

# The Adjutant



**Journal of the Army Ornithological Society**



**Volume 45  
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# Contents:

|                |                                                                              |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Page 1:        | Editor's Introduction.<br>Slimbridge WWT                                     |
| Page 2 :       | National Memorial Arboretum                                                  |
| Page 3:        | A Weekend with the AOS                                                       |
| Pages 4 - 5:   | Acoustic Monitoring                                                          |
| Pages 6 - 7:   | Using a Song Meter to detect Long-eared Owl's breeding sites                 |
| Pages 8 - 9:   | Ringin in the Arctic Circle                                                  |
| Page 10 - 11:  | Ringin in the Western Cape, South Africa                                     |
| Page 12 -13:   | Winter in Madeira                                                            |
| Pages 14 - 15: | Madeira 2024                                                                 |
| Page 16 -17:   | The Hobby Photographer Does Occasional Birding                               |
| Page 18:       | Gallipoli                                                                    |
| Page 19:       | Nature-Friendly Farming in France<br>London Wetlands Centre Field Day update |
| Pages 20 -21:  | A New Zealand Road Trip                                                      |
| Pages 22-23:   | AOS Antarctica (continued)                                                   |
| Pages 24-25:   | 2024 Moth Highlights                                                         |
| Pages 26-28:   | Captain Frederick Courtenay Selous (1851-1917                                |
| I/B/C:         | More Birds Than Bullets (Book Review)                                        |



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Notes from the Editor:  
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Welcome to the 2025 Adjutant. It's my third year of editing and designing the journal and I hope that it's meeting with general approval for the changes I've made to the format. It's now more of a magazine than a scientific tract but this year we have a fair selection of articles covering the more technical side of ornithology, from bird ringing to the use of technical devices to listen to and monitor birds.

It has been something of a struggle to acquire suitable submissions this year, hence the later than usual delivery as I needed to extend the copy date to the end of December, plus the lower number of pages after last year's bumper edition. However, I have to thank our contributors for their efforts as without them there would not be an Adjutant to read. Those articles we have are of high quality with a fine selection of brilliant photographs to illustrate the text but in some cases I have had to resort to internet images or plunder my own stock of relevant bird and scenic photographs.

I've done my best to ensure as few mistakes as possible occur but the usual caveats apply.

That's all from me, now sit back and enjoy the rest of *The Adjutant*, Volume 45.

**(Photographs are credited to the authors unless otherwise noted).**



## SLIMBRIDGE WWT

**By Andrew (Andy) Harrison**

None of the current committee and membership are quite certain as to when the AOS started its annual end of year field trip to The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) site at Slimbridge but, what is certain, given that the AOS was established in 1967, is that it doesn't date back to 1946 when Slimbridge opened to the public.

Slimbridge continues to serve as testament to the late great Sir Peter Scott's vision and drive, as he was responsible for the founding of the WWT and establishing Slimbridge as the first of what is now a network of ten wetland centres. The latest good news is that this network is destined to increase as the WWT has just announced a new saltmarsh restoration project on the Awre peninsula in the Forest of Dean, across the River Severn from Slimbridge.

Perhaps we should also acknowledge Sir Peter Scott's parent's part in the story for one of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's last letters to his wife included the plea: "I am anxious for you and the boy's future – make the boy interested in natural history if you can, ..."

My first diary entry for the event appears to be 2011 and, apart from the pandemic years, has continued every year since. The rumours that we all flock to Slimbridge at this time of year just to see Santa and his elves are most vehemently denied.

The weather for the last two years' visits has been relatively mild so more time has been spent outside exploring than sat in the café hiding from the elements.

Whilst Slimbridge is primarily a wetlands site there is a mixture of habitats that make it a great site to visit at any time of year but the draw in the winter months must be the Bewicks Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) overwintering in the UK from their breeding grounds in Arctic Russia. This year we observed over 45 individuals but, as I write, the official count stands at 67 and the first birds arrived on 3rd November. In 2023, the first birds did not arrive until 16th November and WWT reported this as the latest arrival since 1965 and a possible result of rising temperatures. Time will tell if this is either a blip or a continuing unwelcome trend. As well as the unusual and uncommon such as Ross's Goose (*Anser rossii*) and Crane (*Grus grus*), the sheer spectacle of large flying flocks and roosting groups of more common species cannot be beaten.

The sight of massed Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) and Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) wheeling and catching the sun can be breathtaking and last year's group of over a dozen Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) roosting in a field was impressive. Slimbridge is also a great place to see Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) in close proximity and admire those incredible plumage details.

As I look through my latest list, I am already looking forward to the 2025 pre-Christmas rendezvous and remind myself that I must find time for a spring and/or summer trip.

<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge/>  
<https://www.wwt.org.uk/about-us/our-history>  
<https://www.wwt.org.uk/news-and-stories/news/wwt-to-restore-saltmarsh-on-the-awre-peninsula/> published 10 December 2024  
<https://www.wwt.org.uk/news-and-stories/news/scotts-forgotten-legacy-that-goes-on-inspiring-generations/>  
 My site species totals in 2023 and 2024 were 50 and 66, respectively.  
<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge/news/bewicks-blog-winter-20242025>  
 The study started in 1963. <https://www.wwt.org.uk/news-and-stories/news/dynasties-divorce-and-10000-swans-60-years-of-wwts-unique-bill-pattern-study/>

# National Memorial Arboretum

By Andrew (Andy) Harrison



The National Memorial Arboretum is not a place you automatically associate with bird watching and that was certainly not the reason behind its construction.

The Arboretum, officially opened to the public in May 2001, was the culmination of seven years of fundraising and ground works, driven by Commander David Childs CBE, whose visits to the Arlington National Cemetery and the National Arboretum in the USA had led to his inspiration for the site.

It now provides a central focus for military memorials, especially post Second World War, but despite being run by an arm of the Royal British Legion, there are also many non-military memorials.

Roll on 18 years from its opening and I finally got my act together and visited the Arboretum on a cold but clear and bright January day. The site had a big impact on me as I felt I had at last found a place where I felt 'at home' reflecting on past service and its associated losses. Within three months of that first visit I had become a 'NMA Friend', and I return as often as time and distance allow. My visits have included the Remembrance Sunday Service, Illuminated Arboretum and just because.

This year I was lucky enough to obtain tickets for the Armistice Day service which, conveniently, fell on a Saturday.

So, what about birds? Well, every situation provides the opportunity to observe the local bird life and, after the formal act of remembrance was over, I managed to divest myself of as many of my glad rags as I could and explore the whole site, armed with a pair of binoculars. I never thought I'd find myself wearing Wellington boots with suit, collar and a corps tie.

The previous day I had had my hearing tested to be informed that whilst it was deteriorating it was still well within normal parameters. This proved to be a correct assessment as, early on in my walk around the site, I was still picking up Goldcrest and Treecreeper by their calls and it demonstrated to me that it's not necessarily that you can't hear the birds in your local area, they just might not be there! On this latest visit my afternoon exploration turned up 35 species ranging across the spectrum from Black-headed Gull to Wren.

The Arboretum is located to the east of Alrewas in Staffordshire, on the edge of the National Forest, abutting the confluence of the rivers Tame and Trent, and this mixed habitat and generally tranquil site makes a good place for bird watching. In addition, there are quite a few nature reserves nearby including Branston Leas, Dareklow, Tuckleshome (no I'm not making these up) and Fosseway Heath. South of Tamworth there is also Middleton Lakes RSPB.

Every member of the forces has a preferred place they go to remember but, if you don't have one, then the Arboretum could be just the place that you never knew you were looking for and, even if you do have your preferred place to remember, every member of the forces, veteran or serving, should consider visiting the Arboretum at least once in their lifetime.

For AOS members the Arboretum provides an excellent place both for remembrance, reflection and the opportunity to observe the bird life.

<https://www.thenma.org.uk/>  
Alrewas between Burton upon Trent and Lichfield. See Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/4wzFWoCUfQsRjhCS6>  
<https://www.nationalforest.org/>

# A weekend with the Army Ornithological Society

By Marion Bartuzzo



*Little Owl (Athene noctua)*

During the last six years I have been an active birdwatcher which I find very relaxing and enjoy discovering all the different bird species and their unique habits and life cycles. I am a member of the RSPB North East London Local Group with whom I go on many walks and attend their interesting talks. I also try to visit the many RSPB and Wildlife Trust reserves where great conservation work takes place to provide habitats for the varied species of birds we have in the UK. Recently I thought I would check Defnet to see if there were any birdwatching groups in the MOD, as there seems to be groups for many interests. I was surprised to see that there are ornithological societies for Army, Navy and the RAF. I concluded that the Army Ornithological Society (AOS) would suit me best as they had a number of birdwatching trips as well as carrying out conservation work, surveys and expeditions, so plenty to get involved in. MOD Civilian staff are welcome to join and the cost is £8 per year.

On the weekend of 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June I joined the AOS on a trip to Portland Bill. The weekend was really well organised, with social get-togethers on both Friday and Saturday evenings in local establishments and plenty of birdwatching during the day. Friday evening we met up in a local pub for a pre-arranged meal where I was introduced to the group who all made me really welcome. On Saturday morning we met at the Portland Bird Observatory and had a walk around Portland Bill. I was very excited to see my first Common Scoters which Richard, the group Secretary, pointed out to me flying across the sea. It wasn't until later that day I realised this sighting was a big tick, my 200<sup>th</sup> UK wild bird,

only 434 to go! We saw highlights such as Manx Shearwater, Guillemots, Gannets, Razorbills, Rock Pipits and Ravens. Unfortunately the two puffins that had been seen the day before did not show but I did get to see the Little Owl which lives in the small quarry near the observatory.

After lunch we headed to Chesil Beach where we saw Little Terns on their nests in the protected area. Saturday evening was an organised meal in the Portland Activity Centre which also incorporated the AGM, so an opportunity for more socialising. It was interesting to hear about all the activities the group have been involved in, from their conservation work to various bird-ringing sessions. The weekend concluded on Sunday morning with visits to RSPB Radipole and RSPB Lodimoor for more birdwatching with a break in the café for tea and homemade cake.

## **The AOS can be contacted as shown below:**

The Secretary direct at:

[Richard.Seargent115@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.Seargent115@mod.gov.uk):

## **Website:**

[www.armybirding.org.uk](http://www.armybirding.org.uk):

Social Media:

## **Instagram:**

army\_ornithological\_society

## **Facebook:**

Public facing page – search Army Ornithological Society

# Acoustic monitoring

By Andrew (Andy) Harrison

AOS members cannot be but aware of the ever-increasing deployment of technology in the birding world for both the scientific and hobby aspects with technology developed for scientific purposes gradually cascading down to the non-scientific world.

From a tracking perspective, examples include the AOS deployment of geolocators on Sooty Terns (*Onychoprion fuscatus*) from the Ascension Island colonies, the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) now widely known project tracking Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) migration to Africa from UK and back using newer technology in the form of satellite-tracking using GPS technology, and then there is the world-wide Motus Wildlife Tracking System a Birds Canada programme that uses automated radio telemetry to track birds (and other taxa) that have been fitted with radio transmitters. Motus has been adopted by The Bird Observatories Council in the UK and deployed at several observatories including Dungeness, Sandwich Bay, and Spurn.

One of the other areas where technology is now having a significant impact is in the identification of birds both visually and by sound. Whilst song and call have long been used by birders to identify species the latest developments potentially remove the need for individual birders to have the skills to identify by sight and sound. The tool that has probably done the most to educate people and is easily accessible to all (as long as you have a 'smartphone') is Cornell University's Merlin Bird ID application (Merlin) which very easily allows users to identify birds either by sound ('Sound ID') or by photograph ('Photo ID'), and, for a pretty price, you can now own a pair of binoculars from one of the world's leading optics manufacturers that integrates the Merlin application to identify the birds for you as you watch them.

I do not intend to carry the debate on whether the use of this technology is 'right or wrong' into this journal but, for AOS members who contribute to BTO databases via BirdTrack and surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), all should be aware that the BTO guidance on the use of what they term as 'auto-ID' tools is that users should: 'not rely solely on these apps in the field, and only add records to their survey data if they are confirmed by sight or hearing.' There are currently two key reasons for this. Firstly,

the current tools are not yet considered sufficiently accurate. Ask most Merlin users and they will have a story or two about Merlin ID fails! Secondly, from a scientific standpoint, it is not yet known how the use of such tools might affect the results of long-term surveys. There were apocryphal stories doing the rounds this year about the BTO receiving unusually high numbers of Golden Oriole records in BirdTrack this year because Merlin users were submitting records where Merlin had misidentified the species and the users didn't have sufficient knowledge to identify the errors.

So where does that leave us? Well Merlin and the like are tools and as with every tool they should be used with due consideration of their limitations and dangers.

However, it is still possible to 'play' with the latest technology and contribute to scientific research and that contribution can help both in bird conservation and in improving the accuracy of the tools being developed.

So that brings us to acoustic monitoring.

In mid-June John Hughes very kindly allowed me and Richard Seargent to join him for one of this season's Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) survey visits on Salisbury Plain Training Area (SPTA). The results of John's two-decade study were published last year but, this year, he has been testing out recent technology with the aim of increasing the productivity of the survey.

In addition to the regular walking survey visits, John has been deploying a sound recorder in new sites overnight and, where Quail has been detected by the recorder, he returns to the site for a walking survey to verify the presence. Using this new technology, verified by later visits in person, John has been able to identify more breeding territories than in previous years. (See *notations below*).

But how are the sound recordings analysed? Well you could do it 'manually' using one of the free or professional (paid for) analysis software packages but, happily, here's where the BTO comes to the rescue again with their BTO Acoustic Pipeline. For professional ecologists this is a paid service but for 'citizen science' there are free options. Also, if your interests extend further than birds, it can be used for monitoring Bats and Edible Dormouse (*Glis glis*).

Inspired by our visit to SPTA, which reminded me that I had an unused Smart Meter Micro sat 'gathering dust' at

Dickey R, 2015. 'AOS Ascension Expedition Report 28 – April 2015', *The Adjutant*, Volume 36, 2-12.

BTO Cuckoo Tracking Project: <https://www.bto.org/cuckoos>

Global Positioning System (GPS): <https://www.gps.gov/systems/gps/>

Motus is Latin for movement or motion: <https://motus.org/about/>

<https://www.birdobsCouncil.org.uk/services>

A little ironically from an AOS perspective is the fact that there is a Motus receiver at Portland Bird Observatory but that it is only used for the 'UK Bats' project: <https://motus.org/data/receiversMap?lang=en>

Dettmar S, 2024. 'Using the Cornell Lab Merlin App', *The Adjutant*, Volume 44, inside back cover.

Merlin Bird ID <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/> which integrates with eBird <https://ebird.org/home>

BTO statement on auto-ID tool: <https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/survey-essentials#auto-id>

Unattributed, 2024. 'Surveys in the smartphone era', *BTO News*, Issue 352, Autumn 2024, Page 6. Hughes BJ, 2022. 'Trends in the population size of Eurasian Stone-curlew and Common Quail breeding on the eastern section of Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire 2002-2021', *Hobby*, Wiltshire Ornithological Society annual bird report (published 2023). A Wildlife Acoustics Song Meter Micro.

| Species                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Barn Owl                                                                                        |
| Grasshopper Warbler                                                                             |
| Grey Heron                                                                                      |
| Long-eared Owl                                                                                  |
| Quail                                                                                           |
| Tawny Owl                                                                                       |
| Woodcock                                                                                        |
| <b>We are not expecting to find this species in this location, this may be a false positive</b> |
| Eurasian Pygmy Owl                                                                              |
| Great Grey Owl                                                                                  |
| Great Reed Warbler                                                                              |
| River Warbler                                                                                   |
| Scops Owl                                                                                       |
| Ural Owl                                                                                        |

the back of my cupboard, I decided to dig it out and deploy it in my back garden and use the BTO Acoustic Pipeline to analyse the results.

As we approach the end of the year, I've been monitoring now for over six months. Initially, I would process the sound files weekly but, since November, have settled on monthly. I process the files against the three main 'audible sound classifier' groups available to those contributing to the projects: European Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), European nocturnal breeding birds, European nocturnal flight calls.

Once you have processed the files you are given a high-level summary and then can download the results including a CSV file with all the detections.

By way of example of the sort of results obtained above is a summary extract from my November recordings, processed through nocturnal breeding birds project, showing species identified as both 'definite' and those that are anomalies. Over time, analysis of the data will allow the BTO to refine the anomalies and make the tool more accurate. Except for Barn Owl and Grey Heron I have never detected the other species around my urban garden, in land-locked Berkshire, in the fourteen years that I have lived here.

So, if you're looking for a new birding project or challenge and ringing isn't for you then perhaps acoustic monitoring is.

As noted above, the BTO Acoustic Pipeline is free to use for the current 'citizen science' projects so that just leaves

the matter of the recording equipment. Whilst such equipment is not cheap there are also very reasonable options. One of the leading equipment suppliers, Wildlife Acoustics, very recently almost halved the cost of their smallest recorder and their UK suppliers have passed on the pricing changes.

However, a purpose designed and manufactured wildlife recorder is not essential, although probably a good idea given the climate in the British Isles. One of my near neighbours has been sound recording since 2020 and started out with a small Olympus digital recorder. (See *notations below*).

Technology is becoming an ever-increasing part of our birding lives and acoustic monitoring is another aspect that can be deployed at a local level, at relatively low cost, whilst providing both local insights and contributing to the wider national picture when used in conjunction with the BTO Acoustic Pipeline.



**Go on, you know you want to give it a go!**

*Unlikely to be heard in your UK garden the Ural Owl (Strix uralensis)*  
Internet image.

Examples include Wildlife Acoustics' *Kaleidoscope (Pro)* <https://www.wildlifeacoustics.com/products/kaleidoscope-pro> and Cornell University's *Raven (Pro)* <https://www.ravensoundsoftware.com/software/raven-pro/> BTO Acoustic Pipeline <https://www.bto.org/our-science/products-and-technologies/bto-acoustic-pipeline> Acoustic Pipeline Pricing <https://www.bto.org/our-science/products-and-technologies/bto-acoustic-pipeline/acoustic-pipeline-pricing> A comma-separated values (CSV) file which can be opened using a spreadsheet application such as Microsoft Excel. In the CSV file there are 21 records for each species identified. Wildlife Acoustics Song Meter Micro 2 <https://www.wildlifeacoustics.com/products/song-meter-micro-2> NHBS Ltd <https://www.nhbs.com/pment> Bright-Thomas, P, 2022. '2020: My Year with Sound', *The Birds of Berkshire Annual Report 2020*, Published 2024, 15-18.

# Using a song meter to detect long-eared owls breeding sites

## By B. John Hughes

Long-eared owls now breed on Salisbury Plain Training Area East SPTA(E). Here I report on the use of a song meter to detect their breeding sites.

Barn and tawny owls are well studied on Salisbury Plain, but the much rarer and elusive long-eared owl is poorly recorded. The Wiltshire population of long-eared owls is 10 – 25 pairs. The last record of long-eared owls breeding on SPTA(E) was in 1993 when two pairs were found. None were found during the breeding bird censuses of Salisbury Plain training estate in 2000, 2005 and 2015. The bird is very difficult to census by conventional survey methods, but they can be located by their calls during their breeding season.

Between June and September 2024, at the end of the long-eared owl breeding season a song meter was used to determine the presence of the bird and to identify breeding sites. A song meter mini bat recorder was obtained on loan from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and modified by fitting an acoustic microphone purchased from (Wildlife Acoustics, Maynard, MA, USA). The modified song meter was used to conduct surveys during 40 nights at 29 sites across SPTA(E). The meter was deployed each night at 2000hrs and then collected the following morning at 0800hrs (See below).



***Song meter fitted to a garden fork deployed over night to detected owls calling on SPTA (E)***

The 12 hours of nocturnal bird vocalisations recorded each night were uploaded into the BTO Acoustic Pipeline where bird vocalisations were detected and identified using the European Nocturnal Breeding bird classifier. There was no need to listen to the 12 hours of recording as the classifier produced a 4-second clip of any bird detected.

Clips that reported long-eared owls were independently checked by listening to the recording and by spectrogram analysis using Wildlife Acoustics Kaleidoscope Lite analysis software.

Calls of long-eared owls were detected at 18 of 29 survey sites on 250 occasions. Care is needed when interpreting this result as it could be one owl calling 250 times or 250 owls calling once. Calls were most frequently recorded at two sites, Littlecott Down and Bourne Bottom. A long-eared owl's nest with two young was found on Littlecott Down and long-eared owls were detected calling at Bourne Bottom during 11 nights between 19th May and 17th September and probably bred at this site.



***Two long-eared owl chicks in their nest on Littlecott Down***

Long-eared owls are the most common owl on the Isle of Man and in Ireland where tawny owls are absent. The larger tawny owl is the most common owl on Salisbury Plain and during this survey were recorded 1,659 times. Tawny owls are known to threaten long-eared owls. So, it was surprising to find tawny owls nesting within the long-eared owl's home range at Littlecott Down and Bourne Bottom.

Other rare breeding bird songs recorded during this survey were 283 quail, 765 grasshopper warbler and one churring nightjar. Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) using the song meters held by DIO have great potential for surveys of rare nocturnal breeding birds on Salisbury Plain and plans are in place for surveys during future breeding seasons.

My thanks go to Jenny Bennett, Senior DIO ecologist for the loan of the song meter.

# The 16th International Seabird Group Conference 2024

By B. John Hughes



The first week of September 2004 saw 260 members of the seabird community descend on the beautiful city of Coimbra, Portugal. Rarely are talks from birding societies accepted at international conferences but we were honoured. Representatives from the Army Ornithological Society attended the five days conference hosted by the University of Coimbra. The conference kicked off with six workshops and a welcome address. In the following three days fifty talks on a range of topics including movement ecology, climate change, census, monitoring, demography and renewable energy were given. Our talk on the rate of recovery of seabirds following the eradication of cats on Ascension Island was well received, and complements abounded.

Poster sessions followed (see right) busy days of talks. On display were 150 posters including three that we submitted about our work on Ascension Island.

The next seabird group conference will be held in 2027 and if you are interested in seabird science, I can highly recommend that you attend.



# Ringling within the Arctic Circle

By Roger Dickey, Sophie Crease, Dominic Ash, Lara Winsloe.

## AOS Contribution to the Norwegian Migrant Monitoring Program.



Øvre Dividal National Park has a varied landscape of pine and birch forests, alpine mountains, lakes and marshes created from glaciers and melting ice. Dividalen Bird Observatory sits within the park, one and a half hours by car from Bardufoss Airport (for our ex-Arctic warriors), or two and a half hours from Tromsø. The region is home for many of Norway's big predators, wolverine, bear and lynx, and the Arctic fox mates and raises its young here. In Spring, the Swedish Sami move into the area following the reindeers' natural migration westward to their calving areas in the heart of the park. It is also a natural channel for birds migrating southwest from Russia and Finland, an event that starts in early August.

The Norwegians consider themselves, justifiably, to be a cut above the run of European ringers but have a high regard for the British. Nevertheless, their standards are

exactling – being able to extract quickly and safely from mist nets; being able to immediately identify species and often sub-species without recourse to books, while ageing and sexing quickly and accurately. Their elevated nets that reach into the treetops of birch and aged firs, open on arrival and close

on departure a week later, with regular net rounds, day and night. Sleep is in 4-hour shifts at night unless dragged out of bed to ring owls!

Living conditions are comfortable but basic; four bunk beds which get very little use, a kitchen/dining area unless eating outside, a 'natural' outside wooden loo, ringing room and workshop complete the facilities. Water for cooking and washing-up comes from the river which also doubles as a shower if you can find a waterfall, and bath if you can't. The place is run by Karl-Birger Strann from the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research – Department for Arctic Ecology, ably assisted by his partner, Vigdis. Karl-Birger (K-B) is a seasoned ringer, regularly changing tape lures to suit the weather conditions and the time of day and is a wealth of ornithological information on wetland birds as well as his own patch. Vigdis oversees domestic arrangements – almost as strict as the ringing and combines endless energy with interesting cooking and contagious fits of the giggles.

And so to the ringing. Usually in pairs, net rounds through the woodland is a different experience as, with large elevated nets, each level has to be lowered in turn by pulleys in order to extract birds, before returning the net to the treetops. This accounts for the highfliers – redpoll, brambling, siskin and willow warblers, but lower nets are set out to catch ground feeders such as bluethroat, dunnock, meadow pipits and brambling again. In the evening, tapes are changed to thrushes with large catches of redwing but also song thrush and fieldfare. Naturally, the tapes are changed again after dark, to owls – tengmalm's, pigmy and hawk although we knew that the time for the latter two had passed. And so it proved with only two tengmalms caught but new birds nevertheless for two of the party.



Redpolls were a nightmare for the first few days. There is no 'lumping' here but there are huge numbers of birds that have very similar characteristics and need more than a second glance. The common birds are mealy *flammea* (1008 caught) but the similarity to arctic *exilipes* (meant that care



had to be taken with every bird. As it was, only 5 arctic redpolls were identified plus two 'rostrata' from Greenland (absolute Bunters), and one lesser 'cabaret'. We became highly proficient in ageing and sexing brambling and similarly, redwing, thanks to the numbers caught.

A final thanks to the ringing team – apparently, we caught and processed more birds than any other team from the UK to date and I can well believe it, but I wish that they weren't all redpolls. Testimony to the team in that we have been invited back. A further thanks goes to the Society, which gave us a grant at the last AGM and which helped enormously with the air fares.

A list of species ringed is below.



Tengmalms Owl (*Aegolius funereus*)

## Species

## New Birds processed

|                          |                                     |      |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|
| Mealy (Common) Redpoll   | <i>Acanthis flammea</i>             | 1008 |
| Arctic Redpoll           | <i>Acanthis hornemanni exilipes</i> | 5    |
| Greenland Redpoll        | <i>Acanthisrostrata</i>             | 2    |
| Lesser Redpoll           | <i>Acanthis cabaret</i>             | 1    |
| Brambling                | <i>Fringilla montifringilia</i>     | 305  |
| Dunnock                  | <i>Prunella modularis</i>           | 33   |
| Willow Warbler           | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>       | 26   |
| Chiffchaff               | <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>       | 4    |
| Siskin                   | <i>Carduellis carduellis</i>        | 18   |
| Pied Flycatcher          | <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>           | 15   |
| Spotted Flycatcher       | <i>Muscicapa striata</i>            | 4    |
| Song Thrush              | <i>Turdus philomelos</i>            | 14   |
| Fieldfare                | <i>Turdus pilaris</i>               | 8    |
| Redwing                  | <i>Turdus iliacus</i>               | 177  |
| Tree Pipit               | <i>Anthus trivialis</i>             | 7    |
| Meadow Pipit             | <i>Anthus pratensis</i>             | 3    |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i>            | 5    |
| Redstart                 | <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>      | 4    |
| Garden Warbler           | <i>Sylvia borin</i>                 | 4    |
| Bluethroat               | <i>Luscinia calliope</i>            | 3    |
| Goldcrest                | <i>Regulus regulus</i>              | 2    |
| Bullfinch                | <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>            | 2    |
| Willow Tit               | <i>Parus montanus</i>               | 2    |
| Tengmalm's Owl           | <i>Aegolius funereus</i>            | 2    |
| Great Tit                | <i>Parus major</i>                  | 1    |
| Sparrowhawk              | <i>Accipiter nisus</i>              | 1    |

Total new birds processed

1656

# Ringling in the Western Cape, South Africa

By Ray Marsh

## 27<sup>th</sup> November to 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023

In April 2023 I read that ringers were wanted for an expedition in South Africa organised by Professor Les Underhill of The Biodiversity & Development Institute an independent and non profit company and promptly sent off my application. The expedition with assistance from the Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology was the foundational event for setting up a BioObservatory with tasks focussed on ringing, atlasling, collecting data for the Virtual Museum and a broad category tentatively called Social Ecology involving many amateur naturalists collectively submitting data.

The ringing activity would be at three distinct sites as follows:

27<sup>th</sup> November to 3<sup>rd</sup> December Botuin, Vanrhynsdorp. This is a holiday lodge owned by a ringer with grounds containing an olive grove and a large area of scrub land.

4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> December Vondeling, Paarddeberg, Wellington. A large vineyard producing over 1.5 million bottles of wine annually.

11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> December Ouberg, Montagu. A private nature reserve with a wide range of habitat and again owned by a ringer.

The aims of the ringing activities were:

1. Increase the data base of birds ringed at the three sites with the ultimate aim of improving the conservation outlook for as many species as possible.
2. Improve the knowledge of annual breeding success.
3. Enable annual survival estimates of key species to be made using recapture data.
4. Improve the understanding of moult. (This is very different from moult in Europe)
5. Collect data to develop guides to help ringers to age and sex species.
6. To build on the existing Bird Atlas data.
7. As an aside, to carry out surveys of butterflies, moths, dragonflies and damselflies. Plus attempt to make substantive contributions to all sections of The Virtual Museum, with photographs of the flora and fauna of the three sites, especially with photographs of birds ringed.

## BOTUIN

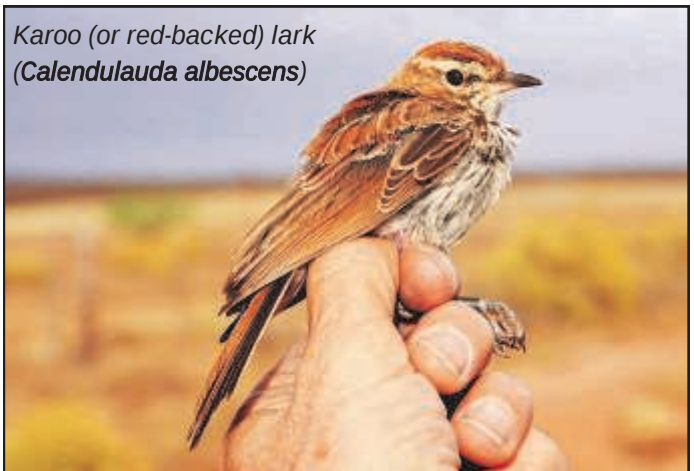
The ringing team headed by Dieter Oschadlieus, a highly experienced ringer whose major interest was weavers, with myself and Graeme Hatley a trainee undergoing his upgrade exam and assisted by Salome the owner of the lodge had met the previous evening and were set up before dawn. The nets were sited among the olive groves and scrub land and over the seven days produced a steady trickle of a good variety of species none of which I had ringed before. Two mornings were spent ringing at the local sewage works, the old style that can be located by the aroma from a considerable distance. The set up consisted of several settling ponds some of which contained a small reed bed where before dawn we set up a line of single shelf nets. At first light the birds quickly left the reed beds and in minutes we had over 60 birds in the nets, they were predominately weavers, Red Bishops, Cape and Southern Masked Weavers but also a beautiful Three Banded Plover. Other species included; Masked, Red-faced and White-tailed Mousebirds, Cape Robin Chat, Namaqua Dove, Cape White-Eye, African Reed Warbler and Karoo Prinia,

Southern masked weaver (*Ploceus velatus*)



The three of us spent a morning ringing in The Karoo, an area so dry it is classified as a desert, there were no trees or bushes just low scrub and grass which left the nets very visible and a strong breeze didn't help at all. Despite the conditions we did manage to catch several birds including 5 Karoo Lark which made Dieter's day as despite many years trying these were the first he had caught.

Karoo (or red-backed) lark  
(*Calendulauda albescens*)



The week's totals were, 410 birds ringed of 31 species, the most numerous were, Red Bishop 121, Cape Sparrow 84 and Lark-like Bunting 73. The most interesting were 4 Red-billed Quelea that had not previously been recorded in the area and a migratory European Bee-eater.

## VONDERLING

We were housed in three separate accommodation units, the largest included a kitchen for self-catering, a big come down from the great meals Salome provided at Botuin. We were joined by four more ringers, two ladies who were studying for a PhD under Les Underhill, one of whom was a full-time researcher at an observatory in Switzerland, and Peter Holmes a UK ringer who I had met on a ringing expedition in Canada. Also joining us was Ryan Tippet a specialist on scorpions, amphibians and insects, especially dragonflies. The nets were set up between rows of vines and in small areas of scrub, the rate of catching was much

slower than at Botuin but we did get two top contenders for bird of the trip, a Malachite Sunbird and a Malachite Kingfisher. Two evenings were spent with Ryan who is a superb guide, looking for scorpions, amphibians and nightjars only the nightjars failed to show although we did hear them calling.

We saw several frogs and scorpions, including Sand Frogs and Thick-Tailed Scorpions, a moth trap caught several moths and insects, the most interesting was an Ant Lion.

The weeks totals were, 197 birds ringed of 26 species the most numerous were Cape Weaver 53, Southern Masked Weaver 45, Southern Red Bishop 19, the number of weavers caught on the trip was keeping Dieter very busy with all the extra measurements he was taking for his research. We also ringed 6 species that were not captured elsewhere, Malachite Kingfisher, African Reed Warbler, Levallant's Cisticola, Malachite Sunbird, Yellow Bishop and Cape Canary. We were asked to ring 16 birds for a rehabilitation centre prior to their release; these included 3 Red-billed Teal, 2 Speckled Pigeons and a Crowned Lapwing.

## OUBERG

This is a large private nature reserve a long way from any other urban area and with a wide range of habitats, including firs, open scrubland, deciduous woodland and a stream with a reed bed. I was accommodated in the main lodge and the owner, Sue, was a terrific cook and with good wine served it was a welcome change from Les's cooking and the cramped accommodation at Vonderling. The nets were set up in five areas local to the main lodge, the most prolific were two nets through some very tall reeds. 295 birds were ringed of 39 species making Ouberg the best for diversity of species caught, the most numerous being, Common Waxbill 68, Southern Masked Weaver 45, Cape Bulbul 26 and Cape White-eye 25, an interesting capture

was a migrating Barn Swallow.

Other species ringed included; African Hoopoe, Red-winged Starling, Lesser Honeyguide, Bar-throated Apalis, Greater Striped Swallow, Rock Martin and an Orange-breasted Sunbird, a first for the area. We also caught 4 Cape Spurfowl but as they were juveniles and their spurs

*Acacia pied barbet (Tricholaema leucomelas)*



were not fully developed we were not allowed to ring them. For me the bird of the trip was an Acacia Pied Barbet that I had the pleasure of ringing.

On the journey back on the outskirts of Cape Town we stopped at large rehabilitation centre where Peter Holmes and myself ringed 2 White-fronted Plovers, a great way to end a great three weeks with some wonderful people and of course brilliant birds.

Over the three weeks we ringed 918 birds of 64 species collecting a substantial amount of data, especially on moult which has up till now been given little attention and is certainly very different from Europe.

**Main Photo: The Karoo.**

**Inset: Cape spurfowl (Pternistis capensis)**

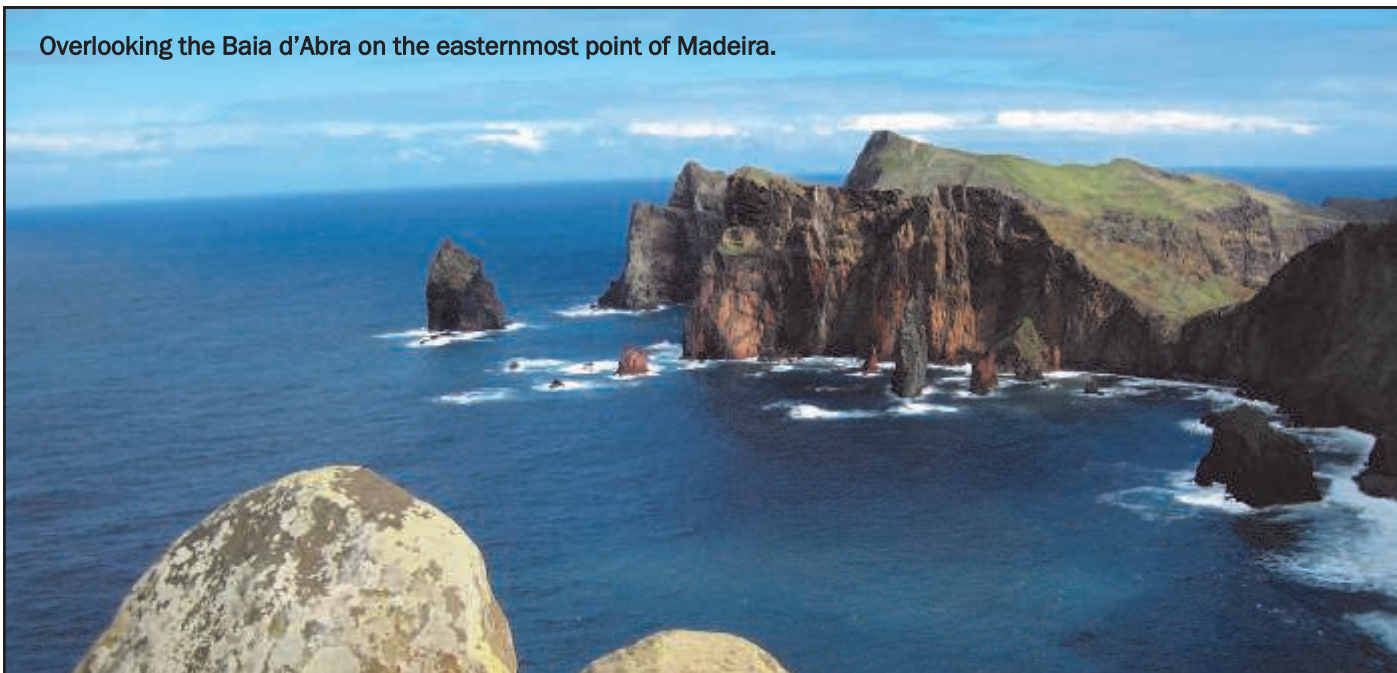
**Below: Bar-throated apalis (Apalis thoracica) and Three-banded plover (Charadrius tricollaris)**



# Winter in Madeira

By Nicholas Beswick

Overlooking the Baia d'Abra on the easternmost point of Madeira.



Should you be thinking of a winter birding trip to Madeira, forget it! However, when you are offered a free holiday in the winter sun, it would be churlish to refuse. But don't expect too many birds...

In 2022, Judy's aunt who was recently widowed didn't want to go to her timeshare apartment on her own and invited us to join her for Christmas and the New Year. This was a great success and so we returned for three weeks in January 2024. This short article summarises my birding experiences from the two trips.

Madeira is a very mountainous island, 40 x 20 Km, some 300 miles of the coast of Morocco. Around half the 250,000 population live in the capital, Funchal, which is the centre of the island's main industry, tourism. Our apartment, at the west end of Funchal, had a stunning sea view but sea watching was a complete wash-out except for

numerous Yellow-legged (Azores) Gulls. The seabirds for which Madeira is famous, including the critically-endangered Zino's Petrel, are not to be found in the winter.

Before our first trip I found a very helpful website: [www.madeirabirds.com](http://www.madeirabirds.com). It includes the island's impressive bird list but only a few are resident or regular visitors. Even birds that we almost take for granted – corvids, sparrows, tits, starlings for example are nowhere to be found. My first walks round Funchal, a pleasantly green city, confirmed this. There were Canaries, Blackcaps, Blackbirds and feral pigeons everywhere along with numerous pairs of Kestrels. St Catarina's Park has a pond that is worth checking and I heard but didn't see a Ring-necked Parakeet. Any trip into town should include Funchal harbour.

Funchal harbour.



Madeira photos © Denis Chandler.



Yellow-legged gull (*Larus michahellis*)

In 2022 Mediterranean Gulls and a Bonaparte's Gull joined the Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gulls. The latter are the Azores race with darker grey mantles that could be mistaken for Lesser Black-backed. The jetty and mooring

platforms by the river mouth also attract a few wintering Turnstones and Sanderlings. Much the most unexpected resident in 2023/24 was a Pink-footed Goose that happily grazed the grass around the marina. The harbour also turned up a White Wagtail and a Black Redstart after a storm.

It's necessary to head out of town to find the more exotic residents but we had decided not to hire a car and went out on organised sightseeing trips or by bus. Funchal has a comprehensive bus network but getting to other parts of the island requires planning as the buses, though reliable, can be very infrequent. Staying within Funchal, a trip up to Monte is worthwhile, by bus or cable car, for a visit to the church and the exotic gardens as well as the famous road sledges. A wander round the gardens or park may turn up the delightful Madeira Firecrest, Madeira Chaffinch, Robin and the endemic Trocaz Pigeon. Palheiro is another good site that may be reached on a city bus. There are formal gardens, parkland, meadows, a golf course and two small reservoirs. I had great views of Trocaz Pigeons, and a flock of Blackbirds eating the fruit of the Handkerchief Tree, also Buzzards, Grey Heron and Grey Wagtail. A walk west of Funchal follows a beachside boardwalk to Camara de Lobos, a fishing village once frequented by Winston Churchill. The river mouth is home to Grey Wagtails and numerous Muscovy Ducks, with Grey Heron and Little Egret possible, while Turnstones and Sanderlings may be found here or around the harbour. A Cattle Egret in a field behind the boardwalk was a surprise.



Muscovy duck (*Cairina moschata*)

Further afield, a trip to the very east tip of the island, Baia d' Abra, is a must. The walk to the easternmost point is spectacular. Here there is rough grassland and heath, home to Berthelot's Pipit and Spectacled Warbler. The latter can be elusive but the males were singing and displaying in late January and I found four territories without difficulty. I also encountered Red-legged Partridge, Quail and Goldfinch but my best find was a pair of Hoopoes. These nest on neighbouring Porto Santo but breeding has not been confirmed on Madeira itself. My other birding bus trip was to Poiso, a crossroads on the spine of the island at some 1,400 metres above sea level. Here there are coniferous and deciduous woodlands, open ground where vegetation is regenerating after a wildfire and thick head-high brush that

contains broom and gorse. The buses allowed me a good couple of hours to wander round and I added Siskin to my list in the fir trees as well as a superb view of the Firecrest. A couple of Plain Swifts flew over the open ridge – part of the population is resident all year and they can turn up almost anywhere. My best sighting, though, was a brief view of two Black Kites, recorded as "infrequent visitors" circling just over the woods.

Our other trips around the island were sightseeing mini-bus tours. Birds were few and far between, though the trips into the mountains included locations where Madeira Chaffinches fed from the hand. The visit to the Banana Museum, worth going to in its own right, provided an unexpected bonus. About 400 metres west of the museum, between the main road and the beach, a small pond held two Glossy Ibis as well as the usual Coots, Moorhens, Mallard and Muscovy Ducks. In 2022, a pond on the Santo Serra golf course had a female Ring-necked Duck. Other chance encounters included Peregrine and more Plain Swifts. A tour over the west end of the island included a brief visit to a remnant of the ancient laurel forest which looked well worth exploring further had the cloud not been down on the hills. I was told that a tour guide had pointed out eagles in this area but it transpired that the locals describe Buzzards thus.

I had hoped to go on the ferry for a day trip to the neighbouring island, Porto Santo, where there are different habitats but it doesn't run in January. Instead, I went on a boat trip to the Desertas Islands – rocky outcrops south-east of Madeira. The name is apt as they are uninhabitable except for a small shoreline area. Two wardens live in a hut for a fortnight at a time, principally to monitor the seabirds. In January, there were Canaries and Berthelot's Pipits plus a lone Sanderling but, as expected, no seabirds. Curiously, tarantulas live on the top of the ridges and thankfully one outside the hut was made of plastic.

Madeira is a lovely island: friendly people, pleasant climate, fantastic scenery, good food and, of course, Madeira wine. The New Year fireworks at Funchal are some of the best in the world. In the breeding season the seabirds must be fabulous. A winter holiday has much going for it but don't expect a massive bird list.



Pink-footed goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

# Madeira 2024

By Andrew (Andy) Harrison

I've written in the pages of this journal before that, "Soldiers should never go to sea." However, in the period since, I seem to have ignored that advice and have found myself all at sea on a regular basis, mostly in various parts of the Atlantic Ocean.

And so, for the latest episode, I found myself bobbing about in the North Atlantic off the North African coast this year. Doh! How did I find myself on the ocean again?

Madeira isn't an obvious choice as a holiday destination for birders because, for avid listers, you don't get many birds to the pound. There aren't many endemics and not a great variety, by way of example, the first three bird species I encountered on arriving on the island were (in order seen): Blackbird, Collared Dove and Blackcap.

However, I'm not an avid lister and Madeira is a place that I've always wanted to visit so, not being a sun, sea and sand type holidaymaker, what better way than to combine a desired destination with a hobby? Consequently, when I happened across the Birdquest Madeira Tour, it seemed like a perfect match. I don't think I could have read all the small print for this 6-day trip mind.

The tour formally kicked off at dinner on the first night when I was offered the opportunity to join a trip up into the mountains in search of Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma madeira*). Having only just arrived I did enquire as to whether it could be done on one of the other evenings only to learn it was then or never. Decision made.



So, soon after dinner, we found ourselves heading up into the mountains to Pico do Arieiro, Madeira's third highest peak. From the car park we tabbed along the Vereda do Areeiro hiking trail (PR1), which felt a bit like a Via Ferrata in places, to a ridge beyond Miradouro do Ninho da Manta. It was then lights out and listen to the calls as the birds flew around their breeding grounds which are at an altitude of some 1800 metres. Occasionally, we would also see silhouettes whizzing past us. We also heard Manx

Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*) flying lower down.

On the tab back to the car park a few of the party were lucky enough to get good but brief views of Zino's Petrel as they flew over the ridge and through their torch beams.

I don't have a brilliant head for heights so I was quite pleased that our night tab in the mountains was in the dark and I couldn't see the extent of the drop on each side of the path.

As I settled down to sleep in the early hours of the morning it was clear that the tour had got off to a really great start.

After a very long first day the next three days were much more civilised but still long and not entirely comfortable (unless you're a matelot).



Each morning, after breakfast, we would head out for various sites around the island in search of the endemics and other 'special' species including: Madeira Chaffinch (*Fringilla maderensis*), Madeira Firecrest (*Regulus madeirensis*), Trocaz Pigeon (*Columba trocaz*), Berthelot's Pipit (*Anthus berthelotii*), Plain Swift (*Apus unicolor*), Atlantic Canary (*Serinus canaria*).



We would then return to the hotel and go for lunch and prepare our kit for the afternoon pelagic which lasted about

six hours. The boat, *Oceanodroma*, was like a cross between a Zodiac and rigid raider with 'seats' for 12 passengers. The 'seats' were the type where you part sit and part stand and are designed to absorb the worst of the thumping you get in the backside as you traverse the waves.

Each pelagic consisted of the outward and return journeys to a particular part of ocean where 'chum' would be put out and we would drift watching for the birds as they came in to investigate.

We were lucky and saw Zino's Petrel every day. Over the three days we also regularly saw: Wilson's Storm Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*), European Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*), Band-rumped Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates castro*), Desertas Petrel (*Pterodroma deserta*), Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*), Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*), Bulwer's Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*).

On the last pelagic our surprise bonus bird was a Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)!

Oh, and it would be remiss of me not to mention that we were rarely without top cover provided by Yellow-legged Gulls (*Larus michahellis atlantis*)!

The final tour day was for landlubbers, and we completed a circumnavigation of the island, by road, picking up any species we had missed to date. No rarities were found and the final new species for the trip were Coot (*Fulica atra*) and Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) but we had the opportunity for better views of some of the species such as Spectacled Warbler (*Curruca conspicillata*). However, in addition to the flora and fauna, the scenery was stunning, and my personal favourite must be Parque Florestal do Fanal where we walked amongst the trees in the drifting clouds.



*Oceanodroma; great for matelots*

fit in a bit of birding. Also, to make the very best of what Madeira has to offer, you need to take to the ocean.

It was a great trip, and I may just have to go back as, somehow, I managed to miss visiting any of the Madeiran wine houses. Perhaps it will be walking and wine next time.

Thank you to Diedert Koppenol, Tour Leader, Birdquest Ltd., and the Madeira Wind Birds team for making it such a great tour.



*Parque Florestal do Fanal*

In the evening we were given the opportunity to go searching for Barn Owl (*Tyto [alba] schmitzi*) which we politely declined.

My personal trip list ended with a total of 40 species.

Would I recommend a trip to Madeira? Yes, but with caveats. You either need to be a very keen birder with an extensive list looking to pick up a few extra Western Palearctic species or you need somewhere where you can take non-birding partners and families for a holiday but still



*Trocaz Pigeon (Columba trocaz)*

*All bird photographs courtesy and copyright Diedert Koppenol, Tour Leader, Birdquest Ltd.*

<https://visitmadeira.com/pt/onde-ir/madeira/costa-norte/porto-moniz/fanal/>

The official trip report and list is available via the Birdquest website: <https://www.birdquest-tours.com/birding-tour-reports/madeira-2024/#23>

# The hobby photographer does occasional birding

By Paul Mannering



On September 24th I ventured on a three week self made holiday to Canada to find new places and return to those that hold good memories. They being Canmore, Banff and Jasper from the Army Medical Services Ski Championships in their Centenary Year of 1998 through to 2000 and Calgary for Medicine Hat as the Army Infra Officer for BATUS in the mid 2000s.

By way of an overview I started in Toronto to get over to Niagara Falls for a few days before moving to Calgary for a week's self-drive through the National Parks prior to a flight to Vancouver for a week's Alaskan cruise bracketed by two days either side in Vancouver to visit relatives. One of those is the President of Canadian Netball. On visiting her I found a presentation plaque from British Army Netball and so the obligatory photo was taken and sent to my final employer British Army Sport.

Prior to the trip, wildfires had burnt through 33 hectares of the Jasper National Park, a third of Jasper town, as the fire pushed by winds, burnt it down within 30 minutes, insured losses total about Ca\$880 million. My pre bookings, one a brand new hotel was raised to the ground, others just evacuated and so alternatives in a town called Golden were arranged. Even as our trip started the residents had just begun to visit the town in buses. Bears had moved in to help themselves to the growing fruit, and of course consumables, not yet removed from site.

I particularly enjoy birding through my greater hobby of photography. Having just invested in a new camera and super telephoto lens I was really excited about the trip to Canada primarily for land and seascapes and no real thought of bird watching or even photography of it. My excursions on the cruise were wildlife oriented. A reserve plan of whale watching was on the cards for the return to Vancouver if all else failed.

The camera is a new OM system Mk II (formerly known as Olympus) and the lens is a 150 - 400 mm pro OM lens with a built in 1.4 converter. The lens also has the capability of taking an external converter and the Olympus converters, of 1.4 or 2.0, fit. Technically the Olympus set up is a micro four thirds camera meaning that you can double the size of the lens to get a feel for what the full frame (FF) equivalent is. In sum therefore, if needed, I had a 400mm (800 FF) x inbuilt 1.4 converter giving a reach of 560mm (1120mm FF) with further reach if the external 2.0 converter was fitted out to 1120mm (2240mm FF). There are limitations with this of course, that despite in built stabilisation (both lens and camera) the slightest movement over that length can cause blurring if a tripod or monopod is not used. It will also affect the level of light getting to the camera's sensor that could result in noisy or grainy images so adjustments need to be made. Thankfully today's tech allows for that to be corrected in post processing after the shoot.

My first encounter with birds came at Niagara during a walk down the riverside. A red tailed hawk (poss Kite) and a turkey vulture buzzed just overhead. Snapshots were taken but not worthy of publication. The cormorants resting on a rocky outcrop mid Niagara river were busy but again hardly worth publishing.

A bus ride along the river took me to the bird kingdom aviary and a butterfly conservatory set in the botanical gardens. The bird kingdom aviary wasn't that spectacular but I did take some shots (village weaver bird, cattle egret, scarlet ibis and golden pheasant). External to the butterfly conservatory in the botanical gardens I found many small species of bird but was really taken by the brightly coloured blue jay, a bright red northern cardinal busily eating berries and either a Hairy, (*Picoides villosus*) or Downy (*pubescens*) woodpecker, but, as ever, I could be wrong. .

*Downy or Hairy Woodpecker?*



Once on the week long Calgary leg, a 1,000 mile self-drive, time allowed plenty of stops en-route and especially around the Bow River Valley. On that journey I found a very busy little bird, just a bit bigger than a sparrow, called black headed junco and a grey jay. I am sure there were plenty more but did not see them well enough to get a photographic record or even look up the species. Vancouver was not that spectacular for me doing any birding but a visit to the Bloedel Conservatory did have birds flying

around. It had plenty of macaws, cockatoo and parakeets, little finches and others that I couldn't identify let alone get a good shot of because they were so busy. Horseshoe Bay provided entertainment from a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) and a cheeky posing seal. Once on board the cruise to Alaska I did hope for more wildlife sightings but sadly not much came to fruition until the turn homeward bound via Glacier Bay National Park. Plenty of wildlife here such as sea otters, seals and a single bald eagle perched and resting on a piece of ice floe is shown opposite. Fantastic to see and of course watching it take off and fly away to its next stop. I saw plenty of white sided dolphins chasing alongside the ship on the approach to Vancouver. The single sighting of a humpback whale did not



*Great Blue Heron*

*White Sided Dolphins (Lagenorhynchus acutus)*



lead to much excitement and so the reserve plan to go whale watching in Vancouver took place. There were plenty of bald eagles sighted along the way but none so spectacular as the one in Glacier Bay. I did get some lovely shots of the humpback whale named Cassiopeia (each whale's tail fin is as unique an identifier as our fingerprint) and her calf. I have shared a couple of these non-birding images for wider interest.



*Bald eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus)*

*The flukes of the humpback whale Cassiopeia (Megaptera novaeangliae)*



# Gallipoli

By Nick Beswick

The concept was simple: capture the Gallipoli peninsula so the Royal Navy could sail through the Dardanelles, threaten Istanbul and force Turkey out of the war. However, the name Gallipoli is synonymous with incompetence, carnage and courage to no avail. Many think of the ANZACS but they suffered only a small proportion of the 20,000 British Empire troops killed in the whole campaign, the same number as lost in the Battle of Normandy. The Fusiliers also played an heroic part so a regimental battle-field tour took place between 13th and 17th May 2024. But what would Gallipoli be like for birds?



Arriving at Istanbul airport late in the afternoon, we then travelled only as far as the Marmara Sea port city of Tekirdag. An early walk the following morning introduced me to Laughing Doves which share the pavements with feral pigeons. David Lindo has forecast that they will be spreading across Europe like the Collared Doves in the last century. Scrub on the coast held another new bird, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, which I subsequently found to be pretty common. Merlin helped by confirming its rhythmic, repeated song. A flock of Alpine Swifts flew over the rooftops before our coach set off on our adventure proper.

The countryside heading south would not look out of place in western Europe – large fields of lush crops – and few birds along the motorway: buzzards and a White Stork. It was only when we reached the Gallipoli peninsula that we encountered more traditional farming and varied habitats. The lunch break at a roadside café provided Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, with Red-rumped Swallows flitting over the fields. Our tour proper started at ANZAC Cove in honour of the Kiwi member of our party. The small beach gave directly on to unforgiving thorn scrub on steep hillsides with the defenders having the advantage of the dominating ground. A Nightingale sang and Bee-eaters trilled past as we paid our respects at the war cemetery. Moving on to the highest feature on the ridge we found the remains of ANZAC and Turkish trench networks and looked out in the distance

to Suvla Bay which was the focus of the second major offensive in August 1915 after the initial assault on 25th April. It was frustrating that we were not to visit Suvla Bay as there is a large seasonal salt lake behind the beach.

Our hotel for the rest of the week was in Canakkale, a city on the Asian side of the Dardanelles. The ferry crossing provided close views of dozens of Yelkouan Shearwaters and Yellow-legged Gulls. The city features immaculately-maintained parks, one with an impressive display board of birds that might be found. My early morning walks turned up Swallows and House Martins nesting in the narrow city centre streets, with numerous House and Tree Sparrows but also some Spanish Sparrows too. Best, though, was a singing Barred Warbler showing well in a young tree in one of the immaculate parks. Curiously, Merlin was unable to identify its song. (See page 4. ED).

Back at Gallipoli, we turned our attention to the main landing beaches at the tip of the peninsula. Why anyone should try to capture a peninsula from the tip upwards beggars belief. The beaches are tiny compared with the Normandy landings so that small numbers of Turkish defenders covering barbed wire obstacles took a devastating toll. At W Beach the bravery of the Lancashire Fusiliers won them six Victoria Crosses, famously before breakfast, as they fought their way off the beach under murderous fire. Thankfully, the scrub now held nothing more sinister than singing Nightingales and purring Turtle Doves. At the next beach a group of Scopoli's Shearwaters passed close to the shore with an estimated 350 Yelkouan a little further out.

Our tour concluded the following day with following the Allied forces as they struggled inland. Conflict rapidly turned to trench warfare with costly assaults by both sides achieving little or nothing. Overhead, Marsh Harriers were frequent along with distant views of buzzards that were probably the Steppe race rather than Long-legged. Booted Eagle, Peregrine and Hobby put in guest appearances. Also of note were a Black-eared Wheatear alongside bleached-out Northern Wheatears and the handsome Black-headed Bunting. A Little Owl looked at us quizzically from the walls of an Ottoman fort but the Cockatiel on a wire in the adjoining village was of interest only to its owners. On our journey back to Istanbul, the coach stopped next to a small maintenance depot. Here, Bee-eaters were nesting in a mountain of sand watched by Northern Wheatears and a Spanish Sparrow. The journey was otherwise uneventful.

The tour was a great success for meeting old friends, paying our respects to those who fell and learning about the campaign. For me, it brought to life the conditions under which my grandfather fought and was wounded. From the birding perspective, a tally of sixty species was respectable though the habitats were unsuitable for the wetland birds I had hoped to find.

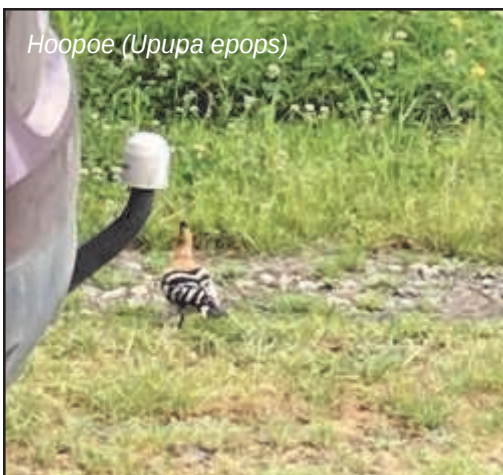
# Nature-friendly farming in France

By Nick Beswick

Our holiday in France this June included a visit to friends living in the *Department des Deux-Sevres*, an area about thirty miles south of the Loire. A map recce using eBird suggested that there would not be much to find – rather like much of the English countryside. But our friends in the village of Noirlieu told us of Cattle Egrets and Hoopoes in their garden...

So, what was there in Noirlieu? At first, I found birds that might be expected in any countryside, such as Blackbird, Woodpigeon, Robin and Wren. But things soon became much more interesting. A couple that would make any day special: the ghostly Barn Owl over the house at last light and the electric flash of a Kingfisher by a small pond. Then there were those that only turn up in Britain as rare visitors: the exotic Hoopoe, the plain but musical Melodious Warbler and the tiny Zitting Cisticola. Two more used to breed in southern England: Red-backed Shrike and Golden Oriole. My last category was of birds that are in serious trouble or scarce in the UK. I was alerted by the dreamy purr of a Turtle Dove, down by 95% in a generation, but common around Noirlieu. Likewise, the jangly song of a Corn Bunting from a telephone wire, an unseen Quail calling from a cornfield and a brief snatch of Nightingale melody from roadside undergrowth. Cuckoo, Spotted Flycatcher and Cirl Bunting joined the roll-call while our friends had a Black Redstart nest in their shed. Skylarks and Woodlarks were singing simultaneously: birds that now occupy restricted and different habitats in Britain. And, most surprisingly, standing in a bare field, a pair of Stone-curlews.

So, is Noirlieu special? Emphatically no! It's not a nature reserve or conservation area but just a typical piece of Deux-Sevres bocage. The reason that I found 59 species of birds is simply nature-friendly farming: a mix of crops, meadows, pastures, woodlands, ponds and scruffy bits. There is no need for re-wilding or special measures. With the right incentives, this approach could succeed anywhere to the benefit of Nature (of course including people). Anyhow, Noirlieu is now well and truly on the eBird map. So, if you find yourself in the French countryside, have a good look; you may be surprised.



Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)

## London Wetland Centre\* Field Day update .

By Andrew (Andy) Harrison

Last year I wrote about our annual field day at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's (WWT)\* London Wetland Centre (LWC) and the challenges now facing AOS members wishing to attend.

The field day was run again this year but, again, with an exceptionally low turnout.

On top of the ULEZ charges, accommodation and transport costs in and around London, and the geographically dispersed membership, WWT has decided to change the opening time of the centre to 1000 hours just in time for the quiet period of the day.

Consequently, the LWC visit is no longer seen as a viable field day and has been removed from the events programme.

Nevertheless, I reiterate last year's comment that the LWC is always worth a visit at any time of year and, if you're on a London trip, especially if you're staying at the Union Jack Club, then the LWC is a straightforward and rewarding option to add to your itinerary.

We are looking at an alternative field day, probably in the Midlands. Wait. Out.



Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

Pic courtesy of Andy Harrison from 2024 edition.

\*Also known as WWT Barnes

# A New Zealand Road Trip

By Nicholas Beswick

“Remember, this isn’t going to be a birding holiday”, said the Boss as we flew off to Auckland from Sydney. I could hardly complain having recorded 176 species in the previous three weeks around the mouth of the Manning River, 200 miles north of Sydney. Especially when they included the magnificent, rare Beach Stone-curlew, awesome views of two White-throated Nightjars flushed from their roost on a forest trail and a vagrant Grey Plover that got the local birders a good deal more excited than I was.

The plan for our fortnight was to visit family in Auckland, then a road trip to Wellington where we have friends, before returning to Auckland. I booked holiday homes and motels in advance at the main tourist spots on our route, with half an eye to eBird hotspots and *The 50 Best Birdwatching Sites in New Zealand*. Sadly, time would not allow trips to any of the offshore predator-free reserves that provide the best opportunities to find native birds but other sites still had potential.

Our holiday started in the leafy Auckland suburb of Titiranga and I quickly found one of the most widespread endemics: the charismatic Tui, a large iridescent blue-black honeyeater with a curious white throat ruff. A Grey Warbler’s song soon gave me another and New Zealand Fantails made a hat-trick. A family visit to the ocean beach at Piha was enlivened by a family of Paradise Shelducks: the deep green-bronze male being outdone by his white and chestnut mate but the only activity at sea was a passing Australasian Gannet, doubtless from the colony a few miles up the coast.

The first stop on the road was the geothermal town of Rotorua. A trip round the neighbouring lakes on a WW2 amphibious DUKW introduced us to the New Zealand Dabchick, a dark version of Little Grebe that had once been thought extinct but now thriving on North Island lakes. In Rotorua itself, a walk through Government Gardens to the sulphurous lake shore revealed nesting shags and the

elegant endemic Black-billed Gulls along with their Red-billed cousins (the familiar Silver Gull in Australia). Neat, dark New Zealand Scaup abounded around the lake. While in Rotorua, we enjoyed a show at one of the Maori villages, inevitably ending with a fearsome Haka, and a picnic in the Whakarewarewa forest where I found a tame North Island Robin, a black version of our familiar bird. At dusk, I walked around the perimeter of Te Puia in the hope of hearing a kiwi but to no avail.

On next to Taupo. En-route we visited the Wai-o-Tapu geothermal park to see the impressive Lady Knox geyser perform and to saunter round the sulphurous springs and pools where House Sparrows and Chaffinches but not native birds abounded. Next, a relaxing boat trip on the Waikato River to the Huka Falls found many introduced Black Swans, including cygnets, that our skipper liked as much as we do Canada Geese. Our motel on the Lake Taupo waterfront gave fabulous views across the vast lake to North Island’s distant snow-capped volcanoes. A Black Duck with a duckling pattered along the shore along with a White-faced Heron and numerous gulls. My early morning visit to Taupo Botanic Gardens was rewarded with New Zealand Pigeons displaying like our Woodpigeons, great views of a pair of Bellbirds, Greenfinch-sized Honeyeaters, a Grey Warbler feeding its chick and a delightful family of Fantails.

The following leg of our road trip was through the mountains to the east coast town of Napier: a good road but wild country with no petrol stations or cafés en-route. The centre of Napier is a delightful Art Deco time capsule from when the town was rebuilt after a catastrophic earthquake in 1931. Given more time, the Cape Kidnappers gannet colony would have been worth a visit but my attention was closer to hand on the Ahuriri estuary by our motel. The site includes ponds, marshes and scrapes as well as the estuary itself. At high tide, the birds were concentrated on the

*Black Shag (Phalacrocorax carbo)*

Internet image.



*Red billed Gull (Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae)*



Pic: © Denis Chandler

scrapes: hundreds of Bar-tailed Godwits and nesting Pied Stilts. I soon found New Zealand Dotterel and the smaller Two-banded Plover but another, more distant, small wader got my pulse racing as I searched for it with my scope. Wrybill. I had not dared hope to see this unique sideways-bent billed bird as they should have migrated by late October to the bottom of South Island to nest. But there two were, feeding with a sideways head movement to catch their prey with that crooked bill. A follow-up early morning provided much better views plus three Marsh Sandpipers, non-breeding visitors, that were quickly chased off by Pied Stilts. On a walk round Ahuriri harbour I found a notice warning of Little Penguins. Online research revealed that a small colony nested inside the secure perimeter of the commercial port and my dusk visit was rewarded as one surfaced briefly on the outside of the port breakwater visible from the beach and another unseen bird called.

We broke our last drive on the way to Wellington to visit the Pukaha National Wildlife Centre, one of several sites undertaking captive breeding kiwi programmes. Although eBird shows that kiwis are surprisingly widespread we realised that the chance of seeing one in the wild was effectively zero. At least we had the satisfaction of knowing the one we watched poking around its enclosure under red light would soon be a wild bird. There was also time for me to make a quick walk round the forest trail where the lookout provided the sight of a pair of Swamp Harriers sky-dancing while a New Zealand Falcon circled high above them. (We saw plenty of harriers along the roads, hunting over open country, as they are as widespread as Buzzards at home and have no other raptors for competition). Judy, though, had the last laugh at Pukaha as she was joined on the visitor centre deck by an inquisitive Kaka, a large stout bronze-brown parrot living in the reserve.

Our holiday home in Wellington was in Brooklyn and aptly named Tui Lookout. It had a commanding view over the city centre while Tuis were to be seen and heard everywhere. There were plenty of Kakas too that have spread into suburbia from the nearby Zealandia reserve. Later, when I was telling Judy about the native owl, the Morepork, I played a recording of its call. To our astonishment, we then heard an unmistakeable "more pork, more pork..." call in the distance. Even better the following evening was the distinctive call of a female North Island Brown Kiwi, the identification backed up by an old eBird record, in the same street.

After lunch the next day with our friends and a fortunate break in the weather, we made for Zealandia. The reserve comprises a forested valley with two small reservoirs on the edge of the city. The whole is protected by a predator-proof fence, allowing native birds to thrive. At first, I found only familiar species, along with numerous Blackbirds. Reaching the upper end of the valley, though, I encountered North Island Robins and Whiteheads while a Red-crowned Parakeet shot past. Two delightful male Stitchbirds, small black and yellow honeyeaters, visited a sugar water feeder and, at last, a North Island Saddleback only feet away.

Blackbird-sized, the Saddleback is also black except for a bold chestnut saddle and chestnut wattles. The flightless Tahake swampphen also breeds at Zealandia but didn't oblige. The following morning I walked up to the Brooklyn wind turbine, just outside the Zealandia fence and found more Whiteheads along with a Shining Bronze-cuckoo.

Our drive back to Auckland was too long to complete in a day so we broke our trip with a night near Turangi on the south west corner of Lake Taupo. On the way there we called at the New Zealand Army Museum, well worth visiting, and picnicked on the Desert Road overlooking an army training area of sparse volcanic scrub. Native birds have not taken to this habitat and a singing Skylark was all on offer. Turangi, though, is a hotspot for the endemic Blue Duck which feeds in fast-flowing mountain streams using a bill that has a curious fleshy black protuberance near its tip. I had almost given up on finding one when I spotted a pair on the Turangi River, just below the main highway bridge!

Only a short drive from Turangi, the Tokaanu wetlands provided a new habitat: reedbeds. I soon heard the unmistakeable boom of a distant bittern. A second one was much closer so that I could hear its intake of breath before it boomed and then it obliged with a brief flight over the reeds. I eventually nailed another elusive bird calling from the drier fringes of the wetland: North Island Fernbird, a streaky LBJ with a long wispy tail. Royal Spoonbills, Swamp Harriers, Pied Stilt, New Zealand Pigeon and a heard Kaka made for a really good final birding walk before we completed our road trip back to Auckland. Back with family, we all enjoyed their resident Tui's antics as the light faded and, much to my surprise as we ate our supper, a Morepork calling nearby to a background of sporadic fireworks. Our hosts knew the call but had never realised that it was an owl!

If you can bear 24-hours in the air, go to New Zealand, whether for a holiday or the birds. Our two-week road trip barely scratched its surface and that was only North Island. There was a great choice of reasonably priced car hire and accommodation. Everyone we met could not have been more welcoming and helpful. The scenery was awe-inspiring and the climate benign. As for the birds, my final tally was 54 native species of which 28 were endemic plus 22 introduced. Not so shabby for a non-birding holiday.



Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) Internet image

# AOS Antarctica (continued)

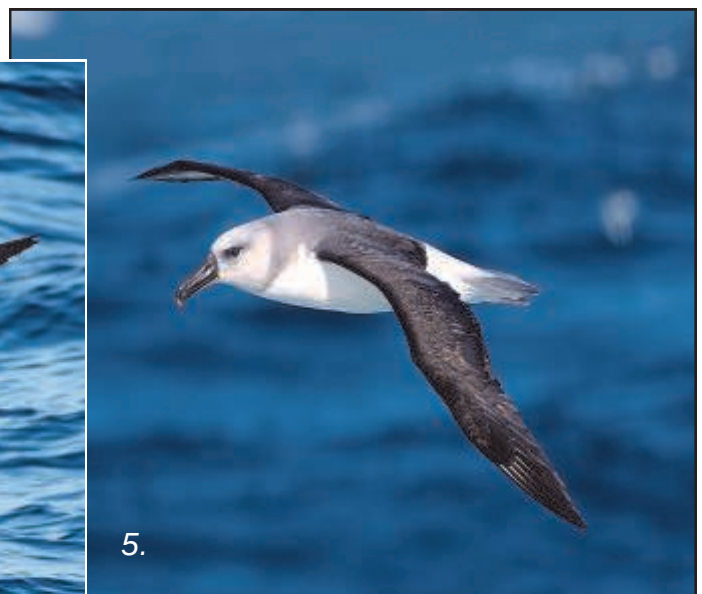
By Anthony Kaduck

In November 2022 AOS members Andrew Harrison, Anthony Kaduck, and Geoffrey McMullan headed to the South Atlantic aiming for Antarctica, with stops in the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. The tale of that ill-starred expedition was told in last year's *Adjutant*. The photos in this submission had to be withheld then due to the number of good articles submitted for the 2024 issue.

*(In an unusual turn of events for The Adjutant this is mainly a pictorial submission. To add some adventure to the proceedings I've decided not to caption the individual pictures but to allow you, the reader, to use your skill and knowledge to select which bird is which. No prizes, just the thrill of recognition. Have fun. ED.)*

**Answers are on page 28.**

*(All pictures are Copyright Anthony Kaduck)*





*The survivors , (l to r) Anthony, Andrew, Geoffrey. Ushuaia, Argentina, 10 December 2022.*

# 2024 Moth Highlights

**By Keith Cherry**

As my birding adventures have had to go on the back burner, I have been putting more time into trapping moths in our back garden in Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire. I use what is called a Skinner trap with a 125 Mercury Vapour lamp. Although our garden is quite small, it is quite good at attracting Moths. I trapped for only 52 Nights and attracted 6,982 Moths of 396 different Species. Included in these numbers were 11 new species for me and 8 species that I had seen before, but were new for our garden. There are two classifications of moths - Macro Moths and Micro Moths. This report is to share some of the highlights.

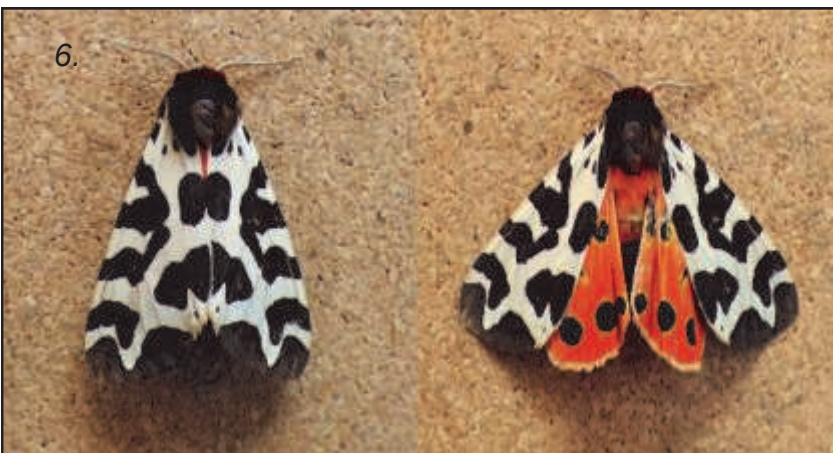
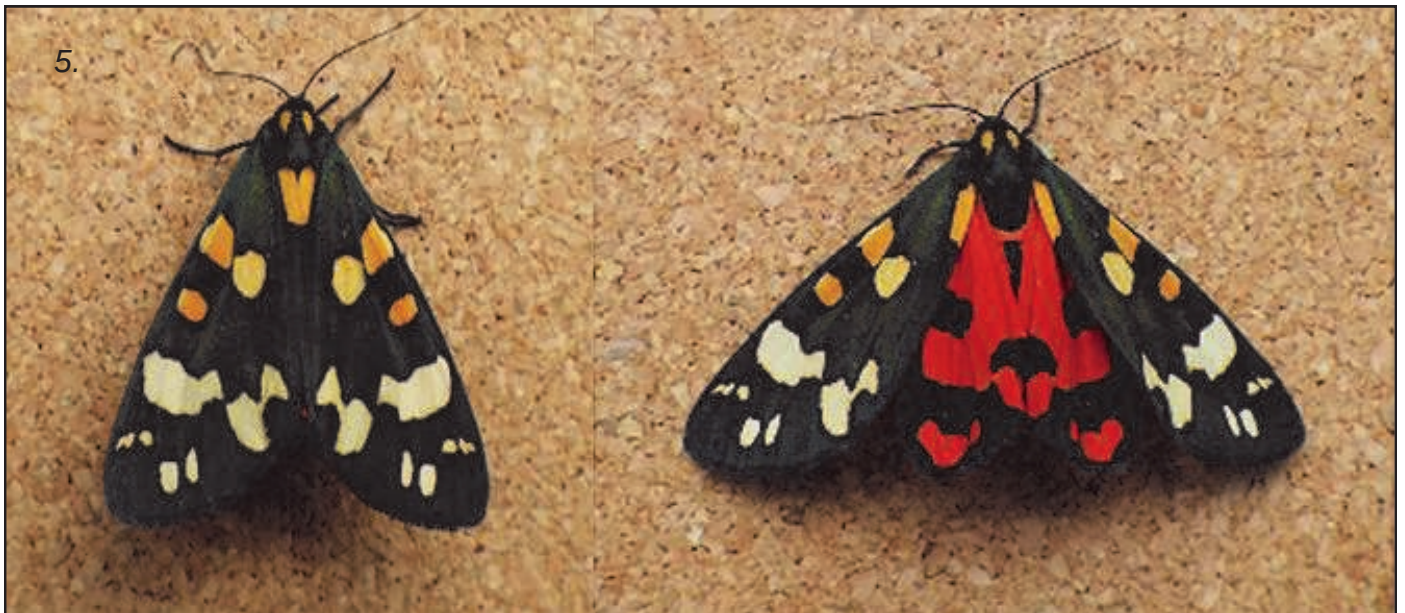
## **New Moths:-**

1. The top moth is a Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet. It was considered Extinct in Hertfordshire until I caught this one on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024.
2. The second moth is a new moth called a Clouded Magpie. It has always been a very scarce moth in Hertfordshire so was a good moth to catch on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Not aware of any other Hertfordshire records for 2024.
3. The third moth is a new moth called a Plumed Fan-foot. Quite a scarce moth so another that was good to catch on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 2024.
4. The last moth on this page is a new Micro Moth called *Palpita Vitrealis* or Olive-tree Pearl that was caught on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2024. It is a migrant from the Continent.

## **New Garden Moths:-**

5. This moth is called a Scarlet Tiger that was caught on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024, showing the coloured underwing that gives it its name.
6. This moth is a Garden Tiger caught on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Not as common as they used to be and I didn't hear of any other Hertfordshire records for this year. Again the underwing is a vibrant colour.
- On the facing page number 7. is also a new Micro Moth called *Acleris literana* or Lichen Tortrix caught on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2024. A moth that I had always hoped to catch.
8. This moth is called a Wormwood Pug. Pugs are notorious for being difficult to identify, but I am sure that this I.D. is correct.
9. This moth is called a *Convolvulus* Hawk-moth caught on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2024. It is one of the larger hawk-moths that are resident in the UK. It turned out to be the seventh different hawk-moth caught this year. The other six were caught on one remarkable night on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024.





I am indebted to Keith for supplying this article on garden moths. You will no doubt be aware that pages have to be added to publications such as these in groups of four. Without Keith's article we would have been two pages short of the required number which would mean either leaving out a submission or having two blank pages, neither of which would be acceptable

A subject a little out of the ordinary for **The Adjutant** but, nonetheless, interesting for those who are keen on all types of wildlife. ED.

# Captain Frederick Courtenay Selous (1851-1917)

By Paul Bennett

The churchyard of St Michael's and All Angels, Pirbright, contains a sizeable granite headstone marking the final resting place of Henry Morton Stanley who died in 1904. My wife and I were married in that church and I thought it would be rather jolly for us to be photographed by his grave, shaking hands. Needless to say, dear Reader, that marvellous opportunity passed us by. Our children were later all christened in the same church; close to the font are recorded the names of a father and son, both called Frederick Selous, both killed in the Great War, the son exactly one year to the day after his father.

I was vaguely aware of the Selous Scouts as an armoured unit fighting in Italy and then as an undercover unit of the Rhodesian Army SAS after UDI but I couldn't quite place the connection with the names on the wall. A gentle interest over the years revealed a big game hunter; a friend of Cecil Rhodes, Baden Powell (in the Matabele Wars) and Roosevelt (whom he joined on a hunting trip in 1909 and remained in regular correspondence with him for the rest of his life, including a five-day stay at the White House and a reciprocal visit to Pirbright); licensed by Lobengula and Chaka to hunt elephants and game in their tribal lands; claimed to have met Cetawayo before the Zulu War and to have visited him in confinement on Robben Island afterwards; and was killed in action in East Africa at the age of 65. Rhodesians wished to emulate and celebrate his hunting and tracking skills by naming these units after him.

Of Huguenot stock via the Channel Islands, Selous was born in the family home in Regent's Park (and later survived the 1867 skating accident on the Park's lake which resulted in the deaths of 40 participants); his father was a Chairman of the London Stock Exchange. With encouragement from his mother, Selous began a life-long interest in natural history, and started collecting birds' eggs and butterflies, not unusual amongst Victorian children and adults at a time when naturalists tended to kill and collect, skin and describe, classify and stuff, and exhibit and educate.

By the time he was admitted to Rugby School in 1866 Frederick had acquired a reputation as a fearless egg collector with a rebellious nature. His prep school headmaster's words of warning to his future school were overlooked by bolder spirits who liked 'naughty' boys. He seems to have spent a lot of time away from the school grounds

pursuing his interests - and teasing and evading bailiffs and gamekeepers. *Two incidents stand out*:- There was a heronry on an island in the middle of the lake at Combe Abbey, about 15 miles away; Fred was determined to take some eggs. On a bitterly cold day one March, he travelled there by train. On reaching the lake which had a fringe of thin ice all round, he stripped to the skin and swam out to the island. He climbed the easiest tree he could find and searched two nests, putting all 8 eggs in a sponge bag before regaining the ground and swimming back to his clothes. He returned to school before he was missed, and if he hadn't then discussed the exploit at a meeting of the school's Natural History Society and shown the eggs, they would not have been confiscated by a rather mean-spirited master who also rewarded him with 500 lines of Virgil to copy out.

Selous learned to shoot with the school rifle club and was soon proficient at the longer ranges but not so good standing with a heavy rifle with a hard pull at 200 yards. When a bit stronger, he became a member of the First Team. Privately, he purchased a pea gun with a single detachable barrel akin to a poacher's gun that could therefore be smuggled around under a coat; he never operated alone on private land so that a pal could carry the barrel and he the stock if they were disturbed. He had discovered that firing a bullet into the nearby canal would stun any nearby pike which would then float to the surface. Disturbed by the owner's gamekeeper from whom they tried to escape, sprinting away once he noticed they were armed. As luck would have it round the corner they saw their Headmaster, Frederick Temple (later Archbishop of Canterbury - and father of another Headmaster (of Repton) who also became an Archbishop) so they burst through a hedge to avoid him. The lad with the barrel couldn't keep up and so they dropped it by a hayrick from where the gamekeeper retrieved it. Knowing the game was up as they had already given him their names, they sauntered back to him and gave him the stock. When, after several days, no official retribution was forthcoming, Selous wrote to the landowner and apologised, asking that his rifle be returned at the end of term. In response they were invited to tea where they learnt that the rifle had never been handed in, the gamekeeper had been sacked and that the rifle would indeed be returned at the end of term. It was.

Too boisterous for Rugby he was dispatched to finish his education in Switzerland and Germany which, after assaulting a forester whilst searching for honey buzzard eggs, and on legal advice, he completed it in Austria.

Frederick arrived in South Africa in 1871 and not long after obtained the amused permission from Lobengula to enter Matabeleland in consequence of his appearing too young a boy to succeed. Then began his wanderings, travelling widely, mainly in Central Africa, shooting elephants, big game and other animals to order for museums and individuals. A precarious living and often stranded up country by disease amongst his livestock, friends or work-force, many of whom died, he still managed to shoot large numbers of elephants and other species despite suffering several illnesses himself over the years. He also started his own private collection.

At the instigation of Cecil Rhodes, in 1890 the British South Africa Company engaged Selous to lead an expedition through Mashonaland. This pioneer expedition helped found the capital Salisbury (now renamed Harare), and Selous spent time mapping the country. He had been submitting regular articles to the Royal Geographical Society and he received their Gold Medal for this work in 1893.

Frederick wrote books about his adventures, often with long-winded titles as was the Victorian way. His first book *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* was published in 1881. The book was well written and achieved immediate success. It was heavily criticized in some quarters as it included a list of all the game shot between 1877 and 1880; the numbers involved were indeed high and led to accusations of 'senseless slaughter', not made any better when he claimed not to have killed anything he and his party did not then eat or give to local natives, slightly hard to believe on days when five or six elephant or giraffe were killed. About this time he became conscious of the consequences of this activity; the hunters were having to move further from the open veldt and into the fly belts, and he started to advocate for some form of conservation and game reserves.

He became engaged to the daughter of a vicar, Gladys Maddy in 1893 but returned to Africa to fight in the Matabele War and did not marry her until his return in 1894. They set up home at Fox Corner, Pirbright, where he also established a private museum to house his growing collection. He became President of the Worplesdon Cricket Club which held an annual match between the Big Game Hunters and the Club. I imagine it quite probable that Frederick and H.M. Stanley will have met at some point

during the 10 years they were close neighbours, perhaps on more than one occasion. He started spending more time in the UK and established a rhythm of birdwatching and egg collection (all by his own efforts and always in clutches), punctuated with hunting trips to secure more specimens from around the world. He became a member of the BOU, writing articles for *British Birds*. His personal museum at Fox Corner contained over 5000 specimens.

Fred's brother, Edmund, a noted ornithologist became an ardent opponent of shooting birds for their skins and the taking of eggs for museums and collections. He much preferred non-destructive ethology, watching and studying bird behaviour, especially that related to mating and flocking. I am not sure whether his brother supported his views in full or in part.

At the outbreak of war Fred was frustrated by the attitude of the War Office to his age and began serving as a special constable in Pirbright. He didn't give up of course and joined the Legion of Frontiersmen who were lobbying to be embodied as a group of reconnaissance scouts. (The Battalion History describes them as "The oddest crew ... clerks, book-keepers, music-hall comedians ... Moroccan bandits, ex-MPs, cowboys, prize fighters and acrobats" but I have not been able to verify this.) Eventually they were allowed to enlist and in February 1915, he was gazetted a temporary lieutenant, aged 64, in the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Frontiersmen) of the Royal Fusiliers and deployed to Africa in May 1915. Fred was promoted captain six months later.

A visit back to England in the summer of 1916 was to be his last. He was twice Mentioned in Despatches by Jan Smuts, and was admitted to the DSO in September, 1916: "For conspicuous gallantry, resource, and endurance. He has set a magnificent example to all ranks, and the value of his services with his Battalion cannot be over-estimated." Sadly, he was killed in action on 4th January 1917, shot dead by a sniper in what was then German East Africa (now Tanzania) while leading his men in the attack on Beho Beho January 4th, 1917. He was 65. He was buried under a Tamarind tree at Rufiji in the reserve later named after him.

The bronze memorial on the following page was accepted on 10 th June 1920 by Viscount Grey of Fallodon on behalf of the Trustees of the Natural History Museum; the niche is made of Syenite from a mine near Pretoria donated by the South African government (Smuts was by then Prime Minister) and shipped to the UK at no cost. Their Selous Collection contains 524 mammals from three continents, all shot by him, including nineteen African lions - as well as his museum which was donated by Mrs. Selous.



in 1922 as the Selous Game Reserve; in 1982 it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to the diversity of its wildlife and undisturbed nature.

In the Latin names of a mongoose and the Zambezi sub-species of the Sitatungi antelope.

Henry Rider Haggard's hero of 18 novels, Allan Quartermain, was modelled on Selous and it seems likely that Wilbur Smith, an admirer of both Quartermain and Selous, named his Courtney (a close spelling) dynasty after Frederick's middle name.

#### President Theodore Roosevelt:

'Selous ... led a singularly adventurous and fascinating life, with just the right alternations between the wilderness and civilization. He helped spread the borders of his people's land. He added much to the sum of human knowledge and interest. He closed his life exactly as such a life ought to be closed, by dying in battle for his country while rendering her valiant and effective service.'

The balance of the memorial fund was donated to Rugby for a scholarship, the deciding criterion would be demonstrating a keen interest in natural history. He was also commemorated as follows:

The 17,000 square miles of the Nyerere Reserve in south eastern Tanzania was originally established

Dollman, JG. *Catalogue of the Selous Collection of Big Game* British Museum (Natural History) (1921)  
Wilson, JM. *Memorials of Rugbeians who fell in The Great War Vol IV*  
Millais, JG. *Life of Frederick Courtenay Selous* (1918)

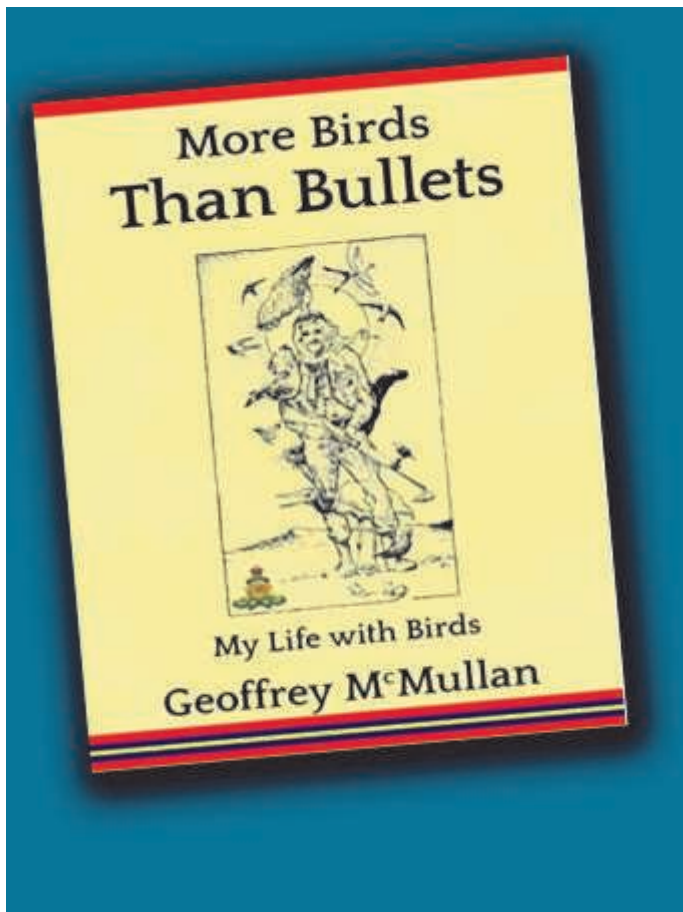
## Answers to the quiz on pages 22-23

- 1). **Blackish Oystercatcher.** (*Haematopus ater*)  
New Island, Falkland Islands, 7 December 2022.
- 2). **Black-browed Albatross.** (*Thalassarche melanophris*)  
West Point Island, Falklands, 24 November 2022.
- 3). **Rockhopper Penguin.** (*Eudyptes chrysocome*)
- 4). **Antarctic Prion.** (*Pachyptila desolata*)  
**Southern Giant Petrel.** (*Macronectes giganteus*)  
Both en-route from the South Sandwich Islands to Port Stanley, 3 December 2022.
- 5). **Grey-headed Albatross.** (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*)  
En-route to South Georgia, 26 November 2022
- 6). **South Georgia Pipit.** (*Anthus antarcticus*) endemic to South Georgia. 1 December 2022.
- 7). **White-bellied Seedsnipe.** (*Attagis malouinus*) Paso Garibaldi, Tierra del Fuego, 20 November 2022.
- 8). **Magellanic Penguin.** (*Spheniscus magellanicus*)  
Saunders Island, Falkland Islands, 8 December 2022.
- 9). **Southern Royal Albatross.** (*Diomedea epomophora*)  
Transit from Falklands to Ushuaia, 9 December 2022.
- 10). **Slender-billed Prion.** (*Pachyptila belcheri*) En-route from the South Sandwich Islands to Port Stanley, 3 December 2022.



Rockhopper penguin (*Eudyptes chrysocome*)  
© Anthony Kaduck

# More Birds Than Bullets (my life with birds)



**Foreword by**

**Mark Cocker - Author of Birds and People**

**Cover Illustration by**

**Cliff Wright who was one of the original  
Harry Potter Illustrators.**

**The Title, More Birds Than Bullets kindly given by  
Lt Col Roger Dicky R.A.**

**All Illustrations by Geoffrey McMullan,  
except the cover picture and chapter nine.**

More Birds Than Bullets is a series of stories about the author's life experiences of birdwatching around the world, covering his life from being a schoolboy, a British soldier, a birder and eventually becoming a nature-based counsellor. I decided not to write in the I but rather allow others tell you about my book. I trust that you will find it interesting, and I have no doubt that it will conjure up your own memories and tales from your birding experiences.

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**"THIS** isn't your average birding memoir ... it's an interesting, sometimes amusing, sometimes eye-opening book that's certainly different from other birding memoirs I've read."

*Rebecca Armstrong - Birdwatch Magazine*

## **A Unique Birding Memoir**

I like the book--unique, fun, and insightful. Don't think I've read another one quite like it--the experiences of a soldier-birder stationed around the world, the perspective of someone in the British armed forces should be interesting for readers .

*Frank M. Izaguirre - American Birding Association*

## **Great Birding Story**

Geoffrey McMullan has written an interesting and, I think, unique little book. This is not your standard birder's diary, nor is it a detailed ornithological treatise ... I found two aspects of the book to be somewhat unique, namely his descriptions and experiences with "bird language" that conveys more information than just the colour, shape, and name of a bird; and secondly, his transition from merely observing and photographing birds to actively working on conservation measures to ensure their survival.

*France Davis - USA*

## **Fatbirder View:**

This sort of autobiographical 'birding life' is always enjoyable to read. We birders like to talk about the birds we've seen, and even those we 'dip out' on and that is just what this book does. The book is a series of tales much as one might tell them around a campfire or over a few pints after a hard day's birding ... more than enough to make one envy of some of the birds and places he has seen. I recommend you join him on that journey.

*'Bo' Beolens, aka the 'Fat Birder' - UK*

## **A thoroughly enjoyable read**

Soldier, birder, traveller, conservationist ... Geoffrey McMullan takes the reader on his life's journey with passion, humor, excitement, and a keen eye (and ear) for detail. ... a thoroughly enjoyable read for birders and non-birders alike.

*Suzie Gilbert Author of UNFLAPPABLE - USA*

## **An engaging tale of balancing military service with bird-watching**

On the strength of a review of Geoffrey McMullan's book. I bought a copy for myself. And I can confirm it is a thoroughly

