

Rare Birds in **Guernsey**



La Société Guernesaise
Ornithological Section

2024

Report on rare birds in Guernsey in 2024

The islands of Guernsey, Herm, Jethou, Lihou and associated islets

Mark Lawlor and the Bailiwick of Guernsey Rarities Committee

The following records have been submitted to, assessed by and accepted by the Bailiwick of Guernsey Rarities Committee (BGRC) which is organised through the Ornithological Section of La Société Guernesiaise. The members of the committee for 2023 (M. P. Lawlor, J. Hooper, W. R. Turner, J. Horton, L. Higgins) would like to thank all the observers and photographers who sent in details of their rarity observations.



Ornithology Guernsey
Part of La Société

The systematic list is based on the BOU British List. Although the BGRC's area covers the whole of the Bailiwick, this report focuses on the rare bird sightings from Guernsey. However, the accepted records from Alderney and Sark are also included for completeness and interest. For each record, the following information is given where available; number of birds, age and sex if known, dates, locations, whether it was trapped or photographed, the names of the finder(s) (if they have completed a rarity report form), and whether it was seen by anyone else (et al.). For each species, it states how many previous Guernsey records there have been (if known) and there is a comment on the birds natural range and migrations. There are also the editor's comments and analysis of sightings for some species. Many thanks to all the photographers who have their photos appearing in this report : A. Stouling, W. Turner, D. Carre, R. Ferbrache, M. Guppy, A. Marquis, J. Down, A. Bott, J. Day, C. Loaring, J. Gibson, R. Vowles, J/P Birtwistle, G Goodeve.



La Société
For nature, history and
science in Guernsey

Cover photo : Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*) by D. Carre

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

One, 20th to 26th April, Grande Mare, photo (W. R. Turner, et. al.) - 9th Guernsey record.

A single Pink-footed Goose appeared on the close-cropped turf of the new golf course in late April and was present there for a whole week, making the most of the lack of disturbance before golf resumes in a couple of years. This record was unusual because, although Pink-footed Geese have become a little more regular in recent years, they have all been late autumn birds. At that time of the year, birds can overshoot their wintering grounds and appear on Guernsey. In Spring, however, wildfowl are returning north away from their wintering grounds, but there aren't regular wintering flocks to the south of Guernsey. Perhaps this bird spent the winter in France, after overshooting the previous autumn.

(Breeds in Iceland, Greenland & Svalbard, wintering in north-western Europe.)

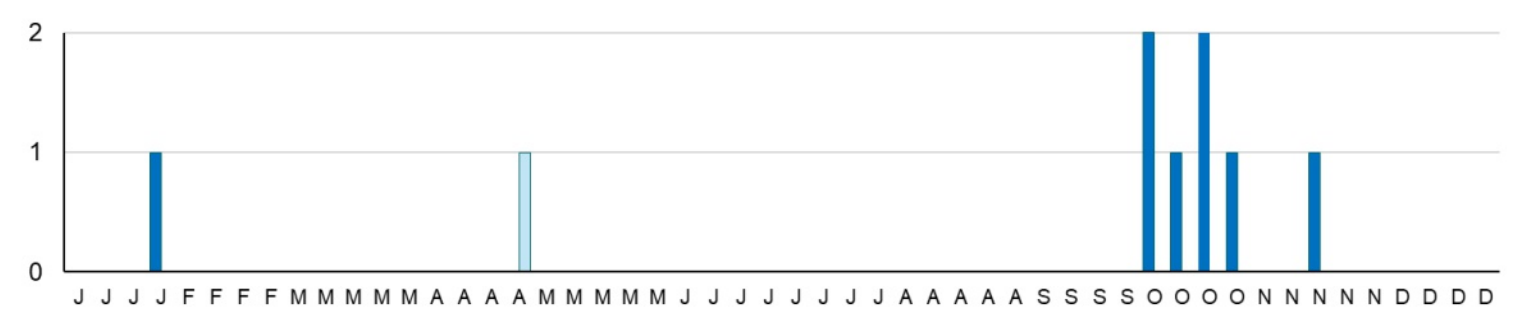


fig. 1 : arrival dates of Pink-footed Geese in Guernsey by week - pale bar = 2024 record



Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

One, first-winter male, 6th November to 2025, Grande Mare & Reservoir, photo (A. Stoaling, et. al.)
 - 14th Guernsey record.

Scaup has always been rare in Guernsey, but it has become especially so recently, this year's bird being the first sighting in sixteen years. Large numbers winter in the southern Baltic Sea and along the Netherlands coast, and very few venture this far south-west. It was thought that when birds did occur here, it was because of exceptionally cold weather in the continent, pushing some birds to our warmer waters. However, such massive freezes are not so common nowadays, which may explain the decline in local records. This bird was the second-earliest, after two in September 1977.

(Breeds on the Arctic tundra, wintering in north-western Europe.)

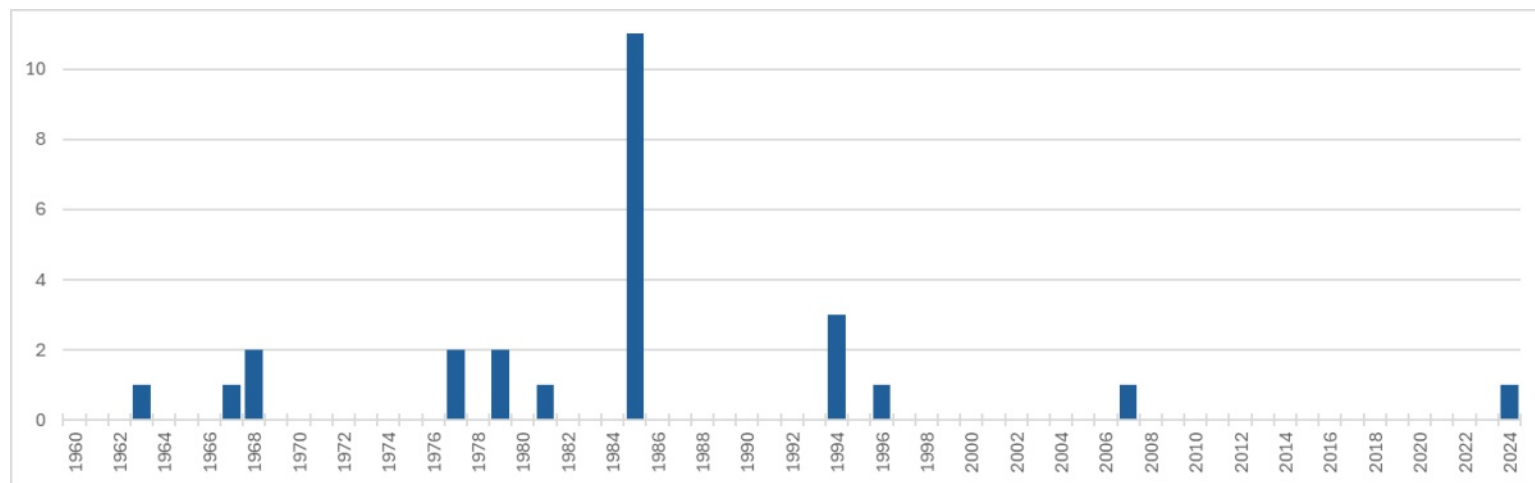


fig. 2 : total individuals of Scaup arriving in Guernsey by year





DCarre



Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*

Two, 23rd August, past Jaonneuse

One, 30th August, past Jaonneuse

Three, 11th September, past Jaonneuse

After last year's massive influx of over 200 individuals, it was going to be interesting whether this would become a yearly event. However, it was soon clear that this would not be the case, and, in 2024, birds were only seen on three dates passing the headland. Six birds though, is still a good total, and the species is definitely set to increase in local waters. However, depending on what happens in 2025, the species may again be added to the rarity list.

(Breeds mainly on East Atlantic islands, wandering north after breeding, but wintering further south in the Atlantic.)

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

One, 18th to 20th April, Pleinmont & various other locations, photo. Two seen together on 20th.

- 13th Guernsey record.

A single bird was seen flying in off the sea at Pleinmont in the afternoon of 18th and was seen widely that day as far across the island as the Capelles area. It was spotted the next day roosting in a tree at Saumarez Park. On 20th a single bird was seen over Grand Pre, which may have been a new bird, since two were seen together over Camp du Roi later that day. With the increase in the number of introduced storks in southern England, it is difficult to say whether the species is increasing or not. No rings were seen on these birds, so we can presume they are fully wild.

(A summer migrant to Europe, wintering mainly in Africa)



AMarquis

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

One, adult, 15th April, Pre d'Enfer (Rue des Bergers), photo - 9th Guernsey record.

The two records of Night Heron in 2023 were the first sightings of this species in Guernsey since 1997, so it seemed likely it might be another few years before the next record. However, there was another bird this spring, an adult dropping into the pond at the nature reserve at around lunchtime on 15th April. Rare species are, by definition, quite unpredictable, but there are often little clusters of records over a span of a few years. This can happen after an unusually wide-ranging influx, birds still 'out of place' from the previous year, but even the natural booms and busts of bird populations would make records irregular and intermittent. Unfortunately, the bird did not stay very long and disappeared as suddenly as it appeared.

(breeds in marshes in central and southern Europe, wintering in Africa.)



DCarre



RVowles

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

One, juvenile, 6th to 8th November, Pleinmont, photo - 30th Guernsey record.

A very elusive young bird was seen, mostly in flight, around the Pleinmont area. This is a very late sighting, the latest ever recorded in Guernsey, as the species is generally a summer-only visitor to Europe. The previous latest bird was on 16th October 1966, three weeks before this bird. Purple Heron is an almost expected rarity each year on the island, but the stats tell us that there has been an average of about seven records each recent decade, and there are often multiple sightings in a year. In the last 25 years, there have been 12 years with no sightings, showing the irregularity of the species.

(A summer migrant to central and southern Europe, wintering in Africa.)



WTurner

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

One, 13th to 15th April, Fermain & various other locations, photo (M. A. Guppy, et. al.) - 13th Guernsey record.

First seen soaring over Fermain Bay, late morning, this bird wandered the island and was noted at various sites for the next two days. Almost all previous records are of one-day birds, so an individual staying for three is highly unusual.

(A summer migrant to Europe, wintering mainly in Africa)



MGuppy

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedichnemus*

One, 6th July, Pleinmont, photo (M. A. Guppy) - 32nd Guernsey record.

Early July is a very unusual time of year for a Stone Curlew to be seen in Guernsey, with all recent records being of spring migrants between March and May. Although there are plenty of records historically, this is only the 10th Stone Curlew since the 1980s.

(Breeds mainly in south/central Europe, but also England, northern birds winter in southern Europe and Africa)



MGuppy

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

One, juvenile, 29th August to 3rd September, Grande Mare, photo (A. Smith, G. Dovey, et. al.) - 1st Guernsey record.

A lone wader was photographed feeding in the shallows of one of the ponds at Grande Mare golf course on 29th August. However, the photos were not positively identified until 3rd September, which resulted in somewhat of a mad scramble for local birders to try and see this new species for the island. The private nature of the site meant that no one was sure whether the bird was still present, and even the first 'sighting' was a red herring, when a similar-looking Wood Sandpiper was located on one of the ponds. Eventually, the Lesser Yellowlegs was refound, and most people managed to see the bird in the evening of 3rd, which was fortunate, as it decided to depart that night. This filled a glaring gap in the island bird list, as Lesser Yellowlegs is one of the most regular transatlantic vagrants to visit western Europe, having been seen over 650 times in Britain and Ireland over the years.

(Breeds in the boreal forests of Alaska and northern Canada, wintering in the southern United States, Central and South America.)



Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

One, first-winter, 2023 to 6th January, Rocquaine, photo - 24th Guernsey record.

The young bird which spent the last week of 2023 in Rocquaine Bay was seen on a couple of occasions until the last sighting on 6th January.

(Breeds on Arctic coasts, wintering in northern Europe)

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

One, 5th May, Rocquaine (J. Hooper, J. Brown, D. Spicer, A. P. Loaring).

One, 20th May, Bordeaux.

Two sightings this year, the first time since 1987. Nightjar seems to be a species that is having a small boom in records, with five in six years, after a long gap of 22 years without any birds between 1997 and 2019. The total number of records in Guernsey is unknown, as the species was apparently not so rare in pre-war times. The first sighting was odd: a bird seen sitting in the road, pre-dawn, noted by a bird race team just starting out for the day. The second bird was observed feeding over the mound at Bordeaux late in the evening, video-recorded chasing insects at dusk.

(Breeds uncommonly throughout Europe, winters in Africa.)

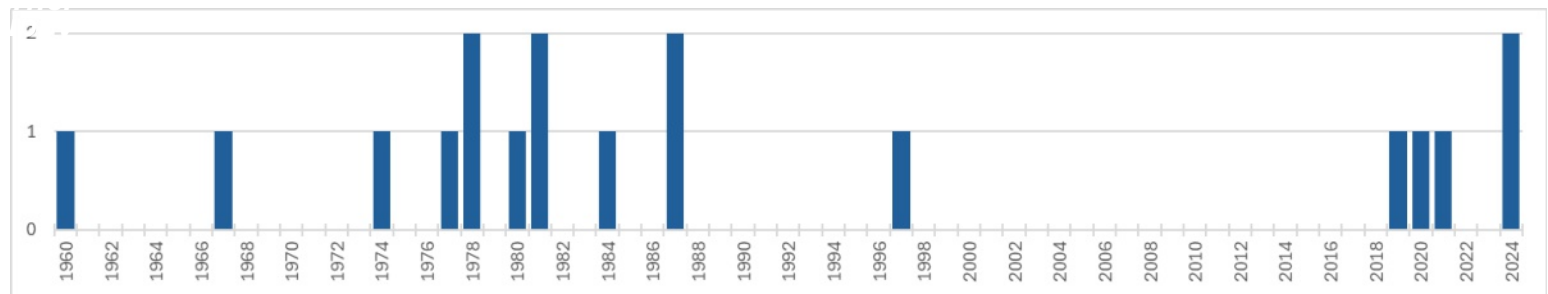


fig. 3 : Nightjar records in Guernsey by year

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

One, 18th April, Pleinmont, photo - 24th Guernsey record.

In the 2000s, Bee-eater appeared to be becoming a more regular visitor to Guernsey, with 13 records in 15 years, so an almost annual species. However, despite increases in many other southern species, this bird was only the second record since 2015. The bird performed very well for a short time in the afternoon, sallying from pines near the camping field to catch bees.

(Breeds in central and southern Europe, winters in Africa)





JGibson



JGibson

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

One, male, 12th April, Rue de la Folie, Torteval, photo
- 16th Guernsey record.

A photo of a mystery bird was posted on the local birdwatching Facebook group, which was quickly identified as a male Woodchat Shrike. This is an increasingly common route for rare birds to be discovered, but often this means that the birds are identified long after they have departed. This was the earliest ever Woodchat Shrike seen in Guernsey by three days.

(Breeds in southern Europe, as far north as central France, wintering in Africa)



J/PBirtwistle

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

One, 26th April to 2nd May, Vazon to Rocquaine, photo.

A single Hooded Crow wandered widely along the coastline between Vazon and Rocquaine beaches for a week in spring. There is a high probability that this may be the same bird that spent a few days here during the same week in 2023. Hooded Crows are very rare in Guernsey, this being only the fourth year that one has been recorded since 2000.

(Breeds in Ireland, Scotland, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, with many birds moving slightly further south in winter.)





JGibson

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*

One, juvenile, 6th October, Fort Hommet, photo
- 60th Guernsey record.

This species has now reached an impressive 60 records in Guernsey, the island being one of the best places to see this species in northwestern Europe. With such a large number of sightings, one may think that it should be taken off the local rarity list, but other factors are taken into account, such as status elsewhere, distance travelled, etc.

(Breeds in southern-eastern Europe and Asia, wintering in SE Asia - prone to westerly influxes.)



JDown

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

One, 11th May, Icart, sound-recorded (M. A. Guppy) - 31st Guernsey record.

A recently arrived migrant bird took the opportunity to sing a few tunes from deep in the scrub at Icart before moving on to its breeding grounds. Nightingale will be a much more regular visitor than records suggest, but its secretive nature means it is rarely seen. Unlike this bird, migrant males seem to sing here very rarely.

(Common breeder throughout central and southern Europe, migrating to winter in Africa. Breeds uncommonly in UK.)

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

One, 26th and 27th October, Fort Hommet headland, photo (M. A. Guppy, et. al.) - 1st Guernsey record.

A large, pale wheatear feeding on the short turf at Fort Hommet headland on 27th October was identified as a new species for Guernsey, an Isabelline Wheatear. These birds are a typical late autumn vagrant to western Europe, albeit very rare, with only a few records per year along the Atlantic fringe. This species is unusual for a wheatear as there is not an obvious male plumage type, so all birds resemble a female Northern Wheatear, a common migrant. The differences are few, but Isabelline is larger and paler, with a slightly different stance. The bird did not stay long and departed overnight, although subsequent analysis of a bird photographed the day before showed that it had actually been present for two days on the headland.

(Breeds in the dry areas of SW Asia and extreme SE Europe as far west , wintering in central Africa and S Asia.)





DCarre



MGuppy



MGuppy



WTurner

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Two, 3rd November to 2025, Foulon Cemetery, photo
- 48th Guernsey record.

Foulon Cemetery was the epicentre of the large influx of Hawfinch in the winter of 2017/18, but these are the first records there since then. The Yew trees of cemeteries are Hawfinch magnets, and there will no doubt be more records here in the future.

(Resident breeder throughout Europe, with northern birds wandering further south in autumn and winter.)



Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

One, female, 4th November, Fort Hommet, photo
(M. A. Guppy).

This species is ticking over at about one record a year at the moment, but they always seem to be brief sightings like this bird. Cirl Bunting has overtaken Yellowhammer as the most likely candidate when coming across a "yellow" bunting.

(Resident breeder throughout central & northern Europe, some northern birds migrate further south in winter.)



Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Three (possibly four), 1st February, Le Coudre, photo.

One, female, 21st May, Pulias (M. P. Lawlor, et. al.).

After an increase in the last few years, especially the influx of 15 birds in 2022, Cirl Bunting was expected to become a more regular visitor to Guernsey, and there were even hopes of more breeding records. However, 2023 was, surprisingly, a totally blank year, so it was good to see a few sightings this year.

(Resident breeder in western and southern Europe, uncommon in SW England and a few pairs present in Jersey.)





DCarre



DCarre

APPENDIX : category D/E species

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*

One, male, 2nd June, St. Martins, photo.

This record is included for completeness, although, unfortunately, Indigo Bunting will not be added to the island bird list. This striking species was seen and photographed on a bird feeder in St. Martins, but was never seen again. The sighting does fit in with an unusual spate of male Indigo Buntings in NW Europe during late spring 2024 - in Co. Durham, Pembrokeshire, Denmark and Iceland. However, the photo is not clear enough to definitively identify the bird as an Indigo Bunting (there are a few similarly blue species). Plus, birds such as this need to be seen well enough to check for signs of captivity, such as leg rings, feather damage, etc. So even though the probability may swing towards a 'wild' bird, disappointingly, the evidence is not there.

(Breeds in the eastern United States & southern Canada, wintering in central America & the West Indies.)



Selected records from Alderney & Sark in 2024

ALDERNEY

Great Shearwater <i>Ardenna gravis</i>	at sea, 28th August.
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	5th June.
Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>	17th June.
Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>	14th November.
Red-flanked Bluetail <i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	3rd November.
Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	26th October and 28th November.

SARK

White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	2, 20th April (same as Guernsey).
------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Scarce species in Guernsey

Below is a list of other rarer sightings in Guernsey in 2024. The species below occur too regularly to be classified as official rarities, and are generally labelled "scarcities". Some years, a scarce species may occur in higher-than-usual numbers and will be missing from this section (for practical reasons). Since these species are not official rarities, no formal report form has had to be completed, and no assessment has taken place by the Rarities Committee. So, as these records are 'unchecked' they are listed with the assumption of correct identification by the observer, and the proviso that an error may have been made on occasion. A handful of reported scarcities have been omitted from this list as it was judged that there was a high likelihood of a mistake being made. Some may be the same bird moving between locations.

Pale-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*)

1, Colin Best NR, 1st Jan.

1, Colin Best NR, 1st to 4th Feb.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

6, Vale Pond (& elsewhere), 2023 to 20th Apr.

4, Colin Best NR (& elsewhere), 16th Oct to 2025.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

1, Grande Mare, 6th Nov to 2025.

Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*)

1 m, Claire Mare, 11th to 30th Jan.

1 m, Pulias, 4th Oct.

2 m+f, Claire Mare, 13th Nov to 2025.

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

1, Claire Mare, 6th Nov.

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

Up to 4 (2m,2f), Claire Mare, Grande Mare, Reservoir,
3rd Nov to 2025.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

1 m, Vale Pond, 14th Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

1 f/i, Fort Le Crocq to Vazon, 7th Jan to 19th Mar.

1 f/i, Petils Bay, 27th Dec.

Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*)

1, Lihou Headland, 13th Dec.

Black-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*)

1, Rocquaine, 28th Jan to 3rd Feb.

2, Lihou Headland, 21st Mar.

1, Lihou Headland, 13th Dec.



Mute Swan - AStoaling



Pochards - JDay



RB Merganser - DCarre

Slavonian Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*)

- 2, Lihou Hd to Vazon, 7th to 29th Jan.
- 1, Rocquaine, 16th Mar.
- 1, Rocquaine, 12th to 13th Dec.

Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

- 1, Vazon, 9th Sep.
- 1, Lihou Headland, 13th Dec.

Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)

- 1, Claire Mare, 13th Apr.
- 1, Vale Pond, 30th Apr to 1st May.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

- [too numerous to list all records]
- Early peak - 17, Candie Rd, 5th Feb.
- Late peak - 32, Reservoir roost, 3rd Nov.

Great White Egret (*Ardea alba*)

- 1, Vale Pond, 5th May.
- 1, Claire Mare, 30th Aug.
- 1, Grandes Rocques, 13th Sep.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

- 1, Herm, 6th Apr.
- 1, Fort Doyle, 22nd Apr.
- 1, Capelles, 8th May.
- 1, Pleinmont, 8th Sep.

Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)

- Up to 3, Grantez, 10th & 11th Aug.
- 1, Courtil de Bas, 6th Sep.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

- 1 f/i, Pleinmont & south coast, 2023 to 17th Mar.
- 1 m, Pleinmont, 4th Jun.
- 1 f/i, Pleinmont & south coast, 15th Oct to 2025.
- 1 f/i, Rue des Hougues, Castel, 23rd Dec.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

- 1, Colin Best NR, 22nd to 24th Mar.
- 1 j, Claire Mare, 2nd to 13th Jul.

Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*)

- 1, Rue de Belial, 3rd Nov.



BN Grebe - R Ferbrache



Hen Harrier - D Carre 20



Goosander - A Stalling



GWEgret - C Loaring



Dotterel - ABott



Spoonbill - DCarre



Cattle Egret - JGibson



GWEgret - DCarre

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

- 1, Claire Mare, 13th May.
- 1, Rocquaine, 25th Sep.
- 1, Rocquaine, 15th to 19th Oct.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

- 1, Vale Pond, 16th to 21st Aug.
- 1, L'Eree Shingle Bank, 17th Oct.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

- 1, Claire Mare, 15th Sep.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyrtus minimus*)

- 3, St. Sampsons Marais, 3rd Jan.
- 1, Rue des Hougues, StA, 15th Feb.
- 1, Grande Mare, 6th Nov.

Grey Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*)

- 1, Jaonneuse, 25th Aug.

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)

- 1, Grande Mare, 3rd to 5th Sep.
- 1, Grand Pre, 7th Sep.
- 1, Grand Pre, 17th & 18th Sep.

Caspian Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)

- 3+ juvs, Perelle/L'Eree, between 10th and 17th Aug.

Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*)

- 1, Jaonneuse, 18th Aug.
- 3, Jaonneuse, 12th Sep.

Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)

- 1, Jaonneuse, 28th Sep.

Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)

- 1, Bigard, 12th Apr.
- 1, Pleinmont, 5th May.

Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)

- 1, Rue des Pres, SPdB, 27th & 28th Mar.
- 1, Fermain Road, 11th Apr.
- 1, Creux Mahie, 8th May.
- 1, Pleinmont, 26th Aug.

Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*)

- 1, Fort Hommet, 6th to 9th Sep.
- 1, Pleinmont, 14th Sep.



Ruff - DCarre



Wryneck - DCarre



Rook - JGibson

Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)

2 m, Rue des Hougues, Castel, 14th Apr.
1 m, Fauxquets Valley, 24th Apr.
1 f, Fauxquest Valley, 25th Apr.

Rook (*Philomachus pugnax*)

1, Rue des Hougues, StA, 7th to 13th Jan.
1, Rue des Hougues, StA, 22nd Mar to 8th Apr.
1, Pleinmont, 26th Apr.

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

1, Rue des Raies, 20th Apr.
1, Fauxquets Valley, 27th Apr.
1, Reservoir, 29th Apr.

Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*)

2, Pezeries, Pleinmont, 26th Oct.
1, Pezeries, Pleinmont, 4th to 9th Nov.
1, Vau de Monel, Pleinmont, 8th Nov.

Melodious Warbler (*Hippolais polyglotta*)

1, Pleinmont, 9th & 10th Aug.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

1, Pleinmont, 16th Apr.
1, Pleinmont, 23rd Apr.
1, Icart, 9th May.
1, Creux Mahie, 11th May.

Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*)

1, Pleinmont, 10th Nov to 3rd Dec.

Blue-headed Wagtail (*Motacilla flava flava*)

1, Mont Herault, 5th May.

Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*)

1, Richmond, Vazon, 3rd to 29th Jan.
1, Claire Mare, 4th Nov.
1, Richmond, Vazon, 15th Nov.

Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

1, L'Eree, 26th Oct to 8th Nov.
1, Fort Hommet, 27th Oct.





Snow Bunting - JDay



Snow Bunting - JDay