NOTES ON CAITHNESS BIRD LIFE

E.S.Mackay's contributions to the John O'Groat Journal, 1913-1918, on the birds of Caithness

Eric Sinclair Mackay

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Preface

The past two decades have seen the discovery of a large number of long forgotten publications on Caithness ornithology, principally by four amateur Victorian naturalists, Robert Shearer, Henry Osborne, William Reid and Eric Mackay. In an attempt to make this material better known, and more widely available, some transcripts of their various publications have been prepared. Those by Robert Shearer have already appeared in print (see Clark & Sellers 2005), and this document deals with those by Eric Mackay. Mackay had always hoped that the principal articles transcribed here (his 'Notes on Caithness Bird Life' series) would be published bound together. In fact his son, Donald, had the manuscripts of the articles as-submitted bound together and inter-leaved with various colour prints of birds; this document now resides in Thurso Library. From this a transcript was prepared by RHW. This new version is an update of the original transcript incorporating some new material, full bibliographic details about the articles, a list of the material in Mackay's collection of bird taxidermy, and in a completely revised format reflecting more closely how the articles looked when they appeared in the *John O'Groat Journal*. We hope Eric Mackay would have approved.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In June 1913 there appeared in the columns of the *John O'Groat Journal* a piece entitled 'Notes on Caithness Bird Life'. It was the first of some 45 articles that were to appear intermittently in the paper over the next five years. The by-line gave the author's name as 'Abrach', the pen-name of Eric Sinclair Mackay. Rather little information about birds in Caithness survives from this period (Mackay wrote primarily, though not exclusively, about things that happened in the period 1860-1890) and it is the purpose of the present publication to provide an annotated transcripton of these articles, together with a number of related publications by Mackay or about Mackay.

Mackay was born in Wick in the early 1840's,[1] the son of Donald Mackay, feuar[2] of Dempster Street, and was named in honour of his godfather, Dr Eric Sinclair, who was the local surgeon, and a much respected figure in the local community. Sinclair was a noted naturalist and amongst other things amassed a substantial collection of bird skins. To the young Mackay the opportunity to inspect these skins was a great treat, and no doubt did much to foster his interest in natural history.

Mackay was apprenticed to James Crawford, fishcurer and on completing his apprenticeship became a journeyman fishcurer for Crawford. In the early 1860's he became manager of James Bremner's fishcuring business and several years later he set up in business in his own right as a barrel manufacturer. With this established and prospering he took on additional responsibilities as the manager of a fishcuring station at Lochboisdale on South Uist and an associated enterprise on the nearby island of Eriskay. In 1873 he set up his own fishcuring business with premises in both Wick and Shetland. All went well for a decade or more, but the mid-1880's were disastrous for the herring fishery in the north of Scotland, and he, along with many other fishcurers, went out of business. Nothing daunted he moved with his family to Aberdeen where he returned to his original trade as a barrel and box manufacturer, the business transferring shortly afterwards to Glasgow and it was here that he spent the remainder of his working life and his retirement. He died in 1918 at the age of 76 years.

Eric Mackay appears to have received only a rudimentary education – not unusual for a working class lad at the time – and this is reflected in part in his written work, which tends to be rambling and too often adopts what one suspects he took to be the way educated people would express themselves. He was by all accounts an intelligent man, quick on the uptake, a good organiser and a capable leader. His pride in Caithness, whilst quite understandable, sometimes gets in the way of what he has to say. His repeated use of the slightly irritating expression 'Caithness to the fore' reveals an insecurity, and is, in any case, quite unnecessary – Caithness was (and still is) an excellent place for birds and is perfectly capable of standing, as it were, on its own two feet and needs no cheerleader to promote it. The other aspect of Maclay's character that comes out in his publications is his quite shameless self-promotion, though this is so transparent that it is more comic than sinister.

Eric Mackay had a lifelong interest in nature, but his overriding passion was for birds. As already noted his godfather was a noted collector of bird skins and the young Mackay certainly received much encouragement from this source. He mentions also his admiration for Robert Shearer's long series of articles about birds and mammals which appeared in the *John O'Groat Journal* in the late 1850's and early 1860's (see Clark & Sellers 2005 for a transcript of these articles). Quite when he himself became a collector of bird skins is not on record. The earliest addition to his collection for which any details survive was a Snowy Owl he obtained from one of the Duke of Portland's gamekeepers

(1) His birth seems not to have been registered (it was not a legal requirement to do so at the time, so there is nothing untoward about this). His death certificate says that he died on 3 February 1918 at the age of 76 years, though two obituaries in the *Groat* (see contributions §49 and §51) describe him as being 77 years old. Depending on whether or not he had had his birthday in 1918, this would put his year of birth as 1840, 1841 or 1842.

(2) Feuar or fiar is a Scottish legal term for someone who has mortgaged, put in pledge or pawned their property, but who is the ultimate owner.

in October 1867 and which later landed him in a deal of trouble (see contribution §27). It seems the gamekeeper did not have permission to sell on skins in this way (though understandably quite a few gamekeepers did this sort of thing as a way supplementing their income). The Duke of Portland had got wind of what had happened (the mounted Snowy Owl had been shown at an exhibition in Wick in 1868, and the tag indicating where it had been taken had given the game away) and wanted what he considered his property back. When the case came before the Sheriff Court, Mackay was able to plead that the gamekeeper had 'occasionally supplied him with specimens of birds, for all of which the defender had paid him handsomely in cash'; the judge threw the case out. Mackay would be about 26 years old when the Snowy Owl was taken, and so appears to have started his collection no later than 1865 when he was about 24 years of age. Most probably he began as soon as he was old enough to handle a gun. Whether there was any formal list of the specimens in the collection with details of provenance is unknown, but they do appear to have been labelled (this was how the Duke of Portland found out about the Snoy Owl taken on the Wester Watten Estate). It has been possible to complete a provisional list of the species represented by combining information from three sources. Firstly, the species Mackay mentions in his *John O'Groat* articles as having been added to the collection (and Mackay was not shy in making it known that additions had been made from time to time), secondly a list of the cases put up for auction when part of the collection was put up for sale by auction in 1889 (see Sellers 2020) and thirdly from an article published in the *Scottish Naturalist* by Pennie & Gunn in 1951 and listing the more interesting species which finished up in the Wick Museum. Together these three sources mention 143 specimens of 124 species. It is difficult to know what, if anything has been missed, but it seems possible, for instance, that there were other, more common species in the Wick Museum, not referred to by Pennie & Gunn. Among the more notable birds in the collection were the following: Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, White-tailed Eagle, Purple Heron, Sabine's Gull and Brünnich's Guillemot, not all, it should be emphasised, taken in Caithness).

It would also be interesting to know which of the skins in his collection were seen by other naturalists, not least as confirmation of identification for those species in which this poses a challenge. When John Harvie-Brown, one of the leading Scottish ornithologists of the late Victorian period, visited Wick in 1885 he mentions having seen the Sabine's Gull 'now in the possession of Mr E.S.Mackay, fish-curer, of Wick' and describes it as a 'lovely specimen' (see Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1887, p.229). Harvie-Brown & Buckley also make reference to a Little Stint 'now in the possession of Mr. Eric M'Kay', information that they obtained from William Reid, a keen local naturalist (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1887, p.219). Harvie-Brown met Reid on this visit and give a very generous acknowledgement of his help in the *Vertebrate Fauna*; Mackay receives only the two mentions already noted but no personal acknowledgement. It is not known whether Harvie-Brown met Mackay, but it seems unlikely that they did, and we knw that Mackay was away in June 1885 (see comments below). This was a difficult period for Mackay – 1884 had been a disastrous year for the herring fishery and 1885 was no better – and he almost certainly had more pressing matters to attend to. Mackay seems not to have made any attempt to publish details of the more interesting of his finds, and, in consequence, those of particular significance such as the Brünnich's Guillemot he took near Wick, are not accepted (this does not make them wrong, it is simply that there are no corroborating details by which they can be evaluated). Indeed it seems that few people outside Caithness were even aware of his grandly named 'Pulteney Collection'.

Even as a young man, however, Mackay appears to have wanted to write something more generally about birds in Caithness, but it was not until he was in his seventies and well into his retirement that he finally got round to it. The result was the series of 45 articles published in the *John O'Groat Journal* between June 1913 and April 1918 under the general heading of 'Notes on Caithness Bird Life', the last eleven appearing in the three months following his death. There are two versions of these articles: those as they appeared in print in the *John O'Groat Journal* (which are the ones reproduced below), and a second bound handwritten set as submitted for publication. (Actually the first half of the latter were a transcription of the articles as-published prepared by Mackay's son Donald after his death; it seems that Mackay had difficulty in getting the

Groat to return the first batch of articles and that he had not kept copies). As submitted Mackay had prepared the material as two lots of twenty articles which he refers to as the First series, and the Second Series. Some appear to excessively long and the editor of the Groat evidently wanted all to be about the same length so divided several into two, or in one case three, parts. Mackay's numbering system seems to have gone awry quite early on, and we have therefore applied our own numbering system to these articles. In addition to the 45 articles in the Notes on Caithness Bird Life series Mackay also published a number of other article sin the Groat, a few a little before this series, and two as it was coming to a conclusion - a grand total of 48 articles.

For the most part these articles refer back to his younger days, some thirty to fifty years before. He says nothing in the articles about his sources of information, but there exists a letter sent with the Second Series of articles and which was bound into the as-submitted versions of the articles and which provides at least some indication of how he set about this. In his own words:

> "You will find that the second series is brim full of local interest, especially those articles written on the indigenous gulls, Terns and Willie Waugtail, as those were copied from a few letters that I wrote during 1861 when I was foreman to the late James Bremner on the new harbour heart. I was *even* at that time so fascinated by those gull scenes that those letters were intended for the Groat of those days, but were never offered for inspection.
>
> Many notes have been now unearthed treating on bird scenes about Pulteney Harbour and the *wollenes* of the south cliffs, plus a lot of scraps that I from time to time noted down during my peregrinations around the Shetlands, West Coast of Scotland and the Outer Hebrides, from 1865 to 1899. Amongst the last of those were the notes on the Little Gull."

The articles were published under the pseudonym 'Abrach', which on the face of it seems quite a modest thing to do (and was by no means unusual at the time). However, he makes repeated reference to himself and his 'Pulteney Collection', and clearly uses the anonymity of a pen-name for some quite shameless self-promotion.

Mackay's style tended towards the long and rambling and, although the articles are ostensibly about birds in Caithness, there are many diversions, which, interesting as they may be, were not really relevant to the task in hand. There are, nevertheless, many useful snippets. Unfortunately Mackay was not very attentive to detail and there are a fair number of obvious, if minor, errors. Harvie-Brown, for instance, is consistently referred to as 'Harvey-Brown', Macgillivray as 'Macgillvray' and Montagu as 'Montague'. There are also some factual errors, highlighted in the footnotes to the text.

There is a marked bias in the articles towards the more unusual or rarer species – common and/or small species get hardly a mention. Perhaps the most important article is the penultimate one (§44) in which those species which had then only been recorded once or twice in the county are listed, together with details of new species added since the publication of Shearer's list in 1863, together with the date first recorded and by whom the bird was found. He claimed seven firsts for himself. Of these, five (Bittern, Black-tailed Godwit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Mealy Redpoll and Black-headed Bunting) appear genuine (though the Black-headed Bunting is no longer accepted partly because few details about it exist, but also because of the possibility that it was an escaped cagebird). The inclusion of Purple Sandpiper is perhaps questionable. There was a specimen of this species in Sinclair's Collection, and as the Purple Sandpiper is not a particularly unusual bird in Caithness (it is, moreover, contained in Shearer's list of 1863, where its status is described as 'common' – see Clark & Sellers 2005, p.200) there is no reason to think that Sinclair's specimen was anything other than a bird taken in Caithness, though no details survive to confirm this – but perhaps Mackay knew something that we do not. Thus, it could have been legitimate for Mackay to claim that his 1863 record was the first *fully authenticated* record for Caithness, if so he should have spelled it out. The looks suspiciousy like another example of self-promotion.

The postion with regard to the Sabine's Gull is, however, quite clear; Mackay neither found it nor was he the first to identify it. It did become part of his collection, but it had been found by an unnamed boy who had given it to a Mr G.G.Nicholson, an accountant in Wick, who in turn drew it to the attention of William Reid. It was the latter who identified it and who published a note about it in the *John O'Groat Journal* just a week or so after it had been found. Given that the

circumstances of its acquisition were also referred to by Harvie-Brown & Buckley in the *Vertebrate Fauna* it was foolhardy, to say the least, of Mackay to claim credit for it, as any such claim would so obviously not stand up to scrutiny. Indeed, by his own admission, Mackay was away in Shetland when this bird was obtained, and, in his absence, it was set up for him by James Sutherland, the local taxidermists (see §37).

Of more concern are the doubts expressed by Knox (2001) about the validity of six of the rare ducks in the collection, namely Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck, King Eider, Bufflehead, Smew and Hooded Merganser. All were adult males, and had been collected in Shetland (3 species), the Outer Hebrides (2) or the Inner Hebrides (1). Mackay explicity claims to have shot the Ruddy Shelduck (see §42) and Hooded Merganser (see §40) himself, and appears to have been responsible for the taking of the Ferruginous Duck, King Eider and Bufflehead, though the wording is slightly ambiguous (see §41). However he made no such claim as regards the Smew.

The issues concerning the validity of these specimens can be summarised as follows:

(i) Inserted in the manuscript version of Mackay's articles as submitted to the *John O'Groat Journal* (details above) is a photocopy of Pennie & Gunn's (1951) article in the *Scottish Naturalist* bearing the following anonymous annotation: 'These are all obviously bogus'. Whilst it is proper that such comments be noted, it is difficult to see why, without at least some justification, any credence should be given to this.

(ii) Evans (1994) too, mentions that Mackay was suspected of fraud, though, as Knox (2001) notes, does not say by whom, or advance any concrete evidence to support this assertion. Again, without some supporting evidence, it is difficult to take such comments seriously.

(iii) Evan's (1994) also notes that all six of these specimens were 'adult males in pristine plumage regardless of the time of year at which they were said to have been collected', but as Knox notes 'no more specific evidence is offered'. Museum collections often show a bias towards males (Cooper *et al* 2019) and it is not difficult to believe that collectors were much more likely to have detected showy males, rather than more cryptically plumaged females, as often occurs in ducks.

(iv) A fourth objection raised by Knox (2019) is that the plumage of the Hooded Merganser, King Eider and Smew, as judged from photographs, was incompatible with the date collected. Unfortunately no details of these inconsistencies have been published, nor are the photgraphs on which they are based publicly available (with the single exception of the Bufflehead which is illustrated in Knox's paper – but no inconsistencies are claimed for this specimen).

Overall, the implication is that Mackay acted fraudulently with regard to some of these ducks (specifically the Hooded Merganser, King Eider and Smew), a serious charge but one which, we believe, is not fully supported by the available evidence, dependent as it is on hearsay, anecdote and unsubstantiated claims, but, equally, one which is difficult to refute. However, if the Ruddy Shelduck and Hooded Merganser are fraudulent, then it is certain that Mackay himself is responsible for perpetrating the fraud, for, as noted above, he states explicitly that he was the person who had shot these birds. A more likely explanation for these, and perhaps some of the other rarities, is that they were escapees from captivity, that is, the details supplied by Mackay were accurate but do not refer to genuine wild birds. Here, unfortunately, the matter must rest; further resolution will only be possible when more information becomes available.

Despite their failings, these articles are a useful addition to the history of Caithness birds, though need to be used with caution. In particular, they throw light on a number of matters for which there are no or few other sources; one is often left wishing that more complete details had been provided, but ultimately the historian of natural history has to make do with what is available. But this is to judge the past by the standards of today, which is unfair. These articles are best appreciated as a snapshot of a time when ornithology was just becoming a popular pastime for the amateur, and Caithness ornithology was in its infancy.

The pages that follow are a transcription of all known publications by Mackay. Chapter 2 contains the 'First Series' of articles in the 'Notes on Caithness Bird Life' series, and Chapter 3 the 'Second Series'. Chapter 4 contains a small number of other articles that Mackay published in the *John O'Groat Journal* and includes the one surviving letter that he wrote. Chapter 5 comprises two obituaries and an appreciation that appeared shortly after his death. Appendix 1 is a

list of the species known to have been represented in the 'Pulteney Collection' – it is only as good as the existing information will allow and is almost certainly incomplete. Appendix 2 is a list of all the species mentioned in the text, giving the commonplace names used by Mackay, their modern equivalents (both those in common use and the international English names as given in the British List – see BOU 2019) together with the current scientific names, also taken from the British List. The transcripts are as they appeared in the John O'Groat Journal, with only the three names mentioned above corrected for clarity. Where the manuscripts as-submitted differ to any significant extent these, the alterations or deletions are indicated in a footnote. Where the manuscripts as-submitted differ to any significant extent, the alterations or deletions are indicated in a footnote. Other footnotes amplify or clarify points made in the text. To emphasise that these footnotes were not included in the material as originally published they are shown in a sans serif font (Calibri Light) and are collected together at the end of each contribution; all text that appeared in the published articles is in a font with serifs (Garamond).

It is quite possible that there is other material by Eric Mackay that has yet to be unearthed. The compilers would be delighted to hear from anyone who can provide any additional information about Mackay and his interest in Caithness ornithology.

Chapter 2

NOTES ON CAITHNESS BIRD LIFE

FIRST SERIES

§1.
John O'Groat Journal, June 6th, 1913

Fulmars and Shearwaters[3]

Sir. In your issue of the 30th ult. your intelligent and careful observing correspondent "Cairnduna"[4] in his "Pulteney Notes" describes what he is now almost certain of *viz* another visit of the Fulmars to one of the South Stacks or their vicinity. What is most interesting about this announcement is that he says that none of those birds which he has treated resembles the one in Mr F.O.Morris's[5] illustration. This opens up a most important point, as only in recent years has a second species, or probably variety, of Fulmar been discovered. That eminent ornithologist Mr Howard Saunders[6] stated in his "Manual of British Birds" that a Fulmar had been recently found that had a grey underbody, with other distinct darker markings throughout its plumage, whereas the Fulmar formerly known to Science has a pure white underbody with other features of plumage predominantly light coloured. "Cairnduna" will induce me to go this week and more closely examine the specimens of Fulmar in the collections of the three museums within our reach, and I shall give the results of my examination probably next week.

Caithness in the forefront

A part of any of the Wick Sea Cliffs being visited by Fulmars, which incident alone is very valuable and important, it will surely be a feather in "Cairnduna's" cap if he has been directly instrumental in locating the latest discovered species of this interesting bird. Not only as a migrant but also we hope to be able to add it to the number of indigenous birds in which the parish of Wick is already so prolific. Anticipating our promised details later we must say that whatever may be found in favour of determining the visit of the new Fulmar to "George o' Tooshal" Look! ye here! What a name for a "wee Poltney" cragsman to conjure with! Yet the birds discovered on Duncansby Head last year and described with such Persian brevity by a "doon-thro" chief who when questioned by an enthusiast said "Ee wis lek a maaw bit et wisnae a maaw," correctly portrays the beautiful specimen in F.O.Morris's book, and the only Fulmar then known. We hope the birds now referred to in the "Notes" are a small colony of Fulmars. If so, what with the Dunnet Head colony, that on Duncansby Head, and now the latest one on "Craigammel",[7] another ancient and alarming jaw breaker —Caithness will be enabled to stand almost in the forefront as a county holding in its ornithological record many of the rarest of British birds.

Fulmars or Shearwaters?[8]

On reading "Cairndunas" report on the variety in plumage of the "Looshal" birds I bethought me of the probable visit of either the Manx or Cinereous Shearwaters from the description in the "Notes" of their erratic and pointless flight when approaching any fixed location or object. The Shearwaters have rarely landed on the Caithness coast, yet both the birds above described are on the Caithness list compiled by the late Rev. Charles Thompson[9] in 1841 and taken from Dr Sinclair's[10] collection. Your correspondent after viewing those birds' attempts to regain their ledges says—"One peculiarity I noticed, that they would fly up the rock face eight or ten times before alighting." Now this movement exactly fits the flight actions of the Shearwaters when trying to regain their breeding or roosting places during the greater part of the daytime. These birds being crepuscular have their eyes partly obscured during the day, they being, like the owls and goatsuckers, night feeders. The writer has seen many a Shearwater make a dozen attempts to land on the edge of its nesting ledge, especially if the day was bright; and again I have seen a bait thrown out from a fishing boat, and before they could pick it

up a dozen whirls around the spot would be made before it was located. The writer therefore favours the idea that the birds seen along the sides of the "Looshal Gorge" were Manx Shearwaters; and even if this should turn out to be the case equal honour will fall to "Cairnduna," as to be the first to discover a breeding colony of Manx Shearwaters on the Caithness coast would be of greater importance than even to locate the breeding haunt of Fulmars. The writer refers to his Shetland experiences of the Manx Shearwaters. The "Lyrie" is the Shetland fisherman's name for this bird.

"Cairnduna" Complimented

But I digress, and must get back to the Fulmars. As I said, I thought of the Shearwaters, at the same time overlooking (or rather forgetting) the reference by Saunders that I had previously read about the second species referred to. Your correspondent "Cairnduna" deserves the thanks of all those interested for the assiduous manner in which he has followed up the visits of those interesting "feathered strangers" since their first appearance on the east side of the county. We hope he'll be rewarded by seeing a permanent colony of Fulmars established on some part of those cliffs he loves so well to wander around and "raise his soul to musings high." How it would have gladdened the hearts of the deceased R.I.Shearer[11] and Henry Osborne[12]—those distinguished observers and recorders of Caithness wild bird life—if they had been in the position having made—which I hope will truly prove to be—such an important discovery by adding to the feathered fauna of the parish.

I shall therefore await anxiously to learn from the "Pulteney Notes" that one or other of those interesting species of birds have now finished their house-hunting and settled down to their nuptial duties and have taken a long lease—for their summer residences—of the ancient "Gorge o' Loosha."

Footnotes

(3) At the time this was written the Fulmar had newly colonised the north coast of Scotland and was steadily spreading southwards. It had first been recorded in Caithness in 1900, initially at Dunnet Head followed by Holborn Head (1905), Duncansby Head and Noss Head (1910) and Berriedale Ness (1911) amongst others (Fisher 1952). What Mackay's article contributes that is new, is that it colonised the cliffs to the south of Wick around 1913, an observation that later writers on Caithness birds appear not to have been aware of.

(4) Cairnduna was the pen-name of John Dunnet, a regular contributor to the *John O'Groat Journal*.

(5) The book referred to is one of those in F.O.Morris's six volume series *A History of British Birds* published between 1850 and 1857.

(6) The book referred to is H.Saunders, (1889), *An Illustrated Manual of British Birds*, 1st edition, (Gurney & Jackson, London). A second edition was published in 1899; these were regarded as the primary source of information about birds in Britain at the time. A third edition, revised by W.E.Clarke and published in 1927 after Saunder's death was not nearly so well regarded.

(7) 'Craigammel' is presumably the site at ND362463 shown as 'Craig Hammel' on modern maps; it is about 4 km south of Wick.

(8) The birds under consideration in this and the following article were, of course, Fulmars, not Manx Shearwaters. Mackay's caution in identifying these birds is understandable given that it is unlikely that he had himself ever seen a live Fulmar. Despite Mackay's comments the habit of birds flying up to a nest ledge and turning just as they are about to stall is much more typical of the Fulmar than the Manx Shearwater.

(9) Revd. Charles Thompson was the minister in Wick. He prepared the first list of the county's birds published in 1845, based in large part on the collection of E.S.Sinclair (see next footnote); see also Sellers (2006).

(10) E.S.Sinclair, the surgeon in Wick, developed a substantial collection of birds, many of which were obtained in Caithness.

(11) R.I.Shearer (1826-72) was an amateur naturalist who spent most of his life in the Ulbster area. Like Mackay he produced a long series of articles about Caithness birds and mammals published in the *John O'Groat Journal* (see Clark & Sellers2005). He also produced a revised version of Thompson's list of the county's birds.

(12) H.Osborne, was another native of Wick with a deep interest in birds. He published a number of well regarded pieces in *The Field*.

§2.
John O'Groat Journal, June 27th, 1913

The Case of the Mid-Clyth Fulmars[14]

In your issue of the 13th inst. you inserted a paragraph amongst the Pulteney Notes stating that fulmars had bred in different places on the Latheron coast for many years past. If this statement is correct it robs of its interesting features the supposed discoveries during these past few years of new breeding haunts of this rare bird. Just fancy for a moment that a colony of fulmars was established for years almost next door—as it were—to Robert I. Shearer when he lived at the Mains of Ulbster, and he not taking the slightest notice of such an important ornithological incident, but continuing through life in all his references and notes to assert that the fulmar petrel was a rare and unindigenous visitor to the Caithness coasts. Henry Osborne often averred the same thing in his notes and correspondence.

Previous Observers

As you are probably aware, R.I.Shearer and Henry Osborne each read a paper before the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh on January 22nd, 1862,[15] when both gentlemen asserted that the fulmar was a very rare Caithness visitant, and neither of them made even the faintest suggestion that it bred in Caithness, or even Britain. During later years neither Harvie Brown, T.E.Buckley, nor Wm. Reid of Wick (although these were the most careful observers and recorders of Caithness wild bird life) even referred to either the Dunbeath or Mid-Clyth colonies—a most bewildering omission if those petrel roosts had existed at the time. Coming to a later period, and even quite recent years (1907) the late Mr David Bruce when compiling his avi-fauna for Mr Horne's book "The County of Caithness," takes no notice of those Latheron fulmars, but gives prominence to the Dunnet Head colony as being the first discovered breeding resort in Caithness of this rare Arctic petrel.

Those fulmar hatcheries reported at Dunbeath and Mid-Clyth—and which are apparently still inhabited—must have been occupied for the last fifty years, at least; however long before then we do not know, as it is on the data of the Clyth correspondent's informant, who avers that he shot one when he was a very young man. We wonder who identified the bird for this "young man," and seeing it was obtained only about a couple of "cat loups" from the Mains of Ulbster where R.I.Shearer resided at the time, one would have naturally thought that he (R.I.S.) would have been the first to be apprised of such a capture. It is also important to point out here that no record of a breeding place of fulmars on the east coast of Britain was known to naturalists previous to 1898, when a few pairs bred on the "Noup of Noss," island of Bressay, Shetland, and to which we will refer later.

The Fulmar in Shetland

The late Dr Saxby of Unst, Shetland, one of the best known authorities on the fulmar (as also on skuas, shearwaters, and British gulls, &c.), wrote in June, 1870, that no fulmar was ever known to have bred in Shetland up till then. Another eminent ornithologist has given a detailed statement of the fulmar's gradual movements south from their natural home in the Arctic regions during the earlier and later years of last century. It appears that the first southward migration was to Iceland, where they are now plentiful, and previous to the year 1839, in which year they were first recorded on the Faroe Islands. Still moving southwards they were next discovered breeding at Foula, Shetland, in 1878, from where they spread to Papa Stour, Eshna Ness, and two places in Unst, all on the Atlantic seaboard of the Shetland Islands, but they were not known on the east side of Shetland until the summer of 1898, as already stated.

To clear any doubt and to set this controversy at rest, your Clyth correspondent, who declares he counted ten pairs of fulmars on the rocks at Mid-Clyth as late or later than February of this year, should further the cause of ornithology in Caithness by getting someone to shoot a couple of specimens and send them down to the curator of the Carnegie Museum, who will forward them to Mr Charles Kirk, Glasgow, for identification and preservation. Mr Kirk will preserve them and set them up in the finest possible style, and when returned to the Museum they will bear the name of your Clyth correspondent with correct data regarding the specimens, thus perpetuating his name for all time as the donor.

Knowledge under a Bushel

Until the existence or otherwise of the breeding haunts of the Dunbeath and Mid-Clyth fulmars is determined, the local interest attached to the Dunnet Head discovery by the late Mr David Bruce, the "Scotsman's" correspondent's notice of them on Copinshay and that which concerns our Carnegie Museum enthusiasts to an intense degree—the locating by "Cairnduna" of the Duncansby Head and Looshal infant colonies of this rare Arctic visitors must be held in abeyance. We have not the least reason to doubt the correctness of your Clyth correspondent's statements, but what makes them sound somewhat mythical is the fact that during the past two years your correspondent "Cairnduna," has referred at least a dozen times to the fulmar through the medium of Pulteney Notes, and references have also been made by many of your other contributors to this bird; yet this most intelligent man, who was "born in Clyth," has during all these years hidden the light of his knowledge under a bushel, or, what is more likely, under a "divad," and never even said "curr nyeaird."

No British bird has excited the interest of ornithologists during recent years more than the fulmar. Even the great naturalist Gatke, who had an unbroken residential experience on Heligoland—he for fifty years having never once left the island—gives some interesting details of the visits (not to breed, as they were never known to nest there) of the fulmar. The references referred to will be found in his (Gatke's) most interesting work "Heligoland as an Ornithological Observatory," a book that should be within easy reach of all those interested in wild bird life.

Footnote:

(13) As Mackay observes. it is ridiculous to suggest that Fulmars had been breeding in the Latheron/Mid Clyth area for decades; much more likely is that they had colonised the area only a year or two before this artice appeared.

§3
John O'Groat Journal, February 20th, 1914

Those frames of photographs recently donated to the Wick Carnegie Library Museum, and labelled "Wild Birds at Home," contain many subjects of pleasing interest to those readers who are employing their pastime in the study of the avi-fauna of the county. Each of the Artists—Mr Charles Kirk, Glasgow, and Mr Charles Jeffreys, Tenby, Wales—by whom (not conjointly) those views were taken, must have given themselves no end of trouble, risk, seclusion, and assiduous watching before they succeeded in focussing their cameras on many of those beautiful and enchanting pictures of the home life of so many specimens, amongst which are to be found some of the rarest Caithness birds. The charming situations exhibited in the collection of plates must have been (through wonderful luck) taken at the precise moment that the subject afforded the artist the chance of procuring them fullest of interesting novelty.

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We find that those photographs comprise 39 different scenes, which include 26 distinct species of the birds of the county, and with the exception of the Hen Capercailze (No.19), all the others are found in the County list, which enhances the value of those plates to a large extent, and makes them a very valuable and appropriate accompaniment to the "Caithness Ornithological Register," also recently gifted to the Wick Museum.[14] Many of the photos display the wonderful instinct exercised by birds when selecting their nidifying surroundings, so that the locality, be it a beach, tree, tarn, loch margins, or moorland, will coincide with the colour of themselves and the material used for their nests. In those localities where the nest is not easily approached, such as sea cliffs and precipitous inland rocks, and sheer precipices where the eyries of eagles, peregrines, and buzzards, and other species of the larger Raptores are constructed and almost immune from the intrusion of man, the situation is protection enough, another evidence shown by birds that they possess to a large extent the first law of Nature—self-defence and preservation.

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Take, for example Nos.33 and 39, the Ring Plover or Ring Dotterel ("San' Lairag"), No.22, Mallard Duck ("Wild Duck"), Nos.18 and 32, the plates of Woodcock, and No.35, the Eider Duck ("Dunter"), and consider their surroundings; it will be seen that the localities and materials selected so closely resemble the birds that they are almost obscured. The breeding localities of the Ring Plover (or Dotterel) are beaches a few yards above high water mark. The rough dark light coloured stones and pebbles as shown in the photos so closely resemble the colour and piebald markings of the bird and the general hue of the eggs that when walking over their breeding grounds pedestrians often trample on them.

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The Ring Plover makes no formation of a nest, but simply deposits the clutch of four eggs on the shingle or bare ground. The eggs are much tapered, and are arranged with the narrow ends inwards. This bird inherits a superhuman instinct—the knowledge of that scientific fact that the stout end of a pear-shaped cone by the law of gravity rolls towards its apex. In consequence, her clutch is deterred from rolling outwards. The same law applies to the single egg of both the Guillemot and Razorbill, and solves the oft-repeated and hoary query: How does it occur that the eggs of those birds do not roll or topple over the ledge when the birds leave hurriedly? Although neither a San' Lairag, an Awpie, or a Burrie can logically or intelligently address a meeting of the British Association on the subject, yet ages before that august and learned body came into existence the progenitors of those birds had discovered why Nature had designed them to produce pear-shaped eggs.

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As the young Ring Plovers resemble their parents and their home surroundings from their start in life, with the addition of their complete faculties to run, eat, and hide when they emerge from the egg—as can nearly all the Grallatores—a dozen of those young birds may be within a few yards or feet without being discovered. The details of the nesting localities and habits of the Ring Plover were obtained on the western seaboard of the island of Eriskay, which they visit annually in large numbers as nidifying migrants,

but only during the midsummer. (The Whimbrels ("May Fowl") also visits Eriskay at the same time and breed there). The few natives who inhabit this part of the island state that the Ring Plovers are never seen during any other season of the year. The shingle beaches to which the San' Lairag resorts are those cast up by the wash of the Atlantic "rollers" and deposited between the sand dunes of this part of the bleak, solitary, and dreary coast of the western seaboard of the Outer Hebrides.

Footnote:

(14) Mackay mentions the 'Caithness Ornithological Register' several times in these articles. From what is said here it appears to be no less than a document listing the species of bird known to have occurred in Caithness (and perhaps with annotations) - what today would be called a 'County List'. Regrettably no copies of such a document have survived.

§4
John O'Groat Journal, February 27th, 1914

The Common Eider

Before concluding No. 3 of this series we will endeavour to describe the nesting habits of the Common Eider, No.35, as taken direct from observations during the writer's sojourn on one of the small Barra islands during the summer of 1870.

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A pair of these beautiful and interesting Oceanic ducks were frequently seen fishing in the Sound, and sometimes in close proximity to our curing station. It was accidentally discovered that they had made arrangements to start housekeeping and had selected a small and solitary islet about half a mile from the main island, and entirely outside the traffic of the station. The selected islet was only a few feet above the height of spring tides, and was sparsely covered with sea grass and decayed sea wrack—the latter being the identical colour of the female, a rich, mottled brown. The nest was placed in a small hollow near the top of the islet, and built round with the brown sea weed. The clutch of eggs before incubation began were five in number, and the eggs were of the capacity of a large egg of the domestic duck, pale sea-green in colour, with a tinge of yellow, and more spherical in shape.

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By common consent the nest and birds were left unmolested until the mother was able to hatch and float her ducklings, when both parents and family disappeared from our ken. We found a very interesting proof of how the eider down of commerce is obtained and collected from the famed colonies of those birds around the islands adjacent to Greenland, Spitzbergen and Iceland. Three visits were made to the nest during the time of incubation. On each occasion we found the down increased, and during our last visit the nest was almost completely covered, so that little could be left on the underbody of the bird by such a process of plucking. (We visited the nest only when the female was observed fishing in the Sound.)

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The colour of the down was squirrel grey, evenly mixed with brown; and any other description of down offered for sale as eider down, if not that colour, is a spurious production. The male Eider does not incubate, and in consequence contributes nothing to the down supply of the nest. When making our voyages of inspection we were invariably accompanied by a fisherman from Staxigoe, who fished from the station. He is still alive, and if he chances to read this he will readily recollect the expeditions we both made to the "Dunter's" nest on the small island near Bayherievah in the Sound of Barra during the summer of 1870.

§5

John O'Groat Journal, March 20th, 1914

The Common Heron (Ardea Cinerea)

Continuing the reference to the "Wild Birds at Home," the plate No. 27—"Young heron on top of spruce" – is certainly a very diverting "snap shot"—the idiotic appearance of the bird, which aspect is carried up to the adult stage, as a heron is one of the most undemonstrative birds found amongst feathered life. A Heron, if unmolested, will stand on one spot for hours, at the margin of an eddy of a tide race or turbulent stream, into which small or weak fish retreat (the bird knowing this by instinct), waiting until some victim swims within reach of its dagger-shaped bill, when, with unerring aim, it is secured and disappears inside. The only apparent movement of the heron during its hours of vigil is to "change its leg." Often with cold weather it stands on one, the other being tucked up amongst the warm feathers of its underbody as a reserve. At intervals it substitutes the warm foot for the one that is probably partly frozen. The ancient proverb "the patience of Job" could well be modernised into "the patience of a heron."

The photograph (No. 27) must have been taken on the west of Scotland as only there do heronries exist where the precipices they often build in are wooded with natural spruce and other firs almost to their summits. The district of Kintail holds many interesting heronries amongst its mountains, a large one being situated near the head of Loch Duich, which the writer visited in 1899. The shores of Loch Alsh and the innumerable eddies along the opposite shore—Skye— which always abound with small fish, are the principal feeding localities of the herons of that district, and to which many species of marine ducks also resort. Professor Macgillivray, in one of his earliest editions (1830) records two large heronries, one on each of the Sutors of Cromarty, both of which have long since been abandoned. Also the late T.E.Buckley, quoting from the Osborne MSS.,[15] records one on the Ord and another on the Stack of Brims—those situations being interesting as that of the southerly and most northerly limits of the Caithness coast line. As far as we know those Caithness heronries have also long since been untenanted.

Although in its fishing and other feeding habits the Heron is a very solitary bird, yet we have many recorded and personal evidences of it being gregarious. In that superb work, "Birds from Moidart and Elsewhere," drawn from nature by Mrs Blackburn (1895), and dedicated to His Grace the Duke of Argyle, the authoress depicts one scene alone of a group of 18 herons seen on the shore of Lochiel. Many interesting pictures of the nesting and other habits of the Heron are in evidence through this work, published by David Douglas, Edinburgh.

Footnote:

(15) The source of this comment is obscure. The quotation from Osborne's manuscript notes in the *Vertebrate Fauna* (p.181) makes no reference to any specific heronry and the few publications by Buckley relating to Caithness do not mention Grey Herons!

§6

John O'Groat Journal, March 27th, 1914

The Common Heron

Macgillivray, in one of his later editions (1840) records (and apparently believed) that eels of certain dimensions, after being swallowed by a heron, almost instantly reappeared after passing through the bird's body, and so on. It was left for a Wick "Professor" to demonstrate the truth of seemingly such an unnatural behaviour. We remember some time ago reading a statement in the "John O'Groat Journal," written by someone residing in Newcastle-on-Tyne, who adopted as a "nom de plume" the historical title of "Little Dornoch," in which he described an exploit of the Wick Professor in heron-bagging on the Macgillivray system. It appears the sportsman in question was inordinately fond of roast heron, and kept a pet live eel of the suitable size for heron-coursing, and which, when freed from the leash, had a line fastened to its tail—this by some subtle and intricate process known only to its owner.

With the eel and other coursing paraphernalia he hied him one day to the locality of the Cruives, when he was fortunate enough to lace a "baker's dozen" of those delicious table dainties in one haul, by operating on the Macgillivray swallowing and emitting process. We have since been informed that the Professor always submitted the roasted herons to the tender mercies of a machine of the granite-crusher order to prepare them for consumption.

To lend colour, and help make the above exploit possible—as to number—we were informed many years ago by the late Alexander Sutherland, gamekeeper, Ackergill, who entered the service of the Estate about the year 1830, and when the Georges were tenants of the Cruives, that owing to the Wick river being then such a salmon resort, many species of birds visited the locality to feed on the ova and fry of those fish. Among those birds herons were often plentiful, he (Sutherland) having on some occasions seen flocks of them up to a score in number. Though this refers to a period previous to the Wick Professor's exploit, yet it is very likely that herons continued to frequent the river and only gradually disappeared.

Referring again to that beautiful work, "Birds of Moidart," the drawings in particular should appeal to all those interested in the avifauna of Caithness, as of that entire collection all the species therein, with three exceptions, also appear on the County of Caithness list. The exceptions are the Red Necked Phalarope, the Nightingale, and the Mute Swan, neither of which have as yet been recorded as being obtained or even seen in Caithness.

§7
John O'Groat Journal, April 17th, 1914

Golden Crested Wren (Regulus Cristatus)—Fire Crested Wren (Regulus Ignicapillus)

The Golden Crests and the Fire Crests are known to science as Kinglets to distinguish them from the proper wrens, which are the Common, the St.Kilda, and the Ruby Crowned. These are all the wrens on the British list, the latter being so rare it is classed amongst the birds which have appeared in Britain less than six times.

The Gold Crest, which is now a yearly migrant from its northern continental summer breeding haunts to Caithness during October and November, has only for the past few years become an indigenous county specie. [*sic*] Many now remain all summer and breed in the few localities in Caithness which are pine-clad, these birds having a preference for forests of this description.

It is well known how easy it is to acquire specimens of birds when compared with the difficulty experienced in endeavouring to obtain even a glimpse of their home lives. There is a beautiful specimen of the Gold Crest in Wick Museum, set up almost equal to life by the same artist who photographed "Gold Crest feeding her young", (No. 11 of "Wild Birds at Home"), yet the preserved specimen is only a "natural history toy" when compared with the fascinating scene of No. 11. The parent shown in the picture, be it male or female—as they both feed their young—has probably visited the nest a hundred times since it began at daybreak to forage for food. How interesting it is to study the parent bird poised on the brink of the nest determining which chick most deserves or needs the present supply, while the whole brood stand up each one clamouring and demanding its right to the morsel. Except through the science of photography such an interesting and charming scene could not have been produced of the home life of this, the smallest and one of the most fascinating of our British birds, the Golden Crested Kinglet.

The Fire Crested Wren (or Kinglet) cannot be properly classed as a Caithness bird, as no specimen is recorded as having been obtained, and can only rank amongst those few birds which have been reported as being observed in the county of Caithness—the Osprey, Greenland Falcon, Grey Phalarope and the Whitethroat.

Referring to a note of ours in the "John O'Groat Journal" of October 20, 1911, in reply to "Cairnduna's" remark about a migration of Gold Crests that autumn, the writer recalled a great immigration of many interesting Insessores during October and November of 1867-68. During the former year, amongst others were many Gold Crests, a few Fire Crests having been reported as having also been seen throughout the county. It would not appear strange that the Fire Crested Kinglet should visit Caithness on migration, as many specimens have been reported from the north-eastern seaboard of Aberdeenshire during the autumn migrations. The writer had sent him a pair of beautiful male Fire Crests from New Maud during the winter of 1892, and it has long since been discovered that the autumn migrants from northern Europe found in the north of Aberdeenshire nearly coincides in number and species with the Caithness visitors from those northern latitudes.

Referring again to the St Kilda wren, I beg to quote from that charming little volume, "St Kilda and its Birds" by J. Miglesworth (1903). The author, when referring to this exceptionally rare bird, says that the demand for the bird and its eggs will in the near future (unless specially protected by law) be the means of extinguishing the species. The extinction of the St.Kilda wren can be easily accomplished, as it exclusively inhabits that lonely island, it being found in no other part of the world.

§8
John O'Groat Journal, May 22nd, 1914

The Hirundines

No groups of birds are so generally distributed over the British Islands and Southern Europe as are the four species of hirundines, all of which are well known to most observers of wild bird life, viz., the Swift, the Swallow, and both the Martins—the House Martin and Sand Martin. The arrival and departure of the Swallow and its congeners can be calculated on to almost a few days.

The greatest known authority on the Martins and their kindred was Gilbert White of Selbourne, who made those four species of birds almost the special study of his life. We give the following extract from his calendar, published 1789, in which he records the dates that the hirundines appear and disappear in his district, which corresponds with their movements in Caithness. About April 12 Sand Martins appear; April 20, Swallows; May 1, House Martins; and about May 7, the Swifts. The disappearance of those birds, on migration, as stated by White, occurs as follows:—The Swifts from August 31 to September 7; from October 4 to 15, the Swallows, Sand Martins and House Martins, the latter being last to leave Britain.

Haunts of the Swallow

We saw in a recent issue of the "John O'Groat Journal" that the writer of the "Pulteney Notes" was informed by some of his friends that Martins or Swallows were lately seen about the cliffs on the north side of the "Brough." As time rolls on it seems that the localities annually visited by the "witchags" changeth not, as the writer 50 years ago, and for previous and subsequent years to that time, found that the first appearance of those birds in the Wick district was almost invariably around the locality noted by "Cairnduna's" friends. Their probable reason for paying an early visit to this particular locality is to obtain any insects that may have lain torpid during the winter amongst the chinks and crannies of those precipices, and now with the coming breath of the "season's life" begin to emerge to fulfil the part that Nature reserved and protected them for, possibly food for the newly arrived and fatigued hirundines being part of their destiny. On the arrival of those migrants a few swallows appear amongst the Martins, but as the time of nidification approaches both the Swallows and the Sand Martins disappear from the locality, leaving only the House Martins to take possession of those precipices with their "clay biggins."

The White Bellied or House Martin (Hirundo rustica), whose unseemly domiciles are often such an eye-sore to many householders, will year after year return to the same nesting place, and although very sociable, yet often the attraction of some suitable rock or precipice will overcome their repugnance to solitude, and such favoured places are often to be seen literally studded with their little edifices. The cliff along the north side of the Brough, from Mayberry inwards, was, and is probably still, a favoured resort of the House Martin, and also a few nests could be yearly seen in the north face of Castle Goe, almost below the "Tailor's Loup".

The House Martin, like the other hirundines, except the Swift, lays from four to six eggs and rears always two broods in the season, and sometimes the eggs for a third are laid, but seldom hatched before the time of migration arrives when the migration instinct overcomes the parental.

Sand Martin

The Bank or Sand Martin (Hirundo riparia) whose small size at once serves to distinguish it from others of its congeners, is a bird of a very different character from the other Martin, and cares nothing for the society of human beings. It is easily known when flying in company of either Swallows or House Martins by the jerkiness of its flight. A few Sand Martins could be found any year—at least many years ago—along the water course, from a line nearly opposite Rockhill to Lower Hempriggs, where a few of their burrows could be seen scooped out about the banks, and they themselves hawking flies up and down the burn. A small colony of those Martins was for many years a pleasing feature of the part of Wick river opposite the lower plantation of Stirkoke, and which could be observed from the plantation side of the river on the opposite bank, which was

scooped out by winter spates, leaving the river brink as an overhanging coul.

We wonder if "Cairnduna" or any of his chums are aware of whether such a colony of Sand Martins still exists there. We would like to know, as often during our summer rambles we visited the place and held high communion with those solitary and interesting birds.

We will treat of the other two hirundines in our next article.

§9
John O'Groat Journal, May 29th, 1914

The Hirundines (Continued)

The Swallow (Hirundo domestica) can be easily distinguished from its three congeners, the Swift and the House and Sand Martins by its long sickle-shaped wings and its forked tail which rather exceeds the length of its body.

The nesting habits of this "hirundo" are peculiar to itself as it courts the society of man and persists year after year in breeding amongst the rafters of barns and outhouses in their darkest nooks; also down an unused chimney stack, favouring, for warmth, one adjacent to one that is being daily fired. The Swallow also often builds its "plaster-cast" edifice down unused wells, coal-pit shafts, and dilapidated mill stacks and such like places.

Freak Nest-Building

The Swallow's greatest enemies are the Owls, which have been known to rob their young from six feet down a chimney stack, and many other almost inaccessible places. This bird chooses many freak places to erect its nest on or in. Frank Buckland in his "Curiosites of Natural History," 1866, records a peculiar instance. The dried body of a defunct owl had hung from a barn rafter over the winter, when the following summer a pair of swallows erected their domicile on the carcase. Buckland removed the owl with the nest attached as a curiosity to his museum, and then, substituted a large conch shell in its place on the rafter. In the following summer a pair of swallows—probably the same birds that the previous season had erected their "clay biggin" on the mummy of the owl—took possession of the shell and set up housekeeping in its innermost recess. It, with the nest, was also placed in the Buckland Museum.

What a peculiar incident in natural history, viz., a pair of British swallows erecting their nest in a shell that probably began its own existence at 4000 fathoms depth on some part of the floor of the Pacific Ocean and ultimately found its way to the shore to fulfil some part of Nature's great plan.

For many years in succession, and before Bremner's old mill stack in Harbour Place was demolished, a few pairs of swallows bred down that old chimney, as during those summers they could be seen flying about the top and hunting for flies in the locality, Sergeant Sandison's garden being a favourite resort. The Sergeant was much interested in his "witchags," as he always termed them. The arrival and departure of those interesting birds could be calculated on to almost a week, and although never more—to our knowledge—than four pairs occupied the stack, yet with the accumulation of the two broods from each pair—the first broods never left the locality before the time of migration—middle of October—nearly 50 birds could be seen flying around their home, awaiting the call from the main body to join in their flight to sunnier climes.

The Swift

The Swift (Hirundo apus) is known by its dull, sooty hue, relieved only by a small greyish patch beneath the chin. This hirundo is an exception from its other three congeners, as it only lays two eggs, which are milk white and pear-shaped; it also only produces one brood in the season. The Swift, like the Sand Martin, is very defective in architecture, making no crust or shell for its nest, but forming it of dry grasses, inartistically and rudely put together. Those birds erect their nests in church steeples or any towers of high altitude and open architecture. For many years a few pairs bred on the spire of the Wick Parish Church. On fine summer evenings they could be seen at great heights circling around their abodes. Swifts, from the time of their arrival until their departure, remain in Caithness only three months almost to a day, and although often arriving with the other hirundines yet they don't flock with them before departure, but leave Britain almost mysteriously.

To avoid the risk of being considered tedious we will refrain from referring in this article to the many theories advanced for the past 200 years for and against the hibernation of the swallow and its kindred, and what still appeals to many people, the consistency of such a theory as such is backed up by possible and probable facts in favour of hibernation. Gilbert White was a firm believer in the theory in that if not the whole of the hirundines, a part of them remained behind in

Britain and entered into a state of torpitude. We will therefore in our next and concluding article on those interesting birds lay before those of your readers who may be interested in a few curiosities of the hibernation theory.

§10
John O'Groat Journal, June 26th, 1914

The Hirundines (Concluded)

As much uncertainty existed amongst early naturalists with regard to the theory of hibernation, and although the annual torpidity of many quadrupeds was confirmed, yet the hibernation of the Swallow and its congeners was then (and partly still is) a theme of controversy.

While referring to Barrington's "Naturalists' Calendar," published 1767, and Pennant's "British Zoology," 1798, we find that each of those naturalists leaned towards the hibernation of the four "Hirundines."

Gilbert White never had any doubts about the hibernation of the Swallows and their kindred—if not the whole, at least part—he having brought to bear in favour of this theory some actual facts which seemed quite feasible. These facts are to this day known to all careful observers of those well known and interesting birds.

When the three species had all disappeared—about the middle of October—the Swifts had already gone early in September—and not a single bird could be then seen, should a warm day occur at any time during November—when flies were out—hundreds of hirundos could be observed during this transitory period of sunshine hunting and feeding as if it were midsummer. White's argument was that if during the month's interval which elapsed between what appeared their final departure and their unexpected appearance, those birds had gone to Africa, it was inconsistent to think that they could or would, return again to Britain to feed on November flies during a few uncertain days of sunshine.

Still a Mystery

The eminent naturalist, Theodore Wood, who was a familiar and personal friend of F.O.Morris, and whose many and instructive works include "Nature and her Servants," "Our Bird Allies," and "Our Insect Enemies," also treats on the theory of hibernation. He (Wood) combats the theory, and propounds what appears consistent logic, but which is apparently obscured by weak points. He suggested that many Martins and Swallows begin to incubate a third brood, but before they have reared them the migration period arrives, when they are lured to warmer climates, and desert their broods to their fate.

The argument produced by Wood in favour of the appearance of those birds during November was that these neglected broods had, through some natural incident—which he does not try to explain—had been able to find sustenance enough to enable them to get fully fledged and fly about and forage for themselves. This theory seems rather hypothetical, as he subsequently stated that even swifts have often been seen during mid-winter when favourable weather prevailed. Thus the appearance and departure of those birds still remains partly a mystery.

Another remarkable incident in the movements of the hirundines is of the millions that disappear from Britain and Southern Europe during autumn not a fractional part returns during early summer; only as many as nature seemingly requires for breeding purposes. What becomes of those myriads that leave but never return is still one of the mysteries of their migration.

Hibernation Theories

The advocates of hibernation supposed that the hypernaculums of the Martins were in the vicinities of their nidifying localities, and the Swifts amongst the innermost recesses of church and other towers, but many of the earlier ornithologists were impressed with the belief that the Swallows hibernated under the surface of ponds or rivers until the warmth of spring roused them from their long winter slumbers and lured them back to active life.

Following up such an unthinkable theory as the above, we beg leave to give an extract from a very old book entitled "The Travels of Master George Bookley," circa 1620. He (Bookley) writes of what he saw—or probably heard of—at Königsburg as follows:—

> "One here in his net drew up a company or heape (heap) of Swallows as big as a bushel fastened by the legs and bills in one, which being carried to their stoves quickened and flew, and coming again into the cold air dyed (died)".

Bookley does not say that he saw the "bushel

of Swallows," but that "one here" saw the "heape" taken from probably a Königsberg fisherman's "aff-en."

Why the "hibernatums" of Swallows were supposed to be underneath the surface of ponds or streams was that often they had congregated in their thousands in the company of both the Martins about 15th October preparing for the final migration—or hibernation—they (the Swallows) invariably separated themselves from the Martins, and then could be seen for a few days about sunset to roost on the "aits" or bulrushes of streams, hanging on to the rushes as they would have done to the ropes of a ship if they had boarded her during their migration flight.

The writer can recall often having seen Swallows roost amongst the bulrushes that grew between the "Fairies Hillock" and the Cruives, but does not refer to this obscure incident as an admission that he believes that those birds ultimately went below the river surface in "bushel heapes."

We wonder if the plot of bulrushes still exists in the locality referred to, or have those riverside improvements swept them also away. How many welcome "Hill Market" sixpences were earned by energetic boys sixty or seventy years ago gathering rushes and selling them to the fishcurers. What a lovely pastime (of pleasure and profit) when tired of bathing to wade or swim in and gather "flags". Our colleague "Cairnduna" will please report if the "bullrush farm" of those old and happy days is still "ti'fore."

Friends of Mankind

Many naturalists have given the hirundo family a prominent front-rank place amongst the friends of all those who live from the produce of the soil. What larvae of pestiferous insects the gulls and common starlings, etc., etc., missed, and left to re-enter the ground and propagate are awaited by the Swallows and their congeners who devour these pests by the million, thus saving the hard-earned fruits of the husbandman.

We have endeavoured in these articles to make the traits and habits of the Swallow and its congeners as interesting as possible to any of your readers who may have read them, and hope that when either the Swallows, House Martins, Sand Martins, or swifts are seen through the summer they will be hailed as some of the feathered friends of mankind.

§11
John O'Groat Journal, May 7th, 1915

GANNET OR "SOLAN GOOSE" (SULA BASSANA)

Our readers will recall that when war broke out we were publishing a series of articles on Caithness Bird Life, having special reference to the excellent collection on view in the Wick Museum. At the time, it was deemed expedient to discontinue the series, but we have now pleasure in giving the ninth article, which has lain in its pigeon hole for many months.

Breeding Haunts of the Gannet

Such a well-known bird to fishermen and seacoast dwellers as the gannet or solan goose has many interesting features connected with its habits and locations. Only seventeen breeding haunts of the gannet have as yet been discovered by ornithologists, viz:— five in Scotland — Bass Rock, Suleskerry (off the Butt of Lewis), Stack (20 miles south east from Cape Wrath), Ailsa Craig and St. Kilda. In Ireland only two colonies are known, these being the Skellag Islands and Stags of Broad Haven, each being on the west of the country. England can claim only one nidifying resort of this interesting sea fowl, that being on Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel. On the western side of the Atlantic there are five breeding haunts of the gannet known, one in the Bay of Lundy and four on the precipitous, rocky islands which are scattered around the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The most northerly known breeding places of the solan goose are on the west of the Faeroes, and three of the coast of Iceland. Macgillivray computed that probably 20,000 pairs of gannets bred on Ailsa Craig, and the same number on the Bass Rock, 50,000 on St.Kilda and 25 - 35,000 pairs on the other haunts in Scotland - Suleskerry and Stack. From these combined figures it would seem that 150,000 pairs, 300,000 birds, are daily fishing for their food around some part of either the west or east coast of Scotland. Macgillivray's estimate of the number of gannets breeding annually around the coasts of Scotland can be easily credited. If any of your local readers examine the interesting photograph by Mr Charles Kirk, Glasgow in the collection of the Wick museum entitled "Wild birds at Home" No.36, they will see it only shows one section of the solan's breeding colony on Ailsa Craig. Yet the picture clearly depicts how crowded are those resorts, as not a ledge capable of sitting room for a bird is unoccupied. from base to summit.

"Gutsy" Gannets

In order to arrive at the approximate number of herring captured daily by a gannet, we take the liberty of quoting a story given by one of your correspondents some time ago when referring to the feeding capacity of the herring gull. A quaint old Sarclet fisherman once recorded —" 'at aince he saw a 'maw' at he kent weel — as he wis ane o' iss vain sheels 'at hatched side 'e hoose — swilk fower herrin' ane efter 'e ither, an' then shook 'is heid an' glowered ip in ma face an' cowned kis he hedna room for mair"! This was only at one meal. Taking the above illustration, we cannot be accused of stretching the number for a "solan" to swallow six fish before it is satisfied and allow that quantity to complete its feeding for a day.Out of curiosity we have tried to put into figures the gannet's consumption of herring for a year. Say the 300,000 gannets captured 1,800,000 herrings daily (allowing six herrings each), that number multiplied by 365 gives the amazing total of 650,000, 000, which, being divided by the average number of 900 herrings to a cran, gives as the result 730,000 crans consumed yearly by the "solan geese" alone, and all taken from the herring shoals found at different periods around our Scottish coasts.

Gannets v. Trawlers

Although these figures may appear to many as hypothetical and illusory, yet they contain sufficient reality to arrest the attention of those alarmists who are clamouring for legislation to suppress herring trawling. To satisfy these extremists the Fishery Board has now obtained statistics of the greatest number of crans trawled in any one year. Those figures show that the highest combined catch by herring trawlers known in a single season does not amount to a sixth part of the quantity consumed by gannets during a like period. This is exclusive of the quantity devoured by the myriads of gulls and cormorants and other large sea-fowl, which are all

herring feeders when they can obtain them. Yet this fulfilment of Nature's laws has been in evidence during untold ages without any apparent diminution of the herring shoals; rather the reverse, in fact.

How Gannets Feed

Possibly many of your readers may have perused that interesting book, "Blackburn's Birds of Moidart and Elsewhere." One of the plates portrays gannets fishing in Loch Ailort. The scene depicted is almost exactly what our fishermen have seen many times during herring fishing seasons. "Solans" striking on a shoal of surface-feeding herrings or on a drift newly afloat (the fish are alive then) close their wings and drop like arrows from a height of over one hundred feet.

An amusing incident happened during the summer fishing season of 1873. The late Mr David Corner, Sarclet, fishing that season for Mr Neil Jamieson with his boat "Youngest" (the last of his many "Clinker" boats of that name) had struck a big shoal when part of his drift came afloat, had attracted some passing flocks of "solans." The birds at once dived on to the floating drift and got meshed. If we remember, nearly one hundred were captured. When the "Youngest" arrived with her heavy shot of herrings at the corner of the south quay the drowned gannets were the sight and topic of the day. Many old fishermen of the present "Pilot House Parliament" will remember the incident well.

Gannets often gorge themselves to such an extent that they are unable to rise from the surface. Many instances are recorded of them being so helpless that they could make no effort to escape.

Peculiarities of the "Solan"

As the "solan" produces only one egg for yearly incubation, and which takes a month to nidify, it has became [*sic*] a topic of wonder how the stock is kept up. At nearly all of the breeding haunts almost every available young bird is captured, and, if not used for immediate consumption, salted down for winter food. When an over food supply is obtained the boiling down process is resorted to, solan fat being often one of the St.Kilda exports.

A most important incident in the early life of the gannet has never been clearly demonstrated. The bird does not arrive at maturity until the end of the third year from its nesting period. Yet during those years of their transition stage few birds are seen around Scottish coasts in their "scorrie" state, as it were. It has been supposed that these young birds retire to some of the remotest breeding colonies of the species, and remain in those localities until maturity.

We once had the pleasure of seeing some skins of these maturing birds with an Inverness taxidermist, who occasionally received consignments of skins from St.Kilda. These gannet "scorries" have little resemblance to the old birds, being beautifully marked with black and white patches.

Much in common with the gannet applies also to the fulmar during its transition period. We wonder if any of our Wick or Pulteney fishermen ever saw a "solan scorrie" or the "scorrie" of a "mollymoke" off the Caithness coast during the second or third year of its existence.

§12
John O'Groat Journal, March 31st, 1916

The Little Gull (Larus Minutus) Pallas

I see that the latest addition to the Mackay Collection in the Wick Museum is a Little Gull (Larus minutus). Of the sixty different species of the genus "larus," [*sic*] distributed over the globe (the larus being the most cosmopolitan of all feathered creation), the Little Gull is the smallest of the genus, being under twelve inches in length. It is certainly one of the most beautiful of the whole graceful British Gull family, more especially during its summer or nuptial plumage, and ranks second in rarity of the seventeen known British gulls. The Sabine's meantime holds the premier place, as the Ross gull has been rejected as a British "Larus."

"A Bird of Mystery"

Previous to 1813 the Little Gull was very little known to ornithologists (especially British), as prior to that year there were no existing records of its having ever visited our shores. The "Larus Minutus" was added by Montagu to the British list during that year—1813. He (Montagu) introduced the interesting stranger as follows—"This is another bird of rare occurrence which has fallen to our lot to accord to the British Fauna. It was shot on the Thames near Chelsea, and is in the collection of Mr Plasted of that place. Its native country appears to be the southern parts of Siberia and Russia, and the shores of the Caspian Sea, migrating more northward in summer to breed."

Records of early captures

Although fifteen specimens are recorded as having been obtained along the East Coast of England from 1813 to 1856, yet very few were got on either the East or West Coasts of Scotland during those years. Previous to 1847 two only were got in Ireland, and a solitary specimen in either Orkney or Shetland. During that year (1847) one was shot in the Bay of Belfast and another on the Shannon, the latter bird being in splendid summer plumage. Of the first two recorded for the West of Scotland, one was killed at the mouth of the Clyde during 1850, being a bird of the year, and is now in the Edinburgh Museum, while another was captured in Galloway during the same season. Sir William Jardine, in referring to the specimen obtained on the Clyde, wrote — "This beautiful little species is also a rare bird, as neither its breeding stations nor its true winter localities are yet correctly traced." Nillson, the Swedish ornithologist, stated that about the middle of the last century the "Larus Minutus" was known to have bred in the marshes in the vicinity of the Baltic, and in Gothland. He (Nillson) found that the Little Gulls were not gregarious. The magnificent work by H. E. Dresser, entitled "Birds of Europe," produces two beautiful, coloured drawings of the Little Gull. The author also refers to a Mr Hancock who shot two specimens on the Northumberland coast during 1851, and had them shown at the Great Exhibition of that year. Those exhibits had slightly forked or hollowed tails, and attracted much interesting attention amongst ornithologists.

Previous and up until 1852 only one specimen was recorded by either Thomson or Macgillivray, and Hudson only refers to the "Larus Minutus" as an irregular visitor from continental Europe. The Shetland specimen was shot on 7th April, 1853, by the late Robert Dunn, Stromness, who was one of the most celebrated bird-skin (especially Scotch) collectors of the last century. Many British museums still show evidences of Mr Dunn's contributions. It appears that Dunn's specimen was the only one ever obtained in Shetland, as although Dr Saxby often takes notice of the appearance of the Glaucous, Ivory and Iceland gulls, yet during his long life as an observer of wild bird life in Shetland he has never once recorded the visit of a Little Gull. The next record of the capture of a "Minutus" was that a very perfect adult male was shot near Fraserburgh on the 28th June, 1854, and is now in the Elgin Museum. During December, 1855, three Little Gulls appeared in the harbour of Dunbar, but the birds were so exhausted from some cause that they were unable to escape and were stoned to death by boys. None of these birds were preserved, being too severely mutilated for such a purpose.

Little Gull included in Dr Sinclair's List

When the list of Dr Sinclair's collection was compiled by the late Rev. Charles Thompson in 1840, a Little Gull was included, yet when Messrs R.I.Shearer and Henry Osborne read their papers[16] before the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh in 1862 no reference was made by either of them to the "Larus minutus",[17] although Mr Shearer referred to the Ruddy Sheldrake and the Hooded Merganser as being amongst the rarest of British bird visitants to Caithness, only one or two specimens of each of those species having been obtained in the county previous and up to 1862. As the Edinburgh Society only inserted British birds with authenticated date of capture and locality, any specimens, however rare, without correct data, were therefore not referred to by Shearer or Osborne on that occasion. Mr Shearer while introducing his paper and report on Caithness birds said that he regretted much that he was unable to give details and date of capture of many of the specimens on the list (Dr Sinclair's) which he had submitted.

Later Messrs Harvie-Brown and Buckley in their "Vertebrate Fauna of Sutherland and Caithness," only mention that Professor Wilson saw a Little Gull in Dr Sinclair's collection, but makes no further reference. Harvie-Brown also describes this gull as a very rare visitant to either Sutherland or Caithness; the only instance on record known to him being a dried-up mummy which was picked up in a cart-rut near Balnacoil in the spring of 1874. This proves that Harvey Brown ignored the existence of Dr Sinclair's "Minutus" as a Caithness procured specimen. Henry Osborne only referred to the bird as rare, but gave no details. The late Mr David Bruce in his reference in Horne's "County of Caithness" only wrote that the Little Gull was in Dr Sinclair's collection. Therefore its obscurity deepened with Caithness ornithologists.

However, we are pleased to treat it as a Caithness bird and believed that the Doctor obtained his specimen in the county, but as was characteristic of his negligence in matters of this description, forgot to attach the correct data at the time. It matters little now, as it has long since been corrupted by moths and rust in common with the fate of all the specimens which comprised Dr Sinclair's collection. The residue now only consists of just a few "scraps of wire," a few "wisps of tow," and a gross or two of "glass eyes." The ravages of the "Thurso Ornithological Catacombs" have long since obliterated all traces of Dr Sinclair's ambitious and toilsome efforts, while forming an ornithological collection, and which for many years was an interesting and valuable asset to the town of Wick, and an honour to the county of Caithness. Previous to and up till the latter date of those early records — 1855 — (with the exception of the Clyde captured specimen) no Little Gulls were obtained anywhere on the West Coast of Scotland, and not until one was shot by Captain Cameron of Glenbrittle, Isle of Skye, in 1865.

Footnote

(16) The papers were read to the Society by John Alexander Smith, M.D.; there is no evidence that either Shearer or Osborne attended.

(17) This is simply not true - the Little Gull is included in Shearer's list (where its status is given as 'rare'), presumably on the basis of the skin in Sinclair's collection.

§13
John O'Groat Journal, April 7th, 1916

West of Scotland Captures

Coming down to specimens of this rare gull obtained in Scotland during recent years Harvey-Brown in his "Fauna of the Outer Hebrides" records as follows—"A specimen of this rare British and still rarer Scotch bird, the Little Gull ("Larus Minutus"), was shot upon the 1st November, 1883, by Mr John Macdonald, Sir John Orde's factor, at Newton, North Uist. The specimen was exhibited, and a paper read upon it by Harvie-Brown at a meeting of the Royal Physical Society, Edinburgh, on l9th December, 1883." This bird was evidently a bird of the year. Harvey-Brown had an opportunity of examining it in the flesh. From notes extracted by the writer from the paper read at Edinburgh, (above referred to) it appears that this North Uist specimen gives the farthest westerly record in Europe of the species, the one got in the Sutherland cart rut the most northerly, and the one got in Galloway (Wigtownshire), the most southerly. Brown has again ignored the existence of Dr Sinclair's Little Gull. To show the importance of any captures of Little Gulls in Britain, the "International Ornithological Congress of Vienna" took up and entered into their report the capture of the North Uist specimen in 1883, and resolved to adopt a uniformity of method for the future in recording species of rare birds found in Britain. In Harvey-Brown's "Fauna of the Inner Hebrides" no Little Gull is recorded as having been obtained in Argyleshire or its adjacent islands. Gray, in his "Birds of the West of Scotland,"[18] says the Little Gull has been observed in various localities on the East Coast of Scotland, but only on the West Coast in the localities of the Isle of Skye. Gatke, the distinguished ornithologist, during his fifty years' continued residence on Heligoland, had during that time collected and preserved nearly 500 different species of bird, but only saw two Little Gulls during the whole period. Of all those birds, Gatke found that only seventeen were indigenous to the island. All the others were either spring or autumn migrants which only visited Heligoland as a resting place, and never longer than a few days.

Home of the Little Gull

In 1875 Mr H. Seebohm went with Mr J. A. Harvey-Brown to explore the Petchora River in north-eastern Russia. The travellers met with considerable difficulties, but came back to England with a rich harvest of skins and eggs, their greatest prizes being the eggs of the Little Stint, the Little Gull, and the Grey Plover. The nesting localities of these three birds were previously unknown to ornithologists. Seebohm discovered that the breeding range of the Little Gull extends from the Lakes of Ladoga and Omega through Southern Siberia, to the southern shores of the Sea of Ochotsk. Their number of eggs is three and much resemble those of the Common Tern in size and colour. Seebohm also states that those gulls during the summer and nesting period often feed on flies, their mode of hawking them being much the same as swallows, or "goatsuckers" (nightjars).

Interesting Movements of Little Gull

As the Little Gull recently added to the "Mackay Collection" was for over sixteen years in the possession of the donor the writer had many opportunities of observing the specimen. The bird is a complete adult male in winter plumage, and it conforms in every detail with the description of the bird given by R. Bowdler Sharpe of the Zoological Department of the British Museum. One confusing peculiarity of the Little Gull, apart from its length (under twelve inches) is its close resemblance to both of it nearest congeners in size, viz., the Black-Headed Gull and the Kittiwake — the former being over 15 inches and the latter over 16 inches in length. The Little Gull in its summer dress in general appearance much resembles the Black-Headed, and in its winter plumage the Kittiwake Gull, but the legs, feet, and bill of the Kittiwake are differently coloured and constructed from that of the Little Gull. By the inscription on the donated case we observe that the bird was shot at Crowlin Island, Sound of Skye, on the 25th November, 1899.

During the writer's short residence at a part of

the Sound of Skye a few miles south from Crowlin Island (Kyle of Lochalsh) he had a very interesting experience of the movements of a Little Gull during December of the previous year (1898). This part of the Sound of Skye has long been recorded as one of the localities visited by this rare "Larus" during its occasional winter visits to the West Coast of Scotland. The herring offal from the fishcuring stations was carried some distance and deposited daily on the shore about "low water," the greater part of which floated with each rise of the tide. To this garbage and fish-fry thousands of our indigenous gulls and terns came every morning to feed (truly a pleasing sight for any lover of wild-bird life). For at least three weeks two Glaucus [*sic*] Gulls and one Little Gull appeared daily along with the host of other gulls and terns.

Affinity of Birds

The Glaucus [*sic*] Gulls fed in company of the others of their genus, but the "Minutus" only amongst the Common and Lesser Terns. The Terns and the Little Gull did not feed on the fish offal, but only on the minute fry of the coalfish, (sillocks) with which the eddies of the Sound abounded. There appeared to be an affinity between the two "burgomasters" and the "Minutus" which was proved by many of their movements. During the mid-day siesta of those thousands of birds to rest and drink from the rain pools collected on the tops of the rocks above high water mark, both the Glaucus [*sic*] and the Little Gull kept entirely apart, and rested by themselves some distance away from the others. As all those gulls and terns departed from their feeding grounds every afternoon, and disappeared in a northerly direction to roost amongst the islands of the Sound, so did our three Arctic and Siberian visitors. However, before those three interesting strangers left they ascended by circles (eagle like) until they attained a great height, and then disappeared in a more north-westerly direction than did the others. On the arrival of our Arctic migrants in the morning they only appeared some time after the others had begun feeding, and then at a great altitude as if timidly and suspiciously approaching the shore. They then descended by wheeling evolutions until they ultimately landed at some distance from the thousands already congregated. We were sure they roosted together in some remote part of Skye and that an affinity existed between them, which showed that they belonged to different regions than did the other sea-fowl frequenters of the Sound.

Ruthless Skin Collection

The pleasures received by us while observing the daily movements of those three rare gulls were abruptly cut short as the three fell the same day to the gun of one of those ruthless violators of Nature's Laws — a bird skin collector — and who likely shortly afterwards traded their skins with some museum committee. Those birds were very valuable because of their having correct and authenticated data attached, the Little Gull (Larus Minutus) being in some respects of increased interest and value as it was a capture from the Sound of Skye, the only accredited visiting district of this gull on the West Coast of Scotland.

Few in Public or Private Museums

The museums of Scotland, either public or private, contain few specimens of the Larus Minutus. We will therefore try to enumerate where some of them are located. The earliest one for Scotland is the specimen recorded by Jardine as being got at the mouth of the Clyde in 1850, which is now in Edinburgh Museum, where Durin's [*sic*] Shetland specimen, got in 1853, is also housed. Another is the bird shot near Fraserburgh in 1854, which now rests in the Elgin Museum. There are no British obtained specimens of the Little Gull in any of the Glasgow museums (either Kelvingrove or People's Palace). There are two (summer and winter plumaged) in the Cochrane Collection in the People's Palace Museum, but they are labelled as being captured in Hungary, and thereby do not count as British specimens. In private museums there are doubtless a few over Scotland. By Harvie-Brown's statement the Dunrobin collection doesn't contain a specimen, and Dr Sinclair's "Minutus" is now extinct. We are aware that the specimen above recorded as being shot at the Kyle of Lochalsh in December, 1898, has since been in a private museum near Oban. Probably the Glenbrittle bird shot by Captain Cameron in the Isle of Skye in 1865 may still be in existence, and also the North Uist specimen referred to by Harvie-Brown in 1883.

The last two Larus Minutus obtained on the English coast were shot at the mouth of the Tyne during the autumn of 1884, both being birds of the year. One each of those birds was placed in private collections in the Newcastle district at the

time of their capture.

As the Wick Museum has now probably the latest capture (1899) of a Little Gull on the West Coast of Scotland (or possibly the East Coast), we would be glad if any of your readers who may take an interest in those above references, could be able to state when and where any specimen of the rare Little Gull (Larus Minutus) has been captured in Scotland since 1899

Footnote:

(18) See Gray (1871)..

§14
John O'Groat Journal, October 13th, 1916

Departure of our Summer Immigrants

From the middle of August until the end of September is a period of pleasing incidents to those of your readers who may take an interest in the movements of Caithness wild birds. Our harbingers of summer were principally land birds, all of which have bred in the county.

Early Departures

Amongst the earliest summer migrants are the Swifts and the Whimbrels (or "little whaups"), the former seldom remaining longer than the 15th of August, having been with us three months, and about the same time as the Whimbrel remains in Britain. The Swifts go south to extreme South African localities, and the Whimbrels or Mayfowls proceed to the shores of the Mediterranean and pass their winter there. Thus our fields, hedgerows, and plantations, which were through spring and summer embellished with a profusion of beautiful feathered creations, are now fast becoming depleted of such ornaments.

Buntings and Finches

Many of the Buntings and Finches which have bred in Caithness now begin to disappear. The greenfinch, hawfinch, bullfinch, chaffinch, and also the siskins and the bramblings migrate before the middle of October for their winter localities in either southern or western climes. All the warblers and the three wagtails — grey, yellow, pied — and also our three Caithness pipits, viz., the meadow, tree, and shore, likewise leave about this time, as do our beautiful three larks (a few of the common skylarks remaining with us all winter.) Of the four Caithness buntings a few of the common (thistlecock lairag) and the yellow-hammer (yellow yarlin) remain with us all winter, but both of the other two, viz., the Black headed and the Reed buntings, depart about the same time as the soft-billed birds.

Insect-eating Birds

Our climate does not encourage insect-feeding birds to remain over winter, but with mild and open seasons a few of those insectivorous birds again appear for a few days during late autumn, and when the sunshine induces insects to come forth.

Hibernation Theory

The appearance of birds (which were thought to have left for other climes), and only for a few days, goes far to support the hibernation theorists. Even swallows have suddenly appeared during a November blink, or a glimmer of an early December sunshine, when they were thought to have been in Senegal or other parts of Africa, they having apparently entirely disappeared from Britain about the middle of October, as also did both of the swallow's congeners — the Sand and the House Martins.

Grallatores

The Caithness "Grallatores" — or waders — which breed in the county and form part of our summer immigrants number sixteen, viz., the Common Snipe, Redshank, Greenshank, Dunlin, Common Curlew, Whimbrel, and the Lapwing, Golden Plover, Ring Plover, Common Sandpiper, Oyster Catcher, Water Rail, Land Rail ("Corncrake"), Common Gallinule ("Water Hen"), Common Coot, and Woodcock. During late years the Woodcock has been found nesting in the county. Previous to then it was not considered even an indigenous British bird. All of the above "grallatores" leave us for other districts during the autumn, with the exception of a few Water Rails, Water Hens and Coots. Stragglers of these three species remain on or about the margins of our brooks, burns, or rivers all of the year round.

Migration of the Denizens of our Coast Cliffs

The localities of the Caithness seaboard from April to the middle of August swarm with beautiful bird life, comprising the three guillemots — Common, Ringed and the Black — also the Razor Bill Auk and the Puffin. And now in addition one of the most interesting and valuable features of Caithness sea-cliff bird life is the presence of Fulmar Petrels. Before the 20th August all those charming birds, with the exception of the Black Guillemot ("Uria grylle"), will have departed, and not a specimen of the above five species will be seen on those cliffs

before next April.* The Black Guillemot, which remains with us all the year, makes its domicile through all seasons in holes formed in the cliff bases. So the precipices above are still without bird life of the genus "Uria" or the Fulmars.

Departure of Herring Gulls and Kittiwakes

During the latter part of the period above referred to — from middle of August till end of September — even the Kittiwakes begin their migration from the Caithness seaboard. The "Faky's" only breeding home in Caithness is the "Rowans of Ulbster," and as soon after their beautiful progeny are able to "fend" for themselves, the "Rowans" knows them no more that season. Even the Herring Gulls begin their partial departure from their breeding ledges about the middle of September, and betake themselves to river margins, as resting roosts, getting much of their food from the adjacent ploughed fields.

The Cormorants and shags also only occasionally visit their nidifying haunts during the winter season. Therefore the sea-coast precipices of Caithness are the most barren of bird life of any other part of the county during fully six months of the year.

Harbingers of Winter

Almost coincidental with the departure of our summer visitors, the winter immigrants begin to appear. As our summer visitors were chiefly composed of land birds, our winter harbingers are principally water fowl and waders. The first of those to arrive are the Waders ("grallatores") all of which have nested in high northern latitudes, many of them within the Arctic Circle. The waders which generally visit us during the Autumn are the Purple Sandpiper, "Sanderling," Knot, Turnstone, Curlew Sandpiper, Bar Tailed Godwit, Black Tailed Godwit, Dotterel, Spotted Green Shank, Great Snipe, the Jack Snipe, Little Stint and Temmick's [*sic*] Stint.

In our next article we will treat more fully on some of the above specimens, and also on other harbingers of winter which appear during autumn and early winter on the coast and inland districts of Caithness.

* With all due respect to "Abrach" we have been informed on excellent personal knowledge that the fulmar revisits for a short period in February the scene of its breeding haunts.

§15
John O'Groat Journal, October 20th, 1916

In addition to our summer immigrants already referred to, five most interesting forerunners of summer, and also the incidents of their departures, are yet to be recorded. Those interesting visitors to the Caithness seaboard are the Great Northern, Blackthroated and Redthroated Divers, and also the Goosander and the Redbreasted Mergansers. Specimens of these birds visit our county every season during late March and early April. The latter two (the mergansers) are to be occasionally found about our seaboard and rivers during the winter (almost all females or young males) and in the plumage of that season of the year. Those charming five members of our feathered fauna have all donned their nuptial dresses before or shortly after their arrival on our coasts. With the exception of the Great Northern Diver they have all been known to have bred in Caithness, and have been ranked amongst our indigenous birds.

Nesting Features of Mergansers and Divers

The goosanders breed but sparingly, and the red-breasted merganser is quite commonly found nesting about some of the most isolated of our county lochs, more especially around lochs of the West of Scotland, and where the situation of those fresh water lakes is in close proximity to the sea coast. Those nesting features of the red-breasted merganser also greatly applies to the goosander, and those of both the red and blackthroated divers. The latter diver, however, is almost exclusively confined to the remotest districts of the Western islands of Scotland, notably the more solitary lochs of the Outer Hebrides. The goosanders are known to be arboreal on some parts of the continent—a peculiar feature in web-footed birds—yet the same applies to the summer duck in Sweden and the cormorants in China.

Great Northern Diver's Migration Mystery

Although a few Great Northern Divers ("rain geese") visit the Caithness coast every spring in the company of its other two congeners, the red and the blackthroated ("dulter geese"), yet its movements before arriving and after leaving the coasts of Britain are obscured in mystery. This beautiful bird—especially in its summer garb—is only known to breed on the extreme north of the western part of the American Continent, and on islands extending far into the Arctic Circle. As the power of flight of the "rain geese" is very limited (not much more than that of some penguins) and as it has never been known to approach our shores by flight or to leave them by the same propelling power, the wonder is how the Great Northern Diver makes its long and intricate journeys from and to its breeding haunts. Does it, like the penguins, while making their migration journeys from the Antarctic to New Zealand, swim all the way?

Again, it is an unsolved problem why it should visit the coasts of Britain and the western shores of Europe for such a brief period, only to return again over the thousands of miles of ocean journey to its breeding localities. In the case of hundreds of migrating birds, they flit from one part of the world to another in search of food, but the Great Northern Diver is not faced with such a dominating cause, as those birds could obtain their food in any locality they deemed fit to resort to. What then is the reasons of their visits to our coasts? Such will apparently remain one of the grand mysteries of migration.

The Wanderings of the Lapwing

While still treating promiscuously on the vagaries of migration, it might interest your readers if something was written about the lapwing, or "shochad." The "shochads" leave us entirely about the middle or end of September, yet their journey does not amount to a long distance, for unlike many of its congeners—the waders—which traverse whole continents during their migration, the "shochads" still remain almost within hail of Britain.

An eminent ornithologist a few years ago marked with leg-rings forty lapwings during August, and before any of the species left on migration. Before the 15th of the following January twenty-five of those marked birds were accounted for by being either captured alive or shot. The localities where they were obtained were as follows:—Five were got in Ulster Province; two near Cork; one in the vicinity of Sligo; ten in Andulusia and other Spanish provinces; one near Algiers, and one on the

Morocco coast, the remainder being captured in the provinces of France and Belgium.

Thus it appears that the "shochads" do not altogether forget us, but keep in touch, and ready to cross over either the Irish Sea or the English Channel to assist us, as it well knows that we would have a "warsy" "peace Sunday" breakfast without some of its eggs. This well known bird in a few weeks after the end of August begins to flock, and I suppose do as they have done from time immemorial, begin to congregate about the Hempriggs fields—often along the Humster elevation—prior to taking their departure for their winter resorts.

The "Jekkiedibeet"

A most interesting feature in the movements of a few of our winter immigrants is that amongst them are a few birds that visit us in autumn, as it were only to rest, and, after remaining with us for a short time, take their departure for southern climes. The evidence for this occurs in the case of the Wheatear ("jekkiedibeet"). This bird is one of our earliest immigrants, often appearing about the middle of September, and is generally first seen about Auldwick and the "Grey Stones," yet the "jekkidies" do not remain in Caithness over the winter, but proceed south after resting with us for a few weeks.

Early in spring the wheatear again becomes one of our summer harbingers, but now from a different direction, as it then comes from the south. On its vernal visitation it remains with us to breed in large numbers. Thus this well known little bird carries out the incidence of being twice an immigrant and twice a migrant within the period of ten months.

A few other Caithness visitors are in the same category as the Wheatear in this respect, and these may be treated of later on. The Little Stint and Temminck's Stint are cases in point, but with the difference that neither of them breed in Britain.

Note

We thank you for the information regarding the occasional visits of Fulmars to Caithness during February, of which we were not aware. In an article that we wrote to your "Journal" three years ago on auks and guillemots we briefly referred to a few of those birds making a yearly and early spring visit to our cliffs, apparently for the purpose of ascertaining whether their last season's breeding haunts were still in existence, they being sent as scouts for that purpose, the main body still remaining in their ocean expanses until the arrival back of those members which were sent to spy out the land. Those few early visitors never remained longer than about a week, when they again entirely disappeared from our cliffs, and probably for a month, when the great influx of the myriads that infest the cliffs of the West and East coasts of the British Islands and the precipices of Western Europe took place. The preliminary appearances of those forerunners adds another weird mystery to the movements of bird life, which are in many cases so profound that they seem to be governed by instincts higher than even human intelligence. It appears that those peculiar early visiting traits practised by the auks and guillemots are also common to the fulmars.

§16
John O'Groat Journal, October 27th, 1916

As many bird lovers have of recent years awakened to the great interest in that branch of ornithological enquiry which concerns migration, we again venture to take the liberty of presenting to your readers a few more scattered references to the movement of our migratory birds. From time immemorial the coming and going of migratory birds — movements so suggestive of romance and mystery — have held fascination for those who may have found pleasure in pondering over such abtruse problems.

The Ring Ousel ("Turdus Torquata")

Before finishing the references to the departure of our "insessores" — or perchers — it would be well to refer to our Caithness thrushes, four of which are well known to all observers who take an interest in those denizens of our woods and hedges. These four comprise the Song Thrush (Mavis), Black Bird, Missel Thrush ("Storm Cock") and the Ring Ousel. The first mentioned three remain with us all year, but the Ring Ousel takes its departure for other regions during early autumn, at the same time as do our other percher migrants. This interesting and beautiful thrush is found on migration all over Europe and the northern parts of Africa, and it returns to Britain during early Spring. The Ring Ousel breeds in the uplands of our county, and is well known to frequenters of those districts.

The Land-Rail (Crex Pratensis)

The Land Rail (Corncrake) arrives in Caithness about the second week of May, and as is the case of the Lapwing, entirely leaves us during the latter part of September, or at farthest, early October. This bird was classed by some of the ornithologists of the eighteenth century amongst those birds which hibernate during winter, they forming that opinion through its apparent absence of powers of flight for migration. Gilbert White of Selby [*sic*] was one of those who believed in the hibernation of the Corncrake. After leaving in October it was generally supposed that the Land Rails entirely left the British Islands, but specimens have been occasionally obtained in Ireland during the winter. The Corncrake, after leaving our shores, becomes a great wanderer, it being found in the Azores and Madeira Islands, and also as far south as the Natal and Cape Colony. These wanderings explode the fallacy about the bird's powers of flight.

Few of us while journeying about the margins of clover or cornfields — which are exclusively its breeding haunts — have seen a corncrake on the wing, and although its cry seemed so near that a person might think they had trampled on the bird, yet it did not escape by flight, or, if so, the movement was only a sort of flutter for a few yards, and only across the same field.

Water Rail (Rallus Aquaticus)

The Water Rail may be considered a resident of the county all of the year; only we find fewer of those birds during winter than in the summer breeding season. The small canal or ditch that encircles the Stirkoke lower plantation, with its water weeds and dense undergrowth, was to our personal knowledge fifty years ago a favourite resort of the Water Rails, obscuration, like its congener the Land Rail, being one of its true predominating traits; and we question if many have seen a live bird in its resorts in consequence of its secluded habits. The Water Rail seldom flies if it can escape by retreating amongst the weeds and herbage. The habits of this wader very much resemble those of the "Water Hen". We have seen them both feeding in company about the Cruives and middle reaches of Wick river, and often in the vicinity of the Stirkoke lower plantation — the water hen swimming and diving, while the water rail skirted the stream in search of water beetles or floating insect larvae. The feeding movements of the Water Rail very much resemble those of the common sandpiper (or "summer snipe"), and although neither of these birds have webbed feet yet they never hesitate to swim across eddies when it suits their purpose. During bygone days, when salmon in abundance ascended our river for spawning purposes, these interesting species of our river feathered fauna would then have food enough and to spare both from roe and salmon fry. We were informed many years ago by the late Mr Alexander Sutherland, gamekeeper, Ackergill, that Wick river was once a great resort of waterfowl of many species. He (Sutherland) during his first years of service on the estate—in the late twenties (and

when the river was proverbial for its great salmon runs)—said that many of the ornithological specimens in Dr Sinclair's Museum were supplied by him from Wick river, amongst which were the rarest and most valuable specimens of ducks in the collection. The eddies in the river where the salmon roe and fry abounded were much frequented by herons, water hens, coots, and ducks. From this river Sutherland obtained the first specimen of that rare Caithness bird, the Purple Heron, and which was sent to the Doctor for preservation.

The Purple Heron

As only two specimens of the Purple Heron have as yet been recorded as being got in Caithness, it is a peculiar coincidence that both specimens were obtained by Alexander Sutherland. The first specimen of the Purple Heron got was the one in Dr Sinclair's collection, and the second, fully forty years afterwards, was secured by the same person on the margin of the Loch of Winless. The latter specimen was gifted to the Mackay collection at 8 Breadalbane Crescent, Pulteney.

Mr Sutherland, while referring to those years of the great salmon invasions, said he often remembered while the Georges were tenants of the fishings, that, with prolific seasons, he has known them to hawk cartloads of fish around the Wick and Pulteney districts and vicinity, and sell salmon of from twelve to twenty pounds weight at from sixpence to one shilling each. Such days of departed glory! The price above referred to was only half of the present-day cost of a respectably-sized "grey-lord." Many of the deceased and also some of the present-day anglers of Wick river would have died from fright had they encountered a shoal of probably 2000 salmon passing under their flies. Our enthusiastic river anglers about Wick and Pulteney are always very bouncy and braggart when they can record the capture of even ONE fish about the size of a medium-grown mackerel. Still, we must not forget to give them credit for the large number of monsters they have hooked AND LOST, each fish carrying with it many fathoms of valuable "graith", not to speak of the flies, which were prepared from materials only known by the individual angler himself, and which secret he would not exchange for the value of a continent. The late Mr James Smith, plasterer, when grumbling at the abnormal rise in stucco, said it was caused through the enormous quantity used in making plaster casts of salmon caught in Wick river. It is a well known fact that IF EVER any of our local anglers had secured a fish about the size of a pretentious grilse, he at once determined to perpetuate the capture by having its exact dimensions cast in plaster, so that succeeding generations might boast about the fishing exploits of their ancestors. We beg to be excused from digressing from our original subject.

The collected handwritten drafts of these articles contains one further paragraph at the end of this piece that read as follows:

"A few more examples of many of those rare visitants may have appeared in the county but have not been recorded. Since the death of Mr James Sutherland and Mr Lewis Dunbar, Caithness has been devoid of a professional taxidermist, the consequence being that the capture of a rare bird is seldom taken notice of. Probably unless those departed taxidermists had been in evidence we would never have heard of the two examples of the American Bittern, or the single appearance of the Kingfisher and the second and third captures of the Bewick's Swan in Caithness. And without the aid of a few intelligent observers many more of our rarer birds would have escaped notice. For instance we have to thank Mr John Dunnet, manufacturer for obtaining the second example of the hoopoe recorded for the county."

§17
John O'Groat Journal, November 3rd, 1916

The motive of the wandering of birds from their summer homes is not that of desertion. There is a phase of autumn and spring migration which is of great importance in the economic laws that govern our feathered inhabitants. On the departure of the cuckoo and the swallow with their hosts of congeners (all typical summer immigrants and migrants), and whose movements have been from time immemorial used as proverbs and parables, their places are filled by hosts of refugees from northern regions.

The British Islands from their geographical situation contain many inducements for multitudes of birds to visit us during autumn — birds which do not breed in Britain. The warm waters that encircle our shores keep our fields, hedges, and forests moist and comfortable. These climatic conditions invite our autumn visitors from the frozen north, especially those which feed on berries, worms, slugs, grubs and larvae. The summer homes of these visitors to Britain being now entirely frozen, compel them to seek their food by visiting our shores. The inducement of our summer insect life also calls back our charming autumn migrants, which now become summer immigrants to our county.

During the autumn immigration from northern lands we are visited by hosts of Fieldfares, Redwings, Woodpeckers, Golden Crested Wrens, and especially multitudes of both the Common and Purple-Headed Starlings and Golden Plovers, all of which now become either field, hedge or forest foragers. These have all bred in northern Europe during the past summer. These visitors from northern regions now join the great army of our local birds (thrushes, starlings, larks etc), which remain with us all winter, and all feed in the fields, forests, and hedges on the grubs and larvae which if left undevoured would become summer insect pests. What wonderful arrangements in the circle of Nature; and which are only looked on by most observers as common passing events! Very few farmers know how to appreciate the worth of their best friends, but wantonly and ruthlessly destroy these birds at every opportunity, never thinking these are essential to the welfare to their industrial life.

As we have previously referred to the "grallatores" (waders) and the "insessores" (perchers) which formed part of our summer harbingers, all of them being indigenous birds, we will now note a few of those above genera which are specimens of our winter forerunners. By selecting a few of each we shall endeavour to take those to which the most interesting incidences of their wanderings are attached, viz., the Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Black Tailed Godwit, Bar Tailed or Red Godwit and the Oyster Catcher, all of which are waders. The perchers are the Wryneck, Golden Crested Wren, Bohemian Waxwing, the Hoopoe and the Snow Bunting.

The Little Stint ("Tringa Minuta")

The same incidences of the migration of the Little Stints also apply to those previously given regarding the Wheatear ("jekkidybeet"). They visit us during early autumn, remaining with us for a short time, then continuing their journey to southern lands, and afterwards visiting us during April or May following on their passage to the extreme north of the European Continent to breed. The nesting localities of the Little Stint were unknown previous to 1875, when the first nest was found on the Petchora River, Northern Siberia, by Seebohm, and the late Harvie-Brown. Nests of this interesting wader were then found in close proximity to those of the Little Gull ("Larus Minutus"). It has been discovered that the Little Stints pass their winters in the extreme parts of South Africa, returning to the north early in the spring to breed. When they again visit us they remain as it were to rest for a few days, and then entirely disappear from Britain until next autumn. For the few which visit us on their northern journey Caithness is apparently a "stepping- off stone" for their further flight. This interesting little stranger—not larger than a titlark—makes therefore (as was once supposed) the longest journey on migration of any known bird of the Old World, as during its southward and northward flights it passes twice over two immense Continents.

Two Little Stints are recorded to have been got in Caithness. One was in Dr Sinclair's collection but had no date attached, and was merely labelled by the late Rev. Charles Thomson in 1840 as the "Tringa Minuta." The second was

shot by Mr Eric S. Mackay on the "Odd" at the back of the north quay, and preserved and placed in his collection. This specimen of the Little Stint was a few years afterwards verified by the late Mr Harvie-Brown and at the same time as that gentleman identified the Sabine's Gull which also formed part of the Pulteney Collection.

Mr Brown was much interested in the Mackay Little Stint as he, as already stated, in company of the now long deceased eminent ornithologist Henry Seebohm, was the first to discover the nest and eggs of the "Tringa Minuta." They (Seebohm and Brown) also about the same localities on the Petchora found Little Gulls ("Larus Minuta") breeding in considerable numbers. A specimen of the latter now adds considerable value to the exceptionally good repository of rare Caithness and north Scotland avifauna, the Wick museum. Mr Brown while visiting Wick during the occasion above referred to was accompanied by the late Mr William Reid, senior. At the time of the Pulteney capture of the Little Stint, Mr Reid supplied a lengthy paper to the columns of "Land and Water" on the incident, the article being copied in other newspapers interested in British ornithology.

Private Possessors of Rare Caithness Birds

A pointed appeal was made some time ago by your correspondent, "Cairnduna," to those who possessed specimens of rare Caithness birds, asking them to donate their feathered treasures to the Wick Museum, and before in a few years they may become irretrievably lost by the relegation of those valuable rarities to the dust heap. Two cases in point are those of two local gentlemen who are possessors of probably the only pair of Pallas Sand Grouse now in existence of the seven specimens obtained in the county during the last migration of those birds to Britain (1889). It really seems a pity to see this pair of rare and valuable grouse outside the Wick Museum. The owners of these Sand Grouse have had them so long that any interest which might have been attached to them has now lost its novelty and become stale. The pair of Pallas Sand Grouse owned by those two gentlemen referred to (one each) are male and female, which makes them doubly interesting.

§18

John O'Groat Journal, November 10th, 1916

The few British birds the discovery of whose breeding grounds had baffled ornithologists up till 1875 were the Grey Plover, Little Stint, Bewick's Swan, Curlew Sandpiper, the Knot, the Sanderling, and Black-tailed Godwit. With the exception of the Grey Plover, which up till now has not been recorded as a Caithness visitant, the remaining six are either occasional or regular autumn immigrants to our shores, all being recorded in the "Caithness Ornithological Register".

Seebohm and Harvie-Brown discovered the breeding localities of the Little Stint, Grey Plover, and Bewick Swan in the region of the Petchora River during 1875, but the nesting grounds of the Curlew Sandpiper were only found on the banks of the Yenisei as late as 1897, and the first nest of the Black-tailed Godwit was discovered the following year in the same region. The remaining two—Knot and Sanderling—were found by Captain Fielding of the Nares Arctic Expedition, breeding as far north as latitude 80 degs. While recording the most interesting incidents available of the wanderings on migration of many of our county birds, we hope that to a few of your readers who may only casually scan either the specimens in the Museum or the catalogue of names in the "Caithness Register" the features of their movements while on migration may prove wonderful and fascinating.

The Curlew Sandpiper ("Tringa Subarquata")

Although Seebohm and Brown failed to find a nest of the Curlew Sandpiper while on their Siberian journeys, yet many examples of the bird had been previously obtained near Archangel and also at the mouths of both the Petchora and Yenisei Rivers, and close to the Arctic Circle. Notwithstanding that those specimens were all in nuptial dress, no nest had been found until July 3, 1897, when on that date H. L. Popham shot a female from a nest containing four eggs near the mouth of the last-named river. The species were found to be very scarce and that the Yenisei forms its western breeding limit.

The Sanderling ("Arenaria Calidris")

Throughout autumn and winter the Sanderlings are rather plentiful on the sandy portions of the Caithness seaboards, the Reiss Sands being a favourite resort. It also has been frequently found during extreme ebbs on the small sandy beaches at the mouth of Wick River, these being at one time the feeding ground of many of our autumn immigrant waders. Many rare specimens have been obtained from this locality. The first nest of the Sanderling recorded was discovered by the German Expedition in 1869 on Sabine Island, East Greenland. On June 24, 1876 Captain Fielding shot at Smith Sound a male from a nest containing two eggs. Sabine has recorded it as breeding freely on the Parry Islands, and Macfarlane, an American ornithologist, killed a female from the first authenticated nest and eggs in Northern Alaska. The above shows the wide range that the Sanderlings cover during their migrations from our shores, as they during their breeding season resort to the extreme northern regions of both hemispheres. The Sanderling is a beautiful "wader," and at some distance much resembles the little gull, especially while in flight, and is about two-thirds the size of a Golden Plover.

The Dotterel ("Charadrius Pluvialis")

It is strange that the Dotterel should be so persistently confused with the Ring Plover, as both are distinctly different birds, one being as common as the other is rare. The Ring Plover — "sand lairag" — is one of our common summer nesting birds, and is well known to observers all round. Many of the Ring Plovers remain with us all winter, should the season be a mild one. The Dotterel found in Dr Sinclair's collection was the only one then recorded as being got in Caithness, and to our knowledge no other specimen has been captured since. Dr Sinclair's Dotterel was shot at Broadhaven by a now almost forgotten Willowbank ornithologist, and one who supplied many rare birds to the Doctor's collection. The gentleman referred to was the only one we ever knew who resembled Thomas Edwards, the Banff naturalist, in many ways; they were much addicted to roaming with a gun; both were shoemakers, and had first to toil in the interests of their families before they could devote themselves to sport; they also were good taxidermists.

Referring again to the Dotterel, we note that

Brown and Buckley record that this beautiful visitant from the frozen north visits Orkney and Shetland but is not known on the West of Scotland. A member of Pearson's Expedition in 1895 found it breeding on the South Island of Nova Zembla. Seebohm includes the Dotterel in his list of Siberian birds having found them breeding on the banks of the Petchora.

The Turnstone ("Strepsilas Interpres")

Although occurring in the North of Scotland every season during early autumn, and remaining in Britain until early spring, it has not been found breeding farther south than Greenland or Smith Sound. From the writer's experience during his two seasons' resident on Whalsay Skerries, Shetland, he found Turnstones on the shores and scaurs of those isolated "outliers," and what appeared strange was that during the last week of July we found those birds in large numbers. The flocks were composed of both young and old birds, the adult birds being still clothed in superb nuptial dresses. This showed that the Turnstones must be very early breeders before they could have completed their incubations and reared their young so that they might be able to accompany their parents to the coasts of Britain so early in the season.

This north-east point of Shetland was probably, like Heligoland, a resting place for those birds before proceeding on their journeys to the western shores of Europe and the United Kingdom. This theory was rather confirmed, as after the 20th August not a single Turnstone was to be seen on the Whalsay Skerries.

Fulmar and Storm Petrels

While referring to the Whalsay Skerries it is as well that we dispose of two interesting Caithness birds during their northerly migrations. Shortly after the disappearance of the Turnstones small flocks of Fulmars—of about ten birds—began to pass the Skerries, flying invariably in a north-easterly direction. This course would bring them, after leaving the Shetlands into the North Atlantic, and, as Dr Saxby wrote, to disappear into ocean solitudes which were outside the beaten tracks of commerce.

The Storm Petrels now began to leave the Skerries where they had bred in hundreds almost around the fishermen's huts, or amongst the loose stones of the high beaches. Those simple birds were so tame and unsuspicious that a Sarclet wag said that their simplicity much resembled that of a Pulteney fishcurer while he was making a bargain!

§19
John O'Groat Journal, November 17th, 1916

As many of the denizens of our foreshores, sands, and scaurs are often confounded in identification, it may be somewhat interesting to point out how one species may be mistaken for another. For instance, the Little Ringed Plover might be erroneously taken for the Ringed Plover ("san' lairag"), yet the former is one of our rarest "grallatores," whereas the latter is one of the commonest of our waders. Again, the Stone Curlew ("thick knee") might easily be mistaken for either the Whimbrel or the Common Curlew, yet the Stone Curlew is one of the most uncommon visitors. The identity of the family of Sandpipers, nearly all of which genus have been recorded as British birds, may be so confused that one or more of our rarest species may be unknowingly overlooked while viewing a flock of these birds.

Besides the Common Sandpiper, we have many examples of this interesting order in our list of Caithness birds, but we will for the present only treat on three more of the group viz., the Spotted Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, and the Green Sandpiper. A few references relating to these three species may prove to be of interest, and may, after being perused, induce readers to place a much higher than a common-place value on them. First, however, we will refer to a regular autumn visitor to our county.

Bar-Tailed or Red Godwit ("Limosa Rufa")

The Bar-tailed Godwits in some seasons visit Britain in immense numbers, especially the southern English counties. The time of the appearance of these Godwits is so certain that, like the swallow and its congeners, it can be relied on almost to a day. In some of the Midland districts of England the inhabitants prepare and employ many devices for their capture, and this period is generally known as "Godwit week."

The migrations of these Godwits have a history almost exclusively their own. We in a previous article referred to the long journeys made by the Little Stints on migration, but the distance covered by the Stint is outclassed by the migration of the Bar-tailed Godwit, especially by the exceptional features of its journey, as it migrates from the Arctic shores of the north-western point of the American Continent to New Zealand. The principal breeding-grounds of the Bar-tailed Godwit are North-West Alaska and the extreme north of British Columbia, while a few have been found nesting in Northern Siberia. From the Siberian stock probably come those which visit the shores of Britain during the autumn. Caithness then receives a share, and these remain with us all winter.

Pacific Ocean Migration

The vast multitudes of those godwits which during the early autumn leave the western shores of Alaska and other extreme northern localities are incredible. Those migrants proceed down and across the Pacific Ocean in a slanting direction to New Zealand, the route taken increasing the ocean journey to fully ten thousand miles. The Sandwich and the Fiji Islands lie directly in the route of those migrating grallatores, and every season a few disabled or fatigued birds land on those islands as if to rest. The number that touch at those half-way houses as it were are infinitesimal when compared with the millions that reach New Zealand, and apparently without a break in their journey.

At the approach of the antipodean winter those myriads begin their northern migration, by the same route, to their breeding haunts during the north-western American summer.

When we consider that those birds have not webbed-feet, and therefore cannot alight on the ocean to rest, the problem of this exceptional migration is deepened. The above ornithological facts will make those who think carelessly about migration wonder if this scheme of nature is a reality or a fiction, and ask why does the Bar-tailed Godwit visit New Zealand exclusively seeing that not a single bird of this species visits the Australian continent?

Before closing the references to the birds of this genus it might be well to devote a little attention to two of the same class, that make Wick river their principal resort, viz., the Water Hen and the Common Coot, both of which are well known to frequenters of our riverside.

The Water Hen ("Gallinula chloropus")

This interesting denizen of our rivers, burns, and lochs resides with us all winter. Should,

however, the winter be an exceptionally severe one, and our streams and burns get frozen, many of them remove to more congenial localities. The Water Hen is a very sociable bird, and takes kindly to the society of man. Those "Gallinules" are often procured for ornamentation of private ponds, and reserved stretches of rivers. Some lovely pairs are to be seen on the portion of the Kelvin which runs through the grove so famous in Scottish song, and also on the boating pond of Queen's Park, Glasgow. Those on the park-pond remain about the margin and feed from the visitors' hands, being great favourites with children.

The Common Coot ("Fulica Atra")

The Common Coot is found to inhabit the larger ponds and rivers of the British Islands. This wader, swimmer, and diver combined is indigenous to our county and is often seen on Wick river all the way up to its origin, the Loch of Watten being a favourite resort of the Coot. This grallatore with hard winters resorts to the coast, and with severe seasons of frost may be seen about Wick Bay.

During his earlier years, and even yet, your esteemed and popular contributor, the compiler of the "Pulteney Notes," during his wanderings along the margins of Wick river in search of any new treasures of nature must have been often in communion with the Water Hens and Coots, especially those birds which located themselves on the reaches of the river in the vicinity of the "Lover's Den." A waggish Bridge Street chemist once remarked that many poor devils about Wick and Pulteney dated their matrimonial misfortunes from the fascinations of the fair sex in that sylvan retreat. As our esteemed friend—the author of the "Notes"—has now entered the stage of the "sere and the yellow" he has no reason to guard against the machinations of those angelic frequenters of the "Den."

Before passing meantime from referring to birds of Wick river, we may say that the Water Ouzel or Dipper, ("Cinclus Aquaticus") once was a common bird about the middle reaches of the river, notably about the Cruives. Those were the days when the salmon roe and fly were abundant. The Dipper's mode of fishing almost exactly resembles that of the Kingfisher. They stand on a stone awaiting the appearance of either fry or water-beetles, close to the surface, when they dart down and capture their prey. Both of these birds if left unmolested will remain on the same perches for many hours.

Reed Bunting and Black-Headed Bunting

Again before finishing our references to bird life on Wick river we may note that the Reed Bunting ("Emberiza Schoeniclus") breeds regularly amongst the reeds in the marshes of the stream. "Cairnduna" here deserves special notice, and as he was the first to discover the nesting of the Fulmar Petrel on the east coast of Caithness, he has also discovered the first nest of the Black-Headed Bunting known in our county, in the locality—we presume—of the Cruives. Both the Black-Headed Bunting and the Reed Bunting resemble each other in one particular feature viz., the male of the former has its head black but not the female, while the female of the latter has a black head, but not the male. In consequence there is always an apparent hazard of taking the one species for the other. We have not the least doubt that "Cairnduna" knows both birds too well to cause misapprehension. The Black-Headed Bunting ("E. melanociphala") was only added to the Caithness list during the winter of 1875, one being then shot at Rockhill by Mr Eric S. Mackay and added to his Pulteney collection.

§20
John O'Groat Journal, November 24th, 1916

The appearance of many examples of our summer breeding birds around our shores and in inland districts during winter does not prove that they have not migrated in some manner or other, but have remained about their summer nesting localities all the year. Irrespective of where those birds may have bred, possibly in the summer Arctic zones, the more temperate climate of South Western Europe, or in the United Kingdom, they all have during autumn migrated from their breeding haunts in a southerly or westerly direction either for short or long distances. Some birds, whose ultimate destinations are probably the most southerly regions of South Africa, again pay us a short visit on their way north to take advantage of the Arctic summer. Many of those do not remain in Britain to breed—the Little Stint and many of its congeners, for instance. Others first pay us a call on their southern migration, but on their return northern journey remain to breed in Britain—the Wheatear ("Jackidiebeet") for illustration. This is a feature that confuses the observer anent [*sic*] the supposed continued appearance of many examples of our summer breeders during winter. To clear up this uncertainty it is necessary to explain that many of our well known Caithness breeding birds migrate south or west as soon as their progeny are able to accompany them. The places of our departed birds are now filled by a great influx of birds of the same species from the north, and which remain with us all winter, and until early spring, when the circumstances are reversed by our last autumn immigrants from the north (and which remained in Britain until early spring) taking their departure for (in many cases) the Arctic regions, and their other different breeding haunts. About the same time that our Northern visitors migrate from Britain, our summer-bred birds return North to their homelands to breed during our summer.

Probably the above remarks are a little laboured, but the problem of this intermediate migration is so delusive that we think a somewhat detailed reference is not out of place.

It is possible that even some of our home-bred sparrows are distinguished by the same characteristic as was referred to in a previous article with regard to the Lapwing—it may have been found that they had changed places with some sparrows from Siberia! To illustrate by one example how the simultaneous migration confused the earlier ornithologists we will take the case of the Oyster Catcher, commonly known in different districts by the local names of "Sea-Pies," "Willie Beebs" or "Mussel-Pickers."

The Oyster Catcher ("Haematopus Ostralegus")

Until the exchange of birds through intermediate migration was discovered—and this was only found out a few years ago—it was thought and confirmed that Oyster-Catchers left Britain entirely for a few weeks during the autumn of some years. The same birds again returned in increased numbers within a short time and remained over winter when once more they entirely disappeared for a few weeks during early spring. This erroneous theory gained credence through the early departure of our local birds in autumn and before our Siberian Oyster-Catchers had arrived, and further because of the early migration of our Arctic breeding birds a short time before our summer visitors from the South put in their appearance. In consequence a halo of mystery surrounded the movements of many species of birds, including our simple, unsuspicious and beautiful Oyster-Catchers. Britain is therefore for a brief period often entirely without a "Willie Beeb" during early autumn, and the same incident occurs some years in early spring.

The Hoopoe ("Upupa epops")

The Hoopoe has been recorded for more than two centuries as a frequent visitor to Great Britain. In spring it arrives on our southern and eastern coasts, and if unmolested it would become one of our indigenous species, but on every occasion of its appearance it is so persecuted by specimen hunters that the poor bird has no time to settle to breed. On the west of England the Hoopoe is not rare, but to the northern part of Britain it is rather an infrequent visitor, though it has occurred irregularly in both Sutherland and Caithness.

A few Hoopoes may occasionally visit the

north of Scotland, yet we have only two authenticated instances of it having been obtained in Caithness. A third bird has been reported, but as no data of its capture was given it counts for nothing, as without identification details it is useless for Museum purposes. A Hoopoe was shot at Durness, Sutherland, during May, 1886. Mr David Bruce wrote that it was "a straggler, only three birds having been got in the county for the last forty-six years." The first recorded capture was during the early summer of 1879, when a specimen was sent to the late Lewis Dunbar, Thurso, for preservation, but it seems that neither the date of its capture, nor the locality where it was obtained were noted by Mr Dunbar; at least there is no existing record of such data. We now come to record the second Hoopoe obtained in the county. To this specimen is attached a most reliable and minute description of its capture, which makes it a most trustworthy and valuable Caithness example. This specimen (a beautiful male) was obtained by Mr John Dunnett, manufacturer, Union Street, Pulteneytown, and presented by him to Wick Museum. The specimen in evidence was received from Donald Mackay, skipper of the fishing boat "Loch Loy" of Embo, on whose boat the bird had alighted while the craft was fishing twenty-five off the Caithness coast. This splendid specimen was preserved and most artistically set up by Mr Charles Kirk, taxidermist, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, and is now one of the ornaments of our Wick Collection of rare birds.

The Parrot Crossbill ("Loxia Pityo-psittacus")

The incident of the capture of the Hoopoe obtained by Mr Dunnet very much compared with that of the male of the only pair of Parrot Crossbills ever captured in Caithness, it also having flown on board a fishing boat when the boat was two miles off our coast. This bird had apparently unknown to the crew taken refuge in the boat's "den" and was ultimately found in one of the sleeping bunks. The recovery of this exceptionally rare addition to the avifauna of our county very much coincides with Mr Dunnet's possession of the Hoopoe, as the skipper of the Wick boat handed over the bird to the late Mr George Auld, chemist, who in turn sent it up to Dr Sinclair, who preserved it for his Museum.

A female Parrot Crossbill was found dead at Lyth shortly after the capture of the male on the fishing boat (they being apparently a mated pair). This bird was sent to the late Mr John Mackie, Wick, and we found in the records of the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh of 1862 that the Lyth bird was commented on by the Society, and a note embodied in their transactions of the appearance of the Parrot Crossbill in Caithness.

§21
John O'Groat Journal, December 1st, 1916

Although we have in a previous chapter referred to the Dotterel, yet there is an inexplicable mystery connected with the reported breeding of this bird in the vicinity of Wick, which necessitates further notice. It seems that Mr David Bruce (see Horne's "County of Caithness") was informed by the late Mr James Sutherland, taxidermist, Wick, that he (Sutherland) had for a period of successive years found the nests and eggs of Dotterel in the vicinity of the Burn o' Wester and Noss Head. As this rare Caithness autumn visitor has been seldom known to have remained even in the British Islands to breed, the mystery that surrounds Mr Sutherland's statement deepens.

We have now had indirect communication with Mr M'Nicol, gamekeeper, Ackergill, who states that in all his experience he never even once heard of either a Dotterel or its nest being got in Caithness. In consequence of Mr M'Nicol's vocation, he would be led to make many visits to both the Burn o' Wester and Noss Head during the breeding seasons and his statement throws some tangible doubts on the accuracy of Mr Sutherland's discoveries.

As the eggs of rare birds are valued in proportion to the frequent or infrequent discovery of their breeding haunts, especially if they are indigenous British birds, we will compare the present-day value of authenticated eggs taken from the few Dotterels' nests obtained within the United Kingdom. For instance, of the seventy-six species of British grallatores, the egg of the Dotterel is placed sixth highest in value on the lists of London dealers. This shows that only five others are of higher price than that of this bird. An egg taken from an authenticated British Dotterel's nest is always value for twenty shillings, and sometimes even more. When Dotterels' eggs are gathered promiscuously from all parts of the world, and stocked by London naturalists the eggs are never less than ten shillings each. Therefore if Mr Sutherland's statement were correct we think that as a taxidermist he threw away one of the chances of his life—at least from a monetary point—if he did not trade his "finds" with some important egg collector. However, I hope to live to learn that next spring my valued friend and collaborator, "Cairnduna," will during his peregrinations "haud North" and visit the reported breeding grounds of the Dotterel at the Burn o' Wester and Noss Head, he having a glance in the passing at his dearly-beloved Primula Scotica, to be found in either locality. With these hard times a few clutches of Dotterels' eggs would easily tot up to a useful sum.

The Spotted Sandpiper ("Totanus Macularius")

As far as our information goes, the above is one of the many Caithness birds which carries the simple legend of "Found in Dr Sinclair's collection." In consequence we have no reliable data to go on as to where the Doctor obtained the specimen. However, a general outline of its appearance and movements may be of interest. We find that it is only a summer visitant to Europe, and, excepting the eastern and south-eastern portions, is only a straggler. This rare visitor to our islands is only known to breed in Germany and other parts of Central Europe. An example of this species upon which no doubt rests has been obtained in Ireland, and was exhibited by Mr Frederick Curtis at a meeting of the British Ornithological Club on 15th February, 1899.

The Wood Sandpiper ("Totanus Glareola")

We were informed by the late Mr Alexander Waters, chemist (who knew all about Dr Sinclair's museum), that this rare Sandpiper was shot at the mouth of the Wick river by the late Mr John Henderson, senr., Willowbank, during the autumn of 1858. Dresser in his "Birds of Europe" records that in Great Britain it occurs here and there as a rare straggler during passage, there being only one instance on record of it having remained to breed in Britain. The Wood Sandpiper has been obtained in Aberdeenshire, and the late Mr Bond received eggs which he considered well authenticated from the vicinity of Elgin, probably from the nest referred to by Dresser. In England this bird is very rare, and in Ireland the first on record was shot in County Wicklow on August 23, 1885. Two more were shot near Tralee in August 1896, and one near Loch Cullin on September 5, 1898.

Neither Bruce nor Brown have referred to the

Wood Sandpiper as a Caithness grallatoris. Gray records only one instance of its occurrence on the West of Scotland, the specimen being shot near Bowling in the autumn of 1853. He adds, however, it has occurred several times in the eastern counties, and he cites one occurrence in Caithness; probably the bird then in Dr Sinclair's collection is the example to which he refers.

The Green Sandpiper ("Totanus Ochropus")

The late Mr Alexander Sutherland, game keeper, Ackergill, informed the writer that the specimen found in the Louisburgh Museum was shot by him at the mouth of the Burn of Wester in the winter of 1855, he having found it amongst a small flock of Dunlins and Purple Sandpipers. This bird is not uncommon on the east side of Scotland, and is of fairly frequent occurrence, but in the north of Scotland it is very rare. It is reasonable to assume that it occasionally breeds in Britain, although there is no proof of such being the case. This interesting Sandpiper is known in many localities as the "Little Green Shank."

Note

In "Cairnduna's" references on the Kittiwake in last week's "Notes" on the nesting habits of the "Faky" are of more value than merely a passing interest. As the Solan Goose, the Fulmar, and Kittiwake breed in colonies exclusively of their own species, the most isolated precipices are selected by those birds for their breeding haunts. It may be possible (but not at all probable) that the few pairs now found nesting at both Freswick and Noss Head may form a nucleus for new colonies on those northern Caithness cliffs. As far back as 1860 Henry Osborne wrote that there was not sitting room on the "Rowans" for those beautiful birds to nest on. It is quite a natural consequence for any overcrowded nidifying haunts to throw off any surplus birds, which after naturally returning to their "natal roosts" to breed find no room for them, then begin to find new breeding situations for themselves.

As the writer's personal observations on Caithness wild bird life covers over 60 years, he definitely states that to his personal knowledge, from the earliest date of observation, no Kittiwakes had bred anywhere on the east of Caithness, except on the "Rowans of Ulbster." Yet he does not doubt but now new colonies of "Fakys" — which must be of small dimensions — have been begun further north.

If we had a few more observers of wild bird life of "Cairnduna's" quality many new and interesting items of information on the wanderings and movements of wild birds would have been recorded, and many new species would no doubt have been added to the county list. The references in the "Notes" to the increasing numbers of Lapwings which are now occasionally seen during winter will be treated in a "note" to the next article.

§22
John O'Groat Journal, December 8th, 1916

There are twenty-six Caithness birds which of themselves have an interesting history, and which may be referred to in a few subsequent articles. Fifteen of these have given only one example each as immigrants, and specimens of the remaining eleven are recorded to have only twice visited Caithness. Many of our feathered visitors pay us only occasional visits, and often between those appearances long intervals intervene. For instance, the Pallas Sand Grouse have not visited Caithness—not even Europe—since 1889, and at their last visit seven specimens were obtained in the county. Two specimens, one of each of the above groups, two examples in the one case and only one in the other, will illustrate the long interval that elapsed between the first and last captures. From the time that Professor Wilson discovered the Brunnich Guillemot in Dr Sinclair's collection during his visit to Caithness in 1842, to the date of the latest addition to our county list, and also to our Wick Museum, viz., the Scarlet Bullfinch (1914) covered a period of seventy-two years. Often forty years occur between the visits of some birds to Britain; our beautiful Waxwing, for instance, being one of them.

We will now enumerate the specimens of which only one example has been found in Caithness, viz., the Mealy Redpoll, Black-tailed Godwit, Kingfisher, White's Thrush, Bewick's Swan,[19] Little Ringed Plover, Stone Curlew, Surf Scoter, American Bittern, Common Bittern, Little Bustard, Scarlet Bullfinch, Sabine's Gull, the New Ivory Gull, discovered by the late R. I. Shearer, and apparently, the Dotterel. The remaining eleven, of which we have had only two specimens each, are the Purple Heron, Brunnich's Guillemot, Hoopoe, Little Stint, Long-tailed Titmouse, Snowy Owl, Honey Buzzard, Buffon's Skua, Dusky Shearwater, Parrot Crossbill, and the Montagu or Ash-coloured Harrier.

The Waxwing ("Bombycilla Garrula")

Since the first recorded visit of the Waxwing to Britain in 1686 great influxes of them have visited our islands. Those migrations much resemble that of the Pallas Sand Grouse in both the numbers and the long periods that have elapsed between each visitation. For upwards of two centuries this charming bird has been known to have visited Western Europe and the British Islands, but only at irregular and long intervals, and sometimes, as in the autumns of 1686, 1830, 1834, 1849, 1866, 1872 and 1892, in considerable numbers, a few occasional stragglers appearing some years during the intervals of those years.

The Waxwing, a Circumpolar Species

As might be expected of circumpolar birds (which breed in both hemispheres) those that migrate to our shores would be from the extreme north of the European or Asiatic Continents. Seebohm found the Waxwing in great numbers at the mouth of the Petchora River and along the coasts of the Kara Sea. Wilson also found this species breeding at the extreme north of the American Continent. The visits of Waxwings have been found to be more to the northern and eastern portions of Britain than to the western side. During the autumn the food of the Waxwing consists chiefly of berries of many kinds, but with a distinct preference for those of the "roddan" tree.

Waxwings' Visits to Caithness

The first known specimen obtained in the county was shot at Rosebank during the autumn of 1849—the specimen being sent to Dr Sinclair's collection. On the 12th November, 1863, another made its appearance within the same grounds. In the winter of 1866-67 a pair haunted a corner of Mr Falconer's garden at the junction Francis Street and Sinclair Terrace. These were not captured, but apparently allowed to depart in peace to their Arctic summer home. The first two successive years after Mr Osborne's death, 1869-70, a pair of Waxwings for some time during the autumns of those years visited the "roddan" trees in the back garden of the County Buildings in Bridge Street. Those interesting visitors were carefully protected from being molested out of respect to the memory of our famous Caithness ornithologist. How Henry would have enjoyed the presence of those Waxwings if he had been alive, as he could have seen them feed from his bedroom window. No Waxwing has been recorded as having been seen in Caithness for the past thirty years. The red

wax-coloured spot found on the wing of this bird much resembles that of the bronze mark found on the wing of the Bronzed-Winged Pigeon of Australia, a specimen of which can be seen in the Mackay collection in the Wick Museum.

[Last autumn a waxwing frequented the garden of Bailie Simpson for some days, to the delight of that intelligent observer, and was also allowed to depart unharmed.]

The Mealy Redpoll ("Linota Linaria")

The Mealy Redpoll is certainly one of our rarest county birds. None of this species has been got in Sutherland, or otherwise recorded in the north of Scotland, except the specimen found in the Mackay collection in Pulteneytown. Mr D. Bruce wrote— "A bird of this species was got in the county and was preserved by Mr E. S. Mackay, and which remained in his collection until it was dispersed." Brown, Seebohm, and Popham discovered the breeding haunts of this beautiful little wanderer to Caithness to be far into the Arctic circle, and of the 110 breeding species discovered by them in Northern Siberia the Mealy Redpoll was one of the most interesting. The specimen under review was shot by Mr James Harper, fishcurer, Pulteneytown, in the stackyard of the late Mr Donald Nicholson, Auldwick, on January 2, 1870, during a severe snowstorm. This little stranger attracted attention by its peculiar movements. It was found amongst a mixed flock of linnets, twites, and snow buntings.

Much could yet be written about our seven wild geese, fourteen wild ducks, eleven beautiful gulls—six of which are indigenous—and the interesting four grebes. Also our fascinating families of titmice, woodpeckers, warblers, flycatchers, buntings, and finches. But the most noble genus of our Caithness avifauna are the series of our twenty raptores, which include our eagles, falcons and buzzards, with our hawks, harriers, and owls. Many of those raptores have been known to have bred in the county for ages, returning yearly to the same eyries (eagles, for instance). Although the Peregrine Falcon is one of the most cosmopolitan birds in the world, yet apparently the same pair has been known for years to occupy the same spot as an eyrie on some of our inaccessible Caithness cliffs, but now unhappily it can scarcely be called one of our indigenous raptors.

Concluding Notes

The protection of game and the relentless cruelty of our gamekeepers with their greed for contributions to their "gable museums," and the filthy lucre received for the skulls periodically exhibited, has contributed to the annihilation (almost) of our eagles, falcons, buzzards, hawks, and owls. Fancy, to compare the value of a grouse to that of a Golden Eagle, or that of a salmon to the value of a White-tailed Eagle or an Osprey! Our two eagles have been known to have bred in the county—until the past thirty or forty years—for past ages, so long that in the case of the White-tailed Eagle its length of time became a Caithness proverb—so that when anyone asked how long they might stay at a certain place, the answer often was—"As lang as 'e 'Erne' bade i' 'e Craig o' Dinnad." We have no doubt that also the noble Golden Eagle during its breeding existence amongst the Morven mountains had an equal record of antiquity.

The death of Henry Osborne in 1868, and that of Robert I. Shearer in 1871 left blanks which have no appearance of being filled. Those distinguished observers of Caithness bird life, for the ten years previous to 1862, added fifteen new species to the county list, which, added to that compiled by Charles Thomson, raised the total to 206. Comparing such efforts with the results of the following fifty-two years we find that with the assistance of the taxidermists, six game-keepers, and five local observers of bird life, the number of new specimens added is only twenty-eight, which now brings the total for Caithness up to 234, the Pink-footed Goose and Scarlet Bullfinch being the last added.

Any statistics cannot be complete regarding the appearance of new species, as without their presence being made known to practical observers many rare birds may yearly frequent our seacoast and uplands without our knowledge of their visits. As we have added much of our personal experience to other outside matter while compiling those notes on Caithness birds, if any statements not in strict accordance with known facts have crept in we hope to be excused by any of your indulgent readers who may have taken the trouble to read them

Footnote:

(19) This is another example of Mackay's lack of attention to detail – elsewhere (see contributions §16, §39 and §44) he makes it clear that he was aware of three

occurrences of Bewick's Swan in Caithness.

Chapter 3

NOTES ON CAITHNESS BIRD LIFE

SECOND SERIES

§23
John O'Groat Journal, October 5th, 1917

The Golden Eagle, Aquila chrysaetus
(*A.chrysaetos*)

The presence of the Golden Eagle gives an interesting tone of ornithological character to any district wherein it may have its eyry, [*sic*] and is an ornament to its precipices. This noble raptore [*sic*] has from time immemorial been associated with majesty and nobility. As the bird combines independence with courage the Red Indian warrior glories in his eagle's plume as the most distinguished ornament with which he can adorn himself. Likewise the dress of a Highland chief is considered by him incomplete without this badge of courage and dignity, and which also indicates high degree.

The Golden Eagle's partial immunity from extinction

How a bird of this size has been able to retain its place in our avifauna is a matter of surprise. This immunity from slaughter, or even extermination, as a British indigenous raptore, is probably attributable to the inaccessible character of its breeding haunts, combined with the bird's vigilant outlook for enemies.

Before referring to its continued but chequered existence amongst the mountains of the West of Scotland and the Western Highlands, we find that Willoughby wrote that this interesting bird in his day bred on the cliffs of Snowdon, and he actually describes an eyry in Derbyshire in 1668. Walls, fully a century later, recorded that the Golden Eagle bred on the Cheviots, while Sir Wm. Jardine stated that in 1838 it was found breeding on the precipices of Westmorland.

Breeding in England and Wales

It is certain that the Golden Eagle in past ages bred in some parts of both England and Wales, but among the latest statistics, by Walpole Bond in his book "Bird Life in Wales" (1903)—no reference is made that at that time this bird bred or was even seen amongst the Welsh mountains. Persecution of this feathered ornament has certainly done its work, and now there is little chance of ever seeing the "Aquila Chrysaetos" an indigenous inhabitant of either England or Wales, where it still lingered as such till 1855. In Ireland we have the authority of Mr R.I.Ussher that this magnificent raptorial bird once bred in a few places in Mayo, Donegal, Galway, and Kerry, but those eyries have long since been abandoned, and those Irish counties now know the Golden Eagle no more. During the early years of last century we find that a few pairs bred on the precipices of the Scottish Border, but the last known occupied eyry amongst those South of Scotland fastnesses was in 1818, and no eyry of this eagle has been discovered in these Southern districts since.

Eyries of the Hebrides

Before touching on the Golden Eagle's continued but sparse existence in the remote Highlands of Scotland, including Caithness and Sutherland, we will refer to its existence until about sixty years ago amongst the mountainous districts of the Hebrides (both Inner and Outer), principally in the imposing precipices of Skye; and also in some of the western mountains of the shires of Inverness and Ross, including both the Bens of Nevis and Wyvis. The gradual trend of this majestic bird to its last sanctuary in the extreme Northern Highlands (and to avoid persecution) also depleted those western mountain solitudes, with their weird grandeur, of their principal feathered ornament.

Protection by Landlords

Apparently the fast refuge of this romantic bird before its final extermination in Britain was the Morven range of mountains, which border the

shires of Sutherland and Caithness. There are still a few pairs remaining of the Golden Eagle, strictly preserved from molestation by both the Dukes of Sutherland and Portland, to whom all those interested in the preservation of this fascinating eagle owe a debt of gratitude.

The few pairs protected by the Duke of Portland have their eyries in his Langwell forest, which enhances the Caithness side of the Morven range. Apart from those Morven eyries we find that a few pairs are here and there given sanctuary throughout the North of Scotland. For this protection so generously accorded by a few bird-loving landlords, all naturalists should feel grateful.

While following the forced northerly migration of this persecuted bird, and only while entering one or other of the romantic passes that this interesting raptore begins to be found in evidence, yet not until the most solitary aspects of their mountain scenery is approached does the Golden Eagle appear to be at home.

Persecution by Flockmasters

This noblest of our Caithness raptores for the past seventy years has been gradually decreasing, principally because of the bird's depredations amongst the flocks during the lambing season, and which corresponds with the time that the eaglets appear. At this season every device is employed by flockmasters, and much expense incurred by offering paying rewards for their destruction. Interesting statistics were culled from the archives of the Dunrobin Estate Office during the early thirties of last century, which showed the number destroyed during four of the Golden Eagle's breeding periods. Those figures showed that from March, 1831, till March, 1834, inclusive, in the county of Sutherland alone, one hundred and seventy old birds, with fifty three young birds and numerous eggs, were destroyed!

The Dunnet Head Golden Eagles

Dunnet Head, that great breeding resort of many rare Caithness birds, had, up to about 1855, an eyry of the Golden Eagle, which had made this famous headland its breeding haunt for many successive years previous to that period. We have the authority of an intelligent and much respected resident of Dunnet for this information. This gentleman has also contributed many fascinating and valuable notes to the writer, all of which will appear through these articles later on. Our Dunnet correspondent's notes will prove to be of great ornithological value to any of those who are interesting themselves in the disappearance of some of Britain's now fast vanishing birds, especially those of Caithness which come under that category. Collectors, especially oologists, are greatly responsible for the (almost) extermination of our eagles. When we know of the temptations thrown in the path of estate servants and others for both the skins and eggs of rare birds, we wonder that a single specimen exists in their usual haunts.

Golden Eagle's Cosmopolitan Range

With the exception of the Peregrine Falcon and the Herring Gull, there is no British bird so cosmopolitan as the Golden Eagle. It is spread throughout Europe, Asia, North Africa, and North America. We find that it is distributed in Europe from Lapland to Spain, and across Asia to Kamchatka and Japan, and southwards to the Himalayas, whilst in the New World it is found from the Arctic Regions to Patagonia. While still referring to the world-wide range of the Golden Eagle, it is most peculiar that it is not found in Greenland. Neither does Slater in his "Birds of Iceland" take notice of it, but Gatke in his "Birds of Heligoland" describes that during his fifty years of unbroken residence on the island only four specimens were seen or captured, and they were young birds as it were resting while passing. We find only one doubtful appearance of it in the Shetland Islands, as when Dr Laurence Edmondston wrote his book, "Views of the Zetland Islands" in 1809 he does not mention the bird. Yet in the "Fauna of Shetland," written by the late Thomas Edmondston in 1844, he noted that this eagle was a very rare straggler. But another confusion arises, as Dr Saxby in his "Birds of Shetland" (1874) writes that he never saw or even heard of a Golden Eagle being got or seen in Shetland. (To be continued.)

§24
John O'Groat Journal, October 12th, 1917

The White-Tailed Eagle (Haliaetus Albicilla)

This eagle is also known by the names of "Sea Eagle," "Fishing Eagle," and "Erne". The noble bird still retains a place amongst Britain's fast vanishing avifauna, although now threatened with extermination. The Erne was many years ago widely dispersed over the British Islands, but such is not the case at the present day, as now it can scarcely be ranked as one of Britain's indigenous raptores.

Eyries on Ailsa Craig and the Bass Rock

In bygone days there were eyries of the Sea Eagle on both Ailsa Craig and the Bass Rock; but those haunts were abandoned long since. Many eyries of the White-Tailed Eagle were occupied on the West Coast of Scotland up to about 1870, when they were gradually deserted, but two important breeding resorts were inhabited for a few years later. One of these was situated on the largest of the Shiant Islands, in the Minch, and the other on the breast of one of the pinnacled stack rocks on the west of Skye, called the "Macleod's Maidens."

Disappearance from Shetland

The Sea Eagle has been gradually forsaking Shetland since 1868, the last eyry in Unst being deserted in that year. Dr Saxby stated that the remains of this eyry could be seen for many years afterwards in one of the high cliffs of Lund. One of the answers received to an enquiry by the writer (and inserted in the "Shetland News" some time ago) was from Mr Wm. Harry Greenaway, Foula, in which he says:— "I can only speak for myself, as my knowledge goes no further than Foula. On enquiry I find it is between sixty and seventy years since this eagle had its eyry on the 'Kame' here, though there are records amongst the islanders of its occasional visits, the last one being about twenty years ago."

West Yell Eyrie

We are much indebted to a Pulteney fishcurer for some interesting details of the West Yell breeding resort of the White-Tailed Eagle.[20] This haunt was about a couple of miles from his Whalfirth herring station, and was situated on a precipice known as the "West Neap of Yell." A pair of Ernes had bred in those cliffs during successive years for ages previous to my informant's experience of the district, which was during the early and middle eighties. The cliff on which this eyry was situated is on the estate of West Sandwick, the factor of which at that time was Mr George Keith, a native of Castletown, Caithness.

Mr Keith's Protection of Eagles

Mr Keith for many years took a keen interest in the Ernes, and seemed to know the pair which annually returned to their breeding haunt as the same couple which for a long series of succeeding years occupied the old nest. During the few years of my informant's occupancy of this herring station he and Mr Keith took a mutual interest in those birds. The factor reserved a small rabbit warren for their benefit during their breeding season, and which was in close proximity to the "Neap". My informant stated that on one occasion he saw the old birds with their pair of eaglets feeding on the carcase of a stranded porpoise, and within full sight of the station workers.

Last Existing Shetland Eyries

There were eyries of the Fishing Eagle on the cliffs of the extreme points of the Mainland of Shetland, namely, one on Fitful Head, near Dunrossness, and the other on the Rammni Stacks off Rona's Voe, Northmavine. The one at Fitful Head is reminiscent of Sir Waiter Scott's "Pirate," as the scene of the escapades of "Norna, the Witch." From other answers to our inquiries we find that both the Fitful Head and the Rammni Stacks eyries were abandoned about the same time as those on Foula—sixty or seventy years ago. It thus appears that the last remaining breeding haunt of the White-Tailed Eagle known to exist in the Shetland Islands was the one on the West Neap of Yell, and which has been already referred to. From a note from a West Sandwick correspondent we find that the West Yell eyry was regularly occupied until near the end of last century, when it was also abandoned, thus

forming the final occupation in Shetland, of a Sea Eagle's breeding haunt. The desertion of Shetland by the Erne was not because of its persecution, through the protection of game, as these islands were without this fatal dominating factor, there being neither game nor gamekeepers on that side of the "Roost." Neither did the natives look on this fascinating bird as vermin, but the reverse, as its presence was generally and generously respected by them wherever it had its eyries.

Albino White-Tailed Eagle

A most interesting capture, and one of great ornithological importance, was that one of the West Yell eyry of the 1884 brood which was obtained near Burravoe, Yell during the early autumn of 1885, which proved to be a complete albino in every detail. Its plumage all over was of a silvery white, and without the faintest trace of any other colour. The legs, toes, and bill were also of the same white as its plumage; even the pupils of the eyes were red, the same as occur in all albinos. This bird was sent down to Lerwick for sale, and was purchased by Mr John T. Garriock, the curator of the Museum, who after getting it preserved, deposited it in the institution on loan, where it remained until the autumn of 1887. At that time an English visitor—who apparently knew the value of the bird—purchased it for £50. This rare specimen of the Erne was shortly afterwards sold to the Norwich Museum, where it still rests.

One of the reasons why our informant inferred that this albino was a production of the West Yell eyry was that from information gathered from the natives of the locality one of the eaglets of the 1884 clutch had a peculiar white appearance. What made the Shetland albino of such exceptional value was the fact that only another albino of this species is on record as having been obtained in the United Kingdom previous to 1885. This example was recorded by Mr St.John as being got in Sutherlandshire in 1848, and now forms part of the Dunrobin Castle collection. It seemed that Orkney was not a favourite resort of the Fishing Eagle's. The absence of high precipices accounts for the few eyries found amongst the islands. An early record of the presence of the White-Tailed Eagle in Orkney is contained in a curious little book written by Mr Bullock in 1812. In it he takes notice of an eyry of this bird on a tremendous cliff called the West Craigs in the island of Hoy, the towering rocks of which rose sheer perpendicular from the sea to a height of fully twelve hundred feet.

Having now disposed of the existence of the Sea Eagle during early and later times amongst the precipices of both Shetland and Orkney, and its final desertion from these islands, we will, as it were, cross over, and endeavour to describe the movements of this bird on the west coast of Scotland, and shall do so in our next article. (To be continued.)

Footnote

(20) Mackay is, of course, referring to himself here.

§25
John O'Groat Journal, October 19th, 1917

The White-Tailed Sea Eagle (continued)

The continued destruction and fiendish persecution of the Erne on the West Coast of Scotland during the middle of last century, especially around the localities of the seaboard cliffs of Skye, were on a par with the slaughter of the Golden Eagle in Sutherland thirty years earlier, as shown in a previous article of this series.

Determined Destruction by Skye landlords

That the West Coast landed proprietors were determined to exterminate this feathered ornament of their precipices is shown by reliable statistics. From these figures it appeared that the number of Sea Eagles wantonly destroyed was appalling.

It was shown that every horrid artifice and device were resorted to. Not only were those landholders not content with the birds slain by the agency of gamekeepers and vermin traps, but they also resorted to the degrading action of poisoning derelict fish and carrion. Reports received by Dr Dewar from two gamekeepers only in Skye show most outrageous figures. One of those paid exterminators describes some of the means he employed to carry out his ignoble work, the result of which was the destruction of fifty-seven of those interesting birds on one estate alone. The report of the other ruthless violator of Nature's laws, shows that within eight years he had either shot, trapped, or poisoned fifty-two adult birds, besides many eaglets, and had also collected or destroyed a large number of eggs. Captain Cameron of Glenbrittle, Skye, reported in 1868 that he was instrumental in destroying sixty-two White-Tailed Eagles within a few years. The above statistics are from a report in Gray's "Birds of the West of Scotland" (1871).

The concrete summary of the above figures give a 171 adult birds and probably as many eaglets, with the addition of a large number of eggs. In those three reports alone a large number of bird's eggs are represented, yet probably as many more were destroyed in the other unreported districts of Skye and Wester Ross. Unfortunately no bird of this description could withstand such persecution without being exterminated.

The Dunnet Head Eyries

While abstaining meantime from making further reference to the Sea Eagle on our own account, we are of opinion that it is now advisable to refer to the notes received from our Dunnet correspondent relating to the Dunnet Head White-Tailed Eagles.

These notes are of such interest, and their details so reliable that they form an ornithological asset of much value. As we have the consent of our correspondent, we cannot do better than give them in their entirety. They are as follows:—

> "There were within living memory three eyries on the Dunnet Head cliffs—one between Easter Head and Sinigoe, at a place called the "Fa'in Stanes", and two west of Easter Head—one between Brigga Head and Ashigoe, and the other at Ashigoe (which means the eagle's goe). The eyry at the "Fa'in Stanes' was in a 'skeoch', a kind of shelf with over-hanging rock in a small bight in the face of the cliff, and was robbed more than once of its young birds and eggs. On the last occasion that it was harried a man was let down the face of the cliff by means of a rope, and after securing the eaglets (not without difficulty and personal injury) was lowered to the base of the cliffs, where some men in a boat were waiting to receive him and his spoil. Tradition relates that after the rope had been fastened to the body of the climber, as he hesitated to make the descent, he had to be pushed over the edge of the cliff, and that when he eventually reached the bottom it was found that there had been only one strand of rope supporting him, the others having been cut by rubbing against edges of the sharp projecting rock. After this invasion and spoilation of their home the eagles at the 'Fa'in Stanes' took alarm and finally abandoned the eyry. The eagles which nested on the west side of the headland now (if not previously) also deserted their Dunnet Head habitat. As far as can be ascertained from some of the older inhabitants, who remember the taking of the eaglets from the 'Fa'in Stanes' eyry, the exodus of the eagles from the Dunnet Head cliffs dates back fifty-five years or thereabouts, from November (1916). The eagle which inhabited the cliffs of the headland was the Erne, or

White-Tailed Eagle, but the Golden Eagle also had its abode there. The eyry at the 'Fa'in Stanes' was said to be the home of a pair of this species. "That the Erne was at one time a familiar bird to the inhabitants of Dunnet may be inferred from a saying that still survives in this district. If a child disagreed with its fellows, and sat by himself sulking, he had an analogue in the solitary eagle sitting on its eyry. 'E's sittin' 'ere lek 'e Erne on 'e Craig o' Dinnad,' the old folks would say of such a child. At Hollandmake and Durran there are hillocks known by the older inhabitants as 'Ernie's hillocks,' elevations that the eagles frequently used as halting places on their way inland in search of their prey. At one time the fishermen of Dunnet used to catch seafowl for the sake of their feathers, for which there was then a profitable market in the town of Thurso. The birds were caught with a floating line at the end of which were attached several hooks, having suitable baits. The line was pulled after the boat and kept in the surface by cork floats. One day, as some fishermen were plying their avocation, an eagle swooped down upon the bait, with the result of the hooks getting fixed in its talons, and was thus held fast. The men had great difficulty in getting their unexpected capture on board, and it was only after the bird had been surrounded with several folds of a jacket that it could with safety be taken into the boat." [21]

The above notes are certainly a very valuable contribution to the history of the waning years of the existence of the White-Tailed Eagle in Caithness, and carries with them the most reliable data of this now almost vanished bird from the British Islands.

Probably the Last of the Caithness Ernes

During the summer of 1888 a superbly plumaged female White-Tailed Eagle (the females of all the rapacious species being much larger than the males), was shot in the vicinity of the Ord of Caithness. This bird was sent down to a Wick merchant for disposal, and was obtained for the Pulteney collection. At the dispersal of this collection in 1889, this eagle, elaborately cased, was bought by the late Mr Alexander Scott, at a high price. In all likelihood this White-Tailed Eagle was last obtained or even seen in Caithness. (To be continued.)

Footnote:

(21) J.A.Harvie-Brown and T.E.Buckley in their *A Vertebrate Fauna of Sutherland, Caithness and West Cromarty* (1887) record that John Wolley, the great Victorian oologist, took the eggs from a pair of White-tailed Eagles at Dunnet Head in 1849, and that the following season the birds had shifted to another site a quarter of a mile away. In all probability this is the event described by Mackay's correspondent.

§26
John O'Groat Journal, October 26th, 1917

OWLS

The Great Snowy Owl (Surnia Nyctea)

This interesting species is of very rare occurrence in the British Islands, it being more particularly a native of the countries verging on the Arctic Circle. The Snowy Owl was first discovered and added to the British list by Dr Edmonston, Unst, Shetland, during 1811. A few specimens have been captured both in Shetland and Orkney, but only twelve examples have been reported as having been obtained on the mainland of Scotland, from the time of its first appearance as a British bird (in 1811) till Christmas, 1906, thereby covering a period of ninety-five years. It may be interesting to state where these specimens were obtained in Scotland, with the year of their capture. In Caithness there was one each in 1850, 1862, 1867, and 1906; in Sutherland, Kilmarnock, Renfrew, Port Glasgow, Pollokshields, one each during 1863; on the upper reaches of the Clyde, two, the same year (1863); and only a solitary specimen was obtained, and that in the vicinity of Inverness, in 1868. Of the twelve specimens recorded in Scotland it is shown that seven of them were captured in 1863.

Snowy Owl Found Breeding in Shetland and Orkney

Mr Bullock in 1812, during his tour to both Orkney and Shetland, seems to have been the first to discover that this Owl bred in those northern islands. Dr Edmonston that same year presented a specimen to Mr Bullock, which induced this gentleman to search for himself, when he procured several examples, two of which are now in Edinburgh Museum.

Probably the last Snowy Owl procured in Orkney was captured on the island of Sanda, and sent alive to Dr Neil, Canonmills, Edinburgh. The following are Dr Neil's remarks thereon:— "In the beginning of May, 1835, I received at Canonmills Cottage a live specimen of the Snowy Owl. It came in a sort of crib by a trading vessel from Orkney, and arrived in tolerably good plight. A letter was also received from Robert Scarth, Esq. of Skae, Sanda, informing me that about the middle of the preceding month of April a very heavy north-wester had set in, with heavy showers of hail and sleet. A large bevy of rooks, snow-flakes, swans, golden-eye ducks, and other northern strangers were driven by the storm to the island. A day or two afterwards a large Owl was seen prowling about the rabbit links. Mr Scarth concluded that from the description given of its size and appearance that it must have been a Snowy Owl—a rare visitor to the Orkneys. He therefore shot it, but only maimed one of its wings, which afterwards healed."

Four Snowy Owls obtained in Caithness

The capture in Caithness of one of those rare owls in 1850 is recorded by Gray, but no details are given.[22] The obscurity of its capture deepens, in consequence of the fact that no Owl of this species was referred to by Thomson in 1841 as being in Dr Sinclair's collection; and the next specimen, as stated by Osborne, was obtained many years later (1862). Therefore, only on the authority of Gray do we accept the 1850 example as one of the four Caithness Snowy Owls.

The second specimen was found in an exhausted condition in the Moss of Killimster on the 12th of November, 1862. This bird was sent down to the late Mr Henry Osborne, who kept it alive in the back garden of the County Buildings until the following spring, when it escaped. The third example was a beautiful adult bird, almost pure white, and supposed to be more in keeping with the name of the bird (Snowy Owl) than any of the other eleven specimens referred to as having been obtained in Scotland. As young birds of this species have much of their nesting grey mixed with their plumage until their fourth year—as is the case with many raptorial birds—this specimen was certainly a complete adult. This magnificent Snowy Owl was found in a vermin trap between Snotterfield and Halsary by one of the Duke of Portland's keepers on the 25th October, 1867, and was bought by the owner of the Pulteney collection, where it remained until its dispersal in 1899.[23]

The last Snowy Owl obtained in Scotland

The last of those rare Arctic visitors obtained in Scotland was got on the 25th December, 1906,

and was sent to the late Mr Lewis Dunbar for preservation. The 1906 specimen carries with it a doubly interesting value, not only because of its being the last captured in Scotland, but from the incident of it being got in the county of Caithness. We will take the liberty of quoting an extract from a letter in our possession lately received from Mr Ronald M'Nichol, Ackergill, and is as follows:—"A Snowy Owl was sent in to Mr Dunbar, Thurso, for preservation on Christmas Day, 1906. Mr Dunbar being from home, I preserved and set up the bird, being one of Mr Dunbar's assistants at that time. This bird appeared to have been the same as seen in the vicinity of Altnabreac a few weeks previously, and had been wounded in an attempt to capture it. This specimen, after being cased, passed into the possession of Mr Keith Murray, solicitor, Thurso, where it still remains, so far as I know to the contrary."

Mr M'Nichol thus holds to his credit the preservation of the last Snowy Owl got in Caithness, or Scotland, or probably even in the United Kingdom up to 1906. Yet in a note received from Mr James M'Nichol, Kildonan Lodge, Kildonan, Sutherland-shire, he states that although no other specimens have been got since 1906, he has no doubt but this Owl occasionally visits Caithness, as he has on several occasions come across its "vomit-pellets," and from their substance and size, consisting of the spine rings and the hair of the white hare, he had no doubt but that they were emitted by this Owl. As Mr M'Nichol is an observer of great intelligence in natural history objects, we have taken for granted that his observations are correct with regard to the yet erratic appearance in the county of the Snowy Owl during later years.

We still hope that Mr M'Nichol or Mr Donald Mackay, postmaster, Shebster, with the help of his friends the Reay game keepers, may in the near future be able to send us a specimen for the Wick Museum, and which will be gratefully received. (To be continued.)

Footnotes:

(22) Clearly, if the bird had been captured in 1850 it cannot have been recorded in Thompson's list, which was prepared in 1841 (and published in 1845). There are several published references to this bird, the earliest being in Morris (1950) where the birds is described as having been taken 'near Caithness' in 1850.

(23) This appears to be a type-setting error. Mackay's collection was put up for sale in October 1889 – see Appendix 1. Note also that contribution §25 gives the date correctly as 1889.

§27
John O'Groat Journal, November 2nd, 1917

OWLS (continued)

With the exception of the Nightjars, there is no genus of bird that create such dread amongst superstitious people as owls. These birds are purely wanderers of the night, as they seldom appear except at late dusk, and again conceal themselves at early dawn. The owl's habitat is partly in solitary mountain districts and in the obscure crannies of cliff bases; and at lower levels, amongst the ruins of ancient towers and castles, church steeples being sometimes commandeered during nesting time.

An Unst Legend

A legend was carried down for many years in the locality of Hermaness, Unst. At the time the first Snowy Owl was discovered in 1811 the natives of that district were for many months afraid to leave their hamlets between dusk and dawn because of the ghost of a great headless gull which was seen nightly flying around. All owls in flight look like a headless gull, because of the close formation of the head to the body. In the case of a large light-coloured bird like the Snowy Owl the cause of the impression became obvious. But not until Dr Edmonston had shot the bird did the spellbound natives become gradually disillusioned. During the writer's visit to the North of Shetland in 1869 an old native of Unst narrated the above legend to him. Dr Saxby also slightly referred to this incident.

An Amusing Sheriff Court Case

An amusing incident happened in connection with the 1867 Caithness example of the Snowy Owl. During the Industrial Exhibition of 1868, which was held in the Temperance Hall that year, there was exhibited from the Pulteney Collection a case containing the complete set of the Caithness Owls (five in number), the Snowy Owl being conspicuous in the centre, and labelled as having been got at Wester Watten on October 25th 1867. This announcement probably attracted the attention of some of the Wester Watten estate authorities. A few months after the Exhibition was opened the exhibitor of the case of Owls received a letter, apparently from the estate office, intimating that at the close of the Exhibition the Snowy Owl in his possession would have to be returned on the gamekeeper from Snotterfield calling for it, as it was intended for the Welbeck Abbey Collection. This request the exhibitor both resented and ignored, and refused to surrender the bird. At the close of the Exhibition the gamekeeper from whom the bird was received called, and offered one pound for the delivery of the specimen. This offer was scornfully refused. A few days after the owner was summoned to the Sheriff Court, before Sheriff Russel, the gamekeeper being prosecutor, who claimed the recovery of the Snowy Owl, on his paying one pound; or, failing that, five pounds' damages plus expenses.

The Case Debated

The prosecutor pleaded that he only sent in the bird for preservation, and had intended to call for it from time to time, but delayed doing so until it was placed in the Exhibition by the defender. The prosecutor also pathetically pleaded that if this Owl was not recovered it would endanger the continuance of his employment on the estate.

The defender made a point of getting the prosecutor to admit that for over three years he had occasionally supplied him with specimens of birds, for all of which the defender had paid him handsomely in cash on each delivery, and on handing in the Snowy Owl now in dispute he was paid ten shillings. On hearing this admission by the prosecutor the Sheriff threw out the case, his lordship remarking that if this bird was wanted for the Welbeck Abbey Collection it would now have to be bought from the defender at his price, and only if he chose to sell it, as the subject in dispute was now his honest and legal property.

The Snowy Owl is circumpolar, Seebohm and Brown having found it breeding in Northern Siberia, and Wilson on the extreme northern limit of the American Continent. This Owl has only on two occasions been known to have bred in the United Kingdom—in Orkney—while in its wild state. Two cases are, however, known of its having bred while in a state of captivity.

The White or Barn Owl (Strix Flammea)

This Owl is also known as the "Screech" or "Church Owl." It breeds very sparingly in Caithness, and in Orkney and Shetland it is almost unknown. The specimen which was in the Pulteney Collection was obtained at Watten by the late Alexander Gunn, game keeper. He sent it in to the late Sergeant Sandison, who donated it to the local collection in Breadalbane Crescent.

Long Eared Owl (Otus Vulgaris)

This is probably the most common Owl in Caithness. It often builds its nest in those deserted by Wood Pigeons or Hooded Crows. Few breed in the county in comparison to the numbers which visit Caithness as autumnal migrants, yet more of them breed than is generally known. The Long Eared Owl has been known to have bred in Orkney, but in Shetland it is known as only an occasional visitor on migration.

Short Eared Owl (Otus Brachyotus)

This Owl is more an inhabitant of the open country, and prefers the ground for nidifying purposes, its nest often being discovered under a heather or broom bush, or in a dense cluster of ferns. One peculiarity of this Owl is the soft, silky and downy feel of its plumage, and the circles or wreaths around its face are shaped with ferruginous coloured feathers. Its ear tufts are also much shorter than those of the previous specimen. Anything appears to come welcome to this bird in the way of food—rats, mice, moles, young pigeons or finches are all drawn on as occasion offers.

Tawny Owl (Uluba Stidula)

This example of our county Owls is also well known as the "Hooter," and is quite common about wooded districts. Stirkoke Lower Plantation is one of its favourite haunts in Wick parish, and it breeds yearly. A hollow in the trunk of some decayed tree when covered with ivy is one of its favourite haunts. During the daytime the Tawny Owl remains concealed, and appears to dislike the sunlight more than any other of its congeners, it depending largely on its sense of hearing. The Long-Eared, the Short Eared and the Tawny Owls which were in the Pulteney Collection were all obtained on the Stirkoke Estate by the late Mr Peter Stenhouse, gamekeeper.

Comparison of American and British Owls

It will be seen from the latest edition published by the "American Ornithological Union" that twenty-three species of Owls are the number stated in their catalogue. On the British list the numbers of Owls of all kinds are fourteen. Only four of our Caithness Owls appear on the American list, viz., the Long-Eared, the Short Eared, the Barn and the Snowy. The Tawny Owl does not appear to be an inhabitant of the New World. Neither does it appear in Siberia. It is most interesting and peculiar to note that the four British Owls which are shown to occur on the American list with four out of our complete list of five Caithness species. (To be continued.)

§28
John O'Groat Journal, November 9th, 1917

Falcons, Hawks and Harriers

A reference to the habits of the four Caithness falcons and also to the hawks and harriers of the county, may be interesting to many of your readers who only know them generally as hawks. There are four species of falcons proper which belong to the Caithness list viz., the Peregrine Falcon, the Kestrel, the Merlin, and the Hobby—the latter being the rarest of the four. The Jer Falcon and the Goshawk being only found in Dr Sinclair's collection, and without any trustworthy data, doubts were held that these two specimens were not obtained in Caithness, and this mistrust was also entertained by both Shearer and Osborne.

Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus)

The Peregrine Falcon is the only bird of those four falcons which breed on the ledges of sea-coast cliffs. It often finds its quarry amongst the rock-pigeons, puffins, auks, and guillemots—its next-door neighbours—some of these birds' breeding ledges being in close proximity to the Peregrine's eyry. The Kestrel, which is more of a migrant than the others, is arboreal in its nesting habits; and the Merlin and the Hobby breed about the moors or small rocky cliffs of the interior. The case in the E. S. Mackay collection in Wick Museum and entitled "Home of the Merlin" shows an interesting illustration of the nesting habitats of this bird. The only bird of the real Hawk family found in Caithness is the Sparrow-hawk; and the other short-winged birds of the raptores found in the county are the Hen-Harrier, the Marsh-Harrier and the Ash-Coloured or Montague's Harrier, all of which breed amongst the moors or marshes. The Sparrow-hawk, like the Kestrel, is also arboreal in its nesting habits, its nest being frequently one abandoned by a rook.

The distinguishing features between the falcons and the hawks and harriers is that the falcon's wings extend to the full length of the tail, whereas those of the latter species are only prolonged to half the distance.

Peregrine Falcon's Eyry in South Stacks

More than fifty years ago, for three years in succession, a pair of Peregrine Falcons had their eyry in one of the South Stacks, Wick. John Swanson, the most daring cragsman ever produced from amongst the Pulteney boys (if still alive, now in Western Canada), harried their eyry the third season, and carried the fledglings down to Henry Osborne, who reared them in the back yard of the County Buildings, and from where he ultimately set them at liberty.

The following year a Peregrine's eyry was discovered in the face of Ulbster Head—erected probably by the South Stack pair of the previous season. The eyry was preserved as much as possible from annoyance by that well-known observer, admirer and writer on Caithness bird life, the late Mr Robert Innes Shearer. A pair of Peregrines continued to breed at Ulbster for many years in succession, but they ultimately disappeared, being probably trapped or shot by some gamekeeper, and nailed up over his kennel door (designated the "gamekeepers' museum") amongst other noble preservers of the true balance of Nature's laws and branded as vermin, the heads of those beautiful falcons being paid for at nine pence each!

We once had the pleasure of visiting Thrumster House, in company with the late Mr William Reid senr., and in response to an invitation from the late Mr R.I.Shearer, when amongst many other ornithological Caithness curiosities we were shown a clutch of young Peregrine Falcons, about a fortnight old, taken from the eyry at Ulbster Head. It appeared the parents hatched out another brood the same season, and flighted them to freedom without molestation. The young falcons referred to were allowed to escape from Thrumster House as soon as they were able to "fend for themselves."

"Cairnduna" on the Peregrine Falcon

We remember reading in the "Pulteney Notes" several years ago a reference by your correspondent to a pair of those interesting falcons which had their eyry in one of the Iresgoe cliffs. His ("Cairnduna's") account of how those beautiful birds were destroyed was very "dreich" reading, he describing that they were blown

completely to "smithereens" by some coast guardsman. These despicable ignoramuses no doubt considered themselves smart, and thought they had performed a noble act, when they had slaughtered what they likely termed a pair of pests.

The numerous "stacks" between Iresgoe and the Old Man, with their adjoining weird and awe-inspiring precipices, have stood like sentinels for untold ages, defying the encroachment of the North Sea. They have been the haunts of countless numbers of birds from time immemorial, yet none of the denizens of those precipices have been of more interest than the Peregrine Falcon, and those cliffs are now unhappily know this noble raptore no more.

As the termination of our personal experiences of those cliffs goes back twenty-seven years, we often wonder if since then any Peregrine Falcons have visited the south part of the seaboard of Wick parish, or say from Ulbster Head to the South Stacks. We invite "Cairnduna" to give our humble query his attention and report thereon through his popular "Pulteney Notes."

Circumpolar Range of the Peregrine Falcon

The Peregrine Falcon is one of three Caithness birds which are almost circumpolar in their range and found breeding in both hemispheres, the Golden Eagle and the Herring Gull being the other two. The Peregrine Falcon has been found in every region of the globe except the Arctic and Antarctic Circles. It is found at Port Kennedy, the most northerly point on the American Continent, and ranging the whole Continent south to Cape Horn, as proved by Darwin, the naturalist, of H.M.S.Beagle, who found this falcon breeding in the precipices along both shores of the Straits of Magellan, and, as he supposed, reaching Cape Horn in its range. Seebohm and Harvey-Brown [*sic*] also found the Peregrine Falcon breeding in the extreme north of Siberia. We have little doubt that this falcon has bred for ages past—at least up till the last forty years—in many of the Caithness cliffs (Dunnet Head in particular), but the preservation of game has largely helped towards its extirpation, as it has already done to the Golden Eagle and the White-Tailed Eagles in many districts throughout Scotland.

Size and Colour of the Peregrine Falcon

As these falcons do not attain their complete adult plumage until the third moult after shedding their nestling garb, the varieties of size and the colouring of their plumage in the intervals have been bewildering to the closest observers. The female Peregrine is very much larger than the male, and its plumage is also of a quite different hue. The consequence of this variation in size and shade of plumage for the first four years of their existence is that they appear as if they were different species of raptores. To illustrate the above remarks, there is a circular floor-case in the hall of the South Kensington Museum which contains thirty specimens of the Peregrine Falcon, with not two of them alike either in size of the specimens or colour of their plumage. This case of Peregrine Falcons is considered to be one of the finest productions of the taxidermist work in the world, the natural-looking artificial surroundingss and setting-up of the specimens being a marvel of the art. (To be continued.)

§29
John O'Groat Journal, November 16th, 1917

AUKS

The Great Auk (Alca Impennis)

The Great Auk or Garefowl was placed on the list of Caithness birds by the late Mr Samuel Laing, M.P., during 1866. He found bones of this bird among the prehistoric superficial deposits ("kitchen middens") at Keiss during his excavations there. There were also discovered the bones of the Little Auk, the Shag, the Cormorant, and the Gannet, and also some bones of the genus Homo. The discovery of the bones of these five birds forms a record of antiquity which has not been accorded to any other species of the avifauna of Caithness.[24]

The prehistoric inhabitants of the northern part of the Caithness seaboard must have indulged in very mixed diets, which, as shown by Laing, consisted of auks, scarfs, and solans, with an occasional "smiach" of limpets and human scraps thrown in. But to our own way of thinking there must have been some mistake about the finding of human remains in those kitchen middens, as any of the "Persian" natives whose acquaintance we have the honour to enjoy at the present day show no cannibalistic tendencies. Howbeit should their prehistoric forefathers ever have had such cravings, the hoary vista of thousands of years has entirely obliterated the taste for "homo" tit-bits in their descendants. But I digress.

Extermination of the Great Auk

Anyone writing of the Garefowl at the present day must entirely depend on the statistical references of writers of a past age, as we presume there are few now alive—if any—who even saw a Great Auk in the flesh. We will therefore first refer to the last few birds that were seen or captured during the earlier part of the last century, and will later on hope to interest some of your indulgent readers with some of those earlier descriptions, which go back for nearly three hundred years.

Very few specimens of the Great Auk have either been obtained or seen in Britain for the last hundred years. The first specimen of this bird obtained for the British Museum was procured for Mr Bullock near Papa Westray, Orkney, during 1812; and one or two other birds were observed about the Orkneys during the same year. Mr Stevenson obtained one on St.Kilda some ten years later, and one is mentioned by Mr Thomson to have been taken off the coast of Waterford, Ireland, in 1834.

Great Auk's European Home

In European waters Iceland appears to have been the principal resort of the Alca Impennis, and from there most of the specimens of this extinct bird's eggs now in existence were obtained. Here (in Iceland) the colony was located on several small islands situated some twenty-five miles to the south-east of the main island. But misfortune seems to have settled on the Garefowl—Nature herself hastening its doom in volcanic disturbance, which in March, 1830, caused the principal breeding reef, "Gierfuglasken," to disappear, and compelled the surviving birds to take up new quarters. Most of those desolated birds appear to have selected the islet of Eldey. Here within a period of fourteen years every bird was killed, the last pair being captured in June, 1844, which proved the final record of the existence of the Great Auk in Europe. Before finishing with the Garefowl's last appearance in Britain, we find that a bird was caught at St.Kilda during the autumn of 1822; and the last specimen ever known in British waters was stoned to death as an "evil spirit" on the island of Stack-an-Armin, St.Kilda, during the summer of 1834.

Garefowl's Early Home in Newfoundland

Trunk Island, of the southern coast of Newfoundland, was in 1534 the principal breeding place in the world of the Great Auk, where millions of these birds bred yearly. The verity of these statements may be inferred from the fact that those birds withstood the strain of their slaughter for fully three centuries before they finally disappeared from the Newfoundland coast.

Before touching further on its final extermination, we will take the liberty of inserting and extract from a very old and quaint book entitled "Voyage to St Kilda in 1697, by M.

Martin Gentleman." This gentleman's remarks are so quaint and amusing with reference to the Garefowl that we give them "in toto" as follows:—

> "The Seafowls are first the Gairfowl, being the statliest as well as the largest of the fowls here, and about the size of the Solan Goose, of a black colour, red about the eyes, a large white spot under each eye, a long broad bill. Stands stately, his whole body erected, his wings short. He flyeth not at all, lays his eggs upon the bare ground, which if taken away He lays no more that year. He is 'palmiped' or web-footed, and has the hatching spot upon his breast—a bare spot, from which the feathers have fallen off with the heat of hatching. His egg is twice as big as that of a Solan Goose, and is variously spotted black, green, and dark. He, without regard to wind, appears on the 1st of May, and goes away about the middle of June."

For lucidity the above report will take a lot of beating. That ancient visitor to St. Kilda didn't trouble himself with tedious details but described the Garefowl as he found it. The most amusing part of the description—from the inference—is that it was the male bird which laid the egg, and it seemed that the lady bird had no part either in the laying or incubation.

Continued Slaughter

We now come to the extirpation of the bird in America—a record of wanton cruelty and carnage that seems incredible. Countless millions of this flightless and helpless Auk, says Mr Lucas—a American ornithologist—were hunted to death with murderous instincts and disregard for the morrow, so characteristic of the White Race. Although there is evidence to suggest that the Garefowl was formerly abundant on the Penguin Islands, off the southern coast of Newfoundland. Trunk Island[25] seemed to be the site of the Great Auk's most important colony.

Trunk Island was especially visited during July 1887, by the U.S. Fish Commissioners' steamer "Grampus," with Mr Lucas on board, for the purpose of investigating the cause of the extermination of the Great Auk. From Mr Lucas's account which appeared in the report he made, we will take the liberty of quoting a few extracts:—

> "Here on the southern half of the island the Great Auk bred in peace undisturbed by man until that fateful day when Cartier's crews inaugurated the slaughter, which only terminated with the existence [*sic*] of the bird. The history of the Garefowl in America may be said to date from 1534, when on May 21st two boats' crews from Cartier's vessels landed on Trunk25 Island, and, as we are told, in less than half an hour filled two boatloads of them, as if they were stones. So that besides those they did not eat fresh, every ship did powder and salt six barrels of them."

How the Newfoundland colonists treated the Garefowl as a substantial asset of the colony we will endeavour to describe in the next article. (To be continued.)

Footnotes:

(24) The information in this paragraph comes from S.Laing, 1866, *Pre-historic Remains of Caithness*, (Williams and Norgate, London).

(25) Presumably refers to Funk Island.

§30
John O'Groat Journal, November 23rd, 1917

GREAT AUK (Continued)

We find that the early colonists of Newfoundland cured the Garefowl for winter use, and the great abundance of birds was advertised as an inducement to encourage emigration to the island. The French fishermen depended very largely on the Garefowl to supply them with provisions, and Trunk Island was a regular port of call (while the birds existed) for passing ships, which made this Auk rookery an arranged rendezvous to augment their stocks of food stores. The immense numbers of Great Auks which yearly visited Trunk Island to breed may be inferred from the fact that as the bird only laid one egg it would increase but slowly even under the most favourable circumstances. The wonder is how so many of those birds existed so long – from the inception of its first slaughter by Cartier's crews in 1534 until its final disappearance from the American waters, which was almost coincidental with its extermination in Europe (1844).

Slaughter for its Feathers

Finally someone conceived the idea of killing this bird for its feathers, and this sealed its fate. Cartwright states that it was customary for several crews of men to pass the summer on Trunk Island solely to slay the Auks for their plumage, and that the birds were slain by millions and their bodies left to rot where they were killed. This reckless work of slaughter went steadily on until the last of the species had disappeared from the face of the earth, and those places where this interesting Auk made its breeding haunts for untold ages now know it no more.

Statistics of the U.S. Commission

Mr Lucas obtained the most ample evidence of the bird's former abundance. He (Mr Lucas) recorded that on the northerly slopes of Trunk Island a single stroke of the hoe anywhere would bring to light at least a score of bones; and although many humeri were thrown aside while digging, yet the collection was found to contain over fourteen hundred specimens of this bone. Previous to the visit by Mr Lucas to Trunk Island, only two naturalists had explored the place. Struvitz went there in 1841, and Professor Milne visited the island in 1874. The latter, after only one hour's work, collected bones enough to complete fifty entire skeletons; while nine years previous to the Professor's visit an expedition, sent out for guano, discovered many entire mummies deep down amongst the deposits.

The extermination of the Garefowl in Iceland had less to defend it than the extermination of the two colonies in American waters, for there in Iceland the last survivors of this doomed Auk were captured to supply the various scientific institutions of Europe, so that literally its extirpation was countenanced and undertaken in the name of science.

Skins and Eggs of the Great Auk

The skins known to exist of this bird number seventy-two, and of its eggs sixty-five are catalogued. These are scattered amongst the museums and private owners over the world. There are also many complete skeletons and mummies, and thousands of part skeletons and other loose bones, principally in the museums of Europe. Of the existing skins and eggs the United Kingdom holds twenty-two and forty-one; Germany comes next with twenty and eight; France has only eight and seven; the United States has only secured three and two respectively. The remaining nineteen skins and seven eggs are distributed amongst the museums of the smaller European states.

When a finely-plumaged, well preserved skin, or finely-marked egg, is occasionally put on the market, it is sure to fetch a fabulous prices. The egg of the Great Auk is fully twice the size of its nearest congener, the Razorbill, and closely resembles the ground colour and markings of the latter. The Great Auk's egg in the Edinburgh Museum testifies to this resemblance. As no more Garefowl eggs can be obtained and added to the above list, models have been executed for many years. Those copies are formed the exact size and shape, and are also correctly painted to represent the colour and markings of the finest and richest of the natural specimens. Many of the principal museums of the world contain an example of

these exquisite and artistic models.

Ornithological Distinction for Caithness

The discovery of bones of the Great Auk amongst the prehistoric animal remains at Keiss places Caithness in the forefront with regard to the Garefowl, as it seems the county holds the only authenticated record of the existence of this bird in Britain during either prehistoric or later periods. Not only is the existence of a few remote specimens ascertained, but they were in numbers that the prehistoric inhabitants of the northern parts of Caithness, like the Newfoundland colonists of later centuries, depended partly on Great Auks for food.

The pertinent query arises, Where did the Keiss Garefowls breed? as the breeding haunts of those birds, during their existence in historic times, show that the Great Auk neither did or could occupy cliffs or precipices, but had to have recourse to high tablelands, one side of which sloped to the beach, where those flightless birds could step ashore. This has been demonstrated by the lay of the land formation of the Antarctic Penguin rookeries. Therefore, unless the formation of the land of the northern part of the Caithness sea coast was differently formed from what it is at the present day, we fail to know where the prehistoric Keissites obtained their supply of Great Auks.

Expectations of Arctic Discoveries

For many years after the supposed extinction of the Garefowl hopes were entertained that a remote colony of those birds might be discovered by some Arctic explorer, and situated in the then supposed open waters surrounding the Pole. But after many years of disappointed expectations the Great Auk's final sentence of extinction was pronounced, and it was placed on the list of extinct flightless birds, and added to the category which already contained the names of the Dodo and the Moa.

§31
John O'Groat Journal, November 30th, 1917

AUKS (Continued)

The Razorbill Auk ("Alca Torda")

The Razorbill derives its name from the likeness in the shape of its bill to a razor. It is also otherwise easily distinguished from the Common and the Ringed (Bridled) Guillemots, from the great intensity of colour carried throughout its plumage, being pure black above and spotless white on its underbody. It is likewise much smaller than the two Guillemots above referred to.

The Razorbill Auk is also known by the local name of "burrie" derived from the "burring" sound produced when either perched on the cliffs or when swimming along the base of the precipices, where their young may be lodged, as if the "burrs" were meant as a call-note to the chicks. After the young birds take to the water this note of the parents is seldom heard, from which incident the inference may be drawn that the "burr" is a substitute for the song of many other birds during their nesting season.

Although scarcely one-fourth the size of its extinct congener, the Great Auk (Alca impennis), yet the Razorbill closely resembles the Garefowl in many ways. With the exception of the large white spot on each cheek, which is a prominent feature of the Great Auk, the plumage and markings of the Razorbill, the delineation and striping of its bill, and the general colours of the legs, webs, and toes are all features of the "burrie" which are nearly identical with its ancient prototype.

Peculiar Nesting Habits

It is instructive to note that the Razorbill lays her egg in a cranny high above the water, instead of the open shelf, on which the guillemot deposits her egg, and in this difference is seen one of the wonderful provisions of Nature for the preservation of a species. The "burrie" invariably selects a crevice which in most cases is only an inch or two higher than itself when standing erect. The selection of such a nesting roost is from an instinct of safety, as neither of the cliff-breeding guillemots can oust them from the place; the nook being much too low for any guillemot to stand erect in, with the exception of the Black Guillemot, which is not a cliff breeder. We have often wondered when seeing a "burrie" flying at great speed towards the face of the cliff, and yet landing safely in the cranny, how it was possible; but we found by observation through a telescope that the bird slackened speed a few yard from the cliffs, with as much momentum left as to land and afterwards scramble into its nursery. As the bases of the nesting crannies of the Razorbill are very narrow, one wonders that when the bird is disturbed, and makes a hasty departure, its egg does not roll out after it. Nature, however, has also provided against such an emergency by the construction of the Razorbill's egg. This bird's egg, besides being exceptionally thick in the shell, is broad at one end and elongated to a point at the other; it, therefore, when disturbed, revolves in a circle, the pointed end gravitating to the centre. If the "burrie's" egg was round like that of the owl it would roll out after the bird.

The Little Auk ("Mergullus Alle")

The Little Auk (also known by the local name of "rotche"), is one of the feathered mysteries of the ocean, and its occasional appearance on the Caithness coast is more a case of force than choice. The visits of the Little Auk to the shores of the United Kingdom have an interest almost exclusively their own, as the bird's appearance often occurs during our severest south-east storms. This beautiful and interesting visitor is solely a "bird of the billows," and its gambols amongst the "breakers" is a feature of its movements. Yet for all of this daring, thousands are often killed by the failing wave-crests, and cast ashore during some of our severe winter storms, while as many more in an exhausted condition are found outside our shores and beaches.

The Little Auks in a Storm

We find amongst other ornithological notes collected at Aberdeen, and now in our possession, very pointed reference made to the movements of a flock of Little Auks. This flock of "rotches" were observed disporting themselves on the outer margin of the broken water during a severe south-easterly storm in Aberdeen Bay. One

striking incident was observed in their frolics that as each advancing wave was about to break numbers of those interesting little divers which happened to be in the trough of the preceding wave flew through the curling crest of the succeeding rollers, and appeared on its back awaiting to repeat the operation. It is impossible to conceive that these "rotches" were feeding in such a situation, but, like children while at play, making a mock of danger. When saying that those Auks flew through the foaming crests, I may remind those of your readers who are not familiar with the movements of divers while under water, that all of those birds while submerged use their wings as the means of propulsion.

Referring again to these notes, it was observed that a few of the birds failed to catch the exact moment before the wave broke and were engulfed in the failing surf. Many dead birds were found along the sands of Aberdeen Bay after the storm referred to. We think that these incidents of the storm movements of the Little Auk help to solve the mystery of how so many of those birds are found dead around the shores of Britain during on-shore storms.

Many Little Auks were driven ashore around the Caithness coast during the disastrous and ever- memorable storm that wrecked the Wick Breakwater on Sunday, February 7, 1867. Four of these birds were that week found alive near the door of the salmon house at Shaltigoe, and numbers of the storm-wafted strangers were found all along the shores and creeks of both sides of Wick Bay. Even any storm which may arise in mid-ocean, and from any wind direction may prove equally disastrous to the Little Auks, and is only known to the dwellers of the coasts when on-shore winds prevail, and which only then cast ashore thousands of those dead auks around our bays and creeks.

Little Auk's Breeding Haunts

This interesting Auk is not an indigenous British bird and previous to 1815 its breeding localities were but vaguely known. This bird appears in Captain Sabine's "Birds of Greenland", and Captain Beechy, in his account of the voyage to the North Pole in 1815, under command of Captain Duncan in the "Dorothy Trent," while describing the scenery of Magdalene Bay, on the western side of Spitzbergen, wrote as follows:— "At the head of the bay there is a high pyramidal mountain termed the Rotge Hill, from the myriads of small birds of that name that frequent its base, and which appear to prefer its environs to any other part of the harbour. They are so numerous that we have frequently seen an uninterrupted line of them extending to fully half way across the bay, or to a distance of more than three miles, and so close together that thirty have fallen at one shot. This living column on an average might have been six yards broad and as many deep. There must have been nearly four million birds on the wing at one time."

§32
John O'Groat Journal, January 11th, 1918

GUILLEMOTS AND PUFFINS

The rarest of this interesting family is the Brunnich Guillemot; and the other three species are the Common Guillemot, the Bridled or Ringed Guillemot; and the Black Guillemot. As the latter three are well known to all frequenters of the Caithness seaboard, they do not require much introduction.

Brunnich Guillemot (Uria Brunnichi)

Only six examples of this Guillemot were obtained in the United Kingdom previous to 1896. Dr Sinclair had one in his collection as far back as 1842, but he failed to recognise it as such, and only had it labelled as a variety of Common Guillemot (Uria troile). This Guillemot was not catalogued by the Rev Charles Thomson as part of the Wick collection in 1841, as the specimen was probably not then obtained. It was, however, discovered in the collection by Professor Wilson during his tour around Scotland and his visit to Wick in 1842.

An Unaccountable Mistake

The omission of the Brunnich Guillemot by Messrs Shearer and Osborne from the list compiled by them in 1862, and submitted to the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh that year, was an unaccountable overlook. This list was supposed to contain all the specimens got in the county of Caithness, subsequent to those reported in the compilation of 1841 up till 1862. Amongst other rare birds diffusely mentioned in the report of those gentlemen, were the Ruddy Sheldrake, the Smew and the Hooded Merganser, which made the omission of the Brunnich Guillemot the more remarkable. Those well known ornithologists also at that time took the trouble of getting the birds compiled by Mr Thomson translated from their generic appellations into the commonplace nomenclature then known and still used in Caithness Ornithology.

Second Brunnich Guillemot Obtained

This bird was shot by Eric S. Mackay on February 16, 1883, between Longberry and Castle Goe, Oldwick, and placed by him in his Pulteney Collection. This second Caithness specimen was attended by a few of the scouting guillemots which visit their old breeding haunts early in spring (some weeks before the arrival of the main body), to ascertain if their last year's breeding ledges were still intact, and then, after a couple of weeks of exploration, return to their principal rendezvous in the North Atlantic to report.

With the view to giving the six specimens mentioned in date-detail, we will again refer to those procured in the north of Scotland—to wit, Dr Sinclair's specimen in 1842; one got in Orkney during 1856, and now in the Edinburgh museum; and the bird in the Pulteney collection procured in 1883. The remaining three specimens were reported by Howard Saunders, and are as follows:—Two were got on the Yorkshire coast, one in December, 1894, and the other almost the same locality in 1895. The third bird of Saunders' report was obtained in Cambridgeshire during 1896. Thus we find that Caithness holds the first place as having on its list the only Brunnich Guillemots ever obtained in Scotland.[26]

This rare visitor to Britain has never been known to breed south of the Arctic Circle, and the only breeding haunt of this Uria as yet discovered is on a great precipice in Sanderson's Hope, near Uppernavik, in Greenland. An explorer describes this cliff as being one thousand feet in height, and extending fully three miles at almost the same altitude. This imposing precipice during the breeding season is literally clad from its base to the summit exclusively with Brunnich Guillemots. Fielden discovered a few albinos in this great rookery.

The Common Guillemot ("Uria Troile")

The Common Guillemot, and its closely allied congener, the Bridled or Ringed Guillemot (Uria lacrymans), are also known by the local name of "Apies." These birds hatch on the ledges of sea cliffs, and, like all urias, lay only one egg, which they deposit on the bare shelf, and without any provision being made for a nest. Gould was the first to place the Bridled Guillemot on the British list, he having reported its discovery in his "Birds of Europe." Shearer and Osborne were the first to report its appearance on the Caithness

precipices; and in consequence it is one of the fifteen specimens added to the county by those gentlemen since the compilation of the earlier catalogue, and which then contained the names of 191 birds. The only external difference in plumage between the bridled and common guillemot is a small white strip extending from the gape for a few inches along the sides of the head towards the junction of the neck, like a bridle. It also has a perceptible white ring around the eyes, hence the names of Bridled or Ringed Guillemot. The sooty colour of the upper bodies of these birds is of a lighter hue in the ringed "apie" as is the tint in "uria troile." the ringed bird being likewise a trifle smaller than its congener.

The Guillemot's Love Affairs

The first week after their arrival on the cliffs the "apies" have a busy and fascinating experience while selecting their partners. Anyone with a good telescope and the time to spare can derive some real amusement by watching the "apies" choosing their housekeepers. A half-dozen gentlemen guillemots may "spot" at the same time some beautiful and charming lady, and all plead for her foot (not her hand), and smiles of approval. Unlike a Cock Grouse, who, while filling up his harem, flies to some prominent knoll and throws down his gauntlet as gauge of battle to his opponents, the gentlemen "apies" just surround the lady, and keep sprawling and hobbling around her (she remaining as a pivot), with their bills wide open; and it is not unlikely that the favoured suitor is the fellow who has managed to gape the longest without a break. We have often thought that if the local name of the "gapies" were applied, it would have been more appropriate than that of "apies" to those birds. To take the love intrigues of the "apies" and apply them to the human side of life, and then fancy a half-dozen of bachelors of the "Mooshtie" type following some charming beauty around the streets, and all glowering at her with their mouths wide open and some of them unwillingly exposing their toothless gums, would be certainly an amusing sight. A snap of a camera at an opportune moment, showing the half-dozen gaping and cavern-looking "gobs" would as a picture postcard soon become priceless.

Pulling My Leg?

We have interviewed the leading Pulteney philologist on the probability of the name "gapies" having been applied to the guillemot during remote ages, and his written reply has almost taken my breath away. This gentleman states that he has unearthed some inscriptions which were in existence previous to the time when either the South Stacks, Dunbar's Stack or the Stack of the Broch were detached from the mainland, and finds that the name "gapies," not "apies," was then applied to the guillemot. Our friend also suggests that the time at which those inscriptions were devised was probably one hundred thousand years ago, and when the Diplodocus was quite common about the Caithness goes and caves! I am rather afraid that this noted philologist has been "drawing my leg." If so, I'll be square with him before the articles on the Guillemot are finished.

Footnote:

(26) For some unaccountable reason Mackay seems to have overlooked the Orkney bird.

§33
John O'Groat Journal, January 18th, 1918

GUILLEMOTS AND PUFFINS (Continued)

The Black Guillemot (Uria Grylle)

This guillemot (also known as the "Tystie," "Sea Pigeon," and " Jenny Grey") does not breed on the ledges of cliffs, but selects as its nesting haunt the loose rock-bases which have been either disintegrated from the precipices or cast up by severe storms, it choosing its breeding hole high enough to be safe from the wash of the sea. Unlike any of the other three Urias, which only deposit one egg, the Uria Grylle lays two, and occasionally three. The "Tystie" does not make any nest, but deposits its eggs on the bare ground, either on gravel in a cleft, or under a large block of stone, but always—as already noted—to be high enough to escape the ocean swell.

The "Tystie" not a Wanderer

The Black Guillemot is not a wanderer, but remains about the British shores all the year, and generally in or near the locality where it was reared. A pair of those birds have been known to occupy the same nesting place for many years in succession; but probably not the same pair of the previous season. The nest of the "Sea Pigeon" is seldom harried, as it is often impossible to reach the deep recess where the bird nidifies.

The Black Guillemot's Confusion of Plumage

There are few birds known which display such vagaries in their different season's plumage as do the "Tysties." As the young birds do not leave the nest until they are fully fledged and able to forage and feed themselves, independent of the help of their parents, the young "Jenny Greys" start life on their own account directly they leave the nest. At the Black Guillemot's first visit to the ocean they are known by the local name of "Jenny Greys," and continue to be so designated until next spring. After the autumn moult of the parent birds, they also become "Jinnidie Greys," with very little difference of plumage from that of their nestlings. On this account and until the ensuing February, we have virtually no "Tysties" around our coasts. Then early in February both the old and the young birds put on their summer dresses, and both become Black Guillemots, with their sombre black coats and the conspicuous white patches on their wings, and with their crimson legs and webs and toes. At this transformation the "Jenny Greys" disappear, as it were, until the summer nestlings again take to the ocean, which occurs about the first week in July, when the same bewildering reversals of plumage again become evident.

Those uncertainties of the moulting and changing appearance of the "Tysties" created some sort of mystery amongst the dwellers around the sea-coasts, and until recent years it was thought by many—and a few even yet—that the black "Tysties" migrated from our coasts early in autumn, and left the young "Jenny Greys" only. When the old birds returned again as spring visitors to breed during the summer, the "Jenny Greys," which remained with us all winter, disappeared, and probably became, as many observers thought, summer nesting visitors to some far-off clime. To give point to the Black Guillemot's changes of plumage, just fancy a herring gull assuming the garb of its nestlings, at its autumn moult, and becoming a "scorrie" until the following spring, and thereby robbing our sea-coasts and landscapes of one of their principal winter ornaments, the herring gull.

The Puffin (Fratercula Arctica)

The Puffin is also known by the local name of "Coulterneb," "Craig-Parrot," and "Tammie Norrie". The Puffins do not arrive at their breeding haunts until after the Guillemots and Razorbill Auks, the Kittiwakes appearing almost in the same week as the "Craig Parrots." The Puffins gradually approach our coasts from their winter ocean rendezvous during April, but few are seen on the rocks before the middle of that month. The main body not arriving at their nesting stations before the first week of May.

The "Craig-Parrots" arrive at their breeding haunts on the British coasts with the regularity of the calendar; and Dr Edmonston so firmly believed in the punctuality of the arrival and departure of the puffins that he placed the dates as the 1st April for their arrival, and depart, as he said, constantly on the 23rd August, it being very unusual to see a Puffin after the latter date.

The Puffin's Breeding Localities

The localities selected by the "Tammie Norries" for nidification are usually lofty cliffs and rocks on the coast, or tolerably high turf covered tablelands. Their nests are either in burrows dug out in the ground by the birds themselves, or in crevices in the rocks; and, as with three of the Guillemots, only one egg is produced for the season. When the young bird is hatched it is well supplied with food by both parents, principally fish-fry of the coalfish ("sillocks"), several being carried in the bill of the old bird at the same time.

How the Young Puffins get to the Sea

As many of the young "coulternebs" are seen following their parents before their flight feathers are developed, a problem still partly unsolved is how those helpless birds descend from their nesting cliffs, which are sometimes 600 feet high sheer down to the sea. The legend is still extant that the male parent carries the chick on its back down to its future home. Some keen observers insist that they have seen the parent bird bearing the young one down perched on its back, the wings being so raised backwards as to form a hollow, the parent not requiring the use of its wings while dropping to the water. But it seems more likely that instinct will teach the nestling the confidence necessary for it to reach the sea, thereafter to be largely its habitat.

We had the pleasure of receiving some time ago a present of a series of photographs portraying many phases of bird life from a leading Wick photographic artist. This fascinating series shows many different features of the nesting life of Puffins on Dunnet Head, and were not taken without considerable risk to the operator. The donation was procured through the medium of Mr John Dunnet, Union Street, Pulteneytown. We heartily thank the artist in the first place and also Mr Dunnet for his thoughtful co-operation. As I intend in the near future to get up another frame of photographs, entitled "Wild Birds at Home," and which I intend to donate to the Wick Museum, our donors may depend that those Dunnet Head masterpieces of photography will have the premier place in our intended donation.

§34
John O'Groat Journal, February 1st, 1918

GUILLEMOTS AND PUFFINS (Continued)

The departure of the Guillemots, Razorbills, and Puffins from our shores about the end of August, and remaining absent for fully seven months each year, cannot be caused by the want of food, as they could still find enough and to spare. If not for this reason, why then do these birds migrate from our coasts?

Hundreds of different species of birds migrate from the colder climates of the globe to its warmer ones, during one or other of the seasons, but climatic changes do not affect the birds referred to. Our precipices become deserted, and not a guillemot or any of its congeners can be seen (except the Uria Grylle), as they all disappear as of one accord to some heretofore unknown region of the ocean, leaving only a few small flocks of from six to a dozen of birds which remain scattered about the North Sea over the autumn and winter months; and not even one of these few stragglers are ever known to land on our cliffs in the interval, not until early spring.

Remote Winter Resorts

Until a few years ago naturalists were uncertain where the multitudes of guillemots, razorbills, and puffins disappeared to after leaving our cliffs and deserting the parts of the ocean surrounding the east and west coasts of the United Kingdom, and the north-western seaboard of Europe. The discovery of one of the great winter resorts of this particular genus of birds was made in a very unexpected manner—through the disappearance of a large steamship on a North Atlantic voyage. This vessel was reported as being disabled through the breakdown of some important part of her machinery, and, through her being caught in a strong northerly current, she was fast drifting north. A warship was dispatched for the purpose of finding her, and this was accomplished after a pro-longed search. When discovered, the vessel had drifted a thousand miles outside the most northerly routes of commerce.

Inhabitants of an Ocean Expanse

In this ocean solitude was discovered countless numbers of all the known guillemots, razorbills, puffins—Little Auks and Brunnich Guillemots being prominent in myriads, it being their resort from their Arctic habitats. Thus was part of the mystery solved where so many of our guillemots and their congeners disappeared from human ken at the end of August each year.

It is quite possible that the attraction of such immense numbers of different divers to this part of the North Atlantic was because of the existence of great shallow banks, where unlimited supplies of fish could be obtained, and which are covered with only a few fathoms of water. For instance, compare the outer and inner Dogger Banks, and also take Smith's Bank, off the Caithness coast, which at its shallowest part has only a depth of fifteen fathoms. Yet this Caithness fishing bank has been known for ages as the most prolific ground off our coast, and still continues to be so. Should this theory be but partly correct, it will enhance the interest of observers towards those fascinating birds which for five months of each year adorn our precipices.

Derelicts Cast Ashore

As we have already referred to derelict Little Auks being driven ashore during south-east storms, we may add that a few birds from the small flocks of guillemots and razorbills which remain about the North Sea are also stranded during those on-shore storms.

An amusing controversy took place some years ago between one of your most popular correspondents and the president of the "Wee Poltney Linguist Society," "Canary Seed." This "passage-at-arms" must yet be green in the memory of many of your older readers. In the wake of a severe south-east storm hundreds of dead guillemots and razorbills were washed ashore around the Odd at the river-mouth. It was long an open secret that some of the Pulteney boys gathered a few of those dead birds (for what purpose was not definitely explained), but such an insinuation was always hotly resented when referred to.

Your correspondent referred to the event, and after elaborating on the occurrence in his usual able manner, unfortunately "bumped up" against the "Wee Poltneys" in his remarks, and if we

remember aright he said that although those boys were busy gathering the dead birds to take some to give a tone to their "slake" and "bubble and squeak" dinners, yet not one of them from Jamie Donaldson's corner to Dauvit Bremner's kent 'a "scorrie" fae an "apie."

We all know what a Pulteney boy can do and threaten when his "birse" is up. As those remarks struck at the kernel of their Society they were determined on retribution. One ferocious "Kinnairdier" bluntly suggested a lamp-post, but after he had procured a rope he found that even the highest of the Pulteney posts were "some laich" for swinging the offender. If it had not been for the intervention of their president, your correspondent would have fared badly!

The president of the Linguistic Society must have also felt those strictures very keenly, as he himself is a copious writer on bird life, and his articles occasionally appear above the beautiful and fascinating pen-name of "Canary Seed."

§35
John O'Groat Journal, February 8th, 1918

INDIGENOUS GULLS AND TERNS

These two interesting families of Caithness birds form a daily pleasing feature to many general observers, and the six species of gulls, and three of terns, all of which are indigenous to our county are well known to all dwellers around our seaboards.

Without entering into our usual method of describing each individual specimen of these nine birds, we will only endeavour to give a general outline, and will strive to attract your readers' attention to their movements and habits. This, we hope, may appeal to many who know all these birds well, and can define one sort from another, and not, as is generally done by many careless observers, to whom a "maw's" a "maw," irrespective of either size or colour.

The Herring Gull and the Kittiwake are the only birds of this genus which breed on the ledges of sea-coast precipices. The other four species are the Greater and Lesser Black-backs, the Common Gull, and the Black-headed Gull, all of which have their breeding haunts in the interior of the county. The nesting localities of the Black-backs are found amongst the marshes and loch margins at a considerable elevation above sea level, and they are also found hatching on precipitous stacks with grassy summits around the sea coasts. Common gulls, are more frequently met with in Caithness during the winter than through the summer months. This gull breeds in small colonies in the most solitary of the moors and marshes, and although called the Common Gull it is the most uncommon of our upland breeders. The remaining indigenous gull of the six is the Black-headed Gull, which is also known by the local name of "pickmire." It breeds in small colonies about weed-covered lochs, the Loch of Stemster being once a favourite resort of this beautiful bird. This colony was for many years strictly protected by the proprietor of the estate—and, we hope, still continues. But notwithstanding the protection accorded to this charming ornament to any estate, the robbing of its eggs is fast doing it direful work, and helping to diminish the numbers of one of our county's most fascinating gulls.

While again referring the Black Backs (the Greater and the Lesser), they are a couple of birds full of interest to observers. The exclusion of the Greater Black-backed Gull ("Larus Marinus") from the protection of the Wild Birds Preservation Act was a piece of selfish and contemptible legislation. Just because this noble bird occasionally picked up a few salmon and trout fry, which were designed by nature to be part of their food.* Man is welcome to his share with the Black- backs, but not to utilise the whole supply.

Homes of the Gulls

Taking it for granted that the destruction of this fascinating "Larus," the Greater Black-backed Gull, has certainly lessened the number of the species in Caithness, especially in the localities of prescribed areas, yet the real homes of those birds, with its congeners, the Lesser Black-backs, are around the innumerable and solitary fresh water lochs of the interior of Argyllshire and other remote districts of the west of Scotland.

The writer, during a recent visit to the upper waters of Lochfyne, found almost the entire absence of both the Herring Gull and the Kittiwake Gull, but the other four species of our Caithness gulls were represented around every sea-coast village in their thousands, and were as tame as common poultry. No one was even seen to molest or even throw a stone at them.

Where the writer lived there came every morning great flocks of Greater and Lesser Black-backs and Common Gulls, many of which almost sat on the doorsteps of the village, awaiting for any fish garb that might be thrown out, or otherwise fishing in the loch, they resembling the Herring Gulls about the Wick and Pulteney streets during summer mornings. Oh, what a glorious association for any lover of nature's feathered creations! The Lesser Blackbacked Gull, with its rich lemon yellow bill, legs, and feet, and its intensely black saddle, with the purity of the white of the other parts of its plumage, is certainly one of the most beautiful birds of all the known British species of gulls.

The flesh colour of the legs of three of our Caithness gulls—the Herring, the Greater

Black-backed and the Common—robs them of the complete fascination of the Lesser Black-back.

A most pleasing feature of the summer passages of the Clyde River steamers is the attendance given them on their passage by large flocks of gulls. While crossing the Firth of Clyde those paddle-boats are followed by those birds in large numbers, which pick up the fish fry or other flotsam disturbed by the paddles. Anyone who may be interested in the movements of gulls will find a pleasing novelty observing them in flight in the wake of those boats. Any time the writer has crossed with any of these Clyde resort boats he found that during the passage across the Firth these gull attendants were almost entirely composed of Herring Gulls and Kittiwakes, with a small sprinkling of the Black-headed Gulls amongst them. (The same species of gulls also followed the east-bound boats going home.) But directly any of these boats passed into the Kyles of Bute, bound west, another class of gulls made their appearance and attended the boats in the same manner. Those newcomers were the Greater and Lesser Black-backs and the Common Gull.

This so far supports the writer's theory that the Argyllshire lochs are now the principal homes of those three species of gull in Scotland, or probably in the United Kingdom. The absence of high cliffs around the shores of Lochfyne deters both the Herring Gull and Kittiwake from using this part of the West of Scotland for nesting purposes; hence their non-appearance in these districts.

* The original text as submitted to the *John O'Groat Journal* by E.S.Mackay contains the following sentence, presumably omitted by the *Groat*'s editor to avoid upsetting local landowners:

"The proprietors of estates through which those rivers flow have no more exclusive ownership to those streams or the fish they contain than have the Greater Black-backed Gull, those rivers being the avenues of one of Nature's plans for feeding some of its numerous bird creations."

§36
John O'Groat Journal, February 15th, 1918

INDIGENOUS GULLS AND TERNS (Continued)

The Caithness terns' nesting habits and localities are akin to those of the Black-headed Gull, or "pickmire". Our terns are the Common, the Lesser and the Arctic. The two former have been known as indigenous to Caithness for ages, but the Arctic Tern was only added to the county list during recent years. This beautiful tern is one of the fifteen birds added by Messrs Shearer and Osborne since the earlier compilations of 1841 and 1862.

Both the Common and Lesser Terns are also well known by the local names of "pictarnies" and "tirrags;" at least the "Wee Poltneys" know them as such, and to their aggravation, as those birds have as yet baffled those sportsmen to catch them with a hook and bait on a floating cork. Terns being pelagic feeders, the cork lure has no fascination for them, which is fortunate, as if either a Jock or a Jimmie had got one alive he would certainly have placed it in his old quarter basket cage, along with the other members of his collection—his mavis, rook, and "lairag"—and fed his "tinnag," like the others, with a stick from the common supply of "droke".

Besides other small nesting colonies about some of the smaller lochs of the interior, terns have also for years bred about the Loch of Stemster, enjoying their share of the protection accorded by the kind-hearted proprietor to the "pickmires." From the time that herrings were first delivered around the creeks of Wick Bay, up till the present day, and during the summer season, Pulteney Harbour especially has been the feeding resort of all the different species of gulls and terns which breed in Caithness; but from the abandonment of the delivery of herrings over gangways, to the new harbour breast stations, and, later, the deepening of the outer harbour, the daily feeding ground of the gulls and terns began to wane. During those years that the Wick summer fishing was confined to almost seven weeks, and when the new harbour, during the spring-tide ebbs, dried up almost to the quay-heads, the gulls in their thousands, "generalled" by Willie Wougtail;[27] attended to feed from the spoil deposited on the harbour bottom.

All herrings spilled from the baskets while being hoisted up for delivery to the "farlanes" around the quay stations (no carting of herrings in those days), and from the creels carried across the gangway to the stations on the new harbour breast, could only be recovered when the harbour dried, and it often looked as if all the gulls and terns in Caithness—and probably some from Sutherland—came every morning to gorge themselves at this sumptuous feast.

To take advantage of the short time of extreme ebb, and when the landings and spillings of the previous day had been heavy, our friend "Wougtail," so as to take time by the forelock, would hastily tie up as many "knips" as possible, carry them to the dolphin, then lying stranded on the harbour sand-bank, and tie them to the ring, covering them up with his oilskin, to protect them from the gulls. Then, after the tide had risen so high that William could not reach the derelict herrings with his arm, he gave recovering the spoil for the time being. Next ebb, however, he waded in to recover his hoard tied to the dolphin, and carried his "knips" to the harbour breast. We have seen "Woug" wading up to his armpits before he had recovered and landed all of his dolphin reserves. Mrs Bain at the old harbour breast was a prime favourite with Willie as a purchaser of his herrings. "He widna pit a herring past 'er," he was wont to say. The gulls had no such excuse as Mr Robertson, and all they could do was collar a "gutsfu'" while they had the chance, and return next morning to begin the orgie over again.

The thousands of gulls and terns which previous to then had daily visited our harbours were now about the middle of August augmented by their nestlings, each breeding pair of birds bringing at least another brace to the scene, so that before the end of August the multitude of the earlier visitors was now nearly doubled. This immense throng assumed a new and pleasing feature, as the various plumages of the young birds added quite a charming aspect to the picture.

The most sombre youngsters of the lot were the Herring Gulls ("scorries") and the most

beautiful of all the chicks were those of the Kittiwake and those of the Black-headed Gull. These nestlings were so alike that, unless by the colour and position and length of their legs, it was very difficult to distinguish them. The young "faky" and the baby "pickmire" being the same size to an inch added to the confusion. The Greater and Lesser Black-backs now added a pair each of beautifully variegated youngsters, with those of the Common Gull, whose chickens very much resemble those of the young of the Kittiwake. The three terns also added their quota of young birds to the throng, the only marked difference between the parent terns and their offspring being the absence of the black caps, and the shorter forks of their tails.

During the early afternoon, after a copious drink at the mouth of the burn at the corner of the harbour breast, those visitors began to disappear. The Black-backs, with their families first, and also the Common Gulls, with their young, and gradually later on, the pictarnies and the "tirrags" and "pickmires" with their progeny, these all flying inland to their breeding locations. The last to leave the harbour for the day were the Herring Gulls and the Kittiwakes, with their "scorries" and young "fakys"—those two species proceeding to the coast cliffs as their rendezvous.

For a few weeks during every summer fishing season, and for a long series of years, the same bird-life scenes were enacted, but which unhappily now (to bird lovers) are one of the departed bird-life glories from Pulteney harbour.

As gulls do not pair until the summer after their second moult, many of those unmated birds appeared amongst the new Harbour flocks. While the other gulls during the nesting season retired at night to their breeding haunts, these unpaired birds resorted to localities where fresh waters occur. The riverside in the vicinity of the mouth of the burn below the Lower Milton Farm, and also the Loch of Hempriggs were both favourite resorts. These gulls are easily known by their mixed plumage of "scorrie" brown and white.

The presence of the Herring Gull has always been considered by fishermen as a sure sign of a shoal of herring, and in consequence they will endeavour to "shot" where they discover these birds.

Mackay's handwritten original contains the following additional paragraph:

"To prove the faith fishermen have in these "gows" one of your correspondents told an amusing story some years ago about an old Sarclet worthy, and if we can recall it to memory it ran as follows: "On a Saturday night in 'e heirt o' 'e fishin' he was going home from Pulteney in his ain Kert which was driven by his wife. For some reason unexplained this veteran was sound asleep on the bottom of the box. While passing the Loch of Hempriggs the "Maws" were making a "shindy" which awoke our hero. While sitting booze-dazed up he imagined he was in his boat, and at the sound of the "gows" he determined to "shot", calling forward to his crew that "She's here! She's here! Lower away!", and he himself gripping what he supposed to be the "aff'en" buoy threw it overboard to secure a "shottin berth". But lo and behold, what he took for the "efter-en doug" was his wife's message basket, which contained amongst other things a bottle full of "Jean's prime best", which went smash on the road, which deprived him of the chance of chasing the Sunday morning hairs from his "mou", or washing the "mochs" from, his yearning next day."

Footnote:
(27) A famous Wick character.

§37
John O'Groat Journal, February 22nd, 1918

MIGRATORY GULLS

The gulls which visit Caithness on migration are five in number, viz.: the Glaucous, Iceland, Ivory, Sabine's, and the Little Gull. All of the above are visitants from the Arctic Circle, their breeding haunts in a few cases being scarcely known. As we have treated very copiously on the Little Gull (Larus Minutus) in a previous series of articles; we will exclude this gull from our present reference, and therefore devote our attention to the remaining four.

The Glaucous Gull (Larus Glaucus)

Glaucous Gulls yearly visits the shores of the United Kingdom in considerable numbers, but not in flocks, and in most cases singly or in pairs. This bird is also known as the "Burgomaster" Gull. None of our migrating gulls stays so long in Britain as the Glaucous. It often appears about the end of September, and in many cases does not leave until near the end of May. Saxby on more than one occasion found it in Unst up till the first week of June. Glaucous Gulls visit Shetland in greater numbers than they do any other part of Britain, mature birds predominating amongst the Shetland visitors. Over other parts of the Kingdom young birds are the principal migrant (Glaucous "scorries"). This gull has been found breeding amongst all of the islands and coasts surrounding the Pole up to 82 deg. N latitude. The mature Glaucous is a beautiful bird, and it and the Greater Black-back are the largest of all our British gulls, both being almost exactly the same size. The young "Burgomasters" are mottled in plumage, and in some parts much resemble the Herring Gull "scorrie," but the continued light and dingy appearance of the outer quill webs, and the otherwise faint colouring of the plumage, give a sort of sickly looking appearance to the young of the Glaucous. We have often thought that it might have been the visit of a Glaucous "scorrie" to the abandoned a "wigwam" of the departed "King Otho," (when he had ascended to administer his macassar oil to the angels) which inspired our late celebrated and much lamented poet, "Leander," when he wrote the following outstanding verse in his "Memorium to the late John Fraser, the barber (alias "King Otho"):—

"But sign of life there is none around
Save one bald, solemn, sickly scorrie,
Which from the roof screams out a sound.
Like "Otho, I am truly sorry."

The Iceland Gull (Larus Islandicus)

This is another visitor from the Northern regions to the county during the winter months, and it resembles the Glaucous so closely in its plumage and other features that not until recent years was it was it identified as a distinct species. The resemblance of the Iceland Gull to the Glaucous compares with that of the Greater and Lesser Black-backs to each other. Even Dr Saxby, who was during his lifetime the greatest authority on our eleven British gulls, failed to discern the difference between these birds during the greater part of his life, and then only did he discover it when he observed a Glaucous and an Icelander standing together, and found the latter much shorter in the legs than the former. Yet Thomas Edwards, Banff, during the earlier part of his ornithological career discovered the difference, and on one occasion nearly lost his life stalking a pair of Iceland Gulls at Gamrie Head.

The Ivory Gull (Larus Eburneus)

The first recorded British specimen of this rare and lovely bird was procured by Dr Edmonston, Unst, during 1822. Another was killed by the doctor's son at Balta Sound in 1844, and Dr Saxby stated that he himself saw one on the 16th January, 1861. A specimen of a variety of this gull (the first and only one ever as yet obtained in Britain) which is now known to science as the Short- legged Ivory Gull (Rigophila brachytarus)[28] was shot at Thrumster, near Wick, by the late Mr Robert I. Shearer in November, 1854, and was sent to Sir William Jardine, who alluded to the newly discovered species in a paper read by him before the "Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh" on the 26th January, 1859. Jardine at the same time also referred to a specimen of the common variety which had come into the possession of Dr Sinclair, Wick twenty years previously, and which had been placed by him in his collection. The breeding haunts of the Ivory Gull are as yet little

known, and only twenty specimens of this gull have been obtained up till 1880. It has lately been ascertained that a beautiful male specimen of this gull was shot in the vicinity of the Annan Canal[29] between Ardrishaig and Lochgilphead in 1913. Dresser states in his "Birds of Europe" that so far as he knows only three authenticated eggs of the Ivory Gull existed in the collections of Europe, but Seebohm records the number as four, three of which were obtained by Professor Malmgren on Spitzbergen, and placed by him in the Stockholm Museum; while the fourth was brought home by Sir Leopold M'Lintock from Prince Patrick Island, and presented by him to the Dublin Museum.

The Sabines Gull (Xema Sabini)

This small forked-tailed gull was first recognised in the United Kingdom by a specimen being shot in Belfast Bay in September, 1822. The bird was first discovered during the Expedition of 1818, by the late Sir Edward Sabine, who found it nesting on the west side of Greenland. Since 1822 about a dozen specimens have been got (ten in Ireland and two in Scotland). Caithness again comes to the forefront with its list of rare British Birds, as it has to add to its credit a beautiful specimen of the Sabines Gull. One of those rare Arctic visitors was found dead on the shore of Loch Sarclet, near Wick, on July 1, 1885. This specimen was presented to the Pulteney Collection by the finder. The owner of the collection being absent at Shetland, the specimen was preserved and set up for him by the late Mr James Sutherland, taxidermist, Wick.[30]

Some time afterwards the late Harvey Brown called to see the specimen, accompanied by the late William Reid, sen. After inspecting the bird Mr Brown said it was a male, and the finest example of a Sabine's Gull he had ever seen.[31]

Footnote:

(28) The *Groat's* compositor evidently had some difficulty reading Mackay's writing; this should read Pagophila brachytarsus.

(29) This should read the Crinan Canal.

(30) The finding date of the Sabine's Gull was *ca*.19 June 1885, and not 1 July as stated by Mackay (see Reid 1885).

(31) It is not clear from this just who Harvie-Brown and Reid were visiting – Mackay himself, or perhaps James Sutherland, the taxidermist in Wick who set up the Sabine's Gull? Either way, it can only have been sexed by dissection, for the sexes are alike as to plumage in this species. Furthermore Harvie Brown & Buckley make no mention of the bird's sex in the *Vertebrate Fauna*. Mackay wrote this around thirty years after the event, and one suspects that his memory was playing tricks on him.

§38
John O'Groat Journal, March 1st, 1918

GEESE AND SWANS

The seven Wild Geese catalogued in the Caithness List are amongst some of our most important and interesting families of natatores. Those geese consist of the White-fronted, Bernicle, Brent, Bean, Grey Lag, Red-breasted and Pink-footed. This fast named goose was only recently added to the Caithness List, and a specimen was presented to the Wick museum by the late Mr David Bruce. This bird was obtained at Halkirk. With the exception of the Red-breasted Goose; of which only one example was ever procured in the county, all the others are well known to many observers amongst either dwellers in the interior or to those who reside in the vicinity of our bays, especially parts of the coast where long and wide foreshores are created during extreme ebbs, and to which at least three of our species resort to feed. Of the seven Wild Geese above referred to none but the Grey Lag was ever known to breed in Caithness.

Red-Breasted Goose ("Anser Ruficollis")

Of this rare British goose only three specimens are on record as having been obtained in Scotland. The first example, as stated by Dr Fleming, was shot near Berwick-on-Tweed by Mr Burney, gunsmith, in May, 1818, and was sent to Mr Bullock, in whose possession Fleming saw it the same year. The second specimen is recorded to the credit of Caithness, and was alluded to by Professor Wilson, but the date and precise locality of when or where it was captured are not given.

Mr Wilson apparently saw this rare goose after Dr Sinclair's collection was removed to Thurso, as his statement runs that this specimen is still preserved in the collection which once belonged to the late Dr Sinclair, Wick. The third specimen of the Red-breasted Goose known in Scotland was reported as having been seen in the immediate vicinity of Strathbeg many years ago. This is another instance of Caithness holding the premier position in having the rarest of our British Birds on its list.

Pink-Footed Goose ("Anser Brachyrhynchus")

This species was evidently overlooked by British ornithologists previous to 1839, when it was added to the British list by Mr Bartlett, of the Zoological Gardens, London. Mr Bartlett pointed out the distinction between it and the Bean Goose. Even since its acceptance as being new to Britain great controversies have taken place as to whether it is a real distinct species or not, many ornithologists having tried to prove that the Pink-footed is only a variety of the Bean Goose. The plumage of both of these birds being so alike (almost to a feather), aided the doubt—the only apparent external difference being the occasional diversion of the colouring of the legs and bill. Amongst the doubters was Mr Macpherson, who had gone thoroughly into the matter, and who declared that he had on more than one occasion found one leg yellow and the other pink on the same bird. He also found that the colouring of their bills was not constant, but changed amongst those birds which were classified as two distinct species—the Bean and the Pink-footed Goose. To determine the matter (if possible) Mr Bartlett penned two pairs of each these birds in the Gardens, and left them together for a few months during the breeding season, but during all of that time he did not discover either of the species associate with the other, and that each species kept distinctly apart, both while in the pond, or on the banks. However, while taking for granted the correctness of the statements made by Mr Bartlett, all must now be persuaded that the Pink-footed Goose is a distinct species from the Bean Goose. The Pink-footed Goose has been found breeding in large numbers in the same localities as those that are now considered the peculiar Bean districts, along the Sound of Harris, and also in the interior of North Uist. As many of the foregoing references also apply to the Bean Goose, we don't intend to write an exclusive paragraph on it.

Bernicle Goose ("Anser Leucopsis")

A legend long existed that the Bernicle Goose was bred from the Barnacle Mollusc, hence the reason for its often being called the Barnacle Goose. Many people know the shell-fish which fastens itself to a ship's bottom during a long

voyage, and also to derelict timber. By close observance of this mollusc it is found that the cutting instrument in the head of the fish, which enables it to bore and burrow far into the interior of a drift-log much resembles the bill of a bird, protruding from the shell much like a chicken emerging from an egg. As Bernicle Geese feed on these shell-fish when they have the opportunity, hence is the origin of the appellation "Barnacle Goose".

Gray in his "Birds of the West of Scotland" (1871) quotes an amusing and curious statement about the Bernicle Goose from a very old book, and which we take the liberty of inserting here. This book is entitled "A Memorial of the Most Rare and Wonderful Things in Scotland as they were Anno Domini 1597," by J.Monipennie. Mr Monipennie wrote as follows:—

> "At Dunbarton, directly under the Castle, at the mouth of the river Clyde as it enters the sea, there are a number of claik-geese, blacke of colour, which in the night time do gather great quantitie of the crops of the grasse growing upon the land, and carry the same to the sea. There they assemble in a round and with wondrous curiositie do offer every one his own portion to the floud, and then attend upon the flowing tide till the grasse be purified from the fresh taste and turned to the salt, and less any part thereof should escape they labour to hold it in with the labour of their nebbes. Thereafter orderly every fowl eats his portion. And this custom they observe perpetually. They are verrie fatte and verrie delicious to bee eaten."

It appeared the Bernicle held the name of claik or clack geese in Mr Monipennie's day, as they are still known in some parts of Scotland as clack-geese, from the clacking sound they make by striking the upper and lower mandibles together, the sound of which can be sometimes heard at a long distance, when a large flock are clacking in unison.

§39
John O'Groat Journal, March 15th, 1918

GEESE AND SWANS

The Brent Goose ("Anser Brenta")

This goose is occasionally a visitor to the ebb "scaurs" of Sinclair Bay, principally in the vicinity of the Burn of Wester. The specimen of the Brent Goose in the Mackay collection in the Wick Museum was shot in that locality. Besides feeding on mussels and other shell-fish found on the "odds" they feed copiously on sea grass ("sly") found on the flat rocks exposed by the receded tide. Brent Geese are very numerous around both shores of the Cromarty and Beauty Firths, where they feed on the mussels and sea slugs found on the long reaches of mud-flats exposed at low-water. At this time they are immune from danger on both sides, as no boat can reach them within gun-shot of the sea. Neither can any fowler from the land, as they cannot travel over the semi-liquid mud to approach them within range. But their destruction during the full tide, when they collect in flocks of thousands, is on an immense scale, as the punt gunners slay them in scores with each lucky shot. A writer in the "Edinburgh Journal of Natural History" for May, 1837 (and who notably was Macgillivray himself, who was the editor) stated that he had once seen a flock of ten thousand Brent Geese in the Cromarty Firth, between Invergordon and Cromarty Ferry. This writer does not say what means he took TO COUNT THEM.

There are two forms of the Common Brent Goose, both of which occur in Britain, one with the underbody dark grey, the other with the belly whitish. The specimen in the Wick Museum is of the latter variety and the rarer of the two. The breeding localities of this goose are still very much a mystery, as the farther north explorers have gone (previous to the Pole being reached) they regularly met Brent Geese after the breeding season flying south with their goslings, which showed that their principal breeding haunts were on the most northerly limits of land in the Arctic regions.

White-fronted Goose ("Anser Albifrons")

This goose does not breed in Britain, and is only a winter visitant, with a somewhat curious distribution. On the West Coast of Scotland it is a rare visitor. In Caithness the White-fronted Goose is a regular winter migrant, and is occasionally to be found in the county until long through the spring. The specimen of this goose in the Breadalbane Crescent collection was procured from Strathmore early in May, 1888, and was a beautiful male. Owing to the lateness of a bird of this class being found in the county, it was surmised that it might have been one of a breeding pair. On our suggesting this to Mr James M'Nichol, Kildonan, who is certainly an outstanding authority on Caithness birds, especially those of the interior and upland species. Mr M'Nichol wrote that in all of his experience he never knew or even heard of a White-fronted Goose to breed in the North, or even Britain, and he presumed the bird referred to might have been a disabled bird, which was unable to migrate with the main body during late March or early April.

Grey Lag Goose ("Anser Ferus")

The Grey Lag Goose is the only one of the seven Caithness "Ansers" which breeds in the county; and although once known to have bred about the Fens of Lincolnshire, the breeding haunts of this goose are now confined to Scotland, including the Hebrides, where it is still abundant on some of the outer isles.

In Caithness the Grey Lag breeds principally amongst the upland "Flows," but an exceptional case of it having bred at almost sea level is recorded by Mr Ronald M'Nichol, Ackergill. In a note in our possession from that gentleman dated January 31, 1917 he says:—"We had a Grey Lag nesting on Killimster Moss two years ago, and which, through assiduous protection, hatched and flighted her goslings to freedom." This is an instance of proof that the Grey Lag Goose, from which our domestic goose has sprung, is even in its wild state inclined to associate with man.

Hooper Swan ("Cygnus Musicus")

The Hooper or Whistling Swan, as this species is variously called, is a bird of passage or a winter visitor, arriving on the coasts and islands of Britain in November and remaining till the spring, sometimes as late as May. The Hooper breeds in

high northern latitudes, from Iceland eastwards. Seebohm and Brown found the Wild Swan in great numbers in Northern Siberia, a little south of the Arctic Circle. Their first arrival there on migration was about the middle of May, thereby showing how late they begin their migration from Britain and Southern Europe to their breeding localities.

The Loch of Wester has been for ages, and we presume still is, a rendezvous of the Hooper Swans on the east side of Caithness. The late Mr Alex. Sutherland, gamekeeper, Ackergill, was a great authority on our swans. It appeared from his statement that the Hoopers would visit Wick river for a series of years in succession, then disappear for a few years, then resume their visits. We lately had the pleasure of receiving from Mr John Dunnet a beautiful photograph of swans on the Wick river, and which we prize very much. The locality these Wild Swans were photographed in (close to the Langhills residences) shows what protection can do, as we have followed with pleasure the measures adopted to save the carcases of these charming visitors from the broth-pots of detestable and unsentimental gunners.

Bewick's Swan (Cygnus Bewickie")

The Bewick's Swan can be easily recognised from the Hooper by its smaller size, and by the colour of its bill, which is only partly yellow. In England this swan is considered a much rarer bird than the Hooper, but on the Scottish coasts and the Outer Hebrides it occurs more plentifully than its larger relative. In Ireland, after severe frosts, it is sometimes seen by hundreds and thousands. The Bewick's Swan was one of the six birds whose breeding haunts were unknown to science previous to 1885. To obtain evidence of the breeding localities of these birds Seebohm and Brown were induced to make their famous journey to Northern Siberia, where they found the Bewick's Swan breeding in large numbers.

Only three Bewick's Swans have been got in Caithness. The first was shot by Mr A.Sutherland, Ackergill, on the Loch of Winlass in 1869, and some years later the late Mr Lewis Dunbar, Thurso, reported that he had received two of this species for preservation, but there was no definite data attached to the birds. In one case he was not sure but the specimen was got in some part of the North of Sutherland; however, we will take it for granted that it also was obtained in Caithness.

§40
John O'Groat Journal, March 22nd, 1918

MERGANSERS

There are only six species of Mergansers known to science, four of which are British, and all of these four occur in Caithness. The remaining two species were discovered by a French expedition on the Auckland Islands, two examples of which were brought home and placed in the Paris Museum. The Wick Museum contains specimens of the four British Mergansers, three of which are in the Mackay collection.

The Goosander ("Mergus Merganser")

This bird is the largest of the genus, and is nearly as large as a Brent Goose. The adult male Goosander when in full nuptial dress is certainly one of the prettiest birds known of the duck or diver families. Goosanders have been frequently got about the mouth of Wick river in the fall and rise of the year, but these visitors in nearly every case were either females or young males, which very much resemble the females, until their first moult. There are some doubts about the Goosander breeding in Caithness. Kearton mentions a case of a nest being discovered by a game keeper on the border-line between Sutherland and Caithness, below the trunk of a tree which had fallen across a stream, but when the place was afterwards visited by him he found that the situation had been swept away by the previous winter floods. Jardine wrote that to his knowledge he never knew a Goosander to have ever bred in Britain. While Macgillivray records that he had known this Merganser to have bred in the vicinity of the lochs of the Outer Hebrides.

Red-Breasted Merganser ("Mergus Sematon")

The Mergansers are also known by the name of "Sawbills," in consequence of their upper and lower mandibles being serrated like a saw. The Red-breasted Merganser is only a winter visitant to the shores of England and the south of Scotland, yet it breeds freely in Caithness, and many remain in the county all year round, but those that remain are without exception old females and the young birds of the year, they all being the colour of the adult female. This Merganser breeds by the margins, or on islands, of the most remote lochs of the Highlands, especially preferring those in the vicinity of the sea.

After the breeding season the males of this bird migrate, leaving the females and young birds around the shores of Britain. The males do not return until the following spring, when they join the females and then repair in solitary couples to their usual breeding haunts. Gatke wrote that during every winter around the coastline of Heligoland thousands of male Red-breasted Mergansers assemble, nearly all of which showed to be very mature birds, as their double crests testified. The double-tufted crest of the male of this merganser doesn't fully develop until its fourth moult, after the nestling year, although many finely plumaged males are got in the intervals, but only with a single tuft. The splendid specimen in the Wick Museum (Mackay collection) was not obtained in Caithness, but got in the vicinity of Stornoway in June 1878. This bird shows the double crest complete. Unlike its other three congeners, all of which when standing assume the general attitude of ducks, the Red-breasted Merganser on land stands nearly upright.

The Smew ("Mergus Albellus")

The Smew, "Smee" or "White Nun" are not uncommon during the winter season about the North Sea, and are known to fishermen as the Red-headed Smews. These are entirely females and young birds, as the male Smews (as in the case of its congener, the Red-breasted Merganser) migrate to distant localities, as yet only very vaguely known. The breeding haunts of the Smew remained a mystery up till 1857, when that year Mr Wooley obtained in Finland three eggs and the female bird. The nest was found in the hollow of a decayed tree. In 1875 Brown and Seebohm had four eggs brought them on the Petchora River, Northern Siberia, a little south of the Arctic Circle. The Smew was one of the birds recorded by Shearer and Osborne during the early 'sixties as being one of our rarest Caithness visitors. A distinguished ornithologist, one who had got into touch with the breeding localities of the Smew in

Northern Europe and Siberia, discovered many years ago a most exceptional trait in the moulting of the male Smew. During this bird's breeding season, and soon after the birds had mated, the male bird assumed the plumage of the female and retained it until the autumnal moult, when he reassumed his own costume. This peculiar freak of nature has always created a difficulty in distinguishing the males from the females of these birds during their nuptial season. What is rather a confusing feature in the summer moulting of the male Smew is the fact that only paired males assume the dress of the females, the unmated males still retaining their usual male attire throughout the year. The Smew, unlike its congener the Red-breasted Merganser, is rarely seen around the western coasts of Europe. Gatke stated that all around the coast line of Heligoland only one male and a few females were ever known to have been seen during his life-long residence on the island. The Smew in the Wick Museum (Mackay Collection) was shot on the north end of Haskussey Island, Colgrave Sound, Shetland in August, 1885, and is a mature and beautiful male in summer plumage.

Hooded Merganser ("Mergus Cucullatus")

There are many unauthenticated statements respecting the occurrence of this rare North American species in Britain, but the records on which reliance may be placed are very few in number. Most of the specimens obtained around these islands have been got in Ireland. Eyton in his "History of the Rarer British Birds" has described and figured a Hooded Merganser, which he obtained in Wales in the winter of 1831. The next recorded is a specimen killed in Dingle Bay in 1840, while Sir R. Payne Galway in his "Fowler in Ireland" reports three specimens having been shot in Cork Harbour in 1878, and another was obtained in January, 1881. The earliest record in Scotland was probably the specimen referred to in Rev. Charles Thomson's list of 1841, and found in Dr Sinclair's collection, and which was possibly the same bird reported on by Shearer and Osborne in 1862 as being one of our rarest Caithness visitors. Brown and Buckley in their "Vertebrate Fauna of Sutherland and Caithness" only make a passing reference to the Hooded Merganser as being found in Dr. Sinclair's list, and very rare. Even Cuvier in his day stated that this Merganser was very rare on this side of the Atlantic. There is no authenticated instance of the Hooded Merganser having been got on the Continent. Since the recorded Caithness specimen in 1841 it is quite possible that other examples may have been seen or obtained in the county but not recorded, and also over other parts of Scotland. There is certainly one instance of a male Hooded Merganser having been killed on the west of Shetland during 1884, but because of its capture not being recorded by some Ornithological Society, it remains unreferred to. This Shetland specimen was shot by Mr E. S. Mackay at Whalfirth Voe in July 1884, and is now in the Wick Museum (Mackay Collection).

§41
John O'Groat Journal, March 29th, 1918

DUCKS AND SCOTERS

There are thirty-two in the complete British list of Ducks and Scoters (twenty-nine of the former and three of the latter), ten of which have appeared in Britain only six times, or fewer. Of the British list Caithness has fifteen examples of Ducks, and three of Scoters, to its credit. The Wick Museum contains (inclusive of those in the Mackay collection), eleven Ducks, but no Scoters. The Mackay collection, however, contains three specimens of the rarest of our British Ducks, each of which has appeared in Britain only four times or less, viz. The Buffle-headed Duck, the Ferruginous Duck, and the King Eider Duck. Although these three ducks were not obtained in Caithness, they yet belong to Scotland's northern avifauna, as those referred to were obtained by Mr Mackay in the following localities:- The Buffle-headed Duck (a male) was shot on Eriskay Island, South Uist, in June, 1870, the Ferruginous Duck (male) at Kyleakin, Skye, in May, 1898; and the King Eider Duck (a male) on Whalsay Skerries, August, 1869.

Mr Howard Saunders records that a male King Eider Duck was obtained in Shetland on February 24, 1899, and was exhibited at a meeting of the Linnean Society on the 2nd March of the same year. Yet the King Duck in the Mackay collection, and which was also procured in Shetland, was obtained twenty years previous to the specimen recorded by Saunders, but unfortunately its capture was not reported to any ornithological society. To show how seldom this duck has visited Britain or the western shores of Europe, Gatke states that during his whole residence of fifty years on Heligoland only one specimen of a King Eider Duck was obtained on the island, and which was shot in January, 1879. This duck as a breeding species belongs to the highest Arctic countries of both hemispheres.

As we intend to refer only to a few of the rarest of our Caithness Ducks and Scoters in this article, some of our interesting local species shall be omitted for the present. We will therefore merely instance the Sheld Ducks, Pochards, and Scoters, as these species, with the exception of the Ruddy Sheld Duck and the Surf Scoter, are well known in Caithness.

Common Sheld Duck ("Tadorna Bellinii")

This duck is known in certain localities as the "Burrow Duck" and also as the "Sand Goose". The striking contrast of colours in the plumage of this beautiful species, to say nothing of its red bill and frontal knob, render it easy of identification, and there is no other species of British duck with which it can be confounded. The Common Sheld Duck is well known to many Caithness observers of bird life, especially to those who reside about the lonelier districts of the uplands of Caithness, and principally during the bird's breeding season.

This charming duck breeds in deserted rabbit warrens, or other holes found amongst the low sand-dunes of the coast, or more especially if an upland loch has a small sandy island near its centre. It chooses this situation both as being suitable for its burrow, and also as an element of safety.

The writer for three years in succession knew a Common Sheld Duck to breed on a small island of this description on a loch at a high elevation in the vicinity of Loch Boisdale, South Uist, and at the end of the breeding season of 1868 he secured the male bird and set it up for the Pulteney Collection. This bird was in most fascinating summer plumage.

In the nest section of the South Kensington Museum is a nest of the Common Sheld Duck of surprising interest. As in almost every case in this section of the Museum, the nests have been removed with much of their natural surroundings still attached; the nest in question is shown with the entire natural situation in evidence. As from the ground surface to the bottom of the burrow is fully five feet deep, the soil being a clayey sand, a section of about six feet square has been entirely cut out and removed. After the block was placed in position in the centre of the floor two sections were cut out exhibiting the trend of the burrow from the surface to the nest, which was also exposed showing, showing its elaborate make-up from down and feathers taken from the bird's belly and breast. The nest also contained a large clutch of eggs. With a pair of charmingly set up birds, the whole subject is beautifully enclosed in

an elaborate glazed case. Excepting the eyry of a Golden Eagle, which has been removed from the cliff in its entirety, with its two eaglets, there is no more fascinating exhibit in this notable section of the Museum, than that of the nest and its surroundings of the Common Sheld Duck.

§42
John O'Groat Journal, April 5th, 1918

Ruddy Sheld Duck ("Tadorna rutila")

Previous to 1843 only three specimens of this rare duck were obtained in the British Islands. The first and original one (a female) was recorded as a British bird, in 1776, and is now in the Newcastle Museum. It was killed in Dorsetshire. Another got a few years later, was sent to Selby for his collection, and the third was shot in 1834 on the Sussex coast. The Ruddy Sheld Duck is known in India as the "Brahminy Duck," and specimens are found to be numerous all around the sea coasts of the Indian Peninsula.

Since 1843, at least five examples have been got in Caithness alone. Messrs Shearer and Osborne in their report read at Edinburgh in 1863 referred to this duck as being one of the rarest visitants to Caithness of this genus of birds, and up till then only two specimens were either obtained or observed in the county. Since 1863 at least four specimens have been got—three in Caithness and one in the Outer Hebrides. One, a mature male, was shot by Mr Eric S. Mackay on a small island at the entrance to Loch Boisdale in June 1868, and preserved and placed a few months afterwards in his Pulteney collection, and is now one of the rare ducks in the Mackay collection in the Wick Museum.

Of later date three interesting specimens were shot on the Loch of Hempriggs by Mr John MacNichol, gamekeeper, Thrumster, on 1st July, 1909—one male and two females—all young birds of their first year. The male and one of the females of this capture were sent to Mr Ronald MacNichol, Ackergill, who preserved and set them up, and donated them to the Wick Museum, this pair of birds being now amongst the most valued bird exhibits in the institution. We therefore challenge any museum in Britain to produce three Ruddy Sheld Ducks all of which were British captures. Although the Loch Boisdale specimen was obtained in June, and the Loch of Hempriggs birds in July, it does not prove that these birds were bred in Britain that year, but more probably in India, and as the eastern summer almost corresponds with our mid-winter they could easily have been bred and become migrants to Britain as early as our mid-summer. This proves that the Ruddy Sheld Ducks appear in Britain some months before any of our other migratory ducks. Although the male procured at Loch Boisdale was accompanied by a female (also in rich summer dress) and the pair remained on or around the small island for fully a month, yet after many arduous searches explorers failed to find a nest of these ducks. The birds had apparently only selected the situation for the time being because of its immunity from danger, they having that year bred on some part of the Indian coast.

Red-headed Pochard ("Fuligula Ferina")

The Red-headed Pochard is almost entirely a winter visitant to Caithness. This duck is chiefly found about the mouths of estuaries during the winter and spring months. Examples of the Red-headed Pochard have often been shot about the mouth of Wick river, but in nearly every case they were females and birds of their first year. The specimen in the Mackay collection in the Wick Museum was shot by Mr Mackay at the mouth of Castlegoe, Auldwick, in January, 1879, and is a beautiful male in winter plumage.

Scaup Pochard ("Fuligula Gesnerii")

The Scaup Pochard is also known by the name of the "White-faced Duck," but which is the female of this bird. This duck is also a winter visitor to the county, and like its congener frequents low-lying parts of the sea coast, especially any fresh-water loch in the vicinity of the sea. It is doubtful if the Scaup Pochard ever bred in Britain, as the only evidence we have was that Jardine shot a single specimen in 1834 on a small fresh-water loch in the north of Sutherlandshire, in the vicinity of the sea. This bird had a young one swimming with it, yet he found no evidence of a nest or that it had bred where it was discovered and shot.

We had a note from our valued correspondent Mr James MacNichol, Kildonan, in which he states that he had apparent evidence of a pair of Scaup Ducks having bred in his locality. If such was confirmed the information would be of great value to British ornithologists. The specimen of the Scaup Pochard in the Mackay collection, a

beautiful male in summer plumage, was shot by Mackay at Geedigoe, South Head, Wick Bay.

The Black, the Velvet and the Surf Scoters

The Common or Black Scoter ("Oidema Nigra") is a winter visitant to Britain, a few occasionally remaining to breed, Caithness sharing such rare occurrences. During mid-winter they are often seen in immense flocks in the Firth of Forth. They have been known to have appeared on the Caithness coast in such numbers in the North Sea, that the flock darkened the ocean for miles around. The Velvet Scoter ("Oidema Fusca") is a frequent winter visitant to the east of Scotland, Caithness included. It is also occasionally found around the Orkney Islands in great profusion. There is no dependable record of it having bred in Caithness. The peculiar plumage of the Velvet Scoter does not resemble that of any other bird that we know of in its feel of downy and silky tendency, except the Short Eared Owl.

The Surf Scoter ("Oidema Perspicillata")

This rare Scoter is an indigenous American bird, and is extremely rare in Britain. The late Mr Osborne records that to his knowledge only one specimen was ever seen on the Caithness coast. The configuration of the bill of the male of this Scoter is of most peculiar construction. In some ways it resembles the bill of the King Duck, and is very richly coloured.

§43
John O'Groat Journal, April 12th, 1918

GENERAL REMARKS

Should any of your readers have wholly, or even partly, tried to read the articles written by "Abrach" on "Caithness Bird Life" they deserve to be congratulated on their patience. They also deserve thanks for any sympathy they have either silently or otherwise expressed for the writer in his rather crude endeavours to compile an outline of the 180 species of Caithness birds which he has referred to, thereby leaving only fifty-five of the whole county list (235) for any future amateur ornithologist to take up, so that then the whole of our Caithness birds, including the last two added, viz., the Northern or Scarlet Bullfinch and the Grey Plover will be treated in some form or other.

The birds on the British list amount to 496 different species up till 1909, 137 species of which have only visited the United Kingdom six times, and many of the 137 not oftener than twice or thrice. The Caithness list up till 1915 consisted of 235 distinct species, many of which include the rarest visitors to Britain, two specimens in the Wick Museum having appeared only twice in these islands. This shows how prominent Caithness stands in the forefront of Scottish counties through having been visited by so many rare British birds. The late Mr David Bruce's memory should be revered for the splendid list of Caithness birds he compiled and treated on, and which was so complete that only five species were left unreferred to by him; and as his treatise was (previous to "Abrach's" articles) the last written on Caithness bird-life, it should stand as a valuable contribution to the ornithology of our county.

Should some energetic local ornithologist take the trouble to unearth from the archives of the "John O'Groat Journal" the successive articles written by Mr Robert Innes Shearer, which appeared weekly above the initials "R.I.S." over sixty years ago, the researcher would find it a pleasing task, and besides he would give to the observers of bird-life in our county a feast of ornithological fare of trustworthy details and references which all lovers of wild birds would enjoy. The writer, though only half through his "teens" when those articles from the pen of Mr Shearer appeared, was so fascinated with them that on the day of the "Groat's" publication, if he was offered the choice of either his supper or the "Groat" the latter would come in first by a "long chalk." No supper could compare with the reading of "R.I.S.'s" charming descriptions of birds and bird life.

If Mr Henry Osborne had not during his latter years been sorely afflicted with a dire malady, which ended his early life, and had he lived to have co-operated with Mr Shearer in compiling a book on Caithness ornithology, such a work, besides being an honour to Caithness, would have been welcomed by all the prominent ornithologists of those days, and certainly would have found a place in all of the leading libraries of Britain. The deceased Mr Buckley did but scant justice to Mr Osborne's notes and statistics, while he co-operated with Harvie-Brown when they were compiling their "Vertebrate Fauna of Sutherland and Caithness", as a large number of Mr Osborne's notes were left unreferred to. In consequence the name of another of our two greatest Caithness ornithologists is now almost entirely forgotten, even by those who knew him personally.

It does not require a college education to become an ornithologist, as anyone imbued with a kindly disposition towards birds soon comes to know the common species, and from them goes on to those of the rarer varieties. At every turn of a walk in the country something new appears in bird-life which may arrest the attention of general observers. Birds of certain localities soon come to know a frequent visitor to their haunts, and especially one who does not molest them. Mr Kearton, the famous photographer of birds in their nesting haunts, first used to familiarise himself with his intended subjects by gradually approaching closer each time, so that he has often stalked the hen on her nest.

As the Dotterel (as has already been demonstrated) does not breed except at high altitudes we have a note from Mr James MacNicol, Kildonan, referring to one of Mr Kearton's visits to his locality, where he resided for some time with the hope of discovering a

Dotterel's nest, but failed to do so in either the Caithness or Sutherland Highlands. Before this venture of Mr Kearton's proved a success he had to visit Kingussie, where he was informed that the Dotterel bred in considerable numbers. After discovering his first Dotterel's nest, he used his usual tactics of gradually approaching the bird with such success that he often patted the sitting female. A photograph appears of this nest with its female sitting thereon in Mr Kearton's elaborate compilation of bird photography.

As an example to anyone ornithologically inclined and to further prove that a scientific training is not required, we take the case of Alexander Wilson, the great American ornithologist, who was doubtless the greatest naturalist of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—if not of all time. Wilson was born at Paisley, July 6, 1766, and was the son of a weaver. He was apprenticed to the weaving trade, and worked as a journeyman for a few years in his native town. He was prosecuted for a lampoon on a master weaver during a trade dispute, and afterwards sailed from Belfast for America, and landed at Newcastle, Delaware on July 14, 1794. Alexander Wilson died on the 23rd July, 1813 in his 48th year.

In the handwritten original there is an additional paragraph which reads as follows:

"What is quite a peculiar coincidence we have a popular and much respected gentleman in Caithness who resembles Wilson in many ways, and walks of life, especially that of his professional craft, and the science of ornithology. Again he has often been threatened with expulsion from the county because of his lampooning tendencies. But the people can't spare him, as he is quite a needful member of the community, and as his uncompromising tactics make him indispensable, and he is also a fear to public transgressors. This gentleman fears no-one. Not even his satanic majesty included."

§44
John O'Groat Journal, April 19th, 1918

NUMERICAL SUMMARY OF THE APPEARANCE OF BIRDS

There are many species of birds which have appeared only once in Caithness, others only twice or thrice, and a few of only which four examples have been obtained.

After a careful scrutiny of all records relating to the visits of rare birds, and which covers the whole Caithness list up till 1913 we find that the following lists can be safely relied on, and are liable to very few corrections. The headings will show the number of appearances and examples obtained.

One Visit

Iceland Falcon
Goshawk
Short-legged Ivory Gull
Black-headed Bunting
Mealy Redpoll
Sabine's Gull
Little Gull
Temminck's Stint
Montague's Harrier
Little Bustard
Black-tailed Godwit
Baillon's Crake
Red-breasted Goose
Kingfisher
Little Ringed Plover
Stone Curlew
Dusty Shearwater
White's Thrush
Grey Phalarope
White Throat
Fork Tailed Petrel
Great Snipe
Common Bittern

Since 1913

Grey Plover
Northern or Scarlet Bullfinch

Two Visits

Dotterel
Spotted Crake
Harlequin Duck
Great Crested Grebe
Hoopoe
Goldfinch
Ruff
Purple Heron
European Jay
Parrot Crossbill
Little Stint
Ortolan Bunting
American Bittern
Surf Scoter
Brunnich's Guillemot
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker [11]
Garrulous Roller

The birds of which three examples have been obtained are the Honey Buzzard, Ivory Gull and Bewick's Swan. Those of four visits are Rough-legged Buzzard, Waxwing and the Great Snowy Owl. Messrs Shearer and Osborne's compilation of 1863 consisted of 206 specimens. To this number these gentlemen were instrumental in adding seventeen new species to the county, none of which were included in Mr Thomson's list which he compiled for the "Statistical Account of Scotland (Wick Parish)" in 1841. At this stage it would only be consistent to give the names of those gentlemen who added the last twenty-nine species to the Caithness list, with a list of the specimens acquired:—

By James Sutherland—American Bittern, 1883; Pallas Sandgrouse, 1888; Buff-backed Shrike, 1898; Great Titmouse 1904.

By Eric S. Mackay—Black-tailed Godwit, 1867; Greater Spotted Woodpecker, 1867; Purple Sandpiper, 1863; Mealy Redpoll, 1870; Common Bittern, 1871; Black-headed Bunting, 1875; Sabine's Gull, 1885.[32]

By Lewis Dunbar—Hoopoe, 1879, Kingfisher 1904.

By G.Bannerman—Little Ringed Plover, 1871.

By William Reid—British Long-tailed Titmouse, 1882; Blue Titmouse, 1883.[33]

By T.E.Biddle—White's Thrush (found in Dr Sinclair's Collection after its removal to Thurso.)

By Alexander Sutherland—Bewick's Swan, 1869.

By Professor Wilson—Brunnich's Guillemot (discovered in Dr Sinclair's collection in 1841, but

omitted by Messrs Shearer and Osborne).

By William MacEwan—Stone Curlew, 1891.

By Alexander Sandison—Ruff, 1873.

By Ronald MacNicol—Grey Plover, Northern or Scarlet Bullfinch.

By David Bruce—Pink Footed Goose, Osprey (only observed); Greenland Falcon (only observed); Grey Phalarope (only observed); WhiteThroat (only observed). Mr Bruce also adds the Great Auk.

The now rare appearance of the three Buzzards in Caithness is quite in keeping with the diminution of the Golden Eagle and the Peregrine Falcon, and the extermination of the White-tailed Eagle, the preservation of game being the principal cause of the (almost) extinction of those interesting raptors.

Mr James MacNicol, Kildonan, states in a note of 12th February, 1917 that "the Common Buzzard" is yet fairly common and may be seen regularly for a time and then disappears for another period. The Rough-legged Buzzard is now rare in the North, and I have only seen an odd one about this season of the year, generally following a severe snowstorm. I have only once seen the Honey Buzzard, and then over twenty years ago in Caithness, and that was one which a near relative was lucky enough to kill in July 1896, as far as I can remember. In the Pulteney collection were the three Caithness Buzzards—the Common, the Rough-legged, and the Honey. All were obtained from the Langwell Estate during 1885. Those birds were sent down at different times to a Wick merchant for disposal, and from whom the owner of the collection bought them.

The Raven is now another of our fast vanishing Caithness birds as its existence very much depended on the carrion left by the "kills" of Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and Buzzards, all of which are now almost exterminated from the county. The disappearance of the Eagles from Dunnet Head nearly sixty years ago sealed the fate of the Raven's residence there, where doubtless many pairs bred yearly. As albinos often occur amongst Ravens it probably was the origin of a legend amongst the natives of those districts, that when something uncommon was expected to happen the doubters would reply by saying "You'll see a white 'corby' before you'll see that." Such a saying is now used all over Caithness at the present day.

Footnote:

(32) As made clear in Chapter 1 (p.7), the Sabine's Gull was found by an unnamed boy and identified by William Reid (see Reid 1885); the mounted skin was donated to Mackay, but, even if one allows some loss of memory (this article was written at least a quarter of centry after the event) it is something of a conceit for him to claim that it was he who added the Sabine's Gull to the county list.

(33) In the same article referred to in the previous footnote, Reid says that he had added eight specie sto the Caithness county list; frustratingly, he does not say which these were.

§45
John O'Groat Journal, April 26th, 1918

CAITHNESS BIRDS ONCE RARE, NOW COMMON

Many birds which were rare visitors to the county a few years ago are now quite common and nest regularly in Caithness. For instance, the Blue Tit, which was only added to our list of birds in 1883, is now a regular breeder. On the authority of "Cairnduna" we understand that this beautiful bird breeds yearly amongst the trees in the gardens of Wick and vicinity, a favourite resort being a garden in High Street.

The Bridled Guillemot, which is one of the additions made by Shearer and Osborne, now breeds in thousands around our coasts.

The charming Waxwing, after a long absence, reappeared a couple of years ago, and became the guest of Ex-Bailie Simpson, who allowed it to remain in his garden unmolested until, we presume, all the "roddan" berries were exhausted, and afterwards the bird-loving Bailie allowed it to depart in peace.

The Garganey Duck or Summer Teal ("Boschas Circia"), is an occasional visitor to Britain. F.O.Morris records that four were got in Stirlingshire in 1841, and that it regularly visits Caithness.[34] The beautiful male specimen in the Wick Museum (Mackay collection) was shot by Mr E.S.Mackay on an islet in the Sound of Barra on 1st June, 1869, and once formed a part of his Pulteney collection.

The Ruff with its partner, the Reeve, were once fairly common in Caithness, but now Mr James M'Nicol places this species on the list of the almost vanished Caithness Birds.

The Siskin was first found in Caithness by Charles Thomson in 1841 (not in Dr Sinclair's collection), but in private possession, as were also the Great Snipe and the Fork-tailed Petrel. On the statement of Mr Osborne, the Hobby is the rarest visitor to the county of all our falcons, and Mr M'Nicol states that our three Caithness Harriers are also amongst our almost vanished Caithness raptores. Various interesting instances of the appearance and disappearance of many of our county birds could yet be recounted, but the above must suffice for the present, as our humble efforts are now drawing to a close, as an erratic recorder of Caithness birds and their movements.

A few more examples of many of those rare visitants may have appeared in the county, but have not been recored.

Since the death of Mr James Sutherlandand of Mr Lewis Dunbar, Caithness has been devoid of professional taxidermists, the consequence being that the capture of rare birds is seldom taken notice of. Probably unless those departed taxidermists had been in evidence we would never have heard of the two examples of the American Bittern or the single appearance of the Kingfisher and the second and third captures of the Bewick's Swan, etc., to Caithness. And without the aid of a few intelligent observers many more of rarer birds would have escaped notice.

For instance, we have to thank Mr John Dunnet, manufacturer, for obtaining the second example of the Hoopoe recorded for the county.

Valedictory

We will now with great reluctance bid adieu to a theme that has engrossed much of our mental workings during a past life of at least sixty-five years; and although many of those years were burdened with the cares and worries of an onerous industrial occupation, yet no day of them was closed without the writer having before his mind some little incident relating to our charming bird creations.

While compiling those articles that comprise the first and second series of "Notes on Caithness Bird Life" we were often much helped by numerous correspondents—to all of whom we tender our thanks. For valuable information on the White-tailed Eagle we are indebted to the editor of the "Shetland News," and also Mr Harry Greenaway, Foula, and Mr J.N.Barclay, Midyell, but principally to our Dunnet correspondent, whose references to the now vanished "Erne" from Dunnet Head will stand for all time as the most valuable contribution on the last breeding pairs of this noble bird in Caithness, and probably in Scotland, or even Britain. To Mr James M'Nichol, Kildonan Lodge, we owe a debt of gratitude, and also the same to his brother, Mr Ronald M'Nichol, Ackergill.

We have also been greatly helped during many years by "Cairnduna," Mr Robert Bain, Mr

George Bain, librarian, as these three gentlemen always took a warm interest in the details carried through in those articles. At the kind suggestion of Mr Bain, librarian, the manuscript of the articles will be handed over to his custody, as he offers to get them bound and placed in the Library as a volume of references.

We certainly cannot close without tendering our gratitude to the editor of the "John O' Groat Journal" for his great kindness and tolerance while these articles were passing through the press; and with thanks to any of your readers who might have taken a kindly interest in these mixed contributions, we must.now to all those friends for the present respectfully bid adieu.

Yours faithfully,

Abrach.

Footnote:

(34) This appears to be another example of Mackay's lack of attention to detail. The Garganey entry in the second edition of F.O.Morris's *A History of British Birds* (1870), volume 5, pp.164-167, says of the species status in Scotland 'six specimens were obtained in Stirlingshire, during the last fortnight of March, 1841. In Orkney a few appear in the spring.' Caithness receives not a single mention.

§46
John O'Groat Journal, December 22nd, 1916

CAITHNESS WILD BIRD LIFE

Interesting addition to the "Caithness Ornithological Register"

SIR. – I thank your correspondent Mr Ronald M'Nichol for his appreciation of my humble efforts to portray Caithness wild bird life. To be able to attract and interest an observer of Mr M'Nichol's practical ability to discern one requires to be able to reflect more than ordinary passing incidents on the movements and home lives of our county feathered fauna. One of Mr M'Nichol's predecessors of by gone days, the late A. Sutherland, contributed many rare birds to the collection of Dr Sinclair and Eric S. Mackay; to the former during his earliest years, on the Hempriggs Estates, and during his later years to the Pulteney collection; and now from the same source the Wick Museum is being supplied by Mr M'Nichol with many rare specimens of Caithness birds with reliable data. Mr M'Nichol's belated announcement that he had shot three Grey Plovers during the autumn of 1915 comes to us as a pleasing surprise. He (Mr M'Nichol) also informs that two of those examples were preserved and set up and donated to the Wick Museum at the time of their captures. As no specimens of the Grey Plover previous to those referred to have been obtained in Caithness, Mr M'Nichol's donation of these birds is of an outstanding and interesting value. We wonder how neither the Librarian nor Mr Robert Bain missed notifying in their monthly report the gift of those Grey Plovers. How such an important addition to the Caithness list escaped their notice is surprising. However, whoever compiles the next "Caithness Ornithological Register," say 50 years hence, will have the Scarlet Bullfinch and the Grey Plover as a nucleus to start with as the first new addition since the old register was compiled. If we had known of Mr M'Nichol's donation of the Grey Plovers we would not, while enumerating a few of our rarest grallatores, have stated that the Grey Plover had not been previously obtained in the county.

The Grey Plover ("Squatarola Helvetica")

Notwithstanding researches made by many distinguished ornithologists for many years there remained a half dozen of well-known British birds whose breeding still continued obscured in mystery, to solve which had been the ambition of many naturalists for fully a hundred years previous to 1875. These birds, to the discovery of whose eggs special interest seemed to attach, were the Grey Plover, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling, the Knot and the Bewick Swan. In 1872 Harvie-Brown accompanied by K. R. Alston, went on an expedition to Archangel, and in 1874 Henry Seebohm, with Robert Collet of Christiania, went to the extreme north of Norway. In neither of those journeys were any of the breeding haunts of these six birds above referred to discovered.

Information received by Harvie -Brown about the regions of the Petchora or Yenesei rivers. Northern Siberia, encouraged the probability of discovering the breeding haunts of those birds. Brown and Seebohm resolved in consequence to visit Northern Russia during the summer of 1875. During their Siberian journey Seebohm and Brown were successful in finding the nests and eggs of the Grey Plover, Little Stint, the Curlew Sandpiper, and the Bewick Swan. The breeding haunts of the Knot and the Sanderling were discovered by other naturalists a few years later in higher latitudes.

Besides having been successful in adding the Grey Plover to the Caithness list. Mr M'Nichol will find from the above references that the breeding haunts of this bird were for ages wrapt [sic] in mystery, which make sit more interesting and valuable.

We hope that Mr M'Nichol may yet be successful in adding the Little Ringed Plover and the Stone Curlew to the Wick Museum. Only a single example of each of these has been recorded as having been obtained in Caithness. The former (Little Ringed Plover) was shot by Bannerman, the Duke of Portland's gamekeeper, at Wester Watten during 1871, and was sent to the Welbeck Abbey collection, and the latter (Stone Curlew) was obtained by William Macewan, gamekeeper, Keiss, in 1861, and, as I have been informed, is now in the South Kensington Museum. – Yours respectfully, ABRACH. December 16, 1916.

Chapter 4

OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY E.S.MACKAY

§47
John O'Groat Journal, December 7th, 1917

THE GREAT AUK'S EGG

INTERESTING DONATION TO WICK LIBRARY MUSEUM

Mr Eric S. Mackay, Glasgow, has presented to the Carnegie Museum, Wick, a diagram of a Great Auk's egg. It is framed in a most artistic manner, and is in itself, apart from the subject treated, a present of no ordinary value. In relation to the matter, Mr Mackay writes to the Editor as follows:—

"After writing the three articles on the Auks, I resolved to present a model of a Great Auk's egg to the Wick Museum, which would enhance any interest readers might have taken in those articles. This intention has been doomed to failure, as at present such an article can scarcely be got for love or money. It appears that the modelling and painting of those eggs are a German art; and only a special application sent direct to the Kaiser would have any effect! There is one London dealer who offers me a nice one at 65s; but not being a millionaire I've kicked at the offer. In normal times those models were regularly advertised at from 10s to 15s each, and to any of those figures I was prepared to go, because I'd set my heart on the thing. However, not to be done and have my whim entirely frustrated, I have sent something as a substitute and which in reality, though not very attractive, yet has the brand of being original, as I'm sure there is not another of the same get-up in existence.

I've delineated a tracing of Seebohm's coloured plate of a Great Auk's egg, which forms the outstanding figure in his most exquisite collection of coloured plates of eggs of all the known British birds (445) and for ornithological coloured drawings it is pronounced as outrivalling both the works of Dresser's "Birds of Europe" or Wilson's "Birds of the North American Continent" (525). Dresser's work is in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, complete in nine immense volumes, and it, along with that of Seebohm, is worth going a "Sabbath day's" journey" to see. The tints of the shell of the Great Auk's eggs are almost identical with those on that of its congener, the Razorbill, and likewise the disposition and positions of the spot markings and colours of the blotchings on the egg of the now extinct bird are almost similar to those on the egg of the Razorbill Auk, only the capacity of the egg of the former bird is nearly three times more than that of its smaller congener."

§48
Letter dated 1917

LETTER ACCOMPANYING THE SECOND SERIES

7 Dryburgh Gardens
Kelvinside
North Glasgow

Dear George,

With this please find the second series of articles which consist of twenty parts. As I considered No.20 to be too large for one insertion you will observe that I have attached a slip at page 8 which shows where you will continue to 21 and then conclude. I have also written Mr. Milar that those articles have been sent to you for the purpose of getting them polished up a bit. When you will then confer with him regarding their insertion. I hope if those articles are inserted it will not prove another disappointment for you in the way of recovering the M.S. Should Mr. Millar have any doubts about the feasibility of handing them back to you directly after each insertion, don't offer them for publication, but take and use them for the purpose you have always intended for such. When I hear that you are regularly recovering those M.S.S. after their publication I'll begin to write out new M.S.S. of the First Series, on the same special linen paper and of corresponding size to the lines now in hand. You will find that the second series is brim full of local interest, especially those articles written on the indigenous gulls, Terns and Willie Waugtail, as those were copied from a few letters that I wrote during 1861 when I was foreman to the late James Bremner on the new harbour heart. I was *even* at that time so fascinated by those gull scenes that those letters were intended for the Groat of those days, but were never offered for inspection.

Many notes have been now unearthed treating on bird scenes about Pulteney Harbour and the *wollenes* of the south cliffs, plus a lot of scraps that I from time to time noted down during my peregrinations around the Shetlands, West Coast of Scotland and the Outer Hebrides, from 1865 to 1899. Amongst the last of those were the notes on Gull. But now my Scrap Kistie is swept out and with the cleaning out process I think I have said my last words on Caithness birds. Can they let up those articles without taking them separate from their fastenings? If so it would leave them snug for you to handle. I enclose a sort of "index" to show the subjects of the consecutive numbers as they go along.

About 15 years ago while rambling amongst the swells at Port Bannatyne (Macawber [*sic*] like looking for something to turn up) I fell and dislocated my shoulder, and before a couple of doctors got the "aul hinge" put back they had to dose me with chloroform. I have ever since found a certain amount of pain in that shoulder, (especially when writing), and this year it has been pretty bad. Only the Law of Compensation comes to my rescue as now with a pinch I can read the small print without the aid of my spectacles, and up to a year ago I could not read the posters on the hoardings. Not if the letters were a slog and thin as one of Dave Gunn's or Geordie Water's (Coolbies), kind kippers, or even the length of a *wealthy* retired Pulteney fisherman's starboard paddle.

The week previous to beginning the insertion of this series you might kindly put in a small par. in the local news column in the Groat announcing the future appearance of them. I know that this series will be read by a great many more than was the first. If I ever survive the writing out of the first series I shall send you a nice index for each with the dates of their publication included. And should ever those forty articles be got up in any bound form those indexes can be bound up with them. Should you and I live for a year or two those articles will have a chance of being put in some complete form, but otherwise their fate will be Och! Och! I know it!

Yours affectionately,

Eric Mackay

A fate which perhaps they deserve, only I hope they'll be used in a respectable S-t- H--le.

A copy of this letter is with the bound copy of the 'Notes on Caithness Bird Life' articles in Thurso Library. It is simply addressed to 'George' - unfortunately it has proved impossible to determine who 'George' was.

Chapter 5

OBITUARIES

§49
John O'Groat Journal, February 8th, 1918

THE LATE MR ERIC S. MACKAY, GLASGOW

Mr Eric S. Mackay, who for many years was prominently identified with the town of Wick and its staple industry, died at Glasgow on Sunday morning, at the age of 77 years.[31] The announcement is one which we make with deep regret, Mr Mackay having been for some time past a frequent and valued contributor to our columns. At the present moment a series on Caithness Bird Life, from his pen, under the nom-de-plume of "Abrach," is appearing from week to week.

A son of Mr Donald Mackay, feuar, Dempster Street, he was named after the distinguished physician, Dr Eric Sinclair. Being a bright little boy he was a favourite with the doctor, and often had the privilege of inspecting the famous ornithological collection at Montpelier House, Dr Sinclair's residence. His predilection for the study of wild-bird life was doubtless fostered by these early advantages, and being himself a careful observer he became master of the subject to such an extent that he was perhaps the greatest authority on ornithology connected with the county. His gifts of bird collections to the Wick Library Museum are well known, and their value is computed at between £60 and £70. Genial to a degree, and abounding in hospitality, he was a man of many natural gifts, and in his later years he delighted in reminiscences of his native town and the scenes and personalities associated with his youth. Many of these reminiscences he wrote down and they appeared in these columns from time to time, being read with intense appreciation. Among other accomplishments he was an excellent violinist.

Having served an apprenticeship with Mr James Crawford, the well-known fishcurer, he himself started in that line of business in 1873, and ultimately had stations in Shetland, etc., becoming, indeed, one of the leading fishcurers of his day. In the Shetland fishing he was one of the pioneers, and while there he had many opportunities (of which he assiduously availed himself) of studying the bird life which abounds in the Shetland Isles. He was also a successful barrel manufacturer. After the disastrous years of 1884 and 1885 he left Wick and started business in Aberdeen as a manufacturer of fish boxes, subsequently removing to Glasgow, where two of his sons are in business.

Some particulars and reminiscences of his association with the trade and interests of Wick and the North must be reserved for a further notice in next issue. In his early days he was an enthusiastic member of the 2nd Caithness Rifle Volunteers, the surviving members of whose original muster-roll are now very few in number.

He was predeceased by his wife (née Miss C. Ross) a number of years ago. To the surviving members of what was a large and happy family sympathy will be extended in the loss of a parent for whom it had been hoped there was to be a longer period of life's eventide than has proved to be the case. In the exercise of his quiet hobbies of writing and ornithological study he had of late years found much pleasure. About a fortnight ago, however, he was seized with an illness from which it was seen he would have small chance of recovery, and the end came on Sunday morning as stated. The news was received in town with keen regard by many of his old friends and acquaintances.

Footnote:
(31) Eric Mackay's death certificate gives his age as 76 years.

§50
John O'Groat Journal, February 15th, 1918

"Abrach"

[By "Cairnduna"]

To many of our towns people the name of Eric S. Mackay was unknown, and to many more it was but a dim memory; the name of one who in the past had borne a prominent part amongst those engaged in our staple industry. I was little more than a boy when he first engaged in the curing, and for some years before then he was a considerable employer of labour as a barrel manufacturer, and was the first in our town to introduce motive power in their manufacture. This was in the form of a horizontal steam engine, which was a prominent exhibit at the Industrial Exhibition held in the year 1868. This engine was made, or rather built, by David Robertson, a son of Mr Wm. Robertson, blacksmith, Kinnaird Street. At that period, however, I knew Mr Mackay as a man of many and varied accomplishments. He was a keen business man, an ornithologist, a taxidermist, a volunteer, and a fiddler of no ordinary repute. Referring to this period of life, in one of his letters he says:—

> "Although I'm removed now—apparently for ever—from the scenes of my early and middle life, amongst the wild birds of Caithness, yet the money [!] of the many happy periods, and journeys spent after specimens, incited, buoyed and encouraged by those—too often—transitory anchors of life—'the pleasures of hope'—expecting that at every corner rounded something might present itself . . . The memories of these pleasant years often come back to me as incidents of an enjoyable past."

His Writings

From the preceding it will be seen that my connection with our departed friend was more as a correspondent, and as one in many ways having kindred tastes, than personally. It is 27 years since he saw these scenes he loved so well, and in the evening of his life he seemed to have returned to the time of "life's morning march." He was a voluminous, virile writer; it would almost appear as if the pen ran away with him. On his favourite subject he was always informative, and many times I have been indebted to him. His letters are full of a broad and keen wit, and often a scathing sarcasm. In several of is letters can be traced evidence of a praiseworthy desire that some of his writings to the "Groat", especially his articles on bird life, should be preserved in book hope. The Library Committee, who benefitted so largely from his generous gifts, will, I hope, see to this as a sacred duty. Had he been spared a few years longer I have no doubt this desire of his would have cystallised into a tangible form. There was one phase in his writings which I always noticed. His plans for the future were of the shortest. Over and over again he refers to his departure, he knew he was an old man, and cheerily faced the inevitable. While we all sympathise with his family, they have as a sweet memory the knowledge that they made his declining years a happy ending to a busy, strenuous life.

> "He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things, both great and small;
> For the great Lord who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all."

§51
John O'Groat Journal, February 15th, 1918

THE LATE ERIC S. MACKAY
(An Appreciation by One Who Knew Him)

The death in Glasgow on 3rd inst. of Mr Eric S. Mackay, the well-known Wick fishcurer, came as a shock of surprise to the town, and many expressions of regret were heard, that one who was a frequent and valued contributor to the "John O'Groat Journal" had been taken away. The deceased had reached the age of 77 years, and his illness was not of long duration. Indeed it was only known to a few particular friends a few days before the end that his illness was likely to have a fatal termination. Yet the personality of the man was such that the announcement of his death became a topic of absorbing interest. There are few Wick men who have left our town for over 30 years who have clung over intervening space with a closer grip to the place of their nativity than Mr Mackay. Over and over again he proposed to pay us a visit but circumstances always intervened to prevent him coming. Yet he continued, with his pen, to keep in constant touch with the local reading public to the last.

The deceased, as stated last week, was the son of Mr Donald Mackay, feuar, Dempster Street, and was called Eric Sinclair after the distinguished medical practitioner of that day whose name is still a household word in Caithness. He received his early education at the South Road School under the able Pulteneytown dominie, the late Mr George Bain, and he recently wrote a history of this school, which appeared in the "John O'Groat Journal." Young Eric early gave proof of having more than ordinary ability and force of character. While still in his boyhood he attracted the attention of the doctor, his godfather, who often invited him to Montpelier House, where he became a frequent visitor to the studio of the doctor, who was also a great ornithologist, and he early initiated him into the mysteries of the taxidermist's art. After leaving school he became an apprentice cooper with the late Mr James Crawford, fishcurer and steamboat agent. During the period of his apprenticeship he gave unmistakable signs of having music in his soul, and took lessons on the violin with the late Mr Sharp, baker, who taught a class for this purpose in High Street, Wick. He also had other tuition in wielding the bow from the late Mr William Anderson, tailor, Wick, who was an expert and graceful performer on the violin. Of the pupils that attended the violin class Mr Sharp had been heard to declare that young Eric Mackay from Dempster Street, and "long" Alex Sutherland from Janetstown, were the best pupils he ever had, and both afterwards became accomplished players of reels and strathspeys.

Young Mackay, while an apprentice, also gave proof of ability in quite another direction. When the Fishery Board promulgated an Order that all fishing boats belonging to the port had to be named and numbered, Eric became an adept in the painting of the names and numbers on the boats belonging to the port of Wick, and there are still fishermen alive to-day who have a keen recollection of the well designed numbers and the bold shading of the same in red and blue that decorated the bows of a goodly number of our fishing fleet fifty years ago.

After working some time as a journeyman with Mr Crawford, Mr Mackay in the early sixties accepted the managership of a fishcuring business then started by Mr James Bremner, ship chandler, Lower Pulteney, afterwards to become better known as the poet of Greenigoe Manor. It was while managing for Mr Bremner that Mr Mackay gave the first proof of how his versatile gifts and abilities could attract to advantage. He instituted and organised a New Year cooper's ball in the barrel loft of Mr Bremner's cooperage in Breadalbane Crescent, which proved a most popular social gathering. It was looked forward to for several years by the principal fishcurers, coopers, and their lady partners and friends as a highly attractive event.

After conducting Mr Bremner's fishcuring business for several years Mr Mackay started as a barrel manufacturer on his own account. He created workshops and stores in Bexley Terrace and by employing a picked staff of superior workmen he quickly did a brisk trade. About this time also he was appointed inspector and arbitrator over a disputed cargo of cured herrings that had been consigned from Wick to Sligo, in

Ireland. Mr Mackay did the journey to Sligo in mid-winter and successfully adjudicated in the dispute. While still carrying on his own work as barrel manufacturer he again became manager of a new herring curing station in the Hebrides for the late Mr Donald Ferguson, Loch Boisdale, a native of South Uist. In this enterprise he supplied the necessary stock of barrels, and both on the island of Eriskay and at Loch Boisdale he for several seasons carried on the work of curing the early herrings caught in the mouth of the Atlantic and in the Minch, which brought a profitable return to Mr Ferguson for his outlay. It is little wonder therefore that Mr Mackay with such varied experience and skill should have resolved to start on his own account as a herring curer. If ever a cooper earned the right to rise from the block and become a fishcurer—a worthy and legitimate ambition—Mr Mackay was that man. This he did in the year 1873, and for ten or twelve years afterwards he was one of our leading curers. He carried on most extensive operations both in Wick and Shetland till the disastrously unprofitable years of '84, '85 and '86 brought financial wreck and ruin to himself and a large number of other fishcurers engaged in the trade.

Mr Mackay with his family then left Wick for Aberdeen, where he erected a barrel and box manufacturing business, ultimately transferring it to Glasgow, where he remained until his death. It is worthy of note that in any enterprise he undertook to carry out he was a game fighter when the odds were against him. No circumstance of commercial misfortune could easily daunt or find him incompetent to deal with the situation. Again and again, like a strong swimmer, his head came to the surface. It was only when the grim reaper Death entered the lists against him and took from him his wife, an estimable lady and competent helpmate, and his two daughters, that the iron of adversity really entered his soul. Though this happened a good many years ago, Mr Mackay never overcame the grief and sorrow of these bereavements.

The history of the man and his life's period in his native town brings back many happy and interesting memories with which he was identified. During the time of his connection with the 2nd Caithness Rifles—as Sergt. Mackay—he was a most prominent and valuable unit in the Corps. The Volunteer dancing, which he organised in the Hall at the head of the Blackstairs, became one of the best recruiting factors in getting young men to join. Scores of young ladies, some of whom are to-day staid and stately matrons, still look back with pride and pleasure to the nights when they whirled with their partners through the mazes of the quadrille or swung through "La'var," and the Blue Danube waltz to the sweet music of Eric's violin. Bold and forcible of speech, with a competency for action which enabled him to carry out whatever he undertook to perform, there lay at the same time underneath this phase of his character a sympathetic and kindly heart. A born artist to the finger-tips, it is questionable if his patron and godfather, Dr Sinclair, while posing his birds, ever excelled his pupil in the taxidermist's art. The splendid collection which the deceased has gifted our local Museum in the Carnegie library is a standing tribute to his genius. Competent judges declare that the case containing the home of the merlin is one of the most artistic representations of natural wild bird life that has ever been set up.

The deceased had a fine and clinical eye of vision for the beauties of nature, and he also had a generous word of recognition for a good tradesman. In fact anything that came within the domain of beauty and art of first-class excellence he was quick to praise and appreciate. As an instance of this phase of his character it may be mentioned that while making a journey one day to the Tannach Moss in order to secure a particular shade of "fog" as a ground-work setting for a case of birds, he on the return journey went out of his way to go to a field in Hempriggs where the renowned ploughman, the late Mr Wm. Phimister, was at work. Old Will, the veteran, was driving a furrow as straight as a dart, and setting it up like a diamond, and Mr Mackay declared that it was indeed worth the trouble of going to see a "star" at work. On another occasion he was one of a party of three, who came suddenly upon a linnet's nest in a whin bush. Long and eloquently did he expatiate on the extreme beauty of this nest and the bower of yellow whin bloom in which it was erected. He declared that examples of that kind in nature put the finest touches of man's genius in the shade.

And so it was all through life with the deceased. The beauties of nature and art, animate and inanimate, commanded his admiration and respect. It is pretty safe to say that as an authority on birds and bird life, especially on those indigenous to his native county, his articles and written testimony, showing keen observation and

knowledge, will be treasured and often referred to in days to come. It is now useless to conjecture as to what heights the bent of his genius might have carried him had his lot been cast in more fortunate surroundings, but as it stands the name of Eric Sinclair Mackay is likely to last longer than that of a good many of us who have to follow him into the Great Beyond. "Peace to his ashes!"

APPENDIX 1 - The Pulteney Collection

So far as is known no proper inventory of the taxidermy in Mackay's 'Pulteney' Collection survives. The compilation which follows is based on the comments in Mackay's articles in the *John O'Groat Journal*, a short contribution published by I.D.Pennie and J.M.Gunn in the *Scottish Naturalist* in 1951, drawing attention to some of the more important skins in the Wick Museum, and a list of the items offered for sale when part of the collection was put up for auction in October 1889. The latter is based on a hand-written list circulated by the auctioneer, Alexander Sinclair of Wick, a copy of which is in the Harvie-Brown archive in the National Museum of Scotland (entries from this source in the list which follows are given simply as the case number as listed in Auction Catalogue - further details in Sellers 2020). What remained of the collection was donated to the Wick Museum in 1916, about two years before Mackay's death. Species are listed below in systematic order.

Black Grouse *Lyrurus tetrax*: 2, a male and a female (Case 6).

Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*: 1 in winter plumage (Case 6).

Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*: 1 male (Case 6).

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*: 2, a male and a female (Case 34).

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*: 1 (Case 6; listed simply as Partridge).

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*: 1 (Case 6).

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*: 1 (Case 14).

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*: 1 (Case 7).

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: Male obtained near Lochboisdale, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, at end of breeding season 1868 (Mackay §41, Case 16); also 1 as prey (Case 15).

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*: Adult male shot by E. S. Mackay on small island at entrance to Loch Boisdale, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, June 1868 (Mackay §42, *cf.* Pennie & Gunn 1951).

Wigeon *Mareca penelope*: 1 (Case 16).

Garganey *Spatula querquedula*: Male, shot on an islet in the Sound of Barra, 1 June 1869 by E.S.Mackay (Mackay §45).

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: 1 (Case 10).

Teal *Anas crecca*: 2 (Case 10 and Case 15, the latter as prey).

Pochard *Aythya ferina*: 1 (Case 10).

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*: Adult male shot at Kyleakin, Skye, Inverness-shire in 1898 (Pennie & Gunn 1951).

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: Adult male shot on Whalsay Skerries., Shetland, August 1869 (Pennie & Gunn 1951).

Eider *Somateria mollissima*: 1 male (Case 10).

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*: 1 (Case 31).

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*: 1 (Case 16).

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*: Adult male shot Eriskay, Outer Hebrides, June 1870 (Pennie & Gunn 1951).

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*: 2 (male and female) (Case 16).

Smew *Mergellus albellus*: Adult male shot in Colgrave Sound at the north end of the island of Hascosay, Shetland, August 1885 (Pennie & Gunn 1951)

Hooded Merganser *Mergus cucullatus*: Adult male shot by E. S. Mackay in Whale Firth, Yell, Shetland, July 1884 (Pennie & Gunn 1951).

Goosander *Mergus merganser*: 1 (Case 7).

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*: 1 (Case 21).

Nightjar *Caprimulus europaeus*: 1 (Case 27).

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*: 1 (Case 6).

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: 1 (Case 14); a second as prey of Buzzard (*q.v.*) (Case 23).

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*: 1 (Case 14).

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*: 1 (Case 14).

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: 1 (Case 14).

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*: 1 (Case 17).

Corncrake *Crex crex*: 1 (Case 32).

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: 1 (Case 31).

Coot *Fulica atra*: 1 (Case 31).

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: 1 (Case 13).

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: 1 (Case 20).

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: 1 (Case 17).

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: 1 (Case 17).

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*: 1 (Case 18).

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: 1 (Case 17).

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*: 1 (Case 36).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: 1 (Case 18).

Curlew *Numenius arquata*: 2, a male and a female (Case 29).

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*: 1 (Case 18).

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: 1 (Case 18).

Ruff *Calidris pugnax*: 1 (Case 36)

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: 1 (Case 36)

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: 1 (Case 18).

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritimus*: 1 (Case 18).

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: One shot North Quay, Wick, Caithness by E.S.Mackay, 7 October 1874 (Reid 1876, *cf.* Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1887 who learnt about it from Reid; see also Mackay §17.; Case 17)

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*: 2, a male and a female (Case 32).

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: 2, 1 in Case 18, and another as prey to a Merlin (Case 23).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: 1 as prey of Kestrel (Case 23); listed in Auction Catalogue simply as Sandpiper, assumed to refer to a Common Sandpiper.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*: 1 (Case 9).

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*: 1, found dead, Loch Sarclet, Caithness, *ca.*19 June 1885 (Reid 1885, Harvie-Brown saw this specimen when he visited Wick in 1885 - see Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1885, p.229).

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*: 1 (Case 35).

Common Gull *Larus canus*: 1 (Case 35).

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*: 1 (Case 9).

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*: 1 (Case 9).

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*: 1 (Case 13).

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: 1 (Case 37).

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*: 1 (Case 13).

Little Auk *Alle alle*: 1 (Case 25).

Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*: Shot between Longberry and Castle Goe, Oldwick, Caithness, by E.S.Mackay, 16 February 1883 (Mackay §32, Case 33).

Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*: 2, 1 normal form (Case 24), the other bridled form (Case 25).

Razorbill *Alca torda*: 1 (Case 24).

Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*: 1 (Case 13).

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*: 1 (Case 13).

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*: 1 (Case 25)

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*: 2, a male and a female (Case 25).

Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*: 1 (Case 37).

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: 1 (Case 24).

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*: 1 (Case 24).

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: 1 (Case 2).

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: 1 (Case 2).

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: One obtained by A.Sutherland., Loch of Winless, probably *ca.*1880 (Mackay §16, Case 2).

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: 1 (Case 8).

Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: Obtained from Langwell Estate, 1885 (Mackay §44, Case 4).

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: 1 (Case 11).

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: 1 (Case 15)

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*: 1 (Case 4).

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: 1 (Case 5).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*: Female, shot, Ord of Caithness, summer 1888 (Mackay §25; Case 1) The Auction catalogue describes this as 'White-tailed Eagle and Brown Hare', the latter presumably as prey. The case was purchased by Alexander Scott 'at a high price'

(Mackay §25).

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*: Obtained from the Langwell Estate, 1885 (Mackay §44, Case 4).

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: Obtained from Langwell Estate, 1885 (Mackay §44); 1 with Rock Dove as prey (Case 23), presumed to be the Langwell bird.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: Obtained at Watten, Caithness, by Alexander Gunn, gamekeeper, date unknown (Mackay §27, Case 3).

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*. One caught in vermin trap between Snotterfield and Halsary by one of the Duke of Portland's keepers, 25 October 1867 (Mackay §26, Case 3. The Auction Catalogue describes this as an adult bird). This was the skin whose ownership was contested and which ended up in the Sheriff Court – see contribution §27.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: Obtained on the Stirkoke Estate, Caithness, by Peter Stenhouse, gamekeeper, date unknown (Mackay §27, Case 3).

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: 1 (Case 3).

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*: Obtained on the Stirkoke Estate, Caithness, by Peter Stenhouse, gamekeeper, date unknown (Mackay §27, Case 22).

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*: Obtained on the Stirkoke Estate, Caithness, by Peter Stenhouse, gamekeeper, date unknown (Mackay §27). The Auction Catalogue lists two Short-eared Owls, a male and a female (Case 22), one of which was presumably the bird obtained on the Stirkoke Estate.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: 1 with (Common?) Sandpiper as prey (Case 23).

Merlin *Falco columbarius*: 2, 1 with a Snow Bunting as prey (Case 15), the other a Snipe (Case 23).

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: 1 (Case 15).

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*: 2 – 1 with Shelduck as prey (Case 15), the other with Teal as prey (Case 19).

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: 1 (Case 27).

Magpie *Pica pica*: 1 (Case 27).

Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*: 1 (Case 30).

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: 1 (Case 30).

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*: 1 (Case 30).

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: 1 (Case 28).

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: 1 (Case 27).

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: 1 (Case 27).

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: 1 (Case 27).

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: 1 (Case 27).

Blackbird *Turdus merula*: 1 (Case 27).

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*: 1 (Case 27).

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*: 1 (Case 27).

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: 1 (Case 27).

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: 1 (Case 27).

Robin *Erithacus rebecula*: 1 (Case 27).

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: 1 (Case 17).

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: 1 (Case 27).

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: 1 (Case 27).

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: 1 (Case 27).

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: 1 (Case 27)

Twite *Linaria flavirostris*: 1 (Case 27).

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*: 1 (Case 27).

Lesser Redpoll *Acanthis cabaret*: 1 (Case 27).

Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: 1 (Case 27).

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: 2, 1 as prey of Merlin (Case 15), the other in a mixed case of passerines (Case 27).

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: 1 (Case 28).

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: 1 (Case 27).

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*: One, shot, Rockhill, Caithness, by E.S.Mackay, winter 1875 (Mackay §19, Case 27).

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: 1 (Case 27).

In total these records represent 142 specimens of 128 species.

Note: Three other cases (12, 26 and 38) contained no birds.

It seems that not all items in the collection were put up for auction in October 1889, for part

including many (but not all) of the rarities was donated to Wick Museum in 1916, a few years before Mackay's death. Where they had been in the meantime is unclear, but it seems likely that they had been on loan to Wick Museum and that the donation in 1916 was simply a formal transfer of ownership.

APPENDIX 2 – List of bird species mentioned in Mackay's articles in the *John O'Groat Journal*

This Appendix lists all the species of bird mentioned in Mackay's 48 articles in the *John O'Groat Journal*, giving both the names used by Mackay as well as their present day scientific and vernacular names as shown in *The British List* (British Ornithologists' Union 2020).

Names used by Mackay	*Modern day names*
Capercailzie	Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*
Brent Goose	Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*
Red-breasted Goose	Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*
Bernicle Goose	Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*
Grey Lag Goose	Greylag Goose *Anser anser*
Bean Goose	Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*
Pink Footed Goose	Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*
White-fronted Goose	White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*
Mute Swan	Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*
Bewick's Swan	Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus*
Hooper Swan	Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*
Common Sheld Duck	Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
Sheldduck or Ruddy Sheld Duck	Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*
Garganey Duck or Summer Teal	Garganey *Spatula querquedula*
Mallard Duck	Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Pochard or Red-headed Pochard	Pochard *Aythya ferina*
Ferruginous Duck	Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
Scaup Pochard	Scaup *Aythya marila*
King Eider	King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*
Eider Duck or Common Eider	Eider *Somateria mollissima*
Harlequin Duck	Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*
Surf Scoter	Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*
Velvet Scoter	Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*
Black Scoter	Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*
Buffle-head Duck	Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*
Golden-eye Duck	Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*
Smew	Smew *Mergellus albellus*
Hooded Merganser	Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*
Goosander	Goosander *Mergus merganser*
Red-breasted Merganser	Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*
Nightjar or Goatsucker	Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*
Swift	Swift *Apus apus*
Little Bustard	Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*
Cuckoo	Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
Pallas Sand Grouse	Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*
Wood Pigeon	Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*
Bronze-winged Pigeon	Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera*
Water Rail	Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*
Land Rail or Corncrake	Corncrake *Crex crex*
Spotted Crake	Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*
Common Gallinule or Water Hen	Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
Common Coot	Coot *Fulica atra*
Baillon's Crake	Baillon's Crake *Zapornia pusilla*
Great Crested Grebe	Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Stone Curlew *or* Thick Knee	Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
Oyster Catcher	Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
Lapwing	Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Golden Plover	Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*
Grey Plover	Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
Ring Plover or Ring Dotterel	Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
Dotterel	Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*
Whimbrel or Mayfowl	Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Common Curlew	Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Bar Tailed Godwit or Red Godwit	Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*
Black-tailed Godwit	Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
Turnstone	Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Knot	Knot *Calidris canutus*
Ruff/Reeve	Ruff *Calidris pugnax*
Curlew Sandpiper	Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Temmick's Stint [*sic*]	Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*
Sanderling	Sanderling *Calidris alba*
Dunlin	Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
Purple Sandpiper	Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*
Little Stint	Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
Woodcock	Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*
Jack Snipe	Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus*
Great Snipe	Great Snipe *Gallinago media*
Common Snipe	Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
Red Necked Phalarope	Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*
Grey Phalarope	Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*
Common Sandpiper	Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Spotted Sandpiper	Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*
Green Sandpiper	Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Redshank	Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Wood Sandpiper	Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
Greenshank	Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Kittiwake	Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
Ivory Gull	Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*
Sabine's Gull	Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*
Black-Headed Gull	Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Little Gull	Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*
Common Gull	Common Gull *Larus canus*
Greater Black-backed Gull	Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*
Glaucous Gull	Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*
Iceland Gull	Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*
Herring Gull	Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
Lesser Black-blacked Gull	Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Lesser Tern	Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*
Common Tern	Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
Arctic Tern	Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*
Buffon's Skua	Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*
Little Auk	Little Auk *Alle alle*
Brunnich Guillemot	Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*
Common Guillemot	Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*
[Ringed Guillemot	Bridled Guillemot = Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*]
Razor Bill Auk	Razorbill *Alca torda*
Great Auk or Garefowl	Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis*

Black Guillemot	Black Guillemot *Cepphus grille*
Puffin	Puffin *Fratercula arctica*
Redthroated Diver	Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*
Blackthroated Diver	Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*
Great Northern Diver	Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*
Fork Tailed Petrel	Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*
Fulmar Petrel or Fulmar	Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*
Cinereous or Dusty Shearwater	Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea*
Manx Shearwater	Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*
Gannet or Solan Goose	Gannet *Sula bassana*
Cormorant	Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Shag	Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
Common Bittern	Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*
American Bittern	American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*
Common Heron	Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Purple Heron	Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Osprey	Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Honey Buzzard	Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*
Golden Eagle	Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
Sparrow-hawk	Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
Goshawk	Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*
Marsh-Harrier	Marsh Harrier *Circus aeroginosus*
Hen-Harrier	Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
Montagu Harrier or Ash-coloured Harrier	Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
White-tailed Eagle	White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*
Rough-legged Buzzard	Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*
Common Buzzard	Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
White Owl or Barn Owl	Barn Owl *Tyto alba*
(Great) Snowy Owl	Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*
Tawny Owl	Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*
Long Eared Owl	Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*
Short Eared Owl	Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*
Hoopoe	Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Garrulous Roller	Roller *Coracias garrulus*
Kingfisher	Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Wryneck	Wryneck *Jynx torquila*
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Kestrel	Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Merlin	Merlin *Falco columbarius*
Hobby	Hobby *Falco subbuteo*
Greenland Falcon	Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*
Peregrine Falcon	Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*
Buff-backed Shrike	Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*
European Jay	Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Rook	Rook *Corvus frugilegus*
Hooded Crow	Carrion Crow/Hooded Crow *Corvus corone*
Raven	Raven *Corvus corax*
Bohemian Waxwing or Waxwing	Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*
Blue Titmouse	Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
Great Tit	Great Tit *Parus major*
Common Skylark	Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Sand Martin or Bank Martin	Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Swallow	Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
House Martin or White-Bellied Martin	House Martin *Delichon urbica*
Long-tailed Titmouse	Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
White Throat	Whitethroat *Curruca communis*
Ruby Crowned Wren	Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*
Golden Crested Kinglet, Golden Crested Wren or Goldcrest	Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
Fire Crested Kinglet, Fire Crested Wren or Firecrest	Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*
Common Wren/St Kilda Wren	Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Purple-Headed Starling	Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*
Common Starling	Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
White's Thrush	White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma*
Ring Ousel	Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*
Black Bird	Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Fieldfare	Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*
Redwing	Redwing *Turdus iliacus*
Song Thrush or Mavis	Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
Missel Thrush or Storm Cock	Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
Nightingale	Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
Wheatear	Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
Water Ouzel *or* Dipper	Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*
Yellow Wagtail	Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Grey Wagtail	Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Pied Wagtail	Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Titlark or Meadow Pipit	Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Tree Pipit	Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*
Shore Pipit	Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*
Chaffinch	Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Brambling	Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*
Hawfinch	Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
Bullfinch	Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*
Greenfinch	Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*
Twite	Twite *Linaria flavirostris*
Linnet	Linnet *Linaria cannabina*
Mealy Redpoll	Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*
Parrot Crossbill	Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
Goldfinch	Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Siskin	Siskin *Spinus spinus*
Snow Bunting or Snowflake	Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*
Common Bunting	Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*
Yellow-hammer or Yellow Yarlin	Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*
Ortolan Bunting	Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
Black-headed Bunting	Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*
Reed Bunting	Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

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