

EDITORIAL

This edition is once again a bit thin but that may have to do with the Army becoming smaller in size and thus busier. This edition is the first where we have had to do it out of my old military loop and thus costs more to produce. What is more galling is that the principle behind this decision is the DIO! I suspect this is the times we live in. That makes our Ascension trips even harder and currently the only way of getting there is via South Africa using the new air service to St Helena and onto Ascension. The repair of the runway for large heavy aircraft at Ascension will not be ready until 2010. That does not stop us reporting all together and I finally found the time to write up some results of surveying White Terns on Ascension.

I am however grateful to those who continually submit articles. There are articles from Nicholas and Keith on areas I have not been to. I have taken on the mantle of organising trips and in 2017 we went to Poland and saw a great many birds that I can add to my growing list. Mark provided the photographs and Kev Campbell gave me the inspiration for the cover. South Africa pops up again with Rodney this time and no matter whatever you do if you have a pair of binos then looking at birds becomes second nature. It is with great sadness that Anne is no longer with us to provide those excellent articles on southern Africa. I expect you will take inspiration from trips abroad and within UK. In 2017 we held our AGM with Salisbury Plain being the main destination on Saturday with Great Bustard, Stone Curlew and Montagu's Harrier being seen. I would like to thank John Hughes (whose patch we invaded) and the RSPB for their assistance. There are lots of local AOS events around the country throughout the year. I would encourage members to attend as besides seeing great birds it is a fantastic experience to be had by all.

As you will know by now Richard Seargent has taken on the mantle of once again being the AOS Secretary. This is our 50th year which we celebrated in style at the Victory Services Club in London recently. Our guest speaker was Chris Fear who monitors Sooty Terns around the Seychelles (well someone has to do it!). Even RAFOS got in on the act at the dinner with a presentation to Colin Wearn from the AOS. The rivalry between the Services does not stop the organisations from being close friends.

| <u>Article</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Population Census of White Terns on Ascension Island | 2 |
| Poland Photographs | 6 |
| Eastern Poland 20-28 May | 8 |
| AOS Trip to Slimbridge | 15 |
| Weekend in Scotland In Search of the Kentish Glory Moth | 16 |
| Spring in Andalucia | 22 |
| A non-birding holiday in South Africa! | 26 |
| Sri Lanka Endemics Birds 5-14 Nov 2016 | 30 |

POPULATION CENSUS OF WHITE TERNS ON ASCENSION ISLAND

(Andrew Bray)

Ascension Island is an important breeding area for seabirds in the tropical South Atlantic (Sanders, 2006). It is a volcanic island 97 km² with more than half of the island covered by ash cones, basaltic flows and cinder areas. It has a high point of 1,171 feet with numerous cliffs across the island. Growing at intermediate level on the north side of Green Mountain are Eucalyptus trees *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. There have been some early counts of white terns, *Gygis alba* carried out on Ascension Island (Dorward 1963, Blair, 1989). The Army Ornithological Society (AOS) has counted White Terns during the last 25 years on several of their expeditions to monitor the Sooty Terns, *Onychoprion fuscatus* on the island. These censuses have been taken at various times of the year though the main breeding season of White Terns is December to March (Dorward, 1963, Ashmole, 2000) though Stonehouse (1960) lists it as November to March. One report using data collected by the AOS prior to 2004 has been published (Easterbrook, 2005). Bird populations fluctuate dramatically yearly (Gill, 2007) as they are affected by breeding success and mortality. A wide range of factors can have an impact each year on sea-birds such as climate shift, food abundance and storms. Long-term population trends provide evidence on how stable a population is. White Terns nest on cliff sides and in Eucalyptus trees where the branch divides though no nest is made for the egg. This could prevent any parasite burden (Houston, 1979). Eggs are therefore laid in precarious positions and any disturbance could mean the egg falling from its position (Dorward, 1963). Counts of nests on Ascension Island have included both habitats.



METHODS

At each location 2 counts were taken by an individual and where possible compared with a counterpart thus providing an average high and low count for a location. Only birds physically on the rock or tree were counted and where 2 birds were perched together counted as a pair then this counted as one. Birds flying, even in pairs, were not counted at all. Thus there is a count for a number of Apparently Occupied Nest (AON). Where two counts agreed then only one figure was entered as a high count. The count on Boatswain Bird Island (BBI) was covered using the same methodology. The only difference is that the cliff sides were divided into segments following natural features top to bottom. Counting birds through binoculars in a small boat in a large swell is not a simple task in practice. On the windward side of BBI the number of counts varied often with only one count of an area. By this time those counting had gained enough experience from counting on the leeward side of BBI where in sheltered water each area could be counted twice by different observers. The boat

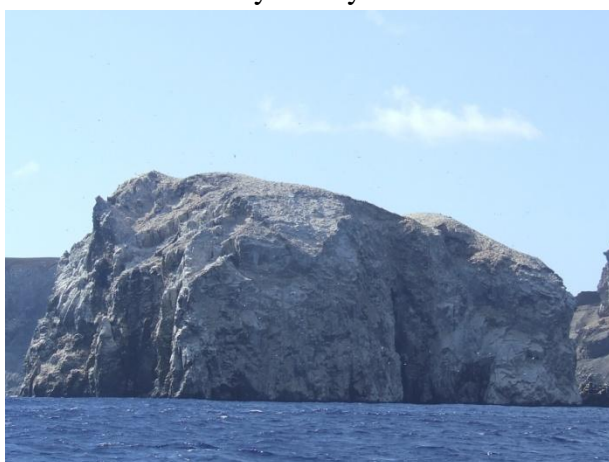
skipper had difficulty keeping the boat in one place for the time to take a count due to strong tides swirling around BBI.

Time factor and persons present also had an impact on completing a full census. On various trips not every part of the island could be visited therefore with limited resources only the main sites were surveyed. The main sites are listed in Table 1. Over the years the data gathered has often been split within locations however for ease of use and for future censuses small areas have been grouped into definite geographic areas that are easily identified when an observer is in place. Some counts are taken from different places however, over the period of visits ideal platforms for a census have been identified. This is particularly relevant to the cliffs of Green Mountain. The track from Donkey Plain to Middleton Hill (Grid 704211) is accessible by 4 wheel drive vehicle and gives excellent views of the cliffs. It was very important to establish sites where terns could be counted. In some areas not all of the cliff could be seen and the observer had to move position to count the remaining terns. It was during these moves that it was very important that no AONs were counted twice. Where feasible the same locations are used to count terns. Six figure grid references can vary up to 100m however the lie of the land will suggest that most counts take place within a much shorter distance.

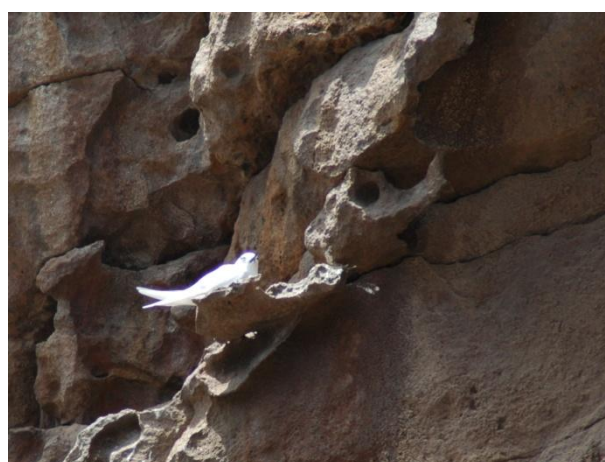
Table 1. Main White Tern locations on Ascension Island. Grid squares use map series G 892, Ascension Island, Edition 5-GSGS.

| Site | Location | Grid Squares |
|------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| A | Green Mountain Cliffs | 7021 |
| B | Valley west of Devil's Cauldron | 7322, 7323 |
| C | Weatherpost Cliffs | 7422, 7421 |
| D | White Hill Cliffs | 7421, 7521, 7522 |
| E | BBI | 7622 |
| F | Cliffs opposite BBI | 7522, 7622 |
| G | Green Mountain Trees | 7021, 7121, 7122 |

White terns have been found in 5 other locations ranging in count from 19 to 1 ($n=7$) with a mean count of 7 from the separate surveys. These should not be included in the overall census as there is no definitive count for each site. They are listed for ease of convenience to demonstrate the number of sites and how little the count is in relation to the main sites. There have not been many surveys of these sites.



BBI from leeward side



White Tern on an AON

RESULTS

Counts of White Tern AONs by the AOS since 2004 (Easterbrook 2005) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Surveys of White Terns by The Army Ornithological Society on Ascension Island between 2005 and 2012.

| | | Grid Squares | Count | Oct/ Nov 05 | 6/11 Feb 06 | 12 Feb 08 | 21 Sep 09 | 31 Mar 11 | 1-2 Dec 12 |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------|-------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Green Mountain Cliffs | A | 7021 | High | 29 | 130 | 214 | | 167 | 169 |
| | | | Low | 20 | 117 | 195 | | 161 | |
| Valley west of Devil's Cauldron | B | 7322 | High | | 130 | 149 | | 167 | 156 |
| | | 7323 | Low | | 116 | 142 | | | 145 |
| Weatherpost Cliffs | C | 7422 | High | | 57 | 33 | | 68 | 171 |
| | | | Low | | 48 | | | | |
| White Hill Cliffs | D | 7421 | High | | | 14 | | | 13 |
| | | 7521 | Low | | | | | | |
| | | 7522 | | | | | | | |
| BBI | E | 7622 | High | 100 | | 529 | | 740 | |
| | | | Low | | | 312 | | | |
| Cliffs opposite BBI | F | 7522 | High | | | 63 | | 70 | 13 |
| | | 7622 | Low | | | | | | |
| Green Mountain Trees | G | 7021 | High | 5 | | 12 | | | |
| | | 7121 | Low | 2 | | | | | |
| | | 7122 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Misc | M | | | | | | | | |
| South Green Mountain | | 7120 | | | 4 | 12 | | | |
| Cocoonut Bay | | 7218 | | | | 1 | | | |
| Ragged Hill | | 7118 | | | | 19 | | | |
| Upper Valley Goat Hole | | 7222 | | | 3 | 3 | | | |
| Letterbox Cliffs | | 7721 | | | | 10 | | | |

DISCUSSION

The Ascension Island Conservation Office has produced a guide on the census of White Terns (Bolton *et. al.* 2012). It uses a number of methods (Ratcliffe, 2001) but further breaks down classification of birds into various sub-categories including AON. It relies on photographs being taken and using Microsoft Paint™ to count adults and chicks. This relies on good photographs being taken. The AONs are then gradually crossed off from the photograph using Paint to ensure that no nest is counted twice. AOS expeditions have yet to compare their more traditional count in the field with this recommended method. The entire census data collated by the AOS has been collected using field observations.

There is a lot of data collected by military expeditions. When we project the long term trends of terns on the island we must be careful on what data is used. There is other data collected over the period that can also be used however for the data to have any significance we should only use that recorded during the breeding season. This should give us a history of what has happened in the past and predict the immediate future. We know that the life of a tern is 36 years according to <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/bird-life-expectancy-white-tern>. Therefore the dates of the last survey mean that birds born at the beginning of the eighties should only be counted as birds born pre-1981 will have died off. . There are no surveys between 2012 and 2017 as the AOS have not been able to visit sites during the breeding period

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to all those members of the Army Ornithological Society who participated in the numerous expeditions. They were willing to walk across the island to count the birds in at various sites and endure seas around Boatswain Bird Island. My thanks to the Ascension Island Conservation Office for their support on these trips and helping with a small boat.

Ashmole P & M. 2000. *St Helena and Ascension Island: a natural history*. Anthony Nelson, Shropshire.

Blair, M. 1989. The RAFOS Expedition to Ascension Island 1987.

Dorward, D.F. 1963. The Fairy Tern *Gygis alba* on Ascension. *Ibis* **103b**: Issue 3, 365-368.

Easterbrook, M. 2005. White (Fairy) fairy Tern count on Ascension Island Exercise Booby Dragon IX; 9th – 20th February 2004. *The Osprey*, Issue 5, 5-6.

Gill, F. B. 2007. *Ornithology 3rd ed.* W. H. Freeman and Co, New York.

Houston, D. C. 1979. Why do Fairy Terns *Gygys Alba* not build nests? *Ibis* **121**: Issue 1, 102-104.

Ratcliffe, N. 2001. *Monitoring methods for seabirds on Ascension island 2nd Edition, revised October 2001*. RSPB, Sandy.

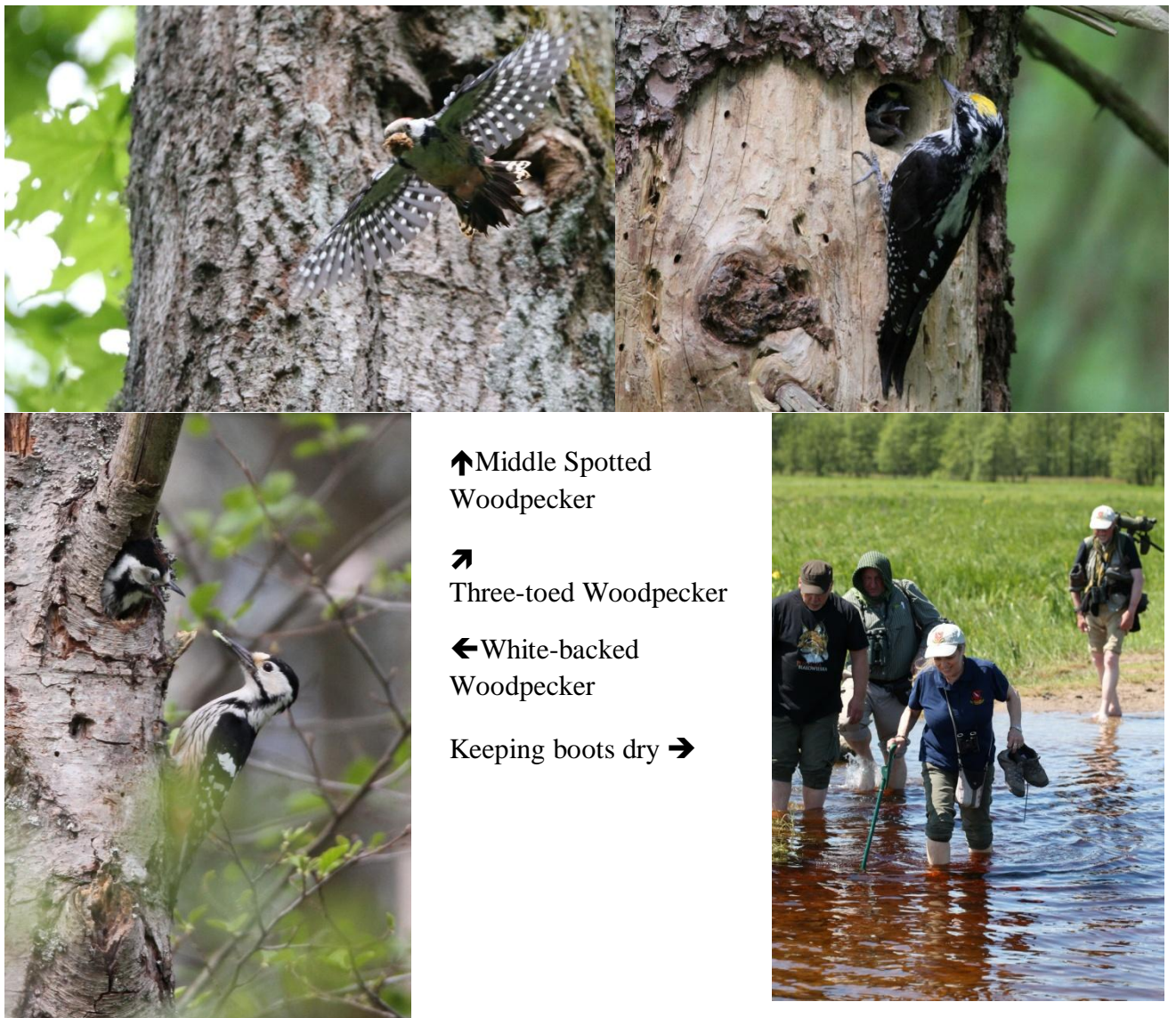
Sanders, S.M. 2006. *Important Bird Areas in the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories*. Sandy, UK: RSPB.

Stonehouse, B. 1960. *Wideawake Island*. Hutchinson of London.

Mark Bolton, Ian Fisher, Nathan Fowler, Richard Hesketh, Will Kirby, Elizabeth Mackley, Norman Ratcliffe, James Reynolds, Sarah Sanders, Jolene Sim, Clare Stringer, Stedson Stroud, Catherine Supple, Dane Wade, Colin Wearn, Natasha Williams. 2012. *Ascension Island Seabird Monitoring Manual* 2nd ed.

POLAND

(Mark Fisher)



↑ Middle Spotted
Woodpecker

↗
Three-toed Woodpecker

← White-backed
Woodpecker

Keeping boots dry →



Corn Bunting

Common Tern

Rosefinch

Cuckoo

Red-necked Grebe

Nutcracker

EASTERN POLAND 20-28 MAY

(Andrew Bray)

We had a very successful trip to Eastern Poland visiting the Bialowieza Forest and Biebrza Marsh. We departed on a BA flight from 20-27 May but actually flew back on 28 May due to all BA flights being cancelled the day we were due to fly back. There were 8 of us on the trip which was just the right size for the minibus.

Saturday 20 May. We arrived at Warsaw Chopin Airport on BA flight from Terminal 3 Heathrow before mid morning. Some of us started at 3am in morning! I was picked up by Mark F and then we picked up Mark E. At the check in we met Simon S. At the gate we met Sandie B and Steve and Maggie D. On arrival at Warsaw I picked up our Mercedes Minibus. We did some birding in trees outside the garage whilst waiting for Norm T. His flight now delayed after we went into meet him so had a snack and drink at the McCafe. Whilst we spent some time by the multi-storey car park we did see Great Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Fieldfare and Spotted Flycatcher besides the Rooks. Despite being a Saturday we joined the queues on the freeway and then the road north was nose to tail traffic with roads east closed due to the building of a dual carriageway. We took the longer way to join our road east. We stopped for some shopping and then made our way to Hajnoka and the house at Lesny Grod. We did not drive down the dirt track far enough first time. Anyway it did not take long before we were in our very nice accommodation.

Sunday 21 May. We were up at 3.30 to meet Arek at 4 am and then drove to the Pygmy Owl site with great views and calling Black Woodpecker. Then it was off to the Strict Reserve for Middle Spotted Woodpecker. You need a licensed guide to enter the reserve with more than 6 people. It was a lovely walk and the Black Woodpecker nest was also pointed out. On way back there was Lesser Spotted Eagle though the Corncrake had stopped calling. We dropped our guide off at church just before 9am as he had to play the church organ. We had breakfast at a local restaurant and whilst others visited the tower, Norm and myself waited for our guide Matuesz to arrive at 10 am; son of Arek. We saw White-backed Woodpecker and 3 toed Woodpecker as well as Thrush Nightingale, Goshawk and Red-breasted Flycatcher. After a short dinner interval at Alto Pizza we then met up to go to the River Narew site for the Great Snipe lek. They were not jumping that much but did see lots of White Egrets plus a male Montagu's Harrier.

Monday 22 May. This was a later start of 7am and we met Matuesz at his house. Our first stop was the near the disused railway where we did not find Grey-Headed Woodpecker. We did find it further on past the old railway station built to look after the trains bringing the Tsar's family pre WW1. The place was destroyed during WW2 but enough survived to do it up. Next stop



Black Woodpecker young

was Wryneck then Barred Warbler and at lunch (stopped at local shop to buy a picnic) was Red-breasted Flycatcher. In the afternoon we saw Nutcracker then stopped at the Palace Park for male Rosefinch but no Syrian Woodpeckers. It was then back to the Strict Reserve and we spent over a hour studying a hole in the distance in which we could see 2 Black Woodpecker chick sticking their heads out. Eventually a parent turned up and we watched it feeding the 2 chicks. Our final stop was out at the first stop of the day to add Marsh Warbler and Icterine Warbler where we also had good views of Thrush Nightingale.

Tuesday 23 May. This was a day without the guide. Our first stop was the observation tower in Bialowieza town. Here we saw a Moorhen! There were plenty of Sedge Warblers. We then drove to another observation tower just outside town. There was a Marsh Harrier in one direction and Common Tern in other. We then followed a board walk and forest trail of 2.7 km to the back of the animal enclosure. During the walk we found Crested Tit and lots of Chaffinches. At the end of the trail there was Wood Warbler and Great Spotted Woodpecker. We bought fresh stuff from Martha's (the local shop where the girl behind the counter had taken a shine to us) and she was very giving in the ice cream stakes the others had whilst I did the lunch shopping. We had lunch in the Palacowy Palace Park. We looked for Syrian Woodpecker but found Marsh Tit. We did find Tree Sparrow in gardens of the houses on the edge of the park. That afternoon we drove back to the house via the Animal Park to see Bison. In evening we had a meal at a local restaurant before driving to Sansky Most. We walked along trail to dip on Hazel Hen. At 2/3rds point there was a big observation tower with 69 steps. Some of us saw a Beaver however the noise of the Pool Frogs dominated the sounds. We continued on the trail complete with very muddy bits back to main trail and to the meadows. They feed the Bison here in the winter but none appeared. There were lots of noisy Corncrakes and one flew twice with great views. On the drive back a Tawny Owl flew across track.

Wednesday 24 May. Today was our drive north. We left house at 7:30 which was earlier than planned; it gets light about 3am! We started by visiting the south end of Siemienowka reservoir. We could see lots of birds on north shore and all 3 Marsh Terns were visible. By the railway track that crosses the reservoir there as Black-throated Diver. We drove around to north shore stopping at Bachury Fishponds which produced our first Penduline Tit and other ducks besides Mallard. There were some Dutch birders but we never left the road (dirt track). We eventually drove on to near the north shore where track meets railway. Here we



Penduline Tit nest

saw pair of Sea Eagles, heard booming Bittern, found a Penduline Tit nest and watched the Terns much closer. A train passed by on way to Belarus which was also visible from reservoir. It was then the warning light for fuel came on however the fuel gauge was correct and we drove to Bialystok where we filled up with diesel then stopped at KFC for lunch and bought an evening snack in Lidl. We found the Syrian Woodpecker site across the road with cycle and walking paths but dipped again. We did see Icterine Warbler and other birds. We then drove to

Bialystok Fishponds with large colonies of Black-headed Gulls. There were Red-neck Grebes in summer plumage, a Bittern booming and another Penduline Tit seen. There lots

more views of marsh terns flying around as well as lots of Reed Buntings. We started to head north again in the town and joined the queue to get out at the roundabout and then headed around town and then north to Knyszyn Fishponds. Sand Martins had made their nests in a small sand heap. Despite lots of mud only a few waders including Redshank, Dunlin and Little Ringed Plover were found. Other birds were Yellow Wagtail (flava race), Rosefinch and Sedge Warbler. We then headed to our accommodation in Wolka Piaseczna. We had learnt from our first stop and kept heading down the dirt track out of village. Once again it was a lovely house that was reached along a sandy drive with rooms that were en-suite. That night we consumed a very large bottle of Merlot plus a few cans of beer. No-one heard the Wolves howling at midnight!

Thursday 25 May. We met our guide Zanec at the HQ to the park at 10am. Here we also met Artur who I had dealt with and the owner of the house. I had to buy tickets to visit the Park here as well. First stop was by the old fort of Oswiec. We visited an observation tower then walked along a board walk back to the main road. We saw Bluethroat for the first time. We then drove to Mscichy on a very bumpy road. After driving down the dirt track we



Bluethroat

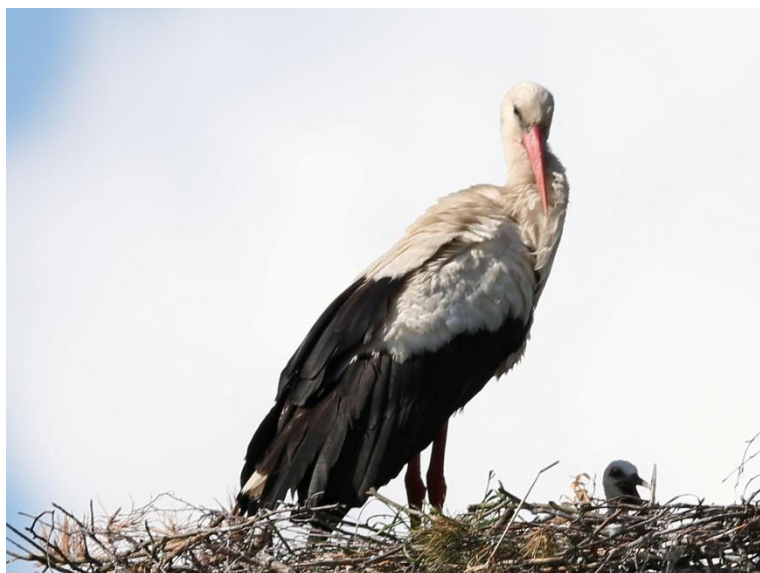
eventually had to stop due to the track being submerged. The first bit of water was easily bypassed on foot however for the second, third and fourth we did have to remove our socks and shoes and roll trousers up to walk through the water. Some of us did not bother putting shoes back on and forget to spray the legs with anti mossie spray! At the end of the walk was a lovely observation tower where we saw Black Stork, Ruff, Black Tail Godwit and Greater Spotted Eagle. A Marsh Warbler was also singing.

There were also sightings of Elk (European Moose). Whether we should have worn wellies was a moot point as

the water did come up to my knees as we waded through it on the track. We stopped for lunch at Brzostowo at a camping site on the river. Here we saw Little Tern, Whiskered Tern and White Winged Tern close up. We had to pay to use the camp site at about 60p per person! Coffee was had at cafe at bridge near Wizna. Wizna was a small town with a mural painted on the wall of Polish POWs held by Germans following a famous Polish stand against the Germans in WW2 when 720 Polish Soldiers held off 42,000 Germans for 3 days. The wall and garden was the actual scene of the photo that was taken of the POWs. Zanec then took us out on his boat to dip on Kingfisher. There was a Beaver lodge close by. Not far from town on the other side of the river is a view point on hill where a gun position was established. Captain Raginis blew himself up with gun rather than surrender to the Germans. Our final stop of the day was at Lawki Marsh for Aquatic Warbler found for the scrub by Mark E. The viewing point was 200m along boardwalk. That night we dined in Goniadz and met the Swedish birdwatchers in the restaurant who appreciated the find.

Friday 26 May. This was another day without a guide. Some of us left at 5am for Oswiec and waited in the observation tower until we had very good views of Savi's Warbler; a Cuckoo made sure we had excellent views of it as it flew slowly past us. We left at 0630 for breakfast back at the house. We then drove to the Fishponds at Knyszyn-Zamek where we

had stopped the previous day. Here we added Whooper Swan and Wood Sandpiper. We had good views of a male Rosefinch. Our next stop was at Tykochin with its cobbled roads, castle and imposing church. We stopped just short of the river and walked to another observation tower. A pair of Montagu's Harriers put on a lovely show flight for us. There were also lots of White Winged Terns and on the walk back we watched the Marsh Warbler cross some water. Just outside town was a big colony of Sand Martins at the large sand works. Bee-eaters called and were seen flying around. A Little Ringed Plover over flew and



White Stork

there was a distant juvenile White Tail Eagle and Honey Buzzard whilst a Hobby with food disappeared behind nearby trees. We then had a Cafe stop at bridge by Wizna where we watched the White Stork changing duty on the nest. We had lunch on a Biebrza River picnic site where the most notable bird was a Great Grey Shrike. We then drove back to near the bridge and walked down a dirt track to find the Kingfisher we did not see the previous day. Sure enough on the opposite side of the river to its nest hole it was sat on a bush. That brought our bird watching

to a close and we headed back to the house stopping at the local supermarket for some bbq stuff. That night after a man had sprayed the area we dined on pork and drank around a very hot fire pit.

Saturday 27 May. We depart at 7am ish for the drive back to Warsaw. We followed the signs for the airport and were glad the traffic jams were on the other side of the freeway as we crossed the River Wisla in Warsaw. We dropped off Norm and then headed for Belvedere Park with its Palace on the Island. It was very popular place for the locals. We spent time looking for the Syrian Woodpecker following a tip. We did not find the bird but did hear Green and had good views of Middle Spotted and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. There were also lots of Red Squirrels. Eventually we called time and headed back to the airport. Here we discovered that all BA flights were cancelled so they sent us to the Marriott Hotel across the road as well as providing dinner and breakfast. We flew home on Sunday 28 May on the morning flight but only an hour late on top of the 24 hours delay.

| | Common name | Scientific name | Date: May 2017 | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 1 | Greylag Goose | Anser anser | | x | | | x | | | |
| 2 | Mute Swan | Cygnus olor | | | x | | x | x | x | x |
| 3 | Whooper Swan | Cygnus cygnus | | | | | | | x | |
| 4 | Gadwall | Anas strepera | | | | | x | x | | |
| 5 | Mallard | Anas platyrhynchos | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 6 | Northern Shoveler | Anas clypeata | | | | | | x | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Garganey | <i>Anas querquedula</i> | | | | | x | x | x | |
| 8 | Tufted Duck | <i>Aythya fuligula</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 9 | Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | | | | | x | | x | |
| 10 | Red-necked Grebe | <i>Podiceps grisegena</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 11 | Great Crested Grebe | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 12 | Black Stork | <i>Ciconia nigra</i> | | | x | | | | | |
| 13 | White Stork | <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 14 | Eurasian Bittern | <i>Botaurus stellaris</i> | | | | | h | | | |
| 15 | Great Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | | x | | | x | x | x | |
| 16 | Grey Heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | x | | | | x | x | x | |
| 17 | Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | | | | | x | | x | |
| 18 | European Honey Buzzard | <i>Pernis apivorus</i> | | x | | | | | x | |
| 19 | Lesser Spotted Eagle | <i>Clanga pomarina</i> | | x | x | x | | | | |
| 20 | Greater Spotted Eagle | <i>Clanga clanga</i> | | | | | x | x | | |
| 21 | Eurasian Sparrowhawk | <i>Accipiter nisus</i> | x | x | | | | | | |
| 22 | Northern Goshawk | <i>Accipiter gentilis</i> | | x | | | | | | |
| 23 | Western Marsh Harrier | <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> | x | x | | x | x | x | x | |
| 24 | Hen Harrier | <i>Circus cyaneus</i> | x | x | | | | | | |
| 25 | Montagu's Harrier | <i>Circus pygargus</i> | | x | | | | | x | |
| 26 | White-tailed Eagle | <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i> | | | | | x | x | x | |
| 27 | Common Buzzard | <i>Buteo buteo</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 28 | Water Rail | <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> | | | | | h | | | |
| 29 | Corn Crake | <i>Crex crex</i> | | h | h | x | | | | |
| 30 | Spotted Crake | <i>Porzana porzana</i> | | h | | | | | | |
| 31 | Common Moorhen | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> | | | | x | | | | |
| 32 | Eurasian Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | | | | | x | x | x | |
| 33 | Common Crane | <i>Grus grus</i> | | | | | | x | x | x |
| 34 | Northern Lapwing | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | | |
| 35 | Little Ringed Plover | <i>Charadrius dubius</i> | | | | | x | | x | |
| 36 | Eurasian Woodcock | <i>Scolopax rusticola</i> | | | | x | | | | |
| 37 | Great Snipe | <i>Gallinago media</i> | | x | | | | h | | |
| 38 | Common Snipe | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| 39 | Black-tailed Godwit | <i>Limosa limosa</i> | | x | | | | x | | |
| 40 | Common Redshank | <i>Tringa totanus</i> | | | | | x | | x | |
| 41 | Wood Sandpiper | <i>Tringa glareola</i> | | | | | | | x | |
| 42 | Dunlin | <i>Calidris alpina</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 43 | Ruff | <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> | | | | | | x | | |
| 44 | Black-headed Gull | <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i> | | | | | x | | x | x |
| 45 | European Herring Gull | <i>Larus argentatus</i> | | | | | | | x | |
| 46 | Little Tern | <i>Sternula albifrons</i> | | | | | | x | | |
| 47 | Whiskered Tern | <i>Chlidonias hybridus</i> | | | | | x | x | x | |
| 48 | Common Tern | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> | | | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 49 | White-winged Tern | <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i> | | | | | x | x | x | |
| 50 | Black Tern | <i>Chlidonias niger</i> | | | | | x | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 51 | Common Wood Pigeon | <i>Columba palumbus</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 52 | Eurasian Collared Dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | x | x | x | x | x | | x | |
| 53 | Common Cuckoo | <i>Cuculus canorus</i> | x | x | x | x | x | h | x | |
| 54 | Tawny Owl | <i>Strix aluco</i> | | | | x | | | | |
| 55 | Eurasian Pygmy Owl | <i>Glaucidium passerinum</i> | | x | | | | | | |
| 56 | European Nightjar | <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i> | | h | | | | | | |
| 57 | Common Swift | <i>Apus apus</i> | x | x | x | | x | | x | |
| 58 | Common Kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | | | | | | | x | |
| 59 | European Bee-Eater | <i>Merops apiaster</i> | | | | | | | x | |
| 60 | Eurasian Hoopoe | <i>Upupa epops</i> | | | | | | x | h | |
| 61 | Eurasian Wryneck | <i>Jynx torquilla</i> | x | x | x | h | | | | |
| 62 | Lesser Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos minor</i> | | h | | | | | | |
| 63 | Middle Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos medius</i> | | x | | | | | | x |
| 64 | White-backed Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i> | | x | | h | | | | |
| 65 | Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | x | x | x | x | | | x | x |
| 66 | Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker | <i>Picoides tridactylus</i> | | x | | | | | | |
| 67 | Black Woodpecker | <i>Dryocopus martius</i> | | h | x | | x | | | |
| 68 | European Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus viridis</i> | | | | | | | | h |
| 69 | Grey-headed Woodpecker | <i>Picus canus</i> | | | x | | | | | |
| 70 | Common Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | x | | | | x | | x | x |
| 71 | Red-footed Falcon | <i>Falco vespertinus</i> | | | | | | x | | |
| 72 | Eurasian Hobby | <i>Falco subbuteo</i> | | | | | | x | x | |
| 73 | Red-backed Shrike | <i>Lanius collurio</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| 74 | Great Grey Shrike | <i>Lanius excubitor</i> | | x | | | x | | x | |
| 75 | Eurasian Golden Oriole | <i>Oriolus oriolus</i> | x | x | x | x | h | h | h | |
| 76 | Eurasian Jay | <i>Garrulus glandarius</i> | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 77 | Eurasian Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x |
| 78 | Spotted Nutcracker | <i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i> | | | x | | | | | |
| 79 | Western Jackdaw | <i>Coloeus monedula</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 80 | Rook | <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| 81 | Hooded Crow | <i>Corvus cornix</i> | x | x | | | x | x | x | x |
| 82 | Northern Raven | <i>Corvus corax</i> | x | x | x | x | | x | x | |
| 83 | European Crested Tit | <i>Lophophanes cristatus</i> | | | | x | | | | |
| 84 | Marsh Tit | <i>Poecile palustris</i> | | | x | | | | | |
| 85 | Eurasian Blue Tit | <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 86 | Great Tit | <i>Parus major</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 87 | Eurasian Penduline Tit | <i>Remiz pendulinus</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 88 | Eurasian Skylark | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> | | h | | x | x | x | x | |
| 89 | Sand Martin | <i>Riparia riparia</i> | x | | | | x | x | x | |
| 90 | Barn Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| 91 | Common House Martin | <i>Delichon urbicum</i> | x | x | x | | x | x | x | |
| 92 | Long-tailed Tit | <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> | | | x | | | | | |
| 93 | Willow Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> | h | h | h | | | x | x | |
| 94 | Common Chiffchaff | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i> | | h | h | x | h | h | h | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 95 | Wood Warbler | <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i> | | x | x | x | | | | |
| 96 | Great Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i> | x | x | h | x | x | x | x | |
| 97 | Aquatic Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i> | | | | | | x | | |
| 98 | Sedge Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i> | | x | h | x | x | x | x | |
| 99 | Eurasian Reed Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> | | | | | x | x | | |
| 100 | Marsh Warbler | <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i> | | | x | | x | h | x | |
| 101 | Icterine Warbler | <i>Hippolais icterina</i> | | x | x | | x | x | | |
| 102 | Common Grasshopper Warbler | <i>Locustella naevia</i> | | | h | | | | | |
| 103 | River Warbler | <i>Locustella fluviatilis</i> | | h | x | | h | | | |
| 104 | Savi's Warbler | <i>Locustella luscinioides</i> | | h | h | | h | h | x | |
| 105 | Eurasian Blackcap | <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> | x | x | x | x | h | h | x | |
| 106 | Garden Warbler | <i>Sylvia borin</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 107 | Barred Warbler | <i>Sylvia nisoria</i> | | | x | x | | | | |
| 108 | Lesser Whitethroat | <i>Sylvia curruca</i> | x | | | | | h | h | x |
| 109 | Common Whitethroat | <i>Sylvia communis</i> | x | | x | | x | x | x | |
| 110 | Goldcrest | <i>Regulus regulus</i> | | | h | | | | | |
| 111 | Eurasian Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | | x | h | x | | | | |
| 112 | Eurasian Nuthatch | <i>Sitta europaea</i> | | x | x | x | | | | x |
| 113 | Eurasian Treecreeper | <i>Certhia familiaris</i> | | x | x | x | | | | x |
| 114 | Common Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 115 | Common Blackbird | <i>Turdus merula</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 116 | Fieldfare | <i>Turdus pilaris</i> | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x |
| 117 | Redwing | <i>Turdus iliacus</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 118 | Song Thrush | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| 119 | Mistle Thrush | <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> | | | | | x | | | |
| 120 | Spotted Flycatcher | <i>Muscicapa striata</i> | x | x | x | x | x | | | |
| 121 | European Robin | <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> | | x | x | x | | | | |
| 122 | Bluethroat | <i>Luscinia svecica cyaneacula</i> | | | | | | x | x | |
| 123 | Thrush Nightingale | <i>Luscinia luscinia</i> | | x | x | h | h | h | h | |
| 124 | Collared Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula albicollis</i> | x | x | x | x | | | | |
| 125 | Red-breasted Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula parva</i> | | x | x | | | | | |
| 126 | Black Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> | | x | | x | | x | | |
| 127 | Whinchat | <i>Saxicola rubetra</i> | x | x | | | x | x | x | |
| 128 | Northern Wheatear | <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> | x | | | | | | | |
| 129 | House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| 130 | Eurasian Tree Sparrow | <i>Passer montanus</i> | | | | x | x | x | x | |
| 131 | Western Yellow Wagtail | <i>Motacilla flava flava</i> | | | | | x | x | x | |
| 132 | White Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| 133 | Meadow Pipit | <i>Anthus pratensis</i> | | | | | | | x | |
| 134 | Tree Pipit | <i>Anthus trivialis</i> | | | | | | x | | |
| 135 | Common Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | x | x | x | x | x | | | x |
| 136 | Hawfinch | <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i> | | x | x | x | | | | |
| 137 | Common Rosefinch | <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i> | | x | x | x | x | | x | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 138 | European Greenfinch | <i>Chloris chloris</i> | | x | x | x | | | | |
| 139 | Common Linnet | <i>Linaria cannabina</i> | x | | | | x | | | |
| 140 | European Goldfinch | <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> | x | x | x | x | | | | |
| 141 | European Serin | <i>Serinus serinus</i> | | | x | | | | | |
| 142 | Corn Bunting | <i>Emberiza calandra</i> | | x | | | | | | |
| 143 | Yellowhammer | <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| 144 | Common Reed Bunting | <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i> | | x | x | x | x | x | x | |



Poland Participants

AOS TRIP TO SLIMBRIDGE

(Andrew Bray)

It was a mild day as 14 souls met in the car park at Slimbridge on what is termed a busy shopping day; Saturday 17th December. We met another 2 in the cafe and also said goodbye to 2 who had only come for breakfast. The cafe at Slimbridge has been revamped and still has teething troubles as a bacon sandwich order had not gone through to the kitchen at the start. The day was going to get better! Those of us who were delayed met the rest of the party at the next warm hide where they were looking at Bewick Swans and ducks. We made our way to the Tower Hide noting Peregrine on our way. At the hide there were Crane, Barnacle Geese, Wigeon, very distant White-fronted Geese (3 fields away and through the gap) and Mistle Thrush and Reed Bunting. It was then back to the cafe via another hide where Di managed to find Redshank, Dunlin and the Little Stint. Despite it being a mild day we stopped at the cafe which once again played a vital part in the day. After tea or coffee we then made our way to the Zeiss Hide where there were plenty of Golden Plover, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwits and Dunlin. A couple of Ruff was by a large flock of Wigeon. A Cetti's Warbler called after most people had left. At the Kingfisher Hide we waited for Bullfinch but the best bird was a Crane flying right past the Hide. It was then on to the Southern Lake Hide and warm comfortable seats where we added Great-crested Grebe and saw lots of gulls and ducks. Passing roasting marshmallows at the Elves grotto required a

late lunch back at the cafe and then we said our goodbyes. Those who stayed for an hour afterwards saw nothing new.

WEEKEND IN SCOTLAND IN SEARCH OF THE KENTISH GLORY MOTH 5-7 May

(Keith Cherry)

Members of the North Hert's Bird Club, like to take a keen interest in all forms of Natural History, especially Butterflies, Dragonflies and Moths.

As a result one of our group, Trevor Brownsell noticed on the website of the Butterfly Conservation, that they were organising a Moth event in Insh Marshes, Insh, near Kingussie in the Highland Region. So Trevor, Richard Pople and I decided to make the effort and try for this stunning and beautiful moth. Richard did a great job booking the flights with Easyjet, to Inverness from Luton Airport, booking our accommodation in the Park Guest House in Aviemore and arranging our car hire.

The Kentish Glory Moth is a large, beautiful iconic moth that formerly occurred south of the border where it was last recorded in 1969/70. It is currently confined to only a few suitable sites around Scotland. It is a moth of open birch woodland, woodland edges, rides and tracksides where only young birch saplings up to 6 to 8 feet tall are deemed suitable for the female to lay her eggs. Male and Females are readily told apart with the female being much bigger and bulkier while the males are darker with very feathery antennae.

The weekend was co-ordinated by Dr Tom Prescott from RSPB Insh Marshes Reserve Office, with trapping taking place in suitable habitat within the Forestry Commission Inshriach Forest. The plan would be to set out traps on Friday and Saturday nights, monitor them into the night and then meet up at Ivy Cottage at 10:00 hrs the following mornings to see what moths had been attracted to the traps. With the days free to do some bird watching, it seemed an ideal combination and we were all looking forward to it.



Friday May 5. We arrived in good time to catch our 09:35 hrs flight to Inverness. With just hand luggage we went straight to the departure area which was extremely busy so we just

joined the long queue and snaked our way through to the security area. Once through the scanner and after replacing our boots and belts, we had breakfast and waited for our flight to be called. The flight left on time and after about an hour and a quarter we were landing in Inverness. Richard and Trevor were going to be duty driver's so we collected our brand new Kia Ceed and made our first stop at the local Tesco, to buy some food and drinks for the day ahead.

Richard had previously toured Scotland with his wife on quite a few occasions, so he had planned a route to Aviemore that would hopefully be productive as well as making the most of the stunning scenery.

Our first stop was to be the RSPB reserve of Loch Ruthven. This was a new site for Trevor and me and is a reliable place to see Slavonian Grebe. As we got out of the car we were met by a chorus of Willow Warbler song. They seemed to be everywhere. We walked along the bank of the Loch towards the hide seeing Meadow and Tree Pipits. We had not been in the hide long before we saw Little Grebe, soon to be followed by two pairs of Slavonian Grebes in their summer plumage. Other birds seen included Stonechat, Chaffinch, Rook, Curlew and Red Kite. A distant Cuckoo was heard but not seen. The weather was glorious and becoming warmer all the time.



Juvenile Dipper

From here we travelled back towards Inverness and took the unclassified road from the village of Farr, over the moor to the Findhorn Valley. This is a single track road and fortunately we only met one other vehicle coming towards us. After a bit of reversing and directing the other driver we managed to pass each other. According to Richard this route is good for Golden Plover, Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle. Not today though! Reaching the valley road Richard parked the car by a river that is before we saw an adult bird that quickly flew down river but was soon followed by a young bird which obligingly stayed put.

Other bird's seen here included Herring and Black-headed Gulls, Pied Wagtail, Sand Martin and Swallow. Moving further down the valley we parked up at another area to view the mountains. There were several birders already in residence. While I was fiddling with the memory card in my camera the cry went up of "Golden Eagle". Trevor and Richard got on it but unfortunately for me it didn't stay around for long so I missed it. Never mind. Other birds seen here included Kestrel, Buzzard and Grey Wagtail.

We continued our journey to Aviemore, seeing among others Red-legged and Grey Partridge, Mistle Thrush, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Common Sandpiper and Greylag Goose. We found the Park Guest House and checked in. We were due to RV at Ivy Cottage at 19:30 hrs, so we had time to find somewhere to have a meal before we set off. Fortunately a pub called the Winking Owl was a very short walk away so we all ordered Fish and Chips which were delicious as was the beer that accompanied it.

We arrived at Loch Insh where Richard had previously found nesting Osprey and we were all pleased to see that the nest was still being used with a bird on the nest and the male perched up nearby. Other birds seen here included Goldeneye, Treecreeper, and Great Spotted Woodpecker. From here we drove to the village of Insh and Ivy Cottage. We went inside and met up with about a dozen or so other people for the trapping event. Dr Tom Prescott described the event and the areas of forest that would be covered, would cover an area of 5 square kilometres. There were about six or seven of the group that had moth traps and about a dozen or so sites that they could choose from, to try their luck. We joined up with a guy called Ron who had chosen site number 8. On the site he set up three traps and we retired to our car to wait for darkness and observe the traps, which is the way we usually do our moth nights. Much to our surprise Ron approached our car and said "I am off to my hotel and I will see you in the morning" This took us by surprise and he explained that he would leave the traps running all night and come back at 7am, check the traps and pot any moths inside the traps for us to see later in the morning.

We sat in the car for a while and went to look at the traps to see if anything was happening. Unfortunately not and the temperature was dropping. A Woodcock was heard and three were seen flying over our heads. This is not what we were expecting to happen so after about 15 minutes we all decided that there was only one thing to do and that was to give the Winking Owl an unexpected visit. Every cloud, as they say.

Saturday 6th May. The sun was up this morning and it looked like it was going to be another fine and warm day. After a fine breakfast we set off for the Stakis Hotel complex as it overlooks the Craigellachie Reserve, which is a site that has often held breeding Peregrine Falcons. A local warden came over to speak to us and he informed us that the birds had recently disappeared, possibly due to the bad weather. A Redpoll flew over and a Goldcrest was seen in nearby trees. Moving on to Loch Alvie, we parked up to view the Loch which was quiet, but we did see Siskin, Dunnock, Great Tit and more Willow Warblers.



Willow Warbler

Time was moving on so we had to head for Ivy Cottage for the morning trap opening. We arrived a little early and waited for the others to arrive, seeing Greenfinch, House Martin and Hooded Crow in the process. People started to turn up including Dr Tom Prescott who informed us the temperature the night before had dropped to minus 5 degrees and out of twenty or so traps, only five moths had been recorded and no Kentish Glory. Our mood was a bit deflated but as we enjoyed a coffee Tom produced our "Blue Peter" moment. He had caught a Kentish Glory male moth previously and had kept it in a fridge to preserve it. It did indeed live up to its name and is a superb moth.

Today's plan was for the whole group to visit site number 8 to look for moths at rest or any eggs that might have been laid. Several Pheromone Lures were placed around the area to try and entice a male or two to visit them. The group spread out trying to find any eggs or to hopefully disturb a moth. Despite spending a couple of hours of intense searching, nothing

was found or produced. We did add a few more birds to our list which were Goldfinch, Chiffchaff, Coal Tit and a Pied Flycatcher was seen by one of our group.

At about 1pm it was decided that we should all disperse to other sites, so as we did not have a trap, we decided to head for Cairngorm and hope to see some of the birds that are regularly seen there. Unfortunately we didn't have much luck and the only birds that we saw were a Common Snipe and Trevor located a solitary Red Grouse.

Leaving Cairngorm we drove on towards Loch Garten and stopped at a well known Dragonfly site where we saw several Large Red Damselflies. We added a few new birds as they came down to drink in a small pool. Namely Wood Warbler, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Robin and Trevor located a very obliging Crested Tit, which we all saw well.



Crested Tit by Richard Pople

Moving on to Loch Garten Reserve, I am afraid that we were having no luck today. The only bird seen of note, was a sitting Osprey, but we did see several Bank Voles and Red Squirrels making use of the well stocked feeders. At least something was.

We dove on to another site just down the road called Loch Mallachie. We walked the Green Trail down to the Loch where Richard had usually seen Redstart but the only birds seen were a couple of Common Crossbill as they flew over. Time was getting on so we decided to return to Aviemore, clean up and go out for our evening meal. We chose the excellent La Taverna, Italian Restaurant this time. Although the weather was somewhat milder we were unsure where the trapping would be taking place and fearing it would be a similar situation as the previous night, we decided give it a miss and go the Ivy Cottage in the morning.

Sunday 7th May 2017. This morning was a direct contrast to the previous two days, as it was grey with misty rain. After a nice breakfast we checked out of the Guest House and made our way to Avie Lochan. This is a small Loch north of Aviemore that is usually a reliable place to see good close up views of Slavonian Grebes. Not today though, so we had to be content with Sand Martin, Goldeneye and Grey Lag Goose. Moving on we made our way to Loch Insh where the female Osprey was still sitting and the male was again perched nearby. We did see a Blackcap, Goldcrest and Sedge Warbler in the area as well. Ivy cottage overlooks the marsh area, so as we were again a little early we scanned the marsh and picked up, among others, Skylark, Curlew, Meadow Pipit, Swallow, Robin and Pied Wagtail.

As the others started to arrive we were pleased to hear that it had been a much better night for trapping. Inside the cottage the people started to get out their pots and share them around for everyone to see. Some pots were put into the fridge for a short while to cool the moths down. This makes observing them a lot easier. One of the groups had netted a Kentish Glory the day before and he had it in a pot for everyone to see. It was decided that the best thing to do



Kentish Glory Males

would be to find a suitable place in the garden to photograph the moths. Tom decided to bring out his Kentish Glory, so we now had two of them to photograph.

The other moths that were caught included Glaucous Shears, Ocherous Pug, Scarce Prominent, Engrailed, Dwarf Pug, Autumn Green Carpet, Red-green Carpet, Red Sword-grass, Puss Moth, Water Carpet, Oak Nycetoline, Brindled Beauty, Early Tooth-striped, Early Thorn, Purple Thorn, Clouded Drab, Red Chestnut, and Common Heath. Several were new moths for each of us.



Red Grouse



Common Sandpiper

After several hours photographing and discussing the moths, we said our farewells to our fellow moth friends and drove north to Lochindorb. This is a well known site for breeding Black-throated Diver and a sighting of them is usually guaranteed. Leaving the main road onto the single track road to the Loch we passed an apparently historic site for breeding Common Gull and they are still using it as there were hundreds nesting on small mounds.

We scanned the Loch for the Divers with no luck so we drove the length of the Loch seeing Common Sandpiper, Redshank and Red Grouse. We returned to the start of the Loch and parked up for a while. And it seemed that we were going to be out of luck this time, but eventually Richard spotted a bird on the Loch and it was indeed a Black-throated Diver. He called out to Trevor and me and we gratefully watched it as it came fairly close to where we were parked. I tried for quite a while to get a photograph of it, but it was very actively diving, as you would expect, so I reluctantly gave in and left it to do what comes naturally. Time was moving on so we decided it was time to head towards the Airport.

We made a quick stop at Carrbridge and walked through Ellen Wood and added a Raven to our list as it flew over our heads. We left Carrbridge and drove towards the airport. We were a bit early so we parked up at Fort George opposite Chanonry Point. We added three more birds to our list in Northern Wheatear, Eider Duck and Cormorant making a total of 71 birds for the trip.

It was an excellent trip and thanks must go to Richard for picking out a route that made the most of our time in Scotland.

TripList :

| | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Black-throated Diver | Common Gull | Black Cap |
| Little Grebe | Herring Gull | Wood Warbler |
| Slavonian Grebe | Wood Pigeon | Chiffchaff |
| Cormorant | Collared Dove | Willow Warbler |
| Greylag Goose | Cuckoo | Goldcrest |
| Eider | Great Spotted Woodpecker | Pied Flycatcher |
| Goldeneye | Skylark | Crested Tit |
| Red Kite | Sand Martin | Great Tit |
| Common Buzzard | Swallow | Coal Tit |
| Golden Eagle | House Martin | Treecreeper |
| Osprey | Meadow Pipit | Jackdaw |
| Kestrel | Tree Pipit | Rook |
| Red Grouse | Grey Wagtail | Carrion Crow |
| Red-legged Partridge | Pied Wagtail | Hooded Crow |
| Grey Partridge | Dipper | Raven |
| Pheasant | Wren | Starling |
| Oystercatcher | Dunnock | House Sparrow |
| Lapwing | Robin | Chaffinch |
| Common Snipe | Stonechat | Greenfinch |
| Woodcock | Northern Wheatear | Siskin |
| Curlew | Blackbird | Goldfinch |
| Redshank | Song Thrush | Redpoll |
| Common Sandpiper | Mistle Thrush | Crossbill |
| Black-headed Gull | Sedge Warbler | |

SPRING IN ANDALUCIA

(Nicholas Beswick)

When my brother-in-law and his wife moved to Spain last year we were quick to fix a visit for some spring sunshine. As our flight descended into Malaga I spotted a large and interesting lake in the otherwise cultivated plain north of the coastal mountains. Perhaps there would be interesting birds near our base at Alameda, a small town an hour's drive north of Malaga. The trip up the motorway, though, was less encouraging: olive groves everywhere and very few birds to be seen. I need not have worried as I found that we were to visit the large and interesting lake the next day, only twenty minutes' drive away.

19 March - Laguna de Fuente de Pedra

The lake, with adjacent lagoons and reedbeds is the largest nature reserve in the area with an attractive visitor centre. Regrettably, though, none of the reserves I visited had information specifically for birders, such as sightings boards. Indeed, there were plenty of visitors but virtually no birders. The reserve's chief attraction is its Flamingo flock, then numbering 3,500 but sometimes very much larger. There are apparently occasional Lesser Flamingos but, with the birds a pink mass way out in the middle of the lake, how anyone could tell is a mystery to me! My first excitement was a pair of White-headed Duck on one of the small ponds – one that I hoped for seen on Day 1! There was plenty more to see on the lagoons and from various viewpoints around the main lake, though there was no access close to the shore. The highlight of the day was a Booted Eagle flying right overhead, sparring with a Raven.

20 March - Iznajar

It was a family outing on another hot, cloudless day to a reservoir in the craggy mountains south east of Cordoba. My brother-in-law had seen vultures here but there were none on the day. The reservoir was disappointingly birdless save for a flock of Cormorants and an out-of-place Egyptian Goose. A couple of Red-rumped Swallows and Choughs on the crags were a bonus.

Back at Alameda, I visited another small lake, Laguna de La Ratosa, which held a modest 162 Flamingos and a flock of Shoveler. A Booted Eagle flew over, along with Red Kite and my first Montagu's Harrier of the trip.

21 March - Teba

I had picked up a second-hand copy of Dave Gosney's guide to sites in Andalucia and it proved invaluable (and a lot easier than a DVD to refer to on a trip). The mountain outcrop at Teba looked worth a visit, with the scenery of the spectacular gorge a bonus. There were few birds of note to be seen from the road so I picked my way round and over the boulders in the gorge. It was just as well that the level of the stream was low! Gosney says that the gorge had been a site for nesting Bonelli's Eagle but not at the time his book was published, so I was surprised and delighted when two adult birds put in an appearance. It was well worth the effort of clambering through the rocks as I found Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting; also, curiously, the only Robin of the whole week. A couple of miles away, Griffon Vultures were building their nests on the crags; there might be Egyptian too later in the spring. The trip was rounded off with Short-toed Eagle hunting over the hillsides.

Back at Alameda, three Black Kites drifted over, the first Swifts appeared and a Montagu's Harrier performed his switchback display flight over nearby fields. The silence in the early hours was broken by a Little Owl calling persistently – he had the decency to perch on a chimney for good views at breakfast time.

22 March - Mollina

I decided to explore locally after a morning on a family outing and walked up the nearby Mollina Mountain, a dome-shaped scrub-covered hill. The variety of birds was disappointing and I was surprised to find no warblers other than Blackcap and Sardinian; perhaps it was still too early in the year. My one find of note was the only Azure-winged Magpie of the trip which disappeared into the woods with a mechanical buzzing call.

There was still time left in the afternoon for a return visit to Laguna de Fuente de Pedra where there were now many more waders on the small lagoons and a Whiskered Tern provided excellent views. At dusk, a Stone-curlew called from near our Alameda base.

23 March - La Lantejuela

A trip up the motorway towards Seville took me to the small town of La Lantejuela where Gosney had identified several promising sites, including one for Great Bustards. Sure enough, they were exactly where he described though the long-range views were spoilt by heat shimmer. A male Montagu's Harrier obliged me by flying directly over and perching nearby. Looking for sandgrouse was a wash-out; I suspect that they disappear in the middle of the day and a glimpse of something in flight could not be classified as a sighting! As the winter had been dry, the seasonal lakes in the area had just about dried up completely and held nothing. However, the site Gosney describes as a sewage farm more than made up for these disappointments. Although there is no access into the site, it has been classified as a nature reserve and the main lagoon is viewable from the road and the open-access roof of the visitor centre (which was shut). The lagoon held good numbers of ducks, including White-headed and Red-crested Pochard, with swarms of hirundines and a flock of Alpine Swifts overhead but the star bird was a Glossy Ibis. Presumably they are expanding their range in Spain as well as elsewhere.

24 March - Wetlands South of Cordoba

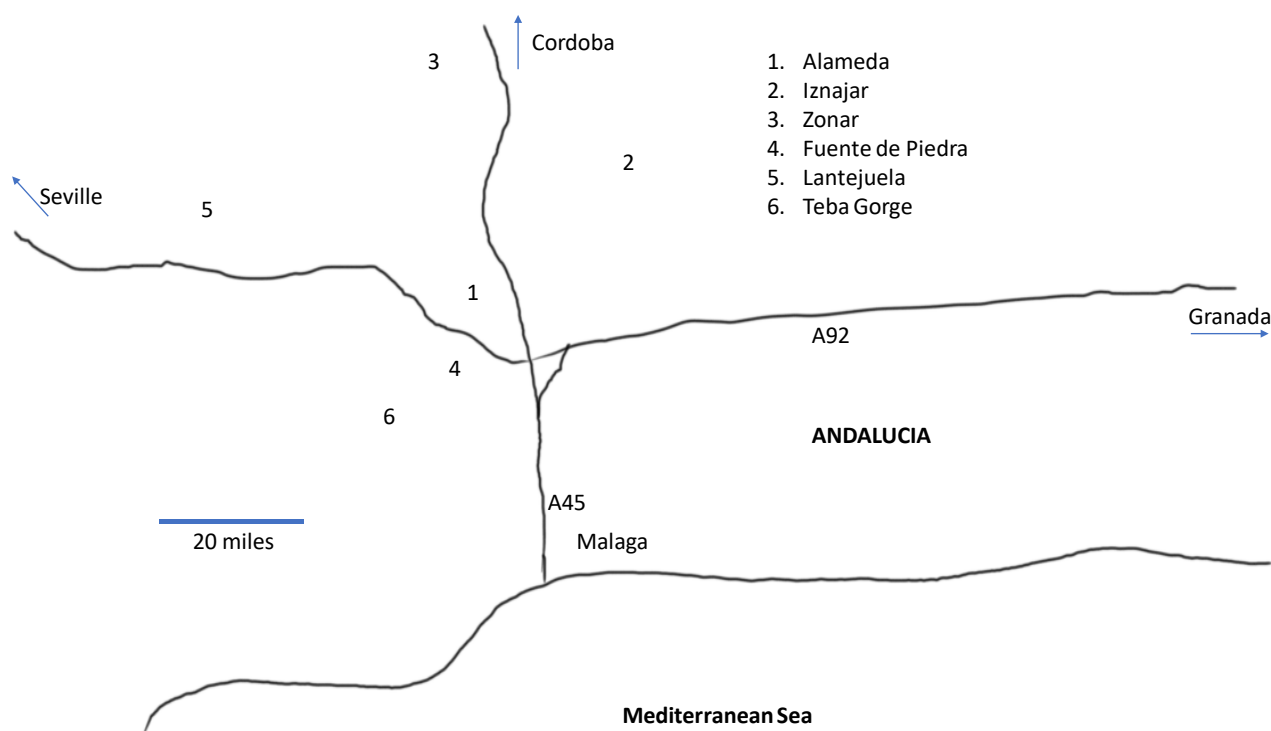
For the last day of our holiday I decided to go in search of Red-knobbed Coot but to no avail, though there were plenty of knobless ones to be checked out. There are several small lakes north of Alameda in the hilly country between there and the city of Cordoba. These are designated nature reserves and are reasonably well signposted. The largest and most important, Zonar, has a visitor centre with displays describing the decline and revival of the White-headed Duck and extensive grounds as well as the lake itself. The scrub was stiff with Blackcaps but nothing unusual while the lake held only one pair of the famed ducks. A Night Heron roost and two pairs of displaying Marsh Harriers were the highlights.

Next stop was the small lake at Rincon with a convenient viewing screen by the car park and closed visitor centre. The star attraction here was two pairs of Black-necked Grebes in their breeding finery and indulging in a brief territorial dispute. On, then, to Amarga where there are two lakes, one deep and one shallow seasonal. The surprise on the deep lake was two male Ferruginous Ducks, along with White-headed and another Black-necked Grebe. The remaining stops on the trip were an anti-climax: Los Jarales was dried out and the Malpassillo reservoir held nothing of note.

Back at Alameda, a White Stork had reclaimed its nest on a disused chimney stack in the town. Two Stone-curlews flew over, calling, at dusk and my wife heard a Scops Owl at dark o'clock but she didn't wake me as we had a very early start to return to Malaga airport. The week's birds had well exceeded my expectations and we will definitely be going again soon.

A Tragic Postscript

We had not expected to return to Spain in 2017 but in October received the terrible news that my brother-in-law had been taken ill and died within a few hours. We went out for his funeral the following week and some birding close to Alameda provided welcome distraction during the three days we were there. The weather was set fair and unseasonably warm; there had been virtually no rain since our spring visit. Notable was an influx of passage migrants on 24 October, with Wheatears, Black Redstarts and Meadow Pipits foraging in the ploughed fields. The water level at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra was much lower and the Flamingo flock down to about 500 birds. A Whinchat stood out among the passage passerines but a single Black Stork stole the show.



List 18 – 25 Mar 17 (105 Species)

| | | |
|----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Egyptian Goose | Buzzard | Crested Lark |
| Shelduck | Sparrowhawk | White Wagtail |
| Garganey | Stone Curlew | Yellow Wagtail |
| Mallard | Lapwing | Black Wheatear |
| Shoveler | Black-winged Stilt | Blue Rock Thrush |
| Gadwall | Wood Sandpiper | Song Thrush |
| Teal | Common Sandpiper | Mistle Thrush |
| Pochard | Green Sandpiper | Blackbird |

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Red-crested Pochard | Snipe | Robin |
| Ferruginous Duck | Ruff | Stonechat |
| White-headed Duck | Redshank | Wren |
| White Stork | Little Ringed Plover | Iberian Chiffchaff |
| Flamingo | Black-headed Gull | Blackcap |
| | Lesser Black-backed Gull | |
| Cattle Egret | Gull-billed Tern | Sardinian Warbler |
| Grey Heron | Whiskered Tern | Reed Warbler |
| Night Heron | Great Bustard | Cetti's Warbler |
| Cormorant | Red-legged Partridge | Zitting Cisticola |
| Glossy Ibis | Feral Pigeon | Southern Grey Shrike |
| Great Crested Grebe | Woodpigeon | Woodchat Shrike |
| Black-necked Grebe | Collared Dove | Great Tit |
| Little Grebe | Scops Owl | Blue Tit |
| Coot | Little Owl | Greenfinch |
| Moorhen | Swift | Goldfinch |
| Purple Gallinule | Alpine Swift | Linnet |
| Griffon Vulture | Pallid Swift | Serin |
| Short-toed Eagle | Swallow | House Sparrow |
| Bonelli's Eagle | Red-rumped Swallow | Spanish Sparrow |
| Booted Eagle | House Martin | Corn Bunting |
| Kestrel | Crag Martin | Rock Bunting |
| Montagu's Harrier | Sand Martin | Jackdaw |
| Marsh Harrier | Hoopoe | Raven |
| Black Kite | Meadow Pipit | Chough |
| Red Kite | | Azure-winged Magpie |

Additions 23 – 25 Oct

Black Stork
Ring-necked Parakeet
Wheatear
Whinchat
Black Redstart
Dartford Warbler

A NON-BIRDING HOLIDAY IN SOUTH AFRICA!

(Rodney Walker)

Sandy and I returned to South Africa in January – a second trip for me – to enjoy the warmth of its climate and to visit old and new haunts. We spent a few days in Cape Town before heading off east via the winelands, then along the Garden Route to Port Elizabeth. We stayed in a number of places some of which I shall identify as we go along and ended up in the Sibuya Game Reserve at Kenton-on-Sea. While I had packed my binoculars it was never my intention to take a particular interest in the birds but! And somehow without trying I realised my list had grown to over 100 species.

As we “wound down” in Cape Town after our long overnight flight we took a wander around the V&A Waterfront area to see what had changed since our last trip. And who should we bump into but on the lawn of a nearby law firm there was the renowned and often noisy Hadeda Ibis pecking into the grass. By the end of the holiday we were sick and tired of its family but we remained friends!



Hadada Ibis

Whilst in the area we also took the ferry across to Robben Island and enjoyed an interesting bus tour which gave us views of the African Penguin colony there followed by a large family of African Sacred Ibis.

After a couple of days in the winelands we moved on to a private estate just outside Stanford, near Hermanus. The latter seemed to have grown considerably since we were last there and we were delighted to find ourselves well away from the madding crowds, care of Mosaic. This organisation is owned by a couple from Florida who decided to set up a couple of small tourist camps in order to improve the opportunities for the locals to work. It lies on the edge of the Walker Bay coastline reserve, on an inland lake, and overlooked by the Overberg. What a find it was; additionally it is still under construction and one morning the workers were watering the area in front of our cottage much to the enjoyment of the local birds all of whom came to have a bath. While this was a non-birding holiday anyone interested in birds would have had to take a close interest, wouldn't they?

What a joy it was a little later on a safari to the beach to come across our first part-time immigrants – the Steppe Buzzard and the Jackal Buzzard. A Greater Kestrel was a first in that area for our guide who immediately found a Black-Shouldered Kite to finish off the day. If you ever find yourself in Stanford make sure you visit the Italian restaurant there. It is called La Trattoria, run by the charming and ever-so-friendly Father-and-son team, Conrado and Lionello Giovannette, and next door is their Don Gelato which provides the best Italian ice cream south of Italy!



Fiscal Flycatcher



Cape Spurfowl

We also visited the Gansbaai and Kleinbaai coastal resorts and after lunch found that a whole family of Cape Spurfowl had taken up residence under our car. Mother watched me with lots of authority as I tried, after perhaps a beer too many in the hot sun, to manoeuvre us out of that situation.

Next we moved on to the Knysna/Plettenburg area where we stayed in a delightful farm complex – Fynbos Ridge - which had just had a close shave with a forest fire. Not only was it a birding paradise

but the owners had a brace of very large pigs which had become domesticated and slept on dog beds in the reception! A sighting of a male Pin-tailed Whydah but without its tail was perhaps a highlight of this paradise. We also spent a day, the hottest day of our whole holiday, trekking through the Robberg reserve. Dozens of fur-seals added to our excitement but here we had a first sighting of a Burchell's Coucal. We were joined at lunch by this cheeky Kelp Gull who would not take 'no' for an answer!

As we headed further east to Port Elizabeth we dropped in for lunch with our UK (!) local neighbours who had rented a house in St Francis Bay. We learnt that another couple were about to stay with them for a few days – one of my fellow Benefice church wardens! The world was getting smaller (Herefordshire was moving to South Africa) but there a further surprise for us in our next location, the Sibuya Game Reserve



Kelp Gull

(<http://www.sibuya.co.za/>). This was our final destination. Our visit started with a boat

journey up the River Kariega for 30 minutes or so before reaching our private tented lodges beside the river. This journey produced close sightings of Goliath, Grey and Purple Herons, Giant and Pied Kingfishers, Spoonbill and the Egrets. No sooner had we landed than we were faced with 20 or so Black-headed Herons. Wow! And I was not there to bird-watch!



During our game drives our concentration was on seeing the wild life from elephant to lions, water buffalo and giraffe, zebra and large numbers of boks. But for me the highlight was our close encounters with white rhino. Sadly 3 of them had been attacked in the previous 9 months (one dead and 2 seriously wounded) and now they are under armed guard. Advisedly all my photos are of their rear ends and in this picture I was cheering them on as they approached another safari vehicle!

There are said to be over 400 species of birds on the reserve. But I was not there to watch birds! Nevertheless it was fun to see Knysna Turaco, Malachite and Brown-headed Kingfishers, European Roller, Black-headed Oriole, Crowned Hornbill and ever so many Amur Falcons (who congregate in large numbers when the food is right). The prize for me was a sighting of two Secretarybirds apparently mating on top of a large bush. We saw a few single ones as well along with families of White Stork. Finally and to our mutual great surprise I shared my final game drive with our local MP and his family. That proved beyond doubt that Herefordshire had indeed moved to South Africa. I taught them a bit about bird-watching, AOS-style too!

List (112 species)

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Kelp Gull | Jackal Buzzard |
| Grey-headed Gull | Southern Pale-Chanting Goshawk |
| Hartlaub's Gull | Amur Falcon |
| Swift Tern | Greater Kestrel |
| Common Tern | Spotted Eagle-Owl |
| African Darter | Black-collared Barbet |
| White-breasted Cormorant | Southern Barbet |
| Cape Cormorant | Knysna Turaco |
| Reed Cormorant | Speckled Mousebird |
| African Penguin | Red-faced Mousebird |
| Yellow-billed Duck | Malachite Kingfisher |
| Egyptian Goose | Brown-hooded Kingfisher |
| South African Shelduck | Pied Kingfisher |
| Spur-winged Goose | Giant Kingfisher |
| Cape Shoveller | Olive Woodpecker |
| Red-knobbed Coot | Crowned Hornbill |
| Coot | Cape Sugarbird |
| Little Grebe | Malachite Sunbird |
| Grey Heron | Lesser (Southern) Double-Collared Sunbird |
| Black-headed Heron | Greater Double-Collared Sunbird |
| Goliath Heron | Orange-breasted Sunbird |
| Purple Heron | Barn Swallow |
| Great Egret | Greater-striped Swallow |
| Little Egret | House Martin |
| Cattle Egret | Burchell's Coucal |
| Black-Crowned Night Heron | Common Fiscal |
| Greater Flamingo | Southern Boubou |
| Lesser Flamingo | Bokmakierie |
| White Stork | European Roller |
| African Spoonbill | Cape Crow |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| African Sacred Ibis | Pied Crow |
| Glossy Ibis | White-necked Raven |
| Hadedda Ibis | African Pied Wagtail |
| Blue Crane | Cape Wagtail |
| Ostrich | Yellow-throated Longclaw |
| Water Thick-Knee | Sombre Greenbul |
| Three-banded Plover | Cape Bulbul |
| White-Fronted Plover | Cape Robin-Chat |
| Crowned Lapwing | Fork-tailed Drongo |
| Blacksmith Lapwing | Black-headed Oriole |
| Common Whimbrel | African Paradise Flycatcher |
| Common Sandpiper | Common Starling |
| Common Greenshank | Red-winged Starling |
| African Black Oystercatcher | Cape Glossy Starling |
| Black-winged Stilt | Cape White-Eye |
| Helmeted Guineafowl | Green-backed Cameroptera |
| Cape Spurfowl | Speckled Pigeon |
| Red-Necked Spurfowl | Red-eyed Dove |
| Secretarybird | Cape Turtle-Dove |
| Martial Eagle | Laughing Dove |
| African Crowned Eagle | House Sparrow |
| African Fish-Eagle | Cape Sparrow |
| Booted Eagle | Sweet Waxbill |
| Yellow-billed Kite | Pin-tailed Whydah |
| Black-shouldered Kite | Cape Canary |
| Steppe Buzzard | Yellow Canary |

SRI LANKA ENDEMICS BIRDS

5th – 14th November 2016

(Keith Cherry)

Due to a mixture of a lack of enthusiasm and availability only Dave Booth and I from the North Herts Birders, put our names forward to take part in this trip. We decided to go again with Naturetrek, as we had always been pleased with how they organise their trips. Sri Lanka has 33 Endemic birds and we were obviously excited at the prospect of seeing them all plus a lot of other birds that were going to be new to us. There was to be 13 people on the trip which we felt was possibly a couple too many, but we were confident that the number would be managed well.

Trip Report

Day 1: Saturday 5th November.

19:45 Evening departure with Sri Lankan Airways from Heathrow to Colombo.
Arriving late morning.

Day 2: Sunday 6th November.

After an uneventful flight of approximately 10 hours 30 minutes, we met up with our guides Saman Kumara and Indika Jayatissa and all the other members of the trip. We all exchanged our currency and made our way to our transport, which was an air conditioned coach. The other members were namely Jenna Berry, Chris Blair, Richard Brinklow, Peter Edwards, George Kalli, Dave Ogilvie, Len and Maureen Shipley, John Ward, Roger Wilkinson and Duncan Brooks. There was a separate driver and his assistant who proceeded to load our luggage.

The first birds to be put on the list were Purple Sunbird and House Crow at the airport. Shortly after setting off, to everyone's relief, the rain stopped. We were heading for Kitulgala, for a two night stay. En route, through a mixture of residential areas, extensive rice paddies and mixed woodland, birds were soon to be seen including Yellow-billed Babbler, Eastern Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Open-billed Stork, White-throated Kingfisher and Purple Heron. Later on a leg stretch produced, among others, a Black-hooded Oriole, Shikra, Greater Coucal and our first endemic, the Sri Lanka Green Pigeon. A stop at some rice fields and ponds added Indian Pond Heron, Brahminy Kite, Little Cormorant and the endemic Sri Lanka Swallow to our lists. To get to Kitulgala we started to climb up towards the hill country. Other birds that were seen en route included Black-rumped Flameback, White-bellied Drongo, Asian Brown Shrike and another endemic the Yellow-fronted Barbet. The Plantation Hotel holds a very nice location on the banks of the Kelani River and among other things, one of its claims to fame is that the film "The Bridge over the River Kwai" was filmed here. After we checked in and found our rooms we were rewarded as a quick look in the hotel gardens resulted in the sky being crisscrossed by Indian Swiftlets and 8 Asian Openbill flew noisily over our heads. This brought the day to a satisfying close so we returned to the hotel to clean up for dinner and call over.

Day 3 : Monday 7th November.

First thing this morning we went for a walk along the river before visiting an area of forest that bordered Kitulgala Village. A new habitat produced new birds including the common Oriental Magpie Robin, Black Bulbul, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Emerald Dove, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, the endemic Spot-winged Thrush and our first mammals being the Asian Palm and Giant Squirrels. Saman went off to try to locate the Chestnut-backed Owlet which is a sought after endemic. At first it seemed as if he was having trouble locating it and we feared the worst, but after a while Saman called us all forward and eventually we all had good views



Chestnut-backed Owlet CB

as it sat out in the open. The great view of this bird put everyone in good spirits and some more new birds continued to boost everyone's mood. These included Scarlet Minevet, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, White-rumped Munia, Lesser Yellownape, Common Iora and two more endemics in Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot and a flyover by several Layard's Parakeet's. We returned to the hotel to catch our breath but also saw Asian Grey Hornbill and Large-billed Leaf Warbler in the hotel grounds and a Crested Serpent Eagle and Oriental Honey Buzzard broke the skyline. We then got on the bus for a short ride to where we were to cross the Kelani River to search an area of forest on the other bank. We crossed the river by the local canoe that managed to take six at a time.

During the crossing a Stork-billed Kingfisher and Green-billed Coucal were seen by some, depending on if you caught the first or second canoe. We walked along tracks that bordered the village dwellings and birds seen included the stunning Brahminy Kite, Common



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher

Tailorbird, Blue-tailed Bee-eater and Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike. A Malabar Trogon was seen by some as was the endemic Sri Lanka Crested Drongo. A White-tailed Sea Eagle and a Black Eagle had us all scanning the skies and a Ruddy Mongoose was added to our mammal list.

Following our safe return crossing of the river we returned to the hotel for lunch and a siesta during the hottest period of the day. Birders never really rest so several took the opportunity to see anything new. Two Black Eagles flew around the area along with several of the sought after Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. A Green Warbler was

located in one of the trees in the hotel grounds and three Tickell's Blue Flycatcher's gave good photographic opportunities for everyone. A short distance from the hotel is a cable suspension bridge across the river. This was to be our next destination. After a short ride in the coach we arrived at the entrance to the suspended cable walkway. We took it in turns and we all crossed safely. We were going to an area known as Mahakandawa Rain Forest and the main target bird was the endemic Green-billed Coucal, The first bird to be seen was a Black-capped Bulbul which was quickly followed by a Black Bulbul and a Black-headed Oriole. A flock of Ring-necked Parakeets flew noisily overhead and we all had better views of Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrots. Unfortunately the forest trails didn't produce as many birds as hoped, but Gold-fronted Leafbird, Lesser Hill Myna and two more endemics, namely the Orange-billed (Rufous) Babbler and the Sri Lanka Junglefowl, which finally showed itself after we had followed its call from the undergrowth for quite some time. The Green-billed Coucal was seen again, but not by everyone, so it was still on the "must get" list. As we crossed back over the bridge a significant mixed Egret roost was starting to build up which was numbering in the hundreds.

Day 4: Tuesday 8th November.

The following morning we went across the bridge for a pre-breakfast return walk to the Mahakandawa Rain Forest. As we crossed the bridge the huge Egret roost started to stir into life and disperse in their various directions. Only one or two new birds were seen, during the walk namely Black Drongo, White-rumped Munia and Green Imperial Pigeon. Everyone had better views of a perched Layard's Parakeet and a Lesser Yellownape, but more importantly everyone finally had good views of a Green-billed Coucal. It made us work for it but the bird was finally traced and seen.



After breakfast the coach was loaded up and we set off for Nuwara Eliya which meant climbing up through the hill country. We passed through numerous tea plantations with names like Edinburgh and St Clair. The buildings and terraces were echoes of the areas colonial past. A stunning feature of the St Clair area is the waterfalls which are known locally as "The Little Niagra of Sri Lanka". On reaching Nuwara Eliya, which is the capital town of the hill country, we checked into our next hotel the "Heaven Seven". A very pleasant hotel and fortunately the rooms command great views over the surrounding areas.

After settling in to our rooms we all boarded the bus and made our way to Victoria Park in the town. Victoria Park is a public park and was originally established as the research field of the Hakgala Botanical Gardens and not surprisingly was named in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The park holds several sought after bird species and we were keen to locate some. By following the main path we soon started to find some birds including Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Grey Wagtail, Asian Brown Shrike and Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher. A Common Sandpiper along with Indian Pond Heron, Forest Wagtail and White-breasted Waterhen were seen on the small stream that runs through the park. A Kashmir Flycatcher, a stunning winter migrant, was seen by some and a Lesser Cuckoo kept up the excitement.

In another area of the park a Sykes's Warbler made everybody work a bit harder to see it, but the endemic Sri Lankan White-eye was soon on everyone's list. The park is a good place to see Pied Thrush but despite Saman's best efforts, he could locate not them. He did however spot, to everyone's relief, an Indian Pitta, in amongst some fairly dense undergrowth. The area was at best a bit of a rubbish dump, but the Pitta seemed very happy there and we all obtained great views of it. The evening started to draw in so to finish the day we went to Seetha Eliya which is a favourable place to try and see the Sri Lanka Whistling-thrush. The coach pulled up on the roadside, alongside a shop. Saman led us down a track next to the shop to where the river flowed into a channel that fell away very sharply into a waterfall. We stood patiently for quite some time until the light became very poor, so it was decided to return to the hotel to discuss the day events, have dinner and call over.

Day 5: Wednesday 9th November.

Today we travelled to Horton Plains which meant a very early 04:45 meet up. Horton Plains National Park is a protected area in the central highlands of Sri Lanka and is covered in Montane grasslands and cloud forest. At 2,300 meters it is the highest plateau in Sri Lanka. We stopped at some ponds on the approach to the park and it was not long before we were seeing birds including Sri Lanka White-eye, Common Tailorbird, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Dark-fronted Babbler and Cinerous (Great) Tit. Next we added two more endemics to our lists in a very elusive Sri Lanka Bush-warbler which was eventually seen by everyone and a Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon. A short walk along the track resulted in another two endemic birds being seen. A Crimson-backed Woodpecker was noisily calling not far from the forest edge when a pair of them flew out into the open above our heads still calling very loudly. These were soon to be followed by a pair of Dull (Dusky) Blue Flycatcher's who seemed to enjoy making themselves hard to track down, but we all saw them well.

It was time to go on to the park. Pied Bushchats were quite numerous on the journey in as were Sambar Deer. The coach park was virtually full of vehicles of all shapes and sizes but we finally managed to find a place to park. Barn and Hill Swallows zipped around the park buildings and a Plain Prinia was seen flitting between tall Montane grass stems. A Purple Sunbird was seen and created a discussion as to the possibility of it perhaps being a Loten's Sunbird. It was decided correctly that it was a Purple Sunbird. As we entered the park our belongings were searched to make sure that we were not carrying anything that if dropped would perhaps be a hazard to the wildlife, such as plastic products. We started what was going to be quite a long walk towards the forest areas. The only birds seen on the way were several Blue-tailed Bee-eaters. The only new bird to be seen was the endemic Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler which made the walk worthwhile. Thick mist started to roll in so it was decided to leave and call into Victoria Park again for the Pied Thrush and then try again for the Whistling Thrush. Despite our best efforts the Pied Thrush was only seen by a few of the group but the Kashmir Flycatcher was clawed back by others. When we arrived at the Whistling Thrush site, our hearts sank as another coach carrying a group of American birders had got there before us. Knowing how limited the space was we knew that there would not be room for us as well. We were about to leave when Indika heard the bird call. Unbelievably the male bird appeared at street level, so we all got off the bus in double quick time. It stood on a piece of corrugated metal for a few minutes giving everybody better views than any of us could have wished for. The mood going back to the hotel was very upbeat and animated.

Day 6: Thursday 10th November.

A pre-breakfast stroll around the hotel soon produced some new and some familiar birds such as a Blyth's Reed Warbler, Ashy Prinia, Scaly-breasted Munia, Common Tailorbird, Pied Bushchat, Brown Shrike, Purple Sunbird, a definite Loten's Sunbird and several Oriental White-eyes flitted around the flowers in a small garden. After breakfast a perched juvenile Besra caused some excitement as it was an ideal photo opportunity. Fortunately it



Besra

was not interested in going anywhere, so it just sat there while everyone who wanted to took plenty of photographs. We loaded up and were now going to be dropping down to a lower elevation while travelling to Embilipitiya. We stopped at a small bird sanctuary called Surrey Estate. New birds seen here included Small Minivet, Asian Koel, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Brown-capped Babbler, Brown Wood Owl, Orange-headed Thrush and a Pied Thrush was finally seen by those who had previously missed it. This place was certainly worth the visit.



Brown-headed Barbet

We stopped for lunch at the Ella Motel Restaurant. The restaurant garden has a fantastic view over the valley below and the forested hillsides. Several birds were easily seen in the garden including Coppersmith Barbet, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Oriental White-eye, Crimson-backed Flameback, Greenish Warbler, Lesser Hill Myna and Brown-headed Barbet. After a very nice lunch, we set off again for Embilipitiya. We made one or two stops en route at some ponds, lakes and rice fields which allowed us to add new birds to our lists such as Woolly-necked Stork, Intermediate Egret,

Indian Peafowl, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Black-headed Ibis and a perched Malabar Pied

Hornbill thrilled everyone. At a further stop we

saw a large flock of Pheasant-tailed Jacana's, Common Kingfisher, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Indian Cormorant, Little Grebe, Pied Kingfisher and several Whiskered Terns.

A final stop was made at an area of open scrubland, to hopefully see the Sri Lanka Woodshrike. Despite Saman's determined efforts we did not see one but we did see Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Little Green Bee-eater, Indian Robin and numerous juvenile Brahminy Kites going to roost. By the time we reached the very impressive Centauria Hotel for our one night stay it was dark so we made ourselves comfortable in our rooms, had our call over and enjoyed a very nice dinner.

Day 7: Friday 11th November.

This morning we loaded up the coach 05:45 as we would not be returning and made our way to Udawalawa National Park for a Jeep Safari. While travelling there we added Spot-billed Pelican and Black-winged Stilt to our list. We had three jeeps lined up and set off as soon as we could. We were soon seeing new birds from the comfort of our elevated positions on the jeeps. A Blyth's Pipit was soon followed by a Jerdon's Bush Lark, Black winged Kite, Crested Hawk Eagle, Ashy Prinia and Rose-ringed Parakeets. As we moved on more new birds were being seen including the



Blue-tailed Bee-eater

striking Blue-faced Malkoha, Jackobin Cuckoo, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Jungle Prinia, Rosy and Brahminy Starling. A small herd of Indian Elephants brought the birding to a temporary pause as they fed quite close to the jeeps. As they moved on through, several Water Buffalo made their way to join the rest of their herd too wallow in a muddy pool.

We reluctantly moved on and were soon rewarded with views of, among others, Grey-breasted(Plaintive) Cuckoo, Barred Buttonquail, Black-headed Munia, and Grey-breasted Prinia. After a short period of inactivity, things started to liven up again with good views of Spotted Deer. Palm Swifts and a single Alpine Swift flew across the clear blue sky and a Yellow-crowned Woodpecker flew across the front of our jeep. A pair of Orange-breasted Green Pigeons, were nice to see as was another perched Malabar Pied Hornbill. Some Blue-tailed Bee-eaters flew in and perched close to the jeep giving a nice opportunity to photograph them. This brought us to a rest area. While we stretched our legs a Painted Stork flew into sight and over our heads. Saman searched for and finally found an elusive Sri Lanka Woodshrike, so another endemic was ticked off. A White-browed Babbler was seen by and a Grey-headed Fish Eagle was heard calling and then located on a distant tree. The return journey was fairly uneventful with an Indian Roller being the only new bird. From the park we went into the town to have lunch at the Nivarana restaurant. After a very nice lunch we set off to head for Sinharaja Rain Forest and our two night stay at the Blue Magpie Lodge. En route we saw a colony of Black- Crowned Night Herons as we travelled through a town and nearer to Sinharaja we were fortunate to see the endemic Crimson-fronted Barbet. After unloading our luggage and finding our rooms we went for an evening walk which unfortunately did not produce any new birds. We then proceeded to settle in after a long but rewarding day.

Day 8: Saturday 12th November.

Sinharaja Rain Forest is of International importance and has been designated a Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

This morning two land rover jeeps turned up and thankfully would take us up the some of the steeper tracks. But first we all had to go to the reserve entrance and get signed in and two official Forest Guides would be accompanying us while in the forest. After a very bumpy ride in the jeeps, we eventually got out and had to walk some of the trails. Small and Scarlet (Orange) Minivets were soon seen and were quickly followed by a Lesser Yellownappe. The endemic Sri Lanka Drongo was next to been seen and gave the people who had previously missed it the chance to eagerly get it back.



White-bellied Drongo

Generally the forest seemed quiet as can sometimes be the case so we had to be patient and hope the birds would make themselves known as the sun started to rise. Eventually we managed to see some endemic target birds, namely White-faced Starling, Red-faced Malkoha, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie and a pair of

Malabar Trogons was seen and once again the people who had previously missed them were relieved to see them now. We had our picnic lunch while we were out and we spent most of the time hearing, but not seeing, the endemic Sri Lanka Myna and it was to be the first endemic to be missed. Only a few more birds of note were recorded, namely the endemic Ashy-headed Laughing thrush and a pair of Sri Lanka Frogmouth were located and seen at their usual roost. A very skulking endemic, the Sri Lanka Scaly Thrush was eventually seen by most of the group. We returned to the Lodge at about 15:30 and were told the disappointing news that the Serendib Scops Owl had moved from its usual roost and moved to a new one. Unfortunately the guides decided that the new location was too unsafe and would not allow us to try for it. Needless to say, the whole group were extremely disappointed, as this was the second endemic that we would miss. It started to rain heavily so that brought the day to an unsatisfactory end so it was a chance to relax and recharge.. Call over and dinner duly followed.

Day 9: Sunday 13th November.

An 05:00 start this morning to a house in the forest that is a reliable place and stake out to see the endemic Sri Lanka Spurfowl. After about half an hour there started to be some activity. A couple of female Sri Lanka Junglefowl wandered through the area soon to be followed by a Spot-winged Thrush. An Indian Blue Robin was the next bird to put in an appearance and not before time and to our collective relief a pair of Spurfowl blessed us with their presence. It was time to leave and we made our way by jeep to another area where, after quite a while, Saman located the endemic Legge's Flowerpecker. We all rushed over to where Saman was and everyone managed to see the bird before it decided to fly off. The last birds to be seen were a few Crested Treeswifts as they circled above our heads and a Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker...It was time to reluctantly leave Sinharaja so we returned to the lodge, loaded the coach and set off. One or two birds were seen en route, which included Purple Heron, Asian Open-billed Stork and Ashy Woodswallow. Our last night in Sri Lanka was to be spent in the Gateway Hotel, which is very close to the Airport and is a very nice hotel. The hotel gardens are like a small nature reserve. With mature trees, ponds, swampy areas and a small stream running through it, is why it is well known as a good place to see birds. An early evening walk produced a good list of birds, but the only new bird was a Collared Scops Owl.



Sri Lankan Spurfowl

Day 10: Monday 14th November.

We had an early morning walk around the gardens which again produced another good list, but the only new bird was a Yellow Bittern that was only seen by a couple of people. We loaded up the coach for the last time and made our way to the airport. After a short drive we said our goodbyes to Saman, Indika and the others, collected our bags and proceeded to check in and prepare for our flight back home

List (177 Species)

| | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Sri Lanka Spurfowl | Crested Treeswift | Black Bulbul |
| Sri Lanka Junglefowl | Indian Swiftlet | Barn Swallow |
| Indian Peafowl | Brown-backed Needletail | Hill Swallow |
| Little Grebe | Asian Palm Swift | Sri Lanka Swallow |
| Painted Stork | Alpine Swift | Green Warbler |
| Asian Openbill Stork | Little (House) Swift | Greenish Warbler |
| Woolly-necked Stork | Malabar Trogon | Large-billed Leaf Warbler |
| Black-headed Ibis | Indian Roller | Blythe's Reed Warbler |
| Yellow Bittern | Stork-billed Kingfisher | Sykes's Warbler |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | White-throated Kingfisher | Sri Lanka Bush Warbler |
| Indian Pond Heron | Common Kingfisher | Zitting Cisticola |
| Eastern Cattle Egret | Pied Kingfisher | Grey-breasted Prinia |
| Grey Heron | Green Bee-eater | Jungle Prinia |
| Purple Heron | Blue-tailed Bee-eater | Ashy Prinia |
| Great Egret | Chestnut-headed Bee-eater | Plain Prinia |
| Intermediate Egret | Eurasian Hoopoe | Common Tailorbird |
| Little Egret | Malabar Pied Hornbill | Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler |
| Spot-billed Pelican | Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill | Tawny-bellied Babbler |
| Little Cormorant | Brown-headed Barbet | Dark-fronted Babbler |
| Indian Cormorant | Yellow-fronted Barbet | Brown-capped Babbler |
| Oriental Darter | Crimson-fronted Barbet | Orange-billed Babbler |
| Black-winged Kite | Coppersmith Barbet | Yellow-billed Babbler |
| Crested Honey Buzzard | Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker | Oriental White-Eye |
| Crested Serpent Eagle | Yellow-crowned Woodpecker | Sri Lanka White-Eye |
| Changeable Hawk Eagle | Lesser Yellownappe | Velvet-fronted Nuthatch |
| Black Eagle | Black-rumped Flameback | Sri Lanka Hill Myna |
| Shikra | Crimson-backed Flameback | Southern Hill Myna |
| Besra | Common Kestrel | Common Myna |
| Brahminy Kite | Plum-headed Parakeet | Brahminy Starling |
| White-bellied Sea Eagle | Layard's Parakeet | White-faced Starling |
| Grey-headed Fish Eagle | Rose-ringed Parakeet | Rosy Starling |
| White-breasted Waterhen | Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot | Pied Thrush |
| Barred Buttonquail | Indian Pitta | Orange-headed Thrush |
| Black-winged Stilt | Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike | Spot-winged Thrush |
| Yellow-wattled Lapwing | Sri Lanka Woodshrike | Sri Lanka Scaly Thrush |
| Red-wattled Lapwing | Ashy Woodswallow | Oriental Magpie Robin |
| Pheasant-tailed Jacana | Common Iora | Asian Brown Flycatcher |
| Common Sandpiper | Marshall's Iora | Brown-breasted Flycatcher |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Gull-billed Tern | Black-headed Cuckooshrike | Tickell's Blue Flycatcher |
| Common Tern | Small Minivet | Dull-Blue Flycatcher |
| Whiskered Tern | Scarlet (Orange) Minivet | Indian Blue Robin |
| Common Pigeon | Brown Shrike | Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush |
| Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon | Black-hooded Oriole | Kashmir Flycatcher |
| Spotted Dove | White-bellied Drongo | Pied Bush Chat |
| Emerald Dove | Sri Lanka Crested Drongo | Golden-fronted Leafbird |
| Orange-breasted Green Pigeon | White-browed Fantail | Legge's Flowerpecker |
| Sri Lanka Green Pigeon | Black-naped Monarch | Pale-billed Flowerpecker |
| Green Imperial Pigeon | Asian Paradise Flycatcher | Purple-rumped Sunbird |
| Green-billed Coucal | Sri Lanka Blue Magpie | Purple Sunbird |
| Greater Coucal | House Crow | Loten's Sunbird |
| Red-faced Malkoa | Indian Jungle Crow | House Sparrow |
| Blue-faced Malkoa | Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher | White-rumped Munia |
| Asian Koel | Great (Cinereous) Tit | Scaly-breasted Munia |
| Grey-bellied (Plaintive)Cuckoo | Jerdon's Bush Lark | Black-throated Munia |
| Lesser Cuckoo | Black-capped Bulbul | Black-headed Munia |
| Collared Scops Owl | Red-vented Bulbul | Forest Wagtail |
| Brown Wood Owl | Yellow-eared Bulbul | Grey Wagtail |
| Chestnut-backed Owlet | White-browed Bulbul | Paddyfield Pipit |
| Sri Lankan Frogmouth | Yellow-browed Bulbul | Blyth's Pipit |



Brown-headed Barbet



Yellow-fronted Barbet