

# A CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF THE OUTER HEBRIDES



Long-tailed Shrike Howmore South Uist November 2000



**CURRACAG**

**WESTERN ISLES NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This checklist includes all the species reliably recorded in the Outer Hebrides up to June 2005. It includes some records of rare birds which have not yet been formally accepted, as well as birds known to have been escapes or deliberately released for sporting purposes.

A total of 372 bird species have been recorded so far in the Outer Hebrides. The islands' are home to important numbers of a variety of breeding birds, especially seabirds, raptors, waders and wildfowl. They are also important for wintering waders and wildfowl and the islands form a major migration refuelling station for Arctic breeding waders and wildfowl during both spring and autumn. The location of the Outer Hebrides on the north western edge of Europe, means that the islands also attract a range of lost migrants from Europe, Siberia and North America. Birdwatchers visiting the islands need to expect the unexpected, especially in spring or autumn when migration is in full swing.

The islands remote location also means that a number of familiar species common on mainland Britain are very scarce or local here. It is also worth noting that there are differences in the distribution of some species between the main islands due to different habitats, land use, and food availability.

## **SEABIRDS**

The Outer Hebrides are home to a several important breeding populations of seabirds. However, the vast majority of these breed on several of the outlying islands of North Rona & Sula Sgeir, St. Kilda, the Flannan Islands, the Shiant Islands and Mingulay & Barra Head. Although boat trips are available to some of these islands, it does mean that most visitors do not get the experience of large numbers of breeding seabirds. There are some smaller colonies of auks and kittiwakes on the coast of Lewis from Point round to the Butt of Lewis, however, most visitors are most likely to see numbers of seabirds from the various ferries crossing the Minch and the Sounds of Barra and Harris. Fulmars, gulls and terns are widespread around the coasts of the main islands, but black guillemots are mainly restricted to the rockier coasts and the major Sounds.

## **RAPTORS**

The islands are one of the most important areas in the UK for breeding raptors, and most, including both species of eagle, can be seen with relative ease from the roadside, or by scanning hillsides and moors. Lewis & Harris and Barra do not have voles and this means that species like hen harrier, short-eared owl and kestrel are either rare or do not breed. The Uists and Benbecula have important populations of hen harrier and short-eared owl, peregrines are also more common there than in Lewis & Harris.

## **WADERS**

The internationally important breeding wader populations characterise both the peatlands of Lewis & Harris and the machairs of the Uists & Barra. The moors of Lewis & Harris support high numbers of dunlin, golden plover, snipe and greenshank, whilst the machairs of Uist & Barra support high numbers of lapwing, dunlin, ringed plover, redshank and snipe. The wide white sand strands of the Uists & Barra are also very important as wintering areas and migration stopovers for a number of wader species, including dunlin, ringed plover, sanderling, turnstone, purple sandpiper, bar-tailed godwit and grey plover. Lewis & Harris, despite having some large intertidal areas seem not to attract as many waders as the coasts in Uist & Barra for some reason.

## **WILDFOWL**

The machair lochs of the Uists & Barra are home to a wide range of wildfowl, including a nationally important population of mute swans. Breeding ducks include shoveler, teal, tufted duck, and small numbers of gadwall and wigeon. The islands are home to a large population of native resident greylag geese, which in winter are joined by small flocks of white-fronted geese and in the Uist & Barra large numbers of barnacle geese. The islands also support a substantial population of wintering whooper swans which are concentrated mainly in the Uists & Benbecula. Spring and autumn sees large movements of geese, including brent geese, and whooper swans heading for Iceland, Greenland and Arctic Canada. Seaduck are represented by large populations of both eider and red-breasted merganser, which in winter are joined by flocks of long-tailed ducks.

Although not strictly wildfowl the islands also support significant breeding and wintering populations of divers. Both red-throated and black-throated breed widely, whilst great northern are common in inshore waters from the autumn through to late spring.

## **PASSERINES**

Although much increased in the last 20-30 years, the relative lack of woodland and scrub in the Outer Hebrides has meant that a number of familiar species of woodland and garden birds either rarely occur here or are localised in their distribution. As the islands lie at the north-west edge of the range of many of these species their numbers often fluctuate, with periodic local extinctions and re-colonisation occurring. Recently the islands have lost great tit, bullfinch and mistle thrush as breeding species; however both goldfinch and linnet appear to be colonising and increasing currently.

## **THE CHECKLIST**

The following checklist summarises the status of the species recorded in the Outer Hebrides. The breakdown by month gives a guide to both the abundance and the likelihood of the species being seen if the correct habitats are visited. For the more regular species the darker the shade of grey the more abundant or likely you are to see it. For the scarcer species the same applies to the squares, with larger squares indicating when it is most likely to be seen. For the species that have occurred as vagrants the squares represent the months in which the species has been recorded. For a handful of the more regularly occurring vagrants there are large squares denoting the months when most records have occurred. There are also notes against some species to indicate differences in distribution or abundance between the main islands.

Andrew Stevenson  
Outer Hebrides Bird Recorder  
July 2005





SPECIES	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	BR	ST
Ruddy Duck				■	■	■			■					V
Honey-buzzard				■	■	■								V
Black Kite					■	■								V
Red Kite									■		■			V
White-tailed Eagle													n	
Marsh Harrier				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			P
Hen Harrier <sup>③</sup>													N	W/P
Montagu's Harrier								■						V
Goshawk										■		■		
Sparrowhawk <sup>②</sup>													n	W/P
Buzzard													N	
Rough-legged Buzzard	■		■	■	■				■	■		■		V
Golden Eagle													N	
Osprey			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		P
Kestrel <sup>③</sup>													N	
Red-footed Falcon					■	■	■							V
Merlin													N	W/P
Hobby					■	■	■	■		■				V
Eleanora's Falcon						■								V
Gyr Falcon	■	■	■	■	■						■	■		V
Peregrine <sup>③</sup>													N	
Red Grouse													N	
Ptarmigan				■			■						FB	V
Black Grouse <sup>⑥</sup>					■									I
Red-legged Partridge <sup>⑥</sup>		■												I
Grey Partridge <sup>⑥</sup>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		I
Quail					■	■	■	■	■	■			n	S/P
Pheasant <sup>⑥</sup>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		I
Water Rail <sup>③</sup>													n	W/P
Spotted Crake <sup>③</sup>					■	■	■	■	■	■	■		n	P
Sora Rail											■			V
Corncrake <sup>⑦</sup>													N	
Moorhen <sup>③</sup>													N	
Purple Gallinule species									■	■				E/V
Coot <sup>③</sup>													n	W/P
American Coot	■	■	■	■										V
Common Crane			■	■	■	■	■	■	■					V
Oystercatcher													N	W/P
Black-winged Stilt							■							V
Avocet				■	■		■		■		■			V
Collared Pratincole							■							V
Little Ringed Plover								■		■				V
Ringed Plover													N	W/P
Killdeer	■		■		■							■		V

SPECIES	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	BR	ST
Dotterel				■	■			■	■					P
American Golden Plover					■				■	■	■			V
Pacific Golden Plover		■	■	■			■	■		■	■			V
Golden Plover													N	W/P
Grey Plover														W/P
Lapwing													N	
Knot														W/P
Sanderling														W/P
Semipalmated Sandpiper									■					V
Little Stint	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			P
Temminck's Stint					■	■	■	■	■	■				V
White-rumped Sandpiper								■	■	■	■			V
Baird's Sandpiper								■	■	■				V
Pectoral Sandpiper				■	■	■	■	■	■	■				V
Curlew Sandpiper		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			P
Purple Sandpiper														W/P
Dunlin													N	W/P
Broad-billed Sandpiper					■	■								V
Buff-breasted Sandpiper						■	■	■	■	■				V
Ruff	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	P
Jack Snipe	■	■	■	■					■	■	■	■		W/P
Common Snipe													N	W/P
Great Snipe									■	■				V
Long-billed Dowitcher					■	■		■	■					V
Woodcock														W/P
Black-tailed Godwit	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	P
Bar-tailed Godwit														W/P
Whimbrel													n	P
Curlew②													N	W/P
Upland Sandpiper				■										V
Spotted Redshank	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		P
Redshank													N	W/P
Marsh Sandpiper										■				V
Greenshank													N	W/P
Greater Yellowlegs	■	■	■	■	■			■			■	■		V
Lesser Yellowlegs								■	■	■				V
Solitary Sandpiper										■				V
Green Sandpiper					■	■	■	■	■	■				P
Wood Sandpiper					■	■	■	■	■				n	P
Common Sandpiper													N	S/P
Spotted Sandpiper					■		■	■						V
Turnstone														W/P
Red-necked Phalarope													n	S/P
Grey Phalarope	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■		W/P

SPECIES	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	BR	ST
Pomarine Skua														P
Arctic Skua													N	S/P
Long-tailed Skua					■	■		■	■	■				P
Great Skua①②													N	S/P
Mediterranean Gull			■	■	■					■				V
Laughing Gull		■				■	■		■	■				V
Franklin's Gull								■						V
Little Gull	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		P
Sabine's Gull					■	■		■	■	■				V
Bonaparte's Gull			■	■	■			■						V
Black-headed Gull													N	S/P
Ring-billed Gull	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			V
Common Gull													N	W/P
Lesser Black-backed Gull													N	S/P
Herring Gull													N	W/P
Iceland Gull														W/P
Glaucous Gull														W/P
Great Black-backed Gull													N	W/P
Ross's Gull	■	■			■									V
Kittiwake①②													N	P
Ivory Gull	■	■				■					■	■		V
Gull-billed Tern					■		■							V
Caspian Tern						■								V
Sandwich Tern				■	■	■	■	■					n	P
Roseate Tern					■	■	■						n?	V
Common Tern													N	S/P
Arctic Tern													N	S/P
Little Tern③													N	S/P
Black Tern				■	■	■	■	■	■	■				V
White-winged Black Tern					■	■								V
Guillemot①②													N	P
Brünnich's Guillemot						■								V
Razorbill①②													N	P
Great Auk														EX
Black Guillemot													N	
Little Auk														W/P
Puffin①													N	S/P
Pallas's Sandgrouse					■	■				■				V
Rock Dove													N	
Stock Dove					■	■	■				■			V
Woodpigeon②													N	W/P
Collared Dove													N	P
Turtle Dove					■	■	■	■	■	■	■			P
American Mourning Dove											■			V



SPECIES	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	BR	ST
Bluethroat			■		■	■			■	■				V
Black Redstart			■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■			P
Redstart			■	■	■	■			■	■	■			P
Whinchat②				■	■					■			N	S/P
Stonechat	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	
Wheatear			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		N	S/P
Black-eared Wheatear				■	■				■					V
Rock Thrush						■								V
White's Thrush									■	■				V
Swainson's Thrush										■				V
Grey-cheeked Thrush										■				V
Veery										■				V
Ring Ouzel			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		n?	P
Blackbird	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	W/P
Eye-browed Thrush										■				V
Fieldfare	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		W/P
Song Thrush	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	W/P
Redwing	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	W/P
Mistle Thrush	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	P
American Robin	■	■												V
Grasshopper Warbler②				■	■	■	■	■	■				n	S/P
Sedge Warbler				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	S/P
Paddyfield Warbler									■					V
Blyth's Reed Warbler									■	■				V
Marsh Warbler					■				■	■				V
Reed Warbler								■	■	■				V
Icterine Warbler						■	■	■	■	■				V
Melodious Warbler					■					■				V
Blackcap②	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	S/P
Garden Warbler	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		S/P
Barred Warbler								■	■	■				V
Lesser Whitethroat	■				■	■				■	■	■		P
Whitethroat				■	■	■	■	■	■	■			n	S/P
Subalpine Warbler					■	■								V
Sardinian Warbler					■									V
Arctic Warbler									■					V
Yellow-browed Warbler									■	■	■			V
Dusky Warbler										■				V
(western) Bonelli's Warbler										■				V
Wood Warbler②					■	■	■		■	■			n	S/P
Chiffchaff②	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	P
Willow Warbler	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	S/P
Goldcrest	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	P
Firecrest	■								■	■	■	■		V



SPECIES	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	BR	ST
Tennessee Warbler									■					V
Yellow Warbler										■				V
Yellow-rumped Warbler										■				V
Blackpoll Warbler										■				V
Hooded Warbler									■					V
White-throated Sparrow					■									V
Lapland Bunting	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■		W/P
Snow Bunting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	W/P
Yellowhammer	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	n	P
Ortolan Bunting					■				■	■				V
Rustic Bunting					■	■			■	■				V
Little Bunting					■				■	■				V
Yellow-breasted Bunting										■				V
Reed Bunting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	P
Black-headed Bunting						■	■	■						V
Red-headed Bunting					■	■	■							E
Corn Bunting <sup>③</sup>	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	N	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak										■				V
Bobolink									■					V
Baltimore Oriole									■					V

### KEY TO TABLE

BR – Breeding status; N – regular/widespread breeder; n – nests regularly in small numbers or has nested occasionally; FB – former breeder

ST – Status

S – summer visitor; W – winter visitor; P – passage migrant, mainly in spring & autumn; V – Vagrant/rare visitor; E – Escape or from a feral naturalized population; I – introduced or released for sporting purposes; EX – extinct

① Breeds mainly on colonies on offshore and inshore islands

② Breeds or is found mainly in Lewis & Harris

③ Breeds or is found mainly in the Uists & Barra

④ Very rare but recorded in several months due to long staying and/or returning individuals.

⑤ Scarce away from the Sound of Taransay where regular

⑥ Recorded from irregular gamebird introductions, no established populations

⑦ One recent record of overwintering in 2001/02 on Barra

⑧ One undated record from 1842.

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Produced in association with Curracag, The Western Isles Natural History Society.