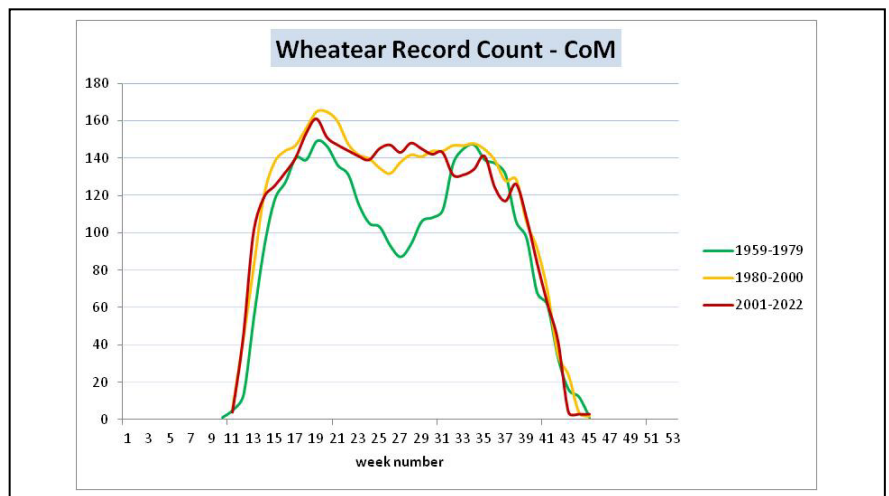
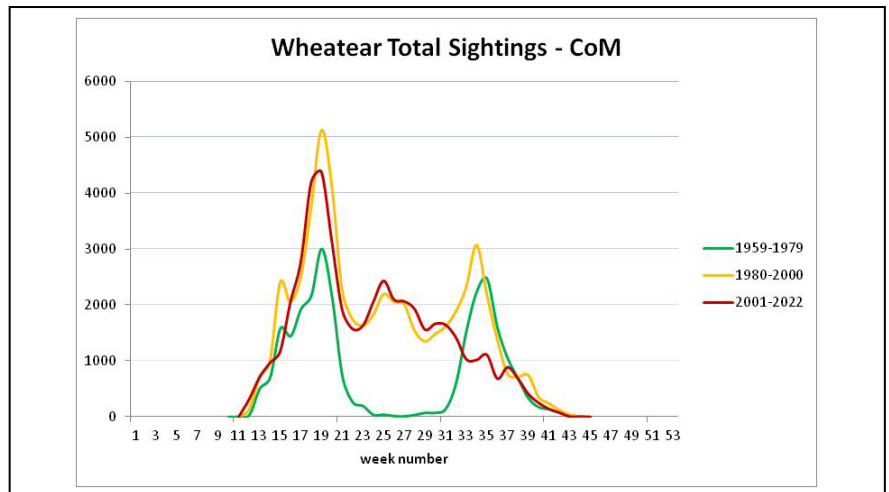


Common Name:	Wheatear
Scientific Name:	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Manx Name:	Claghan-ny-gleiee
BoCC IoM 21 classification:	AMBER
IUCN 3.1 classification:	Least concern
MBRC:	A
Legal classification:	

The Northern Wheatear is now a regular breeding resident, summer visitor, and common passage migrant on the Calf of Man. Historically, it was a consistent passage migrant and has evolved into a key breeding species.

As a passage migrant, the Wheatear is among the earliest migrants to appear on the Isle of Man after winter. The earliest recorded arrival was on 4th February on the main Island, with notable historical records such as several birds seen at the Chicken Rock on 17th February 1887. During the review period, the earliest arrival occurred on 8th March 2016, with a mean arrival date of 20th March from 1959 to 2022. This 'late date' likely reflects the timing of wardens' arrivals rather than the actual migration dates.



Spring migration primarily involves the northern European subspecies *O. o. oenanthe*, which breeds throughout much of Europe, including the British Isles and the Isle of Man. Significant passage numbers have occasionally been recorded in late March, with historical mentions of notable movements, such as a significant passage on 29th March 1937. During this review period, the only three-figure counts in March were 200 on 26th (1974), 115 on 24th (2001), and 100 on 31st (1990). The main migration period spans early April through late May, peaking in early to mid-May when counts often exceed 50 birds. This period is marked by the passage of Greenland Wheatears (*O. o. leucorhoa*) heading towards their breeding grounds in Iceland, Greenland, and northern Canada. Counts during these spring months regularly exceed 50 birds, with notable figures including 500 on 6th April 1987. Studies suggest that up to 90% of migrants passing through the Calf during May are of this subspecies. Greenland Wheatears undertake extensive transoceanic migrations and spend longer stopovers (up to 10–17 days) compared to the nominate race, supporting findings from retrap data on the Calf showing weight gains of 13% to 32% within four to 16 days of capture.

The total sightings graph indicates that spring passage during 1959 – 1979 was around 30% lower than in 2000 – 2022 and up to 42% less than in 1980 – 2000. However, caution should be taken when interpreting this data due to a significant number of records assigned as “present – no count” between 1960 – 2004, particularly during 1959 – 1979. This suggests that Wheatears were present on the Calf during the breeding season but were less frequently recorded, indicating that the observed dip between spring and autumn passages may reflect lower breeding numbers during that period.

The first confirmed breeding record on the Calf was in 1960. Breeding numbers remained low and sporadic from 1964 to 1977, with a revival in 1981 when a single pair bred, increasing to 11 pairs by 1985 and 20 pairs in 1989. Breeding numbers rose further to 30 pairs in 1990, remaining stable until 1994. From 1995 to 2015, recording was inconsistent, with estimates ranging between 1 – 17 pairs and some years only noting presence. A more structured approach in 2016 recorded 25 pairs, increasing to 35 pairs in 2017 and 40 pairs in both 2018 and 2019. The breeding population peaked at a record 64 pairs in 2022.

The Calf of Man is an important Manx breeding site for this BoCCIoM21 amber-listed species. The Manx Bird Atlas highlighted the Ayres coastal heath as an irregular breeding area, with other main breeding concentrations on the northern and central hills of the main Island. Historically, Kermode described Wheatears as ‘not infrequent’, while Ralfe considered them common and plentiful as migrants but scarce as breeders. Madoc was familiar with the species but did not estimate abundance, and Cullen & Jennings (1986) described it as a ‘rather scarce but regular summer visitor and common passage migrant’. Breeding distribution and abundance maps from the Atlas show a broadly similar range between surveys in 1977-81 and 1998-2002, although the number of 10 km squares with breeding evidence decreased from 10 to eight. There were reductions in breeding occurrences along the northern plain but increases in the northern and central hills and on the Calf of Man. Although Wheatears are common breeders in many UK upland areas, there has been a 32% decrease in the breeding population between 1995 and 2020. Range contraction in lowland Britain since 1968-72 was identified, with further losses in lowland England recorded during the 2008-11 Atlas. BTO Breeding Bird Survey trends show significant fluctuations with a moderate, ongoing decline since around 2010, triggering alerts across the UK. Despite the scarcity of historical data for the Isle of Man, recent increases in breeding numbers suggest a positive trend, with the Calf of Man’s breeding Wheatear population potentially constituting more than 50% of the total Manx Wheatear numbers.

Recent research by Grzeskowiak (2023) mapped Wheatear territories on the Calf in spring 2022 and found no significant factors directly influencing population dynamics, including the presence of Brown Rats. Dunn (2022) observed on Skokholm Island, Wales, that most burrow entrances face away from prevailing winds during harsh weather, with Wheatears preferring burrows over rock cavities due to the more stable microclimate.

Fledged young typically appear from late May through June and July, often seen flying from post to post or along drystone walls, emitting their familiar “chack” call. Since 2014, the use of small ‘darvic’ colour-rings with three-letter alpha-numeric codes has shown that many Calf-bred birds disperse away from the islet shortly after gaining independence. Autumn passage starts in early July and peaks towards the end of August, with counts of up to 60 birds relatively frequent. Although the autumn passage is generally lower in volume than spring, counts of 100 or more are recorded, including a peak of 200 on 24th August 1984. From mid-September, numbers decrease significantly, with most counts being of 30 or fewer and a peak of 80 on 21st September 1980. Records extend into October in most years, with between six and eight records annually, and November records are rare, with the latest being a single bird on 8th November 2019.

Accumulative monthly total of records (1959 – 2022):

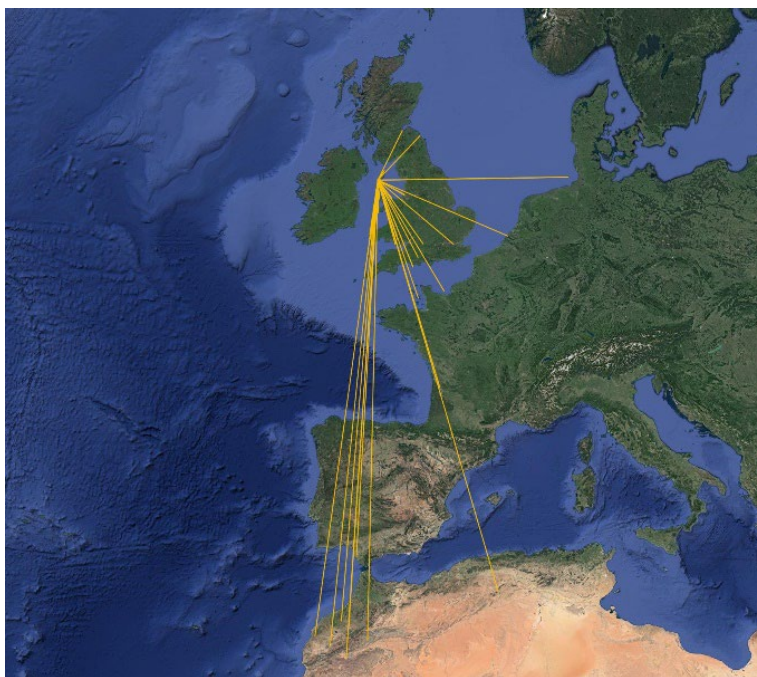
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
		442	1724	2000	1644	1727	1856	1497	485	6	

Between 1959 and 2022, there were 11,831 records of Skylarks. Of these, 12.2% were unfortunately listed as "present – no count." Counts of single birds accounted for 1,087 records, representing 9.5% of the total. The most frequent counts were of 2 to 20 birds, comprising 7,136 records, or 63%. There were 1,535 records, or 13%, of counts ranging from 21 to 50 birds, and 199 records of counts between 51 and 100 birds. Higher counts were relatively scarce, with 23 counts between 105 and 150 birds, eight counts of 200 birds, and three exceptionally high counts of 500 birds on April 6, 1987, and 300 birds on both May 6, 1980, and April 16, 1986.

A total of 4,268 Wheatear have been ringed on the Calf between 1959 – 2022, with the following reports:

Wheatear	ALGERIA	CHANNEL ISLANDS	England	FRANCE	GERMANY	Isle of Man	MOROCCO	Scotland	SPAIN	THE NETHERLANDS	Wales	Grand Total
Recoveries (yellow)	1	1	10	2	2	3	6	1	1	1	10	38
Controls (red)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1

Between 1959 and 1983, Cullen & Jennings (1986) reported that a total of 1,442 Wheatears were ringed on the Calf, resulting in only nine recoveries. Over the subsequent 38 years, the average number of Wheatears ringed annually increased by 50%, likely due to both a rise in the breeding population on the Calf and a growing interest in studying the species, especially in recent years. Colour-ringing began in 2014 and has notably improved the recovery reporting rate from 0.6% to 0.9%, with a significant increase to 3.6% since the introduction of colour-ringing. Future studies using radiotelemetry are planned to address some of the questions raised by colour-ringing and to further explore migration patterns.



Ring recoveries and radar tracking studies indicate that British and Irish Wheatears migrate through France, Spain, and Portugal before crossing into Morocco and Algeria, ultimately wintering south of the Sahara in West Africa. Evidence from the Calf supports this migration route. For instance, birds ringed in late summer or autumn have been recovered in Gironde, France (1,019 km away) just nine days later, in Cadiz, Spain (1,900 km) two months and 15 days later, and in Ouddorp, The Netherlands (634 km) 16 days later. Additionally, Wheatears ringed during spring passage and found later during northward migration include an individual shot in Chardaia, Algeria (2,200 km) 11 months and nine days later, and another found in Ouarzazate, Morocco (2,738 km) one year, 10 months, and 24 days later. Spring recoveries also show the returning route through south-west England and the western seaboard, with

individuals found in mid-March in Normandy, France (369 km) and Somerset (280 km), and towards the end of March in Crosby, Merseyside (132 km), Portland Bill, Dorset (424 km), and in early April in Jersey, Channel Islands (352 km) and Seaforth, Lancashire (134 km). One Calf-bred bird ringed in June 2014 was later seen in Helgoland, Germany (829 km) the following April, suggesting that some birds may return from their wintering quarters via a more easterly route.

Further recoveries from Morocco indicate that Wheatears move through the country during both spring and autumn. Calf-bred birds ringed in autumn have been found at Agoudal (2,449 km away) eight months and five days later, and at Ouled Azzouz (2,369 km) four years and 21 days later. Wheatears of the *leucorhoa* race typically start migrating from their Nearctic breeding grounds in late August and arrive at their wintering grounds by October. Birds ringed on the Calf in late April and early May, often of this race, have been documented in Morocco between October and December. Notable sightings include a bird at Benhamed (2,521 km away) one year, five months, and one day later, another in Marrakech (2,654 km away) one year, seven months, and 18 days later, and a record-breaking sighting in Safi (2,660 km away) four years, five months, and 29 days later, which set the longevity record for Wheatears ringed on the Calf.

Calf-bred Wheatears departing in autumn seem to follow a broader migratory route. Two birds were reported heading southwest, with sightings in Wiltshire and Dorset, while another bird ringed in mid-August was seen at Rainham Marshes, Essex (443 km away) 16 days later. Interestingly, two birds ringed in early to mid-September travelled northeast, with one seen in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland (263 km away) one month and 19 days later, and another in Holyrood Park, Edinburgh (297 km away) just four days after ringing. More localized movements include two birds seen at the Point of Ayre, Isle of Man (50 km away) 18 and 43 days later in early August. Additionally, there have been reports of Calf-bred birds establishing breeding territories in southwest England and Wales, with multiple sightings of some individuals. For example, ADB1080, ringed in June 2018, was first reported in late April 2019 at Ramsey Island, Pembrokeshire (248 km away), then seen two days later on Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire (263 km away). By mid-May, this bird had moved further south to Botallack, Cornwall (440 km away), where it was reportedly breeding. Other sightings include Uwchmynydd, Gwynedd (141 km away), and Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire (262 km away) in June. AFL2733, ringed in July 2021, was seen twice at South Stack RSPB reserve, Anglesey (84 km away) during June 2022 before appearing at the Great Orme, Conwy (102 km away) in August, presumably having bred nearby. Other sightings in Wales, possibly involving passage migrants, include a bird at Bardsey Island, Gwynedd (147 km away) in early April 2016, and another ringed on the Calf in April 1962, seen at Ogmere Vale, Glamorgan (258 km away) 36 days later. This latter bird likely overshot its breeding grounds upon arrival and was in the process of reorienting.

In contrast to the number of recoveries from Wheatear studies on the Calf, it is notable that only one control has been reported. This control involved a bird ringed as a pullus at Bardsey Island, Gwynedd, in June 1989, which was seen on the Calf during spring 1990, representing a movement of 190 km north.

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