

The Breeding Birds of Inchmarnock – An evolving avifauna

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Introduction

In a world of change the one thing upon which we can always depend is change itself. We now have records from Inchmarnock that provide a clear picture of the island's breeding birds since Rev J M McWilliam first visited the island in 1916, and the one constant feature is that the bird populations have continuously evolved. The aim of this paper is to highlight the changes to the breeding birds and to document the current status of the island's avifauna.

Very little was recorded about the birds of Inchmarnock until Rev John Morell McWilliam published an article detailing the birds he had seen on the island since his first visit in 1916 (McWilliam 1938). Fifteen years later, Dr Jack Gibson and C J Gordon wrote a short update (Gibson and Gordon 1953), but a further fifty years have since elapsed and little more has appeared in print about the island's birdlife. In recent years birdwatchers, including Ian Hopkins and Dr Bernard Zonfrillo, have regularly visited Inchmarnock. I have personally visited the island on 23 May 1993, 9 and 11 June 2002, and 13-14 June and 17 July 2003. It is therefore appropriate that the status of the island's breeding birds should again be documented.

Inchmarnock is approximately two miles long (north to south), an average of nearly half a mile wide and lies less than one mile off the west coast of Bute. The central ridge reaches 60m at its highest point. Most of the island is rough grazing, although the current owner, Sir Robert Smith, has reinstated improved grassland to much of the east side. The south end is covered by birch woodland, much of which is stunted and could perhaps better be described as birch scrub. There is a reasonable amount of mature hedgerow along the east side of the island, and small clumps of trees are gathered around the three ruined farmsteads. There is also a small wood near Northpark, consisting mainly of hazel. A raised beach runs along almost the entire length of the west side of the island, with interrupted cliffs situated 100 – 200 metres back from the high tide line. Most of the island's shore is rocky, but on the east side the land slopes gently from the central ridge to the sea. There are two small lochans, one near each end.

There have traditionally been three farms on the island, Northpark, Midpark and Southpark. Although Southpark was inhabited only until 1903, most of the island was farmed until the 1980s, during which decade the last residents departed. Over the next twenty years the island reverted to nature, and it was not until 2001 that the present owner, Sir Robert Smith, started to restore the grassland and pasture. The present diversity of the island's birdlife is undoubtedly greater than it would be if human presence on the island had not moulded the habitats in such a sympathetic manner.

The most notable changes to have taken place since McWilliam's day are:-

Fewer waders now breed, which is in line with what might be expected bearing in mind the national trend.

The Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull colony has increased considerably.

There is a greater variety of passerines now breeding and probably in greater numbers, particularly in the case of Meadow Pipit. This could be related to active farms being abandoned for several years and allowed to 'grow wild' until recently taken back 'in hand' and also the fact that the woodland at the south of the island is believed to be more extensive now than during the 1930s.

McWilliam made no mention of any birds of prey nesting, whereas there are now nesting Buzzard, Peregrine and Sparrowhawk, with Kestrel having nested during the intervening period. The absence of birds of prey in McWilliam's time could have been due to a policy of 'removal' by the inhabitants of both Inchmarnock and neighbouring Bute. Common Buzzard for instance was said by McWilliam (1936) to have 'nested on Bute in recent years' whereas now that 'keeping' is much reduced there are estimated to be between 30 and 50 pairs on Bute.

During the summer several species of non-breeding birds are seen from the island including Gannet, Common Guillemot and Razorbill, but most remain off-shore; however Cormorants regularly rest on a pebble beach at the north-east corner of the island and are also sometimes observed on the rocks at the south end. Little attempt is made here, nor was it by McWilliam, to discuss the non-breeding summer visitors. There is also a striking need for a study of the birdlife of the island other than during the summer months. Practically nothing has been recorded about the birds on Inchmarnock during winter and this ideally should be rectified by future studies. Inchmarnock, like Bute, is virtually landlocked and therefore is not a migration 'hot spot', as are many other Scottish islands. There is however some migration passing through the island but little has been recorded.

Whilst we might continually hear depressing stories about lack of biodiversity and degradation of the Scottish countryside, it should be noted that when McWilliam wrote in 1937, there were no more than 45 species nesting on Inchmarnock whereas there are now between 55 and 60 species breeding every year.

Acknowledgements

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The owners of Inchmarnock have, over the years, very kindly allowed birdwatchers to gain access to the island. I would particularly wish to thank the current owner, Sir Robert Smith, and his employees Jock Turner and Fram Murray, who have been exceedingly helpful in this respect.

Taxonomy and nomenclature

For many years there has been an increasing divergence of opinion on taxonomical matters concerning birds, but there has recently been an international movement towards the adoption of a standard approach both to this and to the use of English bird names. The British Ornithologists' Union's Records Committee (BOURC) has maintained the official British List of birds since 1883, and in 1992 undertook a major exercise to overhaul English names with a view to moving closer to a uniform international approach. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club is now using the BOURC names and taxonomy (from 1992 and as revised in 2002) for the Scottish List. The BOURC taxonomic treatment and nomenclature are used in this paper. Where English names now used are different (other than by the addition of a prefix) from those used in recent papers within the Transactions, the former names are shown in brackets.

Annotated Systematic List of Breeding Birds

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Two pairs were found along the west coast on 11th June 2002, one of which had three downy young. This is the first proof of nesting on the island. On 17th July 2003 a flock of 50 birds was seen including many young birds, almost certainly all reared on the island.

Common Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

McWilliam said 'breeds in small numbers'. This is still the case, with probably less than five pairs.

Eurasian Teal

Anas crecca

McWilliam said 'seen breeding in 1937'. Gibson & Gordon (1953) did not know of any additional records. There were four birds present at the southern lochan on 17th July 2003, but there is no recent proof of breeding.

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

McWilliam said 'seen in 1937'. Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'a few pairs nest'. The species appears to breed in small numbers at present, probably 1- 5 pairs.

Northern Shoveler

Anas chipeata

James Middleton recorded a pair nesting at the lochan in 1974 (Gibson *et al* 1980). This probably refers to the lochan at the north end. This is the only breeding record for the island.

Common Eider

Somateria mollissima

McWilliam did not mention this species, which is now a common breeding bird around the shores of the island. Gibson & Gordon said 'first nested in 1939. A few pairs now breed'. In 1980 Gibson *et al.* said that at least fifty pairs were nesting on Inchmarnock. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says '16 females and 21 young were counted near the island' on 11th June 2002. There are now probably 20+ pairs nesting most years.

Red-breasted Merganser

Mergus serrator

McWilliam said 'a few pairs obviously nest'. This is probably still the case, with possibly 1-5 pairs now nesting, however Gibson *et al.* (1980) said substantial numbers were nesting without quantifying how many, but presumably significantly more than either before or since.

Willow Ptarmigan (Red Grouse)

Lagopus lagopus

McWilliam said that 'perhaps two or three pairs nest each year. The game records indicate declining numbers'. Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that 'one or two pairs nest', but there have been no recent records.

Black Grouse*Tetrao tetrix*

McWilliam (1938) said that it 'occurred years ago but now extinct'. There have been no further records.

Grey Partridge*Perdix perdix*

McWilliam said 'introduced in 1920 but is extinct'. There have been no recent records.

Common Pheasant*Phasianus colchicus*

McWilliam said 'first introduced in 1904 and seen several times since then'. It is still present on the island but numbers apparently small. There are unlikely to be more than 10-20 pairs.

Little Grebe*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

A pair nested on the north lochan in 1939 (Gibson *et al.* 1980). This is the only known breeding record.

Northern Fulmar*Fulmarus glacialis*

Not recorded by McWilliam (1938) or Gibson & Gordon (1953). The first pair is known to have bred in 1965, increasing to 24 occupied sites by 1986 (Gibson & Hopkins 1990). Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says that there were 22 occupied sites at the south-west corner only on 23rd May 1993 (one was checked and had an egg), with many usually further north along the west side which was not visited, but only 11 apparently occupied nests were found (one was checked and had an egg) in 2002.

Non-breeders often attend sites for several years before nesting; therefore by simply counting birds occupying suitable nest sites, an over-estimate of the numbers actually nesting is likely. However it is not practical to disturb all sitting birds to investigate for proof of nesting.

Manx Shearwater*Puffinus puffinus*

A dead bird was found above the tideline on the west side of the island on 11th June 2002. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says 'On dissecting this proved to be a female, having recently laid an egg.' On 13th June 2003 during the early evening a bird was seen flying close to the island and shortly after midnight Zonfrillo heard this species calling. The only known site on the Clyde where breeding occurs is on Sanda Island at the Mull of Kintyre and whilst numbers seen at sea on the upper part of the Clyde have increased greatly within the past decade (usually July - September), records during June remain unusual. It is very possible that this species might be breeding on the island in small numbers. Further investigation is required.

European Shag*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

This species is not mentioned by McWilliam (1938). Gibson (1990) said that breeding was very erratic, with nesting first proved in 1968 (one pair), at least four pairs in 1969 peaking at 10 pairs in 1982, but with no evidence of breeding on several intervening years. Hopkins (pers. comm.) says 3 pairs bred in 2001, Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says '6 birds flew out from a cliffy area at the north-west on 11th June 2002. Birds may be breeding there in caves or under boulders or may simply be roosting or sheltering'. There was no sign of any birds frequenting suitable breeding habitat during 2003.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk*Accipiter nisus*

McWilliam (1938) did not list this species. Hopkins (pers. comm.) says that two pairs nested in 1978, 1979 and 1981. A female was seen on 14th June 2003, indicating that they are possibly resident on the island, although two pairs might represent a 'good year'.

Common Buzzard*Buteo buteo*

McWilliam (1938) did not mention this species. Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'One pair found nesting in 1953, probably nested in 1952' and Gibson *et al.* (1980) said that 'a pair nests most years'. One pair now nests in woodland at the south and another possibly nests on cliffs at the north-west corner of the island.

Common Kestrel*Falco tinnunculus*

Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'One pair normally nests, but not seen in 1953'. There is no evidence of any now breeding on the island.

Peregrine Falcon*Falco peregrinus*

McWilliam (1938) did not mention this species. Gibson *et al.* (1980) said that they have nested occasionally since 1939, but Gibson & Hopkins (1990) said that there was no recent evidence of breeding. A pair laid eggs in 2002 but was unsuccessful. In 2003 a pair successfully raised two young at the same site.

Corn Crake*Crex crex*

Gibson & Gordon said 'one pair known to have nested in 1952 and 1953'.

Common Moorhen*Gallinula chloropus*

McWilliam said one pair present in 1937. No recent records.

Eurasian Oystercatcher*Haematopus ostralegus*

McWilliam (1938) said that it 'breeds abundantly' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) described it as a 'very common nesting species'. It certainly still breeds but there are probably no more than 20 pairs.

Ringed Plover*Charadrius hiaticula*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'three or four pairs nest', whilst Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'about six pairs nest'. There are probably only three or four pairs nesting at present.

Northern Lapwing*Vanellus vanellus*

McWilliam (1938) said 'nests abundantly', but by 1953 Gibson & Gordon could only describe it as 'fairly common'. Now probably no more than five pairs nest annually.

Common Snipe*Gallinago gallinago*

McWilliam (1938) said 'obviously a scarce nesting species', but Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'a few pairs nest', which is probably the current position, although no nests have been found in recent years..

Eurasian Woodcock*Scolopax rusticola*

McWilliam (1938) and Gibson & Gordon (1953) both said 'a few pairs nest'. A few pairs probably still nest annually.

Eurasian Curlew*Numenius arquata*

In 1938 McWilliams said 'breeds in good numbers' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) described it as a 'fairly common nesting species' in 1953. Whilst the species is certainly still present it is unlikely more than five or six pairs breed annually.

Common Redshank*Tringa totanus*

McWilliam (1938) said 'breeds abundantly' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) described it as a 'very common nesting species'. A minimum of two pairs were nesting in 1989 (I Hopkins and R Broad pers. comm.), however although they possibly still breed, there has been no proof of breeding since then.

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos*

McWilliam (1938) said 'two or three pairs nest'. There are now between five and ten pairs nesting.

Black-headed Gull*Larus ridibundus*

McWilliam said in 1938 'occurs round the shore but does not nest'. Gibson et al (1980) said that a small colony nested somewhat intermittently at the lochans, with up to 50 pairs until the early 1970s. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says 25 pairs nested in 1986 and there were still at least six pairs in 1989 at the northern lochan (I Hopkins and R Broad pers. comm.). They no longer nest.

Mew Gull (Common Gull)*Larus canus*

In 1938 McWilliams said that it was nesting in small numbers at the north end and that there had been about one hundred pairs nesting at the south end when he first visited the island in 1916. When writing in 1953, Gibson & Gordon said that a considerable increase had taken place and that there were then three colonies totalling 120 pairs. In 1980 Gibson et al. said that 'up to 100 pairs still nests'. It now nests in small numbers, with only 5 occupied nests found in 2002 (Zonfrillo pers. comm.).

Lesser-Black-backed Gull*Larus fuscus*

McWilliam said that at the time he found about 15 pairs in 1916 the species had only recently started to nest, with numbers rising to 200 pairs in 1924 and 250 – 350 pairs by 1937. Gibson & Gordon (1953) estimated 200 pairs in 1953. Gibson et al. (1980) said that the population was then around 1,000 pairs. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says that there were approximately 750 pairs in 1986, which reduced to 200 pairs in 2002.

Herring Gull*Larus argentatus*

McWilliam said that this species had also only recently started to nest when we found about 15 pairs in 1916, 50 pairs by 1924 and 500 pairs in 1937. Gibson & Gordon found 350 pairs in 1953. Gibson *et al.* (1980) estimated that the population was 1,250 pairs. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says that there were 900 pairs in 1986 and approx 1,550 pairs in 2002.

Great Black-backed Gull*Larus marinus*

McWilliam said that a pair nested in 1918 and in 1921 there were 3 pairs, but by 1937 there was again only one nesting pair. Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that there were about eight pairs. Gibson *et al.* (1980) said that '22 pairs were counted in 1969'. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says 3 pairs were nesting in both 1986 and 2002.

Common Tern*Sterna hirundo*

Not mentioned by McWilliam, Gibson & Gordon said that although there were no previous records, until they found a colony of 25 nests at the north end of the island in 1953. Gibson & Hopkins said that 2 pairs nested in 1982 and 5 or 6 pairs in 1984. There are no recent records.

Arctic Tern*Sterna paradisaea*

McWilliam said that he found a single 'tern' nest in 1924, but that by 1937 there were 15 pairs of this species nesting. Gibson & Gordon said that Arctic Terns slowly increased in number, reaching 60 pairs in three different colonies (two on the west side and one at the north end) by 1951, but in 1953 there was not a single nest. There have been no recent records.

Black Guillemot*Cepphus grylle*

Not mentioned by McWilliam. Gibson (1990) said that they first bred in 1976. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) estimated 3 territories in 1986, when one pair nested in a fish-crate nest box that had been erected by James Middleton. Zonfrillo (pers. comm.) says '9 adults counted offshore on 11th June 2002, probably representing at least 4 pairs', but on 17th July 2003 19 adults were observed close to the shore at the south end, possibly indicating a higher breeding population.

Rock Pigeon (Rock Dove)*Columba livia*

McWilliam (1938) said that 'at least 20 pairs nested in the cliffs' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) described them as a 'common nesting species'. Since that time interbreeding with domestic or feral pigeons has meant that there are probably no pure Rock Pigeons left in the Clyde area.

Common Wood Pigeon*Columba palumbus*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'no doubt breeds'. This is still the case, with probably 5 – 10 pairs, mostly in the wood at the south end.

Common Cuckoo*Cuculus canorus*

McWilliam in 1938 said 'visits the island at least occasionally' and in 1953 Gibson & Gordon said 'visits the island every year'. One was both seen and heard on 23rd May 1993. Probably still annual, parasitising Meadow Pipits.

Barn Owl*Tyto alba*

Gibson *et al.* (1980) said that 'a pair nesting in the south-east quarry had been there for many years' and that James Middleton reported a pair nesting regularly on the island. Alan Gilmour found pellets belonging to this species in a derelict building at Southpark in June 2002 and Ian Hopkins found more pellets in the same building on 17th July 2003.

Long-eared Owl*Asio otus*

McWilliam said in 1938 that 'a specimen taken years ago is preserved at North Park farm', but there is no evidence that the species was breeding on the island. Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that one pair was 'known to nest occasionally'. There are no recent records.

Sky Lark*Alauda arvensis*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'one of the most numerous birds on the island'. This is still the case, with probably 10 - 25 pairs.

Barn Swallow*Hirundo rustica*

McWilliam (1938) said 'two or three pairs nest at each of the two farms'. There is certainly at least one pair still nesting at each of the farms.

Meadow Pipit*Anthus pratensis*

McWilliam writing in 1938 said 'fairly well distributed but not numerous'. By 1953 Gibson & Gordon said a 'common nesting species'. This is now the commonest passerine nesting on Inchmarnock. With an average density of at least one pair per hectare, there are probably in excess of 300 pairs and perhaps as many as 500 pairs.

Rock Pipit*Anthus petrosus*

McWilliam (1938) said 'nests in small numbers', but Gibson & Gordon (1953) described it as a 'very common nesting species'. It is still common, with 10 - 15 pairs now nesting.

White / Pied Wagtail*Motacilla alba*

McWilliam said 'two pairs nested in 1937' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'one or two pairs nest'. There are probably 2 - 5 pairs nesting at present.

Winter Wren*Troglodytes troglodytes*

McWilliam (1938) said 'much less common than might be expected' but as we don't know for sure what he would expect, it is difficult to judge how many pairs nested. Gibson & Gordon (1953) also did not consider it to be common, saying 'a few pairs nest'. At least 20 - 50 pairs nest at present.

Hedge Accentor*Prunella modularis*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'occurs but is certainly not numerous' and in 1953 Gibson & Gordon said a 'fairly common nesting species'. Probably 10 - 20 pairs now nest.

European Robin*Erithacus rubecula*

McWilliam (1938) said 'is seen round the farms, in the woods and above the cliffs'. In 1953 Gibson & Gordon said 'fairly common nesting species'. It would be reasonable to estimate the current breeding population at 20 – 30 pairs.

Common Redstart*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Gibson & Gordon said that 'a pair was present about 1950 and almost certainly nested.' There are no other records.

Whinchat*Saxicola rubetra*

Not mentioned by McWilliam, but Gibson & Gordon in 1953 said that 'one or two pairs nest'. There are no recent records.

Stonechat*Saxicola torquata*

Not mentioned by either McWilliam or Gibson & Gordon, but it now breeds in small numbers around the coast, with 5 – 10 pairs breeding.

Northern Wheatear*Oenanthe oenanthe*

No mention by McWilliam, but Gibson & Gordon in 1953 said that it was a 'common nesting species'. I have only observed a single bird but believe that it probably continues to nest in small numbers.

Common Blackbird*Turdus merula*

McWilliam (1938) said 'very common'. Certainly at least 20 – 30 pairs now breed.

Song Thrush*Turdus philomelos*

McWilliam (1938) said 'much less common than the Blackbird, but I have seen nests and young'. The breeding population is now at least equal to Blackbird at 20 – 30 pairs.

Mistle Thrush*Turdus viscivorus*

Not mentioned by either McWilliam or Gibson & Gordon, they are certainly now breeding but only in small numbers, with possibly 5 pairs.

Common Grasshopper Warbler*Locustella naevia*

Not mentioned by McWilliam or Gibson & Gordon. I heard one singing from suitable nesting habitat just south of Southpark at NS024594 on 14th June 2003 and expect that they are breeding, but only in small numbers.

Sedge Warbler*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

In 1938 McWilliam said probably only a pair or two, as did Gibson & Gordon in 1953. They had increased to 11+ pairs in 1989 (I Hopkins and R Broad, pers. comm.) and there remain at least 5 – 10 pairs at the present time.

Common Whitethroat*Sylvia communis*

Both McWilliam (1938) and Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that only one or two pairs nested. It is certainly a lot more common than that now with at least 20 pairs.

Blackcap*Sylvia atricapilla*

I Hopkins (pers. comm.) heard one singing at suitable nesting locality on east side of island on 5th May 2003. This is the only record.

Common Chiffchaff*Phylloscopus collybita*

Not mentioned by McWilliam or Gibson & Gordon. I have heard birds singing on two occasions and believe that they are probably nesting in small numbers.

Willow Warbler*Phylloscopus trochilus*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'a few pairs nest', but Gibson & Gordon said it was a 'fairly common nesting species' in 1953. Again, like the previously mentioned warblers, this species has evidently increased, with 32+ pairs in 1989 (I Hopkins and R Broad pers. comm.) and now at least 30 – 60 pairs.

Goldcrest*Regulus regulus*

There is no mention of this species by McWilliam or Gibson & Gordon. I heard one singing near Southpark on 14th June 2003 and saw a newly fledged juvenile bird in the birch wood at the south of the island on 17th July 2003. They are certainly now breeding in small numbers, but it is difficult to estimate the size of the population.

Spotted Flycatcher*Muscicapa striata*

Not mentioned by McWilliam in 1938, but in 1953 Gibson & Gordon said 'one or two pairs nest' and in 1989 there were three pairs in the woodland (I Hopkins and R Broad pers. comm.). It again appears to be absent.

Long-tailed Tit*Aegithalos caudatus*

Neither McWilliam nor Gibson & Gordon mention this species. A family party of six birds was seen at the edge of the wood at the south of the island on 11th June 2002 and had almost certainly bred on the island. I also heard birds calling from the wood at the south of the island on 17th July 2003.

Blue Tit*Parus caeruleus*

Not mentioned in 1938 by McWilliam, but in 1953 Gibson & Gordon said that 'one or two pairs nest'. There are certainly now no more than 10 – 20 pairs.

Great Tit*Parus major*

McWilliam does not mention this species. Gibson & Gordon said in 1953 that 'one or two pairs nest'. They continue to occur in small numbers, mainly in the vicinity of the derelict farmsteads. There are now at least 10 – 20 pairs nesting.

Eurasian Jackdaw*Corvus monedula*

McWilliam (1938) said 'breeds in the cliffs' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'fairly common nesting species'. There are now possibly 5 – 20 pairs on the island, but they have not been accurately censused.

Carrion Crow*Corvus corone*

McWilliam said 'two or three seen in 1937', inferring that they probably do not breed. Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that 'one or two pairs nest'. I have seen small numbers of Carrion Crows on each visit and believe that a few pairs breed.

Hooded Crow*Corvus cornix*

McWilliam (1938) simply said 'occurs'. Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'one or two pairs nest'. I have seen a few Hooded Crows and expect that they may breed in small numbers.

Common Raven*Corvus corax*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'it is said to have bred' and 'an old nest in a cliff at the south west of the island is said to be a Raven's'. Gibson & Gordon said that 'one pair nests occasionally; apparently two pairs in 1952 and 1953'. Several Ravens are now always present on the island. There is a nest on the cliffs at the north-west of the island and probably at least one pair nests at the south.

Common Starling*Sturnus vulgaris*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'breeds commonly in the cliffs'. They are no longer common, but a few pairs possibly still nest on the island.

House Sparrow*Passer domesticus*

McWilliam (1938) said 'a few pairs round the farms' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) concur. I do not have any modern records of House Sparrow on Inchmarnock.

Chaffinch*Fringilla coelebs*

McWilliam (1938) said 'is much the commonest finch'. Chaffinch remains the commonest finch, with probably 50 – 100 pairs.

European Greenfinch*Carduelis chloris*

Not mentioned by McWilliam, but Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that it was a fairly common nesting species. Hopkins (pers. comm.) saw the species in 2002, but there is no recent proof of breeding.

European Goldfinch*Carduelis carduelis*

Not recorded by either McWilliam or Gibson & Gordon, there are now small numbers breeding, probably 5 – 10 pairs.

Common Linnet*Carduelis cannabina*

McWilliam (1938) said 'a very few pairs round the farms' but Gibson & Gordon (1953) found it to be a 'fairly common nesting species'. There are probably now at least 10 - 20 pairs nesting.

Twite*Carduelis flavirostris*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'has bred in the past but is now absent'. Gibson & Gordon said that it 'possibly nested in 1951'. I saw and heard one sing in the middle of the island at NS021596 on 14th June 2003 and suspect that it was probably breeding.

Lesser Redpoll*Carduelis cabaret*

McWilliam (1938) said 'Common. Frequents the birch woods' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that it was a 'fairly common nesting species'. There are now 20 - 50 pairs, scattered around the island.

Common Bullfinch*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

McWilliam did not mention this species, but Gibson & Gordon (1953) said that 'a few pairs nest'. It now occurs in the birch woodland at the south end of the island, but probably no more than 5 pairs are present.

Yellowhammer*Emberiza citrinella*

In 1938 McWilliam said 'in my list of twenty years ago, but no longer nests'. In 1953 Gibson and Gordon said that it 'has recently returned and a few pairs now nest'. During my visit in May 1993, I found a pair in suitable habitat near the south of the island, but I have not seen the species on subsequent occasions.

Reed Bunting*Emberiza schoeniclus*

McWilliam (1938) said 'a couple of pairs nest on the island' and Gibson & Gordon (1953) said 'one or two pairs nest', but in 1989 I Hopkins and R Broad (pers. comm.) recorded at least 12 pairs. This figure has now possibly reduced to 5 - 10 nesting pairs.

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