

Army Ornithological Society

NEWSLETTER JULY 2014



NOTES FROM THE HON SECRETARY



Despite initial warnings that the AGM would be the most austere ever the 36 members had a great time in STANTA. We were well looked after by the Range Staff, Mess Contractors and the conservation group who ran two excellent walks which gave us good views of Stone Curlew whilst the advance party managed an over-flying Goshawk whilst they had a lunch in the beer garden of a local pub. The AGM format is set to change; next year we will have a Black Tie Regimental Dinner in the WOs and NCOs Mess in Knightsbridge with some local excellent urban birding. Thereafter I am sure that we'll find some novel ways of holding an AGM

utilizing the Defence Estate but not totally dependent on being housed and dined by them.

I retire as Secretary next year, some 8 months before retiring in total after 34 years service in the Army (I only meant to do 3!). I have had a great time as secretary and fully intend to continue as an active member of the AOS despite a potential civilian job which will see me working in Africa for a month at a time. In the twilight years of my service I come to reflect on all the birds I have seen during my military service which may have eluded me otherwise – Sociable Plover in Iraq from the turret of a Warrior, Macaroni Penguin in the Falklands, Afghan Babbler in a FOB in Helmand and White-backed Woodpecker from the 81 Northing Rebro-site in Bosnia. I often sign off on social media as 'Birding at the Taxpayer's Expense' and as UK taxpayers I thank you from the bottom of my heart for aiding me to add to my life list.

MEMBERSHIP

The Society currently sits at 190 members with one member in waiting. Membership as remained stagnant this year with a similar number being recruited to those leaving for various reasons.

FLYER

The Society now has a recruiting flyer which was shown to members during the AGM. Should you wish to have some copies to aid recruiting please let me know and I'll pass on through the post. Perfect to leave in social areas in military establishments.

EMAIL ADDRESSES – A CONTINUED REQUEST

I only have 121 email addresses registered. Should you have received this newsletter in hard-copy format and would like to cut down postage and packaging I would be grateful if you could send your email contact to Richard.Seargent115@mod.uk and I will ensure that future emails will be sent in e-format.

Please be rest assured that your address will not be used for any business within the society without the approval of the Chairman and/or the Hon Sec.

AGM HISTORY

I am not sure that this has ever been published but we thought members might like to see where we've held AGMs in the past. A useful historical document for someone I guess.

AGM	Date	Location	Notes	Nos*
45	14 Jun 14	Bodney Camp, STANTA		32
44	04 May 13	Lulworth		33
43	10 May 12	Leconfield		26
42	7 May 11	Longmoor		28
41	14 May 10	Catterick		28
40	25 Apr 09	Fremington		28
39	24 May 08	Warcop		23
38	1 Jun 07	Castlemartin		29
37	13 May 06	West Tofts, STANTA		30
36	08 Jun 05	Swynnerton		26
35	15 May 04	St Martin's Plain, CPTA		21
34	7 Jun 03	Bovington		27
33	11 May 02	Wathgill Camp		21
32	12 May 01	Aldershot	1 day event.	23
31	6 May 00	Okehampton Camp		29
30	15 May 99	Castlemartin		36
29	9 May 98	West Tofts, STANTA		29
28	10 May 97	Otterburn		23
27	1 Jun 96	Newton, Isle of Wight		22
26	20 May 95	Catterick		24
25	14 May 94	Bovington		19
24	5 Jun 93	Aldershot		23
23	30 May 92	Colchester		31
22	25 May 91	Bulford, SPTA		28
21	19 May 90	Castlemartin		22
20	27 May 89	Catterick		23
19	14 May 88	West Tofts, STANTA		21
18	25 Apr 87	Shoeburyness		22
17	Apr 86	Thorney Island		28
16	27 Apr 85	Lulworth		22
15	12 May 84	Theddlethorpe, Lincs		13
14	7 May 83	Lydd		12
13	3 Apr 82	Castlemartin		20
12	10 May 81	Bordon		13
11	11 May 80	Catterick		10
10	29 Apr 79	Lulworth, SPTA		10
9	9 Jul 78	Larkhill		12
8	30 Apr 77	West Tofts, STANTA		15
7	26 Mar 76	Royal Commonwealth Soc.	London	15
6	21 Mar 75	Royal Commonwealth Soc.	London	12
5	29 Mar 74	Royal Commonwealth Soc.	London	17
4	27 Mar 73	Royal Commonwealth Soc.	London	16
3	28 Mar 72	Old War Office	London	14
2	14 Feb 69	Naval & Military Club	London	12
1	24 Nov 67	RHQ London Yeomanry	London	10

* Less Partners

FORECAST OF EVENTS

The forecast of events is attached. It has been updated includes a number of the usual favourites. All are encouraged to attend and join the usual cohort of diehards. Also please note the start of the year birding trip in Norfolk where extreme birding comes to the fore.

AOS SHOP

Is your initial AOS tie looking a bit worse for wear? If so please contact the Secretary who will be delighted to send you a replacement at the bargain price of £4 including postage.

The AOS polo shirts continue to sell. If you have not yet purchased one then get one ready for next year's AGM (through Andrew Bray). These polo shirts have been a useful tool for recruiting new members whilst out birding.

www.vistaprint.co.uk can design your own baseball cap with AOS logo. All you need is the logo in the header in electronic format (available through the Secretary) and eight days later you'll receive a cap through the post. A number of members have already received these caps on the AGM and others have ordered personally. Alternately Andrew Bray can provide baseball caps with a cut-down version of the logo (embroidered) through his own contact.

AOS ACTIVITIES



Sea-watching at Portland

Members of the society have been extremely busy with trips to Cyprus, Portland, the London Wetland Centre, Scotland and the annual pilgrimage to Norfolk where members camped before deciding to book a cottage next year. Cyprus has been written about on the website and will appear in the next Adjutant. The whole trip was well arranged by Mark Easterbrook and the group managed to find a first for Cyprus with a single Eurasian Coal Tit at Cape Greko on the first full day of birding and a stunning male Hooded Wheatear on the list.



Hooded Wheatear, Cape Greko © Mark Easterbrook

Thanks must go to Mark and Debs for organising so well. We had trips to the north of the Island, had wonderful meals in great settings and found so many wonderful birds. Mark, you really ought to be a Bird Guide! Mark's new found love for Orchids, Dragonflies and Butterflies was a joy to see and a surprise to many. We managed to clear all the Cyprus endemics with wonderful views of the mountain specialties on Troodos. A return long weekend trip is planned to cover the birds we missed most notably Wallcreeper and Finch's Wheatear.

FUTURE FIELD TRIPS

Members are strongly encouraged to attend field trips and expeditions. Generally the usual suspects turn up and it would be great to welcome other members to our band of intrepid birders. Future highlights will be the annual mass dip on Portland in September ably run by Hilary Nash

and anyone wishing to join us on the long weekend in Norfolk in January should contact me. Planning is in process to bird in the Midlands in November, led by Fran Biggin and Ben White, this will be a new and hopefully annual addition to the AOS Field Trips list and I would be most grateful if you would support.

OPERATION TURTLE DOVE

As you will be aware Turtle Doves are quickly disappearing from the British countryside with numerous reasons sited for their decline. I have been lucky to find 2 separate birds, one in Surrey and one whilst on exercise in Bodney Camp, Norfolk this year, both unexpected. Should you have any sightings the RSPB would love to know where and when. Please look at the link below and add to the distribution list and help this declining species.

<http://operationturtledove.org/>



BLOGS ON THE WEBSITE

Andrew Bray (SPTA) and Mark Easterbrook (Cyprus) both blog on the AOS site. Both blogs are informative and great to read and you are strongly encouraged to take a look. Cyprus highlights have become more interesting now that I have visited with Mark and members of the society earlier in the year. Please log onto www.armybirding.org.uk to view and whilst you are there register on the message board in order to receive up-to-date news from the society.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The society has twitter account (@armybirding) and a Facebook Page (Army Ornithological Society) which is invite only and open to members. Please visit both sites and add photos and sightings. Numerous members of the society 'tweet' their sightings; in Surrey it is fast becoming the main way to report sightings. I tweet as @TicesBirder and the Chairman as @armybirder and both of us often include the work of the society in our submissions. Twitter has become a useful tool for recruiting members with a good half a dozen press-ganged this way.

PARISH NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It has long been my intention as birder and beer drinker to combine these most pleasant of pastimes into a twitch at the Great British Beer Festival at Olympia. Aided and abetted by Andrew Bray but for the first time ever, missing Obi-Wan Pentelow (birding in South Africa), the rules were agreed. No soft options; no 'old favourites'; every beer had to have a birding connection by name or brewery name, however spurious. I think it went quite well although I have no clear recollection past the plate of whelks at the half way mark. Fortunately, and unusually, I made the following notes:

Beer	Brewery	ABV	Notes
Twitchell	Buntingford, Hertfordshire	3.8	Silver Award winner. Fruity bitter. Floral aroma and malty, hoppy aftertaste. Great start.
Screech Owl	Castle Rock, Nottinghamshire	5.5	A traditional well-hopped India Pale Ale. Nicely balanced the light start but you don't want too many of these.
Devon Darter	Clearwater, Devon	4.5	Copper in colour. An aroma of grapes, then a nutty taste, finally leaving light bitterness on the tongue.
Kynance Blonde	Cornish Chough , Cornwall	4.2	Wouldn't usually drink something with nance in the title but this is research. Well-balanced malt and hop aroma with a crisp palate.
Barn Owl Bitter	Cotleigh, Somerset	4.5	Not a soft option but bloody good beer from God's county. Rich, deep coloured brew with fruity aroma and light biscuit on the palate.
Old Golden Hen	Greene King, Suffolk	4.1	Thinking pheasant here and not Buff Orpington farmyard. Brewed using the rare Galaxy hop and giving subtle tropical fruit notes and a delicious smooth finish.
Merlin the Wizard	Merlin, Cheshire	4.2	A hoppy, bitter, golden coloured ale with generous hints of grapefruit flavour. So doubles as part of your 5-a-day.
Corncrake	Orkney, Northern Isles	4.1	A straw-coloured beer with soft citrus fruits and a floral aroma. More of the above?
Black Crow Stout	Poachers, Lincolnshire	4.5	Burnt toffee and caramel flavours in this full bodied stout. Undoes all the good work of the previous two drinks but worth it.
Wild Swan	Thornbridge, Derbyshire	3.5	Lemony citrus hop flavour increasingly dry and bitter in the finish and aftertaste. Bit of a lightweight after the stout but cleansed the palate.
Golden Kiwi	Tydd Stream, Cambridgeshire	4.1	Brewed exclusively with a blend of four varieties of hops from New Zealand, giving intense citrus flavour and aroma. Hops lost something in their journey as quite sharp.
Black Swan Dark Mild	Vale, Buckinghamshire	3.9	Dark and smooth beer. Delicious. Pity we didn't have this earlier as the palate is now past its best and haven't understood Andrew since the Wild Swan.
Wells Eagle IPA	Wells and Youngs	3.6	Orange peel and hop aromas. Bitter hop flavour. Long, dry, bitter aftertaste. And no, we can still taste OK. It's just seeing that's becoming more difficult.
Young's Humming bird	Wells and Youngs	4.2	Fruity, aromatic, refreshing. Hint of passion fruit. An exotic ending and a cracking beer.

AN ACCIDENTAL BIRDER CAPTAIN FRAN BIGGIN

I never intended to become a birder, I came to an appreciation of birds literally by accident. Limited in the types of activity I could partake in by a motorbike accident in 2005 I turned to bird watching as a way to get outside and **do** something. I couldn't climb, mountain-bike, canoe or scramble so I watched birds. My first 'real' bird was a tufted duck which I identified using a pair of binoculars given to me by my Great-Uncle and a book I'd bought for £1.99 at a motorway service station. And since then I haven't really got much better. Despite owning more expensive and much lighter binos and a plethora of books I'm still stumped by pretty much every LBJ. And this is where the AOS comes in. Through going out with enthusiastic birders who are willing to share their knowledge I am learning more in a single weekend than I have on my own in ten years. I was particularly thrilled on the AOS AGM weekend in Norfolk this year when I got to see a Stone Curlew – a bird whose existence I wasn't even aware of this time last year, and which I would never have found under my own steam. I have added many new birds to my 'life list' in this way (I didn't even *have* a life list until I joined the AOS) – Jack Snipe, Cetti's Warbler, Snow Bunting - even far more obvious birds such as Cuckoo and Common Gull which had somehow always eluded me until joining the society. I now see birds everywhere and drive my colleagues mad by pointing out Woodpeckers,

Buzzards, Chaffinches, Chiffchaffs, and anything that moves outside our office window! Alas, I don't seem to be able to persuade any of them to take up birding more permanently. Anyway, what I am trying to say in a round-about way is that I am very lucky to have found a society full of such generous people who are willing to tolerate my incorrect identifications, and allow me to look down the scope at a bird I would have no hope of seeing, let alone identifying, on my own. Now, if only you could find me a Bittern.

Secretary's note: Fran's first trip with the AOS was last year when, not knowing any of us she met up with a few members on the East Bank at Cley and immediately shown a Snow Bunting then spent the rest of the weekend sharing a rather cold Yurt with us. Very brave, and Fran is a welcome and keen addition to the society.

**WHY I WAS LATE FOR THE AGM
LINES FROM THE NAUGHTY CORNER
ANDREW BRAY**

I was late for the AGM. As a committee member this is inexcusable. In my defence.....

I have recently assisted on three nature tours to Corsica, Extremadura and the Pyrenees. The reason is that the trips had more than one minibus load and therefore required an extra driver. Customers are met at the airports and are quite easy to identify as they are dressed in walking boots etc. just like anyone birding for the day (they also use company baggage tags!). The last was a Ryanair flight from Lourdes after a visit to Gedre in the Pyrenees. The Pyrenees is a walking holiday covering the botany, birds and butterflies. The scenery is stunning with huge 'Circs' of steep cliffs and snow. The vehicle did not even use half a tank of fuel as each day was close to our hotel. I was able to add Alpine Accentor and Snowfinch as well as another brief sight of Citril Finch. The main bird was Lammergeier which was seen most days. The alpine meadows were a feast of plants as birds were often heard and not seen which is not that good for customers (fortunately most were majoring in botany). Was this a holiday? Well, I will not convince you that it was not but to some extent it is like being in the forces on exercise, though a posh one. You are responsible for a body of people (who are on holiday) ensuring that the administration and logistics flow seamlessly without faults. Of course it does (what else would you expect?) however you have no say on the type of customer who attends these activities! The good thing is that customers go to bed early as they are tired which allows the guides to have a couple of beers discussing the day and next day (not a loggie exercise then). So far I have racked up 161 species on these trips with quite a few lifers. Why was I late? The flight landed at Stansted on the Saturday morning and I arrived in time for lunch.

I will not be late again. Sorry.

**REMINDER
BIRDFAIR AOS MEET**

Historically the AOS meet on the Friday of the Birdfair (this year 15 August) prior to a weekend's ringing in Catterick. Bizarrely we tend to bump into each in one of the marquees rather quickly but all meet for lunch in the Food court. Usual suspects are guaranteed and hopefully we will see some more of you there.

AND FINALLY.....

Thanks for your support in making the society what it is. We cater for all levels of experience and are keen to see additional faces on the field trips. Further additions to the members list on Facebook and the website would be great and contributions whether it be sightings or photos would add to the success of both sites.

Have an excellent birding year and I look forward to seeing some of you at future events.

MEMBERS GALLERY



Hooded Wheatear, Cape Greko © Mark Easterbrook



Note the design flaw. Cyprus.



Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Lesvos © Debbie Bowles



Little Crake, Jumbo Drain © Mark Easterbrook



Cyprus Bee Orchid © Richard Seargent



Little-ringed Plover © Kev Campbell