

the Bardsey Beacon

Issue 133 | February 2009

Editor's Blurb ...

Welcome to the Beacon. As you will see, this issue is something of a bumper one! I hope you enjoy it.

It's snowing as I put this issue together, so, like me, you may not have holidays at the forefront of your mind (or perhaps you do!), but if you are thinking of visiting Enlli, get your bookings in early to avoid disappointment.

As well as the latest news from members of our dedicated Committee, there are a number of extra articles ... a couple of pieces about Bardsey from the past by Gareth McLardy and Fenella Tillier, an update on the bird feeding station from Emma Stansfield, the latest position on bird record keeping from Mike Archer, a piece about the grey seal by Mandy McMath and a poem about West Coast fishing by Mel Stacey! Thank you all for your contributions.

Anyway, I don't know about you, but I'm looking forward to a long, hot summer. Happy birding (and sealing!)

Mike Armitage



Grey Seal Mum "Hammerhead" Photo: Mandy McMath



The Bardsey Beacon is the newsletter of the Friends of Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory (Registered Charity No. 249790).

A member of the Bird Observatories Council.



Warden's Report

As the ice-sheets and glaciers of the Polar Regions continue to recede, and, for whatever reason our very own climate has become barmy, autumn migration at a Welsh Bird Observatory has started earlier and earlier as each year I spend on the island.....and this year was no exception.

In 2006, the country saw flooding like never before. In my own town of Rotherham, Connor was 'stranded' with his grandparents in the village that became an island for a few days. This year we had excessive winds on the island during the so called summer months, and with boat cancelations at an all time high and day visitors at an all time low, the relentless summer rains meant that water levels and supply were at greater than ever before in summer. The whole island had become a swamp by mid-August, and with wellington-boots being the desired footwear – as opposed to the 'cros' that many of our visitors brought – the scene was set for a moist and rather splashy autumn.

Late July has for the past few years been the time autumn migrants begin to move through the island, however, the first returning Willow Warblers this year were noted as early as the 15th! By the 25th up to 50 were being recorded, as well as several common waders beginning their return journeys. Both Marsh Harrier and Hen Harriers were seen on the island at the same time and a Great Spotted Woodpecker was the forerunner of a bizarre record breaking arrival for this species. Also during the month there was a scattering of other common migrants, such as Common Whitethroat, Common Crossbill, Sand Martins, House Martins and Common Swifts. As the Little Egret colonisation continues across the UK, records on the island have become more frequent. We have seen this diminutive heron in small numbers now for five consecutive years, though we have only just had our 15th record for the island. So to get two records in July was a nice surprise (and with one attracted to the lighthouse in spring and another in August, four records in a single year is going some!). The spread of species is not limited to Egrets; Mediterranean Gulls have taken off over the past decade or so, and are now regular features of a Bardsey autumn. Last year we saw record breaking numbers, with 163 bird-days recorded and since 2000 alone there has been a staggering 93.41% of all the records on the island. So early records of juveniles in July are now no great surprise and a couple were recorded this year. Although some species are increasing (as above), others, both home and abroad are decreasing. One species, probably the rarest bird on a global scale, to regularly visit our shores, continues to decline in numbers on its native Mediterranean island home, but has over the past decade become increasingly more frequent in UK waters and seen annually in reasonable numbers from seawatching hotspots and headlands such as Bardsey. The Balearic Shearwater is now another annual visitor and has been recorded every year for the past decade with counts of over 150 on some days. This figure is a large proportion of the global population of this diminishing species. The first records this year were on 31 July when two were seen.

As we moved into August, migrants continued to move through, however they were in relatively small numbers. Usually the August new moon period can be a time when large numbers of warblers (namely Willow Warblers, Common Grasshopper Warblers, and Sedge Warblers) can be seen on the island. However, the large numbers never happened this year. We still had the same mix of warblers, flycatchers, redstarts etc., but in reduced numbers.

The now annual arrival of non-breeding Black-legged Kittiwakes began in early August, and by mid- to late month up to 7000 were sitting about on the rocks of the west coast, making the scene look like a Christmas card at times, with the huge flock making Carreg yr Honwy look snow-capped. Towards the month's end numbers of migrants did begin to build and on 31st a generally good days birding was had. highlights included Three Red Knot, Seven Dunlin, a Common Snipe, a Bar-tailed Godwit, four Whimbrel, a Common Greenshank, a Green Sandpiper, four Black-headed Gulls, a Great Spotted Woodpecker, three Sand Martins, 120 Barn Swallows, three House Martins, a Tree pipit, seven Grey Wagtails, 15 White Wagtails, 30 'alba' wagtails, two Yellow Wagtails, a 'flava' wagtail, four Common Redstarts, 23 Common Stonechats, 11 Northern Wheatear, a Eurasian Reed Warbler, 16 Common Whitethroats, two Garden Warblers, a Blackcap a Wood Warbler, nine Common Chiffchaffs, 44 Willow Warblers, 25 Goldcrests, a Spotted Flycatcher and two Pied Flycatchers. Also passing at sea the same day were 1700 Manx Shearwater, 85 Northern Gannets, 11

Common Scoters, two Arctic Skuas, a Mediterranean Gull, 23 Sandwich Terns, four Arctic Tern, one Atlantic Puffin and 1000 Razorbills. Late August saw exceptional numbers of Autumn Ladies Tresses growing in the fields around Ty Pellaf and Rhedynogoch. There were many thousands in some fields, and in one small field alone, there were over 2500 that we very carefully counted.

In early September we were visited by the 'A Rocha group'. A Rocha is a Christian conservation organisation, with groups and members scattered all over the world. The group was led by Steve Hughes, a former treasurer of the Observatory and now the Chief Executive Officer of 'A Rocha UK'. Several members of the group wanted to help around the Observatory and took time out of their holiday to help with cleaning the shop, pollarding trees and cutting down some of Nant Withy!

September is always a good time for a few scarce birds to arrive on the island. A few of the better days are listed here:

The 5th saw one Common Teal, five Ringed Plover, three Sanderling, one Ruff, one Common Sandpiper, 55 Barn Swallows, one Yellow Wagtail, 30 White Wagtails, 31 Northern Wheatears, three Common Grasshopper Warblers, one Sedge Warbler, one Eurasian Reed Warbler, four Common Whitethroats, 42 Willow Warblers, 16 Goldcrests, three Spotted Flycatchers, one Pied Flycatcher. On the 7th there was two Sanderling, one 'flava' Wagtail, four Grey Wagtails, 18 'white' wagtails, nine Northern Wheatear, 14 Eurasian Siskin. The next day (8th) there was an Osprey, one Purple Sandpiper, one Dunlin, 55 Barn Swallows, five Grey Wagtails, 60 White Wagtails, ten Northern Wheatears, two Sedge Warbler, one Common Whitethroat, one Garden Warbler and 80 Goldcrest. There was then a small lull for just under a week then however, on 13 there was one Merlin, a Corn Crake, one Sand Martin, 25 Barn Swallow, 15 House Martin, six Grey Wagtails, 30 White Wagtails, two Eurasian Reed Warblers, 35 Goldcrest, two Spotted Flycatchers, one Pied Flycatcher, and a juvenile Red-backed Shrike. On the 14th, 12 Grey Herons and 11 Brent Geese were unusual sights. There was also 190 Barn Swallows, 137 Meadow Pipits, 18 Grey Wagtails, 62 White Wagtails, one Whinchat, 42 Northern Wheatear, one Common Grasshopper Warbler, one Common Whitethroat, three Spotted Flycatchers, three Pied Flycatchers, two Eurasian Siskins, 24 Eurasian Goldfinch. On 15th we had two Common Teal, one Merlin, one Osprey, two Water Rails, ten Dunlin, four Common Snipe, seven Sky Lark, 20 Barn Swallows, one Grey Wagtail, 44 White Wagtails, 21 Northern Wheatears, one Melodious Warbler, three Spotted Flycatchers and three Pied Flycatchers. Another arrival on 16th produced a cracking list of birds with some impressive numbers. There was one Common Greenshank, one Short-eared Owl, one Eurasian Wryneck, nine Sky Larks, 261 Barn Swallows, 152 Meadow Pipits, one Yellow Wagtail, one Grey Wagtail, 32 White Wagtails, four Common Redstart, three Whinchat, 19 Stonechats, 44 Northern Wheatears, 12 Common Grasshopper Warblers, 18 Sedge Warblers, three Eurasian Reed Warblers, one Melodious Warbler (same), 62 Common Whitethroats, four Garden Warblers, 24 Blackcaps, 220 Common Chiffchaffs, 150 Willow Warblers, 450 Goldcrest, 44 Spotted Flycatchers, 15 Pied Flycatchers, one Wood Nuthatch (fifth island record!) and 35 Eurasian Siskin. On the 17th there was one Merlin, another (!) Osprey, one Eurasian Marsh Harrier, three Water Rails, one Grey Plovers, three Red Knot, 31 Barn Swallows, seven Grey Wagtails, 60 White Wagtails, one Black Redstart, two Common Redstarts, five Whinchats, 20 Northern Wheatears, the Melodious Warbler was still here, one Common Whitethroat, one Firecrest and just 20 Siskin. On the 18th yet another Osprey flew south. There was seven Black-tailed Godwits, four Common Sandpipers, a Short-eared Owl, one Great Spotted Woodpecker, 17 Sky Larks, 70 Barn Swallows, 18 House Martins, 15 Tree Pipits, 580 Meadow Pipits, one Red-throated Pipit, one 'flava' Wagtail, 25 Grey Wagtails, 38 White Wagtails, one Common Redstart, one Whinchat, 31 Northern Wheatears, a Barred Warbler, six Common Whitethroats, a Garden Warbler, nine Blackcaps, 38 Goldcrest, two Spotted Flycatcher, four Pied Flycatchers, the Wood Nuthatch again, 28 Goldfinch, one Lesser Redpoll and one Yellowhammer. Yet more good passage on 21st saw seven Grey Heron, one Greater Scaup, one Sanderling, four Dunlin, one Common Snipe, one Green Sandpiper, 35 Sky Larks, 106 Barn Swallows, six Tree Pipits, 285 Meadow Pipits, one 'flava' wagtail, 14 Grey Wagtails, 30 White Wagtails, 35 'alba' Wagtails, one Common Redstart, five Whinchats, 14 Northern Wheatears, two Eurasian Reed Warblers, one Garden Warbler, seven Blackcaps, three Spotted Flycatchers, two Pied Flycatchers, one Eurasian Treecreeper, 50 Goldfinches, 14 Lesser Redpoll, a House Sparrow (a real island rarity!), two Reed Buntings. On 28th yet another good day of passage saw five Golden Plover, two Great Spotted Woodpeckers, four Sky Larks, 19 Barn Swallows, three Yellow Wagtails, seven Grey

Wagtails, 24 European Robins, 23 Northern Wheatears, three Ring Ouzels, three Song Thrush, one Redwing, one Eurasian Reed Warbler, one Lesser Whitethroat, two Garden Warblers, eight Blackcaps, two Yellow-browed Warblers, 18 Common Chiffchaffs, one Willow Warbler, 225 Goldcrests, one Pied Flycatcher, three Common Starlings, one Eurasian Siskin, one Lesser Redpoll, a Lapland Longspur, a fine Ortolan Bunting and one Reed Bunting.

So that was September, not bad all in all, and October, traditionally the best month of the year still to come.

The 1st of October saw a day of sea watching, as the wind had moved into the northwest and was fairly brisk. In total there was two Red-throated Divers, 17 Northern Fulmars, 254 Manx Shearwaters, one Balearic Shearwater, 14 Leach's Storm-petrels, 330 Northern Gannets, two Pintail, two Common Scoters, 40 Eurasian Golden Plovers, 16 Arctic Skuas, 21 Great Skuas, two Long-tailed Skuas, 1000 Black-legged Kittiwakes, three Arctic Terns, two Sandwich Terns, 20 Common Guillemots, 515 Razorbill, one Little Auk, and a record seven Black Guillemots. The only bird of note on 2nd on the land was a Yellow-browed Warbler, though smaller numbers of seabirds were still passing. The numbers of birds moving lessened over the next few days, and a Yellow-browed Warbler and Firecrest on 7th were the only birds of note. On 11th a Paddyfield Warbler was discovered in T□ Pellaf Withy and was an addition to the island's list.

The following day saw one of the best days of visible passage all autumn with some nice birds thrown in for good measure. These included: three Common Kestrels, four Water Rails, five Eurasian Golden Plovers, two Northern Lapwings, a record seven Great Spotted Woodpeckers, 280 Sky Larks moving south, 100 Meadow Pipits, four Richard's Pipits, 49 Eurasian Robins, one Black Redstart, 49 Stonechats, two Ring Ouzels, ten Song Thrushes, 21 Redwings, two Mistle Thrushes, one Eurasian Reed Warbler, one Barred Warbler, two Lesser Whitethroats, one Common Whitethroat, nine Garden Warblers, 31 Blackcaps, one Yellow-browed Warbler, 26 Common Chiffchaffs, 332 Goldcrests, one Coal Tit, 51 Chaffinches, 69 European Greenfinches, eight Eurasian Siskins, 124 European Goldfinches, 23 Common Bullfinches, 180 Common Linnets, one Twite, 15 Lesser Redpolls, a Common Rosefinch, and ten Reed Buntings. WOW....not a bad days birding even if the Paddyfield Warbler had gone!

Migration slowed down a little after this with no major surprises and not many real movements until late on in the month. The 28th saw five Northern Lapwings, three Great Spotted Woodpeckers, three Sky Larks, 31 Meadow Pipits, one Grey Wagtail, one Pied Wagtail, three 'alba' wagtail, one Black Redstart, 16 Common Blackbirds, 18 Song Thrushes, 32 Redwings, five Blackcaps, 48 Goldcrests, 500 Common Starlings, two Coal Tits, 60 Chaffinches, two Bramblings, 13 European Greenfinches, nine Eurasian Siskins, five European Goldfinches, nine Common Linnets, one Lesser Redpoll. The following day (29th) there was four Northern Lapwings, one Common Snipe, one Short-eared Owl, two Great Spotted Woodpecker, three Sky Larks, 43 Meadow Pipits, one 'alba' Wagtail, one Black Redstart, two Fieldfares, 23 Song Thrushes, 13 Redwings, one Lesser Whitethroat, 41 Goldcrest, 200 Common Starlings, five Coal Tits, 198 Chaffinches, three Bramblings, 24 European Greenfinches, three Eurasian Siskins, nine European Goldfinches, two Common Bullfinches, five Lesser Redpoll, three Common Crossbill, one Reed Bunting. Following a lighthouse attraction on 30th there were large numbers of birds on the island including three European Storm-petrels at the lighthouse, five Merlin, three Northern Lapwings, three Eurasian Woodcocks, one Long-eared Owl, two Short-eared Owls, three Great Spotted Woodpeckers, 35 Sky Lark, one Wood Lark, one Barn Swallow, 46 Meadow Pipits, one Black Redstart, three Ring Ouzels, 161 Common Blackbirds, 80 Fieldfare, 110 Song Thrushes, 740 Redwings, six Mistle Thrushes, one Lesser Whitethroat, two Blackcaps, five Common Chiffchaffs, 39 Goldcrests, 2000 Common Starlings, four Coal Tits, one Great Tit, 1300 Chaffinches, 47 Bramblings, 34 Greenfinches, 22 Eurasian Siskins, eight European Goldfinches, two Common Bullfinches, nine Common Linnets, one Twite, eight Lesser Redpolls, one Snow Bunting, two Reed Buntings. The following day (31st) there was a notable movement of finches etc. and some new arrivals including one Hen Harrier, two Northern Lapwings, one Black Redstart, one Ring Ouzel, 215 Common Blackbirds, 55 Fieldfare, 60 Song Thrushes, 227 Redwings, four Mistle Thrushes, two Lesser Whitethroats, 48 Eurasian Jackdaws, three Rook, 44 Carrion Crows, 483 Common Starlings, six Long-tailed Tits, two Coal Tits, 2200 Chaffinches, 35 Bramblings, 100 European Greenfinches, 19 Eurasian Siskins, 58 European Goldfinches, three Common

Bullfinchs, 11 Common Linnets, nine Lesser Redpolls, three Reed Buntings.

November saw record arrivals of Long-tailed Tits, with up to 70 recorded on 1st. A late Yellow-browed Warbler was seen on 19th and another Wood Lark was present on 18th. The 24th saw six Common Crossbills, these being the last good birds before Emma, Connor and I left the island for the winter months.

Steve Stansfield

Secretary's Bit

The Observatory Council held its End of Season meeting on Saturday 6th December at the Haling Dene Centre in Penkridge, Staffordshire.

It was a great pleasure for all Members of Council present to welcome our newly elected President, the Rt. Reverend David Hawkins, Bishop of Barking, to our meeting. He duly took his place at the top table with our Chairman, Patrick Davies making the introduction. The Rev. David made a short speech thanking the Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory for offering him the position as President which he was very pleased to accept. It is noted that the Rev. David may not be able to attend all meetings of the Obs. Council due to his wide ranging episcopal duties, but has stated his full support to the Observatory and its work.

It was of course, the Rt. Rev. David Hawkins who conducted the wedding ceremony for our Warden, Steve Stansfield and his now lady wife, Emma, at the chapel on Bardsey earlier this year, so many 'Friends of the Bardsey Observatory' would have met him there, The Rev. David has visited the Obs. on many occasions and so is well known to quite a number of our members and visitors to the Island.

The Observatory must give its thanks to its Members of Council, many of whom travel long distance to attend our Meetings. Alicia and Bob Normand travel up from their home in Devon, Ian Wright, from Anglesey and Ann Owen Vaughan from Abergele, in North Wales, have travelled to the venue in Staffordshire, others attending from as far afield as Lancashire, Carmarthenshire, Clevedon and Manchester and attend most meetings held at this venue. We change our venue to the Marine Hotel in Criccieth, for other meetings and the AGM which gives Alicia, Bob and others from the South of England even further to travel whilst giving a shorter journey to those living in North Wales itself. None the less, all Members of Council manage to attend most Meetings of Council and the AGM with only very few sending apologies for absence.

The Meeting progressed well following a standard Agenda with Members having been previously presented with a summary of reports from Officers, by e-mail. The Chairman advised Council of progress made since his previous report. A complaint has been received from the Trust and visitors to the Island on the noise created at 'Cristin' when we run the diesel generator. Running the generator more often has become necessary in order to provide power for the water heater (heating, lighting and shower) and in order that batteries may be charged and to run the computer. We are afraid that this additional use is necessary to provide facilities expected by our visitors, in support of providing potable water supply through the use of UV filtration, and to enable our Warden and his Staff to keep up to date with the input of necessary data in support of our work monitoring the wildlife of the Island. If anyone has knowledge of any form of muffle that can be used over the exhaust pipe of the generator to reduce the exhaust noise would they please let an Officer of Council know as soon as possible.

The kitchen window at the Observatory has at long last been replaced, thanks to the efforts of our landlords, the Bardsey Island Trust, though other frames in 'Cristin' give cause for concern.

Visitor numbers were a little lower this past year. The Whale and Dolphin Society did not take their usual two weeks accommodation and the generally poor weather throughout the year has not helped.

Our Warden and his staff have again worked well throughout the season, ably assisted by a number of most welcome volunteers, and many tasks towards the upkeep of the Observatory have been completed but some remedial work still remains to be done early in the coming year.

Our Annual Report for 2007 has been completed and circulated and has received commendation from many sources, both for content and presentation. Very well done Steve (our Warden) Patrick, Dianne and all others involved for their efforts on our behalf.

On numerous occasions I have been asked if I still hold back dated copies of our Annual Report. I do hold some copies and a list of those Reports I have. If you would like to receive one or more of these back numbers I would be pleased to forward them on to you. The Observatory would ask £1 plus postage for any copy (before 2000) £3 for any 2003 – 2006 again plus postage please.

Those still available are 1978, 11 no's, 1979, 10 no's, 1980, 9 no's, 1981, 1 no's, 1982, 10 no's, 1983, 4 no's, 1984, 1 no., 1986, 1 no. 1990, 1 no. 1992, 1 no. 1995, 2 no's. 2003, 6 no's, 2004, 2 no's, 2005, 4 no's, and 2006, 1 no.

I also hold 15 copies of the 'Atlas of Birds Ringed by the Bardsey Observatory from 1953 to 1996' by Loxton, Kittle and Hope Jones. £5.00 plus postage would secure.

I wish you all a HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Mike West

Bird Feeding Station Update

In the last issue of the Beacon there was a request for donations for the purpose of building a feeding station in the back garden of Cristin. The idea was that it may encourage some species to stay around the Obs. or on the island for longer periods, and enable them to feed up at this stopping off point on their migrations. And, that Obs. staff and visitors could sit on the bench to watch birds feeding, and see from the kitchen window.

There has been a really fantastic response to this request, a number of observatory members contacted us to give donations, some quite considerable, and others brought seeds, nuts and feeders to the island on their visit; with the result that we were able to get it up and running before the end of the season! - a great achievement. We also have a good stock of seeds and nuts for a short while thanks to your generosity.

Not only were Obs. members enthusiastic about the idea, but Richard Brown and Emyr Roberts (Trust Warden) threw themselves into making a stand for the feeders (causing some hilarity among the onlookers!). As if this wasn't enough, Richard, with the help of Bob Normand, and Liz James built a splendid bird table constructed from slate and willow sourced from the island. Part of the feeding station, the bird table and its construction team can be seen in the accompanying picture.

It is great news that it was also successful with the birds! Birds that have been seen on the feeders and bird table so far include: Robin, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Wren, Dunnock and Blackbird. In addition to these a Coal tit that arrived in October was seen daily on the feeders until we left the island, and is still on the island now! A fair few birders have also been spotted lined up on the bench outside the kitchen window, all with binoculars trained on the feeders!

All in all a great success; I would like to thank all of you that gave donations towards it very much indeed.

Emma Stansfield

From the Ringing Hut

Many of you who are visitors to Cristin will have gathered outside the ringing hut, ever curious, to inspect the scarcer birds we have caught in the mist nets. On the bench inside are the daily record sheets, detailing the species ringed and their ages and biometrics (wing length, weight, state of moult and so forth).

So, you ask, just how many birds have been ringed since the observatory opened in 1953, how many were caught again on the island and elsewhere, how long have they lived and where did they go?

The answers lie in the hand written A4 data sheets you have seen, and elsewhere – but there are over 16,700 pages with at least quarter of a million individual ringing records, so quite a lot to rummage through! Until the 1990s, rummaging was in fact the only option. The revolution came with computers and programmes written especially to sort and categorise the data. Imagine being able to discover in a moment the details of the only Sabine's Gull so far ringed on Bardsey or to determine the average wing length of the 971 Willow Warblers newly ringed in 1975 and then compare it with those caught in 2005,or anything else that might interest you.

The decision to put all the historic data into the IPMR programme developed over a period of months, as the sheer size of the task was somewhat daunting! The first step was to make duplicate copies from which to work as the originals 'were becoming frail'. The duplication, now thankfully a distant memory, involved photocopying more than 16,700 A4 pages. An additional copy of each was made to provide a complete backup of the originals and these are held securely away from Cristin in accordance with best modern practice.

The original blue and green bound volumes and numerous lever-arch files and their working copies now line the smart and much admired new shelves constructed in the office by Ian Wright and Steve Stansfield last spring.

So what, you will be thinking, has been achieved so far. Well, with the help of numerous kind folk and a lot of encouragement from Steve and others, we are delighted to report that ALL the historic or archival data has now been digitised, the last few thousand being entered very recently by Richard Else, the observatory's Manx Shearwater Research Assistant. This includes all the new rings, all retraps, all recoveries of our birds away from Bardsey and details of all birds trapped on Bardsey but ringed elsewhere. Well done to the many folk involved who will be fully acknowledged in the annual report when the task is complete.

And what else remains to be done? Well, comes the reply, the data must be thoroughly checked before it is sent to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). We have already made a start and we hope to finish later this year. However, we will need some volunteers over the spring and summer, staying at the observatory with volunteer status. Lack of experience with IPMR is not likely to be a problem as we will work in pairs, one volunteer with one 'expert'!

If you would like to offer your help (and enjoy a stay on the island) then please contact Steve direct on 07855 264151. Thanks!

Mike Archer

Memories of a Bardsey volunteer

At the age of 18 my first stay on Bardsey was in the autumn of 1978. With Dr Richard Kennedy (biologist), Ron Atkinson (bird photographer) and others, our week long stay at Cristin in October prolonged into a second week and into November because of delays due to rough seas. My two good friends Peter Roberts and Mike Peacock were warden and deputy. During the stay John and Monica Hawkins (both later were killed tragically in a car accident) shared Cristin. By chance David Hawkins (any relation??) has become the President of BBFO. Returning home to Formby and my job as an audit clerk in Southport, I thought often of my stay on Bardsey and the rich and sometimes rare wildlife that we saw.

In 1981, I decided to quit accountancy and become a voluntary warden. So in April of 1981, I went over on the boat to join Peter and his deputy warden, Dave Suddaby. Almost continuously from then until September I became a long-stay voluntary and trainee ringer.

My four and a half months passed very quickly, although I was kept very busy during this time. After using a bedroom in Cristin's north upper wing, myself and Derek Evans (who was working for the Trust doing building restoration work and a kind and helpful chap) decorated Cristin's old hog smoking room (by the disused sties) to accommodate future voluntary wardens or even some VIP! I became the room's first occupant and from there, helped with mist-netting migrant and resident birds. In those days, furnishings (rugs) and lighting (paraffin lamps) were very simple and basic.

1981 was a good year for Bardsey's avian visitors. Caught or seen were such species as a tailless subalpine warbler, wryneck, wood warbler, penduline tit, unprecedented non-adult sora rail, greenish warbler, common rosefinch, lapwing, merlin (netted) and more than 500 willow warblers ringed in August.

As far as flora was concerned, I found lady's tresses near the old school (later Nellie Evans's summer home. And a rare native fumitory blooming in a garden. I also discovered a stinkhorn fungus in furzes near the lighthouse. Grayling butterfly and slow worm were welcome co-habiters. I wrote about my stay in the newsletter of the Liverpool members group of the RSPB.

During my stay, I also lent a hand to the Stricks who were farming at that time on Bardsey and had previously farmed on Lundy island. I helped with rounding up the sheep and shearing. I also helped Peter Roberts construct the first hide (North West) made from stones taken from the shore. The Stricks goats milk was very much appreciated and one of the lighthouse keepers had a birthday party and I had lobster for the first time and an aniseed drink (which wasn't Vimto, I'm guessing - Ed!)

Douglas Hague was at work on the restoration of the Abbey ruins where a time-capsule was buried for future generations to uncover.

Of course, I met and chatted to many visitors: Peter Robert's old deputy, Chester Rowley, Bryn Williams, Sue Hugheston Roberts, Lou Davenport (Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory), Steve Hughes, Harry Williams (artist), Miriam Rees (Cristin's cook who spared me her binoculars, Dianne Charles, Gordon Langsbury (photographer), Wil (former boatman) and all the Evans family, Roger and Jill Coombs and others. These and others made my stay on the island so pleasant.

Thanks to them and to others for their kindness: Richard Arnold (Bangor University), Ian Wolfenden (Merseyside ringer), Chris Felton (Liverpool Museum) who kindly escorted me in my search for insects and John Dempsey (journalist with the Liverpool Daily Post) who, where possible, has written reports on Bardsey's wildlife.

Gareth McLardy

More tales from Bardsey's past

Alan's contribution in the last issue made me smile. I remember the meeting at David Thomas', when we decided to launch the Appeal to buy the Island. (Half remember as I spent most of the time potato picking!) only to find I was nominated Appeal Secretary! I had enormous trouble getting Wynford Vaughan Thomas to sign the Appeal Letters. Eventually I caught a train from Buckinghamshire to Cardiff and met him in a hotel and gave him 300 letters to sign!! It made all the difference his personal touch made all the difference.

The other story I have is that I came to Bardsey in 1957, over 50 years ago. Robin Pratt and myself decided to spend the New Year on the island but due to bad weather we got stuck on the mainland! Spent 4 or 5 nights in the boathouse at Cwrt. Slept on boxes with the rats running all around. Hung our food up on the rafters. Saw the New Year in at The Ship and had a sing song on our way back to the boathouse!

Eventually we got across, and stayed at Ty Bach next to Eddie and Jane (In Ty Nesaf) We ran out of food, could not get to mainland, so got some porridge from the lighthouse keepers!

We recorded the first Greenland Whitefronts for the island. (Robin will have to verify this for me as he was the experienced birdwatcher - he got a bit aggitated with me because as we were getting nearer I think I put them up!)

Brenda Chamberlain was living at Carreg, Wil and Nellie at Ty Pellaf and Tom and Guto at Nant, and Bert the Pole was caretaking Plas Bach.

I hope one day to get back to Bardsey.

Fenella Tillier (née Cowdy)

Increase in Charges

Due to ever increasing costs, Colin has had to put up the price for the boat crossing, which includes transportation of your luggage both ends of the journey, to £32 per person this coming year. For the same reason it was decided at the Council meeting in December to put up the cost of accommodation at the Observatory as well.

The new rates, including boat fare, are as follows:

Adults: £145; OAP/Student 14 - 18 yrs: £130; Children 3 - 13 yrs: £100; Children up to 3 yrs: Free. Any consecutive weeks will cost £113, £98 and £68 respectively. The non-returnable deposits will remain at £25 per person per week.

I'm sure you will agree that this still makes the Observatory a great place to come for a holiday, whether it is for the birding or the general peace and quiet. Bookings are coming in quite quickly now so please don't leave it too long before you contact me. Our assistant Warden, Rich B, will be in the North single this year so we have the following accommodation: 1 single, 2 twin/doubles and two family rooms with 4 beds in each - plenty for you to choose from! Confirmed bookings are shown on the web site but as provisional bookings don't appear there please contact me before you make a firm booking in case the position has altered. I wouldn't want anyone disappointed. I look forward to increased postal contact in the next few weeks!

Alicia Normand

Hey, Mom, the surf's up!

In Wales it is not unusual for white coated grey seal pups to be enthusiastic swimmers but on Bardsey they can surf too!



I was watching Mother 3 (nick-named "Hammerhead" because of the pattern of dark hairs on her mainly light grey coat) and her pup swimming in the shallows.

The pup was whizzing around in circles having not fully mastered the control made possible through alternate pushing of its hind flippers and directional fine tuning with fore flippers. There was a slight swell and the pair kept beyond the breaking waves but the mother was careful her pup did not stray far, occasionally nudging it in a landward direction.

Suddenly the pup became more interested in Mother than the wide blue yonder and concentrated its efforts on trying to suckle underwater and when this didn't work started to make a calf-like cry. The pup was hungry. The underwater service station was not a success and something had to be done.



Suddenly the pup hitched a piggy-back on its mother's back and they were both surfing into shore, where once she had reached the pebbly shallows the mother turned on her side presenting her nipple to the hungry pup who was latched on and greedily suckling within seconds.

Unlike their counterparts in Scotland it is not uncommon to see Welsh grey seal pups swimming while still in their white coats. The pups are usually more than five days old, over that time having developed a layer of insulating blubber from guzzling their mother's rich, fatty milk. It may be that this early swimming practice gives them an advantage once they are weaned and have to learn to catch their own food. This is a very vulnerable time for young seals with as many as half of them not surviving their first year due mainly to starvation. It looks as though the terrain on Bardsey, with its isolated small coves, gives the young pups a good start in life and it will be very interesting to chart their progress in the ongoing Photo-ID study. After about 3-4 weeks their white hairs are moulted to reveal the adult coat with its unique patterning which, like fingerprints in humans, will allow recognition of individual seals when they return to Bardsey to rest after their foraging forays and, in a few years time to breed, maybe on the very beach that they were born.

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West Coast FISHING

A POETIC INTERLUDE

We have our own Sunset Boulevard here.
Where west coast path snakes by a field for birds.
Look out across the blue, and catch a flash of green,

As they come; laden with gifts from the deep.
A Bass, a Pollock, Mackerel, Wrasse and Crab.
A feast to feed twelve hungry mouths at home.

Along the cliffs, among the crags, birds nest.
They rear three young, safe from voracious gulls.
Their piping cry and darting dance alerts us to their need.
No hook, no line, no rod, no reel.
A sharp persistent beak creates a hole
From which to pluck the flesh; luscious, pearly, soft.
The banquet nobly caught.

Across the deep, time's measured turn calls back.
Vast yearning hauling. us in each year
Pearl-bordered by the waves, the rope-wrought heart still there.
A glance, a touch, a sigh, a dream.
No bait. The island's natural power
Pulls in the catch of friendship:
Companions joyfully found.

Mel Stacey

WebLinks

The Bardsey Website:
www.bbfo.org.uk

The Bardsey Blog:
<http://bardseybellman.blogspot.com/>

The Beacon On-line:
www.bbfo.org.uk/beacon.htm