

CBO e-News

Copeland Bird Observatory e-Newsletter (Autumn 2014)



Diary Dates

Winter Talks (Ulster Museum)

Tuesday 18th November at 7:30pm

Full details can be found on page 6.

The Copeland Bird Observatory (CBO) was formed in 1954 and is Northern Ireland's only bird observatory. The CBO is situated on Old Lighthouse Island off the County Down coast, at the southern side of the mouth of the Belfast Lough. The Island is approximately 36 metres high and 16 hectares (40 acres) in area.

The main aims of the Observatory are to collect data on migratory and breeding birds, to manage the island for the benefit of birds, and to develop and manage a conservation education programme. It is operated on a part-time basis by volunteers and is open from late March to the end of October.

CBO Website:

www.copelandbirdobservatory.org.uk

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/copelandbirdobservatory



Newsletter Articles

Please forward your stories and photographs for future issues to Niall Waterman.

Email: niallwaterman@hotmail.com

Peregrines breed on Copelands

Despite ongoing setbacks with persecution, the population of Peregrine Falcons in Northern Ireland is doing reasonably well. In 2014, over 70 sites were recorded by Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) and British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) volunteers as part of the BTO Peregrine Survey.

We can reveal that one of those sites was on the Copelands. A pair had been noted around the islands for a number of weeks before a brood of three large young was located in mid-May. Under licence from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the nest was visited and the chicks subsequently ringed, the first time Peregrines have been ringed by the Observatory.



Peregrine Falcon Chicks

This is the first time in 20 years that Peregrines have attempted to breed on the Copelands, with the last pair recorded in 1994. During that attempt the female laid two eggs which were incubated for six weeks, but they ultimately failed and left.

Adam McClure

4th Barred Warbler for CBO

On Saturday, 13th September, 2014, an immature Barred Warbler arrived on the island along with a moderate fall of migrants which included 20 Robins, 12 Goldcrests, 8 Chiffchaffs, 2 Blackcaps and a Sparrowhawk. Conditions were misty with a South-easterly wind.



Immature Barred Warbler (© Ian McKee)

This rare visitor was caught in the NW Garden 60' net at 9.50am. Two birds were in the net, one directly below the other. The lower was at about shoulder height and the initial impression on approach was that it appeared to be almost twice the size of the bird in the upper shelf, which was a male Blackcap. It was instantly clear that this was something exciting.

The bird - obviously a warbler - was large, greyish-brown above, paler below and with a large, dark bill. Within a few seconds, the diagnostic features confirmed that here indeed was an immature Barred Warbler. The main features were the pale edges to the upper-tail coverts (giving the rump a distinctive "scalloped" effect) and tertials, the dark centres to the under-tail coverts and the hint of a pale double wing-bar. The presence of some barring on the flanks, occurring in many young birds, was very indistinct – almost absent – on this individual.



Rump and Wing (© Ian McKee)

This was the 4th Barred Warbler at CBO and the 5th for Northern Ireland. All have been juveniles. The first to be recorded on the island turned up in the 60' Heligoland net on 23rd September, 1972. Two then appeared in 1976 within 2 weeks of each other – the first on 25th August, followed by the second on 6th September. All four of the Copeland birds were caught and ringed. With at least 26 ringed on the Calf of Man, which is only 84 kilometres away to the South-east of the Observatory and visible on a clear day, there can be little doubt that Barred Warblers occur on CBO more regularly than we have been able to record over the years.

The first of the two groups of visitors who arrived on the island as part of our first European Heritage Open Day were lucky enough to see this rarity from Eastern Europe.

Chris Acheson

Test Your Identification Skills (Answers on Page 5)



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)



(h)



(i)

Visiting the Copeland Bird Observatory (CBO)

Trips to the CBO should be booked in advance through the Bookings Secretary.

David Galbraith (Bookings Secretary) – **Tel:** 028 9338 2539, **Mob:** 07885 834398

Email: davidgalbraith903@btinternet.com

European Heritage Open Days

European Heritage Open Days (EHOD) is a Europe wide event, held annually to promote historic and modern buildings to the public. As well as the opening of buildings, there are a wide variety of events such as food events, living history, film events and many arts and culture events. This year, the CBO took part in EHOD for the first time.

On Saturday 13th September 2014, 45 people visited the island. The visitors were given a guided tour and introduced to the ornithology work of the observatory. The open day proved very popular and hopefully will become a regular fixture in the CBO calendar.



Chris Acheson showing the group a Manx Shearwater



Wesley Smyth guiding visitors around the island

CBO Volunteer Recognised at Coast Care Awards

On 9th October 2014, the Coca-Cola Coast Care Awards and Seminar event was held at Parliament Buildings, Stormont. The awards were organised by the environmental charity *Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful* to recognise the vital role volunteers play in protecting our coastline and inland waterways. Mark H. Durkan, Minister of the Environment, presented the awards along with BBC TV presenter John Craven who spoke at the event.

The awards were split in to a number of categories including the *Most Committed Volunteer of the Year Award*. This award recognises an individual who has demonstrated ongoing commitment to the coast or inland waterway through consistent hard work on shorelines in the form of clean-ups or other activities. This year, the award was won by Philip Galbraith. Philip is one of the Observatory's most active members and during his frequent trips to the island, demonstrates this commitment by carrying out shoreline clean-ups to remove plastic bottles, tin cans, aerosols and other rubbish from the island. Philip is also a volunteer with Her Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG).

Congratulations Philip!



Philip Galbraith, Winner of the Coca-Cola Coast Care Most Committed Volunteer of the Year Award

Also pictured (left to right): Katy Jenkins, Campaigns Manager with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, Mark H. Durkan, Minister of the Environment, Ailish Forde, Public Affairs and Communications Director with Coca-Cola HBC Ireland and presenter John Craven.

Answers to Identification Skills Test on Page 3:

(a) *Sea Campion* (b) *Grey Seal* (c) *Black-headed Gull* (d) *Small Tortoiseshell* (e) *Painted Lady*
(f) *Red Admiral* (g) *Linnet* (h) *Manx Shearwater* (i) *Chiffchaff*

Copeland Bird Observatory Winter talks at the Ulster Museum

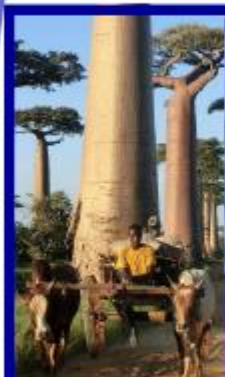


Tuesday 18th November at 7.30 pm

Land of the Lemurs – Travels in Madagascar

The challenges facing the animals and plants on the world's fourth largest island
—presented by Prof. Sue Christie—

When Sue and Peter Christie decided to plan a 'holiday of a lifetime' to celebrate their retirements — Sue, as Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Environment Link, and Peter as a government biologist — they chose one of the world's most fascinating but least visited islands, **Madagascar**. Although five weeks is not long to explore the fourth largest island in the world, Sue and Peter still managed to visit 14 nature reserves, saw 31 species of lemurs, dozens of species of frogs and reptiles, all six endemic baobabs and countless other plants and animals.



They were jumped on by lemurs, walked on by chameleons and came face to face with some rather large spiders! They also saw how 90% of the land on Madagascar has been deforested, and how nature reserves are shrinking and have lost all their large trees; they encountered animals and plants which are the last of their kind, and learned of the crises facing the people and wildlife living on the island.

The challenges facing this beautiful land are many, and the solutions are not readily apparent. Join us at the Ulster Museum as Sue presents a pictorial tour of some of the most fascinating and unique animals and plants on the planet, and ponders on some thoughts for their future.

Also — Copeland Bird Observatory: Autumn Report

Join us as we review some of the happenings on the observatory during another busy season, including Barred and Yellow-browed Warblers, and CBO joins the European Heritage Open Day event.

Admission to CBO winter meetings at the Ulster Museum is free and open to all.
The meetings commence at 7.30 pm, and finish at 9.45 pm.
Please use the Stranmillis Road entrance.

A Memorable Weekend

On the weekend of 3rd – 5th October 2014 a small party consisting of Ian Humphreys, David Stirling and Peter Smyth enjoyed a superb late summer weekend on Copeland Bird Observatory. The weather was windy but mainly dry and warm. The first evening was drizzly and overcast, however, making it ideal for Shearwaters. Being late in the season only a few juveniles remained with four seen and three caught and ringed. Over the weekend the wind was mostly Southerly with small numbers of passerines caught using mist nets, potter traps and the Heligoland traps. Birds included Robin, Blackbird, Meadow Pipit, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldfinch, Goldcrest, Lesser Redpoll, Linnet, Wren and Dunnock.



Yellow Browed Warbler (© David Stirling)

On the morning of Saturday 4th an interesting bird in the garden net made an already good weekend into a rather memorable one. Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler were quickly discounted and Ian mentioned the possibility of Yellow Browed Warbler but with some uncertainty given it was a bird he had never seen before. Back at the lab the identification was unequivocal; Ian's delight irrepressible. Plenty of photos were taken and with modern technology David's wonderfully clear picture was soon spreading across the internet. This was David's first visit for 30 years and Peter's first visit ever. If I told them the weather was always this good, the birds always this interesting and the Shearwaters always as docile I may have been taking a small liberty but I do hope they will return; they were great company and a great help.

PS £1 was duly deposited in the 'new species levy' tin.

Ian Humphreys

Updating Contact Details

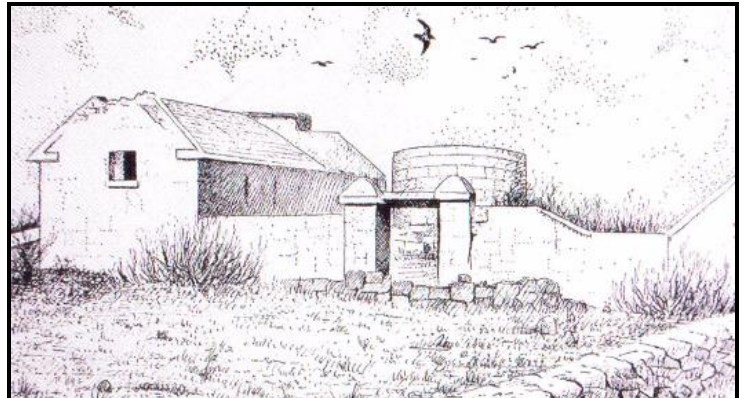
Please contact the Membership Secretary if your contact details change (e.g. new email address).

Ron Bishop (Membership Secretary) – **Tel:** 028 9336 4040, **Email:** rh.bishop1@gmail.com

Arnold Benington (1903-1982) – A Pioneering Naturalist

Arnold Benington was born in Brookfield near Moira in 1903. His father, Charles Benington, was the headmaster of the local school and he saw to it that his son was introduced to the mysteries and joys of the natural world. His passion for nature and thirst for adventure soon developed. Starting at an early age, diary-keeping was used to record his fieldwork. In 1919, he began the first of his 28 volumes of field diaries.

In adulthood, Arnold decided to follow the family tradition of teaching. He read Chemistry at Queen's University, Belfast and went on to teach Chemistry and later Biology at Friends' School, Lisburn (1927-68). Alongside his day job as a science master, he also became a pioneering nature writer, bird photographer, WEA lecturer on natural history subjects and broadcaster. He produced several hundred nature articles and many radio scripts for the BBC. He shared his discoveries, insights and enthusiasms with the wider public through his radio broadcasts, including regular appearances on BBC Children's Hour (1946-63). His 'Nature Diary' column for the *Belfast Newsletter* (1961-67) and 'Nature Notes' articles for the *Ulster Illustrated* magazine (1953-59) included illustrations by his son, the artist Michael Benington.

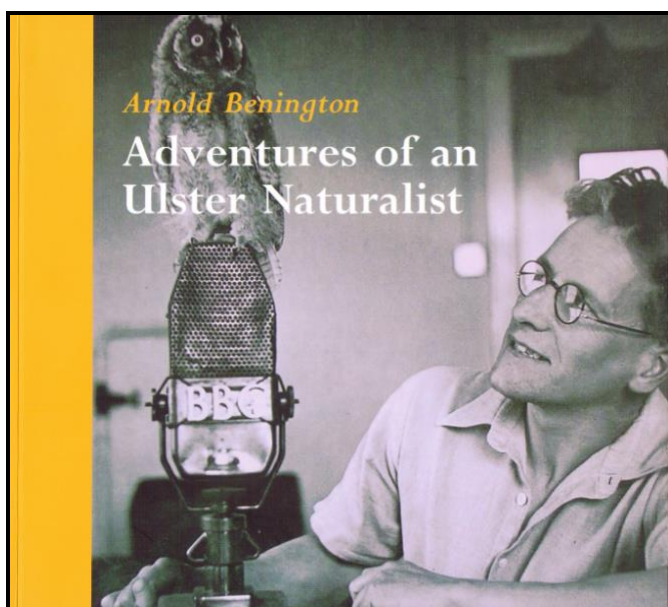


Copeland Bird Observatory (1954)



Head of Manx Shearwater ringed on Copelands

On retirement from teaching in 1968, Arnold could look back on a life devoted to educating children and adults, to landmark studies on Sparrowhawks, to two expeditions to the remote interior of Iceland, and to a lead role in establishing Northern Ireland's first and only Bird Observatory in 1954. The one we enjoy today on Old Lighthouse Island and still run by dedicated volunteers sixty years later. Early photographs from the time can be seen on the following page. The drawings of the Copeland Bird Observatory (above) and the Manx Shearwater (left) are both by Michael Benington.



In 2009, a book retelling the adventures of this pioneering naturalist was published. The book includes extracts from his field diaries, broadcasts and articles. The book was edited by Arnold Benington's grandson, Jonathan, and is illustrated with both Arnold's own photographs and pictures by his son, Michael. It is a fascinating tribute to a man who had an inspirational passion for nature.

Arnold Benington
Adventures of an Ulster Naturalist
(ISBN 978-0-9559727-1-3)

The book is available from Jonathan Benington (In Flight Books) through Amazon.co.uk. Many thanks to Jonathan for kindly allowing images from the book to be reproduced here.



Arnold Benington with two boys ringing Manx Shearwaters, Copelands



Arnold Benington and unknown boy on Old Lighthouse Island

Copeland Bird Observatory 60th Anniversary Dinner

On Saturday 1st November 2014, the CBO celebrated its 60th anniversary with a dinner at the Park Avenue Hotel, Belfast. This anniversary dinner gave members and friends the opportunity to renew acquaintances and reminisce about old times. The evening's programme included a nostalgic visual journey through the years by Peter Munro. With thanks to Neville and Pat (McKee) for supplying many of the slides. Joe Furphy, CBO President, spoke about the significance of Copeland in the wider ornithological world. Black and white photographs and memorabilia from the last 60 years highlighted the history of the observatory and its contribution to ornithology in Northern Ireland.



CBO 60th anniversary dinner in the Balmoral Room of the Park Avenue Hotel

Among those enjoying the evening was Clem Shaw, who was one of the party of 5 which had stayed on the island in 1941. The report produced by this team on the wildlife of the islands inspired Arnold Benington and was thus a major contributory factor in the early plans to establish a Bird Observatory on Old Lighthouse Island. From the earliest days of the Observatory were Brian Moller, who had participated in the 1955 expedition to Iceland and Paul Hillis with his wife Sheila. John Lovatt shared with us the contents of a letter he had received from Chris Bailey (on behalf of the Committee) on 9th May, 1964, which informed him that – as a result of being unable to curb his youthful enthusiasm for building hides – his visits to the Observatory were suspended until the beginning of the following season. Betty Shanks, daughter of founder member John Wilson, was in attendance with husband Roy and was able to put names to many of the faces in the old photographs and slides on display.

The team which currently operates the Observatory was well represented and while Clem was far and away the oldest person at the dinner, the youngest was Matthew Jordan (14), who has been on the island for 3 weekends during 2014. Finally, thanks to everyone involved who helped to make the evening so enjoyable and memorable, especially Chris Acheson for all his hard work behind the scenes.

Looking forward to the next 60 years!

CBO is supported by the following:

