

Cambridge Iceland Expedition 1972

The Cambridge Iceland Expedition 1972 carried out a programme of research lasting six months, from April until October 1972, involving ringing and migration studies both of passage waders and breeding birds and pulli in Iceland. Detailed observations on the passage of waders through Iceland were made in spring and autumn and studies on moulting birds carried out in the autumn. Feeding studies were carried out during July and August.

Fourteen members took part in the expedition, with a maximum of 7-9 present during the passage periods. Guy Morrison and James Wilson spent six months in Iceland, Angela Morrison and Duncan Rothwell five and 4½ months respectively and the other members spent up to one month during peak passage time. Transport was in two Land Rovers, one short- and one long-wheelbase, which were equipped with VHF radio-telephones, a feature which proved essential for effective operation in many coastal areas and at specific catching sites. The expedition was financed principally through grants from the NERC and Royal Society, with further significant and generous contributions from the B.O.U., B.T.O., W.A.G.B.I. and a number of other granting bodies, trusts and industrial concerns. The Wash Wader Ringing Group again very kindly loaned two cannon net sets, which were fired 101 times!

A total of 5,955 birds was caught during the expedition (Table I), 2,261 during the spring passage, 805 pulli and breeding birds and 2,889 birds during the autumn passage. 231 ringed birds were caught, including 140 carrying British rings, 130 of which were Knot (Table II). During the expedition 512 Nest Record Cards and 346 Moults Cards were completed (Table 3). All birds caught were processed.

Guy Morrison, James Wilson and Duncan Rothwell arrived in Iceland on 4th April and after a few days spent in clearing our equipment and vehicles, were soon at large carrying out an extensive programme of reconnaissance on the western coasts. Oyster-catchers, which had already arrived, and Redshank were amongst the few waders found on the shore, though these dispersed very quickly to take up their breeding territories. Apart from small numbers of Purple Sandpipers and Turnstones, which winter in Iceland, the beaches were rather empty, though several small and useful catches were made. In the latter half of April and early May huge numbers of waders arrived - Knot, Turnstone, Purple Sandpipers, Golden Plover, Snipe, Whimbrel etc. Angela Morrison, Rob Wilson, David Pearson and Grenville Clarke joined the expedition and work continued at an extremely hectic pace throughout the month, the lack of darkness meaning that practically every tide could be worked. Catches were made at many sites on the west and south coasts, the largest being 560 at 3.30 a.m. on a small island in Hvalfjordur which could only be reached by boat at high tide. An aerial survey of the principal bays around the Snæfells Peninsula was made in mid-May and accounted for about 50,000 Knot in this area. A B.B.C. television film team visited the expedition and some of the material will be included on the programme on Iceland in the series 'The World About Us', scheduled for December 1972.

In early June, Guy Morrison and James Wilson presented papers at the B.O.U. Conference which was held in Reykjavik, and then work on pulli and breeding birds started in earnest. Working as two independent teams, the entire coastline from the Northwest to the middle of the south coast was covered, with a further survey of the north coast as far east as Myvatn being carried out. 885 pulli and breeding birds were ringed and two of these have already been recovered - both Redshank, one in Lymington, Hampshire and the other in Denmark.

By mid-July, large numbers of waders were again on the shore and we were thrown unceremoniously back into the cannon netting routine. Tony Prater, Chris Clapham, Andrew Cadman and William Dick arrived, also Julian Limentani and Susan Danswan who carried out a programme of feeding studies. Work was again hectic, to say the least, with something like five consecutive tides being worked at one stage involving two sites more than 50 miles apart. Dunlin, which were very scarce in the spring, were now a target species with many on the shore, and our data showed that both they and the Knot passed through rapidly, putting on much less weight than in the spring. The main passage finished by mid-August and in early September we were joined by Clare Lloyd for the final phase of the work. Particular attention was paid to Purple

Sandpipers and Oystercatchers which remained in Iceland to moult before migrating. Huge numbers of geese were seen on passage, including flocks of 4-5,000 Brent Geese in one small area on the west coast. Work drew naturally to a close in early October.

Already 19 Knot and 1 Turnstone have been controlled in Britain; also one Knot in Denmark and one in Germany, as well as the two Redshank mentioned above.

Further information on the expedition may be obtained from R.I.G. Morrison (c/o B.P.O.), and copies of the 1971 Report, containing full scientific results, may be obtained from Tony Prater (price 60p.)

TABLE I

TOTALS OF BIRDS RINGED ON THE CAMBRIDGE ICELAND EXPEDITION 1972

Species	Adults			Juvs			Pulli			Total
	C	R	NR	C	R	NR	C	R	NR	
Red-throated Diver	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Fulmar	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	1	4
Grey Lag Goose	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	4	7
Oystercatcher	2	6	124	-	6	124	-	26	214	502
Ringed Plover	-	2	45	-	1	9	-	11	135	203
Golden Plover	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	40
Turnstone	28	58	816	-	3	28	-	-	-	933
Purple Sandpiper	3	8	408	-	15	256	-	1	8	699
Dunlin	6	21	357	-	10	242	-	-	14	650
Knot	190	52	2098	-	-	14	-	-	-	2354
Sanderling	-	-	84	-	-	-	-	-	-	84
Redshank	2	-	43	-	-	28	-	6	129	208
Black-tailed Godwit	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Whimbrel	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	5	97	103
Snipe	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Red-necked Phalarope	-	-	59	-	-	5	-	-	6	70
Arctic Skua	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7
Black-headed Gull	-	-	18	-	-	12	-	-	3	33
Kittiwake	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Arctic Tern	-	-	40	-	-	1	-	-	3	44
Wheatear	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4
Redwing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
	231	147	4100	-	35	722	-	49	671	5955

C Control
R Retrap
NR Newly ringed

TABLE II

SUMMARY OF BIRDS CONTROLLED BY CAMBRIDGE ICELAND EXPEDITION 1972

	O/C	T/S	P/S	Dunlin	Knot	R/S	Total
British	1	4	-	3	127	2	137
British already carrying Icelandic	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
Icelandic (other ringers)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Icelandic (own, but moved 5 km.)	-	-	1	-	2	-	3
Icelandic: from 1970	1	-	-	-	48	-	49
from 1971	-	24	1	3	9	-	37
Norwegian	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Dutch	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
	2	28	3	6	190	2	231

O/C Oystercatcher, T/S Turnstone, P/S Purple Sandpiper, R/S Redshank

TABLE III

SUMMARY OF NEST RECORD CARDS AND MOULT CARDS COMPLETED BY THE CAMBRIDGE ICELAND EXPEDITION 1972

	Nest Record Cards	Moult Cards
Oystercatcher	174	145
Ringed Plover	88	2
Golden Plover	39	-
Turnstone	-	28
Purple Sandpiper	4	124
Dunlin	12	-
Sanderling	-	1
Redshank	99	17
Black-tailed Godwit	5	-
Whimbrel	73	-
Snipe	4	-
Red-necked Phalarope	6	-
Arctic Skua	7	-
Black-headed Gull	-	20
	<u>512</u>	<u>346</u>

The M.W.R.G. Visit to Denmark and Sweden, August 1972

New information on the timing of Dunlin wing moult

by P. Stanley

It is unfortunate that considering the large amount of interest in waders in Denmark and Sweden there is so little liaison between ornithologists in these countries and workers in Britain. With this in mind and with the intention of obtaining measurements of waders on passage through the Baltic a small party composed of Mike and Daphne Watson and Peter and Judy Stanley visited Fenno-Scandia in August 1972.

Our first call was at Blaavands-Huk on the west coast of Denmark where for many years the visible migration of waders has been intensively studied. This field of wader research which has been somewhat neglected in Britain has produced valuable information that when analysed in conjunction with ringing data has allowed a more comprehensive picture of wader migration to be drawn than can be obtained from ringing data alone. Thus, workers at Blaavands-Huk have produced an interesting paper on the migration of the Knot through the North Sea and their paper on the general visible wader migration at Blaavands-Huk is extremely valuable.

The party spent almost a week at Ottenby Bird Observatory situated on the southern tip of the island of Oland that lies off the S.E. coast of Sweden. Ottenby has long been famous for the pioneer work on passerine and wader migration started at the beginning of this century and large numbers of waders have been trapped for many years. The catching technique is based on cage traps that are placed on the banks of rotting seaweed that build up around the rocky shoreline. Because the Baltic is not tidal, the traps can be placed at the waters edge and when visited every 45 mins. during daylight have produced satisfactory numbers of waders. We were very impressed by this trapping method and feel sure that it could be applied with success in Britain. The efficiency of catching is high and the technique should be ideal for trapping freshwater waders on pools etc. where the water level is relatively stable. (Jack Reynolds has recently used cage traps successfully in N. Norfolk to catch Snipe and other fresh water waders.)

With the generous cooperation of the Ottenby Bird Observatory, the party were able to measure approximately 200 waders including a valuable sample of 130 Dunlin. The Dunlin proved to be particularly interesting because a significant proportion of the adults were migrating in suspended wing moult. The sample of 130 contained 4 juveniles and 70 of the adult birds had eleven old primaries and had not started