On 5th June my new chickens arrived. Later that week I tamed Hedwig, by getting her to come when I called her and giving her food. I have three brown ones and two white ones.

The two white ones have names, Hedwig and Blodwen. They keep trying to come into the house, Hedwig likes to roost on our sofa and one of the brown ones laid an egg on my old bed in mum and dad's room! This chicken is now called Eggbed."



Gannets contd.

Send ideas, photos and drawings for Gannets to me, Jo Jones, Gannets Editor, at address below. Chocolate reward for anything printed!

Carwyn George Lee, age 14, sent this poem that he wrote for an assignment at school using his experiences bird watching on Enlli as inspiration.

Carwyn visits Enlli annually for his holiday, staying for one week in Plas Bach and one week in the Observatory and he sends a 'HELLO TO EVERYONE'. I am delighted to have his brilliantly atmospheric poem to share with everyone and a box of chocolates is winging its way to him as a thank you.

Some say we are 'Free'

Flying high,
High,
Off in the open sky,
Soaring,
Diving,
Calling,
High in the open sky,

In flocks we descend,
Hundreds,
Or thousands,
For our nests we do mend,
From the sea far south,
Or just down by the river mouth,
Rock pipits,
Too red Linnets,
We do come,
But all a silent hum,

We are free,
For that's the way it should be,
With a burden of love,
From a Thrush,
To a Dove.

Carwyn Lee



Whimbrels

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