

EDITORIAL

There is a bumper issue this year with 2 reports from Ascension Island and the ringing report from Gibraltar. We have articles from Europe, Africa and the far east. This year we start with the successful AOS expedition to Ascension. We are gradually discovering more and the article by John Hughes is just the start of a new area of exploration. There was another successful trip to Gibraltar to assist in the ringing programme of this narrow flyway. In due course these birds will be re-trapped or discovered and the rings will provide some beneficial information about the routes these birds take. Nicholas Beswick has been involved in Red Grouse monitoring and we have had updates from an old Chairman who has moved to Herefordshire and that from Barry Buddon in northern Scotland. Andy Rose joined an organisation in Cyprus whose task was to monitor and disrupt the illegal trapping of small birds. This is a dangerous task and it brings home the work of these organisations and the lack of effort by the authorities. Even on holiday there is the opportunity to watch birds as the article by Rich Moody illustrates on a trip to Keflonia. He has also written an article about the AOS trip to Ascension; it was his first visit. Finally there are reports on birding trips to South Africa, Ghana and Japan. These will hopefully give you ideas of where to visit and what you are likely to see. I have used previous reports to plan my own journeys. That said if anyone is booking a tour with Naturetrek please mention my name as a source of inspiration; I could do with some more work! Putting that aside we as a group of individuals do travel around the country, Europe and the world. Writing an article for the Adjutant or the web-site does help other members in their decision making of where to go and what to see. If you are not looking at the web-site www.armybirding.org.uk then you should do. It is always being updated and full of useful information, comments and articles.

| <u>Article</u> | <u>Author</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| AOS Ascension Expedition Report 28 | Roger Dickey | 2 |
| Assembly site for seabirds in the South Atlantic Ocean | John Hughes | 12 |
| Joint Service Ringing On Gibraltar | Roger Dickey | 14 |
| AOS AGM | Kevin Campbell | 20 |
| Red Grouse Monitoring in South Wales | Nicholas Beswick | 22 |
| Ramblings From Herefordshire | Rodney Walker | 23 |
| Kefalonia | Rich Moody | 26 |
| South Africa | Andrew Bray | 31 |
| In Search Of The Picathartes | Keith Cherry | 43 |
| Trip Report Japan - May 2015 | Lynne Millard & Geoffrey McMullen | 62 |
| Expedition To Ascension Island | Rich Moody | 72 |
| Illegal bird trapping - the dark side of Cyprus | Andy Rose | 75 |
| Barry Buddon Update | Bob McCurley | 79 |
| Birding Along Hadrian's Wall | Pat & John Hughes | 80 |

AOS ASCENSION EXPEDITION REPORT 28 – APRIL 2015

(Roger Dickey)

Summary: The breeding peak of sooty terns *Onychoprion fuscatus* in 2015 was estimated to have been 6 weeks earlier than the arrival of the expedition. The delay was due to non-availability of accommodation caused by the high number of contractors on the island. As a consequence, sooty tern breeding densities could not be determined with any confidence on the Waterside and Mars Bay fairs due to the dispersed sub-colonies with eggs and the high numbers of fledged (and fledging) birds. The Mars Bay colony was considerably larger than last year at 11.7 ha (8.2 ha May 2014). A further 1,580 sooty terns were ringed and 397 birds were re-trapped, which included the recovery of eight geolocators from birds. Twenty sooty terns were caught and geolocators deployed on them on metal rings which now leaves 65 to be recovered. A further 20 brown noddies *Anous stolidus* were ringed at nests on the sooty tern fairs. On Letterbox, the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (AIGCD) was assisted in their monitoring of juvenile masked boobies *Sula dactylatra* with 86 adults ringed and 26 re-trapped. In total, six hours of ringing training were conducted with the AIGCD staff.

Background

Since 1987, the British military ornithological societies have monitored the colony of sooty terns 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 *Felis silvestris catus* 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. The return of nesting brown noddies to the main island has also been monitored. This report contains the findings of the twenty first and latest expedition of the Army Ornithological Society (AOS), while working in close co-operation with the seabird monitoring team from the AIGCD. The study remains focussed on, but not exclusively, the breeding biology of the sooty tern, determining the size of breeding population, identifying and recording levels of predation, site fidelity, sub-annual breeding, and migration ecology.

Aims of the April 2015 Expedition

1. Determine the feasibility of censusing the sooty tern population in April 2015.
2. Locate and recover geolocators deployed on birds in March 2011, December 2012, September 2013 and May 2014.
3. Monitor food types and quantities through the collection of regurgitations.
4. Monitor the population of nesting brown noddies on the mainland.
5. Assist in the monitoring of juvenile masked boobies and ring adult masked boobies on Letterbox.
6. Conduct a white tern *Gygis alba* survey with emphasis on birds within the National Park boundary.
7. Black rat *Rattus rattus* indices at Mars Bay.
8. Conduct land bird census.
9. Conduct common myna *Acridotheres tristis* roost count.
10. Conduct sea watches.
11. Continuation of ringing training and renewal of ringing permits held by AIGCD staff.
12. Deploy another 20 geolocators on adult sooty terns and ring another 2,000 birds.

Expedition Booby 21 – April 2015 - Participants

| | | |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Warrant Officer 2 Tony Giles | AOS | Expedition Leader |
| Lieutenant Colonel Roger Dickey (retd) | AOS | Expedition 2IC |
| Group Captain Martin Routledge | RAFOS | |
| Lieutenant Colonel Tony Kaduck | AOS | |
| Major Andrew Bray (retd) | AOS | |
| Major John Hughes (retd) | AOS | |
| Major Carl Powell (retd) | AOS | |
| Captain Kevin Kirkham-Brown | AOS | |
| Mr Rich Mooney | AOS | |
| Dr Jim Reynolds | University of Birmingham/AOS | |
| Mr Colin Wearn | RAFOS | |
| Ms Lucy Garrett | University of Birmingham | |

Members of the expedition were on the island from 6th April to 17rd April 2015 (inclusive). A total of 144 person.days was spent in the field. Four personnel were new to Ascension Island.



Weather

Rainfall for several weeks prior to the expedition had promoted 'greening up' and proliferation of vegetation in some places. Weather conditions had been stable for the complete period that sooty terns were breeding and included almost daily rain showers and cooler mornings from sustained cloud cover. As with the previous expedition, there was up to two hours of light rainfall on the fairs for most days of the expedition. Prior to the expedition, heavy rainfall had washed away much of the track leading down to Letterbox but no significant effect of this heavy rain was noted on young birds.

Sooty terns

Area survey

The fluidity of colony sizes at the Waterside colony, as birds fledged and egg-laying activity diminished, made the surveying of the area impractical and thus pointless. However, at the Mars Bay colony, the area of the colony was determined by traversing the periphery of all nesting birds and logging coordinates regularly (as way points) with a hand-held GPS unit. The Mars Bay colony this season comprised four sub-colonies. A “Fair Description Sheet” was completed for each sub-colony. The total area occupied by breeding birds at Mars Bay in April 2015 was 11.655 ha as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Breakdown of sizes of sub-colonies of sooty terns at Mars Bay during April 2015.

| Survey Date | Fair Number | Size (in hectares) |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 5 th April | MB1 | 3.225 |
| | MB2 | 2.55 |
| 9 th April | MB3 | 3.98 |
| | MB4 | 1.90 |

Nest density

Previous surveys have determined nest densities in quadrats positioned on random transects through both fairs. However, with a lack of sufficient adults incubating eggs nest density could not be established.

Population size

The Mars Bay colony comprised areas of the fair where birds have nested in previous seasons but also the low lying area that follows the track down to the sea. The fair again stretched to the highest ‘shoulder’ of the bay and nearly all the way to the sea and for the second season in succession, no birds nested on the clinker. On 15th May 2014 the Mars Bay colony contained 105,000 Apparently Occupied Nests (AoNs) within a total of 8.22 ha at an average nest density 1.274 eggs per m². As nest densities could not be estimated from repeat quadrat counts, we used the May 2014 nest density (with accepted obvious caveats) to derive a coarse estimate of 148,485 AoNs. This represents nearly a 30% increase in population size compared with 2014.



Optimum survey date

Survey dates are determined by the date of the first egg at the Waterside colony and past expeditions have visited the fairs 42-60 days later, when the colony is at its greatest number of nesting adults, and chicks are between 12 and 30-days old. For the third consecutive season an accurate estimation of this 'first egg' date has been difficult to obtain due to the continuous and late-laying of eggs on the fairs from the previous season disguising the new season's initial nesting peak. The expedition considered that the optimum date of arrival for this season would have been in late February (based on previous breeding intervals). The abundance of fledged sooty tern chicks at the Waterside colony supported this conclusion. Dr John Hughes, basing his calculation on previous data, estimated the first chick will hatch in the next breeding season on 21st December 2015.

Food availability

A relatively new study at the focus of our work has been food preferences of adults, some of which is fed to chicks. These can be observed from regurgitations by some adults when they are handled during ringing and re-trapping activities. Similar to previous recent expeditions, the predominance of sardines and sprats (both Clupeidae) in regurgitant samples was noticeable. Again, there appeared to be little difference between the size of fish prey in the crops of adults whether for their own consumption or fed to chicks. Adult birds newly returned to the nest had a greater inclination to regurgitate when handled. Regurgitated samples were taken for subsequent laboratory analyses (e.g. stable isotope analysis).

Predation

Few corpses of adult and juvenile sooty terns were found and there was no evidence of large-scale predation. The AIGCD considered that domestic cats, although opportunistic killers, had not specifically targeted the fairs and that the constant and increasing numbers of house mice *Mus musculus* represented a more easily obtained source of food. Other predators are discussed below:

Black rats. Only one rat was seen during the expedition's work on the fairs and that was at the Waterside colony. This contrasted with the regular sightings of mice in all areas of the island. The expedition assisted the AIGCD with deploying track pad indicators at Mars Bay which showed a predominance of mouse tracks but some evidence of rats. Previous expeditions noted high levels of predation by black rats at both breeding colonies and, in total, there was evidence of 15 juvenile terns predated at Mars Bay and one at Waterside. Because of the advanced stages of birds in the Waterside colony, rat indices were only calculated for Mars Bay. On two nights prior to trapping, 20 track tunnels were set in the vicinity of the following nights' traps. Both rat and mouse tracks were recorded in 14 of the tunnels, with a prevalence of mice tracks.

Trapping was only of limited success due to the high numbers of mice caught which would have prevented the traps from being freely accessed by rats. Nevertheless, a number of mice caught in the traps were eaten by both rats and land crabs *Johngarthia lagostoma*. The overall consolidated rat index was 18.51 rats caught per 100 trap/nights. Results of rat trapping are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of trapping (west of track) at the Mars Bay sooty tern colony in April 2015. Each location held a pair of traps.

| Location | Date of overnight trapping | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | 12 th April | | 13 th April | | 14 th April | |
| 0566350/9117516 | B | R_{female} | R_{male} | B,T | M | B |
| 0566366/9117540 | B,T | B,T | B,T | M | M | B |
| 0566380/9117558 | M | M | B,T | B,T | B | B |
| 0566401/9117561 | M | M | R_{female} | B | B | B |
| 0566411/9117567 | M | B,T | B | M | B | B |
| 0566429/9117585 | B | R_{young} | B,T | B | B,T | R_{young} |
| 0566456/9117590 | B | B,T | B | B | B | B |
| 0566476/9117576 | M | M | B,T | M | M | M |
| 0566469/9117552 | B | M | B,T | R_{male} | B | B |
| 0566457/9117540 | B | B,T | B | B,T | B | R_{young} |
| 0566455/9117522 | M | M | M | R_{female} | B | R_{young} |
| 0566446/9117500 | X | B | X | B | X | R_{female} |
| 0566434/9117477 | TB | B,T | M | R_{female} | B | B |
| 0566431/9117461 | TB | B | B | B | M | B |
| 0566417/9117467 | M | B,T | M | R_{young} | M | B |
| 0566397/9117434 | B,T | R_{male} | B,T | M | R_{young} | M |
| 0566381/9117424 | B,T | R_{female} | B,T | B | B | B,T |
| 0566367/9117407 | B | B,T | B,T | B | M | B,T |
| 0566350/9117389 | B,T | M | M | M | B | B |
| 0566343/9117383 | B,T | B,T | B | B | B | B |
| 0566337/9117363 | M | M | B,T | M | B | M |
| 0566322/9117346 | B | B | B | M | B | M |
| 0566303/9117342 | M | B,T | B,T | M | B | B |
| 0566276/9117345 | M | B,T | M | B,T | B | B |
| Total rats | 0 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Total mice | 9 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 4 |

Key: R (sex/age class in subscript) – rat; M – mouse; B – bait taken; T – tripped; X – not set.

Ascension frigatebirds *Fregata aquila*. Frigatebirds were monitored when the teams were working within the colonies and the numbers of frigatebirds hunting over, and resting within, the colonies were counted. The main centre of frigatebird foraging activity was at Mars Bay as this was where there were most young and newly hatched sooty tern chicks. There were no frigatebirds seen at the Waterside colony. A summary of observations is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Numbers of Ascension frigatebirds at the sooty tern colony at Mars Bay in April 2015.

| April Date | Counts | Average number | Maximum number |
|------------------|--------|----------------|----------------|
| 6 th | 2 | 10.5 | 13 |
| 9 th | 2 | 6.5 | 7 |
| 10 th | 2 | 2.5 | 3 |
| 11 th | 2 | 15 | 20 |
| 12 th | 4 | 8.2 | 12 |
| 13 th | 3 | 6.6 | 8 |
| 14 th | 2 | 8 | 10 |

| | | | |
|------------------|---|-----|---|
| 15 th | 2 | 2.5 | 3 |
| 16 th | 3 | 6 | 7 |

Common mynas. On previous expeditions we have detected considerable losses of sooty tern eggs from myna predation when they consume some eggs but destroy many more by puncturing the shell at the blunt end. The number of birds seen visiting the fairs appeared to be few although nine were seen at Waterside on 7th April. At Mars Bay, mynas were recorded on almost every day of our visits but their numbers never exceeded four and the daily average was only two. Some egg losses from mynas were noted on Mars Bay but were considerably reduced compared with previous expeditions. There was no definitive count of egg losses from myna predation. Results of the myna roost count are given later.

Sally Lightfoot crabs *Grapsus adscensionis*. While there was evidence of sooty tern corpses being eaten by crabs and some eggs, once opened, having been eaten by crabs, losses to crabs were trivial and did not warrant anything but anecdotal reporting.

Sightings of note

The height of grass within the breeding areas was greater than usual (up to 2 ft) and it was dense in places, often impeding observation and the catching of birds.

It was noted that some pairs had used grass and glass in the construction of their rudimentary nests.

A note was made of up to nine birds open-bill tapping their eggs. There was no obvious cause but we speculated that it was possibly a form of communication between the adult and the unhatched chick.

Desertion

For the second consecutive expedition, there appeared to be less cases of wholesale desertion of eggs (i.e. by tens or hundreds of birds) across colonies although some isolated areas were abandoned. It was considered that this diminution in deserting behaviour by adults could possibly be attributable to a lack of disturbance to the colonies now that they are further from areas where rats and rarely cats forage. Being sited on the western ridge at Mars Bay, the majority of the birds are also now distant from public access routes into the site. However it may also be likely that the apparent increased availability of food is another significant contributory factor. This is a subject for further investigation.

Re-trapping of adults

The higher than average number of expedition members was worth exploiting and on the days available to us at Mars Bay, a great deal of effort was invested in the re-trapping of adult sooty terns with the combined teams of the AOS and AIGCD. With the use of mapping graphics, organised and systematic searches were conducted to maximum effect. The re-trapping process included the search to recover geolocators deployed in March 2011, December 2012, September 2013 and May 2014. In total 397 sooty terns were re-trapped at Mars Bay (slightly fewer than on the 2014 expedition), and there were no controls. A total of 147 man.hours was dedicated to re-trapping. This was a significant re-trapping effort that achieved much given that we could not re-trap birds in the Waterside colony and the need to let Mars Bay 'rest' after intensive trapping efforts when by definition there is significant disturbance of colony members.

Ringling of sooty terns

A further 1,580 sooty terns, including 500 fledged juvenile birds, were ringed by the combined ringing teams. The juvenile birds were estimated to be at least P7 with fully forked tails. The continued ringing and re-trapping of sooty terns are considered fundamental in contributing to our understanding of movement, longevity, distribution, age at first breeding, survival and demographics of the colonies. With over 25,000 birds ringed and approximately 5,500 re-trapped, the AOS and AIGCD continued to combine their ringing and re-trapping datasets in an ongoing collaboration. Anomalies and missing data still exist in the datasets but there is a commitment by both parties to continue to resolve these problems.

Geolocators



In total eight geolocators were recovered from birds in the Mars Bay colony while a further 20 geolocators were deployed on adults at Mars Bay. Full details of the eight recovered devices are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Full details of recoveries of geolocators at Mars Bay from sooty terns re-trapped on Ascension Island in April 2015.

| Location | April 2015 Date Recovered | Geolocator Number | Ring Number | Date Deployed |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| 0566479/9117774 | 6 th | L290-2896 | DE70259 | 3 rd December 2012 |
| 0566386/9117483 | 9 th | L290-0657 | DH04663 | 30 th March 2011 |
| 0566233/9117499 | 9 th | H388 | DE87506 | 4 th September 2013 |
| 0566362/9117426 | 9 th | H391 | DE87507 | 4 th September 2013 |
| 0566233/9117499 | 9 th | L772 | DE97010 | 17 th May 2014 |
| 0566233/9117499 | 9 th | M180 | DE97018 | 19 th May 2014 |
| 0566233/9117499 | 14 th | L768 | DE97001 | 17 th May 2014 |
| 0566233/9117499 | 14 th | L763 | DE97020 | 19 th May 2014 |

Brown noddies

Summary of findings

As we concluded from the 2014 expedition, the number of breeding brown noddies appears to have increased and this is borne out in data held jointly by the AIGCD and the AOS. Our late arrival on Ascension Island meant that many of the brown noddies nesting in the Waterside colony have already fledged young but it has yet to be proved that there is any synchronisation of breeding between the two species. As the AIGCD is



not focussing specifically on brown noddies in the future, it is necessary for future expeditions to arrive in time to monitor their early nesting. However, birds still appeared to be at several different breeding stages (i.e. from incubation to pre-fledging), mirroring the status of sooty terns. Additional nest sites were discovered at Mars Bay but these were well-dispersed from valley floor to the heights above the bay. As usual, they typically followed the pattern of nesting close to, or on, rocky outcrops and in proximity to sooty terns.

Population estimate on mainland

The size of the breeding population of brown noddies on the mainland is difficult to estimate without further monitoring. The estimate in 2014 of over 85 nest sites is likely to have increased but the number of successful broods over the complete breeding period is unknown. At the time of the expedition, the location and contents of the 54 AoNs at Waterside and 50 AoNs at Mars Bay were recorded within the respective sooty tern colonies. Few AoNs at Mars Bay were occupied by chicks, and as at Waterside, they were at all stages of development.

Ringling of brown noddies

Twenty five brown noddy chicks were ringed (five at Waterside and 20 at Mars Bay) as were single re-trapped adults at both sooty tern colonies. The AIGCD holds a comprehensive list of all brown noddies ringed outside of the times of AOS expeditions.

Masked boobies

Summary of findings

Masked boobies were in the middle of a period of breeding with most adults remaining close to, or still on, nests. Few juveniles were fully fledged and a combined team of AOS and AIGCD monitored as many juveniles as possible in the time available. With the AIGCD under time constraints to ring juveniles and adults, the AOS ringed the adult population on both days that we visited Letterbox. This division of labour between the parties for ringling activities was considered the most efficient approach in the short time available.



Population estimate on mainland

No detailed count of the breeding population was made on this occasion but Dr John Hughes' estimated it to be approximately 400 AoNs.

Ringling of masked boobies

In total, 86 adults were ringed and 26 adults were re-trapped. Data on re-trapped birds are not available for this report.

Other avian and non-avian taxa/surveys of note

White terns

White terns were the subject of a brief survey in support of the AIGCD's requirement for an estimate of terns breeding in the Green Mountain National Park. A comparison of counts from previous years is shown at Table 5. Twenty birds were found roosting in the valley west of Devil's Cauldron and 17 birds in eucalyptus on Green Mountain Rd.

Table 5. Comparison of counts of white terns in April 2015 with those found on recent previous AOS expeditions.

| Location | Count | 12th February 2008 | 31 st March 2011 | 1 st -2 nd December 2012 | 7 th -11 th April 2015 |
|---|-------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Green Mountain Cliffs | High | 223 | 167 | 169 | 182 |
| | Low | 204 | 161 | | 155 |
| Valley west of Devil's Cauldron (Goat Hole Ravine) | High | 149 | 167 | 156 | 181 |
| | Low | 142 | | 145 | 165 |
| Weatherpost Cliffs | High | 33 | 68 | 171 | 266 |
| | Low | | | | 232 |
| White Hill Cliffs | High | 14 | | 13 | 42 |
| | Low | | | | 40 |
| BBI | High | 529 | 740 | | 854 |
| | Low | 312 | | | 598 |
| Cliffs opposite BBI | High | 63 | 70 | 13 | 57 |
| | Low | | | | 42 |
| Green Mountain Trees | High | 12 | | | 9 |
| | Low | | | | |

Myna Roost Survey

The population size estimates of roosting mynas can be obtained from counts of birds entering roosts at dusk. Traditional myna roost sites were visited and newly occupied roosts identified on 10th April 2015. Five occupied myna roosts were found. These roosts were monitored simultaneously by a team of 12 observers between 1815hrs and last light (approximately 1915hrs) on 12th April 2015. The total number of mynas entering roosts was 620 with a breakdown of the total shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Roost survey of mynas at roost sites in April 2015.

| Location of roost count | Number of individual birds |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| USAF Base Laundry | 46 |
| USAF Base Gardens | 80 |
| Residency | 25 |
| Two Boats | 322 |
| Scout Hut | 147 |
| Total | 620 |

Land bird survey

Atlantic canary *Serinus canaria*, common waxbill *Estrilda astrild*, common myna and red-necked spurfowl ('francolin') *Pternistis rufa* are introduced land birds that currently breed on Ascension Island. Canaries were heard singing and waxbills were observed collecting nest material suggesting that their breeding seasons had recently commenced. Mynas, on the other hand, were observed feeding recently fledged juveniles and were probably towards the end of their breeding season. An estimate of the land bird population size was made by counting individual birds seen or heard in grid squares. The island was divided into 116 one kilometre grid squares base on the conventional grid lines of the 1/25,000 Ascension Island map. One hundred and one (87%) of the grid squares were surveyed. The total numbers of canaries, waxbills, mynas and francolins were 204, 661, 442 and three birds, respectively. These estimates are considered to be considerably less than would have been achieved with a full land bird survey but the relative proportions of different species' abundances may prove useful as part of the longitudinal study of land bird population trends.

Sea watches

Timed counts of birds in transit at-sea can provide an indication of their relative abundances. Resident seabirds were monitored returning to roost on Ascension Island from waters to the north of the island as well as skuas on northern migration. Direct counts of birds crossing a rock outcrop were recorded at the Klinka Club, English Bay by four observers using telescopes and binoculars. Birds were monitored at 5-minute intervals between 1830hrs and dusk on 13th and 16th April 2015. Timed counts were completed for masked boobies (12 counts), black noddies (29) and skuas (11). The rates at which masked boobies and black noddies returned from the north of the island were 16.7 ± 4.0 and 18.9 ± 2.8 birds per minute, respectively. Four skuas (not identified to species) were recorded during 55 minutes of counting.

Mexican thorn *Prosopis juliflora* encroachments

There were no significant encroachments noted on any of the sooty tern fairs, nor was it considered that there was an immediate threat to the colonies.

Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*

A pair of cattle egrets was noted flying around the Travellers Hill area, often alighting near the sewage treatment works.

Pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus*

A possible pygmy shrew was seen in North East Bay but no photographs were taken. A detailed sighting report was given to the AIGCD.

Outreach

Saturday Club

It was regretted that due to clashes in the Two Boats School's calendar of activities, the expedition was not able to take the schoolchildren into the field at Mars Bay this year as part of their 'Saturday Club' activities.

Training and support

Six hours were spent on ringing training with the AIGCD. Ringing training was led by Colin Wearn.

Acknowledgements

Once again the Army Ornithological Society is most grateful for the support and hospitality shown by the Ascension Island Government and, in particular, the AIGCD with whom we worked closely in a truly joint effort. The AOS is grateful to Jonathan Hall and the RSPB for their continuing support and advice, and for including our Society in the bigger conservation picture. RAF Ascension is thanked for their administrative support without which the expedition could not take place and HQ British Forces South Atlantic Islands for the approval of this exercise and their support to the conservation effort in this part of the UK Overseas Territories. Not least, the Society would like to thank all members of this expedition for their time and dedication to one of the longest running overseas conservation projects supported by the Armed Forces.

ASSEMBLY SITE FOR SEABIRDS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

(John Hughes)

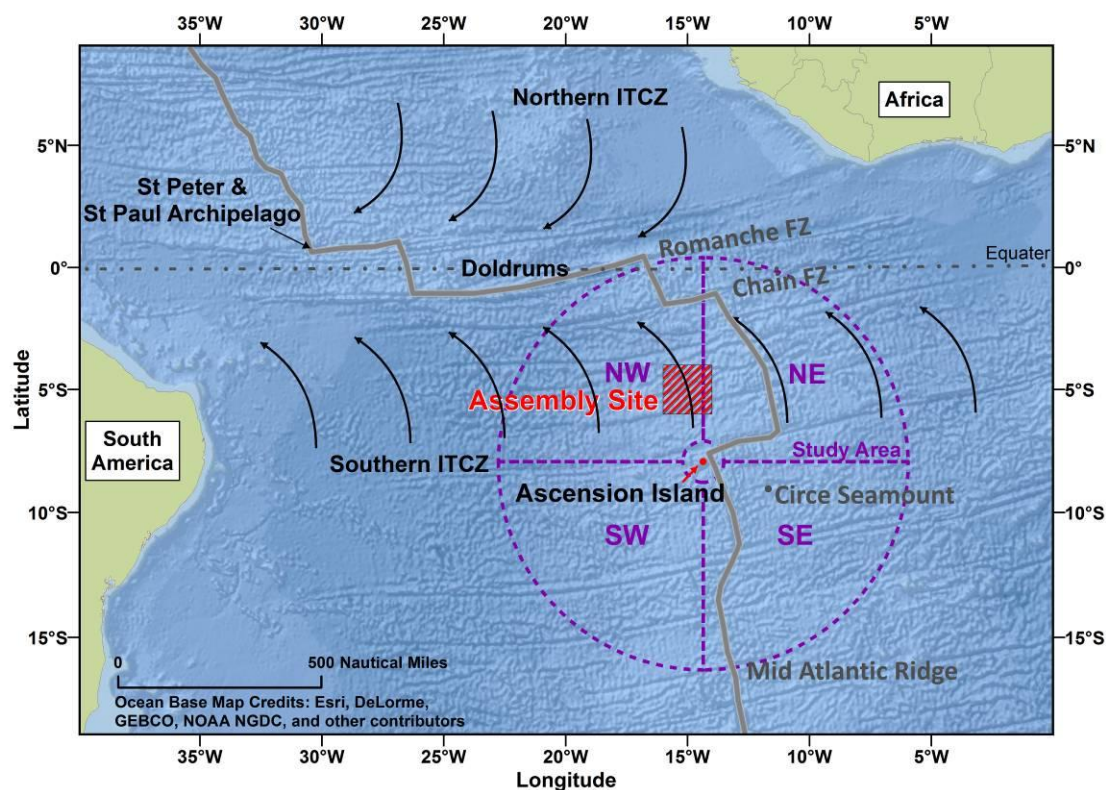


Fig. 1 Locations of study area and seabird assembly site; Credit A J Giles

Designating an area of ocean as a marine reserve is a great tool for conservation, but for it to be effective the reserve needs to include sites frequently used by marine animals. Seabirds are

good indicators of wider biodiversity and where they assemble in large numbers signifies sites important to many marine animals. Few such large assemblage sites have been identified and none has been identified in tropical Atlantic pelagic waters despite their importance for resident seabirds and those 'on passage' during migration. Citizen scientists from the Army Ornithological Society (AOS) have identified just such an assembly site (Fig.1) and have provided preliminary information about the distribution of pelagic seabirds around Ascension Island in the tropical South Atlantic Ocean using a combination of trans-equatorial seabird migrant tracking data (Fig. 2), Royal Navy records of at-sea surveys and land counts of seabirds returning from foraging trips (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2 Migration routes used by many seabirds follow the trade winds and twice a year migratory seabirds transit or stopover at the assembly site north of Ascension Island; Credit BBC



Fig. 3 The AOS team monitoring seabirds return to Ascension Island. Time counts and first appearance bearings were recorded; Credit R. Moody

The study found that waters north-north-west of Ascension Island are used significantly more often by seabirds than those south and east of the island. Three-fifths of the species recorded in the assembly site breed at mid- or high-latitudes and some of these migratory seabirds stopover possibly to wait for favourable winds that facilitate onward flight. The findings are important because no seabird assembly sites have previously been identified in tropical Atlantic Ocean pelagic waters. The AOS has provided evidence to support the aspirations of the Marine Reserves Coalition that waters in the vicinity of Ascension Island should be recognised as a sanctuary for marine wildlife and has highlight an area that is worthy of further targeted investigation.

For further information please explore: http://www.zacgoldsmith.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/MPA-Brochure_AW_LRes2.pdf.

Or for more information you can read: B. John Hughes · Graham R. Martin · Anthony D. Giles · Roger C. Dickey · S. James Reynolds (2015) Identification of an assembly site for migratory and tropical seabirds in the South Atlantic Ocean Global Ecology and Conservation 05/2015; 19. DOI:10.1016/j.gecco.2015.04.011 (Available on the AOS website)

JOINT SERVICE RINGING ON GIBRALTAR

(Roger Dickey)

It was quite obvious that after a month on the Rock in autumn 2013 that we were going to have to go back and repeat our efforts on behalf of the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS). Like all surveys, and ringing comes into this category, there is no point in having a quick look and expecting our data to mean much. But to return at the same period and set up nets in the same locality, gives the data crunchers something to get their teeth into and start working out the patterns. It also means that we will have to return again for reasons explained below!

The purpose of the ringing expedition was to determine whether there was any significant difference in the types and numbers of birds passing over the northern end of Gibraltar during the autumn migration, with those birds caught at the established site on the south side of the Rock – Jew's Gate. In truth, we were forced to pitch nets 100metres higher up the Rock than those at Jew's Gate and our net configuration was different but, cliffs, tourist sites and simple access issues determined our site.

Having had aluminium poles delivered to the lower slopes it fell on the ringers to move these up the hill, secure them with guy ropes and fit the nets. Within 36 hours we were ready with 1000 feet of nets deployed having done a considerable amount of 'pruning' to ensure that in a sudden stiff breeze, there were going to be no entanglements and no damaged birds.



Net lane facing west to Gibraltar Town

Ringers can always improve on their sites and always think that just one more net will make a difference and so a further 5 nets were added for good measure. These, of course, contributed little to the overall effect but made us feel a lot better. Regrettably, two of the

upper nets, sited for Rock Thrush, became the playground for a number of adolescent Barbary Macaques and had to be removed. The macaques were actually very well behaved and were not interested in birds in the nets, although no chances were taken. Adults and very young simply walked past or under the nets.



The macaques' playground

A set of chairs and table were also moved up the slope to provide a comfortable ringing station allowing the net extraction teams to complete a full circuit of the nets and return to the station without having to double back. A circuit took up to 30 minutes to complete with all the extractions and 3 circuits added up to a mile. Calf muscles testified to the height difference from top to bottom of the site.

It was immediately apparent that weather conditions were not only going to be 'difficult' but remain set for the duration of our two week visit. The Viento de Levante or the Levanter that blows from the east across the Straits of Gibraltar were missing and replaced with a hot westerly that effectively put a stop to serious migration. Birds still moved in small numbers but the vast passage of raptors was missing for our complete stay. It is the difference between 150 birds in a morning of 2 years ago and 50, and although at no point did we run out of birds to ring, at times there were slim pickings. This interruption to the normal migration of passerines also meant that it was difficult to predict when certain species were going to pass through. Two weeks is a small window and each member of the team had their own wish list, but for many, the lists were beaten by the weather.

Less for one damn morning, no nightjars appeared in the headlights on the way up to the site before first light and no owls responded to our tape lures. Rather annoyingly, this was not the case at Jew's Gate but is the difference between living on site and leaving nets open and having to furl overnight – a pointer for our next visit?



A busy morning at the ringing station.

Within the first week, Pied Flycatchers were numerous as were blackbirds and robins. The last of the Sardinian warblers were passing through to at least remind us that we were in the Mediterranean, and redstarts in such numbers are rarely caught in the UK. Missing, initially were chiffchaffs, and especially Iberian chiffs which was rather disappointing as there had been a certain amount of 'swatting-up' after catching so many in 2013. What was not missing were the large numbers of blackcaps, mostly juveniles, to the point that if an adult was found it attracted huge interest. It is quite possible that adults overfly the Rock and we certainly expected more than were caught.

This expedition's bird totals, less for one or two, look like a list from an English country garden and less for some surprising numbers of single species, the variety was not as broad as on our previous visit. And for that reason, the report is short and will not dwell on birds common to us all. Pictured are some of our more notable catches. It remains to thank Robin and Julia Springett for so much of the administration and 'contact' work on Gibraltar, the chefs - Julia and Ann Powell, the hewers and carriers – Carl Powell and Mark Cutts, our 'eyes in the air' while ours were on the nets – Steve Copsey, Eric Shaw for the accommodation, and particularly Charlie Perez for allowing us to ring birds on behalf of GOHNS.

Species Totals for the Expedition:

| Species | New | Retrap | Total |
|------------------------|-----|--------|-------|
| Sparrowhawk | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Wren | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Robin | 126 | 0 | 126 |
| Nightingale | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Redstart | 18 | 0 | 18 |
| Blue Rock Thrush | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Blackbird | 37 | 9 | 46 |
| Song Thrush | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| Grasshopper Warbler | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Reed Warbler | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Melodious Warbler | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Dartford Warbler | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Sardinian Warbler | 62 | 4 | 66 |
| Whitethroat | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Garden Warbler | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| Blackcap | 385 | 4 | 389 |
| Chiffchaff | 30 | 0 | 30 |
| Iberian Chiffchaff | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Willow Warbler | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| Spotted Flycatcher | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Pied Flycatcher | 54 | 0 | 54 |
| Blue Tit | 19 | 3 | 22 |
| Great Tit | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Short-toed Treecreeper | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Chaffinch | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Greenfinch | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Total | 811 | 20 | 831 |
| | | | |
| Bruce's Farm | | | |
| | | | |
| Robin | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Blackbird | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Blackcap | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Pied Flycatcher | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| | | | |



Blue Rock Thrush



Spotted Flycatcher



Redstart



Garden Warbler



Sardinian Warbler



Dartford Warbler



Grasshopper Warbler



Short-toed Treecreeper

AOS AGM

(Kev Campbell)



Lesser Whitethroat



Cuckoo



Kestrel



Little Egret



Sedge Warbler



White-winged Black Tern



Avocet



Whitethroat



Wheatear



Spoonbill



Sandwich Tern



Oystercatcher

RED GROUSE MONITORING IN SOUTH WALES

(Nicholas Beswick)

My first impression of the moorlands between the valleys of south Wales near our home was that they were pretty barren. One of the younger Beswicks' first comments on our move was "Oh my God, they're going to make us live on a slag heap"! So I was delighted to flush a Red Grouse on a walk only a mile from home and then to discover that the local area holds the most southerly naturally occurring population in the UK (those on Dartmoor have been introduced).

The whole area has been shaped by human activity since the end of the last Ice Age. The forests have been cleared, large predators exterminated and, more recently, the whole area transformed by heavy industry: iron and steel making and coal mining. So significant was the local area in the Industrial Revolution that Blaenavon, with its eighteenth century ironworks, was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. Some slag heap indeed! Following this achievement, the local authority, Torfaen, secured funding for an ambitious programme, the Forgotten Landscapes Project, to manage the largely rural World Heritage Site area for its heritage, wildlife, local residents and visitors. From the outset, the Red Grouse was recognised as an iconic local species that required special attention. Even at the height of industrial activity the surrounding area was being managed to provide sport for the wealthy in the form of grouse shooting. However, the quality of the moor was allowed to decline after the war and, with it, the number of grouse fell. Combined with the continuation of some shooting this placed the viability of the grouse population at risk. In 2009 agreement was reached to suspend shooting until the population had recovered to a level that would sustain the loss of a few birds to the guns. The problem was first to establish the size of the population and then to monitor its fortunes on an ongoing basis. Unlike their Black cousins, Red Grouse are difficult to monitor as they do not lek. A baseline population estimate was established by beating through the area in the autumn with dogs to count the number flushed. However, this could not be repeated regularly and an alternative approach was devised.

The monitoring methodology adopted does not give an absolute population figure but allows the status of the birds in each survey area to be compared year on year. In principle, this approach enables the relative value of each part of the site to be determined and, over time, to see which differing habitat management regimes benefit the grouse most. Monitoring is undertaken by volunteers who require little specialist expertise or training. Each survey area has been allocated a set route of 2 Km with waypoints at 400 metre intervals. At each waypoint the surveyors play a 30 second recording of grouse calls on a boogie box and watch for the response. The survey is undertaken monthly between December and March when the male birds are establishing their territories and so respond to what they take to be intruders. Grouse ears are obviously attuned to their calls as birds will appear from as far as 200 metres away to investigate, even in breezy conditions. In addition to recording the location and number of birds seen or heard, surveyors report on any sightings of their distinctive droppings that are often helpfully deposited in small heaps on the paths followed by the survey route.



Typical Monitoring Transect

Monitoring has now been continuing for four years but the consistency of the surveying has suffered from the availability and enthusiasm of the volunteers. Tramping over the moors in mid-winter is not everyone's cup of tea. Nevertheless, the data suggest that the population has increased but this could be down to several factors: mild winters, suspension of shooting and cyclical variations being but three. Perhaps surprisingly, birds are often found in areas of mixed grass and heather, rather than in those of dense heather cover. Habitat management remains problematic with threats from over-grazing by sheep, off-road biking, fly-tipping, wildfires and bracken encroachment. Work continues to address all of these, with limited success in the absence of dedicated resources, human and financial. The time-limited Forgotten Landscapes Project has ended but work continues under its all-volunteer successor, the Blaenavon World Heritage Environment Group. A vital objective is to increase the local community's appreciation of their spectacular local environment and wildlife, so that its protection is assured for future generations.

Apart from enjoying the grouse, my personal highlights have included regular encounters with Buzzards, Peregrines, Kestrels and Red Kites, with occasional hunting Merlins and Hen Harriers, and once a Short-eared Owl flushed from its roost. The early spring visits bring the return of Skylarks and Wheatears to the moors and passage waders, such as Curlew, Dunlin and Woodcock. One discovery, linked to the grouse monitoring, was that wintering Woodcock leave the safety of the woods at dusk to feed on the moor, one even resting briefly on a track. The monitoring has also been my chance to introduce several non-birder volunteers to our world; the youngest is now studying ecology at university. In short, grouse monitoring provides me with spectacular birding that serves a valuable purpose and the opportunity to contribute to our local community.

RAMBLINGS FROM HEREFORDSHIRE

(Rodney Walker)

We have been living in Merlin Cottage in Brockhampton for two years now. The cottage is named after the bird (not seen here as yet!). Brockhampton is a delightful hamlet lying between Hereford and Ross-on-Wye on a series of sweeping bends of the river Wye. Capler Hill, above us, contains an Iron Age Fort and today is often used as an OP by all sorts of "funny" people. We are relatively close to the Welsh Border and it was from some of our nearest hamlets that the most fearsome English warriors came; they kept the Welsh at bay over many a century. Hence combat is not unknown in this area and aerial combat continues to this day. We have regular low level (and noisy) visits from RAF fighters as they enter the Welsh valleys practising their skills, or joining in the local training battles with air support, and aerial fighters from a number of other nations also come in support. Chinooks often sneak by us (by day and by night) keeping us on our toes and ensuring that skinny-dipping is an unwise pastime!

But it is the excitements of the wild life and the avian world about which I thought I should ramble about. We live on the edge of a large estate surrounded by fields in which sheep dwell, along with a multitude of moles, pheasants, badgers, stoats, weasels, foxes and deer. To date I have counted over 40 species of bird in or close to our small garden. In the woods around us we have at least 2 raven families and a couple of families of buzzards. Our small pond attracts herons (we never had any fish!), mallards and a moorhen – quite crowded considering it is only half the size of a small dining room table! As the house had been empty for some time when we moved in, we found ourselves competing heavily with spiders, bugs, ladybirds, flies, rats and mice but, to date, no squirrels (in my last house in Cheshire I was under surveillance day and night by at least a platoon of “tree rats”!). A certain amount of counter-action has left us only with a few healthy spiders, we hope. But it was the eaves of the house which held the most excitement – 2 hornets’ nests, 5 wasps nests, a couple of house martin nests one of which has been purloined by house sparrows and a load of entry points into our attics. In the short time we have been here we have had the following nesting in our garden – blackbirds, song thrushes, robins, wrens, all the tits, chaffinches, green finches, house martins, house sparrows, mallards, pigeons, pheasant and red-legged partridge.

I seem to have made a bit of a name for myself as a local bird rescuer. It started in the early summer when I was called upon on 3 occasions to catch and release, first, a robin, then a blue tit and latterly a swallow from houses nearby. In my own garden I rescued a young song thrush from a water butt only to be attacked by a seemingly ungrateful mother – we all survived! But our greatest rescue was of our young partridge family. One morning we saw a clutch of 13 very young chicks on our patio – is 13 really an unlucky number? Well the answer is yes. Over a period of 10 days the clutch was reduced to 7. The local gamekeeper suggested that the others might have gone off with their Dad; I think not as there was no way out of our garden for them at that age. Then one morning I saw Mum standing on our cattle grid; I feared the worst. By the time I reached the area she had gone down inside too! With the help of a friend we built a ramp and carpeted the grid in the hope that they would reappear. Well 30 minutes later Mum climbed out but no chicks. So we went back into action and plucked 7 chicks out and gave them back to Mum. But a fortnight later all we saw was two adult birds and one chick. Oh dear and after all our efforts!

But it has been the aerial scene which has been of the greatest interest over the year. With buzzards, ravens, sparrowhawks and kestrels all patrolling above us it is not infrequent that the lesser inhabitants have to take to the air to protect themselves and their young. Rooks, jackdaws, and pigeons form their own mixed squadrons and can be seen dive-bombing their attackers. But to see two a pair of sparrowhawks clearly taking on a buzzard is rather special. To see a buzzard protecting its young against the ravens – what a racket that was – is new to me; but the raven family, a little later, sheltering its young against a buzzard, got their own back. To see a cuckoo being mobbed by blackbirds and tits gave us a thrill along with a female sparrowhawk on a dive aimed at a “tit” feast on one of our seed holders; she became seriously entangled in our thorny rose bush.

But the most exciting moment of them all was when I witnessed a dramatic snatch and grab attack by a red kite (one of our Welsh friends, I assume!) which stormed a buzzard on the ground eating a rabbit. Not only did the buzzard take a hiding but it also lost its prey to the red kite. Wow!

A personal first for me when I was having breakfast one morning was a short visit to my bird feeders by what appeared to be a slightly large sparrowhawk. Unfortunately I did not have my camera available but it became quickly clear that we had a male goshawk in the garden taking a short break while preparing to attack in the vicinity. This was a really wonderful, close range viewing.

My most worrying moment, however, was on a visit to our local church where I am the churchwarden. This church is of particular interest as it was built during the heyday of the Arts and Crafts movement and contains some special embroidery. One evening this summer I was doing some work in the grave yard, removing unwanted weeds, when I looked up to see 5 (yes 5!) green woodpeckers lined up on the dry stone wall all staring at me. I wondered afterwards whether they had been sent by the Good Lord to make sure I was behaving myself!

Bird list 2015:

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Mallard | Magpie | Nuthatch |
| Red-legged Partridge | Jay | Robin |
| Pheasant | Jackdaw | Dunnock |
| Heron | Rook | Song Thrush |
| Red Kite | Crow | Blackbird |
| Goshawk | Raven | Pied Wagtail |
| Sparrowhawk | Blue Tit | Greenfinch |
| Buzzard | Great Tit | Chaffinch |
| Kestrel | Coal Tit | Bullfinch |
| Moorhen | Swallow | Goldfinch |
| Woodpigeon | House Martin | House Sparrow |
| Collared Dove | Long-tailed tTt | Wren |
| Cuckoo | Swift | Linnet |
| Green Woodpecker | Chiffchaff | |
| Great-spotted Woodpecker | Garden Warbler | |



KEFALONIA

(Rich Moody)

Kefalonia is the largest of the Ionian Islands, (700 sq km) and is located off the west coast of Greece. Though, in recent times, it is most notably known as the location for Captain Corellis Mandolin; it also has lots of history, interesting geography and endangered fauna. As it sits in the earthquake zone it has seen lots of changes, especially the 1953 earthquake which badly affected all but the northern town of Fiskado. Mount Ainos dominates the landscape and at 1628 meters can be seen from most areas. One of the most famous residents is the endangered Loggerhead Turtle which breed on the southern beaches.

What follows is a short trip report highlighting my casual observations from 23rd August – 30th August 2015. Though this was not a birding holiday, I did manage a few morning sorties in various areas and hope that this will give some indication of what to expect. Kephhalonia is not a 'birding destination' but for those of you who visit, a little effort will afford you some nice birds.

Travel and Accommodation

The holiday was booked through Thomas Cook with Olympic Holidays staying at the Liberatos Village Hotel in Lassi. We flew Air Germania out of Gatwick and though there were delays of about an hour each way the flights were fine. Flight time was about 2 hours 50 minutes and is a no frills flight. The town of Lassi is located in the southwest - a ten minute drive north of the airport and a five minute drive south of the capital Argostoli. Liberatos Village hotel, sits approximately at the centre of Lassi, but up a very steep hill, affording you a good ten minute hike from the town. However, after sampling some of the wonderful Greek cuisine, you might be grateful of burning off a few calories.

The accommodation was as expected, basic but comfortable. Air conditioning is installed but must be paid for separately – about 50 euros per week. There were three single beds, stove top, fridge, and minimal cups, glasses, plates etc. The bathroom could have had a couple more features which would have made things more comfortable like a shower curtain that worked and a hook on the wall so you could actually stand under the shower rather than having to hold it – basic stuff. The infamous sewage system is still in place – don't put toilet paper down the loo! We were on the second floor with a nice balcony, table and chairs and drying rack – perfect.

Daily Journal

23rd August 2015

Arrived at 22:00 local time (2 hours ahead of the U.K.) and met the Olympic Rep Amy who guided us to our coach. This all went very smoothly including the transfer of passengers and baggage onto a smaller bus to take us up the small switchback road to Liberatos Village. After settling in and a drink at the pool bar we got the first bird of the trip – European Nightjar! Three individuals were hawking moths around a light next to our balcony.

24th August 2015

Collared Dove was the first bird of the day at 06:55 am. Blackbird and Swallow came next then got looks at a scolding bird I was scanning for - Sardinian Warbler! As I would find out, this bird is fairly common here but what a cracker! With its white throat, black head and bold red eye it really does stand out as a top bird for me on this trip. Red-rumped Swallow, Spotted Flycatcher also got added to the list which totaled 17 species before breakfast. At 09:30 we met with Amy by the pool who filled us in on all of the excursions and local attractions. We also got good intel on recommended restaurants and car hire companies.

After signing up for a boat excursion and a car we headed down to the capital Argostoli by taxi. (6 euros)

Argostoli has something for everyone, architecture, town square, shops, bars, restaurants etc, but, for me, the attraction is the harbour. At about 11:00 am local fisherman return to the harbour and sort out the days catch. Anything they don't want goes overboard which in turn attracts some of the Loggerhead Turtles. For anyone visiting the island this is by far the best way to see these amazing creatures. We watched for about ½ hour and witnessed at least 4 individuals (all females) patrolling in between the boats and along the harbor wall – amazing! After spending the afternoon on Makris Gialos beach in Lassi we picked up our hire car, a Fiat Panda (210 euros for 5 days) from CBR car rentals. We headed southeast along the coastal road to the traditional fishing village of Katelios, about a 45 minute drive. En-route a few more species were added including Alpine Swift, Common Swift, Buzzard and Woodchat Shrike.

25th August 2015

Usual suspects greeted me on my early morning walk of the resort, with amazing views of Sardinian Warbler. Today was spent exploring the island, heading first to Sami on the west coast (45 mins) then to the Grogarati Cave and Melissani Cave. We then continued our travels up island until we reached Fiskardo. This quaint Greek fishing village with its old buildings still intact, is one of the only places not affected by the 1953 earthquake. Birds seen included Hooded Crow, Blue Rock Thrush (check wires and tops of buildings), Goshawk, Short-toed Eagle, Honey Buzzard and Kestrel. That evening after another walk up the steep hill from Lassi we had our first and only Scops Owl calling near the apartment.

26th August 2015

A lazy morning followed by a drive to Lixouri, which sits northeast of Argostoli across the gulf. You can either take a short ferry ride across the bay or drive the coastal road. We arrived at what is referred to as the Livadi Marshes at about 10:45 am. It is the only bit of marshland that we came across and is located off the main road just north of Livadi.

Here we racked up a few more birds which were great as the species list was still looking a little thin. Great Egret, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Garganey, Teal, Mallard, Moorhen and Coot were the most obvious and all new. After another scan Green Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt and Little Grebe showed themselves. In the pines were tits and Chaffinch but also Wood Warbler and a single Icterine Warbler. All these were viewed from the high ground looking down on the marsh. Down at sea level on the main road Marsh Harrier was noted and on the bay side, Common Sandpiper, Stonechat and Zitting Cisticola. Continuing on we turned right onto a small road which leads to a quarry. Kestrel, Hood Crow, Red-backed Shrike and Woodchat Shrike were present.

The small roads south and west of Lixouri were good for shrikes and Stonechat. Plenty of Buzzards around to keep you busy and near Chavdata we finally bumped into one of my favorite birds: European Bee-eater! 15 to be exact. Initially, they were flying around up high and calling. Eventually they landed on some cables which afforded great views.

27th August 2015

Today I was up early as this was my official birding day of the trip – first stop Livadi Marsh. Here I clocked up a few more trip birds including Water Rail, Wood Sandpiper, Peregrine Falcon, Chukar, Night Heron, Reed Warbler and Kingfisher. I followed the route we had taken on the previous day, getting a few photos this time and adding Wheatear to the list. A side road detour south of Livadi produced another Bee-eater, Woodchat Shrike and Wheatear sighting and panoramic views of Petani Beach from the cliffs above.

The afternoon was spent by the pool until about 16:00 when we headed into the hills then finally to Mount Ainos. The road up was fantastic with amazing views. We stayed around the summit for a while and it was here I added my first lifer of the trip – Sombre Tit! Coal Tit and Blue Tit made up the bulk of the tit flock I noted, but with a little luck I managed a look at a

single Sombre Tit - lacking the wing bars and brown tinges on the flanks. Other species here included Robin and Firecrest.

En-route back we took one of the minor roads via Agios Gerasimos Monastery and the Robola Winery. This was well worth the effort as not only was the Monastery amazing we added Cirl Bunting and Whinchat.

28th August 2015

We took the Captain Makis Glass Bottom Boat trip. This was a great day with plenty of fun; swimming, snorkeling, kayaks, volleyball and BBQ on the beach. Yellow-legged Gulls, Black-headed Gulls were noted as we passed one of the fish farms. A single Kingfisher seen near the Argostoli lighthouse and 16 Cormorant were observed.

29th August 2015

Another trip (08:30am start) around the coastal road passed Lixouri, this time we headed to the famous Xi (Ksi) Beach. Here we spent a few hours enjoying the shallow water, red sand and enjoyed a free spa session, using the natural clay from the cliffs which is said to have cleaning and tightening effects to the skin. Serin was the only new bird added here and at about 14:30 we head back to Lassi to return the car. Between Lixouri and Livadi, just north of Pali, we spotted a raptor circling about some hills. Seeing so many Common Buzzard, I almost dismissed it, but decided to pullover just to make sure. I am glad I did. This was not a Common Buzzard. Circling above us was an amazing bird – IMPERIAL EAGLE! This was my most wanted bird of the trip and I had actually written it off. This sub-adult bird circled three times before heading east and disappearing. I didn't have time to get the camera but got an amazing look! Another quick scan at Livadi Marsh produced a new bird for the trip and a bird I haven't seen since 1996 – Marsh Sandpiper!

30th August 2015

Our last day started with a mooch around Argostoli in the morning where I managed to get some Gopro footage of the Loggerhead Turtles. This was followed by a flying visit to Lassi before slogging up the hill one last time just in time to spot the final species of the trip - Golden Oriole! The remainder of the day was spent around the pool where Re-rumped Swallow and Alpine Swift kept me entertained until heading for the airport.

Top tips:

- Bye a map! Directions and sign posts are not always clear...think ahead.
- Give way on roundabouts – once you are on a roundabout you must allow traffic from the right to have right of way – let them on.
- Let locals pass you on the road if you are sightseeing and driving slow.
- Take cash and pay cash as much as possible to help the local community.
- Gratuities are not mandatory but appreciated.
- Drink bottled water only.
- Don't flush toilet paper down the toilet.
- Research Car Hire – We chose CBR who were recommended by our rep and were excellent. We felt safe and not conned by small print. No problems.
- You will see birds when driving the coastal roads – BE CAREFUL – I had to let plenty of birds go as there was no safe place to stop. Keep vigilant whilst driving – let the passenger search for birds, driver stay focused.
- Sign up for excursions – they are fun and get you to areas which could produce good birds + you will be supporting local economy.

Species List:

Teal – Livadi Marsh
Mallard – Livadi Marsh
Garganey – Livadi Marsh
Chukar – Livadi Marsh
Cormorant – Argostoli Gulf from boat
Night Heron – 7 at Livadi Marsh
Little Egret – Livadi Marsh
Great Egret – Livadi Marsh
Grey Heron – Livadi Marsh
Little Grebe – Livadi Marsh
Honey Buzzard – Konidarata (between Assos and Fiskardo)
Marsh Harrier – Livadi Marsh
Goshawk – Konidarata (between Assos and Fiskardo)
Buzzard – daily common
Imperial Eagle – north of Pali
Short-toed Eagle – west of Lixouri and Konidarata (between Assos and Fiskardo)
Kestrel – Livadi area and Konidarata (between Assos and Fiskardo)
Peregrine Falcon – Livadi Marsh
Water Rail - Livadi Marsh
Moorhen - Livadi Marsh
Coot - Livadi Marsh
Black-winged Stilt - Livadi Marsh
Green Sandpiper - Livadi Marsh
Common Sandpiper - Livadi Marsh (along shoreline of bay)
Wood Sandpiper - Livadi Marsh
Marsh Sandpiper - Livadi Marsh
Black-headed Gull – Argostoli harbour and fishfarm seen from boat
Yellow-legged Gulls – seen daily near coast
Rock Pigeon – Melissani Caves
Collared Dove – Common in most areas
Scops Owl – Single bird calling at Liberatos Village
Nightjar – up to 3 birds hawking insects around street lights at Liberatos Village
Swift – Lassi, Melissani Cave area, various
Alpine Swift – Liberatos Village and Katelios
Kingfisher – Livadi Marsh and Argostoli Bay
Bee-eater – Livadi Marsh and Lixouri area
Red-backed Shrike – Quarry road next to Livadi Marsh
Woodchat Shrike – regular in various areas, often perched on telephone or electrical wires
Jay – common
Raven – 2 seen fly north over Lassi
Hooded Crow – Livadi area, Fiskardo and Robola Winery
Firecrest – Mount Ainous
Blue Tit – regular various
Great Tit – regular various

Coal Tit – Mount Ainous
Sombre Tit – Mount Ainous
Swallow - common
House Martin – Liberatos Village
Red-rumped Swallow - common
Icterine Warbler – 1 at Livadi Marsh
Wood Warbler – Livadi Marsh and Mount Ainous
Reed Warbler – Livadi Marsh
Sardinian Warbler – regular various
Blackbird – common
Spotted Flycatcher – Liberatos Village and Lixouri
Robin – Mount Ainous
Whinchat – Robola Winery
Stonechat – Livadi Marsh and Lixouri area
Wheatear – Lixouri, Mount Ainous and cliffs above Petani Beach
House Sparrow – common around towns
Yellow Wagtail - Konidarata (between Assos and Fiskardo)
Chaffinch – Liberatos Village
Greenfinch – Liberatos Village
Serin – 2 at Xi Beach
Goldfinch – Liberatos Village and Lassi
Linnet – Liberatos Village
Cirl Bunting – 2 at Robola Winery
Golden Oriole – 1 at Liberatos Village



SOUTH AFRICA

(Andrew Bray)

I had never put together a bird list of birds seen in South Africa all the times I had visited my parents. My aim was to put this right using various contacts through my parents and visit as much of South Africa as I could. In the end I went for just under 4 weeks from 23 September to 20 October and visited some good areas for endemics but still missed some or just heard some which I did not count as they were not seen. It was quite a journey and only 2 days were with a booked trip. On arrival at Johannesburg I took the Gautrain to Sandton where I was met by Tom. He is now a widower who bought our first house in South Africa with Agnes in 1967. We had lunch at Morningside Club and in the afternoon visited Liliesleaf which was a farm where the ANC Executive met and were arrested. Derek, who I stayed with later, was a boy on the farm next door. Now-a-days it is part of the suburbs as Johannesburg now meets Pretoria and stretches out to areas that were veld not that long ago. On my first day I was reacquainted with the Hadada Ibis as well as birds such as Laughing Dove, Cape Sparrow, and Black-collared Barbet. Tom had quite a few feeders in the garden which attracted various birds including Rosy-faced Lovebird.



Hadeda Ibis

The next morning was an early start to the Olifants River Game Reserve near the Kruger Park. This was a private reserve and Tom had a house overlooking the river. On the way down we stopped at the Taita Falcon site by Abel Erasmus Pass but it was not there, nor there on the way back. Michael who had shown visitors the bird for umpteen years did find for us Mountain Wagtail, Half-collared Kingfisher and Green-backed Camaroptera. That



Mountain Wagtail

evening we drove in our 4x4 around the reserve to find 4 of the Big 5 in less than a hour; we missed Leopard by a minute! We did add quite a few birds to the list including Lilac-breasted Roller, Southern Red-billed Hornbill, Yellow-billed Hornbill, Fork-tailed Drongo, Tawny Eagle and Brown-headed Kingfisher. In the morning we were up at dawn to watch the birds on the river that included Giant Kingfisher, Blacksmith Lapwing and Egyptian Goose that were present every day across the whole country. The days were spent with a morning drive, brunch, rest or swim, evening drive then a braai. The temperature was 36C in the shade and we stopped for a lot of birds. We

were joined by Jenny and later by Charles and Liz who were all birders of various experiences. Birds of note during the 4 whole days were Acacia Pied Barbet, Bateleur, Marico Flycatcher, Red-crested Korhaan, Sabota Lark, Pel's Fishing Owl, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Natal Spurrow, Cape White-eye and vultures including White-backed, Hooded and Lappet-faced. I also saw many animals with lots of elephants, 2 male Giraffe fighting, White Rhino and a lot of antelopes. It was a magical time

except for late Saturday night after the Springbok rugby game; my England shirt never had a re-appearance. It takes roughly a day to drive back to Johannesburg. The next day we collected Jane who is a friend of Tom's sister. She is a birder of excellence and we spent a couple of hours at Marievale which is a bird reserve near a mine tip. That day the wind was very strong and as the reserve is very open most birds were hunkered down in the reeds as it was a wetland site. There was lots of Red-knobbed Coot which covered water wherever I went. Other birds included Black Heron doing its umbrella dance, Hottentot Teal, White-backed Duck and Marsh Warbler.



Fiscal Flycatcher

I was racking up the birds and the following day we were off to Wakkeestroom which was a birding hotspot. Once again it was a very windy day and at a picnic spot I added African Darter and, what was to become very common, Black-shouldered Kite to the list. We had time to visit the dam and lakes that evening in town and saw quite a few water birds as well as others that like the habitat such as African Marsh Harrier, African Swamp-hen, Cliff Swallow, African Rail, Black Crake and Lesser Swamp Warbler. The next day was an early start with our guide, Lucky. He was to show us a range of endemics and we travelled long distances though for most South African's this was just a

trip down the road. We had an excellent day finding birds in the middle of no-where and sometimes at places where what had been a track off a dirt road ended! Our first stop was for a Lanner Falcon on the ground and during the day we saw Bokakerie, Denham's Bustard, Jackal Buzzard, Ant-eating Chat, Buff-streaked Chat, Cloud Cisticola, Blue and Grey Crowned Cranes, Fiscal Flycatcher, Grey-winged Francolin, Southern Bald Ibis, Blue Korhaan, Botha's Lark, Eastern Clapper Lark, Rudd's Lark, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Cape Longclaw, Yellow-breasted Pipit, Secretarybird, Sentinel Rock-thrush and Ground Woodpecker. The next day we stopped briefly at the dam and saw a Red-chested Flufftail which popped out of the reeds for us. This rarely seen bird is all about being at the right time in the right place!

Our next stop was Howick where Tom dropped me off with his sister Evelyn and her husband Derek. The previous occupant of my bed was a Captain Wales when he was on his Rhino jaunt. Evelyn is a very keen birder and her garden was full of feeders. After a short walk with the dog in the afternoon and a stop to see the Woolly Stork in the local school my list was 202 species. Evelyn took me to various places over the next 4 days. The first day was a trip with the Midlands Birding Club around Darval Sewage Works at Pietermaritzburg. There were 12 members on the walk around the streams and ponds. People were very friendly and assisted me in seeing a lot of birds as well as a lot of cannabis growing wild! There were all sorts of water birds including several Goliath Herons and a range of ducks. In addition we saw Black Sparrowhawk, African Palm Swift, Tambourine Dove, Tawny-flanked Prinia and White-bellied Sunbird. Next stop was the Pietermaritzburg Botanical gardens which included seeing Greater Double-collared Sunbird. Our final stop of the day was Metmar Dam and driving on areas that should be underwater. In the newspapers they were warning of at least 500,000 people in Kwa-Zulu Natal having no access to drinking water because of the drought and farmers not planting crops. The only endemic was Cape Grassbird but there were Red-throated Wryneck, Wattled Plover and Black-bellied Bustard as well as Oribi and other bok. My second day in the area saw us

meeting Louise at the gates to a WESSA National Park in the Umgeni Gorge a few minutes' drive away. During our walk down the gorge Evelyn reminded us not to step on any Puff-adders (other snakes would move away) and that Leopard is the only cat there. We did walk past a lonely looking Giraffe but everything else moved quickly away. We did see lots of birds in the canopy as we walked around the slopes. At a view point even the loo had a magnificent view to its front. There were lots of hirundines including Black Saw-wing, White-throated Swallow, Greater-striped Swallow and Brown-throated Martin. We also saw Lesser Honeyguide and Scaly-throated Honeyguide as well as Lazy Cisticola, Levallant's Cisticola and Olive Bushshrike. In the afternoon we visited the Mandela arrest point and the museum to his arrest. Evelyn, when she was a councillor, hosted Mandela when he opened the statue erected to mark his arrest. The memorial is a clever bit of engineering with lots of poles that form his face as you walk closer towards it. Our final stop was the Howick Falls which is about 95m in height and hosted a Peregrine Falcon.

The following day we visited a friend's farm at Benvi. Jenny had an open garden that week and it was a real delight walking around its huge area with so many flowers and trees. We saw quite a lot and heard more but I could not claim them as I did not see them. Birds seen did include Orange Ground Thrush and Forest Canary. We also visited a small valley on the farm which habitat was still a relic of the Afro-mountain Wood. During the walk we saw Long-crested Eagle, Knysna Turaco, Crowned Eagle, Red-chested Cuckoo and Emerald Cuckoo. We stopped at Gartside Farm on the way back where there are a couple of hides for



Secretarybird

birders but no cranes. My final day was a trip to Giant's castle on the border with Lesotho. I was taking part in recording vultures from the bird hide. There were lots of Bearded and Cape Vultures. The place also attracted White-necked raven and Red-wing Starling. There was a herd of 97 Eland spread out in front of us as we returned to the rest camp where I saw Mmalachite Sunbird. The pressure was on to find a Wattled Crane as there were none in the usual places. We were just heading off the road towards a farm when I spotted two way off to my right in a boggy area which saved us a rather lot of time. This was repaid as we had time to stop at a Protea farm in Howick to find Gurney's Sugarbird. That evening I collected a car from Pietermaritzburg airport and drove to Durban (down-hill all the way!). I was up early the following morning to meet Crispin who worked at the University, for a stroll around Pigeon Park which was a short walk from my B&B. This park is a remnant of the Coastal Scarp Forest and held lots of Red and Blue Duiker. There were also lots of African Paradise Flycatchers. Unfortunately I was just a few days late for the Spotted Ground Thrush but did see Brown-backed Honeybird and Square-tailed Drongo. I was told to visit the Botanical gardens and Umgeni River for the Pink-backed Pelican as I could not miss them. Well I visited both places twice and dipped! There were plenty of herons and terns on the river and the gardens were fascinating in their own right. In the evening I met up with Crispin again after I had good views of Purple-crested Turaco which I had heard many times. I added Yellow-throated Tinkerbird and Dark-backed Weaver to my ever growing species list. I was now on 276 species and was flying to the Western Cape in the morning.

The King Shaka Airport is quite a long drive out of Durban. British Airways was doing a special offer of an upgrade to Club which I took as it was a long flight. We landed at Port Elizabeth on the way which is the windy city but in reality a small town. On arrival at Cape Town I picked up my hire care and drove to my B&B at Green Point where I was met by

Cher. I unloaded my bags and headed straight for the cable car at Table Mountain as it was a clear sunny day. It took an hour and a half to get to the front of the queue for the cable car but what a panorama when I reached the top. I also had views of Orange-breasted Sunbird and Rock Kestrel. I had an afternoon in tourist mode enjoying the sunshine. I was up very



White-throated Swallow

early the next day even though the pelagic was postponed a day because of the weather. I was off to Strandfontein Sewage Works and all the ponds. It is the largest works in the Cape and stretches for miles. The ponds were full of Greater Flamingo, Little Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, Cape Shoveler, Yellow-billed Duck and Red-billed Teal. Around the tracks were Spotted Thick-knee, Karoo Lark and Lesser Double-collared Sunbird. It was here that I got the car stuck in sand a long way from the works! I tried to dig the car out but to no avail and then headed down a track that became a path that ended with me scratching my legs in the bush before

retreating back the way I came. I managed a lift from an American who had moved to South Africa for the birds and was employed as a bird guide. He showed me my first Spotted Eagle Owl. Anyway I managed to get a rope and a bakkie but it was 2 wheeled drive and no use. Just then a chap in a Freelander arrived complete with tow rope who pulled me out. He knew about me as I had contacted the Cape Birding Club but was busy all that week so could not show me around some of the local area. He did show me the Maccoa Duck and where a couple of vagrants had been seen. I had a schedule and wanted to get to Cape Point and Cape of Good Hope so did not look for them. At the National Park I saw my first Ostrich of the trip as well as Cape Sugarbird and Cape Bunting. I did stop at Boulders for the African Penguin before returning late to the B&B. That night my meal of a 300g fillet steak with a pint of beer was under £10; I was going to enjoy eating out. It was a very early start for the day I was dreading. I had booked a pelagic trip into the South Atlantic and quite a few of you know that small boats and I do not go well together. I had my bands on plus I took a travel sickness pill. We headed out of Simonstown and I was still surviving when one of the party of six fell ill. I was not too worried as despite the bouncing boat I was still looking for birds. The side effect of the pill was that I was having trouble staying awake! I finally succumbed just after a large Sunfish passed by and woke up as we came across a trawler about 7 miles south of Cape Point. The trawler had been processing a catch and the sea was covered in White-chinned Petrels and Great Shearwaters. In addition there were 5 species of Albatross including Wandering as well as Northern Giant Petrel and Black-bellied Storm Petrel as well as other birds. Whilst we were there the trawler pulled up its net for the Fur Seals to go wild as fish escaped. I was soon asleep again and woke up with about a hour to go before we docked. This gave me time to pick up all 4 cormorant species, more African Penguin and Black Oystercatcher, and to have some lunch. I even felt well enough to drive back to my B&B straight away.



Giant Northern Petrel

As was my habit I was on the road before 7am driving north along Route 27 to a small area of large scrub at Silwersroomstrand where the sun did not help me in finding birds. I then

took the Darling loop which kept me busy for hours. Blue Crane was common and other birds included Cape Weaver, Capped wheatear, Cape Long-billed Lark and Pied Starling. I forgo any long stops on the main road and headed for the West Coast National Park and drove straight away to the South Africa's Number 1 Bird Hide. The tide on the lagoon was so far out even my telescope was not much help. Within half an hour the water was lapping at the hides stilts and had pushed all the waders in including lots of waders we see in UK. There were hundreds of Curlew Sandpiper and a small flock of Lesser Flamingo amongst the huge numbers of Greater Flamingo. I visited a few other hides as well and saw my only snake crossing the road which was a Mole Snake. There were additional birds including Kittlitz's and White-fronted Plovers, Black Harrier and Southern Black Korhaan. That evening I tried for Chesnut-banded Plover at the Cerebos Salt Works at Velddrif but dipped. It was rather late when I booked into my B&B and dark when I reached the restaurant on the waterfront. It was rather chilly at

nights and I had to wear my fleece. The following morning was a quick stop to see a pair of Black Eagles that posed on top of a dead tree away from the quarry then back to Velddrif where again I could not find this plover; plenty of other water birds though. I now have details of a farm to visit where they always are! The day was going to be a long day as I now had at least a 3 hour drive back through mountains to Karooport. I had to wait at roadworks where they closed one side of the road for 5-10kms. Cars sat at the lights for up to about 10 minutes waiting for the



Cape Sugarbird

barrier (manned!) to be opened when the lights turned green. I pushed on forsaking other stops on the way to Karrooport which is the start of a dirt road when the metalled Route 46 turns sharp right. The wind was a major factor that day and kept a lot of birds down as I drove slowly through the mountain gap into the expanse of the Karoo. I was headed for Eierkop and again the book lied as the Karoo Eremomela was nowhere to be heard or seen. I did pick up Grey Tit, Dusky Sunbird, Booted Eagle, Lark-like Bunting and Karoo Chat. I was determined to find the Namaqua Warbler and stopping just short of the metalled road once again I was at the right place at the right time as one flew out of the scrub onto the wire fence, posed, and then flew back into scrub not to be seen by me again. I made the mistake of coming back through the mountains stopping at various places for birds I could not find and then made things worse by driving through Paarl where police manned the junctions as there was so much traffic.

Next morning I joined the Cape Birding Club at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens for a short walk led by Peter. First bird was a Great Spotted Owl nesting in a hanging basket in the courtyard. The walk was short as quite a few wanted to attend the talk on chameleons. My thanks to Mel who was a local bird guide for information when I return. He made sure I saw the Brimstone Canary. After the group split up I did the contour walk before immersing myself in the gardens full of proteas in flower. In the afternoon I visited the Constantia Green-belt and never saw the Knysna Warbler though heard it a few times. It was a lovely area to walk through and then I drove back along the west coast with fabulous views. My final jaunt was along the south coast. As I drove along the N2 pass the airport there was mile after mile of shanty town. Eventually I turned the corner to head south along the east coast of False Bay and to Rooiels. At the gate across the track by the Rock-jumper sign I met the Executive Committee of the Hermanus Birding Club being shown birds by Mike who

was a member and bird guide. That morning I did see several Cape Rock-jumpers viewing the mountain from the orange painted rock. In addition I saw Familiar Chat and Cape Rock Thrush on buildings and rocks. I joined the group at Harold Porter Botanical Gardens where Cape Siskin fed in the flower beds and Sweet Waxbill was massed on the ground by trees holding Cape Batis. After a quick visit the committee all headed off and I gave a lift to Mike who showed me a lot of birds down a dirt road including Large-billed Lark, Grey-backed Cisticola and more Denham's Bustard. I then drove via Hermanus to Agulhas Point and stood where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet. I spent the night at Bredasdorp. The



Great Spotted Owl

never found the bird but did see Bontebok and a White Stork as well as Black Harrier. I was used to not finding birds later in the afternoon so started the long drive back to Cape Town. It was my final night and once again I finished off my meal at the Gelato shop where a large scoop set me back £1.50p. It was time to fly back to Johannesburg and the car hire attendant must have thought I had been negligent as whilst other cars looked clean mine was covered in bugs and dirt. Checks passed I flew back that morning on British Airways to be met by Tom at Sandton Station. The afternoon was spent watching rugby and drinking at Morningside Club. It was a day off birding; at least new species anyway. The next day we drove north to the South East of Pretoria to Rietvlei Game Reserve with lots of Rhino but more importantly Eastern Long-billed Lark, Northern Black Korhaan and Yellow-bellied Eremomela. The park was well kept

and a few families were at the picnic area with children feeding huge Barbel with bread from a hide over the water. In the afternoon we drove to Pilansberg Game Reserve and stayed at Kwa-Maritime Camp complete with a tunnel to a water hole. I found out that I could watch the water hole on the TV in the room which I did later. Some rooms had their own plunge pools outside; it was that sort of camp. We sat out that evening watching the birds and game in the reserve before a fantastic meal that night in the restaurant though every room

following morning I went to De Mond National Park for terns where there were plenty of Common, Swift and Caspian but no Damara. I tried at a beach further south but all I found was a 4x4 stuck in sand with the occupants having coffee. They did not require help as a tractor was on its way to pull them out. On the surrounding dirt roads there were plenty of Red-naped lark and Agulhas Long-billed Pipit as well as Zitting Cisticola. I was looking for Cape Clapper Lark and believed the book as I headed to Swellendam where a Palm-nut Vulture had recently been seen for a few days.

Despite driving along dirt roads I



Northern Black Korhaan

was a self contained so you could bring your own food and drink. The following morning we had a drive around some of the reserve with Purple Roller, Red-breasted Swallow, Yellow-billed Stork, Fish Eagle, African Hoopoe, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and a pair of Secretarybirds being dive-bombed by Blacksmith Plovers being a few of the highlights. Whilst having a late breakfast some Wildebeest and Warthog put in an appearance by the fence and a Southern Masked Weaver tried to help himself to my toast. That evening we were out for dinner at Charles and Liz so we left after lunch for the drive back pass 4-ways which when I was last there was a 4-way stop crossroads and a small cafe. It is now a major suburb of Johannesburg and I nearly missed the original junction that gave it its name. My last day in South Africa and we collected Jane to visit the Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens near Krugersdorp. The Black Cuckoo was a short sighting as it flew past along the river and so fleeting it did not count. I did however get good views of the Red-chested Cuckoo and Golden-tailed Woodpecker. It was a shame that the pair of Black Eagles was out hunting and we did not have time to linger. Four weeks later I now had a list of 370 species. There were still gaps in what I hoped to see and of course parts of the country I had not visited. I met a lot of birders and enjoyed some spectacular scenery from mountains to low-veld. I saw a vast range of birds and heard more. Next time I shall have to take my wife for a holiday then go birding; it would be madness not to.

List of birds seen in alphabetical order:

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Acacia Pied Barbet | <i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i> | African Black Duck | <i>Anas sparsa</i> |
| African Black Swift | <i>Apus barbatus</i> | African Darter | <i>Anhinga rufa</i> |
| African Dusky Flycatcher | <i>Muscicapa adusta</i> | African Emerald Cuckoo | <i>Chrysococcyx cupreus</i> |
| African Firefinch | <i>Lagonosticta rubricata</i> | African Fish Eagle | <i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i> |
| African Green Pigeon | <i>Treron calvus</i> | African Grey Hornbill | <i>Tockus nasutus</i> |
| African Harrier-Hawk | <i>Polyboroides typus</i> | African Hoopoe | <i>Upupa africana</i> |
| African Jacana | <i>Actophilornis africanus</i> | African Marsh Harrier | <i>Circus ranivorus</i> |
| African Olive Pigeon | <i>Columba arquatrix</i> | African Palm Swift | <i>Cypsiurus parvus</i> |
| African Paradise Flycatcher | <i>Terpsiphone viridis</i> | African Penguin | <i>Spheniscus demersus</i> |
| African Pied Wagtail | <i>Motacilla aguimp</i> | African Pipit | <i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i> |
| African Rail | <i>Rallus caerulescens</i> | African Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus baeticatus</i> |
| African Sacred Ibis | <i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i> | African Snipe | <i>Gallinago nigripennis</i> |
| African Spoonbill | <i>Platalea alba</i> | African Swamphen | <i>Porphyrio madagascariensis</i> |
| African Wattled Lapwing | <i>Vanellus senegallus</i> | Agulhas Long-billed Lark | <i>Certhilauda brevirostris</i> |
| Alpine Swift | <i>Apus melba</i> | Amethyst Sunbird | <i>Chalcomitra amethystina</i> |
| Ant-eating Chat | <i>Myrmecocichla formicivora</i> | Arctic Tern | <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> |
| Arrow-marked Babbler | <i>Turdoides jardineii</i> | Avocet | <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> |
| Banded Martin | <i>Riparia cincta</i> | Bank Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i> |
| Bar-throated Apalis | <i>Apalis thoracica</i> | Bateleur | <i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i> |
| Bearded Vulture | <i>Gypaetus barbatus</i> | Bearded Woodpecker | <i>Dendropicos namaquus</i> |
| Bee-eater | <i>Merops apiaster</i> | Black Crake | <i>Amaurornis flavirostra</i> |

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| Black Harrier | <i>Circus maurus</i> | Black Heron | <i>Egretta ardesiaca</i> |
| Black Kite | <i>Milvus migrans</i> | Black Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus bachmani</i> |
| Black Saw-wing | <i>Psalidoprocne pristoptera</i> | Black Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter melanoleucus</i> |
| Black-backed Puffback | <i>Dryoscopus cubla</i> | Black-bellied Bustard | <i>Lissotis melanogaster</i> |
| Black-bellied Storm Petrel | <i>Fregetta tropica</i> | Black-browed Albatross | <i>Thalassarche melanophris</i> |
| Black-collared Barbet | <i>Lybius torquatus</i> | Black-crowned Tchagra | <i>Tchagra senegalus</i> |
| Black-headed Heron | <i>Ardea melanocephala</i> | Black-necked Grebe | <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i> |
| Black-shouldered Kite | <i>Elanus axillaris</i> | Blacksmith Lapwing | <i>Vanellus armatus</i> |
| Black-winged Lapwing | <i>Vanellus melanopterus</i> | Black-winged Stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> |
| Blue Crane | <i>Grus paradisea</i> | Blue Korhaan | <i>Eupodotis coerulescens</i> |
| Blue Waxbill | <i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i> | Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher | <i>Trochocercus cyanomelas</i> |
| Bokmakierie | <i>Telophorus zeylonus</i> | Booted Eagle | <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i> |
| Brimstone Canary | <i>crithagra sulphurata</i> | Bronze Mannikin | <i>Lonchura cucullata</i> |
| Brown Skua | <i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i> | Brown Snake Eagle | <i>Circaetus cinereus</i> |
| Brown-backed Honeybird | <i>Prodotiscus regulus</i> | Brown-hooded Kingfisher | <i>Halcyon albiventris</i> |
| Brown-throated Martin | <i>Riparia paludicola</i> | Brubru | <i>Nilaus afer</i> |
| Buff-streaked Chat | <i>campicoloides bifasciatus</i> | Buffy Pipit | <i>Anthus vaalensis</i> |
| Burchell's Starling | <i>Lamprotornis australis</i> | Bush Blackcap | <i>Lioptilus nigricapillus</i> |
| Cape Batis | <i>Batis capensis</i> | Cape Bulbul | <i>Pycnonotus capensis</i> |
| Cape Bunting | <i>Emberiza capensis</i> | Cape Canary | <i>Serinus canicollis</i> |
| Cape Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i> | Cape Crow | <i>Corvus capensis</i> |
| Cape Gannet | <i>Morus capensis</i> | Cape Grassbird | <i>Sphenoeacus afer</i> |
| Cape Long-billed Lark | <i>Certhilauda curvirostris</i> | Cape Longclaw | <i>Macronyx capensis</i> |
| Cape Petrel | <i>Daption capense</i> | Cape Robin-Chat | <i>Cossypha caffra</i> |
| Cape Rock Thrush | <i>Monticola rupestris</i> | Cape Rockjumper | <i>Chaetops frenatus</i> |
| Cape Shoveler | <i>Anas smithii</i> | Cape Siskin | <i>Crithagra totta</i> |
| Cape Sparrow | <i>Passer melanurus</i> | Cape Spurfowl | <i>Pternistis capensis</i> |
| Cape Starling | <i>Lamprotornis nitens</i> | Cape Sugarbird | <i>Promerops cafer</i> |
| Cape Teal | <i>Anas capensis</i> | Cape Vulture | <i>Gyps coprotheres</i> |
| Cape Wagtail | <i>Motacilla capensis</i> | Cape Weaver | <i>Ploceus capensis</i> |
| Cape White-eye | <i>Zosterops capensis</i> | Capped Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe pileata</i> |
| Caspian Tern | <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> | Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> |
| Chestnut-vented Warbler | <i>Sylvia subcaerulea</i> | Chinspot Batis | <i>Batis molitor</i> |
| Cinnamon-breasted Bunting | <i>Emberiza tahapisi</i> | Cinnamon-breasted Warbler | <i>Euryptila subcinnamomea</i> |
| Cliff Swallow | <i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i> | Cloud Cisticola | <i>Cisticola textrix</i> |
| Collared Myna | <i>Acridotheres albocinctus</i> | Collared Sunbird | <i>Hedydipna collaris</i> |
| Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i> | Common Myna | <i>Acridotheres tristis</i> |

(vulpinus)

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| Common Ostrich | <i>Struthio camelus</i> | Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> |
| Common Tern | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> | Common Waxbill | <i>Estrilda astrild</i> |
| Crested Barbet | <i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i> | Crested Francolin | <i>Dendroperdix sephaena</i> |
| Croaking Cisticola | <i>Cisticola natalensis</i> | Crowned Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax coronatus</i> |
| Crowned Eagle | <i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i> | Crowned Lapwing | <i>Vanellus coronatus</i> |
| Curlew Sandpiper | <i>Calidris ferruginea</i> | Dark-backed Weaver | <i>Ploceus bicolor</i> |
| Dark-capped Bulbul | <i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i> | Dark-capped Yellow Warbler | <i>Iduna natalensis</i> |
| Denham's Bustard | <i>Neotis denhami</i> | Double-banded Sandgrouse | <i>Pterocles bicinctus</i> |
| Drakensberg Prinia | <i>Prinia hypoxantha</i> | Dusky Sunbird | <i>Cinnyris fuscus</i> |
| Eastern Clapper Lark | <i>Mirafra fasciolata</i> | Eastern Golden Weaver | <i>Ploceus subaureus</i> |
| Eastern Long-billed Lark | <i>Certhilauda semitorquata</i> | Egyptian Goose | <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i> |
| Familiar Chat | <i>Oenanthe familiaris</i> | Fan-tailed Warbler | <i>Cisticola juncidis</i> |
| Fan-tailed Widowbird | <i>Euplectes axillaris</i> | Fiscal Flycatcher | <i>Sigelus silens</i> |
| Forest Canary | <i>crithagra scotops</i> | Fork-tailed Drongo | <i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i> |
| Giant Kingfisher | <i>Megaceryle maxima</i> | Glossy Ibis | <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> |
| Golden-breasted Bunting | <i>Emberiza flaviventris</i> | Golden-tailed Woodpecker | <i>Campethera abingoni</i> |
| Goliath Heron | <i>Ardea goliath</i> | Great Crested Grebe | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> |
| Great Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i> | Great Shearwater | <i>Puffinus gravis</i> |
| Great White Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | Great White Pelican | <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i> |
| Greater Crested Tern | <i>Thalasseus bergii</i> | Greater Double-collared Sunbird | <i>Cinnyris afer</i> |
| Greater Flamingo | <i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i> | Greater Striped Swallow | <i>Cecropis cucullata</i> |
| Green Wood Hoopoe | <i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i> | Green-backed Camaroptera | <i>Camaroptera brachyura</i> |
| Greenshank | <i>Tringa nebularia</i> | Grey Crowned Crane | <i>Balearica regulorum</i> |
| Grey Cuckooshrike | <i>Coracina caesia</i> | Grey Go-away-bird | <i>Corythaixoides concolor</i> |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | Grey Plover | <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> |
| Grey Tit | <i>Parus afer</i> | Grey-backed Cisticola | <i>Cisticola subruficapilla</i> |
| Grey-headed Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus</i> | Ground Woodpecker | <i>Geocolaptes olivaceus</i> |
| Grey-winged Francolin | <i>Scleroptila afra</i> | Hadada Ibis | <i>Bostrychia hagedash</i> |
| Gurney's Sugarbird | <i>Promerops gurneyi</i> | Hamerkop | <i>Scopus umbretta</i> |
| Half-collared Kingfisher | <i>Alcedo semitorquata</i> | Helmeted Guinea fowl | <i>Numida meleagris</i> |
| Hartlaub's Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus hartlaubii</i> | Hottentot Teal | <i>Anas hottentota</i> |
| Hooded Vulture | <i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i> | Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross | <i>Thalassarche carteri</i> |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | Jackal Buzzard | <i>Buteo rufofuscus</i> |
| Intermediate Egret | <i>Egretta intermedia</i> | Karoo Lark | <i>Calendulauda albescens</i> |
| Karoo Chat | <i>Cercomela schlegelii</i> | Karoo Scrub Robin | <i>Cercotrichas coryphoeus</i> |

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| Karoo Prinia | <i>Prinia maculosa</i> | Kelp Gull | <i>Larus dominicanus</i> |
| Karoo Thrush | <i>Turdus smithi</i> | Knot | <i>Calidris canutus</i> |
| Kittlitz's Plover | <i>Charadrius pecuarius</i> | Kurrichane Thrush | <i>Turdus libonyana</i> |
| Knysna Turaco | <i>Tauraco corythaix</i> | Lappet-faced Vulture | <i>Torgos tracheliotus</i> |
| Lanner Falcon | <i>Falco biarmicus</i> | Lark-like Bunting | <i>Emberiza impetuari</i> |
| Large-billed Lark | <i>Galerida magnirostris</i> | Lazy Cisticola | <i>Cisticola aberrans</i> |
| Laughing Dove | <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> | Lesser Honeyguide | <i>Indicator minor</i> |
| Lesser Flamingo | <i>Phoenicopterus minor</i> | Lesser Striped Swallow | <i>Cecropis abyssinica</i> |
| Lesser Masked Weaver | <i>Ploceus intermedius</i> | Levaillant's Cisticola | <i>Cisticola tinniens</i> |
| Lesser Swamp Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus gracilirostris</i> | Little Bee-eater | <i>Merops pusillus</i> |
| Lilac-breasted Roller | <i>Coracias caudatus</i> | Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | Little Stint | <i>Calidris minuta</i> |
| Little Rush Warbler | <i>Bradypterus baboecala</i> | Long-billed Crombec | <i>Sylvietta rufescens</i> |
| Little Swift | <i>Apus affinis</i> | Long-crested Eagle | <i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i> |
| Long-billed Pipit | <i>Anthus similis</i> | Maccoa Duck | <i>Oxyura maccoa</i> |
| Long-tailed Widowbird | <i>Euplectes progne</i> | Malachite Sunbird | <i>Nectarinia famosa</i> |
| Magpie Shrike | <i>Corvinella melanoleucus</i> | Marico Sunbird | <i>Cinnyris mariquensis</i> |
| Marico Flycatcher | <i>Bradornis mariquensis</i> | Mocking Cliff Chat | <i>Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris</i> |
| Marsh Sandpiper | <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i> | Mountain Wagtail | <i>Motacilla clara</i> |
| Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | Mountain Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe monticola</i> |
| Namaqua Dove | <i>Oena capensis</i> | Namaqua Warbler | <i>Phragmacia substriata</i> |
| Natal Spurrow | <i>pternistis natalensis</i> | Neddicky | <i>Cisticola fulvicapilla</i> |
| Night-heron | <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i> | Northern Black Korhaan | <i>Afrotis afraoides</i> |
| Northern Giant Petrel | <i>Macronectes halli</i> | Olive Bushshrike | <i>Chlorophoneus olivaceus</i> |
| Olive Sunbird | <i>Cyanomitra olivacea</i> | Olive Thrush | <i>Turdus olivaceus</i> |
| Orange Ground Thrush | <i>Zoothera gurneyi</i> | Orange-breasted Sunbird | <i>Anthobaphes violacea</i> |
| Pearl-breasted Swallow | <i>Hirundo dimidiata</i> | Pel's Fishing Owl | <i>Scotopelia peli</i> |
| Peregrine | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> | Pied Crow | <i>Corvus albus</i> |
| Pied Kingfisher | <i>Ceryle rudis</i> | Pied Starling | <i>Lamprotornis bicolor</i> |
| Pin-tailed Whydah | <i>Vidua macroura</i> | Plain-backed Pipit | <i>Anthus leucophrys</i> |
| Pirit Batis | <i>Batis pririt</i> | Purple Heron | <i>Ardea purpurea</i> |
| Purple Roller | <i>Coracias naevius</i> | Purple-crested Turaco | <i>Tauraco porphyreolophus</i> |
| Red-backed Mannikin | <i>Lonchura nigriceps</i> | Red-billed Buffalo Weaver | <i>Bubalornis niger</i> |
| Red-billed Oxpecker | <i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i> | Red-billed Quelea | <i>Quelea quelea</i> |
| Red-billed Teal | <i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i> | Red-breasted Swallow | <i>Cecropis semirufa</i> |
| Red-capped Robin-Chat | <i>Cossypha natalensis</i> | Red-capped Lark | <i>Calandrella cinerea</i> |
| Red-chested Flufftail | <i>Sarothrura rufa</i> | Red-chested Cuckoo | <i>Cuculus solitarius</i> |
| Red-crested Korhaan | <i>Lophotis ruficrista</i> | Red-collared Widowbird | <i>Euplectes ardens</i> |
| Red-knobbed Coot | <i>Fulica cristata</i> | Red-eyed Dove | <i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i> |
| Red-winged Starling | <i>Onychognathus</i> | Red-throated Wryneck | <i>Jynx ruficollis</i> |

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| Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> | Reed Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i> |
| Rock Kestrel | <i>Falco rupicolus</i> | Ring-necked Dove | <i>Streptopelia capicola</i> |
| Rosy-faced Lovebird | <i>Agapornis roseicollis</i> | Rock Martin | <i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i> |
| Ruff | <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> | Rudd's Lark | <i>Heteromirafr ruddi</i> |
| Sabota Lark | <i>Calendulauda sabota</i> | Rufous-naped Lark | <i>Mirafr africana</i> |
| Scaly-throated Honeyguide | <i>Indicator variegatus</i> | Sandwich Tern | <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> |
| Sentinel Rock Thrush | <i>Monticola explorator</i> | Secretarybird | <i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i> |
| Sombre Greenbul | <i>Andropadus importunus</i> | Shy Albatross | <i>Thalassarche cauta</i> |
| South African Cliff Swallow | <i>Petrochelidon spilodera</i> | Sooty Shearwater | <i>Puffinus griseus</i> |
| Southern Bald Ibis | <i>Geronticus calvus</i> | South African Shelduck | <i>Tadorna cana</i> |
| Southern Black Korhaan | <i>Afrotis afra</i> | Southern Black Flycatcher | <i>Melaenornis pammelaina</i> |
| Southern Boubou | <i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i> | Southern Black Tit | <i>Parus niger</i> |
| Southern Fiscal | <i>Lanius collaris</i> | Southern Double-collared Sunbird | <i>Cinnyris chalybeus</i> |
| Southern Masked Weaver | <i>Ploceus velatus</i> | Southern Grey-headed Sparrow | <i>Passer diffusus</i> |
| Southern Red Bishop | <i>Euplectes orix</i> | Southern Pochard | <i>Netta erythrophthalma</i> |
| Southern White-crowned Shrike | <i>Eurocephalus anguimans</i> | Southern Red-billed Hornbill | <i>Tockus rufirostris</i> |
| Speckled Mousebird | <i>Colius striatus</i> | Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill | <i>Tockus leucomelas</i> |
| Spectacled Weaver | <i>Ploceus ocularis</i> | Speckled Pigeon | <i>Columba guinea</i> |
| Spotted Eagle-Owl | <i>Bubo africanus</i> | Spike-heeled Lark | <i>Chersomanes albofasciata</i> |
| Spur-winged Goose | <i>Plectropterus gambensis</i> | Spotted Thick-knee | <i>Burhinus capensis</i> |
| Square-tailed Drongo | <i>Dicrurus ludwigii</i> | Squacco Heron | <i>Ardeola ralloides</i> |
| Stonechat | <i>Saxicola torquatus</i> | Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> |
| Swee Waxbill | <i>Coccygia melanotis</i> | Swainson's Spurfowl | <i>Pternistis swainsonii</i> |
| Tawny Eagle | <i>Aquila rapax</i> | Tambourine Dove | <i>Turtur tympanistria</i> |
| Terrestrial Brownbul | <i>Phyllastrephus terrestris</i> | Tawny-flanked Prinia | <i>Prinia subflava</i> |
| Three-banded Plover | <i>Charadrius tricollaris</i> | Thick-billed Weaver | <i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i> |
| Verreaux's Eagle | <i>Aquila verreauxii</i> | Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> |
| Wahlberg's Eagle | <i>Hieraaetus wahlbergi</i> | Village Weaver | <i>Ploceus cucullatus</i> |
| Wandering Albatross | <i>Diomedea exulans</i> | Wailing Cisticola | <i>Cisticola lais</i> |
| Wattled Crane | <i>Grus carunculata</i> | Water Thick-knee | <i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i> |
| White Stork | <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> | Whimbrel | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> |
| White-backed Mousebird | <i>Colius colius</i> | White-backed Duck | <i>Thalassornis leuconotus</i> |
| White-bellied Bustard | <i>Eupodotis senegalensis</i> | White-backed Vulture | <i>Gyps africanus</i> |
| White-breasted Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i> | White-bellied Sunbird | <i>Cinnyris talatala</i> |
| White-chinned Petrel | <i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i> | White-browed Scrub Robin | <i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i> |

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| White-eared Barbet | <i>Stactolaema leucotis</i> | White-crowned Lapwing | <i>Vanellus albiceps</i> |
| White-fronted Bee-eater | <i>Merops bullockoides</i> | White-faced Whistling Duck | <i>Dendrocygna viduata</i> |
| White-necked Raven | <i>Corvus albicollis</i> | White-fronted Swift | <i>Cypseloides storeri</i> |
| White-rumped Swift | <i>Apus caffer</i> | White-rumped Swallow | <i>Tachycineta leucorrhoa</i> |
| White-throated Swallow | <i>Hirundo albigularis</i> | White-throated Canary | <i>Crithagra albogularis</i> |
| White-winged Swallow | <i>Tachycineta albiventer</i> | White-winged Black Tern | <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i> |
| Wilson's Petrel | <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i> | Willow Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> |
| Wire-tailed Swallow | <i>Hirundo smithii</i> | Wing-snapping Cisticola | <i>Cisticola ayresii</i> |
| Woolly-necked Stork | <i>Ciconia episcopus</i> | Wood Sandpiper | <i>Tringa glareola</i> |
| Yellow Canary | <i>Crithagra flaviventris</i> | Yellow Bishop | <i>Euplectes capensis</i> |
| Yellow-billed Duck | <i>Anas undulata</i> | Yellow-bellied Eremomela | <i>Eremomela icteropygialis</i> |
| Yellow-billed Stork | <i>Mycteria ibis</i> | Yellow-billed Kite | <i>Milvus aegyptius</i> |
| Yellow-breasted Pipit | <i>Anthus chloris</i> | Yellow-breasted Apalis | <i>Apalis flava</i> |
| Yellow-fronted Canary | <i>Crithagra mozambica</i> | Yellow-crowned Bishop | <i>Euplectes afer</i> |
| Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird | <i>Pogoniulus bilineatus</i> | Yellow-nosed Albatross | <i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i> |
| Yellow-throated Longclaw | <i>Macronyx croceus</i> | Yellow-throated Petronia | <i>Gymnoris superciliaris</i> |
| Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus ruficapilla</i> | | |



Yellow Bishop

IN SEARCH OF THE PICATHARTES **NOVEMBER 15TH – 26TH 2014**

(Keith Cherry)

As the North Herts Birders previous tour had been to Ethiopia, it was a surprise that we decided on the African Continent again. This came about because one of our group had already been to Ghana and had alerted us to the beauty of the Black Bee-eater. So contrary to the title of this tour it was the Black-Bee-eater that enticed us to Ghana. Unfortunately as time passed a few of the regulars had to drop out, for various reasons, so our number reduced to four. Namely John Tomkins, Tony Hukin, Nigel Liley and me. This was to be Nigel's first serious birding trip so he was looking forward to it very much. We flirted with the idea of booking direct with Ashanti African Tours, but decided to book once again with Naturetrek, as they use Ashanti as their ground agents anyway. We also decided to add a three day extension to Ankasa, which is Ghana's only pristine wet evergreen Upper Guinea Rainforest area, as we thought it was an important area to include. There was to be ten people on the trip and although we met up with a few of them at Heathrow, it was not until we reached Ghana, after our six and a half hour flight that we all finally met up. The heat and high humidity made an immediate impact as we left our British Airways 747 and these temperatures would remain in place for the duration of our visit.

So, after being met by our guide Francis Nkator his assistant and butterfly expert Andrew, our driver for the week, Assari and changing some money into Ghanaian Cedis, we finally made contact with Logan Steele, Brian Cosnette, Michael Gray, Geoff Suter, Paul Farmer and James Horsfall. We loaded up our transport and headed for the Alexis Hotel, which was about an hour away. The rooms at the hotel were named after fruits, but even though Geoff offered us the Cherry room, I decided to pass and with Nigel we settled into the Apple room.



Alexis Hotel Accra

After a nice meal and a welcome beer or two we called it a day and looked forward to tomorrow's birding.

Trip Report

Day 1: Saturday 15th November

Morning departure with British Airways from Heathrow to Accra Airport.

Day 2: Sunday 16th November

Weather : Very hot and Humid

As seems to be normal on the first day we are up before dawn and raring to go. John bagged the first birds of the trip namely Common Bulbul and the only African Thrush to be seen on the whole trip, on the hotel lawn. We set off for the area known as Shai Hills Resource Reserve seeing Woodland Kingfisher and the very common Yellow-billed Kite, Laughing Dove and Pied Crow en route. As we set off into the reserve area, birds soon started to be seen. Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Splendid Sunbird were soon followed by

Senegal Eremomela, Senegal Parrot, Black-crowned Tchagra, Western Grey Plantain-eater, Senegal Coucal and a Vieillot's Barbet. A Northern Black Flycatcher was soon recorded as a stunning Violet Turaco flew through and a Honey Buzzard was seen perched on the high rock face that we were approaching. We soon reached the relative cool in the shadow of the rock face and observed the behaviour of nesting Lanner Falcon's. Our attention was soon diverted as several birds including Double-toothed Barbet, Black Scimitarbill, Cardinal Woodpecker, Black-billed Wood Dove and a Spotted Flycatcher were soon followed by Senegal Batis, Levillant's Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Leaflove and Tawny-flanked Prinia. Our raptor list exploded as Hooded Vulture, Shikra, African Hobby, Wahlberg's Eagle, Long-crested Eagle and Lizard Buzzard were seen in quick succession. Our butterfly list was growing also with Common Tiger, Common Chalk Blue, African Citrus Swallowtail and Narrow-banded Green Swallowtail among many others.

After spending an unsuccessful period looking for the sometime resident Mocking Cliff Chat, we consoled ourselves by adding Common Wattle-eye, Short-winged Cisticola, Grey-backed Cameroptera, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, our first Hornbill in the form of an African Grey Hornbill and Green Wood-hoopoe to our growing list. We left this area and as the sun was rising in the sky we headed back to our hotel for lunch. Included in a very nice lunch was the national dish of Ghana, namely Jollof Rice. A tomato based rice dish. This particular dish was to be a daily addition to our meal times. After lunch we loaded up the coach with our luggage as we would be travelling to Kakum Rainforest Lodge at the end of our birding day. Firstly though, we travelled to a new habitat, namely, Sakumono Lagoon. This is a coastal lagoon and is adjacent to a sandy beach, adding Yellow-billed Shrike en-route. It was not long before we were adding a whole new suite of birds to our list, including Western Reef Heron, Spur-winged Plover, White-faced Whistling Duck, Whimbrel, African Jacana and Collared Pratincole. Pied Kingfisher's were numerous, as were waders, including Little Stint, Wood, Common and Curlew Sandpipers. Black and Sandwich Terns were accompanied in the sky by Little Swifts and Ethiopian Swallows.

Time was moving on so we set off for an area called Winneba Plains. This large open grassland unfortunately turned out to be a long hot walk for relatively little return. A nesting pair of Black-shouldered Kite's, White-throated Bee-eater's, Bar-breasted Firefinch and Pied Hornbill were the only new birds seen. It seemed too hot for the birds, but the butterflies loved it and several species were noted including Vine Swallowtail, Broad-banded Green Swallowtail, Mocha Swallowtail, Similiar Yellow, Calypso Caper White and African White-throated Bee-eater. We set off for Kakum Lodge and arrived about 19:00, for our four night stay. After showering and dinner we held call-over and enjoyed a cold beer or three.



African White-throated Bee-eater (JH)

Day 3: Monday 17th November

Weather : Hot and Humid

We were all up early for a 05:00 breakfast of omelette and baked beans, toast, jam and coffee. We set off for the short drive to Kakum National Park, seeing the usual common birds plus a Common Fiscal. No people are allowed into the park unless a local guide accompanies them. The guide was late arriving which gave us a chance to get into the numerous birds that were starting to fill the surrounding trees. A fairly large flock of Violet-

backed Starling's flew into the nearby bare trees. In what seemed no time at all Slender-billed Greenbul, Buff-throated Sunbird, Grey-headed Negrofinch, African Grey Parrot, White-throated Bee-eaters, Little Green Sunbird and Speckled Tinkerbird were seen. Logan and Brian are very keen on raptors, so a pair of African Harrier Hawks helped get their day off to a good start. The guide had still not turned up, which gave us a chance to see more good birds including African Green Pigeon, Vieillot's Black Weaver, Collared Sunbird, Olive Bellied Sunbird and Superb Sunbird. A perched Didric Cuckoo was disturbed by a Tit Hylia, Honeyguide Greenbul and a Rufous-crowned Eremomela.

Our guide finally arrived so we made our way towards the fairly steep steps that would take us up to the start of the Canopy Walkway which Kakum is famous for. We proceeded gingerly across the first walkway to the first platform.



On the Canopy Walkway (KC)

It was not long before we were seeing birds, including Velvet-mantled Drongo, Tiny Sunbird, Ussher's Flycatcher, Golden Greenbul, Black-winged Oriole and Red-headed Malimbe. A familiar Common Swift was soon followed by a stunning Blue Cuckooshrike as well as Maxwell's Black Weaver, Sabines Puffback, Violet-backed Hylotias and Bioko Batis. Francis decided that we should all move on to the third platform. This meant crosses two more areas of walkway to a larger platform. From here there is a stunning open panorama of the rainforest. We were about 40 metres up at this point and one of our number decided that he was not happy to be there so Andrew escorted him back to firm ground.



Yellow-billed Turaco (JH)

By some way of a small consolation, they did see the largest butterfly in Africa, namely the African Giant Swallowtail. With its 7-9 inch wingspan, I, for one, envied this sighting. Meanwhile back on the platform we were being treated to seeing some great birds, including Yellowbill, Splendid Glossy Starling, Hairy and Yellow-throated Barbet's, Preuss's

Weaver, Green, Johanna's, Olive and Fraser's Sunbirds and a stunning Yellow-billed Turaco flew into a tree that was quite close to us and James managed to get a quick photograph of it.

This flurry of activity was soon eclipsed when a Congo Serpent Eagle cruised through at eye level. This pleased Francis as it can be a hard bird to see. One or two Rosy Bee-eaters flew overhead and another burst of birds produced African Shrike Flycatcher, Ansorge's Greenbul, Speckled Tinkerbird, Western Black-headed Oriole and a female African Emerald Cuckoo sat very obligingly on a tree a short distance away. Another beautiful raptor, a Cassin's Hawk Eagle, appeared, as it too cruised through the trees at eye level. This of course delighted Brian and Logan immensely, as another hard to see raptor was on their list. Our morning session on the canopy walkway was brought to a close watching a pair of White-breasted Negrofinches bringing material to the nest they were building and trying to

see a very active Chestnut Wattle-eye. We did manage to see a Grey Longbill on the walk back to our bus which then took us back to the lodge for lunch. Lunch was to be the familiar Jolof Rice, with fish and chicken accompanied by a vegetable dish.

After lunch Tony and I went for a short walk from the lodge and found two small cultivated areas where maize was being grown and picked up Northern Red Bishop, Pin-tailed Whydah, Black-and-white Mannikin, Bar-breasted Firefinch and Copper Sunbird. While we were out in the mid-day sun, Nigel decided to try out and enjoy the swimming pool. We departed the lodge again at about 15:30, the bus made a quick stop to relocate our lunch time birds and headed back to Kakum National Park for another session on the Canopy Walkway.

The walk up to the walkway was uneventful so we made our way out to the number three platform again. No sooner had Francis set foot on it when he called out Black Bee-eater! He had heard it call and saw that there were two perched up, quite a way away, but easily scoped. As this was one of our "must see" birds we were obviously delighted. After we had all enjoyed great views of these fabulous birds, we diverted our attention to other birds that were making their presence known. A Cassin's Spinetail was soon followed by a Blue-throated Roller, Black-winged Oriole, Yellow-billed Barbet and Yellow-mantled Weavers were nest building in trees near the platform. An inquisitive pair of Fire-bellied Woodpeckers started to investigate a hole in a tree, out from the platform. They were being very wary and hesitant in their investigation and it was soon apparent why when a male Yellow-billed Barbet reclaimed the hole as his. A magnificent White-crested Hornbill brought this session to a memorable end so we made our way back to the bus. The intention now was to wait until dark and then look for the Fraser's Eagle Owl that is known to sometimes sit in the trees that surround the car park. As soon as it was dark enough we set off and in what seemed no time at all, Andrew shone his powerful torch into a tree and there it was! It was obviously startled and moved its position slightly, but it sat still and we all enjoyed great views of this elusive bird. We returned to the lodge after a very rewarding day.

Day 4: Tuesday 18th November

Weather Hot and Humid

As usual we were up for a 05:00 breakfast of omelette, baked beans, toast, jam and coffee. The first birds of the day were the usual Bronze Mannikin, Copper Sunbird, Pin-tailed Whydah, Black-and-white Mannikin that frequent the areas near to the lodge, along with an African Palm Swift. Today we are to walk a trail that seems to border the National Park forest and open farmland. As soon as we got out of the coach we saw Little Swift and a Black-necked Weaver led us a bit of a chase, but we all managed to see it. A perched Splendid Glossy Starling was the next bird immediately followed by a beautiful Green-headed Sunbird. The sky around us was suddenly filled with various swallows, namely Ethiopian, Preuss's and what I think is a stunningly attractive swallow, the Lesser Striped Swallow. A Pygmy Kingfisher flew out from a nearby bush but soon disappeared and a Mottled Spinetail did its best to command the sky above us. This rapid activity was soon followed with Simple Leaflove, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Common Fiscal, Black-winged Bishop and Vieillot's Black Weaver competing to be the centre of attention. As we walked on it was not difficult to add to our list with Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Village Weaver, Blue-billed Firefinch, Yellow White-eye, Lanner Falcon,



Lesser Striped Swallows (JH)

As we walked on it was not difficult to add to our list with Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Village Weaver, Blue-billed Firefinch, Yellow White-eye, Lanner Falcon,

Red-faced Cisticola, Olive-bellied Sunbird, Yellow-browed Cameroptera and a stunning Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher was seen by some.

As we moved on, the track continued to be productive with Green Crombec, Tambourine Dove, Pale Flycatcher, Superb Sunbird, Whistling and Singing Cisticola, and a perched Blue-spotted Wood Dove gave us all a chance to rest and catch our breath. Andrew made sure we did not rest for long as he found two Black Bee-eaters perched up, a little way into the undergrowth so some went in to see them. A Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher was to prove elusive for some, but others managed satisfactory views and a Red-vented Malimbe brought this session on the track to a close. We were now approaching a track into Abrafo forest and soon after entering Francis heard the call of a Red-



Black Bee-eater

JH

billed Dwarf Hornbill, Francis played the tape of its call, but it failed to respond. The track through the forest was relatively quiet but we did pick up some new birds including Brown-crowned Tchagra, Yellow-whiskered, Icterine and Golden Greenbul, Yellowbill and a lucky few had a brief sighting of a perched Long-tailed Hawk, before it rapidly took off. Unfortunately this was to prove to be the only sighting of this sought after bird. On leaving the forest there was a flurry of activity as a small flock of Bristle-nosed Barbets were located along with a Red-necked Buzzard and shortly after a Grey Kestrel was seen.



Abrafo Forest (KC)

We left the forest and went on quite a lengthy drive to Twifo Praso. We parked near a petrol station and walked a short distance to a shaded area overlooking the River Pra. The target birds here are Rock Pratincole and White-throated Blue Swallow. Two Rock Pratincole were quickly spotted on a large rocky outcrop on the opposite bank and the swallows were actively flying and interacting with the numerous Ethiopian Swallows in their search for insects. The only other bird to be seen was a Common Sandpiper, which was disappointing. On our lengthy drive back to the lodge for lunch, we stopped near to the village of

Ntafriwaso, to see a huge breeding colony of Preuss's Cliff Swallow's that nest under a bridge, underneath the road. There were indeed several hundred and they wheeled in and out of the bridge and filled the air around us. We then had a long ride back to the lodge for lunch and the usual siesta away from the hot mid-day sun.

In the late afternoon we returned to Abrafo Forest to a particular area that is known to hold the hard to find Rufous-sided Broadbill. It seemed very quiet to start with but the Broadbill was heard and soon after was located. It has a remarkable circular display flight that it performs from a favoured perch while making its distinctive rattling call. The forest continued to be very quiet so we made our way out and onto the adjacent track. From here we eventually saw a few birds, namely Black Cuckoo, Narrow-tailed Starling, Spotted Flycatcher, Tawny Flanked Prinia, Copper-tailed Glossy Starling, a small flock of African

Grey Parrots flew overhead which were soon followed by a very large flock of White-throated Bee-eaters coming in to roost in the surrounding trees. A stunning Bat Hawk flew through and some managed to see an African Goshawk. We waited for dark and hoped to see a Black-shouldered Nightjar, but like a lot of other birds today, it failed to show up. We returned to the lodge and after dinner John, Tony and I went on a moth and insect hunt around the lights that lit the various verandas.

Day 5: Wednesday 19th November
Weather Hot and Very Humid

Today we set off at our usual 05:00 for the Brenu Road. En route we saw our first Piping Hornbill. The Brenu Road

ran through an area of open savannah. As we pulled up in the bus various

swallow species were sitting on a nearby telephone wire, namely Lesser-striped, Ethiopian and our first Mosque Swallows. As we walked on a Senegal Coucal was seen and was soon



Little Bee-eater (JH)



Silk Moth (KC)

followed by an elusive Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike, but most of the group managed to see it. The temperature started to climb and it was plain to see that today was going to be a long hot one. New birds were making their presence known including Singing and Red-faced Cisticolas, Vieillot's Black Weaver, Black-necked Weaver, Wattled Lapwing and Yellow-crowned Gonolek. Unfortunately Andrew was unwell today so we struggled a bit with the butterflies, but we managed a few including Common Bush Brown Butterfly, Small Dancing Acrea, White-banded Swallowtail and Grey Bush

Brown. As we walked on and the heat rose there were lengthy periods of inactivity, but when we did strike into birds they were worth seeing, such as Little Bee-eater, Wilson's Indigobird, Black-rumped Waxbill, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Western Reef Heron, Splendid Glossy Starling and Short-winged Cisticola. We saw two mammals which were Red-legged and Grey-striped Squirrels, but generally we were not seeing many mammals.

We continued to walk until we reached an area of ponds, which we hoped would produce a lot of birds but only Little Swift, Pied Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher and a large flock of Preuss's Cliff Swallows collecting mud from the water's edge were seen. We carried on and after an intense search in the undergrowth we added Snowy-crowned Robin Chat, another Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike and the elusive Oriole Warbler. We concluded this morning's long hot walk at a lagoon where we added Squacco Heron and the beautiful Green or Guinea Turaco to our list.

The coach picked us up and we headed to the Cape Coast. By the time we arrived at the Castle Beach Restaurant we were well and truly ready for lunch. There was an option to go on a guided tour of the castle but no one took up the offer. The castle was apparently built in the 17th century by the Swedish but was taken by the British a few years later. It was used as a holding area for slaves with many cells to house the poor people that had been captured. Indeed some of them never lived to see another day and died in the cells. We enjoyed a very nice lunch with a clear view



Green or Guinea Turaco (JH)

of the ocean from our tables and as birdwatchers never really stop, we added Caspian Tern, Whimbrel, Cape Gannet and Kestrel. We travelled back to Kakum Lodge for the usual rest period and in the evening we went into Abrafo Village and to the very interesting International Stingless Bee Centre to walk a nearby track. The Stingless Bee Centre is a sanctuary for stingless bees and a place for research and environmental education. These bees are stingless because their abdomens cannot produce a stinger. The walk along the track was not particularly productive but the birds that were seen included, Collared Sunbird, Little Grey Greenbul, Red-rumped Tinkerbird, Black-and-white Mannikin and Black-winged Red Bishop. This brought the day to an end and it was back to the lodge to prepare our bags as we will be moving off tomorrow.

Day 6: Thursday 20th November

Weather very Hot and Humid

After loading up the bus we returned to the Stingless Bee Centre in Abrafo Village to walk the track once again. New species had been hard to come by yesterday evening so we hoped for a better result this morning. It was not long into the walk when new birds started to be seen, including Dusky Blue Flycatcher, Yellow White-eye, Magpie Mannakin, Little Green Sunbird, Slender-billed Greenbul and everyone had good views of a perched Blue-throated



Black-bellied Seedcracker (JH)

Brown Sunbird. As usual the temperature started its usual steady climb, but the new birds provided added impetus to stride on. A Common Wattle-eye was soon followed by Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Olive-bellied Sunbird, Rufous-chested Swallow, Green-headed Sunbird and a Red-thighed Sparrowhawk flew overhead. We came upon a marshy pool that was heavily covered in low vegetation and almost immediately a Blue-headed Coucal was seen as tried to keep low in the vegetation. A perched Blue-billed Maimbe was seen by a lucky few and a Red-necked Buzzard had us looking to the sky once again. The main target bird here was the stunning Black-bellied Seedcracker. Although

Francis had seen a fleeting glimpse of it the previous evening, which could not be counted, we hoped it would put on more of a show this morning. We were not disappointed as a pair were seen skimming the tops of the vegetation. They seemed very active and did not sit for long, but James managed to get a pretty good photograph of the male as it perched up for a short while. This bird had been a main target bird for some in the group, so seeing it was a very satisfying. Time here was running out so after seeing a nice Didric Cuckoo and a Red-tailed Greenbul we made our way back to the coach and the final two birds seen here were a Northern Puffback and a Buff-spotted Woodpecker. We now had a long drive ahead of us to complete our search for the Picathartes.

Our first stop was to be for lunch at a very impressive restaurant in Assin Fosu. We enjoyed the usual local fare and relaxed in the cool, away from the mid-day heat. After our lunch stop we headed for the village of Bonkro. This is the local village to the Picathartes breeding site.

As a reward for guarding the site from intruders, Ashanti and Naturetrek are jointly helping the villagers by contributing financially to the building of a school for the village children, which is an excellent idea. Waiting for us at the village were two black Ashanti Land Rovers that would be taking us into the forest as the terrain would unsuitable for the coach. We all climbed on board and set off.

The terrain was indeed hard going but we all arrived safely and set off on foot into the forest. It is about a forty five minute walk to the site and we saw Finsch's Flycatcher Thrush on the way.



Yellow-headed Picathartes (JH)

The last part, although a short distance,

does start to climb steeply. At the site are wooden benches where we all sat looking up the slope to where the nesting area is. The nests are large, made from mud and are placed on the sloping side of an overhanging rock face. We were in situ about 15:15 and we had to wait patiently, but luckily for us one bird turned up after only about an hour. Frustratingly it was off to the right amongst some trees and only a few could see it. We started to take turns in the favoured position when it started to rain. Luckily for the one or two of the group that had not seen it, the rain prompted it to move up onto the area at the top of the slope where it could easily be seen by everyone. It did not stay there for long and it flew off to our right, never to be seen again.

This seemed to be the ideal time to head back so we started down the steep slope.

Unfortunately, John slipped on the wet rocks and took a very heavy, head first fall. Luckily he only suffered minor injuries to his fingers, knuckle joints and his right foot. Having witnessed his heavy fall, I think he was very fortunate to not have injured himself more seriously.

As we returned to, and approached the village, those at the front of the line managed to see an African Cuckoo Hawk as it flew across the track. Darkness started to fall as we travelled back in the Land Rovers to our coach. After a three hour journey back to the Royal Basin Hotel in Kumasi, we cancelled call over as it was approaching midnight.

Day 7: Friday 21st November

Weather Hot and Humid

An early start as today was to be an all day walk through Offinso Forest. We would be taking a packed lunch, so it promised to be a long but hopefully rewarding day. Following a long, difficult and tedious drive of more than two hours we reached the forest and stretched our cramped legs. While we waited for the light to come up so we could start the walk several

birds started to move about, including, White-breasted Negrofinch, Black-winged Oriole, Velvet-mantled Drongo were seen. A Melancholy or Gabon Woodpecker was located at the top of a nearby tree and those that had missed both the Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher and the Red-tailed Greenbul had the chance to claw them back. The main target bird in the forest is the Blue-headed Bee-eater so we were all hopeful of seeing it. To be honest, apart from the occasional new bird the forest proved to be a long, hot and humid walk in the sun. The only new birds that we saw were Klaas's Cuckoo, Pied Flycatcher, Red-headed Quelea, Red-fronted Parrot, Crested Malimbe, Red-billed Helmet Shrike and some luckily saw the much sought after Western Bluebill. We had to wait until almost the end of the day for Francis to hear and somehow find a solitary Blue-headed Bee-eater, which was celebrated more in relief than excitement. This proved to be a very disappointing haul for a really long day in the sun. Numerous butterflies including Velvet-banded Palla, African Beak, Common Swordtail, Common Commador, Large Monk, Mocha Swallowtail, Broad-banded Green Swallowtail and many, many others could not hide our disappointment in the very few new birds that were seen. In a nutshell this forest is 'not worth the effort'. We made our way back to the hotel looking forward to a few refreshing drinks and a rest. Tomorrow was to be our last day as a complete group, as John, Nigel, Tony and me would be doing the three day extension to Ankasa while the others would continue their itinerary and then make their way back to Accra for the journey home.



Red-billed Helmetshrike (JH)

Day 8: Saturday 22nd November

Weather Hot and Humid

After breakfast we all made our way to Bobiri Forest Butterfly Reserve. From a birding point of view I have to be honest and say it was a disappointment as no new birds were seen and of those that were, Red-billed Helmetshrike, Red-headed Malimbe, Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Melancholy Woodpecker and Blue-throated Brown Roller were the pick. Naturally there were a lot of beautiful butterflies which did not really make up for the lack of new birds. After looking around the visitor centre we made our way back to the hotel for lunch and to pack and go our separate ways. As Francis would be returning with the main group we would be having a new guide for our extension. His name is Victor Owusu and he was waiting for



Cream-banded Swallowtail

KC

us, along with another driver when we got to the hotel. After lunch we collected our washing from the onsite laundry. This is an incredibly cheap and efficient service and well worth taking advantage of. Having really enjoyed the company of the others in the group, we said our farewells, loaded up and headed off towards Ankasa. We were now heading for Ankasa, via Nsuta Forest and we would be spending the night in the D&A Guesthouse in Shama Village. The main problem with getting around in Ghana is the condition of the roads and sometimes the journeys are difficult and can become tedious. This journey was to prove to be one of those. The main problem is that the West African Super Highway is being built at the moment and vehicles are constantly being switched from almost reasonable road surfaces to pot-hole laden ones that make any sort of progress frustratingly slow. In spite of this we managed to arrive at Nsuta Forest while it was still light, so we had the chance to do a spot of birding. The first birds to be seen were three Piping Hornbills sitting side by side sharing a bare branch. While watching a Slender-billed Greenbul the call of the Great Blue Turaco was heard in the distance. Victor decided to alter our position and move towards the direction of the calls. Victor played the call of the Turaco and in no time at all one came flying and calling towards our position. What a huge and magnificent bird and what a call it made as it flew overhead. It was, for me, certainly the bird of the trip so far. There were two possibly three birds in the area and it was a real treat to have seen them. Victor heard an African Wood Owl calling, so we made our way back to our original position. A Spot-breasted Ibis was heard but only seen by Victor as it flew over our heads to its roost. As the light began to fail several Hammer Bats were becoming active. Victor thought he heard the call of the very sought after Akun Eagle Owl and as he was scanning the trees with his torch a Bat Hawk flew through. Amazingly Victor managed to locate the Akun Eagle Owl and we all had great views of it as it sat majestically on the top of a tall tree trunk. Although the African Wood Owl was not located, it was a great way to end what had been a long and at times a trying day. We made our way to Shama Village and settled in. It is a very comfortable place to stay and the evening meal was certainly the best one of the week so far. The village does suffer from frequent power cuts so unfortunately there was no hot water at first.

Day 9: Sunday 23rd November

Weather Warm and Humid_

After our usual early start and breakfast we headed back to Nsutu Forest. As we approached there is a small pool and it produced a Striated Heron, Woodland Kingfisher and several Blue-billed Malimbe, which gave a couple of us that had missed them previously the chance to see them. Unfortunately the several Orange Weaver nests were unoccupied on this occasion. The forest has good road and track surfaces so walking around is very easy. It was not long before birds were moving around including Bristle-nosed Barbet, Tiny Sunbird, Red-headed Malimbe, Red-vented Malimbe and Splended Glossy Starling was nice to see again. We moved off of the road and into a cleared area that was surrounded by trees. The abundance of birds that were present only highlighted how quiet some of the other forests had been. After a short search we all located a Yellow-spotted Barbet, which was the final Barbet that we needed and meant that we had seen all of the Tinkerbirds and Barbets that were available for us to see in this area of Ghana. A Tambourine Dove was seen soon after and this bird has been surprisingly hard to see on this trip. Victor heard a Little Green Woodpecker and as he played its call, we watched it as it flew towards us from high up in a tree. It landed a lot closer to us and we all saw it well. It was nice to see a bird respond to its call as we had not had a lot of luck previously. We were all kept busy looking at Ussher's Flycatchers, Ansorge's Greenbul, Naked-faced Barbet and a Fire-bellied Woodpecker when a male African Emerald Cuckoo was found perched up in a nearby tree. What a fabulous and stunning looking bird. A pair of Black Bee-eaters decided that they should take centre stage and certainly did as they flew from perch to perch. Our attention was then diverted up to see a Square-tailed Saw-wing and a Sabines Spinetail as they tried to out-manoeuvre one another. A Honeyguide Greenbul was seen and then Victor decided that we should return to the road as we would have to leave soon. No sooner had we reached the road when a

Levailiant's Cuckoo noisily made its presence known. This proved to be very lucky as Victor noticed one of our main target birds, a Black Dwarf Hornbill sitting quietly close to where the cuckoo had previously been. We were very relieved to finally see this bird, as we had expected to have seen it before now. We had time to see Black-throated Coucal, African Harrier Hawk, African Cuckoo Hawk, Blue-throated Brown Roller and a Western Bearded Greenbul before we had to reluctantly leave this very productive forest. We checked the pool as we left and the Orange Weavers were there this time.

We made our way to Ankasa, but as usual it was slow progress. At an agreed place we swapped the bus for a Land Rover that would take us into the campsite at Ankasa. Happily though we got there while there was still some daylight so rather than go directly to the camp, Victor decided to check out one or two of the pools that are well known to hold good birds if you are lucky of course. As we made our way there, a pair of Crested Guinea fowl, with young crossed the track ahead of the Land Rover. As they had young they did not hurry as much as they would normally have done, so we all had a good view of them. After leaving the bus and



Chocolate-backed Kingfisher (KC)

walking to the pools, we could see that a large group of birders were looking over Pool No1, so we carried on to Pool No3 and it was fortunate that we did. As we approached Pool No3, a Hartlaub's Duck was swimming on the pool. No sooner had we seen it, when it was startled and flew off at high speed. Unfortunately, one of the group missed seeing it but there would be other chances to see it, so he had his fingers crossed. Splendid Glossy Starling, Yellow-billed Turaco, Blue-billed Malimbe, White-crested Hornbill and Bate's Swift were the pick of the other birds seen. As dusk descended we made our way to our accommodation. This was to be two-man tents. There are about 12 tents scattered around the staff accommodation, kitchen and dining area. We settled in as quickly as we could and made our way to the dining area for our welcome dinner a very welcome bottle of beer and to get to meet the group of Swedish birders that were also in the camp for tonight. After dinner John, Tony and I checked out the numerous lights in and around the camp to see the amazing amount of moths and insects that are obviously attracted to them.

Day 10: Monday 24th November

Warm and Humid with afternoon Storm

This morning we set off to check out the pools. On the approach to Pool No1 we had seen Tambourine Dove, Blue-billed Malimbe and Dusky Flycatcher. The pool itself was still and quiet. We waited in hope that the African Finfoot, that is known to frequent this particular pool, in preference to the others, but apart from an African Dwarf Crocodile there was little else to see or watch, so we moved on to Pool No3. Thankfully there was a repeat of the previous evening's occurrence. The Hartlaub's Duck took off after we had all seen it this time. As an encore it flew in a circuit and back over our heads, much to the relief of the group. This is a large and terrific duck that is a must-see at Ankasa. As we walked on from Pool No3, Victor saw a Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill take off from its perch. Unfortunately, he was the only one that got a decent look at it, which was disappointing as it was never to be seen again. Soon after this we managed to see a very elusive African Forest Robin which was quickly followed by a Yellow-bearded Greenbul and a Forest Flycatcher. Some now familiar birds made themselves visible again including Chestnut Wattle-eye, Fraser's

Sunbird, Sabines and Cassin's Spinetail. After another quiet period the silence was disturbed when a magnificent Crowned Eagle flew across a wide opening in the canopy, which allowed us all to see it well. The clouds above us started to look threatening so we started to make our way to some buildings that are used by the forest staff, but not before seeing a White-tailed Alethe just before the rain started. The rain soon developed into a real downpour of monsoon proportions. All we could do was to sit it out and wait for our lunch to arrive. The kitchen staff were bringing it out in the Land Rover and it was a good way to spend our time until the rain stopped. As the rain finally subsided we ventured into the undergrowth that surrounded the building enclosure. Victor had heard a Chocolate-backed Kingfisher and it did not take him long to locate it sitting on a branch ahead of us. We had use scopes to get a good look at it and we all saw it well. This was a great way to bring our lunch break to an end. We walked back to Pool No1 to wait and hope that the African Finfoot would grace us with its presence. We were prepared to wait as long as it took as we were, as you can imagine, extremely keen to see this bird. While we were looking at the African Dwarf Crocodile again, a White-breasted Kingfisher was identified by Victor as it flew across the edge of the pool. Unfortunately our attention was elsewhere and we all missed it. After quite a time Nigel spotted some movement at the back of the pool and he was fairly sure that it was the Finfoot. After skulking in the shadows for a while it finally showed itself and it was the female. I am afraid that we had to settle for her as the male decided to not put in an appearance. The idea now was to walk on until dark, try for some owls and then be picked up. Apart from seeing another Rufous-sided Broadbill and missing another Long-tailed Hawk, that was only seen by Victor as it flew off from a hidden perch, there were no other birds seen. We did however see Lesser Spot-nosed and Mona Monkeys competing for superiority in the trees. Our transport duly arrived and we set off for camp and finally we saw what had proved to be the elusive Blue-headed Wood Dove, on the track ahead of us. We continued on to camp to freshen up, enjoy dinner and relax.

Day 11: Tuesday 25th November

Weather Warm and Humid

Today was our last day so we all hoped that it would be a good one. Victor decided that we should check out the area near the bridge that crossed the river at the entrance to the park. Several birds were seen including Little Grey Greenbul, Cassin's Flycatcher, Speckled Tinkerbird, Plain Greenbul and Yellow-whiskered Greenbul which was not a bad return for the relatively short time that we were there. Victor decided that we should walk a track that went down to and ran adjacent with the river. I would like to say that it was worth it, but the only new bird seen was a Shining Drongo and we also saw a Fire-footed Rope Squirrel so we returned to the bridge. The trees around the bridge continued to produce birds including Swamp Palm Bulbul, Yellow-throated Barbet, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Copper-tailed Starling, Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch and a pair of Black Bee-eaters flew around us for quite a while. The last birds to be seen here was another stunning Yellow-billed Turaco and an elusive Shining Kingfisher was finally seen well. Unfortunately it was time to return to the camp, pack up our gear load up the Land Rover and leave for Accra. We rendezvoused with the mini bus once again and managed to see one or two Reichenbach's Sunbirds as we swapped over the transport.

We made a stop near to a large lake that usually holds several Hartlaub's Duck, but not on this occasion. We did see however a fairly large nesting colony of Orange Weavers. However, on the other side of the road we had a bit more luck and saw a Mangrove or Brown Sunbird as it flew to and from its nest. Time was moving on and we had to make Shama Village so that we could have lunch and freshen up at the D&G Guesthouse. The journey as usual was slow but we finally made it to the guesthouse. As usual there had been a power cut but the water soon warmed up and we all enjoyed a warm shower, all the more appreciated after the cold ones that we were having in Ankasa. Another very nice meal was provided and so, suitably refreshed; we started the final leg of our journey to Accra.

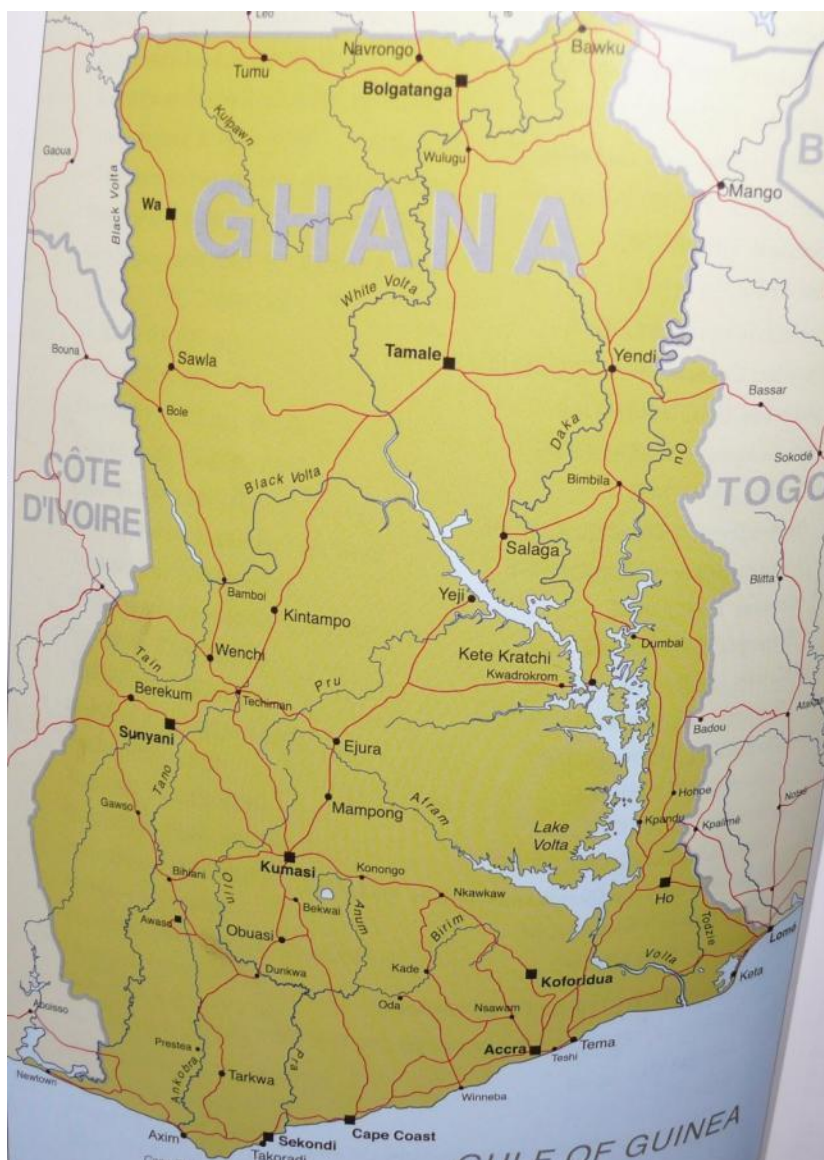
The plan was to have been that we would go to a restaurant in Accra for a final meal, but the journey was very, very slow. A mixture of the bad roads and the 'rush hour' traffic approaching Accra, we decided we would rather miss the meal and head straight for the airport as there did not seem enough time to do both. Victor agreed and we arrived at the airport with a comfortable amount of time to sort ourselves out and carry out the airport procedures in a relaxed manner. We said our farewells to Victor and proceeded to into the very busy and bustling airport.

Day 12: Tuesday 25th / Wednesday 26th November

An uneventful, overnight flight to Heathrow arriving at approximately 07:00 hrs.

Trip Summary

This trip was certainly a mixed bag. It held some special days with great birds and some, to be honest, very poor days with a minimal amount of new birds. We all agree that birding does in a large part depend on a fair share of luck, so maybe some of our poor days can be put down to a lack of it, but not all. It did seem though, in hindsight that on occasions there was a poor choice of habitat to visit. There was a lot of travelling, made worse by the poor quality of roads. This matter is certainly beyond the control of Naturetrek or Ashanti, but it cannot be ignored though when it does impact on your overall enjoyment.



List of Birds:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Crested Guineafowl | Pair seen with young at Ankasa |
| Stone Partridge | Heard at Shai Hills |
| Double-spurred Francolin | Two birds seen by some at Shai Hills |
| White-faced Whistling Duck | Several seen at Sakumono lagoon |
| Hartlaub's Duck | Single bird seen on two days at Ankasa |
| Little Grebe | Two seen in transit to Nsuta Forest |
| Spot-breasted Ibis | One bird heard at Nsuta Forest |
| Striated Heron | Single bird seen on two days on the approach to Nsuta Forest |
| Squacco Heron | Single bird seen at the lagoon on Brenu Road |
| Cattle Egret | Seen most days in various habitats |
| Grey Heron | Single birds seen on two occasions in suitable habitats |
| Great Egret | Two seen on Sakumono lagoon. One on the Brenu Road |
| Intermediate Egret | Single bird seen on Brenu Road. One seen on Cape Coast |
| Little Egret | Two birds seen on Sakumono Lagoon |
| Western Reef Heron | Seen on four days in suitable habitats |
| Long-tailed/Reef Cormorant | Several birds seen on Sakumono Lagoon |
| African Cuckoo Hawk | Single bird seen at Bonkro Village. One at Ankasa |
| European Honey Buzzard | Several birds seen over six days |
| Bat Hawk | Single birds seen at Abrafo Forest and Nsuta Forest |
| Black-winged Kite | Pair seen at Winneba Plains. One on the Brenu Road |
| Yellow-billed Kite | Very common. Seen daily |
| Hooded Vulture | Very common. Seen daily |
| Congo Serpent Eagle | Single bird seen at Kakum N P on Canopy walkway |
| African Harrier Hawk | Fairly common. Seen on most days |
| African/Red-chested Goshawk | Single bird seen on Abrafo Village track |
| Shikra | Two birds seen at Shai Hills. One seen on the Brenu Road |
| Red-thighed Sparrowhawk | Single birds seen on Abrafo Village track and Offinso Forest |
| Long-tailed Hawk | Single bird seen in Abrafo Forest. One missed at Ankasa |
| Lizzard Buzzard | Single birds seen at Shai Hills and Kakum N P |
| Red-necked Buzzard | Single birds seen at Kakum N P, Abrafo and Ankasa |
| Cassin's Hawk-Eagle | Two birds seen at Kakum N P, One at Offinso Forest |
| Long-crested Eagle | Single bird seen at Shai Hills |
| Wahlberg's Eagle | Single bird seen at Shai Hills |
| Crowned Eagle | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Common Kestrel | Single bird seen at the Cape coast |
| Grey Kestrel | Single birds seen at six locations |
| African Hobby | Single birds seen at Shai hills and on the Brenu Road |
| Lanner Falcon | Three birds seen at Shai Hills and single birds at Kakum N P and Abrafo Village |
| White-spotted Flufftail | Birds heard only at Abrafo and Ankasa |
| African Finfoot | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Black Crane | Heard only at Abrafo |
| Black-winged Stilt | Several birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon and the Brenu Road lagoon |
| Spur-winged Lapwing | Several birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Senegal Lapwing | Several seen at Sakumono Lagoon and Brenu Road Lagoon |
| Grey Plover | Single bird seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Common Ringed Plover | Several seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Kittlitz's Plover | Several seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| African Jacana | Several seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Purple Swamphen | Single bird seen at Sakumono Lagoon |

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| Black-tailed Godwit | One or two seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Whimbrel | Two seen at Sakumono Lagoon. One at Cape Coast |
| Common Greenshank | Single bird seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Wood Sandpiper | Several birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Common Sandpiper | Several birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon and single birds at two other locations |
| Ruddy Turnstone | Several birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Sanderling | Several birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Little Stint | One or two seen on Sakumono Lagoon |
| Curlew Sandpiper | Several seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Ruff | Several seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Collared Pratincole | Two birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon |
| Rock Pratincole | Two birds seen on the River Pra at Twifo Braso |
| Caspian Tern | Two birds seen on the Cape Coast from Restaurant |
| Sandwich Tern | One or two birds seen on Sakumono Lagoon |
| Little Tern | One or two birds seen on Sakumono Lagoon |
| Black Tern | One or two birds seen on Sakumono Lagoon |
| Pomerine Skua | One bird seen from beach opposite Sakumono Lagoon |
| Common Pigeon | Seen on most days in suitable habitats |
| Red-eyed Dove | Seen daily |
| Vinaceous Dove | Several birds seen at Shai Hills |
| Laughing Dove | Common. Seen daily |
| Black-billed Wood Dove | Two birds seen at Shai Hills |
| Blue-spotted Wood Dove | Single birds seen at Kakum N P and Offinso Forest |
| Tambourine Dove | Single birds seen at Kakum N P and Offinso Forest |
| Blue-headed Wood Dove | Single bird seen on track at Ankasa |
| African Green Pigeon | Seen on most days |
| Grey Parrot | Several birds seen at Kakum N P and Ankasa |
| Red-fronted Parrot | Several birds seen at Offinso Forest and Bobiri Forest |
| Senegal Parrot | Two birds seen at Shai Hills |
| Great Blue Turaco | Two or three birds seen at Nsuta Forest |
| Green/Guinea Turaco | Single birds seen at the Brenu Road Lagoon and Ankasa |
| Yellow-billed Turaco | Single bird seen on Kakum walkway and seen daily at Ankasa |
| Violet Turaco | Single bird seen at Shai Hills |
| Western Plantain-Eater | Seen almost daily in various habitats |
| Black-throated Coucal | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Senegal Coucal | Single birds seen at Shai Hills and Kakum N P |
| Blue-headed Coucal | Single birds seen on the Brenu Road and Abrafo |
| Blue Malkoha/Yellowbill | Seen on five days in suitable habitats |
| Levaillant's Cuckoo | Two birds seen at Shai Hills and one at Nsuta Forest |
| Dideric Cuckoo | Single birds seen at Kakum N P, Abrafo and Nsuta Forest |
| Klaas's Cuckoo | Finally tracked down in Offinso Forest |
| Yellow-throated Cuckoo | Heard at Ankasa |
| African Emerald Cuckoo | One female seen at Kakum Canopy Walkway. One stunning male at Nsuta Forest |
| Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo | Heard at Ankasa |
| Black Cuckoo | Single bird seen Abrafo Forest |
| African Wood Owl | One bird heard at Nsuta Forest and also Ankasa |
| Fraser's Eagle-Owl | Single bird seen at Kakum N P |
| Akun Eagle-Owl | Single bird seen at Nsuta Forest |
| Mottled Spinetail | Single birds seen in Kakum N P and on the Brenu Road |
| Sabines Spinetail | Single birds seen in Nsuta Forest and Akansa |
| Cassin's Spinetail | Single birds seen from Kakum Canopy Walkway and at Ankasa |
| African Palm Swift | Common. Several birds seen almost daily |
| Common Swift | Several birds seen almost daily |

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| Little Swift | Fairly common. Seen frequently |
| Bate's Swift | Single birds seen on two days at Ankasa |
| Blue-throated Roller | Ones and twos seen at Kakum N P Bibori Forest and Nsuta Forest |
| Chocolate-backed Kingfisher | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Woodland Kingfisher | Common. Seen daily in several different habitats |
| African Pygmy Kingfisher | Single birds seen at Kakum N P, Abrafo and Nsuta Forest |
| Malachite Kingfisher | Single bird seen at the Brenu Road Pools |
| Shining-blue Kingfisher | Single bird seen on the river at Ankasa |
| Pied Kingfisher | Several birds seen at Sakumono Lagoon and at Brenu Road Pools |
| Blue-headed Bee-Eater | Single bird seen in Offinso Forest |
| Black Bee-eater | Generally seen in pairs at five locations |
| Little Bee-eater | Single birds seen at Abrafo on two days |
| White-throated Bee-eater | Very widespread. Seen daily in varied numbers |
| Rosy Bee-eater | Occasional birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and Nsuta Forest |
| Green Wood Hoopoe | Pair seen at Shai Hills |
| Black Scimitarbill | Single bird seen at Shai Hills |
| African Pied Hornbill | Widespread. Seen daily in varied habitats |
| African Grey Hornbill | Single birds seen at Shai Hills, Kakum NP and Abrafo |
| Black Dwarf Hornbill | Single bird seen at Nsuta Forest |
| Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill | Heard at Abrafo Forest |
| White-crested Hornbill | Single birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway, Bibori Forest and Nsuta Forest |
| Piping Hornbill | Occasional birds seen at Kakum N P, Bibori Forest, Nsuta Forest and Ankasa |
| Speckled Tinkerbird | Fairly widespread. Several seen at five locations |
| Red-rumped Tinkerbird | A pair seen in Abrafo Forest |
| Yellow-throated Tinkerbird | One or two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird | Single birds seen at Abrafo Forest and Ankasa |
| Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird | Two birds seen at Shai Hills |
| Bristle-nosed Barbet | Several birds seen at Kakum N P and Nsuta Forest |
| Naked-faced Barbet | Several birds seen at Abrafo Forest and Nsuta Forest |
| Yellow-spotted Barbet | One or two birds seen at Nsuta Forest |
| Hairy-breasted Barbet | One or two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Vieillot's Barbet | Several birds seen at Shai Hills |
| Double-toothed Barbet | Two birds seen at Shai Hills and Offinso Forest |
| Yellow-billed Barbet | One or two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Cassin's Honeybird | One or two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Least Honeyguide | Heard persistently at Bibori Forest |
| African Piculet | Heard at Bibori Forest |
| Little Green Woodpecker | Heard at Kakum N P. Single bird seen at Nsuta Forest |
| Buff-spotted Woodpecker | Single bird seen at Abrafo Forest |
| Cardinal Woodpecker | Single bird seen at Shai Hills |
| Melancholy/Gabon Woodpecker | Single birds seen at Offinso Forest and Bibori Forest |
| Fire-bellied Woodpecker | Two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and single birds seen at Abrafo and Offinso Forests |
| Rufous-sided Broadbill | Displaying male seen in Abrafo Forest. One seen at Ankasa |
| African Shrike-Flycatcher | Single bird seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Senegal Batis | Single bird seen at Shai Hills |
| Bioko Batis | One or two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Brown-throated Wattle-Eye | One or two birds seen at Shai Hills and also Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Chestnut Wattle-Eye | A few birds seen in various forest habitats |
| Red-billed Helmetshrike | Several birds seen in Offinso and Bibori Forests |

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| Fiery-breasted Bush-shrike | Heard at Offinso Forest |
| Orange-breasted Bush-shrike | Single bird seen on the Brenu Road |
| Brown-crowned Tchagra | One or two birds seen at Abrafo Forest |
| Black-crowned Tchagra | Some seen on four days in various habitats |
| Sabine's Puffback | Heard at Nsuta Forest |
| Northern Puffback | Single birds seen at Abrufo and Offinso Forests |
| Lowland Sooty Boubou | Heard at Abrufo Forest |
| Yellow-crowned Gonolek | Single bird seen on the Brenu Road |
| Blue Cuckooshrike | Single bird seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Yellow-billed Shrike | Single bird seen en route to Sakumono Lagoon |
| Common Fiscal | Widespread. Seen on most days |
| Western Black-headed Oriole | A few birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and Ankasa |
| Black-winged Oriole | A pair seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and Ankasa |
| Shining Drongo | Single bird seen on river trail in Ankasa |
| Velvet-mantled Drongo | Frequently seen in all forest habitats |
| Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher | Very elusive pair seen in Kakum N P |
| Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher | Single birds seen in Kakum N P and at Ankasa |
| Pied Crow | Very common. Seen everywhere |
| White-necked Rockfowl/Yellow-headed Picathartes | One bird seen in Kakum N P |
| White-shouldered Black Tit | |
| Western Nicator | One or two seen at Shai Hills |
| Common Bulbul | Often heard in the forests but not seen |
| Slender-billed Greenbul | Very common. Seen everywhere |
| Little Greenbul | Seen regularly in forest habitats |
| Little Grey Greenbul | One or two seen at Ankasa |
| Ansorge's Greenbul | One or two birds seen in Abrafo Forest and Ankasa |
| Plain Greenbul | Single birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and Nsuta Forest |
| Yellow-whiskered Greenbul | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Golden Greenbul | Single birds seen in Abrafo Forest and Ankasa |
| Honeyguide Greenbul | Several birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and Nsuta |
| | Occasional birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and at Nsuta Forest |
| Simple Greenbul | Seen regularly in forest habitats |
| Yellow-throated Leaflove | Single bird seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Swamp Palm Greenbul | Several birds seen in Kakum N P, Abrafo, Nsuta Forest and Ankasa |
| Icterine Greenbul | Single birds seen in Abrafo Forest and Ankasa |
| Western Bearded Greenbul | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Red-tailed Greenbul | Single birds seen in Abrufo and Offinso Forests |
| Yellow-bearded Greenbul | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Square-tailed Saw-wing | A few seen at Nsuta Forest |
| Barn Swallow | Widespread. Seen daily |
| Ethiopian Swallow | Seen frequently in a variety of habitats |
| White-throated Blue Swallow | Several seen on the River Pra at Twifo Praso |
| Rufous-chested Swallow | A few were seen in Abrafo |
| Lesser-striped Swallow | Several birds seen in Abrafo and on the Brenu Road |
| Mosque Swallow | Several birds were seen on the Brenu Road |
| Preuss's Cliff Swallow | Numerous in selected habitats such as Ntafriwaso |
| Grey Longbill | Single bird seen in Kakum N P |
| Green Crombec | Single birds seen in Kakum N P, Abrafo and Offinso Forests |
| Chestnut-capped Flycatcher | Several birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Green Hylia | Single birds seen at Abrafo and Nsuta Forests |
| Tit Hylia | Several birds seen a on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Wood Warbler | Single bird seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Red-faced Cisticola | Several birds seen in Kakum N P and Abrafo |

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| Singing Cisticola | Several birds seen in Kakum N P Abrafo and Offinso Forest |
| Whistling Cisticola | Single bird seen in Kakum N P |
| Croaking Cisticola | Heard at Shai Hills |
| Short-winged Cisticola | A few birds seen on two days in Kakum N P |
| Zitting Cisticola | Heard at Shai Hills |
| Tawny-flanked Prinia | Several birds seen at Shai Hills and Kakum N P |
| Black-capped Apalis | A pair seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Oriole Warbler | Single elusive bird seen on the Brenu Road |
| Yellow-browed Camaroptera | Single bird seen in Kakum N P |
| Grey-backed Camaroptera | Birds seen or heard in a variety of habitats |
| Olive-green Camaroptera | Single bird seen in Abrafo Forest |
| Senegal Eremomela | Two birds seen at Shai Hills |
| Rufous-crowned Eremomela | One or two birds seen in Kakum N P and Abrafo Forest |
| Puvel's Illadopsis | Heard in Abrafo Forest |
| Violet-backed Hylia | Several birds seen on the Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Copper-tailed Glossy Starling | Two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Lesser Blue-eared Starling | Two birds seen at Shai Hills |
| Splendid Glossy Starling | One or two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway, the Brenu Road and at Ankasa |
| Violet-backed Starling | Varying numbers seen Kakum N P and Abrafo |
| Chestnut-winged Starling | Birds seen in Kakum N P and Bibori Forest |
| Narrow-tailed Starling | Five birds flew overhead in Abrafo forest |
| Finsch's Flycatcher Thrush | One bird seen in Kakum N P |
| African Thrush | Single bird seen at Alexis Hotel in Accra |
| White-tailed Alethe | Single elusive bird seen at Ankasa |
| Forest Robin | Single bird seen in Ankasa |
| Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat | Single birds seen on the Brenu Road and in Offinso Forest |
| Mocking Cliff-Chat | Single bird seen by some at Shai Hills |
| Fraser's Forest Flycatcher | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Northern Black Flycatcher | Single bird seen at Shai Hills |
| Pale Flycatcher | One or two birds seen approaching Abrafo Forest |
| Spotted Flycatcher | Two birds seen at Shai Hills another at Abrafo Forest |
| Cassin's Flycatcher | Single bird seen at Ankasa |
| Dusky-blue Flycatcher | Single bird seen in Abrafo Forest |
| Ussher's Flycatcher | Several birds were seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and at Nsuta Forest |
| European Pied Flycatcher | A pair were seen in Offinso Forest |
| Fraser's Sunbird | One or two birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and also at Ankasa |
| Little Green Sunbird | One or two birds seen in Kakum N P and Abrafo |
| Green Sunbird | Single bird seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Collared Sunbird | Widespread. Seen on most days |
| Reichenbach's Sunbird | Several seen on leaving Ankasa area |
| Green-headed Sunbird | One or two birds seen on two days in Abrafo Forest |
| Blue-throated Brown Sunbird | Occasional bird seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and Abrafo Forest |
| Olive Sunbird | Fairly Common. Easily seen on most days |
| Buff-throated Sunbird | Occasional birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and in Abrafo and Offinso Forests |
| Olive-bellied Sunbird | Occasional birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and Abrafo Forest |
| Tiny Sunbird | Single bird seen On Kakum Canopy Walkway and Nsuta Forest |
| Splendid Sunbird | Single birds at Shai Hills and on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Johanna's Sunbird | A pair seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Superb Sunbird | Single birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway, Abrafo and Offinso Forests |

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| Copper Sunbird | Widespread. Seen in most locations |
| Northern Grey-headed Sparrow | Widespread. Seen on most days |
| Black-necked Weaver | One or two birds seen on the Brenu Road |
| Orange Weaver | Several seen on the approach to Nsuta Forest and on the return journey to Sharma Village |
| Village Weaver | Widespread. Seen in most locations |
| Vieillot's Black Weaver | Widespread. Seen on most days |
| Yellow-mantled Weaver | Several birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and at Nsuta Forest |
| Maxwell's Black Weaver | Several seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway and at Nsuta Forest |
| Preuss's Weaver | One or two seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway |
| Red-vented Malimbe | Several seen in Kakum N P and at Nsuta Forest |
| Blue-billed Malimbe | Occasional birds seen at Abrafo and Nsuta Forests |
| Red-headed Malimbe | Occasional birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway Kakum N P and Nsuta Forest |
| Crested Malimbe | One or two birds seen in Offinso Forest |
| Red-headed Quelea | Several birds seen at Offinso Forest |
| Black-winged Red Bishop | Several birds seen in Kakum N P and Offinso Forest |
| Northern Red Bishop | Single bird seen in Kakum N P |
| Yellow-mantled Widowbird | Several birds seen in Kakum N P and on the Brenu Road |
| White-breasted Negrofinch | Several birds seen on Kakum Canopy Walkway, Offinso and Nsuta Forests |
| Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch | A pair seen in Ankasa |
| Grey-headed Negrofinch | Several birds seen in Kakum N P and Nsuta Forest |
| Black-bellied Seedcracker | A pair seen in Abrufo |
| Western Bluebill | Single bird seen by some at Offinso Forest |
| Blue-billed Firefinch | Several birds seen on two days in Abrafo Forest |
| Bar-breasted Firefinch | Several seen in Kakum N P and on the Brenu Road |
| Orange-cheeked Waxbill | Several seen in Kakum N P and on the Brenu Road |
| Black-rumped Waxbill | Several birds seen on the Brenu Road |
| Bronze Mannikin | Widespread. Seen on most days |
| Black-and-white Mannikin | Fairly widespread and seen on five days in various habitats |
| Magpie Mannikin | One or two birds seen in Abrafo Forest |
| Wilson's Indigobird | One or two birds seen on the Brenu Road |
| Pin-tailed Whydah | Seen on several days in Kakum N P |
| Western Yellow Wagtail | Occasional birds seen Shai Hills and Kakum N P |
| African Pied Wagtail | Fairly widespread. Often seen in suitable habitat |

Birds Seen : 268

Birds Heard : 15



African Pied Wagtail

TRIP REPORT JAPAN - MAY 2015

(Lynne Millard & Geoffrey M^cMullan)

It started with a wish to see an endangered species on the Island of Okinawa to the SW of the Japanese mainland. Geoffrey, knowing that time was potentially limited wanted to know if anyone was interested in joining a pilgrimage to the Island to try and find the Okinawa Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos noguchii*) as it is rumoured the population may be down to 100 pairs according to Gerard Gorman (2015), whereas Dr Lester Short (1982) in his monograph of 'Woodpeckers of the World' suggested that only around 20 pairs remained.



Lynne had been looking for an opportunity to revisit Japan (having previously visited 20 years ago) and jumped at the chance. We looked at various options and decided that using a local guide, found via an internet company called 'BirdingPal' was the best choice. We found a guide called Kaz Shinoda who was happy to take on our expedition. He arranged all of our accommodation, internal flights and transport and came up with an all-inclusive trip covering different regions within the Japanese Archipelago. All we had to do was arrange the International

flight. We did do some research into our guide via a tour company in the USA, who could not speak more highly of Kaz. We can confirm that Kaz is an outstanding guide, he never gave up, his *organisational* skills were top notch as well as his care and attention towards us.

May 11, London to Tokyo

We left on May 11 from Heathrow, arriving on the 12 May at Narita airport. A train journey across Tokyo took us to Haneda airport (bus and train journey in Japan are a sight to behold, we could learn a lot from them in terms of our behaviour) and our accommodation for the night. The weather forecast for the following day looked a bit worrying, especially as we had to catch an internal flight to Amami, but not being about to understand the language meant we didn't fully understand what was on its way.

May 12, Tokyo to Amami

Kaz met us the following morning at the hotel and notified us that our flight was delayed by at least a couple of hours and confirmed that this was due to the (unseasonal) typhoon heading straight towards us. It was due to hit the Amami Islands in the morning and Tokyo in the evening. At 15:00 we were informed that the flight was going to take off but to be prepared that it may turn round. Two hours later, and after one of the least turbulent flights, we landed on Amami. We picked up our hire car and headed to the hotel. Typical Japanese efficiency meant that all the main roads were clear of debris from the mornings' typhoon which had hit the island (It did hit Tokyo later that night!).

New Birds Seen: *Eastern Cattle Egret, Great White Egret, Pacific Swallow, Blue Rock Thrush, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Large-billed Crow*

May 13, Amami: *Amami Nature Forest, Akina Farmland, Kinsakabaru Virgin Forest*

The day started with a visit to the Nature Forest. Within about 10 minutes of arriving in the reserve Geoffrey encountered the endemic White-backed Woodpecker or Owston's Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leucotos owstoni*) no less than 3 metres from him and at eye level, he was so excited by this encounter he forgot to take pictures. We had around 5-10 minutes watching the bird, which at some point on the future may well be split as it is quite different in looks from the White-backed that we are used to seeing in our part of the world. After a couple of hours walking through the nature reserve the warden showed us a baby Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos kizuki*) which he had rescued after it had become dislodged from its nest during the typhoon. During the trip we had successfully seen four of the nine sub-species of this delightful woodpecker, at a distance you could see the variations in colour, pattern bill and body size. We encountered some other endemic's namely Lidth's Jay (*Garrulus lidthi*) in the car park, Ryukyu Minivet (*Pericrocotus tegimae*) along the road and Ryukyu Robin (*Erithacus komadori*) which is a very impressive bird and we had excellent views of one individual displaying just within a few feet of us. We also visited nearby farmland (paddy fields) which are a favoured spots for birds, and the Virgin Forest.

New Birds Seen: *Little Egret, Intermediate Egret, Pacific Reef Egret, Lidth's Jay, Ryukyu Minivet, Ryukyu Robin, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker Eastern, Spot-billed Duck, Cinnamon Bittern, Amami Thrush, Grey Heron, Common Moorhen, White Breasted Water Hen (Heard), Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Oriental Turtle Dove, Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Little Cuckoo (Heard), White-throated Needle Tail, Barn Swallow, Ruddy Kingfisher, Brown-eared Bulbul, Zitting Cisticola, Ryukyu Flycatcher, Japanese Paradise Flycatcher, Eastern Great Tit, Varied Tit, Japanese White-eye,*

In the evening we went lamping with a local guide who took us to the forest area where we saw roosting Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Ruddy Kingfisher (*Halcyon coromanda*) and around ten Amami Woodcock which we had caught in our headlights. We also saw a female with 3 young who were pressing into her breast feathers trying to hide from us. We had hoped to see owl in the forest but they proved to be elusive and although heard we had not managed to see our quarry. As we were leaving the forest to return to our hotel (by now it was well into the early hours of the morning) the local guide remembered that as a child he had seen the Scops in the area he had grown up. He was unsure if they would still be there as it was a long time since he'd looked. On arrival we saw a Brown Hawk Owl (*Ninox scutulata*) in flight and succeeded in getting excellent views of a Ryūkyū Scops-owl or Elegant Scops-owl (*Otus elegans*). The bird flew around for a short while before coming to settle on a branch a short distance from us, presenting its-self beautifully for any would be photographers, unfortunately no photos were taken as all the cameras were still in the vehicle! But four very happy teddy bears headed back to their hotel for a well-earned rest after an extremely fruitful trip. We also encountered quite a number of the large Amami Black Rabbit (*Pentalagus furnessi*) also known as the Ryukyu rabbit, Kaz informed us that this is a primitive rabbit and is often called a living fossil, because it is a living remnant of ancient rabbits that once lived on the Asian mainland. The weather forecast was not looking good for the next day; it appeared that another typhoon was heading towards Japan!

May 14, Amami to Okinawa: *Amami Nature Forest, Ose Beach: Okinawa, Yanbaru Forest*

Fortunately the typhoon took a southerly route and missed us! We spent the morning birding in the Forest and then moved towards the airport to Ose Beach. We saw a number of birds including a Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*) which is not native to this area, a possible

vagrant thanks to the Typhoon. A short hop on a Dash 8 took us to Okinawa. We then had a long drive to our hotel in the north of the island. We did some bird spotting en-route; we did not stop until we got close to the hotel. We turned off the main road and after a couple of miles reached some woodland where we screeched to a halt as our target bird flew across the road in front of us. We leapt out of the car and got our first sighting of the Pryer's Woodpecker which turned out to be a pair. Kaz was still sitting in the car looking very relieved as he said to us that the pressure was now off him! Eventually the birds moved on so we continued our journey to a very luxurious Hotel where we were the only guests! The area is also known for Flying foxes but unfortunately none appeared.

New Birds seen: *Pryer's Woodpecker, Temminck's Cormorant, Little Tern, Kentish Plover, Red-necked Stint, Pectoral Sandpiper, Sanderling, Common Green Shank, Grey-tailed Tattler, Eastern Black-tailed Godwit, Black Winged Stilt, Osprey, Rock Dove, Common Kingfisher, Chinese Bulbul, Japanese Bush Warbler (Heard), Ross's Gull, Northern Pintail, White-winged Black Tern,*

May 15, Okinawa: *Ada area, Kijoka Farmland, Okuma Farmland, Benoki Dam*

An early rise had us wandering down the road outside the hotel in search of the Okinawa Rail; this is the best time for sightings of this elusive bird. We were fortunate to get some good views of them by the side of the road and after a short drive around the area we bagged 14, which included an adult colour ringed bird carrying several worms (which it had foraged from the drainage ditch) to its nest which was located in the bush on the opposite side of the road. After breakfast we headed off to the farmland (paddy fields) to see what was about, only to come across another vagrant in the form of a Little Bunting, another quarry of the Typhoon? Several good views of a Cinnamon Bittern were had, a cracking bird to see in full sunlight. We then went on to spend more time in the woodland looking for the Pryer's Woodpecker and we were lucky enough to see another 9, including adults flying to and from their nest site.



Okinawa Rail

New Birds seen: *Okinawa Rail, Terek Sandpiper, Japanese Black Wood Pigeon, Scaly-breasted Munia, Sand Martin, Little Bunting.*

May 16, Okinawa to Tokyo: *Ada area, Kijoka Farmland, Sankaku-ike (Naha)*

More sightings of the Okinawa Rail and the Pryer's in the morning. In total we saw 15 Pryer's and heard two over the course of this part of our trip, one calling and the other drumming. We questioned the predicted number of around 100 pairs now as all the ones we saw were from the roadside, we did not get deep into the woods due to the high risk from poisonous snakes and Kaz did not want us to be put at risk. It seemed everywhere we went the Pryer's was to be seen and heard. We then set off back to the airport in the south. We arrived in Naha in good time and were met with searing heat. We headed to an inland pool which looked empty until you looked closer. Spoonbills and several species of waders were the highlights here. We crossed the road to a river and got good views of a Nordmann's Greenshank and were very thankful of the cars air conditioning! We then caught the flight

back to Tokyo. After a meal at the airport Lynne headed off to a hotel in Ofuna and Geoffrey and Kaz to the ferry terminal to catch an overnight ferry to Mijake-jima

New Birds seen: *Black-faced Spoonbill, Eurasian Spoonbill, Nordmann's Greenshank, common Kingfisher.*

May 17, Tokyo / ferry (Miyake-jima): Tairo Pond and Cape Izu

Lynne had a cultural day around the ancient city of Kamakura, visiting the large Buddha and a few Shrines whilst Geoffrey and Kaz spent the night and day on a ferry trip to Miyake-jima. Geoffrey and Kaz (having slept on the ferry) arrived early in the morning at their destination and collected the hire car which was a matchbox of thing but it served its purpose. Almost immediately we spotted several Black Pigeons (*Ducula melanochroa*) flying close by. We then headed for the Tairo pond (which was in fact a lake) and went in search of the endemics of this small island. We had a brief but very good views of the Lijima's Leaf Warbler



Prver's Woodpecker

(*Phylloscopus ijimae*) we encountered a small flock of Grey-capped greenfinch (*Chloris sinica*) as well as some Varied Tits (*Parus varius owstoni*) this sub-species was much darker than the ones encountered previously. As we walked around we later came across the Japanese Robin (*Erithacus akahige*) foraging amongst the leaf litter along the trail, and could hear an Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus optatus*) in the distance, unfortunately we didn't see it. As we walked around the forest above the lake we came across another sub-species of the Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos k. matsudairai*). From the lake we then drove to the Nature centre where we saw the Izu Thrush

(*Turdus celanops*). We also saw Pleske's or Styan's Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella pleskei*), and a Meadow Bunting (*Emberiza cioides*) feeding from a nearby fence. The day on the island ended with an unexpected Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*) flying in front of our car, big smiles all round. Back on the ferry with an 8 hr crossing ahead of us hopes were high for some great sea bird watching, it was not long before we encountered raft upon raft upon raft of Streaked Shearwater's (*Calonectris leucomelas*) there were thousands of them all away across to the mainland, also saw Black-footed Albatross (*Phoebastria nigripes*), Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*), and Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*). Aside from the birds Geoffrey also discovered that the Pot Noodle's from the machine on the ferry were to die for as they contained fresh noodles and you are expected to slurp when you eat them, not a problem for him! Later that evening Geoffrey reunited with Lynne in Ofuna at the hotel.

New Birds seen: *Black-footed Albatross, Streaked Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Striated Heron, Oriental Pratincole, Red-necked Phalarope, Chinese Bamboo Partridge (Heard), Oriental Cuckoo (Heard), Wren, Japanese Robin, Izu Island Thrush, Pleske's Warble, Meadow Bunting. Plus Yellow Weasel.*

May 18, Tokyo to Mt Fuji: Oiso, Okunawa (Mt Fuji), Lake Yamanakako

Kaz collected us from the hotel and we set off to Mt Fuji. We stopped en-route to see the Japanese Green Pigeons (*Treron Sieboldii*) at Oiso beach. They fly in from the Tanzawa Mountains some 20-30 kilometres away where they breed in the beech forests. They visit the rocks on the shoreline to drink seawater, no one knows why for sure and this is only at this time of the year that they do it. Kaz suggested that it may be related to some deficiency

in their diet, perhaps there are minerals they can only get from the seawater. Among the world's 300 plus species of pigeon, it seems that only the Japanese Green Pigeon is known to drink seawater. On the way back to our car to head off to Mt Fuji we got good views of the few Black-tailed gulls (*Larus crassirostris*) that inhabit the island (the sea birds are noticeable by their absence). We arrived at the Fuji National Park to be greeted with a tuneful sound, only the Japanese could put rumble strips on the road to play the Mt Fuji anthem! There are 5 different 'stages' that are accessible by car, and at each stage we got something new! We also tried to locate the Green Pheasant (*Phasianus versicolor*), we could hear them calling all around us but failed to see any. We then moved to the nature reserve by the lake, where we got excellent views of a Bull-headed Shrike (*Lanius bucephalus*), and the near impossible to see Japanese Yellow Bunting (*Emberiza sulphurata*) sat on the top of a tree singing, which should have been obvious!

New Birds seen: *Black-tailed gull, Black-Eared Kite, Japanese Green Pigeon, Common Cuckoo, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Grey Wagtail, White Wagtail, Bull-headed Shrike, Japanese Accentor, Siberian Blue Robin, Red-flanked Bluetail, Japanese Thrush, Goldcrest, Japanese Warbler, Eastern Crowned Warbler, Narcissus Flycatcher, Willow Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Chestnut-eared Bunting, Japanese Yellow Bunting, Eurasian Bullfinch, Japanese Grosbeak, Eurasian Jay (Heard), Spotted Nutcracker. Plus Sika Deer*

May 19, Mt Fjui to Tokyo: *Lake Yamanakak, Tanzawako (reservoir), The Kaname River*

After leaving our luxurious hotel we revisited the Nature Reserve where we saw a wild boar and then went in search of the Green Pheasant (*Phasianus versicolor*) – Japan's national bird. We headed to a favoured Green Pheasant site but weren't fortunate enough to see it. Driving away a bit disappointed, Geoffrey called for Kaz to stop the car. We reversed back to see one right out in the open walking around the edge of a paddy field! The trip then continued into the hills in the hope of seeing the Crested Kingfisher (*Megaceryle lugubris*) unfortunately it eluded us though we did have wonderful views of the Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*) and Black-Eared Kites (*Milvus migrans lineatus*). After leaving the reservoir we stopped at the Kaname River and the sharp eyes of Kaz picked up a Long billed Plover (*Charadrius placidus*) on the rocks, the only one there. Kaz had not been confident that it would still be there so this was truly one for the bag so to speak.

New Birds seen: *Great Cormorant, Mallard, Little Ringed Plover, Long-billed Plover, Japanese Green Pheasant, House Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Skylark, Asian House Martin, Japanese Wagtail, Brown Dipper, Blue and White Flycatcher, White-cheeked Starling, Red-cheeked Starling, Oriental Reed Warbler. Plus Wild Boar, Japanese Squirrel*

May 20, Tokyo Bay: *Futagoyama (Zushi City, Kanagawa), Sasuke-Inari Shrine (Kamakura), and Kasai Seaside Park (Tokyo), Yatsa Mudflats (Chiba).*

The day started with a walk along a river in woodland. We were in search of the near threatened Japanese Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone atrocaudata*), which – thanks to numerous photographers – was found sitting on a nest near the trail. We saw both the male and the female and short while later we observed a weasel stalking the nest and the male flycatcher trying to chase it off. We then moved to one of the many Shrines in Kamakura for lunch and views of Blue-and-white Flycatcher (*Cyanoptila cyanomelana*). After lunch we headed through central Tokyo to the seaside park for the Azure Magpie (*Cyanopica cyanus*). The next location was the Yatsu mudflats where we got views of the usual waders plus a rather gruesome sight of a crow attacking, killing and consuming a moorhen. We also experienced a day in the life of a Japanese resident when at 17:00 hrs loudspeakers (that are prevalent in Japan) sprung to life with a tune, followed by a message which was

something to the effect of 'school children, it is now time to go home quietly and be respectful to your families'.

New Birds seen: *Little Grebe, Common Tern, Common Coot, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Paradise Flycatcher (Pair on nest), Azure Magpie, Asian Stubtail (Heard), Chinese Hwamei, Common Pochard, Great Crested Grebe.*

May 21, Tokyo Bay: *Inbanuma Marsh, Chosi Port, the Tone River*

The target birds for the morning on the marsh were bitterns, and they delivered getting our first sighting within minutes of leaving the car. We even got clear views of a Eurasian Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) walking in the open alongside the paddy fields. We also got our first sighting of raptors, other than the Kites, then off to Chosi Port for Gulls as it's one of the few places where they could be found. They were mostly sat on the harbour wall, or in the water close to the fishing ships. After lunch we headed to the River, for the Marsh Grassbird (*Locustella pryeri*) and the Black-browed Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*). By the time we finished dusk was approaching and we watched the Egrets arriving to roost. After a meal in an elegant Japanese restaurant we drove back to the hotel with sadness that the trip was over and to prepare for our flight the following day.

New Birds seen: *Vega Gull, Slaty-backed Gull, Eurasian Bittern, Yellow Bittern, Black Crowned Night Heron, Grey Faced Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Marsh Grassbird, Black-browed Reed Warbler, Japanese Reed Warbler, Carrion Crow, Red-necked Grebe, Glaucous Gull.*

May 22, Tokyo to London: *Narita airport and home*

In total we saw/heard 151 species (137 seen)

Sub-species of the *Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker*

- ☐ *P. k. kizuki* (Temminck, 1835) – Kyushu (S Japan).
- ☐ *P. k. matsudairai* (Nagamichi Kuroda, 1921) – Yakushima (off S Kyushu) and Izu Is.
- ☐ *P. k. amamii* (Nagamichi Kuroda, 1922) – Amami Is, in N Ryukyus.
- ☐ *P. k. nigrescens* (Seeböhm, 1887) – Okinawa, in SC Ryukyus.

List of birds by day.

| English name | Scientific name | May 2015 | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | | | | | | | | X | X | X |
| Temminck's Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax capillatus</i> | | | X | | | X | | | | X |
| Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Northern Pintail | <i>Anas acuta</i> | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Eastern Spot-billed Duck | <i>Anas zonorhynchos</i> | | X | | | | | | X | X | X |
| Common Pochard | <i>Aythya ferina</i> | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Black-footed Albatross | <i>Diomedea nigripes</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Streaked Shearwater | <i>Calonectris leucomelas</i> | | | | | | X | X | | | |
| Short-tailed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Wedge-tailed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus pacificus</i> | | | | | | X | | | | X |
| Black-tailed Gull | <i>Larus crassirostris</i> | | | | | | | X | | X | X |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vega Gull | <i>Larus vegae</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Slaty-backed Gull | <i>Larus schistisagus</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Glaucous Gull | <i>Larus hyperboreus</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Common Tern | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> | | | | | | | | X | | X |
| Little Tern | <i>Sterna albifrons</i> | | | X | | | | | | | X |
| White Winged Tern | <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i> | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Eurasian Bittern | <i>Botaurus stellaris</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Yellow Bittern | <i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Cinnamon Bittern | <i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i> | | X | | X | | | | | | |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Striated Heron | <i>Butorides striata</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Eastern Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus coromandus</i> | X | X | | X | | X | | | | |
| Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | | X | X | | | | | X | X | X |
| Intermediate Egret | <i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i> | | X | | X | X | X | | | | X |
| Great White Egret | <i>Casmerodius albus</i> | X | X | X | | | X | | | X | X |
| Pacific Reef Egret | <i>Egretta sacra</i> | | X | | | X | | | | | |
| Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | | X | | | | X | | X | X | X |
| Great Crested Grebe | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Red Necked Grebe | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Black-faced Spoonbill | <i>Platalea minor</i> | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Eurasian Spoonbill | <i>Platalea leucorodia</i> | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Common Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Common Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | | X | | X | X | | | | X | |
| Okinawa Rail | <i>Gallirallus okinawae</i> | | | | X | | | | | | |
| White-breasted Water Hen | <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i> | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Little Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius dubius</i> | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Long-billed Plover | <i>Charadrius placidus</i> | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Kentish Plover | <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Grey Plover | <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Red-necked Stint | <i>Calidris Ruficollis</i> | | | X | | X | | | | X | |
| Pectoral Sandpiper | <i>Calidris melanotos</i> | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Dunlin | <i>Calidris alpina</i> | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Sanderling | <i>Calidris alba</i> | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Oriental Pratincole | <i>Glareola meldivarum</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Wood Sandpiper | <i>Tringa glareola</i> | | X | X | | X | | | | | |
| Marsh Sandpiper | <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i> | | X | X | | | | | | | |
| Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Ruddy Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Common Green Shank | <i>Tringa nebularia</i> | | | X | | | | | | | X |
| Nordmann's Green Shank | <i>Tringa guttifer</i> | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Grey-tailed Tattler | <i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i> | | | X | | X | | | | X | |
| Eastern Black-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa melanuroides</i> | | | X | | | | | | X | |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa lapponica</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Whimbrel | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | X |
| Amami Woodcock | <i>Scolopax mira</i> | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Black-winged Stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> | | | X | | X | | | | | |
| Red-necked Phalarope | <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> | | | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Black-eared Kite | <i>Milvus lineatus</i> | X | | | | | X | X | X | X | X |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asian Stubtail | <i>Urosphena squameiceps</i> | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Marsh Grassbird | <i>Megalurus pryori</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Zitting Cisticola | <i>Cisticola juncidis</i> | | X | | X | X | | | | | X |
| Goldcrest | <i>Regulus regulus</i> | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Pleske's Warbler | <i>Locustella pleskei</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Black-browed Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus bistrigiceps</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Oriental Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i> | | | | | | | | X | X | X |
| Japanese Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus borealis?</i> | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Eastern Crowned Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus occipitalis</i> | | | | | | | X | X | X | |
| Ijima's Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus ijimae</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Narcissus Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula narcissina</i> | | | | | | | X | X | X | |
| Ryukyu Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula owstoni</i> | | X | X | | | | | | | |
| Blue-and-white Flycatcher | <i>Cyanoptila cyanomelana</i> | | | | | | | | X | X | |
| Japanese Paradise Flycatcher | <i>Terpsiphone atrocaudata</i> | | X | | X | X | | | | X | |
| Willow Tit | <i>Poecile montanus</i> | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Coal Tit | <i>Periparus ater</i> | | | | | | | X | X | | |
| Eastern Great Tit | <i>Parus minor</i> | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Varied Tit | <i>Poecile varius</i> | | X | | | X | | | | | |
| Izu Tit | <i>Parus varius owstoni</i> | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Long-tailed Tit | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Japanese White-eye | <i>Zosterops japonicus</i> | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | |
| Meadow Bunting | <i>Emberiza cioides</i> | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Chestnut-eared Bunting | <i>Emberiza fucata</i> | | | | | | | X | X | | |
| Japanese Yellow Bunting | <i>Emberiza sulphurata</i> | | | | | | | X | X | | |
| Japanese Reed Bunting | <i>Emberiza yessoensis</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Oriental Greenfinch | <i>Carduelis sinica</i> | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Eurasian Bullfinch | <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Japanese Grosbeak | <i>Eophona personata</i> | | | | | | | X | X | | |
| Eurasian Tree Sparrow | <i>Passer montanus</i> | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Scaly-breasted Munia | <i>Lonchura punctulata</i> | | | | X | | | | | | |
| Chinese Hwamei | <i>Garrulax canorus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | |
| White-cheeked Starling | <i>Sturnus cineraceus</i> | | | | | | X | | X | X | X |
| Red-cheeked Starling | <i>Sturnus philippensis</i> | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Eurasian Jay | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Lidth's Jay | <i>Garrulus lidthi</i> | | X | X | | | | | | | |
| Azure-winged Magpie | <i>Cyanopica cyanus</i> | | | | | | | | | X | |
| Spotted Nutcracker | <i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i> | | | | | | | X | | | |
| Carrion Crow | <i>Corvus corone</i> | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Large-billed Crow | <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i> | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Ross's Gull * | <i>Hydrocoleous rosea</i> | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Little Bunting * | <i>Emberiza pusilla</i> | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| * Rarity | | | | | | | | | | | |

EXPEDITION TO ASCENSION ISLAND

(Rich Mooney)

On the 5th April 2015 I travelled to Ascension Island with 11 other members of the Army Ornithological Society (AOS) on Expedition Booby Tern XXI. Our mission, over a 12 day period, was an ornithological survey of the breeding seabirds of Ascension Island, a continuation of a monitoring effort that has been running since 1987. The project is in direct support of the Ascension Island Government, assisted by AIG Conservation Office staff, and with the backing of the RSPB.

The Facts

Ascension Island, a British Overseas Territory, is a remote volcanic island in the equatorial waters of the South Atlantic; approximately midway between West Africa and Brazil and sitting close enough to the equator to afford it warm weather year round.

The historical timeline on Ascension Island is fascinating; from its discovery by the Portuguese in 1501 to the establishment of a garrison of British troops in 1815. Captain James Cook stopped here to collect turtle meat en-route to Hawaii as did Charles Darwin on his return voyage upon the Beagle. During World War II it was an important naval and air station and was used extensively by the British Military during the Falklands War. The RAF and United States Air Force are both present on the island.

Climate and terrain added daily challenges for us all – from clambering over jagged rock, negotiating our way through loose volcanic clinker to scrambling up slopes of crumbling scree. Tiptoeing methodically through the Sooty Terns Fairs (breeding grounds) one day, ascending through Eucalyptus woodland in search of White Tern nests the next. A timed seabird count might fill an hour before dusk and the removal of a trapped dead rat could be your first job after breakfast! The diversity of our daily tasks, of which there many, added to the richness of this incredible exploration. We were contributing, building on a tapestry of knowledge that has already changed the fate of some of these magnificent birds for the better. That felt good.

During our visit we re-trapped 397 previously ringed Sooty Terns, 2 of which were ringed in 1996 and 8 that had been tagged with geolocators. We ringed 1480 Sooty Terns, 20 of which were fitted with new geolocators. Blood and contour feather samples were taken from a selection of birds for Stable Isotope Analysis (SIA). The results from these tests will not only let us know the sex of these individuals but also what their diet consisted of over the last few months. Brown Noddy nests were recorded within the Sooty Tern Fairs as well as other sites on the island and 20 individuals were ringed. Two visits to a Masked Booby breeding area on the east side of the island known as Letterbox produced 20 re-trapped birds and 80 individuals were ringed.

The Fairs

Once we had settled into our accommodation on our first morning we headed down to Mars Bay which is situated in the south-west corner of the island. Here we began our first task which was to evaluate the breeding status of the Sooty Tern Fairs. Within the Fairs there are sub-colonies. Each of these were at a different stage in their breeding cycle, so we concentrated our efforts in re-trapping ringed adults in areas where they were easier to catch.

We worked in pairs - one catcher and one recorder. GPS coordinates, ring number and any other relevant data was documented including recording and collecting any regurgitated food. The terns were caught by simply placing a net over the top of them and on average it took about 45 seconds from trapping to release. The atmosphere within the Fair was frenzied, hectic and loud. There was a continual vocalization of a variety of different calls; chaotic but at the same time connected – a symbiotic orchestra. Birds were flying in and out continually. Some swooping, some hovering and scolding – investigating the intruders in Tilley hats!

The level of professionalism, care and overall coordination during this delicate operation was outstanding. Moving through this colony of Sooty Terns safely and ethically took a great deal of patience and concentration, but also had to be done efficiently. What was achieved was a highly organised and synchronised effort which yielded a considerable amount of valuable information with the minimum of disturbance.

There were so many outstanding experiences over the twelve days that it's hard to highlight one. There was the chaos of the Sooty Tern Fairs, summit to seashore land bird surveys, mornings with Green Turtles and evenings with Land Crabs. There was an amazing boat trip to Boatswain Bird Island allowing up-close views of some of the island's most wonderful residents including Red-footed Booby, Yellow-billed Tropicbird, Black Noddy and the endemic Ascension frigatebird. We explored the trails of Green Mountain, hiked the lava fields in the south-west and counted hundreds of Common Myna going to roost. The list goes on but space will only allow me to indulge in one of the highlights.

Reclaimed Land

Letterbox is a high, flat and rugged plateau jutting out on the south-east side of the island. Access to this remote and logistically challenging area is very limited and a long hike awaits you at the end of a bumpy and dusty track. The previous day's call-over (meeting) brought up the fact that the road that had been available on previous expeditions was no longer useable. A torrential down pour had damaged huge parts of it and was no longer an option for vehicle access. We were hiking in. That made me happy - challenge!

All members of the AOS participated on this first of two epic excursions, including three members of the Conservation Office staff. After debussing at the rendezvous point we all prepared our gear. I adjusted my backpack which was feeling a little heavier than normal as I was carrying a scope, tripod and extra water. White Terns glided in silently behind us from the adjacent cliffs, hovering above our heads, investigating the extra-terrestrial beings.

The main group began the descent via the water damaged road down to Letterbox, while Andrew Bray, Kev Kirkham-Brown, known as KB and I followed a different route that ran between the high ground of Weather Post and White Horse hills. We stopped at a few vantage points which afforded us the good views of the nesting White Terns. Our agenda was slightly different than the others, in that we needed to incorporate a breeding census on the way down.

The track we were following began morphing and swirling, the defined edges became blurry and the landscape began to drop away. We were following a goat track made up of crumbling rock and dust with a treacherous drop on one side. Looking down wasn't a good idea. Fortunately, it was intermittent, with occasional wide areas to catch your breath. 'Get high – stay high', is a motto I understand; and that is what we did. We followed the ridgeline trail along Power Peak, terminating at its natural summit - Louis' Leap.

The view from this peak was absolutely incredible. In front of us, 300 meters offshore, was the unmistakable shape of Boatswain Bird Island (BBI). This 5ha island standing tall and strong was Ascension's seabird sanctuary. This avian haven was the last piece of safe land on which these South Atlantic specialties stood their ground. 'Boatswain's own Rorke's Drift!' Ironically, that very battle was happening a few thousand miles to the southeast at the very time (1879) that the enemy was advancing on Ascension. Not Zulus though - cats and rats!

We gingerly headed back along the sharp ridgeline and dropped down into a steep crumbly gully, navigating with three points of contact at all times. At the next vantage point we dumped our packs and set-up the scope for part 2 of our census task - AONs (Apparently Occupied Nests) survey of BBI. Our two target species were Ascension Frigatebird and Masked Booby. Here we had good visibility of the majority of the nesting area.

After meeting up with the main group on the plateau and central area of the reclaimed Masked Booby breeding grounds we reformed new teams. The methods for catching Masked Booby are similar to the terns in that they are caught by net, but that's where the similarity ends. Logistically it was a three person team for processing - one catcher, extractor and holder, one ringer and one recorder. Our team consisted of Roger Dickey, Andrew Bray and myself. Masked Booby's are big, strong, and fast. They have a razor sharp bill that snaps, slashes and strikes with speed and can inflict serious damage (a few of us have the scars to prove it) and must be controlled confidently and safely. Ring number, GPS location, nest contents and sex were all recorded. Interestingly the way to tell the sexes apart is to hear them call – males wheeze and females honk!

After lunch, Tony Kaduk and I joined Dr Eliza Leat, the Seabird Conservation Scientist on Ascension, to check one of the nesting sites of the Ascension Frigatebird. The historical significance of this endemic species has been well documented. Since colonization in 1815, Ascension's seabirds have been under attack. Encroachment on breeding grounds and disturbance over so many years has obviously played a part, but more than anything, rats and primarily feral cats have devastated the breeding birds on this South Atlantic Island. In 2002 the RSPB undertook a feral cat removal programme and the island was declared cat free in

2006. In December 2012, Andrew Bray, a long time member of the AOS and veteran of many Ascension Island expeditions discovered an Ascension Frigatebird nest on Letterbox - the first mainland nest in 180 years! This breeding season (2014-2015) a total of 44 nests were discovered.

At one of the nest sites we visited there were three young and a few adult and juveniles perched on some rocks; an amazing sight. We were witnessing first-hand the fruits of a recovery programme that has changed the fate of not only the frigatebird, but of all Ascension's seabirds. Hopefully, in 8-10 years, these young birds will be fighting for a breeding spot on their reclaimed piece of real estate – Ascension Island!

The hike out of Letterbox was tough going. It was about 28 degrees with depleted water supply, no shade and most members carrying a few bumps, scrapes and scars. Fatigue was setting in. The route back had none of the avian distractions or panoramic views from the way down. Serious ascent with false summits around every switch-back is what we got. The baking sun was relentless and each step was draining what energy we had left. Luckily, I was with a great team full of strong characters and everyone followed a similar philosophy - effort versus reward. It was worth a little pain and suffering to contribute and be a part to such an important project. Please visit my blog for more stories from the field at <http://birdingfieldnotes.blogspot.co.uk/>.

ILLEGAL BIRD TRAPPING - THE DARK SIDE OF CYPRUS

(Andy Rose)

"A Robin Redbreast in a Cage Puts all Heaven in a Rage"
William Blake 1757-1827

Foreword

Like many of you, in June I read Mark Easterbrook's excellent final missive from Cyprus. I was especially seized by his lament about illegal bird trapping, especially the fact that things seemed to be getting worse not better. Below I have re-produced a blog I wrote following my visit to the island this autumn where I worked as a volunteer for the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS). A couple of people I spoke to about CABS before I went had mixed views – a bit extreme and not particularly effective they said. However, having spent 3 weeks in their international ranks I can attest to their commitment and bravery. They are not perfect, but they are present in the Mediterranean basin (and elsewhere) every spring and autumn. I agree with Mark when he says the constraints lie in law enforcement though I would say the problem is more one of capacity and not commitment. I think it is also worth noting that the Eastern Sovereign Base Area of Dhekalia is the worst affected area in Cyprus with decoys being used within 3 meters of the Ayios Nikolaos Station perimeter fence. Finally, having survived 25 years in the Army without being shot at, I and a colleague took incoming fire from a shot gun near Cape Greco. It was close enough to have been uncomfortable. I do not mention this as some kind of badge of honour, but rather to emphasize the potential risks involved.

Illegal bird trapping - the dark side of Cyprus

It's Saturday and I am about to start my third and final week in Cyprus where I have volunteered to work with the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), a German charity dedicated to the eradication of illegal hunting and trapping of birds throughout Europe. Cyprus, which lies in the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin, is one of the key migratory routes that birds use during their journey between Europe and Africa. It is assessed that over 100 million birds visit the island every spring and autumn. According to BirdLife Cyprus, over 2.5 million birds are killed by illegal bird trapping on the island every year. The number is improbably large, but sadly this is a conservative estimate.



Cyprus

Bird trapping has been a traditional rural activity in Cyprus using mainly the sticky sap of Syrian plums applied to short sticks deployed in trees and attracted sometimes by tethered decoy birds. Most people indulged, seeking a little morsel of precious protein to improve their diet. The overall impact on bird populations was probably insignificant. In the modern era trappers have taken advantage of the use of mist nets, upgraded the lime sap to include industrial strength glue and have deployed MP3 players and car batteries to mimic and attract passing birds. The result has been a wholesale scale expansion in slaughter which was only reduced following Cyprus' accession to the European Union in 2004. However, and again according to Bird Life Cyprus, trapping has again increased significantly since 2005, triggering the intervention of a number of non-government organisations, like CABS, and brave individuals prepared to run the gauntlet of organised crime.



Care of the environment seems to be of little importance - sadly a common sight. 'Fly-tipping' is rife

Illegal hunting, mainly with shot guns, is endemic, even in conservation areas. CABS runs camps in Cyprus each spring and autumn. Every night and often early in the morning too, small patrols venture forth into the countryside and suburban areas listening for the unnatural and unmistakable siren sound of bird song. The most commonly heard is that of the Blackcap, a beautiful warbler familiar to most of us in Europe. 'Ambvelopouli', as they are known here, are the main target. Each bird is worth approximately €40 driving an industry estimated to be worth €15M a year. Sadly it's not only Blackcaps that get trapped. 30 other species of bird can be eaten including thrushes and other warblers. The

rest of the 120 or so species that have been reported as caught are simply left to die. There is a local saying that it is bad luck to release a bird, as each is a gift from God.



Illegal hunting, mainly with shot guns, is endemic, even in conservation areas

Patrolling can be dangerous; approaching pick-up trucks and strange voices in the night force volunteers to take cover and hide. Activists have been beaten up in the past and in my time our hire car was immobilized and key-scratched. This is no holiday. Between 4:00 and 5:00 am, the CABS patrols rendezvous with the Animal Protection Service (APS) to brief them on trapping sites they have found during the night and to organize an ambush and hopefully make an arrest. However, the current scale of trapping and the small capacity of the APS are such that their effect is limited. A recent excursion of mine into the British Sovereign Base

(SBA) area of Dhekalia identified so many active decoys that we could only conclude that the situation is now, in this British controlled area at least, out of control. Despite Prince Charles writing to Commander British Forces Cyprus in March 2014 demanding action, very little seems to have been achieved and trapping continues unabated. Mention should also be made of the gauntlet Quails run here in Cyprus. Trappers deploy quail decoys by the dozen across the dry dusty farmland so that the night is filled with the weirdly unnatural sound of their calls. Whilst hunting Quails in season is legal, attracting them with batteries of eclectically powered decoys is not.



Blackcaps - or '*ambelopouli*' - considered a local delicacy



A mist net trapping site near Larnaca airport

Fortunately it's not all bad news. Trapping is abating in some areas and many young Cypriots are determined to turn things around. From my perspective, the dedication and determination, combined with an academic rigor in documenting the issue, of the CABS personal has been humbling. Many have genuinely dedicated their lives to saving birds across Europe in this way and their approach in tackling this distressing issue is impressive. For me, working as a volunteer, the highlights must include the release of birds following the seizure of mist nets. Above you can see how they come. Trapped in mesh and unceremoniously dumped in a bucket. However, careful hands are on standby to cut them free and to release them.



Female Blackcap or '*ambelopouri*' about to be released by a CABS volunteer



A night's black harvest - all these birds - mainly Blackcaps - were successfully released, save one which had to be destroyed

The past 2 weeks have been amazing and eye opening. As I conclude this post a day after starting it, I reflect on the 7 Blackcaps and single Lesser Whitethroat we rescued in the early hours of this morning and released at dawn in a car layby somewhere in the middle of Cyprus. One's happiness is tempered by the knowledge that many hundreds will not have been so lucky. Finally, if you wish to join a CABS camp, look at their website and apply. Please also spread the word so that together we can accelerate the end of this barbarous trade.



A Wryneck shortly before release



Clockwise from bottom right: a dead Ortolan Bunting, Red-backed Shrike, Wood Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Lesser Whitethroat and Great Reed Warbler

BARRY BUDDON UPDATE

Bob McCurley

Last year there was an introduction to the site that is near Carnoustie on the Tay estuary. Having been involved on the conservation committee at Barry Buddon for over 20 years I have grown to regard Barry Buddon as my 'local patch' and the variety of 'Firsts' for the estate never ceases to amaze me on this wonderful training camp which covers an area of 10.5km². Each year 5 local groups consisting of the RSPB, SOC, SWT, Dundee Naturalists Society and the Angus and Dundee Bird Club (ADBC) hold an Open Day which is open to members of these clubs plus the general public. This year it was held on 16 August and was well attended. Each year we have a good attendance for a small location with on average 60 people turning up. Statistical records show we now have 56 breeding birds using the estate; the majority having grown accustomed to the frequent live firing. The overall total of bird species recorded on camp stands at 115. This year some of our early visitors were a Sea Eagle and a Blue-winged Teal. During our Open day we saw breeding Swallow, House martin, Willow warbler, Wheatear and Spotted Flycatcher. There were also a number of birds in passage including Osprey, Whinchat, Cuckoo and Grasshopper Warbler.



4 Spot Chas: Grass of Parnassus

In addition to ornithology we record Oanata and Lepidoptera. On the training area, 17 butterfly

species have been recorded; the rarest being the Purple Hairstreak. Once again a Green Hairstreak was found after being discovered last year. Though no new moths have been recorded this year we did find another new species of dragonfly on our Open Nature Day. A 4 Spot Chaser Dragonfly was spotted and photographed.

We are very fortunate with a nice range of plants including Autumn Gentian and Grass of Parnassus. Our next Open day is on 6 June 2016 if anyone happens to be in the area. I will be pleased to see you.

BIRDING ALONG HADRIAN'S WALL

(Pat and John Hughes)

Our walk along Hadrian's Wall provided some good birding. We walked from east to west the 84 miles length of the wall at the end of March 2015, the week before the walking season officially opened in April.

We used our senior railcard for the journey to Newcastle and back from Carlisle. We started at Wallend where we collected a couple of pebbles from the shore, later to be thrown in the Irish Sea and walked for nine consecutive days along the wall to Bowness on Solway. Bed and breakfast accommodation and baggage transfer was arranged by Brigantes who specialise in walking holiday arrangements. The walk brought Roman military history to life, provided some spectacular scenery and the opportunity to break in a new pair of boots for the Ascension Island field season.

A colony of some 500 pairs of Kittiwake breeding high up on Victorian buildings along the River Tyne and in the centre of Newcastle were a welcome surprise on the first day of the walk.

Tree Sparrows were seen close to the B&B at High House and two pairs of Bull Finches in brilliant breeding plumage were seen on the second day. A short detour from the wall at Irthington takes you to a deep oak lined gorge and the river Irthing where two Dippers were seen feeding in the fast flowing water. Early spring arrivals (Wheatears and Chiffchaffs) were recorded along the length of the wall, all together we recorded 54 species. Weather is unpredictable in the borders during March but we had four beautiful days of spring sunshine, a day of snow followed by days of heavy morning showers. Notwithstanding the weather we recommend the offseason walk as it avoids the crowds, accommodation is less expensive and birding is good.



Kittiwakes breeding on buildings in the centre of Newcastle © Surfbirds