

# Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2003

## Part 2: Short-toed Lark to Little Bunting

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This is the second part of this, the ninth, annual Scarce Migrants report, which covers the passerine species from Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* to Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*. Part 1 of the report, which dealt with non-passerines, has already been published (*Brit. Birds* 99: 74–91).

Of particular interest in 2003 was the simul-

taneous arrival and record totals of two exciting *Phylloscopus* warblers from Siberia. Yellow-browed Warbler *Ph. inornatus* arrived throughout much of September and October, while a three-figure flood of Pallas's Leaf Warblers *Ph. proregulus* in October brightened up many patches of east-coast woodland. Also from the east, but arriving from late spring

**Table 1.** These data show the relative abundance of each species in 2003, by ranking the number of individuals recorded during 2003 in the context of previous annual totals. Note that the number of years of comparable data varies according to species. This table thus highlights in more detail which species were recorded in relatively high or low numbers in 2003 (for example 2003 was the best year on record for both Pallas's Leaf *Phylloscopus proregulus* and Yellow-browed Warblers *Ph. inornatus*).

| Species  | No. in 2003 | Year rank | Years of data |
|--|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| Pallas's Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i> | 303         | 1         | 46            |
| Yellow-browed Warbler <i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>  | 853         | 1         | 36            |
| Rose-coloured Starling <i>Sturnus roseus</i>         | 63          | 3         | 46            |
| Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>            | 93          | 3         | 36            |
| Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>        | 170         | 4         | 46            |
| Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>            | 157         | 4         | 18            |
| Richard's Pipit <i>Anthus richardi</i>               | 129         | 7         | 46            |
| European Serin <i>Serinus serinus</i>                | 59          | 10        | 46            |
| Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>                | 21          | 12        | 46            |
| Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>               | 24          | 12=       | 46            |
| Red-breasted Flycatcher <i>Ficedula parva</i>        | 103         | 13=       | 36            |
| Barred Warbler <i>Sylvia nisoria</i>                 | 161         | 14        | 36            |
| Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>             | 158         | 14        | 18            |
| Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>          | 33          | 16        | 18            |
| Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>                 | 77          | 18        | 36            |
| Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i>       | 20          | 23        | 46            |
| Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>     | 13          | 23        | 46            |
| Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>                 | 22          | 25        | 46            |
| Icterine Warbler <i>Hippolais icterina</i>           | 62          | 27        | 36            |
| Bluethroat <i>Luscinia svecica</i>                   | 64          | 28=       | 36            |
| Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>        | 18          | 32        | 36            |

onwards, came the third-highest total of Rose-coloured Starlings *Sturnus roseus*; and the third-highest total of Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana*, most of which were in the autumn. Common Rosefinches *Carpodacus erythrinus* and Great Grey Shrikes *Lanius excubitor* both appeared in good numbers, unlike many Scandinavian night migrants. Arrivals from southern Europe generally fared poorly, with relatively few Short-toed Larks, Tawny Pipits *Anthus campestris* or Melodious Warblers *Hippolais polyglotta*.

It is only by annual monitoring of these species, based upon records submitted to, and accepted by, local or regional records committees, that short-term anomalies and long-term trends can be detected. Readers are referred to the introduction to Part 1 of this report for fuller details of the nature of the records it contains. Additional data for each species may be found in the 'Scarce Migrants' section of the BBRC website at <http://www.scarce-migrants.org.uk>

### Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1996                            | 1994 | 1999 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 13                            | 636                                | 23        | 45                              | 39   | 31   | 5                      | 11      | 13      | 27      | 18      |

It is necessary to go back as far as 1988 to match the poor showing of 13 Short-toed Larks reported in 2003. An overwintering bird at Cowbar, Cleveland, present from 4th to 12th January, was extremely unusual but not unprecedented. Spring passage got underway on 23rd April, when there was one at Conwy Morfa, Caernarfonshire, followed by singles on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 26th, and Scolt Head, Norfolk, on 29th. A further three appeared in May, at Skern, Devon, on 8th, on Lundy, Devon, on 12th, and on Blakeney Point, Norfolk, on 30th; while the last of the spring arrived on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, on 9th June.

Just five were seen in autumn, between 17th September and 11th October, the first being at Loch of Spiggie, Shetland, on 17th–18th September. Singles at North Warren, Suffolk, on 18th, and at Trevoze Head, Cornwall, on 24th, were the only other September reports. The other two both appeared on 11th October, but at opposite ends of the country: at Virkie, Shetland, and at Treen, Cornwall.

Examination of the pattern of occurrence of Short-toed Larks in Britain reveals that, typically, autumn records have outnumbered those found during the spring. In recent years, however, the number of autumn migrants has declined dramatically, and the five in autumn 2003 represents a particularly poor showing. Indeed, Short-toed Lark seems to be returning to its former status as a national rarity. The generally high numbers seen between 1991 and 2000 have been followed by a steady decline in reports in Britain during 2001–03 (although the present numbers remain higher than the annual totals found during and prior to the 1970s).

Although several European breeding populations, in particular the important Turkish one, were stable or increased during 1990–2000, other sizeable populations in Spain and Russia declined (and overall, the status of this species as a breeding bird in Europe is evaluated as 'Declining'; BirdLife International 2004). Are these population trends reflected in the British numbers? A dearth of autumn migrants is most likely to reflect problems in populations of a more easterly origin (see *Brit. Birds* 97: 651–652).

### Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

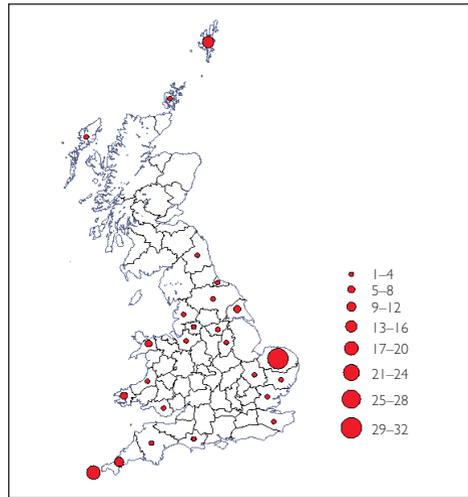
| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1994                            | 2001 | 1995 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 129                           | 3,351                              | 7         | 353                             | 175  | 160  | 34                     | 51      | 65      | 130     | 120     |

A good autumn passage ensured that 2003 was a good year for Richard's Pipit in Britain (fig. 1), the

seventh-best since 1958. At the beginning of the year, two overwintering birds were found at inland localities: at Birley Edge, South Yorkshire, from 14th January to 18th March; and at Langford, Nottinghamshire, from 16th February to 29th March.

Spring passage was unexceptional, with just four reported, three of which arrived during 21st–25th April: at Sennen, Cornwall, on 21st April; at the King's Fleet, Suffolk, on 22nd–24th April; and on St Martin's, Scilly, on 25th–26th April. The other spring bird was seen at Beeston Bump, Norfolk, on 7th May.

The first of the autumn was at Spurn, East Yorkshire, on 6th September, an exceptionally early date. There were no further records until 20th September, when an influx began, bringing 17 birds to widely scattered locations, from Shetland to Cornwall, before the end of the month. Norfolk, with seven, and Shetland, with five, enjoyed the bulk of this early influx. Typically, October proved to be the best month, with fresh arrivals occurring almost daily, 16 being found in the first ten days, 34 in the middle ten-day period, and a further 30 during 21st–31st. Arrivals continued daily, albeit in reduced numbers, into November, with 20 new birds appearing in the first half of the month, including four on Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, on 5th–6th. Thereafter, passage dried up, and just four more were discovered: three on 21st–22nd November, and one on 30th. At the tail end of the year, a wintering bird was discovered on 5th December at Llanilid, Glamorgan, which remained until the end of the year.



**Fig. 1.** Distribution of Richard's Pipits *Anthus richardi* in Britain in 2003, when Norfolk, Scilly and Shetland were clearly the most important counties for this species.

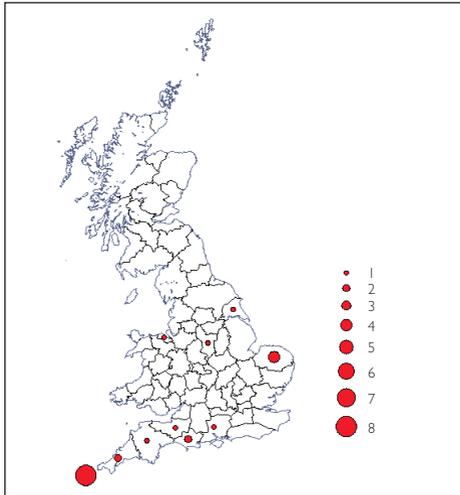


Rebecca Nason

**58.** Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2003.

### Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |       |         | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|---------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1992                            | 1983  | 1993/77 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 22                              | 1,128 | 25      | 57                     | 56      | 45      | 13      | 27      |



**Fig. 2.** Distribution of Tawny Pipits *Anthus campestris* in Britain in 2003.

This proved to be the best year for Tawny Pipits in Britain since 1997 (when 27 were seen), and a considerable improvement on three of the four years from 1999 to 2002, when fewer than ten were reported. In 2003, five spring migrants was just equal to the ten-year rolling average since 1994, but the 17 in autumn was a good showing, in fact the best since 19 in 1997.

Of the five spring reports, the first was at Hemsby, Norfolk, on 26th, the bird then moving to nearby Winterton dunes on 27th where it remained until 3rd May. Another appeared at Beeston Bump on 1st May, followed by singles at Spurn on 3rd–4th May, on Blakeney Point on 16th–17th May, and at Point of Ayr, Flintshire, on 9th–10th June.

In autumn, Scilly was the place to be to find Tawny Pipit; there were no fewer than eight records there and another six in the southwest counties (see fig. 2). The first of the autumn was on Bryher, Scilly, on 24th August, with another August record

on 26th at Nanjizal, Cornwall. Eleven turned up in September, all in the southwest with the exception of singles at Weybourne, Norfolk, and at Barton-on-Sea, Hampshire, both on 27th. Just four were found in October, but this did include one at Aston-on-Trent Gravel-pit, Derbyshire, on 5th–7th



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**59.** Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2003.

October, the first county record and a great bird to find inland. The last of the year was on St Mary's, Scilly, on 22nd October.

Sharrock (1974) suggested that the relatively small numbers which occur in spring, compared with other species with a similar breeding distribution (such as Hoopoe *Upupa epops* and Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*), imply that Tawny Pipits are less prone to overshooting than other species. He also interpreted the south/southeast bias in the distribution of autumn records, with few along the east coast north of Norfolk, as reflecting a species well equipped to avoid lateral displacement in adverse weather, something perhaps to be expected in a diurnal migrant. As for Short-toed Lark, the conservation status of Tawny Pipit in Europe is Declining (BirdLife International 2004) so, assuming that weather conditions are unlikely to play a major role in arrival patterns in Britain, the prospects for 2003 being the beginning of an upturn in fortunes may not be good.

### Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |       |      | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1985                            | 1981  | 1993 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 64                              | 4,541 | 28=  | 622                    | 333     | 267     | 98      |

It remains something of a mystery why 2003 was an excellent year for some species thought of as Scandinavian night migrants – such as Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* – yet it was a dreadful year for others – such as Bluethroat. With just 63 reported, 2003 was the one of the poorest years since 1968 for this attractive species.

Two 'White-spotted' Bluethroats *L. s. cyanecula* were found in 2003, both on typically early spring dates: on Gugh, Scilly, on 21st–22nd March, and on Unst, Shetland, on 2nd April. There were no further reports until 4th May, when 'red-spotted' males appeared at Geosetter, Shetland, and at Hadleigh, Essex. These proved to be something of a false dawn, however, with no further arrivals until one on Bardsey on 15th. This heralded the start of the main influx of the spring, 28 arriving in the second half of May (Shetland alone accounted for 24 of these, while neighbouring Orkney could muster just two, both on North Ronaldsay). Away from the Northern Isles, the only other May reports came from Ingol, Lancashire & North Merseyside, on 25th, and Newtonmore, Highland, on 30th. Four more arrived in June.

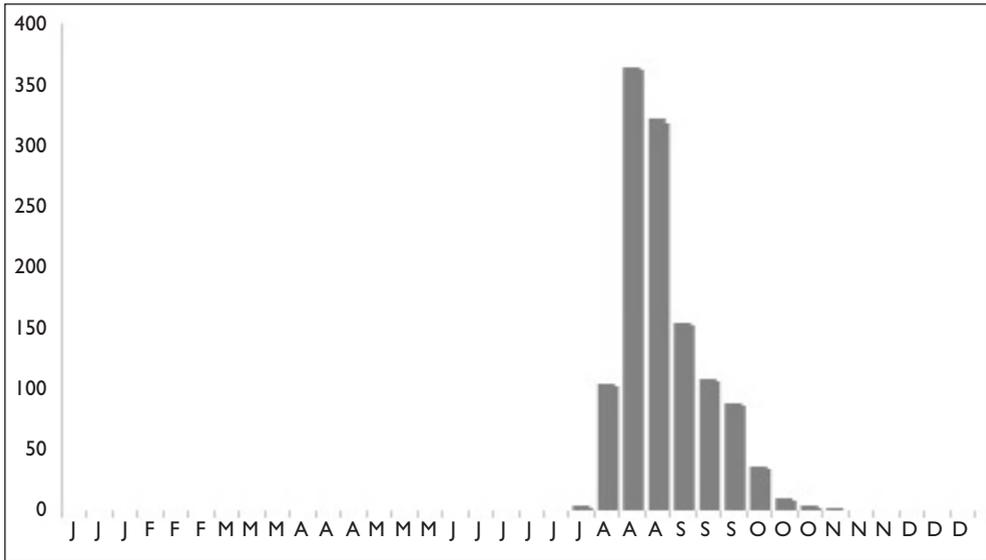
Autumn records again showed a strong northern bias, Shetland being responsible for 17 of the total of 27. The first of six on Fair Isle was found on 12th September, followed by another six elsewhere in the county to the end of the month. Just four were seen on Orkney, all on North Ronaldsay. Away from the Northern Isles, singles were at Girdleness, Northeast Scotland, on 20th, on Tresco, Scilly, on 24th–25th, and on Brownsman, Northumberland, on 27th. Shetland continued its domination into October, accounting for five of the eight records; elsewhere, one was at Saltfleet, Lincolnshire, on 1st, while singles at Blackdog, Northeast Scotland, on 22nd and on St Mary's on 23rd were the last reports of the year.

There are a number of ringing recoveries involving Bluethroats trapped in Britain. Two extraordinary records of birds retrapped at the same ringing site at Slapton, Devon, suggest that not all British migrants are weather dependent, and that some follow an established migration route: one ringed on 17th May 1958 was retrapped on 5th May 1963; while another ringed on 1st September 1968 was retrapped at the same site on 14th September 1970 (Grantham 2005a).

### Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |       |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1976                            | 1991  | 1972 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 20                              | 1,221 | 23   | 102                    | 62      | 61      | 10      | 40      |

With 20 records, 2003 was the best year for Aquatic Warbler in Britain since 1999, reversing the downward



**Fig. 3.** Annual totals of Aquatic Warblers *Acrocephalus paludicola* in Britain, 1958–2003, showing arrival times of migrants in ten-day periods. This figure emphasises the extent to which autumn passage is concentrated into the three-week period in mid to late August.

trend that has been apparent since 1997, although still falling well short of the total of 46 in that year.

Typically, autumn passage was confined largely to the counties bordering the English Channel and Bristol Channel, extending along the south coast from Sussex to Cornwall and Scilly. In total, 15 were seen in these south/southwest coastal counties, while in August three others were found in South Wales: at Gwent Levels, Gwent, on 6th and 18th, and at Kenfig, Glamorgan, on 14th. In addition, single birds trapped on Orfordness, Suffolk, on 14th and 15th August were exceptional, being only the sixth and seventh records for the county, and the first since 1987.

The first of the year was at Gwent Levels on 6th August, and a further nine were found up to 15th August. Three others were seen in the second half of August, four during the first half of September and three in the second half, the last on St Mary’s on 27th September. Pett Level, in Sussex, with a total of five birds, proved to be the best site for Aquatic Warblers in 2003.

Aquatic Warbler is on the Global IUCN Red List Category as ‘Vulnerable’ (BirdLife International 2004). The small European population decreased substantially during 1970–90, and, even though key populations in Belarus and Ukraine fluctuated during 1990–2000, the species continued to decline in many other areas; this decline is predicted to continue, as a result of ongoing habitat loss. A conference in May 2003 in Minsk, Belarus, attended by representatives of 12 countries, pledged to restore habitat for breeding Aquatic Warblers, including 720,000 ha of drained peatland in Belarus ([http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2003/05/aquatic\\_warbler.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2003/05/aquatic_warbler.html)). Ringing is an extremely important source of information about this species in Britain, and ringing effort thus has an impact on the number of records each year. There is little information from recoveries, but two Polish nestlings with consecutive ring numbers were trapped within an hour of each other on 25th August 1990, one at Chew Valley Lake, Avon, the other at Helston, Cornwall (Wernham *et al.* 2002). Other nestlings from that same Polish breeding site in 1990 were trapped in France (two) and Belgium in August that year (Grantham 2004).

### Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1986–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1986–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1986–2003 |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1992                            | 1994 | 1997 | 1986–89                | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 33                            | 917                                | 16        | 106                             | 75   | 63   | 32                     | 61      | 44      |

Although Marsh Warbler is a common breeding bird in adjacent regions of continental Europe, its fortunes in Britain continue to decline. This is reflected in the number of migrants reaching Britain, which, in 2003, numbered just 33, making it the third-worst year since 1986. Marsh Warbler is one of the latest migrants to return to the breeding grounds, and few arrive in northwest Europe before mid May. In 2003, the first was at Quendale, Shetland, on 21st May, this being followed by a further five in May, eight during 1st–10th June, five during 11th–20th June and then a late flurry of three on 27th June. Eight of the 22 were in Shetland, while Norfolk and Suffolk together accounted for a further seven; the remainder were reported from widely scattered localities from Scilly to Kent and north to Northumberland. Apart from one at Viewforth, Orkney, on 1st July, there were no further reports until 24th August when one appeared on Fair Isle. During the autumn as a whole, Shetland accounted for six of the ten records, others in September being found at Spurn on 19th and at Clachan Farm, Western Isles, on 30th. Most appeared towards the end of September, five birds being found between 26th September and 1st October. The last records of the year were on North Ronalds and at Pett Level, both on the rather late date of 17th October.

One ringed as a nestling in the now-extinct breeding colony in Worcestershire in 1985 was found in Greece in October of the same year (Wernham *et al.* 2002). This reflects the known autumn migration route of Marsh Warblers in the west of their range: birds initially head east-southeast into the Middle East before continuing down into East African winter quarters via the Red Sea.

### Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |      |         | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|---------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1997                            | 1992 | 1995/77 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 62                            | 3,660                              | 27        | 286                             | 281  | 173     | 79                     | 104     | 139     | 71      |

With just 62 reported, 2003 was overall a disappointing year for Icterine Warbler in Britain. However, 30 were reported during the spring, making this the eighth-best spring since 1968. Spring passage began on 16th May, with one at Vidlin, Shetland; thereafter, a concentrated arrival produced a further 23 during that month, 19 of them in Shetland. Elsewhere, two were at Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire, on 26th May, followed by singles there on 29th and 31st. A further five were found during the first eight days of June (one on Brownsman, Northumberland, on 1st, two in Shetland, both on 2nd, and singles at Herston, Orkney, and on Bardsey, both on 8th June), while a late bird was seen on Fair Isle on 5th July.

This good spring was followed by a disappointing autumn – with just 32 records, the poorest since 1968. The first appeared at Weybourne on 10th August, and marked the start of a small but steady arrival throughout the month, when 15 were scattered between Orkney and the Western Isles (remarkably, none was seen in Shetland) south to Kent, Pembrokeshire and Scilly. The trickle of migrants continued during September, when three on 10th, two on 14th and three on 22nd–23rd were the only multiple arrivals, although the distance between them suggested that there was no common factor affecting their arrival. The only October record was one on St Mary's on 11th–14th October.

### Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1981                            | 1996 | 1983 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 18                            | 1,143                              | 32        | 60                              | 59   | 54   | 29                     | 39      | 30      | 26      |

Since the collation of national records began, in 1968, there have been fewer Melodious Warblers in only three years: 1999 (14), 1971 (13) and 1969 (11). Of the 18 in 2003, just three arrived in spring: on St Mary's on 4th May; at South Gare, Cleveland, on 31st May (the first county record); and on Sanday, Orkney, on 11th June. The Orkney bird was trapped, and was relocated the following day on Foula, Shetland, where it remained until 15th.

One on St Mary's on 25th July, was the only report in that month, but this was followed by seven in both August and September. Eleven of the 15 were, predictably, in the southwest, while others were seen at Porth Meudwy, Caernarfonshire, on 2nd August; and on North Ronaldsay, one on 18th–24th August, and a second on 10th September. The last of the year and, perhaps, the most unexpected record of the autumn, was on Barra, Western Isles, on 1st–12th October.

Most breeding populations of Melodious Warblers in Europe were thought to be increasing or stable during 1990–2000 (BirdLife International 2004). However, the sizeable population in France declined during that time, and no trend data were available for the Spanish population, and this might help to explain the generally unremarkable numbers in Britain since 1990 (with the exception of 1996).

### Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 2002                            | 1994 | 2001 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 161                           | 5,184                              | 14        | 296                             | 238  | 238  | 144                    | 108     | 158     | 199     |

All 161 Barred Warblers reported in 2003 occurred during the autumn, with the first at Vidlin on 7th August, followed by one on Fair Isle the following day. Subsequently, the number of new arrivals increased steadily through August, when c. 22 were found in total. Arrivals continued during September, which was the peak month, with c. 97 new birds found, the last ten days being the peak period for new birds turning up. Another 15 appeared in early October, 16 during 11th–20th of that month and seven in late October. Remarkably, three were found in early November (including two as far north as Shetland in the first week of the month), and these were followed by an exceptionally late bird at Aberlady Bay, Lothian, on 20th November.

Shetland enjoyed a good year, with at least 91 birds, of which Fair Isle alone picked up at least 22, while Orkney accounted for a further 18 and the Western Isles for 6. The entire east coast, from North-east Scotland to Essex, mustered a total of 37, the south coast from Sussex to Scilly picked up eight, and there was just one in Wales, at Strumble Head, Pembrokeshire, on 12th September.

### Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*



Bill Baston

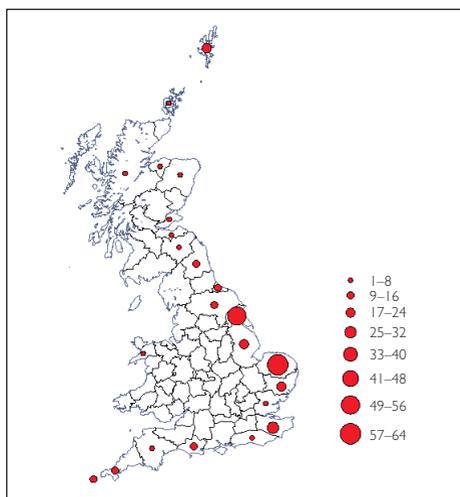
60. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, Southwold, Suffolk, October 2003.

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 2003                            | 1997 | 1994 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 303                           | 1,783                              | 1         | 303                             | 171  | 161  | 3                      | 9       | 39      | 83      | 110     |

In 2003, this species enjoyed an outstanding autumn and a record year, accolades shared with Yellow-browed *Ph. inornatus* and Hume’s Warblers *Ph. humei*. For four weeks in October and November, many birders found one or more of these three delightful warblers at favourite patches of migrant cover right the way down the east coast. What made the influx of Pallas’s Leaf Warblers all the more impressive was the sheer scale and impact of the arrival (fig. 4). The first, at Talmine Bay, Highland, on 11th October, gave no indication of what was about to follow. The deluge began on 13th when 14 appeared, followed by 33 on 14th, 25 on 15th, 19 on 16th, 20 on 17th and 18 on 18th. Arrivals continued on a daily basis throughout October, with 11th–20th accounting for a minimum of 140 birds, while 21st–31st brought a further 101 new arrivals. The influx continued on a smaller scale into November, with 49 during 1st–10th, and ten more during 11th–20th. The end of November saw just two new birds, on 21st and 25th, while the last of the year was at Loe Pool, Cornwall, on 14th December.

What was particularly interesting about this influx was the simultaneous appearance at widely scattered locations throughout Britain. For example, on 13th October, the first day of the influx, birds appeared from Shetland south to Lincolnshire, while the next day they extended further south still, with arrivals from Norfolk to Kent, and reached Cornwall by 15th. The vast majority were reported from the east-coast counties between Cleveland and Suffolk, Norfolk alone accounting for a minimum of 60, while 53 appeared in East Yorkshire, of which no fewer than 21 were at Flamborough Head alone. Many county record totals were broken. Although several appeared in the southwest counties, only one reached Wales – on Bardsey on 27th October.

While it seems likely that there is some duplication of records here, with birds moving between sites, it is equally likely that many more were overlooked.



**Fig. 4.** Distribution of Pallas’s Leaf Warblers *Phylloscopus proregulus* in Britain in 2003. Unprecedented numbers were recorded in autumn 2003 and, predictably, the North Sea coastline was the place to be to find your own Pallas’s Warbler.

### Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

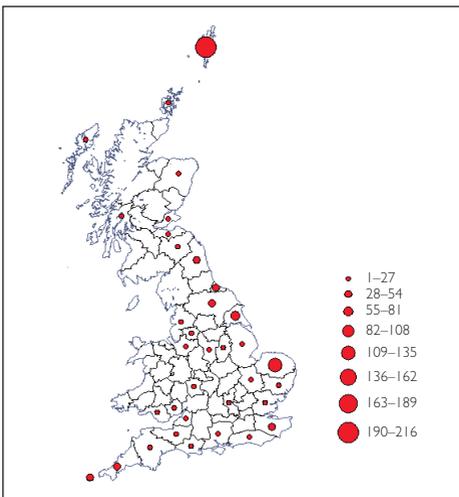
| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 2003                            | 1988 | 1985 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 853                           | 9,093                              | 1         | 853                             | 739  | 542  | 72                     | 322     | 328     | 434     |

As with the previous species, 2003 proved to be the best year on record for Yellow-browed Warblers in Britain (fig. 5). The year started with an overwintering bird at Stiffkey, Norfolk, present from autumn 2002 and last reported on 25th March, while another midwinter bird was seen at Helston on 4th–5th January. There were no further reports until the first of the autumn appeared at Chapman’s Pool, Dorset, on 1st September, an exceptionally early date for a south-coast site. Just two more appeared during the first week of September, including another unexpected record, an inland bird at Carsington Water, Derbyshire, on 7th. More typically, the first influx began on 11th September, with reports from



Rebecca Nason

61. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, Fair Isle, Shetland, September 2003.



**Fig. 5.** Distribution of Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* in Britain in 2003. A record year for Yellow-browed Warbler, but it is interesting to compare the map with that of Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Ph. proregulus* (fig. 4), and the extent to which Yellow-browed Warblers penetrated inland, while Pallas's apparently stayed close to the coast.

Shetland and Northumberland. Thereafter, new arrivals appeared on an almost daily basis throughout September, the vast majority in Shetland, although birds reached Norfolk from 15th, and one was on Lundy, Devon, on 23rd. Arrivals increased and became more widespread during the last ten days of September, when a minimum 153 were reported, most from 26th onwards. There was a slowdown in early October, despite at least 60 new birds being reported during 1st–10th, but a second major influx became apparent from 12th. During the middle ten-day period in October, a whopping 260+ Yellow-browed Warblers were reported, and another 130+ in the last ten days of the month. Consequently, October 2003 became the best month ever for Yellow-browed Warblers in Britain, with c. 460 new arrivals. Inevitably, numbers declined into November, although a further 62 were found in the first half of the month, most of these during the second week. New arrivals continued throughout late November and much of December, with no obvious pattern in distribution, although many were in the southwest. It seems likely that most were earlier arrivals filtering

through to potential wintering areas, although few were seen on more than one day. Despite the scale of this influx, only a handful reached Wales and the northwest coast of England.

### Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |       |      | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1984                            | 1976  | 2002 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 103                             | 3,367 | 13=  | 196                    | 174     | 138     | 75      |

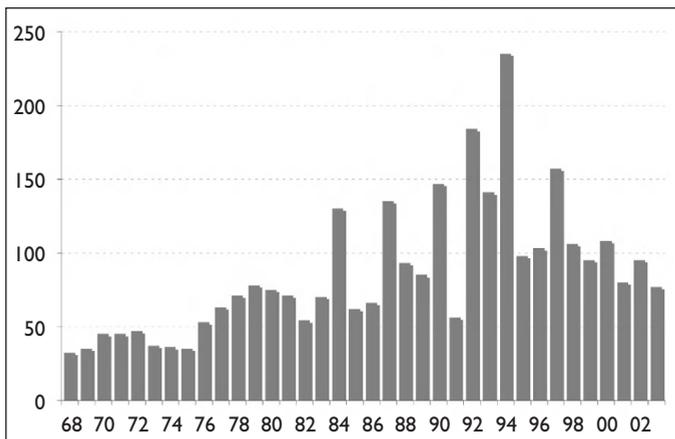
A small arrival in late May and early June 2003 brought singles to Vidlin on 30th–31st May, Blakeney Point and Fair Isle, both on 7th June, and Lundy, Devon, on 11th June. There were no further reports until the first of the autumn arrived on Whalsay, Shetland, on 22nd August. Just four were found in the first half of September, but a more widespread arrival took place from 20th September onwards, with a total of 47 found along the east coast between Shetland and Suffolk. Of these, Shetland accounted for 20, East Yorkshire eight, Orkney seven and Norfolk five. Just nine new arrivals were reported during the westerly dominated weather of early October, but a second influx during 11th–16th brought another 24 birds. A further ten were found in the second half of October, but just three in November, while the last of the year was reported from Horseshoe Plantation, Sussex, on 16th December.

### Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |       |      | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1994                            | 1992  | 1997 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 77                              | 3,100 | 18   | 235                    | 184     | 157     | 48      |

Away from known breeding areas, 77 Golden Orioles were reported in 2003, making this a below-average year. The pattern of spring passage was fairly typical, stretching from 25th April to 21st June. After the first, at Frostenden, Suffolk, a further nine were reported in April, most of these being in the southwest and Pembrokeshire, although there was another bird in Suffolk, at Minsmere on 30th. Another 24 were found during the first three weeks in May, but the last ten days of that month brought at least 27 new arrivals, including ten in Scilly, five in Shetland, and others in Avon, Cornwall, Derbyshire, Devon, Hampshire, Kent and Norfolk; in addition, one at Tainish, Argyll, was unusual. Migrants continued to turn up through the first week of June, a further seven being reported to 7th. Following a few blank days, six more were found between 12th and 16th, while the last of the spring was reported from Stoke Beach, Devon, on 21st June. There was just one autumn report, from Severn-side, Avon, on 30th August.

The status of Golden Oriole as a breeding bird in Europe is ‘Secure’ (chiefly because the popula-



**Fig. 6.** Annual totals of migrant Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* in Britain, 1968–2003. Numbers have generally declined since the early 1990s.

tions in the eastern part of its European range are stable), but during 1990–2000 the species apparently declined in Denmark, Germany, Belgium and France, as well as Britain (BirdLife International 2004). Given that British migrants are chiefly spring overshoots from neighbouring countries, the generally downward trend of annual numbers shown in this report over the past decade or more is perhaps not unexpected (fig. 6).

### Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1986–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1986–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1986–2003 |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1988                            | 1998 | 1992 | 1986–89                | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 158                           | 4,102                              | 14        | 423                             | 374  | 366  | 256                    | 231     | 191     |

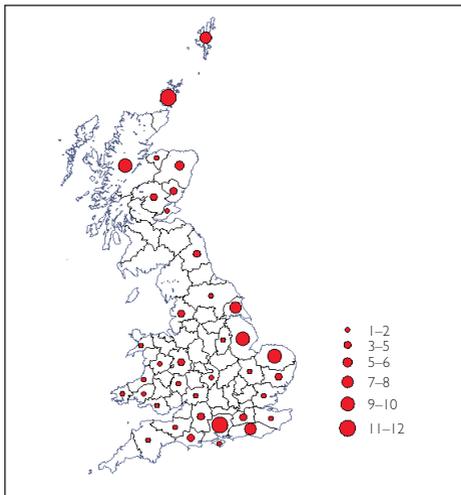
With 99 birds reported during spring passage, numbers at this season were not substantially lower than in the previous five years, although well down on some springs in the late 1980s and 1990s. The first birds appeared on 12th May, with one on Whalsay, two on Fetlar and two on Unst (all Shetland), and one at Birsay, Orkney. Subsequently, new arrivals were reported almost daily throughout May, although with the vast majority in the Northern Isles, and no fewer than 64 in Shetland. In contrast, one at Winterton, Norfolk, on 27th May was the first to be reported in England. Another 11 appeared during the first week in June but spring migrants tailed off markedly thereafter, with just seven more records and the last on North Ronaldsay on 18th.

One July report, a male at Marham Fen, Norfolk, on 6th, probably relates to a dispersing bird rather than an early migrant. In contrast to the spring, autumn passage was particularly disappointing, with just 58 birds reported – the worst autumn on record since 1986, when compilation of national totals began (and making this a poor year overall). The first was seen on Foula on 12th August, and 16 others followed before the end of the month. The trickle continued through September, the 18 new birds in the first ten days of the month constituting the autumn’s ‘peak’. Another 14 in September preceded eight in early October and the last of the year was at Eccles-on-Sea, Norfolk, on 2nd November.

The migration route of Red-backed Shrikes is neatly illustrated by several ringing recoveries, all of which date back to a time when the British breeding population was in better shape: a nestling ringed in Surrey on 6th July 1958 was recovered on Kos, in the Aegean Sea, in September 1958; a nestling ringed in 1960 was recovered in Germany the same year; and a first-year male ringed in Northumberland on 28th August 1954 was recovered in Sicily on 24th September the same year. European breeders loop round the eastern end of the Mediterranean in autumn before heading south through Egypt to their southern African wintering grounds (Wernham *et al.* 2004).

### Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1986–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1986–2003 |         | Annual means 1986–2003 |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1998                            | 1991/90 | 1986–89                | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 157                           | 2,243                              | 4         | 238                             | 160     | 132                    | 128     | 110     |



The grand total of 157 new birds gave 2003 the fourth-highest total of Great Grey Shrikes reported in Britain since 1986. Several wintering birds which arrived in 2002 remained into 2003, and these are excluded from the totals here. Nonetheless, there was still a good spread of new arrivals (or new discoveries) in the early part of the winter, including 16 in January and eight in February, at locations throughout the country. Spring passage, detectable by the number of one-day birds reported, commenced on around 18th March, 11 birds being reported to the end of the month and a further ten in April, the last being two in East Yorkshire on 24th, at East Newton and Flamborough Head. Two

**Fig. 7.** Distribution of Great Grey Shrikes *Lanius excubitor* in Britain in 2003.

Paul Gale



62. Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Roydon Common, Norfolk, March 2003.

others were seen in May, at Urafirth, Shetland, on 20th–21st May, and on Skomer, Pembrokeshire, on 30th–31st May. The former was presumably just a late migrant, but perhaps the Welsh bird was more likely a wandering, non-breeding individual.

Surprisingly, the first of the autumn was a returning bird, back on its regular wintering territory at Elveden, Suffolk, on 10th October. The following day heralded the start of the main east-coast arrival, at least 46 being reported during 11th–20th October. A further 15 arrived during 21st–31st October, 15 during 1st–10th November, while another 17 before the month's end brought November's total to a respectable 32. Smaller numbers of new arrivals were discovered through to the end of the year.

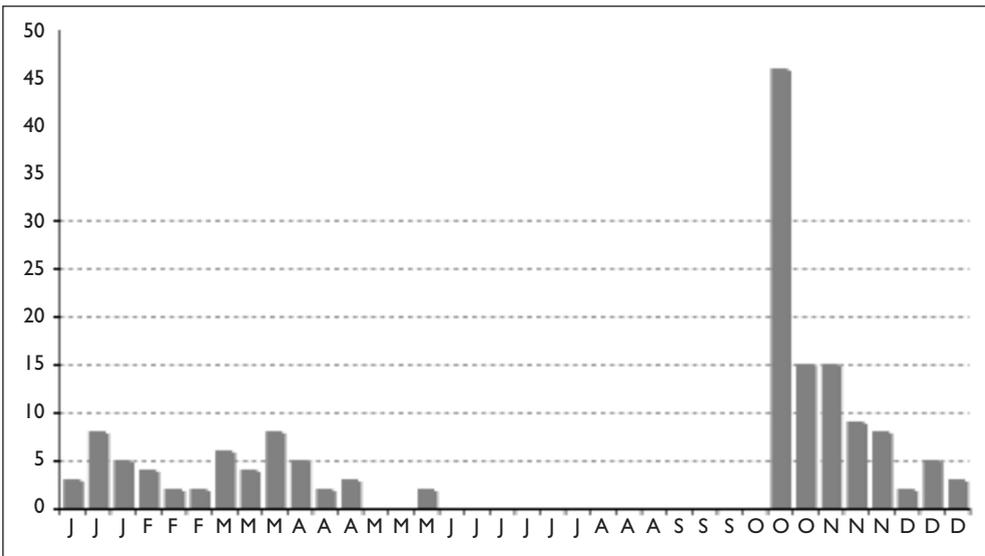


Fig. 8. Numbers of Great Grey Shrikes *Lanius excubitor* in Britain in 2003, showing arrival times of migrants in ten-day periods. Note that spring migrants (as opposed to newly discovered or newly arrived wintering birds) started to pass through in mid to late March. Clearly, the numbers of spring migrants were greatly surpassed by those in autumn, notably a substantial pulse in mid to late October.

### Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1997                            | 2002 | 1988 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 21                              | 717  | 12   | 36                     | 32      | 26      | 12      | 13      |

With 15 spring migrants and six during the autumn, 2003 was a fairly typical year for Woodchat Shrikes. The ‘southwestern peninsula’, from Dorset to Scilly, accounted for 13 of the 21 reports, while, in line with recent years, the east coast fared poorly, with just two in spring: at Minsmere, Suffolk, on 29th May and on the Isle of May, Fife, on 3rd June.

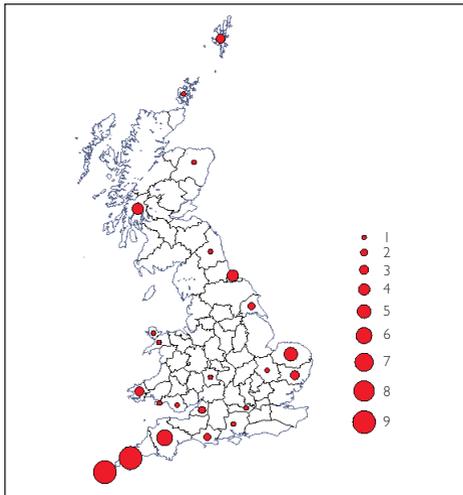
An exceptionally early bird was on Tresco on 30th–31st March, but there was just one other reported before the beginning of May, from Land’s End, Cornwall, on 17th–20th April. Three were found in the first week of May, including two on Scilly, and an inland bird at Langley, Berkshire, on 1st–3rd. The peak arrival period was 22nd May to 4th June, when eight birds were discovered, five of these in the southwest. Single birds in Cornwall and Sussex in mid June completed the spring passage. Autumn migrants appeared between 5th August and 1st October, with two in Cornwall, one in Dorset, and singles in Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles.

One interesting ringing record concerns a female, ringed on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, on 3rd June 1976, which was subsequently controlled at Walberswick, Suffolk, on 20th June of the same year, presumably a spring overshoot that was in the process of reorienting (Grantham 2005b).

### Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 2002                            | 2001 | 2003 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 63                              | 723  | 3    | 193                    | 66      | 63      | 3       | 6       |

With 63 reports in 2003, Rose-coloured Starling continued the recent sequence of exceptionally good years, as the table above and fig. 9 show. The leap in the ten-year annual means between 1990–99 and 2000–03 is extraordinary.



**Fig. 9.** Distribution of Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* in Britain in 2003, showing good numbers along the east coast of England, but also that the ‘southwest peninsula’ was responsible for a disproportionate number of sightings.

Two wintering birds in Cornwall, included in the 2002 report, remained into 2003, but another was discovered on 6th January at Perranporth, also Cornwall, where it remained until 23rd. The first of the spring appeared at Redcar, Cleveland, on 20th April but this early date, well before the return of birds to breeding colonies in eastern Kazakhstan, suggests that it too may have been an overwintering bird on passage rather than an arrival from the east. Just two were reported in May, both in Argyll, at Kilmelford on 21st–23rd and at Seil from 27th May to 8th June. Arrivals became widespread from 1st June, with ten during 1st–10th, and seven during 11th–20th. Subsequently, just one was found in the last week of June and three in the first week of July.

In autumn, one on Anglesey on 7th August was the first, followed by one at Weybourne the following day; two more were discovered in the last week of August, and three in early September. New arrivals were widespread from 15th September, however, with eight in the week that followed, five in the last week of the month, and six during



Steve Young/Birdwatch

63. Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*, Rhos-on-Sea, Conwy, July 2003.

1st–10th October. With the exception of one at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, on 13th–14th October, there were no more until four in the last ten days of October, and three on 1st November. There were just three more in November, all in the southwest between 14th and 18th, while the only December report came from RAF Marham, Norfolk, on 16th December.

Throughout the year, records were biased towards the southwest, with Cornwall and Scilly (each with 9) being the two most favoured counties; in the east, Norfolk and Suffolk managed a combined total of eight.

### European Serin *Serinus serinus*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1996                            | 1994 | 1997 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 59                            | 1,560                              | 10        | 99                              | 82   | 75   | 8                      | 19      | 37      | 68      | 54      |

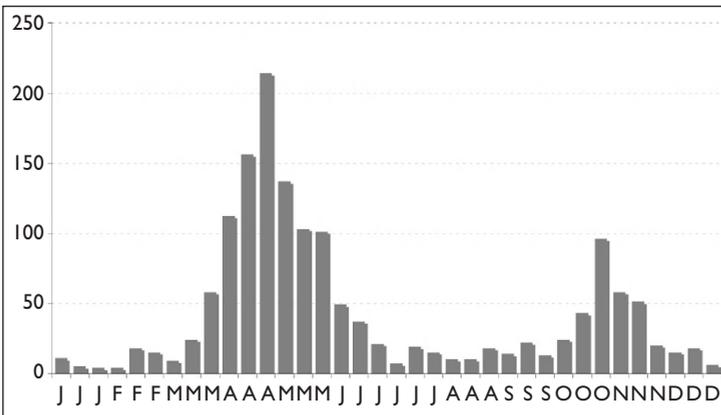
There were two records in the early part of the year, one at Newhaven, Sussex, on 16th February (a bird which remained until 9th March) and one at Dungeness, Kent, on 12th March. No others were reported until one was found at Trevoise Head, Cornwall, on 4th April. Three more turned up during 5th–6th April, which preceded six during 9th–20th and nine during 21st–31st. New arrivals continued into early May, six being discovered in the first week, but then few others were reported until 24th May, and a small flurry of five in the last week of the month. Three were found in June, the last at Portland, Dorset, on 29th. The south coast, from Kent to Scilly, accounted for the vast majority of spring records, but there were also three in Norfolk, singles in Caernarfonshire, Pembrokeshire, Somerset, Suffolk and East Yorkshire, and one in Cambridge on 27th May, further from the sea than most.

With single birds in July and August, and none in September, the early autumn was quiet. There were five in October, nine in November and four were found on St Agnes, Scilly, on 9th–10th December; a pattern which largely conformed to the well-established picture whereby autumn records show a peak in late October and early November (fig. 10). As in spring, autumn records were concentrated along the south coast of England, with just two exceptions: one at Rainham, Greater London, on 3rd August, and one on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, on 23rd November. All in all, a better than average

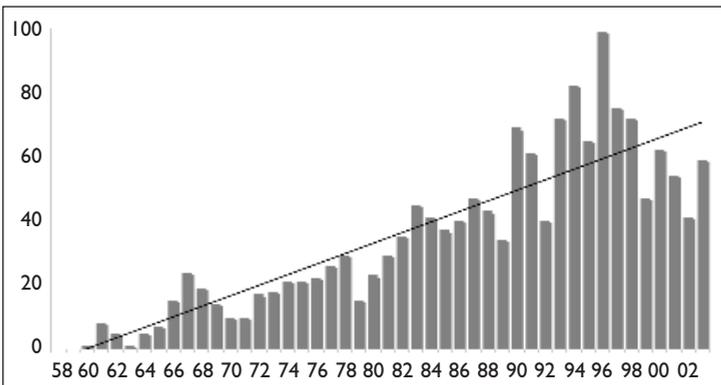
Alan Tate



64. European Serin *Serinus serinus*, Holkham, Norfolk, May 2003.



**Fig. 10.** Numbers of European Serin *Serinus serinus* in Britain, 1958–2003, showing arrival times of migrants in ten-day periods. The spring and autumn migration peaks are shown clearly in this graph, the main passage being in spring, and peaking in late April, while a smaller passage in autumn peaks towards the end of October.



**Fig. 11.** Annual totals of European Serin *Serinus serinus* in Britain, 1958–2003. The upward trend in number of migrants reaching Britain over the past 46 years is clear, although no correction for observer effort is possible.

showing, and the tenth-highest total on record since 1958.

Serins were confined to the Mediterranean at the start of the nineteenth century, but from the middle of that century spread dramatically north and west into Germany, France (reaching the French Channel coast by 1950), the Low Countries and eventually Scandinavia (reaching Finland by 1967; Vinicombe & Cottridge 1996). The European population increased during 1970–1990, and although there were declines in France and Malta in 1990–2000, populations elsewhere increased or remained stable (BirdLife International 2004); a generally rosy picture which helps to explain the overall pattern of British records since 1958 (see fig. 11).

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |       |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1992                            | 1995  | 2000 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
|                               |                                    |           | 170                             | 3,338 | 4    | 248                    | 180     | 173     | 10      | 37      |

It proved to be another excellent year for Common Rosefinches, continuing the run of good years that the species has enjoyed since 1992, when the record year-total of 248 was posted. In 2003, spring passage was somewhat underwhelming, the 42 records well below those for many years in the 1990s, when colonisation as a regular breeding species seemed a real possibility. In contrast, the 126 found during the autumn was the second-highest total on record, bettered only by 157 in 2000.

The first of the spring was on North Ronaldsay



Hugh Harrop

65. Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*, Fair Isle, Shetland, October 2003.

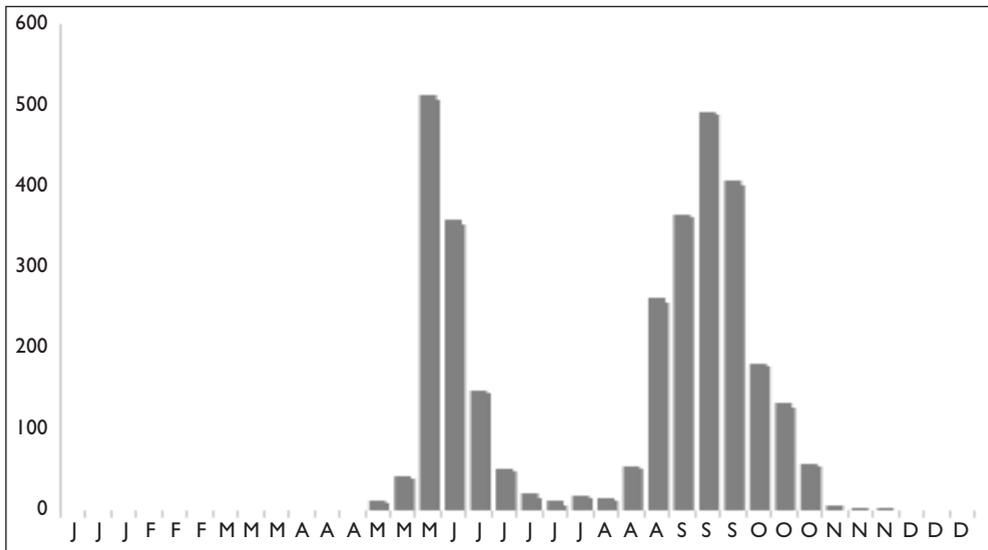


Fig. 12. Numbers of Common Rosefinches *Carpodacus erythrinus* in Britain, 1958–2003, showing arrival times of migrants in ten-day periods. Compared with the pattern for Serin *Serinus serinus* shown in fig. 10, the numbers of spring and autumn migrants are much more comparable; peak spring passage is in late May, and peak autumn passage in mid September.

on 17th May, and was followed by a further 21 birds to the end of May. Of these, 15 were in Shetland, while two in Pembrokeshire (on Skokholm on 25th and Strumble Head on 29th–30th), and one on Blakeney Point on 29th were the only reports away from northern Scotland. A further 20 were found in June, half of these in the first ten days of the month, and these showed a greater geographical spread: ten in the Northern Isles, others along the south and east coasts of England, two in Wales and one well inland, at Uppertown, Derbyshire, on 21st.

After two on Fair Isle in early July, no others were reported until 1st August, when the first returning migrants were reported from Unst (two) and Fair Isle, followed by one at Fortuneswell, Dorset, on 2nd. Two more reports came from Shetland, on 13th and 19th, but it was the last week of August before passage picked up significantly, with 13 in Shetland and three in Orkney. New arrivals increased during September, with 84 new birds logged during the month. Shetland again was responsible for the bulk of the sightings (56), backed up by 15 on North Ronaldsay; a mere 13 were seen away from the Northern Isles. In October, numbers declined, 17 being reported in the first half of the month, but at least the stranglehold of the Northern Isles was finally broken, as new birds appeared throughout the country from Shetland to Cornwall. The last three of the year were all on Orkney: singles on South Ronaldsay on 20th October, North Ronaldsay on 1st November and Rendall on 23rd November.

### Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1968–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1968–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1968–2003 |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 1996                            | 1969 | 2003 | 1968–79                | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 91                            | 2,163                              | 3         | 119                             | 114  | 91   | 53                     | 57      | 72      | 61      |

Overall, 2003 proved to be the third-best on record for Ortolan Bunting, despite the fact that just two were recorded during the spring (the worst spring on record!): at Scatness, Shetland, on 1st–2nd June, and at South Stack, Anglesey, on 2nd June. By contrast, the autumn passage was the best on record, beating the previous record of 82 set in autumn 1992. The distribution of records in 2003 is shown in fig. 13.

The first of the autumn was at Combe Haven, Sussex, on 10th August, but numbers did not start to pick up until the last week of the month, when 15 were recorded, bringing the month's total to 23. The influx continued into September, with 35 in the first ten days and 61 during the month as a whole. New arrivals tailed off rapidly in early October, just five being reported between 1st and 18th, the last at Fife Ness, Fife, on 18th–19th October.

Not surprisingly, the 'southwest peninsula' fared well, at least 67 being reported from Dorset to Scilly and north to Somerset. Several localities reported multiple sightings; for example, there were six at Portland between 29th August and 5th September, and in Cornwall four at Porthgwarra on 5th September and four at St Levan on 6th. Most of the remainder were scattered right along the east coast, from Shetland to Kent, and just four were reported from Wales. Perhaps the most interesting series of reports came from Sewardstone, Greater London, where four appeared in September; one on 3rd, two on 28th – one remaining until 1st October and the other to 4th – and one on 29th September.

The autumn influx is set against a worrying backcloth of concern about this species, which has shown a marked decline in breeding populations across much of western and central Europe during the past three decades (BirdLife International 2004). The autumn bounty presumably stems from a good breeding season, but there seems little reason to believe that we are about to see an increase in the long-term trend.

### Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

| Number of individuals in 2003 | Number of individuals in 1958–2003 | Year rank | Highest annual maxima 1958–2003 |      |      | Annual means 1958–2003 |         |         |         |         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------|------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                               |                                    |           | 2000                            | 1993 | 1989 | 1958–69                | 1970–79 | 1980–89 | 1990–99 | 2000–03 |
| 24                            | 838                                | 12=       | 60                              | 48   | 47   | 5                      | 10      | 24      | 30      | 34      |

A total of 24 Little Buntings was reported in 2003, by no means a vintage year for this species, at least set against the numbers recorded in the past 15 years (although still higher than all but one annual total prior to 1987). Not unexpectedly, a midwinter bird was reported, this year at Porlock Marsh, Somerset, on 14th February. This was followed by three spring migrants: at Sennen on 30th April, on Fair Isle on 9th May, and on Blakeney Point on 1st June.

Autumn passage began on 8th September, with one on Out Skerries, Shetland, the first of eight Shetland records. Ten were found between 21st September and 10th October, traditionally this species' peak period, and a further five during mid to late October. In November, there were two late birds in Shetland, at North Roe on 8th and on Bressay on 17th, and also one at Littlestone, Kent, on 16th; the last of the year was on St Mary's on 9th December. After Shetland (8) and Scilly (3), the remaining autumn records were in Cornwall, Dorset, Kent, Norfolk, Northumberland (2), Orkney, Sussex and the Western Isles.

#### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank most sincerely the county and regional recorders and their assistants for providing such detailed information for 2003 and for supplying additional records for past years where appropriate. Without their ready co-operation, this report would not have been possible.

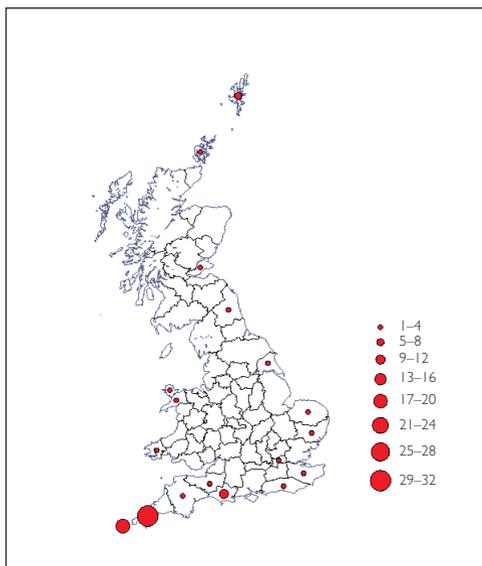
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The production of this report depends in no small part upon the goodwill of the county and regional recorders who provide us with data. In order to make the report as complete as possible, we would be most grateful for a copy of your county or regional report (sent to Mike Rogers at the above address) OR, preferably, data for the relevant species e-mailed to Peter Fraser at [statistician@bbrc.org.uk](mailto:statistician@bbrc.org.uk) as soon as possible.



**Fig. 13.** Distribution of Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana* in Britain in 2003. In an excellent year for this species, the third-best on record, there were a scatter of sightings along the east coast, but the majority were in the southwest.