

FOREWARD

Today's photographs on the cover are all from my trips to Iceland. I have a second career that takes me away though my air miles is cranking upwards. This year our members have been all over the place as far as New Zealand and Peru. There are lots of articles about saving the planet but I am not sure that the Army is rather interested as it is the business of destruction. That said there are now even more ringers in the Army and the diesel miles are certainly heading upwards as well despite public transport. Maybe we should do less however the buses and the trains do not run where we ring nor is it easy to see birds. If we did stop enjoying our past time and left it to watching birds in our gardens then this magazine would certainly change. Climate change is with us whether we like it or not. Maybe we should cut back our journeys however that does mean no twitching and I for one, am 1 bird short of my 200 for the year!

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AOS AGM

(Andrew Bray)

Bob Hayward and I were birding in Northumberland on the Friday so it was about 5pm that we arrived in Pocklington. There were already members there having tea and biscuits outside the block. It was a warm day down in Yorkshire. We had a shower and met in the sports pavilion for a drink. Paul had organised a barrel of Guzzler for the beer drinkers. It was then into the dining hall for a sumptuous meal and then back to the Pavilion for more drinks. It was an early AOS night. The next day we already had some birds on the list which grew to 82 (89 for the weekend) species for the day. This was a huge number and could have grown even more. The day started with a massive breakfast and we picked up our packed lunches in the hall where we were sleeping. Our first stop of the day was at Tophill Low which was a Yorkshire Water Board reserve. The warden met us and we split into 2 groups after an introductory and stimulating talk. The warden took one group to the extreme south and walked back whilst the other group started taking in the hides. We saw over 43 species including Treecreeper, Marsh Harrier and Black-tailed Godwits. At the end of the walk the entomologists were showing off some of the moths they had caught including Ghost Moth, Willow Beauty and Small China Mark. It was then off to North Cave Wetlands which was run by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust as the quarrying finished. Here we saw Oystercatcher, Red Kite, Peregrine, Mediterranean Gull, Bearded Tit and Little Owl. In all over 40 species were seen. The AGM started on time at 6pm outside in the sunshine by the Pavilion. We finished early that gave us time to have another drink before we went across to the Dining Hall for another fantastic dinner. It was then back to the Pavilion for more drinks. Some people went back to their rooms after the meal. On Sunday we visited Potterick Carr near Doncaster which again was run by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. This was a massive reserve and we saw a fantastic flying Bittern as well as Little Ringed Plover and Hobby. At midday the first batch occupied themselves with a hot drink at reception before departing. Not everyone headed to the site but the 270 hectares did not disappoint. So ended the AGM for another year which in terms of accommodation and food will be hard to surpass thanks to Paul Bennett as Bursar of the School at which we stayed.



Kingfisher

ACTIVITIES IN OUR “BACK GARDEN”

(Rodney Walker)

There is a field beside our house which does not belong to us but it has been called “your wonderful back garden” by a local friend. This Spring I was looking out of one of our upstairs windows when I saw two people crossing “our back garden”. This is unusual but there was something about one of them which suggested I had met them before. Then I widened my view only to see what appeared to be two young bucks (deer not young men!) having an almighty battle. Their horns were clearly connected as they were throwing each other around wildly. They closed in on a main field gate but did not go through; instead they fought their way back down the hill towards our house. This scene being too good to be true, I rushed outside to make contact with the two people who it was now clear were involved in the situation. I did know them and they quickly informed me that these two young animals were connected by orange baler twine. They were not fighting (which would have been most unusual at this time of the year) but trying to untie themselves. They had been found in a garden below our house and had jumped their way together over at least two fences before arriving in the field beside us – quite a feat in itself.

What could we do to help? We discussed the options which included calling the farm and gamekeeper staff who might well shoot them, calling a vet or someone who could tranquilise them, or calling a friend who might have some other ideas. One of my companions was a vegetarian and did not like the idea of shooting them – the other was more prone to a more “wild west” approach by us (or someone else) to try to get close to them and lasso them. In the end I rang an experienced friend, explained the situation and invited him to join us. The bucks were still in view and appeared to be slowing down but certainly still connected. On arrival our friend and his wife explained that, if they were shot, the meat would be of no use as in the excitement of the situation the meat would have been contaminated with too much blood. So, after some further discussion the local vet was called. He arrived incredibly quickly (yes, I was very impressed) and, together with our friend, off in a land rover they went to find the bucks who by then had managed to barge their way into the local wood. All went quiet for half an hour during which I drove to the other end of the wood to see whether the deer had broken out. There was no sign of them or the followers. Then suddenly there was a shout and the vet appeared out of the wood to collect his tranquilising equipment from the vehicle.

Some time later the human team re-appeared. And yes, they had managed to tranquilise the bucks who were well enmeshed by then in a laurel bush. Not only were their horns entangled with orange baler twine but also a thickish rope. But, oh dear, neither of the “saviour” team had a knife strong enough to cut the rope! I understand that an all stations phone call produced the farm manager with the necessary cutting equipment. The deer were separated and soon came round and went on their way. How the deer picked up the twine and, perhaps more significantly, the rope, is unknown let alone how they then became entangled but at least in this case they have survived to live and maybe fight another day.

We are aware that the bank on one edge of “our back garden” is often the home to badger and fox families and some ravens and buzzards live in its trees – a plethora of predators. Furthermore harvest time wherever it takes place can see the release of many an animal, amphibian and bug – both friend and foe! This year, for the first time, we were at home when this annual event took place in “our back garden”!

Late in July when the temperature rose to its highest this year, John, our local farmer, decided the weather was right to cut the field. The result was a golden scene for a few days as the cut grass dried out. Indeed it was so beautiful that we really did not want to see it removed. But the time came for the next phase, the tedding and raking of the hay into windrows by John, and we found ourselves in a front row seat during lunch outside for this fascinating event. A friend of the farmer was simultaneously baling up part of the field for his own purposes. While we cannot confirm which of the various activities triggered the next unexpected incursion, suddenly in swooped a red kite, which launched itself on to the ground, captured its prey and proceeded to a nearby branch to have its lunch. I was sent to collect the binoculars. On return the scene had become even more involved with up to 4 red kites circling overhead and occasionally diving on to prey. When they moved a little way away in came 4 buzzards seeking their lunch too, followed by 4 herring gulls. What is it about foursomes but maybe I am getting too excited by this predatory escapade before our very eyes. Throughout, however, we did note that the farmers carried on as if nothing was happening around them. And now a day later all is quiet and serene again although we are looking forward to the next phase when John starts his baling and we watch his every move just in case one (or more for that matter) of the circular bales decides to takes its own course of action. Actually John and I mused about the possibility of a deer climbing on to a bale and then enjoying its own ride across the valley! Maybe Sandy will paint me a picture of such an unlikely event!

Instead early one morning during this harvest time I was woken up by a loud screeching which appeared to be at the bedroom window. Who was trying to enter or at least to get our attention? I opened the window gingerly and looked out and there on the top of the nearby roof ridge was a Barn Owl. "Thanks, Mate" I said and it then floated away across the field.

The baling has now taken place and none of the bales, to date, rolled away. Instead we had more predator competition going on with the rooks, crows and jackdaws joining in the search for food in the shorter grass. As there are so many mole hills in this pasture John has wisely lifted the collecting edge of his baler so as to not damage it – the result is a low-level hay residue which was clearly home to many an edible creature. The competition that morning was led by two red kites who decided to remove the rooks and jackdaws not just from the ground but also from the surrounding trees. Their *modus operandi* was obvious – airborne attack accelerated by the movement of their fork-tails – which the corvids could not defend against. But while this was going on 3 buzzards moved in at ground level, taking guarding positions on some of the bales. This successful, almost undercover, manoeuvre outwitted the red kites who, in the end, had to slink away for a better opportunity elsewhere. This allowed the rooks and jackdaws to return and very soon afterwards they outnumbered the buzzards and took over the field. Noticeably amongst all this mayhem there has been no sign of the ravens. Perhaps they have found solace elsewhere. No, they had found a dead fox carcass which they demolished in a couple of days.

Having heard about our Barn Owl visitation John suggested that we should take a look at the hay bales as there was a likelihood that we would find some Barn Owl pellets. So we did as told and wandered amongst the bales; we found nothing which only served to annoy us later when we learned, via the web, that they sell on E-bay at a pound a pellet!

AOS TRIP TO FINLAND

(Andrew Bray)

Mon 14 May. Helsinki Airport was a very long walk with the chaos of passport control about halfway. We were running out of time though thankfully the plane to Oulu was delayed until all the passengers were aboard. We were not the last though the coach took us to a plane at the other end of the airport past where we had landed. After collecting the cars we went to a pizza restaurant for some food before going out birding. We went to a spot in the Gosny Guide on the way to Oulu Port. Here there were a few Finnish Birdwatchers and we saw 41 species including Terek Sandpiper, Red-spot Bluethroat, Wood Sandpiper, Goldeneye, Goosander and Willow Warbler. We eventually returned to the motel at 10pm! Finland was 2 hours ahead of UK.

Tue 15 May. It was a glorious day with lots of sun all the time. We started at 6am with a trip to Virkkula. This was our first trip to the edge of the sea with a walk out to the tower along a boardwalk. There were lots of birds on the water and marsh from the Visitors Centre. These included Whooper Swan and Sea Eagle to Garganey and Wood Sandpiper to Pied Flycatcher as we headed away from the Centre. We were there for about 2 hours before we headed back to the cars. The Centre was not open but others were already having some breakfast and the rest joined in as the Manager opened up early for us as she was preparing food for lots of visitors. After breakfast we headed for another sea tower at Sannanlahti where we had to walk out from a car park to the tower. We only added Yellow Wagtail but had fantastic views of 4 Sea Eagles. We were looking for Ortolan Bunting which was found near the car



Black Woodpecker

park complete with fire pit that was still smouldering. Our next stop was at Hirvineva where we had lunch. Once again this was mainly water birds. Afterwards we drove around to Ruuki where we took a track that lead into the forest and alongside the railway line. We went further than the map shows and eventually joined another track that lead us to the highway; not before opening a gate that was part of the deer fence. We then drove north of Oulu to the marina at Kiviniemi where the sun started to go down. It was then back along the trunk road until we found

some food. Eventually we crossed the freeway to a large supermarket that had 2 food stands in a cafe. Afterwards we returned to the lagoon on the way to Oulu Oil Port where once again a Terek Sandpiper appeared. It was then back to the motel.

Thu 16 May. It was an early start to look for a garage where Palid Harrier had been seen but we could not find the garage so off to the Airport Hotel we drove and the bird tower out the back at Vihiluto. Here we saw our only Whimbrel. There were the normal ducks plus a Snipe that flew up from the reeds. A bit further up the coast (about 600m) was a car park on a spit where we watched birds including Long-tailed Duck and Common Scoter. An Osprey

fished close by and struggled to get airborne with the fish it had gripped in its talons. We saw Smew, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Gadwall, Mealy Redpoll, Willow Warbler and Marsh Harrier. It was then off to the tower at Akionlahti where did not stop long. It was then off to the ferry between the mainland at the Island of Hailuoto. The ferry takes about 20-25 minutes and is free of charge. We bought some more lunch in the supermarket at Leuvionti towards Vinkantie and stopped the tower hide of Kirkkosalmi where there was Coot as well as a pair of adult White-tailed Eagles. We drove further down the track and parked in an area cleared for this purpose. We then walked down a path which was flooded in place until we reached a bog with the tower accessible by boardwalk; Syokarinlahti. Here the only good view was of a White-tailed Eagle that sat in the top of a pine. We then headed back to the ferry stopping for an Elk which was on its front knees eating. At the ferry port we saw our only Bar-tailed Godwit plus lots of Swallows and House Martins. We stopped at a Bar and Grill on the way back and had very nice food. There was a quiz night going on in the bar as well. It was an early night.

Fri 17 May. We collected our guide, Aija, at 3am from the Airport Hotel. We sat in their minibus plus one of our cars. We headed north to find the Pygmy Owl plus the birds which did not like its presence such as Willow Tit. It was then onto another site for Great Grey Owl. This was followed by another 2 sites that had Ural Owl and Tengmalm's Owls. When driving to the Ural Owl site there lots of Black Grouse and some were even in the same spot when we left the owl site. At the Ural Owl box we all



Tengmalm's Owl

had to be very quite. Aija had a mirror with lights around it which she held up and one at a time had a look at the mirror. It was then onto the spot with Tengmalm's Owl. The bird was already poking its head outside of the hole in the nest box. Once again some good photos must have been taken. We then drove to Lapkingas to see a Black Woodpecker in its nest and a bit further was another site where the old forest was protected. We did not find anything new plus the day with the guide had ended. It was back to the Motel and a garage for lunch which was very delicious and of course some sleep before heading off. We went back to the wood and walked where we drove looking for the 3 Toed Woodpecker which drummed close to us but we could not find it. We did see however Hazel Hen and Robin.

Sat 18 May. Today there was lots of driving as we had distance to cover. We set off early and stopped at Hirvisua tower where we saw our first Cuckoos plus Whooper Swan, Black Grouse and Crane. There was a long boardwalk out and a much shorter route back which was dry in comparison. It was then on to breakfast and then drove to the supermarket at Kuusamo. We then unloaded our kit at the cottages near the airport and drove to Livaara. On the way we saw Capercaillie, Hazel Hen and a Black-throated Diver. We drove the distance in the Gosney Guide and where way short of the hill. We continued to the hill and saw a Siberian Tit which led us to a Greenish Warbler. Near the top was a flock of Parrot Crossbill. There were plenty of Brambling and Willow Warbler. We tried for Rustic Bunting but none visited us despite us hearing their calls. On the way back there was 2 female Capercaillie that

took some time to work out; it was the amount of white on the back. We stopped on one track recommended in Gosney but it was very muddy blocking the way and so we walked down to the bridge. The board walk was better than at Hirvisua as no-one got their feet wet! It was back to the accommodation for some sleep and a glass of something strong.



Pygmy Owl

Sun 19 May. There was a very early morning start for some of the group who drove along roads we drove on yesterday with Black Grouse, Hen Hazel and Capercaillie. Just before the main town they came across a stunning male Capercaillie in the middle of the road. For all of us this was the day we headed north. We started at the campsite just north of Ruka with its ski slopes and jump. There was very little at the camp site so we turned right at the next junction and went to Konttainen Hill. Despite putting out some bird seed and sitting in the car for 45 minutes there were no Siberian Jays. We

walked up the hill with 137 steps in a staircase structure as the hill was so steep. There was very little at the top. We met people from the Kuusamo Bird Club at the cars who were looking for Red-flanked Bluetail. We took some local knowledge and walked up the road to see if a Hawk Owl was about but all we saw were Siberian Jays. Back at the car park the rest of the group were feeding them! We went up the hill the other side of the road and could only hear the Blue-tails. After the briefest of showers we went back to Ruka for some fuel and food. We then headed to the Oulanka National Park and parked at the visitor's centre where most of us had lunch that was bought; some decided that the restaurant was worth it. Afterwards we walked along the path to the rapids. We saw Dipper in the river and a rare Grey Wagtail flew over us in the car park. We headed further north and made sure we were in the Arctic Circle where we took photos before heading south to Kusamoo. We had a quick break and then stopped at Pudasjarvi for something to eat and arrived at the hotel at 9.20pm.

Mon 20 May. It was our last day of the trip and we returned to the tower and visitor centre at Liminganlahti. There was nothing new except a Pallid Harrier flew past the tower before everyone had arrived. We hung around for a while until the visitor centre opened up at 10am at which point coffee and cakes were consumed. Our next stop was the Arboretum at Liminka. This was a very small site with a fabulous stream running through it. There was not a lot about. It was then off to the airport for 8 of us. The remaining 4 went back to the Oil Port site and saw Common Rosefinch as well as the Terek Sandpiper before they



Siberian Jay

headed back to the airport 3 hours later.

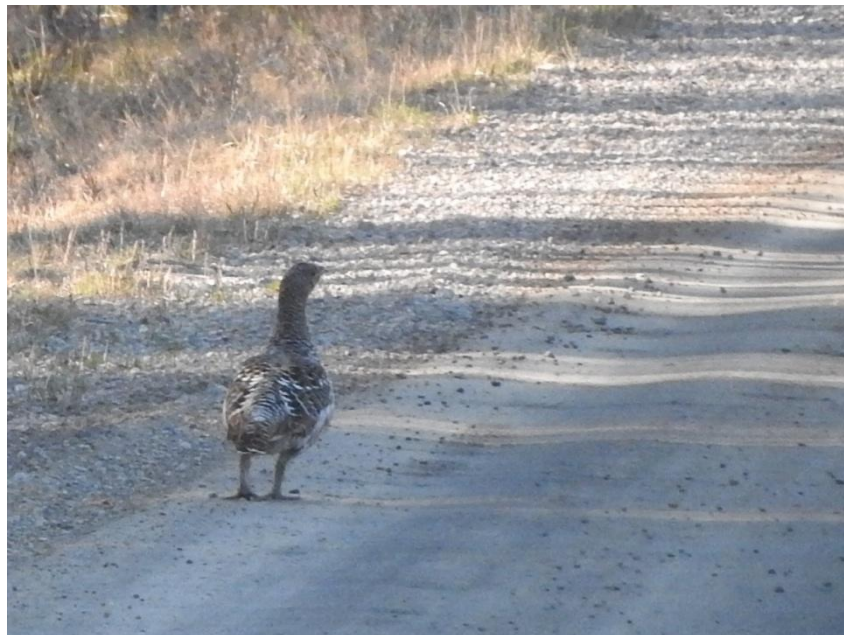
The group saw 139 species in all which was very good for a week in Finland. We saw a lot of water birds. The mosquitoes were not too bad and we did not need to spray ourselves all the time. The accommodation was best classed as adequate for our needs as it was very cheap. Food was not too bad but the cost of alcoholic drinks went up through the roof! We are looking forward to the next trip.

	Common name	Scientific name	TL	May						
				14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
2	Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>	x	x	x		x			
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	x		x	x				
4	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	x	x	x	x				
6	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	x	x	x	x				x
7	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	x		x	x		x		x
8	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	x			x		x		
9	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	x	x	x	x		x		x
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		
11	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	x		x	x				
12	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	x	x	x	x			x	x
13	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	x	x	x	x			x	x
14	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	x			x				
15	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	x			x				
16	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
17	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>	x		x	x			x	
18	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
19	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	x	x	x	x				
20	Hazel Grouse	<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>	x		x		x	x	x	
21	Western Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogallus</i>	x					x	x	
22	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
23	Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	x		x	x				
24	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	x		x	x		x	x	
25	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	x		x					
26	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	x	x	x	x				
27	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritis</i>	x		x					
28	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	x	h	h	h				
29	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	x			x				
30	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	x		x	x				
31	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	x		x	x				
32	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	x					x		
33	Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	x							x
34	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	x		x	x				x
35	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	x			x				
36	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	x			x				

37	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	x		x	x	x	x		x
38	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	x	x	x	x				
39	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	x		x	x		x		x
40	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	x		x	x				
41	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	x			x				
42	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
43	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	x		x	x				x
44	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	x			x				
45	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	x		x	x				x
46	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	x			x				
47	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	x	x		x				
48	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	x	x	x	x		x		x
49	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	x	x	x					x
50	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
51	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	x	x	x		x		x	x
52	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	x		x	x				
53	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		
54	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	x		x					
55	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
56	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
57	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	x		x	x			x	x
58	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
59	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	x		x					
60	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
61	Baltic Gull	<i>Larus fuscus fuscus</i>	x		x	x				
62	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	x			x	-			
63	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	x		x	x	x		x	x
64	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	x	x	x					
65	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	x			x				
66	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	x		x	x				
67	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
68	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	x		x	x				
69	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	x		h	h	h	x		
70	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	x				x			
71	Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	x				x			
72	Eurasian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>	x				x			
73	Tengmalm's Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	x				x			
74	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	x							x
75	Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>	x				h			
76	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
77	Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	x				x			
78	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	x		x	h				
79	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x	x		x				
80	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	x		x					

81	Siberian Jay	<i>Perisoreus infaustus</i>	x						x	
82	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	x		x		x	x		
83	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
84	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
85	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	x	x	x	x				
86	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
87	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
88	Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>	x				x	h	x	
89	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	x				x		x	
90	Siberian Tit	<i>Poecile cinctus</i>	x					x		
91	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
92	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
93	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	x	x	x	x		x		
94	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	x	x	x	x		x		
95	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	x		x	x		x	x	x
96	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
97	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	x					x		
98	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
99	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
100	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	x		x	x				
101	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	x			h				h
102	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	x			x	x			
103	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	x		x					
104	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	x		x	x				
105	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
106	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
107	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
108	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	x		x		x			
109	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	x		x		x	x	x	
110	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	x	x	x	x				x
111	Red-flanked Blue-tail	<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	x						h	
112	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	x	x	x	x		x		x
113	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	x	x	x	x		x	x	
114	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	x	x	x					
115	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	x	x		x				
116	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	x						x	
117	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x		x		x	x		
118	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	x		x					x
119	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	x				x		x	
120	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	x		x			x		
121	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea thunbergi</i>	x						x	
122	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
123	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	x	x	x	x		x		
124	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	x	x	x		x	x	x	
125	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

126	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	x		h			x	x	
127	Northern Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	x				x	x	x	x
128	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	x							x
129	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	x				h	x	x	
130	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	x			x				x
131	Mealy Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea flammea</i>	x		x	x				
132	Parrot Crossbill	<i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>	x					x		
133	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	x				x			
134	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	x					x		
135	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	
136	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	x	x	x	x	x	h		x
137	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Embrezia hortulana</i>	x	x						
138	Rustic Bunting	<i>Emberiza rustica</i>	x					x		
139	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	x	x	x	x				x



Capercaillie

BIRDS OVERWINTERING IN HELSINKI

(John Hughes)

Avoid winters in Finland if you want to see more than a few avian species. Christmas visits to family living in Helsinki have provided me with opportunities to monitor species that overwinter. Despite having the Viikki Nature Reserve with lakes and hundreds of hectares of reedbeds on the doorstep, counts of species were remarkably unproductive. The number of species seen in an afternoon bird watching in November 2008 was just 10 with a Black Woodpecker as the highlight. In November 2015 my list contained 16 species with highlights being 16 Whooper Swans and a Goshawk with a kill. My list in December 2017 during Finnish centenary independence celebrations contained only six species with as in previous years Great Tits, Hooded Crows and Herring Gulls as the most common birds. No owls were seen or heard.

Despite being the end of the road for migratory birds, Finland has an impressive total of 430 species on their check list. The Finns are passionate about their birds and even on the coldest days, walking in the woods, you are likely to bump into fellow birders and wildlife photographers. The European Ornithologists' Union conference was held in Turku in 2017 and of all the cities I have visited none has more tit boxes than Helsinki.

Magnificent paintings by the Von Wright brothers of Finnish birds (the paintings can be seen in the Ateneum National Gallery in Helsinki) are a reminder that when the snows melts there is a dramatic increase in birds. Unlike the UK, with its wealth of winter visitors Finland has few birds that over-winter. However, as others will testify, and I have yet to experience birding in summer has much to offer. On 3 April 2019 my species list doubled as migrants began to arrive and I saw 31 species including a male Marsh Harrier.

Counts of birds seen during the afternoon of 3 April 2019 in Helsinki and the Viikki Nature Reserve.

Species	Number		Species	Number
Grey Heron	1		Robin	1
Greylag Goose	2		Blackbird	12
Canada Goose	92		Fieldfare	> 5
Mallard	> 45		Redwing	1
Pochard	2		Blue Tit	2
Goldeneye	Pair		Great Tit	> 6
Goosander	14 all male		Treecreeper	1
Marsh Harrier	1		Magpie	3
Coot	13		Jackdaw	3
Oystercatcher	3		Hooded Crow	> 35

Black-headed Gull	> 30		Raven	2
Common Gull	> 25		Starling	2
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1		House Sparrow	> 85
Herring Gull	> 10		Chaffinch	5 sings
Woodpigeon	2		Greenfinch	4
Greater Spotted Woodpecker	1			



One of many brightly painted tit boxes on roadside trees in Helsinki

A YEAR IN INDIA – PART TWO

(Major Matt Rea RA)

I spent a year in Southern India as the British Army representative at the Indian Defence Services Staff College. My article in last year's Adjutant covered my experiences at the college and the Nilgiri Hills in the states of Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Karnataka. This article will focus on the wider travels that my wife Aimée and I experienced around India and the sub-continent.

The Nilgiri Hills – The Blue Mountains

The first six months in the Blue Mountains were dominated by the Monsoon. These annual rains hit the hills from a south westerly direction from June to September and from the northeast from October to December. Although we never suffered the torrential downpours that are common on the coastal plains,



Crested Serpent Eagle



Asian Barred Owlet

what we did get was 6 months of mist and drizzle. As soon as the rains changed, so did the bird life. Red Avadavats up from the plains, Rosefinches visiting for the winter, Sunbirds back in their vibrant breeding plumage, the return of the Hoopoes and a veritable explosion of Red-whiskered Bulbuls as the breeding season started. An endemic that had eluded me, the Nilgiri Laughingthrush, finally showed his face on the slopes of Doddabetta, the area's highest peak, and I finally got a view of the abundant, yet secretive, Crested Goshawk.

On another trip to Bandipur Tiger reserve I observed a Crested Serpent Eagle, an Oriental Honey Buzzard, Yellow-footed Green Pigeons and a Blue-faced Malkoha as it skulked in the undergrowth. A final trip to Mysore saw me visit the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary where the Painted Storks, Asian Openbills and Spot-billed Pelicans competed for fish under the watchful gaze of the Mugger Crocodiles.

The Queen of Hills – Darjeeling and Sikkim.

My wife and I took our first holiday in Darjeeling in the Himalayan foothills. Beloved by British colonials who migrated to escape the searing temperatures of Calcutta, the town of Darjeeling still retains the feel of an English village. Nearly half a continent away from the Nilgiri Hills, it was no surprise that the flora and fauna were also vastly different. On our first morning we saw a Rufous Sibia, a Red-billed Leiothrix, a Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and a group of Stripe-throated Yuhinas as we took a stroll around Darjeeling's famed Chowrasta.

After a few days visiting the tea plantations, we travelled north into Sikkim where we trekked along the monastery trail from Yuksom to Tashiding. Here we encountered an abundance of Himalayan birdlife with highlights including the Asian Barred Owlet, Himalayan Cuckoo and the red and yellow dimorphic colours of



Stork-Billed Kingfisher



Black Faced Laughing Thrush

male and female Scarlet Minivets. On the hill above Yuksom stood the Dubdi monastery where we were drawn to the colourful fluttering of a group of Mrs Gould's Sunbirds hanging upside down as they fed on the bushes while the lonesome song of a Great Barbet echoed across the hillside. Back in town, a Striated Bulbul, Verditer Flycatchers and a White-capped Redstart all helped to round off a memorable day.

Next, we embarked upon a 4 day trek along the Singalila Ridge which marks the border between India and Nepal. The ridge, which rises to 3500m in height and provides stunning views of Kanchenjunga, the world's 3rd highest peak, was densely covered in blooming rhododendron and magnolia trees. Swastik, our guide, was an expert in the local fauna which aided us greatly in identifying the numerous species we encountered which included the Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Spotted Laughingthrush and the endemic Darjeeling Woodpecker.

My second trip to this corner of India was on a Forward Area Tour with the college to visit the Chinese border in North Sikkim. During this trip we passed beyond the Great Himalaya range and climbed onto the Tibetan Plateau to the border at 5400m. At this altitude, whilst gasping for breath, I was able to view the Upland Buzzard. On the journey through the state capital of Gangtok the Lesser Yellownape and the Blue-throated Barbet were sighted.

The Tear Drop Island – Sri Lanka

A long weekend in Sri Lanka gave us the opportunity to stay in an eco-lodge on a creek near the Negombo Lagoon just north of Colombo. Indian Flying-Foxes swooped over the creek every evening while Water Monitors lurked in the shallows. As for the birds, within the first 10 minutes of a boat trip on the lagoon, we had seen 4 species of Kingfisher; Common, White-throated, Pied and the magnificent Stork-billed; Purple Heron and Intermediate Egrets gazed into the murky water while the Purple Swamphens skulked in the reeds. The snakelike neck of a Darter protruded above the lagoon and the Asian Koel looked on.

God's Own Country – Kerala (and Kanyakumari)

In December we visited the deep south of India including Kanyakumari on the very southern tip. In Kerala we took a houseboat through the backwaters where over an evening beer, we watched the Blue-tailed Bee-eaters soar through the tropical air and the Brahminy Kites perch in the palm trees. As we drifted through the waterways lined by rice paddies and coconut trees, we saw Indian Golden Orioles, Little Ringed Plovers, Black Drongos as the river bank teemed with fishing Indian Pond Heron.



Dalmatian Pelican



Brahimny Kite

The Land of Kings – Rajasthan plus Mumbai

We took a Christmas tour of Rajasthan, the desert state of north-west India, where the Maharajas of these former princely states built great cities and colossal fortresses. From the train to Bikaner, we saw Egyptian Vultures soaring above the desert while the giant and prehistoric looking Nilgai Antelope sloped across the countryside. At Ajmer there were Dalmatian Pelicans wintering on the lake while the pink city of Jaipur rewarded us with sightings of the Brown Rock Chat and the Rufous Treepie. Welcoming the New Year in Mumbai with a boat trip to the cave temples on Elephanta Island gave us chance to see the Western Reef Egret and the Gull-billed Tern.

The Land of the Thunder Dragon – Bhutan

Bhutan is not an easy place to visit both in terms of bureaucracy and expense and should be considered as a once in a lifetime opportunity. Having a friend in the Bhutanese Royal Guard

to host us helped this become a reality and so my wife and I embarked on a 6-day tour to this fascinating Himalayan Kingdom once my course at the staff collage was completed. We hiked up to the world-famous Tiger's Nest monastery and en-route encountered Black-faced and White-throated Laughingthrushes and a Yellow-billed Blue Magpie. Driving east we passed Punakha Dzong, the former seat of governance, which is built at the confluence of the Pho Chhu (male) and Mo Chhu (female) rivers; one of the few remaining homes of the critically endangered White-bellied Heron. Having taken an icy dip in the clear waters, we were not lucky enough to see a heron, but we did spot Black Bulbuls, a Black-naped Oriole and a Kalij Pheasant on the journey back through the mountains.

The Roof of the World – Nepal

Our final trip was to Nepal where we spent a few days in the capital Kathmandu and took a memorable trip to Chitwan National Park. Famed for its population of One-horned Rhinoceros, Chitwan sits near the Nepal-India border on the Gangetic Plain and is a vast sea of elephant-grass and forests. On the first evening we went on a foot safari by the river and were able to observe an Oriental Pied Hornbill as it soared over the forest, a Himalayan Flameback darting between the trees and mixed flock of Orange-breasted and Thick-billed Green Pigeons as they fed on salt by the river banks. Early the next morning we viewed the Lesser Adjutant while riding on the back of an elephant as well as Red-junglefowl and, most importantly, a group of sleepy rhinos wallowing in a swamp. A boat ride on a dugout canoe allowed us to see Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Stork-billed Kingfishers and the Oriental Dollarbird and finally an Osprey hunting above the river.



Lesser Adjutant

Species	Scientific Name	Location
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	Mudumalai National Park
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Kalij Pheasant	<i>Lophura leucomelanos</i>	Bhutan
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	Cape Comorin
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	Seringapatam
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Seringapatam
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Sri Lanka
Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>	Sri Lanka
Western Reef Heron	<i>Egretta gularis</i>	Mumbai
Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>	Mysore
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	Ajmer, Rajasthan
Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	Sri Lanka
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>	Sri Lanka
Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	Sri Lanka
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Mysore
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Bikaner, Rajasthan
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	Mudumalai National Park
Himalayan Vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	Bandipur Tiger Reserve
Crested Goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>	Nilgiri Hills
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	Sri Lanka
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	Mudumalai National Park
Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>	North Sikkim
Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	Sri Lanka
River Lapwing	<i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Allepey, Kerala

Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Seringapatam
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	Mumbai
River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	Seringapatam
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	Darjeeling
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Thick-billed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>	Mudumalai National Park
Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>	Mudumalai National Park
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>	Sri Lanka
Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	Nilgiri Hills
Himalayan Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus saturatus</i>	Sikkim
Asian Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>	Sikkim
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	Sikkim
Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	Sri Lanka
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	Allepey, Kerala
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	Nilgiri Hills
Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyeros birostris</i>	Delhi
Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>	Sri Lanka
Blue-throated Barbet	<i>Psilopogon asiaticus</i>	Gangtok, Sikkim
Darjeeling Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos darjellensis</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Lesser Yellownape	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>	Gangtok, Sikkim
Himalayan Flameback	<i>Dinopium shorii</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	Chitwan National Park, Nepal
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus</i>	Sikkim
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	Sikkim

Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>	Allepey, Kerala
Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	Bhutan
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	Sikkim
Spangled Drongo	<i>Dicrurus bracteatus</i>	BRT Tiger Reserve
White-throated Fantail	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>	Darjeeling
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa flavirostris</i>	Bhutan
Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	Jaipur, Rajasthan
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Rufous-vented Tit	<i>Periparus rubidiventris</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Green-backed Tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>	Hampi
Striated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus striatus</i>	Sikkim
Himalayan Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>	Sikkim
Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>	Bhutan
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	Sikkim
Ashy-throated Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus maculipennis</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Whistler's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus whistleri</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	Nilgiri Hills
Black-faced Laughingthrush	<i>Trochalopteron affine</i>	Bhutan
Nilgiri Laughingthrush	<i>Montecincla cachinnans</i>	Nilgiri Hills
Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i>	Darjeeling
Rufous Sibia	<i>Heterophasia capistrata</i>	Darjeeling
Large Grey Babbler	<i>Argya malcolmi</i>	Hampi
Spotted Laughingthrush	<i>Ianthocincla ocellata</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
White-throated Laughingthrush	<i>Pterorhinus albogularis</i>	Bhutan
Whiskered Yuhina	<i>Yuhina flavicollis</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Stripe-throated Yuhina	<i>Yuhina gularis</i>	Darjeeling
White-tailed Nuthatch	<i>Sitta himalayensis</i>	Sikkim

Rusty-flanked Treecreeper	<i>Certhia nipalensis</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Bank Myna	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>	Jodhpur, Rajasthan
Pied Myna	<i>Gracupica contra</i>	Delhi
Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>	Delhi
Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>	Ajmer, Rajasthan
White-collared Blackbird	<i>Turdus albocinctus</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	Sikkim
Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassinus</i>	Sikkim
Indian Blue Robin	<i>Larvivera brunnea</i>	Sikkim
Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Plumbeous Water Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus fuliginosus</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
White-capped Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus leucocephalus</i>	Sikkim
Brown Rock Chat	<i>Oenanthe fusca</i>	Jaipur, Rajasthan
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>	Sikkim
Mrs. Gould's Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i>	Sikkim
Fire-tailed Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga ignicauda</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Russet Sparrow	<i>Passer cinnamomeus</i>	Bhutan
Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>	Seringapatam
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Singalila National Park, Darjeeling
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	Nilgiri Hills

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

(Rodney Walker)

No. I am not about to add to the many articles which overcrowd all elements of the media today with advice and reminders on the sexual habits of the human being! Mine is a simpler story which emphasises the excitement that I get from that other family – the fauna which are so important to our very existence however fragile the future of their own survival.

Let us start with the explosion of life in our garden in the Spring. The weather, without doubt, accelerated the growth patterns this year bringing on an early arrival by so many varieties of bees feasting off the pollen even before the frosts had passed by. But sadly we came across far too many bees coming into the house and dying by the windows. I haven't worked out why they come in – indeed, in many cases, how they come in as our doors and windows are normally closed. The good news, however, is that the overall numbers are the highest we have seen in 6 years.

While we were still hoping for a Partridge family (and the mat over our cattle grid is in place), we saw a mass breeding programme by Blackbirds. Furthermore, we had a Blue Tit family in the bird box which is attached to the house. We had not realised that they were there until one day while grandchildren were gallivanting around the garden, I heard squeaking in the box. I set up my telescope and saw that the chicks were definitely in full cry for more food – a sure sign that they were close to fledging – and the parents were looking pretty ragged. I clearly missed the first escapee from the box but persevered until one leapt out and flew away. Its brothers/sisters were clinging to the walls of the house all around me. What excitement! But then to my horror there was a large bang on the window through which I was looking and on the ground outside was a Great Tit. I went to its rescue only to see its dying shudder – it had broken its neck. So the joy of blue tit life was tempered by this concurrent tragedy.

This leads us nicely on to our visit earlier this year to Tiritiri Matangi Island off New Zealand's North Island. We were staying initially with some friends in Auckland. They had kindly booked us in for a visit to the island. Predator-free the island is a 75-minute ferry ride from Auckland's downtown terminal. We arrived early for the ferry and were waiting in the hot sunshine for our transport to arrive when I glanced to my left. To my amazement there



was Tim Hallchurch and Jan. They were on a world tour and were on their way to Los Angeles the very next day. What a fantastic coincidence that we were on the same adventure to see some special bird species on the same day and on the other side of the world.

Tiritiri Matangi is a wildlife sanctuary and one of that country's most important and exciting conservation projects. It is located 30km north east of central Auckland and has to be reached by boat. A hundred and twenty years of farming had seen this 220-hectare island stripped of 94% of its native bush but in the 1980's, volunteers planted between 250,000 and 300,000 trees. The Island is now

60% forested with the remaining 40% left as grassland for species preferring open habitat. All predators have been controlled thus allowing some very rare birds to start the process of re-building their species.

Our day on the Island was fascinating even for the non-birder. It was hot and humid as we wandered through the undergrowth admiring the hard work of so many volunteers. Our leader was such a person and he was accompanied by a young French lady who by night is a watchperson for the ambulance service and by day is a learner guide on the island. We were not clear when she ever slept except on the ferry journey back and forth to Auckland!

The Island is home to twenty of the country's endemic birds some of which have been translocated to the sanctuary for their survival. Others have arrived naturally. We saw most of them during our day's visit. For me four stood out – the Saddleback which has no close relatives anywhere else in the world – the spectacularly-marked New Zealand Pigeon – the Takahe (a chicken-sized now flightless bird) which was thought to be extinct until 1948 having been around for over ten million years when it probably flew to New Zealand – and the North Island Pukako. This is still a very rare bird with sounds like a series of rather sad organ notes. It stands on one leg eating food held by its other leg. Impressive! Our French guide had never seen one (we saw two) and burst into tears at this sighting. I think they were tears of joy – at least we hope so!

The winning observer prize of the day, however, went to Sandy. While the rest of us were trying to identify an elusive, endemic, small, Stitchbird, Sandy spotted a Giant Weta. These large insects are endemic to New Zealand and are very difficult to see. Our guide was really chuffed and congratulated her for a special find. And then a few hundred yards further on, unbelievably, Sandy found another one. Yes, there is something for everyone on that Island.

A WEEK IN GHANA

(Nicholas Beswick)

My oldest friend, Peter, has a long association with Ghana. Tragically, he lost his wife two years ago and decided to set up a village school in her memory. And so I was invited to join Peter and friends on a trip to Ghana for the dedication of the school, to see some of the country and do some birding. The trip was arranged for August when the weather is relatively cool and dry – hot and sticky by British standards but not unbearably so and only an occasional shower to contend with. For the week Peter had organised some tours for general interest but he and I were also able to do some birding around the capital, Accra, where we were based. As Ghana is a large country and the roads not generally good it was not possible to get to the best birding areas. But, as it was my first trip to sub-Saharan Africa, it was still a great adventure.

23 August – Accra. It was late evening by the time I reached the Labadi Beach Hotel on the eastern edge of Accra but I was up bright and early the following morning to explore the hotel grounds before breakfast. Of course, virtually everything was new to me and I was extremely grateful for the Helm Guide *Birds of Ghana* for working out what I had seen. The hotel grounds included a couple of large tree-fringed ponds that provided a range of birds

throughout the week and thankfully no mosquitos. First on my list were the ubiquitous Pied Crows, Laughing Doves and Common Bulbuls. On the ponds, Moorhens were easy to identify but other birds gave only tantalising glimpses. It was a problem to know what family some of them belonged to, let alone pin down a species ID.

After breakfast we all took a trip into the city for some sightseeing and visit to a market but with minimal opportunity to find birds. Unidentified swallows swooped through the streets and a pair of Kestrels were in residence on a rooftop. In the afternoon Peter and I went for another walk round the hotel grounds and to explore the small creek that flowed past the end of the grounds into the sea. It was hardly a salubrious spot – the locals use any waste ground as an “informal toilet” – but there were some good birds including Whimbrel, Common Sandpiper and Greenshank, early post-breeding arrivals. We also found a colony of Little Swifts nesting under the adjacent road bridge and identified the first of many species of herons to be seen during the trip. Of these, the Intermediate Egret has adapted to human development and was to be seen almost everywhere but sticking to the water were Grey Heron, Green-backed Heron, Squacco Heron and Western Reef Egret. Back in the hotel grounds we had a brief view of the extravagantly coloured Violet Turaco. It was no surprise that Helm had chosen it for the front cover of their guide. My day finished with a seawatch from the beach behind the hotel that yielded a few passing Royal Terns and others that were too distant to identify.

24 August – Akokoa. Saturday was the big day for the school dedication and we were soon on a coach for an interminable journey through Accra’s urban sprawl and its appalling traffic. Eventually the road climbed a range of hills and we reached open country. Our destination was not much further, a village of a hundred souls half a mile from the road where the coach parked. After the school’s dedication which involved quite a few speeches and performances by the children and others we made our way across a maize field to the football ground where lunch was served. This was the opportunity to escape to explore the neighbouring fields and I soon spotted two shrikes – Black-crowned Tchagara and the smart black-and-white Common Fiscal. A quiet spot by some rough ground and bushes between two fields proved good. A tiny emerald jewel flew over – my first sunbird – followed by two stunning red and black beauties. The smaller was a typical finch – the Black-winged Bishop. The larger was Blackbird size but with a massive horn coloured bill and a yellow eyepatch – the Double-toothed Barbet. More finches appeared including the delightful Orange-cheeked Waxbill. Back at the village after lunch we were taken on a tour during which an African Pied Hornbill and an African Palm Swift flew over. The day showed that there were plenty of birds living alongside the subsistence agriculture that covers much of Ghana.

25 August – Sakumono. There was a leisurely start to the day after a late return to the hotel the previous evening. Peter arranged for a short visit to the Sakumono wetlands, about ten miles to the east of Labadi. This Ramsar site has been sadly neglected, with access through a very run-down resort and the elevated concrete hide would certainly have been condemned by elf and safety in the UK! However, it provided welcome cover from the hot sun and good views over a great expanse of reeds and lagoons. A family of African Jacanas caught our eye while two Little Bee-eaters, scarcely larger than sunbirds, hawked from a nearby tree.

Everyone had good views of two Senegal Thick-knees, close relatives of the Stone-curlew, but more active during the day. A Purple Swamphen briefly emerged from the reeds along with a Black Crake, a small all-black moorhen with a pale bill. A Pin-tailed Whydah, a tiny black and white finch with an impossibly long black ribbon tail flitted over the reeds. On our way back through the resort we encountered the outrageously iridescent Purple Glossy Starlings on the unused tennis courts.

After a trip into Accra for a street carnival I explored the area across the main road from the hotel as Google Maps showed a lagoon there. It proved a good site, with Wood Sandpiper added to the list of waders and a Malachite Kingfisher perched on an overhanging branch. The adjacent waste ground, in part a football pitch and area for grazing horses, was also productive. A flock of Piapiacs, much like our Magpies, foraged around the margins and a Shikra sparrowhawk watched from a tree, while two Cattle Egrets accompanied the horses and a Yellow-billed Shrike looked on from a bush. At dusk I went down to the hotel ponds as the Pied Kingfishers came noisily in to roost and an African Scops Owl made its repeated plaintive whistle.

26 August – Shai Hills. The group's trip for the day was inland from Accra to the Shai Hills reserve where we were taken on a tour by the forestry wardens. This site is largely scrub and grassland, with some steep-sided hills rising from the plain. We soon sighted some short-horned antelopes but a tantalisingly brief view of an eagle was frustrating. A stop at a small pond found two pairs of White-faced Whistling Ducks, with large ducklings, though the wardens said they had never seen them before. They were the only ducks of the whole week. A Little Grebe was familiar but a surprise and seeing Helmeted Guineafowl in the wild a bonus. A Yellow-mantled Widowbird was spectacular but the best bird was a Dwarf Bittern perched in undergrowth on the pond's margin. The tour continued with a visit to a cave in the hillside housing a huge bat colony, with Flappet Lark in song flight and Senegal Parrot seen along the way. Our last stop was to see the Zebra captive breeding programme where a troop of Baboons put in an entertaining appearance.

Senchi River - Volta. We continued north to spend the afternoon on the River Volta just below the Lake Volta dam. Peter had organised a boat that took us slowly up the river to the foot of the imposing dam and the leisurely trip allowed plenty of opportunity to spot birds. Swallows flitted over the water including two gorgeous White-throated Blue Swallows and a Fork-tailed Drongo hawked from a nearby tree. As the boat approached the dam the skipper told us to look out for flamingos. I was sceptical to say the least! However, a group of Red-billed Hornbills flew over, soon followed by a white eagle with complex black markings – some flamingo! I later identified it as a Palm-nut Vulture. Not a true vulture at all but a little later three Hooded Vultures circled above as our boat returned downstream. Subsequently, I saw these all-dark vultures over Accra and Sakumono. Of the many pigeons around I was able to identify African Green Pigeon and Red-eyed Dove, a large dark version of our Collared Dove.

27 August - Sakumono. As it was another morning without an organised trip Peter and I decided to pay a longer visit to the Sakumono wetlands. We got our driver to drop us on the

beach road so that we could walk round the fringe of the reserve to the hide. Having confirmed that there was nothing on the beach we set off across rough grass towards the wetland. Several tern-like birds flew over and, when we later found one on the ground, we were able to confirm Collared Pratincole. Pratincoles have long been on my bucket list so it was marvellous to see them perform. We soon added Spur-winged Lapwing to the Wattled Lapwings from our previous trip and found several Plain-backed Pipits and a gorgeous Yellow-throated Longclaw in the grassy areas. A closer approach to the lagoon gave excellent views of a small flock of Black Herons with Redshank, Greenshank, Wood and Common Sandpipers on the muddy shore. At this point our walk became trickier as a boggy stream lay across our path and the edge of the reserve was hemmed in by unregulated building. Eventually, with soggy feet, we abandoned our plan, climbed over a wall around a half-built house and found ourselves on the road leading to the resort and the hide. On the way we flushed a couple of Double-spurred Francolins and a Snipe, and saw several Yellow-billed Shrikes. Further watching from the hide added only a Purple Heron to the birds seen on our first visit and we were soon relieved to be heading back to the hotel in the air-conditioned car for a good bath before lunch.

28 August – River Volta Estuary. For our party's last organised trip we headed east along the coast to Ada, at the mouth of the River Volta, here a very wide stream flowing through flat country with numerous mangrove islands. At the resort we embarked on a fast boat to the river's mouth where I found terns fishing along the shoreline. Along with Sandwich and Common Terns were two delightful Damara Terns, the same size as Little Tern, but with all black cap and bill. Our next stop was Crocodile Island where there was one in a secure walled enclosure and we were 'treated' to locally distilled spirit and palm wine – disgusting! The island also featured a small colony of Slender-billed Weavers, nesting exactly as described in the book, low in a tree overhanging water. Our return to the resort was not a success as we waited interminably for snack lunches. It was late afternoon by the time we were back on the boat for a trip up river to Bird Island. However, the delay meant that hundreds of egrets, herons and cormorants were already gathering to roost by the time we reached the small reed-covered island and everyone was treated to excellent views of the birds.

29 August – Achimota Forest, Accra. I was up early for my last morning in Ghana to check out the area around the hotel. More Black-winged Stilts had arrived in the creek, along with a Redshank. A Senegal Thick-knees on the hotel roof was a real surprise and I finally nailed a bird that I had glimpsed several times in the grounds – Green Wood-hoopoe, an impressive glossy green-black bird with a red hoopoe bill and woodpecker behaviour. An obliging Shikra landed above me in a palm tree, allowing me to enjoy the fine orange barring on its breast. Across the road three small parrots helpfully landed in view and turned out to be juvenile Red-fronted Parrots, with only a tiny spot of red plumage. Two Rose-ringed Parakeets were much more easily identified as they flew over.

As my flight home was not until late evening Peter and I had another free morning for birding. I had spotted a forested area on the north side of the city on Google Maps and we hoped to find different birds in this habitat. The forest is thick thorny scrub with some larger

trees but with numerous paths through it. Part has been taken over by religious groups and we wandered into several small clearings to find praying or chanting in progress. Bizarre. Elsewhere we found a spectacular group of Purple Glossy Starlings and two rich brown Broad-billed Rollers. On a hot, windy day small birds were elusive though we much enjoyed Bronze Mannikins and a flock of Orange-cheeked Waxbills. Common Wattle-eye seemed an inappropriate name for a very smart black and white flycatcher with a red eyepatch.

Although this account is about birds my trip had not been principally for birding. We honoured the memory of Peter's wife, saw some sights, experienced rural Ghana well off the tourist trail and met many local people who were charming and helpful. A week organised around birding should include the forests in the west of the country and, if possible, to the drier areas in the north. August is a good time to visit towards the end of the breeding season and when the weather is likely to be fine. It might be easier to find birds earlier in the summer but the weather is generally much hotter and wetter. I enjoy finding and identifying birds for myself but must inevitably miss much. Although the Helm guide refers to growing interest in birds in Ghana we did not meet any other birders. It may still be worth looking for local contacts or guides for a birding trip.

Ghana Bird Records 23-29 August 2019

	Accra Area	Akokoa 24-Aug	Sakumono 25-Aug	Shai Hills 26-Aug	Senchi 26-Aug	Sakumono 27-Aug	Ada 28-Aug	Achimota 29-Aug
African Green Pigeon					2			
African Jacana			4			1		
African Palm Swift	x	x			x		x	
African Pied Hornbill		1	1	1	6			
African Pied Wagtail	x				1		2	
African Scops Owl	x							
African Wattled Lapwing	x		3			2		
Black Crake			1					
Black Heron						11		
Black-and-white Mannikin		1						
Black-crowned Night-heron	x					2		
Black-crowned Tchagara		1						
Black-shouldered Kite	x			1		1		
Black-winged Bishop		1						
Black-winged Stilt	x						4	
Blue-spotted Wood Dove				1				
Broad-billed Roller								2
Bronze Mannikin								2
Brown Sunbird	x							
Cattle Egret	x					x	x	
Collared Pratincole						x		
Common Bulbul	x	x	3	x	x	x	x	x
Common Fiscal		1						
Common Sandpiper	x				1	1	1	
Common Snipe						1		
Common Swift	x							
Common Tern							x	
Common Wattle-eye								1
Damara Tern							2	

Double-spurred Francolin						2		
Double-toothed Barbet		1						1
Dwarf Bittern				1				
Flappet Lark				1				
Fork-tailed Drongo					1			
Great White Egret			3			3	4	
Green Wood-hoopoe	x							
Green-backed Heron	x				1			
Greenshank	x					8		
Grey Heron	x							
Grey-backed Camaroptera								1
Helmeted Guineafowl				2				
Hooded Vulture	x				3	2		
Intermediate Egret	x	2	2		5	x	x	
Kestrel	x							
Laughing Dove	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Little Bee-eater			2			2	2	
Little Egret	x					1	x	
Little Grebe				1				
Little Swift	x		x		x	x		x
Long-tailed Cormorant	x				x	x	x	
Malachite Kingfisher	x				1			
Moorhen	x							
Northern Grey-headed Sparrow	x	x			x		x	x
Olive-bellied Sunbird		1						
Orange-cheeked Waxbill		x		x				10
Palm-nut Vulture					1			
Piapiac	x							
Pied Crow	x	x	4	x		x	x	x
Pied Kingfisher	x					2	2	
Pin-tailed Whydah			1		1			
Plain-backed Pipit						4		
Purple Glossy Starling			4			1		6
Purple Heron						1	1	
Purple Swampphen			1					
Red-billed Hornbill					4			
Red-eyed Dove					2			1
Red-fronted Parrot	x							
Redshank	x					1		
Rose-ringed Parakeet	x							
Royal Tern	x							
Sandwich Tern							x	
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	x							
Senegal Coucal	x	1				1		
Senegal Parrot				1				
Senegal Thick-knees	x		2			2	1	
Shirka	x					1		1
Slender-billed Weaver							4	
Splendid Sunbird		1		1			1	1
Spur-winged Lapwing						3		
Squacco Heron	x		3			2	6	
Village Weaver	x	x	x	x		x		2
Violet Turaco	x			1				
Western Grey Plantain-eater	x						1	1
Western Reef Egret	x						x	

Whimbrel	x							
White-faced Whistling Duck				10				
White-throated Blue Swallow					2			
White-throated Francolin				2				
Wire-tailed Swallow					x	x	x	
Wood Sandpiper	x					4		
Woodland Kingfisher	x				1			
Yellow-billed Shrike	x		6					2
Yellow-mantled Widowbird								
Yellow-throated Longclaw						1		
Zitting Cisticola	x					1		

KUWAIT

(Mark Easterbrook)

Introduction. The group of 7 people led by 2 tour leaders saw 147 species in the week 12-20 Apr 19. Kuwait has the potential to turn up some excellent birds and rarities. This coupled with it being the easiest place in the world to connect with a number of sought after species and many birds that interest the avid Western Palearctic lister makes it a must visit and exciting country to go birding in. This trip was no exception and delivered the goods. With it being a relatively small country, getting around is easy due to the smaller daily distances to travel and the good infrastructure. Unlike many birding tours to larger countries, staying in one hotel for the duration of the tour was a relative luxury.

Day 1 – 12 Apr. _We flew from Heathrow to Kuwait City via Istanbul, Ata Turk airport with Turkish Airlines. The flights were generally on time and were uneventful. I have always been pleased with the service of Turkish Airlines and this was no exception. Some people initiated their Turkish lists with a Blackbird, White Wagtail and House Sparrow in the airport. We arrived in Kuwait the following day.

Day 2 – 13 Apr. After an overnight flight and clearing immigration in Kuwait City we proceeded to meet Pekka Fagal our local guide. It is worth mentioning that submitting an eVisa request prior to travelling saved me a great deal of time and messing about.

Whilst driving to the hotel, Common Mynah, House Sparrow, Laughing and Eurasian Collared Doves were seen – The list was up and running! We arrived at the Continental Hotel in Kuwait City at about 1430 and after quickly unpacking our optics were soon in Al Saheel Park. A city park just 10 minutes' walk from the hotel proved to be an excellent location to see migrants and was visited every day.

We started to walk around the park immediately encountering Common Mynahs, House Sparrows and White-eared Bulbuls. A while later at a small reed bed, a male Common Redstart, a Blackcap, a couple of Willow Warblers and Pallid Swifts were overhead. A strange call and a movement in the reeds alerted the team and almost without hesitation Basrah Reed Warbler was called by Mark. Sure enough with its strange call and unfamiliar song, white underparts, cold upperparts, bill length and striking head pattern a much wanted target bird was secured within hours of arrival, to everyone's relief.

We continued to walk finding Indian Silverbills, in fact the park was the only location in which they were encountered. A few Lesser Whitethroats fed on cacti in the gravel and a bird flew up and perched. Close study of the bird and photographs revealed it was an Eastern Cinerous Bunting. Later at a small ornamental pond, as we watched from the bridge, a Great Reed Warbler was obvious but not so the male Little Bittern which was an excellent find by Graham.

That evening we all opted for curry in the hotel and it was excellent. Sadly no alcohol to celebrate our early success, but several glasses of water and a good night's sleep set us up for day three.

Day 3 – 14 Apr. With Nick suffering from insomnia he woke Mark at 0500 with a coffee and by 0530 they were in the Al Saheel Park. This set the trend for the week and the park was visited by varying numbers from the group for an early morning round throughout the week. Immediately to the reed bed and now there were two Basrah Reed Warblers, allowing good views and chances for photography. A Sparrowhawk darted overhead and a Ring-necked Parakeet called as it went. Many of the same birds were present from the previous day but a singing Eastern Olivaceous Warbler was new. As we returned to the hotel a small stand of trees held a female Semi-collared Flycatcher which was a surprise.



Basrah Reed Warbler at Al Saheel Park

After an enjoyable and good breakfast we headed off to Pivot Fields in the Sulabia area at 0730, arriving at about 0815. As we drove to some pools an Isabelline Shrike was seen by some as we proceeded onwards. At the pools numerous Spotted Crakes were calling and several were eventually seen well. As we scanned the waders including, Temminck's Stints, Ruffs, Little Ringed Plovers, Wood Sandpipers, Little Stints, Common Sandpipers and a single Turnstone and Curlew Sandpiper with the highlight being six Collared Pratincoles, a Great Spotted Eagle soared in the distance and a Steppe Buzzard landed in a nearby tree. Sadly, a pair of goons turned up with a Falcon and said "We are hunting". What followed was like a scene from Monty Python as the Falcon was released and one of the "Learned Gentlemen" ran around in the water like a demented Crane. Alas with all serenity and peace broken, we moved on. As we drove the tracks, a ringtail Montague's Harrier was seen. We arrived at our next location to be treated to a quartering ghostly and quite stunning male Pallid Harrier and in the trees a male Semi-collared Flycatcher performed well for all to see. Accompanied by a Common Redstart – there were plenty of birds about. As we walked

around another nearby pond, more Redstarts and Nick found the first male White-throated Robin, that remained elusive but we needn't have worried as it was the first of many for the week. With another two Steppe Buzzards and a few Black Kite moving around we began to drive around the many tracks.

As we drove we saw Yellow Wagtails of several races, a couple of Whinchats and what were becoming the normal resident birds. We returned to the pools where "The Hunters" had departed. Luckily enough we were put onto a Red-wattled Plover with 3 chicks and this scarce resident and WP tick was enjoyed by all. Nothing much had changed although the only Little Egrets of the tour were seen and a Ruppell's Weaver landed on a reed top briefly and below a female Little Bittern skulked. With many Yellow Wagtails and Red-throated Pipits passing overhead it was time to depart for lunch and Jahra Farms.

After lunch we arrived at Jahra Farms to find our quarry sat in front of us – six adults and a juvenile Bank Mynah. We continued to walk the area after our initial success and found our first White-throated Kingfisher and the only Grey Wagtail but little else so we departed for the Doha area. On the mud flats underneath the new causeway many waders had gathered the majority of which were Lesser Sand Plovers with several hundred being present. Careful scanning produced the only Broad-billed Sandpiper of the week along with some commoner waders. In the surrounding scrub a male Pied Wheatear and six Ortolan Buntings showed well. Perhaps a strange highlight was the Arabian Red Fox running past us showing its outsized ears.

The final stop of the day was the Sulabikhat Bay area and in particular the areas known as the "Manchester Club" in the hope of sighting the lingering Crab Plover which had not yet departed for its breeding grounds. As we scanned the area four Greater Flamingos fed in the bay and good numbers of Slender-billed Gulls, Little Terns with a single Black-headed Gull and Lesser Crested Tern being present. Many Eurasian Curlews and Whimbrels were feeding and a single Caspian Tern and Gull-billed Tern did a fly by as a pair of White-winged Black Terns sat on the mud. Roosting was very large numbers of Curlew and Terek Sandpipers and a single Bar-tailed Godwit fed actively. As we watched the waders gather to roost we were becoming a little concerned. We decided to move closer and as we trudged through the sticky mud, Graham shouted there's a large white bird over there. There it was the lone, lingering Crab Plover a highlight for many. It must have been obscured or had flown in as we moved forward; in any event it was scoped to death and enjoyed by all.



Crab Plover at “Manchester Club” Mud Flats

Day 5 – 15 Apr Up and at em! The 0530 walk to Al Saheel Park for the early morning ritual. There had obviously been an influx of migrants and several Red-throated and Tree Pipits called overhead. A female White-throated Robin was seen well and at least nine Blackcaps fed in the open. Remarkably so did a Basrah Reed Warbler. An inspection of the now famous reed bed revealed the presence of another two chasing each other and singing. As we walked back to the hotel a single Whitethroat was noted and the now common birds including Great Reed Warblers were also present.

The group departed the hotel at 0720 and proceeded to the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) University site. It is well known for wintering Grey Hypocolius and Pekka decided to visit on the off chance that some may still be there. As we pulled up and alighted, Pekka heard a bird calling. We soon found a fine pair feeding that were viewed at a distance of about twenty metres. With cameras working overtime it was a fantastic steal, and a great bird to get in the bag as early on as they are not always seen during the Spring – RESULT!



Male Grey Hypocolius at KISR University

Delighted we departed for the longish drive north to Al Abraaq Oasis – an area of irrigated woodland and scrub in the middle of the desert and a migrant hot spot. As we arrived the area was alive with birds and although Peter said he’d seen it busier on occasion, it was agreed that today was an above average showing. Of the Shrikes, Masked, Woodchat, Isabelline and Red-tailed were all seen well. The area was dripping with Common Redstarts and at least eleven White-throated Robins were seen. Chats were well represented with a single Bluethroat, Common Nightingale, and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin being seen. An amazing flock of 19 Grey Hypocolius caught the group’s attention and it was fantastic to see such a large number flying around the area with their striking wing pattern. As a Steppe Eagle passed overhead not all the group saw it as the others were getting to grips and scoping a strange Chiffchaff, that Peter had got on to which proved to be a Mountain Chiffchaff. At least fifteen Ortolan Buntings rested in nearby trees and a single Night Heron was overhead.



Female Grey Hypocolius at Abdaly Farms

As we drove the area a single Pale Rockfinch was seen well and posed for the camera and then later as we were leaving, at a pond, six were present in a bare tree. At least 10 Squacco Herons flushed and a Common Sandpiper fed on the edge of the pond with a Red-throated Pipit and two Yellow Wagtails. We departed to a Western Cattle Egret sat atop a tree.



Pale Rockfinch at Al Abraq

Onward to Jahra Pools Reserve. Although no longer open due to refurbishment which was a bit of a disaster, we eventually found a spot where we could stand on some earthworks and view over the top of the fence and reed bed. Not ideal but it would have to do – making the search for Grey-headed Swamphen near impossible, as was to be the case.

Not to be thwarted in a couple of hours the group turned up some great birds the highlights being four White-tailed Plovers, a single Spur-winged Plover and a lone Blue-cheeked Bee-eater with several others being heard. Avocets were present and a flock of circa thirty five Greenshanks was impressive. The first Black-winged Stilts were seen along with several Ringed Plovers and when an Osprey and Great Spotted Eagle rose, in time honoured tradition all waders flushed which alerted the group to the presence of a Green Sandpiper and four Ferruginous Ducks. With dusk arriving at least eight Marsh Harriers came to roost along with three Glossy Ibises and twenty seven White Storks stopped for a drink. Scanning the

mass of *hirundines* the only Red-rumped Swallow and Common Swift was seen. Finally, Clamorous Reed Warblers sang atop the reeds as did Graceful Prinias and White-throated and a single Pied Kingfisher patrolled the reed bed.

At dinner, the waiters no longer bothered to offer us the European menu as we were all extremely happy to indulge in the British passion that is curry eating. The Indian food at the hotel continued to be outstanding!

Day 6 – 16 Apr The by now routine regular walk around Al Saheel Park revealed nothing new but at least three Basrah Reed Warblers were present and it now became a mission to record them on every day of the tour – which would be unprecedented.

Heading off to Mutla’a ranch, we arrived to find that yet more of the habitat had been destroyed and not many trees remained. That said it still managed to turn up some good birds that were not seen again. Walking the depleted wooded area that was said to be a shadow of its former self it seems likely that it will not be long until the whole area disappears as a viable site. We continued finding at least four European Cuckoos and two Namaqua Doves, with the male being very showy that Ashley had originally spotted.

Ashley found the first male Red-backed Shrike of the week and Graham the only Wryneck. A Common Nightingale sang from a thicket and a male Grey Hypocolius fled the area. With a male White-throated Robin, a pair of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins and a female Semi-collared Flycatcher being seen the area still managed to attract some tired migrants.

We journeyed to Abdaly Farms for another target species. Not long after we arrived the calls of Afghan Babblers were heard and it was not long before we were viewing and photographing a family party of five, a few of which sat in the open panting. Another pair of Namaqua Dove was noted but little else so we proceeded to a nearby water bottling plant that was surrounded by trees.



Afghan Babbler at Abdaly Farms

At the plant, a Hoopoe was flushed which had been a bit thin on the ground to date. At the rear of the plant on some dead scrub, two Woodchats and a Turkestan Shrike along with a male Semi-collared Flycatcher, another European Cuckoo and a scruffy looking Little Owl was a surprise as it flushed from a nearby tree.

Continuing the day we travelled to KISR – Liyah and drove a lightly wooded area surrounding a small hill to the south followed by a desert area in the north. The southern area held many Pied and Northern Wheatears including one male showing strong characteristics of the Greenland form. A White-throated Robin, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and a Tawny Pipit kept the group interested. Good numbers of Woodchat and Isabelle-line Shirazes were present with a Barred Warbler being seen briefly. Perhaps the bird of the area was the only Upcher's Warbler of the week.

In the Northern half of the site, we quickly found a few Bar-tailed Desert Larks with at least one Desert Lark also being identified along with several Crested Larks. Ortolan Buntings were becoming numerous as were Northern Wheatears and at a pond six Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters flew by calling and going about their migration.

Day 7 – 17 Apr. A bit of a busy day but the usual walk around the park was a necessity for some. All the same today but three Basrah Reed Warblers maintained the 100% record for the week. Another Eastern Cinnabar Bunting showed well as did a Great Reed Warbler.

Prior to Green Park opening at 0900 it was necessary to fill some time and Pekka decided to take us to Rumaithiya Park and what an outstanding decision this proved to be. Proving that no matter how good a birder you are, good fortune is essential. Initially it was a fairly dull, mundane affair with Blackcaps, Willow Warblers and the common species being present. The lethargic period was broken when a large raptor alighted from a nearby tree. Everyone saw it well noting the tail pattern and as it landed again in the top of a tree, it was quickly identified as a Crested Honey Buzzard. It sat up for the cameras and then flushing all in its path departed across the city, never to be seen again. An outstanding WP tick and lifer for some.



Crested Honey Buzzard at Rumaithiya Park

After gaining entry to Green Island the first Great Cormorant of the trip was seen and shortly after Nick found what appeared to be the only pair of the target bird – Red-vented Bulbuls. Job done and with no Ruppell's Weavers being seen in the area for some time as the trees they used to nest in had been cut, we departed.

We continued to Fintas Park where Pekka had also seen Ruppell's Weavers recently. After some searching and waiting everybody secured views of two pairs of this ropery, yet valid WP bird. We drove to the Fahaheel area in an attempt to do a bit of sea watching and find a

Socotra Cormorant. As Pekka attempted to gain access to the tower above a shopping mall, we quickly learned that it was being renovated and that access was not possible. Instead we stood on a ledge by a restaurant, which was not ideal and caused some initial problems with the security guards. As it was, we were allowed to stay and were soon watching many Lesser Crested Terns and below them on a small tower in the sea, one of the target species – four White-cheeked Terns. Unfortunately, with lunch approaching and diners requiring a view from the restaurant other than a group of unkempt birders we had to move on without a Cormorant.

We drove further south near to an oil refinery and again viewing was far from ideal and no Socotra Cormorants were seen. We did however see Pied and Northern Wheatears and firstly heard calling and then located a group of circa thirty European Bee-eaters, which were our first of the week.

At Abu Hasania, more Lesser Crested Terns, a pair of perched Gull-billed Terns and a Swift Tern completed the line-up – but no Cormorant. We continued to Port Zour, Salmiya and put in another hour or so in. There was a bit of movement resulting in sightings of two Pomerine Skuas, three Swift Terns, a number of Lesser Crested Terns, a Kestrel, Common Sandpiper and a movement of Eurasian Swallows – but no Cormorants.

Day 8 – 18 Apr. The walk around the park this morning produced nothing new but at least three Basrah Reed Warblers were still present and noisily active. We departed after breakfast once more and arrived at KISR – Kabt. Kabt is an area of extensive experimental cultivated areas and desert scrub. Almost immediately we started to see birds and one of the first was the only Spotted Flycatcher of the week. At least four Rock Thrushes including a female were looking resplendent and a number of Turkestan and a Red-backed Shrike were noted as we passed in the search of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark. A good looking and easily identifiable male Lesser Kestrel was perched on wires and a Common quickly followed. As we continued we added a Woodchat Shrike, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Sparrowhawk, more Pied and Northern Wheatears, European Bee-eaters and a single Namaqua Dove. Most impressive were 150+ Ortolan Buntings sat on wires. It appeared that due to heavier rain in the winter and additional growth in the vegetation, it was no longer suitable habitat for the Sparrow Lark and unfortunately they appeared to have moved on and none were seen.

We decided to give Jahra Pools Reserve another whirl and as we got out of the vehicle a Great White Egret was seen over the reeds with a Grey Heron. As we scanned the area from the earth mounds, the Great Spotted Eagle was still present as were the Avocets. Two White-tailed Lapwings were seen and a Caspian Tern cruised over the reeds. As three or four Squacco Herons stalked the reed bed at least eleven Spotted Crakes and a Little Crake were seen. A male Little Bittern flew in and perched precariously on top of a reed for all to see and a Green Sandpiper flew to the pools. A Grey-headed Swamphen was heard yet unfortunately did not come to the front edge of the reeds and remained a heard only record.

We finished the day at Souk Sharq attempting to find a Socotra Cormorant which again was unsuccessful. However, several Great Cormorants, a Sandwich Tern and a few Swift Terns were recorded, with Lesser Crested Terns being in the majority.

Day 9 – 19 Apr. Al Saheel Park produced a Turkestan Shirke this morning along with several commoner migrant species and of course three Basrah Reed Warblers. The group

headed to Al Abraaq once more in the hope of seeing some more migrants. As we approached across the desert, a few raptors were seen and whilst the Eastern Black Kite caused a few ID headaches initially, the adult Egyptian Vulture was somewhat easier. It had been a couple of days since our last visit, but what a difference. Hardly any birds were present, a Masked Shrike, Ortolan Bunting, mixed flock of Bee-eaters and two Lesser Kestrels being the highlights. Several hundred Vagrant Emperors were quite a sight however.

After another unsuccessful visit to Al Fahaheel Marina to sea watch the group returned to the hotel early and decided to split. Half went to Souk Sharq to sea watch and the others to the local park to look for migrants. There had obviously been an influx as the first birds seen that had not been present in the morning was a male Pied Wheatear and at least four Whinchats. At least four Eastern Cinerous Buntings were present and a male Red-backed Shrike sat up for the camera. Several other common migrants, with the Basrah Reed Warblers showing well concluded the day.

The sea watching group secured views of Swift Terns and proving perseverance is king, recorded two Socotra Cormorants amongst a few Great Cormorants, bringing the quest to an end.

Day 10 – 20 Apr. The final morning and walk around the park before a shave at the local barbers and the short trip to the airport. The group spent about two hours in the park and once more it proved productive. As we watched a number of Blackcaps feeding on the grass, there was not only one, but two Basrah Reed Warblers feeding on the grass in the open. Several Tree Pipits fed in the open and two Ortolan Buntings rested on rocks around the ornamental pond that also held two Great Reed Warblers. Walking to “The Reed Bed”, three Ring-necked Parakeets were noisy as they passed over us. At the reed bed, three Basrah Reed Warblers, a nearby Common Whitethroat, several Lessers, a few Indian Silverbills and a Common Restart but no sign of yesterday’s Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin. An Eastern Cinerous Bunting was seen and a Spotted Crake was flushed but we could not locate the Corncrake identified by a group of Danish birders.

Eastern Cinerous Bunting at Al Saheel Park



As this was the only site that Basrah Reed Warbler was seen at during the week, albeit in good numbers and showing extremely well it obviously became a must go to site for visiting

birders during the week. This site has huge potential to turn up all sorts of surprises I would think. The last bird of the tour was a Common Mynah as we reached the airport.

A boring yet easy flight saw us get to Heathrow at 2225. I hope all group members got home safely and I thank them for their company and contributions during the week.

Consolidated Species List Common Names are used except where subspecies are highlighted. (Red – Not seen by the whole group)

Great Cormorant	Fahaheel Marina and Souk Sharq
Socotra Cormorant	2 recorded from Souk Sharq on the 19th
Little Bittern	1 at Al Saheel Park, 1 at Pivot Fields and 1 at Jahra Pools
Black-crowned Night Heron	Several seen at Pivot Fields, Al Abraaq and Jahra Pools
Squacco Heron	Many Seen in suitable habitat
Cattle Egret	A few seen but not numerous
Western Reef Egret	Seen in all coastal areas without difficulty
Little Egret	Six seen at Pivot Fields
Great Egret	1 seen at Jahra Pools on the 18th
Grey Heron	Numerous at wetlands
Purple Heron	1 seen at Al Saheel Park
White Stork	A flock of 27 seen at Jahra Pools on the 15th
Glossy Ibis	3 seen on the same day as the White Storks at Jahra Pools
Greater Flamingo	4 seen from “Manchester Club” on 14 th and 2 from KISR University when looking for Hypocolius
Ferruginous Duck	4 at Jahra Pools on 15th
Crested Honey Buzzard	A cracking find at Rumaithiya Park on the 17th
Black Kite (<i>migrans</i>)	Several seen during the week in various locations
Black Kite (<i>lineatus</i>)	1 on the 19 th over the desert approaching Al Abraaq
Egyptian Vulture	1 adult as above
Western Marsh Harrier	Pivot Fields and Jahra Pools
Pallid Harrier	Pivot Fields and KISR Kabt
Montague’s Harrier	Pivot Fields
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Widespread in singles
Steppe Buzzard	3 at Pivot Fields on the 14th
Greater Spotted Eagle	1 at Pivot Fields, Jahra Pools and KISR Kabt
Booted Eagle	1 Dark Phase out to sea at Green Island on the 17th
Steppe Eagle	1 at Al Abraaq

Eastern Imperial Eagle	1 at KISR Kabt
Osprey	Only at Jahra Pools on the 15th
Lesser Kestrel	2 at KISR Kabt and 2 at Al Abraaq on the 19th
Common Kestrel	1 over the sea at Port Zour and 2 at KISR Kabt
Spotted Crake	Numerous at Pivot Fields and Jahra Pools with one in Al Saheel Park on 19th
Little Crake	1 at Jahra Pools on both visits
Eurasian Moorhen	2 at Pivot Fields
Grey-headed Swamphen	1 heard only at Jahra Pools
Black-winged Stilt	Several at roadside pools but mainly at Jahra Pools
Pied Avocet	Only at Jahra Pools
Crab Plover	Luckily 1 remained at roost at “Manchester Club” on the 14th
Collared Pratincole	6 at Pivot Fields on the 13th
Little-ringed Plover	Numerous at Pivot Fields
Ringed Plover	Several at Jahra Pools and “Manchester Club” mud flats
Kentish Plover	Many at Doha Spit and Causeway mud flats
Lesser Sand Plover	The most numerous wader at “Manchester Club” and Doha Spit mud flats
Grey Plover	Numerous at mud flats and coastal sites
Red-Wattled Lapwing	4 – 1 Adult and 3 chicks at Pivot Fields on the 14th
White-tailed Plover	4 at Jahra Pools on the 15 th and 2 on the 19th
Spur-winged Plover	1 at Jahra Pools on the 15 th – was a “Write-in” for the list
Sanderling	Common at Doha Spit mud flats
Little Stint	Common at Pivot Fields
Temminck’s Stint	At least 7 present at Pivot Fields
Curlew Sandpiper	1 at Pivot Fields and hundreds at “Manchester Club” mud flats
Dunlin	Several at Doha Spit
Broad-billed Sandpiper	1 at Doha Spit on the 14th
Ruff	Many at Pivot Fields before being flushed by “Hunters”
Common Snipe	2 at Pivot Fields and 1 at Jahra Pools
Bar-tailed Godwit	1 at “Manchester Club” on the 14th
Whimbrel	Common at “Manchester Club”
Curlew	Numerous on mud flats
Common Redshank	Not that numerous at Doha Spit
Marsh Sandpiper	1 at Jahra Pools on the 15th

Common Greenshank	A flock of c35 at Jahra Pools on the 15th
Green Sandpiper	1 on 2 occasions at Jahra Pools
Wood Sandpiper	Numerous at Pivot Fields and several seen at other pools
Terek Sandpiper	Hundreds roosting at “Manchester Club”
Common Sandpiper	Widespread and fairly common in suitable habitat
Ruddy Turnstone	1 at Pivot Fields and numerous at “Manchester Club”
Pomarine Skua	2 at Port Zour on the 17th
Black-headed Gull	Not as numerous as Slender-billed but seen at the same locations
Slender-billed Gull	The most common Gull seen at all coastal locations
Caspian Gull	1 at “Manchester Club”, 1 at Jahra Pools on 2 occasions
Little Tern	Many but most numerous at “Manchester Club”
Gull-billed Tern	2 at and 1 at “Manchester Club”
Caspian Tern	Singletons at Jahra Pools, “Manchester Club” and
White-winged Tern	2 on the mud at “Manchester Club”
Sandwich Tern	1 on 2 occasions at Souk Sharq
Great Crested Tern	Several seen well but not numerous at coastal sites
Lesser Crested Tern	The most common Tern at coastal sites
Feral/Rock Dove	Widespread and numerous
Eurasian Collared Dove	Widespread and numerous
Laughing Dove	Widespread and numerous
Namaqua Dove	2 at Mutla’a Ranch, 2 at Al Abady and 1 at KISR Kabt
Ring-necked Parakeet	2s and 3s calling over Al Saheel Park on several occasions
Common Cuckoo	At least 5 at Mutla’a Ranch and 1 at the Al Abady water bottling plant
Little Owl	1 at Al Abdaly water bottling plant
Common Swift	1 at Jahra Pools
Pallid Swift	Common over Kuwait City
White-throated Kingfisher	Several seen at Jahra Pools, Jahra Farms and Al Abraq
Pied Kingfisher	1 female at Jahra Pools
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	A few at Jahra Pools, 7 at KISR L and at least 2 in a mixed flock at Al Abraq
European Bee-eater	Flocks seen at Port Zour, Al Abraq and KISR Kabt
Eurasian Hoopoe	Surprisingly scarce with 1s seen in a few locations
Eurasian Wryneck	1 at Mutla’a Ranch

Bar-tailed Lark	At least 3 at KISR Liyah
Desert Lark	Only at KISR - Liyah
Crested Lark	The most common Lark in sparsely vegetated habitat
Sand Martin	Good numbers seen at Pivot Fields
Eurasian Swallow	Widespread and numerous
Red-rumped Swallow	1 at Jahra Pools with the above
Tawny Pipit	1 at KISR L and 1 flyover at Al Abraq
Tree Pipit	Many Flyovers but common in Al Saheel Park
Red-throated Pipit	Several flyovers and seen well at Al Abraq and Jahra Pools
Yellow Wagtail (flava)	Pivot Fields – all surprisingly not very numerous
Yellow Wagtail (bema)	Pivot Fields
Yellow Wagtail (feldegg)	Pivot Fields
Grey Wagtail	1 only at Jahra Farms
White Wagtail	1s seen at various sites
White-eared Bulbul	Ubiquitous
Red-vented Bulbul	A pair at Green Island
Grey Hypocolius	A pair at KISR University on 15 th , a flock of 19 at Al Abraq on 14 th and a single male at Mutla’a Ranch on the 16th
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	1s and 2s at Al Abraq, Al Saheel Park, Mutla’a Ranch and KISR Liyah
Common Nightingale	1 at Al Abraq on the 14th
Bluethroat	1 at Al Abraq on the 14th
White-throated Robin	Good numbers seen in singles but at least 11 at Al Abraq on the 14th
Common Redstart	Very numerous and in every tree and bush at Al Abraq on the 14th
Whinchat	Present in small numbers and widespread with a maximum of 4 in Saheel Park on the 19th
Northern Wheatear	Common and widespread – 1 male showing characters of “Greenland” Wheatear was at KISR Liyah
Pied Wheatear	Widespread males and females in almost any location
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush	5 – 4 males at KISR Kabt only
Graceful Prinia	1s & 2s at Pivot Fields, Al Jahra Pools and Abdaly Farms
European Reed Warbler	1 heard singing at Pivot Fields
Basrah Reed Warbler	Only in Al Saheel Park – seen every day with a maximum of 5

Great Reed Warbler	Singles seen in various locations but common in Al Saheel Park on all days
Clamorous Reed Warbler	Several singing at Jahra Pools
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	Fairly Common in suitable habitat
Lesser Whitethroat	Very Common in suitable habitat
Common Whitethroat	Not very common 1s at Al Saheel Park and Mutla'a Ranch
Blackcap	Common in all locations
Barred Warbler	2 in Al Saheel Park and 1 at KISR Liyah
Willow Warbler	The most numerous Warbler everywhere
Mountain Chiffchaff	1 identified as this species at Al Abraq
Common Chiffchaff	Not as numerous as Willow Warbler but in the same locations
Spotted Flycatcher	1 at KISR Kabt
Semi-collared Flycatcher	Single Male and Females at Al Saheel Park, Pivot Fields, Al Abady Bottling Plant and
Afghan Babbler	A family party of 5 at Abdaly Farms
Isabelline Shirke	Widespread and seen in suitable habitat
Red-tailed Shrike	Not as numerous as above but in the same habitats
Red-backed Shrike	3 males seen in Mutla'a Ranch, Al Abraq, KISR and Al Saheel Park
Woodchat Shrike	Fairly Common and widespread in suitable habitat
Masked Shrike	Single males at Al Abraq and
House Crow	1 in Kuwait City seen from the car
Common Mynah	Widespread and Common
Bank Mynah	A family party at Jahra Farms
House Sparrow	Ubiquitous
Pale Rockfinch	6 at Al Abraq on 15th
Indian Silverbill	Only in Al Saheel Park with a maximum of 20
Eastern Cinerous Bunting	Only in Al Saheel Park with a maximum of 4
Ortolan Bunting	Widespread in good numbers
Ruppels Weaver	2 pairs at Fintass Park

Summary

A successful tour despite a few minor administrative issues and being occasionally “navigationally challenged”. Although as a result, some birding time was lost it did not overly detract from being able to connect with most of the sought after species.

A combination of a bit of luck, that you always need, coupled with Pekka's good site knowledge ensured that when migratory species were present, we got to see them.

Not an overtly pretty or scenic country, it holds some excellent sites that present migratory species with a resting and feeding place, making for exciting and unpredictable birding.

PERU

(Kev Campbell)

Although not a birding trip per se, a holiday in Peru to trek the Inca Trail to Mach Picchu followed by a few days in Cayman Lodge in the Amazonian rain forest, provided an abundance of exotic birds, as well as some amazing wildlife to watch and photograph (it would have been rude not to). What follows is a brief and informal 'non-birding' trip article highlighting the main birding events, sights and experiences, which I hope may lead you to consider future birding trips to this amazing part of the world.

The trip started on the 3rd October with a couple of days in the beautiful and very Spanish colonial feeling city of Cusco (elevation of 3,400m) to acclimatise, before moving on to a town called Ollantaytambo where we overnighted before starting the four day trek from the Urubamba River, which took us across mountain passes (reaching an elevation of 4,275m known as Dead Woman's Pass) and through cloud forests, passing several amazing Inca sites, before reaching our destination and the most widely known 15th-century Inca citadel Machu Picchu.

After breakfast at our hotel in Ollantaytambo I managed to fit in a very quick birding session resulting in Blue and Yellow Tanager, Green and White Hummingbird, Cinereous Finch, Eared Dove, Chiguanco Thrush, a small flock of Mitred Parakeets and three White-collared Swift. It was a fairly short trip to the start of the Inca Trail at Piscacucho, commonly known as Km82 and the start of our trek. I should point out that although I took the decision to take my camera and 150-600mm lens on the trek in the hope that if I were lucky enough to see the iconic Andean Condor I would at least have a chance of getting a couple of shots off as a lasting record of the event, due to the elevation and somewhat arduous nature of the trek it spent most of the time in my rucksack, whilst I concentrated on placing one foot in front of the other and remembering to breath (fairly deeply I might add).



Blue and Yellow Tanager

After arriving at our camp at the end of day 1, birds seen around the site, as well as some of the more common birds already noted, included different varieties of Hummingbird, Black-backed Grosbeak, Golden-billed Saltator and a rather splendid Sparkling Violetear (large

Hummingbird). Day 2 was well known for being the most challenging and physical day of the trek and would see us reaching the highest elevation and the well known mountain 'Dead Woman's' pass. Half way up we stopped at a plateau which offered stunning views of the valley below us and mountains and glaciers in the distance and was treated to a rather splendid three course lunch prepared by our chefs and amazing porters (we opted for the 'comfort' trip – why rough it!). I took this opportunity to get my camera out and take some photos of the distant mountains and glacier and was soon rewarded with the amazing sight of a juvenile Condor soaring over the mountain peaks to our right. Luckily the bird put on a good display for around 30-40 seconds before heading back in the direction that it had come – an amazing sight to see and one which put a big smile on my face for the rest of the day. Other birds seen included Black-fronted Nunbird, Masked Flowerpiercer, Andean Flicker and Moustached Flowerpiercer.

Days 3 and 4 of the trek didn't provide any new birds of note but this was probably due to my focus on the task of trekking up and down the precarious stone staircase of the trail, rather than the lack of birds in the vicinity. On day 4 and upon arrival at the Sun Gate (Intipunku), once a guardhouse that marked one of the principle entrances to Machu Picchu, not only were we rewarded with views across the valley to the amazing site of the beautiful Inca citadel, but



Black Chested Eagle

shortly after arriving a rather impressive Black-Chested Buzzard Eagle (often mistakenly identified at distance as a Condor) soared into view to the right of the mountain Huyana Picchu (the mountain behind the citadel in most tourist photos and incorrectly presumed by most (including me) to be the mountain Machu Picchu, which is in the direction that most photos of the citadel are taken from). Another bird for the list was an American Kestrel which

offended by the eagles presence mobbed it until it was satisfied that it's course had changed sufficiently to no longer be a threat. After spending the night relaxing/recovering in Machu Picchu town (Aguas Calientes) we returned to the site of Machu Picchu to take in the splendor of the place, which I must say is definitely as impressive as I believed it to be. The most notable and abundant birds at the site were White-winged Swallows which nested in the cracks of the ruins and White-chested Swifts which did what Swifts do, audibly making their presence known to all those busy going about their business below.

On day 6 of our trip we returned by train to the town of Ollantaytambo before switching to our tour minibus for a relatively short trip back to the city of Cusco, where we enjoyed a final meal with the other members of our tour/trekking group before we all went our separate ways, be that home or the next leg of our holidays. For us it was a one hour flight to Puerto

Maldonado, where we were met by our Cayman Lodge rain forest representative and outstanding guide who accompanied us on a short bus trip to the Tambopata river where we travelled by boat upstream for about two hours to our lodge and home for the next few days. As we had moved on to this new phase of our holiday the camera was well and truly released from its confines and during the boat trip alone a good number of birds were snapped and added to the list, including Greater Yellow-Headed Vultures (in abundance), Black Vultures, Roadside (AKA Riverside) Hawks, different types of Macaws, Parrots and Parakeets, Weavers etc.

The following day and probably the highlight of our stay in the rain forest started at 3.00am with a further two hour boat trip up the Tambopata River to the Chuncho Macaw Clay Lick, the largest Macaw clay lick on earth. Every morning at around dawn, Macaws, Parakeets and



other Parrots flock to eat the clay (understood to provide them with sodium and to neutralise dietary toxins), in their hundreds, creating one of the most incredible wildlife spectacles that I have seen and heard. As well as the three largest and stunning Macaw varieties (Blue and Yellow, Red and Green and Scarlet) and different types of Parrots and Parakeets, birds seen included Capped Heron, Cattle Egret, a lone Common Sandpiper, White Winged Swallows, a lone perched migratory Osprey and three stunning Chestnut-eared Aracari which provided a relatively close and much appreciated fly-by / photo opportunity. Another fly over, confirmed by our guide, included a Blue-throated Piping Guan, which is a rather large bird (approx 69cm) and similar in appearance to a Turkey.

Over the 3 days of our time in the rain forest our guide led us on a number of both night and day forest walks and treated us to some amazing bird, insect and wildlife encounters, including many types of the local monkey population. Birds seen and photographed during the trip are included in the list of birds table below, but the highlights for me were probably the small but absolutely stunning Band-tailed Manikin which we were able to watch from a distance displaying in his lek to his female counterpart and the rather prehistoric but colourful and equally impressive looking Hoatzin (Chicken bird, Stinkbird, Reptile bird etc.), which we were able to view in good numbers from a small canoe/boat in a mangrove lake whilst searching (unsuccessfully) for Anaconda.

In summary, Peru was an amazing place to visit and although we only saw a fraction of the amazing and huge variety of birds that the country has to offer, it was an amazing experience and one that will live long in the memory – where to go next?

List of Birds

	Inca Trail / Machu Picchu		Tambopata River / Rain Forest
1	Rufous-collared Sparrow	1	Common Sandpiper
2	Chiguanco Thrush	2	Scarlet Macaw
3	Mitred Parakeets	3	Red and Green Macaw
4	White-collared Swift	4	Scarlet Macaw
5	Blue and Yellow Tanager	5	Chestnut-fronted Macaw
6	Green and White Hummingbird	6	Red-bellied Macaw
7	Cinerosus Finch	7	Mealy Parrot
8	Eared Dove	8	Orange-cheeked Parrot
9	Black-backed Grosbeak	9	Blue-Headed Parrot
10	Golden-billed Saltator	10	Dusky-headed Parakeet
11	Sparkling Violetear	11	Mitred Parakeet
12	Masked Flowerpiercer	12	White-winged Swallow
13	Andean Condor	13	White-chested Swift
14	Black-fronted Nunbird,	14	Capped Heron
15	Andean Flicker	15	Cattle Egret
16	Moustached Flowerpiercer	16	Greater Yellow-headed Vulture
17	Black-chested Buzzard Eagle	17	Black Vulture
18	American Kestrel	18	Roadside Hawk
		19	Plumbeous Kite

		20	Smooth-billed Ani
		21	Band-tailed Manikin
		22	Broad-billed Motmot
		23	Hoatzin
		24	Ringed Kingfisher
		25	Yellow-browed Sparrow
		26	Russet-backed Oropendola
		27	Crested Oropendola
		28	Yellow-rumped Cacique
		29	Tropical Kingbird
		30	Silver-beaked Tanager
		31	Social Flycatcher
		32	Black Skimmer
		33	Yellow-tufted Woodpecker
		34	Rufescent Tiger-heron
		35	Great Egret
		36	Snowy Egret
		37	Blue-throated Piping Guan
		38	Bat Falcon
		39	Black Caracara
		40	Andean Caracara
		41	Anhinga (Snake bird)
		42	Neotropic Cormorant
		43	Orange-backed Troupial
		44	Osprey
		45	Speckled Chachalaca
		46	Violaceous Jay
		47	Streaked Flycatcher
		48	Tody Flycatcher
		49	Buff-throated Woodcreeper
		50	White-chinned Jacamar
		51	Chestnut-eared Aracari
		52	Curl-crested Aracari
		53	Great Tinamou
		54	Boat-billed Flycatcher

CRASH SITES AND CARACARAS

(David Morgan DSC)

In March last year I was asked whether I would be able to travel to the Falkland Islands; an unusual request made even more interesting by the fact that the request came from a retired Fuerza Aérea Argentina pilot. Hector Sanchez and I first encountered each other on a very dark evening 37 years ago at extremely low level, near Lively Island, some 60 miles southwest of Stanley. His formation of four Skyhawks was attacking one of HMS Fearless' landing craft when my wingman and I appeared on the scene. Hector was the only Argentine to get home.

The plan was for my wife and me to fly down on the Airbridge from RAF Brize Norton (not a trip for the fainthearted!) and meet Hector in Stanley. His party included Luis Cervera (another A4 pilot) and Pablo Bolzán whose father had been killed on 8th June 82 by my wingman's Sidewinder after I had emptied my guns at him. We planned to visit the crash site and erect a small memorial as well as trying to find the wreckage of a Dagger on Lively Island that had been flown by Hector's best friend, José Ardiles.



King Penguin



Magellanic Penguin

There had been little time to appreciate the wildlife of the islands during my first visit in 1982. Indeed the only contact I had with the local avian population was trying to avoid hitting Albatrosses and watching the Sheathbills perching unconcernedly on the lip of HMS Hermes' ski-jump whilst a formation of Sea Harriers waited impatiently (and noisily!) to get airborne. This time however, I resolved to make more of an effort to explore East Falkland and its indigenous fauna.

On our first day in Stanley, we met up with Hector and Luis and walked out to Stanley airfield. This has changed little since the war and the control tower still bears scars from my cluster bombs. It is also possible to see the mostly now-filled craters of Black Buck 1's 1000 lb bombs, as they march from the edge of the runway up over Canopus Hill. From the tower we could see elegant Black-browed Albatross patrolling the shoreline and the inner harbour.

The following day was very special; Caro and I were driven to the Volunteer Point reserve to visit the penguin colonies. The journey was a ninety-minute drive over stone tracks, followed by another two hours of extreme off-road excursion. We travelled in convoy across a vast landscape of bog and tussock grass under wonderful blue skies until, cresting a hill, we saw the rookeries. They are on a spit of land between a beautiful white-sand beach and a lagoon and contain thousands of chattering (and very smelly) birds which seemed completely oblivious to our presence. The three common types of local penguin were all in evidence; the beautiful and aloof King penguins, slightly smaller Gentoos and finally the burrowing Magellanic.

Many of the Kings were brooding eggs on their upturned feet (no low-flying allowed!) and a number of chicks had already hatched. In addition, there were many extremely tame Upland Geese. These totally wild birds have no fear of humans at all and will happily peck your shoe-laces in search of a treat.



Two-Banded Plover

Surprisingly on this particular day, the wind had dropped below the usual 20 knots and we were able to enjoy a picnic in the dunes overlooking the perfect white sand and azure-blue sea. Were it not for the penguins waddling past and the odd Two-banded Plover skittering through the sea cabbage, it could have been the Caribbean (on a cool day!).

The following day, I abandoned Caro to the flesh-pots of Port Stanley and joined Hector and his compatriots on another eight-hour boggy safari to visit the wreckage of Danilo

Bolzán's Skyhawk on Hammond Point. His son was accompanied by a dozen of his friends and together we built a small cairn and placed a simple memorial. It was quite an emotional few hours but I was able to explain to both Hector and Pablo the exact details of our fight and show them the evidence of a Sidewinder warhead on the tailplane and fuselage. There was no doubt that the aircraft had been hit at very low level and exploded in mid-air.

As we were working around the largest piece of wreckage, I realised that there was a pair of Tussock Birds using it for shelter, which somehow seemed very appropriate. They were very happy hopping amongst us and feasting on the massive crop of diddle-dee berries.

Day three saw us driving around the north of East Falkland, past Teal Inlet to Port San Carlos. This is where the Harrier Forward Operating Base was established in May '82 and my first reaction when I saw it again was "Bloody hell, that's small!" And small it was – only 650 meters in length; enough to get airborne with a full weapon load and internal fuel. HMS Sheathbill (or Sid's Strip if you were RAF) made a huge difference to our available CAP time, increasing it from 5 minutes per transit from the ship to more than an hour.

It was here that we had problems with the local wildlife in '82, as the Upland Geese discovered that the tin strip was lovely and warm and a good place to sit. The judicious use of size 10 boots didn't offer a lasting remedy, so a number were "liberated" and became the Goose Galtieri main course at the Wardroom Victory Dinner.

Our next destination was the British Cemetery in San Carlos. This is a beautifully peaceful and well-kept site, not at all mournful. Having found a few friends on the list of those who have no grave, I spied a stunning Long-tailed Meadowlark but it refused to be photographed! I did however, capture a good shot of a Dark-faced Ground-tyrant perching on the cemetery wall before we headed for Goose Green to pay our respects to Lt Nick Taylor, who was shot down on 4th May.

Our penultimate day in the islands was spent exploring the battlefields to the west of Stanley and gaining an appreciation of just what an amazing feat of arms the battles for Mount Longdon, Tumledown and Wireless Ridge were. There is little left of the detritus of war; just the odd rusting gun and cluster bomb casing and most of the minefields have now been cleared. This has, apparently reduced the pickings for the Striated Caracaras that scavenge ceaselessly in the mountains and uplands.

And then came the long and slightly melancholic journey home. The wild – but amazingly tame beauty of the islands has left a lasting impression on both of us and I feel that I can now close the door on that part of my life. It was wonderful to be able to appreciate at last, the wildlife and to realise that those of us who went south in '82 have enabled the islands to flourish and grow in a way that probably would not have happened without the task Force.



Tussac Bird



Ground Tyrant

ALASKA

(Jon & Lynne Mullin)

At the AGM in general conversation, I casually mentioned that we had arranged a trip to Alaska in the summer with the aim of observing and photographing the local wildlife. Our editor rapidly picked up on this revelation and requested an article for the Adjutant. This focused the mind and led to the purchase of the excellent reference work “Guide to the Birds of Alaska” by Robert Armstrong, which was constantly at our side and is now very well thumbed.

In short, we had hired an RV from mid August to mid-September in order to drive all of the Alaskan paved roads – which, apart from a couple of hundred miles, we achieved. On arrival, we headed south from Anchorage to the Seward Peninsular, after it was north to the Denali National Park, then up to Fairbanks and back to Anchorage in a circle through Valdez. A deviation by plane from Fairbanks to Barrow in the far north to see the Arctic Ocean proved most fruitful.



Bald Eagle

The first major birding event was at Homer. The town of Homer includes a sand spit off the Kenai Peninsular and the area is famed for its Bald Eagle population. It is a major Halibut fishing centre, and coupled with the abundance of salmon, attracts these magnificent birds, which are well used to people and hence performed for my camera at quite close range. We also took a flight out to a beach in the Katmai National Park to encounter Brown Bears at first hand – a spell-binding experience.

The next event was from Seward, which necessitated driving through significant forest fires that subsequently closed the road just after our transit and reduced visibility over the peninsular significantly. However, a boat trip out into the sound still allowed us spectacular views of coastal glaciers, sea mammals and a wide range of sea birds from Puffins (Tufted and Horned) and Murres to Cormorants and Kittiwakes.



Sandhill Crane

Denali was spectacular and gave us our Golden Eagle, Northern Goshawk and Belted Kingfisher, as well as a wide range of perching birds. Although, the Grizzlies, Caribou, Beavers, Moose and Arctic Ground Squirrels somewhat stole the show.

Fairbanks and its environs was my favourite location and we were treated to a magnificent display of Sandhill Cranes on their migration south. Plenty of Ravens as you ventured into the remote hills, but not much else – apart from the spectacular scenery, gold mining, Black Bears, Foxes and the Aurora.

Our trip to Barrow on the Arctic Ocean, definitely a frontier town (albeit alcohol free), was very different for a wide range of reasons from cultural to its featurelessness. Highlights included the Parasitic Jaeger hunting for Lemmings and the Snow Buntings. The flat light was ideal for some good nearshore bird photographs.



Parasitic Jaeger

One slight disappointment was the limited diversity in opportunities to see significant quantities waterfowl as we crossed the country – which I had expected to be widely dispersed and common. I presume that it was slightly too early for the mass migrations as we gazed upon virtually empty lakes in the east of the country near the Canadian border. But we got some good shots of Trumpeter Swans on a number of occasions.

Our many woodland encounters saw the Downy Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush and the Dark-eyed Junco. Although fleeting views did unfortunately not result in publishable pictures.

Valdez took us back into Bald Eagle country, where they were more plentiful than at Homer and one junior was especially photogenic. It also gave us our best view of the colourful Steller's Jay.

I had high hopes of the ferry journey across Prince William Sound to Whittier, but the inclement weather made photography more difficult and grounded the subjects. Spirits were revived by a superb 5 hours on the Matanuska Glacier, crampons et al. And that, after a short drive back to Anchorage was the end of four fantastic weeks in our home on wheels.

So, in sum, it was a magnificent visit to one of the few un-spoilt and accessible wildernesses remaining. One of those trips of a lifetime, and a great time of the year, as high season for tourists is June –July. We were at the back-end of the stunning floral displays and perhaps slightly early for some migrations, but it worked well as winter can come very quickly in September. Should we be fortunate enough to go again, we would go in May and take in the remote settlement of Nome for its legendary migratory birds.



Arctic Redpoll