

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) 2013



Red Campion in April (Lewis Yates)

Breeding bird surveys were carried out over the entire island during April, May and early June. Early visits in April and early May were designed to catch early breeders (although this is already too late for Ravens and Choughs) and early displaying birds. Later visits in late May and early June were for migrant breeders and nesting residents. The island was divided into sections and covered as thoroughly as the fragile nature of the island allowed by Nia Stephens, the Assistant Warden, and Bee and Ed, the Wardens. As many territories as possible were mapped within each square. A few species are included where breeding was not confirmed (Shelduck and Linnet) for completeness.

Canada Goose *Branta Canadensis*

28 nests

Nests of this species were mapped as a single species study, mostly during April, and were not covered directly by BBS. 28 nests were mapped, which is a considerable increase on last year's 18 pairs. This is a worrying trend as this controversial species is thought to have a negative impact upon the reserve. Geese do trample vegetation, add nutrients to the soil and out-compete less aggressive wildfowl species. They are also a non-native, albeit naturalised, species. The first goslings were seen in North Valley on the 4th of May. However only two nests hatched successfully and goslings were only seen in North Valley and at Moorey Mere until late May. It is thought that no goslings actually fledged on Skomer in 2013.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

One pair

Breeding activity was extremely low in 2013 and no conclusive evidence of breeding was actually obtained using BSS or otherwise.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Min. of four pairs

A few nests were found including one that didn't hatch at South Pond, possibly because the female died during the incubation period. Others in North Valley hatched and broods of 10 and 7 were seen on the 19th and 25th of May respectively.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

c. Two pairs

There were possibly two pairs attempting to breed, one at North Pond and one at South Pond. A female was in amongst the Puffins in North Haven on the 9th of June.

Teal *Anas crecca*

c. Two pairs

There were probably two pairs that attempted to breed in 2013, one at North Pond and one at South Pond. A female was seen with two small ducklings on North Pond on the 28th of June but there were no further sightings of this family.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Common breeder, only five pairs recorded on BBS, many young seen and fledged.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Five territories

It turned out to be incredibly difficult to pin down territories in 2013. There were certainly displaying birds at Bull Hole and over South Castle on The Neck and pairs were picked up in other areas during BBS visits. Two chicks fledged from the Bull Hole nest which was tucked in out of sight, unlike last year's nest which was in plain view. There was also much activity at Tom's House but breeding was not confirmed there.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

One pair

Although the exact details of nest site etc. are not known (possibly in a cliff site at the Waybench), a recently fledged juvenile was photographed where East Pond Stream flows into the sea and up to three juveniles seen regularly thereafter. Mating was seen at the Triangulation Pillar lending further evidence to breeding having occurred somewhere on Skomer.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Three territories

Three pairs held territory at Double Cliff, High Cliff and Protheroe's Dock. There was no irrefutable evidence of successful breeding i.e. young chicks. However, juvenile Peregrines were seen at Garland Stone and Protheroe's Dock in July.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

A nest first thought to be from this species turned out to be a Moorhen. Birds were heard into May but in the end there was no firm evidence of breeding.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Min. four pairs

Pairs were seen at North Pond, South Pond, Moorey Mere and Green Pond. A nest was found at South Pond on the 13th of May containing eight beautiful eggs. The nest was originally thought to be a Water Rail from the nest and clutch size but the egg size, of 43mm, was thought to be more consistent with Moorhen. There was a nest on the small island at Moorey Mere, even after the water dried up, and a juvenile eventually fledged from there. Juveniles were also seen at Green Pond from July onwards.



Figure 1 Moorhen nest

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Min. 40 pairs

The first apparently incubating adult (AIA) was found on the 4th of May on a cliff ledge above the Ivy at North Haven. This nest hatched on the 1st of June and at least one chick got quite big before it disappeared. At the end of the first week of June eggs started hatching all over the island and a surprising number fledged.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

c. Three pairs

Displaying Curlews were mostly seen over the northern half of the island in March and April. There were two pairs early on (April/May) in the area between North Pond and Pyramid Rock and one of these definitely made a nesting attempt, with adults alarming around a nest on the 13th of May. Another possible pair frequented the central fields. Unfortunately no chicks were seen and all nesting attempts failed.

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Two pairs

One pair probably nested in the trees at East Pond Stream and there were birds seen in suitable habitat elsewhere around the island.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Four pairs, four to five chicks fledged

A nest was found just south of Gorse Hill on the 25th of April containing four white eggs. On the 12th of May this nest contained three chicks with one chick being much larger than the other two. We revisited the nest on the 28th to ring the chicks but only found one, which we ringed. However, on the 13th of July two fledglings were seen in the area, so two may have fledged from here. Adults were also seen feeding young around nests at North Castle and on The Neck in June. Both of these nests probably produced at least a fledged chick each as juveniles were seen in these areas from July onwards. There was a further pair near the Rabbit enclosure on North Valley Rise which may also have fledged a chick. Interestingly a bird was seen flying north off The Neck and out to sea at dusk on the 3rd of May.



Figure 2 Short-eared Owl chick

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One pair

A pair nested in the walls just west of the farm and raised at least one chick which could be seen being fed in late June.

Common Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Six pairs

Only six breeding/permanently displaying male Skylarks feel like a depressingly low number to me, given the habitat. And no chicks were seen. However, given the nature of the habitat (areas of burrowed and fragile ground that can't be walked over) it is hoped that a few chicks got off without us seeing them.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seven pairs

The first Swallow wasn't seen until the rather late date of the 9th of April, signifying a late year for all our birds. Six pairs eventually nested at the farm complex and produced a fair amount of offspring. One pair attempted to nest in the Lime Kiln at North Haven but the brood all died and were knocked out of the nest. The same pair may have tried again in the Lime Kiln a bit further up at the Harold Stone but the outcome of this attempt is unknown.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

25 pairs

I tried to study a population of Rock Pipits in North and South Havens but failed due to lack of time and unfamiliarity with the species. I wanted to look at breeding density, habitat choice and breeding success. 25 pairs/ territories were identified on BBS visits. As mentioned in previous reports (Sarah Harris 2012), this is probably only about half of the actual number breeding on the island, but, due to the terrain and accessibility, a lot of pairs get missed. It would be interesting to conduct the study mentioned above and try and extrapolate the findings across other similar areas around the island.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

c. 80 pairs

As with Skylark and other ground nesting passerines on Skomer this species may be under recorded due to the inability to access vast areas of suitable habitat. Having said this, the number recorded on BBS visits in 2013 probably isn't too far off the mark. There were

probably two ill-defined broods as chicks were being fed from mid-May right through the summer.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Four pairs

One pair nested in the rocks high above the sales point at North Haven and there were three other pairs that nested. At The Farm, adults were seen carrying food in the last week of April and chicks were seen from the start of May. A second brood was being fed around the farm in the first week of June



Figure 3 Adult male Pied Wagtail

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Min. twelve pairs

A little down on last year's 21 territories and some birds may have been missed.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

22 pairs

A good year for Wheatears with an increase in the number of breeding pairs and many young fledged. The first bird was seen on the surprisingly early date of the 5th of March and displaying and singing birds were widespread by the second week of April. Nests were being built from then onwards and chicks fed in late May/early June. Fledglings were seen from the first week of June. A male sang with great gusto from above the sales point for several days in early June and was joined by a female on the 2nd. A confiding pair at The Wick was feeding young down a burrow in early June and continued to enter the nest with people sitting no more than three meters away. The first fledglings were seen on the 9th of June. A charming family with five fledglings was seen at the ancient ruins on the far side of The Neck on the 16th of June. The second brood was more discrete than the first.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seven pairs

Most pairs were centred around The Farm and North Valley.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

18 pairs

Whitethroats are a noisy and obvious addition to Skomer's avifauna. 18 territories were identified using BBS data and at least one nest was found. Adults were seen feeding chicks in

North Valley on the 11th of June and fledglings were seen around the farm in the first few days of July.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

32 pairs

Lower than the number recorded in 2012, showing how so many factors can effect small, short lived migrants and determine the number of individuals returning to breeding locations in particular years. The same is true for the above species. A pair was lining a nest next to Moorey Mere hide on the 22nd May. A pair was feeding young at South Stream on the 31st of May.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

1 pair

A bird was singing between The Farm and Well Pond in May and June and may well have nested near the willows at Well Pond.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Min 62 pairs

Breeding birds were typically widespread, although there was a noticeable cluster around The Farm, and many young were seen. The 62 pairs detected on BBS visits may be an underestimate. An adult was seen feeding young near Moorey Mere on the 31st of May and nest building was still going on in June.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*

Min 6 pairs

The number of pairs given above is an a minimum. No nests were actually found although one was suspected at Double Cliff. Two young with an adult were seen at South Stream on the 19th of June.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Min 26 pairs

This is an absolute minimum and the real number of Jackdaws breeding on Skomer is significantly higher and quite impressive. Nest building began in March. Chicks were heard in Ivy at North Haven from the 19th of May and also nearby at North Castle on the 23rd of May. An adult was observed eating auk egg at the landing steps on the 22nd of May. Roosts in North Valley regularly exceeded 100 birds.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Min. four pairs, two young fledged

There were a minimum of four pairs which attempted to breed in 2013. These were situated at Wick Basin, somewhere between Wick Basin and Bull Hole, The Lantern and South Castle. Only one of these attempts was successful. The pair at South Castle bred in an inaccessible cave and only by luck were the newly fledged chicks seen by boat on the 18th of June as they made their first forays from their birth cave. This family group was then seen regularly around North Haven and further afield. Further juveniles were seen along the rocky outcrop near The Farm but it is likely that these were brought over from mainland breeding sites or indeed from other islands. The pair which attempted to breed under an overhang at Wick Basin included a bird colour ringed on Ramsey in 2006. This pair was seen nest building from the 26th of April and were seen mating on the 12th of April. All of the Chough observations were made either by targeted effort in March and April or by chance as in the South Castle observation. As with most breeding attempts in 2013, nesting Choughs were delayed by the

colder than usual early spring and this may have had an impact on the success of some of these attempts, although this is difficult to prove. A communal roost formed around the south side of The Neck in October and November and usually contained about ten birds. 15 birds were seen near the Lantern at dusk on the 14th of November.



Fig 4 Family of Choughs (*Pia reufstecki*)

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Min five pairs

Nests were found at High Cliff, West Pond, East Pond Stream and Moorey Mere. Fledged young were seen from the Moorey Mere nest by the end of May.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

Min four pairs

The first nest was found at The Basin on the 5th of March containing five eggs. This increased to six by the 9th. A nest was also being built on The Neck at this time but wasn't found until the 23rd of April, when it contained three well grown chicks. These three chicks were seen on the 8th of May as fully fledged birds. The nest at The Basin also fledged three or four chicks in April. The outcome of the other nests is unknown. Big flocks of Ravens moved onto the island in September, probably taking advantage of the thousands of fledging Manx Shearwaters, and over 100 birds were present on some days.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

The first Linnet was seen on the 18th of March. A small number of birds were seen thereafter and throughout the breeding season. Several birds were seen on BBS visits, but these were just fly overs and no breeding was confirmed. Family parties were seen at The Farm, with short, spikey tails, but even so could still have flown over from the mainland.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Four to five pairs

Two males were in South Valley in May and there were another three pairs in North Valley between North Castle and North Pond.

The following seabird species bred on Skomer in 2012, but were reported elsewhere:

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus argenteus*

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus graellsii*

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

Razorbill *Alca torda*

Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*