

Army Ornithological Society

NEWSLETTER
JUNE 2009



AGM

The AGM was held at Fremington Camp. Fortunately the rain expected over the weekend turned into one small shower whilst we were on the dunes of Braunton Burrows. The species count was not excessive however there were good views of some of the less common birds especially the Whimbrel on the River Taw. The highlight was the walk along the Heddon Valley on Sunday morning which included Peregrine Falcon and Black Redstart as well as numerous Dippers. On the Saturday evening John Hughes gave an excellent presentation on the work the Society has carried out on Ascension Island. At the end he was presented with a Sooty Tern wood carving to thank him for his efforts over the last 19 years.



The minutes of the AGM are included with this newsletter. You will note that changes are underway. The Chairman has decided to step down and the Secretary has pressing work commitments over the next 2 years before his retirement which will take him out of the country for some prolonged periods of time. As the minutes of the AGM are delayed in being sent out please note that the Chairman will accept nominations for his replacement that are late, but not that late!



Black-headed Gull

Forecast of Events

The forecast of events is attached. It has been updated and Tim Hallchurch has added a week in Hungary for 2010. He has put Kazakhstan on hold until the value of the pound goes up and the economic situation makes it more cost effective. There are also plans for Oman in the future.

Also please note that the start of the year birding trip is on Sunday 3 Jan 2010 rather than its traditional Saturday.

AOS trip to Hungary 2010

The trip will use the services of Roy Adams who lives in Hungary. The dates are still to be decided, but are likely to be in May probably 1 – 8th, to get back for the AGM at Catterick.

It will be for one week only, to keep down the costs but there is a possibility of an extension if there is a demand. Being based at one hotel cuts down travelling and it will be possible for those who do not wish to bird every day, to relax in the hotel or travel independently.

The budgetary cost of the tour is £890 per person based on 2009 prices. However the organiser has said that he will keep these prices for us for 2010. However he required a 10% deposit before September. I appreciate that this is probably not possible but as long as there looks as there are enough takers, I will pay him something in advance. There is a £60.00 excess charge for single travellers. I will negotiate a discount if there are sufficient numbers who wish to go.

This includes:

- A seven day Holiday with Return Flights with British Airways from London Heathrow to Budapest. Collection and return from Budapest airport to the hotel.
- Half board at the 3 star hotel Villa Volgy in Eger.
- Daily Trips to a variety of outstanding bird watching sites.

The following varied excellent bird-watching sites are within one hour of the hotel.

Hortobagy. This is one of Europe's greatest locations with Egrets, Herons and wetland birds apparently everywhere and easily viewable. It will require a guide from the National Park to view Great Bustard and Aquatic Warbler.



Lake Tisza.

Excellent for Marsh Terns, Pygmy Cormorant and a variety of Herons and Egrets. The scrub at the side of the lake contains Red Backed Shrike (very common). River Warbler etc.

Bukk Hills. These border the hotel and consist of large areas of broadleaf woodland, vineyards and several lakes. Collared Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and Hawfinch are abundant. Scops Owl breed in the town park Eger and are easily seen (nest boxes are

used). Areas of old Beech forest have Red Breasted Flycatcher, White Backed Woodpecker and Ural Owl. Lesser Spotted, Middle Spotted, Syrian, Grey Headed and Black Woodpeckers are all common and widely distributed in the forest.

Bodrogzug and Tisza Floodplains. Excellent for Corncrake, Little Crake, Black Kite, Black Stork, Icterine Warbler and Saker Falcon. Immature White Tailed Sea Eagle and Osprey are common on passage.

Fishpond systems are also excellent places to visit; for a whole variety of Eastern European species.

Hotel.

The Hotel Villa Volgy is situated in the Szepasszonyvolgy (Valley of Beautiful Women) which is famous for its wine cellars. This neighbourhood of the hotel is very quiet, so it can be a perfect place for relaxing. The popular wine cellars and restaurants can be approached with an easy walk.

In 2006 the hotel's new 4-star wing was opened, where air-conditioned rooms, conference room and wellness facilities await guests. The 100-year-old main building was renovated in 2009, the new wing houses modern, high quality, 4-star rooms and a unique restaurant, the wellness section was extended. The 2 restaurants of the hotel offer Hungarian specialities and wellness meals. In the larger restaurant – built in 2005 – max. 200 persons can be seated in pleasant, comfortable, air-conditioned environment. The smaller room is suitable for max. 60 persons. Grill parties on the terrace and wine tastings (with award winning wines of the region's most famous winemakers) in the hotel's own wine cellar are very popular among the guests. Closed parking place is available free of charge. The imposing buildings of the hotel are surrounded by a beautiful park where you can find trees offering cool shade, a small rock garden and blooming plants. Those who like romance will surely be amazed by the 100-year old chapel, where weddings can be held.

Rooms. The 3-star rooms are comfortable and equipped with bathroom (all of them have a shower with shower curtain), telephone, Internet access (upon charge), fridge and television. There are new 4-star rooms that are a larger size, wooden floor, bathroom, air-conditioning, safe, Wifi Internet connection (free of charge), hairdryer and minibar. Rooms with terrace, non-smoking rooms and rooms for the disabled are also available. I will enquire the price of the 4 star rooms but in May I don't see a need for air conditioning.

Spa facilities. The hotel's wellness department was opened in 2006, it is situated in the new 4-star wing (it can be approached from other buildings through the garden, inside corridor is not available). A 10-meter long inside pool, Jacuzzi, steam-, aroma-, ice-cabin, Finnish sauna, infra sauna, massage shower and a fitness room offer ideal facilities for guests who would like to refresh themselves, do a little workout or just relax. On the sun-terrace you can spend pleasant hours sunbathing. Solarium and massage are available on request.

If you are interested please call or email Tim Hallchurch as soon as possible so that he can plan further; timothy@hallchurch.com, phone number 01865 377099.

Web Site

Andrew Harrison has taken over the web site and will be assisted by Tony Giles. If you have not yet logged on to the correspondence pages please do. They have various ideas for the site. If you have any ideas please contact them through the site.

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.

MOD BIRD COUNT

You will note that in the minutes that Defence Estates (DE) has signed a contract with the British trust for Ornithology. In essence DE wants you to record all your sightings on the MoD estate on the BTO's Birtrack site. They will then get all the data electronically. If you are not on the net then your paper records should be sent to the representative of your local conservation group. If you are not sure who to send the record to, please contact Roger Dickey.

WEB SITE ARTICLES

The following selected articles have appeared on the web site this year. Both Chris Dickey and Lynne Gibson are back from Afghanistan.

Recent Events. The annual extreme AOS trip was to Scotland this year when after an 11 hour trip north we started birding at 0345 hrs. B-n and R-n Divers, Slab Grebes, Crested Tits, Ospreys, Capercaillie, Red Grouse and more, made up for the poor weather. Even that encouraged a Snow Bunting to join us in a blizzard on Cairngorm but a snow whiteout prevented views of Ptarmigan. This was Tony Kaduk's last trip with AOS for a while as he returns to Canada soon. Happy Birding Tony, thanks for your company, and we await our invitation in a year's time to Canada during migration! John Hughes' evening Quail Survey did not reach last year's exceptional totals but gave us the best views possible of a complete Whinchat family, with inevitable Stone Curlew calling in the background. For those not birdwatching at the Cotleigh Brewery stand at Earls Court on Wed 5



Snow Bunting

Aug, the next event is Thursley Common in August followed by the September Portland weekend in the company of the RNBWS.

Birding Through SUSAT. (Chris Dickey) Life in the Musa Qaleh AO has changed drastically with the temperature increasing every day but with the abundance of water from the winter thaw in the north, both wheat and poppy are already knee high. Swallows are very much present and the locals have taken to putting up nets although I'm not convinced they're into ringing?!

Under the late taliban rule, it was forbidden to keep caged birds, which I'm sure some of you would be favourable towards. However, because of this, I think that the ring-necked parakeets in the Hasi Rashid Gardens are escapees rather than native colonials.

With spring in the air, Kestrel and Saker Falcon are more obvious in their hunting and can be seen most days.

The bird that I could not PID due to not having my spotters guide can now be known as I have patrolled back to the DC for the sole purpose of collecting the book (dedication). Dad, you were right, it was an Eversmann's Redstart, of which there are plenty around the trees lining the wadi.

Owls are also present in the AO as I found out on the night ambushes of last week. Unfortunately my thermal imager which located the birds, could not give any definition. The MOD will have to update their TI's to give me a better chance!

Pashto First Twitterings. (Lynne Gibson) Am out here at the moment but it is very difficult for me to get on email. Rather like Chris (I think) it can be rather intermittent. Am usually based at FOB Delhi but am currently down on the PB line for a while. Maybe you wouldn't mind posting something up on the site for me - I am not quite sure what I am doing entirely with this site. Pls don't feel obligated at all though.

My descriptions will quite honestly be much WORSE than Chris's. I am enthusiastic but hopeless at identification. However, so far, I KNOW that I have seen some black winged stilts, a couple of coots, 3 mynahs and an unknown duck type thing - all around the pond in Kandahar (Rich will know the pond I mean).

Also, have seen tree sparrows, crested larks (loads) and some buzzards who were flying over Bastion when I was there. There were also some birds (too far away to identify) which were in a group of 5 or 6 which were flying around like starlings - all flying in a bunch and wheeling around quite close to the ground.

At Delhi, there are now loads of swallows and also a flycatcher (not sure what type) which seems always to be on the wall near my accom. There are also some birds which I can hear but I haven't seen yet. They seem to call early in the morning and have a rasping call. They seem to call to each other, as one calls and then another seems to answer from another place. Sorry - that's a bit hopeless but all I can say about them.

Nothing new seen at the PB or on patrol yet - although did see a fresh water crab

yesterday! Plenty of crested larks and sparrows here. To be honest, on patrol I am just trying to get round - I am definitely NOT an infantry type - so perhaps am not noticing the bird life as much as I could be!

Anyway, that's it for now. Thanks for thinking of me!

March in Orlando. (Andrew Bray) It was so cold that in the morning I had to clear the frost from the windscreen - well done the MOD 90! My latest excursion to the warmth of Florida produced an annoying cold snap for 3 days which by the weekend was over. My visit to Sea World was therefore in more normal temperatures - very warm. I also discovered on this trip that I am a hero - it says so on my Sea World ticket. Handy hint - on production of ID card you get in free and can then enjoy the Kracken plus the excellent shows. Around the exhibitions there are quite a few gulls looking for a bit of fish or discarded french fries!

Daylight hours are short at this time of year and most of them were spent in a windowless office though I did manage to get a few minutes in the morning or evening around the hotel. I also had a day at Merritt Island. The main event on the Island was the Black Point Wildlife Drive. This is a 7 mile auto tour through one of the best wildlife viewing areas. In addition to birds the drive produced alligators and an otter. Most of the area is marsh, swamp, water and a few trees. In one of the trees a Bald Eagle has a nest. We could see the parent but we were led to believe that there was a chick as well. The nest is enormous and we were fortunate that the parent was standing on the edge. A highlight of the drive was during a short walk away from the track when an Osprey decided to investigate us (my boss accompanied me for some fresh air) and flew so close over us that you felt you could touch it. The main reason



Northern Harrier

to go on the drive was to see ducks and the lagoons were filled with Blue-winged Teal and Northern Pintail as well as Coot. In one pond there was a huge flock of American Avocet in a small pond we found Roseate Spoonbills then more in a larger pond. The 2 Snow Geese and a Ross's Goose were seen close to the road amongst Wigeon. The air buzzed with Tree Swallows and on one stop I picked up a Northern Harrier hunting. After the Drive we went for a walk on the Scrub Jay Trail which did

not live up to its name. We did find quite a few birds including an Eastern Towhee and a Limpkin. The drive to the beach did however produce Florida Scrub Jays sitting on bushes close to the road. There were more sightings of birds on the beach and some had feathers! The beach is close to the Shuttle launch pads and one is surrounded by cranes as they re-model it ready for the Mars missions. On the drive back from the beach we started seeing Ospreys with fish in their talons. At the Island Visitor Centre there were a pair on man made nest pole. One then took a fish from the water right in front of us. I missed it as I was looking at a Yellow-rumped Warbler at the time!

Unfortunately my plans for birding before and after work did not quite work out. I did see some Armadillos and mosquitoes which joined us during a game of softball (a misnomer if ever there was one) under floodlights. Despite the lack of opportunities my list for the trip was (59 species):

Pied-billed Grebe	Wild Turkey
American White Pelican	Clapper Rail
Brown Pelican	Common Moorhen
Northern Gannet	American Coot
Anhinga	Limpkin
Double Crested Cormorant	Laughing Gull
Snowy Egret	Ring-billed Gull
Tricolored Heron	Royal Tern
Little Blue heron	Mourning Dove
Great Blue Heron	Belted Kingfisher
Great Egret	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Cattle Egret	Downy Woodpecker
Wood Stork	Least Flycatcher
Glossy Ibis	Eastern Kingbird
White Ibis	Florida Scub-jay
Roseate Spoonbill	Tree Swallow
Snow Goose	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Ross's Goose	American Robin
Northern Pintail	Northern Mockingbird
American Wigeon	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Blue-winged Teal	Palm Warbler
Hooded Merganser	Prairie Warbler
Bald Eagle	Black-and-white Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Common Yellowthroat
Black Vulture	Northern Cardinal
Northern Harrier	Eastern Towhee
Osprey	Savannah Sparrow
Red-shouldered Hawk	Common Crackle
Red-tailed Hawk	Boat-tailed Crackle
American Kestrel	

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:

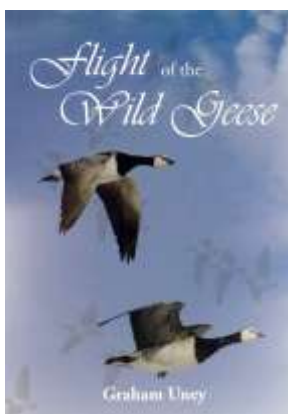
- **State of Play**. An update on the indicators on current changes. The report highlights global warming and the decline of species around the world. On the bright side is the news that conservation works and direct action has saved 16 species. A searchable database is at www.birdlife.org/sowb.

- Taking Care of Business. Details of project that recruited caretakers for priority sites which are critical for the conservation of globally threatened species in the Caucasus.
- The IBA programme goes to sea. Seabird conservation at sea presents some unique challenges. This update provides details of how candidate marine IBAs are selected.
- Forcing the issue. How the UK and Germany assisted in compiling an IBA inventory for central Asia. The result is national networks of IBA caretakers.
- Birds without Borders. An introduction to the Born to Travel campaign that aims to tap the goodwill towards birds and biodiversity at local level on the migratory routes.
- Downhill for montane conservation. The continuing battle between conservation and ski resort developers targeting conservation areas.
- In Xanadu. The development of IBAs in Mongolia.
- Celebrating the CLP. A review of the Conservation Leadership Programme as it approaches its 25th anniversary in 2010.

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

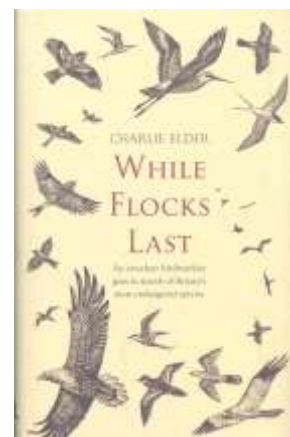
- On the status and distribution of Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* and Common Nightingale *L. megarhynchos* in Armenia.
- The timing of spring passage of soaring birds at Zait bay, Egypt.
- On the distribution and ecology of the Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in Armenia.
- Status of selected migrant species in Kuwait: observations and ringing, spring 1997.

Book Review




Flight of Wild Geese, Graham Uney. The authors' fascination with the comings and going of birds, especially barnacle geese takes him on a voyage from the Solway Firth to Svalbard. The book is mainly about his journey and the wildlife he encounters. An easy read that sets a scene that we may eventually lose with global warming. Graham Uney is a freelance writer, photographer and tour leader. The book is published by Whittles Publishing.

While Flocks Last, Charlie Elder. The author sets out to see the UK red list species in one year. He explains why they are on the list and the efforts made in conservation besides his efforts in tracking them down. It is not an easy task to see them and many of us will recognise events that are all too common and real to us personally. Charlie Elder is a journalist and writes with an easy to read style putting into words what most of us experience. The book is published by Transworld Publishers.



POLO SHIRT ORDER FORM

From:	
Address:	

	Shirt Colours Available	
	Polo Shirt	Black, Bottle Green, Dark Royal, Red, Navy, White, Grey, Light Royal, Light Jade, Burgundy
	Ladies Shirt	Lilac, Royal, White, Red, Navy, Sky

Sizes

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.