

FOREWORD

This year the editor has discovered bird ringing and has spent many a weekend on Salisbury Plain. The experience has shown how many birds we miss when walking, as what can seem quiet is actually busy if the mist nests are a sign of what is about. Salisbury Plain is not like the rest of UK as it is mainly open grassland but it still hides a lot of birds and some unexpected ones such as a Great Reed Warbler caught whilst I was ringing at Portsmouth. When you are out and about what seems a forlorn experience may actually be great if we wait. This year's articles have an African bias where there seems to be birds everywhere one looks. The reports are not short of sightings and often there are many views of the same species. In fact the "must see" species list for the trip can become a common sight. There are reports on the AOS trip to Morocco, another organised tour to Ethiopia plus trips in Zimbabwe and South Africa. There is bird watching at the "back door" in Australia. Back in Europe there was a bit of a nostalgia trip to the old Inner German Border, much of which is a "Landschafts-schutzgebiet". I contacted a friend who worked in BRIXMIS who remembered many of the training areas we visited, one which was definitely out of bounds in the past! Our final article is about the Nest Record Scheme. Once again spending time in an area looking for birds has its own rewards and often more are seen than we expect. What looks barren is not and can hold several birds. For the coming year take your time when out and about; you may see more than you think.

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Editor with friendly Chiffchaff

SOOTY TERNS ON ASCENSION ISLAND IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC INTEGRATED POPULATION MONITORING PROGRAMME EXPEDITION REPORT 26 – SEPTEMBER 2013

(Andrew Bray)

Summary: The expedition arrived after the peak of breeding activity but it completed a full census of sooty terns. The colony size in late August 2013 was $175,000 \pm 5,200$ AoNs. A further 2,000 sooty terns were ringed and 398 re-trapped including the recovery of one geolocator. Ten sooty terns were fitted with geolocators on metal rings which will be searched for and recovered next year on the next expedition. This will help us to determine the migration of adults between breeding seasons.

Population Dynamics of Sooty Terns – Long-term Monitoring Programme

Background

Since 1987 British military ornithological societies have monitored the colony of sooty terns *Onychoprion fuscatus* and other seabird species on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic. The first population census was completed in 1990 10 years prior to the commencement of the RSPB-mediated feral cat eradication on the island. Sooty terns were closely monitored during the two years when cats were culled and monitoring has continued in the post-eradication phase. This report contains the findings of the latest field trip of the nineteenth AOS expedition. The study has focused on the breeding biology of the sooty tern concentrating on establishing the size of breeding population, identifying and recording levels of predation, site fidelity, sub-annual breeding, investigating egg, chick and adult survival rates; more recently, we are now also investigating migration.

Aims of the August/September 2013 Expedition

1. Population census of the sooty tern.
2. Locate and recover geolocators deployed on birds in March 2011 and December 2012.
3. Survey the number of masked boobies *Sula dactylatra* and Ascension frigatebirds *Fregata aquila* on Letterbox.
4. Ringing training and renewal of ringing permits held by Conservation Office staff.
5. Rat indices at Waterside.
6. Deployment of geolocators on another 10 sooty terns and ringing of 1,000 birds.

Expedition Booby 19 – August/September 2013 - Participants

Warrant Officer 2 Tony Giles	AOS	Expedition Leader
Lieutenant Colonel Roger Dickey	AOS	
Captain Jim Porter	AOS	
Chief Petty Officer Mark Cutts	RNBWS	
Ms Lynne Millard	AOS	
Andrew Bray	AOS	
Dr Jim Reynolds	University of Birmingham/AOS	
Colin Wearn	RAFOS	

Members of the expedition were on the island from 30th August to 6th September 2013 (inclusive). A total of 64 person days were spent in the field.

Population Estimates

The population survey this season was carried out post-peak abundance and 85+ days (i.e. 29 days of incubation and 56 days pre-fledging) after the first egg of the breeding season was laid. Ideally we would survey 42-60 days after first egg has been laid when the colony is at its greatest. Last season was slightly earlier than the 290 day breeding cycle and this season was even earlier suggesting a re-alignment of periods possibly linked to breeding success. On Waterside on 31st August 2013 there was a range of chicks from hatchlings to juveniles on the wing. At Mars Bay on 1 September 2013 there were still birds on eggs and juveniles that were seven weeks old. The Conservation Office reported that there had been birds on eggs ever since the last expedition departed the island on 7 December 2012.

Survey

The area of the colony was determined from GPS data. GPS allows for constant recording of the position of the bearer as he/she walks the periphery of the breeding birds on the ground and then the data are downloaded onto a computer. This allows the area of each sub-colony to be calculated. The colony this season was comprised of 11 sub-colonies (two at Waterside and nine at Mars Bay) and, as in previous years, a "Fair Description Sheet" was completed for each sub-colony. The total area occupied by breeding birds in August 2013 was 11.10 ha.

Nest Density

Nest densities were measured by counting all eggs that were passed over by a 1.784 m long piece of string when rotated 360 degrees about a stick to which one end was tied. Quadrats were taken at random points within sub-colonies at Mars Bay including the newly colonised areas on the klinker where the lowest breeding densities were detected. In total 577 AoNs were counted in 54 quadrats. The AoNs per m² are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of parameters used to estimate the size of breeding populations (pairs) of sooty terns at the two colonies on Ascension Island in September 2013. Population size is determined by multiplying colony area by breeding density of birds.

Colony	Area (ha)	No. of quadrats	No. of nests Counted	Av. density per m²	Population size
Waterside	6.38	0	0	1.83	116,435 ±3,500
Mars Bay	2.08	15	274	1.83	38,064 ±1,100
Mars Bay Lava	2.64	39	303	0.77	20,328 ±600
Total	11.10	54	577		174,827 ±5,200

Population Size

At Mars Bay on 30th August 2013 the colony contained 59,000 AoNs and at Waterside the colony contained 116,000 AoNs. Mars Bay consisted of birds on the area of fair where they have previously nested and also on a new area on the basalt flow to the south-east of the fair. The lava flow consists of extremely jagged and clinkery rock with deep cracks that is about 5 metres high and is over 1 kilometre wide as it reaches the shore. The sub-colonies were treated separately for quadrat surveys. No quadrats at Waterside were taken as the few remaining eggs were hatching. We used the breeding density estimated at Waterside of 1.83 (averaged over 15 seasons) to calculate the population size.

Leucistic Birds

A flying juvenile was seen on Waterside (31st August) and a six week old chick was also ringed there on 5th September. The chick was still in the same area on the following day.

Desertion

This season there were very few areas of desertion on Waterside and Mars Bay. These were not surveyed.

Surveys

Movement at SeaMigration

A task on this expedition was to deploy another 10 geolocators. These were deployed as part of an on-going investigation. Pale green colour rings were deployed to identify the year of ringing and to aid re-sighting of birds carrying geolocators at a later date.

Study Sites

Once again, all bird species attempting to breed or that had bred on the three study sites established in 1990 was noted (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of the number of breeding pairs of various seabird species on three long-term study sites on Ascension Island in September 2013.

Species	Study site:		
	Waterside	Mars Bay	Letterbox
Sooty tern	Approx. 116,000	Approx. 59,000	0
Masked booby	0	0	380 chicks yet to fully fledge
Brown booby	0	0	6 (1 chick and 1 double clutch of eggs)
Tropicbirds	0	0	0
Brown noddy	3 (2eggs and 2 chicks)	0	0
Ascension frigatebirds	0	0	0

During the visit to Letterbox we noted that the masked boobies had finished breeding. There were roosts of 132 and 100+ adults besides ones and twos scattered across the area by their last nest site. There were 4 large crèches of juveniles as well as some still besides their nest. There were 330 juveniles close to full adult plumage with some capable of flight and others within days of being capable of flight with up to 30 more younger birds not yet in flight plumage.

White Tern and Black Noddy

Both white terns and black noddies were present but neither species was breeding. There was a large roost of 500+ black noddies at South East Bay. No black noddies were at Pyramid Point.

Mexican thorn

The spread of Mexican thorn *Prosopis juliflora* to the edge of the sooty tern colonies was first recorded in 1998. Since then its steady but relentless encroachment into the nesting areas has been mapped using GPS. However, no measurements were taken on this visit. Currently, trees are not impinging on the current breeding areas of sooty terns. However, they provide rats with food when sooty terns are absent from the island between breeding seasons.

Breeding Success

Survival rate of nestlings

In previous breeding seasons we subdivided the breeding period into incubation, hatching, nestling and free-ranging chick stages and measure mortality in each. Between 1998 and 2011 nestling survival rate was 0.54 ± 0.20 nestlings per egg laid. In 2013 survival rate to the end of the nestling period (when chicks were approximately 7 days old) was calculated by monitoring eggs close to hatching, nestlings and chicks surviving beyond two weeks. This involved four marked areas of 6×6 m at Mars Bay. Three squares were of chicks under one week old and eggs and one was of chicks about one week old. The number of eggs laid in each quadrat was estimated from mean quadrat density (i.e. 1.83 eggs m^2 , Table 1). Nestling survival rate in Sep 2013 was 0.44 ± 0.18 nestlings per egg laid (Table 3).

Table 3. Nestling survival rate in four squares with differing substrates at Mars Bay in September 2013 nestling survival rate was calculated from an estimate of the number of eggs laid in each square using a mean egg density of 1.83 eggs m^2 and counts of nestling age approximately 7 days

Square	Substrate	Estimated number of eggs	Nestling count	Survival rate nestling per egg laid
1	Rocky	66	24	0.36
2	Sandy	66	35	0.53
3	Flat rock	66	22	0.33
4	Natural depression with bush	66	36	0.55

Food Availability

Observations of what food was being regurgitated or fed to chicks were noted although no systematic study was undertaken. Samples were taken for analysis at the University of Birmingham. There was evidence of both sprat and squid being fed to chicks.

Ringling

A further 530 adult sooty terns and 470 juveniles that could fly were ringed with details given in Table 4. When catching flying juveniles the rain allowed easier catching as they were reluctant to take to the wing when approached. When the passenger aircraft passed over both adults and juveniles took to the air. When these ring totals are added to previous ones including ringing completed by the RSPB and Dr Gale in November 1975 who used US Fish & Wildlife Service rings, the overall total of sooty terns ringed to date on Ascension Island is 23,926. This does not include rings from the Ascension Conservation Office.

Table 4. Summary of ringing activities from different locations from the expedition to Ascension Island in September 2013.

Location	Date	Ring No		Number of birds ringed	Notes
Mars Bay	3 rd	DE87001	DE87500	500	
Mars Bay	3 rd	DD99501	DD99751	250	ASI rings
Mars Bay	3 rd	DD99783	DD99795	13	ASI rings
Mars Bay	4 th	DE87501	DE87510	10	
Waterside	5 th	DE87511	DE87530	20	
Waterside	5 th	DE87531	DE88000	470	Flying juveniles

*Note: During the field season we also ringed four brown noddies (DB33218-DB33221; two adults with a yellow plastic ring on left leg and two juveniles with no colour rings).

Re-trapping adults

A major task was to spend time in re-trapping adults, especially to recover geolocators deployed in March 2011 and December 2012. In total 398 sooty terns were re-trapped this season and none of these was a control. Time allocation to re-trapping was 166 hrs. Re-trapping was mainly undertaken in pairs with one person catching with a hand-net and another recording the ring number and the GPS coordinates of the recapture site.

Predation

A number of studies were carried out involving predation of eggs, chicks and adult birds.

Dead adults

Eight dead sooty terns were found and all were at Mars Bay. Signs of cat predation were found at Mars Bay. The Conservation Office has set cameras and cat traps in the area.

Cat predation

There were signs of cat predation at Mars Bay as birds had had their back and breast muscles removed whilst their head remained untouched. There were two areas surveyed for large chicks killed. Both areas had chicks that were five to seven weeks old. The first area was the side of a small sub-colony following a natural line 56 m long cleared 5 m either side. The second area was at the edge of a large sub-colony at a natural narrow point that consisted of 71 m². Both areas were cleared of large chick corpses at the start. Young chick skeletons were not cleared as these could have been taken by rats rather than cats. A rat was seen on a remote camera in the area. Results of the test areas suggest an average of 13 kills per night. Details are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of cat kills at Mars Bay on various days of the expedition.

Area	Cleared	31/08/13	01/09/13	02/09/13	03/09/13	04/09/13	05/09/13	06/09/13
1	11	1	0	5	2	0	2	0
2	95	3	10	9	18	16	10	15

Rat index

Previous expeditions have been concerned about the high levels of predation by black rats *Rattus rattus* at both sites. Rat indices on both these sites were completed (Table 6). Surveys

Table 6. Summary of rat trapping on Waterside on Ascension Island in September 2013. The index is a count of the number of rats trapped per 100 trap nights.

Location	Dates	Traps set	Trap-nights lost	Corrected trap-nights	Captured	Index
West side of Waterside	3 rd –6 th Sept	54	13.5	40.5	24	59

We used 18 T-Rex traps. Sites were determined by choosing a line where the sooty terns were nearest the airfield perimeter track as there was no evidence of rat-predated chicks.

Predation by Ascension frigatebirds

During each visit to a fair the number of frigatebirds over, and resting within, the colonies was counted. The main centre of frigatebird hunting activity was at Mars Bay as the majority of eggs at Waterside had hatched and the chicks were too big to be preyed upon. We carried out some observations of frigatebirds hunting with details provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Numbers of frigatebirds at two sooty tern colonies on Ascension Island between August and September in 2013.

Location	Counts	Average number	Maximum number
Waterside	2	1	1
Mars Bay	18	13	25

Myna predation

Common mynas *Acridotheres tristis* predate on sooty tern eggs but prick and destroy many more eggs than they consume. Mynas were seen on the fairs at both Mars Bay and Waterside but the expedition did not look for damaged eggs.

Other Activities

Training and Support

Members of the Conservation Office joined the expedition on most days. Two and half days of ringing training of seabirds were delivered to staff from the Ascension Island government. For three persons it was a matter of re-assessment of ringing licence and for two more it was the provision of a limited ringing licence.

Acknowledgements

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BIRDS OF MOROCCO
(Tim Cowley)



Moussier's Redstart



House Bunting



Northern Bald Ibis



Thick-billed Lark



African Desert Lark



Booted Eagle



Crowned Sandgrouse



Desert Sparrow



Egyptian Nightjar



Eastern (Desert) Olivaceous Warbler



Spotted Sandgrouse



Maghreb Wheatear



Western Subalpine Warbler



Blue Rock Thrush



Crimson-winged Finch



Levaillant's Woodpecker



Rock Sparrow



Seebohm's Wheatear

MOROCCO 2-12 APRIL 2013

(Tim Cowley & Andrew Bray)

We had a very early start to catch the first flight out of Gatwick to Agadir. At the airport we met up with each other mainly over breakfast but, if not, we greeted others at the boarding gate. On arrival we knew we had landed in Africa as coats were not needed and the queue at passport control inched forward very slowly. At the airport we met our guide Josele with our driver Mohammed and a rather large minibus. We were off birding from the start and visited Souss Massa an area of scrub where we soon picked up Moussier's Redstart which became a rather common bird. It was closely followed by Crested Lark, Thekla Lark and Common Bulbul which turned out to be very common. In the "warbler bush" we found Subalpine Warbler, Melodious Warbler and the star of the morning, a Black-crowned Tchagra. All the while Bee-eaters and Fan-tailed Warblers called above us and our only Common Stonechat perched on a vantage point. After a short drive we went for a walk along the river in the valley. Above our heads were Pallid Swifts with some Little Swifts and the bushes were full of warblers including an Isabelline Warbler. There were finches and doves all around whilst



Black-crowned Chagra

by the river there was Little Egret, Glossy Ibis and Moroccan Cormorant with its full frontal white plumage. A Purple Heron flew in and landed on the edge of the reeds so everyone could see all its detail. A short detour was made to locate four Marbled Teal before heading back to the crossing point where numerous birds were bathing. On the other side we cut across the land to another bend in the river where we found some very obliging Plain Martins whilst a Cirl Bunting sang to us and a Black-shouldered Kite

made sure its presence was known as it circled above us. Our next stop was the hotel and desperately trying to avoid a long siesta before heading out to Wadi Souss and the estuary. Here we walked out along the sand then mud then rubbish then mud; you get the picture. Anyway the pools beside the river held plenty of birds including Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, far too many Little Egrets, a Cattle Egret, many Grey Herons and our second Purple Heron. There were many Gull-billed Terns on the river line accompanied by a few Sandwich Terns. There was a large range of waders including Black-winged Stilt, Avocet, Kentish Plover, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Little Stint, Sanderling, Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwit. There was also Moroccan Wagtail however the star was the Stone Curlew standing behind us beautifully camouflaged amongst the driftwood. It was getting late and time to head back to the hotel for food and bed.

Day 2. This was an early start and the target bird for the morning was Northern Bald Ibis. There are thought to be about 500 birds left in the wild and Morocco is a stronghold. The

talk was that we might find one flying rather than the 47 we did see that followed us around once they knew we were from the AOS! In finding the first flock we also found Short-toed Lark, Spectacled Warbler and Woodchat Shrike. A number of small flocks had been sighted and flew over the hill crest so that is where we headed for, however a single bird took the opportunity of dropping in front of us for a quick walk before flying off to the others. We met up with them again by the side of the road at Tamri Estuary and when we finally had enough and walked down to the beach came and joined us for the walk. It is very hard to ignore an Osprey perched nearby but they managed it. The Ruddy Shelduck hardly received more than a cursory glance! Lunch was now calling which consisted of the usual fare: flat bread and olives, Moroccan salad, meat with rice and vegetables and fresh sweet oranges afterwards. A House Bunting popped into the restaurant to see how we were getting on with the meal. Red-rumped Swallows flew close to the windows and a Barbary Ground-Squirrel crawled across the rocks below. There was a short interlude after lunch during which we saw a distant Short-toed Eagle and Common Raven. On the drive back to Agadir we searched each flock of Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls before finding six Audouin's Gulls by a campsite of RVs, where retired persons from France, Germany and UK had escaped to for the winter. Returning to the hotel we also saw several Southern Grey Shrikes of the dark *algeriensis* subspecies. After a stop at the hotel we headed back to Oued Souss and the estuary. We by-passed the earth road block and followed the road to where the bridge had been washed away. Here we picked up close views of Woodchat Shrike and Tree Pipit, as well as a large number of resting White Storks. Near the start point we also added Wood Sandpiper and Green Sandpiper that were feeding in one of the streams. We eventually started out from the same car park as the previous day and made our way to the perimeter road of the one of the Palaces in search of nightjars. It was on the road that a Barbary Partridge popped out for all of us to see and a Peregrine watched the group from the safety of the tall trees, whilst we waited for the main event. Unfortunately we were seen by an Army truck and before long a Policeman turned up and pointed in a direction. What he said we did not know but we trudged off back to the river in the way he pointed and as we joined another suitable track a Red-necked Nightjar flew right by us. The views were not ideal but at least one bird called and flew past the group a second time. So the Policeman was telling us that the Nightjars were not by the Palace walls' but further away.



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater

Day 3. Today was a very long drive up to the high plateaux. It was raining when we left but stopped briefly past the airport for all of us to look at a large flock of Spanish Sparrow. We also were stopped at a Police roadblock. Maybe the policeman last night wanted to know if we saw the Nightjar? It started raining again but there was a break for the first spot of birding on a bridge on River Souss at Aoulouz. A Kingfisher put on flight for everyone and

our only Squacco Heron of the trip stood impassively. It was only a short stop and we were quickly on our way to our next stop to buy saffron from a carpenter in a very windy town. After that it was more driving east until lunch where Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters put on a show. Later on we stopped by a stream leading to a lake at Ouarzazate. A Western Bonelli's Warbler was seen by a few but everyone saw the Whinchat, Desert Olivaceous Warbler, Tawny Pipit, Short-toed Lark and Wryneck. We passed by our hotel, seeing a Golden Eagle en route, and a sudden braking caused excitement as we all saw initially Thick-billed Lark and then Temminck's Lark as the minibus slowly reversed. It was dusk when we reached the Pharaoh Eagle Owl site near Boumalne Dadès and the owl was missing. It was then back to our hotel in Boumalne for luxurious food and a massive buffet.

Day 4. We started just outside town with Trumpeter Finch by the road, mixed in with some Short-toed Larks. Not far away there was a pair of Red-rumped Wheatears and a Fat Sand Rat which is the food of choice for Eagle Owl. After a short drive we de-bussed and fought to keep our feet as we walked up a wadi to find the Pharaoh Eagle Owl back in one of its favourite spots, sheltered from the wind. A long walk across the Tagdilt Track area produced Temminck's Lark, Desert Lark, Desert Wheatear and a displaying Hoopoe Lark. In addition we saw a few small groups of Black-bellied Sandgrouse plus four Crowned Sandgrouse, which included one male. A Long-legged Buzzard soared above us whilst larks and wheatears flitted amongst the stones and scrub. In the drive back to the road in the minibus three Cream-coloured Coursers were seen only 100m from joining the road. After lunch we went back to the hotel for a short break before following the river up the Dadès Gorge to a



Pharaoh Eagle Owl

café, where we stopped for a drink as the rain turned to snow. Once the sun started to peek through we drove further up the gorge before walking up a re-entrant a few metres to be surrounded by birds including lots of Black Redstarts, Black Wheatear, Moussier's Redstart and the target bird, a Tristram's Warbler. Everyone had excellent views of the male Warbler as it flitted amongst the rocks and vegetation as well as the only Rock Bunting of the trip. In the sky Crag Martins flew by and a pair of Bonelli's Eagles soared high above with the sun catching the

plumage. We then headed back to Boumalne for a walk along the river in the cultivated strip. This was warbler city with Melodious, Isabelline, Subalpine, Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, Sardinian, Willow and Western Bonelli's. Also seen were Nightingale, Pied Flycatcher, Common Redstart, Chaffinch (*africana*), Serin and African Blue Tit with its dark navy-blue cap. The light was starting to fade so ended a fantastic day of birding with the entire group having "lifers".

Day 5. We woke to a beautiful sunny day with not a cloud in the sky and only a gentle breeze. We carried on where we left off last night and checked out the green strip by the bridge. We added Sedge Warbler, Yellow Wagtail, Melodious Warbler and Tree Pipit to the list of small birds. Our next stop was back at Boumalne Dadès where the walk was pleasant

now that the wind had dropped. On the way we stopped for Thick-billed Lark and Bar-tailed Lark. At the wadi we soon found Tawny Pipits and Black Wheatears. At last we saw our target bird, Maghreb Wheatear on top of the rocky face but it quickly disappeared before everyone had a view. Everyone did see the female Maghreb Wheatear and it flew down to the valley floor and was pushed off its perch by a male Seebohm's Wheatear which was an unexpected sighting. On the way back we picked up a Hoopoe in a very scraggly bush, plus a second male Seebohm's. Our next birding stop was at Imidier a bit further down the road but still no male Maghreb Wheatear although good views of Trumpeter Finch, Desert Lark and Black Wheatear. A lunch break at Touroug provided excellent views of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater on the telegraph wires and the chance to listen to some popular Malian music. Our next stop was in the middle of the scrub desert near a water hole at Oued Gueris. In the area we found a flock of Short-toed Larks, Crested Larks (*riggenbachi*), Bar-tailed Larks and wheatears. Our target bird was took some getting to grips with but eventually we all saw Scrub Warbler. It was then on our way to our next stop via a coffee stop. On the way we picked up Common Swift, Barn Swallow and Ruddy Shelduck by some water as we crossed a river. On arrival at our next stop at Rissani, via a quick stop for a Roller, all we found were Woodchat Shrikes plus three Turtle Doves and a Southern Grey Shrike (*elegans*). It was then onto the hotel at Merzouga, which provided opportunities to see even more including Brown-necked Raven and Ortolan Bunting.



Scrub Warbler



Fulvous Babbler

Day 6. It is barren everywhere however the little bits of vegetation hold an abundance of birds. Before breakfast Ortolan Bunting and Western Orphean Warbler were in the bag. Later on during the morning the Western Orphean Warbler was seen even better. Our first stop was some fields near Begaa village, where an irrigation system had been installed (a concrete channel). This was very fruitful with a large flock of Crowned Sandgrouse, Spotted Flycatcher, Lanner Falcon, Southern Grey Shrike (*elegans*) and a Rufous Bush Robin all showing

well and close, never mind the birds we have become accustomed to such as Crested Lark, Seebohm's Wheatear, Eurasian Bee-eater, Yellow Wagtail (various subspecies) and

Woodchat Shrikes. We left the wadi and with the help of a local Berger nomad guide we were directed onto an Egyptian Nightjar disguised as a rock. We were able to get very close and besides opening an eye for a short period it never moved. We then headed into the sand dunes where there was vegetation of grass and other plants plus a few old trees in the dunes. During the drive we stopped for the missing bird of yesterday, a Fulvous Babbler that was by itself. In addition we were able to compare the size of a Western Orphean Warbler against a pair of Subalpine Warblers that were close by, plus Crested Lark (*randoni*). We then drove further into the sand dunes and our next bird was a male Desert Sparrow which looked like a



Greater Hoopoe Lark

mini shrike with its black features against a clean white cheek and front. Only a short drive away of 400m we stopped again, this time to look for Desert Warbler and found two, plus a displaying Greater Hoopoe Lark. Both desert specialities were in the bag and we had seen so many “lifers” that morning so next stop was a picnic lunch before visiting the Berber who showed us the nightjar. We gathered in the front room furnished with rugs and a satellite TV. We were treated to mint tea and peanuts. We also had the opportunity to buy some fossils such as shark’s teeth.

Anytime we were near a population, boys would gather behind us and lay out their wares of fossils that they had collected and buffed. It was back to the hotel for a break. Mid afternoon we headed to a natural shallow lake nearby Merzouga that was stuffed with birds including large flocks of Greater Flamingos, Marbled Duck, Common Pochard and Eurasian Coot whilst Black-winged Stilt and Ruddy Shelduck were seen in all directions. We added Wood Sandpiper, Marsh Harrier, Black Kite and Brown-necked Raven as well as Black Tern and Collared Pratincole. A Booted Eagle gave us a good close ID of its features when mobbed by a Brown-necked Raven showing both sides of it in flight. We drove to the other side of the lake where we identified Black Terns that could be seen as specks in the heat haze from our first location. Our final walk was along the irrigation ditch at Merzouga Oasis where a large range of warblers and other small birds were seen as well as a Cuckoo by two of the group.

Day 7. If we did not know what a desert looks like we now do. We first drove to a ringing station manned by Spaniards with nets around the trees by a dried pond. Here we saw Desert Olivaceous, Isabelline, Subalpine, Bonelli’s and Willow Warblers. We headed away from any buildings heading towards Algeria before a stop by some dunes to find two Desert Warblers. We then drove further into the desert across flat stony ground, through sandy wadis, over rock faces until we reached an oasis with some running water and a small pool below a cliff face. Even out here there was a family living complete with solar panels on their mud brick homes. In the oasis we saw Sedge and Reed Warbler. Swallows flew up and down the water and a White-crowned Wheatear circled us whilst a Brown-necked Raven flew by. There was also a Little Ringed Plover and White Wagtail. The stars were two Fulvous Babblers who appeared just as we had finished our picnic lunch. It was the same track back to the hotel though at one time all three 4x4 vehicles were line abreast over the flat stony desert. It was today that some of the team really had stomach issues and of course one vehicle got stuck in the sand at the bottom of a gully. Our final bird of the morning was a Greater Hoopoe Lark that put on some fine display flights. We drove back to Rissani in the

afternoon and picked up a local guide who took us to see two Barbary Falcons on a cliff face. They were Barbary Falcons despite not being perfect as the description in the book as the group tried to find reasons why they weren't! It was then over the escarpment to a natural bowl filled with grass tufts where there was a flock of over 70 tolerant Spotted Sandgrouse, so all had superb views with the light just right. We failed to see a Pharaoh Eagle Owl not too far away however a pair of Brown-necked Ravens were mobbing the hole in the cliff where the owl was supposed to be. No doubt it had retreated into the hole and was plotting revenge on the ravens. This was the end of our desert adventure with all the desert specialities seen and with good views. The sand glowed red as the sun set and we returned to the hotel ready to wash off the dust.

Day 8. After a right turn out of the hotel we stopped after 400m for a walk through Merzouga Oasis. This produced the normal warblers with some excellent views, so as to see the differences between Isabelline and Desert Olivaceous Warblers. There was also a Rufous Bush Robin and Wryneck. It was going to be a long drive that day and during the journey saw Black Kite and both bee-eaters in good numbers. Before lunch we stopped at Tinerhir (middle of nowhere by the road). Here we found a male Maghreb Wheatear that was canny enough to perch on a pylon so everyone could see its fine plumage and attracting all of the attention from its less showy mate. In addition there was a Trumpeter Finch and Desert Wheatear to provide a change of scenery. After lunch at Boumalne we headed west and picked up Little Owl sitting on a telegraph pole. Our final stop was at the lake at Ouarzazate.



Montagu's Harrier

This was the first time our group had approached from this direction as previously we had only stopped at a stream. It was a popular lake for shorebirds including Little Stint, Dunlin, Sanderling, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit and Collared Pratincole. There was Eurasian Coot, Shoveler, Mallard and Marbled Duck plus lots of Ruddy Shelduck and White Stork. The highlight were two hunting Montagu's Harrier. Later that

evening we returned to a place by the lake where an Egyptian Nightjar had been reported but were not able to find it, though four Montagu Harriers and more than two hundred White Storks came in to roost.

Day 9. This was another long drive over the Atlas Mountains. It started pleasantly enough as some sat out in the sun on the veranda looking at the garden with Bee-eaters swooping around and a Hoopoe nicely perched in a palm. We were soon on the road re-tracing our steps before a diversion to the World Heritage Site of Ait Benhaddou. Here we walked around the gardens by the river as locals worked their fields. There were lots of hirundines in the air with Barn Swallow, Red-rumped Swallow, House Martin and Sand Martin, as well as Pallid Swift and Common Swift. We also saw Common Redstart, Goldfinch, Tree Pipit,

Spotted Flycatcher and Thekla Lark plus our normal warblers. A Lanner Falcon flew above the old town and a White Stork stood in the river. Our next stop was over the 2,260 metre mountain pass at Tzi-n-Tichka for lunch. While it was being prepared we went for a walk to the gorge. Here there was Black-eared Wheatear, Black Wheatear and Northern Wheatear. Just as Rock Sparrow was called so was Barbary Partridge. We all had superb views of this lone bird sheltering by a large rock, possibly hiding from the dark morph Booted Eagle that passed overhead. On the way back to the minibus was loud simultaneous shout of, "Woodpecker". A male Levaillant's Green Woodpecker kindly flew to various bare trees so we could see it in its splendour. After lunch we tried to see it again but it remained hidden in the few fir trees though there was Red Crossbill, Chaffinch and African Blue Tit to see. It was then time to progress through the pass with more spectacular scenery and a pair of Short-toed Eagles putting on a good display, before arriving at a junction with a dirt road where we stopped to look for raptors. Raptors included Booted Eagle, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Long-legged Buzzard and Kestrel. We did see other birds including a distant Cuckoo and a variety of finches including Red Crossbill, whilst further down the hill there was a Cuckoo on the wire by the road. Our next stop was the hotel in Marrakech where Pallid Swifts dominated the sky from the relaxing viewpoint by the pool. A dip was required after 2 long days in the minibus.

Day 10. Our last day and we headed towards the High Atlas Mountains and were soon going uphill all the way to the ski resort of Oukaïmeden. Most of the snow had melted though there was still enough at the top as some people were taking their skis on the chair lift. Within 10 minutes we had seen Red-billed Chough, Alpine Chough, Rock Sparrow, Crimson-winged Finch, Seebohm's Wheatear and Moroccan Shore Lark. This was all by the lifts! We then went for a walk to some old buildings around the valley and saw more of the same plus a Mistle Thrush,

two Barbary Partridge and two Golden Eagles. Heading back to the minibus we saw even more larks, finches and sparrows. A drive up to the radio mast above the resort produced Moussier's Redstart and a Blue Rock Thrush that had caught a lizard and was bashing it against a rock. We went back to the resort for lunch before heading downhill where after a few minutes we stopped and walked down the road spotting Wren, Dipper, Red-rumped Swallow, Kestrel and a mixed flock of about one hundred choughs. We then went to Ourika valley nearby to search for more birds but the road was packed with cars with families enjoying a meal along the river bank provided by many of the stalls. We gave up with one location and drove to another which was away from the bustle and soon saw African Blue Tit, Great Tit (our last bird species on the list that everyone saw!), Nightingale, Little Swift



Barbary Partridge

and we all had excellent views of another male Levaillant's Green Woodpecker. This was a successful end to an excellent trip with a clean sweep of the birds on the list to see. It was now time for a swim and a beer but the hotel is dry!

List of species seen by day:

Species	Scientific Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			x			x				
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			x			x				
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		x								
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo maroccanus</i>	x	x								
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	x	x	x					x		
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	x									
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	x	x	x			x				x
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			x							
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	x	x	x	x	x			x		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		x	x	x		x		x	x	
Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>		x								
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	x									
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	x	x						x		
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	x					x				
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>		x	x		x	x	x	x		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	x							x		
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>								x		
Marbled Teal	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>	x					x		x		
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>						x				
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>						x				
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		x								
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	x		x							
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>						x		x	x	
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circus gallicus</i>		x							x	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus harterti</i>			x			x				
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>								x		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus punicus</i>									x	
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>									x	
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus cirtensis</i>			x	x		x	x	x	x	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos homeyeri</i>			x							x
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>			x	x					x	
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>						x			x	
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus erlangeri</i>						x			x	
Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus pelegrinoides</i>		x					x			
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus minor</i>		x						x		
Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara spatzi</i>		x							x	x

Species	Scientific Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	x									
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	x		x			x		x		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	x	x								
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	x	x	x			x		x		
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	x									
Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oediconemus saharae</i>	x	x								
Cream-colored Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>				x						
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>						x		x		
Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	x	x								
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	x	x				x		x		
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	x						x	x		
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	x					x		x		
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>								x		
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	x									
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	x	x								
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	x	x				x				
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	x	x				x	x			
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		x				x				
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>		x				x				
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos Hypoleucos</i>	x	x	x			x				
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	x	x						x		
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	x							x		
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>								x		
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	x							x		
Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>		x								
Western Yellow-legged	<i>Larus cachinnans michahellis</i>	x	x	x							
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus graellsii</i>	x	x								
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>		x								
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>	x	x				x				
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	x	x								
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>						x				
Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>							x			
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>				x						
Crowned Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>				x		x				
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	x	x	x						x	x
Eurasian Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>						x			x	
Pharaoh Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo ascalaphus</i>				x						
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua saharae</i>								x		

Species	Scientific Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>		x								
Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>						x				
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>					x			x	x	x
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	x	x	x					x	x	x
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	x	x								x
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	x		x							
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus chrysocercus</i>			x		x	x	x	x		
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>					x				x	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			x		x	x	x		x	
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>			x					x		
Levaillant's Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis vaillantii</i>									x	x
Bar-tailed Lark	<i>Ammomanes cincturus arenicolor</i>					x	x	x	x		
Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti payni</i>			x	x	x		x	x		
Greater Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>				x	x	x	x			
Thick-billed Lark	<i>Ramphocoris clotbey</i>			x		x					
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea rubiginosa</i>		x	x	x	x	x	X	x		
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata randonii</i>	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	
<i>Crested Lark</i>	<i>Galerida cristata riggenbachi</i>					x					
Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae aguirrei</i>	x		x					x	x	
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris atlas</i>										x
Temminck's Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris bilopha</i>			x	x	x					
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		x	x			x		x	x	
Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola mauretanica</i>	x									
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>				x					x	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica rufula</i>		x	x			x		x	x	x
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>		x	x	x				x	x	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		x		x	x		x		x	
<i>Moroccan Wagtail</i>	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>	x	x						x	x	
Blue-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	x	x			x	x		x	x	
<i>Spanish Yellow Wagtail</i>	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	x	x				x				x
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			x	x					x	x
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			x		x	x				
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		x		x	x	x			x	
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>										x
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>										x
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>										x
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>										x
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula mauretanica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>						x		h		

Species	Scientific Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus bonapartei</i>										x
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	x	x	x							
Streaked Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta saharae</i>					x					
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			h		h					h
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>					x		x			x
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	x						x	x		
Isabeline Warbler	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Desert Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida reisieri</i>			x			x	x	x		
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	x				x	x	x	x	x	x
Western Bonelli's	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		x	x	x					h	h
Greater Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				x	x	x	x	x		
African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>						x	x			
Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis hortensis</i>						x				
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	x	x	x	x		x			x	
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>		x			x					
Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola moroccana</i>				x						
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					x	x			x	
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca speculigera</i>				x	x	x		x	x	
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>				x	x	x		x	h	x
Rufous-tailed Scrub	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>						x	x	x		
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>				x					x	x
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>	x	x		x	x					x
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>			x				x			
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	x									
White-crowned Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga augra</i>			x		x	x	x	x	x	
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>		x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Seebohm's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>					x	x		x		x
Maghreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe halophila</i>					x			x		
Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>				x						
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti homochroa</i>				x	x	x	x	x		
Fulvous Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulvus moroccanus</i>						x	x			
Great Tit	<i>Parus major excelsus</i>			x						h	x
African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistess ultramarinus</i>				x	x				x	x
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis algeriensis</i>		x	x		x					x
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis elegans</i>						x	x	x		

Species	Scientific Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala cucullata</i>	x									
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica mauretanic</i>	x	x	x						x	
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax</i>										x
Yellow-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax graculus</i>										x
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>						x	x	x		
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i>		x						x	x	x
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	x	x	x						x	x
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus tingitanus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			x							
Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>						x				
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia barbara</i>									x	x
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>	x		x	x	x				x	x
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>									x	
European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	x	x	x						x	x
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	x		x	x					x	x
Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>									x	
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	x		h	x	x			x	x	x
Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea aliena</i>										x
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Rhodopechys githaginea zedlitz</i>				x	x			x		
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	x									
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia africana</i>				x						x
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>					x	x		x		
House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>									x	

ETHIOPIAN ENDEMIC 9th -22nd NOVEMBER 2012

(Keith Cherry)

Ethiopia had been on our to-do list for a number of years so it was decided that 2012 was to be the year to get it done. Unfortunately only six of our group would be able to take part so I contacted Naturetrek and asked that we be included on their scheduled November trip. Those in attendance would be John Tomkins, Richard Pople, Trevor Brownsell, Tony Hukin, Colin Alderman and me. Arrangements became slightly complicated when Naturetrek enquired if we would be interested in taking part in a five day southern extension to the main trip that would enable the group to maximise their chances of seeing more endemic birds. After some considerable thought only four of our group would be able to allow the time to do this. It transpired that there would be 13 people on the main tour, of whom 9 would be doing the extension.

Day 1: Friday 09th November. Overnight flight from Heathrow to Bole International Airport Addis Ababa.

Day 2: Saturday 10th November. After a trouble free flight and changing our money for Ethiopian Birr we were met at the airport by a representative of Ethiopian

Quadrants, the ground agents of Naturetrek and we started to assemble with the others. We soon joined up with Roger Halsey from Somerset, who proved to be a real authority on raptors, Graham Canny from Hertfordshire who is a very keen photographer and last but not least Matt Eade from East Sussex, a young and very sharp birder who seems to possess that special instinct that all the top birders have. What transpired next was very frustrating, a three hour wait for two more people, who we eventually found out would not be joining the tour.

Obviously we took the time to scan the area outside and soon saw our first birds of the trip including Pied Crow, Common Fiscal, Dusky Turtle Dove, Swainson's Sparrow, Tawny Eagle, Baglaffeht Weaver and the endemic White-collared Pigeon.



Wattled-Ibis © K. Cherry

We made our way to our transport and finally met up with our guide Elias Bayou and we all proceeded to the Ghion Hotel, our base for the first two days. After checking in we all went for a walk around the hotel grounds and were soon seeing birds including Tacazze Sunbird, Speckled Mousebird, Mountain White-eye, Brown-rumped Seed-eater, Ruppell's Robin-chat, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher and Rock Martin. With our packed lunches on board we then moved on to the Gafersa Reservoir, situated just outside Addis. Moving through Addis was not always easy as the chaotic and colourful congestion made it a slow progress. This proved to be a very good site which held all the expected wetland species including various waders and egrets as well as Yellow-billed Duck, White-breasted Cormorant, Three-banded Plover, Great White Pelican, Augur Buzzard, Pied and Red-breasted Wheatear and the endemic Wattled Ibis.

Moving on from there for lunch and a few road stops and walks produced good birds including African Citril, Brown-throated Martin, Ruppell's Vulture, Yellow-crowned Canary, Lanner Falcon, African Black Duck, Pin-tailed Whydah, Yellow Bishop, the stunning and scarce Half-collared Kingfisher and the endemic Ethiopian (Black-headed) Siskin. A tiring but great second day

Day 3: Sunday 11th November. Today our group was joined by Cliff Waller and Mike and Norma Jackson, a lovely retired couple from Sheffield. Cliff was to be our second guide, primarily for the southern extension and had just finished guiding the



Griffon Vulture & Verreaux's Eagle © M.Eade

previous weeks Naturetrek trip, of which Mike and Norma had been part. Our group was now complete.

The schedule today was to drive across the Sululta Plains to reach the Debre Libanos Gorge. After a 6am breakfast we set off. As we crossed the dry and arid grassland we stopped at a small marshy area which produced some great birds including Pallid Harrier, Black-headed Heron, Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Plover, Common Crane, Thekla Lark, Hamerkop, Red-rumped Swallow and a stunning endemic Erlanger's Lark.

Moving on, our next stop was at an area that was littered with Beehives. A troop of Gelada Baboon's approached the area from the right and a troop of Olive Baboon's came in from the left. The expected fracas for territory didn't materialise as the Olive Baboon's moved on through, so we concentrated on the birds again and they didn't disappoint with a Hemprich's Hornbill soon located along with a Stout Cisticola. A Griffon's Vulture flew by and was soon followed by a Ruppell's Griffon Vulture and a Black-breasted Snake Eagle put in a majestic appearance.

Before we could get our breath back the shout of "Lammergeier" went up! A stunning adult flew low from the left. The strong ray's from the sun lit up the bird and it made a fantastic sight. We all agreed that a better view would be hard to imagine. Roger was especially pleased as it had been his major target bird for the trip! Some of the group had fairly distant and unsatisfactory views of White-billed Starling. It was time to move on to the Debre Libanos Monastery. As we approached the Monastery a Ruppell's Black Chat was seen by all. The humidity was rising as we set off to walk the very rocky path that led through a small forest adjacent to the Monastery. A Variable Sunbird was soon followed by Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Brown Woodland Warbler, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Eastern Grey Woodpecker and everyone had great views of a solitary White-cheeked Turaco. We now had to move on to the Gorge where we would be having lunch in the German 'themed' restaurant, but a short stop on the way produced Streaky Seedeater, Brown Parisoma, Tawny-flanked Prinia and Red-billed Firefinch.



White-winged Cliff Chat © M. Eade

After a great lunch we set about scanning the gorge and very soon we all had much better views of White-billed Starling. A Lanner Falcon flew through but the star turn was provided by a Griffon Vulture and a Verreaux's Eagle vying for supremacy of the air. The confrontation lasted for quite some time as the Eagle seemed to be intruding on the Vulture's nesting area. A spectacular duel ensued but a truce seemed to be called and things settled down again. We all then walked to what is known locally as "Portuguese Bridge". Our sought after bird here was, among others, the White-winged Cliff Chat.

When we reached the area there seemed to be a steep descent to the bridge and beyond so only a few of us went in search of our prey. Eventually a Cliff Chat was located, sitting proud on top of a cactus. Some also managed to see a Mocking Cliff Chat and lots of Yellow-billed Kites flew just above our heads so the walk down certainly seemed worth the effort. It

transpired that people that had stayed at the top had also seen the White-winged Cliff Chat and had also located some, now long gone, Blue-breasted Bee-eaters. There is possibly a lesson to be learned there. It was time to return to Addis so we headed back across the plains. A short stop at the same wetland area again produced good birds including Three-banded Plover, Yellow-billed Duck, Green and Wood Sandpiper, Yellow (Black Headed) Wagtail, Red-throated Pipit and some endemic Blue-winged Geese.

Day 4: Monday 12th November.

Today was to be a long journey to Wondo Genet and by 7am we were on our way. Great birds were picked up as we went including Crested Eagle, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Wattled Starling, Superb Starling, Grey-backed Fiscal but none better than a party of the amazing Abyssinian Ground Hornbills as they walked through a nearby field. Richard set off in hot pursuit and managed to get close enough for this great shot!



Abyssinian Ground Hornbill © R. Pople

Our next stop was at Koka Bridge, a busy road bridge that seems to cut through Lake Koka. There were lots of birds to see here and our list was growing in no time at all. African Fish Eagle, Wire-tailed Swallow, Spur-winged Geese and Helmeted Guineafowl were soon followed by Reed Cormorant, Pink-backed Pelican, Kittlitz Plover, African Snipe, Goliath Heron, Chestnut Weaver and Matt managed to see Lesser-striped Swallow. We moved on from here to Lake Ziway Jetty where the birds were close and numerous. We had Maribou Storks and Sacred Ibis at almost arms length. Glossy Ibis,



Pygmy Kingfisher © M. Eade

Intermediate Egrets and Three-banded Plover shared the muddy areas with Temminck's Stint's and Marsh Sandpipers. It was hard to know where to look next as Pygmy Geese and a stunning Pygmy Kingfisher were added to our list. As we slowly walked along the now crowded jetty Black Crake, Mourning Dove, Woodland and Malachite Kingfisher's were admired as Ethiopian Swallows and the beautiful Northern Carmine Bee-eater's flew above our heads. A Basra Reed Warbler, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Grey-headed Gull, Brown-throated Martin and some stunning Blue-breasted Bee-eaters were the remaining highlights of this bird rich area. It was time for lunch

so we moved on to the Zwai restaurant. Even here the birds continued to come. Our lunch was constantly interrupted as a pair of Black-winged Lovebirds roosted in a tree in the

gardens, soon to be followed by an Eastern Grey-headed Woodpecker and a Speckled Mousebird. In the small park next to the car park Black-billed Wood Hoopoe, Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu and a Fork-tailed Drongo added to our indigestion. Richard saw a Spotted Creeper and a Common Redstart was seen as we boarded our coach.

Our next scheduled stop was at Abiata Nature Reserve where Somali and Common Ostrich are free to roam. As we walked through the dry Bush the flow of new birds continued, including, Red-billed Hornbill, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Rattling Cisticola, Hemprich's Hornbill, Boran Cisticola, Brubru and Red-faced Crombec. Grant's Gazelle were also very much in evidence. We walked to a known roost for a Barn Owl, but it was not there. Our guide Elias knew of another of its favourite haunts and sure enough it was flushed and seen by all. We walked on to an area of scrub which produced Black-headed Batis, Masked Shrike, Von der Decken's Hornbill, White-headed Buffalo Weaver and a Lappet-faced Vulture flew overhead. The last stop of the day was to be an area of high ground overlooking a gorge where we were to hoping to see Abyssinian Black Wheatear. We eventually tracked it down along with a White-winged Black Tit, Yellow-breasted Eremomela, Little Bee-eater and a Marico Sunbird zipped in and out of a nearby bush. That was to be the end of our day, so we set off for Wondo Genet, arriving after dark. We sorted out our rooms and reflected on what had been a fantastic day.

Day 5: Tuesday 13th November. Wondo Genet is a forest reserve that is unfortunately being deforested at an alarming rate. There is a daylong stream of women and children laden down under the weight of wood that they have stripped from the hillside. They then sell on this wood, which enables them to buy essential items such as soap and cooking oil. There seems little hope that things will change as the forest is most probably their only source of income.

A pre-breakfast walk produced an enviable list of birds! Silvery-cheeked Hornbills were quick to let their presence be known, soon to be followed by Abyssinian Woodpecker, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Bruce's Green Pigeon and Slender-billed Starling. As we passed the hot springs in which a number of locals were bathing, more birds showed well, including Lesser Honeyguide, Nubian Woodpecker, Variable Sunbird, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher and the endemic Yellow-fronted Parrot. As we reached the quarry at the end of the trail we were greeted by a Little Rock Thrush, Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, Tambourine Dove, Ruppell's Robin Chat, Mountain Wagtail and a Half-collared Kingfisher flew through giving brief views. The return walk added to the list with African Citril, Bronze Manakin, Northern Puffback, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, African Thrush, Double-toothed Barbet and an African Goshawk sat in a tree outside Chalet Number 1.



Vereaux's Eagle Owl © M Eade

After breakfast we took a short drive to the local School of Forestry. Fortunately this forest is private and protected and is full of mature trees. As we walked the trail, many new birds were

soon being seen including White-rumped Babbler, Abyssinian Ground Thrush, Olive Pigeon, Little Sparrowhawk, Thick-billed Raven, Green-backed Honeyguide, Banded Barbet and a perched Narina Trogon was a nice find. The highlight was provided by a known site for Verreaux's Eagle Owl. One bird was present when we arrived at the site, but was soon joined by a second which had a squirrel in its beak. The forest is a very good site for both birds and butterflies. The afternoon was taken up with a long and tiring uphill walk that led to a view of a Crowned Eagle nest. Only a few new birds were added, of which Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Red-winged Starling and Lemon Dove were the pick.

Day 6: Wednesday 14th November Today was to be a long drive to Goba and the Bale Mountains National Park. We had not been long into the journey when we happened upon a scene of 'cattle carnage'. A local bus had collided with a herd of cattle and at least seven cows littered the roadside. They were in various stages of decomposition with dogs feasting on them and a large group of Vultures waiting their turn. Moving on, Dwarf Raven, Black-winged Plover, Black-headed Heron, Somali Crow and two Lanner Falcons were all seen well. We stopped at a small quarry which is known to hold a pair of Cape Eagle Owls. With the help of some local children the Owls were finally tracked down. Other birds that had been seen were, among others, Blue Rock Thrush, Hill Chat, Thekla Lark and Steppe Eagle. With the Owls seen we moved on and a further short stop produced Red-knobbed Coot, Augur Buzzard and our first sighting of the endemic Rouget's Rail.



Abyssinian Catbird © M. Eade

Our next stop was at the Dinsho Park Headquarters, where we picked up a couple of local



Abyssinian Longclaw © M. Eade

guides who hopefully would show us two sought after Owls. We did not need to walk too far when we were looking at first a roosting Abyssinian Owl and then an African Wood Owl. Both were great birds to add to our ever-growing list. Other birds seen in the area included Northern Puffback, Thick-billed Raven, Ethiopian Boubou, Common Waxbill, Abyssinian Ground Thrush and the endemic Abyssinian Catbird. We drove on from here and stopped at a large open area of Grassland, where we hoped to see the endemic Abyssinian Longclaw. In what seemed a remarkably short time one was seen and we all feasted on what can be a notoriously difficult bird to locate. Other birds seen here were an Ethiopian Cisticola, African Stonechat, Yellow Bishop and a Black-winged Kite. We loaded up and

headed off for the Bale Mountain's National Park and the Goba Wabishebel Hotel in very high spirits.

Day 7: Thursday 15th November. As we headed towards the high altitude Sanetti Plateau, it was not long before we came across a couple of Chestnut-naped Francolin, soon to be followed by some endemic Rougets Rails. An Abyssinian Hare was seen and then a few pairs of Moorland Francolin were very obliging and seen by everyone. It was not long before the roadside pools produced more endemic birds such as Blue-winged Geese and Spot-breasted Lapwing. Matt was delighted to see the Lapwing as he had these down as his "must see" birds. New birds continued in the shape of Ruddy Shelduck, Red-billed Chough, Mountain Buzzard and a large flock of the endemic Black-headed Siskins whirled around us in frenzied activity. A pair of Wattled Cranes was seen on a distant pool which pleased everyone but that feeling was soon overtaken when an Ethiopian Wolf was spotted hunting. This mammal had been on everyone's wanted list so the excitement was rising. Unfortunately the activities had been so "full-on" that it had gone unnoticed that Graham was suffering with a double dose of Altitude sickness and stomach trouble. He was reduced to lying on the back seat of the coach



Rouget's Rail © M. Eade

It is well to remember that the High Plateau is over 14,000 ft at the highest point and any movement should be at a measured pace. Norma was also suffering a bit so Cliff decided to carry on over the Plateau to the lower elevation on the other side, which should help Graham recover.



Spot-breasted Lapwing © M. Eade

Several other mammals had been seen, namely Giant Mole Rat, Unstriped Grass Rat and Mountain Nyala which is found nowhere else in the world and the National Park was established for their protection. As we began the descent, new birds were still being seen, including Lesser-spotted Eagle and the stunning Black Sparrowhawk. We stopped beside a wooded area to try and find the Brown Parisoma as the Bale Mountains race is sometimes considered a separate species. It was not long before one was tracked down. Other birds seen here were Eastern Grey-headed Woodpecker and the White-backed Black Tit which is found at higher elevations.

It was time for lunch, but the coach carried on down with Graham to give him as much time as possible at a lower altitude. Birds seen during and after lunch were Moorland Chat, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler and Tawny-flanked Prinia. Things had gone quiet so when the coach returned with a brighter looking Graham we set off to return to Goba. Golden, Tawny and Steppe Eagles were seen as we crossed the Plateau but the highlight was an Ethiopian Wolf that circled the coach while hunting, which enabled Matt to get this great photograph, before it ran off. It seemed to be the perfect time to finish as not long after the rain set in and stayed with us for most of the return journey.

Day 8: Friday 16th

November. Today is the day when the group splits up. Richard, Graham, Colin and a now, fully recovered Graham are to proceed to Awassa for a day and then back to Addis, while the rest of us, namely Matt, Mike, Norma, Trevor, John,

Tony and me would proceed to Negelle, to start the southern extension. With the arrival of three 4x4 vehicles from Ethiopian Quadrants, we said our goodbyes, loaded up, and headed off. For today Trevor and I would be in the first vehicle with the driver and our new local guide, Girum Tewlde.



Ethiopian Wolf © M. Eade



Red-and-yellow Barbet © K. Cherry

We would be heading back across the Sanetti Plateau and then a long drive on dirt roads would be in front of us. As we started to ascend towards the Plateau, Girum stopped the vehicle as an endemic Salvadori's Seedeater flew alongside. By the time the other vehicles had arrived, it had gone which is the problem with being split up.

The expected birds that we had seen yesterday were still in evidence, but as a mist started to descend we came upon two Wattled Cranes that were very close to the road. Unfortunately

the mist was falling very quickly so they were not in view for long. We moved on and the rain began to fall and stayed with us as we left the Plateau and drove through the Hareenna Forest.

Today was a long, but species rich day. Our first available stop produced Long-crested Eagle, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Black-winged Lovebird, Lesser Blue-eared Starling and Shelley's Starling. With a ten hour journey ahead of us we had to keep pushing on. A short leg stretch was soon providing new species, such as, Short-winged Cisticola, White-headed Buffalo Weaver, Ring-necked Dove, Lesser Masked Weaver, Emerald-spotted Dove, the beautiful Golden-breasted Starling and some saw Violet-backed Starling. A little further on, we stopped to see the stunning Red-and-yellow Barbet sitting out boldly on a termite mound. Further on, a small marshy area held Green Sandpiper, Sand and House Martin, African Grey Flycatcher and African Grey Hornbill.

The main species we would be looking for during our lunch stop was the much sought after endemic and enigmatic Prince Ruspoli's Turaco. A Black-headed Oriole and Red-billed Oxpecker were quickly located but it took a lot of help from some local children to track down our target bird. It was playing hard to see in the top of tall tree but we all eventually had good views. We made our way back to the road and it came as no surprise to me to find that Matt had found his own bird, which was a lot easier to see and several photographs were taken. It proved to be a fantastic bird and as it had been one of the main target birds on trip, it was a great relief that it had been relatively easy to locate and enjoy.



Prince Ruspoli's Turaco © M. Eade

As we pressed on any stop proved to be a bird rich area. Purple Roller, Rufous Chatterer, Cardinal Woodpecker, Northern White-crowned Shrike were soon followed by a Black-

bellied Sunbird, that settled briefly before a male Red-headed Weaver stole his perch.



Black-billed Barbet © K. Cherry

Every stop proved to be easy birding as White-crested Helmet Shrike's and White-rumped Babbler's flew through where we were standing. A Dodson's Bulbul a sub-species of the Common Bulbul was identified, an African Thrush put in an appearance and a perched Brown Snake Eagle took everyone's attention. Tempus fugit, as they say, so we had

to push on to Negelle. Our last leg stretch again proved to be full of birds, the highlights included Yellow-throated Petronia, Reichenow's Seedeater, Northern Black Flycatcher, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Black-headed Bati. They were soon followed by African Paradise Flycatcher, Black-billed Barbet and a Grey-headed Kingfisher that was seen to be continually flying from its perch into a remarkably shallow puddle. The last bird of the day proved to be Crested Francolin. We arrived at the Noc (New) Hotel in Negelle after dark and



Sidamo Lark © M.Eade

settled in to our rooms which were by far the most comfortable of the trip so far. After cleaning up we took to the vehicles once again for a short drive into the town for a meal at the Nile Hotel Restaurant.

Day 9. Saturday 17th November. After breakfast at the Nile Restaurant we set off for the Liben Plains. The important bird to see here is, not surprisingly, the Sidamo Lark. This bird is critically endangered with only an estimated 200 pairs left. As we arrived at the area of plain that we would be searching, the feeling was that the area of grassland was so large that finding the Lark was going to be very difficult. We fanned out into a long line and walked forward hoping to flush out our quarry. A Somali Short-toed Lark was the first bird that we disturbed and then a Pectoral-patch Cisticola took to the air. Ethiopian and Barn

Swallow's flew low over the grass. A Sidamo Lark was eventually located and we keenly followed it as it flitted around. We were all delighted to have found and seen the bird, considering the size of the area we were searching. A single Peregrine Falcon flew over and a flock of about 50 White Storks spiralled on thermals in the distance while some managed to see a Juba Weaver.

We returned to the vehicles and drove on in the same direction. A small group of Temminck's Coursers brought things to a sudden halt. As usual new areas produced new birds, of which White-crowned Starling, Abyssinian Roller, Lilac-breasted Roller, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Crowned Plover, Yellow-breasted Apalis and Slate-coloured Boubou were the pick. We were to return to the Nile Restaurant for lunch and a Western Steppe Buzzard was seen as we waited for the vehicles to return to the hotel.



Temminck's Courser © K. Cherry

This afternoon was to be similar to this morning, searching an area of Acacia Plain for any Bustards or Coursers that we could locate in the area. On the way we were extremely lucky to see a Caracal, also known as the

Desert Lynx, which is a wild cat that is widely distributed across Africa. Having said that we were extremely lucky to have seen it! We duly arrived at a large expanse of plain that held scattered Whistling Acacia, so called because of the sound made when the wind blows through them. As we started off we were rewarded with views of Grey-capped Social Weaver



Eastern Chanting Goshawk © K. Cherry

and Red-billed Buffalo Weaver. Again we spread ourselves out into a long line and walked the Plain. Despite a long hot search in the sun, there was nothing found apart from Plain-backed Pipits and numerous Isabelline Wheatears, until a Gabar Goshawk was eventually sighted and by following it to where it had landed, it led us to a small river that held Red-billed Teal and a Grey Kestrel was also seen. Birds seen on the trip back to the hotel included Lesser Kestrel, a stunning Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Greenshank and a nice party of Yellow-necked Spurfowl.

Day 10: Sunday 18th November. Today was again going to be a fairly relentless 350 km drive to Yabello. The only comfort came in the knowledge that wherever we stopped we were virtually guaranteed new and exciting birds.

Almost as soon as we set off we all stopped to look at a pair of very impressive Bristle-crowned Starlings. Good birds to see. As we drove on one or two stops added great birds to our ever growing lists, including Wattled Starling, Lilac- Breasted Roller, Abyssinian Roller, White-bellied Go-away-bird, Striped Kingfisher, Little Bee-eater, Pygmy Falcon, Purple Roller and more Golden- breasted Starling. Some saw an Amur Falcon and we all saw our first Buff-crested Bustard. We also made a short stop at a village which is known to have a small population of the near endemic White-winged Dove. It seemed no time at all when one was seen sitting on a telegraph pole and good views were had by all. Just as we were leaving an Egyptian Vulture flew into view, circled the village before flying away into the distance. A short stop by a small bridge was rewarded with views of White-browed Scrub Robin and Golden-breasted (Somali) Bunting.

Our lunch was to be taken alongside the Dewa River. We then walked through an area of Acacia Scrub which produced some great birds including Violet-backed Sunbird, Northern Grey Tit, Grey Wren- Warbler, Black-throated Barbet, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Juba Weaver, Yellow-spotted Petronia and the amazing looking Abyssinian Scimitarbill. As usual, there was no time to spare so we pushed on, but typically it was not long before we had to stop to see the first of two large flocks of the beautiful Vulturine Guinea fowl;



Abyssinian Scimitarbill © M. Eade

fantastic birds! Unfortunately they were not going to hang around so no photographs were good enough to be included. A Black (Great) Sparrowhawk and Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill were seen as we continued what seemed to be a never ending drive. After quite some time a welcome break added Taita Fiscal, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike and a Chestnut Weaver was clawed back by those that had missed it before and some Somali Courser's were seen soon after our restart. With our legs crying out for some exercise we eventually made a welcome stop which proved to be very productive with Black-capped Social Weaver, Shelley's Rufous Sparrow being seen and a Bateleur Eagle cruised through. As that disappeared into the distance an endemic White-tailed Swallow flew around, above our heads until it too went out of sight.



Stresemann's Bush-crow © M. Eade

Our final stop of the day, just outside Yabello, brought a long day to a satisfying end. A small pool held some Egyptian Geese and a Wood Sandpiper. A Lark was seen and a patient search proved worthwhile when a Gillett's Lark was seen well. As we wandered about on our still stiff legs a flock of about eight Blue-naped Mousebirds landed in a bush just ahead of us, but obviously not liking our presence, took off almost immediately. They were soon replaced by a pair of Magpie Starlings and a Long-billed Pipit brought our day to a close. We travelled the last few miles and

settled into the Yabello Mobile Hotel.

Day 11: Monday 19th November. Today we would be looking for the main endemic bird of the area, namely the Stresemann's Bush-crow. This bird is confined to this relatively small area of Ethiopia. It has always puzzled naturalists as to why this highly adaptable bird has not spread out over a much larger area of Ethiopia. The reason has finally and only recently been discovered. It seems that the Bush-crow exists within a micro-climate or "climate bubble", wherein the temperature never rises above 20° centigrade.

We drove out for a short while and a Tawny Eagle sitting in the top of a tree took our attention. As we observed the eagle some smaller birds appeared below it which we soon realised were Bush-crows. We approached the tree with caution, but it was soon clear that they had no intention of going far so we had ample time to see and photograph



Red-collared Widowbird © K. Cherry

them. After some time our attention was drawn to movement on our left and we all saw an Aardwolf as it ran through the bush. A relative of the Hyena and its food source are Termites, like the Aardvark. That excitement over, it was time to move on.

Our next stop was to be an interesting one. We were led by a young man, to his village in the bush where, in one of the native huts a White-tailed Swallow had made its nest. It had indeed built its nest 'inside' the hut on a roof support. A White-tailed Swallow was flying around outside so we moved on in case we were disturbing it. Other birds seen in and around the village were Black-shouldered Kite, Yellow-fronted Canary, Chestnut Sparrow, Black-chested Snake Eagle and some saw a Vitelline Masked Weaver.

It was decided that we would return for lunch and then go out later than usual and stay out until after dark and do a night ride. We set off and saw Northern White-crowned Shrike, Pygmy Falcon and Orange-bellied Parrot on the way to a large area of mixed scrubland. This held some excellent birds including Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike, Beautiful Sunbird, Slate-coloured Boubou, Rufous Chatterer, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-headed Batis, Banded Parus, a white morph African Paradise Flycatcher, Buff-breasted Warbler and a pair of d'Arnaud's Barbet. A further road stop came up with White-crowned Starling, White-bellied Canary and a pair of Purple Grenadier which pleased me, especially as it was one bird that I had hoped to see.



Blue-breasted Bee-eater © M. Eade

As the light began to fade we set about walking across an area of open scrub and grassland. There was quite a large population of Crowned Plover here who showed their displeasure at our presence with noisy alarm calls. Things were fairly quiet but a Somali Fiscal and Tiny Cisticola livened things up for a while. We then flushed a Francolin sized bird and after a determined search, it was located and identified as a Couqi Francolin. The light was fading fast so we returned to the vehicles and started to patrol the roads and tracks. Cliff used his powerful torch but only a roadside Greyish Eagle Owl and three Bush Babies were seen. Another long but rewarding day!

Day 12: Tuesday 20th November. Today we were to return to the original itinerary and make our way to Lake Awassa. This would mean that the inevitable day long journey was in front of us. Cliff was hoping to get to our destination in

good time, which would enable us to see some of the area before dark. In other words we would be making very few stops on the way!

More Stresemann's Bush-crows were seen as we travelled out of the area. The one meaningful stop that we did make was worth the wait. On the edge of a small village there was an area of marshy grassland. We saw Hadada Ibis, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill's, Baglaffeht's Weaver, Black-and White Mannakin, Bronze Mannakin, African Citril Yellow Bishop and a very obliging Red-collared Widowbird sat out nicely for us. We had to push on and we got to Lake Awassa while there was still enough daylight left to have a look around.

We dumped our gear in the comfortable chalets of Awassa Hotel and reassembled outside. We were greeted by a Woodland Kingfisher as we set off. Silvery-cheeked Hornbill's and Maribou Storks were flying in to the surrounding treetops to roost. Cliff suggested we got



Goliath Heron © K.Cherry

into the transport and we went down to a lakeside area near to the Fish Market. The only new bird seen here was a Black Heron. We returned to the hotel grounds and were soon amongst new and some now familiar birds, including Red-throated Wryneck, Cut-throat Finch, Black Crake, Pygmy Goose, African Reed Warbler, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Blue-headed Coucal, Blue-breasted Bee-eater and numerous Malachite Kingfishers. The light finally gave up and we were all looking forward to a restful evening.

Day 13: Wednesday 21st November.

Our final day started with a short stop on the lakeside and we were greeted by an extremely close Goliath Heron in all its glory. It fished directly in front of us seemingly oblivious to our presence. There was a lot of activity going on around it as Pied and Malachite Kingfishers were actively feeding. A Lesser Swamp Warbler played hard to get until everyone had seen it well. White-winged Black Tern, Little Stint and a Grey-headed Gull were the last birds to be seen before we set off for our last long distance drive to Addis Ababa. We made a short visit to Lake Abiata to see the fairly distant Lesser and Greater Flamingos as well as the numerous Common Cranes that inhabited the vast grassland. We continued to travel up the Rift Valley and called in to Lake Langano. We

headed for an area, where an old hotel was being renovated known as Bekele Molla. Red-billed Buffalo Weavers were soon followed by White-browed Sparrow Weavers, Ruppell's Starling, Buff-bellied Warbler and Rufous Chatterer. After a short pause another wave of activity produced Village Indigobird, Red-Cheeked Cordon-bleu, Red-faced Crombec, Black-billed Barbet and Little Rock Thrush. A Mocking Cliff Chat showed well which pleased those that had



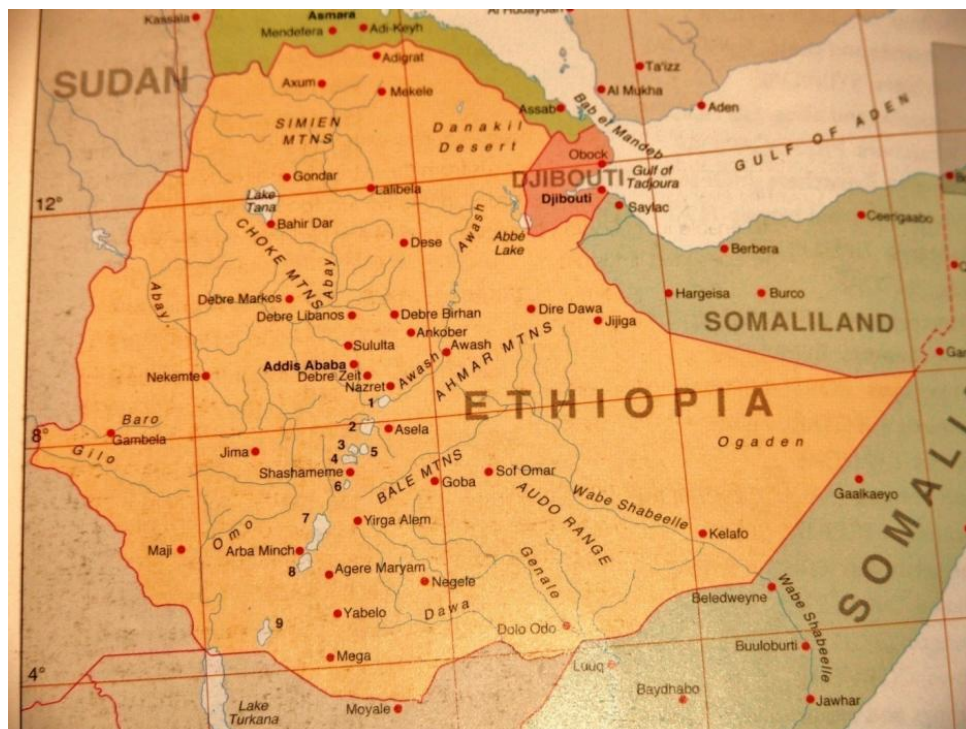
Slender-tailed Nightjar © K.Cherry

missed it earlier in the trip and a Red-fronted Barbet was our last addition to our Barbet tally. What a fabulous family of birds they are!

We now headed for the restaurant that sits on the edge of the lake. We were met by a local guide that proceeded to show us a Slender-tailed Nightjar on the ground and then a roosting Greyish Eagle-Owl, which was a nice way to end the morning. We retired to the restaurant for a nice lunch and to rest before the last leg of our journey. We set off and the journey was fairly uneventful until we made our final stop at Koka Bridge once again, where we saw Whiskered Tern, African Fish Eagle, Yellow-billed Stork, a beautiful Black-crowned Crane and a White-rumped Swift was the last new addition to our considerable list of birds. We arrived safely at the Ghion Hotel and enjoyed an evening of relaxation and reflection. We flew out from Addis Ababa the next morning and after a decidedly dodgy landing, due to high winds, arrived safely at Heathrow.



North Herts Birders at Debre Libanos Gorge



TRIP TO HWANGE NATIONAL PARK – FEBRUARY 2013

(Anne Nason)

Our second safari on our 2013 visit to Zimbabwe was to Hwange National Park which proved to be a brilliant birding destination. It is situated in Matabeleland, close to the border with Botswana, on the edge of the Kalahari. We stayed at The Hide, a private concession just outside the south-eastern boundary of the park where the vegetation is acacia woodland with grassy vleis. We drove into the park every day but the land around the camp was also excellent for birds and animals as there are no fences in between. At this time of the year, nearing the end of the wet season, the area is green with tall grasses and many temporary waterholes, but in the winter months the park is arid and of course the game is then concentrated around the larger waterholes. However, for birders this is a good time to visit as the migrants are still present.

It was a long journey from Harare but in a Landcruiser it was fairly comfortable. We set off at 5.20am with our daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter and as we had been advised to take the short cut from Kweke to Lupane instead of going via Bulawayo, we took the A5 out of Harare. We were in Kweke by 8am and stopped for a coffee before taking the short cut via Silobela which was about 250km, supposedly cutting off 2 hours from the journey via Bulawayo. The road condition was a bit of a gamble but there was only one bad patch of about 20kms, while the rest varied between a graded dirt track and tarmac. We were informed by mobile phone en route that the Gwaii road had been washed away so we must enter by the Hwange Main Gate which added another 80km to the journey. At Lupane we joined the main Bulawayo – Victoria Falls road. We arrived at the park gate at about 12.15 and drove for what seemed miles through the park, but as the map was very inaccurate, we spent another 40 minutes on the wrong road. We finally made The Hide about 2.30 after an 8 hour drive, with much relief all round. The camp is located about 20 minutes outside the park

and there were very few signs but at least we saw a group of Ground Hornbills on our detour and thankfully disappointed the vultures! Most people are transferred from the main gate by safari vehicle, but in a Landcruiser it is possible to drive all the way.

Apart from the woeful lack of signage, The Hide is a very well-run and comfortable camp and after a quick lunch we went out with Daffy, our black Zimbabwean guide, who was absolutely excellent in

spotting birds and knew all the calls. For the next 2 days we drove round with Daffy, who had a great sense of humour. The birdlife was exceptional and as the park and the concession receive many visitors, the birds are used to vehicles and perch on



Rufous-naped Lark



Southern Carmine Bee-eater

the dead leadwood trees (elephant damage) in the most obliging way. On one occasion we drove within 4 metres of a Southern Carmine Bee-eater and a Rufous-naped Lark, perched within a metre of one another, and the lark kept singing his three-syllabic song quite unperturbed by the proximity of the safari vehicle. The bee-eater just posed! Later that day we watched a Lilac-breasted Roller trying fruitlessly to swallow a large frog, which was much too big for it. Eventually he flew off and when we passed him a few minutes later the frog was gone. European Rollers and Bee-eaters were still around, along with the other migrants, Barn Swallows and Spotted Flycatchers. The common resident flycatcher was the Marico. One of the best photo opportunities was the African Crane that Daffy spotted on the road in front of us, as these birds are notoriously difficult to see. Crimson-breasted Shrikes were relatively common although mostly skulking in bushes, but Red-backed Shrikes sat out on obvious perches. Magpie Shrikes with their long wispy tails were very visible, and also the White-crowned Shrike and the White-headed Helmet Shrike. All three species of these shrikes fly around in small parties, as does the Pied Babbler. The common starling was the Cape Glossy.

On the first evening we enjoyed a sundowner with the most sensational sunset before us. The effect was heightened when a Secretary Bird flew onto the top of a tree and was



Lilac Breasted Roller with frog



Shaft-tailed Whydah

silhouetted against the sunset with open wings, while nearby we watched a Kori Bustard stalking past. We were surprised not to see more raptors, but presumably they are more plentiful in the dry season when they breed. We saw Bateleur, Tawny Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Yellow-billed Kite, Black-shouldered Kite, Shikra, and African Harrier Hawk. The White-backed Vulture was the only vulture seen and a Pearl-spotted Owl the only owl, although we were told that a Barred Owl lived round the camp.

Waterbirds were reasonably plentiful although we were very surprised not to see any egrets at all. Grey Heron and Black-headed Heron were the only Herons, and storks were represented solely by the Saddle-billed. Red-billed Teal and White-faced Duck were frequently seen and the Wood Sandpiper was the most abundant wader. At one waterhole a Little Grebe was spotted with a chick on its back. Blacksmith Lapwing are common around many of the waterholes. Other birds of interest included the Rattling Cisticola which seemed to be calling from every bush, African Oriole, three varieties of Hornbill – Southern Yellow-billed, Grey and Bradfield's Hornbill – Red-crested Korhaan, Meyer's Parrot, Shaft-tailed Whydah and the Violet-eared Waxbill. The list for Hwange is about 400 species but taking photographs takes time and we only saw about 100 species.

On our second night we went out for a night drive and saw some interesting game including a small herd of elephants, jackal, various types of antelope and a spring hare. The latter was hopping along like a small kangaroo with its bushy tail stretched out behind it. The only birdlife we spotted were nightjars flying in the beam of the torch, which were most probably Fiery-necked.

On our last evening Daffy had heard of the presence of a large herd of elephants and a pride of lions, so we first went to watch the herd come down to a waterhole for their evening drink. There were a number of calves amongst the herd, some just a few weeks old. Other animals



Swainson's Spurfowl

around were giraffe (covered in both Red and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers) Waterbuck, Impala, Kudu and Warthog. We then drove some distance to see the pride of lions which were lying around a waterhole. There were nine of them, all lionesses or sub-adult males with one half-grown cub. We enjoyed our sundowners watching the lions, but were not allowed to dismount from the vehicle!

The next morning we only had two hours birding, from 6.30 to 8.30, as we were leaving at 9.30. The morning light was brilliant with no clouds in the sky and all the spurfowl were sitting up on dead trees. Ian photographed Red-billed and Swainson's Spurfowl illuminated by the sun. We then spotted a pair of Striped Kingfishers at the top of another dead, tree and a

Tawny Eagle before setting off for our journey home. The Gwai road had been repaired so we were able to take the shorter route beside the railway line. Bizarrely, we had sometimes been woken by a train passing at 4.am! The camp is tucked away miles from civilisation, but the railway line goes through the National Park. The Hide is hoping to have a dedicated train to run guests from Victoria Falls, and will stop only a couple of miles from the camp but this is still in the planning stage.

Our journey to Gwai River was relatively straightforward and the repaired road rough but passable in a 4x4. We then arrived at the main road and travelled via Bulawayo but as the road was being repaired, the one-way traffic slowed us down. The traffic police have recently been issued with radar guns but our son-in-law is a genius at chatting them up, so we paid no fines! We stopped overnight at Antelope Park, just before Gweru, to break the journey for the night, which would have taken 8 hours if we had done it in one go. The next morning was only a three hour hop back to Harare.



Red-billed Spurfowl

It was a most successful trip and Hwange National Park is highly recommended to anyone interested in African birds. The Hide is an excellent safari camp but there are cheaper options. Zimbabwe is changing rapidly, although elections are due this year, so there is some uncertainty, but we travelled by road over a great deal of Zimbabwe and were treated with great courtesy by everyone we met.

List of species seen:

Little Grebe	Grey Heron
Black-headed Heron	Saddle-billed Stork
Hamerkop	Spur-winged Goose
Egyptian Goose	Comb Duck
White-faced Duck	Red-billed Teal
White-backed Vulture	Bateleur
Black-chested Snake Eagle	Tawny Eagle
African Harrier-Hawk	Yellow-billed Kite
Black-shouldered Kite	Little-banded Goshawk (Shikra)
Red-billed Spurfowl (Francolin)	Swainson's Spurfowl
Helmeted Guineafowl	African Jacana
African Crake	Secretary Bird
Kori Bustard	Red-crested Korhaan
Black-winged Stilt	Blacksmith Lapwing (plover)
Wood Sandpiper	Common Sandpiper
Red-eyed Dove	Cape Turtle-dove
Laughing Dove	Emerald Spotted Wood-dove
Meyer's Parrot	Grey Go-away Bird (Lourie)
Leviellant's Cuckoo	Diderick Cuckoo
Pearl-spotted Owl	African Palm Swift
Striped Kingfisher	European Bee-eater
Sothorn Carmine Bee-eater	Little Bee-eater
Lilac-breasted Roller	European Roller
Purple Roller	Broad-billed Roller
Ground Hornbill	Bradfield's Hornbill
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	Green Wood-hoopoe
Lesser Honeyguide	Crested Barbet
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	Bearded Woodpecker
Rufous-naped Lark	Red-breasted Swallow
Barn Swallow	Fork-tailed Drongo
African Golden Oriole	Southern Black Tit
Arrow-marked Babbler	Southern Pied Babbler
Dark-capped Bulbul	Yellow-bellied Bulbul
Groundscraper Thrush	Bearded Scrub-Robin
Grey-backed Cameroptera	Long-billed Crombec
ZittingCisticola	Rattling Cisticola
Leviellant's Cisticola	Tawny-flanked Prinia
Spotted Flycatcher	Marico Flycatcher
Southern Black Flycatcher	Chinspot Batis
African Pipit	Crimson-breasted Shrike
Magpie Shrike	Red-backed Shrike
Black-crowned Tchagra	Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike

White-crested Helmet-Shrike	Southern White-crowned Shrike
Brubru (heard)	Black-backed Puffback
Cape Glossy Starling	Red-winged Starling
Wattled Starling	Red-billed Oxpecker
Yellow-billed Oxpecker	White-bellied Sunbird
Marico Sunbird	Red-billed Buffalo-weaver
White-browed Sparrow-weaver	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow
Red-billed Quelea	Shaft-tailed Whydah
Violet-eared Waxbill	Black-eared Waxbill
Scaly-feathered Finch	

Trip to Zimbabwe – February 2013

Changa Camp, Lake Kariba

(Anne Nason)

After an absence of two years from the African Continent, Ian and I were delighted to be back on African soil once more, arriving in Zimbabwe via Johannesburg on the 31st January. Basing ourselves with our daughter and son-in-law in Harare, we arranged two birding safaris during our visit. The first was to a brand new Safari Lodge on the shores of Lake Kariba. Opened in September 2012, and at present catering for only 8 guests at a time, we were very fortunate to find ourselves the only guests, along with our very experienced guide, John Stevens. These lodges are often underused in the wet season, but for birders it is a time that palaeartic migrants are still about.

On the 5th February we left Harare at 6am for the five hour drive with a hired car and driver. Much of the route to Kariba, through Karoi and Chinoyi, has a great deal of heavy traffic as it is the main trucking route to Zambia, but our driver, Bruce, who had lost his farm, was a good raconteur and he and John made it interesting by pointing out things of note en route. From the turn-off to Kariba the road wound its way peacefully through the Matusadona National Park to Carribea Harbour which was lined with large houseboats, but we were quickly transferred to a motor boat for the 45 minute journey across the lake. Luckily the lake was calm as on occasions it is too rough for the motorboat. En route we spotted White-winged Terns, some of which were perched on small clumps of water hyacinth only about 50 cm across. Nowhere did we see large areas of water hyacinth, so it was surprising to see an occasional small clump floating on the water.

Changa Camp is on the mainland, inaccessible by road, but still within the huge Matusadona National Park. Spurwing Island is nearby and also has a safari lodge, but Changa is the only camp on that part of the mainland. As we arrived, the call of a Fish Eagle welcomed us to the camp. Two young white Zimbabweans, Steve and Jo, run the camp with a very efficient black staff. Steve was at Peterhouse School in Zimbabwe with our two older grandsons so we immediately had things in common. The large tents (with solid foundations) were very comfortable but blend into the background like all well-run wilderness camps. The main tent had the most beautiful view over the lake with vantage points for Fish Eagles and Reed Cormorants on the dead trees dotting the shallows of the lake.

Changa is on a flat peninsula with extensive lake shorelines covered with short panicum grass and the vegetation inland is savanna scrub with combretum and mopane trees. Looking across the lake towards the Matusadona range there is a magnificent view with the mountains as a backdrop.

Around the shoreline there are numerous waterbirds and waders including flocks of Woolly-necked Storks which are normally seen in ones and twos, but one flock of about 50 birds was sighted. Egrets are represented by four species, including the Black Egret which shades the water with its open wings to entice small fish into its reach. Wood Sandpipers were the most prevalent small wader. A pair of White Crowned Lapwing was obviously nesting on the small beach below the camp as they defended their territory vigorously if we wandered down to the shoreline. These lapwings are always associated with water, so it is not surprising it was the most dominant of the lapwing species present, although Blacksmith and Crowned Lapwing were also seen. Mindful of the large crocodiles, we were advised not to go too close to the water. In the mornings hippo tracks were found crossing the beach, coming quite close to our tent.

Huge flocks of barn swallows could be seen flying low over the grassy foreshore, feeding intensively before their long migration. The only other hirundine seen was the Wire-tailed Swallow. Other migrants included the European Roller, Spotted Flycatcher and a surprisingly large number of what we must presume were Common Cuckoos on migration. We saw at least 20 in the Sanyati Basin and although the distinction between Common Cuckoo and African Cuckoo is very small, we identified them as most likely to be Common Cuckoo.



Common Cuckoo



Collared Palm-Thrush

Our guide, John Stevens, knows Matusadona NP extremely well and he knew where the Collared Palm-Thrush and the Narina Trogon might be found, so the second day we set off for a stand of illala palm trees and after sitting in our vehicle for some time and calling up the thrush with a recording, it suddenly appeared. Likewise with the Narina Trogon the next day in a riverine clearing where there were tall stands of leadwood, tamarind and ebony trees. A female Trogon made an appearance and sat on a branch for about 20 minutes. The use of recordings to call up birds is controversial but in this case it was to document the species in the area. Our birdlist for the three days is not particularly long, but we concentrated on some specials, rather than quantity.

As we travelled around the tracks in the reserve, there were Golden Orb spiders everywhere, with their webs slung across the road, mostly above the height of our open safari vehicle. There must have been literally thousands as every bush was festooned with them and our vehicle managed to collect a good number on its way! Other wildlife of interest apart from the elephants, impala, waterbuck and warthog, were some slit-nosed bats roosting in a hollow tree, a leopard tortoise, terrapins in the pools and even mating toads in a large puddle in the road.

Unfortunately it rained quite heavily in the morning of our second day, but we still went out in the vehicle and were treated to the roaring of a huge male lion known to be the dominant male, but although he was so close the roars were quite intimidating, we didn't manage to spot him through the thick bush. We sat in ponchos in the driving rain (warm at least!) and watched waders along the shoreline. One small "fishing party" was made up of an African Spoonbill, a Little Egret and a Black Heron who were fishing co-operatively.

The second evening we had supper laid on a table on the beach surrounded by lanterns but thankfully we did not have uninvited guests as previously some guests had suffered a fright when hippos decided to join the party!

Apart from Cape Turtle Doves, probably the most frequent bird species in the scrub savanna was the Grey Hornbill. There were fewer raptors than I had expected, but besides the African Fish Eagle, Bateleur and Osprey, we saw Amur Falcon and possibly a Hobby, but it was not positively identified as it was too distant. White-backed and White-headed Vultures were also present.



Amur Falcon (male)

One good sighting for us was a Dusky Lark, an uncommon summer visitor from tropical Africa which strangely resembles a Groundscraper Thrush. Ian photographed it but at a distance. Lilac-breasted Rollers were fairly common and unusually, so were African Golden Orioles. Birds around the camp included White-fronted Bee-eater, Puff-backed Shrike, Red-winged Starling and Crombec. We were surprised to hear a Willow Warbler singing, which proves they do sing in Africa, but possibly only just before migration.



White-headed Vulture



Goliath Heron

The second afternoon we went out on the pontoon (a covered platform on a hull with an outboard motor which could travel surprisingly fast) and had a wonderful evening exploring all the bays where we saw Goliath Heron, African Darter, African Jacana, Egyptian Geese with goslings, Water Thick-knee and Greenshanks to mention just a few of the many birds seen. Hippos inhabited every bay but as they have so much space, they are not particularly aggressive. We anchored in a small bay in the late evening where Ian and John managed to catch some bream which were later cooked for our supper.

Although the lake was dammed over 50 years ago, many of the trees near the shore are still standing, although stark and leafless, but they now provide nesting sites for both African Darter and Grey Heron. We managed to spot young in both nests without disturbing the adults too much. Fish Eagles were perched like candles on some of the skeleton trees.

Next morning we had to leave Changa for the motorboat across the lake, and we seemed to travel so fast there was not much opportunity for bird-watching, but we did manage to spot a White-fronted Cormorant and a Grey-headed Gull! Bruce met us in the harbour and kindly offered to take us up to a viewpoint to see Kariba Dam which is an impressive sight, and then further up the hill to Kariba village where we had a magnificent view of the lake. The drive back to Harare was uneventful, but we stopped briefly at Lion's Den to buy the best biltong in Zimbabwe!

List of species seen:

White-breasted Cormorant	Reed Cormorant
African Darter	Goliath Heron
Grey Heron	Yellow-billed Egret
Great White Egret	Little Egret
Cattle Egret	Black Heron
Green-backed Heron	Marabou Stork
Woolly-necked Stork	African Openbill
African Spoonbill	Egyptian Goose
White-faced Duck	White-headed Vulture
White-backed Vulture	African Fish-eagle

Osprey	Bateleur
Amur Falcon	African Hoopoe
Swainson's Spurfowl	Crested Francolin
Helmeted Guineafowl	African Jacana
Crowned Lapwing	White-crowned Lapwing
Blacksmith Lapwing	Common Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper	Common Greenshank
Collared Pratincole	Water Thick-knee
Grey-headed Gull	White-winged Tern
Double-banded Sandgrouse	Red-eyed Dove
Cape Turtle-dove	Emerald-spotted Wood-dove
Namaqua Dove	Common Cuckoo
Levaillant's Cuckoo	Jacobin Cuckoo
Narina Trogon	Pied Kingfisher
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	Woodland Kingfisher
White-fronted Bee-eater	Lilac-breasted Roller
European Roller	African Grey Hornbill
Red-billed Hornbill	Green Wood-hoopoe
Common Scimitarbill	Golden-tailed Woodpecker
Dusky Lark	Barn Swallow
Wire-tailed Swallow	Fork-tailed Drongo
African Golden Oriole	Black-headed Oriole
Arrow-marked Babbler	Dark-capped Bulbul
Collared Palm-thrush	Willow Warbler
Long-billed Crombec	Spotted Flycatcher
Tropical Boubou	Retz's Helmet-shrike
White-crested Helmet-shrike	Black-backed Puffback
Meve's Starling	Red-winged Starling
Red-billed Oxpecker	Eastern Nicator
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	Grey-headed Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow-weaver	

SOUTH AFRICA NOVEMBER 2012

(Carl Powell)

It shouldn't have surprised us; we knew we would see them, just not quite so soon. We had just entered the second security gate to the game reserve, turned a corner, and there they stood; two very large White Rhino. Barely had we time to take in just how large and close they were when around the next bend the track was blocked by a small group of Elephant! Even closer and much, much larger still! All of us on the mini-bus were first time visitors to Africa and to say we were excited, well, how under-stated can that sound!

A few miles further on we arrived at the Mjejane River Lodge to a warm welcome and hot face cloths. The Lodge comprises of a main building with a lounge, bar and restaurant around which are several chalets. The complex overlooks the Crocodile River which forms the southern boundary of the Kruger National Park. Our journey had started over 24 hours previously with an overnight flight from Heathrow to Johannesburg and an onward internal flight to Nelspruit and finally by mini-bus. We had selected our holiday from the Saga brochure and travel was with South African Airways. Both offer great service but we were particularly impressed with SAA for the standard of in-flight service and the way they looked after Ann.

The grounds of the lodge were well protected and can be freely accessed on foot although, on more than one occasion, we saw Warthog run across the front lawn; it was safe to walk around. When walking around it was easy to see lots



Dideric Cuckoo

of bird species and of course, for us first timers, they were practically all lifers! The tree outside the main lounge held a large colony of Lesser Masked Weavers and Diderick Cuckoos were also very common. Another common visitor around the complex was Brown headed Kingfisher, usually hawking insects from fence posts or tree branches. Lesser Striped Swallows nested on ceiling of our patio and made many visits to feed their young.



Red-billed Oxpeckers

Their nest constructed much as our Barn Swallow but with a long entrance tunnel. On one of my walks I was drawn to a tree by alarm calls mainly by Scarlet chested Sunbirds and Southern Boubou. A member of the ground staff came up and said “snake”. I took this as a question and answered that I didn’t know. More insistently he repeated “snake” and pointed to a deadly Black Mamba above me! There was much bird life to be seen along the river with a variety of egrets, herons, storks and

waders. Most common were Great and Little Egret, Goliath Heron and Blacksmith Plover. Water Thickknee were also seen every day on the sandbanks below our view point. The weather in November was reasonably pleasant but we did experience some heavy rain showers. These had an effect on the river level which altered daily from “normal” to deep and very fast altering the shape and size of the sand banks and the wildlife using them. Also in the river every day were Hippos and Crocodiles. We did game drives every morning and evening. Every day we saw White Rhino, Elephant, Buffalo and Impala. Most days we would also see Waterbuck, Zebra and Giraffe as well as Vervet Monkeys. The large herds of Cape Buffalo attracted flocks of Cattle Egrets and several Red billed Oxpeckers but it was with Giraffe we had our best views of these. We were lucky enough to have the same driver for all game drives, a local expert named December. We had heard tales that some drivers are only interested in big game but once December knew we were birders he made every effort to stop and allow us to “do our thing”. The others in our truck quickly became interested too and at least two of the three couples discovered their latent birding gene and by the end of the trip were asking for advice on bins and UK guides! Of all the animals you would hope to see I suppose Lion would be top of the list and we were not disappointed. Our first sighting came one morning with three resting on the opposite bank of the river. We got really close on one occasion when we joined others, (at least 10 other vehicles!), watching a group of four young males resting literally at the side of the road.



White-fronted Bee-eater

Of equal importance to us however, were the birds. For every animal we saw there were many more birds. How quickly it is to become accustomed to seeing Southern Yellow billed Hornbill or Fork tailed Drongo even Brown Snake Eagle. Accustomed yes, but not blasé or bored! Our list grew daily from the small Green backed Cameroptera and Tawny flanked Prinia to the magnificent Martial Eagle, Bateleur and White backed and Hooded Vultures. And, of course the many distant and mysterious “little brown jobs”. Resident

White fronted Bee eaters had been joined by wintering flocks of Eurasian Bee eaters and every day saw more evidence of migration. Barn Swallows joined the local hirundine flocks and Common and Green Sandpipers appeared along the river. On one occasion a small flock of Curlew Sandpipers flew past and on another we saw several Collared Pratincoles resting on a sandbank. Birding highlights came every day of course, and it is difficult to pick out just a few. However, the splendour of Lilac breasted Rollers, magnificent Martial Eagle or the skill and endeavour of the Lesser Masked Weaver will always be strong memories. But, for me, the one brief but very memorable encounter with a pair of Bronze winged Coursers in the headlights of our Land Rover as we surprised them after dark will take some beating!

Too soon our time was up and we left taking with us some wonderful memories of the 134 bird species we had seen, not to mention the close encounters with animals straight from the TV documentaries we love to watch! We will return to Africa one day to extend our experiences.

List of species seen:

Birds

White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>
Reed Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>
African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Green-backed Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
Saddlebilled Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>
African Openbill	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>
African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>
Hammerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
Hadedda Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
White-faced Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
African Pygmy-goose	<i>Nettapus auritus</i>
African Black Duck	<i>Anas sparsa</i>
Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Aegypius tracheliotos</i>
White-headed Vulture	<i>Trigonoceps accipitalis</i>
White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Bataleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
Brown Snake-eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
Lizzard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>
Gabar Goshawk	<i>Melierax gabar</i>
Swainson's Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis swainsonii</i>
Natal Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis natalensis</i>
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida edouardi</i>
Black Crake	<i>Amaurornis flavirostra</i>
African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>

Red-crested Korhaan	<i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i>
Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>
Blacksmith Lapwing (Plover)	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
Bronze winged Courser	<i>Rhinoptilus chalcopterus</i>
Double-banded Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles bicinctus</i>
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columbia livia</i>
African Morning Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
Cape Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Emerald Spotted Wood-dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>
Brown headed Parrot	<i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>
Purple-crested Turaco	<i>Gallirex porphyreolophus</i>
Grey Go-away Bird	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>
Red chested Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>
Striped Cuckoo	<i>Oxylophus levaillantii</i>
Jacobin Cuckoo	<i>Oxylophus jacobinus</i>
Diderick Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
Burchell's Coucal	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinnis</i>
White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>
Striped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>
Eurasian Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
White-fronted Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>
Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>
Southern Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>
Trumpeter Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>
Crowned Hornbill	<i>Tockus albeterminatus</i>
African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>
Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>
Green Wood-hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>
Black-collared Barbet	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>
Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>

Cardinal Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicus fuscescens</i>
Bearded Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos namaquus</i>
Monotonous Lark	<i>Mirafrapa passerina</i>
Sabota Lark	<i>Calendulauda sabota</i>
Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>Hirundo abyssinica</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>
Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>
Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i>
Kurrichane Thrush	<i>Turdus libonyana</i>
White-browed Robin-chat	<i>Cossypha heuglini</i>
White-browed Scrub-robin	<i>cercotrichas leucophrys</i>
Green-backed Camaroptera	<i>Canaroptera brachyura</i>
Long-billed Crombec	<i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>
Yellow-breasted Apalis	<i>Apalis flavida</i>
Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>
Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>
Southern Black Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis pammelaina</i>
African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
Chinspot Batis	<i>Batis molitor</i>
Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>
African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
Magpie Shrike	<i>Corvinella melanoleuca</i>
Southern Boubou	<i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i>
Brown-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra australis</i>
Retz's Helmetshrike	<i>Prionops retzii</i>
Southern White-crowned Shrike	<i>Eurocephalus anguitimens</i>
Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>
Cape Glossy Starling	<i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>
Violet-backed Starling	<i>Cinnyrinclus leucogaster</i>
Burchell's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>
Wattled Starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>
Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra senegalensis</i>
Collared Sunbird	<i>Hedydipna collaris</i>
White bellied Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris talatala</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Cape Sparrow	<i>Passer melanurus</i>
Red-billed Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>
Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
Southern Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>
Lesser Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>
Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>
Yellow Bishop	<i>Euplectes capensis</i>
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>

Blue Waxbill
Yellow-fronted Canary
Golden-breasted Bunting

Uraeginthus angolensis
Crithagra mozambica
Emberiza flaviventris

Mammals

Chacma Baboon
Vervet Monkey
Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat
Horseshoe Bat
Scrub Hare
Lion
African Elephant
Burchell's Zebra
White Rhinoceros
Hippopotamus
Common Warthog
Giraffe
Cape Buffalo
Bushbuck
Greater Kudu
Bush Duiker
Steenbok
Waterbuck
Impala
Blue Wildebeest
Nyala
Klipspringer

Paio ursinus
Cercopithecus pygerythrus
Epomophorus sp
Rhinolophus sp
Lepus saxatilis
Panthera leo
Loxodonta africana
Equus burchelli
Ceratotherium simum
Hippopotamus amphibius
Phacochoerus africaus
Giraffa camelopardalis
Syncerus caffer
Tragelaphus scriptus
Tragelaphus strepsiceros
Sylvicapra grimmia
Raphicerus campestris
Kobus ellipsiprymnus
Aepyceros melampus
Connochaetes taurinus
Nyala angasii
Oreotragus oreotragus

Reptiles & Amphibians

Leopard Tortoise
Nile Crocodile
Striped Skink
Cape Dwarf Gecko
Southern Tree Agama
Giant Snail

Geochelone pardalis
Crocodylus niloticus
Mabuya striata
Lygodactylus capensis
Acanthocercus atricollis

Butterflies

Yellow Pansy
Garden Inspector
Red Tip
Brown-veined White
African Monarch
Pearl Charaxes
Joker

Junonia hierta
Junonia archesia
Colotis antevippe
Belenois aurota
Danaus chrysippus
Charaxes varanes
Byblia ilithyia

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

(Nicholas Beswick)

On our previous holidays in Australia my wife and I visited up-country New South Wales which provided some marvellous birds: everything from Wedge-tailed Eagles to Regent Bowerbirds. But this time we would be staying with our daughter and her man in suburban Sydney and visiting his family in Melbourne over Christmas. Would there be anything to find or would I be in a birdless urban jungle?

I need not have worried. There were superb sites within easy reach of both of our bases and, in between festivities, I was able to clock up an impressive list. But how did the cities



Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

themselves compare?

Would Lane Cove on the north side of Sydney harbour offer more than Brunswick in Melbourne and how would the city centre birding compare?

Laura's second floor apartment in Lane Cove had a small balcony looking over a very leafy residential area, with massive gum trees looming over the buildings. It was soon obvious that most of the local residents would appear on the balcony itself

for seed, nuts or bread. At the bottom of the pecking order were the Noisy Miners, members of the honeyeater family thoroughly at home in suburbia and the bullies of other smaller birds. But they were wary on the balcony, quickly leaving the field to other visitors. Next was the local flock of feral Pigeons which would be seen off by the small but feisty Rainbow Lorikeets which more than did justice to their multicolour name. These would grapple with the Pied Currawongs, elegant members of the crow family. But top of the tree were the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, nicknamed Mr and Mrs Stampy who would arrive with a blood-curdling screech, flare their crests and stamp until food arrived. They were perfectly content to feed with people sitting on the balcony, almost prepared to take bread from the hand.

Not long after we arrived, a coarse trumpeting announced the appearance of the local Public Enemy Number One: the Channel-billed Cuckoo. This impressive bird has been called the “flying walking stick”, reflecting its pale plumage, long thin tale and massive horn-coloured bill. Its presence would throw the Noisy Miners into frenzy, though it was after the nests of much larger victims. Also featuring was the magnificent King Parrot, the largest of its ilk in Australia, whilst a surprise in a well built-up area was a Brush Turkey walking nonchalantly down the street in the middle of the day.

In contrast, our part of Melbourne was much more reminiscent of a London suburb of neat detached houses and small gardens. The English character was enhanced by the mellow song

of Blackbirds. Blackbirds? Brought over by settlers a century ago, these emigrants happily coexist with the inevitable Noisy Miners and another aggressive incomer, the Myna. House Sparrows, too, contributed to the British atmosphere. Unlike Sydney, the birds did not frequent the yard though Crested Pigeons and Spotted Turtle Doves would join their feral brethren on the roof. The gardens also supported families of White-plumed Honeyeaters with flocks of Rainbow Lorikeets in the gum trees or screeching over. In sum, a clear home win for Sydney but what of the away match?

Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens, on the waterfront next to the Opera House, boasted an impressive bird list,

including the majestic Powerful Owl. The variety, though, on our visit was limited. The ornamental ponds held familiar fowl: Black Duck, Wood Duck, Chestnut Teal and Dusky Moorhen. Around the cafe White Ibises prowled around the tables ready to pounce on scraps. Joining them briefly was a normally elusive resident, a Buff-banded Rail, a handsome bird with neatly barred black and white underparts divided by a



Rainbow Lorikeets

broad orange-brown chest band. Even more surprising was a family of Tawny Frogmouths roosting in a tree in full view of passers-by. These remarkable relatives of the nightjars are almost the size of Tawny Owls in beautifully mottled greys and browns with huge flat, wide bills. When one stirred it opened its large orange eyes briefly and yawned to reveal an enormous cream gape – what a bird!

My Melbourne city centre site was the Royal Park, housing the zoo and a little reminiscent of Regent's Park. Around the zoo the incessant “ting” of bicycle bells betrayed the presence of Bell Miners lurking in the gum trees but much of the park was uninspiring. However, a 400 metre circle of uncut grassland had attracted a rural visitor, a Brown Songlark that eventually gave me good views. The surprise of the morning was a small wetland on the edge of the park with muddy, reedy ponds. An Australian Spotted Crake potted along the muddy margin until it was seen off by a Purple Swampphen with its half-grown fluffy purple chick. A small flock of flashing turquoise and yellow Red-rumped Parrots landed to drink whilst several species of honeyeaters foraged in adjacent bushes. An unfamiliar call distracted me from the Little Egret and White-faced Heron hunting, to pin down in a bush a small green-bronze bird with a barred chest: Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo. It was quickly chased off by a White-plumed Honeyeater but obliged by reappearing in no time. Despite Sydney's splendid Frogmouths, Melbourne had clearly won the return match!

Sydney Lane Cove	Melbourne Brunswick	Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens	Melbourne Royal Park
Brush Turkey	Silver Gull	Little Pied Cormorant	Little Egret
White Ibis	Crested Pigeon	Little Black Cormorant	White-faced Heron
Feral Pigeon	Spotted Turtle Dove	White Ibis	Little Black Cormorant
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Feral Pigeon	Chestnut Teal	Chestnut Teal
King Parrot	Rainbow Lorikeet	Black Duck	Black Duck
Rainbow Lorikeet	Little Lorikeet	Wood Duck	Hardhead
Little Lorikeet	White-plumed Honeyeater	Dusky Moorhen	Australian Grebe
White-throated Needletail	Noisy Miner	Buff-banded Rail	Purple Swampphen
Laughing Kookaburra	Australian Magpie	Masked Lapwing	Dusky Moorhen
Channel-billed Cuckoo	Little Raven	Silver Gull	Coot
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Welcome Swallow	Tawny Frogmouth	Australian Spotted Crake
Noisy Miner	House Sparrow	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Silver Gull
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Blackbird	Rainbow Lorikeet	Galah
Australian Magpie		Laughing Kookaburra	Rainbow Lorikeet
Australian Raven		Feral Pigeon	Red-rumped Parrot
Pied Currawong		Noisy Miner	Crested Pigeon
Grey Butcherbird		Australian Raven	Spotted Turtle Dove
Welcome Swallow		Australian Magpie	Feral Pigeon
Tree Martin		Pied Currawong	Laughing Kookaburra
		Welcome Swallow	Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo
		Tree Martin	Superb Fairy Wren
		Myna	White-plumed Honeyeater
			Red Wattlebird
			Bell Miner
			Noisy Miner
			New Holland
			Honeyeater
			Magpie Lark
			Brown Songlark
			Australian Raven
			Little Raven
			Australian Magpie
			Grey Butcherbird
			Grey Currawong
			Welcome Swallow
			Clamorous Reed Warbler
			Myna
			Greenfinch

ARMY ORNITHOLOGY TOUR TO EASTERN GERMANY – MAY 2013

(Andrew Rose)

In late May 2013, six members of the Army Ornithology Society visited eastern Germany. For many it was a trip down memory lane, despite the fact that all of the sites visited would have been deep behind the Iron Curtain when some of the team last served in Germany. The aim of this particular assignment was to visit a mixture of habitats in the east, including wet meadows, riverine, montaine and heathland landscapes, many of which, thanks in part to Communism, remain in a condition our parents might have recognised in the UK when they were young.



Andrew Bray, Richards Seargent, Roger Dickey, Andrew Rose, Dave Pentelow, Bob Hayward standing on the border without being arrested.

First up was the Drömling, a sparsely populated depression north east of Wolfsburg – the home of VW. Covering an area of 340 square kilometres, this pastoral idyll is unique in its scale and wealth of wildlife. Created in the 18th Century by Frederick the Great and protected in the late 20th century by neglect more than anything else, the area was declared a nature reserve in 1990 and is now one of the few places in northern central Europe where one can still hear Corncrakes calling or listen to Barred Warblers chattering away in the bushes beside you. Tree Sparrows are a common as are a confusing array of warblers, including Marsh and River, singing from deep within the never ending network of ditches or “sumpfs” - as the locals call them. Marsh Harriers are common, as are Red Kites, Golden Orioles and Storks – White and Black.

Positioned between Harz mountains to the north and Thüringen Wald to the south, lies the Helgestausee and the Aumühle fish ponds, their obvious attractions for birds being made even more so by their position sandwiched between high ground to the north and south. In spring and autumn thousands of Common Cranes pass through this corridor accompanied by

a whole host of other migratory species, including Ospreys and Black Kites. On arrival we heard the distinctive call of a Bittern as well as the now familiar supporting choral cast of Marsh and Reed warblers. Sadly we also attracted the unwelcome attention of the Fish Pond owners who refused us access in quite unfriendly terms. Having found the carcass of a dead Osprey riddled with shot at the same site a couple of years earlier, their motivation was probably linked to a determination to keep prying eyes away than anything else.

To the east and in the rain shadow of the Harz Mountains lies Sachsen Anhalt and, in many respects a whole new world. For here, in a narrow corridor 20 km wide by 100 km long, is the home of the Bienenfresser (Bee-eater). The former have been extending their range northward in the shadow of the Harz these past 4 decades and now number in excess of 300 pairs – the most northerly component of the German population. And as if on cue and much to the relief of the tour guide, we found an obliging pair in the inauspicious surroundings of an opencast landfill site near the otherwise eminently forgettable east German town of Unseburg. And, as if to prove that beauty is really in the eye of the beholder, the site also turned up a Little Ringed Plover, a pair of displaying Marsh Harriers and a Great Reed Warbler raucously advertising his ownership of the tiniest of ponds. Further to east, flowing essentially from the south to the North Sea, lies the River Elbe – one of central Europe's great river systems. The river acts as a migration 'super highway' and, in recognition of its supreme importance to wildlife, the entire valley, extending over 400 km in length and passing through five German states, has been declared a biosphere reserve. The landscape is often continental in scale, mainly riparian but also including substantial areas of ancient forest and heathland. Our focus was in the area of Dessau and especially the Wulfener Bruch nature reserve – a vast area of unimproved wet grazing habitat lying in the Elbe's flood plain.



A common sign

A wide array of birds were seen here, including numerous Grasshopper, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers, Wryneck, Golden Orioles, Whinchats, Red-backed Shrikes and, on the local ponds, Ferruginous Ducks and Whiskered Terns. A visit to a seemingly primordial forest bordering the Elbe revealed an immature White-tailed Eagle, Middle-spotted Woodpecker and an extraordinary chorus of frogs calling from the

swamps. Finally, and acting on fresh intelligence provided by two local conservationists, we visited the Oranienbaumer Heide – a former Volksarmee training area 10 minutes south east of Dessau. This heathland habitat, though now considerably overgrown with young trees, was, according to our informants, a breeding site for Hoopoes and Great Grey Shrikes. A long walk failed to locate the former but patience delivered the latter, characteristically perched on the top of a Silver Birch.



Ox-bow on the Elbe in flood

Our eastern odyssey took us next towards Berlin and a determination to explore some of the former Volksarmee training areas most of which have been converted into nature reserves, and the Belziger Landschaft – famous in Germany as being one of the last remaining places where one can see Great Bustards. Having overnights in a former tractor factory collective and dined splendidly on local ‘Spargel’, the next morning saw us heading towards the Heidehof former military training area. Conditions were not brilliant with low cloud and mist which at least had the benefit of obscuring the giant wind turbines which now cover a substantial part of the reserve. As in Dessau, the heathland and scrub habitat, which had been perfect for Tawny Pipits, had been substantially degraded by the unchecked growth of trees, leading us to question what if any land management techniques were being employed by NABU and the other conservation agencies. Notwithstanding, several Hawfinches and a Great Grey Shrike were located as well as an elusive and fast moving Hoopoe. Finally, a finch succeeded in taxing minds but was eventually identified as a female Cirl Bunting. Berlzig provided a graceful female Great Bustard drifting in and out of view in the long grass. Other species included White-tailed Eagle, Marsh Harriers, Red Kites, Quail (calling) and Blue-headed Wagtails. The location also provided the rarest sighting of the trip – a German ornithologist out with his family. On a serious note, apart from the two conservationists we met near Dessau, he was the only birder we encountered on the entire trip - a stark contrast to the madding crowds to be encountered in the UK at equivalent sites.

To wrap up the tour, we agreed to head west a day early in order to finish on the Elbe and the Drömling which had so impressed us on our first day. We crossed the Elbe on a small ferry – quite an experience in view of the fact that the river was running fast and high. Safely ashore on the west bank, we headed to Bertingen home to one of the numerous wildlife rich ox-bow lakes along the river. A quick scan revealed numerous ducks and terns – including many Black some of which were nesting perilously on floating platforms anchored in the rising waters.

Our final morning started where we began – in the Drömling. Though not quite as productive as our first visit – though we managed to locate a Wood Warbler singing high in the canopy – it provided time to reflect on the amazing variety and quantity of species we had seen. East Germany, at least in wildlife terms, is a wonderfully rich place to visit but is evidently unfrequented by the UK birding community. People don't know what they are missing!

List of Species:

Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Greater Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Corncrake	<i>Crex crex</i>
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>

Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>
River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>

Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>

A FIRST SEASON NEST RECORDING

(Josh Marshall)

I work as a police officer within Devon and Cornwall. Whilst my main role is a patrol officer I also work as one of the forces' Wildlife Crime Officers. Part of this job has seen me lead and develop cases against egg collecting and also cases of nest disturbance with regards to Schedule 1 species.

Schoolboy bird nesting at a time was considered to be a virtuous interest in natural history, indeed many birders may have become involved with the hobby through this pastime. Quite recently David Attenborough came out saying he did it and it should be re-introduced to encourage youngsters into nature once more. I am not sure about that idea, but I am sure that in future, due to the 'playstation generation', we will be no longer plagued by egg collectors. They are a dying breed according to RSPB. Egg collectors in the past or oologists as they were known played their part in science, in providing a better understanding of the breeding biology of birds. The introduction of cameras, along with the already amassed scientific collections there reached a time where there could be no justification for robbing nests. It became frowned upon to take eggs and eventually in 1954 it was made illegal to do so. In times gone by ornithologists quite regularly shot birds to identify them. At that time it was considered a worthwhile scientific practice. The development of binoculars and telescopes have obviously aided in making that practice unnecessary. Likewise egg collecting is abhorrent and now completely unnecessary. Collectors are not making any contribution to science anymore. It is purely obsessive, and purely for the individuals own greed and interest. Stiff penalties now exist to deal with those taking part in this. Anybody aware of anyone partaking in this practice or in possession of wild bird eggs is encouraged to contact the Police, RSPB or Crimestopper's in confidence.

I was initially very apprehensive about joining and taking part in the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Nest Record Scheme (NRS). You are essentially doing what any egg collector would do but without the taking of the egg. You are utilizing and learning the same skills. I needed to reassure myself that the scheme was worthwhile and the right thing to be doing. I contacted the BTO to speak with them. I read a lot of online information and most importantly bought the BTO book on the scheme. I learnt that the data collected are used to produce trends in breeding performance, which help identify species that may be declining because of problems at the nesting stage. NRS data also allow measurement of pressures such as climate change on bird productivity. It is also now a requirement for any schedule one license holder to contribute NRS cards for the nests that they monitor. When I mentioned that I was interested in this scheme, I was met with puzzled looks and heard that some quarters were a bit uncomfortable with Nest Recording. The upmost integrity of this scheme is vital and the BTO accept no person with unspent wildlife convictions.

I have been interested in birds since around the age of 7, a hobby passed onto me by my late father. He regularly took me out birding with him. Together we found Chiffchaff and Whitethroat nests. Sitting motionless within brambles watching Whitethroats returning to feed chicks was enthralling. My interest in the breeding behavior of birds is an aspect of ornithology that has always fascinated me. So, in March this year I contacted some local nest recorders working within my area; Mark Lawrence, Dave Scott and Mark Penney. They all study an area on Dartmoor for the scheme. I wanted to ensure that if I was to take part that I

firstly could do it with the upmost care and consideration for the birds but also to satisfy myself that I possessed the aptitude for the study.

I was taken out by NRS stalwart and BTO ringer Mark Lawrence on a Stonechat nest finding tutorial which I really enjoyed. The initial lesson with Stonechats gave me the grounding for most of the species I located throughout my first season. I was taught the basics from scratch including when to approach a nest and when to leave it alone. I was taught conduct around the nest, what to and not to do when inspecting it, and most importantly the birds' welfare comes top. If recording the nest and due to its location or state this would hinder the birds, then you leave the nest alone. All this information is available on the BTO website or in the book for any further clarification.

The next day saw me find my first ever Stonechat nest! The following days I found another 2 in the Mansands area near to Brixham. As the season went on I located further species around my local area of Brixham. Species included Whitethroats, Chiffchaffs, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warblers and Linnets. The Sedge Warbler located by myself and Mark Penney was the first documented breeding of this species in that area for at least 30 years! The study was showing itself to be worthwhile. I was becoming hooked. All the information I gathered was entered onto the BTO nest record cards. This card records information such as habitat, location, altitude, clutch and brood sizes. It also records each visit you make and essentially the outcome of the nest. Depending at what stage you find the nest will depend on how many



Stonechat Nest

times the nest is visited. Finding the nest at building or egg stage would require approximately 4 visits. Finding it at chick stage would require fewer visits. Ideally the egg stage provides the most useful data as the nesting attempt can be followed right the way through. If the nests are found at the correct stages then the young will be ringed with BTO rings. If adults are ringed then an attempt where possible will be made to record these individuals too.

Unfortunately not all nests make it.

Some are predated, some are trampled

by cattle, and some fail due to the weather. As disheartening as this can be it all provides useful data that the BTO compile on a national level. The information that you do obtain though is incredible and when added to other results provides a huge scientific database. This year, within my study area, there has been great success for nesting Stonechats. All pairs on the study area were recorded, not just one attempt but in most cases all their attempts and in some cases 3 broods. The same applied to Winchats. Over 90 Meadow Pipit nests were recorded within the study area. Other species such as Yellowhammers, Reed Buntings, Redpolls and Skylarks were all monitored. It provides a great data snapshot of how this part of the moor is doing.

I took the step next encouraged by Mark Lawrence of nest recording on their Dartmoor area of Venford. This site certainly took me by surprise as there were birds everywhere and it took a while to get to grips with the environment (very different to the slog of the coastal nest

recording). Throughout the day it began to click and I found 3 Meadow Pipit nests. I was pleased to be asked by the others to join their study group and contribute my findings. I began to find other species also throughout the season including, more Meadow Pipits, Stonechats, Whinchats, Chaffinches, Yellowhammers and for me personally the most enjoyable were the Tree Pipits. I was given a small area to concentrate on. Within this area I located a concentration of Tree Pipits. I was able to record 9 nests of this species, 4 from egg stage and the remaining 5 at chick stage. The annual total recorded at the BTO only numbers 40 on average annually for the whole country. Depressingly this species has reached red level on the conservation status.



Tree Pipit

My main interest is the ground nesting species. The methods of locating the nest can be quite specialised and it's not simply a case of looking through hedges or into nest boxes. Not that there is anything wrong with this, far from it. Ground nesting birds just appeal to me personally. It's pitting your wits against the bird, getting to understand what the subtle behaviors mean, such as the very slight difference in a call can tell you if the bird has a nest with eggs or chicks in. Likewise you learn to understand when a bird has no nest. I have learnt so much more

about the species I have watched as part of this study than I ever knew before. The most important part is that it is enjoyable and you are really contributing to a scientific study. The Dartmoor National Park has even used the data we have compiled to inform their land management practices in certain areas.

I am looking forward to the next breeding season to further my knowledge of the breeding biology of these species. There is a certain stigma attached to the practice of recording nests. Quite rightly certain species benefit from a higher level of protection being listed on schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and a license is required to monitor these species. However with the correct training and ideally some tutorship from experienced recorders the NRS is a valuable and enjoyable way of further understanding another side of birds.



Tree Pipit Nest



Short-eared Owl



Whinchat



Stone Curlew