

EDITORIAL

This is the last time I shall edit this publication whilst wearing a military uniform. Next year I shall retire as my time is up. I have been responsible for the Bulletin and the resurrected Adjutant for quite a few years and I will continue this pleasure during my retirement. Whilst I have travelled “over the pond” quite a few times this year, which is reflected in a 2 page photograph spread, however our members have been further afield. It does not matter whether you are serving or not as opportunities always present themselves. Members do not have to travel the world either as the Society organises day trips and weekends where the range of species is always good, as can be seen on articles from Norfolk, Rye and Portland as well as a Pelagic. As a military Society we are all encouraged to become involved with our nearest estate and hopefully members will submit articles on their local conservation efforts on the Defence Estate. We know that the Defence Estate will have reduced manning and funding in the future so the efforts of volunteers will be increasingly important in the maintenance of the estate. I have started the ball rolling with an article on a winter bird survey on Salisbury Plain West. It is just not the MoD Estate that concerns us as the article from Peter Hubert looks at raptor migration in the eastern Pyrenees. Localised reports can lead to proper investigations and full blown studies into issues that bodies may not be aware of. In fact all reports are of use no matter how small as they build up a picture. This current publication builds a picture of places to visit. Whether it is a trip to Namibia or Kazakhstan there are always lots of birds to see. The Far East is a very popular destination with articles on Borneo and Thailand. It is not just leisure that provides opportunities as there is always a chance to go birding when on business such as trip to Libya.

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FOREWORD

It is really quite commendable that as institutions crumble, establishments downsize, and the general quality of life comes under increasing pressure from a paucity of resources, that this Society of ours stands firm in our pursuit of bird watching and all that that activity entails. Furthermore, it has the audacity to publish this annual account of our endeavours when other publications are consigned to the internet or fall by the wayside. As I take over the responsibility of Chairman, I am very conscious that it has been the leadership and support given to us all by Rodney Walker, throughout his tenure, which has left the AOS in such good stead. On behalf of the Society, I give you, Rodney, our warmest thanks.

But it will not have escaped our membership that we have just been subjected to a Comprehensive Spending Review and a Strategic Defence and Security Review, the combined effects of which will make fundamental changes to Defence and the Army, and I thought that it may be useful to give you an idea of how I see, albeit indirectly, these changes potentially affecting our Society.

In particular and over the next couple of years, I consider there to be 2 significant and one implied threat – a general withdrawal of funding, a reduction in the priority given to conservation across the Defence estate and possibly wider, and a resultant inability to excite new members from within the hard-pressed Services and the MOD. From my new perch in Headquarters Field Army it is very clear that there is little that we currently do that is not under a very strong spotlight and must meet the dual requirements of contributing to the main effort of winning in Afghanistan, and affordability. While this is commendable stuff to us tax payers, it threatens us as a Society in areas of postage, accommodation, access, printing, grants and other concessions. Secondly, the potential reduction in support to Conservation driven by the same budgetary constraints will inhibit our ability to influence and publicise and grow by reputation. The knock-on effect on our ability to attract new members becomes obvious.

So, if this is the environment in which the Society sits, what are we to do to ensure that we give you, our current members, what you want and provide you with a ‘special’ birding society that future members will also want to join? The Committee have already started! The current committee is a blend of enthusiastic people with experience and new ideas. We received a good steer from our President at the AGM where he suggested that to survive, we must sell ourselves better. Our unifying theme is therefore going to be **‘Raising our Profile’** and will, I hope, involve everyone in the Society and also provide a focus for some of our events. The committee has already looked at ways of saving money - and spending it - in order to encourage further activities. From both Committee and membership we will need to include ideas that encourage new members to join, promote our publications, exploit our web-site in terms of the message it conveys to people about us, and decide how we are to organise and promote our field days and expeditions.

And at last...to birds. The articles in this Journal bear testimony to the diversity of interest shown by members through bird watching, surveying, ringing and expeditions. Through all these activities, the Army Ornithological Society punches well above its weight and, with our sister Service Societies, makes a significant contribution to conservation in the round. So, pour yourself a drink, put your feet up, and enjoy the read.

Roger Dickey
Chairman Army Ornithological Society



WINTER SURVEY OF SPECIES ON IMBER TRAINING AREA

(Andrew Bray)

There is increasing evidence to suggest that a large number of farmland species are already in serious decline (Gregory *et al.* 2004). A critical factor in this decline is the availability of food in winter (Siriwardena *et al.* 2008). Despite schemes such as Environmental Stewardship in UK to enhance food resources, farming practices are unlikely to provide enough food in late winter for species that depend on seed in farmland. Areas of natural habitat within the arable landscape are likely to have an increasing role in supporting populations. A major island of undisturbed land surrounded by agriculture is Salisbury Plain. Salisbury Plain supports the largest known expanse of unimproved chalk grassland in north-west Europe. It also represents 41% of Britain's remaining chalk grassland area which is a rich wildlife habitat. The site covering 19,690 ha was designated a SSSI under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (see Figure 1). The site has not been subject to intensive farming methods.

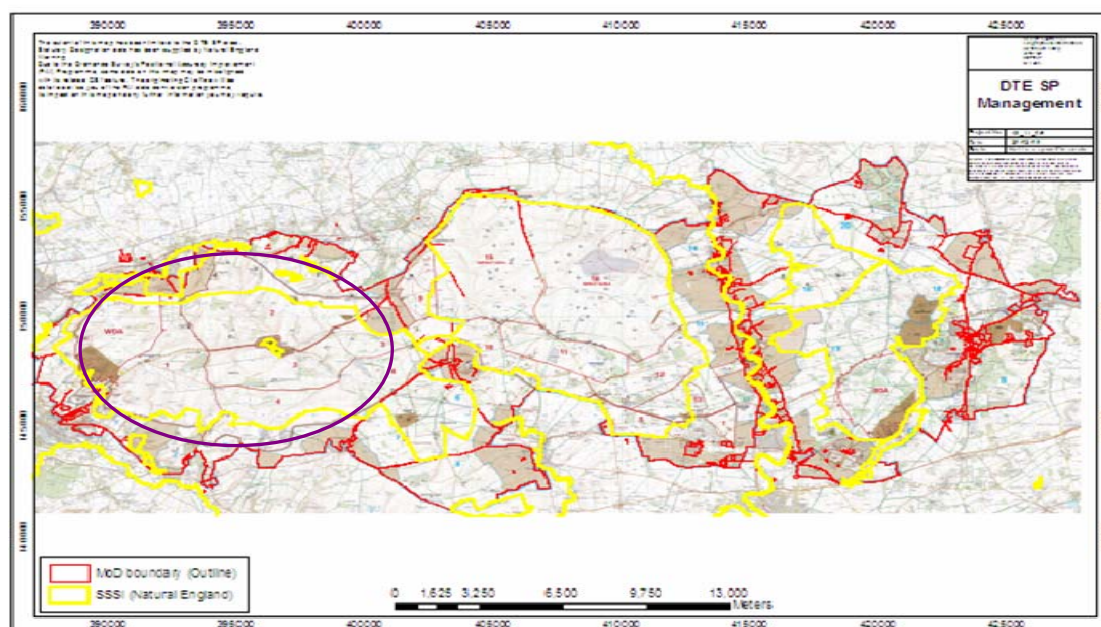


Figure 1. Map of SPTA. Red boundary is MOD land and the yellow boundary shows SSSI areas. The purple eclipse indicates the area of the Imber winter survey.

The area is an important site both nationally and internationally for breeding and wintering birds. It supports 7 species listed on Annex 1 of the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. In addition it has species listed within the red data Book. Important breeding species include Buzzard, Stonechat, and Corn Bunting. In winter the Plain is an important area for foraging flocks of thrushes, finches and buntings. These with the abundance of small mammals provide the prey for wintering Hen Harrier, Short-eared owls and Merlin. The area is an important winter roost for Hen Harrier in southern England. A breeding bird survey (BBS) carried out by Defence Estates (DE) and the RSPB in 2000 (Stanbury *et al.* 2000) found nationally important species including Skylark, and Grey Partridge. The Imber area is the largest of the

character areas of the High Chalk Plain landscape. The area owned by the MOD is characterised by the calcareous grassland. The boundary between the training area and farmland is distinct.

METHODS

Selection of Grid squares

The selection of grid squares was based on the RSPB Breeding Bird Survey of 2005 (Stanbury *et al.* 2005). This replicated their survey of 2000 (Stanbury *et al.* 2000). Within the selected Imber area the RSPB surveyed 48 squares. The number of volunteers for this project was not enough to cover this quantity. Using local knowledge a map survey was carried out to ensure that a proportion of the various types of habitat were taken into consideration. The grid squares were marked out on a spreadsheet and those surveyed by the RSPB were highlighted. For each northing a selection of 4 squares was chosen less northing's 51 and 52 where 2 squares were selected. The selection was made by using United Kingdom Training Areas 1:25,000 map, Salisbury Plain (West), Series GSGS 5294, Edition 7-GSGS to select different types of cover and size. An extract is at Figure 2.

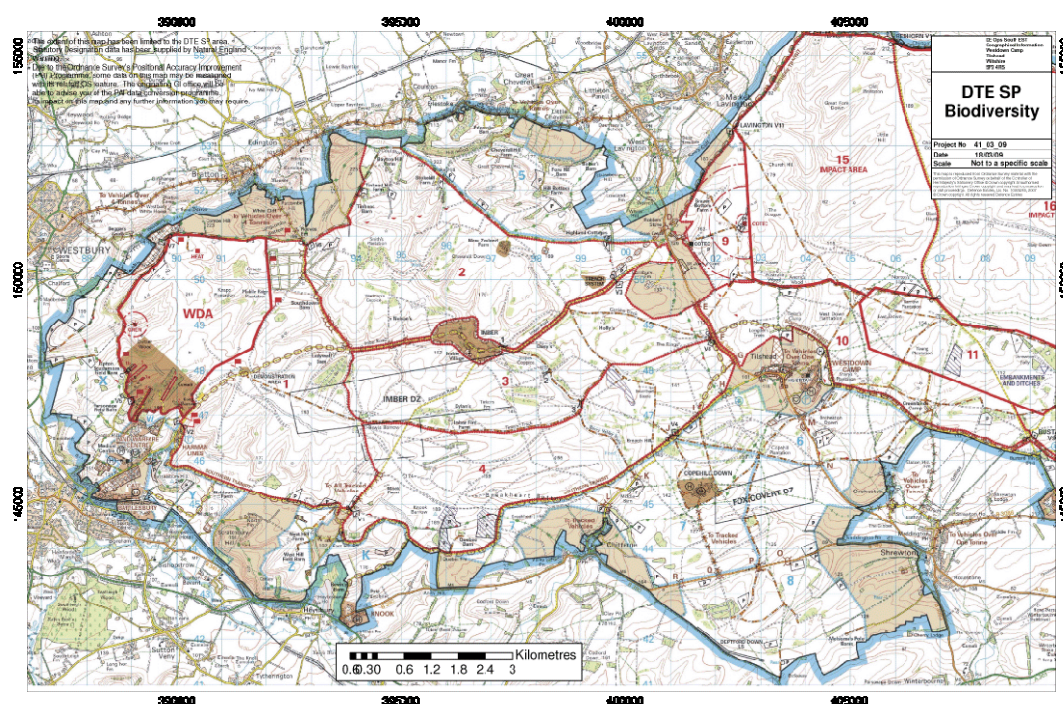


Figure 2. Imber area map extract showing danger areas WDA, 1, 2, 3 and 4.

This ensured that squares with over 90% grassland were included as well as those with a major plantation of trees and those with scrub and small copses of young and mature trees. In all 28 priority squares were drawn up. A review of the squares selected was not quite balanced for the shape of the survey area and a square on the 45 northing was deleted and another square on the 48 northing was selected. This stratified selection (Bibby *et al.* 2000) ensured that there would be no bias towards specific squares with known populations. It also prevented the volunteers from selecting their own favourite sites. The remaining RSPB squares were then also given

a priority in case additional squares could be surveyed. A diagrammatic view of the selection is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Diagrammatic view of the selection of grid squares.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | | | 9452 | 9552 | 9652 | 9752 | 9852 | | | |
| | | | | 9451 | 9551 | 9651 | 9751 | 9851 | | | |
| 9050 | 9150 | 9250 | 9350 | 9450 | 9550 | 9650 | 9750 | 9850 | 9950 | | |
| 9049 | 9149 | 9249 | 9349 | 9449 | 9549 | 9649 | 9749 | 9849 | 9949 | | |
| 9048 | 9148 | 9248 | 9348 | 9448 | 9548 | 9648 | 9748 | 9848 | 9948 | 0048 | 0148 |
| 9047 | 9147 | 9247 | 9347 | 9447 | 9547 | 9647 | 9747 | 9847 | 9947 | 0047 | 0147 |
| 9046 | 9146 | 9246 | 9346 | 9446 | 9546 | 9646 | 9746 | 9846 | 9946 | 0046 | |
| | 9145 | 9245 | 9345 | 9445 | 9545 | 9645 | 9745 | 9845 | 9945 | | |

Black = RSPB surveyed squares in 2005.

Blue = squares not surveyed by the RSPB in 2005.

Bold = squares surveyed as part of winter count 2008/09.

Census

The MoD Bird Count was used as the basis of the survey. This will ensure that the data collected is in line with data collected in previous surveys and in the future. This will allow comparison of results of wintering species against the same species that breed on the area. This is not as straight forward as it sounds as individual species may include migrants as well as resident birds. Volunteers were asked to visit their allocated square twice during the winter season. The first visit was from early December to mid January and the second visit up to the end of February. The volunteers were asked to carry out two transects of their square at least 250 metres apart and that they chose their routes so that they were able to capture birds in the primary and secondary habitat. They were asked to include birds overflying the square so that a better picture of what birds were on the Plain could be established; the chances were that the birds were feeding or roosting in the area. The survey should take no longer than two hours. As part of the survey they were to estimate the percentage of primary and secondary habitat. They were asked to record this against the following classifications: Woodland, Scrubland, Semi natural Grassland, Farmland and Human Sites. They were also asked to record the start time of the survey and select the weather conditions as Fine, Moderate or Poor; this is subjective however it is in line with MOD Bird Count criteria.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results from the squares surveyed. As there is reliance on volunteers not every square was fully covered. In some cases additional squares not on the original selection list were surveyed. The recording of percentage of the square by habitat provided no significant result; Table 2 shows species count against primary habitat. There was no correlation at all between species and percentage of the square with the primary habitat of grassland. As an example Blackbird had an occupancy rate of 77% and was found in squares where up to 95% was classified as grassland, the remainder being scrub. This non correlation also applied across other data collected in that the weather, timings and days between counts had no discernible significance on the results. Only 2 squares had one visit. Observers for the first winter carried out the second winter visit where recorded.

Table 1. Comparison of Data

| Grid Sq | 2008/09 | | | | | 2009/10 | | | | |
|---------|---------|----|------|---------------|--------------|---------|----|------|---------------|--------------|
| | C1 | C2 | Pair | Days Interval | Weather Diff | C1 | C2 | Pair | Days Interval | Weather Diff |
| ST 9050 | 15 | | | | | 8 | 6 | | | |
| ST 9145 | 9 | 10 | 5 | 55 | 0 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 55 | 0 |
| ST 9146 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 55 | 0 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 55 | 0 |
| ST 9148 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 44 | | 4 | 2 | 2 | 56 | 0 |
| ST 9247 | 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| ST 9248 | 21 | 11 | 10 | 49 | | 16 | 19 | 11 | 65 | 0 |
| ST 9250 | 15 | | | | | 9 | | | | |
| ST9345 | | | | | | 10 | 11 | 6 | 57 | 0 |
| ST9346 | | | | | | 9 | 4 | 2 | 57 | 0 |
| ST 9348 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 43 | | | | | | |
| ST 9349 | 7 | | | | | 10 | 8 | 4 | 37 | 0 |
| ST 9447 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 49 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 64 | 0 |
| ST 9451 | 22 | 17 | 12 | 68 | 2 | 22 | 11 | 10 | 70 | 1 |
| ST 9452 | 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| ST 9546 | 12 | 19 | 7 | 56 | | 13 | 18 | 3 | 51 | 0 |
| ST 9548 | 15 | 16 | 10 | 45 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 23 | 0 |
| ST 9549 | 25 | 17 | 16 | 47 | | 17 | 14 | 11 | 64 | 0 |
| ST 9550 | 17 | 19 | 11 | 67 | 1 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 70 | 1 |
| ST 9645 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 34 | 1 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 53 | 0 |
| ST 9647 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 49 | 1 | | | | | |
| ST 9748 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 48 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 74 | 0 |
| ST 9749 | 21 | 12 | 11 | 27 | | 14 | 10 | 7 | 72 | 0 |
| ST 9751 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 42 | 1 | | | | | |
| ST 9752 | 9 | 15 | 7 | 58 | 0 | | | | | |
| ST 9846 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 33 | 2 | | | | | |
| ST 9849 | 12 | 16 | 6 | 55 | 1 | 9 | | | | |
| ST 9850 | 17 | 11 | 7 | 50 | 1 | 13 | 11 | 7 | 74 | 0 |
| ST 9945 | 9 | | | | | 1 | 7 | 2 | 33 | 0 |
| ST 9948 | 13 | 9 | 4 | 34 | | | | | | |
| ST 9949 | 13 | 16 | 7 | 52 | 1 | 10 | 7 | 4 | 24 | 0 |
| SU 0047 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 47 | 0 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 27 | 0 |

Count is the number of species in the square.

Pair is the number of same species counted.

Days interval is the number of days between the counts.

Weather Diff is the difference between counts using the criteria of Poor, Moderate and Fine.

Table 2. Species count against primary habitat.

| Species Count | | | | Species Count | | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------|
| Grid Sq | Grassland | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | Grid Sq | Grassland | 2008/09 | 2009/10 |
| ST9050 | 80 | 15 | 8 | ST9549 | 75 | 26 | 20 |
| ST9145 | 65 | 16 | 8 | ST9550 | 92 | 23 | 22 |
| ST9146 | 85 | 10 | 9 | ST9645 | 97 | 9 | 12 |
| ST9148 | 75 | 5 | 4 | ST9647 | 98 | 11 | 0 |
| ST9247 | 90 | 6 | 0 | ST9748 | 55 | 10 | 7 |
| ST9248 | 95 | 22 | 24 | ST9749 | 90 | 22 | 17 |
| ST9250 | 65 | 15 | 9 | ST9751 | 95 | 12 | 0 |
| ST9345 | 65 | 0 | 15 | ST9752 | 95 | 17 | 0 |
| ST9346 | 85 | 0 | 11 | ST9846 | 70 | 10 | 0 |
| ST9348 | 90 | 9 | 0 | ST9849 | 95 | 21 | 9 |
| ST9349 | 95 | 7 | 14 | ST9850 | 85 | 21 | 17 |
| ST9447 | 100 | 4 | 3 | ST9945 | 97 | 9 | 6 |
| ST9451 | 45 | 27 | 23 | ST9948 | 90 | 18 | 0 |
| ST9452 | 80 | 8 | 0 | ST9949 | 90 | 21 | 13 |
| ST9546 | 85 | 24 | 28 | SU0047 | 80 | 12 | 12 |
| ST9548 | 80 | 21 | 14 | SU0148 | 90 | 5 | 0 |

Grassland is expressed as percentage of square.

Species Distribution

In total 62 species which included a Great Grey Shrike and a Common Gull flying over on the first winter. There 4 species recorded on the second visit that were not recorded on the first winter. These were Pied Wagtail, Nuthatch, Jay and Brambling though all had been recorded previously on Birdtrack and for the BTO Winter Atlas (Lack, 1986). The list of species recorded is at Table 3.

Table 3. List of Species found

| Species | Scientific Name | Species | Scientific Name |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> |
| Red-legged Partridge | <i>Alectoris rufa</i> | Fieldfare | <i>Turdus pilaris</i> |
| Grey Partridge * | <i>Perdix perdix</i> | Song Thrush * | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> |
| Pheasant | <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> | Redwing | <i>Turdus iliacus</i> |
| Hen Harrier | <i>Circus cyaneus</i> | Mistle Thrush | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> |
| Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> |
| Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | Goldcrest | <i>Regulus regulus</i> |
| Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | Long-tailed Tit | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> |
| Merlin | <i>Falco columbarius</i> | Coal Tit | <i>Pariparus ater</i> |
| Golden Plover | <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> | Blue Tit | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> |
| Lapwing * | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | Great Tit | <i>Parus major</i> |
| Snipe | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | Nuthatch | <i>Sitta europaea</i> |
| Woodcock | <i>Scolopax rusticola</i> | Great Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius excubitor</i> |
| Black-headed Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> | Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> |
| Common Gull | <i>Larus canus</i> | Jay | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> |
| Herring Gull | <i>Larus argentatus</i> | Jackdaw | <i>Corvus monedula</i> |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus fuscus</i> | Rook | <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> |
| Feral pigeon | <i>Columba livia</i> | Carrion Crow | <i>Corvus corone</i> |
| Stock Dove | <i>Columba oenas</i> | Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Wood Pigeon | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | Starling * | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> |
| Tawny Owl | <i>Strix aluco</i> | Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> |
| Short-eared Owl | <i>Asio flammeus</i> | Brambling | <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i> |
| Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus viridis</i> | Greenfinch | <i>Carduelis chloris</i> |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> |
| Skylark * | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> | Siskin | <i>Carduelis spinus</i> |
| Meadow Pipit | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> | Linnet * | <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> |
| Pied Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | Mealy Redpoll | <i>Carduelis flammea</i> |
| Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | Bullfinch * | <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> |
| Dunnock * | <i>Prunella modularis</i> | Yellowhammer * | <i>Emberiza citronella</i> |
| Robin | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | Reed Bunting * | <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i> |
| Stonechat | <i>Saxicola torquatus</i> | Corn Bunting * | <i>Miliaria calandra</i> |

* indicates species on UK BAP Red List

Not a single species was recorded in each square however 4 species (Woodpigeon, Blackbird, Magpie and Crow) were recorded in more than 50% of the squares visited. The most widespread guild (Bradbury & Allen 2003) was corvids. The most widespread species was Carrion Crow and the species with the highest density was Starling. Corvids are also widely spread as well as Buzzard, Wood Pigeon and Blackbird. These are comparable with data from other winter survey results (Birdtrack) and this is not unexpected (*per obs*) as whilst carrying BTO Atlas surveys I expected to see Corvids and Woodpigeons as a matter of course. Fieldfares were also present in large numbers. They are a winter visitor and congregate in large flocks on open fields and grassy areas. The majority of species occupancy was low. The highest number of squares occupied by a species from the UK BAP list is Skylark. Semi-natural grassland provides the highest density for this specie compared to other habitats and accounts for nearly 20% of the UK population (Gregory & Baillie 1998). Its decline in UK is attributed to the loss of rough grassland by managed grassland (Newton 2004). This also applies to the Meadow Pipit.

Table 4. Results of Species Winter data

| Species | Av Nos | Sq counts | Av sq | Abundance | Max |
|--------------------------|--------|---------------|-------|-----------|--------|
| Mallard | 9.50 | 4.00 (5-3) | 2.38 | 0.19 | 6.00 |
| Red-legged Partridge | 24.50 | 5.50 (5-6) | 4.45 | 0.49 | 10.00 |
| Grey Partridge | 9.00 | 3.00 (5-1) | 3.00 | 0.17 | 6.00 |
| Pheasant | 23.50 | 14.50 (19-10) | 1.62 | 0.46 | 4.00 |
| Hen Harrier | 2.50 | 2.00 (3-1) | 1.25 | 0.05 | 2.00 |
| Sparrowhawk | 2.00 | 2.00 (1-3) | 1.00 | 0.04 | 1.00 |
| Buzzard | 24.50 | 18.50 (23-14) | 1.32 | 0.48 | 3.00 |
| Kestrel | 11.00 | 9.50 (10-9) | 1.16 | 0.22 | 2.00 |
| Merlin | 1.50 | 1.50 (3-0) | 1.00 | 0.03 | 1.00 |
| Golden Plover | 73.50 | 2.50 (2-3) | 29.40 | 1.44 | 50.00 |
| Lapwing | 342.00 | 5.50 (9-2) | 62.18 | 6.87 | 200.00 |
| Snipe | 2.50 | 2.00 (2-2) | 1.25 | 0.05 | 2.00 |
| Woodcock | 9.00 | 5.00 (5-5) | 1.80 | 0.18 | 5.00 |
| Black-headed Gull | 13.00 | 1.00 (1-1) | 13.00 | 0.25 | 20.00 |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | 5.00 | 1.50 (3-0) | 3.33 | 0.09 | 5.00 |
| Herring Gull | 13.50 | 1.50 (2-1) | 9.00 | 0.26 | 21.00 |
| Wood Pigeon | 284.50 | 27.50 (27-28) | 10.35 | 5.67 | 60.00 |
| Stock Dove | 27.00 | 7.00 (11-3) | 3.86 | 0.53 | 11.00 |
| Feral pigeon | 3.50 | 1.50 (2-1) | 2.33 | 0.07 | 3.00 |
| Tawny Owl | 0.50 | 0.50 (1-0) | 1.00 | 0.01 | 1.00 |
| Short-eared Owl | 5.50 | 3.50 (6-1) | 1.57 | 0.10 | 3.00 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------|-------|---------|-------|-------|--------|
| Green Woodpecker | 7.00 | 6.00 | (5-7) | 1.17 | 0.14 | 2.00 |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | 3.00 | 2.50 | (5-0) | 1.20 | 0.06 | 2.00 |
| Skylark | 112.00 | 22.00 | (22-22) | 5.09 | 2.23 | 27.00 |
| Meadow Pipit | 72.00 | 17.50 | (20-15) | 4.11 | 1.44 | 25.00 |
| Pied Wagtail | 0.50 | 0.50 | (0-1) | 1.00 | 0.01 | 1.00 |
| Wren | 31.00 | 17.00 | (18-16) | 1.82 | 0.62 | 4.00 |
| Dunnock | 17.00 | 9.00 | (7-11) | 1.89 | 0.35 | 5.00 |
| Robin | 19.50 | 10.50 | (13-8) | 1.86 | 0.38 | 4.00 |
| Stonechat | 51.50 | 19.00 | (22-16) | 2.71 | 1.01 | 24.00 |
| Blackbird | 123.00 | 37.50 | (44-31) | 3.28 | 2.44 | 13.00 |
| Fieldfare | 552.50 | 15.50 | (16-15) | 35.65 | 10.99 | 200.00 |
| Song Thrush | 5.00 | 4.50 | (4-5) | 1.11 | 0.10 | 2.00 |
| Redwing | 15.50 | 6.50 | (9-4) | 2.38 | 0.30 | 7.00 |
| Mistle Thrush | 1.50 | 1.00 | (1-1) | 1.50 | 0.03 | 2.00 |
| Chiffchaff | 1.00 | 0.50 | (1-0) | 2.00 | 0.02 | 2.00 |
| Goldcrest | 6.50 | 3.50 | (6-1) | 1.86 | 0.12 | 4.00 |
| Long-tailed Tit | 20.50 | 3.50 | (3-4) | 5.86 | 0.42 | 12.00 |
| Coal Tit | 10.50 | 4.00 | (5-3) | 2.63 | 0.21 | 8.00 |
| Blue Tit | 57.00 | 20.00 | (19-21) | 2.85 | 1.16 | 16.00 |
| Great Tit | 54.00 | 18.00 | (19-17) | 3.00 | 1.09 | 10.00 |
| Nuthatch | 1.00 | 0.50 | (0-1) | 2.00 | 0.02 | 2.00 |
| Jay | 1.50 | 1.00 | (0-2) | 1.50 | 0.03 | 2.00 |
| Magpie | 98.00 | 30.50 | (35-26) | 3.21 | 1.93 | 20.00 |
| Jackdaw | 117.00 | 10.50 | (9-12) | 11.14 | 2.34 | 39.00 |
| Rook | 484.00 | 18.00 | (21-15) | 26.89 | 9.49 | 316.00 |
| Carrion Crow | 305.50 | 40.50 | (42-39) | 7.54 | 6.20 | 60.00 |
| Raven | 13.50 | 8.00 | (10-6) | 1.69 | 0.27 | 5.00 |
| Starling | 897.00 | 15.00 | (18-12) | 59.80 | 17.51 | 350.00 |
| Chaffinch | 61.50 | 17.00 | (19-15) | 3.62 | 1.24 | 9.00 |
| Brambling | 6.50 | 0.50 | (0-1) | 13.00 | 0.14 | 13.00 |
| Greenfinch | 2.00 | 1.50 | (2-1) | 1.33 | 0.04 | 2.00 |
| Goldfinch | 92.50 | 13.00 | (14-12) | 7.12 | 1.84 | 20.00 |
| Siskin | 20.00 | 0.50 | (1-0) | 40.00 | 0.38 | 40.00 |
| Linnet | 19.50 | 2.50 | (3-2) | 7.80 | 0.38 | 30.00 |
| Lesser Redpoll | 1.50 | 0.50 | (1-0) | 3.00 | 0.03 | 3.00 |
| Bullfinch | 4.00 | 2.50 | (3-2) | 1.60 | 0.08 | 3.00 |
| Yellowhammer | 10.00 | 6.00 | (9-3) | 1.67 | 0.20 | 3.00 |
| Reed Bunting | 1.50 | 1.00 | (2-0) | 1.50 | 0.03 | 2.00 |
| Corn Bunting | 6.00 | 2.50 | (5-0) | 2.40 | 0.11 | 5.00 |

Av Nos is the average between the two years.

Sq Counts is the average number of squares between 2 years where a species was counted.

The range is shown in parenthesis for the two seasons.

Av Square is the average of species per square observed.

Abundance is the likelihood of numbers for each square with the Plain taken as whole.

Max is the maximum count in any square.

DISCUSSION

The survey of the Imber area was an interesting exercise as it was undertaken based on anecdotal evidence which turned out to be wrong. It demonstrated that there were Plovers, Raptors and Owls on the area. It highlighted the abundance of Pigeons and Corvids and showed that the species richness is still as applicable in winter as it is in

summer, less summer migrants. As a casual observer the Plain looks like a desert of grass with small oases of trees scattered by chance. Nothing of course is by chance. The hedgerows in the north were to simulate the French hedges of Normandy; the woods were to simulate the make up of the plain of North-west Germany and the rusting armoured hulks enemy formations. The fact that the military requires area for manoeuvre of troops has resulted in a large area being preserved in its semi-natural condition since the turn of the twentieth century. It is only in recent years that the full value of this area for wildlife has been properly appreciated by governmental bodies and conservation agencies.

The aim of this study was to set a baseline for the long term study of distribution and abundance of bird species on the Imber area. It is based on the current MoD Bird Count methodology. Whilst this methodology may collect data, the question is how useable is it? The selection of observers was left to the random in their volunteering, abilities and dedication to the task. The grid squares had already been selected for the RSPB's breeding survey of 2000 and 2005. The timings of the visit was left to volunteers as were transects walked. Everything was in place to ensure that there was the randomness required to get a better picture of what was happening rather than targeting a species or a particular grid. To this effect the survey has generated a multitude of data however it cannot be sensibly used at this stage. There is no discerning reason for the sightings of Raptors or Owls. Plovers were found in the usual anecdotal spots though not all the time and there were smatterings of sightings of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits as expected. A range of woodland species were found across the area as were thrushes, insectivores and other granivorous passerines. For the first time we now know what species can be found and have a reasonable idea on their abundance even though the standard deviation can be great. There will be some changes for the next survey. A consideration is to limit timing of visit. In the Mediterranean, Herrando *et al.* (2006) advised that common winter bird censuses should only be conducted in the morning. For this survey volunteers selected their own time though the Mode is 1000 hrs and the Median 1046 hrs. The difficulty is access and limiting timings of the visit may cause volunteers difficulties that may prevent them surveying.

In addition an area that requires being considered is the association between the birds, habitat and pennings. Questions arise such as why are Skylarks and Meadow Pipits not evenly distributed given the uniformity of the landscape? Is their distribution affected by pennings? The mapping of grazing and distribution of Skylark and Meadow Pipit will require further investigation.

The decline of farmland species is a concern. The Imber area is an area of preserved unimproved grassland which hosts a wide range of species including a number that feature on the Red List. Using volunteers of the local MoD conservation group, bird species and their distribution have been recorded for the first time by grid square. The overall picture is one of uncertainty however there is now an understanding of what is there in species and abundance to inform future surveys.

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RAPTOR MIGRATION IN THE EASTERN PYRENEES

(Peter Hubert)

Introduction

There seems to be remarkably little literature in English describing the bird migration across the Pyrenees. In 'Ibis' I have found just two articles published since 1945; one of these was a short notice (1). Guide books on the birds to be seen in the Pyrenees provide insufficient detail to enable the observer of being sure of seeing much of the migration across the mountains (2). Yet most of the vast number of migrant birds that breed in North-west Europe and which winter in Spain or North-west Africa must cross the significant natural barrier of the Pyrenees. This article will examine the migration strategies of selected species of raptor and it will focus on the Eastern Pyrenees and that part of the mountain range that lies within the French administrative département of Pyrénées-Orientales, also known as Roussillon. This lies opposite Northern Catalonia and to the East of Andorra.

There is an active French society, Groupe Ornithologique du Roussillon, that has maintained detailed records of the sightings of its members. A comprehensive synopsis of these records is published annually in a 40 page booklet. This article is based on the results of these and personal observations which together cover the period 2004 to 2010. The some 400 hours of personal observations were carried out at a site in the coastal plain that has been selected as a possible site for a wind farm. The site provides good observation across the wide coastal plain between Mont Canigou and the sea near Perpignan. It also provided good observation over several possible crossing points over the mountains as well as approaches and exit routes on the North side of the mountains as far West as Céret. Regular but less frequent observations

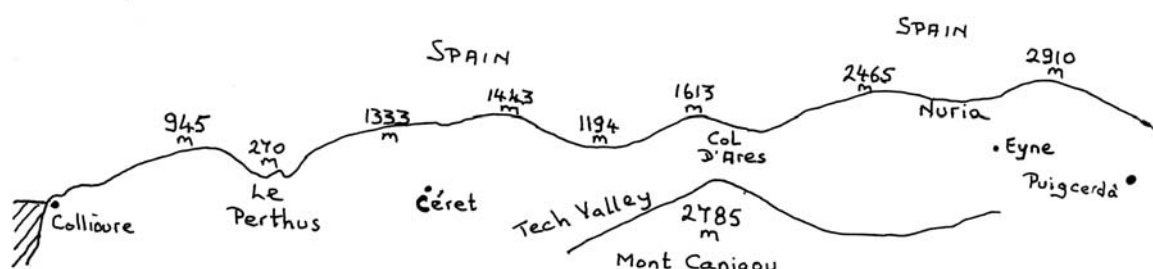
totalling a further 150 hours were carried out on the mountain plateau and nearby passes at the West of the département. The available data reveals huge gaps in our knowledge of the peak periods for the movement of species, population numbers involved in the migration through Roussillon and their flight paths. There is, therefore, an element of speculation in the following remarks.

The terrain

The Pyrenees are a significant barrier that must be crossed by most migrant birds that breed in North-west Europe and especially those that breed in Central or East France and beyond to central and Northern Europe. At the West end of the mountain range, bordering the Atlantic, there is a 4 km gap between the foothills and the sea. At the East end the gap scarcely exists at all. For most of their length the mountains rise to over 1,500 metres; in many places they are over 2,500 metres high. In the West and central parts there are narrow valleys on both sides of the range that lead the birds up to the passes across, but these passes are frequently at a height of over 2,000 metres. Only at one, Col d'Organbidexka, which is South-east of St Jean Pied de Port, has the Autumn migration been monitored consistently over a significant number of years. It is through this pass that most of the Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) cross in Spring and Autumn. At the East end of the Pyrenees the form of the ranges is different. They continue right up to the sea at the towns of Collioure and Port Vendres. However North of Collioure a coastal plain that is up to 30 to 35 kms wide around the town of Perpignan. This plain gradually narrows from Salses as it runs North towards the town of Narbonne. This narrowing is caused by a substantial block of hills known as the Corbières. From Salses it is easy to distinguish the line of the valleys of the Têt and Tech as they run West-south-west towards the Spanish border in the Pyrenees behind Mont Canigou. Along the coastal plain up to Narbonne lie a number of large lagoons. About 20 kms North of Roussillon lies the town of Narbonne. Just in from the coast near Narbonne there is the migration watch site of Gruissan-Narbonne. Here, a small rocky outcrop on the edge of marshes and a lagoon provides excellent views to North, West and South. Regular monitoring of the Autumn migration has taken place there in recent years. Some monitoring of the Spring migration has taken place from a point on the South side of the lagoon there, but with less consistency.

There is a low pass, Le Perthus, some 20 kms inland from Collioure. Further to the West, but standing almost clear of the main range, is Mont Canigou, a massif that rises to over 2,700 metres. To the South of this, lines of low hills bisected by valleys run North-South on both sides of the frontier. On the North and South sides of Mont Canigou are the river valleys of the Têt and Tech that drain towards the sea in a East-north-east direction. At the head of the valley on the North side of Canigou there is a long East-West plateau known as the Cerdagne. This plateau lies astride the frontier with Spain which runs North-South at this point. The plateau is at about 1,500 metres, but it has high mountains to the North, West and South. It is about 10 kms deep and over 25 kms long; this includes 15 kms that lie in Spain. There are two valleys that lead into it on the French side of the border from the North and to the South there are several narrow valleys that lead into the mountains but the South exits from the valleys over the mountains are at around 2,300 metres. At the base of one of these valleys, near the village of Eyne, an observation point was established in the 1980s. It was forced to close after aggressive and destructive action by French hunters. It should be remembered that there are about one and a quarter million 'hunters' in

France and only some 45,000 people with a declared interest in nature conservation or birding: the contest is unequal especially as the hunters provide an influential voting block in national and local elections. However, in the Autumn of 2010 the Eyne site was reactivated on a trial basis. This site gives good observation over much of the plateau and especially the two entry points from the North, the Col de Puymaurens to the West by the border with Spain and from the wide valley of Le Capcir on the East; it is from the Capcir that the larger number of migrant raptors enter the Cerdagne. Eyne also gives observation over several of the exits South and West. It is a good observation point in both Spring and Autumn. To the West of the Cerdagne the mountains in Spain lead up to the border with Andorra which is about 10 kms beyond the border at Puigcerdà.



The weather and its effects

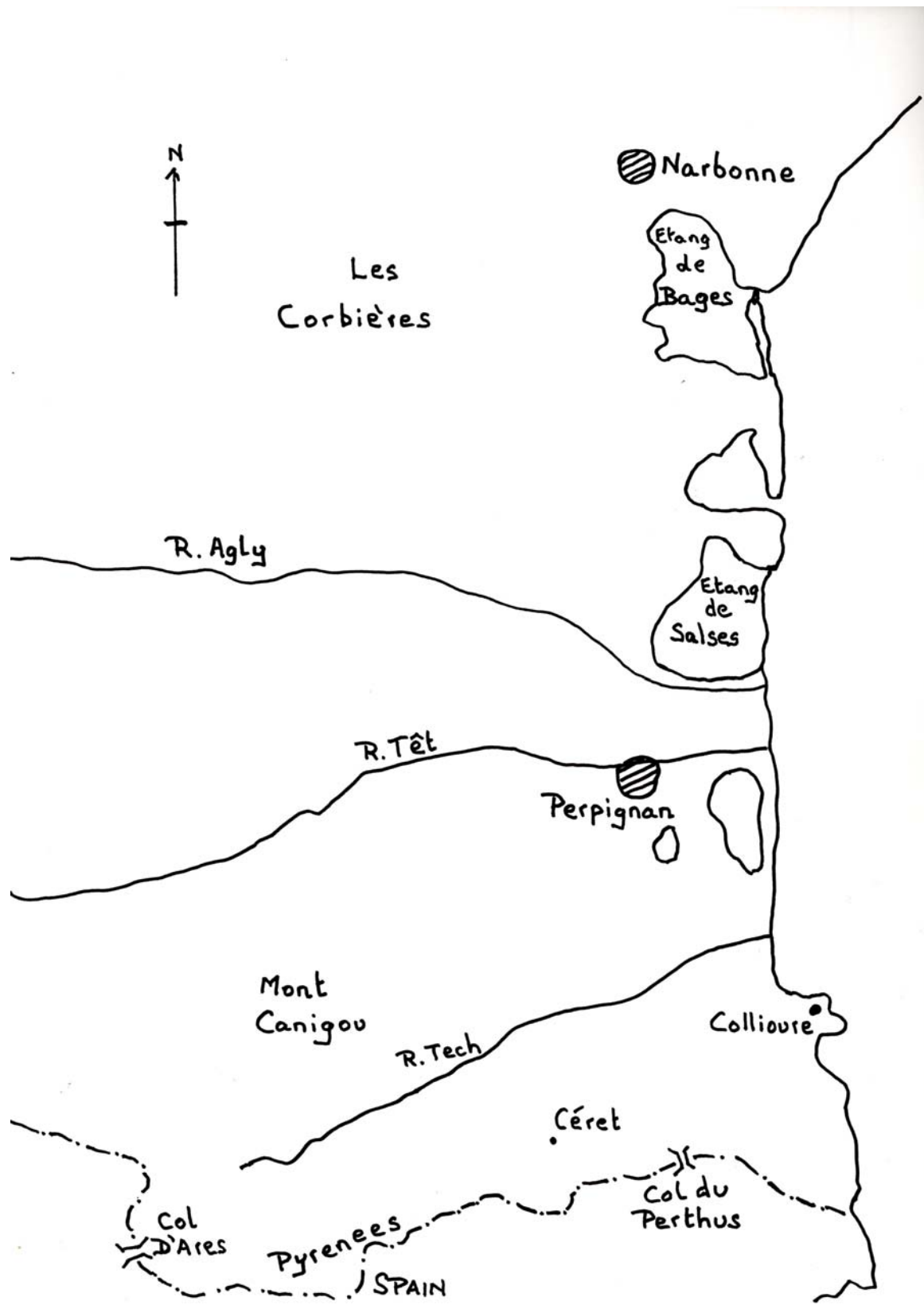
Migrating birds not only have to contend with the actual mountain barrier; they also must adapt their migration strategy to take account of the various very strong winds that frequently occur in Roussillon. Of these, the most notorious and frequent is the 'Tramontane' (known as 'Le Cers' around Narbonne). This wind, which is part of the same meteorological phenomenon as the better known 'Mistral', occurs when there is High pressure to the West of the Bay of Biscay and Low pressure over the Mediterranean. It is cold, violent and may last for three or four days and is more common in Spring and Autumn. The wind blows from the North-west until it reaches the coast and then the wind tends to veer to the South, blowing across the Pyrenees into Catalonia and being very influential across the coastal plain for about 50kms to the South of the Pyrenees before it dissipates. However, the upper valleys of the rivers that run on the North and South sides of Mont Canigou as well as the high plateau of the Cerdagne are sheltered from this wind. The wind blows at about 60 kph with frequent gusts up to 85 kph and some gusts over 110 kph. Inevitably, if it is blowing it has a marked effect on the flight path of the migrants. Other winds may blow off the sea in a North-westerly direction (the 'Vent Grec') or from the coastal plain of Catalonia that lies to the South (the 'Vent Marin'). These winds blow less frequently; they are less prolonged and less violent. Never-the-less they are an influence on the pattern of migration. The 'Vent Marin' often is accompanied by rain that may be heavy and prolonged. Remarkably little detailed research seems to have been carried out to assess the full impact of the winds to establish in anything more than very general terms how the birds adapt both in their choice of route and altitude.

Some general trends are apparent. In Spring the wind from the South, the 'Vent Marin', inhibits the crossing of the Pyrenees by raptors; this is apparent only in the section to the East of Mont Canigou; the wind has no impact to the West of it. The

raptors gather in the plain on the South side of the Pyrenees until the wind abates. As a result there are significant surges in numbers once the wind ceases or changes direction. The effect of the 'Tramontane' in Spring is different; the raptors continue to cross the Pyrenees but to the South and East of Mont Canigou and not over the Col du Perthus which, being only 290 metres high, would seem to be an obvious crossing point. This requires some explanation. It has already been stated that the 'Tramontane' blows strongly in the plain that lies to the South of the mountains on the general line Figueres – Girona. A glance at a map of Spain shows that raptors entering Spain from North Africa and crossing at the straits of Gibraltar will need to fly in a North-east direction to hit the East end of the Pyrenees. The 'Tramontane' does not spread West from Figueres. Migrants moving up to the Pyrenees are unlikely to enter the Catalan coastal plain and face a strong head wind as they struggle to cross even the low crossing at Le Perthus. Instead they would remain in the more sheltered areas and cross in the valleys due South of Mont Canigou. The majority then move towards the East slopes of the mountain where the impact of the wind is less severe. The majority travel at between 800 and 1200 metres above sea level. Smaller numbers cross the plain, but at low level; they often drop into the narrow valleys and gullies, possibly to mitigate the effect of the head wind. Few raptors enter France through the Col du Perthus when the 'Tramontane' is blowing. In calm weather the birds come over the passes in the hills to the South of Canigou as well as through other higher passes to the East, through the Col du Perthus and even over the low hills where the ridge gives way to the sea at Collioure on the coast. Those raptors crossing from South of Mont Canigou then head down the Tech valley towards the coastal plain. Most fan out over the plain, often flying high and using the thermals. The Black kites (*Milvus migrans*) tend to fly towards the coast and in the direction of Narbonne. The European Honey Buzzards (*Pernis apivorus*) follow a similar line, but the Short-toed Eagle (*Circus gallicus*) moves in a generally North direction keeping fairly clear of the coast.

In Autumn, the migration of the raptors in Roussillon is longer drawn out and a little less conspicuous, with some species seeming to slip away almost imperceptibly. The 'Tramontane' has a marked effect on the migration strategy of raptors in Autumn. The general direction of the wind and the presence of the high hills of the Corbières push birds from the central France towards the Mediterranean coast near Narbonne where they meet birds that are coming West along the coastal plain from the Bouches-du-Rhone. The birds following this plain originate from North Italy and from migration routes that feed into the Rhone valley from the North and the East. The raptors tend to gather in very large numbers on the coast near Narbonne; it is from this point that the coast to the South opens out into a series of very large lagoons; these extend almost as far as the Pyrenees some 60 kms away to the South. Their presence discourages further migration South until the 'Tramontane' has abated. Some birds, especially the Honey Buzzards instinctively move inland and West so as to avoid the sea and lagoons. However, the exact route to the Pyrenees of all the migrant raptors has yet to be determined. In calm weather fewer migrant raptors pass this point. It is assumed that they move on a broader front across the hills of the Corbières, heading to the west of Mont Canigou; this is the main route followed by other large migrant species such as the White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*).

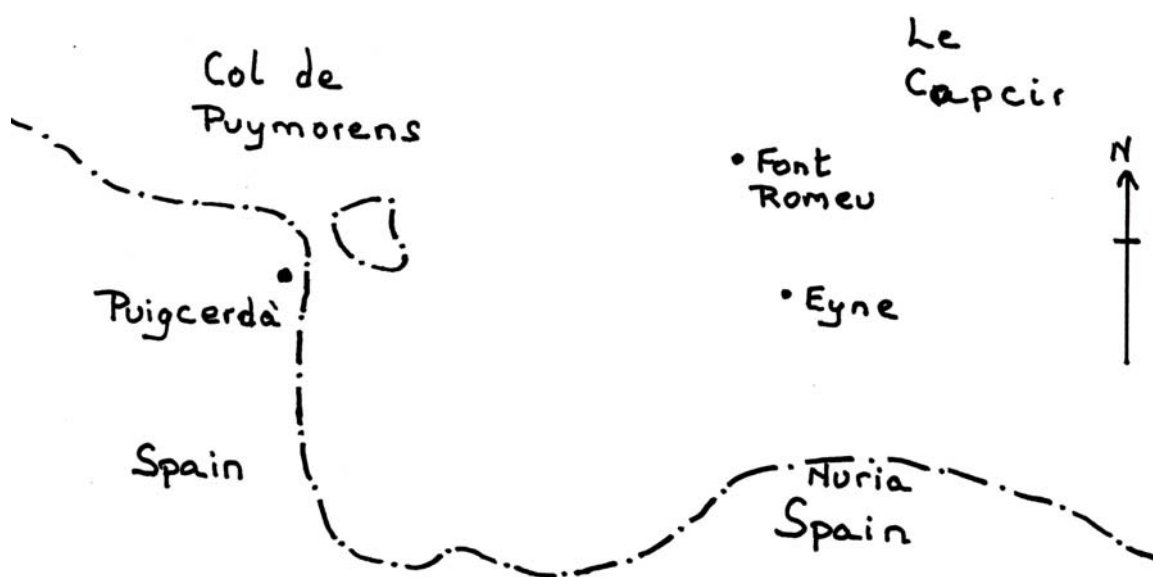
In cloudy weather, the numbers of migrants is smaller. In such weather the cloud clings to the upper and middle slopes of Canigou. Despite this there is a trend for the migrating raptors to head along the West edge of the plain and along the lower Eastern slopes of Canigou in a South-west direction towards the Col d'Ares. The



higher slopes of the massif of Canigou itself are avoided by the migrants. There are

some steep, narrow valleys on the West side of Mont Canigou that lead towards Spain. There are no records that suggest that there is any significant raptor migration up these valleys in Autumn.

The Cerdagne does not feel the direct effect of the 'Tramontane'; it is shielded by the area of high ground of the Corbières that lie to the North. In Autumn, the 'Tramontane' reduces the number of raptors that make the crossing in the area of the Cerdagne; they are blown East to the coastal plain. In calm weather the migrants enter the area of the Cerdagne via the two passes on the North side; these are the Col de Puymorens, which runs into the Cerdagne near the border with Spain at Puigcerdà and from the Capcir, to the East of Font Romeu. From there they may follow any one of a number of routes. Some will cross the plateau and take a path up one of the narrow valleys leading over the high area of Nuria to go South to join the El Freser valley. Most, however, tend to go down the North or South sides of the plateau and then exit the plateau at a point on the Spanish side of the frontier South of the town of Puigcerdà where they cross the mountains and take the El Llobregat valley that leads down towards Barcelona. In Spring the raptors enter the Cerdagne plateau on a broad front but with slightly larger numbers coming down the valley to Eyne from the high ground at Nuria. This suggests that they came up from the South using the El Freser valley. They exit to the North and towards the Aude through the two passes on the North side.



As a general tendency (that has numerous exceptions) the peak period for the movement of the raptors across the mountains is between about 11 AM and 2 PM. This, of course, enables them to gain maximum benefit from the thermals. It is also noticeable that, using the thermals as the birds cross the passes they are frequently travelling two or three hundred metres higher than they need to clear them. On crossing the birds descend rapidly on the far side.

Notes on the migration strategies of selected raptors.

There are 18 species of raptor that migrate regularly across the Pyrenees (excluding Vultures). However, the data available is adequate for comments to be made on the migration strategies of only 12 of these species. As will be apparent, the data for some of these is very incomplete and, in some cases, requires further confirmation (3). Assessments for the numbers of migrants were not possible from existing data (4). Reference has therefore been made to the records of sites near Narbonne from where it is possible to monitor the Spring and Autumn passage along the coastal plain from Perpignan.

Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)

The population of Black Kites in France, which was assessed at about 2000 pairs, is entirely migratory. However, some 40,000 have been recorded crossing in the Autumn at the Col d'Organbidexka, (although 20,000 annually is more usual). The main entry points to France in the Spring are also towards the West end of the range. At the East end the migration is less dramatic. The first birds arrive from the middle of February. It is not until the last week of March that the passage reaches its peak that lasts until about mid April, with stragglers continuing until early May. Most move in small groups but groups totalling up to 100 may be seen from time to time.

The Autumn movement starts early in July. The last birds will have left by the end of the third week in September. But the peak period is in late July and the first week of August. Because of unfavourable winds in excess of 1,200 Black Kites have been recorded on the coast near Narbonne in the last week of July, but there are no comparable records of such numbers for Roussillon. The route that they use from Narbonne to reach and cross the Pyrenees is not known, though there are sparse records indicating a possible passage in the area of the Col d'Ares. However it is possible that they veer away from the coast over the Corbières and then to the west of Canigou; but this has yet to be confirmed.

Whilst there are no data to give a reliable estimate of the annual passage of Black Kites through Roussillon, data from a site near Narbonne suggest that a figure of 2,000 passing along the coastal plain in Autumn is average, but with nearly 7,000 in some years. The number migrating through the Cerdagne is between 1,000 and 1,500..

Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*)

The population of Montagu's Harriers in Western Europe has been in decline over recent decades. The breeding population in France may number around 700 pairs. There are no records that allow for any assessment of the numbers that use the Eastern crossing points over the Pyrenees and there are very few records for the Autumn migration. Data from the site near Narbonne indicate that between 150 and 200 may pass annually in Autumn but fewer are seen in Spring. Sparse records for the Spring migration indicate that early birds may arrive in mid March with peak numbers crossing a month later and the last birds returning in mid May. In Autumn the available records suggest a passage from early August with most birds gone by the early September.

Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

The breeding population in France of Western Marsh Harriers is probably around 300 pairs. The species in North-west Europe is mainly migratory; so birds from elsewhere in Northern Europe probably migrate over the Pyrenees. Very small numbers overwinter in Roussillon. Records indicate a return passage occurring from mid March through to late April, with a possible peak in late March to mid April. Records from the Narbonne area indicate that over 350 Western Marsh Harriers pass along the coastal route. There are no adequate data from Roussillon for the Autumn passage. Records from Narbonne indicate the main passage along the coastal plain occurring between late August and late September with small numbers moving three or four weeks each side of those dates. The total number of Autumn migrants is around 1,000.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Only part of the European population of the Eurasian Sparrowhawk is migratory. In Roussillon the species is present throughout the year; so identifying migrants poses some difficulties. The first returning birds have been recorded in early and mid March at the Narbonne site. The peak for the Spring passage is in mid April with the last migrants returning at the end of that May. It is probable that these late birds are immature. There is insufficient detail from Roussillon to comment on the Autumn migration in the plain. Records from Narbonne show that the numbers of Eurasian Sparrowhawks migrating is fairly steady from mid August through to late November with a peak in late September. A full season might show a passage of between 1,500 and 5,000 birds. Sparse records from the species migrating in the Cerdagne suggest a similar pattern but with much smaller numbers.

European Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)

The European Honey Buzzard is a common and conspicuous migrant across Roussillon, especially in Spring with nearly 6000 being recorded passing along the coastal route. The European population is entirely migratory. Counts in the Autumn at the West Pyrenean site of Col d'Organbidexka have totalled over 17,000. Records of the Spring migration of the European Honey Buzzard along the Mediterranean coast show that significant numbers that cross the East Pyrenees continue into Northern Italy. Ringing records confirm that birds from Eastern Europe migrate across France and Spain to reach their wintering areas in West Africa (3).

During both the Spring and Autumn passage the birds frequently travel in large but loose groups, using thermals for soaring flight where possible; however, in less favourable conditions they are capable of prolonged flapping and then they will generally travel singly. The spring passage begins at the end of March, although there are reports of occasional single birds in the preceding weeks. The peak period is during the last week of April and the first week of May, with stragglers continuing to come through until the end of May. The first post breeding birds appear in mid to late July. But the peak period covers the last week of August and the first week of September. Data from Roussillon and Narbonne suggest that the total autumn passage along the coastal plain to be up to 12,000 in some years. In calm weather many passing Narbonne move inland and over the Corbières; some follow the coastal plain

gradually drifting West as they reach the Pyrenees. There are no records of birds crossing East of the Le Perthus pass. In times of the 'Tramontane' they take a more defiant path South-west towards the Col d'Ares where they cross into Spain on a front of about 20 kms. In the Cerdagne, the pattern of movement is similar, though there are few records of large groups moving through except when the weather is calm and hot. In such circumstances around 1,200 have been recorded in a day when scarcely any have been reported in the coastal area around Perpignan.

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Widespread across most of Western Europe, the Common Buzzard is a partial migrant. Birds from, in particular, the North of Europe, leave their breeding grounds and move in mainly South-west direction. Ringing recoveries from the Iberian Peninsula include birds from Norway, Sweden, Latvia, Germany and France.

There are not many reliable records for Roussillon for either the Spring or Autumn passage. Those that there are indicate that the main Spring passage is in early and mid April whilst the Autumn passage starts in mid August and continues into October. Autumn numbers passing at Narbonne are around 1,300.

Booted eagle (*Hieraetus pennatus*)

A small population of Booted Eagles survives to breed in the high ground of the Corbières and Massif Central in France. Most of these birds migrate, but in recent years there have been regular reports of one or two birds over-wintering in Roussillon. The migrant birds return over the Pyrenees in late March and early April. There are few records for the Autumn passage; there are sparse records showing that the first birds migrate from late August; most records are in October with, on 8 and 9 October 2004, an exceptional passage of 237 birds. In a normal year it would be unusual to report more than 20 in the season.

Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)

The Short-toed Snake Eagle is almost entirely a Summer visitor to North-west Europe. There have been a few reports of birds that have apparently over-wintered in Roussillon. The first returning individuals have been recorded from late February and a steady flow from the end of the first week of March provided the wind conditions are favourable. Exceptionally, 150 were reported on 13 March 2010 and 185 the next day; these movements included several groups of 20 to 40 birds. However, only 110 Short-toed Snake Eagles passed along the coastal route; the remainder headed on a broad front over the Corbières. Judging by the reports from other migration-watch sites along the coast, the group of 110 represented a significant part of the breeding population of North Italy. A similarly large group was to be reported moving from Italy past Nice in the following Autumn. The last Spring arrivals occur around mid April. In the Autumn the departure is more discreet with birds leaving individually starting in August. Records indicate that the main departure is from mid September through to the third week of October. In Roussillon the indications from available records are that they migrate on a broad front with small numbers being reported both in the plain and at Cerdagne. The Narbonne site records suggest an annual Autumn passage of less than 150 or less, except that in the Autumn of 2010 more than 360

were recorded. The records for March 2010 suggest that either it was extra-ordinary or that the birds disperse after crossing the Pyrenees on a broad front and return South in the Autumn on a similarly broad front across the length of the Pyrenees; as the result there are few concentrations of birds.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

As with several species of raptor, the Osprey is mainly migratory with just occasional reports of an over-wintering bird. The Osprey migrates individually. Following their dramatic decline during the 19th and 20th centuries as the result of persecution, numbers has stabilised in the Western part of Europe with a small population in Britain and a somewhat larger one in Western Scandinavia. The population in Eastern Scandinavia and Russia is substantial but the birds from these two areas migrate to the South-east.

There are records of returning birds from late February but these are exceptionally early. Most individuals pass through the Roussillon during the second half of March, April and early May. 53 were recorded on the coastal route near Narbonne in Spring 2010. There are fewer records for the approaches to the East Pyrenees for the Autumn passage, whilst at Col d'Organbidexka, in the West, there are many more records. They begin in late August with the last in early November. The peak period at Col d'Organbidexka is during the second and third weeks of September. The crossings in Roussillon are not confined to the plain; there are a few records of crossings in the Autumn from the Cerdagne.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

The Kestrel is a familiar and common breeding bird throughout most of North-west Europe. It is a partial migrant throughout all that range except in Scandinavia; there the birds are almost all migratory. Because it is so common it is not easy to detect the migrants from those that are resident. However, the Kestrel generally travels fast and very directly when on migration. The records for Roussillon show the Spring passage occurring from mid March through to late April. Over 420 migrants have been recorded during the Spring passage at Narbonne. The Autumn migration begins in August and may continue into late October. The Narbonne site has recorded over 800 migrants in an Autumn season.

Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*)

The Lesser Kestrel is quite common in the Cerdagne. In the Autumn from late August through to mid September there is an evening roost on a group of electricity pylons on the West edge of the plateau. Typically about 70 are present in late August with numbers rising to nearly 200 at the start of September; 85 were still present on 12 September 2006, after which none were seen that year. A smaller roost was recorded in August on a ridge not far from Perpignan. The very few records for the Spring migration are for mid April. Observations of the Autumn passage indicate that it runs from the second half of August through to mid October but with only about a dozen birds being recorded.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

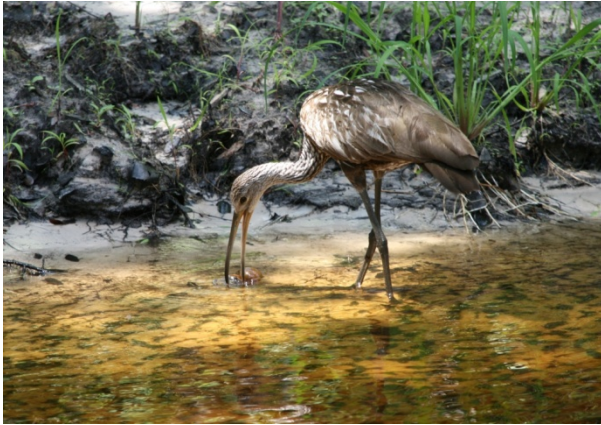
The Hobby is a migrant throughout its range in North-west Europe. On migration the birds move singly and are not easy to pick up. 50 birds have been recorded in a season at the Narbonne site. The Spring return takes place from mid April through to late May, making the Hobby one of the later migrant raptors to return. The Autumn movement starts in mid August and ends in the middle of October. The available records for the Cerdagne are insufficient to assess the size of the passage there. In the plain the number is around 130 for the season.

Some concluding remarks

The periods of migration, the routes that the birds take and the height at which they travel are much influenced by the weather patterns and particularly by the winds that can be violent and prolonged. Whilst the general outline of the routes taken is known, much needs to be done to confirm which mountain passes are used by the migrants and whether all the raptors follow similar strategies in adverse conditions. The re-establishment of a manned observation point at Eyne is very welcome and the resultant data will help to confirm how much the 'Tramontane' reduces the migration through the Cerdagne. The absence of any consistent monitoring of migration in the area of the Col d'Ares and of a migration monitoring site in Roussillon plain to complement the one near Narbonne is regrettable. The paucity of consistent reports for the Spring migration at any site over the Pyrenees means that many of the assessments are, at best, tentative and need to be confirmed. The migration over the Eastern Pyrenees in both Spring and Autumn is very significant, though markedly less than it is in the West of the Pyrenees; it merits much more study than it has been accorded hereto

Notes

1. 'Visible migration through the Pyrenees: an autumn reconnaissance', D & E Lack. *Ibis* vol 95 1953, 271-309 and 'Migration on the Bosphorus & near the Eastern Pyrenees', Hugh F I Elliott. *Ibis* vol 104 1962, 248-9
2. 'A Birdwatching Guide to the Pyrenees', Jacquie Crozier. Arlequin 1998 and 'Where to watch birds in France', La ligue française pour la protection des oiseaux (LPO). Edns Nathan 1992
3. Ringing reports and estimates of population numbers breeding in North-west Europe are based on those given in 'Handbook of the Birds of Europe, Middle East and North Africa' Vol 2, Cramp & Simmonds. OUP
4. To estimate possible numbers of raptors that migrate through Roussillon the French website 'migration.net' was consulted and, in particular, the reports from the observation sites at Gruisson-Narbonne and Gruisson-étang de l'Ayrolle were noted.



Limpkin



Tri-coloured Heron



Black-bellied Whistling Duck



Green Heron



Skimmer and Laughing Gull



Royal and Least Terns



White Ibis



Black Vulture



Pileated Woodpecker



Crested Caracara



Roseatte Spoonbill



Snail Kite



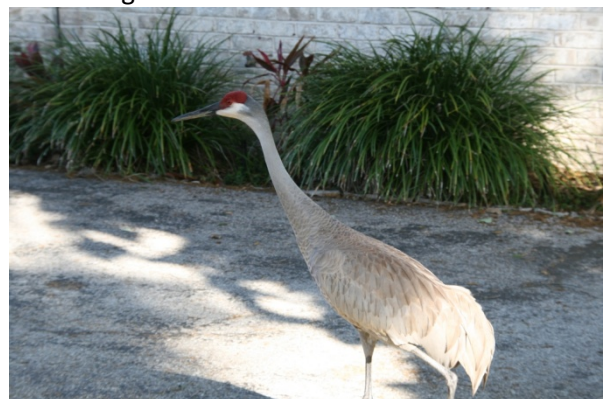
Red-bellied Woodpecker



Reddish Egret



Great Horned Owl



Sandhill Crane

AOS TRIP TO NORFOLK

(Andrew Bray)

The annual start the year off visit to Norfolk moved to a Sunday this year. Please note that the café at Hunstanton Bus Station does not open until 0830 hrs. As members arrived they greeted each other with the traditional saying and then froze. I am not saying it was cold for the month but it was a foretaste of the weather to come.

Fortunately that day it turned out rather nice. We had good visibility throughout the day and the majority were wearing several layers (more than normally worn). Talk over breakfast was of the snow we had to drive through to get to the start line and the number of Barn Owls already seen. After the warming and filling large breakfast we drove in convoy to Old Hunstanton to start the day's bird watching. At first all we could see were hundreds of gulls however it did not take long for the eyes to adjust and species started to be seen in all directions. The highlight was the Velvet Scoter over which there was much debate until it was cut short when it flew for a long stretch left to right in front of us.

Our next stop was Titchwell RSPB Reserve. This has always been a productive spot and we were not disappointed. At the start of the walk just past the café we came across several Water Rails all giving us great views. We gradually worked our way to the sea wall stopping often with scopes out to pick a wide range of birds on the water areas to our right and across the marsh to our left. An unusual sighting was a Red Kite and a large flock of Twite conveniently landed a few yards from the path. Eventually the various parties arrived at the beach. Once again the tide was out and the wind was straight into our faces. The early arrivals were frozen to their optics and headed back to the shelter offered by the shop. It was not a straight forward return as



Pink-foot Geese

more birds kept popping up for us to see. As ever the whole day could be spent at this reserve however a hot drink and some food later it was off to Holkham Gap.

If the sea is out at Titchwell it is out at Holkham however there are large areas of shallow water covered by vegetation that is liked by flocks of birds. The group, line abreast, headed out into

the "swamp" to get close to the large flocks that kept bobbing up. The flock would rise, swirl and descend into the grass. After much patience we all came to the conclusion that the flocks only consisted of Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Linnet and Goldfinch. We then headed west towards the opening to the hide. On the way we picked up intelligence that Snow Bunting was further down the beach. The route march began and there was the reward at the end. By now the light was dimming and the views from the hide were of thousands and thousands of Pink Foot Geese skeins flooding the sky. This was truly a magnificent site. It was on this note that farewells

started and the group began to dissipate for that long drive home. Once again Norfolk had lived up to expectation and the year list got off to an exceptional start for the 11 who attended.

| | |
|---|---|
| Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i> | Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i> |
| Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> | Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i> |
| Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i> | Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i> |
| Snow Goose <i>Anser caerulescens</i> | Great Black-backed Gull <i>Larus marinus</i> |
| Greater Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i> | Common (Mew) Gull <i>Larus canus</i> |
| Brent Goose <i>Branta bernicla</i> | Common Guillemot <i>Uria aalge</i> |
| Common Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> | Stock Pigeon <i>Columba oenas</i> |
| Eurasian Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i> | Common Wood Pigeon <i>Columba palumbus</i> |
| Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i> | Eurasian Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> |
| Eurasian Teal <i>Anas crecca</i> | Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i> |
| Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | Sky Lark <i>Alauda arvensis</i> |
| Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i> | Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i> |
| Northern Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i> | White / Pied Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i> |
| Common Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i> | Winter Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> |
| Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i> | Hedge Accentor <i>Prunella modularis</i> (Dunnoch) |
| Common Eider <i>Somateria mollissima</i> | European Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> |
| Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i> | Common Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i> |
| Velvet Scoter <i>Melanitta fusca</i> | Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i> |
| Common Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i> | Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> |
| Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i> | Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> |
| Red-legged Partridge <i>Alectoris rufa</i> | Great Tit <i>Parus major</i> |
| Grey Partridge <i>Perdix perdix</i> | Black-billed Magpie <i>Pica pica</i> |
| Common Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> | Carrion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i> |
| Red-throated Diver <i>Gavia stellata</i> | Common Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> |
| Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> |
| Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> | Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> |
| Northern Fulmar <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> | European Greenfinch <i>Carduelis chloris</i> |
| Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | European Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> |
| Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | Common Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> |
| Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | Snow Bunting <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i> |
| Eurasian Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> | Northern Gannet <i>Morus bassanus</i> |
| Eurasian Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | Red Kite <i>Milvus milvus</i> |
| Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i> |
| Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i> |
| Common Coot <i>Fulica atra</i> | Water Rail <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> |
| Eurasian Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> | |
| Pied Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> | Purple Sandpiper <i>Calidris maritima</i> |
| Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> | Eurasian Woodcock <i>Scolopax rusticola</i> |
| European Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> | Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i> |
| Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> | Tawny Owl <i>Strix aluco</i> |
| Northern Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i> |
| Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i> | Stonechat <i>Saxicola torquata</i> |
| Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i> | Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i> |
| Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> | Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i> |
| Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i> |
| Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i> | Bearded Tit <i>Panurus biarmicus</i> |
| Eurasian Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i> | Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> |
| Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i> | Twite <i>Carduelis flavirostris</i> |
| | (Common) Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza</i> |

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

schoeniclus
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* (domest)



AOS TRIP TO RYE HARBOUR NATURE RESERVE

(Tony Cornick)

Ten members of the Army Ornithological Society visited Rye Harbour Nature Reserve in East Sussex on the morning of 20 June 2010. Tom Walcot arranged the outing to what is his favourite local reserve, after he and Judy had entertained several of us to an excellent kedgeree breakfast. The weather was cool with some cloud and occasional blustery wind, which affected small bird sightings.

The reserve is situated to the south and west of Rye Harbour with its eastern boundary running beside the River Rother estuary salt marshes and Camber Sands. The habitat for birds proved extremely varied, as we took a seven mile walk in a clockwise direction around the area, visiting all five hides, which are modern and user-friendly.

Several man-made shallow saline lagoons for waders revealed Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Oyster Catcher and most importantly, large numbers of breeding Avocets



with young. As we travelled along the shore-line overlooked by a vegetated shingle ridge, we saw Wheatear, Linnet, Pied Wagtail and Ringed Plover, while overhead flew a constant procession of gulls and terns returning with food for their young. The reserve is blessed with several nesting colonies of seabirds, including Mediterranean and Black-headed Gulls as well as Common, Sandwich and Little Terns, the latter

having successfully nested in small numbers after two bad seasons. Crossing areas of low-lying grazing fields with Kestrel and Skylark, separating wetland ditches revealed Sedge and Reed Warblers, Reed Bunting, Whitethroat and a Hobby. Ducks were in short supply on the pools and the extensive filled gravel pits in the centre and northern part of the reserve, but Grey Lag, Canada Geese and Mute Swans were spotted with young. Areas of shrub and woodland provided sightings of the usual common birds for those habitats.

Swifts were abundant whilst Swallows, House and Sand Martins were present in small numbers towards the end of the walk. Although we failed to see Water Rail, Bittern and Bearded Tit, which frequent the reeds surrounding the largest of the reserve's gravel pits, Cetti's Warblers and Curlew were heard and a Cuckoo flew across its waters.

Our total bird count for the morning was a creditable 59 species and a further 10 were seen in Tom and Judy's garden or while in transit to and from the reserve – see attached list. Our enjoyable visit to this excellent reserve ended with a fish lunch at a local pub which was greatly appreciated by old codgers and young alike. I would recommend a visit to Rye at other times in the year, either in the winter or during migration.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD (h)
ON RYE HARBOUR NATURE RESERVE, EAST SUSSEX & OTHER BIRDS
SEEN IN HAWKHURST, KENT (ORGANISER'S HOME) OR IN TRANSIT

| | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Great-crested Grebe | Sand Martin |
| Cormorants + young | House Martin |
| Little Egret | Swallow |
| Mute Swan + young | Pied Wagtail |

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Grey Lag Geese + young | Duncock |
| Canada Geese | Wheatear |
| Shelduck | Blackbird |
| Mallards + young | Reed Warbler |
| Teal | Sedge Warbler (H) |
| Tufted Duck + young | Cetti's Warbler (H) |
| Kestrel | Whitethroat |
| Hobby | Chiffchaff (H) |
| Moorhen + young | Willow Warbler (H) |
| Coot + young | Wren (H) |
| Oystercatcher + young | Rook |
| Avocet + young | Carrion Crow |
| Ringed Plover | Jackdaw |
| Lapwing + young | Starling + young |
| Sanderling | House Sparrow + young |
| Curlew (H) | Chaffinch |
| Redshank + young | Linnet |
| Common Sandpiper | Goldfinch |
| Black-headed Gull + young | Reed Bunting |
| Mediterranean Gull + young | |
| Herring Gull | <u>OTHER BIRDS</u> |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | |
| Common Gull | Tawny Owl |
| Common Terns + young | Grey Heron |
| | Great-spotted Woodpecker + young |
| Little tern + young | Robin |
| Sandwich Tern + young | Song Thrush |
| Wood Pigeon | Great Tit + young |
| Collared Dove | Blue Tit + young |
| Cuckoo | Nuthatch |
| Green Woodpecker | Jay |
| Swift | Magpie |
| Skylark | |

AOS VISIT TO PORTLAND

(Andrew Bray & Hilary Nash)

Hilary Nash organises a weekend at the Portland Observatory in September every year when migration is in full swing. It is not always obvious that this is the case as we are always expectant of rarities passing through and they can disappoint such as the Wryneck which had shown well for the 2 days prior to our arrival. This does not stop us from exploring the blustery point and fields whilst taking the opportunity to

visit Ferrybridge and the two TSPB reserves of Lodmoor and Radipole. This year (10-12 Sep) we all got off to a rarity start with a Pectoral Sandpiper a few minutes' drive from the observatory. This little bird was not shy and we all had close views of it. The weather did not disappoint either with windy conditions and good sunny spells providing excellent visibility. The Point was awash with Linnet and Wheatear to the point where we became rather blasé on seeing these wonderful birds with their white



Pectoral Sandpiper

rump. In addition flocks of Swallows swept past heading south using the Bill for a last minute snack.

At Ferrybridge the morning did incur a shower or two though a small group did persevere whilst the tide turned leaving fresh pickings for flocks of Ring Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin and Sanderling whilst a Mediterranean Gull looked on. The afternoon was spent at Lodmoor where we able to add Curlew Sandpiper to the ever growing list of waders including Greenshank,

Redshank, Spotted Redshank, Common Sandpiper and Black-tailed Godwit. In addition Hobby and Marsh Harrier patrolled the sky over the reed beds. On our return to the Observatory we stopped at the RN Cemetery for views of Peregrine Falcon. This is a site where a morning stop is more fruitful. A group had visited early that day with various warblers singing.

On Sunday we all headed for Radipole where the Pectoral Sandpiper had taken up residence. There was a wide variety of species with Snipe and ducks showing well. A Lesser Whitethroat appeared and a Goldcrest kept popping out of the dense tree growth. Over the weekend a total of 79 species was seen; not our best total as seen from the table. It is noticeable how the same species crop up year on year.

LIST OF BIRD SPECIES SEEN IN 1999 TO 2010

| <u>English Name</u> | <u>Scientific Name</u> | <u>All Years</u> | <u>2004</u> | <u>2005</u> | <u>2007</u> | <u>2008</u> | <u>2009</u> | <u>2010</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | | | | |
| Black Throated Diver | <i>Gavia arctica</i> | X | | X | | | | |
| Red-throated Diver | <i>Gavia stellata</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Great Northern Diver | <i>Gavia immer</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Black-necked Grebe | <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Great Crested | <i>Podiceps</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grebe | <i>cristatus</i> | | | | | | | |
| Fulmar | <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> | X | X | X | | | X | X |
| Manx Shearwater | <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Balearic Shearwater | <i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i> | X | | X | | X | | |
| Sooty Shearwater | <i>Puffinus griseus</i> | X | X | X | | | | |
| Gannet | <i>Morus bassanus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Shag | <i>Phalacrocorax aristorelis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Mute Swan | <i>Cygnus olor</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Canada Goose | <i>Anser canadensis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| [Barnacle Goose] | <i>Branta leucopsis</i> | X | | X | | | | |
| [Snow Goose] | <i>Anser caerulescens</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Brent Goose | <i>Branta bernicla</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Shelduck | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Gadwall | <i>Anas strepera</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Pintail | <i>Anas acuta</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Shoveler | <i>Anas clypeata</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Wigeon | <i>Anas penelope</i> | X | X | X | | X | | |
| Teal | <i>Anas crecca</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Pochard | <i>Aythya farina</i> | X | | | | | | X |
| Tufted Duck | <i>Aythya fuligula</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Eider | <i>Somateria mollissima</i> | X | | X | | | | |
| Common Scoter | <i>Melanitta nigra</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Ruddy Duck | <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i> | X | X | X | X | | | |
| Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Marsh Harrier | <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> | X | | | | | | X |
| Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| Honey Buzzard | <i>Pernis apivorus</i> | X | | | | X | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Hobby | <i>Falco subbuteo</i> | X | | | X | X | | |
| Peregrine | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Merlin | <i>Falco columbarius</i> | X | | | X | X | | |
| Pheasant | <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> | X | | | | X | | X |
| Water Rail | <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> | X | X | H | H | H | X | |
| Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Ringed Plover | <i>Chararius hiaticula</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Lapwing | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Knot | <i>Calidris canuta</i> | X | X | | X | | X | X |
| Sanderling | <i>Calidris alba</i> | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| Purple Sandpiper | <i>Calidris maritima</i> | X | X | | | | | |
| Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Dunlin | <i>Calidris alpina</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Curlew Sandpiper | <i>Calidris ferruginea</i> | X | | | X | | X | X |
| Little Stint | <i>Calidris minuta</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> | X | | X | | | | X |
| Redshank | <i>Tringa totanus</i> | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| Spotted Redshank | <i>Tringa erythropus</i> | X | | | | | | X |
| Greenshank | <i>Tringa nebularia</i> | X | | X | | X | | X |
| Black-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa limosa</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa lapponica</i> | X | | X | | | | X |
| Snipe | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| Ruff | <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> | X | | | | | | X |
| Pectoral Sandpiper | <i>Calidris melanotos</i> | X | | | | | | X |
| Great Skua | <i>Stercorarius</i> | X | | X | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | <i>skua</i> | | | | | | | |
| Parasitic Skua | <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> | X | | X | | | | |
| Black-headed Gull | <i>Larus ridibundus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Common Gull | <i>Larus canus</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Mediterranean Gull | <i>Larus melanocephalus</i> | X | X | | | X | | X |
| Herring Gull | <i>Larus argentatus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus fuscus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Great Black-backed Gull | <i>Larus marinus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Kittiwake | <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> | X | X | X | | | X | |
| Sandwich Tern | <i>Stena sandvicensis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Common Tern | <i>Sterno hirundo</i> | X | | | X | | | X |
| Puffin | <i>Fratercula arctica</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Guillemot | <i>Uria aalge</i> | X | X | | | | X | |
| Stock Dove | <i>Columba oenas</i> | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| Wood Pigeon | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Common Cuckoo | <i>Cululus canorus</i> | X | X | | | | | |
| Short-eared Owl | <i>Asio flammeus</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | X | | | | X | X | |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopus major</i> | X | | | X | X | | |
| Kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | X | | X | | X | X | X |
| Wryneck | <i>Jynx torquilla</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Skylark | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Sand Martin | <i>Riparia riparia</i> | X | X | X | X | | X | |
| Barn Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| House Martin | <i>Delichon urbica</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Water Pipit | <i>Anthus spinoletta</i> | X | | | | | X | |
| Rock Pipit | <i>Anthus petrosus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Meadow Pipit | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tree Pipit | <i>Anthus trivialis</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Pied Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Yellow Wagtail | <i>Motacilla flava</i> | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| Grey Wagtail | <i>Motacilla cinera</i> | X | X | | | X | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Hedge Accentor | <i>Prunella modularis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Robin | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i> | X | | | X | X | X | |
| Northern Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Stonechat | <i>Saxicola torquata</i> | X | X | X | | X | | |
| Whinchat | <i>Saxicola rubetra</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Song Thrush | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> | X | X | | | X | | |
| Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Blackcap | <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> | X | X | | X | X | | X |
| Garden Warbler | <i>Sylvia borin</i> | X | | | X | X | | X |
| Lesser Whitethroat | <i>Sylvia curruca</i> | X | | | | X | | X |
| Whitethroat | <i>Sylvia communis</i> | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| Dartford Warbler | <i>Sylvia undata</i> | | | | | | | |
| Sedge Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i> | X | | X | X | X | | |
| Grasshopper Warbler | <i>Locustella naevia</i> | X | | | X | X | | |
| Cetti's Warbler | <i>Cettia cetti</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Icterine Warbler | <i>Hippolais icterina</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Melodious Warbler | <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i> | X | | | | X | | |
| Willow Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> | X | X | | X | X | | |
| Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Goldcrest | <i>Regulus regulus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | | |
| Firecrest | <i>Regulus ignicapillus</i> | X | X | | | X | | |
| Spotted Flycatcher | <i>Muscicapa striata</i> | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Pied Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i> | X | | | X | | X | |
| Great Tit | <i>Parus major</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Blue Tit | <i>Parus caeruleus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Long-tailed Tit | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> | X | X | | | | | X |
| Bearded Reedling | <i>Panurus biarmicus</i> | X | X | X | | X | | |
| Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Jackdaw | <i>Corvus monedula</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Rook | <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Carrion Crow | <i>Corvus corone</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | X | X | | | | X | X |
| Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Rose-coloured Starling | <i>Sturnus roseus</i> | X | | | | | | |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | X | X | X | | X | | X |
| Linnet | <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Greenfinch | <i>Carduelis chloris</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Reed Bunting | <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i> | X | X | | | X | | X |
| Yellowhammer | <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> | X | | | X | | | |
| Ortolan Bunting | <i>Emberiza hortulana</i> | X | | | | | | |
| Escapes | | | | | | | | |
| Cape (South African) Shelduck | <i>Tadorna cana</i> | (X) | | | | | | (X) |
| White-cheeked (Bahama) Pintail | <i>Anas bahamensis</i> | (X) | | | | (X) | | |
| Hooded Merganser | <i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i> | (X) | | | | (X) | (X) | |
| Southern Red Bishop | <i>Euplectes orix</i> | (X) | | | | (X) | | |
| | Total Species | 141+4 | 85 | 86 | 87 | 97+3 | 78+1 | 79+1 |

NAVAL PARTY AOS
2010 PELAGIC - PORTSMOUTH TO BILBAO - 16-19 SEPTEMBER

(Andy Harrison)

Soldiers should never go to sea. That was certainly the general conclusion at the end of the 2008 pelagic after an "interesting time" in the Bay of Biscay. So why, two years later, were a party of six stood once again on the deck of the P&O ferry *Pride of Bilbao* steaming out of Portsmouth destined for Bilbao by way of the Bay of Biscay?

Good question. There are, of course, numerous answers but the two key elements driving the decision to set sail again were the dulling of memory over time (it couldn't have been that bad last time) and the fact that the P&O Portsmouth to Bilbao service provided by the *Pride of Bilbao* was due to finish at the end of September. Oh, of course, there was the remote chance of seeing a few birds and cetaceans that landlubbers don't normally see!

So, on the evening of Thursday 16 September, the cast assembled at the P&O ferry terminal at Portsmouth for the latest adventure: Roger Dickey ("captain" and Chairman), Andrew Bray ("officer of the watch" and "retiring" Honorary Secretary), Richard Sergeant ("first mate" and new Honorary Secretary), Bob Hayward ("principal weapons officer"), Andy Harrison ("chief stoker") and Richard Horton (welcome civvy guest).



By the time the party had been processed, boarded, found cabins and sorted themselves out it was dark and too late for any deck time. Consequently, the company sought out the galley and after some scran retired to a quiet corner of the barracks for tales of past sea faring and birding adventures over a glass or two of grog.

Reveille was called at 0500 hours on Friday 17 September but, thankfully, the drummer was not present. The party was fully assembled out on the top deck (starboard side) before full light, ready to repel boarders. Portsmouth to Bilbao. Bay of Biscay. Bound to be a rough crossing; it always is. Not this time! After a chill start the day proved warm and dry and the sea state was calm. Naval Party AOS stood too from 0600 hours to 1910 hours by which time you couldn't see anything by dint of the fact that it was dark. So, who failed to indent for night vision equipment so that the vigil could be continued throughout the night?

Perversely, the good weather that made the voyage so gentle on the senses, meant that the bird life was limited. Gannets and Great Skuas were regularly sighted but

Shearwaters and Petrels were in short supply. During the quieter periods hardened bird watchers resorted to searching for and watching cetaceans! There were, of course, examples of pelagic rarities such as Tree Pipit, Willow Warbler and Whitethroat. There is nothing quite like watching a small passerine crossing the open sea, miles from any land, to ram home the realities of migration.

Friday evening was another night of revelry in the galley and mess deck. Oh, ok, food, beer, conversation and bed!

The party had a bit of a lie in on Saturday 18 September but were all ready to catch the liberty ship at 0700 for the run ashore in Bilbao. As with the previous trip the plan involved taking a taxi to the top (as near as you can get in a taxi) of the local hill to re-acquaint all with "terrestrial" birds. After a good time around the top, the party made a leisurely walking descent down the hill back to the ferry port in time to re-embark for the 1215 sailing. Over 33 species were seen during the run ashore and, as ever, the highlights will vary according to individual but must include Sardinian Warbler, Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike and, for the author, Black Redstart.¹

Once back on board the party returned to the top deck (port side) to be greeted by the sight of a flock of 40+ Spoonbills flying west. The stag ended in the middle of Last Dog Watch (1900) the day having remained dry and bright and, despite the wind, the sea state was again calm (phew!). Sightings of sea birds were infrequent so watching cetaceans was, again, the order of the day; not that many are admitting to it!

The final day, Sunday 19 September, saw the party all on deck by 0645, despite another lie in, and remained at its station until disembarkation at Portsmouth at 1715. The party did however move down a deck to take advantage of the protection from the wind afforded by the superstructure! Very few new species were seen on the return passage but two Puffins were spotted and a Peregrine Falcon was observed on and around one of the old forts protecting Portsmouth harbour.

Having safely disembarked, complete with stomach contents, the party dispersed and headed for home locations. Whilst the total number of species seen during the trip was a respectable 77 for several of the party this included a significant number of "lifers" (four for the author and 12 for Richard H).

Soldiers should never go to sea. Why is it then that the AOS membership is discussing alternate options for pelagic trips in 2011 and beyond now that the *Pride of Bilbao* service has ended?!

Avast!

Species Lists

Pelagic

British (English) Name

Fulmar

Cory's Shearwater

Scientific Name

Fulmarus glacialis

Calonectris diomedea

¹ Despite being told that they are common in London, the author has never seen one in the UK.

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sooty Shearwater | <i>Puffinus griseus</i> |
| Manx Shearwater | <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> |
| Storm Petrel | <i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i> |
| Gannet | <i>Morus bassanus</i> |
| Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> |
| Grey Phalarope | <i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i> |
| Pomarine Skua | <i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i> |
| Arctic Skua | <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> |
| Great Skua | <i>Stercorarius skua</i> |
| Sabine's Gull | <i>Xema sabini</i> |
| Great Black-headed Gull | <i>Larus ichthyæetus</i> |
| Herring Gull | <i>Larus argentatus</i> |
| Black Tern | <i>Chlidonias niger</i> |
| Sandwich Tern | <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> |
| Guillemot | <i>Uria aalge</i> |
| Razorbill | <i>Alca torda</i> |
| Puffin | <i>Fratercula arctica</i> |
| Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> |
| House Martin | <i>Delichon urbicum</i> |
| Yellow Wagtail | <i>Motacilla flava</i> |
| White Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> |
| Pied Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i> |
| Melodious Warbler | <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i> |
| Garden Warbler | <i>Sylvia borin</i> |
| Whitethroat | <i>Sylvia communis</i> |
| Willow Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> |

ANOTHER TRIP TO TRIPOLI

(Nicholas Beswick)

On my previous business trips to Libya I had found myself in central Tripoli with access to the foreshore but with no opportunity to look for land birds. This time, I stayed in a compound in the hinterland south of the city and with time for exploration at the end of the working day. I was lucky to find nearby a large area of undeveloped land, mostly open eucalyptus woodland with patches of thorn bushes, apparently designated for development as a national park. Bird life in the surrounding area of smallholdings was very sparse in comparison.

My arrival, coinciding with a dust storm with temperatures of 40C was inauspicious, but things improved the following morning with the sight of forty Long-legged Buzzards circling over. As I never saw them again, I imagine that they had come in only as a result of the weather. The trees around the compound held numerous Turtle and Palm Doves, countless Spanish Sparrows and a few Serins but very little else. That evening my first big surprise was a Squacco Heron that flew in to perch in a tree close to our compound, there being no watercourses anywhere in the area. I also saw my first ever Fulvous Babblers in the same area, along with more familiar Woodchat

and Southern Grey Shrikes. The babblers are delightful thrush-sized birds with an endearing habit of forming very tight groups snuggling together and preening each other.

Exploring the National Park brought more surprises, starting with a pair of Stone-curlews. A few days later we attended a barbecue, sadly alcohol-free, at a Libyan colleague's compound, Surprise became astonishment as two pairs of Stone-curlews flew in at dusk: quite some garden record by anyone's reckoning. And the icing on the cake was a Barn Owl flying over as we ate delicious locally-caught fish.

Friday was a day off during my week's trip and a visit was arranged to the amazing Roman city of Leptis Magna, some sixty miles east of Tripoli and now a World Heritage Site. The ruins, some partly rebuilt by the Italians before the war, were spectacular, the birds rather less so, though passage Spotted and Pied Flycatchers were much in evidence. Sadly, I could not conjure up a Collared. Back at the National Park, my list grew slowly over successive evenings with most of the small birds again being on passage. These included a singing Reed Warbler and a couple of showy but silent Icterines. An aggressive pair of ravens were a puzzle: their calls were tenor to the Raven's bass croak. I eventually nailed them as Brown-necked Ravens: the voice, the tail was only as long as the folded wingtips and the wingbeats were silent in normal flight. Even on a perched bird, the brown neck took considerable imagination to discern. It also took me several visits to get a decent view of the Barbary Partridges resident in the park. Hunting is clearly not a problem in Libya.

The Birdlist website, www.birdlist.org/libya, details some 293 species recorded in the country. As Libya has only recently become visitable and has next to no tourism, one wonders when these records were collected. Libya is a vast country, so it was really no surprise that I saw only a tiny fraction of the list. I did find it interesting that many of the species I encountered had clearly migrated straight across the Sahara and that some were still far south of their breeding areas well on into the season. A further visit is on the cards in due course and a trip out into the desert proper would be a mouthwatering prospect if it could be arranged.

Libya Bird List 4-11 May 2010

All records are Tripoli area unless otherwise stated

| Species | Scientific Name | Remarks |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| White Stork | <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> | 3 near airport on 4 May |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | Several foraging in fields |
| Squacco Heron | <i>Ardeola ralloides</i> | One on 5 May |
| Long-legged Buzzard | <i>Buteo rufinus</i> | 40 over on 5 May |
| Honey Buzzard | <i>Pernis apivorus</i> | One on 10 May |
| Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | Common |
| Barbary Partridge | <i>Alectoris barbara</i> | |
| Stone-curlew | <i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i> | |
| Feral Pigeon | <i>Columba livia</i> | Abundant |
| Turtle Dove | <i>Streptopelia turtur</i> | Abundant |
| Palm Dove | <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> | Abundant |

| | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Barn Owl | <i>Tyto alba</i> | |
| Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | |
| Pallid Swift | <i>Apus pallidus</i> | |
| Hoopoe | <i>Upupa epops</i> | |
| Bee-eater | <i>Merops apiaster</i> | |
| Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | |
| Sand Martin | <i>Riparia riparia</i> | With Swallows and House Martins on 9 May |
| House Martin | <i>Delichon urbica</i> | |
| Whinchat | <i>Saxicola rubetra</i> | |
| Yellow Wagtail | <i>Motacilla flava</i> | One over on 4 May |
| Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i> | |
| Icterine Warbler | <i>Hippolais icterina</i> | Singles on 7 and 9 May |
| Olivaceous Warbler | <i>Hippolais pallida</i> | Leptis Magna only |
| Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> | One singing on 10 May |
| Sardinian Warbler | <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i> | |
| Spectacled Warbler | <i>Sylvia conspicillata</i> | |
| Spotted Flycatcher | <i>Muscicapa striata</i> | |
| Pied Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i> | All females |
| Southern Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius meridionalis</i> | Very widespread |
| Woodchat Shrike | <i>Lanius senator</i> | Common in scrub |
| Brown-necked Raven | <i>Corvus ruficollis</i> | |
| Fulvous Babbler | <i>Turdoides fulvus</i> | |
| Spanish Sparrow | <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> | Abundant |
| Serin | <i>Serinus serinus</i> | Common |
| Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | Leptis Magna only |
| Linnet | <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> | |

TRIP TO NAMIBIA 21st FEBRUARY – 8th MARCH 2010

(Anne Nason)

Leaving Heathrow on the 21st February for a bird safari to Namibia after one of the coldest winter's in England for 30 years, was a most delightful prospect and one that certainly lived up to every expectation. Namibia is a beautiful and fascinating country and has a large number of endemics or near endemics, so we saw many birds we had never seen before and came home with a record number of photographs.

On arrival at Windhoek Airport via Johannesburg on the afternoon of the 22nd we were met by our South African guide, Bert Palthe and driven the 40 km to the city in brilliant sunshine. We stayed one night at the Onganga Pension in a pleasant suburb within walking distance of Avis Dam, a good birding spot. After a quick change we set off for the Windhoek Water Treatment Plant – sewage works do seem to be a favourite spot for birders in Southern Africa! There we saw South African Shelduck, Red-knobbed Coot, Darter, Southern Pochard, Night Heron, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Sedge Warbler and Red-billed Francolin to mention a few. On the way back to the pension we drove to a vantage point to look over the hills of

Windhoek and in the scrubby bushes spotted Red-headed Finch and Black-chested Prinia. At callover before supper we totalled 51 species and we hadn't even left Windhoek.

Early the next morning we set off on foot for the dam, although due to his enthusiasm, Bert had us start whilst it was still dark! Dawn was breaking as we reached the dam and although there was little birdlife on the water, the trees nearby yielded Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler, African Wren-Warbler, Red-eyed Bulbul and Blue and Common Waxbills, and bizarrely, an Australian Zebra-finch which must have been an escapée.



White-browed Sparrow

Red Bishops were in the maize fields and White-browed Sparrow-Weavers were common, as they were throughout most of Namibia. After breakfast we called in to a supermarket to buy food for our lunches on the road, mostly grapes, avocado pears and mangos. We then set off for the Desert Homestead, near Sossusvlei, but instead of taking the direct tarred road via Rehoboth, we went via the C26 to the Kupferberg Pass. Bert had incredibly sharp eyes and spotted everything that moved and a lot that didn't. Before we had got very far he had pointed out Monteiro's Hornbill and Short-toed Rock Thrush. All along the route, via the D182 and the C24 we stopped continually to photograph birds. I told Bert that one of the birds I most wanted to see was a Pygmy Falcon, and before long he spotted one near a Sociable Weaver's nest. These huge thatched nests provide nesting places for both the Pygmy Falcon and Rosy-faced Lovebirds and soon we saw the latter as well. We were to encounter both these special species in greater numbers later on in the trip. The Sociable Weaver nests sometimes become so large that when it rains, the weight brings both the branch and the nest down and we witnessed several collapsed nests during our trip.

Bert chose shady spots for us to stop for coffee and lunch from his cold box as the distance to our next destination was about 300km and on the route we took there was only one place, Solitaire, where it was possible to buy fuel or food. On the Spreetshoogte Pass we were lucky enough to see a pair of klipspringer right beside the road, and they remained long enough to photograph them outlined against a view of a flat plain below with mountains in the background. Several raptors were seen on the telegraph poles including Harrier Hawk and Pale Chanting Goshawk. We reached Solitaire about 4pm where we stopped for fuel and cold drinks, and then drove on the 100km to the Desert Homestead where we stayed for the next two nights. Nearly all the roads we travelled were unsealed, but as they are wide and well graded it is possible to do a reasonable speed, however, as we were constantly stopping for birds, we did not often travel very fast. Between Solitaire and the Desert Homestead we

saw both Rüppell's and Northern Black Korhaan as well as Black-breasted Snake Eagle and Steppe Buzzard. We arrived just as it was getting dusk and the Desert Homestead was a welcome sight after a very long day.



Pale-chanting Goshawk

Next morning we had a very early start and were up at 4.30 as Bert wanted to get to the entrance to the Namib Naukluft Park by 6am to be one of the first in the queue. There are several lodges closer to the park entrance, but most are either a great deal more expensive or simple campsites. The gates open at "daybreak" but this can be widely interpreted. However, by about 6.45 we were through the gates and Bert got our pass from the Park office. We then drove to the area where the Dune Lark is found, passing several beautiful and striking Gemsbok (Oryx) and herds of Springbok on the way. To our great surprise, in this remote area of the Namib desert we found a woman sitting under a large

umbrella with a table full of drinks and thermoses! She told us that she was the medic for the Namib Desert Challenge, an event for ultra runners, and this was one of the staging posts. Knowing that the daughter of one of our regimental friends is an ultra runner, Mimi Anderson, we asked if she was running, and were told she was in the lead and expected to finish by Dune 45 later in the day.

We searched amongst the tussocks in the dunes for the lark, and were lucky enough to find several, one of Namibia's "specials." We drove on along the stony valley, seeing two Ludwig's Bustard's on the way, to the spot where everyone has to transfer to park vehicles for the last 4km as the sand is too deep for normal vehicles. At Sossusvlei we walked on in the thick sand to where we could overlook a strange area resembling a dried-up lake dotted with starkly skeletal trees which are said to be 800 years old. Bert and Ian went down to the "lakebed" but I decided to wait for them. By this time it was extremely hot with the heat reflecting off the red sand so it was not the best place to linger as I found to my cost! On our way back, reunited with our own vehicle, we stopped by Dune 45 because we knew that it was the finishing point for that day's ultra run. We met up with Tim, Mimi's husband, and invited him to join us for our picnic lunch. We soon saw Mimi in the distance and on arrival, after running for 56km that day in the searing heat of the Namib Desert, she had to run up Dune 45 and back, which she did in less than 30 minutes. I sat with her under the shade of one of the few trees in the desert while her feet were attended to and she chatted to me as if she had just run a couple of hundred metres. Phenomenal, and our guide Bert was incredibly impressed at this feat by a young Englishwoman! The next day she completed the final leg and won the 5 day event, beating all the men to boot! It was

an extraordinary coincidence that by complete chance, we were there to witness this amazing feat in the Namib Desert.

On the 25th February we left the Desert Homestead and set off for the long journey to Walvis Bay, photographing Greater Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, Southern Ant-eating Chat, Capped Wheatear and other species on the way. The Gaub Pass runs through a canyon, where we stopped for a picnic lunch, using one of the concrete picnic tables that are conveniently placed along many of the roads in Namibia. We later descended into the Kuiseb Pass where we saw a herd of Hartmann's zebra in the distance, differing from Burchell's zebra in the widely spaced stripes on their rumps. This is the pass where during WW2 a couple of German geologists hid themselves for two years rather than be interned. Their story is told in a book called "The Sheltering Desert" by Hanno Martin – one of the geologists. We then crossed the extensive gravel plains where we saw several species of larks and Tractrac Chats, arriving at Walvis Bay in the late afternoon at Lagoon Lodge, painted the brightest yellow you



Rüppell's Bustard

can possibly imagine. Opposite the lodge is an esplanade overlooking the lagoon where we immediately spotted Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Avocets, and a wide variety of waders. We had dinner in a French restaurant in a converted chapel, recommended by the French owner of our lodge. This is one of the features of Namibia - endless drives through empty stretches of desert landscape and yet the few towns one encounters are relatively modern and sophisticated.

Early next morning we drove along the road to the salt works in a light mist, where we found Chestnut-banded and White-fronted Plover in the brine ponds. It is this mist that brings life to the Namib Desert as it rolls inland and creatures obtain liquid from it, like the dune beetle which stands on its front legs so that the mist condenses on the largest possible surface and trickles down to its mouth. In turn, birds like the Dune Lark eat the beetles for moisture.

The Great White Pelican in ponds beside the road had turned bright pink because of the brine - more colourful than the Flamingos, most of whom were juveniles. As we returned for breakfast we were treated to the amazing sight of thousand of terns, mostly Damara and Common Terns, wheeling and turning in huge flocks in the sky, in fluid patterns, like the starlings in the UK. After breakfast we set off along the coast road, made of compacted brine and surrounded by dunes, to Swakopmund. En route we stopped to see the guano platform, a short distance out to sea, set up by a

man from Swakopmund who was considered utterly mad but was eventually lent the money to construct a small platform. He is now the richest man in the town and has a huge guano platform for the roosting Cape and White-breasted Cormorants that come every night in their thousands and deposit tons of guano which is then harvested for fertiliser. Another stop was to see the “Lichen Forest” – a protected area where lichens grown directly on the sand.

Swakopmund is a very Germanic town and we stopped briefly for picnic provisions and then drove on to Henties Bay where we turned east on the C35 towards Uis. Along this road we stopped to photograph Namaqua Sandgrouse and Burchell’s Courser, and the Benguela Lark. After Uis we drove through part of the range of the desert elephants but unfortunately did not encounter them. One of the best sights was a party of several adult ostriches with about 30 young of different sizes crossing the road in front of us. We eventually arrived at Twyfelfontein in Damaraland and booked into the Lodge for two nights – a comfortable lodge set in a dramatic background of reddish rocky hills. The main dining-room upstairs in the thatched lodge has had to be netted because of the Pale-winged Starlings stealing food from the tables! In the morning Ian went down to the small waterhole to take photographs where he was lucky enough to see a Secretary Bird come down to drink. Bert took



Bare-cheeked Babblers

me to see the rock engravings carved by the Herero people, about 5 kms from the lodge. The engravings illustrate the large number of animals present in the past, and it is thought that some of the pictures were for teaching children which animals were dangerous and also showing their footprints for tracking. Animals included elephant, lion, rhino, giraffe, ostrich etc. All we could find were Dassie Rats, a small rodent with a long furry tail, Striped Mouse and Elephant Shrew - not exactly “the Big Five”!

After picking up Ian, we went to a dried riverbed where we found Bare-cheeked Babblers, Groundscraper Thrush and heard a Red-crested Korhaan calling. With the heat reflecting from the sand it was incredibly hot and from time to time we stood under the “Shepherd’s Tree” which has dense foliage and Bert explained the temperature would be 6° cooler than the outside temperature. Another stop at a campsite a few kilometres away yielded Ruppell’s Parrot, another endemic.

En route to Etosha the following day we went via the Petrified Forest. This is an area where there are petrified tree trunks, some of substantial size, lying on the ground where they had been washed millions of years ago, it is believed, from the forests of the Congo. We went via Khorixas and then stopped at Outjo to buy more lunchtime provisions at a small supermarket. Turning due north onto the C38, we entered Etosha National Park by the Anderson Gate and drove to a waterhole where we saw herds of springbok and black-faced impala with Wattled Starling feeding at their feet.

Great Sparrow, Chestnut Weaver, Scaly-feathered Finch were also spotted along the road, along with several raptors. Arriving at Okaukuejo Camp in the early evening we saw a juvenile Martial Eagle on a tree just inside the fence. We quickly drove to the area and saw the eagle with a huge crop bulging through its chest – obviously a very well-fed juvenile.

Our rondavel was close to the camp waterhole which was home to a pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls. They were roosting in a huge tree behind the waterhole and Ian was able to take photographs at a distance. Sociable Weavers were nesting noisily in the smaller trees and Crimson-breasted Shrike were also around. Water Thick-knee. Wood Sandpiper and Blacksmith Lapwing were feeding around the edge.



Pygmy Falcon

Next morning, setting off to drive round the area outside Okaukuejo Camp, we had not gone far before we saw a tiny female Pygmy Falcon sitting on a thornbush with the thorns almost as big as the bird. In contrast in size, Kori Bustards, the largest flying bird, were relatively common and in the 6 days we spent in Etosha we must have seen more than 30, and the same number of Northern Black Korhaans. These handsome birds are very similar to the Southern Black Korhaan but the latter are only found in the Western Cape. The only distinction is that the Northern species has conspicuous white flashes in the primaries when flying.

The animals in Etosha National Park were all in very good condition as the rains had allowed a good growth of grass and we saw Springbok, Gemsbok, Blue Wildebeest, Red Hartebeest, Burchell's Zebra, Giraffe, Eland, Kudu, Black-faced Impala, Steenbok, Damara Dikdik, Common Duiker, Warthog, Lion, Spotted Hyena, Black-backed Jackal, Ground Squirrel and a variety of Mongoose during our six days in the park. The habitat varies from acacia thorn scrub to open grassland, some areas of woodland savannah with Mopane trees resembling parkland and in the east a broadleaved woodland habitat. The vast pan to the north is absolutely featureless and mostly devoid of life except we could see a distant line of pink where the flamingos were nesting after the rains. We were told that Elephant herds will also cross the pan. Sadly, we saw none as they had apparently already gone north. There is a designated place where you can drive onto the pan, just to experience the vastness of this 5000 square mile area.

In the dry season the animals are concentrated round waterholes, although at this time of the year they were more dispersed, but the bird life was amazing. The park rules are strict and one is only allowed to get out of the vehicle at designated spots. These were very few and far between so it was difficult sometimes to find somewhere to

picnic. Back at Okaukuejo for dinner, a jackal walked nonchalantly through the outside tables of the restaurant, and Rock Martins were roosting on the thatched roofs.

Next morning we paid a last visit to the camp waterhole to see the Eagle Owls and were rewarded by the sight of a Lesser Honeyguide. The next two nights were spent at Halali Camp in the middle of the Park so we set off slowly, but although only 70+ km away, we took most of the day to get there as there was so much birdlife to photograph. The Pygmy Falcons, both male and female, were spotted again, Red-necked Falcon, Sabota and Monotonous Larks, Double-banded Courser to mention a few. At



Monotonous Lark

Rietfontein waterhole we saw Tawny Eagle, a juvenile Saddle-billed Stork, African Jacana and European Bee-eaters. More poignantly we were shown the grave of a young Dutchwoman, aged 36, who had died in the 19th century on the trek into Angola. A sad and lonely spot to die in those early days of pioneering.



Blue Crane

Halali Camp is smaller than Okaukuejo and is known for its owls, so after arrival in the mid-afternoon we searched for them and Bert found an African Scops Owl roosting in a tree near the restaurant. Barn Owls were heard but not seen. Next day, by asking the gardeners, we found two White-faced Owls in a tree near one of the rondavels. Southern White-crowned Shrike were also seen in the camp area, Red-billed and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills and Gabar Goshawk. Driving around this section of the Park we saw many Abdim's Storks, a pair of Blue Crane with a young chick, and Temminck's Courser. Dozens

of White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures were feeding on the remains of a zebra from a lion kill. One of the vultures had a yellow numbered tag on its wing, and later we met the biologist who was studying vultures. We also spotted a Secretary Bird sitting on a low tree beside the road which remained stationary whilst Ian photographed it and then shortly afterwards we saw the juvenile standing on its nest

on top of a large, solitary tree about 200m from the road. Just as Ian got out his camera it sat down and disappeared from sight.

For our last two days in Etosha we stayed at a private camp, Onguma Lodge, outside the eastern Von Lindequist Gate, which was small but very comfortable. During dinner we could watch the Verreaux's Eagle Owls catching prey by the floodlit waterhole, which certainly added interest to our meal! We had called into Fort Namutoni for lunch in the Park, an old German fort where, in 1904 the remaining

German soldiers had been slaughtered by the local tribe – a Rorke's Drift situation. While eating lunch we were entertained by Red-faced Mousebirds feeding on a fig tree. On our last day in Etosha, whilst driving to the entrance gate from Onguma, we came across a young zebra foal caught in some wire beside the track, lying in the bush. We immediately reported it to the gate and were relieved in the evening when we were told it had been rescued and reunited with its mother. We drove up to the Andoni Plain via Fisher's Pan. En route Ian



Secretary Bird

was lucky enough to photograph an adult Marico Flycatcher feeding a fledgling. We also saw a young Brubru which took us some time to identify as it is unlike its parent. We saw more Blue Cranes, one of them wearing a coloured leg ring. Shaft-tailed Whydahs, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Barn Swallow, Banded Martin and others were spotted en route. The waterhole near Namutoni proved to be an excellent place for birds and animals. About 40 Black-winged Pratincole were feeding around the edges, also Three-banded Plover, a family of Egyptian Geese and several Vultures sunbathing. On our final evening at Onguma Lodge we were entertained by several jackals fighting off an interloper to their pack.

On the 6th March we left Etosha after six memorable days of amazing birding and drove down to Erongo Wilderness Lodge near Omaruru. Shortly before reaching Tsumeb we stopped at Otjikoto Lake, a curious sinkhole with vertical sides, where the ground had collapsed into an underground lake. During the 1914-18 war the Germans drove many of their large guns into the lake, although some have now been recovered and are in the Windhoek Museum. There is a unique species of fish in this very deep water.

Erongo Wilderness Lodge is in an area surrounded by kopjies and for the last two kilometres visitors have to transfer to a lodge vehicle as the track passes over a rock. Erongo has a large number of endemics and was an excellent end to our trip. Verreaux's Eagles nest on one of the kopjies, and although the young had fledged, we saw the eagle on the wing. Hartlaub's Francolin were seen in the morning, and near the restaurant which is built on a rock, seed is put out for flocks of Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Great Sparrows, Green-winged Pytilia, various doves and other species

which made it an excellent place for a photo-shoot! It is safe to walk in the area and on our walks one of the most interesting sightings was a young Klaas's Cuckoo being fed by a Rockrunner. There were also White-tailed Shrike, (Namibia's national bird) Pririt Batis, Acacia Pied Barbet, Rock Kestrel, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Violet-eared Waxbill and Black-faced Waxbill. Whilst walking across a rock, I stepped over a crack, and immediately saw the local guide look back quickly. I had just stepped over a Horned Adder. It was an adult, but only about 18 inches long. It slithered under a small rock and the following day when I looked for it, it was still there. We saw several klipspringer, and a troop of baboons and dassies (Rock Hyraxes) were everywhere. The following day we went to a dried up riverbed with Bert and our local guide, and he showed us where the Violet Wood-hoopoe was nesting, Ruppell's Parrots, and at last, our first Woodpecker of the trip, a Bearded Woodpecker. That evening a large porcupine appeared beside the restaurant, as it has learnt that food is available nearby! It was interesting to see one so close.



Pririt Batis

On our final day we left after breakfast, but as we drove off we spotted an African Wild Cat being mobbed by birds. We drove the 200 or so kilometres back to Windhoek and then to the airport but even in the departure lounge we spotted our 250th species of the trip – a Greater Striped Swallow nesting under the overhang of the building. We caught the plane to Johannesburg and then on to Harare to stay with our family, after an absolutely memorable trip to Namibia, and a wealth of new species seen. Our trip had been arranged by Lawsons of Nelspruit, the same people who arranged the AOS trip to South Africa two years ago, and whom we would highly recommend. Their website is www.lawsons.co.za

BIRD LIST FOR NAMIBIA

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Common Ostrich | <i>Struthio camelus</i> |
| Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> |
| Great White Pelican | <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i> |
| White-breasted Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i> |
| Cape Cormorant (E) | <i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i> |
| Reed Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i> |
| African Darter | <i>Anhinga rufa</i> |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> |
| Black-headed Heron | <i>Ardea melanocephala</i> |
| Yellow-billed Egret | <i>Egretta intermedia</i> |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> |
| Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i> |
| Hamerkop | <i>Scopus umbretta</i> |
| African Openbill | <i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i> |
| Marabou Stork | <i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i> |
| Abdim's Stork | <i>Ciconia abdimii</i> |

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| Saddle-billed Stork | <i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i> |
| Greater Flamingo | <i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i> |
| Lesser Flamingo | <i>Phoeniconais minor</i> |
| Egyptian Goose | <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i> |
| South African Shelduck (E) | <i>Tadorna cana</i> |
| Cape Teal | <i>Anas capensis</i> |
| Hottentot Teal | <i>Anas hottentota</i> |
| Red-billed Teal | <i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i> |
| Cape Shoveller (E) | <i>Anas smithii</i> |
| Southern Pochard | <i>Netta erythrophthalma</i> |
| Comb Duck | <i>Sarkidornis melanotos</i> |
| Secretary Bird | <i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i> |
| White-backed Vulture | <i>Gyps africanus</i> |
| Lappet-faced Vulture | <i>Torgos tracheliotus</i> |
| Black Kite | <i>Milvus migrans</i> |
| Yellow-billed Kite | <i>Milvus aegyptius</i> |
| Black-shouldered Kite | <i>Elanus caeruleus</i> |
| Verreaux's Eagle | <i>Aquila verreauxii</i> |
| Tawny Eagle | <i>Aquila rapax</i> |
| Wahlberg's Eagle | <i>Aquila whalbergii</i> |
| Booted Eagle | <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i> |
| African Hawk-Eagle | <i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i> |
| Martial Eagle | <i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i> |
| Brown Snake-Eagle | <i>Circaetus cinereus</i> |
| Black-chested Snake Eagle | <i>Circaetus gallicus</i> |
| Bateleur | <i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i> |
| Steppe Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> |
| Augur Buzzard | <i>Buteo augur</i> |
| Gabar Goshawk | <i>Micronisus gabar</i> |
| Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (NE) | <i>Melierax canorus</i> |
| African Harrier Hawk | <i>Polyboroides typus</i> |
| Lanner Falcon | <i>Falco biarmicus</i> |
| Red-necked Falcon | <i>Falco chicquera</i> |
| Western Red-footed Falcon | <i>Falco vespertinus</i> |
| Rock Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> |
| Greater Kestrel | <i>Falco rupicoloides</i> |
| Pygmy Falcon | <i>Polihierax semitorquatus</i> |
| Red-billed Francolin (NE) | <i>Pternistes adspersus</i> |
| Hartlaub's Francolin (NE) | <i>Pternistes hartlaubi</i> |
| Helmeted Guineafowl | <i>Numida meleagris</i> |
| Blue Crane (E) | <i>Anthropoides paradiseus</i> |
| Common Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> |
| Red-knobbed Coot | <i>Fulica cristata</i> |
| Kori Bustard | <i>Ardeotis kori</i> |
| Ludwig's Bustard (NE) | <i>Neotis ludwigii</i> |
| Rüppell's Korhaan | <i>Eupodotis rueppellii</i> |
| Red-crested Korhaan | <i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i> |
| Northern Black Korhaan (E) | <i>Eupodotis afraoides</i> |
| African Jacana | <i>Actophilornis africanus</i> |
| African Black Oystercatcher (E) | <i>Haematopus moquini</i> |
| Common Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> |
| Chestnut-banded Plover | <i>Charadrius pallidus</i> |
| White-fronted Plover | <i>Charadrius minutus</i> |
| Red Knot | <i>Calidris canutus</i> |
| Curlew Sandpiper | <i>Calidris ferruginea</i> |
| Little Stint | <i>Calidris minuta</i> |
| Sanderling | <i>Calidris alba</i> |
| Ruff | <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> |
| Grey Plover | <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> |
| Three-banded Plover | <i>Charadrius tricollaris</i> |

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| Crowned Lapwing | <i>Vanellus coronatus</i> |
| Blacksmith Lapwing | <i>Vanellus armatus</i> |
| Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> |
| Wood Sandpiper | <i>Tringa glareola</i> |
| Common Greenshank | <i>Tringa nebularia</i> |
| Common Whimbrel | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> |
| Ruddy Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> |
| Pied Avocet | <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> |
| Black-winged Stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> |
| Water Thicknee | <i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i> |
| Black-winged Pratincole | <i>Glareola nordmanni</i> |
| Burchell's Courser (NE) | <i>Cursorius rufus</i> |
| Temminck's Courser | <i>Cursorius temminckii</i> |
| Double-banded Courser | <i>Smutsornis africanus</i> |
| Namaqua Sandgrouse (NE) | <i>Pterocles namaqua</i> |
| Double-banded Sandgrouse (NE) | <i>Pterocles bicinctus</i> |
| Cape Gull | <i>Larus vetula</i> |
| Grey-headed Gull | <i>Larus cirrocephalus</i> |
| Hartlaub's Gull (E) | <i>Larus hartlaubii</i> |
| Sandwich Tern | <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> |
| Common Tern | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> |
| Damara Tern | <i>Sterna balaenarum</i> |
| Rock Dove | <i>Columba livia</i> |
| Speckled Pigeon | <i>Columba guinea</i> |
| African Mourning Dove | <i>Streptopelia decipens</i> |
| Cape Turtle (Ring-necked) Dove | <i>Streptopelia capicola</i> |
| Laughing Dove | <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> |
| Namaqua Dove | <i>Oena capensis</i> |
| Emerald-spotted Wood-dove | <i>Turtur chalcospilos</i> |
| Rüppell's Parrot (NE) | <i>Poicephalus rueppellii</i> |
| Rosy-faced Lovebird (NE) | <i>Agapornis roseicollis</i> |
| Grey Go-away Bird | <i>Corythaixoides concolor</i> |
| African Cuckoo | <i>Cuculus gularis</i> |
| Jacobin Cuckoo | <i>Clamator jacobinus</i> |
| Klaas's Cuckoo | <i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i> |
| Diderick Cuckoo | <i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i> |
| Barn Owl (heard only) | <i>Tyto alba</i> |
| African Scops Owl | <i>Otus senegalensis</i> |
| Southern White-faced Scops-Owl | <i>Otus leucotis</i> |
| Pearl-spotted Owlet | <i>Glaucidium perlatum</i> |
| Verreaux's Eagle-Owl | <i>Bubo lacteus</i> |
| Freckled Nightjar | <i>Caprimulgus tristigma</i> |
| Bradfield's Swift (NE) | <i>Apus bradfieldi</i> |
| White-rumped Swift | <i>Apus caffer</i> |
| Little Swift | <i>Apus affinis</i> |
| Alpine Swift | <i>Apus melba</i> |
| African Palm Swift | <i>Cypsiurus parvus</i> |
| White-backed Mousebird (E) | <i>Colius colius</i> |
| Red-faced Mousebird | <i>Urocolius indicus</i> |
| Grey-headed Kingfisher | <i>Halcyon leucocephala</i> |
| Woodland Kingfisher | <i>Halcyon senegalensis</i> |
| Striped Kingfisher | <i>Halcyon chelicuti</i> |
| European Bee-eater | <i>Merops apiaster</i> |
| Swallow-tailed Bee-eater | <i>Merops hirundineus</i> |
| European Roller | <i>Coracias garrulus</i> |
| Lilac-breasted Roller | <i>Coracias caudata</i> |
| Purple Roller | <i>Coracias naevia</i> |
| African Hoopoe | <i>Upupa africana</i> |
| Green Wood-Hoopoe | <i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i> |
| Violet Wood-Hoopoe (NE) | <i>Phoeniculus damarensis</i> |

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| Common Scimitarbill | <i>Rhinopomastus cyanomelas</i> |
| African Grey Hornbill | <i>Tockus nasutus</i> |
| Red-billed Hornbill | <i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i> |
| Damara Hornbill (E) | <i>Tockus damerensis</i> |
| Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill | <i>Tockus leucomelas</i> |
| Monteiro's Hornbill | <i>Tockus monteiri</i> |
| Acacia Pied Barbet (NE) | <i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i> |
| Lesser Honeyguide | <i>Indicator minor</i> |
| Bearded Woodpecker | <i>Dendropicos namaquus</i> |
| Monotonous Lark (NE) | <i>Mirafrapa passerina</i> |
| Rufous-naped Lark | <i>Mirafrapa africana</i> |
| Sabota Lark (NE) | <i>Mirafrapa sabota</i> |
| Karoo Long-billed Lark (E) | <i>Certhilauda subcoronata</i> |
| Dune Lark (E) | <i>Certhilauda erythrochlamys</i> |
| Spike-heeled Lark | <i>Chersomanes albofasciata</i> |
| Gray's Lark (NE) | <i>Ammomanes grayi</i> |
| Benguela Long-billed Lark | <i>Certhilauda benguelensis</i> |
| Red-capped Lark | <i>Calandrella cinerea</i> |
| Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark | <i>Eremopterix leucotis</i> |
| Grey-backed Sparrowlark (NE) | <i>Eremopterix verticalis</i> |
| Barn (European) Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> |
| White-throated Swallow | <i>Hirundo albigularis</i> |
| Red-breasted Swallow | <i>Hirundo semirufa</i> |
| Greater Striped Swallow (E) | <i>Hirundo cucullata</i> |
| Rock Martin | <i>Hirundo fuligula</i> |
| Common House Martin | <i>Delichon urbica</i> |
| Banded Martin | <i>Riparia cincta</i> |
| Fork-tailed Drongo | <i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i> |
| African Golden Oriole | <i>Oriolus auratus</i> |
| Cape (Black) Crow | <i>Corvus capensis</i> |
| Pied Crow | <i>Corvus albus</i> |
| Carp's Tit (NE) | <i>Parus carpi</i> |
| Southern Pied Babbler (NE) | <i>Turdoides bicolor</i> |
| Bare-cheeked Babbler (NE) | <i>Turdoides gymnogenys</i> |
| African Red-eyed Bulbul (E) | <i>Pycnonotus nigricans</i> |
| Groundscraper Thrush | <i>Turdus litsitsirupa</i> |
| Short-toed Rock-Thrush (NE) | <i>Monticola brevipes</i> |
| Mountain Wheatear (NE) | <i>Oenanthe monticola</i> |
| Capped Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe pileata</i> |
| Familiar Chat | <i>Cercomela familiaris</i> |
| Tractrac Chat (NE) | <i>Cercomela tractrac</i> |
| Karoo Chat (NE) | <i>Cercomela schlegelii</i> |
| Southern Anteater Chat (E) | <i>Myrmecochichla formicivora</i> |
| White-browed Scrub-Robin | <i>Erythropygia leucophrys</i> |
| Kalahari Scrub-Robin (NE) | <i>Erythropygia paena</i> |
| Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler (NE) | <i>Parisoma subcaeruleum</i> |
| Icterine Warbler | <i>Hippolais icterina</i> |
| African Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus baeticatis</i> |
| European Sedge Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus shoenobaenus</i> |
| Long-billed Crombec | <i>Sylvietta rufescens</i> |
| Yellow-bellied Eremomela | <i>Eremomela icteropygialis</i> |
| Grey-backed Cameroptera | <i>Cameroptera brevicaudata</i> |
| African Wren-Warbler (NE) | <i>Calamonastes fasciolatus</i> |
| Rockrunner (E) | <i>Aecheaetops pycnopygius</i> |
| Zitting Cisticola | <i>Cisticola juncidis</i> |
| Desert Cisticola | <i>Cisticola aridulus</i> |
| Rattling Cisticola | <i>Cisticola chiniana</i> |
| Black-chested Prinia (NE) | <i>Prinia flavicans</i> |
| Spotted Flycatcher | <i>Muscicapa striata</i> |
| Marico Flycatcher (NE) | <i>Malaenornis mariquensis</i> |

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| Chat Flycatcher | <i>Malaenornis infuscatus</i> |
| Pririt Batis (NE) | <i>Batis pririt</i> |
| Cape Wagtail | <i>Motacilla capensis</i> |
| African Pipit | <i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i> |
| Long-billed Pipit | <i>Anthus similis</i> |
| Lesser Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius minor</i> |
| Common Fiscal Shrike | <i>Lanius collaris</i> |
| Crimson-breasted Shrike (NE) | <i>Laniarius atrococcineus</i> |
| Black-backed Puffback | <i>Dryscopus cubla</i> |
| Brubr | <i>Nilaus afer</i> |
| Brown-crowned Tchagra | <i>Tchagra australis</i> |
| Bokmakierie (E) | <i>Telephorus zeylonus</i> |
| White-tailed Shrike (NE) | <i>Lanioturdus torquatus</i> |
| White-crested Helmet-Shrike | <i>Prionops plumatus</i> |
| Southern White-crowned Shrike (NE) | <i>Eurocephalus aguitimens</i> |
| Wattled Starling | <i>Creatophora cinerea</i> |
| Violet-backed Starling | <i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i> |
| Burchell's Starling (NE) | <i>Lamprotornis australis</i> |
| Cape Glossy Starling | <i>Lamprotornis nitens</i> |
| Greater Blue-eared Starling | <i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i> |
| Pale-winged Starling (NE) | <i>Onychognathus nabouroup</i> |
| Marico Sunbird | <i>Nectarinia mariquensis</i> |
| Dusky Sunbird (NE) | <i>Nectarinia fusca</i> |
| Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver | <i>Bubalornis niger</i> |
| White-browed Sparrow-Weaver | <i>Plocepasser mahali</i> |
| Sociable Weaver (E) | <i>Philetairus socius</i> |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> |
| Great Sparrow | <i>Passer motitensis</i> |
| Cape Sparrow (NE) | <i>Passer melanurus</i> |
| Southern Grey-headed Sparrow | <i>Passer diffusus</i> |
| Scaly-feathered Finch | <i>Sporopipes squamifrons</i> |
| Chestnut Weaver | <i>Ploceus rubiginosus</i> |
| Southern Masked-Weaver | <i>Ploceus velatus</i> |
| Red-billed Quelea | <i>Quelea quelea</i> |
| Southern Red Bishop | <i>Euplectes orix</i> |
| Yellow-crowned Bishop | <i>Euplectes afer</i> |
| Green-winged Pytilia | <i>Pytilia melba</i> |
| Blue Waxbill | <i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i> |
| Violet-eared Waxbill (NE) | <i>Uraeginthus granatinus</i> |
| Common Waxbill | <i>Estrilda astrild</i> |
| Black-faced Waxbill | <i>Estrilda erythronotus</i> |
| Red-headed Finch (NE) | <i>Amadina erythrocephala</i> |
| Shaft-tailed Whydah (NE) | <i>Vidua regia</i> |
| Long-tailed Paradise Whydah | <i>Vidua paradisaea</i> |
| Black-throated Canary | <i>Serinus atrogularis</i> |
| Yellow Canary (NE) | <i>Serinus flaviventris</i> |
| White-throated Canary (NE) | <i>Serinus albogularis</i> |
| Golden-breasted Bunting | <i>Emberiza flaviventris</i> |
| Cape Bunting (NE) | <i>Emberiza capensis</i> |
| Cinnamon-breasted Bunting | <i>Emberiza tahapisi</i> |
| Lark-like Bunting (NE) | <i>Emberiza impetuani</i> |

BIRDWATCHING ON THE SILK ROAD - A TRIP TO UZBEKISTAN & KAZAKHSTAN

(Gerry Birch)

‘THE GOLDEN ROAD TO SAMARKAND’

For many years I have had a yen to travel to Central Asia, an area long closed to travellers from the West. The Silk Road with the fabled ancient cities of Samarkand and Bokhara have always seemed full of mystery and intrigue, stemming from the era of what became known as ‘the Great Game’ in the nineteenth century as the Russian empire extended its borders and influence eastwards through Central Asia. This was perceived by the British Indian government as a threat to India and their sphere of influence. The Central Asian khanates were all brought under the Tsarist regime and remained under Russian control after the revolution in 1917 and until the end of the Russian empire in 1989/90 when the ‘Stans’ achieved their independence. The players of ‘the Great Game’ were explorers and military officers from Russia and from the Indian Army as both sides tried to establish invasion routes, estimate resources of the area and the attitude of the Khans to their respective governments. They travelled into the unknown with no maps and little information save what they gleaned from local contacts – not always accurate or friendly. For a good part of the year the weather was very poor, either deep snow and very low temperatures or stifling heat and often lack of water in the summer.

Since Tim Hallchurch’s proposed tour did not attract the necessary support, I decided that it was now or possibly never. I chose a Birdquest trip that would include Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan so that I could look at part of the Silk Route and sample the spectacular scenery that these intrepid explorers had experienced during their journeys through Central Asia. I was not to be disappointed. There were 10 of us, a very international group: five from UK, one from France, one from Italy, one from Finland and couple from Sweden. Our guide was Belgian, very experienced and had been on the early pioneering trips to the area. In Uzbekistan we had a local rep from the ground handling company, although not a birder he was knowledgeable having taken birding groups before as well as cultural groups. In Kazakhstan we had a Russian academic from Almaty who was quite excellent. The drivers and the local support staff in both areas were good and helpful.

The flight from Heathrow via Istanbul to Tashkent was uneventful, if a bit long. I left home at 0430hrs and landed at 0400hrs to be greeted by a line of ‘babushkas’ in white coats who thrust thermometers under our arms and ten yards further on these were withdrawn by another line of ‘babushkas’ and ‘read’ and then chucked in a bin! We boarded two good minibuses and headed for the hills behind Tashkent – the western end of the Tien Shan range. We arrived at around 0730hrs at a fairly smart hotel (altitude 5,000 feet) which was primarily a ski resort. The snow had melted in the immediate area but we were not too far below the snowline. It was dump kit, breakfast and out birding by 0900hrs. Beautiful clear air with mountain views and ...the song of Nightingales! The mountain tracks around the hotel gave excellent views particularly of the many raptors

that appeared. These included Egyptian, Eurasian Black, Himalayan Griffon and Eurasian Griffon Vultures, Booted Eagles, Honey and Long-legged Buzzards, Kestrel and Hobby – mainly before lunch. In the afternoon we walked down a small quiet juniper-clad valley and had good views of White-crowned Penduline Tits building their nest, Yellow-breasted and Rufous-vented Tits, Paradise Flycatcher, White-capped and Rock Buntings. On return to the hotel gardens we again saw and heard the Nightingales and a few Red-rumped Swallows. Dinner was followed by a rather abortive owling session. I finally got to bed some 36 hours after setting out!

The 0530 start was delayed by a heavy thunderstorm. We finally set off at 0700 hrs and again were greeted by several singing Nightingales and views of Rock Buntings, Rosefinch, Hume's Whitethroats and the Yellow-breasted Tits. After breakfast we drove back to Tashkent, stopping en route for Lesser Grey Shrike and our first Red-headed Buntings. Tashkent is the largest city in Central Asia and with a population of 3 million is the fourth largest city of the Russian empire after Moscow, St Petersburg and Kiev. It suffered a serious earthquake in 1966 and underwent a huge rebuilding phase under the Russians. On the outskirts are the remains of much of the Russian inspired industrial infrastructure and there are many single storey 'peasant style' houses with their own compounds, usually given over to growing vegetables. The centre, with Independence Square, has a park with an equestrian statue of Tamerlane (prior to independence the site had had statues of the Tsars and then Lenin). We had a restroom stop at the four star Uzbekistan Hotel – some 17 storeys high with a huge ballroom in traditional Russian style. The restrooms were certainly four star, the like of which we were not to see again! We transferred to a luxurious air-conditioned coach for our drive to Samarkand. No camels or horses for us. At the area around the Syr Darya River, known in ancient times as the Jaxartes, we stopped to look at the colony of nesting White Storks on the pylons.



The Registan

Nearby were flocks of House Sparrows (*bactrianus* form) interspersed with some Spanish Sparrows on the grassy field edges. We arrived in Samarkand in the late afternoon and had our first glimpse of the blue domes of the Registan. Our hotel was in the leafy outskirts of the city with an open courtyard and verandas. The next morning we departed at 0500 in four 'dinky' Daewoo minibuses, driven with great élan by the Uzbek drivers, often two or three abreast on the wide main road, the M39, down

which the Soviets drove their tanks en route to Termiz, at the border with Afghanistan in 1979 (the route also followed by Alexander the Great). This may explain the large potholes. At the top of the pass (1700m) which overlooks the road to Tamerlane's birth

place, Sahrisabz, we got out into the cool of the Zerafshan Mountains for our packed breakfast that was almost immediately interrupted by the sound and then sight of our first Chukar. Other exciting birds were seen in quick succession, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Turkestan Shrike, a well performing Upcher's Warbler, White-throated Robin, Eastern Orphean Warbler and squadrons of Rosy starlings overhead. We walked up a flower-filled valley with rocky outcrops to a plateau area which produced good views of Hume's Short-toed Larks, Red-headed Buntings, Hoopoe and Rock Sparrow. We drove back to lower altitude to the village of Amankutan for our picnic lunch which we had in rather rundown camp, originally built for the communist Young Pioneers, now used by school children. The many trees providing shade were grown by orders of General Abramov, the first Russian governor of Samarkand. Here we had good views of White-winged Woodpecker, Nightingales, Turkestan Tit, and Grey-capped Goldfinch. However the highlight was a pair of Paradise Flycatchers building their nest in a fruit tree.

The next morning an early pre-breakfast walk around the nearby Zerafshan River added excellent views of Shikra, Purple Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Osprey, Caspian Reed Warbler Bearded Tit and Lesser Whitethroat. After breakfast we spent the rest of the morning looking at the Registan complex with its ancient mosques, madrassahs and Mausoleum of Timur (Tamerlane is a corruption of 'Timur the lame'). The azure domes have been completely restored to what they must have looked like soon after completion in the 14 – 16th centuries. Although it was the height of the tourist season, there were no crowds and no problems in visiting and photographing these Islamic sites. Lunch consisted of tasty shashlyks before the drive to Bokhara.

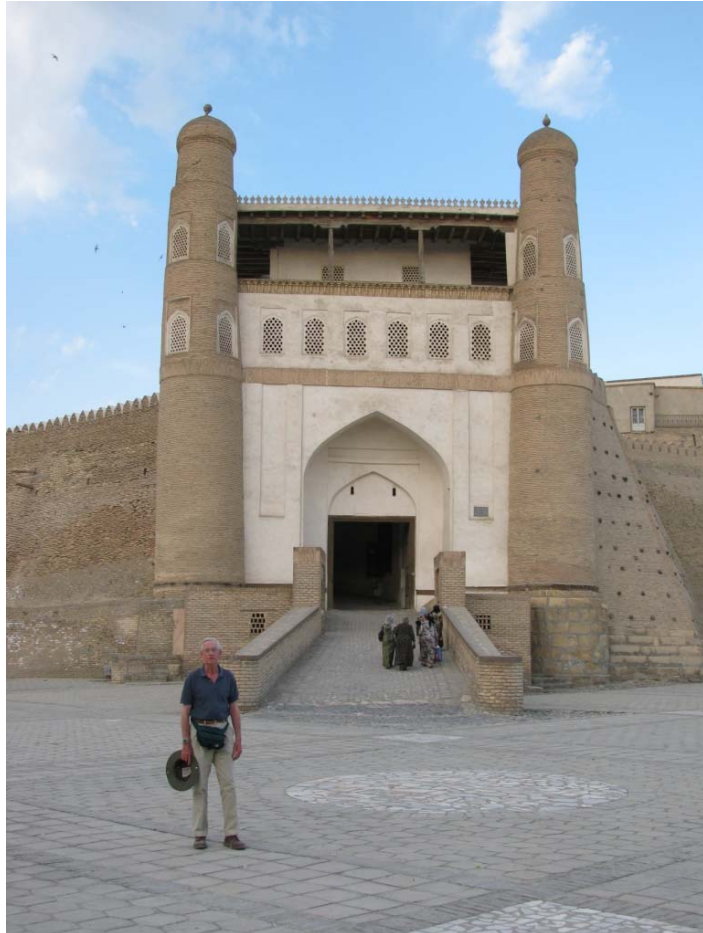
BOKHARA AND BEYOND

We were becoming quite used to the comforts of our 40 seater coach as we bowled down the road to the ancient city of Bokhara. The comfort stop produced White-tailed Lapwing and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. We arrived at a small comfortable hotel that had been the home of a Jewish merchant. It was, like all the old buildings, constructed around a small courtyard with recently renovated rooms opening off a veranda. We retired to a roof-top restaurant for supper that overlooked the old town with its minarets silhouetted against the setting sun. At 0415 we up and away for 40 minute drive to Lake Tudakol, an area of brackish water with salt clearly visible on the mud. The area had been used for industrial purposes and was criss-crossed by rail tracks lined with overhead telephone wires – very nostalgic for us older people. There were numerous White-tailed Lapwings, Temminck's Stints and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. The target here was Marbled Duck. We were fortunate to see a flight of three that landed a good way off, but it was a reasonable 'tick'.

We returned for lunch in the central square of Bokhara before spending the afternoon looking at the old town. It was once a busy centre on the Silk Road with extensive bazaars and caravanserais. Today the domes and minarets of the mosques and madrassahs have been restored and we spent the afternoon looking at the main sites including the minaret from the top of which criminals were thrown 'pour encourager les autres'. The main fortress was where two Indian Army officers, players of the 'Great Game', were held before being publicly beheaded on the orders of the Khan in 1842. The latter felt that

after the British defeat in the First Afghan War 1839-42, he would be safe from any retribution. Dinner was taken in the dining room of a 19th century merchant's house with its original décor still intact.

The next morning we set off early on our way to the Kyzyl Kum (red sand) desert with its Saxaul-covered dunes. There had been some rain overnight and drizzle on the outward journey. This had the effect of keeping the temperature down, making a day in the desert much more bearable. The target species was Pander's Ground Jay, a species not easily observed as it tends to inhabit areas difficult of access such as Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. We found a jay within minutes of getting off the coach. It was perched on a Saxaul bush some 50 yards away and was soon covered by some 8 telescopes! Not long after one came within 15 yards as it foraged amongst the



The Ark Fortress

bushes. Later in the day we were to find a nest with some 5-6 newly hatched young. The day produced some excellent desert species as we wandered through the flowering bushes with other unusual plants including giant broomrapes growing to three feet high, and a type of pale pink aquilegia. Of particular note were Ortolan Bunting, Isabelline Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Scrub Warbler, Steppe & Long-tailed Shrikes and Rosy Starling. On return to Bokhara there was just time to revisit the bazaar to make some small purchases which turned out to be the last chance to do so on the trip.

At 0500hrs, the by now usual early start, found us by a series of pools on the edge the newly established Amu-Bokhara reserve for Goitred Gazelles on the outskirts of the town. There we saw the only Common Pheasant of the trip and had excellent views of Menetries's Warblers and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins. After a picnic breakfast we drove to the airport for our flight to Tashkent – a rather ancient Uzbekistan Airways Illyushin

114. We were met by bus and had some three hours birding at the Chimgan hills, some 20km out of town. Here we had really good views of Golden Orioles before returning to the airport for our evening flight to Almaty in Kazakhstan. There was just time to grab a gin & tonic before boarding another ancient Russian aircraft, this time an Antonov 416. We arrived at 2300hrs and went to our hotel, the Altyn-Kigarylly, definitely 20th century Russian style.

SNOWED UP IN THE CELESTIAL MOUNTAINS

After a short night we awoke to a beautiful sunny morning with the Tien Shan Mountains (the Celestial Mountains) as a snowy backdrop to the city of Almaty. This was the capital of Kazakhstan until the President decreed that a new capital be built to the north out on the Steppes. There are many glitzy new buildings along with the older 19th and 20th century ones established by the Russians. The city is booming with roads full of modern vehicles causing long traffic jams. This is now the country's financial centre based on the known levels of energy and mineral reserves for which funds are readily available. A new 'Great Game' is being played out with nations jockeying for influence. We drove eastwards towards the Chinese border paralleling the snow capped mountains through agricultural areas that gave way to semi-desert. Stops en route produced sightings of Great Egret, Golden Eagle, a colony of Pale Martins, Desert Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush. At one point we stopped a short distance off the main road. The site was an old road construction camp which had been supplied by spring water with leaking pipes that gave the birds a good drinking place. Here we had superb close views of Linnets, Mongolian Finch, Grey-necked Bunting and Crimson-winged Finch. A Tolai Hare put in an appearance as did scores of Giant Gerbils. We arrived in the early evening at Chilik, a somewhat 'one horse' village, typical of the area. The hotel was basic although my diary noted that we had 'not a bad supper'.

Next day we drove eastwards again to explore the hills and the Charyn Gorge through which the Ili River flows. Of particular note was the regular stream of Chinese registered trucks each carrying three lengths of large diameter pipes for the new pipeline to take oil to China. Our first stop added a Steppe Eagle on its precariously positioned eyrie. In a wild rocky area we had amazing views of a Saker Falcon and its nest with three downy chicks. After stopping to photograph the spectacular Charyn Gorge, we moved to a stretch of open woodland with stands of Turanga trees. The quarry here was the Yellow-eyed Dove. The trees apparently grow in soft sand which makes walking difficult and by now it was becoming quite warm. However after some frustrating glimpses we eventually had a pair which gave a good territorial display. Some hard 'stalking' also produced a pair of White-winged Woodpeckers. Lunch was taken by a series of old concrete and metal pylons which now host some Saxaul Sparrows. By now a very strong wind was blowing which seriously hampered further exploration but we did get a splendid view of a Macqueen's Bustard as it too was shuffling about in the fierce gusts.

After another night in Chilik, during which it rained quite hard, we started our return to Almaty. We had the morning in the semi-desert and saxaul desert areas. Here we had Demoiselle Cranes, Eurasian Hobby, several greater Sandpipers and a large number of

Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Arriving back in Almaty we hit the usual traffic jam and fought our way out north towards the mountains through prosperous suburbs, large houses with views over the city to the flatlands to the south and the mountains to the north. When the metalled road gave out we transferred to the obligatory smaller and more powerful six-wheel drive Russian truck. The road up to the old space observatory was very scenic if very rough! Stops en route added Brown Dipper and Blue Whistling Thrush.

The accommodation was in the staff quarters of the now virtually abandoned observatory at 8,000 feet. We had spectacular views of the snow covered mountains. Again my diary noted a good supper – this time what I know as ‘momos,’ a Tibetan dish of stuffed dumplings, clearly a similar local dish in this region too. We awoke to a glorious morning with the ‘Celestial Mountains’ all around us. We drove above the tree-line and had views into a valley covered by juniper bushes. Here we saw a pair of Himalayan Snowcock and a number of other expected species such as Alpine Chough, White-tailed Rubythroat, Water Pipit, Plain Mountain Finch, White-winged Grosbeak and Black-throated Accentor. We made our way slowly up the track in the six-wheel vehicle to the higher observatory station known as Cosmostantia – now totally abandoned. At 11,000 feet the truck stopped so it was all out and we covered the last 2 km and 1000 feet plus on foot even more slowly! However the rewards were definitely worth it. The sole occupants of Cosmostantia appeared to be Guldenstadt’s Redstarts and Red-billed Choughs. Further on, by now into the snow-line, we had good views of both Altai and Brown Accentors. The views of the Tien Shan from here were something to be remembered. The walk back down to the vehicle was much easier and our driver had been able to effect the necessary repairs. Having had our lunch in these surroundings we descended to the dam and lake below the main observatory. We walked alongside the lake and into the stony valley above it searching for the enigmatic Ibisbill, a target species for many on the trip. Luck was with us as a bird was flushed and settled a short distance away. Again eight telescopes searched the area and eventually the bird was located sitting amongst the stone on edges of the lake. We spent about half an hour watching this hard-to-find wader. On the way back we added Eversmann’s Redstart, Blue-capped Redstart, Hume’s Leaf Warbler, Red-fronted Serin and Red-mantled Rosefinch to our tally. We awoke to thick mist the next morning, a known hazard in this location and the reason for our three night stay. The last group had had this weather for their full three days. We drove a short way from the observatory into rather damp high valley surrounded with rock faces and juniper coverts. The sky suddenly cleared as we squelched across valley floor and across mountain streams. Almost immediately a pair of Himalayan Snowcocks was located followed by three Black Grouse. Our attention switched to the juniper bushes as we had excellent views of quite a number of White-winged Grosbeaks and White-tailed Rubythroats. However we were to have one of the highlights of the trip as first a Sulphur-bellied Warbler with a Red-mantled Rosefinch performed well in the juniper bushes and rocks. This was very quickly followed by extremely good views of Severtzov’s Tit-Warbler feeding on the ground amongst the rocks in front of the juniper – a truly exciting sighting. Rain then closed in and we returned to the observatory to eat our lunch before venturing out again – this time below the observatory to the lower conifer forest. Here we

found a solitary Songar Tit after a lot of frustration, but we added Coal & Great Tits, Goldcrest and Tree Creeper in the process.

After a while we saw threatening clouds coming up from Almaty, and as we returned towards the main observatory a storm overtook us, heavy hail turning to snow as we arrived. It was still snowing when we went to bed. The next morning revealed a fresh covering of snow some 40cms thick with cloud and fog, i.e. near 'white out' conditions. No road or track was visible. Having packed our kit and loaded up the six-wheel vehicle, it stopped after about 200 yards. The gear change would not operate. It took the driver some hour and a half to fix but he managed it whilst others tried to locate the track out of the observatory complex towards the main track back down the mountain. Finally this was found and the cloud began to lift. The driver started cautiously down and every so often on the 'dodgy' bits, usually narrow bridges with no sides, we disembarked and walked. The stops produced Crossbills and Nutcracker. Below the snow-line we stopped to overlook a deep stream bed which had a large concrete wall above it. Here we had the most amazing views of two Wallcreepers which we watched for about 30 minutes. We made the RV with our original bus, rather later than expected, to find our Russian girl from the local travel agency somewhat worried but, importantly, with our lunch. There was a long drive ahead of us as the next location was a yurt camp out in the Steppes to the north of Almaty.

THE KAZAKH STEPPES

We drove through the northern outskirts of Almaty noting the modern villas and the anti flood/landslide defences. The city is vulnerable to flooding as the snow melt from the Tien Shan Mountains swells the rivers and can cause considerable damage. We headed north towards the steppes and the Taukum desert. Progress was halted at a level crossing which was blocked for repairs. There were no diversion signs and a good deal of chaos. Eventually our driver found a cross-country route which took us along old tracks beside the vast concrete irrigation ditches that had been constructed in Soviet times to irrigate the steppes to enable wheat to be grown. The system was designed to catch the melt water coming off the Tien Shan. Many of the ditches and sluices are now disused although some did provide water and small farms with large 'fields' were clearly being cultivated. The sheer scale of this system and the effort needed to build it was mind-boggling. We drove on through poppy-covered grasslands and stopped at Lake Sorbulak. Here we had excellent views of Terek Stints, Dalmatian Pelicans, wild Mute Swans, a large colony of Great Cormorants and Black Terns. Crossing the desert we came upon a concentration of Black-eared Kites, Calandra and Short-toed Larks and Brown-necked Raven. At last the yurt camp came into sight. The camp consisted of a series of two-man yurts, a large dining tent/ kitchen tent (cf EPIP) a shower tent and a couple of loo tents. They had all been transported to the site by a container lorry. The container held the generator. After a good supper we thankfully retired to bed. The night sky was amazing but bitterly cold. My diary says that I needed long woollen socks. There was a 360 degree view and with no artificial light it was magical and well worth the effort of getting up. Dawn was early and the again unforgettable, the planets were still visible and the red sky changed as the sun rose. There was loud dawn chorus of singing larks. After early

breakfast we set off in minibuses to scan the Artemisia flats of the Taukum desert for the target species of Caspian Plover. We were rewarded with good views of a male after something of a stalk. We also found Black-bellied Sandgrouse, some Greater Sand Plovers and Brown-necked Raven. Sadly the much-hoped for Pin-tailed Sandgrouse failed to put in an appearance. By now a very strong wind had got up and I noted in my diary that I wore thick clothing most of the day. We drove on northwards to the Ili River and its associated reed beds and Turanga woodland. Here we found Black-headed Penduline Tit, Little Bittern, White-winged Woodpecker with lots of Common Cuckoos, Turkestan Tits and Indian Golden Orioles. The last reedbed produced Great Bittern, Red-crested Pochard, Ferruginous Duck, Black Tern & White-winged Black Terns and a Great Reed Warbler. By now we were feeling the unceasing wind and drove back to the yurt camp after a tiring day. The next day we drove back to Almaty, birding on the way. Again there was no sign of the Pin-tailed Sand Grouse at the waterholes. We stopped once more at Lake Sorbulak and added Collared Pratincole to the list and had close-up views of a Long-eared Owl with four recently fledged young. As we approached Almaty the snow-covered Tien Shan behind rose up before us out of the steppe. We had an uneventful flight to Astana on an Air Astana 737; this is a modern airline with a British chairman. Astana (formerly Akmola or Tselinograd) is the new capital, replacing Almaty which has been developed over the last 10 years. It is the brain-child of President Nazarbayev with the aim of providing depth (away from China and the other 'Stans' and their capitals all located to the south) and development for the sparse population in the north and centre of the country. The drive into Astana gave us a chance to see the massive building programme. The designs of the huge office blocks, university, housing developments and 'monuments' produce a skyline quite unlike anything I had seen before. The designs are quite bizarre and are built straight out of the barren steppe. We were accommodated in what might be described as 2/3 star hotel, designed for business groups. The capital is still being built and we were the only occupants of the hotel. At least we had the opportunity to clean up and there was a hot shower. The next morning we set off for a remote steppe village in the Kurghaldzhin nature reserve to the north of Astana where we were to stay overnight, birding on the way. Of particular note were Sociable Plover, Black Larks, White-winged Larks, Sykes Wagtails and Common Cranes. At midday we arrived at the scattered village with houses of the traditional Russian single storey wooden construction. The houses were each set in a small garden, often with hens and pigs and even the odd cow as well as flowers and vegetables to help eke out a meagre living. This is a very poor area, contrasting strongly with Almaty and Astana and we were seeing the village at the best time of year. In winter they have to endure harsh freezing conditions and intense heat and dust at the height of summer. Villages such as these were built to service the steppes that had been converted into agricultural use under Soviet rule. Nearby was the crumbling infrastructure of the collective farm that once operated in the area and had given employment. Now there were a few jobs in the recently created reserve and for some weeks in the summer a small number of birding groups like ours were being accommodated. I was able to converse in German with our hostess, 'Kenchi', as the three of us billeted in her house were without a Russian speaker. Her daughter was away at the university in Almaty and her husband was away driving. He had been a machinery operator in the days of the collective and now had to rely on occasional work. Kenchi was not happy with 'glasnost' and the changes

following the fall of the Soviet empire. Her generation is the one that has missed out whilst younger people, such as her daughter, have new opportunities previously denied to them under the old system. However we were made very welcome and we had a particularly tasty version of a cream tea Kazakh style – home-made blackcurrant jam, a type of doughnut with thick fresh cream from the home cow. The afternoon was spent at a steppe lake, Lake Issey. Here we had an amazing view of 3-4000 Red-necked Phalaropes. Other waders included Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Dunlin, a single Broad-billed Sandpiper, a lone Whooper Swan, Slender-billed and Steppe Gulls. We also watched a pair of pale Merlins (race *pallidus*). It had been along day and we were glad to get back to our quarters for a late supper. Although the beds were basic I slept well. Next morning after fresh eggs for breakfast we drove out to the steppes and surveyed two more large lakes in the Kurghaldzhin area. Again we saw some 3000 Red-necked Phalaropes and witnessed a feeding frenzy of Dalmatian Pelicans and Great Cormorants that had clearly identified a large shoal of fish. We were fortunate to see two drake White-headed Ducks – an endangered species. Other species noted included Montague's Harrier, Black-necked Grebe, Teal, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Little and Common Gulls. On return to the village we had lunch in our houses and finally we had to say good-bye to our hostess. I would have liked another night with more time to talk about the situation in the country. We drove back to the architectural wonders of Astana for dinner at the hotel. The service here was more akin to that of the Soviet era. Hotels are very expensive in Almaty and Astana (I was quoted 3-400 US\$ per night by a tout at Almaty airport). Next morning with kit packed we drove out to a pine forest area just north of Astana to find Pine Bunting. This took quite a while but we were eventually rewarded with excellent sightings of several males which have a distinctive Yellowhammer-like call. On a nearby pond we found a fine pair of Slavonian Grebes and in the next door field an Ortolan Bunting. Lunch was taken by a marshy lake area situated close to a series of derelict factories and concrete housing which produced Common Quail after something of a beat, with lots of White-winged Terns and finally several Bluethroats. All that remained was to have a final clean up – the hotel had allowed us two rooms to store kit and have showers before a final dinner and night flight back to UK via Istanbul.

In retrospect it had been a very successful trip. There had been some long days and periods of 36 hours without much if any sleep at the start and end of the trip. Time had not been wasted. My own tally was some 60 new species, but possibly more importantly, I had had the opportunity of visiting an area that had long held a fascination for me.

Book List:

The Birds of Kazakhstan – Arend wassink & Gerald J Orel. (2007)

Collins Guide Birds of Russia – Algirdas Knystautas. (1993)

Eastern Approaches – Fitzroy Maclean. (1949 – Penguin edition, 1991)

The Great Game – Peter Hopkirk. (1990)

Central Asia - A Traveller's Companion – Kathleen Hopkirk. (1993)

In Search of Kazakhstan – the land that disappeared – Christopher Robbins (2007)
The New Great Game – Blood and Oil in Central Asia – Lutz Kleveman (2003)
Murder in Samarkand – Craig Murray. (2007). Not advisable to carry with you.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Subspecies names are given where known and/or appropriate, either in a comment or in parentheses.

GAVIIDAE

Black-throated Diver (B-t Loon, Arctic Loon) *Gavia arctica*: Fair views of two in breeding attire on a reed-edged lake in the Astana steppes.

PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe (Dabchick) *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: Small numbers were noted near Bukhara and on the Astana lakes.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: A couple were seen at Lake Tudakul and then many more at Lake Sorbulak and on the Astana lakes.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: Good numbers around Astana, with 15 or more seen in a day.

Horned Grebe (Slavonian Grebe) *Podiceps auritus*: Excellent views of a pair in exquisite breeding plumage on a small lake north of Astana. Slavonia is a geographical and historical region in eastern [Croatia](#).

Black-necked Grebe (Eared Grebe) *Podiceps nigricollis*: One showed briefly at Lake Tudakul, and 20 were found on the Astana steppe lakes, all in splendid breeding plumage.

PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: A large colony could be seen in the distance at Lake Tudakul, and many showed on the Astana lakes. The subspecies involved is *sinensis*.

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*: Our first were seen around roadside canals en-route to Samarkand, and at Lake Tudakul we had some good views of several birds perched and in flight. This species is treated as NEAR THREATENED by BirdLife International in “Threatened Birds of the World”.

PELICANIDAE

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*: Great views of six at Lake Sorbulak were followed by regular observations of small numbers on the Astana lakes. This species is treated as CONSERVATION DEPENDENT by BirdLife International in “Threatened Birds of the World”.

ARDEIDAE

Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*: Two were seen in flight at lakes in the northern Taucum desert and another showed at a reed-edged lake north of Astana. We also heard the distinctive booming.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: A brief flight view of one at Lake Tudakul, was followed by excellent views of perched and flying birds at small lakes in the northern Taucum desert.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: A dozen were seen at the Zerafshan river near Samarkand, a couple at Lake Tudakul and another two in the Taucum desert.

Great Egret (Great White Egret) *Egretta alba*: Small numbers were seen in Kazakhstan, many sporting the black bills of breeding plumage.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: A scattering of sightings, both in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The highest numbers were noted at Lakes Tudakul and Sorbulak. Also regularly seen at the Astana lakes.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Several were seen around Lake Tudakul, but best of all were the birds nesting on pools by the road in the Kyzyl Kum desert. The large rufous young showed well in the reedbed nest.

CICONIIDAE

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: 30 were counted along the road from Tashkent to Samarkand, their colony of nests scattered along the roadside pylons near the Syr Darya River (the Jaxartes of the ancients). A single bird was found roosting along the Zerafshan river near Samarkand.

PHOENICOPTERIDAE

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*: A 1000+ showed very well at several steppe lakes in the Astana area. We observed some display and marvelled at their beautiful flight colours.

ANATIDAE

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*: A single at Lake Tudakul preceded hundreds seen at the Astana steppe lakes. These are the 'real thing' here and not part of the introduced population of western Europe.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*: Four birds were seen on two days on the Astana steppe lakes.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*: Regular observations of this well-known species at lake Tudakul and on the Astana steppe lakes. These pink-billed birds are of the eastern *rubrirostris* race.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*: Regularly seen, our first were at Lake Tudakul, then more were out in the Charyn area, and we also found them quite high in the Tien Shan. We saw a pair with chicks at Lake Sorbulak and also small numbers on the Astana steppe lakes.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: Numerous on the Astana steppe lakes.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: Small numbers were noted on the Astana steppe lakes. Penelops is old Greek for a kind of duck.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: Four were seen at Lake Tudakul, and then many more on the Astana steppe lakes.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*: Three were seen on a lake in the Astana steppes.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: Regular encounters at most of the various wetlands we visited.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: Small numbers of this elegant duck were noted on the Astana steppe lakes.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: This handsome fellow was found at Lake Tudakul, at Lake Sorbulak and then more numerous at the Astana steppe lakes.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: Regular observations, but most common in the Astana area.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*: A few at Lake Tudakul preceded fair numbers at the Astana steppe lakes.

Ferruginous Duck (Ferruginous Pochard) *Aythya nyroca*: Six were seen at Lake Tudakul, two at Lake Sorbulak and eight on small lakes in the Taucum desert. An attractive species. This species is treated as NEAR THREATENED by BirdLife International in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: Two were at Lake Tudakul, and then a handful more were seen on the Astana steppe lakes.

ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: Two showed well overhead in the hills to the east of Tashkent.

Crested Honey Buzzard (Oriental Honey Buzzard) *Pernis ptilorhyncus*: Seven were migrating together over the hills to the east of Tashkent. The distinctive tail pattern of the males was really obvious.

Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus*: Regular observations, with single birds seen near Tashkent, near Bukhara, several patrolling the plains in the Charyn area, many around Kanshengyal (migrants on the move?) and a few in the Astana area.

Lammergeier (Bearded Vulture) *Gypaetus barbatus*: A splendid observation of an adult in the hills to the east of Samarkand. Another bird showed well in the Tien Shan above Almaty. The Spanish name of this glorious species is Quebrantahuesos (= the Bonebreaker).

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*: Great looks at two near Tashkent and three more showed very well at Aman Kutan, near Samarkand.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*: Five of these monsters obliged at Beldersay and two more were seen at Aman Kutan, near Samarkand.

Himalayan Griffon Vulture *Gyps himalayensis*: Six performed well at Beldersay, where we could compare them directly with the previous species. Several more were identified in the Charyn area.

Eurasian Black Vulture (Monk Vulture, Cinereous Vulture) *Aegypius monachus*: Two were seen around Beldersay and another was noted in the Charyn area. This species is treated as NEAR THREATENED by BirdLife International in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Short-toed Eagle *Circus gallicus*: Two singles were seen in Uzbekistan, one near Tashkent and one at Aman Kutan, near Samarkand.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Frequently seen around wetland habitats, particularly numerous around Samarkand and Bukhara, and also in the Astana area.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*: Small numbers of this very attractive and elegant species were seen in the Astana region. Fantastic, close up views of cracking males on several occasions. This species is treated as NEAR THREATENED by BirdLife International in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: A few observations in the Astana steppes. Best was the well-performing subadult male at the White-headed Duck lake.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: Singles were encountered at Aman Kutan near Samarkand and in the Charyn area.

Shikra (Little Banded Goshawk) *Accipiter badius*: No fewer than 18 observations this year. Best were the showy birds by the Zerafshan river at Samarkand and the obliging birds along the Amu-Bukhara canal.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: Small numbers of the *vulpinus* race were seen in Uzbekistan and in northern Kazakhstan. A bird of the race *japonicus* was noted in the Tien Shan above Almaty.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*: Many of these splendid birds were seen throughout the tour, from the very south in Uzbekistan to the northern steppes of Kazakhstan. Several active eyries were also found.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*: A bird sitting on a ridiculously-situated nest was noted in the Charyn area and three birds showed well in the Astana steppes.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: Six sightings of this well-known bird of prey in the greater Almaty area.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*: Five observations of this dashing species, including a single pale morph and four dark morph individuals. Remember the "landing lights"!

PANDIONIDAE

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: A single bird showed well along the Zerafshan River near Samarkand. Strangely enough, a new species for the Birdquest Turkestan tour!

FALCONIDAE

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*: Great looks at five near Samarkand and another four performed well in the Charyn area. Adorable males! This species is treated as VULNERABLE by BirdLife International in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Seen very regularly throughout the tour.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*: Some wonderful views of these lovely birds close to their old Rook nests in roadside shelter belts near Astana.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*: We had a good look at a female of the race *lymani* in the Bolshoi Almatinskiy and then superb views of male and female of the ghostly race *pallidus* near their nest in the Astana steppes.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: Quite a few were encountered, mostly in Uzbekistan, the Charyn area, the Taucum desert and the Astana steppe. While trying to concentrate on Caspian Plovers in the Taucum desert, we witnessed a Hobby catching and then plucking a Greater Short-toed Lark. What a show!

Saker (Saker Falcon) *Falco cherrug*: Fantastic views of a large female near her eyrie containing three downy chicks in the Charyn desert. She sat for a long time on a nearby hilltop and then showed off her flying prowess by chasing a Long-legged Buzzard away. Sadly, a lot of Saker Falcons are still illegally captured in Kazakhstan for use in falconry. Cherrug is derived from the Hindi word *charg* for the female Saker. The tiercel (male) is known as *chargela*.

PHASIANIDAE

Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*: Good looks at two males and a female in the Tien Shan. We saw them in flight and also admired them foraging in the top of some large spruces.

Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis*: Excellent studies of singing and feeding birds amongst the crags of the upper reaches of the Tien Shan. Fabulous telescope views of males and females. The number four in the Bird of the Trip game. The distinctive Palearctic genus *Tetraogallus* consists of five closely-related species, which all occur in remote and steep mountainous areas and are all highly-desired by Palearctic birding enthusiasts. One has to work to see snowcocks!!!

Chukar (Chukar Partridge) *Alectoris chukar*: A single was seen on the rocky hills at Aman Kutan and several more showed well in the Charyn area.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*: As we tried to home in on their liquid calls we flushed several getting fair flight views of at least three in a grassy area near Astana.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*: Heard calling in several localities in Uzbekistan and also in the Charyn area, which would have been the typical encounter. We had brief views of a pair (appropriately of the race *zerafshanicus*) in the early morning at the Amu-Bukhara canal.

RALLIDAE

European Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* (H): One was emitting its pig squeals at a lake in the Kyzyl Kum desert.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A few observations of this very well-known species, both in Uzbekistan and in Kazakhstan.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Common on the Astana steppe lakes, also seen at Lake Tudakul and one or two other wetlands.

GRUIDAE

Common Crane *Grus grus*: Several pairs were found on the Astana steppes.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*: Perhaps the most attractive member of its family, our first encounter was with eight birds in the Charyn desert. In the Taucum desert we found several small flocks and we also had regular encounters with these elegant birds in the Astana steppes.

OTIDIDAE

Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*: We were lucky to see a single bird during a severe storm in the Taucum desert, offering a good prolonged view while it was running and stumbling across the flat plain. In previous years we have seen many more, and the sad truth is that the Houbara-hunting Arab falconers have moved into Central Asia, and this appears to be the net result. At the current rate of decline, the prediction is that soon there will none left! The Central Asian population is now highly endangered due to excessive hunting by these wealthy Arabs in the Gulf region, Pakistan, and now Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. We were told that in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Arab-sponsored "scientists" collect eggs of wild birds, which are brooded and reared in captivity and the resulting semi-wild birds released just in time for the

falconers to kill!! Very dubious stuff!! This species is treated as NEAR THREATENED by BirdLife International in “Threatened Birds of the World”.

HAEMATOPODIDAE

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: One was seen in the northern steppes.

IBIDORHYNCHIDAE

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*: A single bird was scoped by the river at the Bolshoi Almatinskiy lake, it's partner perhaps sitting tight nearby! It showed off its amazing prowess of turning itself into a stone. Always a great bird to see! It is the only species in its family. The favourite species for Nils and Leonardo and the number three in the Bird of the Trip game.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: Frequently seen at various wetlands along our route, most commonly near Bukhara and around the Astana steppe lakes.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: Fair numbers of these elegant waders were seen at the Astana steppe lakes.

GLAREOLIDAE

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: A single was noted over the Amu-Bukhara canal and another one showed well at Lake Sorbulak.

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*: One of the best birds in the Astana area, we had multiple encounters. Particularly memorable was the colony around the shores of a small marshy lake, where they were very vocal about our presence. Many great looks. The scientific epithet refers to Alexander Von Nordmann (1803-1866), a Finnish/Russian naturalist and explorer. This species is treated as DATA DEFICIENT by BirdLife International in “Threatened Birds of the World”.

CHARADRIIDAE

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: Pairs were seen frequently along our route, usually on open areas near waterholes. Remember the yellow orbital ring.

Kentish Plover (Snowy Plover) *Charadrius alexandrinus*: 15 were seen at Lake Tudakul, where a male was spotted squatting over its nest. We also noted a pair at a salt lake in the Astana steppe.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaulti*: Four were found on the Sugaty plain, and then several more were seen around Kanshengyal. The race involved is *crassirostris*.

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*: Our first contact was at some distance, and after walking several hundred meters closer, we enjoyed great views of a richly-coloured male on the endless plain at Kanshengyal. Always a great bird to see well.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied Plover) *Pluvialis squatarola*: A single summer-plumaged bird was seen on the Astana steppe lakes.

Sociable Lapwing (Sociable Plover) *Vanellus gregarius*: In spite of the well-known rarity status of this bird, we did remarkably well at finding them. On our first morning in the Astana area we found several together on a short-grazed sward. Later the same day we had great scope views of a pair that obviously had a nest nearby, so we swiftly vacated the area. This species is treated as VULNERABLE by BirdLife International in “Threatened Birds of the World”.

White-tailed Lapwing (White-tailed Plover) *Vanellus leucurus*: We saw c15 at Lake Tudakul including several very confiding birds, and another six were seen at the Amu-Bukhara canal.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*: Plentiful in the Astana area, with odd individuals encountered in the Charyn area and at Lake Sorbulak.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Red Knot (Knot) *Calidris canutus*: Two migrants in breeding plumage showed briefly at Lake Tudakul.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: Two were seen at Lake Tudakul, and then hundreds more showed well on the shores of the Astana steppe lakes.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*: Six were seen very well at Lake Tudakul, then we found several more at the waterholes in the Taucum desert. A few were also noted at the Astana

steppe lakes. The bird is named after Coenraad Jacob Temminck (1778-1858), a Dutch ornithologist, collector and author.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: Hundreds of lovely summer-plumaged birds could be enjoyed around the Astana steppe lakes. Many great studies.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Scores were seen around the Astana steppe lakes, all involving big and very bright individuals (nominata).

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*: Paul did very well finding this rarity amongst lots of Little Stints at one of the steppe lakes near Astana. Great scope views of this distinctive wader.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Only small numbers were seen around the Astana steppe lakes, where several males were already in their 'jousting' plumage, and hustling around each other in preparation for the lekking season.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*: We found several vocal pairs around the Astana steppe lakes.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* (NL): A single summer-plumaged bird was seen at Lake Sorbulak.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: This well-known species was present around the Astana steppe lakes, and quite a few were noted at Lake Sorbulak.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*: Just a few very nice summer-plumaged birds were observed around Astana.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: A couple of sightings of this distinctive wader.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*: A single bird was seen by a lake near Samarkand.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: Two were seen at Lake Tudakul and three more were noted at a pool in the Kyzyl Kum desert. The onomatopoeic Russian name is 'Fifi'!

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*: Four were studied at close range at Lake Sorbulak and several more were seen at various steppe lakes near Astana. A splendid wader!

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Odd birds were encountered along our route, often along rivers.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Two lovely summer-plumaged examples were found at Lake Tudakul and another nine were seen at the Astana steppe lakes.

Red-necked Phalarope (Northern Phalarope) *Phalaropus lobatus*: Great encounters during our two days around the Astana steppe lakes. We easily saw over 7,000 birds as on several lakes they dotted the water like midges! Quite a spectacle seeing hundreds of these jewels pirouette together!

LARIDAE

Pallas's Gull (Great Black-headed Gull) *Larus ichthyaetus*: Small numbers of these impressive gulls were noted around the Astana steppe lakes. Always spectacular.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*: Just a single bird was seen on the Kurghalzhin lakes.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*: Seen around all the major wetlands visited, particularly in the north.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*: At least 1,000 were seen around the Kurghalzhin lakes, all in full breeding flush. Many great looks.

Mew Gull (Common Gull) *Larus canus*: Just a few were noted on the Astana steppe lakes.

Caspian Gull *Larus [cachinnans] cachinnans*: Just two at Lake Tudakul, and then more at Lake Sorbulak where they nest. Scattered records of small numbers at several wetlands in southern Kazakhstan.

Steppe Gull (Baraba Gull) *Larus [cachinnans] barabensis*: Most of the many big gulls seen around Astana were of this form, showing darker upperparts than the above, a less brutal looking bill and a more rounded head, and a smaller white mirror on the underside of the wingtip.

STERNIDAE

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*: We saw eight around the Kurghalzhin lakes.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*: We found six at Lake Tudakul, and then several on the Astana steppe lakes where we saw a group of twelve.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Seen frequently in the Astana area, a couple near Sorbulak, and rather commonly at various localities in Uzbekistan. Many of the birds showed much black on the bills, which is typical of the form *minussensis*. Central and eastern Kazakhstan is an area of intergradation between this form (breeding from central Siberia and the Altai eastwards) and the nominate race.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*: A good number were seen at Lake Tudakul, and also found on other pools and rivers in Uzbekistan. We also found a few at Lake Sorbulak and at the Astana steppe lakes.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: A couple were noted on Lake Sorbulak and c15 showed well at lakes in the northern Taucum desert. Several more were seen about the pools and reedbeds of the Astana region.

White-winged Tern (White-winged Black Tern) *Chlidonias leucopterus*: We had our introduction to these extremely delightful birds in the Taucum desert, and then we saw dozens more over the marshes and ponds of the Astana region. Riitta's favourite.

PTEROCLIDIDAE

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*: We saw three at Lake Tudakul, c25 in the Charyn deserts and c50 in the Taucum desert. We obtained great looks at interacting birds at the waterholes in the Taucum desert.

COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Too many!

Yellow-eyed Dove (Yellow-eyed Stock Dove, Pale-backed Pigeon) *Columba eversmanni*: Excellent views of six birds in the Turanga (*Populus euphratica*) woods by the Ili river. Great scope studies of perched birds and lovely display flights. A real speciality of this tour. This species is treated as VULNERABLE by BirdLife International in "Threatened Birds of the World".

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*: These familiar birds were encountered in small numbers all along our route.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Just a handful of observations of this lovely, but declining species.

Oriental Turtle Dove (Rufous Turtle Dove) *Streptopelia orientalis*: In Uzbekistan, first encountered at Aman Kutan and along the Zerafshan River near Samarkand, then plenty more seen along the Amu-Bukhara canal. They were regularly encountered in Kazakhstan, at the Ili River, in the Tien Shan, at Kanshengyal and in the Astana area. These all refer to the race *meena*.

Laughing Dove (Palm Dove) *Streptopelia senegalensis*: Common in the drier parts of Uzbekistan and often seen in towns and villages.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*: Commonly seen in Uzbekistan, and regular in small numbers in southern Kazakhstan.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*: The biggest surprise of the tour was finding a male of this mainly African species at an oasis in the Kzyl Kum desert in Uzbekistan. The nearest known breeding location is southern Israel, which is c2800km away as the dove flies. There have been observations in Kuwait, which is only c1800km away.

CUCULIDAE

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: Seen and heard virtually throughout, with many excellent observations.

STRIGIDAE

Pallid Scops Owl (Striated Scops Owl) *Otus brucei* (NL): A bird was flushed by our knowledgeable Russian guide in a Turanga grove near the Ili River in southern Kazakhstan, but concerted efforts by the whole group to re-find it, failed miserably.

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: A great encounter near our lodgings at Chilik, with great views of one sitting in the open on a bough of an elm tree.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: Five very pallid examples were seen in the middle of the day in the Bukhara area.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* (H): We heard the distinctive vocalizations in the distance in the Beldersay area, near Tashkent.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*: Fantastic looks at an adult and four recently fledged youngsters during our lunch stop near Lake Sorbulak. Well found, Leonardo!

APODIDAE

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Common in Uzbekistan, especially around the ancient cities. Rather thin on the ground in Kazakhstan and only noted in the south.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: A delightful accompaniment to the wonderful monuments in Samarkand, where numerous low-flying birds gave excellent views.

MEROPIDAE

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*: Plenty of these beauties were seen around Bukhara and along the road to the Kyzyl Kum desert.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Regularly encountered, but most numerous in Uzbekistan. We also noted them in small numbers in the Charyn area and even in the Astana steppes.

CORACIIDAE

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Seen most frequently in Uzbekistan and in the south of Kazakhstan, a delightfully common roadside bird!

UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: Seen and heard regularly throughout the tour, with a hidden nest indicated by food-carrying parents at a Kanshengyal waterhole.

PICIDAE

White-winged Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucopterus*: We had great looks at a pair of this Central Asian endemic in the poplars at Aman Kutan, near Samarkand. We also saw them very well at two different locations in the Turanga woods along the Ili river.

ALAUDIDAE

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*: Plenty of these big, noisy fellows in the Taucum desert, along the road out there and around our yurts.

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*: Less numerous than the above, but present in small numbers around Kanshengyal in the Taucum desert.

White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera*: A good scattering of these pretty larks on the Astana steppes, less numerous than the following species around Kurghalzhin. Several excellent scope studies of this fine lark. It is endemic to the arid steppes of central Eurasia, occurring from just east of the Black Sea till extreme north-western China.

Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis*: One of the spectacular highlights of this tour, with hundreds of individuals seen on the Kurghalzhin steppes. Many males were seen along the roadside, taking to the air in their unusual 'air-rowing' displays. A truly exquisite species!

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: A small number were found in the deserts around Charyn, but they were very numerous around Kanshengyal with singing birds all around our camp, where some started singing as early as 4am! We also found a few in the Astana steppes.

Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris*: Superb scope studies at five near Aman Kutan, song-flighting and running about on a barren upland pasture. These demure birds showed the dark lores and dark culmen typical of this species, and sing a less elaborate song than the above species.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*: We found small numbers in the Taucum desert and had great scope views of this subtly-plumaged species. The identity of these birds has been the subject of some debate, and the race involved is *heinii*.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: Often seen along our route, particularly in the Bukhara region and in the Kyzyl Kum desert.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*: A single was seen song-flying at Lake Tudakul, in its favoured habitat of vegetated patches close to water. We recorded several more in the Charyn area.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: The other numerous lark on the steppes around Astana. Great to hear so many sing together.

Horned Lark (Shore Lark) *Eremophila alpestris*: Two showed all too briefly on the Sugaty Plain, favouring the stonier areas over 1000m. The race here is *brandti*.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*: A reasonable number were seen in the Bukhara region, and also at Lake Sorbulak, Kanshengyal, and more numerous around Astana.

Pale Martin *Riparia diluta*: A colony in a sand pit near Chilik was very active and allowed close scrutiny of this recent split from the previous species. They are clearly quite different from Sand Martins, with a diffuse breast band, broad at the sides but tapering to nothing in the centre with a dirty wash on the throat and a more contrasting dark face. The upperparts are clearly pallid and they show some scalloping on the upper tail.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*: One showed well over the Kokpek gorge in the Charyn area.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Almost daily observations with a maximum of 60 at one of the Astana steppe lakes.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*: Great looks on and around the nest at the hotel at Beldersay near Tashkent, and several more noted around Samarkand and at Aman Kutan.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*: A happy colony thrives at the Beldersay hotel with some nesting in alcoves on our balconies. We also saw them at odd places in southern Kazakhstan.

MOTACILLIDAE

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: Regular in the Charyn and Sugaty Plain area, usually visible as it performed its creaky song-flights. A couple were also seen at Aman Kutan and around Astana.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Several performed their happy song flight in the Tien Shan, and we also saw it in the Astana area.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: A handful were seen at higher elevations in the Tien Shan. They look much more brown and buff than western European birds and relate to the race *coutellii*.

Sykes's Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] beema*: Good numbers of these were found around pools and damp margins on the Astana steppe. They obviously like to follow herds of sheep and cattle. Colonel William Henry Sykes (1790 –1872) was an [Indian Army](#) officer, [politician](#) and [ornithologist](#).

Black-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] feldegg*: Plenty of these very distinctive birds around Lake Tudakul where they were vocal and obvious. The call is quite different from our Yellow Wagtails.

Western Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi*: One was seen at a waterhole in the Kyzyl Kum desert.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*: Our first was a migrant on a pool near Bukhara. Then we saw one at Lake Tudakul and a further three at steppe lakes near Astana, all of the grey-backed nominate race.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: A small number were encountered along our route, at Beldersay, Aman Kutan, a migrant in the Kyzyl Kum desert and several in the Tien Shan.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*: A single migrant was seen by a pool in the Kyzyl Kum desert.

Masked Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] personata*: An endearing bird, with many encountered in Uzbekistan and a few found in southern Kazakhstan.

CINCLIDAE

Brown Dipper (Pallas's Dipper) *Cinclus pallasii*: Two showed very well while feeding a fledged youngster along a torrent at Beldersay near Tashkent. We saw another three on streams in the Tien Shan. Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811) was a German author and naturalist in Russian service, who travelled widely in Siberia and Kirghizia.

TROGLODYTIDAE

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (H): A single was briefly heard in the Tien Shan above Almaty.

PRUNELLIDAE

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*: Three were seen very well at Cosmostantsia in the Tien Shan, singing with gusto from dilapidated buildings. A central Asian endemic.

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*: Many were seen and singing in the junipers of the Tien Shan (*huttoni*). A species with two widely separate populations, one in the northern Urals (nominate) and one in the north-western Himalayas (*huttoni*).

Altai Accentor (Himalayan Accentor) *Prunella himalayana*: Great views of four around snow-covered Cosmostantsia in the Tien Shan. It is endemic to the Himalayan region.

TURDIDAE

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (Rufous Bush Chat) *Cercotrichas galactotes*: Several sightings of some very showy and vocal birds (*familiaris*). We began with a single in the Kyzyl Kum desert and then two at the Amu-Bukhara canal that performed as well as any could, singing from telephone wires and from the tops of bushes. In Kazakhstan we found one in the Charyn area.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: Plentiful and noisy at Beldersay, where we scoped a couple. They were with us all through Uzbekistan (except in the Kyzyl Kum). In Kazakhstan they were very audible in the Charyn area and also in bushes near Astana. These birds of the race *hafizi* visibly differ from western populations by being greyer with a more contrastingly rusty tail, and having pale edges to their wing coverts and a pale supercilium, plus their songs sounds rougher.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: About a dozen performed incredibly well in bushes and reedbeds in the Astana area. The race involved is *pallidogularis*, which shows a pale blue throat with a bright rufous spot and a narrow rufous lower breast band. Fantastic scope studies!

White-tailed Rubythroat (Himalayan Rubythroat) *Luscinia pectoralis*: A dozen of these jewels were seen in the Tien Shan, emerging from the junipers to sing. We also saw a couple of females, which is quite unusual as they normally skulk. The number five in the Bird of the Trip game.

White-throated Robin (Irania) *Irania gutturalis*: Just one of these attractive chats at Aman Kutan, a male singing from the top of bushes among the rocks. What a cracker.

Eversmann's Redstart (Rufous-backed Redstart) *Phoenicurus erythronota*: Splendid scope views of a male of this handsome chat in the spruces of the Tien Shan. The bird is named after Eduard Friedrich Eversmann (1794-1860), German naturalist, author and collector in Kirghizia and Siberia.

Blue-capped Redstart (Blue-headed Redstart) *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus*: Two males showed very well among the spruces of the Tien Shan.

Güldenstädt's Redstart (White-winged Redstart) *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*: Six birds performed very well among the snow-covered buildings at Cosmostantsia in the Tien Shan. These hardy birds seemed little concerned with the snowy conditions! Johann Anton Güldenstädt (1745-1781) was a [Baltic German naturalist](#) and [explorer](#) in Russian service. The favourite bird for Jean-Yves.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maura*: Two were seen in the Charyn area, three in the Tien Shan and then not again until we reached the Kurghalzhin steppe where we saw several.

Pied Bushchat (Pied Stonechat) *Saxicola caprata*: Quite a few were obvious and vocal around Lake Tudakul and the Amu-Bukhara canal. The range of this bird stretches from Iran and Uzbekistan right across southern Asia to New Guinea!

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*: Our first were in the Kyzyl Kum desert, with more seen around the Charyn region, then commonly in the Taucum desert. They are a remarkable mimic, at Kanshengyal we heard them imitate Greater Short-toed Lark and a whinnying horse!

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: Fairly common and visible on the steppes around Astana.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*: Quite a few were seen in rocky hills in Uzbekistan and south-east Kazakhstan. They were most numerous around Aman Kutan.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*: Only found in the Charyn area where we found them in the sparsest desert habitat. A fine-looking fellow!

Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii*: We had a great encounter in rocky hills near Aman Kutan. A pair was seen, but it was the handsome male that chose to show off the most. This must be the furthest north-western part of their range.

Variable Wheatear (Eastern Pied Wheatear) *Oenanthe picata*: A pair of the race *capistrata* was seen in rocky roadside habitat as we travelled to Samarkand. Despite close scrutiny, they are a bit perplexing, but these seem to show a whiter and more restricted white cap, a more extensive black breast, a more regular tail pattern and a noticeably more compact and smaller shape. They also seemed to favour the actual rocky slopes while the Pieds seemed to stick to the tops of the hills. It has also been suggested that *capistrata* is part of a 'hybrid-swarm' with Pied Wheatear! A confusing collection of black-and-white birds!

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: Three were seen in the Charyn hills.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (European Rock Thrush) *Monticola saxatilis*: Great looks at a male and a female of this attractive species in the rocky hills of the Charyn area.

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*: Several were seen quite well at Beldersay. Two more showed well in the Tien Shan.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Not uncommon at Beldersay, Aman Kutan and in the Tien Shan forests where they are represented by the race *intermedius*.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* (H): We heard the quiet song in a forested area north of Astana.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: Seen at both ends of the Tien Shan, in the Bolshoi Almatinskiy and at Beldersay.

SYLVIIDAE

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*: Perfect and prolonged scope views of a singing bird at Aman Kutan. We also heard it along the Zerafshan river and in bushes on the Astana steppes. The bird is named after Francesco Cetti (1726-1778), an Italian mathematician, naturalist and author.

Scrub Warbler (Streaked Scrub Warbler) *Scotocerca inquieta*: Two typically rather furtive birds showed well among the Saxaul bushes in the Kyzyl Kum desert. We even managed to scope them for really good views!

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: We saw one perched up 'reeling' in a large reedbed on the Astana steppes.

Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*: A splendid scope look at one in full voice, in bushes on the Astana steppe.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*: Great looks at one in the reedbed of a lake in the Kyzyl Kum desert. Interestingly, they completely ignored the recordings of the song of Spanish birds. The race involved is *mimica*.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*: Several good sightings of this reed-loving species, both in Uzbekistan and in Kazakhstan.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*: Regularly recorded (seen and heard) all along our route through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. One of the most regularly recorded warblers.

Caspian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus fuscus*: Several were seen singing away in the reedbeds at Lake Tudakul and also along the Zerafshan river. Although not greatly different to European Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus*, the song seems simpler and less varied, more strangled and less 'throaty'.

Indian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus brunnescens*: Noisy and easy to locate, we found dozens in the reedbeds around Lake Tudakul. We also saw it near Samarkand.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: Good looks at one in the northern Taucum desert and regularly heard in the Astana reedbeds.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*: Several were seen singing and skulking in the trees at Aman Kutan. A few more were found in the Kyzyl Kum desert and in the Charyn area.

Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*: This demure fellow was seen well and fairly often in the Astana region, most numerous in bushy areas in the steppe, where we had great looks at multiple examples singing their bubbling little song. One or two birds performed on wires, allowing for perfect scope views. The darker feet were quite obvious!

Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*: The southern counterpart of the above, preferring trees and taller vegetation and having a very different song. We saw them commonly in the tamarisks at Lake Tudakul and also quite regularly in the Charyn area.

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*: Great scope views of a vocal songster boldly holding territory at Aman Kutan and another was singing in the Kyzyl Kum desert. Remember the loose-hinged tail!

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*: A single bird was found in a bushy area along the Nura river in the Astana steppes. A new bird for this tour!

Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*: Fantastic scope views of a showy male along the Amu-Bukhara canal near Bukhara.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*: Four birds – a pair feeding two youngsters - showed very well in the Kyzyl Kum desert and another was found in the Charyn area. We were able to discern the pale eye.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*: Eight of these big fellows were seen at Aman Kutan, giving us very good looks as they sang throatily from the Hawthorn bushes. Birds breeding here are of the race *jerdoni*, which winters in India unlike other forms of Eastern Orphean Warbler which go to Africa. Another split in the offing?

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*: It took a while, but eventually we obtained excellent views of a singing bird in riverside bushes in the Astana steppes.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*: Some birds seemingly of the *curruca* or perhaps *blythi* form were seen around Astana, then other migrant birds not specifically racially identified were seen in Uzbekistan around Samarkand and Bukhara. We saw several of the form *halimodendri* (Steppe Lesser Whitethroat) that has a distinct warbling song, in bushes by the Ili river in south-eastern Kazakhstan.

Hume's Whitethroat *Sylvia althaea*: Common around Beldersay and at Aman Kutan, the most striking difference between this and European *curruca* birds is the loud warbling song, instead of a harsh rattle. It prefers mountains and its breeding range extends from here through to northern Pakistan.

Desert Whitethroat *Sylvia minula*: A couple of birds seen in the Saxaul bushes of the Kyzyl Kum desert could have been this form, but we did not see them well enough to really distinguish them.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: We had a couple of sightings in Uzbekistan and heard it in the Astana region. These grey-mantled birds should be of the race *rubicola*.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*: Several migrants were encountered in Uzbekistan (the Samarkand area and near Bukhara). In Kazakhstan we only found some singing birds in shelter belts north of Astana.

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*: Common and vocal in the Bolshoi Almatinskiy (living up to its German name of 'Tien Shan Warbler') with a few birds seen in the northern Taucum desert.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*: A single skulking migrant was found in a juniper area in the higher reaches of the Tien Shan, above Almaty.

Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus*: Fantastic views of one or two on a rocky juniper slope in the Tien Shan.

Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus tristis*: Several migrants were seen near Samarkand and then we had great looks at two of these in the Astana area, singing their very un-Chiffchaff like song!

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: A single bird was seen in the Bolshoi Almatinskiy spruces.

Severtzov's Tit-Warbler (White-browed Tit-Warbler, Stoliczka's Tit-Warbler) *Leptopoecile sophiae*: Fantastic looks at several in the junipers in the higher reaches of the Tien Shan. Perfect views of this uniquely coloured dainty jewel! THE BIRD OF THE TRIP and the favourite bird for Hilary, Noel, Anita, Kinta, Paul and Gerry. The bird is named after Nicklai Alekseevich Severtsov (1827–85), Russian naturalist, explorer and biogeographer. The scientific epithet probably refers to Tzarina Maria Alexandrovna (1824-1880), formerly Princess Maximiliane, Wilhelmine, Auguste Sophie Marie, wife of Alexander II, Tzar of all the Russians. Note that the Handbook of the Birds of the World (HBW) places this species, together with the closely related Crested tit-Warbler in the family Aegithalidae, the Long-tailed Tits!

MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Many migrants were encountered in Uzbekistan: at Beldersay, at Aman Kutan, Tudakul, the Amu-Bukhara canal and in the Kyzyl Kum desert. In Kazakhstan we saw it in the Taucum desert and near Astana.

Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*: We saw one at Beldersay near Tashkent and a total of three of these marvels at Aman Kutan. We obtained great views of a female gathering nesting material and building her nest. A delightful and very attractive species.

TIMALIIDAE

Bearded Reedling (Bearded Tit, Bearded Parrotbill) *Panurus biarmicus*: A few showed at Lake Tudakul and we also had a couple in reedbeds around Astana.

PARIDAE

Songar Tit *Parus songarus*: It took a while, but eventually we obtained great looks at this species in the spruces of the Tien Shan (nominate). Two others were glimpsed and heard. This species is represented by three separated populations in China and neighbouring regions.

Rufous-naped Tit *Parus rufonuchalis*: This handsome tit was beautifully seen near our well-appointed hotel in the Chatkal range. Here at the western edge of its range that extends as far east as Nepal.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Small numbers were noted in the spruce forest at Bolshoi Almatinskiy.

Azure Tit *Parus cyanus*: A bird of the *tianschanicus* race showed well near our guesthouse at Chilik. We also found this race in the northern Taucum desert. We saw a single bird of the brighter white *hyperrhiphaeus* race near Astana.

Yellow-breasted Tit *Parus flavipectus*: Delightfully common at Beldersay near Tashkent and another five were seen in the Aman Kutan area, near Samarkand. Many excellent encounters.

Great Tit *Parus major*: Just a few were seen, in shelter belts along the road from Almaty, and also in the Astana area.

Turkestan Tit (Turkestan Great Tit) *Parus bokharensis*: This Central Asian endemic was seen at Aman Kutan, Samarkand and in the Ili valley Turanga woods. The scientific epithet obviously refers to the city of Bukhara.

SITTIDAE

Eastern Rock Nuthatch (Great Rock Nuthatch) *Sitta tephronota*: Five birds were seen in classic rocky habitat at Aman Kutan. They showed particularly well and we also found a nest being built in a rock cleft.

TICHODROMADIDAE

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: Fantastic prolonged scope studies of two males on a concrete wall in the lower reaches of the Tien Shan above Almaty. The birds had obviously been pushed to lower levels by a severe snow storm. Definitely one of those must see birds!! It scored very well in the Bird of the Trip game.

CERTHIIDAE

Eurasian Treecreeper (Common Treecreeper) *Certhia familiaris*: A single bird was seen in the spruces of the Bolshoi Almatinskiy.

REMIZIDAE

Black-headed Penduline Tit *Remiz macronyx*: Good looks at two males at reedy lakes in the northern Taucum desert (Kazakhstan). One male showed a dark hood and a pale throat, but our second bird had a completely black hood and throat, convincing us all. Variation is well documented in this scarce species! Some authorities consider this taxon as a subspecies of European Penduline Tit. The race involved is *ssaposhnikowi*. A new species for our Turkestan tour and for your leader!

White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus*: Good views of several during the tour, with two building a nest near our Beldersay hotel, and another two at their nest at our lunch stop between Chilik and Almaty.

ORIOOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: Four migrant birds showed well in a fruiting mulberry tree at an oasis in the Kyzyl Kum desert and another two were seen in the Astana steppes!

Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo*: This species differs from the above in having a big black teardrop behind the eye and much yellow in the wings. In Uzbekistan we saw this one below our Beldersay hotel and near Samarkand, while in Kazakhstan we saw several in the Charyn area and also in the Turanga woodland along the Ili river.

LANIIDAE

Turkestan Shrike *Lanius [isabellinus] phoenicuroides*: We had good looks at four at Aman Kutan (Uzbekistan), then more in Kazakhstan with several showing well in the Charyn region.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: Excellent looks at a female on the Astana steppe. A lucky soul saw a male in bushy habitat north of Astana.

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*: A couple of sightings of birds belonging to the *erythronotus* race in southern Kazakhstan.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*: Commonly found wherever trees adjoined open country, all the way from Bukhara to the Charyn area, plus several close to Astana.

Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris*: In the Kyzyl Kum desert we saw five birds, and although no *pallidirostris* bill or facial features were noted, it's possible that this form is highly variable. There is more work to be done on the taxonomy of Central Asian Grey Shrikes!

CORVIDAE

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Recorded almost daily! The race involved is *bactriana*.

Pander's Ground Jay *Podoces panderi*: A splendid species that obliged by appearing right on the roadside, where it foraged at close range for c15min! Great stuff. In the vast landscape of the Kyzyl Kum desert we observed a total of ten adult birds. We also found a nest containing six juveniles in a small Saxaul tree. The Pander's Ground Jay is endemic to the deserts of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and there is a small isolated population to the southeast of Lake Balkash in southern Kazakhstan. The bird is named after Heinrich Christian Von Pander (1794-1865), a Latvian/German geologist and palaeontologist. It was voted as the second best bird of the tour! The five species of ground jay (genera *Podoces* and *Pseudopodoces*) are all enigmatic species of remote, hard to reach places that appeal very much to Palearctic birding fanatics.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: Excellent views, eventually, of a couple in the spruce zone of the Tien Shan above Almaty (*rothshildi*).

Alpine Chough (Yellow-billed Chough) *Pyrrhocorax graculus*: Excellent views of two in the higher reaches of the Tien Shan above Almaty.

Red-billed Chough (Chough) *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: Six birds were seen around Cosmostantsia, high in the Tien Shan. The birds showed well and obviously had nests with young in the derelict buildings.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Seen frequently almost throughout the tour, all were of the silver-necked *soemmerringii* race.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*: Common throughout much of the tour. Around Astana they are blamed for the decline of the Sociable Lapwings, and indeed this may be a contributing factor, but I think it's more to do with the Lapwings needing a very short-grazed sward, which is now scarce due to the lack of both domestic and wild herbivores.

Oriental Crow *Corvus orientalis*: These were encountered regularly, particularly along the fringes of the Tien Shan and outlying hills.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*: Taking over from the above in the Astana region, though in smaller numbers.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*: 13 were seen in the Taucum desert, showing paler feet than the next species and with flight feathers that usually appear greyer than the underwing coverts. Several of the birds seen had a distinctive brown wash all over their bodies.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: Two were seen at Aman Kutan, and we also encountered a couple near Samarkand. We also noted two in the Tien Shan.

STURNIDAE

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: Seen throughout except in open desert or high mountains, always less numerous than the following species!

Rosy Starling (Rose-coloured Starling) *Sturnus roseus*: In Uzbekistan we saw c1000 on the move going north-eastwards at Aman Kutan. Smaller numbers were noted in southern Kazakhstan. Many great views of these attractive birds were obtained.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*: Seen daily (even at 2750m in the Tien Shan) until we shook them off by flying to Astana!

PASSERIDAE

Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri*: Some wonderful looks in the Charyn deserts at five individuals, the lovely males showing off their ginger-and-black head markings, peeking out of their nest holes and chirping away merrily. Restricted to Central Asia. Although in Mongolia they are usually only found in Saxaul tree (*Haloxylon ammodendron*) habitat, in Kazakhstan they seem to prefer Turanga woodland and the neighbourhood of villages close to the desert.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: We saw a great number of 'non-House Sparrows' in Uzbekistan and also in the Kazakh deserts, this is the migrant *bactrianus* form, which is significantly brighter and smarter with a big black bill, and tends to shun human habitation.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*: Good numbers were seen at Lake Tudakul and in the Kyzyl Kum desert oases.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: A scattering of sightings all along our route through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Rock Sparrow (Rock Petronia) *Petronia petronia*: Excellent views of several at Aman Kutan (Uzbekistan) and good views again of several near the Saker Falcon eyrie in the Charyn area.

FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Heard and briefly seen in a wooded area north of Astana.

Red-fronted Serin (Fire-fronted Serin) *Serinus pusillus*: Perfect scope views of several in the spruce/juniper zone of the Tien Shan above Almaty. Several birds were song-fighting and chasing each other with all the joys of spring.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: Small numbers were noted at widely scattered localities, both in Uzbekistan and in Kazakhstan.

Grey-capped Goldfinch *Carduelis caniceps*: Seen especially well in the wooded valleys at Aman Kutan, where displaying and singing birds obliged at length.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: Several showed very well while coming in to drink at a puddle in the Charyn desert. The race involved is *bella*.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*: Great scope studies of a pair at a drinking pool in the Astana steppes. These birds are quite different from the fairly drab races we see in western Europe.

Common Crossbill (Red Crossbill) *Loxia curvirostra*: Very satisfying scope views of a dozen of these widespread birds in the spruces of the Tien shan. The race involved is *tianschanica*.

Plain Mountain Finch (Hodgson's Mountain Finch) *Leucosticte nemoricola*: Small numbers were seen in the higher reaches of the Tien Shan.

Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguinea*: Superb views of several at a drinking puddle in the Charyn desert (nominate).

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*: c15 of these smart birds were seen very well at water holes in the Kyzyl Kum desert. Several were also seen coming to puddles in the Charyn desert.

Mongolian Finch (Mongolian Trumpeter Finch) *Bucanetes mongolicus*: Fantastic views of 100+ at a water puddle in the Charyn desert. Their sweet calls being a constant companion during our wait for bigger fry.

Common Rosefinch (Scarlet Rosefinch) *Carpodacus erythrinus*: Small numbers were noted at widely scattered localities, both in Uzbekistan and in Kazakhstan.

Red-mantled Rosefinch *Carpodacus rhodochlamys*: A pair of these fine finches perched up for exquisite views in the junipers near the Tien Shan Observatory. Gorgeous!

White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes*: Vocal and bold in the junipers and spruces of the Tien Shan, even in the snow! c20 birds obliged and allowed close scrutiny.

EMBERIZIDAE

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*: This fine species was our target bird for our last birding day of the tour. We found four jousting males in a shelter belt north of Astana, and we obtained excellent scope views.

White-capped Bunting (Chestnut-breasted Bunting) *Emberiza stewarti*: Two were singing away by our hotel at Beldersay near Tashkent. Several more were noted in the Charyn area. Handsome!

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: Six showed well at our hotel at Beldersay near Tashkent and we found a few more in the Charyn gorges.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: Three were noted at drinking pools on migration in southern Kazakhstan and we had great scope views of singing males in a weedy field to the north of Astana.

Grey-necked Bunting (Grey-hooded Bunting) *Emberiza buchanani*: Ten or more were seen singing away on rocky hillsides in the Charyn area. We also observed them coming in to water puddles.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*: Three showed quite well at Lake Tudakul and refer to the 'parrot-billed' *pyrrhuloides* form (with very fat bills and much less black/more white around the head and breast). Several more typical-looking birds were seen in the reedbeds around Astana.

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*: A prominent and vocal fellow, with many seen in the hills at Aman Kutan, in the Charyn area and very commonly en route to and around Kanshengyal in the Taucum desert.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: A single bird was seen singing in a weedy field en route to the Taucum desert.

MAMMALS

Steppe Pika *Ochotona pusilla* (H): One was heard in the Astana steppe. Strange vocalizations!

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*: A few were seen in the Astana steppes.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*: Several were seen, in the Ili and Charyn area.

Eurasian Red Squirrel (Red Squirrel) *Sciurus vulgaris*: A couple of observations of these handsome creatures in the Tien Shan.

Bobak Marmot *Marmota bobak*: Dozens were seen on the Astana steppes.

Long-tailed Marmot *Marmota caudata*: Some nice views of several of these furry fellows in the Tien Shan. They were very confiding!

Yellow Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus fulvus*: Seen frequently in the drier parts of Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan.

Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus*: A few were noted at Lake Sorbulak and at lakes in the Taucum desert. An introduced species from North America.

Great Gerbil *Rhombomys opimus*: Plenty in the Charyn area. Really cute!

Coypu *Myocastor coypus*: We saw one of these large rodents swim at Lake Tudakul. Another introduced species.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: A very pallid individual was seen at Aman Kutan.

Eurasian Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*: One of these brutes showed briefly along a reed edge in the Astana steppes.

Goitred Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*: A proper wild one was seen in the Charyn desert. Released animals were also seen in the reserve at the Amu-Bukhara canal.

REPTILES

Horsfield's Tortoise *Agrionemys horsfieldi*: Regular encounters with these endearing creatures in the hills and deserts.

Desert Sand Boa *Eryx miliaris*: This was the snake that obliged so well in the Kyzyl Kum desert.

European Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*: A rather large individual showed to some of us in a pool at Lake Sorbulak.

Sunwatcher Toadhead Agama *Phrynocephalus helioscopus*: These were the more common lizards in the Kyzyl Kum desert.

BORNEAN RAINFOREST ADVENTURE 27 FEB – 15 MAR 2010

(Tom Walcot)

It takes 14 hours in the air, two legs each of seven hours with a refuelling halt at Dubai, to reach Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital of Brunei. After a brief tour around the city, where we saw a flock White-winged Terns in the creek, we flew on to Kota Kinabalu in eastern Sabah (once British North Borneo), for it was there that our real birding was to begin. Our group was 15 strong with everybody keen to see as many bird species and other creatures as possible, hopefully from short range. Our guide was a local Malaysian, whose eyes were extraordinarily sharp and whose knowledge of the Bornean fauna seemed to be unsurpassable. During our stay the weather was invariably hot and very humid at the lower levels but pleasantly refreshing at altitude. Happily we escaped being drenched in a tropical downpour. A good many of the species we identified were encountered at more than one location, but they have only been mentioned below as occurring at the place where first seen.

Our first base was Sabandar beach resort on the South China Sea near Tuaran. There we had a magnificent sandy beach graced in the early mornings by small herds of wild ponies accompanied by ever present Cattle Egrets while Barn Swallows on passage flew

back and forth. It was only after a while that we realised that sandflies also occupied the beach and that they seemed to relish human flesh. Birding was however quite good: the grounds yielded plenty of hugely active Eurasian Tree Sparrows; lots of Asian Glossy Starlings busily nesting in the eaves; a host of yellow-vented Bulbuls regaling us with song and splendid Chestnut Munias and tiny Brown-throated Sunbirds flitting about in the shrubbery. Slightly further afield much raucous calling heralded the presence of Collared Kingfishers intent on guarding their territories, while a wander into the nearby bush produced Little Spiderhunters; a few Magpie Robins (so aptly named in Colonial times); Peaceful Doves ambling about on the ground, a most attractive Common Iora offering a superb view of itself and a cautious Greater Coucal. Overhead White-breasted Wood Swallows performed aerobatics before settling conveniently on treetops where they could be easily inspected; occasional Brahminy Kites soared past and at a lower level House- and Silver-rumped Swifts swirled among the guests. But probably the best sighting was of a group of Lesser Frigatebirds which periodically patrolled the beach full of expectations.

Two days later we boarded a flight for the historic and attractive town of Sandakan, which lies in NE Borneo on the Sulu Sea. As we landed lots of Asian Palm Swifts were swooping around the airport gardens. With its natural harbour and access into the interior Sandakan used to be the capital of British North Borneo. Here we visited the principal tourist attractions, which included the Memorial Garden that was once site of an infamous Japanese camp for thousands of Australian and British PoWs. From there, an hour's coach journey mostly through miles of oil palm plantations, much lacking in bird life, brought us to a small jetty reaching out into a narrow stream densely bordered by mangroves. As we waited a Lesser Coucal briefly appeared before we clambered down into two small craft powered by twin outboards and set out on a 25 km voyage to the island of Libaran. While underway, perhaps surprisingly, very few birds and only four species were seen: on the riverine mudflats a pair of Common Sandpipers and on seaward ones several Pacific Reef Egrets while one or two Black-headed Gulls and a lone White-bellied Sea Eagle sailed by overhead. Our journey became more adventurous than expected when we had to take our sister craft, whose engines had failed, in tow after which the spray and hammering we received from the waves increased to a very unwelcome extent.

For the next three nights we had a pleasant stay on Libaran. By day we explored the island and from searching the trees added Orange-breasted Flowerpeckers and Pied Trillers to our List, as well as having good views of Flying Foxes, otherwise known as Fruit Bats, and some Tree Squirrels. A survey of smaller bushes revealed the marvellous Asian Paradise Flycatcher and a few Ashy Tailorbirds. Elsewhere on the open ground both Spotted and Emerald Doves were to be seen, while three Richards Pipits were closely observed feeding among rough grass by the seashore. One expedition by motor boat took us to a nearby island where, while we gently glided along a river, we found our first Proboscis Monkeys and a number of Long-tailed Macaques. Bird life was also present in the form of impressive Green Imperial Pigeons and striking views both static and in the air of the spectacular Stork-billed Kingfisher. Also keenly photographed by some of us were Water Monitor Lizards, the primary carrion-eaters of the region, as they

either swam in the river or skulked through the undergrowth. A second expedition found us on Selingan Island. Here we were introduced to the mechanics of turtle hatcheries and at night watched a Green Turtle laying its large clutch of eggs in a self-dug hole in the sand. We also came across two new avian species : several Pied Fantails busily exploring bushes for insects and four Megapodes routing on the ground. The latter resemble guinea fowl, and apparently exist only on a few small islets in furthest NE Sabah, just a few miles away from The Philippines. Interestingly, this unique species did not feature in my principal bird book, but its identity was confirmed by our guide and I later looked it up in *Smythies*.

The next stage of our adventure involved a fast 90-min boat trip back to the mainland. We then headed for the renowned Sepilok Orang Utan Sanctuary. There, apart from enjoying the sight of juveniles being fed on a tree platform, we encountered two new bird species: the brightly-coloured Rufous-backed Kingfisher, and some Crested Mynahs - birds which I had last seen and noted as Grackles in Malaya in 1968. On our way out, after studying our first Pig-tailed Macaque and looking hard at one or two black Prevest Squirrels, we got a superb view of a massive male Orang Utan that was outside the reserve and living wild. Just in case it became aggressive, we were warned to move away fast if it showed signs of coming our way! Continuing by bus we set off for Sukau Lodge situated on the bank of the Kinabatangan River. Here we remained for two days and revelled in a range of supposedly languid river cruises. But on one outing we had excitement when the guide in an adjacent boat caused a immature python to drop out of a tree onto his own clients, very much to their dismay and our amusement! Around our bungalow noisy Oriental Pied Hornbills abounded and less obvious Mangrove Blue Flycatchers could fairly easily be located. However, the best viewing came from being afloat, when one was able to see either across the river or along it. At such times we had some memorable, and for many of us, first-time sightings: Black-necked Swiftlets flashed hither and thither; six rather uncommon Wandering Treeducks were spotted preening on a mudbank; a group of Large-billed Crows called noisily before being located; occasional pairs of Lesser Adjutant Storks glided majestically overhead, and now and then the appropriately-named Dollar Bird flew by. On a later outing we saw some Bearded Pigs and were privileged to have excellent views of two more of Sabah's ten indigenous primates, the Maroon and Silver Langurs, and most graceful to the eye they were. On the avian front we enjoyed fine views of the massive Rhinoceros Hornbill as it honked to its mate in the treetops and then flew after it to the next perch. Also a pleasure to watch at very close hand were dozens of Glossy Swiftlets as they energetically built their tiny nests onto minute rocky overhangs. As for raptors, we had superb views of two Crested Serpent Eagles, one Changeable Hawk Eagle and the unusually-named Jerdon's Baza, all perched atop vantage points. Elsewhere at ground level we came across several Little Egrets and a clutch of Purple Herons, while during a short trek in the jungle we recorded three Bronzed Drongos, a White-rumped Shama and a Black and Red Broadbill. Quite often Oriental Darters were seen both on the wing and at rest while drying their wings.

The next stage of our journey saw us bound for the Gormantong Caves brought to fame by Sir David Attenborough. As we started off, we were lucky to spot a solitary Wreathed Hornbill and a little further along our way a few Pink-necked Pigeons on the roadside

cables. On reaching the caves we saw literally hundreds of whirling and darting Swiftlets. These were the Black-naped, which occupied the lower cave areas and the Edible, which lived in the upper recesses. We learned that the nests of both species were much in demand, with the Edible fetching the higher prices. Several Hill Mynahs were discovered outside the huge cave entrance, as was a furtive Chestnut-breasted Malkoha found moving carefully in some thick vegetation.

After this, we endured a drive of about five hours before reaching at our Mountain Lodge in the town of Ranau, which in 1945 became the site of a notorious Japanese PoW camp after the inmates from Sandakan were force-marched there. Our Lodge boasted a wide variety of plants and bushes in full bloom. This made it a lovely spot much appreciated by the local birds, among which we were able to enjoy the spectacle of a truly elegant species, the Indigo Flycatcher. But of course we had come into the mountains with the aim of seeing as many submontane species as possible and, in order to do this, our programme included two early morning strolls at even higher levels. On the first of these we identified the following : small flocks of busily feeding Chestnut-crested Yuhinas; a number of Chestnut-capped Laughing Thrushes; several Black-sided Flowerpeckers and three or four very distinctive Sunda Treepies plus a few Bornean Whistlers and, at close range, some absolutely beautiful Crimson Sunbirds. Also present were two other birds that were absent from my principal reference. Each was subsequently looked up, the first in *King & Woodcock* and the latter in *Smythies*, and they were of course also confirmed by our very helpful guide. They were: the amusingly-named Mugimaki Flycatcher and the Sunda Whistling Thrush. Three of each species were seen. The following day, higher up the mountain but unfortunately when early morning mist restricted visibility, three more local species were observed: the handsome Green Magpie, a handful of Ashy Drongos and two pairs of the beautifully-coloured Scarlet Minivet, where the hen's coat in contrast to her mate's is a brilliant golden yellow.

On the morrow we set off downhill for the 93 km run to Tuaran, where our adventure had begun. A bit of local meandering produced yet more new species: two White-breasted Waterhens, Blue-throated Bee-eaters hawking in the evening light, one Plumed Egret and a rarity, the Slaty-breasted Rail, which was noticed as it moved furtively from one patch of cover to another. Other bird watchers will undoubtedly have seen a greater number of species in this region over 17 days, but we were not all twitchers bent on seeing everything possible but a group of like-minded people who were overjoyed with what we found. For those who have not yet travelled to that part of the world, a visit for birders is very strongly to be recommended.

References:

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|---------------------|--|
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SYSTEMATIC LIST: BORNEAN RAINFOREST ADVENTURE
27 FEB – 15 MAR 2010

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Oriental Darter | <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i> |
| Lesser Frigatebird | <i>Fregata ariel</i> |
| Purple Heron | <i>Ardea purpurea</i> |
| Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> |
| Pacific Reef-Egret | <i>Egretta sacra</i> |
| Plumed Egret | <i>Egretta intermedia</i> |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> |
| Lesser Adjutant | <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i> |
| Wandering Treeduck | <i>Dendrocygna arcuata</i> |
| Jerdon's Baza | <i>Aviceda jerdoni</i> |
| Brahminy Kite | <i>Haliastur indus</i> |
| White-bellied Sea-Eagle | <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i> |
| Crested Serpent-Eagle | <i>Spilornis chula</i> |
| Changeable Hawk-Eagle | <i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i> |
| Megapode | <i>Megapodius freycinet cummingsii</i> |
| Slaty-breasted Rail | <i>Gallirallus striatus</i> |
| White-breasted Waterhen | <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i> |
| Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> |
| Common Black-headed Gull | <i>Larus ridibundus</i> |
| White-winged Tern | <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i> |
| Pink-necked Pigeon | <i>Treron vernans</i> |
| Green Imperial Pigeon | <i>Ducula aenea</i> |
| Spotted Dove | <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i> |
| Peaceful Dove | <i>Geopelia striata</i> |
| Emerald Dove | <i>Chalcophaps indica</i> |
| Chestnut-breasted Malkoha | <i>Phaenicophaeus curvirostris</i> |
| Greater Coucal | <i>Centropus sinensis</i> |
| Lesser Coucal | <i>Centropus bengalensis</i> |
| Edible-nest Swiftlet | <i>Collocalia fuciphaga</i> |
| Black-nest Swiftlet | <i>Collocalia maxima</i> |
| White-bellied Swiftlet | <i>Collocalia esculenta</i> |
| Silver-rumped Swift | <i>Rhaphidura leucopygialis</i> |
| House Swift | <i>Apus affinis</i> |
| Asian Palm Swift | <i>Cypsiurus balasienis</i> |
| Rufous-backed Kingfisher | <i>Ceyx rufidorsa</i> |
| Stork-billed Kingfisher | <i>Pelargopsis capensis</i> |
| Collared Kingfisher | <i>Halcyon chloris</i> |
| Blue-throated Bee-eater | <i>Merops viridis</i> |
| Dollarbird | <i>Eurystomus orientalis</i> |
| Wreathed Hornbill | <i>Rhyticeros undulatus</i> |
| Oriental Pied Hornbill | <i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i> |
| Rhinoceros Hornbill | <i>Buceros rhinoceros</i> |
| Black-and-red Broadbill | <i>Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos</i> |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Barn Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> |
| Pacific Swallow | <i>Hirundo tahitica</i> |
| Pied Triller | <i>Lalage nigra</i> |
| Scarlet Minivet | <i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i> |
| Common Iora | <i>Aegithina tiphia</i> |
| Yellow-vented Bulbul | <i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i> |
| Ashy Drongo | <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i> |
| Bronzed Drongo | <i>Dicrurus aeneus</i> |
| Green Magpie | <i>Cissa chinensis</i> |
| Sunda Treepie | <i>Dendrocitta occipitalis</i> |
| Large-billed Crow | <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i> |
| Chestnut-capped Laughing Thrush | <i>Garrulax mitratus</i> |
| Chestnut-crested Yuhina | <i>Yuhina everetti</i> |
| Magpie Robin | <i>Copsychus saularis</i> |
| White-rumped Shama | <i>Copsychus malabaricus</i> |
| Sunda-whistling Thrush | <i>Myiophoneus glaucinus borneensis</i> |
| Ashy Tailorbird | <i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i> |
| Indigo Flycatcher | <i>Eumyias indigo</i> |
| Mangrove Blue Flycatcher | <i>Cyornis rufigastra</i> |
| Pied Fantail | <i>Rhipidura javanica</i> |
| Black-naped Monarch | <i>Hypothymis azurea</i> |
| Asian Paradise Flycatcher | <i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i> |
| Mugimaki flycatcher | <i>Ficedula mugimaki</i> |
| Bornean Whistler | <i>Pachycephala hypoxantha</i> |
| Richard's Pipit | <i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i> |
| White-breasted Wood-Swallow | <i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i> |
| Asian Glossy Starling | <i>Aplonis panayensis</i> |
| Crested Myna | <i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i> |
| Hill Myna | <i>Gracula religiosa</i> |
| Brown-throated Sunbird | <i>Anthreptes malacensis</i> |
| Crimson Sunbird | <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i> |
| Little Spiderhunter | <i>Arachnothera longirostra</i> |
| Orange-bellied Flowerpecker | <i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i> |
| Black-sided Flowerpecker | <i>Dicaeum monticolum</i> |
| Eurasian Tree-sparrow | <i>Passer montanus</i> |
| Chestnut Munia | <i>Lonchura malacca</i> |

THAILAND
18 – 31 DEC 2009

(Mark Easterbrook)

Introduction

My wife had the choice of where we holidayed at Christmas this year and chose Thailand – I was quietly delighted. We booked independently through the Travel Councillors who dealt with our flight arrangements, transfers and accommodation. Although I was constantly reminded that "I had done quite a lot of birding this year, and this was not a birding holiday"; the chance to see Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordman's Greenshank, White-faced Plover and Malaysian Plover was an opportunity that could not be missed. Consequently I booked a couple of birdguides before I arrived in Thailand (2 in the Bangkok area and one in Krabi when we headed south to Phuket for the second half of the holiday). I will not enter into costs, it's for you to negotiate what you wish to pay and for what sort of day out you want. In any event, my first trip to Thailand and a non-birding holiday resulted in a fairly successful trip. I accepted before my departure that it was not the best time of the year for Pittas; however the waders were my main focus. I had no intention of driving in Thailand and being situated in the centre of China Town (the busiest part of town for traffic jams); I think I made the right decision. For those wishing to drive, select a hotel a little out of town to avoid the numerous and frequent traffic jams, ensuring that you do not have to transit Bangkok if you can avoid it.

Nick Upton's web page provides some excellent pre trip information along with many contacts and site information and I recommend you visit it at: <http://www.thaibirding.com>

Day 1 – 18 Dec

We flew from Heathrow and with the heavyish snow fall and the ability of the UK to get wrapped around the axle over it, we had to quickly rehash our travel arrangements and get to the airport by taxi, train and tube as opposed to driving as planned. In any event we departed on time and flew overnight arriving in Bangkok and the Grand China Princess Hotel in the heart of China Town at about 1730 the next day.

Day 2 – 19 Dec

Arriving in the evening in Bangkok, after a shower we explored the local area and enjoyed our first seafood street food that was excellent and very cheap. A couple of beers later and it was off to bed.

Day 3 – 20 Dec

Despite a couple of beers it did not cure the jetlag and we were awake very early. After breakfast we departed for the weekend market at Chatuchak. Before the onset of a round of mental shopping and bartering, the nearby Suan Rot Fei Park afforded an opportunity to catch up with some common Bangkok birds. The park provided good views of Olive-backed Sunbird, Chinese Pond Heron a couple of Taiga Flycatchers, Pied Fantails and several other common city birds but the only Black-hooded Oriole of the trip.

Later that day we caught the underground from the market to Lumphini Park, where besides more views of the commoner birds there was an opportunity to catch up with a few others that I had noted on previous trip reports. Indeed, as others had previously noted, this was the only place where I caught up with Black-collared Starlings and Asian Pied Mynahs. The site of a monitor lizard eating a fish that it had caught was also quite a spectacle. By now it was becoming dark, so we made for the nearby night market where we also ate some more excellent Thai cuisine for dinner. Many thanks also to Andy Howes for some useful Bangkok information.

Day 4 – 21 Dec

Before departing the UK, I had booked an excursion to the Bridge on the River Kwai with City-discovery.com. We were picked up at 0600 and preceded to the Bridge in an air coned coach. Along the roadside, numerous Black Drongos, Little and Great White Egrets were seen along with several Indian Rollers.

At the bridge I had good views of several Red-collared Doves, another Taiga Flycatcher whilst in the Kanchanaburi Military Cemetery I found a couple of Oriental Pipits, Zebra Doves and four Sooty-headed Bulbuls. An Ashy Wood Swallow also put in an appearance on a nearby telephone line.



Sooty-headed Bulbul

We drove to Nam Tok train station to catch the train back to the bridge via Hell Fire Pass and the coach for the journey back to Bangkok. At the station I saw two Thick-billed Flowerpeckers and a small group of Black-headed Bulbuls. From the train, several Indian Rollers, a Blue-tailed Bee-eater and two Little Green Bee-eaters were noted.

An early evening arrival at the hotel gave us ample time for a couple of beers, a shower, some more great street food, another couple of beers and a good night's sleep. All in all, a really enjoyable day albeit with limited birding opportunities.

Day 5 – 22 Dec

I had booked Peter Ericsson (email: pkknjj@yahoo.com), today for a trip to Pak Thale and Lam Phak Bia Sand Spit with Mr Daeng – a local fisherman. Peter had been recommended from a trip report that I had read and he proved to be a very able birder and great company. My wife accompanied us today and although very bored at the salt pans, she did experience a bit of local culture, see the country and enjoy an excellent lunch provide by Mrs Daeng – thank you. The obvious and most pressing aim being to see Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the now most reliable wintering site in Thailand.

The day started at the King's Mangrove Project near to Pak Thale wader site with a flyover Peregrine. At the mangroves and reed beds, several Ruddy-breasted Crakes were seen, Common and Pintail Snipes, numerous waders including Marsh Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover, Red-wattled Lapwing and Long-toed Stint. An Oriental Reed Warbler was seen in the reeds and two Dusky Warblers flitted about. Both Great White and Intermediate Egrets were present allowing for easy discrimination but separating Javan and Chinese Pond Herons was still proving problematic.



Intermediate Egret

We proceeded to Pak Thale where the search for Spoon-billed Sandpiper ensued. After about four hours, and several thousand waders later, with time pushing on, it was necessary to give up the search in order to guarantee seeing the other target waders. On leaving Pak Thale, obviously disappointed I reflected that it had been a whose-who of waders including Marsh, Terek, Common, Broad-billed, and Curlew Sandpipers, Long-toed and Red-necked Stints, Kentish, Grey, Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Eurasian Curlew, numerous Terns and two flyover Painted Storks, proving that despite the obvious omission Pak Thale is an exceptional site to spend time at.

We drove to another area of salt pans where a large roost had formed. The roost included one of the target birds, with circa fifty Nordman's Greenshanks, sixty Great Knots, numerous Common Greenshanks and several Caspian Terns amongst the Brown-headed Gulls. After carefully noting the relevant ID features of the Nordman's we departed for lunch – which was an authentic Thai meal prepared by Mrs Daeng.

The boat trip along the mangroves provided fleeting views of Black-capped and Collared Kingfisher before arriving at the sand spit, to be greeted by a dark phase Pacific Reef Egret. We walked gingerly along the beach flushing a pair of Malaysian Plovers and then saw a loan wader. We approached a little closer and scoped what proved to be a male White-faced Plover, apparently holding territory. The ID features were clear and easy to pick out on this individual with an obvious black eye in a white face lacking any black or dusky areas on the lores, coupled with the collar head and overall light colour. With Kentish Plovers to compare the individual against, it was an ideal opportunity. The bird was very skittish and eventually flew off, not to be found again during my visit. We scoped yet more beautiful male and female Malaysian Plovers, however were still missing one of our quarry. We returned to the boat, when a largish Egret flew out of the

mangroves and landed on some distant rocks. A quick rethink and bail out of the boat ensured that I scoped the Chinese Egret and left the sand spit extremely happy.

Stopping on the roadside along the Thung Bahng drainage channel and fields on the way back to Bangkok gave an opportunity to catch up with some noteworthy birds including a male and female Plain-backed Sparrow at the nest, another Oriental Reed Warbler, a couple of Black-eared Kites and a Pink-necked Pigeon. An egret that flew out of the reeds was the most definite (as you can be) example of a Javan Pond Heron that I saw that day. The only Long-tailed Shrike of the holiday was seen and a Greater Coucal clumsily made for a near by bush. A small flock of Baya Weavers and a Siberian Stonechat concluded the day's excitement.



Pink-necked Pigeon

Day 6 – 23 Dec

I had booked a day out with Nature Trails Thailand (ntrails@truemail.co.th) via Patcharee and my guide for the day was Ms Sukanya Thanombuddha who proved to be good company, with a good sense of humour, impeccable spoken English skills and above all a very competent birder. Having dipped on the Sandpiper the previous day at Pak Thale with Peter, I was extremely glad that I had worked in a contingency day and had a second bite at the cherry. Another early morning pick-up at 0600 and we were soon speeding south to Samutsakhon and the famous saltpans. Having searched through several thousand Red-necked Stints, Lesser Sand Plovers, Long-toed Stints broken up by a lone Great Knot without success, I was beginning to feel a little edgy. Sukanya then received a phone call and said that the lone Spoon-billed Sandpiper had been found sleeping by whom other than the legendary Mr T.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper

We quickly returned to the vehicle and sped about a kilometre down the road where Mr T greeted us. After frantically setting up the scope I was soon on the bird. Shortly after it started preening and there in all of its glory was the spatulate-shaped bill. I moved closer to digiscope it – a fantastic moment with a bird that I had wanted to see for some time. I concur with others in that, if you wish to enhance your chances of seeing the Spoonie, employ the services of Mr T.

Delighted, we moved on to a nearby temple where the monks harvested the nests of Gremain's (Eddible nest) Swiftlets for Bird's Nest Soup (what else)? Having achieved the aim of the day we moved onto Mahachai Mangrove Research Station. Several good birds were encountered and photographed here with several others heard only. The list of mangrove specialities included Golden-bellied Gerygone, Mangrove Whistler, Collared Kingfishers, several Oriental White-eyes, a Green-billed Malkoha and a small family group of Racket-tailed Treepies.



Mangrove Whistler



Golden-bellied Gerygone

After a very enjoyable lunch of Tom Yam soup and Chilli Squid we moved along the Rama II road pulling off to view several wetland areas. Five beautiful Grey-headed Lapwings gave themselves up along with a Yellow Bittern, the only Asian Openbill of the trip, Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas whilst in the reeds, acceptable views of Black-browed Reed Warbler, Yellow-bellied Prinia and Blunt-winged Warbler were gained.



Grey-headed Lapwing

Before returning to Bangkok for 1800 several Streak-eared Bulbuls, White-rumped and Scaly-breasted Munias were noted in roadside scrub.

Day 7 – 24 Dec

An early morning departure from the hotel saw us catching the 0955 flight to Phuket, arriving at about 1000 and transferring to our hotel in Patong (which was a shock)! Having arrived in the Ayia Napa of Thailand, I wasn't particularly enamoured to be there and I advise others to avoid the place like the plague and select an area to the south such as Kata or Karong Hill. In any event the hotel was set back and quiet which was a relief; however it was clear that birding was going to be difficult in the area and I was pleased that I had booked a day in Krabi for the 29th Dec.

Even so, an immediate lifer in the hotel grounds in the form of several Yellow-vented Bulbuls cheered me up. The ever-present Common Mynahs became irritating whilst a few Common Tailorbirds and Olive-backed Sunbirds revealed themselves. A walk along the street gave me the opportunity to view some Pacific Swallows and a colony of Little Swifts, nest building under a hotel overhang.



Yellow-vented Bulbul

Day 8 – 25 Dec

A quiet day today, however not wishing to have a “blank” day I managed to walk into the hills where I was pleased to find a Grey Wagtail, Besra, a soaring Oriental Honey Buzzard and finally a lifer in the form of a Red-eyed Bulbul.

Day 9 – 26 Dec

We had been given a complimentary Phuket tour today, which we had taken knowing that it would include the equivalent of Turkish rug shops etc. It did, however, some of the places we visited did afford some birding opportunities and I saw a female Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker, several Brown Shrikes, a couple of Common Buzzard, the only Black-nest Swiftlet and a group of what appeared to be nothing more interesting than Red-rumped Swallows. An afternoon at leisure and a few Singapore Slings, fitted in well with my wife's plans.

Day 10 – 27 Dec

We did the tourist trip today, wishing to visit Phangnga and (James Bond Island) on a boat trip. Although the birding was not prolific, I noted an Orange-bellied Flowerpecker before boarding the boat. Throughout the trip Brahminy Kites were very common and two White-bellied Sea Eagles were seen. On the island itself, two Pacific Reef Egrets and a cracking male Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker was recorded. On stopping at Lawa Island on the return voyage, a Forest Wagtail and Asian Brown Flycatcher put in an appearance and a surprise lifer – three Olive-winged Bulbuls that I was not expecting.

Day 11 – 28 Dec

I took an early morning walk to Karon hill today and started at the Meridian Hotel. This area looks like a much better place to stay for a bit of casual birding. The walk gave opportunities to see White-breasted Kingfisher, Asian Koel, Grey Wagtails a White-breasted Waterhen and in a private Hill Resort a little down the hill towards Patong a pair of Streak-throated Bulbuls, so I managed to avoid another blank day. We spent the remainder of the day by the pool reading and supping a few more cocktails (Mange Tout Rodney – Mange Tout).

Day 12 – 29 Dec

I had booked a day out in the Krabi area before I left the UK with Tony "Eagle-eye" from his Website at: Thailand Bird Watching (info@thailandbirdwatching.com). The day began with a trip through the Krabi mangroves with Mr Dai, where many Brown-winged Kingfishers were seen. A White-bellied Sea Eagle sat above us and two Dollarbirds were seen sat motionless on lookout points. A couple of Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds were seen and a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo flew over us. A Vernal Hanging Parrot perched on a dead snag but try as we may; the Mangrove Pitta remained a heard only record.

We proceeded to the mouth of the estuary to some sand bars on which many Greater Sand Plovers sat along with at least 50 Lesser Crested Terns and about the same

number of Black-naped Terns. An Osprey watched us from atop one of the fishing pens and eight Whimbrels were noted along with a Great White Egret and a Javan Pond Heron. As we departed the boat, the only Asian Glossy Starling was noted in Krabi town on top of a TV aerial.



Lesser Crested Tern

We departed for lunch on route to Khao Nor Chu Chi (KNC) Forest and reserve. As previously mentioned this was never going to be the optimum time of year to see Pittas and so it proved. However, the afternoon was productive although in true forest fashion slow and hard work most of the time, interspersed with periods of immense activity. One such moment bought a mixed flock including a Crow-billed Drongo, Chestnut-headed Babbler, Chestnut-winged Babbler, Rufous Piculet, two Chestnut-bellied Malkohas, an Asian Paradise Flycatcher and a Black-naped Monarch. A little further along the track a pair of Little Spiderhunters was seen. As we continued further a pair of Thick-billed Spiderhunters were seen and a single Vernal Hanging Parrot zipped by. Whilst returning to the vehicle at least seven Grey-rumped Treeswift flew low overhead.

Thinking the day was over I was treated to a Javan Frogmouth sat in the open after a little coaxing, near KNC at a place called Ron Falls (I think). It was a stakeout that Tony had discovered previously. A long journey back to Patong saw me arrive at the hotel at about 2100, just in time for "tea and medals" – well the Thai equivalent – street food and Singha beer.

Day 13 – 30 Dec

This was our final full day and it was spent enjoying a couple of massages and beers, relaxing, before flying home the following day. No new birds were added as a result, however it did keep the peace and compromise was gained between birding and family imperatives.

Day 14 – 31 Dec

Liking to start early when returning home to avoid just waiting in a hotel, we departed at 0500 took the early morning flight to Bangkok and arrived in Heathrow via EVA Airlines at about 1930 local time. Just in time to flake, exhausted before missing seeing the New Year in. The last bird seen in Thailand was a small group of Tree Sparrows at Bangkok Airport.

Consolidated Species List

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| Little Grebe | A couple seen on wetlands near Bangkok |
| Indian Cormorant | 1 bird flying at Lam Phak Bia appeared to be this species |
| Little Cormorant | Fairly common and very numerous around Pak Thale |
| Little Egret | Common and widespread |
| Chinese Egret | 1 bird at Lam Phak Bia |
| Pacific Reef Egret | Several at Lam Phak Bia, James Bond Island and Krabi fishing enclosures |
| Grey Heron | 1s and 2s seen at Pak Thale and Rama Rd |
| Purple Heron | 2 seen near to the Rama II Rd |
| Great White Egret | Good numbers in suitable habitat |
| Intermediate Egret | Individuals positively identified, however seemingly numerous |
| Chinese Pond Heron | Widespread and very numerous |
| Javan Pond Heron | As above if you get a good enough view to discriminate in winter plumage |
| Striated Heron | Several seen in suitable habitat |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | Four seen at the King's Mangrove project |
| Yellow Bittern | 1 at the ponds off the Rama II Road |
| Painted Stork | 2 at Pak Thale |
| Asian Openbill | 1 at the ponds off the Rama II Road |
| Crested (Oriental) Honey Buzzard | 1s seen on several dates at various locations around Patong |
| Black-eared Kite | 2 near to Pak Thale and 2 near the Rama II Rd |
| Brahminy Kite | Very common throughout |
| White-bellied Sea Eagle | 2 at James Bond Island and 1 at Krabi mangroves |
| Besra | 2 around the Patong area |
| Common Buzzard | 3 seen around Karon Hill |
| Osprey | 2 at Samutsakhon and 1 at Krabi fishing pens |
| Peregrine Falcon | A flyby near Pak Thale |
| White-breasted Waterhen | 1s & 2s in suitable habitat |
| Ruddy-breasted Crake | 3 seen well at the King's Mangrove project |
| Common Moorhen | 1 at the King's mangrove project |
| Pheasant-tailed Jacana | Not as common as Bronze-winged but several in wetlands off the Rama II Rd |
| Bronze-winged Jacana | Numerous off the Rama II Rd and 2 in drainage channels at Thung Bahng |
| Black-winged Stilt | Common in suitable habitat |
| Pacific Golden Plover | 4 or 5 at the King's Mangrove Project |

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| Grey Plover | Several at Pak Thale |
| Little Ringed Plover | 3 at the King's Mangrove Project |
| Kentish Plover | Numerous at Pak Thale and Lam Phak Bia sand spit and Samutsakhon salt pans |
| White-faced Plover | A lone male in breeding plumage at Lam Phak Bia sand spit |
| Malaysian Plover | At least 8 at Lam Phak Bia sand spit |
| Lesser Sand Plover | Numerous at Pak Thale, Samutsakhon and Krabi |
| Greater Sand Plover | Not as numerous as above but present in reasonable numbers |
| Grey-headed Lapwing | At least 5 in wetlands off the Rama II Rd |
| Red-wattled Lapwing | Small numbers at suitable wetland habitats |
| Pintail Snipe | At least 2 at the King's Mangrove project |
| Common Snipe | Numerous at the King's Mangrove project |
| Black-tailed Godwit | C40 at Pak Thale |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | Present at Pak Thale but not as numerous as the above |
| Whimbrel | 8 at Krabi fishing pens |
| Eurasian Curlew | 9 at Pak Thale |
| Spotted Redshank | Several at the King's Mangrove project |
| Common Redshank | As Above |
| Marsh Sandpiper | Common at the King's Mangrove project and Pak Thale |
| Greenshank | Common around Pak Thale |
| Nordman's Greenshank | At least 50 at Pak Thale - roosting |
| Wood Sandpiper | 5 or 6 at the King's Mangrove project and 3 in wetland off the Rama II Rd |
| Terek Sandpiper | 1 at Pak Thale |
| Common Sandpiper | 1s and 2s in suitable habitat |
| Great Knot | Common at Pak Thale and 1 at Samutsakhon and a large flock of C60 flying at Lam Phak Bia sand spit |
| Red Knot | Amongst the waders at Pak Thale |
| Sanderling | Numerous at Pak Thale and Lam Phak Bia sand spit |
| Little Stint | Undoubtedly present amongst Red-necks at Pak Thale and Samutsakhon salt pans |
| Red-necked Stint | Very common at Pak Thale and Samutsakhon |
| Long-toed Stint | Numerous at Pak Thale, Samutsakhon and the King's Mangrove Project |
| Dunlin | 1 at Pak Thale |
| Curlew Sandpiper | Common at Pak Thale and Samutsakhon |

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| Spoon-billed Sandpiper | THE PRIZE – 1 roosting at Samutsakhon salt pans on the 23 rd Dec. |
| Broad-billed Sandpiper | At least 5 at Pak Thale |
| Brown-headed Gull | Common at Pak Thale |
| Gull-billed Tern | Common at Pak Thale |
| Caspian Tern | Several at Pak Thale |
| Black-naped Tern | At least 50 at Krabi fishing pens |
| Lesser Crested Tern | At least 40 seen at Krabi fishing pens |
| Common Tern | Common at Pak Thale and 1s seen elsewhere |
| Whiskered Tern | Common at Pak Thale |
| White-winged Tern | 1 at pools off the Rama II Rd |
| Spotted Dove | Common throughout |
| Red Collared Dove | Numerous around Bangkok and Pak Thale |
| Zebra Dove | A common bird of towns and parks |
| Pink-necked Green Pigeon | 2 at fields near Thung Bahng |
| Vernal Hanging Parrot | 1 at Krabi Mangroves and 1 at KNC |
| Koel | Single males and females seen throughout |
| Chestnut-bellied Malkoha | 2 seen well at KNC |
| Green-billed Malkoha | 1 seen at Mahachai Mangrove Research Centre |
| Greater Coucal | Singletons seen at widespread locations |
| Javan Frogmouth | 1 at Ron Falls close to KNC |
| Grey-rumped Treeswift | At least 8 seen at KNC |
| Black-nest Swiftlet | 1 seen near Phuket |
| Germain's Swiftlet | Seen near Bangkok and Pak Thale with numerous nests viewable at the harvesting temple |
| Asian Palm Swift | Common at widespread locations |
| Little Swift | 1 from the hotel in Bangkok, 1s and 2s seen elsewhere and a large colony nesting on a hotel overhang in Patong |
| Common Kingfisher | 1s & 2s seen throughout |
| Brown-winged Kingfisher | At least 5 seen in Krabi mangroves with Mr Dai |
| Smyrna Kingfisher | Fairly common and seen in most suitable habitats |
| Black-capped Kingfisher | Common at the King's Mangrove project and Krabi |
| Collared Kingfisher | 2 at Lam Phak Bia mangroves and 2 at Mahachai mangrove project |
| (Little) Green Bee-eater | Widespread in small numbers |
| Blue-tailed Bee-eater | A few seen south of Bangkok and during the Kwai River trip |
| Indian Roller | Singles throughout – common in parks |

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| Dollarbird | 2 birds seen during the Krabi mangrove boat trip |
| Coppersmith Barbet | A common bird in Bangkok city parks |
| Rufous Piculet | 1 bird scoped at KNC |
| Golden-bellied Gerygone | At least 2 birds seen at Mahachai mangrove research station |
| Mangrove Whistler | 1 bird photographed at Mahachai mangrove research station |
| Barn Swallow | Common in the Bangkok area |
| Pacific Swallow | Common around Phuket and Krabi |
| Oriental Pipit | Widespread in small numbers in parks in Bangkok |
| Forest Wagtail | 1 at Lawa Island |
| Yellow Wagtail | 1 at Pak Thale and 1 at Samutsakhon |
| Grey Wagtail | 2 in the hills around Patong |
| Black-headed Bulbul | 5 at Nam Tok train station and 4 at KNC |
| Sooty-headed Bulbul | 3 or 4 in the Military cemetery at Kanchanaburi |
| Puff-backed Bulbul | 1 at KNC |
| Stripe-throated Bulbul | 2 seen on Karon Hill and 1 at KNC |
| Yellow-vented Bulbul | Common around habitation in Patong |
| Olive-winged Bulbul | 2 on the Island of Lawa in Phangnga NP |
| Streak-eared Bulbul | Common and widespread |
| Red-eyed Bulbul | 1 in the hills at Patong and 1 at KNC |
| Common Iora | Common and widespread in small numbers |
| Oriental Magpie Robin | Common in 1s & 2s near habitation |
| Siberian Stonechat | 1 in a drainage ditch at Thung Bahng and 1 in reeds off the Rama II Rd |
| Orange-headed Thrush | 2 or 3 at KNC |
| Zitting Cisticola | Heard and 1 seen at Pak Thale |
| Yellow-bellied Prinia | 1 in reeds off the Rama II Rd |
| Plain Prinia | 1s and 2s seen off the Rama II Rd and at the King's Mangrove project |
| Black-browed Reed Warbler | 1 in reeds off the Rama II Rd |
| Blunt-winged Warbler | As above |
| Oriental Reed Warbler | 1 at the King's mangrove project and 1 in a bush at Thung Bahng |
| Common Tailorbird | Seen in 1s & 2s at various locations |
| Dark-necked Tailorbird | 1 at Krabi mangroves and 2 at Mahachai mangrove research station |
| Dusky Warbler | At least 2 at the King's mangrove project |
| Greenish Warbler | 1 in trees in Suan Rot Fei Park - Bangkok |
| Asian Brown Flycatcher | 1s throughout |

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| Taiga Flycatcher | 1s & 2s in Bangkok parks and at the Kwai River bridge |
| Pied Fantail Fantail | A common bird throughout |
| Black-naped Monarch | 1 at Mahachai mangrove research station and 1 at KNC |
| Asian Paradise Flycatcher | 1 at KNC |
| Rufous-crowned Babbler | 1 at KNC |
| Chestnut-winged Babbler | 1 at KNC |
| Plain-throated Sunbird | 1 at Mahachai mangrove research centre |
| Ruby-cheeked Sunbird | 2 in Krabi mangroves and 1 at KNC |
| Olive-backed Sunbird | A common bird throughout |
| Little Spiderhunter | 2 at KNC |
| Thick-billed Spiderhunter | 2 at KNC |
| Thick-billed Flowerpecker | 2 at Nam Tok train station |
| Orange-bellied Flowerpecker | 1 near Phuket Pier and 1 at KNC |
| Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker | 1 in Phuket and 1 at James Bond Island |
| Oriental White-eye | 4 at Mahachai mangrove research centre |
| Black-hooded Oriole | 1 in Suan Rot Fei park - Bangkok |
| Brown Shrike | 1s throughout |
| Long-tailed Shrike | 1 on a telegraph wire at Thung Bahng |
| Black Drongo | Numerous on wires in widespread locations |
| Crow-billed Drongo | 1 at KNC |
| Greater Racket-tailed Drongo | 1 flyover at Krabi mangroves |
| Racket-tailed Treepie | A small family group of 4 at Mahachai mangrove research station |
| Large-billed Crow | Common throughout |
| Ashy Woodswallow | 1 at Kanchanaburi cemetery and several at Thung Bahng |
| Asian Glossy Starling | 1 in Krabi town |
| Pied Mynah | Common in Lumphini Park - Bangkok |
| Black-collared Starling | Only 3 in Lumphini park |
| Common Mynah | Widespread and numerous throughout |
| White-vented Mynah | Common in Bangkok |
| Plain-backed Sparrow | 2 at a nest at Thung Bahng |
| Eurasian Tree Sparrow | Widespread and numerous |
| Baya Weaver | A small flock at Thung Bahng |
| White-rumped Munia | Small numbers in scrub off the Rama II Rd |
| Scaly-breasted Munia | As above |



Oriental White Eye

Summary

The aim was achieved – Spoon-billed Sandpiper! It was never going to be the best time to visit Thailand with the Pittas not calling, however a fantastic country to bird in with plenty of opportunities for the birdwatcher on a family holiday. The street food is not to be missed. Cheap, fresh and very tasty, we encountered no stomach upsets or any other difficulties through eating (every day) in this way – I recommend it! If you wish to target the Pittas etc, do your homework and visit at the right time of year, however, if you happen to be in Thailand there are plenty of other birds to enjoy as you also enjoy the country, culture and cuisine.