

Army Ornithological Society

NEWSLETTER
JUNE 2010



NEWS

Introduction

The more astute will notice that the style is similar to that last produced. This is because the Secretary is still clinging to the post by his fingertips despite the blows. You will be able to read the explanation in the minutes of the AGM. It is temporary arrangement.

AGM

The AGM was held at Catterick staying at Wathgill Camp. It was an excellent weekend even if I say so myself. It started with a social on Friday evening and it must have been the air as we were all in bed by 1030pm. Alternatively it may have had something to do with the 6am start out to the Black grouse lek. There we saw up to 10 males displaying. This was followed by a hearty breakfast in camp before we split up into 2 groups. Both groups met up at lunchtime on a sunny and windswept viewpoint to eat lunch and swap stories with the highland cattle. One trip was to wood to see Pied Flycatcher and Redstart followed by a trip to an



ancient hill fort for a Buzzard's nest. The other trip was a drive to sights on the driver training area, the fish ponds and a trip across the moors to see Red Grouse, Lapwings and their chicks. Both groups saw all the target birds. There was a surprise for one group was a pair of nesting Teal on the moor. In the evening after the AGM we were given an excellent talk by Dr David Baines on the Black Grouse project. David explained what had happened in the past, the successes and limitations and that we are still reliant on Mother Nature as the recent wet summers and snowy winters had proved. This was followed by a superb dinner with good food and wine. On Sunday we visited the nature reserve at Foxglove Covert. It was a constant effort ringing day which produced a wide range of species for us to see at close range. Our thanks to Tony Crease for the activities organised. The reserve has grown since our last visit

and is about to get even bigger with more resources. There was much to see and a party was given a conducted tour by Sophie Benaiges.

[Saturday bird list]



Committee

Roger Dickey has taken over as Chairman of the Society. Roger is currently serving as the SO1 Command Plans at HQ Land Forces. He joined the Army in [I need a CV].

President's Medal

The Criteria for the award of the President's Medal has been approved.

1. Intention: The President's Medal recognises an individual member's outstanding contribution to the furtherance of the core objectives of the Army Ornithological Society.
2. Selection: The President's Medal will be awarded solely by the President of the Army Ornithological Society. The President may ask for recommendations from the Chairman and seek advice from other members. The decision of the President is final.
3. Number of Awards: The award of the President's medal will be exceptional and so there can be no expectation of an annual selection. However, there is no limit to the number of awards which the President may make in any one year but more than one would be abnormal.
4. Eligibility: With the exception of previous recipients, all current members of the Army Ornithological Society are eligible for the President's Medal.
5. Presentation: The presentation of the award will only be made at the Society's Annual General Meeting.
6. Accoutrements: The President's Medal will take the form of a bronze medal in a presentation box. It will be accompanied by a signed and framed citation. If not already a Life Member, the President's medal will be accompanied by the grant of Life membership of the Society.
7. Record: Each award of the president's Medal will be recorded as an 'Afternote' to the Minutes of the Annual general Meeting and a list published in each copy of The Adjutant (or its successor publication).
8. History: the President's medal was initiated by Field Marshal Sir John Chapple GCB,CBE DL, president, and Brigadier Rodney Walker CBE, Chairman, in 2010.

Forecast of Events

The forecast of events is attached.

Portland 10 – 12 Sep 10. Please contact Hilary Nash by 3 Jul 10.

RAFOS trip to Cyprus 2010

RAFOS have been asked to conduct a raptor survey 16 Sep to 10 Nov 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 this 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 SBA will provide the accommodation and transport while in Cyprus and individuals would fly themselves to Cyprus and pay for their own food. We are looking for volunteers to assist for any length of period. Over a 2 week period it is likely to cost £450 for flights, food and other expenses. Though the birding is primarily a raptor watch, the survey will also cover the 3 main wetland areas in the vicinity.

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 ARTICLES

Reporters have swapped over in Helmand last April. There is a site on the web where updates are posted. Some recent extracts include:

Migration has arrived (Richard Seargent)

This has been a cracking couple of weeks with a visible migration and a couple of surprises. Below is a day to day account, some of it extracted from my birding diary, showing the birds of Bastion and the surrounding Helmand countryside. It will hopefully give you a taste of what the middle of Helmand is like at the height of spring migration.

11 Mar

Today a run around the airfield produced both **Turkestan** and **Isabelline Shrikes** perched on razor wire. Large numbers of **Swallows** over flying north and stopping to feed around the margins of the Waste Water Site (WWS). **Crested Larks** singing all over the airfield most perched atop mounds of earth.

16 Mar

I had an excellent run this afternoon which produced a **Saker Falcon** over the eastern part of the airfield, and a lone **Rock Thrush** at the WWS. One **Green Sandpiper**, a singing **Graceful Prinia** and one **Citrine Wagtail** (in full breeding plumage) were all found within the confines of the WWS. The **Saker** was a stunning and an extremely large bird – very rare nowadays due to the Arab falconry trade and a privilege to see, albeit for such a short time and without the use of my under-utilized binoculars. The WWS is now cut off by the recent runway build but I only have access by foot if I clamber over a couple of short fences and ignore the shouts of the contractors.

17 Mar

Yet another run around the airfield (7 miles again) this afternoon with a short break at the WWS to catch my breath and cool off in the breeze. A flock of **Spanish Sparrows** (50+) **Citrine** and **Masked Wagtails**, **Crested Lark**, two **Variable Wheatears** (race *picata*) were all immediately obvious with four **White-tailed Plovers** on the adjacent stony ground and three **Kentish Plovers** flushed as I passed the outflow. A small flock of Larks were possibly **Short-toed** but were mobile and I was unable to confirm.

18 Mar

My final IRG to CP Samsor and FOB Shawquat to show my replacement the ground he will be expected to cover over the next six months. Three **Steppe Buzzards** were seen on the 4 ½ hour journey to Samsor with 20+ **Crowned Sandgrouse** just after departing Bastion. Swallows a plenty in the Green Zone and much evidence of **Pied Bushchat**. Along the route I found several **White-tailed Plover** in flooded fields and a single **Green Sandpiper** at the edges. A lone male **Marsh Harrier** over CP Samsor at midday was a new Afghan tick and not expected. There was evidence of **Common Myna** breeding at the old fort at Shawquat with birds in and out of a large hole in the wall.

19 Mar

Another run in the heat of an Afghan afternoon. Things are looking up with five **White-tailed Plovers** at the WWS. **Crested Larks** are again Omni present and as I



arrived I flushed four **Little-ringed Plovers**. One **Bluethroat** in the reedy margins and several **Masked** and **Citrine Wagtails** were joined by a **Yellow Wagtail** of the race *thunbergi*. Another **Green Sandpiper** again, flushed as I crossed the berm, in between the WWS and the desert.

20 Mar

An early start at 0600hrs was not wasted with an hour's trip to the WWS.

Both **Ringed** (5) and **Little-ringed Plovers** (4) today (the Ringed is a major surprise). I surprised a pair of stunning and confident **Hoopoe** feeding in a ditch as I walked towards the WWS. A roost of 200+ **Spanish Sparrows** left the small reed bed and again **Yellow Wagtails** mixed with **Citrine Wagtails** at the edge of the outflow. The **Yellow Wagtails** were of the races *melanogrisea* and *flava* and it was obvious that there were also two races of **White Wagtail** with both *dukhunensis* and *personata* present.

Swallows overflew north and another wader made an appearance as I flushed a **Wood Sandpiper** from an outflow stream. At the far side of the WWS a pair of **Pied Bushchat** flitted around the vegetation, possibly looking for a suitable breeding area, and three **Tawny Pipits** fed at the edge. **Graceful Prinias** sang with possibly three males holding territory. As I walked back a flock of 30+ **Short-toed Lark** landed and fed in front of me for some time and several Warblers, mainly **Chiffchaff**, but some unidentified, flitted around the reeds. The first **Syke's Warbler** of the year showed

well at the edge of the reeds and a stunning male **Bluethroat** appeared and called as I passed. A **Crested Lark** sang high in the air as I left and this was the first time that I had heard and seen one doing so.

The afternoon run around Bastion 1 and 2 only produced one **Tree Sparrow** and a brief glimpse of a singleton **Crested Lark** and this highlighted the paucity of birds in camp now that it has become more and more urban! However, at the end of the day, it was well worth getting up early and I'll do the same tomorrow. You never know what will be around!

Latest from Bastion (Tony Giles)

I have managed to get down to the WWS most afternoons whilst out running. The black winged stilt is regularly there. No sign of the Hoopoe over the last two weeks though. There's still a lot of work going on and it looks like the new runway is going to go straight over the site as it looks like they are going to tunnel the water through a culvert.

Yesterday I acquired a camera on loan with a 200mm lens and a x2 convertor, so it was up early this morning to see what I could snap. Fridays are a good day to go down as it is their holy day out here (like our Sundays) so a lot of the workers are not around to disrupt the birds. I was greeted by a great egret flying off as I arrived, then good shows of bay backed and long tailed shrikes. There were plenty of warblers around in the reeds and a single citrine wagtail which I have not seen around over the last week.

A number of good photos were taken which I have emailed back to Andy to upload to the gallery so it's worth a regular check to see if the page has been updated. Finding it difficult to ID a few of the birds particularly the warblers and what looks like a species of tit, which I can't find in the guide out here. Any suggestions on ID's would be greatly appreciated. Why not make your way to the gallery and have a stab....



In addition to the Helmand site there has been good traffic on sightings. Enclosed is an article on a pelagic with a difference.

Birding By Barge Along River Stour (Tony Kennelly)

I was given a ticket on the Sailing Barge Victor, as a Christmas present, for last weekend (Saturday 6th February) on the River Stour from Mistley, Essex. This was a RSPB organised trip, with sailings each winter, when the tides allow, so mostly elderly birders, with the odd family and a few experienced birders. The Victor departed at 0830 at a very leisurely pace using the propellers, not by sail, so it was very smooth and calm, and my telescope hardly shook all trip.

Almost immediately, there were a lot of waders visible in good numbers too (Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit,

Grey Plover & mostly Knot). The plentiful Shelduck, Wigeon & Teal were joined by Mallard, Pintail, Gadwall, Tufted Duck & Pochard (the last 3 driven off reservoirs by the icy weather). As we headed east towards Harwich the Dark-bellied Brent Geese appeared (the Stour Estuary holds about 2% of the UK's wintering population), along with Avocet, Turnstone, Lapwing, Golden Plover and all the commonest 5 species of gull. The deeper channels held plenty of Great Crested Grebe, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser with good views from the slow moving barge. This enabled me to pick up the first of 4 Great Northern Divers, they generally disappeared but re-appeared quickly, sometimes nearer for good views and photographable for those with good cameras.

The large flocks of Knot & other waders were often sent up by a passing peregrine, which I managed to see twice; once at a distance plus once close over the barge. We turned just before Parkeston, around the Titan (a platform for positioning the wind turbines at sea). On the return leg we saw 2 Slavonian Grebes, distantly in front of Holbrook School, 5 Common Scoter and a Black-necked Grebe. On the Suffolk fields we saw 6 Brown Hares chasing each other with 4 Buzzards soaring above them. There were several Grey Seals in the estuary happy to watch us watching them. As we approached Mistley Quay another 2 Great Northern Divers were fishing in the channel we had to use, so another good view was had to end the trip. Finally, a Sparrowhawk flew over the quay as we landed. I recorded 48 species including feral pigeon and 2 Black Swans. However there were no Grey Herons but I saw 2 Little Egrets instead.

I would recommend this trip to you all for the good views of the mergansers & divers, however there numbers were probably boosted by the very cold weather here and in Europe. For those on a weekend bird watching in East Anglia, there are plenty of reserves, reservoirs and other sites in the vicinity for an afternoon visit. There was plenty of tea and coffee available along with a large bap filled with hot, freshly cooked sausage, bacon and scrambled egg.

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 watershed in Vietnamese conservation. A five-year project in Chu yang Sin national park is coming to an end. The article updates on what has been achieved including the success of reducing illegal hunting and logging.
- Brazilian IBAs. The article covers the work and aims of *Important Bird Areas in Brazil: Part II*.
- Euro Bycatch. An update on the EU promise to end the slaughter of at least 200,000 birds in EU fisheries. It covers mitigation measures have been taken around the world that can be applied.