

Army Ornithological Society

NEWSLETTER
JANUARY 2009



The Adjutant

This mailing includes the new look Adjutant. It was due to be sent out in time for Christmas but work got in the way. This year I have left some articles out which will most likely go into next year's publication. Articles are required by the end of October 2009 and photos are always welcome. As a handy hint please resize your photos so that they are manageable. I welcome your opinions on how to improve the magazine.

AGM

The 2009 AGM will be held at Fremington Camp near Barnstable. It will be held over the weekend 24-26 Apr 09. The cost is about £15 per head but should not exceed £20 per head. The camp is situated on the estuary and the back gate leads out onto one of our walks. The other walk will be around Braunton Burrows, now only a 15 minute



Dipper © John Stentiford

drive away thanks to the new bridge at Barnstable. Our guest speaker is John Hughes who will sum up 25 years of AOS activities on Ascension Island in a short presentation. Please return the enclosed attendance form by 30 Mar 09.



Spotted Flycatcher © John Stentiford

Forecast of Events

The forecast of events is attached. You will note our old favourites plus some new events. You will notice the gap for the organiser of the Scottish trip. If anyone would like to take this on please let either Richard Sargent or the Secretary know. In 2008 we nearly occupied every bed at Portland Obs so please let Hilary Nash know if you are attending soonest.

Web Site

Roger Dickey has done a wonderful job in setting up the web-site. Andy Harrison will be proposed as the new web-site manager at the next AGM. It can only be successful if you use it. I thoroughly recommend that you register as new user if you have not done so. To do this please go to the Message Board page, click register and follow the instructions. There is a time delay so that we can check you are an AOS member, which stops unwanted guests getting onto this area.

Polo Shirts

There was a good initial wave of interest. If you missed including it on Santa's list then cheer yourself up at the start of the New Year by ordering it now. The order form is enclosed.

MOD BIRD COUNT

The MOD Bird Count will continue in its new form in 2009. Defence Estates (DE) have agreed a way forward with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) on the sharing of survey data. A draft contract is on the point of agreement and both DE and BTO see the clear advantages of working to a common database for birds. We are looking forward to a joint announcement.

The arrangement is for the MOD observers to enter their data using BTO BirdTrack. DE will get GIS extract of all data on agreed MOD sites which will then be used to provide reports. If you are not using BirdTrack, reports should be sent direct to DE; details of which will be on a simple form. Bird counters will be able to make as many or as few entries as they wish over the breeding period, ensuring that all habitats are covered.

BirdTrack (www.bto.org/birdtrack/index.htm) is an exciting project that looks at migration movements and distributions of birds throughout Britain and Ireland. BirdTrack provides facilities for observers to store and manage their own records and for forwarding records to their County Bird Recorders. The results will contribute to knowledge of birds and to their conservation at national, regional and MOD estate scales.

You are therefore encouraged to become involved with you local MOD conservation group and join in by carrying out a survey of a training area or range. If you live by a remote piece of MOD owned land then that also requires a survey. These small tracts often do not have anyone involved in conservation and so any assistance is always welcomed.

Surveys are carried out on an individual grid square basis over the breeding season. It requires a survey during the period Apr – Jun and on the form record the maximum numbers of birds seen. You can visit the grid square as many times as you like but it must be over the set months.

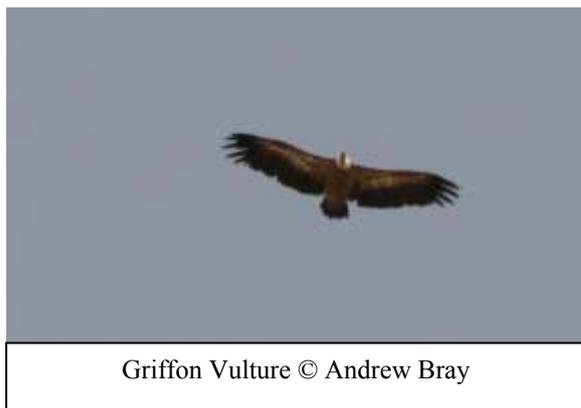
WEB SITE ARTICLES

The following selected articles have appeared on the web site this year.

Birding by SUSAT by Chris Dickey. Currently based in Musa Qaleh, North Helmand (*he has now moved even further north – Hon Sec*). Being part of the FST working with the infantry, the only birding that I can do is whilst on patrol, identifying birds using the SUSAT of my Minimi (*belt fed machine gun – Hon Sec*). However crude this form of extreme birding is, I have managed to identify:

Blue-Cheeked Bee-Eater; Crested Lark; Tree Sparrow; House Sparrow; Kestrel; Magpie; Saker Falcon; Raven; Pied Mynah; Common Mynah; Swallow; Hoopoe - whilst in a 10hr fire fight; Laughing Dove; Goliath Heron.

Northern Spain by Andrew Bray. After watching England beat Andorra in Barcelona the decision was whether to go to Zagreb or stay in Spain for some birding. Of course no-one could watch the football in Spain so I was not alone in missing the match by spending, what would have been travelling time in Croatia, in pursuit of birds in Northern Spain. I stayed at the Boletas Birdwatching centre near Huesca and was well looked after (maybe there is an AOS weekend opportunity). Anyway it was the wrong time to see birds however, being a tourist was not objectionable. I started my exploration in the steppes with Woodchat Shrike followed closely by both types of



local Sandgrouse; Calendra, Thekla and Crested Lark; Montague and Marsh Harriers and topped it off with a Short toe Eagle. I dipped on Little Bustard, my target bird, but it was getting late and I still had a long way to go for dinner and some very refreshing red wine. The next 2 days were spent in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Besides Spotless Starlings, Griffon Vultures and Be-eaters in abundance the highlights included Black Wheatear,

Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Sparrow and Crag Martin. My main target was Lammergeier and it put in an appearance both days but not in the locations where it was a certainty. The big surprise was Golden Oriole flying around a canyon at the end of the second day. My last day was spent in the Hecho Valley. Walking high up on alpine meadows was a pure delight even though the birds were hiding in dense bushes. For butterfly listers it would have been a different matter. Anyway I was on a high as I had found my main target earlier that day as it flew across the gorge over my head and landed on a sheer cliff in full view. For the next few minutes I had great views of the elusive Wallcreeper. My final list was over 70 species which was not bad for a tourist taking in castles and rock formations. I thought I was crazy spending all day in the heat looking for birds but then again I watched some of the climbers on Los Mallos Riglos; they were just insane!

Thursley Common by Richard Seargent. Thursley Common is a national nature reserve managed by Natural England which has received excellent press recently due to the re-established colony of **Silver-studded Blue Butterfly** which was thought to have been destroyed following the fire of 2005 (see Daily Telegraph of 14th July

2008). It is the biggest stretch of Heathland in Surrey and probably the best place in the UK to see **Hobby** at close quarters.

The 13th July 2008 saw four members of the AOS arrive at the Moat Car Park with hopes of seeing one or two of the Heathland avifauna. They were not to be disappointed with only Tree Pipit and Nightjar missing from the final list. Richard Seargent, the local, appeared groggy with one hell of a hangover following the previous evening's summer ball, Roger and Chris Dickey had travelled from the South West and the recently civilianised Andy Harrison had driven down from St Albans.

On emerging from the tree line the group were heralded with the song of **Dartford Warbler**. Despite a lengthy search none were seen but family parties of **Whitethroat** and **Stonechat** entertained at the beginning of the board walk. Within minutes we were given superb views of **Hobby** hawking low over the heath feeding on dragonflies. **Hobby** continued to show well throughout the visit and most, if not all, of us had our best views ever of this enigmatic falcon. As we watched from our excellent vantage point a pair of **Crossbill** flew high overhead making their characteristic contact call.

On the return leg of the walk Chris found a **woodpecker** hole with breeding **Redstart** and, as we watched, a pair of **Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers** were found feeding low on silver birch saplings. Again all of us had cracking views of this species and at one point the smaller of our native **woodpecker** trio was joined by both **Green** and **Great-spotted Woodpeckers** in the same field of view. Meanwhile in the background **Wood Lark** fed on the ground. As a finale we finally had excellent views of **Dartford Warbler** feeding and possibly bringing food to young.

Three hours later we arrived back at the Moat Car Park and drove quickly to Frensham Great Pond for a well earned Bacon Sandwich. A short walk around the edge of Frensham Great Pond produced little extra although we did have good views of feeding **Common Tern**.

Ex SHARP POINT. (This is an article by Richard Seargent half way through a unit exercise to Kenya). Kenya has been a revelation. I came here last year on the recce and clocked up 100+ lifers and I now find myself in a country rich in avifauna where, despite the large numbers seen last year, I still get to see new birds. This missive is to summarize what I have seen since arriving over three weeks ago. I find something new most days and have recorded over 60 species within Nanyuki Showground Camp (NSG) itself.

Ostrich is an iconic African bird and I see one or two on most visits to Sweetwaters. It appears that males are currently holding territory as the same bird is in the same area on each visit. It is still weird to see this bird and I still get a buzz when one wanders into view.

Hérons and their allies are well represented in this neck of the woods. **Hadada Ibis** are everywhere and most journeys produce **Black-Headed Heron** and **Cattle Egret**. A trip to Nairobi inevitably produces **Sacred Ibis** and Maribou Stork. **Grey-crowned Cranes** are common at Sweetwaters and during the last visit I found a flock of some

50 birds. As stated earlier in the exercise, this species is now on my 'garden list'.

Raptors have been less in evidence this visit, that said, the ones I have seen have been amazing, with **Augur Buzzard** daily, **Great Sparrowhawk** and **African Goshawk** around NSG and **Tawny Eagle**, **Long Crested Eagle**, **Brown Snake Eagle** and **Martial Eagle** in the environs of Nanyuki. An unidentified **falcon**, possibly **Lanner**, was seen on the A2 to Nyeri yesterday,

Waders have again proved interesting with **Blacksmith**, **Crowned** and **Senegal Plovers** all at Liakipia Airfield and a single **Three-banded Plover**, a welcome tick, at Sweetwaters.

Passerines have provided the bulk of my lifers and the following list provides a snapshot of what can be seen easily around Nanyuki, the majority in NSG itself. **Yellow-rumped Seedeater**, **Quail Finch**, **Singing Cisticola**, **Chin-Spot** and **Black-headed Batis**, **African Citril**, **Scarlet-chested Sunbird**, **Nothern Combec**, **Blue-headed Bluebill**, **Purple Grenadier**, **Black Saw Wing** and **Pin-tailed Whydah** have all been seen within minutes of my accommodation. **Superb Starlings** are as common as **Starlings** in the UK but much more colourful and provide the backdrop of sound in the late afternoon. **Cape Robin Chats** are extremely common around the dining area and a **Common Indigobird**, a stunning species, fed around my feet yesterday as I drank a welcome chocolate milkshake at the Cape Chestnut Café.

Woodpeckers and their allies have made the odd appearance. **Cardinal Woodpecker**, African's equivalent to **Lesser Spotted**, is common whilst the widespread but uncommon **Bearded Woodpecker** is often seen at Sweetwaters. **Rufous-necked Wryneck** is currently nesting just outside the side gate at NSG and **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird** and **Black-throated Barbet** have been welcome distractions.

PUBLICATIONS

World Birdwatch. This publication is produced by Birdlife International. If you would like an article please contact the Secretary who will forward a copy. Current articles of interest are:

- **Building Partnerships**. Conservation challenges at IBAs are often too complex and dynamic for BirdLife Partners to address alone. A new BirdLife report looks at the many different alliances which have enabled BirdLife Partners around the world to achieve their goals.
- **IBAs in Timor-Leste**. More than 20% of Timor-Leste remains forested, providing habitats for a whole suite of endemic birds. BirdLife's new IBA directory for Timor-Leste identifies 16 key sites, and 3 have already been included in the island's first national park.
- **Times they are a changing**. The RSPB's Grahame Madge reports on the worrying vision revealed in January's publication of a Climatic Atlas of European Breeding Birds.
- **Forcing the issue**. Launched in 2006, the Albatross Task Force has already made great inroads into bridging the gap between conservationist and fisheries in an effort to stop seabird bycatch.

- Remnants of Paradise. BirdLife's newly published Important Bird Areas in the Caribbean identifies sites which could secure the future of the region's endemic and threatened birds. But 43% of IBAs are wholly outside the formal protected areas system.

Sandgrouse. This is produced by the ornithological Society of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia. Articles of interest include:

- Birds of the Badia region in Jordan.
- Bird Sites of the OSME Region 5 – Birdwatching in the Meriç delta in NW Turkey.
- Turkey Bird Report 2002 -06.
- A Checklist of the Birds of Syria.

London Bird Report 2005. This covers an area within 20 miles of St Paul's Cathedral. It therefore covers parts of the counties bordering Greater London (includes Middlesex) from Hertford to Redhill and Staines to Brentwood.

Book Review



A Life of Ospreys by Roy Dennis.

Roy Dennis writes from great knowledge as he was the first Osprey Warden at Loch Garten. The book is mostly his history of the success of the project to expand the Osprey population. Once you get past the opening biological details the book is very interesting. It contains everything you wanted to know about Ospreys. What makes it readable is the use of individual birds to illustrate the points to be made. He covers the history, threats and conservation of the UK's ospreys and finishes with a look at those he has seen abroad especially as our population is closely linked to those of mainland Europe. The bulk of the book is about the successful programme in UK and is a must for anyone with even a passing interest. To think that the UK went from a single known pair in the 1950s to nearly 200 pairs today is much to do with Roy's work as

anything else. The book is in softback and is available at Whittles Publishing www.whittlespublishing.com at a cost of £18.99.

POLO SHIRT ORDER FORM

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	Ladies Shirt	Lilac, Royal, White, Red, Navy, Sky

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MEN	Small	Medium	Large	XL	XXL				
Chest Size	34-36	38-40	42-44	46-48	50-52	56-58			
LADIES	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24
Chest Size	30	32	34	36	38	40	42	44	46

Cost:

	Cost	P&P per item	Total
Polo Shirt	£11.69	£1.98	£13.67
Ladies Shirt	£12.86	£1.98	£14.84

Order:

Shirt Type	Size	Colour	Qty	Cost
Total Remittance				

Cheques payable to Army Ornithological Society

Send order form and cheque to:

Maj A J Bray, JAMES Programme, Battlesbury Bks, Warminster, BA12 9DT.

AGM 2009
ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES AND AGENDA POINTS

From:
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To: Maj A J Bray JAMES Project Battlesbury Bks WARMINSTER Wilts BA12 9DT

AGM ATTENDANCE

I will / will not* be attending the AGM at Fremington, 24-26 Apr 09.

I will be accompanied by

ACCOMMODATION

I will require the following meals:

- a. All meals (Fri supper (1800 - 1900hrs) – Sun lunch).*
- b. I shall be late arriving on Fri 24 Apr and first meal will be breakfast Sat 25 .*

I have the following special dietary requirements:

.....

AGENDA POINTS

I wish the AGM to discuss the following:

.....
.....
.....

Date:.....

Signed:.....

* Delete as appropriate.

This form should reach the Secretary by Mon 30 Mar 09.
Alternatively ring the Secretary before this date on:
01380 739211 (Home)
01980 223682 (Work)