

CBO News

Quarterly newsletter of Copeland Bird Observatory

ISSUE 03

February 2013



Editorial You may think that just because it is winter and the Observatory is not operating, that it is a quiet time of year. Well, you would be wrong! There has been a huge amount of work going on during the past 3 months, and there is due to be a lot more before the start of manning at the beginning of April. I hope that the contents of this CBO News gives an insight into what keeps us busy in the 'off-season'.

In particular we are pleased that we have been awarded funding from the NIEA Challenge Fund – one of the benefits of being a member of Northern Ireland Environment Link – to refurbish and replace our increasingly rotten jetties. This is a major task for us, both in the planning and design stage, and in the transporting and construction stage – see page 3. The new steel is due to be shipped out to the island on 9th February – so if you can help, please do.

I hope you enjoy this edition, and if you can contribute to future editions, please get in touch.

Shane Wolsey, Editor



A Grey Seal mum keeps an eye on us as we survey the South jetty during our planning for its replacement (Shane Wolsey)

In this issue:

Winter talk and AGM
Funding news
Travelling gulls

Woodworm
New jetties
Acoustic systems

Ringing training
Management plan
Sand Martins

and more!



Some of the rotten steelwork on the East Jetty – see page 3



Black Guillemot looking forward to the 2013 season.

Not just another AGM!

Tuesday 12th March 2013

AGM + Puffins and terns on Copeland - plans for 2013 by Shane Wolsey.

Ulster Museum at 7.30pm. Admission is free.

Please don't let the fact that this is indeed an AGM put you off coming along - we always manage to progress AGM business at a moderate canter!

This is the third and last in what has been a very successful winter meeting programme at the Ulster Museum, and it provides us with an opportunity to review some of the work of the observatory during 2012 - and to look forward to what we hope will be some exciting developments in 2013.

The programme will include presentations by the Ringing Secretary and the Records Secretary. They will consider how well 2012 matched up to recent years - possibly, for us, not quite a 'Golden year' with a slow start in spring, but perhaps made up for in the autumn with some rarities including our third ever Common Rosefinch. This was also the year that we built a new Heligoland trap (which will be christened in 2013), and continued to collate important GPS data from our ongoing Manx Shearwater tracking project in partnership with Oxford University.

However, 2012 was notable as the year that the Puffins arrived and terns returned. The main presentation of the evening will be by Shane Wolsey who will describe how these birds were attracted, and what we will do in 2013.

So come on! Put this date for your diary and find out more about the significant environmental work of Northern Ireland's only bird observatory.

These meetings are open to CBO members and non-members alike. Please feel free to bring along anyone you think might be interested.

Wesley Smyth

The CBO committee has a woodworm problem!

Or rather our beautiful old buildings have. Anyone visiting the observatory during the past few years and who has a keen eye for fine detail will have noticed the pin-hole evidence around the cupboards in the corridor, or perhaps on the ceiling joists in the kitchen, indicating an extensive woodworm infestation.

Woodworm is actually the grub, or larval stage, of a beetle; this can spend months or years munching its way through wood before finally emerging as an adult to lay eggs and start the cycle over again.

At a recent meeting the CBO committee decided to organise some winter work parties and knock this problem on the head. Hence, on a fantastically calm late November morning, a team of twelve volunteers equipped with the latest in protective masks and goggles, with new shiny step-ladders and pump-action sprayers, found themselves standing on the pier at Donaghadee with total elimination as their goal. However, as with all good plans, we soon realised that there's more to it than just standing on a ladder and spraying. Rooms had to be emptied, carpets lifted, furniture and curtains covered, and, in the case of the kitchen, all eating utensils temporarily removed. Then our two 'woodwormers' Shane Wolsey and David Flowerday got to work. And a messy oily job it was too. This first trip saw the ceilings in the kitchen and dorms 1 and 2 completed. During a second trip on 27th December, Shane moved on to complete the common room and dorms 3 and 4. So, this just leaves the ceiling and cupboards in the corridor for another day.

These special work party trips have made me realise just how fortunate Copeland is in the quality and enthusiasm of its volunteers. A call for help goes out, and is always answered by our membership. No special skills are required to partake in a woodworm trip, or to tie wire mesh to a heligoland trap, or move a bag of concrete for the new jetty, but all of these tasks are essential to keep the observatory operating. No skills? Well perhaps just the life-skill of willing to get stuck in and help.

Wesley Smyth



Volunteer David Flowerday spraying the roof of Dorm 1 (Wesley Smyth)



CBO Editor displays an acrobatic pose as he woodworm sprays the kitchen roof.

(Wesley Smyth)

Funding News

Copeland Bird Observatory are pleased to announce that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency have offered a further five years of grant aid. This grant will run until 2018 and funds our core costs for running the Observatory and managing the island, costs such as gas, habitat management equipment, monitoring equipment and of course the boat.

In offering this continued grant aid NIEA are supporting the Observatory's role in managing and protecting the habitats and species of Lighthouse Island which is part of the Copelands Area of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Protection Area. Funding is provided through the Natural Heritage Grants Programme. The Observatory Committee is extremely grateful for this continued grant aid which will let us build upon our first sixty years of work!

The continued support of volunteers (you!) to the Observatory is greatly appreciated and every day of volunteer time you can give to the Observatory helps us meet our grant aims and ensure the long term protection of the islands. So your support is vital.

The CBO application was co-ordinated by Ian Humphreys on behalf of the Observatory Committee and we are all extremely grateful for the time and effort he gave.

New Jetties

Thanks to generous funding from the NIEA Challenge Fund (administered by NIEL – Northern Ireland Environment Link) the observatory is undertaking major improvements to both jetties in early 2013. The South Jetty in particular has been deteriorating over the last number of years to the stage where major repairs or refurbishment are now required. The East Jetty too is in need of some less significant repairs to bring it up to the required standards.

Work is already well underway to construct a new galvanised metal jetty for the south, which will fit over the top of the existing concrete structure, with the same footprint. In fact, the engineering work is already completed and the components are presently at the galvanising plant. The new structure will be fixed to the existing and will make the surface much less prone to weed growth, more stable and with fitted handrails and steps. This in turn will allow the jetty to be used over a greater tidal range and provide much more useful space for loading/unloading of the boat.

This promises to be a very significant improvement on the current facilities and is expected to last for many years to come. The jetty will carry sacrificial anodes, so that any corrosion from the seawater can be kept to an absolute minimum. Much of it is in sections that can be bolted together, so in the unlikely event of damage or corrosion, then only the affected part needs to be repaired.



Crumbling concrete on the South Jetty

Improvements are also planned for the East Jetty with a new walkway, handrail and mooring posts, all will again be galvanised.

The work for fitting is planned to take place before the start of the 2013 season. There will be work trips to transport materials, so watch this space for details if you think you are fit and able enough to assist with the transport to the island of the materials. The work will however be very heavy and awkward. A work week is planned for the middle of March to complete the installation, when the contractors (TH Engineering) who have designed and built the structures, will carry out the installation, assisted by several of our members.

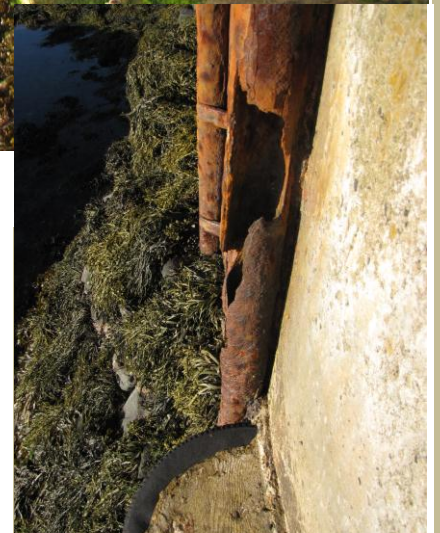
David Galbraith



Above: the South Jetty is surveyed.

Left: Philip McNamara provided professional advice on the requirements of the new jetties.

Right: some of the rotten steelwork to be replaced in the East Jetty.



(Shane Wolsey)

Ringling Training Day Copeland Bird Observatory held a ringing training day on 20th January at Greenmount Agricultural College, Antrim. Despite the snowy weather 11 brave souls turned out - actually those of us at the nets thought it was really rather mild!

This was a bit of an experimental day just to try out this new site - a brilliant place with a lot of potential for the future and it was really great to see some new faces and trainees. We caught 64 new birds which were a nice mix of eleven species, the highlights were two Treecreepers.

Many thanks to Rodney Monteith of Greenmount College for facilitating our visit, and for permission to ring on site from Greenmount College. We hope to be back soon!



A total of 64 birds were ringed:

Lesser Redpoll	13
Robin	4
Blackbird	2
Blue Tit	16
Great Tit	13
Dunnock	1
Chaffinch	5
Siskin	1
Coal Tit	6
Treecreeper	2
Goldcrest	1

Adam McClure looking after some of the catch



Nick Hesketh, Richard Holland with trainer Davy Galbraith



Nigel Ireland and Michael Stinson checking wing lengths

The trainers at the end of a good day:

Davy Galbraith
Shane Wolsey
Kerry Leonard

(all photos on this page by Kerry Leonard)

Bite sized news:

Copeland Management Plan Much effort by a planning sub-committee has been going into the preparation of a Management Plan that covers Lighthouse Island, Mew Island and with some work associated with Big Copeland. Several drafts of this plan have been prepared and re-drafted, with the current draft just having been sent out to outside organisations (NIEA, RSPB, BWI and National Trust) to get their feedback before the plan is finalised and submitted to NIEA for approval. The plan will also be submitted to a potential funder to cover the cost of some of the management actions that are included, and which are not covered by our normal funding.

Heligoland trap work During two winter visits to the island Chris Acheson has led teams of volunteers to complete the building of the new south trap (near the pub – see CBO News 02) and has undertaken extensive repairs to the Heligoland Trap (the one alongside the accommodation buildings). This work means that these two traps, along with the Wall Trap, are now in first class repair and are ready to catch birds in the forthcoming 2013 season. The Gully Trap is currently in a very poor state of repair and has been targeted with a plan of repair effort early in the new season.

Acoustic systems The NIEA Challenge Fund is supporting, through Natural Copeland, the purchase of two new acoustic attraction systems and the annual repair of the three similar systems that we used during 2012. These systems will be available for deployment in March 2013 and will be used to attract four tern species and Puffins. We may also use them for one other species in 2013. More about this at the forth-coming winter meeting on 12th March, and also in the next CBO News.

Duty Officers Manual and approval Another of CBO's management sub-committees has been working on revising the Duty Officers Manual, and also on the process for approving Duty Officers. The Manual has been designed to guide Duty Officers while on the island on the management practices that have been agreed by the Management Committee. It will be distributed to all Duty Officers and will be available for everyone to read on the island.

January winter meeting On 22nd January we held an evening of talks in our usual venue in the Ulster Museum. An audience of 45 people listened to two talks: Ian Enlander related his recent long holiday in India, describing the wealth of species (birds, mammals and reptile) that he saw, along with the hugely varying habitats that he visited. His presentation also illustrated some of the environmental issues that have been affecting India. It was a fascinating, beautiful and worrying presentation. Irena Tománková then gave an intriguing presentation on the research she has been undertaking for her PhD on the ducks of Lough Neagh. The decline of most of the duck species was illustrated, along with the decline of chironomids. Her findings inevitably raise many questions about the reasons for the changes in the populations of both taxa – more research needs to be done!

Travelling gulls January has seen several of our Copeland Common Gulls turning up elsewhere on their off-season holidays! Two birds were seen by Tony Murray at Duncannon Strand, Duncannon, Co. Wexford, one on 8th January and another bird on 10th January. Another bird was reported by Geoff Hunt at Sarsfield Lock, River Shannon, Limerick City on 12th January, and finally Alain Le Dreff reported one of our birds at Kervigen Beach (48°09'18N-004°17'36W), Plomodiern, Finistère, FRANCE. All these birds were first year birds, so hatched on Big Copeland in 2012.

All these gulls were identified because they have yellow colour rings as well as their metal BTO rings. If you see any more Common Gulls with colour rings please report them to Shane Wolsey shane.wolsey@btinternet.com



Adult Copeland Common Gull at Millise with colour ring 2BBC (Brendan Dunlop)

Membership 2013 membership renewals are now due! It would really help us a lot if all those who have not yet paid, did so without us chasing them up. Membership fees are really important for the operation of the Observatory, and having paid-up members is vital for us getting grant support – paid-up members shows that there is support for what we do. **So please renew now!**

Contact Ron Bishop, Membership Secretary 028 9336 4040 rh.bishop1@gmail.com



CBO members help with housing project!

Three CBO members have been helping with the establishment of a new home for Sand Martins. Neville McKee, Sandy McWilliams and Shane Wolsey have been advising Rodney Monteith at Greenmount Campus to provide Sand Martins with a pleasant surprise when they return this year to the Antrim area, following the construction of an artificial nesting bank in the grounds of the campus. Greenmount Campus is part of CAFRE, the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, and provides training for students in agriculture, horticulture and other land based industries.

Recently some of these students were involved in the construction of the nest complex and hopefully their hard work will be rewarded this spring when the first occupants take up residence. The artificial bank has 168 nesting chambers and has been built with the British Trust for Ornithology in mind as each chamber can be accessed individually to allow monitoring and recording of chicks.

In addition to its scientific value the nest complex will be a great educational resource to visitors such as the thousands of school children who visit the campus as part of their RSPB guided extracurricular activities.

Rodney Monteith



Front wall with entrance holes. (R Monteith & S Wolsey)



Internal access to each nest chamber

(Rodney Monteith)



Copeland Bird Observatory, established in 1954, is Northern Ireland's only bird observatory, and operates annually from late March to the end of October. The manning and administration of the Observatory is carried out entirely by volunteers who visit the island to record migrant and breeding birds. The islands also hold important populations of breeding seabirds, in particular Manx Shearwater (the only colony in Northern Ireland) and Arctic Tern. The Island is part of the Copeland ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest) and SPA (Special Protection Area). CBO's mission is to maintain and manage a bird observatory on Lighthouse Island. We wish to enhance the island resource and its biodiversity through the use of sustainable management practice, good science and inclusive education. We will do this in a way that can be managed by, and supports the integrity of the Copeland Bird Observatory as a voluntary organisation and ensures that it is open to all members of the community.

CBO News is compiled and edited by Shane Wolsey. If you wish to make a contribution to **CBO News** please send your text and photos to shane@swolsey.biz. All contributions and photos are individually credited.

CBO is supported by:

