

# Rare Birds in Guernsey 2009



# Report on rare birds in the Bailiwick of Guernsey in 2009

Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, Jethou, Brecqhou 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 which is organised through the Ornithological Section of La Société Guernesiaise. The members of the committee for 2009 (*M.P.Lawlor, J.M.Medland, C.J.Mourant, B.G.Wells, M.P.Atkinson*) would like to thank all the observers and photographers who sent in details of their rarity observations.



The systematic list is based on the BOU British List. The records from the three main islands of the Bailiwick are listed separately – Guernsey first, then Alderney, then Sark (although there were no records received from Sark this year). For each record, the following information is given where available; date and location of first sighting, further locations, number of birds, age and sex if known, whether it was photographed, the names of the finder(s), and whether it was seen by anyone else (*et al.*). For each species, it states how many previous records there have been from that island (if known) and there is also a comment on the birds natural range and migrations. There are also the editor's comments and analysis about the sightings in Guernsey.

**Cover photograph :** Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*, Mont Varouf, 25 April 2009 by Paul Hillion

# Guernsey

## Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

1<sup>st</sup> record

15<sup>th</sup> November, Grande Mare, two first-winters, into 2010, photo (A.J.Bisson, M.P.Lawlor, et al.).

Whilst birding at the Grande Mare Golf Course on 15<sup>th</sup> November, AJB came across and photographed an *Aythya* diving duck on one of the ponds. He sent the photo to MPL and they decided that the bird was quite likely a Lesser Scaup and needed investigation. By the end of the week a second, very similar bird had joined it and careful observation of wing patterns and head shape finally confirmed the birds as Lesser Scaup. Although the second bird was not seen until a few days later it is presumed that they arrived together, as they often separated and used different ponds during their stay. As *Aythya* ducks are few and far between on the island, this was not really a predicted addition to the island list, but the species is becoming more common in the UK in recent years after first occurring in only 1987.

(Breeds Canada and N United States, wintering along N American coasts)



Lesser Scaups (*Aythya affinis*), Grande Mare, December 2009 © P.Hillion

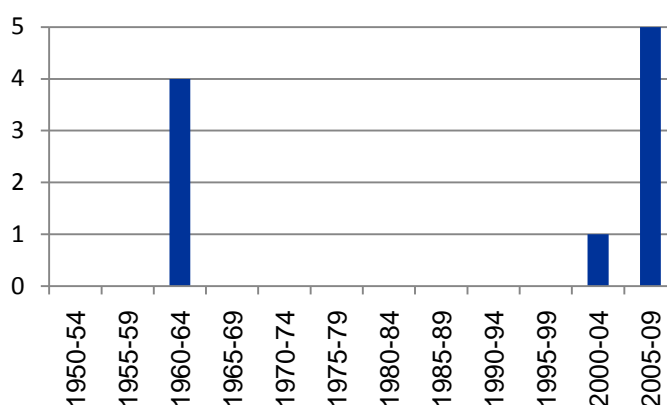
## Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

7<sup>th</sup> record

7<sup>th</sup> January, Longue Rocque, St. Peters, then Les Vauxbelets, St. Andrews, to 5<sup>th</sup> March, photo (C.Bale, et al.).

Although Cattle Egret is now becoming an expected species every year, it is worth remembering that it is historically still a rare bird. The chart opposite shows that Cattle Egrets have only been regular since 2004 in line with a northwards expansion in Europe. The birds in 1964 were together in one flock.

(Almost cosmopolitan breeder in warmer climates, in Europe mainly in Spain and Portugal, although expanding northwards in France. Outside breeding season disperses widely)





Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Les Vauxbelets, February 2009 © P.Hillion



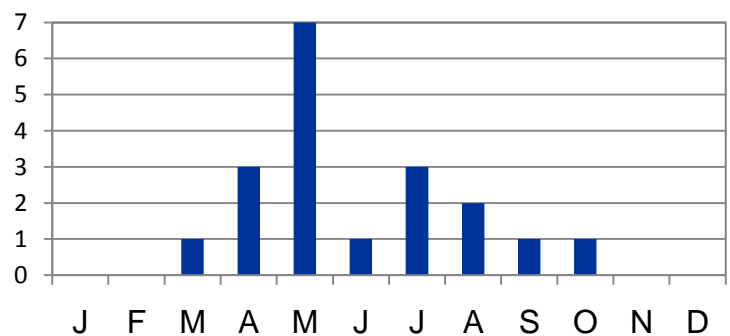
## Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

20<sup>th</sup> record

15<sup>th</sup> May, Grand Pré, first-summer, photo (L.Thomson, R.J.Murphy, et al.).

The bird was aged as a first-year by the rufous fringes to the wing feathers and the rufous rather than black neck stripes. The chart below shows that this species can be encountered at any time in the spring, summer or autumn, but primarily as an overshooting spring migrant or by post-breeding dispersal in mid-summer.

(Breeds in C and S Europe, including France, wintering in tropical Africa)



Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Grand Pré, May 2009, © M.Cunningham

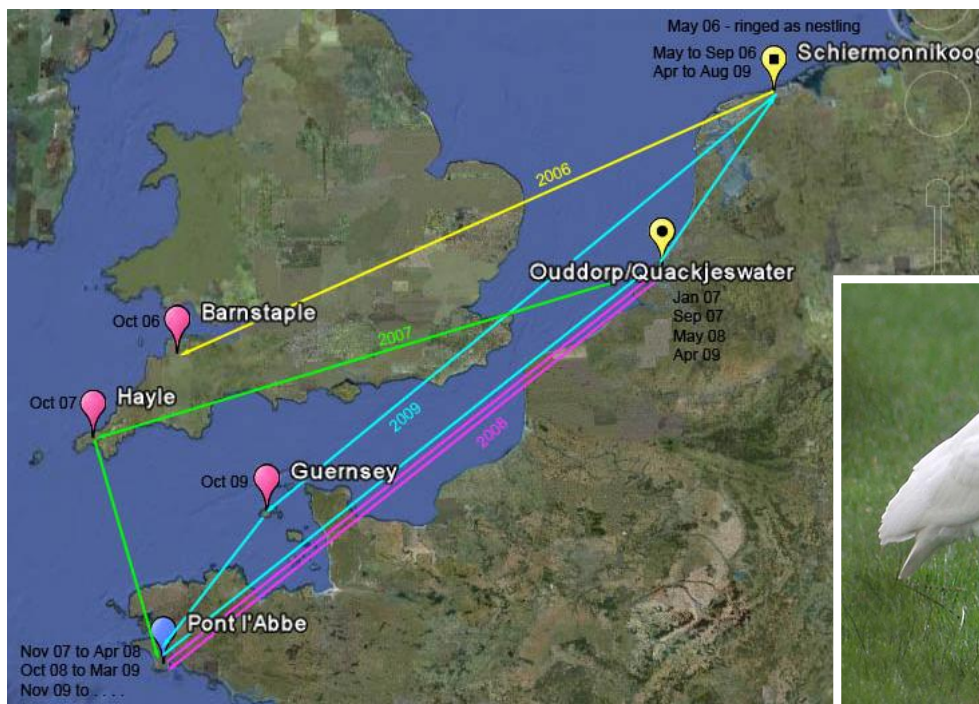
## Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> records

28<sup>th</sup> June, Claire Mare, then Vale Pond, to 29<sup>th</sup> June, photo (R.J.Murphy, *et al.*).

9<sup>th</sup> October, L'Eree Old Aerodrome, three, photo (T.Bougourd, *et al.*).

There seems to have been a run of Spoonbills recently, with five records in the last three years. The colonies in Holland are expanding in size and one of the October birds showed that this is probably the origin of most of our sightings of this species. This bird – shown in the photograph right – was colour-ringed and subsequent research revealed that it was ringed in a colony in Holland 3 years ago. Since then it has been wintering each year in Brittany, as is shown on the map below.



(In Europe breeds mainly in SE, with isolated colonies in Holland and France, birds wintering to S of breeding range)

Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*),  
L'Eree, Oct 2009 © J.P.Down



## Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

6<sup>th</sup> record

20<sup>th</sup> May, over Le Villocq, Castel, (M.A.Guppy).

(Breeds in C and S Europe, including France, wintering in tropical Africa)

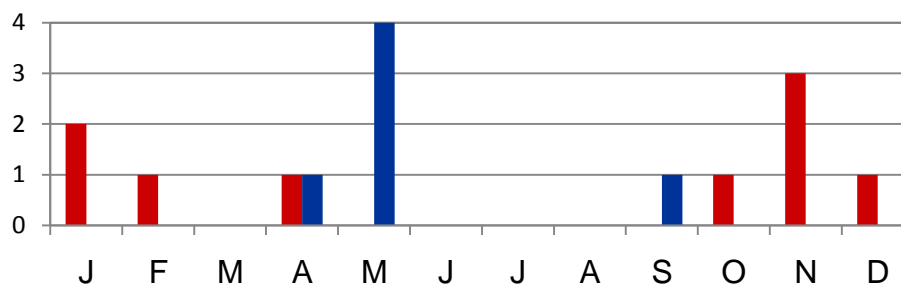
## Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> record

12<sup>th</sup> April, over Baubigny, St. Sampsons, and four other locations between there and Pleinmont, photo (M.P.Lawlor, *et al.*).

18<sup>th</sup> October, over Rue de la Boullerie, St. Andrews (W.R.Turner).

(Resident and partial migrant in C and S Europe, including France and UK (where mainly reintroduced))



Kite records in Guernsey - red bars = Red Kite, blue bars = Black Kite

The chart above shows the spread of kite records from the island. Up until this year, there was a very distinct pattern in records, with Red Kite being a winter species (all records between November and February) and Black Kite a summer species (all records between April and September). However the 2009 Red Kites were the latest and earliest sightings so far, and this may become a trend in the future as Red Kite becomes more common.

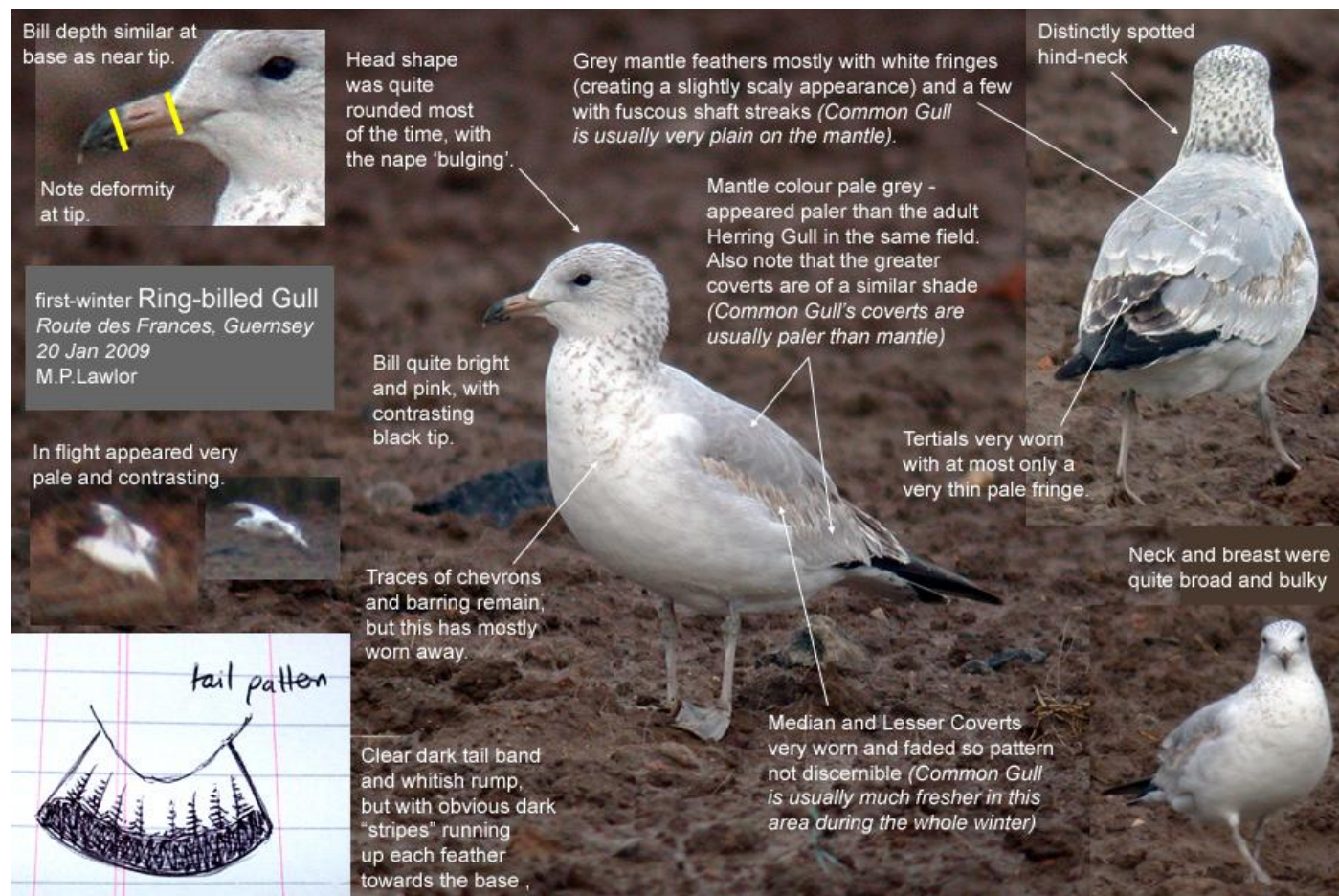
## Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

7<sup>th</sup> record

18<sup>th</sup> January, Rue des Frances, St. Saviours, first-winter, to 26<sup>th</sup> January, photo (M.A.Guppy, et al.).

The identification of this individual was not straightforward in the field, as it appeared to have some characteristics of Common Gull, especially as it was a lone bird with nothing to compare it with. Careful analysis of photographs though proved it was a Ring-billed Gull.

(Breeds Canada and N United States, wintering further South)



Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*), Rue des Frances, Jan 2009 © M.P.Lawlor

## Iceland Gull *Larus glaucooides*

18<sup>th</sup> record

19<sup>th</sup> February, Mont Cuet Landfill, Chouet, second-winter (P.K.Veron).

(Breeds throughout Arctic, moving further South to winter)

## Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

15<sup>th</sup> record

25<sup>th</sup> February, Mont Cuet Landfill, Chouet, second-winter (P.K.Veron).

(Breeds in Greenland and N Canada, moving further South to winter)

It was only because of Paul Veron's gull-ringing project, and his almost daily presence at the rubbish tip, that these birds were seen at all. So perhaps these species are more regular than records suggest.

**From December 2008, Lihou Island, and probably other sites, first-winter female, probably to 22<sup>nd</sup> July, photo.**

**21<sup>st</sup> January, Beaucamps area, and various other sites, probable first-winter male, to 24<sup>th</sup> July, photo.**

The highlight of the year for most people was the extended stay of a Snowy Owl on Lihou Island. This bird, a young female, was first seen briefly in December 2008, but reappeared on 10<sup>th</sup> January much to the joy of local birdwatchers, and was seen regularly throughout the spring. The isolation of Lihou Island for most of the time was ideal and meant it was disturbed very rarely. When visitors were there, it generally flew onto offshore rocks and waited for the tide to rise again.

However, even more astonishingly, a second bird was discovered wintering on private land at Beaucamps. First seen on 21<sup>st</sup> January, this bird was highly elusive and was seen every now and again at various locations in the centre of the island. At first it was presumed to be the Lihou bird visiting, but there were so many overlaps in dates this was unlikely. It did not give itself up to local birdwatchers until it was found in a field near Mont Varouf on 25<sup>th</sup> April and plumage details proved that it was a second bird. It was also an immature bird but paler and less heavily marked than the Lihou bird (*a photo of this bird appears on the cover of this report*).

There followed regular sightings of Snowy Owls from as scattered locations as Herm, Saumarez Park and Pleinmont, indicating that these birds moved around whilst they were here, and the final definite sighting was on 24<sup>th</sup> July. As far as we can tell, both birds stayed into July.

With these birds, plus the bird in Alderney, this means that there were three Snowy Owls wintering in the Channel Islands during the 2008-2009 winter. This is, of course, unprecedented but there were also birds seen in Scilly, Belgium and Holland during this time. The origin of these birds is unknown but one may speculate that these birds may actually originate from North America, hitching a ride across the Atlantic on a ship which then moved through the Channel, flying off when land was spotted. This hitch-hiking behaviour has been observed previously on more than one occasion for Snowy Owl.

*(Breeds throughout Arctic, nomadic, often moving slightly further South to winter)*



Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*), Lihou, Mar 2009 © P.Hillion

## Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

10<sup>th</sup> record

**27<sup>th</sup> October, over Pezeries, Pleinmont, (J.Hooper).**

During late October there was a heavy passage of autumn migrants of various species through the island. It is surprising that Woodlark is not a more regular visitor to Guernsey as plenty of individuals migrate along the adjacent French coast and small numbers pass over Jersey.

*(Breeds throughout Europe, northern birds wintering further South)*

## Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> records

**From November 2008, Fort le Crocq, to 4<sup>th</sup> March, photo.**

**1<sup>st</sup> January, Perelle Beach, to 6<sup>th</sup> January, photo (M.P.Lawlor, M.A.Guppy, et al.).**

**16<sup>th</sup> October, Fort le Crocq, into 2010, photo (M.P.Lawlor, et al.).**

Water Pipit appears to be going through a change of status. Previously, the species was a spring or autumn migrant, staying around for between 1 and 3 days. All recent records have been of wintering birds and they have been mostly long-stayers. This is especially surprising since the chosen locations of these birds have not been the typical wintering habitat of Water Pipit. They generally prefer freshwater habitats such as reservoirs, marshes, sewage works and watercress beds, but the Guernsey birds join the Rock Pipits on the beaches and amongst rock-pools.

The bird from Perelle pictured below was unusual in that it lacked an obvious pale supercilium, but it resembled a typical Water Pipit in all other respects.

*(Breeds in mountains of S and C Europe, migrating to winter in the lowlands, including the UK)*



Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*), Perelle, Jan 2009 © P.Hillion

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

23<sup>rd</sup> record

**18<sup>th</sup> August, Claire Mare, trapped, photo (C.J.Mourant, J.Hooper).**

Nightingales will pass through the island in small numbers each spring and autumn, but they are very rarely seen. Currently we are recording this species only once every five years or so.

*(Breeds throughout C and S Europe, wintering in Africa)*

*Nightingale (Luscinia megarhynchos),  
Claire Mare, Aug 2009 © J.Hooper*



**Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata maura/stejnegeri*

2<sup>nd</sup> record

**26<sup>th</sup> September, Pleinmont, first-winter, photo (J.M.Medland, et al.).**

This is only the second record of the Asian race of Stonechat from the island and it stayed for just one afternoon. The photo below shows that eastern Stonechats are much paler than our local birds – a sandy-buff colour. The plain, whitish, unmarked rump can just be seen which is the clinching feature. The only previous record was in October 1995 at La Bouvee, St. Martins.

*(Breeds in N Asia, wintering from India to S China)*



*Siberian Stonechat (Saxicola torquata maura/stejnegeri), Pleinmont, Sep 2009 © M.P.Lawlor*

## Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis*

4<sup>th</sup> record

20<sup>th</sup> March, Port Soif, two, breeding pair, to 14<sup>th</sup> August, photo (M.A.Guppy, *et al.*).



In late March a male Fan-tailed Warbler (or Zitting Cisticola) was discovered calling from an area of scrub between Port Soif beach and the football pitches and the next day a second bird was discovered in the same place. The area looked fine for a breeding attempt and with the prolonged stay of the pair this seemed ever more likely. The male bird was exceptionally vocal and could be heard calling daily as you drove past in the car.

There were some signs that the birds may have had young in a nest in late spring but no youngsters were actually seen and perhaps the nest was predated or the pair suffered from too much disturbance. The pair tried again however and by early August, both birds were definitely seen bringing food into the nest site in a patch of brambles. The first nesting of this species in the island.

The birds suddenly disappeared in mid-August, again with no juveniles seen fledged. We hope that the youngsters did fledge and the birds just left the area straight away.

*(Resident throughout Mediterranean and along western coasts of France)*

female Fan-tailed Warbler (*Cisticola juncidis*), Port Soif, Aug 2009 © C.Bale

## Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> records

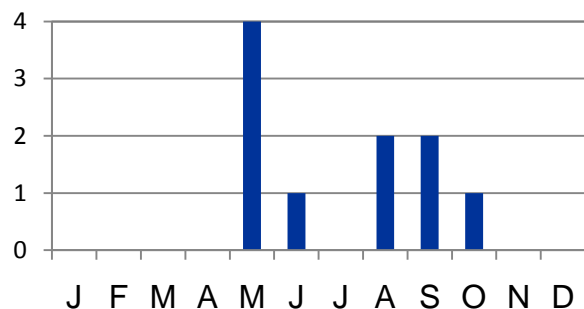
24<sup>th</sup> May, Lihou Island, adult female, photo.

29<sup>th</sup> August, Mont Herault, juvenile, to 31<sup>st</sup> August, photo (L.Thomson, *et al.*)



The first time that two birds have been recorded in the same year. The chart below shows an equal spread between spring and autumn birds.

*(Breeds throughout S Europe as far North as C France. Winters in Africa)*



Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*), Mont Herault, Aug 2009 © M.P.Lawlor

## Jay *Garrulus garrulus*

5<sup>th</sup> record

**25<sup>th</sup> December, Le Hurel, St. Martins (C.J.Mourant).**

A fabulous Christmas present for one lucky observer when a Jay flew over his garden. This record occurred at the start of a large influx of 'winter' birds onto the island. It is surprising that it has been so long since the previous record in 1939, as this species is prone to wandering, and is a common resident on Jersey.

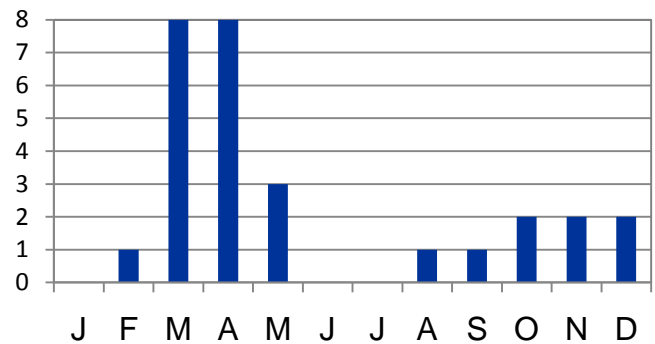
*(Resident in woodland throughout Europe)*

## Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

**5<sup>th</sup> April, Pleinmont (L.Thomson).**

In the last five or six years, Rooks have become more regular after the previous five years without a record. The chart shows all sightings since the species was last present in large numbers (1977), and indicates that Rook is mainly an early spring migrant, with smaller numbers in late autumn.

*(Resident in Central and N Europe)*



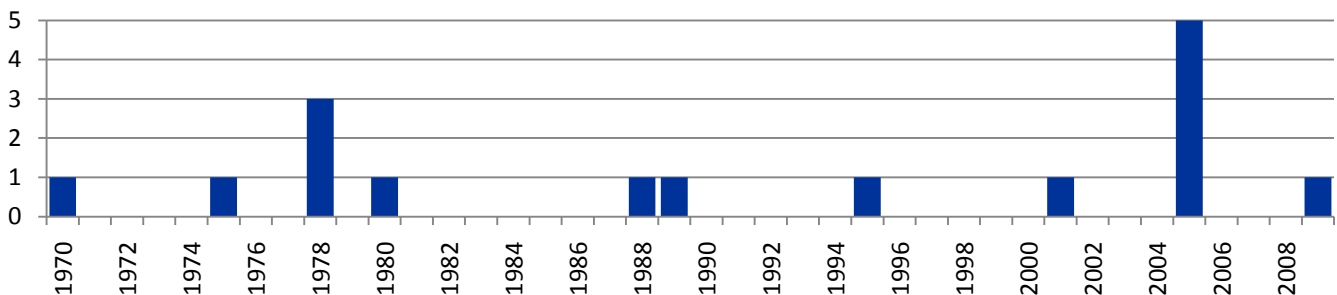
## Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

18<sup>th</sup> record

**24<sup>th</sup> January, Cuckoo Lane, Vale (H.Nicol).**

The Hawfinch is an irregular visitor to the island, but is usually seen every few years as the chart below shows. It has been seen in all seasons and there is no obvious pattern to this bird's occurrences.

*(Resident throughout Europe)*



## Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*

4<sup>th</sup> record

**24<sup>th</sup> May, Jerbourg Point, adult male, to 26<sup>th</sup> May, photo (Mrs.S.Harborow, et al.).**

A superb end to the Spring, with this brightly-coloured individual showing so well. The island's birders are very grateful to the owner of its chosen garden, firstly for noticing and reporting the bird, and secondly for allowing access into the garden for such good views. There is a very definite pattern to the Guernsey records of Black-headed Bunting, with all four birds being males, all being in very late Spring (22<sup>nd</sup> May to 21<sup>st</sup> June), all staying 3 or 4 days, and all visiting garden bird feeders.

*(Breeds SE Europe and Middle East, wintering in India)*



*Black-headed Bunting (Emberiza melanocephala), Jerbourg, May 2009 © P.Hillion*

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## Alderney

### **Rough-legged Buzzard** *Buteo lagopus*

*c.8<sup>th</sup> record*

**7<sup>th</sup> January, South Cliffs and elsewhere, to 15<sup>th</sup> February, (C.C.Michel, et al.).**

*(Breeds on tundra of N Europe, wintering in C Europe)*

### **Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

**30<sup>th</sup> May, Platte Saline Beach, male, photo (A.H.Riley, et al.).**

*(Breeds along coasts of Europe, summer visitor in the North)*

### **Snowy Owl** *Bubo scandiacus*

*2<sup>nd</sup> record*

**From November 2008, various locations, first-winter female, photo.**

*(Breeds throughout Arctic, nomadic, often moving slightly further South to winter)*



Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*), Alderney, Jan 2009 © P.Hillion

**Fan-tailed Warbler** *Cisticola juncidis*

c.8<sup>th</sup> record

30<sup>th</sup> September, near Airport, to 30<sup>th</sup> October, (A.H.Riley, *et al.*).

(Resident throughout Mediterranean and along western coasts of France)

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

7<sup>th</sup> record

8<sup>th</sup> June, Trinity Lane, photo (A.H.Riley, *et al.*).

(Resident throughout Europe)

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**Appendix : List of records not accepted**

The records below were submitted to the Committee but the circumstances and evidence provided did not convince the Committee that the identification was fully established.

Greater Scaup, Pembroke, Guernsey, 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

Red Kite, Vauxbelets, Guernsey, 26<sup>th</sup> June.

Red-throated Pipit, Baubigny, Guernsey, 26<sup>th</sup> October.

There were also a few other rare birds reported during the year, but as the Committee did not receive a rarity report form, it is presumed that the observers withdrew their record.

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