

EDITORIAL

(Andrew Bray)

We start our magazine with an article about the AOS with the runner up prize in the Sanctuary Awards for environmental work. We then include articles about ringing including on the rock of Gibraltar which has become an annual exercise with the Navy and Air Force. I must thank the authors for their photographs as well as Kevin Campbell, Mark Easterbrook and Edward Bevan for their input as well. You will no doubt notice that the photograph element is about sea birds. If you would like to see your photographs taking this part of the magazine please submit them to the editor (a theme is always appreciated). Without photographs the magazine would be very boring.

We travel around the world starting in Australia and eventually ending up in Canada with another AOS trip via India, Turkey and Spain (next year the AOS is visiting Finland). There are a couple of articles from UK and I would ask the organisers of any trips in the UK to submit an article. Lastly, there is an article from Tice's Meadow as so many members are ex Army and the Society gets involved in different ways. Despite only a few articles the magazine is rather large.

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Barrow's Goldeneye, Iceland
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SANCTUARY

(Andrew Bray)

The annual Sanctuary Awards, now in its 28th year, showcases remarkable conservation and environmental initiatives across Ministry of Defence (MoD)-owned land, known as the Defence Estate. The Sanctuary Awards 2018 were held at the Ministry of Defence in central London on Tuesday 20th November 2018.



From left to right: Andrew Bray (AOS), Dr Jim Reynolds (University of Birmingham & AOS), Dr John Hughes (AOS), Colin Wearn (RAFOS), Roger Dickey (AOS) and the Rt Hon Tobias Elwood MP (Minister for Defence People & Veterans) at the Sanctuary Awards 2018.

The AOS was 1st Runner Up in the Environmental Project Award in recognition of the AOS Ascension Seabird Conservation Project which started when members visiting the island *en route* to the Falklands reported massive seabird declines in many species. The AOS mounted its first field expedition in 1990 with soldier-naturalists beginning what became a long-term monitoring programme. Its enduring goal was the collection of data to investigate significant pressures on the seabird populations of the island.

The enthusiasm of 55 volunteers from all services, who contributed to 23 expeditions between 1990 and 2018 is remarkable. Heat, poor facilities and rough terrain make conditions on Ascension arduous and limited time requires teams to start work immediately on landing. The AOS Ascension project has been largely self-funded and conducted in all cases by volunteers who have often given up their leave and made personal financial contributions. MoD support to conservation work is included in 15 papers published in international scientific journals. These have considerably enhanced the MoD's reputation in the eyes of the scientific and conservation communities.

JOINT SERVICE RINGING – GIBRALTAR

(Carl Powell)

Ringing expeditions to Gibraltar took place over the periods 25 September – 20 October 2013, 29 September – 14 October 2015 and 26 September – 10 October 2017.

The objective of the exercises was to trap, ring, collect biometric data and release un-harmed as many migrant birds as feasible on one of the main European migration routes. Each bird is aged, measured and weighed. It is also assessed for moult, fat and muscle condition. A series



The crew

of 18m mist nets were deployed in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, an area not covered by ringing activities rather than the permanent ringing site at Jew's Gate at the southern end of Gibraltar. British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) rings were supplied by the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) and all data collected was downloaded to the BTO via their Integrated Population Management Recorder (IPMR) using the facilities at Jew's Gate. This was done daily at the end of activities which, after a strenuous day ringing up steep rocky slopes, could prove a challenge of its own!

The expeditions were mainly self-financing with participants making individual travel arrangements and covering accommodation and messing charges. However, generous grants from both the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society (RNBWS) and the Royal Airforce Ornithological Society (RAFOS) help to defray the costs of food for the first two expeditions and vehicle hire for the third. In 2013 we were able to borrow a VW pickup from HQBF Gib and in 2015 a car. Driving a large pickup through the narrow one-way system had moments but no harm was done! Accommodation on a self-catering basis was at Bruce's Farm within the Upper Rock Nature Reserve and home to GONHS. As you might expect there is no "farm" these days but the building offers eight bedrooms, two bathrooms and communal sitting room, dining room and kitchen. A larger room offers dining/conference opportunities and the large patio overlooks the bay. Somewhat tired, the accommodation is adequate and

convenient.

Our main points of contact and liaison on Gibraltar were Cdr. Stewart Lawrence RN, SO1 J4 within HQBF Gib (RNBWS) and Charlie Perez, the Head of Gibraltar Bird Observatory. Always cooperative and helpful, Charlie



Red-necked Nightjar

takes a great interest in our progress and welcomes the extra input we provide to the recording of the birdlife of Gibraltar. Stewart came to visit the ringing site and we also crossed paths on a bird watching outing to Europa Point, the southernmost tip of Gibraltar.

PARTICIPANTS

The main participants were:

Lt. Cdr. Julia K Springett RNBWS
Gp. Capt. Robin Springett RAFOS
Lt Col. Roger Dickey AOS
Maj. Carl Powell AOS
Mrs. Ann Powell AOS (non ringer)
CPO Mark Cutts RNBWS

Several others attended for shorter periods ranging from day visits to short stays including Maj John Hughes (AOS), Chief Tec John Wells (RAFOS) with his wife Sue and WO Steve Copsey (RNBWS). Sue very kindly volunteered to spend some time with us at the ringing site to carry out the duties of “scribe”, noting all the information ringers gathered onto pre-printed sheets.

Daily routine followed the same pattern on each day ringing was possible although over the three expeditions very few days were lost. Nets were opened before daybreak and closed only when bird movement ceased usually mid-afternoon. After closing the nets and in order



Short-tailed Snake Eagle

to record data it was necessary to drive around the extensive one-way system to Jews' Gate to take our turn on the computer. There were some long days! There were always visiting ringers based at Jews gate who also need to use the computer to input their own data. The ringing center usually has a visiting Ringer-in-charge who, on each of our expeditions, was AOS member Maj Ray Marsh! During the first visit in 2013 we established a successful net layout and method of opening and closing and this was continued during the subsequent two visits. In addition to normal mist netting it

was sometimes possible to capture Nightjars as they rested on the tarmac road on the way to the ringing site. They would be caught in the vehicle headlights whilst a nominated stalker tried to sneak up in the dark. Although several were seen the capture rate was low but it was fun trying! Two nets were also deployed in the gardens of Bruce's Farm but with only limited success. Domestic duties were divided and shared with Ann and Julia doing the vast majority of food preparation for the evening meals. Roger and Mark did most of the washing up. Carl did most of the laundry as well as being the number cruncher.

The weather was usually kind with very few days lost. Ideal ringing conditions are overcast with no wind but these ideals are rarely met and Gibraltar is no exception. However, the

strong easterly winds bring the Levanter when a cloud layer forms over the top of the rock which can sometimes produce a fall of migrants and, a decided drop in temperature!

As can be seen from the list of birds processed Blackcap was by far the most abundant migrant with our being a mere fraction of the numbers migrating south to Africa each autumn. Amongst more familiar migrants were Robins, Blackbirds, Garden Warblers and Pied Flycatchers as well as Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler. Good numbers of Sardinian Warblers, Iberian Chiffchaff and Blue Tit were also caught but surely not all of these were local birds that would remain in situ. Apart from the two species of Nightjar some other notable birds were a Hoopoe, Blue Rock Thrush, a ring Ouzel in stunning *alpsetris* plumage and small numbers of both Western Orphean and Bonelli's Warblers. The catching rate over the three expeditions was fairly even except for 2017 when a much larger number of Blackcaps came through.

As well as ringing there was also the opportunity to observe the passage of migrant raptors and other larger species. Short toed Snake Eagles, Booted Eagles and Red and Black Kites are almost common place overhead. In 2017 a pair of Ravens were seen daily having taken up residence above Bruce's Farm.



Booted Eagle

Gibraltar is famed for the resident Barbary macaques. Many live on the upper rock but they were never a problem to us. They avoided the open nets despite climbing the net poles on occasion! Our closest encounter came when a lone male, a large individual, raided Julia's rucksack and stole an apple. This he ate in our company before leaving with not even a thank you! The only other mammal encountered were feral cats which did attack captured birds at least twice. We reported the problem to the local authorities who dealt with it quickly and efficiently.

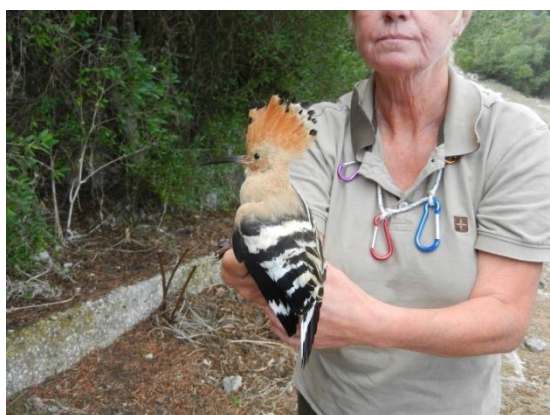
Several species of butterfly were also noted the most delightful of which was the Two tailed Pasha.

The three expeditions were considered to be very successful with an overall total of 3343 birds processed, an important addition to the records of European bird migration through Gibraltar.

Date	2013	2015	2017
Sparrowhawk	2	1	6
Collared Dove			2
Scops Owl			2
Nightjar	6		1

Date	2013	2015	2017
Red-necked Nightjar	3		4
Hoopoe	1		
Wryneck			1
Tawny Pipit	1		
Tree Pipit			1
Robin	170	127	42
Nightingale	4	1	2
Common Redstart	23	18	21
Black Redstart	3		
Northern Wheatear	2		
Stonechat	2		
Song Thrush	29		2
Blackbird	52	40	22
Ring Ouzel			1
Blue Rock Thrush		1	
Garden Warbler	55	13	51
Blackcap	488	387	1025
Whitethroat	7	4	2
Western Orphean Warbler	3		3
Sardinian Warbler	74	62	41
Subalpine Warbler	3		6
Dartford Warbler	1	2	
Grasshopper Warbler	2	1	
Reed Warbler	1	2	6
Melodious Warbler		1	
Willow Warbler	17	13	19
Western Bonelli's Warbler	2		1
Chiffchaff	22	30	10
Iberian Chiffchaff	39	1	15
Wren	10	6	4
Spotted Flycatcher	2	3	2
Pied Flycatcher	62	55	43
Great Tit	3	1	
Blue Tit	30	19	16
Short toed Treecreeper		1	
Chaffinch	5	6	

Date	2013	2015	2017
Greenfinch	11	10	7
Ortolan Bunting	1		
Total	1136	805	1358
Re-traps/controls			
Redstart			1
Blackbird		9	7
Garden Warbler			1
Blackcap		4	10
Sardinian Warbler		4	1
Willow Warbler			1
Pied Flycatcher			1
Blue Tit		3	2
Total		20	24



Hoopoe



Pied Flycatcher

RINGING WITHIN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

(Roger Dickey)

Come out of Tromsø Airport, drive for two and a half hours southeast into the forested Dividalen valley and then take a short track to a typical Norwegian small wooden shack. Dressed already for ringing and after a light meal, it's out to open all the nets. The light is enough now in mid-summer to see what we're doing but dawn is only an hour away. The ringing station is a small room with attached kitchen and bunk room; the freshly dug toilet is

only a short walk away; the showers or bath is wherever you feel comfortable amongst the rocks in the melted snow-water stream, a stone throw's away and where all our drinking and cooking water comes from. This is Dividalen Ringing Station at the very start of the migration period in mid-August, surrounded by a huge expanse of evergreen forest on the slopes of the mountains, deciduous trees in the valley floor that give way to small open meadows and a vast understorey of wild raspberries. And there are nets everywhere including arboreal nets that are lifted by rope and pulley to ensure that from treetop to forest floor, all the flight lines are covered.



Tengmalm's Owl

Three of the four participants are AOS members although this visit is through Swaledale Ringing Group (Tony Crease, Sophie Rainer and Leanne Stollery), with our hosts being Karl-Birger Strann, a renown Norwegian ornithologist and ringer, and his wife Vigdis. The latter live beside the fjord an hour from Tromsø and spend all the migration period in Dividalen, a key bottleneck in the Arctic Circle, to monitor birds moving between Norway,

Sweden, Finland and ultimately, Russia. The standard of ringing in Norway is high. I failed to spot margins for error! Used to large flocks of several hundred birds a day, emphasis is on both speed and accuracy with birds processed with the minimum of delay, ringers speaking directly to the recorder (K-B or Vigdis) who types data directly into the database. The phrase 'I'm waiting' is one that I am more used to delivering rather than being the recipient. And what a curious assortment of ring sizes with seemingly no alphabetical logic!

Net rounds included lowering the shelves and extracting birds before moving to the next shelf and finally reopening the net by hauling on the securing ropes through the pulleys. All well and good until the rope comes off the pulley and jams 30 feet up. With 24 hour a day ringing and ringing teams of only two, it takes very little time to get into a rhythm of extraction, processing, eating, and sleeping, although the latter was frequently interrupted



Siberian Jay

with the capture of 'something special', usually owls but occasionally a large

flush of birds. As the only rookie to the area, it was marvellous to see large numbers of Brambling, Redpoll and Willow Warblers as well as thrushes. Bluethroats were in enough

numbers, sexes, and ages to make good comparisons of plumage – a personal objective for the trip. Tape lures play an important part in the process and choosing the correct tape makes a significant difference to the types and numbers of birds brought in. Owls react very well. A little early in the season, it was not expected to catch many owls but Tengmalm's, Hawk particularly, and Pigmy allowed all the team to get to grips with ageing if, admittedly, after some interesting discussion in the early hours.

So altogether it was a fabulous experience in a wonderful setting. It was a reminder that within ringing, there are many different manners and styles and procedures that all lead to the achievement of a common objective. Certainly, great company throughout the week and a thanks to Swaledale RG for allowing me to join them. Abject disappointment that I came away without a pair of Vigdis-knitted Norwegian socks, but there's always next year.



Hawk Owl

Processed and Ringed Bird List

Redpoll	Sparrowhawk	Garden Warbler
Willow Warbler	Redpoll <i>rostrata</i>	Treecreeper
Willow Tit	Hawk Owl	Tengmalm's Owl
Spotted Flycatcher	Bullfinch	Waxwing
Redstart	Chiffchaff	Siberian Jay
Bluethroat	Reed Bunting	Three-toed Woodpecker
Dunnock	Song Thrush	Wren
Brambling	Fieldfare	Sedge Warbler
Great Tit	Tree Pipit	Robin
Pied Flycatcher	Yellow Wagtail	Pigmy Owl
Redwing	Chaffinch	Mistle Thrush

SEA BIRDS

(Carl Powell)



Arctic Tern



Yellow-legged Gull



Black-headed Gull



Glaucous Gull



Common Gull



Icelandic Gull



Lesser Black Backed Gull



Herring Gull



Mediterranean Gull



Fulmar



Gannet



Kittiwake

AUSTRALIA 2017

(Richard Seargent)

When I became a full-time reservist, and received my regular gratuity in 2016 my wife and I decided, instead of ploughing it into a mortgage or buying a new car, that we'd use it to holiday in countries (preferably outside Europe) that we hadn't been to before. World travel was on the agenda and since retiring as a regular we have visited Canada, the US, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Antigua, Australia and, most recently, Indonesia. I now find myself agreeing to holidays mainly on the proviso that I must buy a new field guide.

My daughter left for a gap year or two in Australia at the beginning of January 2017 and we took the opportunity to visit her in October of that year for three weeks although sadly mine was shortened to two weeks due to compassionate reasons at home. During our time in country we managed to visit most of the places that were on our 'must see' list and, although this was a family holiday, I was up early most mornings to get a couple of hours birding in before everyone else rose. By the end of the trip I had seen 122 species, most of which were lifers. Had I remained with my family for the final week I would most certainly have picked up many other species in the Daintree National Park and the Barrier Reef; surely a reason to go back.

Below is a brief, around Australia, list of where we went and what I saw taken directly from my notebook. It is not a site guide but should give a flavour of what birds can be seen when on a non-birding holiday. A systematic list is at the end and a couple of species remain unidentified due to brief glimpses.

As a child and into my early twenties in Germany I had kept Australian Finches as a hobby. This family was high on the list of 'must sees' but by the end I only managed three species and my main target bird. Heck's Long-tailed Finch remained unseen. In addition, surprisingly, I did not see one Budgerigar, at the time of year we were there birds were sat on eggs in holes in trees and are difficult to see; had I been four weeks later I would have witnessed massive flocks, particularly around the Red Centre.



Masked Lapwing



New Holland Honeyeater

Sydney (New South Wales) - Darling Harbour, the City, Manly, Bondi, the Harbour and Botanical Gardens

Sydney is rich in avifauna. It's vicinity to the sea, the green spaces and its relatively small size enables birding in short spurts and public transport, whether ferry, bus or train is easily accessible. I found the walk around the peninsula from Manly Beach very productive even

when doing so on day one when still jet-lagged and it was here that I found my first New Holland Honeyeater, one of many from this family I was to see during the trip. The 3km walk to Bondi Beach from Coogee is worth the effort and I managed to see a large feeding frenzy off shore containing mainly Short-tailed Shearwaters, White-bellied Storm Petrels and the omni-present Silver Gull. Passerines were everywhere and it was here where a couple of species remained unidentified. Look out for the colloquially named ‘Majestic Bin Chicken’, the Australian White Ibis, which are found everywhere in Sydney mostly near human rubbish. It is certainly worth checking out the many parks, especially the Botanical Gardens, the latter also producing great views of the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House.

Uluru and the Red Centre (Northern Territory)



Mistletoebird

A top destination with Uluru (formerly Ayer’s Rock) on my list of places we need to visit and it did not disappoint. Add to this the equally stunning rocks at Kata Tjuta you’d miss a trick if you didn’t stop off here for a couple of nights. We visited Kata Tjuta on our first night for the sunset then walked around Uluru the following morning at sunset. My target bird was Zebra Finch, a bird I used to keep as a kid and I managed to find one family party.

Spinifex Pigeon is another bird to see here and look out for White-plumed Honeyeater around the hotels. The

walk around Uluru is 12km and you get the best of the outback including ‘Dreamline stories’ and aboriginal rock art.

Darwin and Kakadu National Park (Northern Territory)

Tell any Australian that you are going to Darwin and they will invariably say ‘why?’ I loved Darwin, it bills itself as the gateway to be Kakaduo National Park (although it’s a 5 hour drive) and you don’t have to travel far to see great birds. If you visit be prepared to be very hot and sticky so an early start is advisable. Top places to find birds are the Esplanade and



Red-collared Lorikeet



White-bellied Sea Eagle

the Darwin Military Museum. I found most of my birds in the former and my target bird, Rainbow Pitta, near the military museum. Other notable species included Double-barred Finch and Chestnut-breasted Munia, bird I also used to keep as a teenager. Look out for Rainbow Pitta around the tracks around the East Point Mangrove Board and Forest Walks. I found one quickly as it bounced over the track but sadly had issues photographing the bird. I visited Casuarina Coastal Reserve for finches, connected with the two species but bagged a few other birds I missed for the remainder of the trip.

Kakadu was a dream, waders and waterbirds abound and a trip on the Yellow River Billabong is a must; you'll see the biggest Saltwater Crocodiles Australia offers and I would have spent the week here if I'd had the chance. We headed north of the national park to look at the Cahills Crossing Point between Arnhemland and Kakadu. During our visit, we saw several very large Saltwater Crocodiles waiting for Barramundi and the odd fisherman unluckily enough to fall into the river; indeed, the week before one local aborigine was eaten having fallen in crossing over. On the drive down and back from Kakadu it is worth checking the many truck pit-stops on the route; invariably they are well manicured and hold several species of the cockatoo family.



Saltwater Crocodile

Cairns, the Atherton Tablelands and Port Douglas (Queensland)

Another of my must-see areas to visit was the Atherton Tablelands although a new one on me. The Tablelands is a high plateau, rich in agriculture above the rainforest outside Cairns. It is very colonial with clapperboard houses, quaint villages and hard wood forests. I was pleased to see Sarus Crain here and, had we spent a bit more time here, should have seen



Rainbow Pitta

Duck-billed Platypus outside Yungaburra. We stayed in Port Douglas and I only spent a night here before being called home on Compassionate Leave. Had I stayed I had been given a great place to see Cassowary and Noisy Pitta in the Daintree National Park and would have certainly added many species to my list. On the only morning I did get out before flying home I was on sensory overload as I walked off track in the rain forest looking for the illusive Pitta.

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Birds of Australia: A Photographic Guide (Iain Campbell).
Field Guide to the Birds of Australia (Helm Field Guides).
Finding Australian Birds: A Field Guide to Australian Birding Locations (Tim Dolby).

SYSTEMATIC LIST

	Species	Sydney	The Red Centre	Darwin and Kakadu	Cairns, Port Douglas and the Atherton Tablelands
1	Australasian Grebe			X	
2	Short-tailed Shearwater	X			
3	White-bellied Storm Petrel	X			
4	Australian Pelican	X			X
5	Little Black Cormorant	X			
6	Pied Cormorant	X			
7	Black-faced Cormorant			X	X
8	Little Pied Cormorant			X	
9	Australasian Darter			X	X
10	Great-billed Heron			X	X
11	Great Egret			X	X
12	Pied Heron			X	
13	Intermediate Egret			X	X
14	White-faced Heron			X	
15	Cattle Egret			X	
16	Rufous (Nankeen) Night Heron			X	
17	Black-necked Stork	X		X	
18	Australian White Ibis	X		X	
19	Straw-necked Ibis				X
20	Glossy Ibis			X	
21	Royal Spoonbill			X	
22	Magpie Goose			X	X
23	Plumed Whistling Duck			X	
24	Radjah Shelduck			X	X
25	Green Pygmy Goose			X	
26	Black-breasted Kite		X	X	
27	Australian Kite		X		
28	Black Kite		X		
29	Whistling Kite			X	X
30	Brahminy Kite			X	
31	White-bellied Sea Eagle			X	
32	Australian Kestrel	X	X		
33	Grey Goshawk				X
34	Wedge-tailed Eagle				X
35	Australian Brush Turkey	X			X
36	Orange-footed Scrubfowl			X	X
37	Sarus Crane				X
38	Brolga			X	X
39	Purple Swamphen			X	
40	Dusky Moorhen	X			
41	Comb-crested Jacana			X	
42	White-headed Stilt			X	

	Species	Sydney	The Red Centre	Darwin and Kakadu	Cairns, Port Douglas and the Atherton Tablelands
43	Bush Thick-knee			X	
44	Beach Thick-knee			X	
45	Australian Pratincole			X	
46	Masked Lapwing	X		X	X
47	Red-capped Plover			X	
48	Little Curlew				X
49	Eurasian Curlew				X
50	Far Eastern Curlew			X	X
51	Silver Gull	X		X	X
52	Whiskered Tern			X	
53	White-headed Pigeon				X
54	Spotted Dove	X	X		
55	Crested Pigeon		X		
56	Spinifex Pigeon		X		
57	Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon			X	
58	Diamond Dove			X	X
59	Torresian Imperial Pigeon			X	X
60	Red-tailed Black Cockatoo			X	
61	Galah		X		
62	Little Corella			X	
63	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	X		X	X
64	Rainbow Lorikeet	X			X
65	Red-collared Lorikeet			X	
66	Eastern Rosella	X			
67	Australian King Parrot				X
68	Long-tailed Nightjar			X	
69	Australian Swiftlet				X
70	White-throated Needletail				X
71	Blue-winged Kookaburra				X
72	Laughing Kookaburra			X	X
73	Forest Kingfisher			X	
74	Red-backed Kingfisher		X		
75	Azure Kingfisher			X	
76	Rainbow Bee-eater			X	
77	Rainbow Pitta			X	
78	Welcome Swallow	X	X		
79	Fairy Martin	X	X		
80	Tree Martin				X
81	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike			X	
82	Rufous Fantail			X	
83	Willie-wagtail	X	X		X
84	Common shining Flycatcher			X	
85	Grey-crowned Babbler			X	
86	Rufous Whistler			X	

	Species	Sydney	The Red Centre	Darwin and Kakadu	Cairns, Port Douglas and the Atherton Tablelands
87	Lemon-bellied Flyrobin				X
88	Olive-backed Sunbird				X
89	Mistletoebird		X		
90	Yellow-throated Honeyeater		X		
91	Bell Miner				X
92	Noisy Miner	X			
93	Black-eared Miner			X	X
94	Yellow-throated Miner		X		
95	Little Wattlebird				
96	White-plumed Honeyeater		X		
97	Red Wattlebird	X			
98	Rufous-banded Honeyeater			X	
99	Brown Honeyeater			X	
100	New Holland Honeyeater	X			
101	White-cheeked Honeyeater	X			
102	White-throated Honeyeater			X	
103	Blue-faced Honeyeater			X	X
104	Helmeted Friarbird			X	
105	Noisy Friarbird				X
106	Australasian Figbird			X	X
107	Spangled Drongo			X	
108	Magpie-lark			X	X
109	White-breasted Woodswallow				X
110	Black-faced Woodswallow		X		
111	Pied Butcherbird		X		
112	Australian Magpie	X			
113	Pied Currawong	X			
114	Torresian Crow		X		X
115	Australian Raven	X		X	
116	Common Starling	X			
117	Common Myna	X			X
118	House Sparrow	X			X
119	Crimson Finch			X	
120	Australian Zebra Finch		X		
121	Double-barred Finch			X	
122	Chestnut-breasted Munia			X	

TOWN AND COUNTRY IN NEW SOUTH WALES

(Nicholas Beswick)

Much had changed since our last trip Down Under. Our daughter, Laura, had moved from Sydney's Northern Beaches to Artarmon, an urban district much closer to the city centre. Up country, our friend, Sue, had moved from her 59 acres of bush and rough grazing – her personal nature reserve complete with the deadly Black and Brown Snakes – to a small property in the fishing town of Harrington on the mouth of the Manning River. Two very different locations and what birds were to be found? An extremely useful on line resource is Birdline New South Wales which links to Eremaea eBird lists (equivalent to BirdTrack); there is open access to these lists with maps to show their location, though one has to remember that New South Wales is half as large again as France and those sought-after birds might as well be on another planet. Xeno-canto is an invaluable library of sound recordings against which to match unfamiliar sounds, given an idea as to the bird responsible.

Our extended holiday started with two weeks in Sydney. Our jet lag on arrival was compounded by unfamiliar nocturnal screeches followed by the Kookaburras' manic laughter at very first light. Then it was over to the Rainbow Lorikeets and the Noisy Miners that lived up to their name to ensure we didn't sleep in. An early morning walk was called for and I soon found a circuit to take in the local park that included wooded gullies. I met a man with a camera who showed me the pictures he had taken in the park of a Pacific Baza, a spectacular medium-sized raptor, with a curious pointed crest on the back of its head. He had also seen Tawny Frogmouths, distant relatives of nightjars, that accounted for some of the strange night-time sounds. I doubted that I would ever see the Pacific Baza as it seemed a very unlikely urban resident but I was wrong as it obliged by appearing in a gum tree in the park a few days later. Two other newly arrived migrants were more easily heard than seen: the Pacific Koel that yells its name "ko-el" endlessly and the impressive Channel-billed



Rainbow Lorikeet

Cuckoo, when seen invariably being chased by a gang of Noisy Miners which take exception to just about everything in their patch.

On our first day Laura took us for a walk through the park at Artarmon to Flat Rock Creek where a stream plunged through a spectacular wooded gully to join one of Sydney harbour's many small inlets. On this and subsequent walks I found an impressive range of birds for an inner city location, including the impressive King-parrot, the delightful

tiny Spotted Pardalote, the tuneful Golden Whistler and even a Brown Goshawk cruising over pursued by a Pied Currawong that was nesting in the woods. A local told me that he had seen

a Superb Lyrebird, my bogey bird from previous trips, but needless to say I was not so lucky. I was horrified to learn that this designated nature reserve was under threat from a massive road project in planning.

Greater Sydney covers a huge area, including several good birding areas though most entail a car journey. Also beware pay and display car parking which can be eye-wateringly expensive. The Royal Botanic Gardens, round the corner from the Opera House, is a must for visitors to the city with just a couple of hours to spare. Expect close encounters with the Australian White Ibis, aka Bin Chicken, which will steal your lunch given half a chance. These opportunists have adapted to the urban environment all too well and are a menace! The ponds in the Gardens hold common waterfowl including a possibility of the elusive Buff-banded Rail while the trees might harbour Powerful Owl or Tawny Frogmouth. We have seen all on past visits but, though they were absent this year; a gem of a Shining Bronze-cuckoo passing through was ample compensation.

Centennial Park, a couple of miles south east, can be reached by bus or metro from the city centre but there is free parking in the park itself. Half as large again as Hyde Park, its lakes are home to a good range of water birds, including the iconic Black Swan. On my first visit, the star birds were a couple of Pink-eared Duck whose massive bills put the Shoveler's to shame and that Buff-banded Rail that obliged by foraging on bare ground before slipping into the lakeside vegetation. On the day we were due to come home we did not have to be at the airport until lunchtime and had an excellent brunch at the park's café. The rangers' office next to the café is a good source of information on the park's special nocturnal residents that I had been unable to find for myself earlier. Only a short walk away under the canopy of a huge fig tree was the resident Powerful Owls with their fledged but still fluffy offspring. These birds are Australia's largest owls and live up to their name, taking prey up to the size of possums. Every good Powerful Owl photograph shows a half-eaten possum in its talons! Much more difficult to find were the parks Barn Owls, said to be in the palm trees by one of the lakes. With over twenty trees to check, Laura and I stood no chance until we met Steve Howard, a volunteer ranger. Even when we went to the right trees the owls were difficult to see, tucked under the palm fronds hard against the trunk. Steve also showed us the family of Tawny Frogmouths which relied on camouflage rather than concealment to remain undetected.

Further afield, Sydney Olympic Park is well worth visiting for waders at the waterbird refuge, a large shallow lagoon with a hide and viewing screens. Black-winged Stilt and Red-necked Avocet are abundant breeding birds while I also found Great and Little Egrets and Royal Spoonbills. Other waders are likely depending on the season: I had Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Black-fronted Dotterel. Waders may also be seen on the lagoon at Mason Reserve which may be reached by a footpath under the A3 highway. The Olympic Park also has one of the few areas of accessible mangroves in Sydney Harbour and a good range of passerines may be found with perseverance. White-bellied Sea Eagles nest in an area that is off-limits but may be seen cruising over. Bicentennial Park, part of the overall site, has a lake with the common waterfowl, including nesting ibis and cormorants.

A half-hour trip by car from the city to the Northern Beaches provides opportunities to visit several very different habitats in a small area. Starting at the south, Dee Why has a large brackish lagoon and scrubby sand dunes behind its beach. There is free parking on the streets rather than paying \$8 (£5) an hour in the car park. The lagoon may or may not be open to the sea, affecting the extent of exposed mud and birds present; I experienced both conditions during our stay. Australian Pelicans are likely to be present along with ducks, cormorants,

herons and gallinules. Just the north of Dee Why, at Long Reef a huge shelf of rock extends out from the promontory, providing a refuge for seabirds and waders. On our last visit I could walk to Long Reef in a few minutes from Laura's apartment and had some good seawatches. This time opportunities were limited but I was able to pick up passing Shy Albatross and Arctic Skua along with large numbers of Short-tailed Shearwaters and Australasian Gannets. On the reef non-breeding Common and Little Terns were an ID headache but Pacific Golden Plovers, Turnstones and Red-necked Stints were more obliging.



Pied Currawong

A couple of miles to the north of Long Reef and a little way inland are the twin reserves of Warriewood Wetlands and Irrawong. Warriewood features reedbed and swamp as well as some well-populated ponds while Irrawong includes a remnant of mature rainforest. Together the two are well worth a half-day visit. At Warriewood a boardwalk trail crosses the swamp and meanders through wet woodland. New here since my last visit was a colony of Bell Miners, bright green Starling-sized birds that make incessant “ting” calls – really very irritating! A local birder told me that Grey Goshawk and Swamp Harrier were regular visitors in late afternoon but unfortunately they had not adjusted their watches to daylight saving time and were not to be seen. On a different section of boardwalk loud calls from the reedbed almost beneath my feet attracted my attention. Patience was rewarded when I eventually spotted a Lewin's Rail through a gap in the reeds. On my last trip to Sydney I had been lucky enough to see the gaudy Noisy Pitta at Irrawong but it had not been recorded there this year. However, on my second visit I did at last get a decent view of my bogey bird – Superb Lyrebird. These are not particularly rare or difficult to find – Laura and Simon had had several round their campsite on a weekend trip – but had eluded me on all my five previous Australian trips. My problem, it transpired, was that they breed very early in the season and the male's spectacular display was over and done before we arrived. On my second visit to Irrawong it betrayed its presence by its song, very loud, rich and varied, and after a while appeared – a plain dark brown bird but with that magnificent tail. Also showing well at Irrawong were Spangled Drongo and Dollarbird. Both are large insectivores that hawk from exposed perches high in the more open parts of the forest; the latter must be a distant relative of the Roller and shares a delight in aerial display.

Two other nearby reserves worth considering are Deep Creek, a more extensive area of forest than Irrawong, and Chiltern Trail. The latter is a walk through dry bush on the high ground above Irrawong and is a good area for getting to grips with the many species of honeyeater in the region. As their name implies, they all take nectar from flowering shrubs but they range from the tiny jewels of the Scarlet Honeyeater and Eastern Spinebird, though the miners to the Wattlebirds and Friarbirds. On my previous visit I had been fortunate to meet a local birder who pointed out several species that I would have missed. This time I was on my own and tragically a very recent bushfire had burned out everything on one side of the trail. Despite that, I caught up with White-eared and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters which I did not encounter elsewhere. Distant wailing that grew closer alerted me to a flock of fifty Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos that flew close overhead and then alighted in burned out trees still wailing, as if to mourn the destruction of their home. These impressive cockatoos were very much a feature throughout this trip while I had only glimpsed the odd one on previous visits. I learned that this could be connected with the severe drought in New South Wales causing birds resident inland to move to the coast.

My last Sydney highlight was a trip to Pitt Town Lagoon. This regularly features on the NSW sighting records and is an easy drive in under an hour from the city centre, in the flat farmland on the east bank of the Hawkesbury River. There are national parks within a few miles to round out a day's birding. On my visit I was very grateful for the shelter of the concrete bird hide. The Rain Goddess aka Mrs B had worked her magic for drought-stricken NSW and it pelted. After some minutes I was joined by a local birder and an American and then tagged along with them. I was slow to realise that I was gate-crashing a professional guided tour but Andrew Patrick, the guide, was happy to have me along, especially when I pointed out White-breasted Woodswallows. I thought little of these, having seen them daily in Harrington, but Andrew considered them a great find in the Sydney area. Because of all the rain, the lagoon had flooded, reducing the chance of seeing rails or crakes venturing out of the reedbeds but I did have excellent views of a Glossy Ibis, to go with Straw-necked Ibis and White Ibis (in its "proper" habitat) while Golden-headed Cisticola and Little Grassbird were much more fleeting. The attractive Black-shouldered Kite (an *Elanus* - think the Iberian Black-winged Kite) and a Swamp Harrier put in guest appearances. Learning the songs and calls of an unfamiliar avifauna is a huge challenge but the last bird of note at the lagoon posed no problems – our very own Blackbird! Introduced by early settlers, they have established themselves but not in the city where they probably face too much competition from the Noisy Miners and nest predation by possums. Andrew's tour concluded with nearby Mitchell Park where his knowledge of songs and calls was invaluable in finding gerygones and other elusive small passerines in the forest.

After a fortnight, it was a two hundred mile journey north to visit our friend, Sue. The five hour train trip is spectacular though hardly fast. Nearly everyone travelling up the coast to Brisbane flies; bullet trains they are not! The line ascends steadily north from Sydney to plunge spectacularly to cross the mouth of the Hawkesbury River and on to the outskirts of the next large town, Newcastle. Along the way it crosses wetlands where Black-winged Stilts and Avocets could easily be made out and a Swamp Harrier floated over. After Newcastle, the line becomes single-track, winding its way up through hilly cattle ranching country, Cattle Egrets abundant, to the country town of Gloucester before descending into the Manning River valley and on to our destination, Taree, where an excited Sue was waiting for us. That night the distant roar was not the traffic on the Sydney freeway but the ocean rollers breaking at the mouth of the mighty Manning River. What excitements awaited?

Compared with our last trip, two disadvantages were immediately obvious. First, Sue had given up WiFi, meaning no easy Internet access, and second, she had disposed of her Suzuki runabout, so I had either to go along with her plans or confine myself to the local area. That said, Harrington had a huge amount to offer, with the river at the end of Sue's street and the sea a mile away. On my first morning Rainbow Bee-eaters were singing from the telephone wires and the White-breasted Woodswallows were hawking only a short distance further on. My biggest surprise, however, were the Ospreys nesting at the top of a huge conifer on the main street to the sea. Even more surprising was they had fledged young – along with a few other species they breed during the Austral winter which tends to be mild and relatively calm.

The part of the river fronting on to the town is a huge tidal lagoon and home to waders on the mudflats, including Eastern Curlews that dwarfed an accompanying Whimbrel and Bar-tailed Godwits. On one visit I was thrilled to see the large, spectacular Beach Stone-curlew which sports a fearsome bill, well suited to its favourite prey of crabs. The bird is described as very shy and critically endangered in NSW on account of habitat loss and disturbance but this one seemed not least bothered by people walking nearby. It was a very lucky sighting indeed as I was told by staff from the NSW Wildlife Service that there were only a couple of pairs in the whole region. The lagoon is protected from the ocean by a breakwall, beyond which are sandbanks that come and go in successive seasons. These provide a resting place for hundreds of Crested Terns and I was pleased to find a couple of Gull-billed and a single Caspian with them. Pied Oystercatchers and Red-capped Plovers also preferred the sand to the mud.



Silver Gull

Just inland from Sue's home Harrington becomes Harrington Waters, a massive continuing development that comprises upmarket estates, shops, a hotel and a golf course. Running alongside the golf course a large lake holds a good variety of waterbirds and many singing Australian Reed warblers along its margins. Beyond the golf course, Industrial Road leads past some small factory units through forest to the Harrington sewage plant and a trail continues on into the vast Crowdy Bay National Park. The habitats vary from forest to dwarf scrub to swamp and can be challenging for pinpointing singing or calling birds. I made several visits to the area, the last on the day before we left Harrington, 4 October. At breakfast a couple of swifts – White-throated Needletails – flew over the house. Clearly, birds were on the move. In the absence of Internet I did not realise at the time that this was their first reported sighting anywhere in NSW. On my walk I encountered Leaden Flycatcher and, in a different area, the subtly different Satin Flycatcher, most easily distinguished by their dissimilar calls. The latter is apparently uncommon in NSW and my record prompted a request for a detailed sighting report. Other birds included a Black-shouldered Kite on its nest, a noisy party of immature Satin Bowerbirds, Brown Quail flushed from under my feet and a flock of a dozen Needletails overhead. In the absence of a decent map, I followed a path waymarked as "Harrington Fire Trail", assuming this looped round the town to protect it from bushfires in the National Park. However, while I could tell that the trail was heading away from town rather than looping, there was no way off it. And, needless to say my borrowed mobile phone had run out of juice. Fortunately, when the trail eventually met a road I was able to hitch a lift back into town.

Going three miles through Harrington and up the coast is Crowdy headland and bay, with a small fishing and yacht harbour. The name comes from an early explorer's sense of irony as, even now, the pristine sandy beach is anything but crowded. We enjoyed several picnics at the end of the beach though there was only one day when the girls felt it warm enough to brave the water. This was an excellent spot for raptors, with Whistling, Square-tailed and Brahminy Kites all showing off their different flight styles and hunting techniques along with White-bellied Sea Eagle and, on one occasion, Australian Hobby. The lighthouse on the headland is an excellent spot for sea-watching. The birds were scarce this year but the Humpback Whales, on their migration, were magnificent. Indeed, we enjoyed splendid whale-watching all along the coast (though none off Sydney where they are apparently further out to sea). Between Harrington and Crowdy there is a walk through a remnant of coastal rainforest that proved worth a visit, with Wonga Pigeon heard.

My one full birding day was at Cattai Wetlands. This reserve, run by the Greater Taree City Council, has only been open for a few years, on my first visit by permit only. Now it is one of the premier sites in the region and very well maintained. The reserve only came into existence in 2003, because an ill-conceived project to drain the wetlands many years ago had brought minerals to the surface that then oxidised, generating sulphuric acid, polluting the area and draining into the Manning River. The problem is far from resolved and the council has ambitions to take over a much larger area of land. Cattai Wetlands boasts records of some 170 bird species. Of these, the most remarkable is the Comb-crested Jacana, a curious smallish wader with a fiery comb and huge feet that enable it to walk on water, or rather the lily pads that cover the lake at Cattai. Equally impressive, in a different way, is the massive Jabiru or Black-necked Stork which I have only ever seen once some ten years ago. The reserve's warden (surely the best council job ever) hopes the wetlands might attract Brolga, Australia's crane, in future. The fifty birds I saw on my visit were all familiar bar one that I hardly dared hope to see, the Southern Emu-wren. This tiny bird has its name from its

extremely long spindly tail feathers that reminded its discoverers of Emu plumage. Unlike its relatives the Fairy-wrens that are only too keen to show off their dazzling blues, the Emu-wren is very shy and lurks in areas of long grass. So I was thrilled when a pair emerged close by with the male showing off his Cambridge blue bib.

In the course of our stay with Sue we had several trips around the greater Taree area which provided opportunities for incidental birding. Port Macquarie has an estuary in the centre of town that hosts waders including both Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, other wetland birds and raptors. Running inland through the town is Koolunbung Creek, a reserve with boardwalks through mangroves and wet forest. The highlight of my wet afternoon while the others “enjoyed” retail therapy was spotting a mother and baby Koala high in a gum tree, doing what Koalas do best, sleeping. Amazingly, most of the Australians I met had never seen one in the wild. Another memorable trip was to Coorabakh National Park. Dirt roads wind through forested mountains to Little Nellie and Big Nellie, huge volcanic plugs standing proud over the area. Then it was on to a clifftop lookout with a vista extending many miles to the Manning valley, Taree and beyond. Although there were rather few birds, a ghostly white figure gliding over the canopy far below was the prize, a Grey Goshawk. Not far away another site, Bird Tree, boasted immense ancient rainforest trees including what is claimed to be the tallest in NSW (has anyone actually gone round measuring them all?) but, despite the name, precious few birds.

The weather broke and rain, accompanying us back to Sydney, stayed around for most of the last fortnight of our holiday. However, we made the most of things and enjoyed several trips out: Bowral, home of the Donald Bradman cricket museum; Blackheath in the Blue Mountains where there is a delightful rhododendron garden and spectacular views; and Wiseman’s Ferry where we were amazed to see a Wombat foraging, completely unconcerned by our presence. So, how did things stack up? The list shows what I found where on each part of the trip. After our first fortnight, the Sydney list had reached a round 100. Harrington easily passed that with 133. But the last fortnight, with the trips to Long Reef and Pitt Town Lagoon helping no end, added another 49. Inevitably, there were gaps from my previous visits as I was unable to reach some good sites around Taree but also because the strange weather had delayed the arrival of some spring migrants. It should not be difficult to clock up 200 species in and around Sydney, especially if a pelagic trip is included. Needless to say, we are already looking forward to our next trip and hope to venture further afield. It will undoubtedly be different!

New South Wales 8 Sep – 19 Oct 18

Species	Sydney	Greater Taree
Brush-turkey	Artarmon	
Brown Quail		Cattai Wetlands
Shy Albatross	Long Reef	
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	Long Reef	
Short-tailed Shearwater	Long Reef	
Australian Pelican	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Australasian Gannet	Dee Why	Harrington
Darter	Dee Why	Forster
Pied Cormorant	Blackwater Bay	Harrington
Little Pied Cormorant	Blackwater Bay	Harrington
Great Cormorant	Blackwater Bay	Harrington
Little Black Cormorant	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington

Species	Sydney	Greater Taree
Hoary-headed Grebe	Dee Why	
Australasian Grebe	Warriewood Wetlands	Harrington
Black Swan	Dee Why	Harrington
Greylag Goose (feral)	Centennial Park	
Muscovy Duck		Harrington
Pacific Black Duck	Dee Why	Harrington
Mallard	Olympic Park	
Grey Teal	Dee Why	Harrington
Chestnut Teal	Clifton Gardens	Harrington
Pink-eared Duck	Centennial Park	
Hardhead	Dee Why	Harrington
Australian Wood Duck	Olympic Park	Harrington
Buff-banded Rail	Centennial Park	
Lewin's Rail	Warriewood Wetlands	
Dusky Moorhen	Olympic Park	Harrington
Purple Swamphen	Dee Why	Harrington
Eurasian Coot	Dee Why	Cattai Wetlands
White-necked Heron	Warriewood Wetlands	Manning Point
White-faced Heron	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Cattle Egret	Pitt Town Lagoon	Cattai Creek
Great Egret	Pitt Town Lagoon	Harrington
Little Egret	Pitt Town Lagoon	Harrington
Eastern Reef Egret		North Haven
Striated Heron	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Glossy Ibis	Pitt Town Lagoon	
Australian White Ibis	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Straw-necked Ibis	Pitt Town Lagoon	Taree
Royal Spoonbill	Olympic Park	Harrington
Ruddy Turnstone	Long Reef	
Eastern Curlew		Harrington
Whimbrel		Harrington
Grey-tailed Tattler	Dee Why	
Bar-tailed Godwit	Long Reef	Harrington
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Olympic Park	
Red-necked Stint	Long Reef	
Comb-crested Jacana		Cattai Wetlands
Beach Stone-curlew		Harrington
Pied Oystercatcher		Harrington
Sooty Oystercatcher	Long Reef	Port Macquarie
Masked Lapwing	Artarmon	Harrington
Pacific Golden Plover	Long Reef	Harrington
Black-fronted Dotterel	Olympic Park	
Black-winged Stilt	Dee Why	
Red-necked Avocet	Olympic Park	
Arctic Skua	Long Reef	
Silver Gull	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Caspian Tern		Harrington

Species	Sydney	Greater Taree
Gull-billed Tern		Harrington
Common Tern	Long Reef	
Little Tern	Long Reef	
Crested Tern	Dee Why	Harrington
Pacific Baza	Artarmon	
Black-shouldered Kite	Pitt Town Lagoon	Cattai Wetlands
Osprey	Dee Why	Harrington
Square-tailed Kite	Clifton Gardens	Crowdy
Black Kite	Balmoral Beach	
Whistling Kite		Crowdy
Brahminy Kite		Crowdy
White-bellied Sea Eagle	Olympic Park	Crowdy
Wedge-tailed Eagle		Coorabakh
Brown Goshawk	Flat Rock Creek	
Collared Sparrowhawk	Olympic Park	
Grey Goshawk		Coorabakh
Swamp Harrier	Pitt Town Lagoon	
Peregrine Falcon	Dee Why	Forster
Australian Hobby		Crowdy
Brown Falcon	Chiltern Trail	Harrington
Nankeen Kestrel	Olympic Park	
Topknot Pigeon		Crowdy
White-headed Pigeon		Harrington
Feral Pigeon	Artarmon	Taree
Spotted Turtle Dove	Blackwattle Bay	Harrington
Brown Cuckoo-dove		Harrington
Bar-shouldered Dove	Chiltern Trail	Harrington
Common Bronzewing	Irrawong	
Crested Pigeon	Dee Why	Harrington
Wonga Pigeon		Harrington
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	Chiltern Trail	Crowdy
Galah	Blackwattle Bay	Harrington
Long-billed Corella	Long Reef	
Little Corella	Palm Beach	Harrington
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Artarmon	Port Macquarie
Rainbow Lorikeet	Artarmon	Harrington
Scaly-breasted Lorikeet		Old Bar
Australian King-parrot	Artarmon	Coorabakh
Crimson Rosella	Blackheath	Gloucester
Eastern Rosella	Pitt Town Lagoon	Harrington
Red-rumped Parrot	Blackwattle Bay	
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Chiltern Trail	
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo		Harrington
Shining Bronze-cuckoo	Botanic Gardens	Cattai Wetlands
Pacific Koel	Artarmon	Port Macquarie
Channel-billed Cuckoo	Artarmon	

Species	Sydney	Greater Taree
Powerful Owl	Centennial Park	
Barn Owl	Centennial Park	
Tawny Frogmouth	Artarmon	
White-throated Needletail		Harrington
Azure Kingfisher		Cattai Wetlands
Sacred Kingfisher	Warriewood Wetlands	Crowdy
Laughing Kookaburra	Artarmon	Harrington
Rainbow Bee-eater		Harrington
Dollarbird	Irrawong	
Superb Lyrebird	Irrawong	
Varied Sittella	Wiseman's Ferry	Crowdy
White-throated Treecreeper	Mitchell Park	Coorabakh
Superb Fairy-wren	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Variegated Fairy-wren	Artarmon	Saltwater
Southern Emu-wren		Cattai Wetlands
Spotted Pardalote	Flat Rock Creek	
Large-billed Scrubwren	Mitchell Park	
White-browed Scrubwren	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
White-throated Gerygone	Mitchell Park	Harrington
Brown Gerygone	Mitchell Park	Harrington
Brown Thornbill	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Yellow Thornbill	Olympic Park	Forster
Striated Thornbill	Irrawong	Port Macquarie
Buff-rumped Thornbill	Chiltern Trail	
Red Wattlebird	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Little Wattlebird	Chiltern Trail	Harrington
Striped Honeyeater		Harrington
Noisy Friarbird	Pitt Town Lagoon	
Bell Miner	Warriewood Wetlands	
Noisy Miner	Artarmon	Harrington
Lewin's Honeyeater	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Mitchell Park	Cattai Wetlands
Brown-headed Honeyeater		Harrington
White-eared Honeyeater	Chiltern Trail	
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Chiltern Trail	
White-plumed Honeyeater	Olympic Park	
White-naped Honeyeater	Blackheath	
White-cheeked Honeyeater	Dee Why	Harrington
New Holland Honeyeater	Dee Why	
Brown Honeyeater		Harrington
Eastern Spinebill	Flat Rock Creek	Coorabakh
Scarlet Honeyeater	Mitchell Park	Port Macquarie
Eastern Whipbird	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Eastern Yellow Robin	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Grey Shrike-thrush		Harrington
Golden Whistler	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Rufous Whistler		Harrington

Species	Sydney	Greater Taree
Grey Fantail	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Willie Wagtail	Artarmon	Harrington
Leaden Flycatcher		Harrington
Satin Flycatcher		Harrington
Magpie-lark	Artarmon	Harrington
Spangled Drongo	Irrawong	Harrington
Olive-backed Oriole	Irrawong	Harrington
Australasian Figbird		Harrington
Satin Bowerbird	Mitchell Park	Cattai Wetlands
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Artarmon	Harrington
White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike		Taree
White-breasted Woodswallow	Pitt Town Lagoon	Harrington
Grey Butcherbird	Artarmon	Harrington
Pied Butcherbird		Harrington
Australian Magpie	Artarmon	Harrington
Pied Currawong	Artarmon	Forster
Grey Currawong	Bowral	
Australian Raven	Artarmon	Harrington
Forest Raven		Harrington
Welcome Swallow	Artarmon	Harrington
Tree Martin	Olympic Park	Taree
Fairy Martin	Pitt Town Lagoon	
Brown Songlark		Taree
Australian Reed Warbler	Olympic Park	Cattai Wetlands
Golden-headed Cisticola	Pitt Town Lagoon	
Little Grassbird	Pitt Town Lagoon	
House Sparrow	Dee Why	Harrington
Red-browed Finch	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Silvereye	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Mistletoebird		Cattai Wetlands
Red-whiskered Bulbul	Dee Why	
Eurasian Blackbird	Pitt Town Lagoon	
Common Starling	Dee Why	
Common Myna	Flat Rock Creek	Harrington
Total	149	133



White-plumed Honeyeater

A YEAR IN INDIA – PART ONE

(Major Matt Rea RA)

I am spending a year in Southern India as the British Army representative at the Indian Defence Services Staff College. I've been here since May 18 and will return to the UK in April 19. This article will focus on my experiences in the areas local to the college in the state of Tamil Nadu. I'll write another article for next year's addition covering my wider travels in the sub-continent. The credit for the photographs goes to my wife Aimée who has far more patience than I!



The Owl with Maj & Mrs Rea

Mark Twain once remarked that “India is a place where extraordinary things seem commonplace.” Everything here is new. In my introductory interview with the DA in Delhi I couldn't help gazing out of the window as an Indian Grey Hornbill flew past. A welcoming party of Peafowl – the national bird – sat on flat roofs opposite the airport as I arrived in Coimbatore. The first Indian Roller sat on the wires en route to the college caused much excitement, the second slightly less, and by the tenth they had become normal. I had waited for years to see a Hoopoe in Europe and I'm still waiting to see one in the UK; I saw three on my first afternoon on the road outside my quarter.

Nestled amid the Nilgiri Hills in Southern India, the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, Tamil Nadu, has been educating Indian and International officers since Indian Independence in

1947 with the first British representative attending the 4th course in 1950. Wellington Cantonment was originally built in 1854 by British forces keen to escape the searing heat and humidity of the plains and is adjacent to the colonial hill station of Coonoor and a short distance from Ooty, the summer capital of the Madras Presidency. Part of the Nilgiri Biosphere reserve the area was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO in 2008 and is a haven for all types of wildlife ranging from 100 species of mammals, 80 species of reptiles, about 39 species of fish, 31 amphibians and 316 species of butterflies and most importantly for this article - 350 species of birds. Mammals range from elephants, leopards and gaur to the endemic Nilgiri tahr and the elusive tiger (which I'm yet to see!).

My quarter is situated on the edge of a hill overlooking a colourful Indian village and surrounded by tea plantations. Common garden birds here are Red-whiskered Bulbuls, Oriental White Eyes, Purple and Crimson Backed Sunbirds, Oriental Magpie Robins and the local favourite the Pied Bushchat which is favoured by local tribes people, the Toda and Kota, due to its sexual dimorphism. Common sightings when out walking or running in the local area are the aforementioned Hoopoe, the White Spotted Fantail, Spotted Doves, Yellow Billed Babblers, Indian Scimitar Babblers, Long-tailed Shrikes and the charismatic Ashy Prinia. The White-cheeked Barbet is the conductor of the evening serenade with his

preferred roost being a tree opposite my house while a common wake-up call comes from both the Grey Junglefowl and the Greater Coucal.

Within a short drive is the lake at Ooty, home to Indian Spot-billed ducks, Coots and White-breasted Waterhen; while a little further is the wild Avalanche Lake which is reminiscent of Scottish Loch (and with weather to match) where we spotted the endemic Nilgiri Pipit. Other birds endemic to the region include the striking blue Nilgiri Flycatcher and the reclusive Nilgiri Flowerpecker, while the state bird of Tamil Nadu is the dazzling Emerald Dove. The latter is far from conspicuous despite its glorious colour and I've only managed to see it twice in the six months I've been here.



White Spotted Fantail

Barbet, Little Green Bee-eaters, Yellow-crowned and Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers as well as the resplendent Black-rumped Flameback. A memorable evening walk to overwatch an elephant migration route gave us the chance to see Purple Rumped and Loten's Sunbirds, walk past a roosting Spotted Owlet, see the endemic Malabar Lark and have an unforgettable encounter with a Brown Fish Owl which our guide managed to locate by watching the other birds get spooked out of a tree line. As we approached the trees for a fleeting second its enormous orange eyes stared back at us about 5 metres away. Our guide was considerably better at spotting and identifying wildlife than us! Three times he pointed out an Indian Hanging Parrot and each time it has disappeared by the time I looked around. To date, I've only managed to see one of these little parrots and that was an injured one by the road side while out for a run. Although we placed him back in the bush, I fear that his broken wing means he was soon to become mongoose food.



Nilgiri Flycatcher

Dropping down from the hills the road to Mysore goes through the contiguous Mudamalai and Bandipur Tiger reserves. Although we weren't lucky enough to see a tiger we did see elephants and a sloth bear, and the avifauna is as diverse as it is captivating. A two-day visit saw us observe over thirty new species including a Changeable Hawk Eagle, Malabar and Plum-headed Parakeets, the raucous Coppersmith



Little Green Bee-eater

Further along from Mudamalai is Mysore. Famous at home due to its place in both British military history and Richard Sharpe's fictional adventures it is also a great place to see both the Black-headed and Red-naped Ibis and watch the Brahminy Kites circling over the flooded river.

So far an incredible six months and hopefully there will be more memorable sightings to come during the next few months. I will write another article for next year's edition of the Adjutant; covering some of the field trips I've been on with the course and some of the trips my wife and I have made around the country. So far I've visited Delhi, Mumbai, Darjeeling, Sikkim (twice) and Sri Lanka and over the next six months will visit Kerala on the west coast, Vizag on the east, the desert of Rajasthan in the North and Maharashtra in the west.



Yellow-crowned Woodpecker

List of Birds

Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
Painted Bush Quail	<i>Perdica erythrorhyncha</i>
Grey Junglefowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>

White-cheeked Barbet	<i>Psilopogon viridis</i>
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>
Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus nanus</i>
Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Leiopicus mahrattensis</i>
Streak-throated Woodpecker	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>
Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
Malabar Parakeet	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>
Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
White-spotted Fantail	<i>Rhipidura albogularis</i>
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Cinereous Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>
Malabar Lark	<i>Galerida malabarica</i>
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
Indian Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>
Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
Indian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta castanea</i>
Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnia malabarica</i>
Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
Indian Blackbird	<i>Turdus simillimus</i>
Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>
Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
White-bellied Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis pallidipes</i>
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
Nilgiri Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias albicaudatus</i>
Pied Bush Chat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
Nilgiri Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
Crimson-backed Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma minima</i>
Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
Nilgiri Pipit	<i>Anthus nilghiriensis</i>

TURKEY

(Andrew Bray)

Day 1. 16 Jun. We all saw each other at London Heathrow for a flight to Istanbul. Turkish Airlines serve food and drink and economy class is pretty decent for legroom. We then changed planes in Istanbul with a long walk from International Terminal to Domestic Terminal. Once on board we sat on the plane for over 90 minutes whilst a major storm erupted around us. There was a snack on the plane. We arrived at Antalya airport to collect hire cars and were faced with an hour's driving to the hotel. We eventually got to bed just after 1am.

Day 2. 17 Jun. This was an early morning start in darkness and was met at the Total Garage. We also took the other minibus and drove down some back streets before the huge Oypinar Dam wall came into sight. We then travelled along the road until we came to the end by a restaurant and walked down the steps and across several pleasure boats until we came to the last boat. We were joined about 10 minutes later by the Wildwings group. We then sailed to the Small Canyon to look for the Brown Fish Owl but it was not there. We then headed to the Grand Canyon and lo and behold there was an adult and a juvenile. The lake was pretty much dead except for Yellow-legged Gulls and Great Cormorants. The owls were on the side



Brown Fish Owl

of the cliffs giving everyone excellent views. A Middle Spotted Woodpecker flew into the side whilst we there as well. Our next stop after we moved the car to a spot we could not attract a fine was outside the town of Mangavat by the river. Here there were numerous Bush Robin and Spur-winged Plover. An Elanora's Falcon flew over as did a Little Ringed Plover. There were lots of birds on the dry dusty area including a Little Bittern, Hoopoe and Graceful Prinia but soon it was time to move on. We stopped for lunch at a garage restaurant on the way to our next location at Cimic outside Akseki. Here we listened to

Olive Tree Warbler and a few caught a glimpse of it. There was Sombre Tit, Krupers Nuthatch, Peregrine, Rock Nuthatch, Black-headed Bunting, Cretzschmar Bunting and a Long-legged Buzzard. A Syrian Woodpecker showed well as did a Black-eared Wheatear and Short-toed Eagle. We went for a walk around a small copse on the other side of the Route 695. There were few birds about as the area had been clear felled around the copse but there were thousands of grasshoppers. We headed back to the car where we were dropped off and then stopped for supper on the way back to the hotel.

Day 3. 18 Jun. Today was going to be a long drive. We stopped for breakfast at the same restaurant we visited for lunch yesterday. We then drove to Cimic to look for the Olive Tree Warbler as the there were allegedly 2 pairs close to the road. Once again, it was mainly heard and only fleetingly seen. It was then a long drive to Konya on a surprisingly good road where the ring road is in built up areas. We then took the road for Eregli and were surprised to find it was dual carriageway all the way. A brief stop outside Konya and a lunch stop near Eregli produced the normally seen birds of Hooded Crow, Swallow Swift, White Wagtail, House Sparrow plus a Black Kite of the eastern race, Hobby, Masked Shrike and some Red-

billed Chough. We drove up to the base for the next 2 nights arriving in plenty of time at Oz Safak Pension for some to go for a local bird walk with shrikes and buntings. We sat on the veranda overlooking the orchard of Cherry Trees for dinner drinking an ice cold beer.

Day 4. 19 Jun. It was once again an early morning start in the dark with 2 of us sitting in the boot of the 4x4. The other car broke down not too far into the journey with a flat and the driver could not get the wheel off this Russian looking jeep. At the top of the track at Demirkazik there was Caspian Snowcock, Black Redstart, Alpine and Red-billed Chough, Water Pipit, Chukar, Red-fronted Serin and Radde's Accentor. All showed very well as did Crimson-winged Finch, Snowfinch, Horned Lark and a Ring Ouzel. Some drove back and



Red-fronted Serin



Radde's Accentor

others walked and saw Golden Eagle and quite a few Finch's Wheatear.

After a very late breakfast we headed to the Emli Valley where we were issued lots of tickets for our visit; it was explained by Basar why so many when we returned to the pension, bureaucracy survives! At the reserve we eventually found a pair of White-fronted Robin, Rock Bunting and heard a Nightjar churring. There were lots of butterflies as well. Our thanks go to Mark Easterbrook for taking so many photographs and then being able to identify them (with assistance). We returned to the Pension for an evening meal and gorged on cherries from the orchard of Basar; our guide for the trip up the mountain.

Day5. 20 Jun. We spent the morning looking for other birds. Our first stop was just before the town of Camardi looking for Bimaculated Lark. We did see Calandra Lark and there was debate later that day on which birds in the photographs were which. We then drove to a track passed Findikli where we looked for Eastern Rock Nuthatch which has been known to found in the area despite it being the extreme end of its territory. We spent the rest of the morning there seeing all sorts of birds including Spotted Flycatcher, Crossbill, Lesser Whitethroat and aerobatic Ravens. We had lunch near the motorway junction at Pozanti then it was a long drive to Tasucu for a stay in our rooms for 2 nights. This is where Booking.com had taken the money but we were not booked in! Eventually the neighbour spoke to the owner and after a meal in town we were allowed to stay for both nights in the rooms we had booked. Fortunately we could get into the rooms but they were not ready for us! To say that no-one answered calls or were not that interested was an understatement. All worked out well in the end despite one of the flats being booked out for the second night (but the potential occupants were moved elsewhere).

Day 6. 21 Jun. The next day was a bird watchers delight around the Goksu Delta despite the reeds that have grown up and the watching stands burnt down. We did follow a track round one of the main lakes and found lots of birds including Purple Heron, Greater Flamingo, Spur-winged Plover, Marsh Harrier, Grey-headed Swamphen, Little and Common Terns, Redshank, Kentish Plover, Curlew plus Great and Little Egrets. We kept heading for the main river but never made it as the area was criss-crossed with very small roads and villages with no signposts. We had a drive along a channel later that day and down a farm track to



Spur-winged Plover



Stone Curlew

find Glossy Ibis and Cattle Egret. We were looking for the other hide that could be seen standing up above the reeds. We also found Roller, Lesser Kestrel and Black-winged Stilt. Two of the others during an afternoon break found the hide but it was surrounded by reeds and was not worth travelling to. We ended the day at a beach location looking for seabirds that included Scopoli and Yelkoan Shearwaters. The greatest thrill was the sight of the close flypast by Greater Flamingo as they headed into the strong wind.

Day 7. 22 Jun. We had an early morning drive around the Goksu Delta back to a bird watching hide with Stone Curlew still showing well and Black Francolin crossing the road in front of us! There were still Red-crested Pochard on the lake and the area was again infested with Reed Wablers (Caspian race) and Zitting Cisticolas. We then drove along the coast road where in places it was very good and in others it was a switchback ride. We had lunch at a large area with several restaurants. Our destination was the Koprulu Kanyon National Park. On the way we stopped near Beikis where the cicadas drowned out the bird noise. We did find Turtle Dove to add to the list as well as Syrian Woodpecker. At the gorge we were running out of time so stopped in various places to see what we could find such as Krüpers Nuthach. Sadly there were no Dippers in the stream above the rafting companies and there were not many raptors flying around. We then headed to Antalya where a tyre was destroyed on a curb. The spare turned out to be flat as well! Fortunately it did not take too long for all to be rectified. We found the hotel for the night and that evening various people found restaurants to their satisfaction. It was hot and humid that night and so it was the next day.



Ruins of Perge

Day 8. 23 Jun. We explored the Roman ruins at Perge whilst noting the butterflies and birds and of course the lizards. The ruins were fantastic and so much remained of the main streets and bath houses. The humidity was over bearing and there were few birds about but we could count on Woodchat Shrike and Black-eared Wheatear plus Crested Lark to fill our stop there. We were soon heading back to the hotel for a shower and a change of clothing for our return flight. The flight back was uneventful and we were straight through passport control at Heathrow and hardly had to wait for the bags as we said our goodbyes. Everyone had lifers on this trip, some a lot more than others. We also learnt that villages near the Syrian border with those “hard to find” birds were safe to travel to, so maybe a weekend birding? Despite a few setbacks such as the accommodation everyone can safely say that the trip was very enjoyable.

Common name	Scientific name	June						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>					x	x	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>					x	x	
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta ruffina</i>					x	x	
Caspian Snowcock	<i>Tetraogallus caspius</i>			x				
Chukar Partridge	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>			x				
Black Francolin	<i>Francolinus francolinus</i>					x	x	
Scopoli's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea diomedea</i>					x		
Yelkouan Shearwater	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>					x		
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>					x		

		June						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>					x		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	x	x		x	x		x
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis dalcinellus</i>					x		
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	x				x		
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>					x	x	
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>					x		
Cattle Egret	<i>Bulbulcus ibis</i>					x	x	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>					x		
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					x	x	
Great White Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>					x	x	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>					x	x	
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	x				x	x	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			x				
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	x						
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>					x	x	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	x	x					
Black Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	x						x
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>					x		
Grey-headed Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>					x		
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					x		
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>					x	x	
Eurasian Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>					x		
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	x				x	x	
Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>					x		
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	x						
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>					x		
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>					x		
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					x		
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>					x		
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	x			x	x	x	
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	x						
Baltic Gull	<i>Larus fuscus fuscus</i>							
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>					x		
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>					x	x	
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>					x		
Rock Dove/'Feral'	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	x	x	x		x		
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>						x	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	x	x					x
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			x				
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Bubo zeylonsis</i>	x						

		June						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio oyus</i>	x						
Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>			x	x			
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	x	x	x	x	x		
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	x	x		x	x	x	
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		x		x			
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	x	x					
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	x	x	x			x	
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>				x			
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>	x						
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	x	x				x	
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>					x		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x
Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>	x						
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	x	x					
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	x				x		
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		x	x	x			
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	x				x		x
Masked Shrike	<i>Lanius nubicus</i>	x	x		x		x	x
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		x		x			
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius x</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x				
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	x	x	x				
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>			x				
Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		x			x		
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		x					
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	x	x		x	x	x	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>				x			
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	x					x	
Sombre Tit	<i>Poecile lugubris</i>	x	x	x				
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	x	x		x			
Great Tit	<i>Parus major aphrodite</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Penduline Tit	<i>Remizpendulinus</i>	x					x	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Horned Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>				x		x	
Calandra Lark	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	x				x		
Bimaculated Lark	<i>Melanocorypha bimaculata</i>				x			
Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>					X	X	
White Spectacled Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthopygos</i>	x			x	x	x	x
Sand Martin	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>			x				
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	x	x	x		x	x	x
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	x	x	x				
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	x	x	x		x		

Common name	Scientific name	June						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	x	x		x			x
Radde's Accentor	<i>Prunella ocularis</i>			x				
Graceful Prinia	<i>Prinia gracilis</i>	x				x	x	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		x		x			
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus tephronotus</i>	x	x					
Eastern Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus orientalis</i>	x	x					
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					x	x	x
Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>							
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Iduna pallida</i>	x	x			x		x
Olive-Tree Warbler	<i>Hippolais olivetorum</i>	x	x					
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	x				x		
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>					x	x	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	x						
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	x		x				
Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>				x			
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				x			
Rüppell's Warbler	<i>Sylvia ruppeli</i>	x		x				
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	x						
Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>	x		x				
Krüper's Nuthatch	<i>Sitta krueperi</i>	x	x				x	
Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>		x					
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		x	x		x		
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	x	x	x			x	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	x	x					
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>			x				
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Erythropygia galactotes</i>	x				x	x	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				x			
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		x	x	x			
White-throated Robin	<i>Irania gutturalis</i>			x				
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	x	x					
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			x	x			
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>		x	x				
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	x	x	x	x			
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			x				
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	x	x	x	x			
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>		x					
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	x			x			x
Finsch's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe finschii</i>			x				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	x	x			x		
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>			x				
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		x		x			

		June						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Yellow (Black-headed) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>					x	x	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	x	x	x	x			
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	x	x	x	x	x		
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			x		x		
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>			x				
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	x	x	x	x			
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	x		x	x	x		
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	x		x				
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>				x			
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	x	x	x	x	x		
Snowfinch	<i>Montifrigella nivalis</i>			x				
Crimson- winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguineus</i>			x				
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	x		x	x			
Red Fronted Serin	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>	x		x				
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	x	x	x	x			
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>			x				
Cretzschmar's Bunting	<i>Emberiza caesia</i>	x		x				
Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		x	x				



Masked Shrike



Red-backed Shrike

RETURN TO ANDALUCIA

(Nicholas Beswick)

After last year's unexpected tragedy I did not anticipate going back to Spain in a hurry. However, we heard from friends who had sold up from their cottage near King's Lynn and moved in a huge 'five-wheeler' mobile home to a campsite half way between Malaga and Marbella. So April found us at Malaga airport once more and me wondering what the birds would be like. The Costa del Sol hardly seemed natural habitat for AOS members... The site, though, was adjacent to an undeveloped stretch of coast at Cabopino with a strip of heavily vegetated sand dunes and woodland at the back of the beach a designated nature reserve.

16 April – Cabopino

Our walk on the beach yielded exceptionally tame Sanderlings and several Portuguese Men'o'War washed up by recent storms. Gannets flew west, well out to sea. In the dunes Sardinian Warblers were singing everywhere and chasing prospective mates, while Woodchat Shrikes watched for prey from the tops of bushes. The campsite held Crested Tits in old pine trees and Red-rumped Swallows flew over. Later in the week a delightful Firecrest appeared by our friends' home.

17 April – Caesares

My friend, Roger, took me on a trip to Caesares, a village set on a spectacular crag in the foothills of the coastal mountains. A good outing for raptors, we had close-up views of a flock of Griffon Vultures, with Montagu's Harrier, Short-toed Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Lesser Kestrel and Red and Black Kites also featuring. A flock of 22 Bee-eaters flying over was a bonus. I also had an excellent view of the pale-throated form of Black-eared Wheatear; the female accompanying the handsome male was very nondescript.

18 April – Cabopino

Roger and I stayed local to explore another small nature reserve, Calahonda, a ravine containing old woodland and dense undergrowth. Cetti's Warblers were singing and obligingly perched in the open to give us amazing views. A Nightingale sang once while a Robin appeared but did not sing at all. Afterwards, I continued to explore the scrubby hillsides above the town, already being carved up for further developments. Highlights were a flock of Bee-eaters foraging over the slopes, a family of Stonechats and a fly-by Hobby.

19 April – Ronda

Roger and Jill promised us a spectacular trip to the medieval town of Ronda, high in the mountains. The views on the trip were indeed breath-taking but there were few birds to be seen from the viewpoints where we stopped. By now, we had found a daily feature of the weather was a south-easterly wind that strengthened as the day progressed and definitely made the birds more elusive. Ronda itself was well worth the trip as a tourist destination. The cathedral contains all manner of treasures as well as interesting architecture but the town's main claim to fame is the vertiginous gorge, dividing the old from its newer expansion. Common, Alpine and Pallid Swifts swooped over and under the bridge over the gorge, while Lesser Kestrels and Choughs performed around the cliff-faces. Less spectacular but a lifer for me was a Rock Sparrow perched halfway down the cliff face. Roger was disappointed that the raptors usually around had stayed away, with just a Booted Eagle noted.

That evening we joined other expatriate friends for an alfresco meal at a restaurant in the foothills near Malaga, with Kestrel, Buzzard, Short-toed and Booted Eagles all flying over.

20 April – Laguna de Fuente de Piedra

It was my turn to organise the trip and so we drove up the motorway north of Malaga to Fuente de Piedra. This was the only return visit from last year. After the 2017 drought the winter had been exceptionally wet and the Laguna and associated seasonal ponds were full. This was good news for the Greater Flamingos, of which there were said to be 18,000 pairs present, mostly in a large pale pink mass at the far end of the lake. However, there were still plenty close to hand, flying past, feeding and even mating, to awe Roger and Jill. As she said, quite some “budgie-hunt”! The smaller ponds held White-headed Duck, Red-crested Pochard, Black-winged Stilt and Avocet, with Redshank rather less expected. Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns obliged but the wind again suppressed small bird activity. In the town, White Storks were nesting, with the birds sharing sitting to come down to feed in fields by the lake.

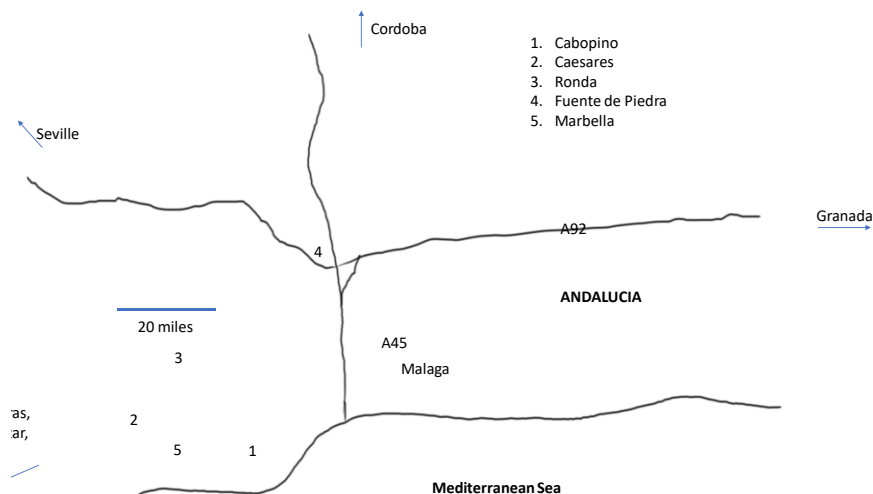
21 April – Marbella

After a tourist day, I slipped out for a short visit to the river at Nueva Andalucia, near Marbella. This yielded the only Turtle Doves of the week, singing from power lines. Nightingales sang from riverside undergrowth. In the shallows, a Little Egret was feeding by using its feet to stir up prey from the stream bed and a Ringed Plover flew from a gravel bar.

22 April – Tarifa

For my last day, I ventured west hoping to catch migrants heading across the Straits of Gibraltar. The weather, though, was inconsiderate, with low clouds blanketing the ridges between Algeciras and Tarifa. The sum total comprised several small groups of Griffon Vultures, a few Honey Buzzards, a Booted Eagle and a Hobby. Fortunately, nearby Tarifa beach proved well worth a visit – a huge sandy beach backed by dunes, pastures and lagoons, with a boardwalk and hides. Gulls on the lagoon included two Audouin’s, with waders featuring Bar-tailed Godwit in breeding plumage and Kentish Plover. A group of Balearic Shearwaters fed briefly just off-shore.

It remains to be seen whether Roger and Jill get itchy feet and move to another campsite. They may well do but we intend to be visiting Andalucia again in the next year or two. A longer trip will definitely include a visit to Gibraltar itself and an excursion to Coto Donana.



Andalucia Bird List 16 – 22 April 2018

Balearic Shearwater	Black-winged Stilt
Gannet	Avocet
Cormorant	Redshank
Shelduck	Common Sandpiper
Mallard	Sanderling
Shoveler	Dunlin
Pochard	Kentish Plover
Red-crested Pochard	Ringed Plover
White-headed Duck	Black-headed Gull
White Stork	Audouin's Gull
Greater Flamingo	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Cattle Egret	Yellow-legged Gull
Little Egret	Gull-billed Tern
Little Grebe	Whiskered Tern
Black-necked Grebe	Feral Pigeon
Coot	Woodpigeon
Moorhen	Collared Dove
Purple Gallinule	Turtle Dove
Griffon Vulture	Monk Parakeet
Short-toed Eagle	Swift
Booted Eagle	Alpine Swift
Kestrel	Pallid Swift
Hobby	Swallow
Lesser Kestrel	Red-rumped Swallow
Montagu's Harrier	House Martin
Black Kite	Crag Martin
Red Kite	Sand Martin
Buzzard	Hoopoe
Honey-buzzard	Bee-eater
Sparrowhawk	Crested Lark
Bar-tailed Godwit	White Wagtail



White Stork

CANADA

(Tony Kaduk)

In pursuit of a Biggish Year I planned a two-week road trip to hit most of the major birding hotspots in Southern Ontario. Executing this plan would involve thousands of kilometres on the road, late nights, early mornings, breakfast at Tim's, and long marches in all kinds of weather conditions. Travelling companions were needed to share the driving load and bear witness to the mayhem of Spring migration, but they needed to be stout-hearted types able to endure the conditions without whingeing. So naturally I turned to my colleagues in the AOS and on 5 May Andrew Harrison and Mike Williams arrived at YYZ eager to pad their Canada lists. Mike's was at zero when he arrived, so he was at that happy stage where every bird was potentially a lifer.

After the obligatory touristy stuff (a visit to the wildly-overpriced CN Tower, a somewhat adequate meal at Wayne Gretzky's) we sped off down the highway bound for the vortex that is Point Pelee.

The Vortex

Point Pelee National Park is justly renowned as one of the premier birding spots in North America. As the southernmost point in mainland Canada and the shortest way across Lake Erie it acts a superhighway for migratory birds. The masses of inbound birds that flow through in May are only matched by the thousands of birders and photographers who descend upon the park in droves.

Birding can be a peaceful, contemplative way of enjoying nature, but birding in Pelee in May is... not. The hordes rush madly between trails and viewing areas, hot on the heels of any rarish bird that peeks its head out of the bushes. Photographers with massive lenses and tripods elbow their way to the front, demanding to know which bird is the "good" one. Birders compare notes on what is being seen, often ending with the dreaded phrase "you should have been here ten minutes ago."

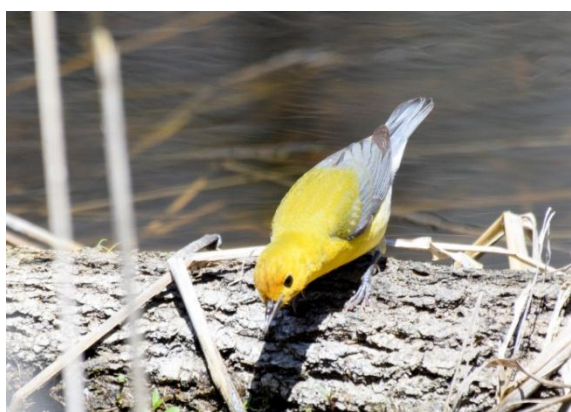
So Pelee is, in short, a zoo, but it can't be denied that we were seeing a lot of birds in a very short time. We arrived late on the 6th and "only" added 13 species in the pouring rain. Another 22 showed up the next day, including White-eyed Vireo (a lifer for me).



White-eyed Vireo

Rondeau

Point Pelee is not the only hotspot in the bird-blessed Southwest of Ontario. Rondeau Provincial Park is about an hour away and a much more pleasant experience. The variety of birds on view was excellent but for some reason Rondeau does not attract the mobs. We birded the park on the 8th and added several good species including the much-desired Prothonotary Warbler. And just when spirits were dangerously flagging the Visitor Centre came up with cups of good coffee, and all was well again.



Prothonotary Warbler



American Avocet

On the way back from Rondeau the word went out that American Avocets were being seen at Hillman Marsh. Of course we had to check it out, so we and a couple hundred of our closest friends descended on this conservation area for a look. The small, one-lane parking area was completely overwhelmed so we parked in a nearby churchyard, tabbed in on the double, saw the birds and moved back out in the space of about 15 minutes – much to the surprise of the lady collecting money at the gate. Then it was back to the vortex on the 9th for one last round of crowd-birding.

For all its oversubscribed charms, the Pelee area was an excellent place to run up the year list. I started the excursion with 152 species on my year list, and added 66 species over three and a half days. We missed the enigmatic Worm-eating Warbler, but added a few semi-rarities and hard-to-see birds including Kentucky, Hooded and Cerulean Warblers, American White Pelican, Surf Scoter, Willet, the Avocets and a Red-headed Woodpecker.



American White Pelican

We also had an excellent meal of ribs at Ray's Ribhouse in Leamington, albeit on the third attempt: on Sunday evening the extraction fans broke down and the place was filled with smoke, and of course as everyone knows (!) all restaurants in Leamington are closed on Mondays. But Tuesday all was well and it was worth the wait.

The morning of the 10th saw us headed East. A short side trip to the Blenheim sewage lagoons on the way netted Wilson's Phalarope, Horned Lark and a few waders, then it was on to Long Point.

Long Point

The Long Point area is another prime birding hotspot in Ontario and we planned to have a good look around for about a day. There are dozens of birding spots in the area but ground zero is a smallish patch of scrub known as The Old Cut. Long Point itself juts well out into Lake Erie so it's another shortcut for migrating birds. They land at the point and then work their way north, foraging through scrub, reeds and wet boggy coves - the bird equivalent of a breakfast buffet.

Old Cut is the end of the road – the good habitat comes to an end and their next move is a long flight to the next feeding station. So the birds tend to loiter around Old Cut for a while, getting in their pre-flight meal and flinging themselves into mist nets so they can be banded by the diligent workers at the Long Point Bird Observatory.

What we were hoping to experience at Long Point was a “fall” of warblers. When conditions are right (or wrong, from the warblers' point of view) unfavourable winds and/or rain can force a huge number of migrating birds to seek shelter in the nearest available cover. They then try to load up on food until the time comes to resume the Northward trek.

A big fall is an epic experience. You can find yourself surrounded by hundreds of warblers of twenty or more species, all buzzing about and singing their special songs of love. Birders experiencing a fall often descend into warbler mania, a state of giddiness and mild confusion brought on by being surrounded by fast-moving natural beauty and trying to look at every bird at once.

However, this time it was not to be. As in our visits to Pelee and Rondeau, there were a good number of birds passing through but nothing like the madness we were hoping for. 24 hours at Long Point only added two new birds to our list, though we had a frustrating might-have-seen-for-a-second experience with an exotic yellow-throated warbler. We consoled ourselves in the traditional birder way (application of beer) and then girded ourselves for the longest day of our trip.



Least Flycatcher

The Long March

The next day we set out on a 500km road march, aiming to bypass Toronto, nab a series of scarce birds that hang around in the Carden Alvar, and end up in Brighton poised for a thorough scouring of Presqu'ile Provincial Park.

We escaped Toronto traffic relatively unscathed, and made it to Kirkfield in time to have a great lunch at the imaginatively-named but nonetheless estimable Kirkfield Restaurant. Thus fortified we headed north to Wylie Road, the heartland of special alvar birds.

We first visited my no-fail site for Vesper Sparrow – and failed. But things improved when we got onto Wylie Road. Eastern Bluebird on the fencepost. Tick. Bobolink in the grassy field. Tick. Stop at the bird hide and look for Loggerhead Shrike. Tick. As we left the bird hide we were treated to, in quick succession, excellent views of Field Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow. Tick, tick. Down to the marsh for Swamp Sparrow. Tick. About the only target bird we missed out on was Upland Sandpiper, but for consolation we had

extraordinarily close views of the normally shy and retiring Wilson's Snipe. By 17:30 our work there was done, and we headed south for Brighton and a few hours of sleep, punctuated by feverish visions of multicoloured warblers flitting just out of sight.



Wilson's Snipe



Marsh Wren

Presqu'île

Presqu'île Provincial Park is one of my favourite birding haunts. It's another migrant trap that sticks out into Lake Ontario, but it also has long sand beaches that attract migrating waders. Having arrived during peak migration season we hoped to find a selection of early waders, but our hearts were still set on experiencing a fall of warblers.

Our first stop was the Brighton Constructed Wetland (another sewage lagoon, albeit with a downtown name). This site can be excellent in the right conditions but it's very much feast or famine. If the water levels are too high the mud flats, a.k.a. smorgasbord for waders, are submerged. Our visit was more on the famine side, with only a few waders sneaking about. Blue-winged Teal, normally a regular visitor, were also absent. The best sightings were our first Marsh Wren of the year – expected at the site – and Sedge Wren – apparently unexpected at that site, provoking an I-don't-think-so email from the local eBird coordinator.

So basically we “dipped” at the sewage lagoons, but we hoped for a regain when we got to the Park. Almost certainly we would be inundated by warblers and sandpipers, as payback by the Bird Gods for our many hours of driving and birding. Almost certainly we were not.

Not that it was bad, mind you. We had two plover species (Black-bellied and Semipalmated) and two sandpipers (Least and Spotted). Nothing earth-shattering but two of these were new to the trip list. We also added a nice (and early) Olive-sided Flycatcher near the Camp Office and our first Great Egrets lounging about on Gull Island (as they do). Probably our best find was a lone Black Scoter lurking among a small gaggle of Surf Scoters. So... not bad, but not brilliant either. The warbler count consisted of the three most common warblers (Yellow, Yellow-rumped and Tennessee) and no others.

Poignantly, there is a plaque at the Lighthouse, dedicated by his friends to a now-deceased birder “in memory of many twenty warbler days”. Our three-warbler day seemed a bit sad in comparison. At this point I was starting to doubt whether we would ever get to the 180+ species seen on the two previous Army Ornithological Society expeditions to Ontario. A serious case of piss-taking seemed likely.

So with tears in our eyes we set our course for Algonquin.

Algonquin Provincial Park

Algonquin Park is basically a large chunk of boreal forest with a road through it. It's not a place where you go to see masses of birds, but we were there aiming to spot some northern specialities. So to cut to the chase, we were successful in our hunt for:

- Black-backed Woodpecker
- Spruce Grouse
- Ruffed Grouse
- Red Crossbill
- White-winged Crossbill
- Pine Siskin
- Purple Finch
- Red-breasted Nuthatch

... and were unable to find:

- Boreal Chickadee (which have been very scarce this year)
- Common Redpoll (though Andy *may* have seen one), and
- Canada Jay (which ought to have been easy to find, but alas our jay-hunting skills were evidently not up to the job)



Moose

Assiduous early-morning scouring of the Spruce Bog Boardwalk also netted (in the metaphoric sense, I hasten to add) a sleeping Boreal Owl. Boreal is quite a rare bird this far South, and drew the expected I-don't-believe-you message from the EBird police. Any

residual indignation at this offence to our *amour propre* was washed away by a few pints of Muskoka's finest at the Mad Musher. Then off to our next point of call.

13 May The County

After lunch we made the long trek down to Picton, arriving in time to check in at our hotel, beetle off to Beaver Meadow for Black Terns and a Green Heron, then engulf some large meals at the Acoustic Grill.



Black Tern

The next day's meet was ominous, but as ever we had our crack-of-dawn breakfast at Tim's and set off. The first stop was Kaiser X-Road, and unlovely bit of farmland that is usually flooded in the Spring, and thus rather attractive to visiting waders. On that morning there was a decent array of waders from five species, but nothing new for our list. And just as we arrived the rain started to pour down with increasing enthusiasm. The omens for a bird-free day were all around us as we made our way to the Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area at the southern tip. And sure enough, the rain was truly sheeting down when we arrived and there was nary a soul about – even the bird ringers from the bird observatory had vanished. After we had stood under a makeshift tarp for an hour or so, not drinking the coffee that should have been there (the Friends of something or other usually offer coffee during the Bird Festival), we began to feel a bit glum. The subject was not mentioned out loud, but our inside voices were arguing for a retreat to the warmth and succour of Picton.

It was then, at the moment of absolute weakness, that one of my local birding pals happened by. Soaked to the skin he was, as was his dog, but he allowed that he had heard some interesting warbler calls from the woods at Traverse Point. Now Ken is a bit of a bird savant, and will usually hear a given bird about 100 metres before I will. But the rain was starting to tail off a bit so we decided to see what we could dig up.

Warbler Mania

Well, that title is a bit of a spoiler. Yep, we went to the woods and there they were: hundreds of birds lurking under their own equivalent of a shelter half waiting for the weather to turn. It was the true warbler experience we had been hoping for, with each of us spotting different birds simultaneously and trying to “get on” all of them at once. In between sponging off our optics we managed to tick off 48 species in two hours – 16 warbler species, including the much sought-after Canada Warbler, Hermit and Swainson’s Thrushes, a Black-billed Cuckoo (lifer for all of us), and a variety of other migrants. Peering through the mist we spotted a gaggle of Surf Scoters at close range, though by then my lens was wet inside and out so the images are – shall we say – atmospheric.



Magnolia Warbler



Surf Scoter

When we repaired to the Bird Observatory more goodness awaited. A few other brave souls had by then materialized and we goggled at the array of birds on hand. At one point we were admiring a Golden-winged Warbler at close range (a hard-to-see bird) when about six feet in the other direction up popped a Blue-winged Warbler (equally hard to see). Added up there were fifteen warbler species on the site, of which six were additions for the day list.

As we made the trek out to the lighthouse we continued to add to the list. The most unusual find was a Common Nighthawk perched on a limb. This bird is rarely seen at the Observatory – as far as I can tell “mine” was the only one spotted this year – and as a purely nocturnal and well-camouflaged beast is usually only identified by call. So to see and photograph one was quite good. It also illustrates an important lesson of birding: the likelihood of seeing a rare bird increases logarithmically with distance from the car where one left one’s camera. Fortunately while I was tabbing way back to the Observatory and then returning to the point the creature was content to sit in place, believing itself invisible, and dream of devouring giant moths.

So for a dreary, rainy day we ended up with 62 species including six more for the Biggish Year list. Needless to say, a few pints of Prince Eddy’s went down that evening, in honour of an epic day.

The next morning we decided to give Presqu’ile another chance, certain that it would have some warbler goodness to show us. It did not, but we were mollified by good looks some forest birds including Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, Grey Catbird and lots of Cedar Waxwings. A smattering of waders was about but nothing new for the list. We then headed east towards Kingston, with a quick stop at a site along the way yielding Sora and

Virginia Rail, and a farmland road that finally yielded a Vesper Sparrow for the trip. We descended into Kingston where my beloved had dinner and beds waiting.



Common Nighthawk

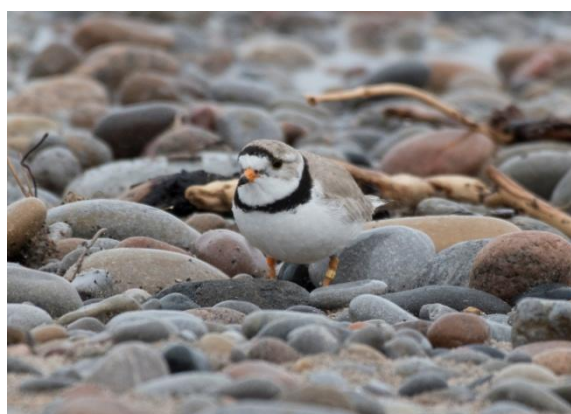


Cedar Waxwing

We had a bit of a lie-in the next day and then explored some sites in the local area. By now new birds for the list were few and far between, but we did get good looks at a Barred Owl family and Great Crested Flycatcher. Then it was back to town to freshen up, as we were scheduled to attend the annual dinner of the Kingston Field Naturalists.

The next morning featured a very early start, as one of our number required a 0200 visit to A&E. By the time that was sorted out we decided to get some sleep and get back in the saddle after lunch. We checked out some more local sites but by now it was getting very difficult to find new birds for the list so we eventually repaired to Chez Kaduck for the traditional barbecue.

The next day would be our last so we set out to check out a few sites on the way to the airport. It was a wet and blustery day but we managed to pick up a lone Piping Plover at Darlington, and finally had our first decent views of Wood Ducks. Then it was time for a last visit to Tim Horton's before we made the run to the airport.



Piping Plover

And so the third rotation of Ex TIMBIT TRAVELLER came to an end. This will probably be the last one for a while as most of the world-travelling AOS members took part in one of the three iterations however, Saskatchewan looms.

By the Numbers:

Bird Species Seen by at least one member – 198 (Previous Ex TTIII record 185)

Seen by all members – 194

Road Mileage – 3663km

Road mileage from London to Moscow – 2879km

0530 Tim's Visits – 11

Tim's Visited – 10

Beer species consumed – 12

National Parks – 1

National Wildlife Areas – 2

Provincial Parks – 5

Conservation Areas – 10

Outdoor Education Centres – 1

Sewage Lagoons – 3



Tim's



Yellow-rumped Warbler

AOS AGM

(Andrew Bray)

This year we were based at 14 Signal Regt (EW) at Brawdy. We arrived in time on Friday evening for a brief and a meal followed by the bar. We also paid into the float for the number of bird species we would see the next day. There was quite a few! We all had eventful trips to Pembrokeshire however the following morning was rather laid back. We visited Skomer Island bathed in broken sunlight. We all met up for 10:30 ferry having seen a range of birds in camp and on the headland by the boat. We went for various walks but everyone did see Chough as well as Stonechat and Meadow Pipit. There were plenty of gulls as well. A small team had gone to the shop early to wait in the queue to buy the 23 tickets for the crossing; monies had been collected the night before. On the boat we saw lots of Puffin which the tourists had come to see. Once on the Island we had a brief from the staff then were free to explore for 5 hours. The majority of us walked around the Island in an anti-clockwise direction. There were Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots and Kittiwakes galore on the cliffs. We all had spectacular views of Short-eared Owl as well as a range of birds including gulls, Curlew and Shelduck in the 2 valleys. Some Atlantic Seals were on the islands by Garland Stone. It was very spectacular with dramatic cliffs and reasonably warm as well. We caught the 4pm boat from the harbour and on the way back we had a good view of a Manx Shearwater. It was a quick change and a meal at 6pm (staff shortages as the Regt works Mon –Thu only and it was a Bank Holiday weekend). After dinner we held the AGM which was productive in discussions before we ended up back in the bar. The next morning we said goodbye to a few and the remainder walked a short circular route just out of camp taking in the coastal path. There was dramatic scenery and of course Choughs. We got back to the cars just as it started to rain. This was a superb weekend in a long forgotten part of the country adding birds to everyone's life and year lists. Our thanks to Mike who organised the welcome even if he was based in the USA in the run up! Some visited Minwear Woods on the way back for Wood Warbler as directed by me who travelled to North Wales.



Red-billed Chough

SLIMBRIDGE 16 DECEMBER 2017

(Lynne Millard)

The annual Christmas meeting at Slimbridge was attended by 10 members making the journey to the Gloucestershire site this year. The weather was cold (well it was December) so we anticipated the café would be well utilised (which it was, although we didn't beat our record for the number of visits in as day). Once all the winter woollies were in place we ventured onto the Reserve with great anticipation.

Unfortunately we were greeted with frozen ground and icy ponds so much of the wildlife was feeding elsewhere, but although they were fewer in numbers we still managed 59 species. We were rewarded with sights of the Cranes feeding in the distance and a flyover, views of a Water Rail but no Bittern sightings. The Bewick swans as usual were in abundance.



Water Rail

Birds seen

Cormorant	Redshank
Grey Heron	Black Tailed Godwit
Mute Swan	Snipe
Bewick Swan	Ruff
White Fronted Geese	Black Headed Gull
Greylag Geese	Herring Gull

Canada Geese	Great Black Backed Gull
Barnacle Geese	Wood Pigeon
Red Breasted Goose	Collared Dove
Shelduck	Meadow Pipit
Mallard	Pied wagtail
Gadwall	Wren
Pintail	Duncock
Shoveler	Robin
Wigeon	Mistle Thrush
Teal	Blackbird
Pochard	Goldcrest
Tufted Duck	Great Tit
Buzzard	Blue Tit
Sparrowhawk	Long Tailed Tit
Peregrine	Magpie
Ring Necked Pheasant	Jackdaw
Water Rail	Rook
Moorhen	Carrion Crow
Coot	House Sparrow
Crane	Chaffinch
Golden Plover	Goldfinch
Lapwing	Bullfinch
Dunlin	Reed Bunting
Little Stint	



Bewick's Swan

TICE'S MEADOW – 2018 REVIEW

(Mark Elsoffer)

As 2018 draws to a close, I am grateful to the Army Ornithological Society for allowing me the opportunity, in my capacity as Secretary of the Tice's Meadow Bird Group, to take a look back at a momentous year at Tice's Meadow Nature Reserve.

For those of you who have yet to visit us, Tice's Meadow is a newly developing nature reserve in Badshot Lea (Surrey), on the outskirts of Aldershot. The site is owned by Hanson (owners of the former quarry), and managed in partnership between Hanson, the Tice's Meadow Bird Group, the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and Surrey County Council. Tice's Meadow is widely considered to be one of the best inland sites to watch birds in the south-east of England, with 190 species of bird having been recorded. It is also a key local site for many species of butterflies, dragonflies, reptiles and amphibians, including many locally scarce and endangered species. Being so close to the home of the British Army, and with a large number of both serving and retired military personnel volunteering on site, we are proud to call ourselves "The Army's Nature Reserve". That said, we do let Navy & Air Force personnel on site too - closely monitored of course! Our ties with the Army are further strengthened by AOS Chairman Roger Dickey serving as our President, and AOS Secretary Richard Seargent serving as our Treasurer. We are very appreciative of all the hard work Roger and his team of ringers put into our nest box monitoring scheme and the regular ringing sessions that they run on site. Roger's ringing demonstrations are a highlight of our annual Spring BioBlitz, with scores of appreciative children particularly enthralled by the way his team skilfully handle and record the birds.



Restoration of the site into a nature reserve officially finished in May this year, and Tice's Meadow has undergone a series of dramatic changes in 2018, with a number of major projects delivered by the volunteers, thanks to generous financial support from a number of charitable organisations. Our innovative Swift Tower now stands proud in the Meadow - a nest box with room for 11 pairs of Swifts, mounted on an 8m telegraph pole, with a solar-powered Swift calling device. Barn Owl and Kestrel boxes have also been erected on similar poles, along with forty new nest boxes in the woods, which now form part of an official nest

box ringing scheme run by Roger. Our woodland bird feeding station has proven to be a huge success - popular not only with the woodland birds, but also with visitors who can get unrivalled views of the birds feeding within it whilst not disturbing them. Our innovative bio-diverse bird watching shelter has also now been completed. Built from a second-hand shipping container, with a bio-diverse "brown roof" and wall mounted invertebrate habitat panels, not only does it provide visitors with shelter from the elements but it will also be home to a wide variety of wildlife. Last, but by no means least, our Biodiversity Trail saw an £11,000 investment in site infrastructure, creating a 1.5 mile long self-guided walk through the site. Six benches, 16 waymarker posts, 5 bespoke wildlife interpretation panels and 5 entrance signs. All these site improvements, and the associated publicity, has lead to a noticeable increase in visitor numbers, and subsequently new volunteers for our group.



Community engagement is a key pillar of our work, and vital to ensuring a successful future for the nature reserve. 2018 saw guided walks on site for many local groups, ranging from school children and Cub Scouts, through to Rotary members and borough councillors. Local school children have displayed their nature related artwork along our new Biodiversity Trail, and the residents from a local home for adults with learning disabilities continue to tend the area of meadow we have set-aside for them to cultivate their wildflowers and grain crops. We have also committed to building 100 nest boxes for the village infants school, and are continuing to work closely with the Badshot Lea Bloomers on nature related work in the local village.

Pleasingly, the sterling efforts of our volunteers this year have been formally recognised - we came 2nd place in the UK Quarry Life Awards and 1st place in the Community Stream of the International Quarry Life Awards - receiving cheques for a total of €12,500. These awards have enabled us to green-light development of a Sand Martin nesting bank, which we plan to build in 2019. Our Chairman Richard Horton (whom many of you will know) was this year awarded a prestigious Services to Farnham Award in recognition of his years of service to Tice's Meadow and the wider community - I'm sure you'll be pleased to know that he can now legally drive his geese through Farnham on the first Sunday of the month!

Bird watching wise, 2018 has seen many highlights on site, including the first ever Cattle Egrets (8th for Surrey), a Hawfinch, a Merlin, a Scaup, a Caspian Gull, a Kittiwake, and multiple sightings of Great White Egrets, Goshawks and Ospreys. Our Little Ringed Plovers bred again this year, and record numbers of many other species were recorded. Regular

visitors in 2018 have become accustomed to being spoilt by excellent displays put on by the local Peregrines and the visiting Hobbys. The winter months have seen very showy Jack Snipes and Water Rails, along with record sized flocks of Siskins and Chaffinches around the feeding station. Spring passage again saw good numbers of Wheatears and Yellow Wagtails, although Autumn passage was rather quiet, with few waders recorded.

We look forward to working together even more closely with the AOS in 2019, and welcoming more AOS members to site. Our 2019 Spring BioBlitz is being held between Friday 3rd May and Sunday 5th May. There is always a strong AOS presence on site during our BioBlitzes, so do come down and enjoy the event if you are free.

More information about Tice's Meadow can be found on our website (www.ticesmeadow.org). For those of you on social media, we also have active Twitter (@TicesMeadow) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/groups/ticesmeadow) accounts.



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