



La Société Sercquaise Report 2024

Ornithology Section

Prepared by Lynda Higgins



Winter Visitors

There were few reports of our winter visitors such as golden plover, lapwing, woodcock and snipe in February and March.

Garden Birds

Garden birds were present in good numbers throughout the year. House sparrow have disappeared completely from the Avenue due to severe hedge cutting after 1st March which is the breeding season. Although, small colonies of house sparrows are still present at Pomme de Chien and La Vert. We are seeing more farmland birds such as linnet, chaffinch and goldfinch, present in large flocks, as well as meadow pipits, which is good news. Greenfinch numbers have declined severely. This recent decline may be linked to an outbreak of trichomonosis, a parasite-induced disease that prevents birds from feeding properly; first noted in pigeons and doves in 2006. RSPB and BTO have issued warnings about feeding stations and the need to regularly clean them to prevent spread of the disease. Only two volunteers took part in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Survey. The top ten birds were chaffinch, house sparrow, great tit, woodpigeon, blue tit, collared dove, robin, dunnock, ring-necked pheasant and wren.

Spring Migration

The 2024 spring migration was difficult. By the second week of February night-time temperatures were above 9 degrees centigrade and early migrants took advantage to move north. A chiffchaff and blackcap were reported singing on 14th February. The weather then turned colder which seemed to put a halt to the migration. It wasn't until May that temperatures became warmer. In spite of this the first pair of chiffchaff were reported on 9th March, spot on time. A large flock of 50+ meadow pipits on 11th March and the first northern wheatear on 20th March. The first swallows were spotted on 22nd March feeding on insects at Les Laches, a week earlier than last year and in line with 2022. The bad weather in March and April meant that migrants were arriving in very poor condition.

Rarities

We enjoyed only one rarity; the White Stork reported by Peter Guille (20th April). Although not considered rarities we did also see the following scarcities; Osprey in Greve de la Ville on 3rd September and a further pair passing Les Burons on 14th September, heading south. A Hoopoe was observed in the field on the corner of Dixcart Lane on 15th September by Helen Magell. A Honey Buzzard came down and settled in trees on the north side of Harbour Hill on Wednesday 2nd October (seen by Jan Guy and Peter Guille). An Asian Hornet nest was found on the ground and broken apart in Dixcart on Thursday 3rd October at 3 pm (reported by Rob Knight). Honey Buzzard seen flying below tree-line up Harbour Hill on Friday 4th October (seen by Jan Guy). The cuckoo was heard on 23rd April in the Harbour Hill, La Forge and Dixcart Woods area and again on 25th April in La Seigneurie Woods. Another cuckoo was heard at Vallon d'Or on 17th May. Two pairs of great spotted woodpecker also bred successfully again. There were regular reports from Lucy Belfield of a female with one juvenile feeding in Dixcart Woods.

Barn Owls and Long – eared Owls

Two breeding pairs of barn owls were present throughout the year and bred successfully. There have also been repeated reports of sightings on the east of the Island, away from the other two nesting sites. This is encouraging news. Dispersal of the young from the nest usually leads to high mortality rates but the fact that this individual has seemingly survived the worst of the winter brings hope of a possible third breeding pair. The Barn Owl Trust have recently requested information concerning the status of our Barn Owls and data will be provided to them. There is no evidence that the Long-Eared Owls have returned to breed. They last bred successfully in Dixcart Woods in 2022.

Other Raptors

Peregrine falcon - three breeding pairs at Saignie Bay, Greve de la Ville and Les Laches. The breeding status of the Marsh Harrier was unclear in 2024. There were a number of sightings of the male hunting on a daily basis and later in the year the female with a juvenile, which is consistent with possible breeding success. Monitoring indicated that four breeding pairs of buzzards were present.

Seabird Colonies

Our seabird colonies were surveyed in 2024. Three aerial surveys were carried out by Wild Islands on 22nd/23rd May and 23rd & 30th June of the guillemot colonies. The whole colony count method was used. In addition, a round island seabird count was carried out on 24th May with the very kind help from Andy Cook and Sue Daly. I am able to report the following:-

Kittiwakes – five pairs displaying courtship behaviour and carrying nesting materials were seen on 24th May. They were later joined by more juveniles. The aerial survey carried out at Les Burons on 30th June indicated what looked like one egg laid in one of the nests but the egg failed to hatch, and the birds left the site about 10th July. We are hopeful that they will return in 2025. Full story was covered in the Summer Newsletter <https://www.socsercq.org/newsletters>

Puffin at L'Etac – On occasion the puffin numbers seemed low but around 20 were recorded by Peter Guille in June to the east of L'Etac and a smaller group to the west which is similar to 2022 and 2023.

Guillemots - Very good numbers:

Count	Date	Les Burons-total Ind	Les Autelets-total Ind
1	23/05/2024	508	300
2	23/06/2024	313	362
3	30/06/2024	272	344
Mean			
Average		364	335

Razorbills numbers remained stable with 65 breeding pairs and were present at La Grande Moie (7 breeding pairs), the new colony at Les Fontaines now has 40 breeding pairs and Les Burons and L'Etac (5 breeding pairs) and Pot Bay (3 breeding pairs). They were also seen at Bec du Nez, Boutique Caves and Brechou.

Fulmer numbers were up; 9 breeding pairs at Saignie Bay, Convanche Chasm - 1 breeding pair, Pot Bay - 1 breeding pair, Gouliot Caves - 3 breeding pairs and Brechou – 1 breeding pair, Port a la Jument – 1 breeding pair, Moie du Mouton – 7 breeding pairs and at soufleur near Noir Bais – 7 breeding pairs - 30 breeding pairs in total. An increase of 87.5% from 2023.

Small numbers of manx and balearic sheerwaters were recorded in July, August and September.

The autumn migration proved more eventful. Good numbers of raptors, hirundines, and passerines were recorded. By mid-October the thrush invasion brought large numbers of redwing, fieldfare and continental blackbirds. The little egret which became resident last winter decided to leave with its mate.

Acoustic Monitoring of Spring and Autumn Migrations

In 2023 we started acoustic recordings of the migration which monitors the nocturnal movement of birds, in addition to the daytime census surveys. This project stalled in 2024 but will be resumed in March 2025.

Project Nightingale

A survey of an undisclosed site will be made in April and May to ascertain whether the nightingale is in fact breeding at the site. This project will use acoustic monitoring to minimise any disturbance to the birds.

The full list of 2024 daytime sightings is available at

<https://www.socsercq.org/ornithology>

Many thanks for all your reported sightings in 2024 which helped to build an accurate record of our resident and migrant bird population. All sightings contribute to the working list of Channel Islands birds.

Any sightings are always welcome. Please text Lynda Higgins on mobile 07781 426822, or email details of "what, where and when" to wildlife@socsercq.sark.gg Alternatively, you can post your sightings on Facebook "Sark Bird Sightings". Photographs and videos are helpful. Rarity reports require photographic evidence.