

Army Ornithological Society

NEWSLETTER
DECEMBER 2009

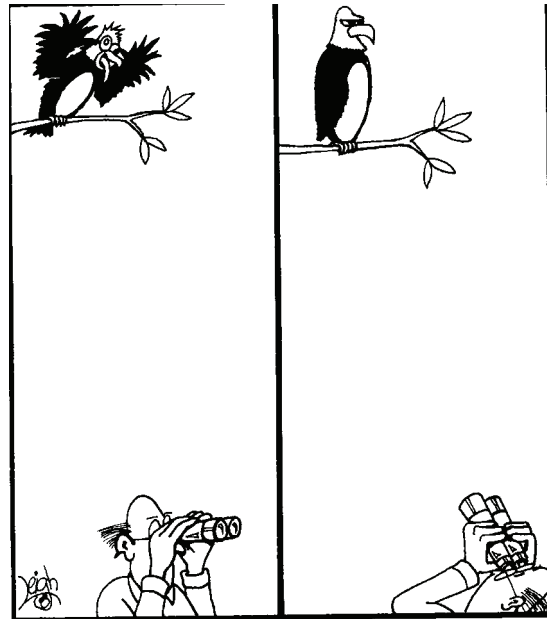


Introduction

This is the last newsletter under the current regime. The Secretary will be handing over to Richard Seargent ready for the AGM. I would like to thank you for your continuing support and on behalf of us all wish Richard all the best. I have been Secretary for 6 years during which time I have organised a number of trips to Ascension, Europe and UK as well as our AGM weekends. Each year it is always nice to see new faces and I hope some of our recently joined members will make the trip to Catterick in May. I first joined the AOS in 1997 and attended the AGM at STANTA the following year. Since then I have been blessed with new friends and a much better knowledge of birds thanks to AOS members.

AGM

The AGM for 2010 will be held at Catterick staying at Wathgill Camp. It will involve a trip around the local training areas on Saturday with Black Grouse lekking. On Sunday we will visit the nature reserve at Foxglove Covert. It will be Tony Crease's last AGM as a uniformed member and will a fitting day to see what the determination of one man can achieve for conservation. Please send your returns to Andrew Bray rather than Richard; Andrew cannot offload secretary that easily.



Committee Vacancy

A vacancy exists for Events Member. The role is to co-ordinate events throughout the year. This includes publishing a Forecast of Events and encouraging members to organise an event, de-conflicting when necessary. The incumbent will provide a liaison with RNBWS and RAFOS to ensure all events are known and publicised. As with many items though we are an Army Society we do operate within a Joint framework.

As a general point the Society is always looking for new volunteers to serve on the Committee. We would like to reach a point where we have one job one member. If you are interested please contact the Hon Sec.

Forecast of Events

The forecast of events is attached. Please note that the start of the year birding trip is on Sunday 3 Jan 2010 rather than its traditional Saturday.

Ascension 2009

The visit to Ascension occurred in October. In total 7 AOS and 2 RAFOS made the trip. The sad news is that the number of breeding Sooty Terns was well down on previous visits. There may be various reasons however it was noticeable that there was a food shortage of sprat that is the main food.

RAFOS trip to Cyprus 2010

RAFOS have been asked to conduct a raptor survey Sep/Oct 2010 on the Cyprus SBA to determine whether birds were being killed by getting caught in the wires of 2 new large aerial arrays. On a visit to Cyprus in May last year they agreed the basis for this survey and the proposal is to conduct a survey for up to 10 weeks next Autumn with a maximum of 10 members on island at any one time. Assuming that most people could commit to 2 weeks this would require 50 people to carry out the survey. This would be too much for RAFOS on its own so a Joint Survey was agreed by the SBA Environmental Office. The basis of the survey is that the SBAA will provide the accommodation and transport while in Cyprus and individuals would fly themselves to Cyprus and pay for their own food. If the SBAA cannot fund our accommodation and transport the survey will not take place.

At present the Environmental Office has a business case being processed through the Command Secretary for the approval of funds and RAFOS expect a decision in Mar 2010. In the meantime they are going ahead with gathering names of interested parties and making some preliminary plans. Anyone interested should contact Dick Yates on 01531 821857 or at richardyates7@btinternet.com. This is an outstanding opportunity for any member who would like to bird on the SBA.

Web Site

Those who regularly use the web site will notice that it has been revamped with more sites. You can even now see the survey areas on Ascension Island by year. The message board has a wealth of information however you will need a log on to write or reply. The key point is that it is your web site. The managers, Andrew Harrison and Tony Giles, want your ideas of what you would like to see. These can be passed direct to them or through the Hon Sec.

MOD Bird Count on Track (Extract of Roger Dickey's article to Conservation Update magazine)

The evolution of the MOD Bird Count from an annual single day's survey in May to a simple yet scientific survey that contributes to the nation monitoring of birds in Britain, is almost complete. We have reached the stage that every site of MOD real estate, whether a large training area, firing range or built-up barracks can

electronically submit bird counts to Defence Estates, via the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) through BirdTrack – an online bird recording scheme. Not only are bird surveyors helping Defence Estates to monitor distribution and densities of wild birds on the estate, vital evidence that helps with management and development decisions, but our data contributes on a national scale in partnership between BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland. And this is no exclusive scheme for the hard-line birder but suits all levels of birdwatcher – just a little ID skill required! But over the last 10 years I've seen almost as many changes to the Bird Count – what's BTO's BirdTrack going to do for us the MOD Bird Count surveyors, and am I ever going to see a return on my hard won bird lists?

BirdTrack is a year round recording scheme that will use the data from our Bird Count records to support species and site conservation at local, national and international scales. As well as being able to record birds on the Defence estate, BirdTrack will be able to show us how that data contributes to the national picture including the mapping, migration and movement of birds across the country. Better still, once registered, BirdTrack will hold all our data whether submitted as individual sightings or as comprehensive lists, and we will be able to add data as frequently as suits the individual or Conservation Group feels necessary to build up site records. But here's the difference from our steam driven efforts of the past – every night BirdTrack computers look at all the records submitted that day and produce up-to-date maps and graphs showing the latest in migration, movement and distribution, locally and across the country. For the MOD, BTO will extract all bird data obtained from MOD land and provide specific reports on bird densities and distribution as back-up to your own lists of data.

The partnership with BTO and the use of BirdTrack really is a massive step forward. However, as always, it is totally reliant on the volunteer who goes out onto the training area or walks around the barracks and carefully records the birdlife on our estate. As a Conservation Group or as an individual 'MOD Bird Counter' please encourage as many people as possible to support the project by putting their bird records on BirdTrack.

For more information please contact Claire Backman at DE EST, your local Conservation Group or any of the Service bird watching societies.

WEB SITE ARTICLES

Our reporter is back in Helmand and updates the site with weekly reports. A recent extract is shown below.

This week was dominated by Larks (Crested and Oriental Skylark) and Red-breasted Flycatchers which appear to be having a late migration surge. A possible Syke's Wagtail, if it had been positively IDd, would have been a lifer but the bird sadly flew before I could get to grips with it. One Bluethroat was found around the country late on Tuesday and was the last for the week.

Masked Wagtails continue to fly south, although they are a resident species. My first foray out this week to FOB Silab was extremely successful, birding wise, with Great-white Egret, White-throated Kingfisher, both on the canal and several Blue-cheeked Bee-Eater overhead. The return journey included Kestrel hunting low over the desert,

Hoopoe Lark, and two large flocks of Crowned Sandgrouse just south of Bastion. This species is seen almost daily flying from the Helmand River.

Finally, Tree Sparrows, Mourning Dove, and Crested Lark remain omnipresent around camp.

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:

- **A cartography of hope**. Bird life International are about to publish the Important Bird Areas Americas. This book contains the most comprehensive inventory of key sites for biodiversity. The article explains what the book set out to achieve and how it provides hope for the future.
- **Wings over Wetlands**. An update on the WOW programme that aims to conserve the 200 plus waterbirds that use the African-Eurasian flyway.
- **Adapting to change**. The article tries to unravel the science and policy behind the adaptation, biodiversity and people to the effects of climate change.

Sandgrouse. This is produced by the ornithological Society of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia. Articles of interest (Vol 31(2) 2009) include:

- Western flyway of the Siberian crane *Grus leucogeranus*: further releases of captive-reared birds in Iran.
- The Ras Baalbek semi-desert; Lebanon's arid land area and its birds.
- Ornithological surveys in Bamiyan province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The Ring. Original papers published by the Polish Zoological society. An international journal dealing with the problems of bird ringing, migration and monitoring bird numbers.

London Bird Report 2006. Published by the London Natural History Society. Covers an area with a radius of 20 miles from St Paul's cathedral.

Sea Swallow Vol 58 (2009). The RNBWS magazine has articles on Seabird diversity in Brazil and the expedition to Diego Garcia in 2007.

Notices

An art dealer is advertising Tunnicliffe wood engravings, available from:

Larkhall Fine Art Ltd
10 Margaret's Buildings
Bath BA1 5NJ
Tel 01225 444480
www.larkhall.com (look under exhibitions).