

Lynda Higgins

The Recorder - Ornithology Section

La Société Sercquaise

Founded in 1975 to study, preserve
and enhance Sark's natural
environment and cultural heritage



Night Callers



Night Callers

- An update on the record keeping by La Société Sercquaise (ornithology section) and how Sark is contributing to the research into bird migration and other studies

In the beginning

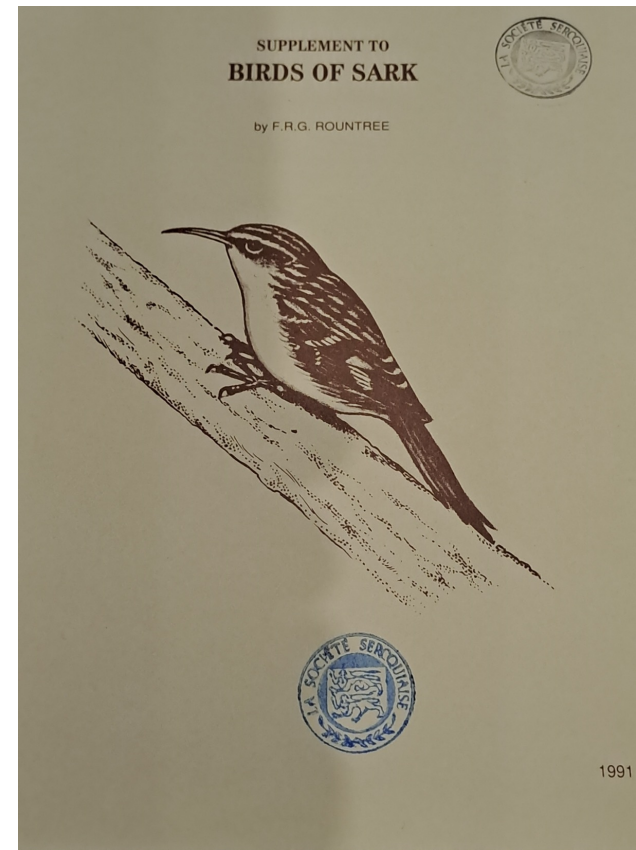
- Sark Ornithological Committee founded in 1966 (Frank Rountree, Philip Guille and Richard Dewe)
- Julian Langford (BTO ringer) taught Sarkee Philip Guille to use mist nets and ring birds from 1966 to 1969.
- Philip Guille became known as the “Birdman of Sark” by netting and ringing birds under licence from CI Bird Ringing Scheme from 1970
- Philip Guille netted 65,000 birds up until his untimely death in 1987

Publications

Birds of Sark published 1974



Supplement published 1991



Other Studies

- Seabird Colony Register Survey between 1985 and 1988
- Survey of Manx Shearwaters 1989 to 1991
- Seabird Monitoring Programme surveyed colonies in 1999 and 2000
- Some further ringing of mainly herring gulls

2015 onwards

- Mostly ad hoc sightings recorded by the Recorder
- No verification of records
- Little monitoring of migration
- Steps to improve records with key arrival/departure dates noted

Steps to Improve Records

- Seabird colonies, owls and other birds of prey closely monitored
- Sighting records verified by the Rarities Committee
- RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch
- Sark Watch lessons at Sark School
- Bird Migration Ringing in April and October
- Nature Week events

Société Sercquaise Resources

- Members across the Island send in their sightings
- Facebook page “Sark Bird Sightings”
- Photographic evidence encouraged
- Some members now use an App such as Merlin

Record Keeping

- Annual Bird Sightings Lists since 2015
- Channel Islands Working List by Glyn Young (226 species)
- <https://www.jerseybirds.net/resources>
- Guernsey Rarity Report by M Lawlor
- <https://www.guernseybirds.org.gg/>

Seabird Colonies in Sark

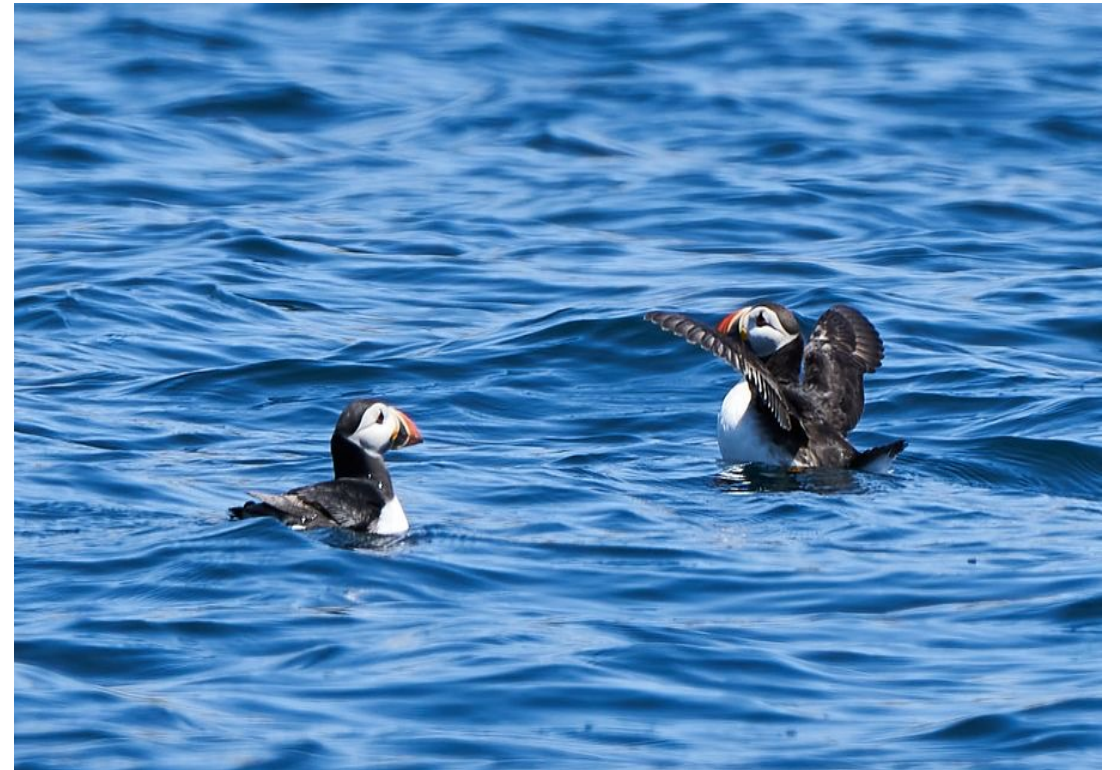


Guillemots (*Uria aalge*)

- Largest colony in the Channel Islands
- Grown from 76 breeding pairs in 1968
- 200 pairs at Les Autelets (2022)
- 200 pairs at Les Burons (2022)

Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*)

- 750 pairs of puffins were recorded as breeding on grassy slopes of Moie Fano, Moie de Brenière and L'Etac in 1946.
- By 1972 this had fallen to 20 to 25 pairs and this number had remained stable since that date.
- Now in decline ???



Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

- In 1972 the fulmar was listed as a non-breeding occasional summer visitor.
- Breeding pairs present since 1986
- Since then fulmar numbers have increased to 20/25 pairs breed each year around Sark.
- New nesting site this year close to Derrible Bay



Birds of Prey



Birds of Prey

- Pair of long-eared owls raised 5 young in 2022. One raised by GSPCA and one fatality. 3 owlets fully fledged.
- Long-eared owls have not nested this year
- Barn owls - two nest sites raised young in 2022.
- Breeding buzzards (4 pairs) and peregrines (3 pairs)

RSPB Great Garden Bird Watch

- Counts carried out at five to seven locations across the Island
- Good coverage
- Involves those not normally interested in birdwatching eg. children
- Important to monitor all birds to get the whole picture

Sark Watch



Migration Bird Ringing



Nature Week

La Société Sercquaise



Sark Nature Week

26th April to 3rd May 2021

Monday 26th April
2 pm to 4 pm - Wildflower walk to Little Sark (Meet at Caragh Chocolates near la Coupée)

Tuesday 27th April
9 am to 11 am - Bird ringing demonstration & moth trap & identification*

Wednesday 28th April
9 am to 11 am - Bird ringing demonstration & moth trap & identification*
2 pm to 4 pm - Wildflower walk to Dixcart Woods (Meet at Visitor Centre)

Thursday 29th April
9 am to 11 am - Bird ringing demonstration & moth trap & identification*
2 pm to 4 pm - Dartford warbler search (Meet at Sark Henge)

Friday 30th April
9 am to 11 am - Bird ringing demonstration & moth trap & identification*
2 pm to 4 pm - Scaly Cricket Hunt to Dixcart Bay (Meet at La Collinette)

Saturday 1st May
9 am to 11 am - Bird ringing demonstration & moth trap & identification*
2 pm to 4 pm - Wildflower walk Gouliot Headland (Meet at Visitor Centre)
8.30 to 9.30 pm - Barn Owl & Bat walk (Meet at Island Hall)

Sunday 2nd May
9 am to 11 am - Bird ringing demonstration & moth trap & identification*
2 pm to 4 pm - Sea Watch walk to see Gulllemot colony (Meet at Seigneurie)

Monday 3rd May
2 pm to 4 pm - Wildflower Mystery Walk (Meet at Visitor Centre)

**All bird ringing & moth trapping takes place at Le Vallon d'Or*

Please Note - All events & walks are weather permitting & may have to be cancelled at short notice. Cancellation will be announced on Sark Bird Sightings Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1548893585370449>



Birds of Conservation Concern UK

- Sark provides habitat for a number of these ; notably the nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) and turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) – Red List and dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*) – Amber List.
- Due to our lack of intensive farming and low pesticide use other species such as the linnet (*Linaria cannabina*) (Red List) and meadow pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) (Amber List) can also be seen.
- The Balearic shearwater is seen in Sark waters in August/September

How do we drive our research going forward?

- We are on the main migration highway and we often have rarities dropping in.
- Over Easter weekend we had a visit from a hoopoe. The following weekend we enjoyed a visit from a hawfinch. Last week red kite.
- Problems with bird-ringing (weather, Avian flu, shortage of ringers etc)
- But main activity is at night

Night Callers

- 80% of UK summer migrants move after dark
- Use stars and moon to navigate
- More easily avoid predators
- Take advantage of calmer air – smoother flights use less energy
- Less likely to overheat and suffer from dehydration

Night Callers

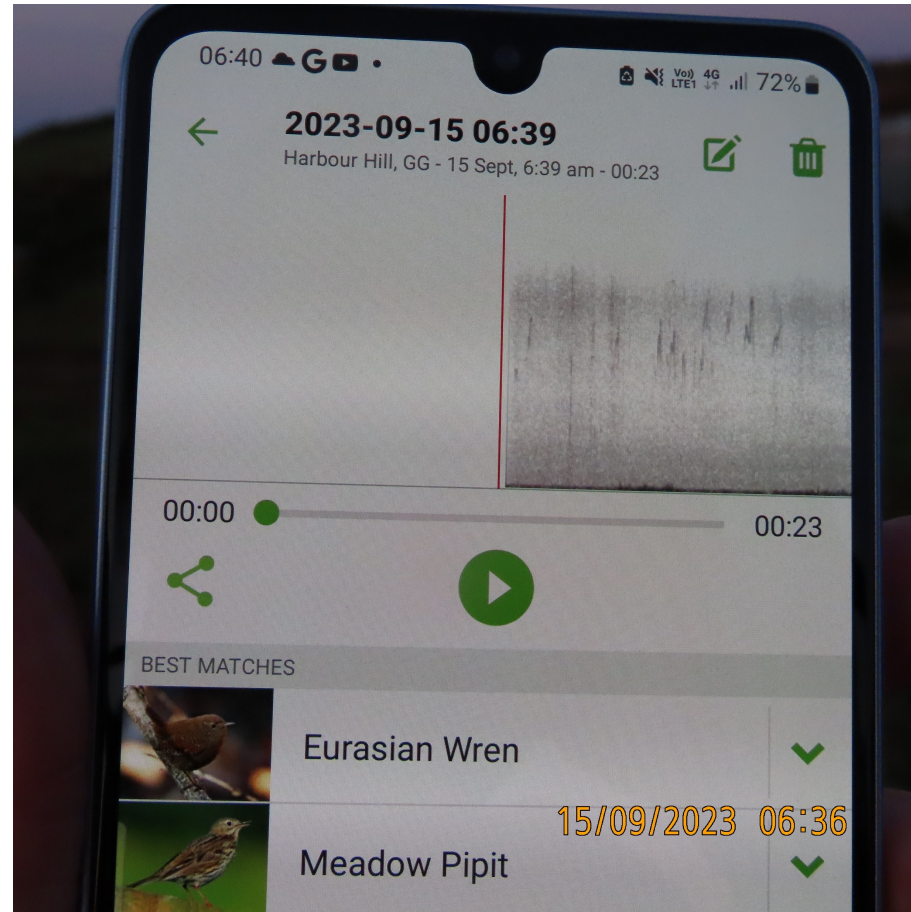
- Sark is an ideal location for nocturnal migration monitoring
- Dark Skies status in 2011 – Artificial Light at Night is greatest threat
- Low peripheral noise levels – no cars, police sirens etc.

Acoustic Recording Equipment

- Song Meter Mini Bat recorder
- Acoustic microphone
- Software – identification



Identification Software



British Trust for Ornithology



- BTO Acoustic Pipeline being developed for bird identification
- High quality ecological data
- Verifiable data which can be quality checked
- Survey protocols



3TO - European nocturnal flight calls

- A multi-species classifier - focuses on common nocturnal migrants
- Provides species-level detection for 50 species of common nocturnal migrant, including:
 - crakes and rails
 - waterfowl and waders
 - passerines

Main aims of migration surveys

- Increases species detection and contribute to research
- More accurate than manual survey methods (Holmes et al. 2014 and Furnas & Callas 2015 – woodlands) (Tegeler et al. 2012 and Budka et al. 2022 – meadows)
- Increase number on species list from 226



BTO – nocturnal breeding birds

- Owls
- Nightjars
- Crakes
- Woodcock

Benefits of Acoustic Monitoring

- Little disturbance for potential nesting sites
- Enables us to target species to survey
- Cost effective

Night Callers

- Enhance our records
- Contribute to the science
- Hope to create a living legacy in memory of our Birdman of Sark

