

## **CHANGES IN THE FIFE LOCAL RECORDS COMMITTEE SPECIES LIST**

As the great majority of observers in Fife know, Scotland has a three tier system for adjudication of rare and scarce bird records; BBRC deals with UK rarities, SBRC deals with Scottish rarities and FLRC with local rarities and scarcities. Both BBRC and SBRC actively review their species list year on year. For example last year BBRC added Ferruginous Duck to their list. This species, which is of international concern, has been on the BBRC list before then it was removed when it became more regular and now because of declines in the UK and elsewhere it has, correctly, been re-instated. This has implications for Fife observers; the Ferruginous Duck is very rare in Scotland but there are two well documented Fife records. At the same time Black-winged Stilt and Red-flanked Bluetail were removed from the BBRC list. These two species met the criteria for removal; ten records per year in most ten year periods. For older observers it is sometimes, understandably, difficult to 'get to grips' with the fact that Red-flanked Bluetail is no longer a BBRC species, however we live in constantly changing times and bird distribution and status can change very quickly. Species removed from the BBRC list, in Scotland, become SBRC species. Similarly SBRC regularly review their list and species removed from it become FLRC species, giving the members of FLRC more responsibility to 'get it right' Recent examples are American Golden Plover and Ring-billed Gull.

### **Removals**

In recent years several species have been removed from the FLRC list; Little Egret, Storm Petrel and Mediterranean Gull. These species have all become much more regular in the county. However, over the same period other species have become scarcer. This has brought about some potential changes in the FLRC list. Before we go into those species let's look at another species which has increased; the Goshawk. We now know that there are somewhere around 15 pairs of Goshawks in the county. Because of this FLRC will no longer require descriptions of adult birds observed at established breeding sites. Juveniles generally, and adults away from their breeding grounds will still require descriptions for now and in two or three years we will review the species as a whole.

### **Amendments and Additions**

Firstly, we have amended the criteria for three species; Red-crested Pochard, Long-tailed Skua and Black-necked Grebe. The first two species have become less regular and records of all genders and ages of Red-crested Pochard and Long-tailed Skua will require documentation. Black-necked Grebe was added to the FLRC list recently, that remains unchanged, it is a former breeder which is now rare in the county. However the recent position has been a requirement for descriptions of Black-necked Grebe in winter plumage only. Descriptions will now be requested for this species in all plumages as there are potential identification pitfalls in summer plumage particularly with birds seen at longer range.

Roseate Tern also becomes a 'description species'. We understand that in the past there have been influxes of Roseate Terns e.g. 1999 and 2000 but these influxes are rare. Bewick's Swan, once regular in winter, is now very scarce and there are also mild ID issues here so the Committee was unanimous about its addition to the FLRC list. As Mediterranean Gull goes Iceland Gull and Glaucous Gull come on! In 2013 Mediterranean Gulls were seen nine months out of 12 but there were no records of Iceland or Glaucous

Gulls for the whole year. A change of taxonomy results in Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese being different species and both remain on the FLRC list. There is one other species that should be added to the FLRC list. It is a surprising one. Between 2003 and 2013 there were only three spring and autumn records of Bluethroat. Exactly the same number as Red-flanked Bluetail. This statistic alone puts Bluethroat on the FLRC list.

## **Future Changes and Discussion**

A small group of species including Nuthatch, Red Kite and Barred Warbler are likely to be reviewed in the next three or four years, for removal, as they are becoming more regular. Two other species, Red-backed Shrike and Great Grey Shrike, are potential additions. We will be keeping a close eye on the occurrence of those species.

Much has changed since the first FLRC list. One of the biggest changes is the increase in the number of images of rare and scarce birds in Fife that are freely available. Like other Records Committees, FLRC are happy to accept images as submissions. We would prefer these to be accompanied by a records form and very brief notes on circumstances and main features on the bird. However, we will accept without the documentation if the image(s) alone is/are convincing enough. It is worth saying, however, that the fact that images exist does not mean automatic acceptance.

We understand, with clarity, that not all observers enjoy the process of submitting records. The vast majority, however, agree there has to be some sort of system. We try to be as flexible as possible. One thing worth saying is that the best field birders tend to be the best submitters and we all learn something about the ID of a species if we have to write a description of it.

In Fife we have a good communication system; most observers get the information to help them see the majority of rare and scarce birds. Let's be clear about one way we can all give a little more back; please document your finds, rather than leaving it to someone else! As things stand the Records Committee, and our Recorder in particular, spend a great deal of time 'chasing up' and 'backing up' descriptions. For most observers description writing for the year shouldn't be a particularly onerous task.

High rejection rates are also a myth. BBRC has an annual acceptance rate of between 80 and 90 %. The FLRC acceptance rate in 2012 was almost 97%. Furthermore, if we look at a five year period e.g. we have detailed records for 2001–2005, the highest acceptance rate was again 97% in 2005 and the lowest was 81% in 2001. Over that period the acceptance rate overall was just over 90%.

We can probably agree that we all want the annual bird report to be as full and accurate as possible, let's all help make that happen.

These changes to the FLRC list will be backdated to take effect from January 1st 2018 and the amended list will be published on the FBC website.

**Ken Shaw and Graham Sparshott (on behalf of FLRC )**