

Editorial

Many readers may be somewhat puzzled by the choice of photograph for the cover of the first issue of Vol. 102, but it marks the first of twelve front covers chosen to highlight the ambitious project for a new bird observatory on Fair Isle. Twelve photographers and artists have generously agreed to donate the usual fee for a *BB* front cover to the Fair Isle appeal (see www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk), and a top-up donation from *British Birds* will be made at the end of the year. Hugh Harrop's image of the Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* in October 2004 is an appropriate beginning to the series in many ways – an iconic first record for the Western Palearctic sums up what Fair Isle means to many birdwatchers. It was Hugh who first suggested to me that photographers might donate covers to the FIBO appeal; I might have been even more grateful had he had the tact to choose a bird that I had seen on the island, but no matter...

Many readers will know that I have strong connections with Fair Isle, having been warden there in the mid 1990s and being a current member of the board of trustees charged with replacing the existing observatory building. Nonetheless, I feel that it is highly appropriate for *BB* to support this appeal, both in monetary terms and through the publicity generated. To its credit, the network of British and Irish bird observatories has maintained its relevance for birdwatchers in the twenty-first century, and the importance of long-term data on migrants has been highlighted in recent years, including in *BB* by Dick Loxton (*Brit. Birds* 95: 328–333) and by some of the papers referred to in Angela Turner's summary in this issue of how climate change is affecting Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*. Migration studies are undergoing a more general resurgence at the present time, partly as the result of improvements in tracking technologies such as satellite tagging. This was emphasised at the BTO's annual conference in December, where a stimulating talk by Phil Atkinson confirmed that, 45 years after Ken Williamson (the first Fair Isle warden) moved from Migration Research Officer to Populations

Research Officer at the BTO (and the journal *Bird Migration* ceased to be published), migration is firmly back at the forefront of the BTO's priorities. Projects such as BirdTrack have been showing us the value of co-ordinating observations on a wide scale for a few years now (see www.birdtrack.net and also the opportunity described on p. 44) – and we can all look forward with real optimism to projects in the BTO pipeline to look at migration on an international scale.

As well as a fine variety of Fair Isle-related covers, there is a great deal more to look forward to in Vol. 102 of *BB*. The recent series on Important Bird Areas has proved extremely popular and several excellent contributions are in the pipeline for 2009. A new series of short articles on conservation priority species in the UK will provide a domestic counterpoint to the mostly international flavour of the IBA series, while a strong line-up of individual papers will support regular reports such as those of BBRC and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. One report missing from recent volumes has been that for scarce migrants; Pete Fraser is busy accumulating data, however, and we plan to publish a five-year summary covering 2003–2007 sometime in 2010. This will mean that, for some species (those initially considered as rarities by BBRC), we can assess changes over a remarkable 50-year period.

Two key milestones of particular relevance to *BB* will be reached in 2009, which you will read more about as the year progresses. The British ringing scheme, administered by the BTO since the 1930s, dates back to 1909, when the vision of Harry Witherby and others led to the formation of the *British Birds* ringing scheme. As alluded to above, 2009 is also the half-centenary of BBRC, which will be marked in a variety of ways in the journal, among them a celebration of memorable rarity events, a special category in this year's 'Bird Photograph of the Year' competition and, in particular, by a wide variety of papers and notes which bear the 'From the Rarities Committee's files' banner.

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