

Rare Birds in Guernsey



2010

La Société
Guernesaise
Ornithological
Section

Report on rare birds in the Bailiwick of Guernsey in 2010

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 2010 (*M.P.Lawlor, M.A.Guppy, C.J.Mourant, P.Alexander, A.Riley*) would like to thank all the observers and photographers who sent in details of their rarity observations.



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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; number of birds, age and sex if known, date and location of first sighting, further locations, whether it was trapped or 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 of sightings in Guernsey.

Cover photograph : Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*, Castel, December 2010 by Chris Bale

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

One, 22nd April, Fort le Crocq, photo.

(*R.J.Murphy, L.Thomson, et al.*)

Same, Lihou Island, 23rd April.

This bird was only seen twice as it fed on the sea along the west coast. Mute Swans are currently very rare visitors to the island, and this is only the second documented record since 1994. The total number of records is impossible to ascertain, as there were small numbers of feral birds present during the middle part of the 20th Century.

(*A common resident species throughout the UK and Northern and Central Europe*)



J. Hooper

White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

Thirteen, from 1st December, staying into 2011, L'Eree Old Aerodrome (Colin Best NR), photo.

(*J.P.Down, T.D.C.Earl, C.J.Mourant, et al.*)

With the feral flocks that are resident on the island, this species is actually rarer than it appears. The feral birds rarely travel far from the northern part of the island, and the behaviour of this group, combined with their arrival during a period of cold weather, indicated that they were almost certainly a wild flock.

(*Breeds in Arctic Russia, wintering in large flocks in Europe including Britain and France*)



M.P.Lawlor

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*)

Two first-winters, November 2009 to 26th February, one until 13th April, Grande Mare, photo.

Presumably one of the same, 25th October to 14th November, Grande Mare, photo.

(A.J.Bisson, et al.)

The two birds which arrived in 2009 were new species for the island's list, and these birds stayed well into 2010, occasionally visiting the Reservoir. The bird which appeared on the same pond later in the year (*right*) was assumed to be one of these birds - ducks often return to the same lakes year on year - although it was impossible to be certain of this. There were indications that the bird looked too young to be in its second winter, but the odds of a new bird turning up are very small.

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



A.J.Bisson

Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*)

One, first-winter male, from 26th December, staying into 2011, Pembroke/L'Ancrese Bay, photo. (14th Guernsey record)

(D.J.R.Andrews, et al.)

This was a very welcome bird, as it was the first long-staying Long-tailed Duck since 1997, when one was present in the same bay. There have been a couple of seawatching sightings in this time but, as with other seaduck, this species is increasingly rare. The pink spot on the bill shows that it is a male bird.

(Breeds in the Arctic, wintering in the seas of northern Europe. Usually very uncommon in the English Channel)



P.Hillion

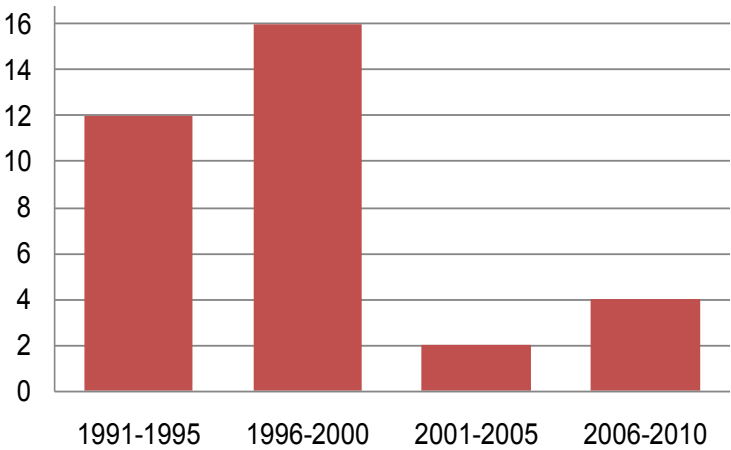
Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

One female, from 9th December, staying into 2011, Grande Mare, photo.

(G.D.Atkinson, et al.)

The first record for five years of this once-regular winter visitor.

(Breeds in northern forests, wintering on lakes and coasts of central and western Europe)



graph 1 :
Seaduck records in Guernsey 1991 to 2010

The chart left shows the records of three rare seaduck species in Guernsey : Goldeneye, Scaup and Long-tailed Duck. The dearth of sightings during the last decade is obvious compared to the 1990's. Perhaps it is the warmer winters, or maybe lack of food.

Pacific Diver (*Gavia pacifica*)

One, first-winter, 2nd to 6th January, Grandes Havres, photo. (1st Guernsey record)

(M.P.Lawlor, J.P.Down, P.Hillion, et al.)

Same, Perelle, 28th March.

(Breeds in the Arctic America, wintering in the Pacific Ocean. Not recorded in Europe until 2007 and is an extreme rarity)



The Pacific Diver which was identified on 4th January is quite possibly the rarest bird ever seen in Guernsey. It is the North American cousin of the Black-throated Diver and it usually spends the winter in the Pacific Ocean. Only in 2007 was the first bird identified in Europe and there have been just a handful of records since. It is thought that the reduction of the Arctic ice cap has resulted in an ice-free sea passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans which has never been there before.

Although it was identified on the 4th January, photographs show that it was actually present from at least 2nd, perhaps even before that. It disappeared on 6th, but was probably seen a few times before reappearing in March at Perelle. It is slightly smaller than Black-throated with a slighter bill. It is darker in plumage, with the dark flanks being diagnostic.



P.Hillion

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

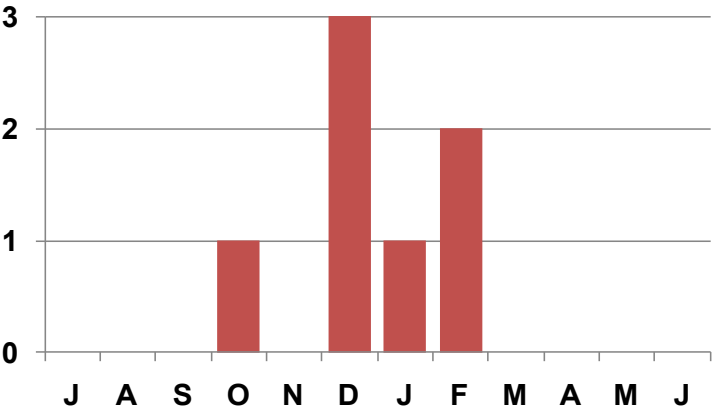
One, 25th December, La Rochelle Road & La Maritaine Road, Vale, moving to Les Varioufs, St.Martins from 26th December, staying into 2011, photo. (8th Guernsey record)

(*H.Nicol, V.E.Froome, et al.*)

Although this is only the eighth island record, seven of these have been in the last seven winters. It would be a surprise these days if we did not get at least one in the year.

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

graph 2 : Months of arrival of recent Cattle Egrets



R.A.Ferbrache

Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*)

Three, 19th August, over Hougue du Pommier and surrounding area. (2nd Guernsey record)

(J.Brown, P.Bretel, et al.)

Same birds, 20th August, over Grande Mare, Les Beau-camps and Les Effards, St. Sampsons.

An exceptionally rare species, the previous island record being way back in 1962. These birds were discovered circling over the island in the late afternoon, but unfortunately they were not seen to land and so most local birdwatchers were not able to see these magnificent birds. The next day, when the sun started to warm the island, they took flight and quickly headed in an easterly direction, back towards France. A few more people were lucky enough to catch sight of the group as they did so.

(A summer migrant to Europe, breeding mainly in the East but increasing in the West)



Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)

One, 1st to 5th May, Claire Mare, photo. (W.L.Atkinson, et al.)

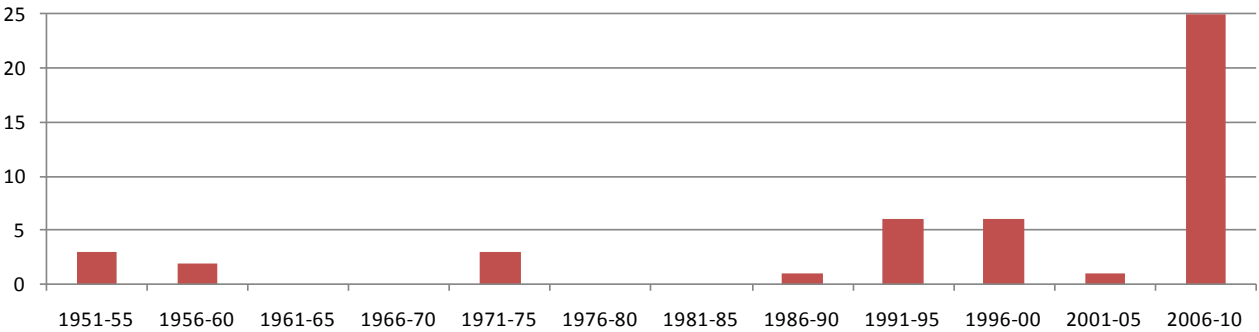
Nine, 2nd June, over Claire Mare. (C.Brouard, P.Alexander, et al.)

Seven, 8th October, Fort le Crocq and L'Eree. (A.J.Bisson, et al.)

As well as the above three records, there were one or two undocumented sightings during the year. Due to the regularity of Spoonbill sightings in recent years, especially as we now appear to be getting migrant flocks, this species has been taken off the rarity list and is now classed as a scarce migrant.

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

graph 3 : Number of Spoonbills arriving in Guernsey since 1950 in five-year periods.



Crane (*Grus grus*)

One, 1st & 2nd April, initially over Perelle Bay, then at L'Eree/Colin Best NR, photo (8th Guernsey record).

(M.A.Guppy, et al.)

Same, over Rue des Bergers and Les Effards, St. Sampsons on 2nd, and St. Sampsons Marais from 2nd to 4th April.

The first record for eight years and only the second in Spring, with most records in late Autumn. This bird was seen by many people during its stay.

(Breeds in northern Europe, wintering in Mediterranean countries, with large flocks moving through France during migration)



M.Cunningham

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

Three, 2nd June, Claire Mare/Colin Best NR, photo (6th Guernsey record).

(M.Cunningham, et al.)

One of the highlights of the year was watching this flock of beautiful Stilts feeding in the evening sun in the new pond behind the Claire Mare reedbed. They stayed just for a few hours but were enjoyed by most of the island's birders. The previous records have all been single birds.

(Breeds in southern and western continental Europe, some wintering around the Mediterranean and some migrating to Africa)



M.P.Lawlor

Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedichnemus*)

One, 27th March, Rue des Comtes, St. Saviours, then at the Reservoir, photo.

(M.A.Guppy, et al.)

One, 27th April, L'Eree Shingle Bank, photo.

Stone Curlew has become very rare and these were the first multi-observed birds for ten years. The first bird was very elusive, but the bird at L'Eree showed well all day (right).

(A common summer migrant to most of central Europe. Less common in the UK)



P Hillion

Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*)

One, 12th to 20th September, L'Ancrese GC, photo (15th Guernsey record).

(N.Wood, et al.)

This bird showed very well throughout its stay, often allowing close approach which is often the case with the species. This species has now occurred in five of the last seven years.

(A North American species breeding in the Arctic and migrating south over the western Atlantic each autumn to its wintering grounds in South America.)



C. Bale

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER



C. Bale

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

One first-winter, 22nd January to 15th April, Chouet and elsewhere along west coast, photo.
(16th Guernsey record)

(P.K. Veron, et al.)

A long-staying individual spent most of the time around the rubbish tip, but was seen as far as L'Eree on occasion.

(Breeds in the high Arctic and winters a little further south in Northern Europe.)



P.Alexander

Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*)

One immature female, 4th March to 4th April, Lihou Island, Le Guet & Herm, photo.

(P.K. Veron, et al.)

A real surprise was the return of one of last year's Snowy Owls to Lihou Island in the early spring. It can be safely assumed, on the balance of probability, to be the same bird that wintered in 2009, and plumage details appeared to suggest this. It stayed on the islet until 19th March and then on the 21st it was surprisingly found roosting in pines at Le Guet. On 27th March it was rediscovered in the valley above Belvoir Bay, Herm and stayed there until the 4th April. Snowy Owls are known to return to the same place to winter year after year, but it was a surprise that one did so this far south, although it clearly didn't spend the whole of the winter in our area.

(Breeds throughout the Arctic, nomadic, often moving slightly further south to winter)



C. Bale

Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*)

One, 21st May, Les Effards, St. Sampsons. (17th Guernsey record)

(M.P.Lawlor)

A single bird was observed swooping for insects around gardens in the late afternoon, but stayed for just a minute or so.

(Summer visitor to the Mediterranean region of Europe, with decreasing numbers breeding to Northern France)

Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)

One, 13th & 14th May, Fort Hommet, photo. (6th Guernsey record)

(M.A.Guppy, et al.)

One, 6th to 16th October, Fort Hommet, photo. (7th Guernsey record)

(M.P.Lawlor, et al.)

Still a very rare bird in the island, two records in a single year is a first. The most remarkable thing about the two records was that, despite being five months apart, the two birds were discovered in exactly the same spot!

(Common Summer visitor to the Mediterranean region of Europe)



Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*)

Four, 7th January, near La Grande Mare.

(A.J.Bisson)

As well as the above record which was accepted by the Rarities Committee, there were at least another four reports of this species in the autumn and winter which were not submitted. It is thought that, with the increasing number of records, Woodlark should now be classed as scarce migrant, and so is being removed from the list of species requiring a description for acceptance.

(Resident species in Western Europe, with additional winter migrants from further east. Increasing in the UK)

Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*)

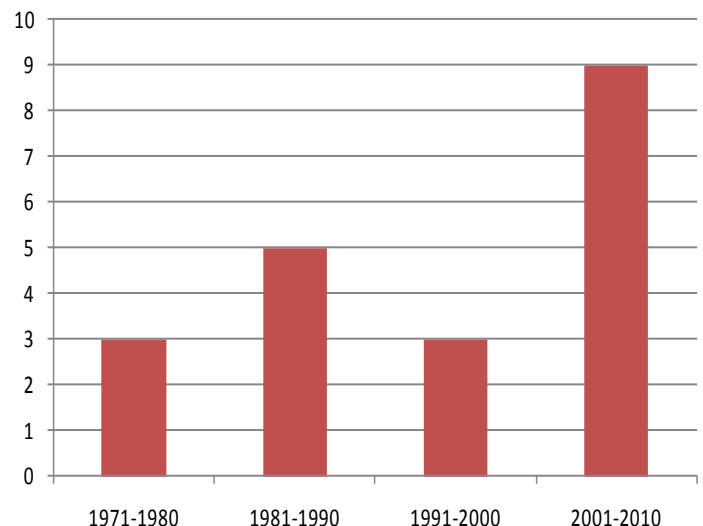
One, 2009 until 24th March, Fort le Crocq.

One, 21st October, Fort le Crocq, photo. Also visiting Vazon beach and Rue des Bergers NR. (19th Guernsey record)

(A.J.Bisson)

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

graph 4 : Number of Water Pipits arriving in Guernsey per decade.



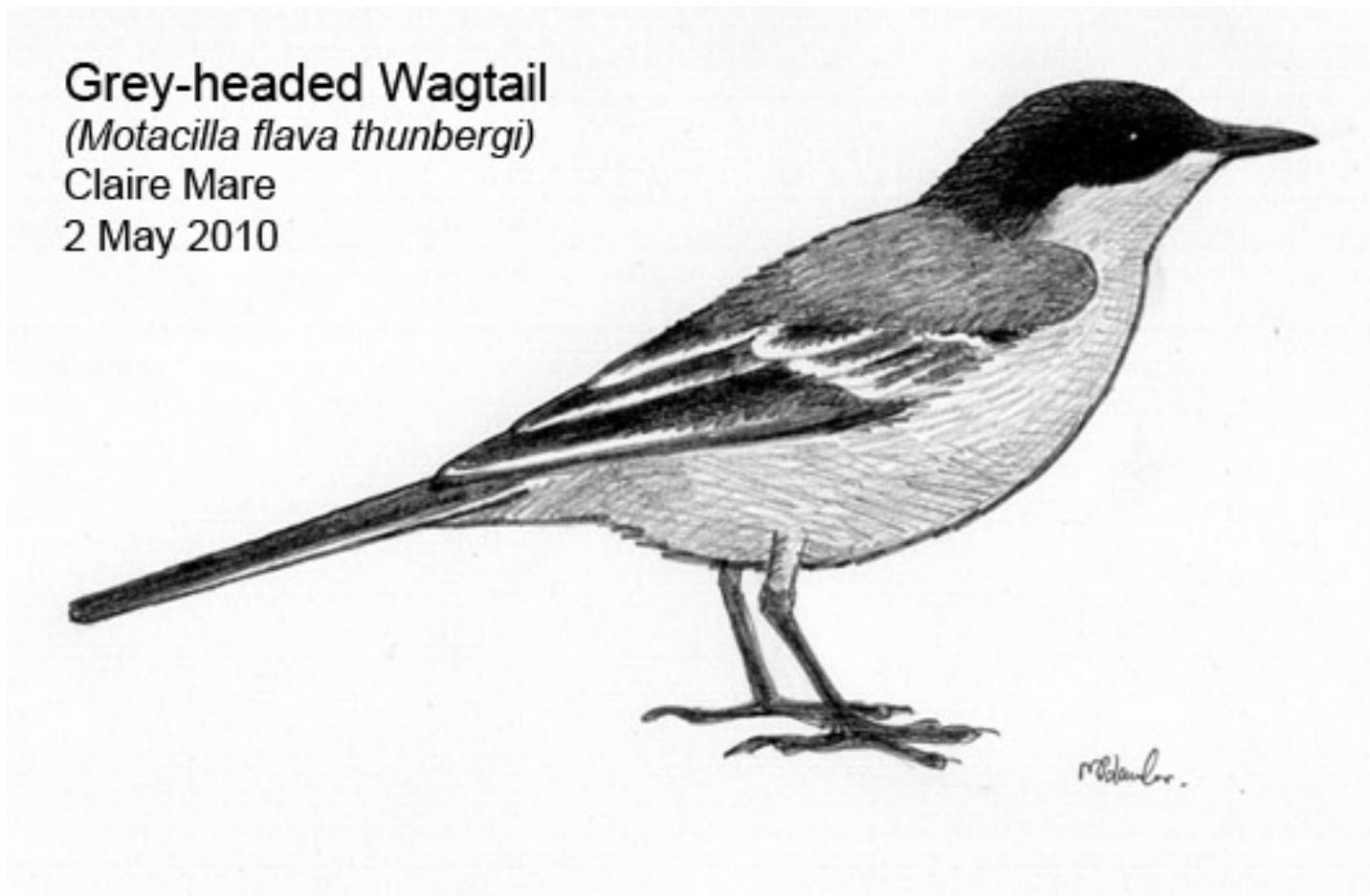
Grey-headed Wagtail (*Motacilla flava thunbergi*)

One male, 2nd May, La Claire Mare NR (1st Guernsey record).

(M.A.Guppy, M.P.Lawlor, C.J.Mourant, et al.)

In amongst a roving flock of Yellow Wagtails feeding in the grass by the Claire Mare pond, a distinctively dark-headed bird was noted. With the yellow throat and slate-grey head, it was identified as the northern-European race of Yellow Wagtail. This is the first time that this sub-species has been recorded for certain on the island, although one or two dark-headed birds have been noted in the past. It was elusive however and did not stay for very long.

(Summer visitor to the forests and bogs of Scandinavia and further east.)



Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

Initially 4, then up to 7, from 25th December, staying into 2011, Highlands Estate, and Rue Cohu, Castel (11th Guernsey record).

(M.Carre, J.Rigler, et al.)

On Christmas Day, festive visitors to a garden in Castel were a group of 4 Waxwings feeding on berries outside the window. A few days later the news got out to local birdwatchers and everyone was able to enjoy great views of these birds. This was the first record since 2003, when an elusive pair of birds evaded most birders elsewhere in Castel. This winter's birds also found the rotting apples in a garden along Rue Cohu to their liking, and seven birds were counted there on the final day of the year. The birds in Guernsey were part of a massive influx into the UK.

(Breeding in Northern Scandinavia and Russia, usually moving further south in the winter. A very irruptive species, reliant on food availability, it will occasionally move into Western Europe in big numbers.)



C.Bale



B.G.Wells



M.P.Lawlor

Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhychos*)

One, 23rd May, Pleinmont (heard only). (24th Guernsey record)

(*M.A.Guppy, et. al.*)

An elusive individual sang from deep within the bushes by the camping field. As is typical of this species, it refused to show itself at all during its short stay.

(Common summer visitor to central and southern Europe, with smaller numbers in the UK)

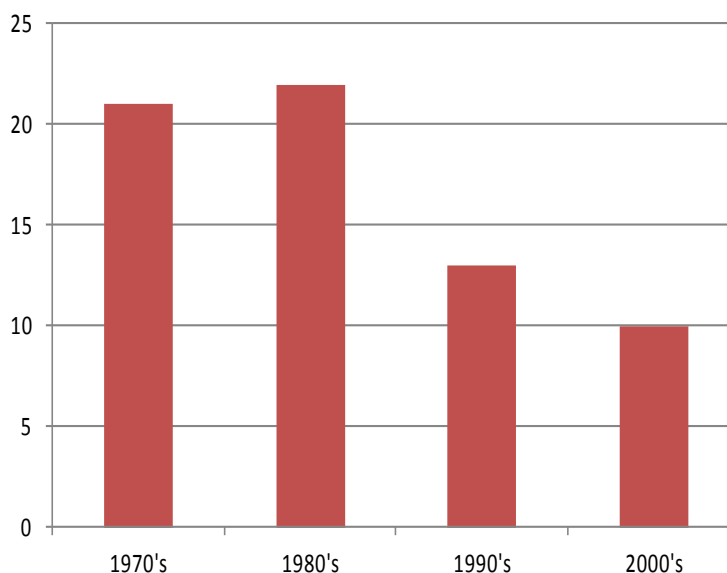
Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*)

One, 16th August, Claire Mare, trapped for ringing, photo.

(*C.J.Mourant*)

The first to be trapped for quite a while, this species appears to be slowly declining as a migrant to the island (see chart below).

(A rare breeding species in the marshes of eastern Europe. Unusually, this species migrates westwards to the coasts of western Europe, before turning south towards Africa)



Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*)

One female, 3rd October, La Corbiere. (26th Guernsey record)

(*H.E.Rouillard*)

A brief sighting of this regular rarity, which has been typical of recent records, very few of which have stayed for longer than a day, and most for less than an hour.

(Common summer visitor to central and southern Europe)

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

One, 23rd April to 18th May, Mont Herault, photo.

(*D.J.R.Andrews, et. al.*)

A long staying bird, seen on and off during its stay, feeding in horse paddocks and other fields.

(*Common resident throughout Western and Central Europe*)



M.P.Lawlor

Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*)

One, 1st and 2nd July, Rocquaine, near to Fort Grey, photo.

(*S. & H.Wild, et. al.*)

A big surprise feeding at a bird table in the middle of summer. The exact number of records of Hooded Crow in Guernsey is difficult to ascertain as there were lots of sightings during the 1970's which were probably the same long-staying and returning individual. There have been five records since 1990, all which have turned up in the spring or early summer (between 9th April and 1st July) which is somewhat surprising.

(*Breeds in Eastern and Northern Europe, the closest birds being in Ireland. Migrates further south in winter from the more northern latitudes.*)



M.Cunningham

Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)

One, 21st October, Mount Row, St. Peter Port, photo.
(18th Guernsey record)

(M.A.Guppy)

A brief sighting, high in the trees of a suburban garden.

(Widespread European species, but very uncommon in the north-western parts of its range. Partial migrant, especially in eastern Europe)



M.A.Guppy

Alderney

Below is a summary of the birds from Alderney which were submitted to and accepted by the Rarities Committee. (Note that no birds from Sark were submitted this year).

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

One photographed in Longis Bay on 18th July.

Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*)

One over the south-west of the island on 31st May. (M.Tilley, H.Morgan, M.Betts).

Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)

One around Fort Tourgis & Longis Common on 27th & 28th May. (M.Atkinson, et al.)

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

One by The Nunnery & Essex Farm on 28th May. (A.H.Riley, M.Atkinson, M.Maurice)

Crane (*Grus grus*)

One in off the sea at Saline, then over St. Annes on 6th April – thought to be the same as the Guernsey bird. (A.H.Riley, M.Atkinson)

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

An adult by Alderney Lighthouse on 3rd March. (A.H.Riley).

Red-flanked Bluetail (*Tarsiger cyanurus*)

One at La Vallee on 29th October, only the second for the Channel Islands. (A.H.Riley)

Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)

One photographed in a garden at La Vallee on 28th November. (B.Benyon)