

FOREWORD

It has been an abysmal year here in UK with the wettest Summer for many years. At least our AGM produced fine weather and many birds. We must have a very friendly birding Padre with a direct line upstairs as all our organised trips were undertaken in good weather from Norfolk in January to Barnes in October. Even a week on Fair Isle in September only produced an hour of a downpour. Not that those on overseas trips had much to worry about inclement weather. Richard Seargent provides an article on his latest foray into Afghanistan and provides a record of species seen during 3 tours. Peter Hubert updates an article on Raptor Migration in the eastern Pyrenees that was first covered in 2010. By pure coincidence an article on SPTA(West) also appeared that year and it is updated for this publication as well.

This year we launched our new web site with better graphics and layout. Already we have had success in recruiting new members. Short articles on our field trips can be found at www.armybirding.co.org. There are two articles however on AOS trips. The AOS trip to Fair Isle was sensational. For any birder where the list is important then this is a must. Even I was carried away with the rare birds that could be easily seen. Once again our members have been on trips to places where there is a rich bird life even if they were not on a birding trip. Somehow we find time to go birding even if there is so little time. Even on my family holiday a few early mornings in the hotel grounds produced some good birds and a few lifers for the list. Articles from Nicholas Beswick, Carl Powell, Ray Marsh and Kevin Kirkham-Brown all follow the same theme; whilst I was on holiday in Egypt I managed to get some birding in and they did judging by their species list and photographs. There are 2 articles on Cyprus where Mark Easterbrook looks back to his tours then and now and makes some salient points that are applicable to all. Josh Marshall on the other hand provides an update on the anti-trapping camps that are gaining in publicity and effectiveness. His is a disturbing story nevertheless and is essential reading.

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WINTER SURVEY OF SPECIES ON IMBER TRAINING AREA

(Andrew Bray)

The only formal surveys carried out on the military estate of Salisbury Plain have been carried out during the breeding season (RSPB). The Defence Infrastructure organisation (DIO) is responsible for the management of the habitat. This is mainly carried out on Imber Training Area by letting to farmers for them to carry out management regimes such as grazing and scrub clearance. All schemes are carried out in conjunction with national bodies due to the importance of sites as the area is predominately a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as well as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). Salisbury Plain (19,690 ha) which represents 41% of Britain's remaining chalk grassland area is divided into 3 main areas and this survey looks at the western side of the Plain within an area where there are no public rights of way. The Plain is the largest piece of unbroken unimproved chalk grassland in Western Europe and has been undisturbed by intensive farming for at least half a century. The area is an important site both nationally and internationally for 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. 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.

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. At the start there were not enough volunteers to cover all these squares. 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 (extract is at Figure 1). 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. Over the 3 periods the number of volunteers has increased slightly as has the number of squares that they have surveyed. The standard of surveys is not quantifiable and surveyors have been left to choose squares where feasible. If directed to specific squares and time there is the possibility of comparing surveyors however there is a risk of coverage decreasing. As some surveyors have carried out MoD Bird Surveys on squares in the breeding season they have been allowed to survey these squares in

winter thus some selected RSPB squares have not been covered whilst those not of priority have been surveyed. Over 3 periods only 4 of the original RSPB squares has not been surveyed at least once and 3 non-priority squares have been surveyed. A diagrammatic view of squares surveyed 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 & Shaded = squares surveyed as part of winter counts.

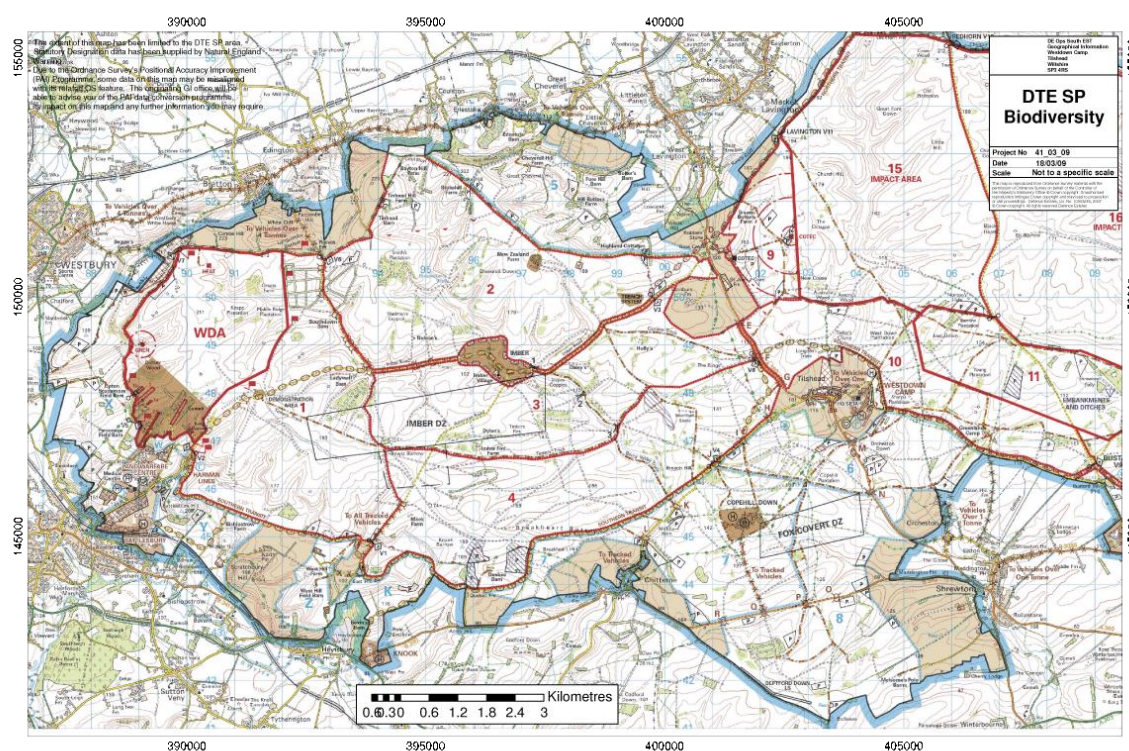


Figure 1. Imber area map extract showing danger areas WDA, 1, 2, 3 and 4.

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 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 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 included 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 was to 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. This is rather subjective given that a lot of grassland has some form of scrub and some is used as temporary pastures. DIO also has a programme of scrub clearance. The percentages have remained the same or changed within 15% over the years. Only one square has had a larger percentage change (ST9648). The grass in large parts of the square had been cut for hay and thus it has been shown as grassland rather than farmland on final results. 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. Not all volunteers were able to complete 2 visits however all results are included. Surveys were carried out two years running then a year was missed out before another survey to allow other surveys to take place including Hen Harrier roosts.

RESULTS

All results were recorded on Microsoft Office excel spreadsheets and the programme used to carry out the equation functions. 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 92% 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.

Table 2. Species count against primary habitat.

Species Count					Species Count				
Grid Sq	Grassland	2008/09	2009/10	2011/12	Grid Sq	Grassland	2008/09	2009/10	2011/12
ST9046	65			11	ST9645	97	9	12	10
ST9049	70			19	ST9646	80			15
ST9050	80	15	8	13	ST9647	98	11		16
ST9145	65	16	8	12	ST9648	20			7
ST9146	85	10	9	3	ST9748	55	10	7	7
ST9148	75	5	4	11	ST9749	90	22	17	8
ST9247	90	6		23	ST9746	95			6
ST9248	95	22	24		ST9748	60			12
ST9250	65	15	9		ST9749	95			17
ST9345	65	0	15		ST9751	95	12		12
ST9346	85	0	11		ST9752	95	17		16
ST9348	90	9		3	ST9846	70	10		9
ST9349	95	7	14	13	ST9847	60			11
ST9445	92			14	ST9848	80			11
ST9446	90			14	ST9849	95	21	9	22

Table 2. Species count against primary habitat.

Species Count					Species Count				
Grid Sq	Grassland	2008/09	2009/10	2011/12	Grid Sq	Grassland	2008/09	2009/10	2011/12
ST9447	100	4	3	2	ST9850	85	21	17	18
ST9448	50			7	ST9945	97	9	6	7
ST9451	80	27	23	12	ST9948	90	18		7
ST9452	80	8		20	ST9949	90	21	13	19
ST9545	95			10	ST9950	95			9
ST9546	85	24	28	25	SU0046	80			14
ST9548	80	21	14	7	SU0047	80	12	12	12
ST9549	75	26	20	20	SU0048	80			18
ST9550	92	23	22		SU0148	90	5		17

Grassland is expressed as percentage of square.

48 grid squares surveyed over the period

Species Distribution

In total 66 species have been recorded including 4 which were one count of one (Peregrine, Barn Owl, Great Grey Shrike, Blackcap) and 4 species of one count of greater than one (Common Gull, Chiffchaff, Brambling, Lesser Redpoll) and 3 species in one period with multiple counts (Lesser Black-backed Gull, Treecreeper, Corn Bunting). All the species are not unexpected and can be seen in the summer and winter regularly. Both Peregrine and Barn Owl breed on the area and remain during the winter. All species have been recorded previously on Birdtrack and for the BTO Winter Atlas (Lack, 1986). The list of species recorded is at Table 3. A total of 47 species have been recorded on all 3 winters.

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>	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Coal Tit	<i>Parus 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>	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>

Table 3. List of Species found

Species	Scientific Name	Species	Scientific Name
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</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>	*	
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	Reed Bunting *	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
		Corn Bunting *	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>

* indicates species on UK BAP Red List

Shading indicates species recorded all 3 winters

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. Also widely spread besides corvids are Buzzard, Wood Pigeon and Blackbird. These are comparable with data from other winter survey results (Birdtrack) and this is not unexpected (*per obs*). Recorded greater than 40% are Buzzard, Fieldfare, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Starling. 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 species 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). Salisbury Plain therefore is important for this species and the same criterion also applies to the Meadow Pipit. Both these species are present all year though they are harder to count in winter. They rarely fly and only seem to break cover when disturbed by the observer walking close by (*pers obs*). Despite this both have an abundance of >1 per sq km. Starlings flock together in winter in a murmuration. On the Imber site during the last winter a flock in their tens of thousands gathered at dusk near New Zealand Farm (ST9651). It is therefore not surprising that small flocks were seen across the area during the day thus giving an abundance of 46.79.

Table 4. Number of Counts by Period Against Species

	2008/09	2009/10	2011/12	Total
Mallard	3	1	5	9
Red-legged Partridge	6	8	5	19
Grey Partridge	1	7	5	13
Pheasant	10	25	19	54
Hen Harrier	1	4	3	8
Sparrowhawk	3	6	1	10
Buzzard	14	39	23	76
Kestrel	9	14	10	33
Merlin		1	3	4
Peregrine		1		1
Golden Plover	3	2	2	7
Lapwing	2	3	9	14
Snipe	2	6	2	10
Woodcock	5	8	5	18
Black-headed Gull	1		1	2
Lesser Black-backed Gull			3	3
Herring Gull	1	1	2	4
Common Gull		1		1
Wood Pigeon	28	43	27	98
Stock Dove	3	6	11	20
Feral pigeon	1		2	3
Barn Owl		1		1
Tawny Owl		2	1	3
Short-eared Owl	1	5	6	12
Green Woodpecker	7	14	5	26
Great Spotted Woodpecker		2	5	7
Skylark	22	20	22	64
Meadow Pipit	15	24	20	59
Pied Wagtail	1	1		2
Wren	16	29	18	63
Dunnock	11	12	7	30
Robin	8	12	13	33
Stonechat	16	3	22	41
Blackbird	31	52	44	127
Fieldfare	15	40	16	71
Song Thrush	5	6	4	15
Redwing	4	22	9	35
Mistle Thrush	1	4	1	6
Blackcap		1		1
Chiffchaff			1	1
Goldcrest	1	22	6	29
Long-tailed Tit	4	9	3	16
Coal Tit	3	9	5	17
Blue Tit	21	37	19	77

Table 4. Number of Counts by Period Against Species

	2008/09	2009/10	2011/12	Total
Great Tit	17	38	19	74
Nuthatch	1	1		2
Treecreeper		6		6
Great Grey Shrike			1	1
Jay	2	11	0	13
Magpie	26	47	35	108
Jackdaw	12	23	9	44
Rook	15	24	21	60
Carrion Crow	39	58	42	139
Raven	6	9	10	25
Starling	12	42	18	72
Chaffinch	15	29	19	63
Brambling	1			1
Greenfinch	1	3	2	6
Goldfinch	12	22	14	48
Siskin		1	1	2
Linnet	2	10	3	15
Lesser Redpoll			1	1
Bullfinch	2	7	3	12
Yellowhammer	3	12	9	24
Reed Bunting		1	2	3
Corn Bunting			5	5

Table 5 takes the counts from all 3 surveys and shows the average numbers counted and the average number of birds found in a count with the count range in parenthesis. This is translated into abundance across the whole of the area. Large flocks such as Starling, Fieldfare, Lapwing, and Rook skew numbers as each square is unlikely to hold that amount however this reflects the population size.

Table 5. Results of Species Winter data

Species	Av Nos	Sq Counts	Av sq	Abundance	Max
Mallard	7.00	3.00 (1-5)	2.33	0.13	6
Red-legged Partridge	25.00	6.33 (5-8)	3.95	0.44	10
Grey Partridge	12.33	4.33 (1-7)	2.85	0.20	6
Pheasant	32.67	18.00 (10-25)	1.81	0.54	6
Hen Harrier	3.00	2.67 (1-4)	1.13	0.05	2
Sparrowhawk	3.33	3.33 (1-6)	1.00	0.05	1
Buzzard	34.33	25.33 (14-39)	1.36	0.57	4
Kestrel	13.00	11.00 (9-14)	1.18	0.22	3
Merlin	1.33	1.33 (0-3)	1.00	0.02	1
Peregrine	0.33	0.33 (0-1)	0.00	0.00	1
Golden Plover	90.33	2.33 (2-3)	38.71	1.53	96
Lapwing	235.67	4.67 (2-9)	50.50	4.69	200
Snipe	3.67	3.33 (2-6)	1.10	0.06	2

Table 5. Results of Species Winter data

Species	Av Nos	Sq Counts	Av sq	Abundance	Max
Woodcock	9.33	6.00 (5-8)	1.56	0.17	5
Black-headed Gull	8.67	0.67 (0-1)	13.00	0.17	20
Lesser Black-backed Gull	3.33	1.00 (0-3)	3.33	0.06	5
Herring Gull	9.33	1.33 (1-2)	7.00	0.18	21
Common Gull	3.00	0.67 (0-1)	0.00	0.04	8
Wood Pigeon	271.67	32.67 (27-43)	8.32	4.90	60
Stock Dove	23.00	6.67 (3-11)	3.45	0.42	11
Feral pigeon	2.33	1.00 (0-2)	2.33	0.05	3
Barn Owl	0.33	0.33 (0-1)	0.00	0.00	1
Tawny Owl	1.00	1.00 (0-2)	1.00	0.02	1
Short-eared Owl	5.67	4.00 (1-6)	1.42	0.10	3
Green Woodpecker	9.67	8.67 (5-14)	1.12	0.16	2
Great Spotted Woodpecker	3.00	2.33 (0-5)	1.29	0.05	2
Skylark	96.00	21.33 (20-22)	4.50	1.78	27
Meadow Pipit	80.67	19.67 (15-24)	4.10	1.41	25
Pied Wagtail	0.67	0.67 (0-1)	1.00	0.01	1
Wren	39.00	21.00 (16-29)	1.86	0.66	5
Dunnoek	17.00	10.00 (7-12)	1.70	0.31	5
Robin	20.00	11.00 (8-13)	1.82	0.35	4
Stonechat	36.00	13.67 (3-22)	2.63	0.70	24
Blackbird	145.00	42.33 (31-52)	3.43	2.49	20
Fieldfare	1008.33	23.67 (15-40)	42.61	16.09	350
Song Thrush	5.33	5.00 (4-6)	1.07	0.10	2
Redwing	65.33	11.67 (4-22)	5.60	0.95	30
Mistle Thrush	3.67	2.00 (1-4)	1.83	0.06	3
Blackcap	0.33	0.33 (0-1)	0.00	0.00	1
Chiffchaff	0.67	0.33 (0-1)	2.00	0.01	2
Goldcrest	20.00	9.67 (1-22)	2.07	0.30	6
Long-tailed Tit	44.67	5.33 (3-9)	8.38	0.70	21
Coal Tit	11.67	5.67 (3-9)	2.06	0.21	8
Blue Tit	92.00	25.67 (19-37)	3.58	1.51	16
Great Tit	98.33	24.67 (17-38)	3.99	1.58	24
Nuthatch	1.00	0.67 (0-1)	1.50	0.02	2
Treecreeper	2.67	2.00 (0-6)	0.00	0.04	2
Great Grey Shrike	0.33	0.33 (0-1)	0.00	0.01	1
Jay	11.67	4.33 (0-11)	2.69	0.17	16
Magpie	112.00	36.00 (26-47)	3.11	1.93	20
Jackdaw	229.67	14.67 (9-23)	15.66	3.63	100
Rook	681.67	20.00 (15-24)	34.08	11.24	316
Carrion Crow	351.67	46.33 (39-58)	7.59	6.16	100
Raven	14.33	8.33 (6-10)	1.72	0.25	5
Starling	3161.67	24.00 (12-42)	131.74	46.79	1122
Chaffinch	103.67	21.00 (15-29)	4.94	1.68	120
Brambling	4.33	0.33 (0-1)	13.00	0.09	13

Table 5. Results of Species Winter data

Species	Av Nos	Sq Counts	Av sq	Abundance	Max
Greenfinch	4.00	2.00 (1-3)	2.00	0.06	5
Goldfinch	131.33	16.00 (12-22)	8.21	2.18	30
Siskin	15.67	0.67 (0-1)	23.50	0.28	40
Linnet	65.33	5.00 (2-10)	13.07	0.97	50
Lesser Redpoll	1.00	0.33 (0-1)	3.00	0.02	3
Bullfinch	9.00	4.00 (2-7)	2.25	0.14	6
Yellowhammer	32.00	8.00 (3-12)	4.00	0.48	20
Reed Bunting	1.33	1.00 (0-2)	1.33	0.02	2
Corn Bunting	4.00	1.67 (0-5)	2.40	0.08	5

Av Nos is the average between the three periods.

Sq Counts is the average number of squares between 3 years where a species was counted.

The range is shown in parenthesis for the three periods.

Av Square is the average of species per square observed.

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

Max is the maximum count in any square.

DISCUSSION

Over the 3 winter periods the survey of the Imber area has confirmed the species that are to be found and provided a guide to their relative abundance. It does not provide the complete picture as species that range over a wide area such as Hen Harrier, Merlin and Short-eared Owl are difficult to relate to only part of the Plain. It highlights that the area is dominated by corvids and Woodpigeons (abundance of 4.9). There is also a species richness that is just as applicable in winter as it is in summer with 66 species that includes a range of woodland species, thrushes, insectivores and other granivorous passerines. There are large flocks of Fieldfares (abundance 16.09) however the numbers of other thrushes are small with Mistle Thrush at a rate of 0.06. Of note is that there is only 1 year in which Corn Bunting, a local speciality was recorded. Breeding Peregrine was also recorded once. Is this just an anomaly or do they move away from their normal breeding areas in the winter? What other species are affected by migration off the Plain in winter? The survey does not take into account other counts that happen on the area that are recorded by conservation group members thus there are limitations to the accuracy of the picture as a whole however this does provide a snap shot of what to expect.

The study has set a baseline for any 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 for use. What is not considered is how the weather impacts on the birds. Last winter was particularly cold with significant snow. At no stage were the counts of species examined to see if this was a factor in the count. Despite some of the

limited scope of the survey we now know what species can be found and have a reasonable idea on their abundance even though the standard deviation can be great.

The survey has thrown up interesting ideas that maybe deployed in future. 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 these surveys volunteers selected their own time and though only 25% of all surveys were carried out after midday, the Mode is 10.00 hrs and the Mean 11.16 hrs. The difficulty is access and limiting timings of the visit may cause volunteers difficulties that may prevent them surveying however, only 11% of surveys started after 1400 hrs. In future it may be possible to limit surveys to the morning period.

The decline of farmland species is a concern (Gregory *et al.* 2004). 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. 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. Using volunteers of the local MoD conservation group, bird species and their distribution have been recorded 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 management and 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. To the South in Spain is Catalonia and to the East, 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 2011. 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 significant 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, 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 there is a coastal plain that is 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, along the length of the Pyrenees on both sides of the frontier. On the North side of Mont Canigou there are two river valleys of that drain towards the sea in an Easterly direction, the Agly and the Têt and on the South side of Mont Canigou there is a third river valley, the Tech. 25 kilometres inland from the coast a significant tributary to the Agly exits through a wide, steep sided valley that leads North into the Corbières, this is the Verdoble river. At the head of the Têt 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 bloc 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.

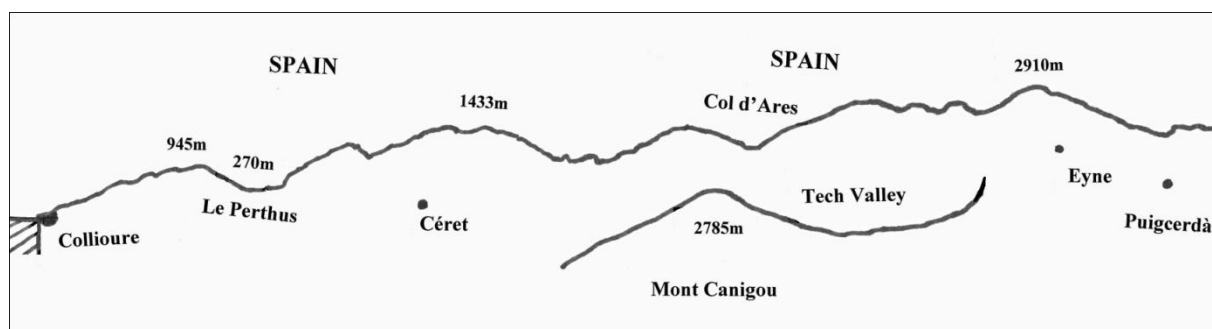


Figure 1. Features and Passes of the Eastern Pyrenees.

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 70 kph, with frequent gusts up to 90 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 of the Pyrenees, (the 'Vent Marin'). These latter 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 trends as to 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 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 windy conditions the birds stay close to the base of Mont Canigou following valleys that lead North to the Têt valley and then over low hills to the Agly valley, at which point most follow the line of the Verdoube river North over the lower East slopes of the Corbières towards Narbonne. 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 (*Circaetus 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 Central France towards the Mediterranean coast near Narbonne; there 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. The presence of these lagoons 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.



Honey Buzzard

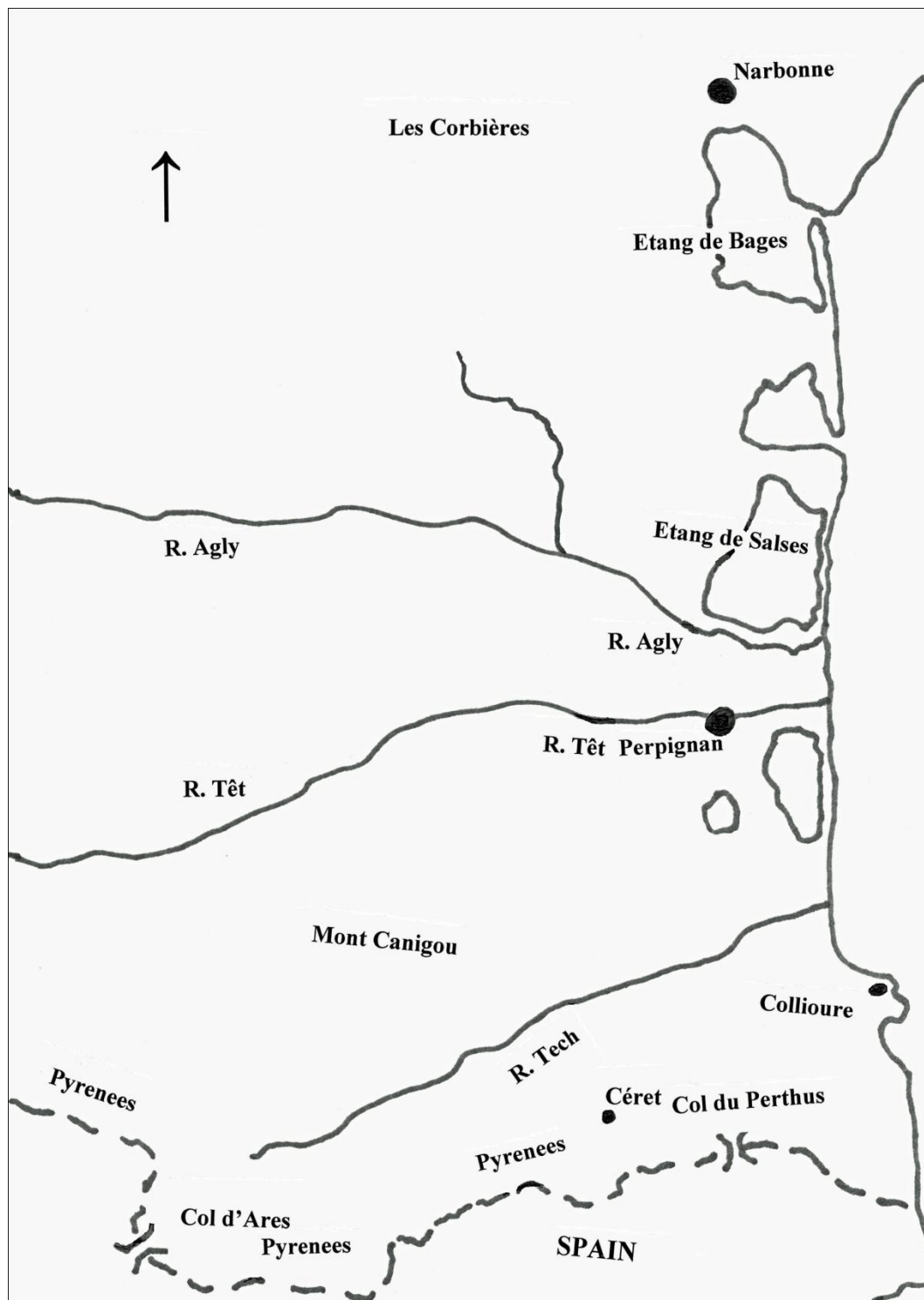


Figure 2. Map of coastal plain and lagoons.

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, there 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.

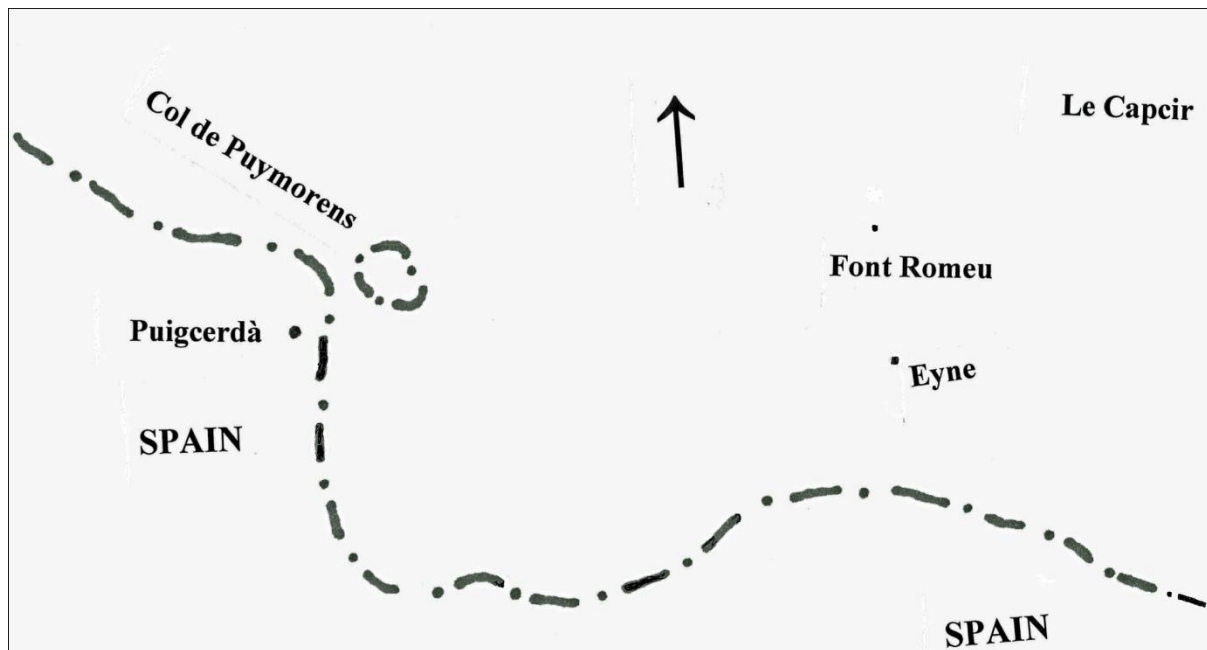


Figure 3. Map of the Cerdagne.

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 mountain 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 17 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 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; stragglers continue passing through 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 over-winter 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 from mid March to early 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 in the middle 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 in excess of 13,000 in some years. In calm weather many passing Narbonne move inland and over the Corbières; some continue to follow the coastal plain gradually drifting West as they approach the Pyrenees. There are no records of birds crossing East of the Le Perthus pass. In times of the 'Tramontane' they take a more definite 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 the Autumn passage. Those that there are indicate that the Spring passage starts in January but the main period 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. When harsh

weather hits Northern and Central France there may be a significant later influx to Roussillon.

Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus 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 2011 there was a more spectacular passage in the second half of October and into early November with more than 1000 Booted Eagles counted at Narbonne. In a normal year it would be unusual to report more than 20 in the season. The birds from France are migrating South through Spain. However, there is a smaller population that breeds in the Iberian Peninsula. For reasons that are unclear this population initially goes North into France before heading East towards Italy and thence South to cross the Mediterranean.

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. In the Spring of 2012 more than 1200 Short-toed Eagles were counted passing along the Mediterranean coast towards Italy, with the peak period being 10 to 13 March. 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 over the high ground of the 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 a passage along the plain; there are records of crossings in the Autumn from the Cerdagne. In respect of these the Ospreys follow the line of the Têt valley, travelling at low altitude West up the valley, unlike most of the other raptors that tend to follow the crest lines.

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 March 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.

Other species

The following raptors are regular migrants across the Roussillon but the data are insufficient to permit reasonable comment: Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*), Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus*) and Merlin (*Falco columbarius*).

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.



Long-legged Buzzard
(Cyprus)

OPERATION HERRICK 16

HELMAND PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN

A BIRDER'S PERSPECTIVE

(Captain Richard Seargent)

Commissioning from the ranks was perhaps the pinnacle of my career and enabled me to take some control of where and when I would be posted; rather bizarrely I chose units who were on high readiness and deployable and thus some six years later I have found myself on three operational tours to Afghanistan, the first with United Kingdom Joint Force Medical Group and the latter two with 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards (I have since learnt from this mistake and my next posting will be solely in Knightsbridge). All three deployments have primarily been based in Camp Bastion¹; the International Stabilization and Assistance Force (ISAF) Hub in Helmand Province; initially this has been seen as a cushy posting but during Op HERRICK² 16 we received indirect fire from mortars, a suicide bomber and, as I type, Bastion is recovering from the Taliban attack where eighteen insurgents were killed, one insurgent captured and a significant amount of damage on the runways resulting in two United States Marine Corps (USMC) deaths and the destruction of Harrier Jets and other aircraft.

I have had the privilege of not only deploying for periods above and beyond what is normally expected of an individual but also to birdwatch for a total of 19 months in a country on the crossroads of the Western, Eastern Palaearctics and the Oriental Region. The run up to all the tours included pre-deployment training in Cyprus, Kenya or Canada and I had the opportunity to add significantly to my life list. I have not been disappointed. I have now completed two summer tours and one deployment over the winter. The Relief in Place (RiP) periods between Brigades always occur during the migration periods and thus I have had the opportunity to be in the middle of migration in an area where migrants abound. Camp Bastion has changed considerably since my first tour in 2007 – it is now the size of Reading and areas that were productive on Op HERRICKs 6 and 11 have now been built on and on this tour the expansion of the runway to the south has increased not only the military's footprint on the ground but also the area I have been able to birdwatch. On my first and second tours I was able to run around the perimeter. During this tour had I done so I would have had to complete a marathon!

I arrived in Camp Bastion on 28th January 2012 along with 40 individuals of the Battlegroup Headquarters to take over from a Danish Battlegroup. This deployment was some two months before the remainder of the Battalion and we had to set up a Headquarters and Rear Joint Operations Centre in both Main Operating Base (MOB) Price and Joint Operating Base (JOB) Bastion. The area of operations we were to take over from the Danes was Combined Force Nar-e-Saraj (North)³ (CF NES(N)) and area in the north of Helmand in the Upper Gerheshk Valley. Initially bird life was limited. If anyone has been to that part of the world you'll be aware that winter is not the best time to see birds. Within the first weeks I had found the Omni-present Laughing Doves, Crested Larks, Tree Sparrow and the odd Common Myna. Occasionally, towards the end of the day flocks of Crowned Sandgrouse were seen to

¹ Camp Bastion is split into 4 elements; Bastions 0, 1, 2, 3 and is now a multi-national base (British, US, European, Tongan, Antipodean and Arab Forces) under UK control.

² Operation HERRICK - the title for on-going UK operations in Afghanistan.

³ The Helmand Area of Operations is split into a number of Combined Forces (CF). For CF read Battlegroup.

the south of Bastion. At the time I didn't know where they were landing but by the end of the tour this species became an almost daily species on my list. It was evident straight away that places where I had visited on HERRICKs 6 and 11 had been built on and it was obvious that I had to drive around the newer areas of Bastion and even into Camp Leatherneck, the adjacent USMC Camp. As such I borrowed one of the unit Tata pick-up trucks and found two areas, one at the end of the runway which I named Runway's End Marsh and a grey water Lagoon in Leatherneck which became colloquially known as the Poo Pond – I'll leave your imagination as to why it was. In addition birds were often seen perched on razor wire around both camps and a-top rubble. Overflying birds often proved interesting with some passerines unidentified. That said, a flock of Rose-coloured Starling over Bastion One was unmistakable.

Both areas had some Phragmites and subsequently both passerines and waders were attracted. During the spring migration I found Caspian Reed, Blyth's Reed, Clamorous Reed, Booted Warblers, the odd Sykes's and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers in abundance along with smaller numbers of Siberian Chiffchaff and Hume's Whitethroat. Red-throated Serin, and Rustic Bunting were added to my life list and the rocky areas held Pied Stonechat, Southern Grey, Daurian, Turkestan and Long-tailed Shrike and flocks of Trumpeter Finches were observed during the move north. Hoopoe, Roller, Variable and to a lesser extent, Hume's Wheatear, used the Runway's End Marsh as a stop-over and I added Blue-capped Redstart, Siberian Stonechat and Afghanistan's first Oriental Magpie-Robin⁴ in this area. Greater Hoopoe-Lark held territories along the perimeter fences and were often seen singing and displaying, whilst I picked up single Asian Desert Warblers twice whilst out running. The Sandgrouse congregated around the grey water stream leading into the marsh and was a sight to behold. Raptors were a welcome relief to periods of boredom and during migration I picked up the odd Steppe Buzzard, many Pallid Harriers, a single male Montegu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Saker and initially a few Shikra. Waders were evident throughout with large numbers of Black-winged Stilt, White-tailed Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, occasional Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, Little and Temminck's Stints, Dunlin, Ruff, Common Snipe, Common, Green and Wood Sandpipers and Red-necked Phalarope. In addition I added Oriental Pratincole to my list with an overflying bird at the beginning of the tour. Other birds included White-winged Tern and Heuglin's Gull, the former occurring mainly during reverse migration in Camp Leatherneck. Crowned, the odd Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were often found at the end of the runway mostly at the end of the day but singletons were present throughout, particularly from July onwards. The species list, although not extensive, is not bad for a desert site and some species perhaps come as a surprise to readers not familiar with Central Asian avi-fauna.

Camp Leatherneck holds an outstanding PX (the US NAAFI) , a reasonable barber, a coffee shop but also the Poo Pond. The Pond obviously attracted large numbers of waders and it was here that I first saw Lesser Sand Plover and it was a delight to visit this area, some five minutes from my workplace, on a daily basis to see what had dropped in over the night. I had run-ins with the USMC Military Police on occasion who could not understand why I was looking at an effluent filled pond and deemed me a security risk. Sometimes they could not think out of the box; I was clearly British, in British Uniform and carrying a Service Pistol and ID Card. Still, it was all rather worth the hassle as I had on occasions seven or eight species of Wader in front of me and on was able to observe Red-necked Phalarope doing what they do best – spinning around in the margins in order to disturbed invertebrates.

⁴ To be formally accepted but details already published in Sandgrouse.

Forays out of Bastion were this time limited but most months I travelled to the various Patrol Bases (PBs)⁵ or to MOB Price to conduct admin clinics and always took my bins with me. All movement was by Support Helicopter (SH) and so I was unable to pick up the desert birds I had hoped to see and had, indeed seen on previous tours whilst manning a GPMG as top-cover to a vehicle move. MOB Price had a large number of wintering Black Kites and in the PBs I added Steppe Eagle and Chestnut Shouldered Bush Sparrow to my list. Rupert King-Evans, a Company Commander in the Battalion and AOS member, was continuously on the ground and his sightings mirrored mine although he did add Black Stork to birds seen in the area. Other individuals reported birds over PBs which must have been Demoiselle Cranes, a species which migrates up and down the Upper Gerheshk Valley. The Trips out of Bastion were always interesting with long period stuck in PBs due to the lack of SH and all movement necessitated wearing the following kit:

- Rifle (with 150 5.56mm rounds of ammo)
- Sig Pistol (with 30 9mm rounds of ammo)
- Mark 7 Combat Helmet (fully scrimmed)
- Osprey Body Armour (20kgs complete)
- Day sack (with overnight kit and 48 hour rations)
- Hammock
- Belt Kit (Webbing)
- Old Bausch and Lomb 10x42 Binoculars
- Birds of the Middle East (Helm)
- Birds of Pakistan (Helm)*⁶
- Notebook

*Both books soon to be superseded by Birds of Central Asia (Helm)

I published this kit list on both the AOS Webpage and Birdforum under 'Essential Kit for a Helmand Twitch' which produced numerous comments ranging from the funny to those of a more profound nature.

This tour was outstanding bird wise. I really didn't expect to pick up new birds this time around and certainly was pleased to find Afghanistan's first Oriental Magpie-Robin. Sightings were sent to OSME and were included on their e-forum and in their Journal⁷. Birding is a useful diversion from work and I was certainly never bored. I was able to birdwatch outside my accommodation, whilst on a run and when commuting around Bastion. I did not just observe birds, there was numerous other species around and I was able to enjoy Globed Skimmer, Lesser Emperor, Asian Monarch, Bedstraw Hawkmoth, Leopard Gecko, Jackal, Jerboa, numerous Bat sp and I had reports of what appeared to be 2 Lynx in one of the PBs. Military Birders have added significantly to the knowledge of the avi-fauna of Afghanistan and I have had much discussion with OSME with regards to the Afghan list, not only adding Oriental Magpie-Robin but also Speckled Pigeon (from HERRICK 6) which appears to be a feral species at Kandahar Airfield. From what I can gather information has been received from a number of British Soldiers, two USMC Officers and a Finnish Diplomat in Kabul. I blogged sightings on the AOS website, tweeted sightings on Twitter and included what I saw on an Afghanistan thread on Birdforum. Photos were published on the AOS Website, on the Birdforum Gallery and on my Facebook Page.

⁵ PBs contained a Company Group with additional support elements and often with integral Afghan Security Forces

⁶ Those species not generally seen in the Palaearctics; Blue-capped Robin, Oriental Magpie-Robin

⁷ The Journal of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia

I am now firmly back in the UK and looking forward to my next posting; a posting which will not include another operational tour. I am attempting to see all the birds I missed over a 7 month tour and in the last month have managed to see both Long and Short-billed Dowitchers, Pectoral Sandpiper and the Rainham Baillon's Crake.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES SEEN IN AFGHANISTAN⁸
OPs HERRICK, 6, 11 AND 16

SPECIES	HERRICK 6 2007	HERRICK 11 2009/10	HERRICK 16 2012
Little Grebe	X		
Grey Heron		X	
Great White Egret		X	
Black-Crowned Night Heron	X		
Little Bittern	X		
Black Kite		X	X
Egyptian Vulture		X	
Marsh Harrier		X	
Pallid Harrier		X	X
Montagu's Harrier			X
Shikra	X	X	X
Steppe Buzzard		X	X
Long-legged Buzzard		X	
Steppe Eagle		X	X
Booted Eagle		X	
Lesser Kestrel			X
Common Kestrel	X	X	X
Merlin	X	X	
Hobby	X		
Amur Falcon	X		
Laggar Falcon	X		
Saker Falcon		X	X
Peregrine Falcon		X	
Common Quail	X		
Demoiselle Crane	X	X	
Common Coot	X		
Black-winged Stilt	X		X
Collared Pratincole			X
Red-wattled Lapwing	X		
White-tailed Lapwing	X	X	X
Ringed Plover		X	X
Little-ringed Plover	X	X	X
Kentish Plover	X	X	
Lesser Sand Plover			X
Common Snipe		X	
Green Sandpiper	X	X	X
Wood Sandpiper			X
Common Sandpiper	X		X
Little Stint	X	X	X
Temminck's Stint	X	X	X
Dunlin			X
Broad-billed Sandpiper	X		
Ruff	X		X
Red-necked Phalarope	X		X

⁸ Names follow HBW and appears as shown on Wildlife Recorder.

SPECIES	HERRICK 6 2007	HERRICK 11 2009/10	HERRICK 16 2012
Heuglin's Gull			X
White-winged Tern			X
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse			X
Black-bellied Sandgrouse			X
Crowned Sandgrouse		X	X
Collared Dove	X	X	
Laughing Dove	X	X	X
Speckled Pigeon	X		
Rose-ringed Parakeet		X	
Little Owl	X		
Sykes's Nightjar	X		X
Little Swift	X		
White-throated Kingfisher		X	
Common Kingfisher		X	
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	X	X	
European Bee-Eater	X	X	
European Roller	X		X
Hoopoe	X	X	X
Great Hoopoe-Lark		X	X
Desert Lark		X	
Greater Short-toed Lark		X	
Hume's Lark		X	
Crested Lark	X	X	X
Oriental Skylark	X	X	X
Plain Martin	X		
Sand Martin	X		
Barn Swallow	X	X	X
Eurasian Crag Martin	X		
Red-rumped Swallow		X	
Richard's Pipit	X		
Tawny Pipit		X	
Rosy Pipit		X	
Water Pipit		X	
White Wagtail	X		X
Masked Wagtail	X		X
Yellow Wagtail		X	
Yellow-headed Wagtail	X		
Eastern Yellow Wagtail			X
Citrine Wagtail	X	X	X
White-eared Bulbul		X	
Red-spotted Bluethroat	X	X	X
Rufous Scrub-Robin	X		X
Oriental Magpie-Robin			X
Blue-capped Redstart		X	X
Black Redstart	X		
Siberian Stonechat	X		X
Pied Bushchat	X	X	X
Hume's Wheatear			X
Northern Wheatear		X	
Variable Wheatear	X	X	X
Desert Wheatear	X	X	
Spotted Flycatcher	X		X
Red-Breasted Flycatcher	X	X	
Taiga Flycatcher		X	
Graceful Prinia		X	
Streaked Scrub Warbler		X	

SPECIES	HERRICK 6 2007	HERRICK 11 2009/10	HERRICK 16 2012
Paddyfield Warbler			X
Caspian Reed Warbler			X
Blyth's Reed Warbler	X		X
Great Reed Warbler	X		
Clamorous Reed Warbler	X		X
Booted Warbler	X	X	X
Sykes's Warbler	X	X	X
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	X		X
Upcher's Warbler	X		
Common Chiffchaff		X	
Siberian Chiffchaff		X	X
Mountain Chiffchaff		X	X
Plain Leaf Warbler	X	X	
Arctic Warbler	X		
Greenish Warbler	X	X	
Lesser Whitethroat	X		
Small Whitethroat	X		
Hume's Whitethroat		X	
Eastern Orphean Warbler	X		
Asian Desert Warbler	X		X
Menetries's Warbler	X		
Afghan Babbler		X	
Isabelline Shrike	X		
Turkestan Shrike	X	X	X
Daurian Shrike	X	X	X
Bay-backed Shrike	X		X
Long-tailed Shrike	X		
Southern Grey Shrike	X		X
Common Magpie	X		
House Crow	X		
Common Starling		X	X
Rose-coloured Starling	X	X	X
Common Myna	X	X	X
House Sparrow (<i>bactrianus</i>)	X	X	X
Spanish Sparrow			X
Tree Sparrow	X	X	X
Pale Rock Sparrow	X		
Chestnut-shouldered Bush Sparrow			X
Common Rock Sparrow		X	
Red-fronted Serin			X
Trumpeter Finch	X	X	X
Red Crossbill		X	
Rustic Bunting			X

BIRDS OF AFGHANISTAN

(Captain Richard Seargent)



Bay-backed Shrike



Turkestan Shrike



Variable Wheatear



Spotted Flycatcher



Laughing Doves



Pied Bush-chat



Crowned Sandgrouse



Hoopoe



Hume's Whitethroat



White-winged Black Tern



Yellow-throated Sparrow



Wood Sandpiper



Red-necked Phalarope



Yellow Wagtail

NORFOLK

(Andrew Bray)

Our annual trip to Norfolk takes place on the first Saturday of January. We hope for a brisk North Easterly but on this occasion we had a mild South Westerly wind. It is quite a civilised affair with breakfast at Tesco's in Hunstanton before the off. Of course a few will stop at the Wolferton Triangle for Golden Pheasant on the way up, not as though there have been any sightings for years by our members. This year was not different and despite regular reports of sightings that have come through, none was seen on this day (morning and evening). Maybe we will all have to stop on the way up in future. This trip was different to our normal itinerary as we had an extra location to go to, namely Cley reserve for the Western Sandpiper. There was also an Arctic Redpoll at Titchwell on the alert pagers. Our trip does start however with serious birding at Hunstanton Cliffs with Fulmar the main tick. Sea watching was more difficult as the tide was right out and I mean right out. Experienced sea watchers were required as most birds flying across were specs on the lens! It did mean that we did not spend much time here before joining the throng at Titchwell. Between the car park and centre we joined the large crowd eager to spot the unusual Redpoll feeding amongst the more common varieties. All 3 species or sub-species were found. It was then a quicker pace than the normal birdwatchers walk to the beach as time was pressing. The highlight was an Icelandic Gull flying over the long line of birders before landing to the east which resulted in a large number of scopes all pointing in the same direction. There was a shortage of ducks at sea but we were fortunate for good views of Long-tail Duck plus there were plenty of waders on the shore. On the way back there was more time to stop and add a range of additional waders plus a Water Pipit and some other passerines. A very obliging Water Rail made taking photographs an ease. A cup of something hot and we were off to Holkham Gap. A stop on the way for some found a Black Brant amongst the Brent Geese but it did mean they missed the Rough-legged Buzzard seen by those who did not stop (it did not come back whilst we were there – splitter!). We were determined to spend no more than an hour on the beach and headed for a small flock seen to the east which turned out to be completely un-exciting with not a Shore Lark or Snow Bunting hiding amongst them. A forced march back to the cars and then off to the Wildlife Reserve at Cley. We headed for the hides in the centre and forced our way in amongst the throng to look for the Western Sandpiper amongst thousands of Dunlin and other waders which regularly took flight as the Peregrine moved location! Eventually it was called in another hide and good views were obtained eventually for all those who had persisted. In total 101 birds were seen; a good start to the year.

List of Species seen:

Name	Scientific Name	Name	Scientific Name
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Brent Goose (nigricans)	<i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>

Name	Scientific Name	Name	Scientific Name
Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucoides</i>	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Hedge Accentor	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Mealy Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	Arctic Redpoll	<i>Carduelis hornemanni</i>

Name	Scientific Name	Name	Scientific Name
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>
Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus		

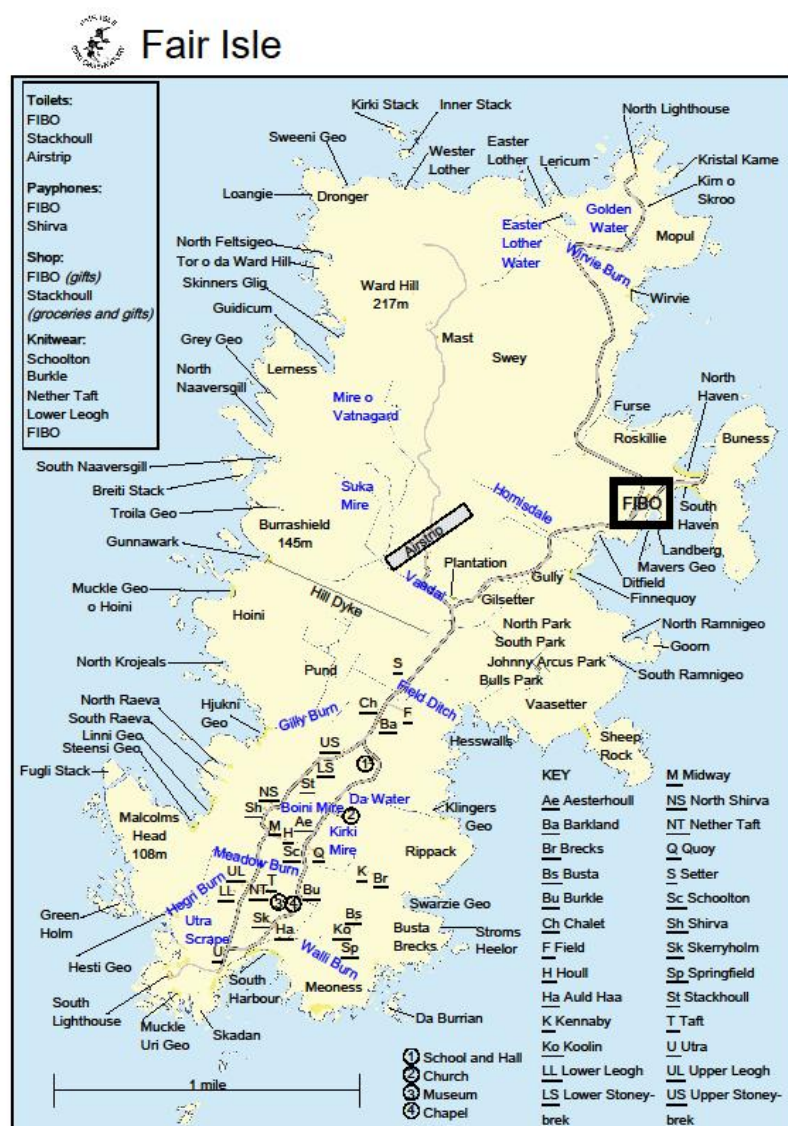
(101 Species)

AOS FAIR ISLE EXPEDITION (28 Sep – 4 Oct 12)

(Tim Cowley)

Background

In mid 2010 loose chat about visiting Fair Isle turned into a recce by October the same year, conducted by Tim Cowley and Andy Harrison, which laid down the foundations for an AOS expedition in 2012. This had followed a publicity campaign documenting the opening of a new Bird Observatory and fund raising for the final £60,000 of capital required to finish the ambitious project. Fair Isle has had an Observatory since 1948 thanks to George Waterston. Originally occupying old naval buildings, it was replaced in 1969 with a purpose built Observatory that lasted forty years, but in 2010 the new £4 million, eco-friendly Observatory was opened with en suite, Wi-Fi and many other great facilities. It must rate as one of the best Observatories and is thanks to the hard work of the Observatory Trust, as well as the financial backing of Scottish Government's Rural Development Programme, Shetland Islands Council.



Map of Fair Isle
(Reproduced by kind permission of David Parnaby)

Highlands and Islands Enterprise and many other donors, including the Defence School of Transport Welfare Fund's charity donation.

Fair Isle is a small island sitting 24 miles north of North Ronaldsey in the Orkneys and 27 miles south of Sumburgh in the Shetland Islands. Although slightly closer to the Orkneys, Fair Isle forms part of the Shetlands. Being approximately 3.5 miles long and 1.5 miles wide, with a resident population of only about 70 islanders it is Britain's remotest inhabited island and, with very few vehicles, it still deserves its Norse name '*Fridarey*', the isle of peace.

The northern part of the island is underdeveloped with few signs of human presence, such as the airstrip, North Lighthouse, North Haven Jetty and Observatory. By contrast the southern part of the island, which is more fertile and sheltered, is a patchwork of fields and houses. With the exception of the Havens and the South Harbour, the majority of the coastline is rugged, often with very steep cliffs or narrow geos. The islanders are very friendly and cooperative. Neighbours share the duties of fire crew at the airstrip. The tradition of Fair Isle knitwear is still alive and well on the island too but for many visitors it is the birds that are the principle draw. Fair Isle has become famous as the most likely place in the UK to see three very special species, 'the Fair Isle 3': Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler, Lanceolated Warbler and Pechora Pipit.

It is most Fair Isle visitors' ambition to see one or more of these very special birds, which reach the UK in very small numbers most years. So it was with some anxiety that the AOS group headed north on 27 Sep 12, as the two warbler species had already occurred elsewhere in the UK during the days leading up to the trip and there was never a guarantee of the pipit. To add to the feeling that it may all be over Fair Isle had Britain's second ever Magnolia Warbler only days before AOS team arrived too. Had the AOS trip missed the autumn peak in spite of the charts Tim Cowley had produced before booking the dates, in an attempt to do more than moisten a finger and hold it aloft in the fresh air.

Day 1: 28 Sep 12

Fair Isle is so remote that it can make travelling to the island a little problematic and demands some flexibility due to the weather conditions. For ease and flexibility Tim Cowley had intentionally started the 2012 expedition at Tingwall Airport on Shetland Mainland at 1400 hrs on 28 Sep 12. This allowed the expedition members the flexibility to extend their trip to Scotland, which several did. The six members had arrived in two groups, one travelling by sea from Aberdeen to Lerwick and the other by air from Inverness to Sumburgh. Tim, Andy Harrison and Hilary Nash travelled on overnight ferry and arrived at about 0730 hrs and had 7 hours to bird on the Mainland. Andrew Bray, Dave Pentelow and Tony Kaduck decided to fly and forfeit the opportunity to bird before arriving on Fair Isle.

Arriving on Shetland Mainland the boat party learned that the best birds were actually close to Sumburgh Airport and headed south. Time was spent looking for an Isabelline Shrike in the two small communities of Toab and Hestingott, then over to the quarries on Sumburgh Head for a Little Bunting. Neither bird could be found despite best efforts but there was success with Peregrine, Spotted Flycatcher, Shetland Wren (Shetland Subspecies *zetlandicus*) and a Hawfinch, plus Whooper Swans on Loch Spiggie and Rook near Tingwall as the group headed north. These birds were the only seen on Shetland Mainland.

The rendezvous went to plan, the weather was good and after a nail biting weigh in at the airport (particularly Tim, who looks considerably bigger in all of his gear than those who packed for one), we boarded the small Islander aircraft and were soon flying over the beautiful small bays in southern Shetland then over the open sea, with Gannets clearly visible below us. Tony Kaduck was gutted to find himself as the only trained pilot amongst the group to be relegated to one of the rear seats, whilst Andrew Bray rode shotgun. Had the plane come down in the sea there was never any chance of Tony and Tim unfurling themselves from the rear seats to even have an attempt at reaching an emergency exit. Fortunately that was not a problem and within about 30 minutes the plane passed by Fair



Tim, Andrew, Dave, Andy, Tony, Hilary

Isle's North Lighthouse and we soon rumbling along the rough landing strip on the Island. Debus drills kicked in and we retrieved bags in seconds and looked for our transport. The transport was briefly delayed, as it needed to make a second trip for the departing passengers' luggage, so we took advantage of the good weather and had a team photo:

We arrived at the Observatory, de-booted in the Boot Room, dumped our bags in our rooms and joined Sam Fraser for our Observatory Arrival Brief, marvelling at Rebecca Nason's fantastic bird photographs

and Orkney artist Sheila Scott's wall hangings that decorated the walls that whet everyone's appetite! We sat patiently through Sam's brief, all the time desperate to get out and start birding. Soon we were under Starter's Orders and heading south with two purposes; to familiarise with key features and to try and catch up on some of the birds that had been seen recently on the island.

As we walked south we were being shadowed by several Bonxies overhead. This was pretty much the format for our arrival and departure along the route towards the Plantation. We visited the heligoland traps en route, as the trap walk was a daily early morning option with the wardens. We birded the area around the Chalet and Barklands, before heading clockwise around the southern part of the island. We picked up some good birds in the few hours we had before heading to Stackhoull Store to connect with our return transport at 1845 hrs. These included Rock Dove, Raven, Hooded Crow, Fair Isle Wren (subspecies *fridariensis*), Common Redstart, Shetland Starling (Shetland subspecies *zetlandicus*), Twite and Common Redpoll (North-western subspecies *rostrata*). Plus the main target bird of the afternoon, an Olive-backed Pipit! The pipit was close to Auld Haa, near South Harbour. The bird had been trapped in a greenhouse and released as we approached. It was difficult to see in the roadside vegetation, below a stone wall. Luckily it then flew and landed close to part of an old stone wall in the middle of a field. We approached the wall cautiously and were able to see the bird slowly heading away from us along a shallow grassy rut. Although there for several minutes, the bird was difficult to get on to but once found the entire key features of this smart little bird could be seen.

The evening was spent in the Observatory bar, doing essential research and paying attention for any nuggets during the callover. Several Corncrake were seen in the bar that night before the team hit their pits, along with a few more local ales thanks to the Orkney Brewery!

Day 2: 29 Sep 12

The day started with a 0655 hrs meeting in the Boot Room. The team split into two with some accompanying the wardens on the trap round and the remainder taking a walk down to the Havens. North and South Havens are two back to back natural harbours separated by a short causeway below the Observatory. On the other side of causeway is a large hill called Buness. The following early morning walks would consist of either accompanying the wardens, birding the Havens or making the extra effort to take in Buness and still be back for breakfast at 0830 hrs. This was a quiet morning on the trap round and a few commoner birds such as Shags, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Bonxies, and Grey Seals were in the Havens.

Breakfast at the Observatory is always a welcome experience and normally attended by all visitors. The catering at the Observatory is of a high standard and with lots of exercise and fresh air, much needed!

After breakfast the team headed south in search of a Barred Warbler at Setter, seeing our only Mistle Thrush of the trip. Barred Warblers can be difficult to see at the best of times and the garden at Setter provided plenty of cover. Despite spending some considerable time peering over the low stone walls frustratingly we could not locate the warbler and had to make do with a Common Redpoll. As we continued our walk south towards the Chalet the Observatory minibus pulled up by us we were informed that a Buff-bellied Pipit had been found north of the Observatory. We boarded the minibus and in a few minutes we were back at the Observatory, just in time to see the Observatory Administrator and Warden's wife, Susannah Parnaby, heading off along the road that leads to the North Lighthouse. We followed her along the road and across country to the small crown stood on the cliff top at Furse. We had travelled with one of the Yorkshire Recorders, Craig Thomas, who had mentioned the need to check for the pale lores and sure enough the quite plain backed pipit below us had pale lores! We were very lucky to see the pipit being harassed by a larger darker, more heavily streaked Rock Pipit. The bird showed well as it slowly made its way up a grassy, horizontal ledge. Although 2012 has been a bumper year for this very rare North American passerine, this bird was a fantastic find.

As time was now short before lunch we decided to walk due south towards the air strip in the hope of finding something for ourselves. We flushed several Common Snipe, some of which choose not to display their diagnostic flight pattern or call, which delayed our progress while we checked them out. The closer walked to the air strip we found ourselves being accompanied again by Bonxies. We discovered a less fortunate Bonxie that had been relatively freshen eaten and carried a ring (MA22135), the details of which were passed to the Warden, David Parnaby. It was not until after we had walked around the air strip and were heading down to the Plantation that we flushed one of the birds we were hoping to see, a Jack Snipe.

Rare or interesting birds can turn up at any time on Fair Isle and lunchtime at the Observatory proved that. When we arrived back at the lounge we were put on to a Red-backed Shrike in the garden. After lunch we were sat having a hot drink before heading south again when a

small bird flew into the lounge, gently hit a window and slid down behind a sofa. Assistant Warden Jason Moss walked over and picked up the bird, then announced, 'Blyth's Reed Warbler'! Depending on where you were sat at the time it was either an armchair or sofa tick for some.



Blyth's Reed Warbler

The group decided to try and complete the search of the southern part of the island, as there were still several species that many in the group wanted to see. Once again we failed to connect with the Barred Warbler at Setter but as we walked past Chalet, Tim caught a glimpse of the tell-tale tail of a Barred Warbler in flight and shouted at the group ahead. Those stood near Barklands were able to see the bird briefly before it disappeared into cover. Whilst waited patiently for the bird to reappear, we found an obliging Yellow-browed Warbler, a Common Redstart and Blackcap but the Barred Warbler was not going to play. From Barklands we headed down to the Stackhoull Store, where several good birds had been seen in the previous two days. In the area between

Stackhoull and Lower Stoney-brek Tim glimpsed a Paddyfield Warbler and the team scrutinised every bird that showed, first of all a Common Whitethroat and later a Garden Warbler, but no sign of the Paddyfield Warbler. A Paddyfield Warbler had been seen nearby at Boini Mire two days earlier but this bird could not be relocated and had not been seen to fly. Frustrated the group moved on and found 4 Lapland Buntings between Stackhoull and North Shirva, followed by a confident Bluethroat at North Shirva, feeding in the open while being watched by a cat. Most of the group decided to then concentrate on looking for an Arctic Warbler that had been feeding along the road south of Midway, while Andrew decided to look for the Little Bunting that had been seen at Kennaby. The little warbler had been seen actually on the road earlier that afternoon, so we walked slowly along the road and carefully checked the gardens around Midway, finding at least one Goldcrest but could not locate the Arctic Warbler and so headed back to catch our transport. Shortly after arriving at Stackhoull, Andrew arrived with news that he and Craig Thomas had seen the Little Bunting and the Arctic Warbler. Time was tight, the minibus would arrive to collect us very soon. No time to hesitate, we were force marching back south to Midway and there in the field close to where we had been stood earlier was the Arctic Warbler, feeding in the grass. Once everyone had seen the wing bar and the broken supercilium over the bill we were racing back to Stackhoull.



Arctic Warbler

The evening was spent listening to a talk by Sam Fraser on Fair Isle, followed by the ritual intensive research and callover in the lounge.

Day 3: 30 Sep 12

Tim was up and out before first light being keen to be at Da Water for 0645 hrs and the chance to check out the area for snipe and warblers before anyone could disturb it. An hour after Tim set off in the rain the remainder of the team walked the Havens and Bunness, with little success. By the time Tim had finished walking the marshy area between the School/Kirk road and Swarzie Geo in 5 metre strips, the remainder of the group were heading south to meet him. Tim was unable to find any unusual warblers. The highlights of getting soaked were a Merlin, 11 Jack Snipe and a Tree Pipit.

The team met at Kennaby, to look for the Little Bunting seen by Andrew the evening before. The Bramblings were still present but the Little Bunting had moved on. News broke that a Red-breasted Flycatcher had been found at Hesswalls, so Andrew decided to go and look for it, while the remainder of the group decided to check other crop patches in the hope that the bunting could be found. The team walked south to Burkle and then started to take the track east towards Springfield when a small bird attracted Tim and Tony's attention. The bird flew towards Auld Haa, so Tim and Tony pursued the bird whilst the remainder continued towards Springfield. The small bird could not be relocated, so Tim and Tony followed the Walli Burn east to meet up with the group and search for migrants along the Burn when Craig Thomas drew their attention to a Richard's Pipit showing well in the next field, at Meoness. The two contacted the main group and stayed on the bird until everyone was able to get good views of the large, elegant pipit. At Auld Haa the group found a Lesser Whitethroat, which increased the list of Sylvia warblers seen on the trip, plus 11 Rock Dove and a Greenland Wheatear.



Yellow-browed Warbler



Paddyfield Warbler

With time running out the group headed north to Stackhoull in a clockwise direction, picking up a very nice Yellow-browed Warbler between Stackhoull and North Shirva but no further sign of the Arctic Warbler or Bluethroat. At Stackhoull the Paddyfield Warbler popped up as the minibus arrived. The minibus was delayed slightly but in the end the group boarded the transport, with the intention of returning after lunch.

The lunchtime treat consisted of two Yellow-browed Warblers in the Observatory garden. At 1400 hrs the team boarded the transport with the expectation of having to put in a hard shift, if they were going to see the flighty Paddyfield Warbler. The reality could not have been more different. Within a few minutes of arriving at Stackhoull the bird was back in the area between Stackhoull and Lower Stoney-brek, exactly where Tim had seen the bird the day before, only this time it came out and performed brilliantly for the group of onlookers. Its plumage was very faded but nevertheless superb views.

It was only 1415 hrs and already we had achieved our main aim of the afternoon, so we headed off in the direction of the Red-breasted Flycatcher, Andrew had already seen the bird and was able to take the others directly to the spot that over looked the geo that the bird was feeding in. En route we flushed another Jack Snipe, saw several more Bramblings at Kennaby, 2 Twite at the School and a Merlin. The small flycatcher was almost down at sea level, so the views were not great but the elevated viewpoint allowed clear views of the bird's tail in flight.



Fulmar

Around Hesswalls we were experienced to an aerial display by inquisitive Fulmars and 10 Black Guillemot on the sea. The majority of the group then headed inland to take the shorter route back to the Observatory, while Tim and Tony headed north along the coast. The only new birds were found along the coast, a Common Sandpiper and 6 Wigeon.

Day 4 – 01 Oct 12

The team started the morning at the Havens, where the 7 Black Guillemot were joined by a Common Guillemot and a Razorbill.

After breakfast the team walked to the Plantation, picking up a Snow Bunting on the way, and then we followed the Hill Dyke partway to the west. In an extended line we then headed south to Pund, hoping to find an interesting pipit or warbler. There were several thrushes about and a Jack Snipe was flushed near Pund but otherwise quiet. Keen to explore more of the island we headed to the Reevas and the foot of Malcolm's Head. The scenery along this part of the coast, being smashed by the Atlantic, is breath taking and not for the nervous. There were no rarities but we continued to add birds our trip list, like Blackbird, and see some interesting migrants like a first winter male Common Redstart.

From Malcolm's Head we headed across the open area between the Head and the Leoghs, finding 3 more Lapland Buntings, another Tree Pipit and 3 Pink-footed Geese. The Utra Scrape was checked for waders and passerines but had to be content with 4 Common Snipe and Hooded Crow. We headed north once more along the road the Stackhoull, always looking out for the Arctic Warbler or a new arrival. At Stackhoull we relocated the Bluethroat between Stackhoull and Lower Stoney-brek before catching the transport back to the Observatory.

Lunchtime at the Observatory produced a Yellow-browed Warbler, a fleeting glimpse of a Sparrowhawk and 2 Redwings.

In the afternoon the group continued its exploration of new areas by heading to the North Lighthouse. There were many Fulmars, Eiders and Meadow Pipits along the whole route, plus a Merlin over Wirvie Burn. At the lighthouse were 2 Ravens, 4 Goldcrests, 4 Greenland Wheatears, a Snow Bunting and 2 Twite, with many Gannets and Fulmars out over the sea. The team divided to cover more ground on the return but very few birds were seen. The only new addition were 3 Tufted Ducks at the Furse and a juvenile Siskin close to the Observatory, which flew south via the Observatory garden.

By 1700 hrs the team was back in the Observatory and, tired from the long walks, relaxing in the lounge watching a Yellow-browed Warbler and Chiffchaff or getting changed in their rooms. Only minutes earlier Dave had headed off for an early shower and then everything changed. A Pechora Pipit had been found at Shirva. Tim ran around the Observatory to get everyone out and down to the minibus. All but Dave were ready in seconds; unfortunately Dave was already in the shower. This was terrible but Dave decided to finish his shower and the rest of the team queued outside the Observatory for a place on the minibus. Dave and Susannah Parnaby took control of excited gathering, asking who had seen the species before and who had not. As a very noble gesture those who had seen a Pechora Pipit stepped aside and let those who had not get on to the transport first! The 5 AOS members were amongst the first group and after a drive that can only be described as adding to the moment, David Parnaby shot across the Island to deliver the first group before heading back to collect the second group. The Pechora was a lifer for the 5 members, certainly an important bird for Tim having missed a bird in Fishguard and having missed the bird during the 2010 recce. It seemed like every birder on the island, less Dave, was there. Surprisingly the pipit was feeding in recently cut field, showing very well and only metres away from long grass – what luck! All too quickly the light started to fade and it was time to return to the Observatory for a late supper, feeling somewhat guilty about Dave missing such a special the bird.

Day 5 – 02 Oct 12



Pechora Pipit

Dave and Tim were up early and heading to Shirva in the dark, making sure that they were at the site before first light. At 0640 hrs Dave saw movement in the field and sure enough the Pechora Pipit was still there. A great relief and the two were rewarded with good views. Tim even managed to get some photographs of this notorious skulker.

Meanwhile the remainder of the team had checked out the Havens and Bunness before enjoying another breakfast and heading south. It was about this time that a Locustella warbler was found near the Double

Dyke Trap, about 400-500 metres south of the Observatory. There was initially some confusion about the species and some experienced birders believed the bird was a Common Grasshopper but by the time Tim received a telephone call from the Observatory all

confusion had been cleared up and the bird had been correctly identified as a Lanceolated Warbler. Tim and Tony were still looking for the Little Bunting at the School when the call had been received. The bunting search was immediately abandoned and the competition for the longest stride commenced. It would have surely looked comical to a non-birder but there was no time to waste. The two passed the news to every birder they saw en route to the trap, including some of the other team members. Some of the group had already seen the bird by the time Tim and Tony arrived. It was feeding out on the very short, grazed grass at the foot of the high stone wall, just north of the trap. It passed through the wall several times, finding



Lanceolated Warbler

enough between the stones. The bird was remarkably tolerant and came so close that Tim had to walk backwards to be able to focus his lens on it. A brilliant bird and second of the 'Fair Isle 3', this was better than all expectations!

The team returned to the Observatory early, as we were so close. 2 Yellow-browed Warblers were showing well in the garden again over lunch.

After all of the excitement in the morning the group set out to do the southern part once more. We started at the Pechora Pipit, you cannot too much of a Pechora Pipit in the

UK! We then headed south-east and later north, taking in Middle Burn, Quoy, Kennaby, Walli Burn, Auld Haa, Springfield, Rippack and the School, in the hope of connecting with a Little Bunting, the only rarity known to be on the island that we all had not seen. There was a Jack Snipe at Walli Burn, Lesser Whitethroat and Fair Isle Wren at Auld Haa, Golden Plovers at Rippack and a selection of Reed Bunting, Common Redpoll and Twite at the School but no Little Bunting. The evening consisted of yet more intensive research in the lounge and attendance at a fascinating seabird talk delivered by Assistant Warden Will Miles.

Day 6 – 03 Oct 12

The early morning routine was re-established with a visit to the Havens and Bunness. The highlights included a fly through Tufted Duck at the Havens and 11 Snow Bunting on Bunness.

After breakfast we headed south via Barklands, Lower Stoney-brek and North Shirva to Meadow Burn. At Meadow Burn the team split into two, half going along the road and half taking the cross country via Meadow Burn, Hegri Burn, Malcolm's Head to Utra Scrape. The birding was quite poor a Blackcap, 4 Common Redpoll and c 40 Twite, until we found a Curlew at Utra Scrape. The road group had made it to the Cemetery ahead of the cross country group and joined another group of Observatory birders, the large group was spotted from Utra Scrape and quickly the second group made their way to the Cemetery. As the later group arrived a small bird flew from the close to the small cliff and crossed the road. The large group announced, "It's a Pallas' Grouper"! The third of the Fair Isle 3. The bird flitted back to the seaward side of the tarmac road and disappeared from view before briefly popping on to the bottom cable in the roadside fence. Tim rattled off four quick photos and those around him were able to examine the frozen image. The bird's back and underparts

were hardly marked, it had a prominent supercilium and the tail was very dark, this had to be a Pallas Gropper, although at the angle the pictures were taken the tail tips could not be seen, not the pale tertial tips. The bird had flown towards Skerryholm and landed at the bottom of a fence, close to one of the posts. It had appeared long tailed in flight. The growing crowd waited for the Observatory to organise the group, get their nets and help to get Dougie Barr, Director of the Observatory Trust, to the site for this was his bogey bird. Incredibly the bird stayed almost motionless at the bottom of the fence for about 40 minutes, showing its upper half quite well. The bird then flew over part of the group and landed in the burn between Skerryholm and Utra. The Observatory staff organised the group to assist and flushing the bird towards the mist nets. As if briefed, the bird flew straight into the net and the rest as they say is history.

There was definitely a sense of disbelief in the minibus as we drove back the Observatory. Within a few days the group had seen all of the Fair Isle 3. There was a definite buzz in the Observatory that lunchtime and no notes were taken.



Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler

After lunch the team headed south yet again to walk the route from Stackhoull, through the Leoghs to Utra and then to explore area around Skadan, near the South Light, before heading around South Harbour and Auld Haa. At least that was the plan for our last afternoon on the island. When we arrived at the Leoghs we found an interesting patch of silage and as Tim and Andrew walked through it something crept through the grass in front of them. A larger flush was quickly organised, with Dave Pentelow making sure that nothing escaped of the boundary ahead of us. The 'thing' was about the size of a rat, only there are no rats on Fair Isle, as far as anyone knows. The 'thing' looked too big for a pipit or warbler. A crake or rail were the most likely candidates for the strange behaviour, as the 'thing' remained undetected despite several attempts to flush it in the rain. The group moved on to Skadan and added three species to the trip list, a Scaup, a Black-headed Gull and a Woodpigeon. At that point the weather worsened quickly, with heavy rain from the west making birding impossible. Some had more patience than others, waiting for the rain to abate but it did not and eventually everyone made their soggy way north via Stackhoull, Field and Double Dyke Trap to the Observatory. On return we received news that a real Corncrake had been seen close to Hill Dyke but it was not found.

That night at the callover Dougie Barr stood and delivered a celebratory speech that after 15 years of trying he had finally caught up with the elusive Pallas' Gropper and offered to buy the fifty or so birders in the bar a drink. His speech was both humorous and moving. It was a really vivid image of what this one rare bird meant to an experienced Fair Isle birder and how lucky the AOS group had been to see the Fair Isle 3 in for what was for two thirds of the group their first trip.

Day 7 – 04 Oct 12

The pre-breakfast period was used to prepare for departure. Then news was received that the group would have to be split into two due to the weather forecast for the afternoon. Andrew and Tony volunteered to take the earlier flight and immediately organised a hire car for the Shetland Mainland. Andy, Dave, Hilary and Tim decided to visit the South Light for the first time before their departure. The whole group travelled to the air strip together and then Sam Fraser very kindly dropped the remaining four off at Stackhoull. The Woodpigeon was quickly relocated at Skadan but there was no sign of the previous day's Scaup. Around the lighthouse a nice group of 6 Snow Bunting fed in the grass close to the edge and as we departed for Auld Haa 2 Barnacle Geese flew west over South Harbour. We then followed what were now familiar routes past Auld Haa, Schoolton and Boini Mire back to Stackhoull and our final drive north past Barklands, the Chalet and Setter to the Observatory.

A lazy lunch was followed by the last group's farewells and thank yous to the Observatory Staff who taken such good care of us. Then it was a short drive to the airstrip and the chance of something new on Shetland Mainland.

The second team picked up their hire car from Tingwall Airport and made contact with the Andrew and Tony. The two teams arranged to meet in Toab, to look for the Isabelline Shrike that had been seen again the day before. As the group walked along Toab's main street Tim caught a brief flight view of what he was sure was the Isabelline Shrike. The team searched the area in the direction the bird had flown but it could not be relocated. With limited daylight left it was decided that the group should go to Hoswick, where Andrew and Tony had already briefly seen a Siberian Stonechat, a recently split species. The team arrived as the light was fading quickly and the bird almost certainly gone to roost, however the group staying on Shetland for an extra day had at least reced the site for a future visit.

Having run out of light to birdwatch any further the team headed for the Isleburgh Hostel in Lerwick. We had booked an eight person dormitory for the six of us. It was basic but clean, well-organised and close to the centre of town. A quick change and the group were soon sat in the Gurkha Kitchen restaurant following a Portland tradition of Nepali cuisine to end a period of good birding.

Day 8 – 05 Oct 12

It was an early start for the group. Andrew and Tony needed to be at Sumburgh Airport for an early flight to Inverness. In spite of their best efforts it meant that we were all awake quite early. For Andy, Dave, Hilary and Tim it was a full Scotch breakfast in the Co-op supermarket and then off to try and find a few more rarities before our travel plans in the afternoon.

First stop was near Veensgarth for American Golden Plover, which was found amongst a small group of Eurasian Golden Plovers; including a leucestic bird. The group then journeyed north to the Olna Firth, in search of a Surf Scoter. Red-throated Diver and an Arctic Tern were found but no scoter. We moved on to Lower Voe to look for a Spotted Sandpiper. No sandpiper but another chance to look at the dark Shetland Wren. We met up with other birdwatchers in the area that were having the same problem. We cut our losses and headed towards Sumburgh, to make sure that Dave would not miss his flight and we were back in the area for the Stonechat and Shrike.

We arrived at Hoswick and walked up the burn about 200 metres. Someone had put a dish of mealworms out for the Siberian Stonechat and it was happily taking the worms on the other side of the burn, only about 20 metres away. When it preened in the nearby willows it was possible to see the black underwing coverts. On to Toab and we had another try for the Isabelline Shrike. Tim took the group back to where he had seen the Shrike flush from the day before and it was back in the same bush. The garden used by the bird was next to a tractor and we carefully positioned ourselves to see the bird without flushing it. It was reasonable tolerant. It did move to another garden known to be favourite spot but returned to the bush where we had seen it originally.

With all of the birds on our target list seen or assumed as not showing the group tried one last time to see if the Little Bunting was still showing in the Sumburgh quarries. Sadly we had to admit defeat on that bird and drove Dave to the Airport. The Aberdeen ferry group headed back through Toab, where we encountered several birders still looking for the Shrike and helped them to find it before finally heading to Lerwick for the ferry and a well earned supper.



Siberian Stonechat

Summary

All in all one of the most successful week's UK birding that most of the group have had. We were able to see many 'hard to see' and 'nice to see' species very well despite the wind being a south-westerly for our visit. Not one but all three of the Fair Isle 3 was seen exceptionally well, plus the natural spectacle that Fair Isle and the Shetlands provide. The weather had been kind to the group most of the time. Everyone had arrived on and departed from the island on the intended date, which is no mean achievement. It may be difficult to get to Fair Isle and the Shetlands, and a little pricey for the UK but well worth it.

Special Thanks

The group enjoyed their stay at the Observatory and the fantastic support provided by the husband and wife/Warden and Administrator team of David and Susannah Parnaby, the Assistant Wardens Will Miles and Jason Moss, the Ranger Sam Fraser and the administration team who help make everyone's life more comfortable, especially Becky Rosser and Tracey Weekes.

Shetland and Fair Isle Species List:

The following list is taken from notes taken by or provided to Tim Cowley during the expedition. 'X' marks a sighting without a recorded number. The 3 shaded columns highlight the periods spent on Shetland Mainland.

Name	Scientific Name	Fri	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	We d	Thu	Fri
		28- Sep	28- Sep	29- Sep	30- Sep	01- Oct	02- Oct	03- Oct	04- Oct	05- Oct
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>					3	3			
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	c200		7	80	2	21			c40
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>								2	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	2								
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	2								
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>				6					
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	X	X		8					
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	X								
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					3		1		2
Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>							1		
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>									
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	X	X	2	32	17		14		80+
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>									1
Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	20+	30+	14	31	400		100		20+
Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	X		X	10+	60+		20+		X
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>									4
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	X		8	15+	30+		15		c20
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>									1
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>					1				
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2		2	1					
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	2			2	1				1
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1								
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			1						
Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>							?		
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	X			5				2	c8
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			25	32		8		14	c26
American Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i>									1
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			6	5	4				
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	X								
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				1					
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	X	2	2	1	3		4	1	2
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>									X
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	X			1			1		2
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	11		18	c30	2		4	4	2
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	1		3		2				
Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minumus</i>			1	12	1	1		1	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		2	10	20	4	1	2	1	8
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	X			2					
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	X						1		X
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	X	1	2	1					X
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	X	X		10+		1			10+

Name	Scientific Name	Fri	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	We d	Thu	Fri
		28- Sep	28- Sep	29- Sep	30- Sep	01- Oct	02- Oct	03- Oct	04- Oct	05- Oct
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	X		3	2	1		3		X
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>									1
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	1	4	9	3	9		1		1
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	X	X			1				c15
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>					1				3
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	X			10	9				c27
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	X	X	7	12	2		4		2
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>							1	1	
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia dacocto</i>	2					1			
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>			1						
Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>									1
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	2								1
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	X	X	1	2	3		2		3
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	X	X	3	4	3				8
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	X	X	14+	33+	1	c25			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			1	8	1	8	1		
Shetland Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes zetlandicus</i>	1								3
Fair Isle Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes fridariensis</i>		X	1		2	1	1		
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			1		4	1	1		
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	1	1							
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>					1		1		
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>			1	3	2	2			
Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>			1						
Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>			1	1					
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>			1						
Lanceolated Warbler	<i>Locustella lanceolata</i>						1			
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella certhiola</i>							1		
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			2	1	1	3	1	1	
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			1						
Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>			1						
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		1	1						
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			1	1		1		1	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	1								
Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>				1					
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			1						2
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>			1		1				
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		1	1		1				
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>									1

Name	Scientific Name	Fri	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	We d	Thu	Fri
		28- Sep	28- Sep	29- Sep	30- Sep	01- Oct	02- Oct	03- Oct	04- Oct	05- Oct
Northern/Greenland Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	2	1	2	1	7	1	1		
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	3				2				3
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			3	4	2	2			
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		X	35+	5	12	4			
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			1						
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>				x					
Shetland Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris zetlandicus</i>	X	X	27+	c226			10	2	X
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			1		1	2	2		
Pied/White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla yarrellii</i>	X		1						
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>				1					
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	X	20+	32+	23+	3	3	4	2	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>				1	1				
Olive-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>		1							
Pechora Pipit	<i>Anthus gustavi</i>					1	1			
Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>			3	9	7		4	2	
American Buff-bellied Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>			1						
Lapland Bunting	<i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>			4		3				
Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>					2		11	6	
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>						1			
Little Bunting	<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>		1							
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			X	6+					
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>							1		
Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>			1 sp			1 sp	4sp		
Mealy Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea flammea</i>			1						
Greenland Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea rostrata</i>		5				1			
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>					1				
Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	X	1	c23	14	11	c20	c40		
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	1								
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	20+	X	15+	X	X	X	X

CYPRUS BIRDING – THEN AND NOW

(Mark Easterbrook)

Introduction

When I was asked to write an article for Birdlife Cyprus Monthly Newsletter by Jane Stylianou regarding the changes to birding and the occurrences of species on the Island since

I left, I did have some immediate thoughts. Having gone home and thought about it, I came to the conclusion that the article would probably benefit from a more general view of changes to the Cyprus birding scene and should not only focus on species occurrences. I left the Island for the second time on 11 Jul 2000 and remember writing an article for the newsletter detailing the previous two years. For me, as a fairly novice birder at the time it was a fantastic couple of years and I left with a Cyprus list totalling 263, including some notable species including Pygmy Cormorant, Little Bustard and White-crowned Black Wheatear - not bad I thought.

The Return

I returned to the Island on June 9th 2012. It was not long before I acquired some wheels and was soon out and about. I noticed immediate changes regarding sites, development and more importantly the fabric of Cyprus birding, but more of that later. It was certainly a very happy moment when I met Andreas Kephalas at Sotira Pools in my first week, ensuring that Spur-winged Plover numbers were accurately recorded – fortunately some things never change and should never change.

The Sites

What a dramatic change in the birding sites. Akhna Dam was but a puddle when I left, Oroklini Marsh didn't exist and sadly the malodorous raw sewage pond that was Cape Greco tip has disappeared to be replaced by Ayia Napa Sewage Works. The Ayia Napa football pitches complex then consisted of only 1 pitch, which certainly



Masked Shrike

made working the area a lot easier but at least Larnaca Sewage Works is a constant. Zakaki Marsh is sadly not what it was. Now overgrown with reeds, hopefully the proposed management of the area can restore its former glory, whilst Bishop's Pool is probably too well managed and manicured and doesn't attract the species that it used to, although who could complain about the recent White-throated Kingfisher – a Cyprus “tick” for me.

The Species

The change in the occurrences of species, especially of those breeding has also seen a sea change over the past twelve years. Imagine my surprise to find breeding Little Terns at Oroklini, previously a fairly scarce migrant alongside breeding Red-crested Pochards, formerly a scarce winter visitor. Spur-winged Plovers are everywhere, formerly a much localised breeder of Akhna Dam and Parthenitis Dam, all carefully recorded by my good friend and fellow birder in the east, Andreas Kephalas.

Birding

There is no doubt that the numbers of active bird watchers has increased on the island and that the standard of birding and recording has improved significantly. The reporting, recording, photography and all round awareness has taken a massive step forward. Individuals appear more knowledgeable and well read than previously and there is genuine passion for the hobby; previously a “twitch” involved two of us from the east and Jeff Gordon. These developments can only be a good thing (I will leave the subject of “twitching” for another article, if I’m ever asked to write one) for the future of Cyprus birding. My wife, Debs, would argue that birding is not a hobby for me, it’s an obsession, and perhaps I agree with her, but surely you need commitment and passion to become competent at anything?



Red-footed Falcon

Recording

The Cyprus Bird Recorder is a very important and time consuming appointment, which I have always regarded as a thankless task. I have been fortunate to know the last three recorders all of whom I have the greatest respect for their knowledge and birding ability – John Sanders (a great friend and mentor), Jeff Gordon (another great character and friend) and of course Colin Richardson (having met him in the UAE in 1998, we have remained



Wryneck

friends ever since). Having had records scrutinised and rejected/accepted by all of them, I’ll leave you to decide which particular form of rejection you prefer, from the “What a load of rubbish” to the “Really?” approach. In any event all have one thing in common; they have furthered the knowledge and credibility of Cyprus birding. One has only to look at the Annual Report to see a tangible improvement in standards. Whilst nobody likes having records rejected it should not be taken personally. It is essential that the submission of descriptions are scrutinised and are used to stimulate ornithological debate, only

through this will our understanding improve. Of course, record shots using digital cameras

were unheard of during my previous time on the island but this has made life much easier. I also see the Sub-rarities committee (in its infancy when I left), as a major step forward in raising the bar for the acceptance of records. Perhaps if this had existed previously we might not have some rather dubious species on the Cyprus list. It would be remiss of me not to mention the challenges both technical and diplomatic faced by all recorders when dealing with records from the many visiting birders to the island whose monopoly on finding Cyprus rarities has been challenged in recent years.

The Future

Imagine what could be seen in Cyprus with some moderate site management and a reduction in illegal bird poaching practices. One can only hope that there is a reduction from what now appears to be an intensification of such practices that I had not encountered during my last visit; this was truly shocking. The merger of the COS 57 and COS 70 organisations, to Birdlife Cyprus and the inclusion of records from, and field trips to the occupied north are changes that could only have been dreamt about previously. Birdlife Cyprus is now working hard to ensure that the required site management is carried out and waging a long hard fought campaign against illegal trapping. With many stresses on the movements and wintering areas of species due to habitat loss and food sources, the additional burden of an activity that is indiscriminate and carried out on an industrial scale will undoubtedly lead to significant population reductions and perhaps the local extinction of species.

Summary

Not all change is for the better, although it must be said that Cyprus remains an exceptional place to birdwatch and a superb destination for Northern European birders to gain experience of those tricky, seldom occurring species that occur regularly here. The fact is, whether we class ourselves as Bird Watchers, Birders, Twitchers, Listers, Ornithologists or Ringers we all have a common aim; to better understand, identify and record the species that occur – so let's get out there and enjoy it because we will not progress that knowledge by sitting on the patio – unless you happen to have a Yellow-browed Warbler in the garden!



Crimson-winged Finches

NIGHTINGALES AT CASSINO?

(Nicholas Beswick)

“On the night of 11th May, the 2nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers noticed the song of the Nightingales...they noted how the Nightingales, although startled into a few minutes' silence, burst into song again and throughout the night kept up their valiant efforts to drown the dreadful din of the artillery barrage”. (Northgate Parkinson, C. 1949. *Always a Fusilier*).

A week long battlefield tour, based at the resort of Sperlonga, midway between Rome and Naples, seemed the ideal opportunity to find out if there were still Nightingales at Cassino in the company of some of the last veterans of the campaign. The coach trip from Rome through flat, intensively farmed countryside was disappointingly bird less, as was the sea on arrival at our hotel. Waking early the following morning, I found that the dawn chorus was composed exclusively of numerous Blackbirds but a pre-breakfast walk was more encouraging, with a Nightingale singing in a garden and seen briefly, and a Hoopoe. Our first battlefield tour was to Minturno where the 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers crossed the River Garigliano south west of Cassino to capture Monte Damiano. From a distance, there was little evidence of birds on the scrub-covered mountain and on our return to Sperlonga a Honey Buzzard drifting over with a flock of Swifts was a welcome bonus.

14 May The morning started with a seawatch from the hotel patio, with distant views of Mediterranean and a few Cory's Shearwaters. As there was no organised trip, I arranged to go with our tour guide to Cassino to go hill walking once he had finished his business on a project to erect a memorial to the Canadian Army. Even though he had made some preliminary arrangements, he had yet to secure a plot of land for the memorial and obtain the permission of the local authority. To have the memorial in place in time for the weekend seemed like a plot from a reality TV show. Our first call was with the landowner of a potential site. I took a walk round whilst protracted discussions occurred and was pleased to find a Fan-tailed Warbler, the only one of the trip. A little later our Italian host was impressed when I pointed out a Short-toed Eagle passing over. He insisted we stay for lunch – his wife didn't seem to be in the least put out to have three unexpected guests to feed. We eventually escaped at 4.30pm as we had still to call on the stonemason but the all-important site had been secured and we were assured that planning permission would be forthcoming. At last, it was time for our walk. We chose Monte Trocchio, across the valley from Cassino. The weather was blustery and the mountain birdless but I could easily imagine that I was following in the path of the artillery observers who set up their posts on the ridge. Indeed, one hollow looked remarkably like the remains of a sangar looking across to the monastery. And, astonishingly, the memorial was in place by the weekend!

15 May Tuesday saw our trip to Anzio, including the grimly aptly named Campo di Carne – “Field of Flesh” where some of the heaviest fighting on the beach-head perimeter occurred. After our ceremony at the War Cemetery we continued into town where I visited the museum. Although it contained some Fusilier and other British memorabilia, the visitor might easily have concluded that this was an all-American operation! The highlight of the day was the visit to the area outside the town known as the Wadis where the 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers found themselves deployed into the perimeter just in time for the main German counter-attack. The wadis are deep scrubby gullies crossing rather flat open country and make a defensive plan a nightmare. The courage and tenacity of the Fusiliers was remarkable

and the line held in the most appalling conditions. The pieces of shrapnel and spent bullets we found bore witness to the ferocity of the fighting.

On our return I decided to walk the couple of miles from our hotel to a lake I had spotted from the bus. It was well worth the trip to see a flight of four White-winged Black Terns and one Black Tern flitting over the water and I was lucky that they eventually came close enough for a really good view. As neither species breeds in Italy, I was indeed fortunate to catch what appear to be rare passage migrants in the country. The following morning I walked early to a second lake which proved to be a saltwater lagoon and disappointingly birdless except for some gulls that were too distant for definite identification without a scope, except that they were certainly not Black-headed or Yellow-legged. That day was our trip to Rome where I added the Pope to my sightings list, a rare bird indeed, plus Swiss Guards in full ceremonial plumage!

17 May The following morning I returned to the lagoon with scope and was thrilled to identify Audouin's Gulls whilst hundreds of Swifts streamed overhead, along with a high-flying Purple Heron. Then it was off to Cassino for the climax of our tour. We again started with our remembrance ceremony in the War Cemetery and paid our respects to some of the Fusilier graves, including that of the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion who was killed even as the Germans were finally pulling out of their positions. Our visit to the monastery was also moving as we saw how the iconic complex had been painstakingly reconstructed after the Allied bombing that retrospectively had proved to have been unnecessary. Lunch in town was enlivened by the appearance of a local enthusiast in a vintage Jeep with a collection of memorabilia from the war. Of particular note were a Spandau MG 42 and a Bren gun. The locals had collected discarded weapons and used them as reinforcements in the concrete buildings erected as the town was reconstructed after the fighting. Now, as those buildings were in turn being cleared, the weapons were coming to light. Finally, we travelled just outside the town to see where the 2nd Royal Fusiliers had conducted an assault river crossing and secured a breach in the German positions. And, from a patch of dense bushes on the route of their advance, a Nightingale sang!

18 May For our last full day I decided to explore the local area around Sperlonga armed with a reasonably detailed map. First I spent some time getting to grips with a couple of Pallid Swifts in the screaming horde that hurtled round the town's rooftops. On the way out of town a purring Turtle Dove was a welcome change from the numerous Collared Doves but there was little else of note until I turned off the main track and followed a path up into the scrubby hills. A pair of Dartford Warblers feeding their young caterpillars was an encouraging sight but again birds were generally thin on the ground with just a Woodchat Shrike of note until I found a male Black-eared Wheatear with a full black cap in a stone quarry. My route then returned via some disappointingly empty deciduous woods whilst there was an ominously large number of spent shotgun cartridges scattered on the ridge above. I had all but decided to retrace my steps into town in time for tea at the hotel when I took one last look at the summit of the mountain only to see a distant thrush-like bird flying around the crags. My second trip up was a great deal faster than my first so as to reach the summit and get home in time for supper. I paused only to scrutinise an errant Carrion Crow in a small flock of Hoodies. But, as I scrambled up the boulder-strewn slope, where was that bird? I was on the point of giving up when it appeared briefly on the steel cross erected on the very peak and it was indeed a Blue Rock Thrush. But my walk back down the other side of the mountain became positively surreal as almost every bush in the valley seemed to hold a Spotted Flycatcher or a Melodious Warbler when I had only found a couple of either in the

whole of the week thus far. On reaching the road into town I had another first for the trip – a Woodpigeon and, a little further on, another Blue Rock Thrush and a pair of Black-eared Wheatears, the male this time being the black-masked variant.

19 May Our week came to an end all too soon, with just time for a last seawatch before we boarded the bus back to Rome. A large flock of gulls and shearwaters over some disturbed water was too distant for specific identification but a Peregrine coming in off the sea was a bonus. Reflecting on the trip, I felt that there had certainly been plenty of interest on both bird and military history fronts. Where the birds were concerned, there were some species absent that I would have expected whilst there were some real surprises too. And, most importantly, there were still Nightingales at Cassino.

Species in Central Italy 12 – 19 May 2012

Name	Scientific Name	Records
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	Regular offshore at Sperlonga
Mediterranean Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>	Regular offshore at Sperlonga
Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	2 over Lago Lungo 18 May
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea pupurea</i>	1 over Sperlonga 17 May
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	3 at Lago di San Puoto 18 May
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	
Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	2 near Sperlonga 17 May
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michaellis</i>	40 at Lago di San Puoto 17 May
White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	4 at Lago di San Puoto 17 May
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	1 at Lago di San Puoto 17 May
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1 near Cassino 14 May
Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	1 over Sperlonga 13 May
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1 near Sperlonga 18 May
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	1 near Cassino 14 May
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1 near Sperlonga 18 May
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	
Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	1 near Cassino 14 May; 1 at Sperlonga 18 May
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Flocks of hundreds heading north near Sperlonga 16 May; flock of around 50 around the town
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	2 with Swifts at Sperlonga 18 May
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1 near Sperlonga 18 May
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	

Name	Scientific Name	Records
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	1 over River Garigliano 13 May
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	1 near Sperlonga 17 May
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	Black and pale-throated forms near Sperlonga on 18 May
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	A few in Sperlonga area 18 May
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	One near Sperlonga 16 May
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	2 males near Sperlonga 18 May
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	1 near Sperlonga 13 May
Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	1 near Cassino 14 May
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	Family near Sperlonga 18 May
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephalus</i>	
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	20+ near Sperlonga 18 May
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	1 at Anzio 15 May
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	30+ near Sperlonga 18 May
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europea</i>	Family near Cassino 17 May
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	1 near Sperlonga 18 May
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corax corone</i>	1 with group of Hooded Crows near Sperlonga 18 May
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	10 near Cassino 17 May
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1 at River Garigliano 13 May
Italian Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	
Serín	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	1 near Cassino 14 May
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	1 near Sperlonga 18 May

(71 Species) Species without individual records widespread in suitable habitat

Caribbean Cruise 2012

(Carl Powell)

Who could resist such an invitation? Certainly not Ann and I. To celebrate my Aunt's 60th wedding anniversary a Caribbean cruise was planned with an invite to family and friends to join them. As the date also coincided with our own anniversary and that of my cousin we did not hesitate in accepting. One twist is that most of the family and friends live in the USA so it was a double opportunity for us. First we had to get to Georgia.



Bananaquit

We arrived at Atlanta airport on Tuesday the 10th July, negotiated Immigration and Customs with relative ease, and were soon on our way to catch up with family and friends. My cousin Mike lives in the mountains north of Atlanta and has a garden or yard as they say, overlooking a golf course and close to a lake. With a plethora of bird feeders all around it was a birding haven. Eastern Bluebirds feeding young, Ruby throated Hummingbirds all round and bright American Goldfinch were just some of the everyday sights. My digital camera was in constant use.

On Saturday we drove down to Cape Canaveral in Florida for the final gathering before the cruise. Lots of Turkey Vultures and Broad winged Hawks overhead as well as a selection of egrets in roadside fields and wetlands. At one comfort break I managed to add House Sparrow and Collared Dove to my growing list!! Our party finally assembled on board "Freedom of the Seas" with arrivals from Ohio and New York. Over 30 of us all ready to party! It can be a little embarrassing when, in a well-populated bar, you look out, see a new bird for your trip, point and shout "Brown Booby"! Just as well they know me!

Sadly, birding at sea was non-existent including between Islands, however the highlights came during shore excursions. Not a good start however when our planned trip ashore to the Bahamas was cancelled due to high winds and driving rain. We can get that in England! St Thomas and St Johns in the US Virgin Islands proved more fruitful. Magnificent Frigatebirds, Royal and Sandwich Terns and Brown Pelicans all seemed common in the harbour areas and inland Pearly eyed Thrasher, Zenaida Dove and Grey Kingbirds were additions to the trip list.

Great views of a Brown Booby as it wheeled and dived in advance of our ferry between the islands obviously aware that the bow wave turned up small fish it could feed on. St Maartens also proved interesting with Black faced Grassquit, Common Ground Dove, Green Heron and a very obliging Cattle Egret only too pleased to pose for a close up! I finally tracked down Banana Quit, a bird we had become familiar with on a holiday on Trinidad and Tobago.



Pearly-eyed Thrasher



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Back in Georgia birding around the house was again fruitful with Pileated Woodpecker the highlight amongst several woodpeckers. Blue Grosbeaks on the final morning brought our trip total to a humble 66. Not a great total but this was primarily a family holiday not a birding trip and it did include some good birds. I also managed some reasonable photos which I hope you will see along with this report.

List of Species seen:

Species	Scientific Name	Species	Scientific Name
Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Masked Booby	<i>Sula dactylatra</i>
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulucus ibis</i>	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
White Ibis	<i>Plegadis albus</i>	Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>
Turkey Vulture	<i>Carthartes aura</i>	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>	Coopers Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>
Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
Swallow-tailed Kite	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columbia livia</i>	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Zenaida Dove	<i>Zenaida aurita</i>	Mourning Dove	<i>Zeaida macroura</i>
Common Ground Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>
Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides villosus</i>	Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	Gray Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Carolina Wren	<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>
Grey Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>
Pearly-eyed Thrasher	<i>Margarops fuscatus</i>	Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	Carolina Chickadee	<i>Poecile carolinensis</i>
Tufted Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>	Brown-headed Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pusilla</i>

Species	Scientific Name	Species	Scientific Name
White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Purple Finch	<i>Carpodacus purpureus</i>
American Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>	Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>Dendroica dominica</i>
Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>	Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>
Black-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris bicolor</i>	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>
Blue Grosbeak	<i>Passerina caerulea</i>	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
Boat-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus major</i>	Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>

(66 Species)

SOUTH AFRICA

(Ray Marsh)

Introduction

After several years of talking about visiting South Africa and the Kruger National Park in particular, my wife and I finally set off on 26th August for a four week holiday. The itinerary was planned so that my wife, a non-birder, enjoyed the trip as much as myself. We flew to Cape Town to spend 6 days in each of two locations at Noordhoek and Hermanas before flying to Johannesburg where we collected our hire car and drove to Marloth Park to spend our remaining two weeks.

Noordhoek, 26 August – 1 September

We had picked Noordhoek being convenient for both Cape Town and Table Mountain National Park. On arrival at our B&B Hadedra, Ibis were soon very evident in the garden with their noisy calls, the garden also provided close-ups of Egyptian Goose, Spectacled



Blue Crane

Pigeon, Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle Dove, Common Fiscal (Shrike), Fiscal Flycatcher, Red-winged Starling, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Lesser Double-collared Sunbird, Cape White-eye and Cape Canary. Prior to leaving the UK I had taken Mark Easterbrook's advice (The Adjutant 2011) and booked Brian Vandervalt for a day's birding. On our third day Brian collected us and we set out on what proved to be a very good day's birding with 106 species, many of them lifers. Our day followed that of Mark's starting at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens where we were

shown probably the same pair of breeding Spotted Eagle Owls, the gardens also produced African Goshawk, Cape Frankolin, Rameron Pigeon, Burchell's Coucal, Karoo Robin, Orange-breasted Sunbird and four species of Canary. Our last port of call was at the Cape Town Water Treatment Works where, besides White Pelican, we had 7 species of duck and good views of Red-breasted Sparrow Hawk. In between we had added amongst others, Blue Crane (top of my birds to see list), White-fronted Plover, Banded Martin, Black Saw-wing Swallow, Cape Bulbul, Capped Wheatear, Cape Sugarbird and Malachite Sunbird.

Hermanus, 2 – 7 September

Hermanus is well known for the Southern Right Whales that spend 6 months of the year in the bay and our four hour trip to view these magnificent creatures gave us close up views of nearly 30 of them plus 1 Fin Whale. A drive through constantly changing countryside to Cape Agulhas, Africa's southern-most point, produced scores of Blue Cranes and added Jackal Buzzard, Stanley's Bustard, Pearl-breasted Swallow and Grassbird to our ever growing list of life ticks. The showy long 'tail' of the Blue Crane is in fact made up of three elongated tertial feathers on each wing. We visited the Harold Porter Botanical Gardens in Betty's Bay and we were so impressed by the beauty and tranquillity that we made a second visit, it was here we added amongst others, Cape Rock Thrush, Fork-tailed Drongo, Knysna Warbler, Bar-throated Apalis, Cape Batis and Sweet Waxbill. A few kilometres from the Gardens at Stoney Point was a colony of around 28,000 African Jackass Penguins which were very entertaining, but also very pungent.



Cape Sugarbird

List of Species seen:

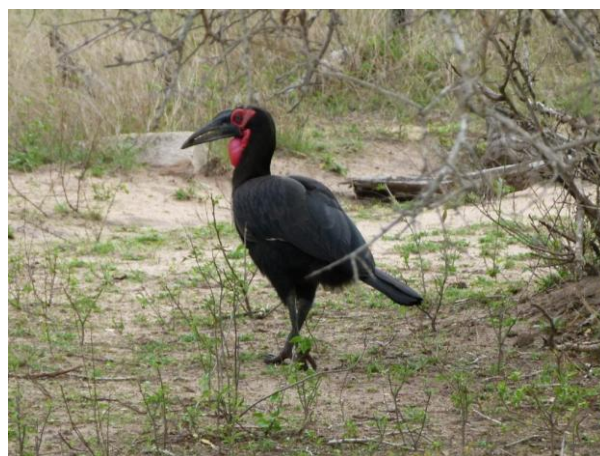
Ostrich	Red-knobbed Coot	Capped Wheatear
African Penguin	Stanley's Bustard	Familiar Chat
Great Crested Grebe	African Black Oystercatcher	Stone Chat
Black-necked Grebe	White-fronted Plover	Cape Robin
Dabchick	Kittlitz's Plover	Karoo Robin
White Pelican	Three-banded Plover	Cape Reed Warbler
Cape Gannet	Blacksmith Plover	Knysna Warbler
White-breasted Cormorant	Common Sandpiper	Bar-throated Apalis
Cape Cormorant	Greenshank	Grassbird
Bank Cormorant	Curlew Sandpiper	Grey-backed Cisticola
Reed Cormorant	Avocet	Levaillant's Cisticola
Crowned Cormorant	Black-winged Stilt	Karoo Prinia
Darter	Spotted Thick-knee	Dusky Flycatcher
Grey Heron	Water Thick-knee	Fiscal Flycatcher
Black-headed Heron	Kelp Gull	Cape Batis
Little Egret	Hartlaub's Gull	Cape Wagtail
Cattle Egret	Swift Tern	African (Grassveld) Pipit
Sacred Ibis	Rock Dove	Common Fiscal (Shrike)
Glossy Ibis	Speckled Pigeon	Southern Boubou
Hadedda Ibis	Rameron Pigeon	Bokmakierie
African Spoonbill	Red-eyed Dove	European Starling

Greater Flamingo	Laughing Dove	Pied Starling
Egyptian Goose	Burchell's Coucal	Red-winged Starling
South African Shelduck	Spotted Eagle Owl	Cape Sugarbird
Yellow-billed Duck	Black Swift	Malachite Sunbird
Cape Teal	White-rumped Swift	Orange-breasted Sunbird
Red-billed Teal	Little Swift	Lesser Double-collared Sunbird
Cape Shoveller	Speckled Mousebird	Greater Double-collared Sunbird
Southern Pochard	White-backed Mousebird	Dusky Sunbird
Mallard	Red-capped Lark	Cape White-eye
Spur-winged Goose	White-throated Swallow	House Sparrow
Maccoa Duck	Pearl-breasted Swallow	Cape Sparrow
Yellow-billed Kite	Greater-striped Swallow	Cape Weaver
Black-shouldered Kite	Rock Martin	Masked Weaver
African Fish Eagle	Brown-throated Martin	Red Bishop
Jackal Buzzard	Banded Martin	Yellow Bishop
Red-breasted Sparrowhawk	Black Saw-wing Swallow	Common Waxbill
African Goshawk	Fork-tailed Drongo	Swee Waxbill
Rock Kestrel	Pied Crow	Pin-tailed Whydah
Cape Francolin	White-necked Raven	Cape Canary
Helmeted Guineafowl	Cape Bulbul	Forest Canary
Blue Crane	Sombre Greenbul	Brimstone Canary
African Purple Gallinule	Olive Thrush	Yellow Canary
Common Moorhen	Cape Rock-Thrush	Cape Bunting

(132 Species)

Marloth Park & The Fuger National Park, 8 – 22 September

After spending 12 days combining sightseeing with whale watching and birding in the Cape Town area my wife and I flew to Johannesburg where we collected our hire car and drove to Marloth Park where we had hired a house for 2 weeks. The township of Marloth is unique in that while the whole areas is fenced and gated for security, inside there are no fences and birds and animals are free to roam through the bush in which the houses are located. The Crocodile River forms a 7 Km long boundary between Marloth and the Kruger with the east gate of



Ground Hornbill



Saddle-billed Stork

Marloth being just 14 miles from the Crocodile Bridge gate into the Kruger. Our time in Marloth was spent driving or walking very slowly around the dirt roads or sat on a bench overlooking the Crocodile River whilst viewing the animals and adding to the lengthening list of life ticks including, White-backed Night Heron, Cape Vulture, Wahlberg's Eagle, Emerald-spotted Pigeon, Speckled Mousebird, Kurrichane and Groundscraper Thrushes and Pink-throated Twin Spot. The total for Marloth Park

(including the Crocodile River) at the end of 2 weeks was 147 species of birds and 20 species of mammals.

We spent 4 days in the Kruger, staying for 2 nights at Lower Sabie Camp, each day getting really good views of 4 of the 'Big 5', Elephant, Rhino, Buffalo, Lion and Leopard, but not managing all 5 in one day. The mammal highlights were watching a leopard eating a freshly killed impala, a very young elephant calf suckling from its mother and a rhino and calf crossing the road less than 20 metres in front of us. The birding highlights included really close up views of Martial Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Saddle-billed Stork and 2 groups of Ground Hornbills, my must see Kruger bird. Our 4 days in the Kruger produced a total of 105 species of birds and 27 species of mammals. After having experienced such stunning close up views of so many mammals and birds the Kruger is now top of our list for 2 weeks holiday in 2014.

List of Species seen:

Ostrich	Red-eyed Dove	Yellow-breasted Apalis
White-breasted Cormorant	Cape Turtle Dove	Long-billed Crombec
Reed Cormorant	Laughing Dove	Green-backed Cameroptera
African Darter	Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	Stierling's Wren-warbler
Grey Heron	African Green-Pigeon	Sitting Cisticola
Goliath Heron	Brown-headed Parrot	Rattling Cisticola
Purple Heron	Purple-crested Turaco	Neddicky
Great White Egret	Grey-goaway-Bird	Tawny-flanked Prinia
Little Egret	Klaas's Cuckoo	Grey-tit Flycatcher
Cattle Egret	Burchell's Coucal	Southern Black Flycatcher
Squacco Heron	Pearl-spotted Owlet	Pale Flycatcher
Greenbacked Heron	Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle-Owl	Fiscal Flycatcher
White-backed Night-Heron	Common Swift	Chinspot Batis
Hammerkopf	White-rumped Swift	African Paradise-Flycatcher
Woolly-necked Stork	Little Swift	African Pied Wagtail
Saddle-billed Stork	African Palm Swift	African (Grassveld) Pipit
Marabou Stork	Specked Mousebird	Common Fiscal (Shrike)
Yellow-billed Stork	Red-faced Mousebird	Magpie (Longtailed) Shrike
Hadedda Ibis	Pied Kingfisher	Black-backed Puffback
African Spoonbill	Giant Kingfisher	Brubru
White-faced Duck	Woodland Kingfisher	Brown-crowned Tchagra
Egyptian Goose	Brown-hooded Kingfisher	Grey-headed Bush-Shrike
African Black Duck	White-fronted Bee-eater	White-crested Helmet-Shrike
Secretary Bird	Little Bee-eater	Retz's Helmet-Shrike
Hooded Vulture	Lilac-breasted Roller	Southern White-crowned Shrike
Cape Vulture	Purple Roller	Burchell's Starling
White-backed Vulture	African Hoopoe	Cape Glossy Starling
Lappet-faced Vulture	Green Wood-Hoopoe	Greater Blue-eared Starling
Yellow-billed Kite	Common Scimitarbill	Red-billed Oxpecker
Black-shouldered Kite	African Grey Hornbill	Marico Sunbird
Tawny Eagle	Red-billed Hornbill	White-bellied Sunbird
Wahlberg's Eagle	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	Scarlet-chested Sunbird
Martial Eagle	Southern Ground-Hornbill	Collared Sunbird
Brown Snake-Eagle	Black-collared Barbet	Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver
Black-chested Snake-Eagle	Acacia Pied Barbet	House Sparrow
Bateleur	Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow
African Fish Eagle	Crested Barbet	Yellow-throated Petronia
African Harrier –Hawk	Lesser Honeyguide	Thick-billed Weaver
Coqui Francolin	Golden-tailed Woodpecker	Spectacled Weaver
Natal Francolin	Cardinal Woodpecker	Village Weaver
Red-necked Spurfowl	Bearded Woodpecker	Southern Masked Weaver
Swainson's Spurfowl	Sabota Lark	Lesser Masked Weaver

Helmeted Guineafowl Black Crake Cori Bustard Red-crested Korhaan African Jacana White-fronted Plover Kittlitz's Plover Three-banded Plover Blacksmith Plover White-crowned Lapwing African Wattled Lapwing Common Sandpiper Wood Sandpiper Greenshank Ruff Black-winged Stilt Water Thick-Knee White-winged Tern	Barn Swallow White-throated Swallow Wire-tailed Swallow Pearl-breasted Swallow Red-breasted Swallow Lesser-striped Swallow Fork-tailed Drongo Black-headed Oriole Southern Black Tit Arrow-marked Babbler Dark-capped Bulbul Sombre Greenbul Curricane Thrush Groundscraper Thrush White-browed Robin-Chat White-browed Scrub-Robin Bearded Scrub-Robin Bar-throated Apalis	Red-headed Weaver Red-billed Quelea White-winged Widowbird Green-winged Pytilia Pink-throated Twinspot Red-billed Firefinch Blue Waxbill Common Waxbill African Quail Finch Cut-throat Finch Bronze Mannikin Red-backed Mannikin Pin-tailed Whydah Long-tailed Paradise-Whydah Dusky Indigobird Purple Indigobird Village Indigobird Yellow-fronted Canary Golden-breasted Bunting
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(181 Species)



Red-eyed Dove



Speckled Pigeon



Pearl-spotted Owlet



Spotted Eagle Owl

CUBAN HIGHLIGHTS - MARCH 2012

(Major Kevin Kirkham-Brown)

2012 and we decided to holiday in Cuba. Both my partner (Meta) and I had wanted to visit this jewel of the Caribbean for a number of years, and so the trip was on. This however was a family holiday and not an ornithological expedition; but I did take the opportunity to do a little birding, as and when the opportunity arose. It would have been a sin not to! The aim was, where possible within our tight schedule, to see as many Endemic species as possible.

Our itinerary was hectic and included visits across the island but most time was spent at the eastern end of Cuba in the Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba and Holguín areas. We initially arrived in Havana for a couple of days, staying in the world famous hotel Nacional de Cuba.



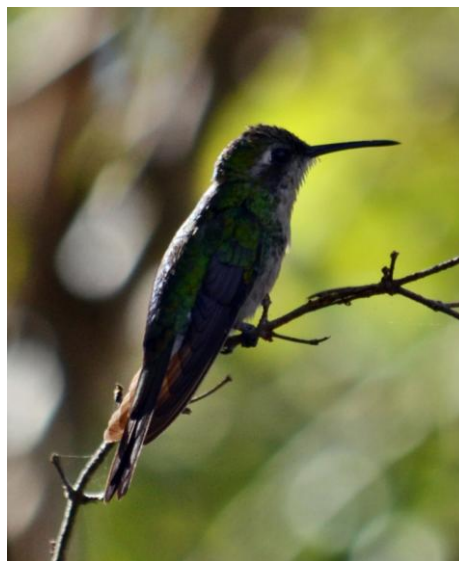
Figure 1. Cuba is an archipelago of islands located in the northern Caribbean Sea. The main island is some 1,199 km (745 mi) long.

The grounds of the hotel Nacional de Cuba in Havana provided the first real insight of what to expect. A large domesticated cock peafowl *Pavo cristatus* roamed the hotel gardens, ensuring that everyone knew he was there with its raucous calls. Being located on the coast but part of the New Town area of Havana, you see all the usual urban favourites; surprise, surprise, Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* are regular visitors as are the common or garden Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*. Red-legged Thrush *Turdus plumbeus* and Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* abound as do, Cuban Blackbird *Dives atrovirens*, Greater Antillean Grackle *Quiscalus niger*, Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis* and the ubiquitous House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. As an introduced species, I saw far more of these cheeky chaps than I usually do at home!

Sea birds and other passerines were visible from the hotel rooms and gardens and when out walking. Small flocks of Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* could be seen navigating the coastline around Havana; difficult to miss really. Others sightings included the common or garden Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Antillean Palm-Swift *Tachornis phoenicobia*, Cuban Martin *Progne cryptoleuca* and the ever-present opportunist Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*, which can be seen both singularly or in small ‘committees’ soaring over the sea or climbing the thermals off buildings or mountains. Our Hemingway tour gave us the opportunity to see

other species in and around the city of Havana, including the old town, and the hill top home of 'Finca Vigia', meaning "lookout house". Here we saw our first Cuban Emerald *Chlorostilbon ricordii*; it was a fleeting glimpse in the garden.

Leaving Havana, we then took an internal flight down to Baracoa (via Holguin). On the short trip to the airport our minibus stopped in a small car park in the outskirts of Havana, whilst the driver collected our packed lunches for the journey. I glanced out of the window and there sitting on the post of a small chain-link fence was an American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*, with what looked like a small rodent of some description in its talon. The bird, a small male, its markings much more pronounced than our European Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, appeared as unconcerned as you like, as the driver lit his cigar and made his way over to a building across the road. It was an amazing sight and it was so close I could have almost leaned out of the window and touched it.



Cuban Emerald

Having landed at what must be the shortest runway in the world (I'm sure the heliport at Bessbrook Mill was longer); we spent two nights at Villa Baracoa (which is comprised of El Castillo and Porto Santo). Set at the very eastern tip of the island of Cuba, Baracoa was



Cuban Gnatcatcher

founded by the first governor of Cuba, the Spanish conquistador Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar in August of 1511. It is the oldest Spanish settlement in Cuba and was its first capital (the basis for its nickname Ciudad Primera, "First City"). It is also an enchanting area of natural beauty and the town that they believe Columbus landed! Again, the Turkey Vultures were prominent and I gazed with enthusiasm in the hope that there may perhaps be a Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus* amongst them, alas not! Our day at the Coffee and Cocoa Plantations provided further opportunities and a Cuban Oriole *Icterus dominicensis melanopsis* was seen, along with more Mockingbirds, ground Thrushes and the Cuban Crow *Corvus nasicus*. We also saw the Cuban national flower growing here; the

beautiful White Butterfly Jasmine (*Hedychium Coronarium Koenig*). This fragrant flower has the most pleasant and noticeable fragrance towards evening and late-night as it releases its aroma after sunset. Due to its delicate petals it is often called 'White Butterfly', 'Butterfly Jasmine' and the 'White Mariposa' depending on the region of Cuba that it grows in.

After a couple of nights in Baracoa, we travelled by minibus across Guantánamo Province (famous, of course, for the Guantánamo Bay detention camp facility located within Guantánamo Bay US Naval Base, leased as part of the Cuban-American Treaty of 1903), to Santiago de Cuba. Santiago de Cuba is the second largest city of Cuba and capital city of Santiago de Cuba Province in the south-eastern area of the island, some 540 miles (870 km) south-east of the Cuban capital of Havana. En route the journey also took us through part of

the Sierra Maestra, which is a mountain range that runs westward across the southeast of Cuba, and one of the best spots in Cuba for birding. A real shame we only had the opportunity to see it from a moving vehicle, apart from one short comfort break. This at least allowed us to hear the Cuban national bird; the Cuban Trogon *Priotelus temnurus*. This was our first encounter with this fairly common but elusive bird. In addition I got my first sight of Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway* circling the hill-top where we had stopped; the advantage of being able to climb to the top of a rickety wooden tower helped to get a clearer view. I had only ever seen this species in captivity at a falconry display previously. I could have stayed up there on the unstable structure for longer however most of the remaining tour group (there was only eight of us in total) and the tour guide were beginning to become a little restless, as there was a schedule to keep to.



Cuban Trogon

Santiago de Cuba is seen as the birth place of the Cuban Revolution. We were bombarded in great detail on Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution against the regime of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista (July 1953 until Batista was finally ousted on 1 January 1959). As part of the excursion we visited a number of museums, encountering many of the more abundant species over and over again, with Red-legged Thrush, Cuban Blackbird, Greater Antillean Grackle, Cuban Crow and House Sparrow, being prevalent together with the Cuban Emerald. This delightfully little hummingbird was even seen trapped in a room during a visit to a small museum just off the main square in Santiago de Cuba. Fortunately, we were able to coax the little chap out before it became too exhausted.



Great Lizard Cuckoo

The visit to the Castillo de Morro – an old Spanish fort with incredible views across the bay, gave more opportunities and it was interesting watching the Brown Pelicans, Turkey Vultures and gulls flying along below us from the café balcony. However the boat trip out into Santiago Bay to lunch at the El Cayo Restaurant that allowed closer views of the sea birds of the area. In addition to the gulls that persistently flew by the tables looking for

scraps, there was a concourse of sea birds peppering the buoys in the centre of the bay. Here we saw Brown Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* with its wings hanging out to dry in that typical M shape, Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*, Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* and the commonest gull there was the Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*.

Many of these birds were juveniles. It was amazing watching the aerobatics, particularly the terns, as they dived for food.

Following our non-stop visit to Santiago de Cuba, we then headed north to the relaxed beaches of Guardalavaca (125 miles) for a four night stay in the luxury of the Paradisus Rio de Oro. Guardalavaca strangely translates as 'guard the cow', but is more likely that the name Guardalavaca is a malapropism for the original name Guardalabarca, meaning "guard the ship", a name possibly deriving from an era when cut-throat pirates often raided the area. It is located on the northern shore of Cuba, bordering Bahia Naranjo (Orange Bay), on Cabo Lucrecia, and is part of the municipality of Banes. We were staying on the Playa Esmeralda.

The grounds of this magnificent and well managed hotel offered ample opportunity to see more fauna and flora of the area. Many small warblers were attracted to the gardens in search of food and in addition to the likely candidates that were seen at just about every location we visited, the male Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens* and the Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum* were the most common visitors. Walks around the gardens soon revealed other species, including the endemic Cuban Green Woodpecker *Xiphidiopicus percussus*, Common Ground-Dove *Columbina passerina* and Great Lizard-Cuckoo *Coccyzus merlini* as regular sightings.

Discussions with our holiday rep on the best place to go birding allowed us to be introduced to Carlos; a local vet employed as a tour rep by personal choice because he could earn more money this way; there is something fundamentally not quite right about that. He was a font of knowledge on the local bird species and agreed to spend a day with us birding in the beautiful area. The place we visited was some hilly scrub land and it wasn't long before we were surrounded by birds. First the Turkey Vultures but also seen soaring the hills were a couple of buteos; at first I thought they were the same species, but Carlos informed me that there were in fact Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus* and Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*; closer views indicated he was absolutely right! Amongst the cattle roaming the fields were Great Egret *Ardea alba*, Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, some of which could also be seen in the hotel grounds, I was later to discover. We walked up the hill and into more dense scrub; here we were surrounded by warblers and other small passerines,



Cuban Tody

including the endemic Cuban Vireo *Vireo gundlachii*, Oriente Warbler *Teretistris fornsi* and Cuban Grassquit *Tiaris canorus*, the Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla* found us extremely interesting and followed us around as we moved further up the hill, where we identified Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*, Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*, Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica*, Yellow-faced Grassquit *Tiaris olivaceus*, as well as more Black-throated Blue Warblers, and Palm Warblers. Kingbirds were a regular spot in this area and we managed to identify three different species, including the rare for this part of Cuba, Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus* along with the Gray Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis* and Loggerhead Kingbird *Tyrannus caudifasciatus*. But there was more excitement to come, when we sighted the endemic Cuban Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila lembeyi*, although not

uncommon in Cuba, this was the first time Carlos had seen one on ‘his patch’.

Further exploration of this region and in thicker scrub, we came across a number of the endemic Cuban *Tody Todus multicolour*, such a cute little chap, whose vibrant colours would brighten any day; and such show offs that they just sat there singing away that you could get quite close to get reasonable pictures of this little charmer. On our way to our next location; high on a densely wooded mountain, we spotted Western Spindalis *Spindalis zena* and the Red-legged Honeycreeper *Cyanerpes cyaneus*, amongst others that we’d already seen.



Cuban Pygmy Owl

So next on the agenda was the Cuban Trogon and the Cuban Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium siju*, both endemic and Carlos was convinced we’d get to see them at the next locale. The 15 minute journey took us up a mountain path until we had to get out and walk. The temperature was well in the high 30s Celsius and the thick jungle cover and high humidity, has me wringing wet, but it was well worth it. It was the Pygmy Owl that was spotted first. Difficult to see in the thick undercover and the silent flight meant keeping a close eye on its movement. In its talon a small lizard. A beautiful small diurnal woodland owl, its head followed our every move too. We tracked its movement for some time, all the time hearing the Trogons calling but not seeing them. Then suddenly two Trogons appeared almost simultaneously, and we spent some time trying to get a half decent photograph

before they disappeared into the undergrowth. Getting back to the hotel about six in the evening, as darkness fell, I can only look back on the day with amazement!

The next day relaxing around the hotel, I walked down to a small lake close to the beach, where I’d previously watched local fishermen up to their chests fishing with small round nets. First seeing a Little Egret and the familiar yellow feet hunting the shallows, I noticed a small single Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* standing on a little rock, so I decided to sit awhile and watch. It wasn’t long before a Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon* was seen fishing the margins and then a coot appeared. To me it looked remarkably similar to any other coot I’d seen and I wasn’t particularly excited; Lough Neagh and Castle Espie are overrun with them! I took a photograph anyway and later checked my guide book to notice that there are only two coots normally found in the Caribbean and this one was unmistakably Caribbean Coot *Fulica caribaea*, a very rare and threatened species. I only saw a single bird, so I’ve no idea if there is a remote possibility that the bird would breed on the grounds of the hotel; it would be a nice thought though.



Caribbean Coot

Our holiday was coming to an end and the drive to Holguin exhibited much of the usual species with the Turkey Vulture seen out of every window. Waddling up the road was a

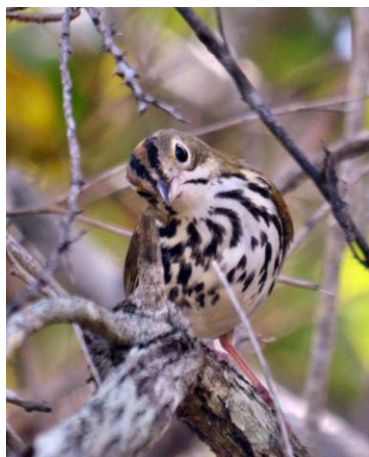
familiar farmyard bird from my childhood, the comical Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata*; there was no human habitation in sight, so whether this was feral or domesticated, I could only guess. The flight from Holguin to Havana, via Santiago de Cuba was delayed and we eventually arrived back at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba for our last few days sight-seeing and buying gifts.

A great holiday, a truly amazing experience and a second visit is a must. Though next time to take in some of the other Cayos to see the flamingos, spoonbills and the parrot-like species I missed on this trip. The surprise had to be the Caribbean Coot, though the Cuban Tody, Cuban Emerald, Cuban Trogon and Cuban Pygmy Owl all exciting sights. The Cuban Woodpecker I thought was another Cuban Blackbird until I checked the photograph, which reminds me, that although I've been watching birds for most of my life, I still have a lot to learn. At the end of our trip we had positively identified 57 of the 364 species (and seen numerous I didn't positively ID) and we saw 15 of the 25 endemic species. In Cuba there are 16 globally threatened species, 7 species classed as introduced and one species known to be extinct (for the list last reviewed in October 2011).

List of Species seen:

Name	Scientific Name	Comment
Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i>	(Introduced species)
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	
Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>	
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	
Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>	
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	
Caribbean Coot	<i>Fulica caribaea</i>	Rare/Accidental Near-threatened
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	
Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	(Introduced species)
Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	(Introduced species)
Common Ground-Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>	
Great Lizard-Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus merlini</i>	Endemic (country/region)
Cuban Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium siju</i>	Endemic
Antillean Palm-Swift	<i>Tachornis phoenicobia</i>	Endemic (country/region)
Cuban Emerald	<i>Chlorostilbon ricordii</i>	Endemic (country/region)

Name	Scientific Name	Comment
Cuban Trogon	<i>Priotelus temnurus</i>	Endemic
Cuban Tody	<i>Todus multicolor</i>	Endemic
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	
Cuban Green Woodpecker	<i>Xiphidiopicus percussus</i>	Endemic
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	Rare/Accidental
Gray Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>	
Loggerhead Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus caudifasciatus</i>	
Cuban Vireo	<i>Vireo gundlachii</i>	Endemic
Cuban Crow	<i>Corvus nasicus</i>	Endemic (country/region)
Cuban Martin	<i>Progne cryptoleuca</i>	
Cuban Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliophtila lembeyi</i>	Endemic
Red-legged Thrush	<i>Turdus plumbeus</i>	
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	
Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>	
Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	
American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	
Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>	
Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>	
Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>	
Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>Setophaga dominica</i>	
Oriente Warbler	<i>Teretistris fornsi</i>	Endemic
Western Spindalis	<i>Spindalis zena</i>	Near-Endemic
Red-legged Honeycreeper	<i>Cyanerpes cyaneus</i>	
Cuban Grassquit	<i>Tiaris canorus</i>	Endemic
Yellow-faced Grassquit	<i>Tiaris olivaceus</i>	
Cuban Blackbird	<i>Dives atrovioleaceus</i>	Endemic
Greater Antillean Grackle	<i>Quiscalus niger</i>	Endemic (country/region)
Shiny Cowbird	<i>Molothrus bonariensis</i>	
Cuban Oriole	<i>Icterus dominicensis melanopsis</i>	Endemic
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	(Introduced species)



Ovenbird



Cuban Vireo



Black and White Warbler

ILLEGAL TRAPPING IN CYPRUS

(Joshua Marshall)

On the 27th April I left for Cyprus having volunteered my services for the charity, Committee Against Birds Slaughter (CABS). I spent a week out there assisting with the removal of the trapping sites and reporting the incidents to the local authorities and the local police. This article is a report of my week out there working within a small team of volunteers to prevent this archaic and barbaric practice. In addition we would free birds that had become trapped and dismantle the elaborate trapping stations.

Background

Anyone fancy eating a whole songbird, plucked of course but it will still contain the bird's skeleton and insides? No? The practice is called Ambelopoulia and is available in Cyprus as a delicacy served fresh or pickled.



What's more shocking is the practice of catching the birds for this 'dish'. The use of Lime sticks and mist nets by the local Cypriot people is common practice throughout the country. The birds land on the sticky substance upon the sticks where they become stuck and die or are killed by the trappers. Cyprus due to its geographical location is a staging post for millions of birds migrating to Europe, many destined for our own shores. This delicacy commands high prices in Cyprus and therefore is a good source of income for the locals. However, the practice of this delicacy is complete illegal under EU laws as is the trapping of the birds. Most popular birds for this dish are the warblers and flycatchers that pass through the country. They are then sold to the local restaurants for a high price.

Day 1

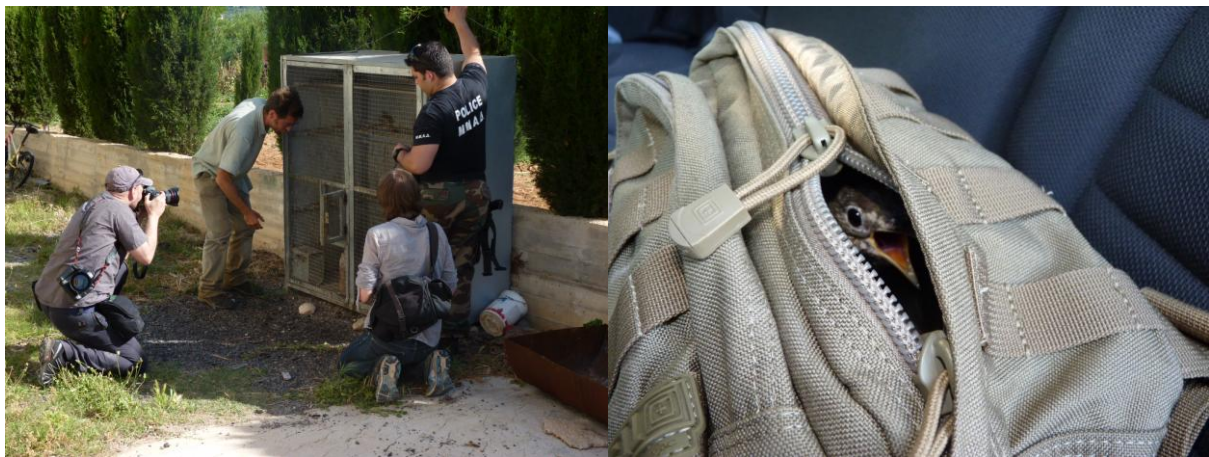
I flew out from Gatwick in the afternoon into Larnaca Airport and was met by a lady from the car rental company. She introduced me to an American called David who was a photographer from the National Geographic Magazine. He has come along to take photographs for a story they are running about illegal bird killing. After a nightmare journey from the airport after being furnished with shocking directions to the hotel we arrived shortly after midnight. An early start at 0600hrs saw me meet up with the other volunteers; I was paired with a Hungarian chap called Tamas who had previous experience on the island. We went straight out to a location near Cape Greco and searched for around 3 hours. Approximately 2 hours in

to the first outing we noticed a male within a white pickup truck who appeared to be observing us and on his mobile phone. When he approached us he was aggressive in his attitude and began interrogating me as to what I was doing here. Bearing in mind I was dressed like an average tourist, I explained to him that I was here bird watching but he was relentless in his quest to establish if I was looking for bird trappers. I politely but robustly informed him that his attitude was terrible and that he had nothing to worry about so he went away.

It is quite shocking to think that he thought that his behaviour and attitude was acceptable. If he had spoken like that to another less tolerant person he may have got more than some 'tactical communication' as we refer to it within the police. We were working within a conservation area so were quite within our rights to be there. We found much evidence of discharged shot gun cartridges in the area as well as a lot of historic trapping sites. It looked as if this area was well used in the past.

The birds were very good in the area and I saw a few species that I have never seen before. Birds found included Black-headed Bunting, Cyprus Warblers, Chukars, Spectacled Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Isabelline Wheatear, Golden Oriole, and heard a Nightingale. Crested Larks were numerous as were Fan-tailed Warblers. I also managed to see some Bee Eaters and a couple of large Cuckoo species, probably Great Spotted but they were a bit too far to be sure.

The afternoon was spent out and about with the local Cypriot police. We soon located a property that was keeping songbirds within a cage. Apparently as well as eating them they like to hear them sing! There were 2 Song Thrushes, European Robin, Blackbirds and Chaffinches within a small cage. After a conversation with the local police the birds were released.



However, due to be confined for so long the thrushes were unable to fly as their flight feathers had been worn away by constant rubbing in the small cage. My 511 MOAB bag became a thrush carrier for a short while as I transported them back to a location where they would be relatively safe. Despite the owners denying catching birds I located a plucking point on their property; the feathers were those of Blackcaps. We located a mist net illegally catching birds within a lemon grove, the property was vacant so the police documented what they had found. The mist net contained Sparrows and a Blackcap. As the evening approached we located a small holding that had lime sticks in use. Due to it being private property though we were unable to enter. The owner soon turned up and kicked up a storm. He was all mouth and lying through his teeth regarding the lime sticks within his garden as

there was a Wood Warbler dangling from its wing attached to the sticky lime. The police response and procedures are something else here but I will discuss this later. It had been a very busy first day and an insight to the rest of the week.

Day 2

The day started early (0450hrs) out on a high piece of ground overlooking several olive tree plantations. Our group of 7 were joined by another conservation group led by an 80 year old Swiss lady! No movement from the orchards prompted us to search systematically the olive tree plantations registered on the group leader's computer data base. We located hundreds of lime sticks today and released a few birds. Fortunately we managed to reach the sticks before the majority of birds were trapped.

On searching one plantation a male arrived in a 4x4 truck and blocked both our vehicles in. He eventually moved and proceeded to hurl abuse at us. He began following our vehicles, driving incredibly close to the rear of the vehicle I was driving. Standard Operating Procedure in this scenario for is to drive to the local police station. However, the Cypriot



Lesser Whitethroat trapped on a Lime Stick

male also followed us into the police station car park. I was curious as to why he had taken this action. I had a robust conversation with him regarding his attitude, driving style and general demeanour. I asked him why he was doing this but he seemed to deny that he had taken this course of action. It's surprising how his attitude changed on speaking face to face. Our group leader had informed the police of what had happened so they proceeded to take the 3 of us into the station for a chat. To cut a long story short the male denied ever shouting at us, stating that he was singing loudly. He also said that he was not following us but needed to attend the station for another matter.

This was not a birding holiday by any means but you do bump into some good ones whilst out and about. In the olive tree plantation I came across a Nightjar plus heard an Olivaceous Warbler. Also today a Blue Rock-thrush was located and other birds of note were Little Bittern, Squacco Heron and more Bee Eaters. Crested Larks were everywhere and I also saw a Hoopoe whilst watching the numerous Spectacled Warblers around the scrub. Due to the frenetic pace searching the areas you cannot spend time watching the birds. Past experience has taught the veterans that any unnecessary time spent hanging around is likely to result in a visit from a 4x4 loaded with aggressive Cypriots.

Day 3. Illegal nets and decoys.

After getting some sleep during the early evening we were due to go out at 0100hrs to cover a number of locations listening for decoys. Decoys in Cyprus consist generally of a number of speakers placed around one of the gardens/plantations. These drag in the birds migrating at night towards the decoy location. Within that location mist nets are placed for the birds to fly into. The mist nets are placed in a suitable location within the orchard where the birds are likely to fly through. They then become trapped and wait for the trappers to come along and seal their fate.

We visited many locations throughout the night. Normally these night operations are conducted with assistance from the local police as they say it is too dangerous to do it without them. However, the team leader after a number of visits with the police in the past and no traps located had become suspicious as to why they had found none so, tonight we went alone.



Decoy Speaker

Up until about 0400hrs we could hear no decoys. One of the final visits was to a well known trapping location of a property allegedly belonging to the Cyprus mafia! We immediately heard Blackcap song being repeated, the song could be heard from far away, the same phrases repeated over and over again. We parked our vehicle in a housing estate and quietly made our way towards the location. Sure enough a decoy was being played. The team leader who knows the area well and the danger it entails (he has been physically beaten a number of times during these camps) was nervous that we should spend no longer than necessary here. We withdrew making our way back from the location, ducking into the long grass as cars passed by. We quietly re-entered the housing estate to get back into the vehicle. The team leader had arranged to meet with the anti-poaching squad (a unit within the police force) at 0500hrs in order to inform them of the areas that held decoys. Another decoy site had been located by the other team of volunteers. On meeting the police they followed us to the location where at first light a man was within the garden. He was summoned to the gate where he was questioned by police. The police informed us that nets were in place and approximately 16 birds had been trapped. The police here have a very different way of working in Cyprus and at times it can be frustrating to experience, although this year have had much better support from the local authorities than they have previously known. A lot of work behind the scenes is conducted by to improve relations and they apply pressure via ambassadors, MEP's etc for more support against this illegal past-time. Due to the anti-poaching squad having to wait for the regular police to arrive to deal with the offence we had to sit and wait. They were very quick today and arrived within 5 minutes. The owner did not want us within his property so we sat and waited. The police returned having released all the birds. They confiscated the poles and other equipment and the owner of the garden was told to report to the police station for charging. No arrest was made.

The rest of the day I walked the rural areas with my Hungarian friend on the camp, Tamas. We looked for trapping sites whilst others searched elsewhere. He is around the same age as me and also shares a passion for birds so we had plenty to discuss. He colour rings the

breeding Rollers in his local area. We walked for a long distance checking small plantations ducking into these without drawing attention to ourselves. We are constantly reminded by the team leader Andreas of the need to be careful when investigating these areas. It does give you that feeling of being somewhere you shouldn't be and I suppose a bit of an adrenaline buzz! You're not allowed to enter the fenced areas but we walk the perimeter of these checking for any of the tell tale signs of trapping. The majority of plantations are not fenced but often near to houses or farms. The encounters with the locals so far I think I managed well, using communication so far to help resolve situations. They generally shout loudly and wave their arms at you; they speak on mobile phones and call their friends to join them. I'm sure that they are not saying nice things about my mother but I do not speak the language to be that offended.

Anyway, our walk was long and we visited many plantations, some empty, and some that are being used but not active at our time of inspection. We did find 3 lime sticks with one Blackcap stuck to them which we freed. The area held few birds so it was not surprising that we found little. The team to date have seized in excess of 600 lime sticks, confiscated a decoy and a mist net set up. The area was very agricultural and I expect that the lime sticks we found were an elderly farmers set up for him only, as is the ancient tradition here. It seems to me that the decoys and mist nets are the major threat to the fantastic birdlife that is resident and passing through the island on migration.

During the day we saw a lot of Cattle Egrets flying over accompanied by Squacco Heron, Spoonbills and Spur-winged Plovers. The bird life in Cyprus is fantastic! Searching the orchards you often flush more common migrants such as Redstart, Cuckoo, Lesser Whitethroats etc. As I have said before you get little time to check the birds, mostly in between plantations but today a small phylloscopus attracted my attention whilst slowly driving along a track. I shouted to Alex to stop the car! Bonelli's Warbler! I assumed it must be the eastern type *orientalis*?

Day 4

Another early start after a late finish saw me out near to Cape Greco searching the gardens in that location. Although plenty of sites with signs of the trees being pruned for lime stick were found, no active sites were located. This was good news. Whilst scanning for human activity amongst the scrub I picked up a small white pickup truck. It was in the middle of nowhere next to a small stand of bushes. I watched carefully for around 15 minutes before the truck moved. I then moved in for a search of the area but found no lime sticks. Even negative searches are useful for the operation as they allow the organisers to collate these results within their data base linked to Google Earth. This can then display to them how the work is going, i.e the site may have been active 2 years when confiscated sticks but for the last 2 years there may have been nothing. This assists them with analysis to ascertain if the campaign is having a positive effect and whether the prosecutions are a deterrent.

As the day moved at a relentless pace, the 2 teams extensively and systematically searched areas directed on the move by Andrea Rutigliano (team leader) via his lap top and Google Earth. A garden search located decoys within the four corners of the olive tree orchard. As so often the case with decoys the mist net ride was located within the orchard, a tell tale sign of the commercial mass slaughter of the birds. Vegetation is removed to create a narrow corridor in which to place the net. What is very evident is the debris of slaughter as there are

shot gun cases are everywhere. Often these are very fresh which is in contradiction of the hunting season. Unfortunately it is justified by most as a 'custom' or 'tradition'.

The birds seen today were again tremendous. Rollers were everywhere and Shrikes were plentiful with Masked, Lesser Grey and Red-backed being seen. I was a bit gutted with the fall of migrants experienced within South Devon today and not being there to witness it but, these weren't bad!

Day 5

The rain fell with intensity during the night which meant it was poor trapping weather. Any lime sticks placed out would be rendered useless by morning in the wet weather. We finally got going at around lunchtime. Whilst travelling to our designated area the most stunning bird appeared very close to us. Without hesitation the car was stopped by our group leader Andrea (who, normally puts his birding aside due to his passion for this cause) couldn't help but swerve into the hard shoulder to view this bird (maybe something to do with him not seeing Pallid Harrier yet). Sadly it wasn't the rare harrier but a magnificent male Montague's Harrier which was very close at times.

The day progressed well with a number of sites searched. It seems to be a day for harrier migration with another 4 ringtail Montys seen as well as Marsh Harriers. The birds mentioned are to help emphasise the variety and importance of this island and the effect the trapping has on these species. There are plenty of trip reports on the web that list what is possible here and the best places to go. I have visited very few of these places but being out all day in remote locations you are likely to bump into them. I try not to do the same here but it is difficult for someone who is interested in birds not to be enthused with what is on offer on this island.



Lime Stick Tree

The olive tree plantations and gardens that we search are a vital and essential stopping point for most of the smaller (passerine) migrants. The orchards I have visited are literally littered with Nightingales (that are easily seen), Flycatchers (Spotted, Pied, and Collared), Redstarts, Warblers are everywhere, Lesser Whitethroat, Bonellis, Wood and Willow to name but a few. However they are easy prey for the hunters, poachers, farmers and everyday folk that want to catch and kill them to eat or to sell. This is typical of many of the orchards visited. Trappers create these grim structures to place lime sticks in the best locations. Favourite is the Blackcap but birds such as Orioles, Shrikes, Bee-eaters are caught, killed and discarded as they are considered as by-catch.

I had a discussion with an anti poaching squad police officer today, part of his duties being to target and prevent these practices. He knew that I was a British police officer undertaking regular patrol duties in England and that part of this role was as a wildlife crime officer. He was aware that I had an interest in protecting and watching these birds. I asked him firstly what did he think about the practice. He was incredibly laid back and blasé about the illegal

practice of trapping and consuming these birds. He went onto to say, "Small bird is the tastiest item of food and a real delicacy for me, I eat the bird whole by breaking of the beak first, placing the whole bird into my mouth, I then pull the bird from my mouth by the feet so they come away along with the spine". He then said,

" I am not interested in prosecuting the old man who puts out a few lime sticks in order to feed himself or his family, what I am interested in is the persons using mist nets, they do it for commercial purposes and this is wrong. I'm not going to deal with the old man as he gives me the information where and who is putting these up ".

Seems contradictory to me, and he is a person charged with the responsibility with dealing with this problem when the team leave the island. He likened this to a drug user found to have in his possession a small amount of drugs. He would rather know who sold it to him than prosecute the drug user found with the drug. Using your discretion as a police officer is an important part of the job, it allows you to use common sense where necessary and achieves outcomes that sometimes an arrest or prosecution would never be able too. His assumption is misguided that the old man catching a few birds for his dinner is not an issue. data clearly shows that lime stick catching of small birds' accounts for the majority of songbirds slaughtered at migration times. The practice is illegal under EU law. Traditions and customs do have a place but this mass annual slaughter of migrating birds needs to end. This is not meant as some activist/fanatic rant but millions of birds are being lost each year, for a 'custom' and a 'tradition'.

Amazingly Andrea informed me today that he was having to meet the media for an interview and suggested that I might like to do a bit of birding around Cape Greco until last light as there was little point in myself and Tamas being there. It has been full on with the work, night and days so it was nice to get a few hours off. First stop was a recently ploughed field, which was crawling with birds. At least 50+ Yellow Wagtails of various different sub-species including feldegg and dombrowskii types. There were Ortolan Buntings, Short-toed Larks and Whinchats. I was pleased to pick out a Tawny Pipit, also in the one field was Lesser Short-toed Lark and a Bimaculated Lark. Both Black-eared Wheatear and Cyprus Wheatear were seen with singing Great Reed Warblers and a Nightingale out in the open! We finished the evening watching Nightjars wing clapping and feeding over the cereal fields as the sun set.

Coming up next time... An encounter with a trapper, decoys, and some saved birds.
By the way, nearly 4,000 lime sticks destroyed so far!

Day 6

More rain overnight but today proved to be the busiest day so far, hundreds of lime sticks were found with a good number of birds also freed. We managed to get out after breakfast when the rain had stopped meeting up with the Cyprus anti poaching unit. The aim again was to visit some private gardens that we could not enter but that we're suspected of being trapping areas. Gardens were located and found to have lime sticks. The Cypriot police do not allow into the gardens when they are dealing with owners. They enter and release the birds and the owners are then prosecuted later though I am not convinced about this.

I visited a site that was well known for the trapping of Bee-eaters. Bee-eaters are normally a by-catch of the lime sticks for smaller birds (they are often killed and discarded or just left to die).

This site is a place for bee hives so the Cypriots have developed a way of trapping Bee-eaters to prevent them from harvesting the bees. They are a different take on the lime stick using vertical bamboo poles, they have the same devastating affect though. Fortunately it appeared for the time being this practice had ceased in this particular area. It was a very good area for the birds though with large numbers present.



Carefully removing a bird

We located many birds and lime sticks. We had to work quickly to remove them before any of the trappers became aware of our presence. Despite what we are doing is completely legal the veterans of this operation are very wary of being caught by the trappers. They have on a number of occasions been assaulted.

Here you can see how adhesive this stuff is, Andrea here is working quickly to safely remove the birds, being careful to not rip the feathers out.

With the operations for this years spring migration camp drawing to a close the leaders were keen to keep the pace up with visiting and revisiting plantations, orchards and gardens. A location was approached which I believed would not herald much turned out to be a set up that had trapped many birds. This site was just behind a popular hotel in Protaras, filled with many tourists. As we approached we could hear the repetitive call of a Blackcap, but this was clearly a decoy playing. Making our way through the bush we located a small tree. On closer inspection the tree was littered with birds hanging like perverse Christmas decorations. It's hard not to be shocked when you see this happening and to think that without you or in Cyprus at these crucial times these birds would just be slaughtered. We freed these birds which included Blackcaps, Wood Warblers and Lesser Whitethroats. Shortly after the last bird was freed this truck pulled up. He then drove past us shouting abuse at us. Tough luck mate, no birds for you today!



Lime Stick working with Decoy

I split from the main group with a couple of others to search an area near to a very busy public area with shops etc nearby. We parked the vehicle in a discreet location. The garden was next to a small farm that had several Cypriots working within it. We were easily visible from the road so we had to work quickly. As with the majority of places we found freshly set lime sticks with more warblers. I worked quickly to free the birds acutely aware of the ever present great from the Cypriot trappers.

Day 7

The plan for today was to start early and get out before first light. I was given the task of attending a couple of plantations close together with the intention of reporting any persons entering the plantations and placing lime sticks. If I noted any persons engaging in this activity I would call one of the team leaders who were waiting at strategic points with the anti-poaching squad.

I was dropped off near to the site. As I approached the plantations on my own the tales from previous camps of assaults and near abductions induced a feeling of vulnerability. No rifle, protection kit or mates/colleagues to back you up as in my current and previous employment. I kept a low profile around the plantations as various 4x4 drove past and signs of life were



Abandoned bird

heard in the outbuildings on the plantations. The gardens were quite obviously in use for trapping birds

Quite a lot of the plantations have outbuildings that are often left open. These sometimes contain prepared lime sticks or other related paraphernalia. I looked into one this morning and was quite surprised/alarmed to see its occupier! Fortunately he had his back to me so didn't see me. I left to have a wander around his plantation. Although this plantation was definitely being used I could find no evidence this morning but maybe a bit too early. On my

way back to meet the others a Black Kite drifted over. The day proved good for Raptors with Honey Buzzard also seen along with a good number of Hobby. While patrolling a nice little valley packed with Bee-eaters, a group of 7 Hobbies flew through and suddenly began mobbing a much larger Raptor which was some type of eagle. I didn't get the best of looks at it and Tamas who has more experience with them got on it after me. Not an expert on eagles at all so let's leave it as the one that got away! Also seen during the day was a stunning Rock Thrush in one of the orchards. The Rollers were around in numbers too. It is the smaller passerines that caught my eye in the orchards, the sheer numbers are incredible.

Unfortunately what you find out and about are birds that have just been forgotten about and left to die in the netting.

The day was very successful with lots of birds' recovered and huge numbers of lime sticks destroyed. One lime stick had actually collapsed under the weight of the 5 Blackcaps stuck on it. A number of nets were also seized during today's operations, with numerous birds being freed. Earlier I wrote about a plantation that I visited first thing in the morning. I asked if we could return close to last light to see if



Removing Lime Sticks

any lime sticks had been placed. We hit the jackpot. The trapping tree was 20 metres away from the house that the trapper and his friend were cooking dinner in. We worked quickly and quietly to free the birds and destroy the lime sticks, it was a bit of a buzz knowing that we were doing this under their noses. Hope they weren't planning on Blackcaps for tea. We took the lot of sticks and destroyed them.

That night we had a failed operation for a known decoy site. Andrea, Tamas and myself reached our destination to find the property which contained the probable decoy was having a house party. We were compromised and heard numerous shouts from the house directed towards us so turned around and left. About 300m down the track we were met by the Cypriot police drugs squad. They stopped our vehicle and asked for identity and explained to us that we should not remain in the area as it was a Cypriot mafia area and very dangerous to be around. They told us to go home. This was probably just a coincidental meeting?

Goodbyes were said when we arrived back at the hotel to the people that were leaving in the early hours. I had booked a very late flight the next day with the intention to do some birding on the island as the hire car only had to be back at the airport just before my flight.

Day 8

Tamas, a German colleague and I all headed for Capo Greco headland at first light. It was initially very quiet. We saw Cyprus Wheatear, and I managed to get some decent views of a couple of Tawny Pipits that were hanging around. We became really interested in one of the Cyprus Wheatears as it seemed to show a lot of white on the rump, but having learned since returning that there are only 2 previous records of Pied Wheatear on the island it seems very unlikely that it was one. Ortolan Bunting, Black Francolin, Bee-eaters, Spectacled Warblers, Marsh Harriers and Zitting Cisticolas amongst others were all present. We had to take 2 of the group to the airport just before lunch so this seemed a perfect opportunity to check a small wetland area of Oroklini Marsh half way between Larnaca and Agia Napa. This was my first wetland visit in the country. This was a great location and we immediately saw Night and Squacco Heron along with lots of Black winged Stilt which were flying up to mob a hunting female Marsh Harrier. Whilst scanning the lake we also picked up many Ruff, Little Stint, some Garganey and lots of Little Ringed Plover. There was lots of Spur-winged Plover also. 11 Glossy Ibis dropped in out of nowhere and fed for a while too. I could have stayed here all day to be honest but we needed to get to the airport to drop the others off especially as there were Eleanora's Falcons to be found!

After a longer than expected trip we arrived at Kensington Cliffs overlooking a fantastic beach called Quarry Beach. Sardinian Warblers were cutting around the small firs and scrub and alarming at our presence. Suddenly from out of nowhere both light and dark morph Eleanora's Falcons burst into view at eye level! They were incredible and a strong candidate for bird of the trip. They were a lot bigger than I had expected, close to a Peregrine but with a lot less body mass and an emphasis on the wings. They were incredibly acrobatic in flight.

We moved onto the salt lakes at Akrotiri and immediately we saw a large group of Flamingos.

Tamas is great with waders which was a good job. He picked out some Kentish Plovers as we drove across the dry part of the Salt Lake after a fruitless search in a church for some Spanish Sparrows. Time unfortunately was ticking on and we had to get back. We called again at Oroklini Marsh to enjoy some more birds there before heading back to the hotel.

My time in Cyprus was drawing to an end. I had met some quality people on the trip that I hope to meet again. As I said goodbye to my roommate I gave him my copy of Advanced Bird ID guide by Nils Van Duivendijk, that he had read practically every day in the room. He was very pleased. I set off from the hotel to the airport in company with David (National Geographic photographer) and we managed a couple of pints in the airport lounge before we both departed.

Reflections

Cyprus made a big impression on me. The camp was a fantastic experience and I have been asked to attend again and really hope I will be able too. I would really encourage anyone who feels they may be interested to apply. There are various protection camps that you can attend and all the information is on the web. I am hoping to spread the word to other Wildlife Crime Officers about Cyprus. I noticed a definite change in attitude and professionalism when the authorities understood that a British police officer was working with this organisation. I think it would be helpful for more officers to take part.

It is shocking in this day and age that the practice of bird trapping is still going on. People can help by writing to the Cypriot authorities. A number people I have spoken to since are going to avoid the country until they take a grip of the situation. I have received many e-mails at work from members of the public completely disgusted with the pictures they have seen on my blog (the content, not, surprisingly my photography!). The trip attracted attention from a number of media quarters which has been great in raising awareness throughout the country which was one of my aims and has assisted. It is also important that the Cypriot public that need to be more vocal in damming this activity. For example the recent U turn by DEFRA regarding the control of Buzzards in the UK was no doubt assisted by the public outrage demonstrated on various social networking sites and letters to the authorities.

It was a great feeling to have released the birds we found stuck to the lime sticks and to have removed the sticks that we're waiting to inflict certain death on species bound for our own shores. But it is the tip of the iceberg. What they are doing is vital, in that they are not only removing the sticks, nets and decoys but they are robustly campaigning with the authorities for this to be dealt with. More importantly they are raising awareness of this problem throughout Europe. The fact that National Geographic is running a story on their campaign speaks volumes.

The preferred bird for trapping is the Blackcap, with many of the 'by-catch' will just be left to die. This has and regularly includes species such as Shrikes, Bee-eaters, and even once a Pallid Harrier. Also reptiles are caught up too. Many times when just out and about on my own I was approached by person's intent on questioning my motives for being in the countryside. I was not wearing any motif or acting in any way that would have provoked suspicion. Worryingly this is a country where you can bird the area as a tourist but be approached in a hostile manner by people. I would like to think that they benefited from meeting someone with a professional manner; not a thug but an attitude that matched theirs. They are not a great advert for Cyprus tourism.

I really enjoyed being in the company of a great team all passionate about the cause. I'd like to thank all of them for accepting me into the team and being such great company. The bird life in Cyprus is fantastic. I visited very few of the 'known' birding sites, spending most of the

time in Olive tree plantations but a rough count of species seen totalled 115 with many species seen for the first time. Best bird freed from the lime sticks? No question, see picture below.



Awaiting Rescue