EDITORIAL

This is a rather slim publication. I wonder if you are suffering from austerity as not many of you seem to be doing much. I understand that a few are twitching however this is mainly a UK based activity. Life is precious and time to do things does seem to fly past. This year I have been birding in Corsica, Southern France and Oman (none of which are in this magazine) and my bird count is down for the year. Two were as a guide amd my trip to France in the summer was more about football with the odd day birding. The expedition to Ascension Island in October was cancelled due to a shortage of birds. This "shortage" seems to be a theme this year! There was an earlier expedition to Ascension and once again there was a Joint Ringing visit, this time to a Welsh island. I am grateful to Anne Nason for her visits to family in Zimbabwe and a short trip by Keith Cherry across the pond. Otherwise the Chairman and Editor may have taken over this year! The Society has been busy and besides a great time in Scotland for the AGM there have been various trips organised; some of which are covered in this year's magazine. These trips are very rewarding and are at basic cost but not always basic in beds once booked. I would like to say a big thank you to all those who take pictures when out birding. It is something I tend to forget even though my camera may be close by. You will note that Mark has been on an expedition to see birds in UK and has taken some wonderful pictures. I am only on 216 birds this year in UK however I have seen a lot of Great Bustards and rather a lot of birds in the hand as ringing has rather taken over my days this year.

EXPEDITION REPORT 29 – JANUARY 2016

(Roger Dickey)

Summary: The main effort of the small expedition was to support the work of the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (AIGCD) towards the introduction of a marine protected area. Changes to flight costs for non-MoD personnel reduced the number of participants on the expedition. The breeding peak of sooty terns *Onychoprion fuscatus* was estimated to have been 4 weeks earlier than the arrival of the expedition. The delay in deployment was due to non-availability of aircraft. This and catastrophic effects of adverse weather on the earlier-hatching of birds on the Waterside fairs made an estimate of sooty tern breeding densities impossible at the time of the visit as Waterside was deserted. However, Lucy Garrett's data from December 2015 estimated the Waterside and Mars Bay colonies to be 11.57 ha (cf. Mars Bay alone was estimated to be 11.7 ha in April 2015 on the previous expedition). A further 2,019 sooty terns were ringed including 20 birds that were part of the GPS logger preliminary study. Ten birds were deployed with GPS loggers. A total of 107 birds were re-trapped but none of them carried a geolocator. There remain 65 geolocators to be recovered. A further eight brown noddies *Anous stolidus* were ringed at nests on the sooty tern fairs and one bird was re-trapped. On Letterbox, we assisted the AIGCD in their monitoring of adult masked boobies *Sula dactylatra* with 20 adults ringed and 15 re-trapped. In total, five 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 second 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 focused on the breeding biology of the sooty tern, determining the size of breeding population, identifying and recording levels of predation, site fidelity, diet, sub-annual breeding, and migration ecology. However, on this expedition the main field effort was to establish a methodology for the deployment of GPS loggers on adult sooty terns breeding on the island.

Aims of the January 2016 Expedition

1. Pilot and thereby establish a methodology for the deployment and recovery of GPS loggers on up to 20 adult sooty terns.
2. Locate and recover geolocators deployed on birds in March 2011, December 2012, September 2013, May 2014 and April 2015.
3. Monitor food types of adult sooty terns 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. Provide continuation of ringing training and renewal of ringing permits held by AIGCD staff.

7. Ring 2,000 adult sooty terns and brown noddies in total, and re-trap both species.

Expedition Booby 22 – January 2016 - Participants

Lieutenant Colonel Roger Dickey (retd)	AOS	Expedition Leader
Chief Petty Officer Mark Cutts	RNBWS	Expedition 2ic
Dr Jim Reynolds	University of Birmingham/AOS	
Lieutenant Commander Julia Springett (retd)	RNBWS/RAFOS	
Warrant Officer Steve Copsey	RNBWS	

Members of the expedition were on the island from 14th January to 26th January 2016 (inclusive). A total of 65 person.days was spent in the field. The expedition was assisted by Lucy Garrett and Kat Rawlins who were already on Ascension as part of the former's PhD ongoing research efforts.

Weather

Rainfall for several weeks prior to the expedition had once again assisted the proliferation of vegetation. However, for several days just prior to the expedition, heavy and persistent rain had fallen on the fairs, soaking and drowning chicks and adults alike and displacing large numbers of eggs. Total cloud cover lasted on most days until the late hours of the morning. There was up to an hour's light rainfall on the fairs on several days with only one day remaining cloud-free. Heavy rainfall had washed away much of the track leading down to Letterbox.

Sooty terns

Area survey

The ability of the expedition to establish area surveys was compromised by lack of time, the number of participants, and the failure of the Waterside Fair. However, a pre-visit survey of both Waterside and Mars Bay colonies yielded the data in Table 1.

Nest density

Nest densities were measured by quadrats counted on random transects through both fairs. In total 1,070 apparently occupied nests (AoNs) were counted in 81 quadrats. The AoNs per m^2 are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. The numbers of sub-colonies, the density of nests (based upon *n* quadrats) and the population sizes of sooty terns breeding at Waterside and Mars Bay during December 2015.

Survey location	Number of sub-colonies	Size (ha)	Nest density (eggs per m^2)	Population size (mean number of pairs ± 95% confidence limits)
Waterside	2	3.03	2.19 (*n* = 80)	127,761 ± 16,630
Mars Bay	3	8.54	1.50 (*n* = 72)	66,315 ± 4,926

Population size

By the time of the visit the Waterside colony was nearly empty. The Mars Bay colony had also suffered from the adverse weather conditions but it was still receiving birds. Yet, even here there was severe loss of eggs and chicks. The fair again stretched to the highest 'shoulder' of the bay and nearly all the way to the sea. No birds nested on the clinker. It is understood that the 'new' birds arriving and attempting to settle during the time of the visit, provided a further breeding 'spike' in February and March 2016 after the AOS expedition had departed the island (K. Andrews, pers. comm.). Whether these birds were 'failed' breeders from earlier attempts at Waterside and Mars Bay is not known. Adding the total colony area and multiplying by the average nest density (*n* = 152 quadrats) as follows:

$$11.57 \text{ ha} \times 1.85 \text{ eggs m}^{-2}$$

gives a total of 214,045 (± 12,120.3) pairs of birds or 428,090 (± 24,240.6) individual birds in December, one month before the visit.

Optimum survey date

Survey dates have always been determined by the date of the first egg laid at the Waterside colony and, hence, past expeditions attempted to visit 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. On this expedition, for the fourth consecutive breeding season, an accurate estimation of this 'first egg' date has been difficult to obtain due to the continuous and protracted late-laying of birds on the fairs. The result is that late breeders mask the new season's initial nesting peak. The expedition considered that the optimum date of arrival for this breeding season would have been in mid-December 2015. A considered calculation, based on previous data, estimates the optimum time for the next expedition to coincide with the next sooty tern breeding peak will be on 18th September 2016.

Determining offshore feeding locations during breeding period

In association with AIGCD, a number of adult sooty terns were fitted with PathTrack Nanofix Geo+ GPS devices with solar panels (for battery re-charging) to determine the areas at sea where these birds feed during their breeding period. Research has already been conducted on previous expeditions on adult sooty terns equipped with leg-mounted geolocators to determine where birds assemble and feed in the periods between breeding seasons. This knowledge is fundamental in informing us as to how birds use areas of the

Atlantic around the island and thus in ensuring that a new Marine Protected Area (MPA) around Ascension Island accommodates the needs of this most pelagic of seabirds. A total of 10 birds was fitted with GPS loggers from five different study plots (10 focal birds per plot), each with a corresponding number of control birds, and all located at the Mars Bay colony. Birds to be deployed with GPS loggers had to be at least 180 g at capture and observations in the run-up to capture determined that they had been in attendance for at least 3 days before they were approached and caught. This would optimise the outcome from the pilot study both in terms of the bird being in high body condition when receiving the GPS logger and it leaving the colony soon after deployment following an incubation switch with its partner. Thus, we invested much time in the field observing birds on their eggs from distant vantage points. As this was the first time that GPS tracking had been attempted on an expedition and indeed on this species on the island, a number of useful lessons were learnt in what was considered to be a pilot study before more loggers are deployed on subsequent expeditions. A recommended methodology is detailed in Appendix A. Limited time prevented the AOS from being present during the recovery phase of this GPS study.

Food availability

Regurgitations by some adults when they were handled during ringing and re-trapping activities showed a predominance of sardines and sprats (both Clupeidae). Again, there appeared to be little difference between the size of fish prey in the crops of adults whether for their own consumption or for that by chicks.

Predation

The corpses found of adult and juvenile sooty terns were most likely the result of severe rainfall on the fairs and there was little evidence of predation. The AIGCD continues to consider that domestic cats, although opportunistic killers, have not specifically targeted the fairs and that the increasing numbers of house mice *Mus musculus* on the island, and especially on the fairs, represent a more easily obtained source of food for cats. Other predator species of terns are discussed below:

Black rats *Rattus rattus*. No rats were seen during the expedition's work on the fairs and compared with their numbers on previous expeditions, mice were present in only small numbers. No rat trapping was conducted on this expedition.

Ascension frigatebirds *Fregata aquila*. Frigatebirds were monitored when the teams were working within the colonies and the numbers were counted of frigatebirds hunting over and resting within the colonies. Most young and newly hatched sooty tern chicks at the time of the expedition were at Mars Bay. There were no frigatebirds seen at the Waterside colony other than those in transit. Frigatebird numbers were high compared with those on previous expeditions and this probably resulted in high chick predation rates in sub-colonies. They were probably more concentrated at Mars Bay as a result of the failure of the colony at Waterside. A summary of observations is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Numbers of Ascension frigatebirds at the sooty tern colony at Mars Bay in January 2016.

Date	Counts	Average number	Maximum number
14th	2	23	30
15th	3	20	26
16th	3	18	21
17th	2	12	12
18th	2	21	31
19th	2	13	17
20th	2	11	12
21st	3	10	15
22nd	2	6	11
24th	1	18	18

Common mynas *Acridotheres tristis*. 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. They appear to taste the albumen of many more eggs than they ultimately consume (B.J. Hughes Unpubl. data). Mynas seen visiting the fairs appeared to be few in number. At Mars Bay, a maximum of three pairs were recorded on one day and mynas were recorded on almost every day of our visits but their average numbers never exceeded two pairs. Some egg losses from mynas were noted on Mars Bay but there was no direct count of tern egg losses from myna depredation.

Sally Lightfoot crabs *Grapsus adscensionis*. While there was evidence of sooty tern corpses being scavenged by crabs as were some eggs that had been opened by another agent, losses to crabs were trivial and did not warrant anything but anecdotal reporting.

Sightings of note

Several adult birds had been washed into low vegetation where they had drowned probably as a result of their wings initially becoming entangled within low lying branches. Flash flooding had washed many eggs off the lower and sandier slopes of Mars Bay and into gullies where they had accumulated.

Birds were at every stage of breeding at Mars Bay.

Desertion

The recent weather conditions made it difficult to determine the causes of the few cases of desertion seen. Speculation on causes during previous expeditions that birds had moved to higher elevations at Mars Bay to escape rat-infested habitat and human disturbance remain difficult to investigate. However, there appeared to be few areas unaffected by inundation from heavy rainfall and this appeared to be one obvious cause of desertion preceding the current expedition.

Re-trapping of adults

The re-trapping effort was considerably reduced because of limited numbers of catchers available. The re-trapping process included the search to recover geolocators deployed in March 2011, December 2012, September 2013, May 2014 and April 2015. In total 107 sooty terns were re-trapped at Mars Bay and there were no controls. A total of 23.5 man.hours was dedicated to re-trapping.

Ringing of sooty terns

A further 2,019 sooty terns were ringed by the combined ringing teams, including 20 rings from Lucy Garrett as part of the GPS logger project. No juvenile birds were ringed on the expedition. Further progress was made in reconciling anomalies between deployed ring numbers on birds and ringing locations as a result of dialogue between the AOS and AIGCD; we continue to combine ringing and re-trapping datasets in an ongoing collaboration. Post-expedition enquiries focussed on ring records held at the BTO also contributed to a reduction in the number of such ringing anomalies. (Principal rings used DT30001 – DT32000).

Geolocators

Despite routine searches during re-trapping, no geolocators were found on the visit but two had been recovered in the few weeks leading up to the expedition arriving on the island.

Brown noddies

Summary of findings

The number of breeding brown noddies appears to have further increased since the last expedition in April 2015. Many of the brown noddies nesting in the Waterside colony were on eggs but it has yet to be investigated whether there is synchronisation between their breeding and that of sooty terns. Nevertheless, birds still appeared to be at several different breeding stages (i.e. from incubation to pre-fledging), mirroring the status of sooty terns. Nest sites at Mars Bay 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. Nine adult birds were ringed and one adult bird with a yellow colour ring was re-trapped at Mars Bay.

Population estimate on mainland

The size of the breeding population of brown noddies on the mainland continues to be difficult to estimate without detailed monitoring. The total estimate is well over 100 nest sites 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 were checked but not all sites in Mars Bay were recorded. A total of 19 eggs were found at Waterside. Fewer AoNs at Mars Bay were occupied by eggs and, as at Waterside, they were at all stages of development.

Ringing of brown noddies

Of the nine adult brown noddies ringed, five were at Waterside and four at Mars Bay. Blood was taken from each of these birds as part of an ongoing study to attempt to use morphometrics taken in the field to sex birds. Blood is used to sex birds definitively at the Functional Genomics Facility at the University of Birmingham where DNA is extracted and subjected to established molecular genetics approaches. The AIGCD holds a comprehensive list of all brown noddies ringed outside of the times of AOS expeditions. (Principal rings used DT32001 – DT32008).

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. Very few juveniles were fully fledged and expedition members assisted the AIGCD in monitoring as many juveniles as possible in the time available. With the AIGCD under time constraints to ring juveniles and adults, the AOS only ringed adults in the breeding population.

Population estimate on mainland

No detailed count of the breeding population was made on the expedition but it was estimated to occupy approximately 400 AoNs.

Ringing of masked boobies

With one ringing team, only 20 adults were ringed and 15 adults were re-trapped.

Other avian and non-avian taxa/surveys of note

White terns *Gygis alba*

White terns were not surveyed on this expedition but there was no evidence of eggs having been laid in the trees and cliffs of Green Mountain.

Mexican thorn *Prosopis juliflora* encroachments

There had been a significant effort on Mars Bay to remove Mexican Thorn. Therefore, 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.

Outreach

Saturday Club

It is regretted that the timing of the expedition coincided with a school holiday and the expedition was not able to take the schoolchildren into the field at Mars Bay this year as part of their 'Saturday Club' activities.

National Geographic

A number of photographs of ringing masked boobies were taken on Letterbox by Clare Fieseler who was on the island for an assignment with National Geographic. Clare is a PhD student at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill but is often undertaking photo assignments as part of her science outreach activities.

Training and support

Six hours were spent on ringing training with the AIGCD. Ringing training was led by Roger Dickey.

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 expeditions simply 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.

Recommended Methodology for Establishing Study Plots, Monitoring of Incubating Birds, and the Recovery of GPS Loggers from Sooty Terns

Considerations:

1. Up to 40 individual birds will need to be weighed to identify those that exceed a body mass threshold (as stipulated by the BTO Unconventional Methods Permit), their nest sites accurately located and marked for monitoring, be re-caught for deployment of loggers, further monitored for up to seven days, and then re-captured in order to recover GPS loggers.

2. To minimise disturbance, individual nest sites should be marked clearly so that effective monitoring of birds can be conducted at a distance preferably from an elevated vantage point. Individual targeted birds should be sufficiently far from each other to ensure the hand netting of one does not disturb others. No other activity should take place in the study plot nor should the site be close to regular walkways used by others during routine activities in the colony.

3. Birds considered suitable for GPS logger deployment should be marked boldly on the white neck feathers with green or black marker pen and with uniquely numbered and lettered (Interrex) colour rings for ease of identification.

Preparation:

4. Up to 10 study plots should be identified containing birds sitting tightly on eggs. The plots should be in a 'fan' formation to ensure that there is one central ringing area and that plots are not disturbed while others are being worked on, as shown in Figure 1.

5. From one vantage point the whole of the study plot should be observable with all nests visible and not obscured by rocks or vegetation.

6. Up to 10 birds should be selected per study plot, weighed, marked and their nests accurately located and marked with a device that can be read from a distance. Birds that are unsuitable (i.e. in low body condition and/or below the body mass threshold) could be used as controls. Interrex rings allow for identification of both targeted birds and controls. As well as marking the targeted bird, we also marked their incubated egg with the corresponding number of the nest site (i.e. between '1' and '10'), allowing us to determine whether the breeding attempt had been abandoned as a result of disturbance from our work on the study plot.

Monitoring:

7. Birds should be monitored each day to determine how many days they have been incubating and when they switch incubation duties with their mates.

8. Disturbance should be kept to a minimum and routine activity within the plot should be monitored to detect incidents of agitation, desertion, cross-brooding or abnormal behaviour that may influence the selection of birds for logger deployment.

9. Birds on their 4^{th} or 5^{th} day incubation should be targeted for GPS logger deployment.

Attaching Harnesses:

10. Harnesses may need to be attached to numerous birds in a study plot over several days.

11. Birds are captured and removed from study plots where they are first weighed to ensure that they exceed the 180 g body mass threshold for logger deployment. Then, their body condition is assessed with a simple checklist and once passed they are processed.

12. Control birds need to processed immediately after the targeted bird has been equipped with a GPS logger and released.

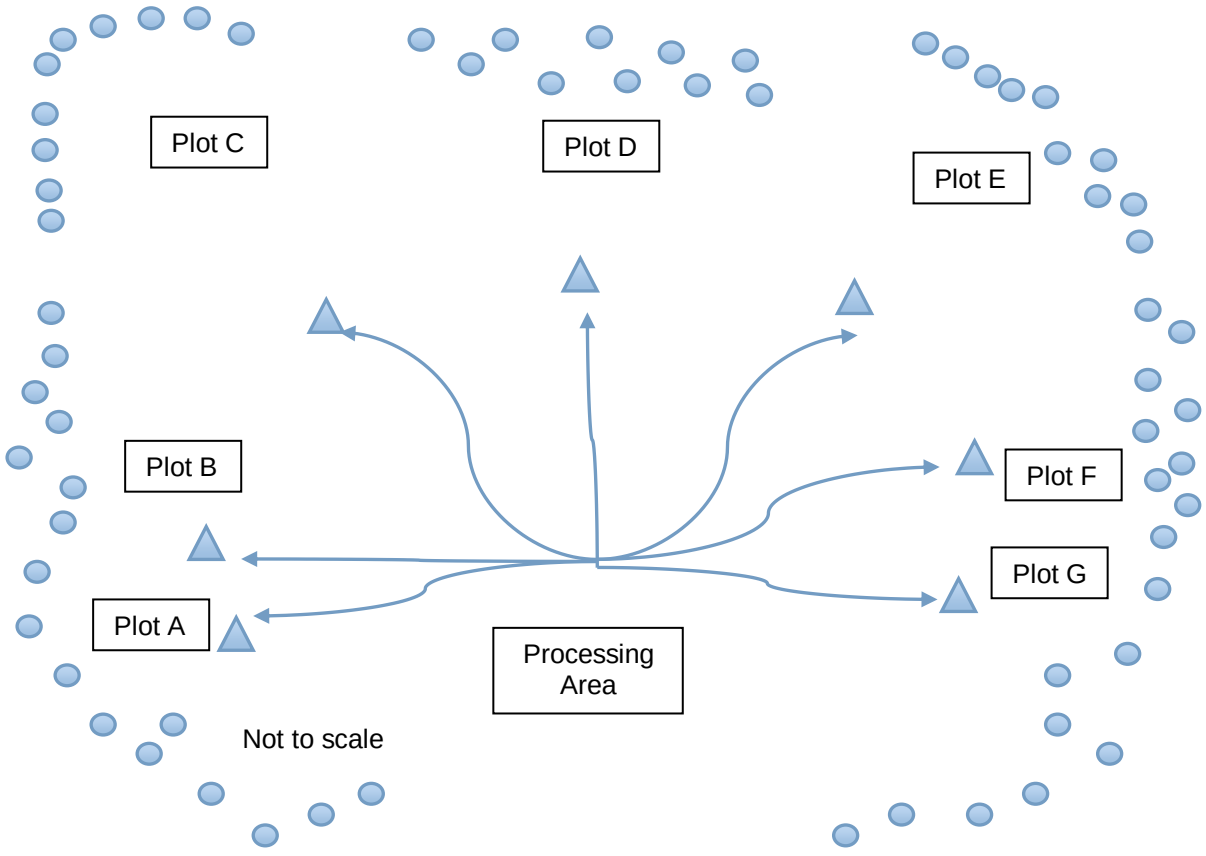
13. Birds should be re-marked with green or black marker pen before release to facilitate subsequent monitoring at disturbance.

Monitoring and Recapture:

14. Individual nest sites within study plots should be monitored at the same time on each day of monitoring until the bird(s) carrying the GPS logger(s) returns after a period at sea.

15. Slip elastic harnesses securing the GPS device on each bird should be removed at the first opportunity after the returning bird has settled and been recaptured. If the bird is not recaptured, the slip elastic is photodegradable and will detach, releasing the GPS logger, from the bird within 1-2 months post-deployment.

Figure 1. Example layout of study plots, viewing areas and associated processing location.



JOINT SERVICE RINGING – SKOKHOLM 18TH – 25TH APRIL 2016

(Roger Dickey)

It lies in the Celtic Sea two miles off the south west Pembrokeshire coast. We are probably more familiar with Skomer but Skokholm has its own charm and because there are not the regular boat visits of its neighbour, its own sense of remoteness with tall, sandstone cliffs and a wild landscape. The island is approximately half a mile across at its widest point and a mile in length – and few people! There are never more than 26 people on the island which works out as 10 acres of space for every visitor!

In spring and summer, it is colonised by tens of thousands of nesting seabirds returning to their island home. By day there is frenetic activity among the Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots and gulls and by night there is a more vocal but equally hectic commotion from the Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels. And there are vagrants that are passing through.

Not difficult to understand why the island was selected for a week's visit by a small group of Service ringers, and a recce the previous year by Robin and Julia Springett confirmed that if the weather held, there would be plenty to do. The beauty of Skokholm in ringing terms is that with three Heligoland walk-in traps, plenty of spring and potter traps, and that every night hundreds of manx shearwaters and storm petrels can be caught with the use of hand held nets, ringing is not dependent on favourable winds and rain-free days – just as well in the circumstances.

Tri-service Ringing Team

The island's wardens are currently Richard Brown and Giselle Eagle, both superb naturalists and as might be expected, first class ornithologists. The wardens are assisted by two young graduate volunteers who spend four months on the island gaining valuable experience, and work relentlessly carrying out daily surveys of the breeding migrants and resident birds – as well as looking after the administration of the residential areas.

Rations are manhandled onto the weekly boat run and then onto the island with a small supply of essentials pre-stored and available for purchase. Self-catering worked well with other visitors tending to eat early at night and very late in the morning. Accommodation was a surprise with comfortable individual bedrooms and a common room with open fire for call-overs and whisky-fuelled chill-outs. Heating was not so clever at that time of year, relying on solar panels to heat water.

The team of myself and Carl Powell from AOS, Julia Springett and George Candelin from RAFOS and Mark Cutts from RNBWS, allowed an equal division of responsibilities between all the A ringers and the trainee. To address this slight imbalance and in the interests of getting a palatable meal prepared on time, Julia catered and the blokes washed-up. If somewhat reverting to typecast roles, it ensured that we all fed very well.

As with most ringing sites activity is greatest at dawn and regular patrols of the heligolands, the daily-deployed spring and potter traps, and mist nets around the buildings, always produced good results. As the first ringing team of the year on the island, Richard was happy to let us get on with our own routine with the caveat that anything unusual should be processed with full biometrics, suitable photographs taken and that he was to be contacted before the bird was released.

And so to the birds. Considering the time of year and lively weather conditions, the ringing and retrapping of 292 birds was well worth the effort. The deployment of spring traps proved to be particularly useful as our visit coincided with a movement of Greenland Wheatear *Oenanthe leucorhoa* and these slightly larger and darker birds were a pleasure to process.

Willow Warblers *Philloscopus trochilus* were our most numerous catch by far and we were initially sceptical at Richard's insistence that retrapped birds were repeatedly processed rather than immediately released. However, this was a useful record as to the length of time birds spent on the island and it can be seen from the comparison in numbers on the accompanying table, that these birds landed at night and that very few stayed for a second day.

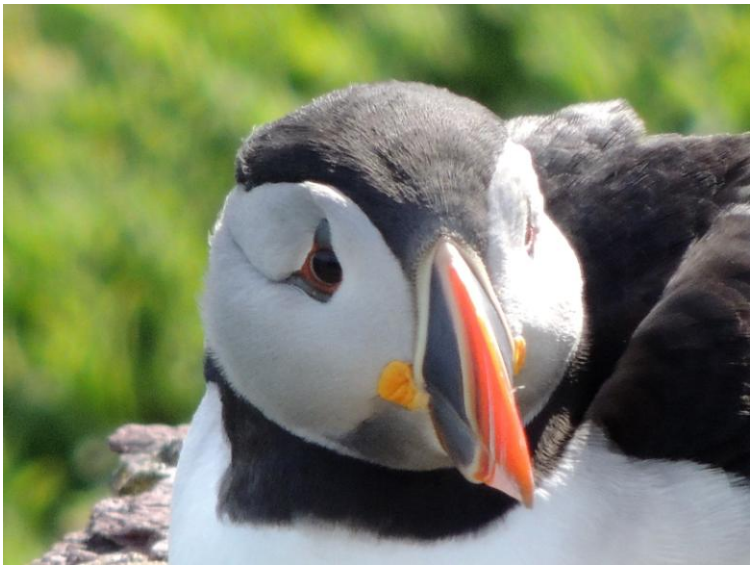
Early sightings of a Water Rail on a small spring-fed pond surrounded by reeds ensured that we deployed potter traps and a variety of different types of bait. Despite this and follow-up efforts to catch its mate, only one water rail was caught as it meandered into a heligoland trap.

It wasn't until the day before we left that an interesting warbler was noticed in the vegetation around the outbuildings, subsequently identified as a Subalpine Warbler but of the *albistriata* subspecies. Now, it's against protocol to push birds into nets or traps and a cardinal sin to get in the way and prevent a bird from getting itself caught so there ensued a period of 'one eye on the bird and the other on fellow ringers' as the warbler unconcernedly fed in the local elder bushes. Eventually the bird was caught and the names were soon in the hat for the honour of processing this rarity. Mark Cutts who had previous with most of the A ringers present while in Gibraltar, resigned himself to not getting a look-in. Carl took the honours but all had a good chance to see this impressive little warbler.

One of the reasons for visiting Skokholm was to be able to have a good look at and ring Manx Shearwaters Puffinus puffinus (Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* were not yet present on the island). Moon conditions were perfect during the latter part of our week and three evening searches saw a total of 48 birds ringed and 10 birds re-trapped from previous

visits. Daylight walks to the far side of the island had identified a considerable number of corpses, birds killed by Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* in the main. These corpses are counted and removed to estimate the effect of the gull population on shearwaters. Armed with hand-held nets, the team split in two and moved down two transects, catching and ringing as they went. Escapees (the bracken often inhibited clean catches) invariably mocked our efforts from the depths of their burrows.

This small expedition was immense fun, produced more records for the islands database and allowed many of us the new opportunity to ring shearwaters. Down time was inevitably spent birding on the island and watching the build-up of gulls on their breeding sites, peregrines hunting and tracking down a single Ring Ouzel. Attempts to catch gulls with leftovers from the kitchen are best left unrecorded. The thanks of all go to Julia Springett who co-ordinated the visit and administrative arrangements – and cooked!



Skokholm Ringing Totals April 2016									
Date	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Totals
Manx Shearwater					9	21	18		48
Water Rail		1							1
Meadow Pipit		2							2
Wren	2	1							3
Robin				1					1
Redstart					1	1			2
Stonechat			1						1
Wheatear		5	1				1		7
Song Thrush				1					1
Blackcap		7	9	10	2	2	5		35
Lesser Whitethroat						1			1
Whitethroat			1						1
Subalpine Warbler							1		1
Grasshopper Warbler							1		1
Chiffchaff	2	3	6	2	3	2	1		19
Willow Warbler	5	34	25	13	10	2	22		111
Goldcrest				1					1
Goldfinch	1								1
Linnet							2		2
Totals	10	53	43	28	25	29	51		239
Retraps									
Manx Shearwater					2	6	2		10
Wheatear		1							1
Blackbird				1					1
Meadow Pipit			1	3		1			5
Wren	1	6		5		2			14
Willow Warbler		1	3	1	1	2	1		9
Chiffchaff	1		3	2	1				7
Blackcap		1		1	1	2	1		6
Totals	2	9	7	13	5	13	4		53

UK BIRDS
(Mark Leitch)

Spotted Crake

Sabine's Gull

Rose-coloured Starling

Buff-breasted Sandpiper

Lesser Grey Shrike

Purple Swamphen

Lesser-spotted Woodpecker

American Golden Plover

Little Bittern

White Stork

Nightingale

Great Spotted Cuckoo

Siberian Accentor

Dalmatian Pelican

Turtle Dove

Red-eyed Vireo

Waxwing

Baird’s Sandpiper

AOS TRIP TO LESBOS
16-23 APRIL

(Andrew Bray)

It was an early morning start for Gatwick Airport for the 7 of us who spent a week in April on what is supposed to be an idyllic Greek Island close to Turkey. We were there for the migrants and resident species; the feathered type and we never saw any others. The weather was slightly unseasonal in that it was hot from breakfast though a warm fleece was required for the early morning trips out. We arrived in the afternoon and caught our bus to the hotel which was occupied by other birders and a group of Latvian's who were involved with the refugees. We suspect that they provided some sort of security as they were all big; the sort of person you do not want to meet when they are angry! Anyway the Aegean Hotel was not full and the staff was very friendly and helpful.

Red-rumped Swallow

We had our first walk that afternoon looking out at the water by the Christou River. Basically at the front of the hotel we saw lots of Yellow-legged Gulls, Corn Bunting, Crested Lark, Hooded Crow, House Sparrow, Wood Sandpiper and hirundines. Singing by the hotel was Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler. We tended to see these or hear them every day. That night we ate in the hotel. There was a mis-communication about transport and that evening we were given 2 Fiat cars plus 2 walkie talkies. We kept the cars all week and filled up twice in the whole period. The cars were cheaper than the minibus so we all had some rebate from the kitty.

The following morning we walked to the Skala Kalloni Pool (about 100m away) and picked up our first Squacco Heron. Common Tern was flying by the coast and a Whimbrel was at the mouth of the Christou River. A Stone Curlew was much closer as were Crested Larks and Little Egret and Great Egret. Reed and Sedge Warbler called noisily from the reeds; we were to see and hear them a lot during the week. After breakfast we headed for the Kalloni Salt Pans. This was a vast area of working lagoons and a huge pile of salt by the works entrance. It is also a good area to bird watch. There were plenty of Greater Flamingo, Pied Avocet and Black-winged Stilt as well as Ruff and other common waders. By the wetlands there was Red-throated Pipit, Yellow Wagtail (*feldegg*). Also we saw Black stork, woodlark and the start of lots of Red-rumped Swallow. The next stop was the Alchaderi Forest where we had a picnic lunch. We passed some amazing poppy fields on the way. In the forest we saw Lon-legged Buzzard, Kruper's Nuthatch, Short-tailed Treecreeper, Greenfinch, Cirl Bunting and Tree Pipit. On a rock

Yellow Wagtail

formation nearby was Black-eared Wheatear. In the river there were lots of terrapins and fish. We stopped at Skamnioudi for a cold drink and they brought some calamari out as well. At Kalami Swamp there was a Marsh Harrier. That night we dined out in the local village and were introduced to Retsina.

The next day we headed west after breakfast. Before breakfast we went to the ford at the Tsiknias River. This river was a major attraction with lots of species including Kingfisher, Whinchat, Common Sandpiper, Olivaceous Warbler, Little Bittern, Water Rail, Little and Spotted Crake and Little Owl. We travelled to the Ipsolu Monastery where we saw Cretzschmar's and Cinereous Bunting, Collared Flycatcher, Woodchat Shrike, Isabelline Wheatear, Rock Nuthatch, Rock Sparrow and heard a Golden Oriole calling in the valley. On the drive down to the coast there was Lesser Kestrel. We had a picnic lunch on the beach by a chapel set in a cave at Faneromeni once we realised we were following a new road not on the map!

Cretzschmar's Bunting

As we looked out to sea, large numbers of Yelkoan Shearwater flew past the headlands either side all heading south. Around the area we saw Masked Shrike, Turtle Dove, Jackdaw and White Wagtail. Drinks were taken in the Australian Cafe at Sigri which only served instant coffee and not Greek Coffee. On the way back we stopped at the Lardia Valley but only added Crag Martin to our growing list. We also stopped for fuel at Skalochori. Once again we ate out in the local village at a different restaurant with no sea view.

On 19 Apr we visited the Matochi Lake before breakfast and saw Little Crake and similar birds we saw all the time. We were looking for Bittern which we did not find. After breakfast we drove up the Napi Valley stopping just short of Napi for a walk along a track with Sombre Tit, Middle-spotted Woodpecker and lots of Chaffinches. We stopped a bit further on the road side at Koriani for no new birds but plenty of Wheatears. It was then downhill to Skala Sikaminias with the chapel of Our Lady of the Mermaid that features on most of Lesbos advertising. We then drove west along the sea front past the NGOs welcoming refugees that had dried up due to patrol vessels in the water between Lesbos and Turkey. Notable birds included a large flock of Spanish Sparrow, Peregrine, Sub Alpine Warbler, Rock Nuthatch whilst Bee-eater and Chukar were heard. On the way back we stopped at Kavaki for warblers (sub Alpine and Ruppels) and at the Kaloni mini soccer pitch for the Scops Owls sitting in full view in the Eucalyptus Trees. We ate in the hotel that night as bed time was getting earlier!

Masked Shrike

The next day we were back at the ford before breakfast. We added Baillon's Crake sitting out on an old tyre with Spotted and Little Crake by it (all 3 rails were in the same view through the telescope!). The Penduline Tit had built a nest yards away. Along the river we added Glossy Ibis and Purple Heron. The day was going to be spent locally and after breakfast we headed for the salt pans with Citrine Wagtail and Little Ring Plover. The reservoir in the Potomia Valley added nothing and lunch was taken in the valley where we found Fresh-water Crabs (*potamon iberium*). There were lots of birds we had already seen including the Long-legged Buzzard. We then drove back to the Kalami Swamp with Zitting Cisticola and 22 Bee-eaters perched on the wire. Back at the river there was a Squacco Heron and lots of Common Sandpiper. It was then back to the salt pans for Black-tailed Godwit, Whiskered, Little and Black Tern as well as about 2000 Ruff that kept taking off and swirling about. It was a long day and that evening we had a lovely Meze involving meat and fish by the coast at the local village.

Rüppels Warbler

We had an early breakfast the next day and headed west stopping at the Lardia Valley (no Blue Rock Thrush) before driving up to the wind farm on Mt Ordimnos however it was blowing a gale so we did not stop for a walk around the top. Instead we headed to Eressos and the rough track to the Meladia Valley. This is an area away from civilisation where we had lunch. The key bird was a Lesser Grey Shrike as well as Cuckoo, Spanish Sparrow and Woodlark. A Whip Snake was caught and launched into the air but only a few of us saw it, some of us at very close quarters! We had a drink in a tavern at Eressos before heading back to the salt pans for an evening viewing. That night we ate in the hotel as they did a BBQ with sausages from Cyprus.

Eurasian Scops Owl

On our last full day before breakfast we went to the Tsiknias River mouth with Stone Curlew, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Squacco heron and Little Ring plover to name a few. After breakfast we headed north to Kavaki where we had superb views of Ruppels Warbler and Blue Rock Thrush for those who had dipped earlier. We then headed back to Kalloni and finally found a tavern at Apothikes on the south west corner of the Kalloni Bay. We had a superb lunch with the Calamari being served whole, all 3 of them plus a large bowl of prawns. It turned into a long lunch in an idyllic setting and for the first time no-one spoke English! Afterwards we took the track to the beach at Makara . On the way there was Lesser Kestrel and at the beach we added Little Stint, Greenshank and Garganey to our list. It was a

lovely setting and we did not have long enough there before it was time to head back to the hotel after another long day to hand the vehicles back to Tsalis Rentals. They were delivered to and collected from the hotel. Back at the hotel we had lamb knuckle cooked with potato wrapped in silver foil plus baked apple in honey. It was a very delicious meal to end our trip on. Of course it was not the end!

The next day before breakfast we walked to the Skalloni Pool (not a lot) and then walked around the pools by the Christou River in front of the hotel with Kentish Plover and Little Stint. We also walked around the area after breakfast and before packing to depart. At the airport we booked in and then went for a drink at a local tavern. By the time we were through security the plane was already loading! The flight back was not full so there was room to stretch out if required.

Lesbos is a wonderful place and we may have been a week early as the migration did not really start in earnest until the following week; maybe the late wet spring stopped the birds or the hot weather meant that they flew straight on. It is understandable why people come back year after year as the bird life is concentrated and Skala Kalloni is a wonderful base. I would like to thank the crew for a wonderful trip and great company.

			Date:							
Common name	**Scientific name**	trip	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Chukar Partridge	*Alectoris chukar*	x				2				
Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	x		6	2		4	3	15	x
Common Shelduck	*Tadorna tadorna*	x			2		8	12	58	
Garganey	*Anas querquedula*	x							1	
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	x	2	9						
Yelkouan Shearwater	*Puffinus yelkouan*	x			x				x	
Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	x		1		3	3			
Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*	x		20	5		30	50	x	
Black Stork	*Ciconia nigra*	x		6		1	4	2	1	
Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	x					20	20	20	22
Little Bittern	*Ixobrychus minutus*	x			1					
Squacco Heron	*Ardeola ralloides*	x		2			2		1	
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	x								
Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	x	x	x	3	1	2	1	6	
Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	x					2			
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	x		1	1	1	4	1	2	
Pygmy Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*	x			1					
Short-toed Snake Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*	x					5			
Western Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	x		1						
Levant Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter brevipes*	x			1					
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter nisus*	x		1						
Common Buzzard	*Buteo buteo*	x		1				2	1	

Long-legged Buzzard	*Buteo rufinus*	x		1	5	x	2	1	1	
Lesser Kestrel	*Falco naumanni*	x			2				4	
Common Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	x			1	1	1	1	1	
Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	x				1		2		
Water Rail	*Rallus rallus*	x			1					
Baillon's Crake	*Porzana pusilla*	x					1			
Little Crake	*Porzana parva*	x			1	2	1			
Spotted Crake	*Porzana porzana*	x			1		1			
Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	x		1	9	30	x		x	x
Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	x		1			2			
Eurasian Stone-Curlew	*Burhinus oedicnemus*	x			1				2	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	*Haematopus ostralegus*	x							1	
Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	x		40		x	x	x	x	x
Pied Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*	x		120			x	x	x	x
Common Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*	x			3					
Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	x		3			5		7	1
Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	x	x							5
Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	x					2	2		
Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius arquata*	x							2	
Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*	x		1						
Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	x							1	
Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	x		1	1		2		1	2
Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	x							1	22
Temminck's Stint	*Calidris temminckii*	x							7	
Ruff	*Philomachus pugnax*	x		6			1000	4	x	
Yellow-legged Gull	*Larus michahellis*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Little Tern	*Sternula albifrons*	x					8	8		
Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*	x		7			x	20	x	4
Black Tern	*Chlidonias niger*	x					1			
Rock Dove /Feral Pigeon	*Columba livia 'feral'*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Common Wood Pigeon	*Columba palumbus*	x				3				
European Turtle Dove	*Streptopelia turtur*	x			1	2			2	
Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Great Spotted Cuckoo	*Clamator glandarius*	x	x							
Common Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*	x			h2			1	1	
Eurasian Scops Owl	*Otus scops*	x				3			1	
Little Owl	*Athene noctua*	x			2			1	1	
Common Swift	*Apus apus*	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	x			1					
European Bee-Eater	*Merops apiaster*	x				h	22			h
Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	x		1	h	h				

Middle Spotted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos medius*	x			1	2			1	
Red-backed Shrike	*Lanius collurio*	x						1	1	
Lesser Grey Shrike	*Lanius minor*	x						1		
Woodchat Shrike	*Lanius senator*	x			10	12	2	1	1	
Masked Shrike	*Lanius nubicus*	x			1	2				
Eurasian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus oriolus*	x			h					
Eurasian Jay	*Garrulus glandarius*	x		2		5	5	6	1	
Western Jackdaw	*Coloeus monedula*	x			x				x	
Hooded Crow	*Corvus cornix*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Northern Raven	*Corvus corax*	x		1	6	1	2	8	1	
Sombre Tit	*Poecile lugubris*	x				6		1		
Great Tit	*Parus major*	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Eurasian Blue Tit	*Cyanistes caeruleus*	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	*Remiz pendulinus*	x					1		1	
Crested Lark	*Galerida cristata*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Woodlark	*Lullula arborea*	x		1				1		
Sand Martin	*Riparia riparia*	x		x		x		x	x	x
Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Eurasian Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*	x			x			x	x	
Common House Martin	*Delichon urbicum*	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*	x		6	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cetti's Warbler	*Cettia cetti*	x		x	x	x	x	1	x	x
Common Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*	x				h		h		
Sedge Warbler	*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*	x		1	6	2	x	x	x	x
Eurasian Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*	x		x	x	x	x		x	x
Marsh Warbler	*Acrocephalus palustris*									
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	*Iduna pallida*	x			1		1	1	3	
Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*	x					2			
Eurasian Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*	x		h						
Common Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*	x		1	1					
Subalpine Warbler	*Sylvia cantillans*	x				8		1	1	
Rüppell's Warbler	*Sylvia ruppeli*	x				1			2	
Eurasian Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*	x		1				h		
Krüper's Nuthatch	*Sitta krueperi*	x		2			2			
Western Rock Nuthatch	*Sitta neumayer*	x			1	1		1		
Short-toed Treecreeper	*Certhia brachydactyla*	x		3						
Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	x		1						
Common Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	x		3	x	x	x	x	x	x
Common Nightingale	*Luscinia megarhynchos*	x	2	5	x	x	x	x	x	x
Whinchat	*Saxicola rubetra*	x			1	1	1	1	1	
European Stonechat	*Saxicola rubicola*	x			4	2		5	7	

Isabelline Wheatear	*Oenanthe isabellina*	x		1	x	1		3	2	
Northern Wheatear	*Oenanthe oenanthe*	x			x	1		1	1	
Black-eared Wheatear	*Oenanthe hispanica*	x		2	x	x	2	x	x	
Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*	x						2	3	
Spotted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa striata*	x			1					
Collared Flycatcher	*Ficedula albicollis*	x			2					
House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Rock Sparrow	*Petronia petronia*	x			x			x		
Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	x	x	x	x	1	5	2	5	2
Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*	x					2			
White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	x			1		2			
Tree Pipit	*Anthus trivialis*	x		1	1	1				
Red-throated Pipit	*Anthus cervinus*	x		5			x			
Common Chaffinch	*Fringilla coelebs*	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
European Serin	*Serinus serinus*	x	x							
European Greenfinch	*Chloris chloris*	x		x	x		x			
European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Common Linnet	*Linaria cannabina*	x						4	8	
Corn Bunting	*Emberiza calandra*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cinereous Bunting	*Emberiza cineracea*	x			4			1		
Cretzschmar's Bunting	*Emberiza caesia*	x			1			5		
Cirl Bunting	*Emberiza cirlus*	x		2	1			2	1	

Black-eared Wheatear

PORTLAND
16-18 SEPTEMBER

(Andrew Bray)

It had started off as a small select trip and ended up with a few more attendees. We all fitted in 2 cars and had a great weekend ending up with a twitch. We met various people in different locations but the majority of us found ourselves looking for an elusive Wryneck at Barleycrates. It did not show nor did it on Saturday when we were looking for a Rose-coloured Starling; another dip. We made up for it by going to the Whitestone Gallery Cafe in Easton. We had a good start on Friday however with a Balearic and Manx Shearwater. There were more Wheatears than anyone expected and we soon had Yellow Wagtail and a pair of Spotted Flycatchers in the book before we went to the Pulpit Inn early for food (they stop taking orders very early). Did we drink more than we wanted to? I cannot remember as we were up before dawn on Saturday for a walk down to the point and then around the fields before breakfast at the Lobster Pot. The Little Owl was more visible as it flew around the quarry. Sea watching produced a steady stream of Gannet and Cormorant but we did add Guillemot, Puffin and Common Scoter. The point was full of Linnet and Meadow Pipit. A pair of Peregrines was flying around the cliff faces for our walk up to the Maritime post and beyond. Culverhouse provided a range of tits and warblers. After breakfast the quarry produced some very good views of a Wryneck. At Ferrybridge the tide was on the way out and we soon had Mediterranean Gull, Knot, Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Sandwich Tern added to the list. Our next stop was a walk around Lodmoor. Here on display was Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Sanderling, Barnacle Goose, Hen Harrier, Snipe, Ruff as well as the more common residents. It was getting warm despite the breeze and the cars met up again at Radipole (we had got split up by some unsuccessful twitching). At the reserve a late lunch of cake, ice cream and drinks was partaken (once Hoody was seen) before we once again went our separate ways. One car had a very unsuccessful twitch like the other car in the morning. We all met up at the Observatory to sun ourselves on the veranda. Once again we went to the Pulpit Pub rather than into Weymouth. Everyone was able to eat and drink; puddings were eaten as well! Then there was cake and biscuits back at the Obs as well. At a call over the list of bird species seen over the day and half topped 98 with the 2 birds on Sunday making a total of 100 birds seen by AOS members over the weekend. We all did not see the full list but we were all doing very well. On Sunday we again had an early start. The wind had dropped and there were cloudy skies. The air was dominated by Swallows with the odd House Martin and Sand Martin. Other migratory species were in very low numbers though a lone Balearic Shearwater was seen from the point. After breakfast in the Lobster Pot we decided to twitch the Rose-coloured Starling that was absent on Saturday. This time we had better directions are it was soon found in an area we had not checked beforehand. A very non-descript Starling but it did add to the good views we already had of Barn Owl, Fulmar and Raven. From there everyone went their separate ways.

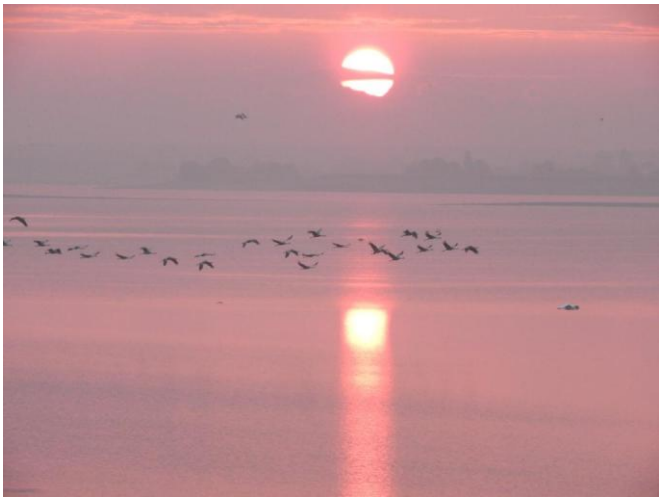
Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*	Yellow-legged Gull Larus michahellis
Greater Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*	Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*
Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*	Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Shelduck Tadorna tadorna	Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*	Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
Gadwall *Anas strepera*	Puffin *Fratercula artica*
Shoveler *Anas clypeata*	Guillemot *Uria aalge*
Wigeon Anas penelope	Razorbill Alea torda
Teal *Anas crecca*	Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Pochard *Aythya ferina*	Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*	Barn Owl *Tyto alba*
Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*	Little Owl *Athene noctua*
Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*	Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*	Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*	Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*
Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*	Skylark Alauda arvensis
Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*	Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*	Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica
Gannet *Morus bassanus*	House Martin *Delichon urbicum*
Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*	Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*
Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*	Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	Tree Pipit Anthus trivialis
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	White / Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flavissima*
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*	Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	Robin Erithacus rubecula
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*	Wheatear Oenathe oenanthe
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*	Stonechat Saxicola torquatus
Coot *Fulica atra*	Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*	Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*	Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*	Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Knot *Caladris canutus*	Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Sanderling *Calidris alba*	Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*	Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*	Spotted Flycatcher Muscicapa striata
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*	Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*	Great Tit *Parus major*
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*	Long-tailed Tit Aegithalos caudatus
Redshank *Tringa totanus*	Magpie *Pica pica*
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*	Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*	Rook *Corvus frugileus*
Curlew Numenius arquata	Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*	Raven *Corvus corax*
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*	Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*	Rose-coloured Starling Pastor roseus
Common Gull Larus canus	House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*	Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*	Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

AOS TRIP TO FRANCE
20-23 OCTOBER

(Andrew Bray)

It was dark on Thursday evening as 4 members of the AOS (Roger D, Steve D, Bob H and I) set off for the Chunnel. An easy journey meant that there was time for a visit to Burger King before it closed and then we were on the train heading for France. It was dark all the way to Lac de Mer Chanteloq and we parked up in the car park for a few hours sleep. By dawn there was a collection of cars and people were on a point looking north. We joined them as the light became better and watched thousands of cranes take off at different times to fly to the local fields from their roosting spots. The lake was about 30 foot below normal levels and there was a lot of exposed mud and islands. Along every bank there were crowds of ducks, cranes, cormorants and Great Egrets. Everywhere we looked there were groups of Great Egrets. There were large numbers of Mallard and Coot plus smaller numbers of Teal, Pintail and Wigeon. We headed clockwise around the lake to various birding view points. The Port de Nuisement was deserted of boats as the water level was well below the slipways and there was only a trickle of water to sail in. It was here on the eastern side that we found most of the waders that day including Curlew, Whimbrel, Dunkin, Golden Plover and Lapwing. On the sides of the basin there were large flocks of Linnet and Goldfinch. At the wood by Plage de Cornee we walked along tracks by the road in the trees where we saw Hawfinch, Middle-spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Crossbill. After a stop at the NE side of the lake at a breach in the old wall we then headed back to our first stop. We were unable to find a White-tailed Eagle but had added Peregrine. We then headed to Almance Lake in the Foret d'Orient. We added a few more birds to the day list and after travelling along dirt roads headed for Fontainebleu and the Hotel F1 at Moret sur Loing.



Cranes at dawn

Great Egrets

Little did we know that the town was shut for the evening and for a period of 2 weeks. The only place to eat was a pizza place that did takeaways however there were a few tables and the place served soft drinks. The nearest bar etc. was at Fontainebleau which was some

distance away. That was our second pizza for the day as we had one for lunch at Arrigny. The hotel was very basic but the beds were comfy. We were woken at midnight by the fire alarm but we were soon back in the land of nod or Pink Floyd. The next morning was very foggy and after some bread and jam, juice and hot drink we headed for our first stop near the horse racing course. We did not even hear a Grey-headed Woodpecker but there were lots of tits moving about. Our next stop was Carrefour de L'Epine Fureuse and once again we dipped on the woodpecker but the Short-toed Treecreeper and Nuthatch were all around us. It was then back to the BP garage on the outskirts of Fontainbleau for coffee and cake. The sun had come out and we then visited the area by a viaduct south of the Obelisk roundabout near a military training area. Here we had spectacular views of the Lesser-spotted Woodpecker. A bit further on was Carrefour du Monteil where we did a triangular walk before returning to our first stop. We spent a couple of hours in the region and sat on a bench overlooking the valley and race course. Lots of tit flocks were present with Marsh Tit, Willow Tit, Nuthatch and Short-toed Treecreeper. We had learnt from the previous night and stopped at Avon at a supermarket to buy cold beer and found a bar serving food. It did mean back at the hotel we had to drink the beer before it became warm!

The next morning was also foggy and we set off early to avoid traffic on the ring road around Paris. By the time we turned off the peage for St Omer the sun was shining and hardly a cloud in the sky. The reserve at Romalaere is part of the local wetland. It is a walk from the visitors centre to the reserve and a boardwalk takes you to a hide. There were plenty of Redwing and Fieldfare about but most birds we saw were common throughout the year. Unfortunately we could not spend too much time there and were soon heading for the Chunnel, a Burger King and home.

Bob H not cold at all

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*	Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Greylag Goose *Anser anser*	Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*
Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*	Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*	Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrecopus medius*
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrecopus minor*
Gadwall *Anas strepera*	Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
Pintail *Anas acuta*	Tree Pipit Anthus trivialis
Shoveler Anas clypeata	Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
Wigeon *Anas penelope*	White / Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Teal *Anas crecca*	Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Pochard *Aythya ferina*	Robin Erithacus rubecula
Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*	Stonechat Saxicola torquatus
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*	Redwing *Turdus iliacus*
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*	Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*	Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*
Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*	Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*	Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*	Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	Great Tit *Parus major*
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	Coal Tit *Periparus ater*
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*	Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*
Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*	Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*	Long-tailed Tit Aegithalos caudatus
Coot *Fulica atra*	Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
Common Crane *Grus grus*	Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*
Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*	Magpie *Pica pica*
Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*	Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*	Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*
Curlew Numenius arquata	Rook *Corvus frugileus*
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*	Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*	Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*	House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*	Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Yellow-legged Gull Larus michahellis	Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*	Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Stock Dove *Columba oenas*	Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*	Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*	

Corn Bunting

TRIP TO ZIMBABWE
17th FEBRUARY – 9th MARCH

(Anne Nason)

Once again, escaping the dreary winter days in the UK, we made a visit to our family in Harare. Clear blue skies greeted us and the familiar sounds of Dark-capped Bulbuls and

Laughing Doves soon made us feel at home in Africa again. The garden in Orange Grove is full of trees, flowering shrubs, cacti and palms, so it was home to many sunbirds, the commonest being the Variable (or Yellow-bellied) and the Amethyst (Black) Sunbird with the Miombo Double-collared an occasional visitor. A Wood Owl was roosting at the top of a palm tree and a family of Whyte's Barbet could often be seen at the top of the kapok trees, which were covered with pink and white blossom. Purple-crested Turaco often passed through the garden - their croaking call a frequent background accompaniment, and an immature Lizard Buzzard was occasionally spotted, quietly observing the ground from a tall tree. The White-capped Robin-Chat (Heuglin's) called loudly in the evenings and one morning a Grey Heron, squawking loudly, was chased through the garden by a small raptor. In the three weeks in Harare we saw nearly 40 species in the garden at Orange Grove.

Variable Sunbird (male)

Variable Sunbird (female with nesting material)

The nearby vlei is planted with maize and teeming with Red-collared Widowbirds, Yellow-mantled Whydah, Pin-tailed Whydah, Red Bishop and a nesting Southern Masked Weaver showing off his handiwork on a maize stalk. After 10 days in Harare our daughter and son-in-law took us on a trip round the eastern border of Zimbabwe. Leaving at about 7.30am, our first stop was a lunch break at La Rochelle, a few miles short of Mutare, the former home of the Courtauld family, now owned by Zimbabwe National Trust. Recently it has been run as a hotel in order to pay for the upkeep of the botanical gardens planted by Sir Joseph and Lady Courtauld in the 1950's. As it was drizzling with rain the birds kept to their roosts, but the orchid house was filled with exotic and local varieties and the spectacular botanical gardens are in the process of being reclaimed. These gardens are greatly improved since our last visit 15 months ago. On the way, several times our son-in-law had to argue with the traffic police who like to stop cars simply to extract money from the drivers, but as usual he managed to talk his way out of the situation, as he had not committed any of the supposed violations!

We drove on to Leopard Rock Hotel in the Vumba, in the Eastern Highlands, a few miles from Mutare, where there is a beautiful view of the mountains in Mozambique as it is very close to the border. Although it was still slightly wet, we did a bird walk in the forest behind the hotel even though it was quite steep and not easy to keep one's balance. Because of the bad light it was difficult to make out the plumage, but our guide, Bennie, spotted a Swynnerton's Robin. We heard Livingstone's Turaco calling - a deeper note than the Purple-

crested, and Tambourine Dove. When we emerged from the forest onto the golf course we saw a few more species including a pair of African Black Duck on the lake, but the walk the next morning was more productive as the weather was sunny again. Bennie pointed out White-eared Barbet, a male Malachite Sunbird in non-breeding plumage, Pin-tailed Whydah, Robert's Warbler and several other interesting species. Samango monkeys were seen quite close to the hotel and several were carrying small babies.

We left Leopard Rock at 10am to drive on to Chimanimani two and a half hours further south, along the border with Mozambique, to stay at the Plunket's beautiful house, Rathmore, which our son-in-law and daughter are to manage, arranging for paying guests to visit. The house is an attractive bungalow furnished in English country house style and the immaculate garden a mixture of English rose garden and tropical species, with a row of royal palms beside the swimming pool. Nesting on the veranda was a pair of Wire-tailed Swallows, building their cup-shaped mud nest in a corner of the ceiling. Unfortunately it was raining the afternoon we arrived and I only had time for an hour's birding next the morning, but the most interesting sighting was of a Black-fronted Bush-Shrike resplendent with an orange breast and vivid yellow belly, contrasting sharply with it's rather uninteresting name. African Oriole's were calling and the garden seemed full of Speckled Mousebirds and the ubiquitous Dark-capped Bulbul. Arrow-marked Babblers chattered in the gardens with Kurrichane Thrushes in attendance.

Sadly we only had time for a one-night stay and then it was on southwards again, down into the low veldt. The roads on this part of the journey were badly pot-holed but most of the roads in Zimbabwe are in surprisingly good condition. The final part of the journey to Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge was 43km on a dirt road, which took us about an hour in a Land Cruiser. The Lodge is on the west side of the Save River, in a spectacular position on a cliff with a view down to the sandbars below where we spotted a 14 foot crocodile basking in the sun and several hippo grunting in the deeper water. We noted that we were firmly asked to sign the indemnity form before we went on a game drive!

Chilo Gorge Lodge is one of the few safari lodges in Zimbabwe open all year although the most popular time is in the dry season. It is owned by Clive Stockil who was away at a Conference, having received the Tusk Trust Prince William Award for Conservation in Africa in 2014. After a quick lunch, we set off on a game drive, but in order to enter the Gonarezhou National Park, it is necessary to cross the Savé river. The name Gonarezhou means 'Place of the elephants.' On arrival at the crossing we discovered that the water level was too high for the vehicle to cross, so we were ushered into a boat. However, half way across it became grounded on a sandbank and the only option was to get out and wade. The distance was about 75 yards and although it was generally quite shallow, there were deeper channels where the water was up to my thighs. One of the boatmen took my hand to lead me across as I was concerned about falling over in the gloopy sand and ruining my camera and binoculars. Our daughter sent a message on What's App telling the rest of the

A helping hand

family that the grandparents were crossing a crocodile infested river on foot, having just seen several crocodiles upriver - yes, mobile phones work in deepest darkest Africa, although not in our valley in Wiltshire! The replies were quite interesting!

Crocodile infested water!

We had a 2 hour drive, seeing elephant, buffalo, nyala, zebra and impala, and encountered a rather feisty young elephant throwing his weight about, who trumpeted at us, but the bird life was interesting and we saw a juvenile Martial Eagle, African Spoonbill, Levaillant's Cuckoo, Southern Carmine Bee-eater and many waterbirds when we had our sundowner by a pan. We were all quietly hoping that on our return the boatmen would have found a place where they could get the boat across the river or at least conjure up some canoes. However, it was not to be, and we were faced with wading 100 yards across the river with the sun going down. The guide had a rifle, although I noticed it was still in its case, but he told us all to keep together and although one member of the group lagged behind and we had to wait for him every few minutes, we finally got across with some relief and no crocodiles in sight. When we told the story to someone who had fought in the War of Independence, he said that he knew the river well and we were lucky to get across safely without encountering a crocodile as they know that the shallower places are where the animals usually cross, and they lie in wait. This time, thankfully the crocs went without their dinner!

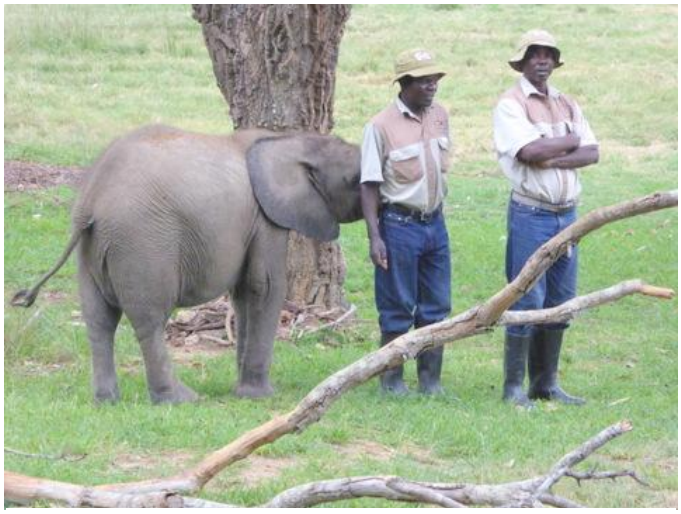
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater

The next day, believing that discretion is the better part of valour, we decided that as the river had not gone down sufficiently, we would stay on the Lodge side of the river and not risk being crocodile fodder, so we were taken through the community areas to a place where the trees had not been ravaged by elephants. We walked through the forest to see a huge Nyala tree estimated to be about 3,000 years old, with Thomas, our black Zimbabwean guide, who was extremely knowledgeable. He also took us to a baobab tree where they had been gathering honey and as we approached the tree, a Greater Honeyguide flew off the honeycomb which had been left by the villagers who had recently been climbing the tree by hammering spikes into the trunk of the baobab to reach the hive. Some of the trees are peppered with holes where centuries of honey-gatherers have hammered in their spikes. Honey gathering is no longer allowed in the National Park, but the baobab trunks there have been severely damaged by the elephants.

During lunch at the Lodge we were entertained by a Mocking Cliff-Chat who was singing

from the rafters. Red-winged Starlings were nesting under the thatch and a beautiful Scarlet-chested Sunbird spent much of the day collecting nectar from a red flowering bush. In the late afternoon we were driven to the waterfall in the Chilo Gorge where we saw Dark Chanting Goshawk, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Eastern Long-tailed Whydah and an African Cuckoo and then enjoyed a sundowner on the sandy beach near the site of our previous day's adventures.

The following morning we had to set off at 7am for the 6 hour plus drive back to Harare. On our last afternoon we visited 'Wild is Life', the animal orphanage not far from the airport in Harare. It is a most interesting visit even for those who are familiar with African wildlife as the girls who showed us around explained everything most thoroughly. They now have five baby elephants and although they do not want them to interact too much with the visitors as they will eventually be released into the wild, at the end we were able to visit them in their stables and little Moyo, the youngest elephant who is only 2 years old, explored our faces with her trunk, as she craves any attention. Two giraffes came to the tea tent to be fed bottles of milk, although they looked almost fully grown! The pangolin, who is devoted to her keeper, has to be taken to find ants in the farmland every day, and will only eat one particular type of ant. To get to the farmland he carries her in a backpack and is with the pangolin all day. Sadly, pangolins are one of the most endangered species in the world as Asiatic pangolins have been almost wiped out for Chinese medicine and now they are turning to African species. Recently the Chinese President visited the orphanage and one can only hope that he will realise that his country is putting so much African wildlife at risk. This is definitely a place to visit for anyone going to Harare as they need the support of paying guests to continue their vital work in rehabilitating orphaned animals.



Moyo with her keepers

As a result of the animals, which attract flies, there were large numbers of wild birds around. Cattle Egrets, Abdim's Storks, and we even saw several White Storks flying over, presumably on their migration northwards.

I hope this article will help to convince people that Zimbabwe is a good country for birders to visit. Over the last few years we have travelled extensively around the country and never had any trouble. We have visited Lake Kariba, Mana Pools, Hwange, Victoria Falls, Great Zimbabwe, the Matombo area south of Bulawayo, Nyanga and the Eastern Highlands. Some of the beautiful lodges are crying out for clients to come and visit them. It is a

fascinating country with many varied habitats and welcoming people. The Lodges need visitors to keep them open so that the vital work of conserving the wildlife of Zimbabwe will continue.

Bird List for Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge and Gonarezhou National Park
(Only 2 hours were spent in the National Park)

African Spoonbill
Goliath Heron
Grey Heron
Cattle Egret
Squacco Heron
African Openbill
Saddle-billed Stork
Yellow-billed Stork
Hadeda Ibis
African Darter
Wood Sandpiper
Egyptian Goose
Spur-winged Goose
African Jacana
Martial Eagle (juv)
African Fish Eagle
Brown Snake Eagle
White-backed Vulture
Dark Chanting Goshawk
Crested Francolin
Swainson's Spurfowl
Helmeted Guineafowl
Pied Kingfisher
Woodland Kingfisher
Brown-hooded Kingfisher
Blacksmith Lapwing
African Pipit
African Pied Wagtail
Rattling Cisticola
Red-eyed Dove
African Mourning Dove
Emerald-spotted Wood-dove
Cape Turtle Dove
Green Pigeon
Levaillant's Cuckoo
African Cuckoo
Diederick Cuckoo
Grey-headed Parrot
Brown-headed Parrot
Dark-capped Bulbul
Speckled Mousebird
Southern Carmine Bee-eater
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
Broad-billed Roller
African Grey Hornbill
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill
Greater Honeyguide
Mottled Spinetail
Lesser-striped Swallow
Fork-tailed Drongo
White-browed Robin Chat
Mocking Cliff-Chat
Red-backed Shrike
Red-billed Buffalo Weaver
Meve's Starling
Red-winged Starling
Variable Sunbird
Scarlet-chested Sunbird
Long-tailed Paradise Whydah
Dusky Flycatcher
Southern Black flycatcher

Lizard Buzzard on a kapok tree in Harare

BERMUDA AND NEW YORK
14TH – 25TH APRIL 2015

(Keith Cherry)

Bermuda had always held a fascination for us, so it seemed the ideal destination for my wife and me to celebrate our 40th Wedding Anniversary and my wife's birthday at the same time. As Bermuda is only an hour and a half flight from New York we saw it as an ideal opportunity to go there with the added bonus of no jet lag. Although no visa was required for Bermuda, we would have to obtain clearance for our visit to New York. Due to our close relationship with the USA all that is required for us, as British Citizens, is an electronic visa, namely an ESTA which can be applied for online. Not a problem for me but as my wife is originally from Eire, she is described in her passport as a British Subject. Knowing how strict American immigration officials are likely to be, we opted to apply for a full visa for her to avoid any potential complications. This was achieved but only after jumping through numerous hoops on the way!

This was never intended to be a full on birding holiday so I only picked things up as and when. The spring is not the best time to visit Bermuda from a bird's perspective. It is stuck out in the middle of the Atlantic and the autumn migration seems to a lot more productive. The island holds a few resident birds including the White-tailed Tropicbird or Longtail, as it is known locally. It is a common breeding bird in the spring and summer and a bird that I was very keen to see.

Our transport to the airport was included which was a nice thing so we set off in high spirits. We flew with British Airways from Heathrow and after an approximately 6 hour flight we arrived in Bermuda. The Grotto Bay Beach Resort is very close to the airport so it was not long before we were settling in to our comfortable rooms, overlooking the grounds and the bay beyond.

The resident Great Kiskadee are very evident and their distinctive call echo's around the resort grounds. Other birds that frequent the grounds included Northern Cardinal, Grey Catbird and European Goldfinch along with the usual Starling and House Sparrow. The beach area produced on various occasions Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Snowy Egret, Mourning Dove and the ever present Ruddy turnstone.

Great Kiskadee

Northern Cardinal

Green-backed Heron

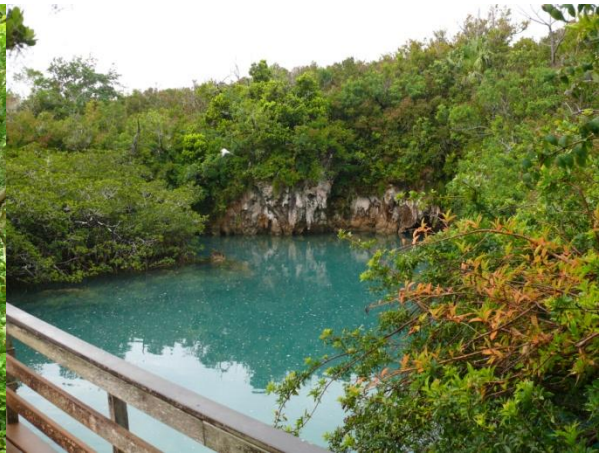
Snowy Egret

Mourning Dove

Jamaican Anole

Blue Hole Park and the Walsingham " Jungle" is a fairly short and pleasant walk from the resort and it is a good place to see the endemic sub-species of the White-eyed Vireo and as I found also, an excellent place to observe White-tailed Tropicbird's visiting their nest.
The Walsingham Jungle is an area of dense mixed woodland with a clear trail through it that leads to the Walsingham Pond and a large area of mangroves. There is one or two ponds in the park and one held a nesting pair of White-tailed Tropicbird's.

Trail through Walsingham Jungle



White-tailed Tropicbird nesting site

White-tailed Tropicbird

Bermuda is a beautiful place to visit and we would highly reccomend it. There is an excellent ferry and bus service that will enable you to visit all the island. The beautiful town of St George's is a must see place as are the historic Royal Naval Dockyards. The capital city of Hamilton is a great place to walk around and ideal for some retail therapy if desired. Although I did not have the chance to explore them, there are plenty of birding sites and habitats to try and the excellent "Birdwatching Guide to Bermuda" is ideal and essential information.

We reluctantly left Bermuda and moved on to New York. I managed to spend a couple of hours in Central Park. I concentrated on the southeast corner around East 59st street. Namely because it was the nearest point to our hotel in East 45th street and there is an area of a Nature Reserve around some small lakes. No sooner had I walked into the park when birds started to

make themselves known including White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Rusty Blackbird and Blue Jay. It was not long before I managed to add Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Red-winged Blackbird, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow,Common Grackle and American Crow. I had no idea that Central park would be that productive that quickly.

White-throated Sparrow

American Robin

Central Park

Bermuda List

White-tailed Tropicbird
Green-backed Heron
Snowy Egret
Great Blue Heron
Ruddy Turnstone
Mourning Dove
Great Kiskadee
Bermuda White-eyed Vireo
American Crow
Grey Catbird
European Starling
Louisiana Waterthrush
Northern Cardinal
European Goldfinch
House Sparrow

New York List

Double-crested Cormorant
Canada Goose
Mallard
Common Merganser
Mourning Dove
Blue Jay
American Crow
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Northern Cardinal
Song Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
White-throated Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
Red-winged Blackbird
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle

FRENCH LITTLE OWL

(Hugo Fletcher)

I made a passing reference to owls, which clearly struck a chord with many of you in the last Forces Pensions newsletter, initiating a correspondence on the subject and prompting me to share a rather sad owl story with you all; one of which I was reminded by my recent holiday in Besancon (good town) where something strange and wonderful occurred; when I spoke French, the reply was invariably and helpfully in perfect English, a wholly novel experience. Whilst this might be a telling comment on my language ability, it was also a far cry from when, as a boy, I accompanied my mother into a French taxidermist's shop to get a little owl stuffed. We had found it dead on the roadside and she was dutifully and rather reluctantly doing this at my bidding. Having consulted the dictionary for the verb "to stuff," she began: "pourriez-vous farcissez cet hibou"? She was also carrying a dead owl, which in itself was a good clue as to what she wanted. Neverthless, the proprietor looked blankly at her and summoned two assistants. They also looked at her as if she was a mad woman and then prolonged the agony by smirking and saying that the delicatessen opposite might be able to help. It turns out that although the verb farcir does indeed mean to stuff, it only applies in the sage and onion sense, when you want to cook it. The word we needed was "naturaliser". But they didn't bother to tell us that. They did eventually however agree to naturaliser the owl, who for many years adorned my bedroom. I don't know where he is now, I must check the attic. I must also remember to contact Larousse to ask if they would like to add "please will you stuff my owl" to their list of useful everyday French phrases in their next dictionary. I feel this might be helpful should the French all suddenly stop speaking English in the event of a Brexit. On the other hand perhaps it would be easier if we all simply reverted to talking at them more loudly. In English of course. I promised myself I would not mention Brexit in this issue, but it's all-pervasive and I could not help myself. It won't occur again. The rest of the newsletter is about the Society, what it can offer you, current pensions issues, and other-things-that-might-be-of-interest.