



ARMY ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN 2003

EDITORIAL

This is my second attempt at providing the Bulletin. I would like to thank all those who have contributed¹ and I believe you will enjoy reading about the exploits of our members. They do seem to get around. Besides our visits to UK sites our members have managed to travel long distances. Having spent many years visiting South Africa before I became really interested in birds, I now know what I missed out on thanks to Keith Cherry. I do remember the 'Hadadas' in the garden for their size and noise plus Lilac Breasted Rollers for their colour. One incident I remember well was in the Kruger National Park as I watched a waterhole with a cold beer in hand. A Pied Kingfisher was catching fish and using the dam wall to kill them as it smashed the head of the fish against the causeway.

I still wish to pursue articles on local walks. It is my attempt at having something that we can use to attract serving members of the Army. It is always good to know where you can see birds locally on arrival at a new station. At this point you ought to be aware that the editor has also taken on the Secretary's role for the Society, so attracting new members will become one of my concerns as it should be for all of us.

You will note the photograph. I am not searching for ducks but those who attended the AGM in Bovington will recognise the incident. The AGM was a treat for most of us with some spectacular views of birds (two groups had close encounters with Buzzards). Next years AGM will be on the South Coast in the Cinque Ports area. It is hoped that I will be able to meet new faces then. At the back of this Bulletin is a list of forthcoming field trips and expeditions. I wish to point out that next year we will be carrying out our ninth expedition to Ascension Island. I visited the island for 36 hours at Easter to see how John Hughes and Colin Wearn (RAFOS) were getting on with an interim survey. The number of birds nesting filled 10 hectares. There were a number of re-traps that included Sooty Terns swapping pairs plus there was a US bird that was at least 27 years old and a bird with a Brazilian ring. I fully recommend our UK trips having been to Porton Down, Suffolk, Somerset and Portland this year. The amount and variety of birds seen were excellent and included many first time sightings for myself.



The major expedition for the AOS was the trip to Gambia and features on the front cover. I understand that the boat was no African Queen and it was very hot. The reports suggest that despite the basic conditions of sleeping where they worked and only one loo, they all had a marvellous time. An article by Hillary Nash takes us up the river with a daily diary.

Finally I must apologise to Anne Nason for some spelling mistakes in her article in the last Bulletin. I hope that in this edition I have not succumbed to another faux pas. Of course you are all thinking that you did not spot the mistakes. I take it this year you will now hunt through the Bulletin and I look forward to Letters to the Editor.

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FORMER ARTICLES RE-VISITED

(Ken Wright)

Ontario, Canada

Readers may well recall that I wrote about visiting Stratford on Avon, Ontario (A Family Holiday to Ontario, 1999) and referred to the many birds that we saw on the river. This included a particular Goose that I could not positively identify (well, it wasn't an Owl!). My request for an ID from members did not elicit any response so in my own heart, I went along with the owner of that animal food shop that we visited.

I also went through Stratford again when I went over to see my brother (The Return of the Swans, 2001) and it was all frozen up. Not a bird to be seen and the river was completely frozen over – as were many other places as well.

Some time after my return – like the year after! – I received information from my niece about an activity that takes place in Stratford annually on 1st April at 2pm. This is the Ceremonial Swan Parade, complete with Pipe Band. It is known as a “truly festive celebration” to announce the change of seasons. Oh how I wish I could have been there. Last year there were 28 Swans in the parade and while the actual breeding flock is larger, some additional breeding pairs are held back so that they can be transported to other nearby waterways. Apparently Stratford's Honorary Keeper of the Swans says he knows why the critters appear so eager to be released from their winter quarters. “The lengthening daylight hours trigger a



hormonal response in the swans and they need to get back on to the river to establish their territories. You will see the mated pairs looking for their nest sites within hours of being released and the younger birds in the non-breeding flock will be engaged in a lot of flirtations. If too many breeding Pairs are released, there will be many territorial fights between rival males that can turn deadly”.

The parade last year included 28 Swans, an Emperor Goose, some Chinese Geese, Bar-headed Geese, Ruddy Shelduck and the Black Swan ‘Mid-nite’ and her cygnet ‘Chris-nite’. Apparently the cygnet was named after a youngster who rescued it from the river the previous

fall when it had become separated from its mother and was lost in the extreme cold weather. Leading the parade was the Perth County Pipe Band and local dignitaries. Even coffee and doughnuts were handed out to spectators.

In the photograph, I am taking it that the large goose at the front, with the knob on the bill – the one that I could not identify, is the Emperor Goose.



Hawk Conservancy

Members who read my article last year (An Activity Day at the Hawk Conservancy, 2002) will no doubt remember that I had intended to include some photographs but because of my illness, had not finished the film off.

That task is now completed and here are those that I had intended to use. The first is of “Danebury”, the **American Bald Eagle**, taken as weighing took place before the flight. Apparently weighing has to be so exact – overweight and they will not fly and underweight, they are not fit to fly.

For at the end of each flight, food is given.

The second picture is of me holding “Morgana”, the **Harris Hawk**, during our own flying activity.



PORTON DOWN 17 MAY 03

(Andrew Bray)

My first trip to Porton Down, famed for insects and birds and there I was in the car park by the conservation centre donning the full set of waterproofs. The omens were not good, as the sky was dark with rain clouds. The group was met by some volunteer wardens and after a quick brief and a chance to look around the conservation centre we were off through security. We made our way to a wood ready for a walk to the other side and the hope of finding stone curlews, the main prize. Once through the wood and out into the open it was not long before the birds were spotted. They were very obliging by standing near on the skyline of the valley

slope allowing everyone to get good views. The rain held off and the group was on a mission to find more pairs. Unfortunately for long periods of the walk the route was barren of birds but there were lots of foxes. There was also the opportunity to update our botany skills with some nice showings of small native plants (and I thought they were garden weeds!). At lunch spirits were still cheerful as the heavens had not opened up and we had seen quite a number of birds including impressive views of Yellowhammers. It was then off to another part of the range for a scrubland walk. Mind the cars, bright red lights showing, cars slewing across the road but no-one looking as all faces were looking up as a Hobby put in a spectacular appearance. The afternoon walk started well but then the rain arrived with a vengeance. Birds were heard (h) but seldom seen and on return to the cars a halt was called. The total birds for the group was:

Woodpigeon	Swift	House Martin	Pied Wagtail
Rook	Starling	Mistle Thrush	Corn Bunting
Jackdaw	Pheasant	Meadow Pipit	Long Tailed Tit
Gold Crest (h)	Chaffinch	Crossbill	Crow
Buzzard	Yellowhammer	Greenfinch	Stone Curlew
Cuckoo	Green Woodpecker	Sparrow Hawk	Skylark
Willow Warbler (h)	Whitethroat (h)	Lesser whitethroat (h)	Blackcap (h)
Hobby			



THE BRITISH BIRDWATCHING FAIR 2003

(Gerry Birch)

This event first held in 1989, has become firmly established in the birdwatchers year and has continued to grow in size and popularity reflecting the increase in the number of birdwatchers and the interest in ornithology and the hobby in general. Funds raised from the fairs go towards the support of critically endangered areas of concern to birdwatchers and conservationists. This year was the fifteenth fair and on Day One the total raised by all these fairs over this period so far, passed the one million pounds total. The area being supported this year was the Madagascar wetlands.

One advantage of living in south Cambridgeshire is its proximity to the site of the fair at Rutland Water, with a journey time of one and a half hours if the A14 around Huntingdon is clear. In order to gain full value in attending events like these an element of planning is

necessary. I take the same approach to this as we do for the Chelsea Flower Show, get there at the start of the day. I noted that this year the organizers ran a courtesy bus from Oakham station throughout the day. Don't ask me how to reach Oakham by train! By 0900hrs I was on the start line having obtained a good parking spot but still had to queue for my £9 day ticket. Two and three day tickets are also available for the 'obsessed' although I have to say that if one attended all the events there would be probably be enough to do. As a result of previous visits I have developed a strategy and having got my programme I head firstly to the Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre to see how the Ospreys are getting on and look at the Tree Sparrows at the nearby feeding station. It is worth taking a small pair of binoculars that can be easily carried and also a small rucksack for sandwiches and drinks and as somewhere to put the inevitable handouts and purchases etc acquired during the day.

This year five Osprey chicks in two nests have hatched both on private land nearby. There were apparently also two non-breeders in the area. These could be seen from the Centre and initially there is little competition in the main viewing gallery that can become very crowded later on. At this stage one can sit quietly and go through the programme to work out the detailed tactics for the rest of the day. This year there were seven 'trade' marquees and several separate large tents for various outdoor displays. There was a full programme of simultaneous events taking place in both the Events and Lecture marquees. I highlighted some five events that I thought I might attend and then set off to find our guide and mentor from the recent very successful AOS trip to Poland – Marek Borkowsky at his Wildlife Poland stand. He and Hanjia had arrived late the previous day and were still sorting out their pitch 'aided' by their three young children! They had travelled in their trusty 'Chevvy' minibus converted into a 'camper' without too many amenities and were living on site. Later in the day I returned to collect my carved stork and Hanjia said that they had had a busy day with lots of inquiries although one cannot measure then what results might subsequently accrue. The centrepiece of their stand was a description of the journey they made from east to west across Poland herding their special horses on the hoof. Marek considers this of particular conservation interest and it is quite an amazing achievement in modern day Western Europe. He has already brought horses across from Poland which are now grazing on the RSPB reserve at Minsmere and he was deep in conversation with an RSPB staff member about a possible article for *Birds* magazine next year. Watch that space. The potential of horses for grazing on reserves seems increasingly to be realized. The National Trust has also recently introduced a herd of them (not from Marek) onto the Wicken Fen reserve here in Cambridgeshire. I could have done with some on the Stradishall training area! Marek had been asked to visit Northern Ireland to look at the possibility of some of his horses being located on a reserve apparently near Belfast (NI warriors may know where this might be).

My next move was to listen to a BTO presentation on the expansion of the Little Egret. Most of us are aware of this and those living on the south coast will have had firsthand knowledge of the increase in breeding pairs. I remember how excited we were on the AOS AGM visit to Newtown IOW, not that many years ago, when we sighted just one bird. Now they are not uncommon in the winter on Colchester ranges, whiter than the white patches on the targets! Some 50 pairs nest in the Newtown area and the peak UK autumn count in 2001 was some 3000. The Orwell estuary at the moment has some 56 and the BTO estimate a possible autumn peak this year of 5000. It is thought that the autumn peak includes birds dispersing from NW France. The lecturer noted that the Great White Egret was also increasing in the Netherlands and was being more regularly recorded here in UK and may yet be another candidate for increased and regular breeding in UK (cf the wretched Collared Dove!). Shades of global warming? A subsequent presentation on the 'Brenne' area nature park in France also highlighted the increase in Egrets. This area some 5 hrs drive from Calais is SW of Orleans

and consists of a mosaic of habitats of manmade 'etangs' (or fishponds) most dating from the Middle Ages with woods, pastureland and a relatively sparse human population. Species seen include Montagues Harrier, Hoopoe, Purple Heron, RB Shrike etc. A subsequent visit to the Regional Nature Parks of France stand was interesting not least for the bevy of attractive French girls speaking excellent English with charming 'Allo Allo' accents (but don't spoil it by mentioning the Gulf War II!). Not only were the virtues of the area in respect of birdwatching and general wildlife (27 species of orchid) emphasised, but also the excellent range of B&B accommodation and the standard of the food. The handouts seem very useful with enough in English to describe the areas in sufficient detail. Next up was Dr Knystautus, a Russian, from Ibisbill Tours. He was forced to ad lib for several minutes with a string of amazing jokes at the expense of the old communist system whilst a new projector was found! During his talk on birding on the 'Silk Route' he spoke not unnaturally about the Ibisbill. Whilst its breeding habitat in the rocky riverbeds of Central Asia, such as the upper reaches of the Indus, was still relatively undisturbed, the same cannot be said of its wintering habitat. This also requires the same stony river beds to be found at the foot of the Himalayas in India and in the Nepal terai at sites such as the Rapti river. These were subject to increasing disturbance due to road construction when large amounts of pebbles and stones are extracted. This activity is causing reduction in overall numbers. The last presentation I attended was given by a gentleman rejoicing in the name of Mr Alpha O Jallow from (I believe) the Gambian government department dealing with wildlife. He described some birding hotspots that I remember from the AOS trip and the large number of species to be found in The Gambia. He also set this against the large increase in population from 25 per sq km to a current level of around 100 per sq km with the halving of total forest cover between 1946 and 1999. He also mentioned the problems of the Tanji bird reserve and the problems with the coastal road building project and resulting coastal forest degradation that has so dogged that reserve. He highlighted the need to involve the local population in conservation projects but how this translates to action on the ground with any priority for wildlife I am less certain. Other members with more recent Gambia experience may have views on this subject. He emphasised the importance of the delightful Bijol Islands for the Royal Terns and other birds using the site on migration and the creation of the West African Bird Study Association to foster awareness of conservation amongst the local population.

Also seen at the fair apart from Marek and Hanjia Borkowski were Carl and Ann Powell, Carl in his professional capacity doubtless, and Flip Bruce Lockhart on the African Bird Club stand. Dr Hemsagar Bharal from the Kosi Thappu reserve in Nepal was due on the Naturetrek stand on Day Two, but I was pleased to meet one of his guides who had been with us in 2001 and who particularly remembered the 'swimming memsahib' aka Mrs Patricia Davies whom he had also met on her earlier visit to Nepal.

Apart from the people and the presentations what else is there to do and see at the fair? The answer to that is 'plenty'. The Oriental Bird Club had their own stand and amongst other things were getting up a petition about the continuing lack of water at Bharatpur. Their brief is elsewhere in the bulletin. The problem at these events is that it is too easy to become carried away with ideas for trips, buying exotic equipment, wonderful pictures, cards and photographs (a copy of Chris Knight's British Birds winning photo of the year of a Skylark in flight could be had for £65). Then there are countless book 'bargains' new and second hand for temptation! I can thoroughly recommend a day at the fair for straight self-indulgence in ones hobby, but possibly not every year.

BULFORD CONSERVATION GROUP

(Leslie Bond)

Now that the MOD Bird Count is behind us, it seemed the right moment to let members know what our Area has to offer.

The Group covers the eastern third of Salisbury Plain, east of the River Avon and extending to Perham Down, Everleigh and Upavon. Except for the Rifle Ranges, the whole area is accessible on foot and there is an extensive gravel transit track network.

The ornithological Sub-Group has some 20 members, about 12 of whom are active, as well as an enthusiastic Nest Box team that has appeared on Southern Television and won two Shell Better Britain awards. The team is led by Robert Hayden who lives at Gunville besides the river.

The habitat is predominantly chalk grassland, much of which is grazed, some established woodland around Perham and Everleigh, plus numerous small plantations and scrub. Some of the latter is being cleared under the EU Life Project injecting some £2.1m into the preserving the unique chalk grassland of Salisbury Plain and Porton Down. The Avon Valley and river itself produces a different and welcome habitat on our Western Boundary.

Now to this year's birds. We leave **Stone Curlew** monitoring on and off the scrapes to the RSPB; at an autumn gathering 2 years ago, we counted over 70 **Stone Curlew** in one area. Some recent sightings include **Montagu's Harrier**, **Red Kite** (on one occasion carrying food), **Hobby**, **Peregrine**, **Stonechat** over wintering, **Winchat**, **Nightingale**, **Little Egret** on the river and **Curlew** on the downs. **Barn**, **Little** and **Short-Eared Owls** are regular inhabitants and **Raven** has been seen overhead. This year the count so far is 89 species.

The Nest Box Team is advising Bulford Parish Council on developing an area of Nine-Mile River. The team meets every Friday evening in the Conservation Group Hut. Most of the hut has been converted into a workshop with its tools and material donated, acquired, liberated or bought using money from awards.

If you are thinking of visiting, or live near enough to become involved, please get in touch with Leslie on Tel 01672 851403.



A VISIT TO THE PYRENEES

(Nicholas Beswick)

Judy and I didn't need too much persuading to visit my godmother in May, especially when we found that a new budget airline route had opened to her local town, Pau. Only a quarter of the way along the French side of the Pyrenees from the Atlantic, the climate is maritime and the countryside much like southern England. For our week we experienced typically unsettled English spring weather, though rather warmer, and the mountains were blanketed in low cloud on several days with extensive patches of snow on the higher peaks.

As a result we divided our time between the mountains and other areas. A trip to Biarritz was a must, to see the famous resort, but was a non-event for birds. Just up the coast, the mouth of the river at Anglet is worth visiting for waders and seabirds which included a couple of lingering Gannets. Near Pau, the heronry at Artix is a spectacular site in an unexpected location, set between industrial complexes. Featuring dozens of nesting Cormorant, Grey and Night Heron, Little and Cattle Egret, there is a hive of activity and always the possibility of scarce visitors such as Squacco Heron and Great White Egret. Other artificial lakes near Pau are also well worth visiting: Ayguelongue and Uzein are both very near the airport and attract passage migrants. Ayguelongue also has a population of Coots.

Although the snow had only recently cleared from the higher passes into Spain the meadows above the tree line were alive with wildflowers and Marmots. We soon realised that their shrill whistle was not an unfamiliar bird call but could warn of a passing raptor. There are good places to explore around the main passes at Pourtalet and Somport. Griffon Vultures and Buzzards are common but other species less so. Still, we were briefly treated to the majestic spectacle of a Lammergeier gliding over. Away from the higher slopes Black Kites were everywhere and Red Kites widespread. Once the passes are clear it is possible to do a circular trip into Spain where the arid scenery and birds are very different from the French side. The Spanish villages appear to have been caught in a time warp and are well worth visiting. Having experienced blazing sunshine all the way from Somport to Jaca and then west towards Pamplona we were disappointed to find cloud rolling over the mountains on our route north back into France at La Pierre St Martin. The area around the ski slopes is a weird formation of karst pavements and outcrops and is a possible site for Wallcreeper but there was little to be found in the mist. Despite recent sightings, the waterfall at Sanchese above the village of Lescun was equally Wallcreeperless but is still worth a visit for other birds, the magnificent scenery and wildflowers.

Back at my godmother's home near Pau we quickly became familiar with Black Redstart, Melodious Warbler, Serin and Cirl Bunting in the garden. Quite unfamiliar was a grey sparrow size bird lurking and chattering in the undergrowth. With a bright red bill, dazzling golden throat and wing patches, it was clearly not a native! It appears that a population of *Leiothrix lutea* has become established from escaped birds and so this is presumably a legitimate addition to my European list! This spectacular bird rejoices under any permutation of Pekin, Japanese, Robin or Nightingale according to various websites but Pekin Robin seems to be the most logical.

For those visiting the area *A Birdwatching Guide to the Pyrenees* published by Arlequin Press is invaluable. An enthusiastic local bird club – Le Groupe Ornithologique des Pyrenees et de l'Adour (GOPA) – publishes a newsletter and annual report. GOPA may be contacted through its website gopa64.free.fr and welcomes records from visitors. As far as timing is concerned,

mid May is perhaps a week or two too early to catch all the breeding species in the high mountains but conversely is late for the forest specialities such as White-backed Woodpecker. As my godmother said, "It's *such* a shame you didn't see the Wallcreeper, you'll just have to come again!". And so we shall.

A RECORD OF BIRDS SEEN IN THE PAU AREA 10 – 18 MAY 2003

NOTABLE RECORDS

Records are of single birds except where otherwise stated

11 May – Amou

Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis*

12 May – Uzein Lake

Great White Egret *Egretta alba* – one overflow

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – 8

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus* – one singing

12 May – Artix Lake

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*)

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*) not counted

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*)

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*)

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* – pair plus 7 cygnets

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* – 2

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* – 3 singing

13 May – Lasseube

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* – 2

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

13 May – Anglet

Gannet *Sula bassana* – 2

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandviciensis* – 4

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Redshank *Tringa totanus* – 2

Knot *Calidris canutus* – 2

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* – 7

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* – 5

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* – 5

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

14 May - Arette-Pierre St Martin

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*
Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella* – 3
Snow Finch *Montefringilla nivalis* – 3

15 May – Oloron

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*
Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*
Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

15 May – Lescun Area

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Probable breeding at Sanchese
Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius colluria*
Raven *Corvus corax*

16 May – Pic du Midi d'Ossau

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* – adult

17 May – Laroin (river & gravel pits)

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* – 2
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – 5
Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* – 2
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* – 30 (nesting in banks of pits)
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* – 2 singing
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* – 8 singing
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* – 4 singing
Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* – one singing
Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* – one

17 May – Pourtalet

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*
Skylark *Alauda arvensis* – 4 singing
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* – 4 singing
Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

18 May – Ayguelongue Lake, Momas

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* – 7
Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Gadwall *Anas strepera* – one pair
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – 2
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* – 16
Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* – 2
Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* – one singing
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* – 2 singing

18 May – St Faust

Honey Buzzard – *Pernis apivorus*
Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

ST FAUST SPECIES LIST

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
Hobby *Falco subbuteo*
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* (3 territories)
Swift *Apus apus*
Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
House Martin *Delichon urbica*
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Great Tit *Parus major*
Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*
Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*
Pekin Robin *Leiothrix lutea*
Nuthatch *Sitta europea*
Crow *Corvus corone*
Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Magpie *Pica pica*
Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
Serin *Serinus serinus*
Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*

OTHER RECORDS

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*
Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*
Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*
Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
Coal Tit *Parus ater*
Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*
Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*



THE SOUTHERN RED SEA

(R H J Nash)

I again headed for the Red Sea this year to do a bit of fish watching over the 2nd to 8th August 2003. This time I decided to try the south of Egypt and booked on a boat sailing from **Marsa Alam**, the last main settlement before you cross the Sudanese border. It is a dusty, rather scruffy town with little to recommend it, except that it is the closest port to **St John's Reef**.

It was just as well this was not a birding trip, because for the first 3 days we were well away from any dry land and I didn't see a bird. My first sighting was a small group of **Swift Terns** (*Sterna bergii*), who were resting on some coral heads that protruded just above the surface. The next sighting came some 2 days later as we were passing a low sandy island where I saw a **Brown Booby** (*Sula leucogaster*), a flock of **White-eyed Gulls** (*Larus leucophthalmus*) and a couple of **Bridled Terns** (*Sterna anaethetus*). That was it, as far as the boat trip was concerned.

Such a list would hardly justify any mention, but things did look up once we had returned to **Marsa Alam**. A walk down town produced a pair of **Palm (Laughing) Doves** (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) and c.8 **Brown-necked Ravens** (*Corvus ruficollis*). Another **White-eyed Gull** was foraging on the beach.

The next morning we had a 4-hour coach trip to get back up north to **Hurghada**, from where our plane flew to Gatwick. Our outward journey was made in the dark so we saw very little even when we were awake. This trip started well with a pair of **Caspian Terns** (*Sterna caspia*) fishing just offshore. **Brown-necked Ravens** were seen regularly and one or two more **Caspian Terns** were offshore. The next new bird was a *Falco sp*, probably a **Sooty** (*F. concolor*) or a **Barbary Falcon** (*F. pelgerrindoides*). I think it was more likely to be the former, but I didn't see it well enough. The reef then produced a white **Western Reef Heron** (*Egretta gularis*) and an **Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*) as well as 2 small wader sp, too far away even to hazard a guess.

The highlight of the trip was at **Hurghada** whilst I was having lunch (v. poor), in the Beach Restaurant of the Hilton Hotel. In a period of about 10 minutes **1000+ White Storks** (*Ciconia ciconia*) flew over in flocks of 100 to 200.

The final bird record was a group of **Hooded Crows** (*Corvus corone*) by the roadside en route for the airport.

Only 11 species, but it was a fish watching trip!

BIRDING ON THE RIVER DANUBE

(Anne Nelson)

In mid-April 2003 Ian and I made a trip down the Danube from Passau to Budapest and back. I had not expected it to be a birding trip, but in fact we had some interesting sightings. We flew

British Airways to Munich and were then taken by coach on the two hour drive to Passau, near the border between Germany and Austria.

As we drove through the flat, fertile German farmland I spotted Lapwing and Pheasant on the ploughed fields, and the occasional Buzzard and Skylark overhead, as well as common species like Jackdaw and Wood Pigeon. We embarked at Passau in the evening and set sail on the Viking Line's *Heinrich Heine* soon afterwards. The following day, while still in Austria, we arrived at a lock with birch woods nearby, and a clump of bushes only yards from our boat. I spotted a small brownish bird hopping in and out of a bush, and with hastily grabbed binoculars, I identified it as a Tree Sparrow. Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff were calling from the birch woods, but soon we dropped 60 feet or more to the bottom of the lock and the view was blocked by a concrete wall.

The next day we disembarked at Esztergom in Hungary and went round the huge cathedral, modelled on St. Peter's Rome. A Kestrel was circling the cathedral, possibly using it as a nesting site. We then took a coach to Budapest and en route stopped to take photographs of a White Stork on its bulky nest at the top of a power pole, with its tangle of electrical wires, right beside a busy road. Not a scenic photograph, but it was interesting to see how storks have adapted to modern life! The crows we saw in Hungary and Austria were Hooded Crows, rather than Carrion Crows – a distribution I had not expected.

Next morning we were taken to a farm about an hour out of Budapest, to watch a display of horsemanship, similar to the Cossack style of riding. The “putscha?” was on the flat Hungarian plain that stretches interminably to the horizon, giving the impression of being at sea. The first swallows had arrived and were inspecting the farm buildings and in the near distance was a marshy area where Ian spotted a Marsh Harrier quartering the ground and I heard the piping of a Greenshank.

My eye was caught, not by birds, but by the movement of some small animals on a mound behind the display ground where the riders were carrying out daring feats on horseback. With my binoculars I could just make out that they were rodents of some sort, and appeared to be similar to the North American prairie dog, or to marmot, but were smaller. I could not find anyone who could tell me in English what they were, which was hardly surprising as when I returned home and looked them up in the Collins Guide to the Mammals of Europe, I discovered they were “European Sousliks”. Presumably we do not have a translation for them! I have subsequently discovered that they are on the “endangered species” list.

We travelled from Budapest to Bratislava mostly by night, and our time in Vienna was taken up with sightseeing, but on the return journey to Passau we passed through a huge set of locks where House Martins were already at their nests under the giant “bridge” which straddled the lock. Upstream of the dam we saw many hundreds of Tufted Duck on the river, and a solitary Smew. On this stretch of the Danube we passed a marshy area with Heron, Marsh Harrier, Great Crested Grebe and Coot. There were also Black-headed Gulls, possibly nesting.

It was noticeable in the 6 days since we had passed down the river how much further the trees had come out into leaf, and bird song was more in evidence. Shortly before Passau I spotted two geese flying eastwards down the river and managed to get my binoculars to them before they receded into the distance. I was surprised to see that they were Bar-headed Geese. On referring to my bird book, I discovered that these Geese, usually seen flying over the

Himalayas, are now reasonably common in mainland Europe – obviously escapees from wildfowl collections.

One more unexpected sighting was a Great White Egret, spotted from the bus on our return journey to Munich airport, which was another surprise, but according to the distribution map, they are present in that area. There were many Roe Deer in the fields, in one instance, a herd of up to a dozen. At least the German love of “hunting” has not wiped out the Roe Deer population!

Although our species list for the trip was only about 42, we had had some interesting sightings and it had added to our enjoyment of the trip, during which we had visited three capital cities, Budapest, Bratislava and Vienna and several other places of historical and architectural interest.



(Melodious Warbler at Portland Sep 03)

EXERCISE NIGHT HERON
AOS EXPEDITION TO THE GAMBIA
7TH TO 21ST MARCH 2003

(Hilary Nash)

Exercise Night Heron was the name given to a joint project between the AOS and the ***Makasutu Wildlife Trust*** to produce a base line survey of all the birds and other wildlife seen on a trip up the River Gambia. The methodology and logistic arrangements in The Gambia were organised by ***Dr Linda Barnett*** and ***Craig Emms***, whilst ***Roger Dickey*** had the job of coercing AOS members to participate and also of getting us there.

At 6:15am on Friday 7th March 2003 we met at Gatwick. *My Travel*, with whom we were flying, insisted that our cabin baggage was not to exceed 5kg and there followed a song and dance as most of us had put all our heavy stuff there to circumvent to parsimonious 15kg limit on hold baggage. By deftly moving possessions around in the party and wearing anything

heavy we confused the check-in desk and booked in. We then retired for a rather indifferent English breakfast, as meals were not provided on the flight. We touched down in **Banjul**, where Linda and Craig and Solomon our Gambian Army coach driver met us. He fixed our passage through Customs and we set off for the *Safari Garden Hotel*, where we quickly spruced up before going to a reception in our honour at the **British High Commission**. It was a typical “official” affair with small eats and polite conversation with local dignitaries. Luckily it was a cool evening and finally we were all thankful to get into bed.



(Hilary Nash)

Next morning we got up at 6am to meet for birding at 6:30am, but it did us little good as it was too dark to see anything until 7:15am but the mozzies enjoyed their breakfast in the intervening period. Our walk on a neighbouring golf course produced a **Lizard Buzzard** and an **African Harrier Hawk** as well as several others. After breakfast we stocked up on insect repellent and changed money into Dalasis, the Gambian currency. We stopped at the **Sewage Farm**, which cost us D15 (35p) each, a useful arrangement as the site workers make sure the birds are not disturbed. It was good for waders with **Marsh** and **Wood Sandpipers**, **Spotted** and **Common Redshanks** as well as **Ruff** and **Greenshanks**. There was a large flock of **White-faced Whistling Ducks**, **White-winged Black Terns** and good views of a **Red-necked Falcon**. We were dragged away protesting, as we had to get to **Tendaba Camp** by the evening. We made the obligatory halt at “the 100Km post” where we had a good raptor display with our only good view of a **Bateleur** as well as a **Grasshopper Buzzard**, **Tawny Eagle** and a **Palm-Nut Vulture**. At **Tendaba** we supped a welcome cold beer then joined our boat the “**Alagi**”, which was to be our home for the next 12 days. The enclosed lower deck served as lounge /dining room/ bar and housed the loo. The upper deck, covered by a sun awning, was where we watched during the day and at night slept on mattresses protected by mosquito nets. Once we had settled in, we then went across the river to the **Bolong**, in search of **Night Herons**. We saw the **Black-Crowned**, but the **White-Crowned** eluded us. We moored in mid-river for the night, and were cooled by a welcome breeze.

At 7:30 on Sunday 9th March 2003 we set off for a tour with a bird guide, **Abdulhie**. It was very hot but we saw some good birds including **Bruce’s Green Pigeon** and the first of many spectacular **Yellow Crowned Gronoleks**. **Geoff Mullen**, a fanatical woodpecker man caught up with a **Fine-Spotted Woodpecker**, and **Brown-Rumped Buntings** were seen. We

returned to the boat at 9:45am having added **Village Indigobird** to our lists. We all had a very welcome shower and washed some clothes in **Tendaba Camp** before boarding and setting off on the first leg of the survey which was 22 km to **Krul Point**. En route we stopped and went up the **Tunku Bolong**, where we spotted an **African Finfoot**. This bird had almost mystical meaning for me as I had spent hours searching for it on the last AOS trip. This one was swimming across the **Bolong** and was caught out midway in a wide channel. We also saw **Goliath Herons**, which are magnificent birds. On completion of Section 1 we continued with Section 2, a 7 km trip to **Devil Point**. This was followed by the 3rd and final 7 km Section of the day to **Fanafenni** or **Yelitenda Ferry Crossing**. Before anchoring for the night we counted some 500+ **Black Kites** flying into roost.

Before dawn we listened to the calls of a Gambian **Epaulated Fruit Bat** and **Vinaceous Doves**. After breakfast we started the 4th Section of 20 Km from **Yelitenda Ferry** to **Bai Tenda**. The dawn count of the **Black Kites** leaving their roost reached 1,000+. I did a stint recording which is hard work! A skein of **Spur-Winged Geese** provided a new bird, as did a **Marsh Harrier**. The 5th Section was a short leg at 5.5 km and took us to the west tip of **Elephant Island**. The 6th Section was both sides of **Elephant Island**, one side being done in the dinghy, which proved very hot work, as there was no shade from the sun. We had lunch thereafter and then had a break as it was very hot and most of the birds were asleep or hidden in deep cover. The 7th Section was both sides of **Dankuntu Island**. This time it was the other watch's turn to cook in the open boat. We encountered a flock of **150 White-Faced Whistling Ducks** accompanied by **6 Knobbills**. The final section of the day was 14km from **Dankuntu Island** to the village of **Kau-ur**. We landed here for a walk ashore and found **Black-Winged Kite** and **Rufous Crowned Rollers**. Back on board we had a very good supper followed by much merriment as people tried to organise their mosquito nets in a the strong wind. There were claims that the evening's entertainment was well worth a year's AOS subscription.



(Roger and Laura Dickey – the photographers)

After breakfast on Tuesday we set off on the Section which took us past **Pappa Island**. Our watch (the Port one) was looking into the sun, which made it difficult to see anything, and the Mangrove thickets we passed were pretty dull. Just before lunch we went ashore at **Jarreng**. Here we saw a lovely **Grey Kestrel** and our first definite **Intermediate Egret**; we also got good views of **Cut-Throat Finches** in a Baobab tree. We moored up the southern tip of

Pasari Island, a beautiful location and watched evening flights of **Spur-Winged Geese** and **White-Faced Whistling Ducks** as well as **Black-Crowned Night Herons** and hundreds of doves. For supper we ate macaroni cheese and a local specialty, groundnut flavoured stew.

The night was spent listening to **Hyenas** calling. A watch before breakfast produced a lot of dawn movement of the birds we saw the evening before and also 2 new ones: a **Marsh Owl** and two **Egyptian Geese**. The next section took us past *Pasari Island*, a vast reed bed that was uninhabited. It no doubt sheltered lots of birds but they kept themselves well hidden. We landed on the far tip of the island amongst pig poo and saw our first **Black-Headed Heron**. Further upstream we spotted our first **Hippos**, 10 in all. We also got a wonderful view of a **Martial Eagle**, sitting on a branch quite close as we passed by. It filled the entire field of view in my 'scope. Our stint in the dinghy round *Deer Island* produced our first **Red-Fronted Bee-Eater**. Stopped for lunch near a *Kasang Hill*, a lattarite hill some 160ft high, where we saw a **Western Banded Snake-Eagle**. Several people went for a swim in the river, which was most refreshing, the threat of crocs notwithstanding. We parked up near *Baboon Island*, where there are some troops of released **Chimpanzees**. One of the alpha males, a released animal called "**Jambo**" put on a very aggressive threat display.



(Mark Easterbrook and Richard Sargent)

An exciting night with **Pel's Fishing Owls** calling. We were up early to survey the numerous channels round the islands of the National Park. Much of this had to be done in the dinghies. We saw quite a few hippos but very few crocodiles. It got very hot by midday, c.40°C. We reached the *Safari Bird Camp* on *McCarthy Island* by mid-afternoon and it was pleasant to move into the tents there, get our well worn clothes washed and cool off in the swimming pool. An evening walk produced good views of a **Stone Partridge** and an **African Scops Owl** was found in the camp after dark. An excellent supper was followed by a display of Gambian Dancing.

Friday 14th March 2003. We got up at 7am to go out with the guide, but he failed to show up, so we went off on our own. We found the **Verroux's Eagle Owl**, but arrived back too late for breakfast, but the staff kindly made us some. The port watch did the long leg round *McCarthy Island* in the dinghy. It was very hot and not good for birds, but it did add **Little Green Bee-eater** to the list. We joined the boat for the 12 km leg to *Bansang*, which was in the heat of the day, but we saw a **Lappet-faced Vulture**. Other interesting sightings were **Gabor Goshawk**

and **Giant Kingfisher**. Dropped anchor at **Bansang**, where there was a party going on to celebrate the Muslim New Year; this and a combination of a vociferous Donkey and a randy **Hippo** made for a noisy night.

It was a hot night with the wind doing nothing to cool it. The birds started well with a **Giant Kingfisher** and **Martial Eagle** as well as **2 Black Crakes** and a **Yellow-Throated Leaflove** before breakfast. The day's section was **Bansang** to **Kanantoba**, a distance of 22 km. There were many raptors initially; we saw **Gabor Goshawk**, **Dark Chanting Goshawk** and **African Hawk Eagles** en route. We also saw a good number of **Red Colobus Monkeys** and some **Pattus Monkeys**. We stopped at the end of the day at the **Mungo Park Memorial** and went ashore to look for the Northern Anteater Chat, which we did not find, but we saw **Black-Headed Plovers** and a party of **White-Crested Helmet-Shrikes**. Took a wrong path on the way home and had to pay 10 dalasi to a local boy to guide us back to the **Memorial**.

Sunday 16th March 2003. The day's section was **Kanantoba** to **Diabugu Tenda**, a leg of 35km. The morning session was long and the port watch again had the sun in their eyes for part of the way. Another **Martial Eagle** was seen, as was a flock of **European Bee-eaters**. I also got a brief view of the elusive **Common Wattle-eye**, so often heard. Lunch was curry and chips. The afternoon temperature topped 40°C, which was uncomfortable. The **Black-Billed Wood Dove** now appeared to be the commonest dove. It was strange how the relative abundance of the doves varied on differing stretches of the river, all of which superficially appeared to be similar. We stopped 10km short of **Diabugu Tenda** as we felt we had done enough.



(The Gambia River)

The day's counting started at **Diabugu Tenda** with a 34km passage to **Bassé**. It proved to be rather dull though the **African Mourning Dove** replaced the **Black-Billed Wood Dove** as the most common species. We reached **Bassé** at about lunchtime. The forecasted **Egyptian Plover** was there much to the relief of all, particularly **Craig**, who we had threatened to sack if it was absent. It was a beautiful bird and we had excellent views. We had an opportunity to go ashore and make phone calls. The exercise was not a success as we talked to au pairs, answering machines or secretaries rather than partners. Afterwards we stopped at the HQ of a development agency where we could buy cold mango juice and crisps. The captain then told us he has never been beyond **Bassé**, so we recruited a very old man as pilot. As Tuesday's

schedule was planned for 75km and we were ready to move by 3pm, we set off on the first leg of 28km to **Findo Fato**. It was again very hot and we did not see anything really exciting. The bucket shower in the evening was really refreshing.

Tuesday 18th March 2003. It was not a comfortable night, for although there was quite a wind, it was hot and felt as though some one had opened a vast oven door. We had an early breakfast as we then had a long stretch of some 47km to cover on the day's section, which started at **Findo Fato** and finished at **Fatoto**. It was mainly through arid scrub, which was very dry and burnt brown. The only green being a strip some 30m wide along either bank of the river. The count started well with **2 African Finfoots** and a number of **Black-Headed** and **Purple Herons**. After 5½ hours counting we stopped for lunch and then decided that most of the **Swallows** we had been seeing were **Red-Breasted** and not Barn. There was also a good selection of raptors: **Wahlberg's Eagle**, **Lizard Buzzard** and **Verreaux's Eagle Owl**. The counting ethos collapses in mid-afternoon when **Laura Dickey** saw a **Spotted Hyena**, running along the bank, watched warily by a troop of **Baboons**. We reached **Fatoto** at teatime and went ashore to the local cyber café (well a room where there was a telephone to the outside world.) The town is very run down and poor and a lot of buildings are in a state of decay.



Wednesday 19th March 2003. During the night we heard **Pearl-Spotted Owlet** and **Long-tailed Nightjar** plus an infuriating insomniac **Spur-Winged Plover**. We set out after breakfast upstream in the dinghies to survey the last section from **Fatoto** to the **Sengalese Border**. It was pretty hot in the boats and we added no new species to our list and saw rather fewer birds than previously. We were pleased to get out of them after 4½ hours and before the heat of the day, which reached 45°C. We spent some of the afternoon sitting on the deck, watching **Cobras** hunting along the water's edge and the small birds coming down to drink. We added **Green-Winged Pytilla** to the list. In the evening **Four-Banded Sandgrouse** flew in to drink at the river edge. A large owl, possibly a Spotted Eagle Owl, flew overhead. After supper the crew gave an excellent concert of local drumming songs and **Roger**, **Geoff** and **Richard** responded, if not to quite the same level.

We got up with some relief after our last night on the boat. **Fatoto** was not the most beautiful of places and it was still very hot and oppressive. Our plans for an early start were frustrated as our intentions had not reach Solomon, our driver, who was working on the old time of 9:15 so we had an hour hanging around after breakfast, but it gave us the chance to say farewell to the crew. We then started our long trip back to **Banjul**. We made good progress to **Bassé**, especially where the road was recently tarmaced. We then had a long, very slow and bumpy

section past *Tendaba*, as here the black top was full of pot holes and we spent almost as much time driving on the verge alongside the road, as on it. A pot-holed blacktop is worse than a dirt road; at least with the latter can re-graded easily. We reach *Abuko* at about 4:30pm and picked up our smart clothes from *Linda* and *Craig's* house, then had time for an hour's walk round the Reserve. We added **Pied Hornbill**, **Blue-Spotted Wood Dove**, **Snowy-Crowned Robin-Chat** and **Little Greenbul** to the list and also get excellent views of a **Painted Snipe**. We then went back to the *Safari Garden Hotel* for a most welcome shower and a shave, which was followed by a farewell dinner with bubbly from *Linda* and *Craig* to celebrate their *Darwin Initiative Award*.

Friday 21st March 2003; our last day in The Gambia. The 'extreme' birders made a dawn raid on the nearby golf course but those that stayed abed did better. At 8:30am we set off for *Biljo Forest Park Reserve* on the coast. Here we added **Oriole Warbler**, **Green-Backed Eremomola** and **Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher**. We then to the very large and flashy *Senna Gambia Hotel* for some shopping before setting off to the airport at 2:30pm. En route to the airport we saw our last tick, an **African Spoonbill**. It was boiling hot in the terminal and very crowded and inevitably the aircraft was about 1½hours late departing.



FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE - A BIRDWATCHING TRIP TO SOUTH KOREA

(Keith Powrie)

We decided to take a trip to South Korea to see what the Far East had to offer in the way of new and interesting over-wintering birds. So we booked a 12-day jaunt with Birdwatching Breaks, 14th – 26th February 2003.

The excitement of the holiday started very early on, with the total evacuation of Heathrow's Terminal 2 into the cold morning air, as the result of a 'bomb-scare'. We eventually were on our way to Frankfurt, an hour and a half late, where we originally had 50 minutes for transfer. Fortunately they had held the plane and we arrived at Incheon International Airport on time and with our luggage!

Here we met our guide “James”, driver “Mr. Seo” and “Bob”, an American who had arrived earlier. Bob regaled us with tales of his previous day and a half birding, and we decided to visit Song-do on our way south, instead of Asan Bay.

Despite the sea being partially frozen, the mudflats by the promenade provided the first birds for our Korean List, with **Spot-billed Ducks**, and a range of gulls including **Black-tailed, Kamchatka, Vega and Mongolian Gull**. We also found four **Oystercatchers** of the eastern race and a party of **Swan Geese** flew over. A pine-covered promontory had held a wintering pair of the very rare **Chinese Nuthatch**. After a prolonged wait that revealed our first female **Daurian Redstart, Great Tits and Coal Tits**, (which have crests in Korea), both male and female Nuthatches were seen. The female provided excellent views while she perched motionless. **Hen Harrier** and **Great White Egret** were added to the list en route to our hotel.

The following day, our destination was the large reclaimed Chonsu Lake A and the associated extensive rice fields. These rice fields stretch from horizon to horizon and are so vast that they have to be seeded by aircraft. At harvest time several thousand employees from the nearby Hyundai factory are released to assist with the task!

A wrong turn en route provided our first **Rustic Buntings, Marsh Tit, Oriental Turtle Doves, Oriental Greenfinch and Brambling**. We arrived at the lakes at about 0900 and spent most of the day searching the shores of the lake and the numerous tracks traversing the rice fields. The area gave us our first experience of the large concentrations of wintering birds in South Korea. The rice fields yielded our first flocks of **Tundra Bean Geese**, with over 1000 seen during the course of the day. These were accompanied by **Greater White-fronted Geese**, with around 500 recorded in the area. A wide reedy channel produced a flock of **Chinese Penduline Tits, Vinous-throated Parrotbills** and a range of buntings which included, **Eastern Reed, Pallas's Reed and Chestnut-eared** together with another **Daurian Redstart**, all providing the challenge of knowing which to look at first!



Rustic Bunting

A flock of **Lapland Buntings** were picked up in flight and when eventually located on the ground, provided prolonged views. Three distant **Oriental White Storks** were observed soaring and alighting in the rice fields and numerous **Great White Egrets** were seen.

Searching the lake produced large numbers of wintering wildfowl, including at least 1000 **Spot-billed Duck** and an estimated 20,000 Mallard. Good numbers of sawbills were also present in the form of 200 **Goosander** and at least 75 **Smew**. We also located our first Black-necked Grebe. The large numbers of wildfowl attracted good numbers of raptors and at least 3 immature **White-tailed Eagles** were found. Two of them offered exceptionally close

views and were seen to make a food pass, which made a gripping and memorable experience. Despite much searching, we failed to locate the wintering **Steller's Sea Eagle**. At least 4 **Common Buzzard** of the race japonicus were seen and a single **Upland Buzzard** was watched for a long period, soaring at first and then hovering at a great height whilst hunting. We flushed a single **Japanese Quail**, which eluded one of the party, but all managed to catch up with the flock of 17 **Eurasian Spoonbill** that were initially located flying towards the lake at a great distance and later found roosting on the edge of an island. In this same area we discovered our first **Baikal Teal**, a group of two drakes and a duck.. Not quite the spectacular numbers we were expecting! Maybe we would find more in the evening.

We moved on briefly in the late afternoon to the nearby Lake B where we found our first **Falcated Duck** with a **Bull-headed Shrike** being spotted en route. Returning to Lake A at dusk, we drew a blank with Baikal Teal, but a roost of 32 **Great White Egret** and 200 **Ruddy Shelduck** ended the day on a high note.

The next day we arrived at the Keum tidal barrage in thick fog at about 08.30, which made birding in the estuary impossible. A party of at least 15 **Coal Tits** in a park by the promenade provided a brief diversion. These 'crested' birds apparently represent an intergrade population between the form ater and pekinensis. We continued on up to the birdwatching centre on the river, but again the fog was too thick to appreciate the birding here. There were clearly good numbers of **Baikal Teal** present with large flocks of several hundred drifting into view on the edge of the fog. A tame **Oriental Turtle Dove** was present in the car park and the area behind the centre provided good views of **Olive-backed Pipit** and **Yellow-throated Bunting**. Given the weather, we decided to head up river and search for passerines. This proved very rewarding, with a stop at a nearby farm to view our first Hawfinch (looking very washed out in colour compared with British birds). Further investigation of the farmland unearthed large numbers of **Vinous-throated Parrotbills**, **Rustic Buntings**, **Brambling**, **Brown-eared Bulbuls**, **Naumann's** and **Dusky Thrushes** and three **Common Rosefinch**, which are apparently exceptionally rare in winter and inland in South Korea.

Returning to the Birdwatching Centre, the fog had lifted sufficiently to reveal the true numbers of **Baikal Teal** on the river. Stretching as far as the eye could see in both directions, a huge dense flock were swimming in the centre of the river, with very little of the actual water visible in some places. Previous reports had put their numbers at around 180,000, but a waterfowl census the day before had counted 250,000, which may well have been a more realistic figure. (Which begs the question, "How did they count them?") Whatever the true figure, the spectacle was amazing, and when the siren from a passing police vehicle put a large number of them to flight, produced one of the most memorable moments of the tour. Two albino birds induced a brief moment of head scratching. Several **Falcated Duck** provided a diversion, as did our first **Peregrine**. After enjoying the spectacle and lunch, we travelled to the barrage where the tide was rising and almost high. Careful inspection of the large flock of gulls loafing on the river, revealed at least 129 **Saunders' Gulls** providing good comparison with the accompanying **Black-headed Gulls**. Prolonged scanning eventually located a small, distant party of 6 **Swan Geese** feeding on reed rhizomes on the edge of the river, with large numbers of **Tundra Bean Geese**. We managed to drive round and secure reasonably close views of these magnificent birds. The rice fields close to this spot provided our first **Buff-bellied Pipits**. We then headed towards the estuary mouth in search of waders, but the fog began to roll in again and the only wader seen was a male **Kentish Plover** on the sea wall. Returning for one last scan, close to the barrage area revealed 2 **Pied Avocet** (a vagrant to South Korea) swimming out the tide amongst a large number of wildfowl which included an estimated 2000 **Northern Pintail**, 200 **Common Goldeneye** and at least 20 **Smew**. A fine male **Daurian Redstart**, who posed wonderfully for the cameras, provided a fitting finale to the day.

The following morning, thick fog hampered our birding at Yongam reservoir, but a 1st-winter **Night Heron** was located feeding on the shore near the barrage. As we travelled from this site, a brief stop to search for a roadside passerine led to the locating of the only **Japanese White-eyes** of the trip. After eluding several members of the party for a few minutes, we were all rewarded with good views of these delightful birds. As we travelled through the agricultural landscape we observed large flocks of **Dusky Thrush**. The next stop was an area of rice fields alongside a canalised river. A pair of **Bull-headed Shrikes** gave excellent views on the roadside wires and we had several flight views of **Eurasian Skylark**, the vocalisations of these birds differing slightly from their British cousins. A **Common Buzzard** perched on the far side of the river encouraged us to explore the area. A small patch of riverside reeds rewarded us with more

Chinese Penduline Tits and our first **Black-faced** and **Little Buntings**, together with ubiquitous **Vinous-throated Parrotbills**, moving like a small army on manoeuvres.

Further along the road, another stop near Hwang San provided good views of several **Eurasian Jays**, of the race *brandtii*, and our first **Pale Thrush**, **Pheasant** and **Long-tailed Tits**.

We arrived at Kochannam at lunchtime and after our traditional fried egg sandwiches, we spent the rest of the day exploring the vast area of rice fields and the reclaimed lake with its extensive reed beds. Searching the reedy ditches for buntings, which were predominantly **Yellow-throated Buntings**, yielded at least 3 **Japanese Quail**, flushed at close range, providing views for those who missed their brief appearance last time. The reed beds around the lake provided the only **Eastern Marsh Harrier** of the tour and several **Pallas's Reed Buntings**. Scanning the large flocks of **Greater white-fronted Geese** failed to locate the hoped for **Lesser White-front**, but the lake did reveal our first **Greater Scaup**. Raptors were in evidence towards late after noon and we were rewarded with excellent views of perched **Peregrine**, **Goshawk** and a number of **Hen Harriers** (including at least 3 adult males). One particularly memorable sight was of a perched **Goshawk** being repeatedly mobbed by several **Hen Harriers** until it was ousted from their territory.

Having spent the night at Haenam, upon leaving the town after breakfast we were rewarded with our only **Japanese Waxwing**, a flock of 6 being picked up from the moving vehicle.

Whilst stopped to observe these birds, a **Black-backed Wagtail** was also spotted on one of the buildings. A stop for an exploration of the Busancheon River provided our first, but distant, **Azure-winged Magpie**, along with **Green Sandpiper**, **Grey Wagtail** and our only **Common Kingfisher**. The reeds in the river revealed yet more marauding **Vinous-throated Parrotbills** and several elusive buntings including our first **Meadow Bunting** and a female **Black-faced Bunting**.

The forest edge, alongside the river also proved productive with our first **Varied Tit** and **Pygmy Woodpecker**. Several **Olive-backed Pipit**, flushed from the river bank, rounded off an enjoyable visit and we pressed on to Suncheon Bay.



We arrived at Sunchon to find the tide in, but enjoyed good views of **Reed** and **Pallas's Reed Buntings** in the reed beds, together with our first **Moorhen**. We soon realised that **Little Egrets** were outnumbering **Great White Egrets** for the first time. Five **Eurasian Spoonbills** were roosting on the edge of the bay, as were a small party of **Whooper Swans**. We waited for the tide to fall, which revealed good numbers of **Eurasian Curlew**, **Dunlin** and small groups of **Kentish Plover**, together with flocks of **Saunders' Gull**, with their distinctive tern-like flight. However, we could see no sign of the crane flock. The sight of vehicles driving down the east side of the bay encouraged us to attempt to explore this area, which proved to be a wise decision. We located some cranes feeding in fields near the village of Sun Hak Ri and were rewarded with good views of the flock which numbered approximately 100 individuals.

The majority were **Hooded Cranes**, but 10 to 15 birds showed signs of hybridisation with **Common Crane** and at least one apparently pure **Common Crane** accompanied the flock. The village also provided a flock of at least 50 **Azure-winged Magpies**, giving exceptional views as they fed around the buildings and making a pleasant change from the pied version.

The first **Osprey** of the trip flew over while we were engrossed with the wonderful sight of the magpies. We returned to the western side of the estuary to finish the day at the headland at the estuary mouth. Here we saw at least another 250 **Saunders' Gulls** and another **Pale Thrush**. After a warming cup of coffee, we set off for the Hanwa Condo at Jirisan for the night.

After breakfast we explored the area around the hotel, below the Buddhist temple in Jirisan National Park. The gardens were designed to bring peace and tranquillity. They were laid out in typical oriental style with symbolic sculptures in complimentary settings at strategic points on the path to the temple. The rocky stream below the large ornamental bridge was home to a pair of **Brown Dipper**. The trees lining the ornamental walk proved very productive with the distinctive subspecies of **Wren (dauricus)**, **Nuthatch**, **Large-billed Crow**, **Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Great, Marsh** and **Varied Tits** all providing exceptionally good views. We eventually dragged ourselves away for the long drive to Junam Reservoir. This drive took in some spectacular scenery along the Seum Jin river and a stop in suitable habitat produced our only **Long-billed Plover** and a single **Japanese Wagtail**. We also enjoyed really close views of **Meadow Bunting** here. A brief stop to search a large flock of corvids, (predominantly **Rooks**) failed to locate the hoped for Daurian Jackdaw.

Soon after arriving at Junam we located our first **Taiga Bean Geese**, together with small numbers of **Baikal Teal**, and several **Falcated Duck**, including an obliging, preening drake that appeared determined to reveal every feather for our observation. Several **Daurian Redstarts** and **Buff-bellied Pipits** provided a brief distraction before a majestic **Greater Spotted Eagle** was located soaring overhead. Whilst studying this through the telescope, half a dozen swifts were picked up which transpired to be **Pacific Swifts**. Several more were seen at Tongpan, representing an exceptionally early arrival, some 4 weeks earlier than normal. Prolonged searching through the **Greater White-fronted Geese** flock eventually revealed the only **Lesser White-fronted Goose** of the tour, an adult which showed well in the bright sunlight. Our only **Merlin** of the trip was also seen here, dashing across the arable fields.

Moving on to Tongpan Reservoir, we found more **Smew**, our only **Eurasian Siskin** of the trip and a family party of **Tundra (Bewick's) Swans**. From here we travelled to the Nakdong for dusk, where we visited the west side of the estuary. Here we found several **Osprey**, **Common Buzzard**, **Hen Harrier** along with the **lineatus Black Kites** providing low level overhead views. There were at least 75 **Saunders' Gulls** on the mudflats as well as large numbers of **Taiga Bean Geese** and **Whooper Swan**.

Fortunately the day dawned fair for our boat trip out on the Nakdong estuary. We boarded our fishing junk for a four hour trip. Junk being the operative word – no cabin, no cover, no toilets, no handrails, no life raft, no life jackets, the decking was cracked and perforated and the skipper wore a crash-helmet! Undaunted, we set sail and headed down the river on a rising tide. Small numbers of **Smew**, **Goldeneye** and **Black-necked Grebes** came close allowing good views to be had. We soon came across a **White-tailed Eagle** feeding on a mud bank. Further in the distance were two more large eagles, one of which looked promising for a **Steller's Sea Eagle**, so we headed around a large island in pursuit but they had both flown on our approach. Further good views of **Black Kite** and **Greater Scaup** were obtained before we headed for the estuary mouth. Once there, we manage to obtain some excellent views by sailing close to a party of **White-winged Scoter**, our target species. We returned to dry land where we spent the rest of the day searching the southeast shore of the estuary and the wooded rocky outcrop. This area provided several new species including **Red-throated Diver**, **Slaty-backed** and **Glaucous Gulls** amongst masses of **Vega**, **Black-tailed** and **Kamchatka Gulls**. The wooded hillside was relatively quiet, but eventually yielded a very elusive group of buntings, which included at least one **Grey Bunting**. A last scan of the estuary at dusk revealed four **Swan Geese** excavating deep trenches in the mudflats in search of food.

The next day was a difficult day's birding as a consequence of the unpleasant weather conditions. The Guryangpo is an exposed, rocky peninsular and shelter proved hard to find. Nonetheless, persistence revealed many of the area's specialities. One of the first stops produced **Ancient Murrelet** and **Black-throated Diver**, albeit we were hoping for Pacific. The harbours and bays provided shelter for a good number of gulls, predominantly **Black-tailed**, **Vega** and **Slaty-backed**, but searching located a first-winter **Heuglin's**, at least six **Glaucous** and two or three **Glaucous-winged Gulls**. A flock of 15 **Black-legged Kittiwake** and a **Japanese Cormorant** flew east at the tip of the peninsular and we also located the only **Rhinoceros Auklet** in this area. At least two female **Blue Rock Thrush**, of the distinctive form phillippensis, looked thoroughly dejected in the driving rain. The west side of the peninsular provided **Red-necked** and **Slavonian Grebes**, more **White-winged Scoter** and a small flock of **Sanderling**. We eventually abandoned the birding in the mid afternoon in favour of a return to our hotel and a change of clothes.

A much better day for weather followed and saw us searching in the complex of dammed lakes and rivers around Andong, which has been favoured by small numbers of **Scaly-sided Merganser** in recent winters. A **Mandarin**, seen from the moving vehicle, led us to a flock of nine birds on a roadside river, the displaying males looking very impressive.

Searching the area for mergansers produced over 150 **Goosander** and at least 30 **Smew**, but none of the quarry species. Exceptional views of **Japanese Wagtail** provided some compensation, as did several **White-tailed Eagle** (including the only adult of the trip), several **Falcated Duck** and good numbers of **Rustic** and **Yellow Bunting**. However, by mid afternoon we had to abandon our search and begin the long drive north to Seoul.

Whilst gathering together outside the hotel after breakfast, we saw three **Meadow Bunting** on waste ground near the entrance.

On arrival at the arboretum at Gwangneung, we soon located **Solitary Snipe** and **Brown Dipper** on the river by the car park, together with at least 10 **Mandarin** and exceptional views of **Hawfinch** and **Rustic Bunting**. On entering the arboretum we flushed a small party of **Pallas's Rosefinch** and managed to set the telescope on at least one female in the lower canopy. Exploring the forest around the boardwalk proved excellent for woodpeckers, with prolonged telescope views of a pair of **Black**, at least one **White-backed** (which was seen-off by the male Black on at least one occasion), a pair of **Grey-faced** and several **Pygmy Woodpeckers**. **Nuthatches** were also exceptionally tame and obliging, and several **Jays** provided good views, along with **Brambling**, **Varied** and **Marsh Tits** and two **Naumann's Thrushes**. To complete an enjoyable morning's birding, an eastern subspecies of **Black** or **Cinereous Vulture** soared low over the canopy providing stunning views – most unexpected in a forest! We retired for lunch at the country retreat of a journalist from the Korean Times, who had accompanied us around the arboretum, whilst he collected material for an article on foreign birdwatching trips to South Korea. A pair of **Bull-headed Shrikes** hunted the abandoned rice paddy adjacent to the house.

After lunch we headed to Imjingak and spent some time scanning the area from the rooftop above the restaurant where many Koreans and tourists visit to see the edge of the DMZ (De-militarised Zone) along the Imjin River. Within the imposing fencing, to keep out human intruders, were spectacular numbers of birds, including at least 9 **Black Vulture**, 5000 **Greater White-fronted Geese** (including one pure white albino – mistaken for a Snow Goose), 16 **Ruddy Shelduck** and eventually, our first **White-naped Crane**. Travelling down the Han river in the late afternoon, frequent stops located further **White-naped Cranes**, bringing the day's total to 43, around 80 **Swan Geese** and an impressive concentration of at least 5000 **Common Pochard**, along with masses of gulls, including an estimated 1000 **Mongolian Gulls**. The birding here can appear rather surreal, stopping on the hard shoulder of a motorway and viewing through banks of fencing and razor-wire, but the rewards are most gratifying. The evening was rounded off nicely with a close fly by of the only **Short-eared Owl** of the tour.

With another morning cloaked in fog, we opted for a visit to the Temple at Jeon Dungsang on Gangwa Island, in an attempt to locate some woodland species. This proved to be a good move, with excellent views of **Pallas's Rosefinch**, including a cracking male. Persistent searching revealed a single male **Chinese Nuthatch** accompanying a party of tits. This bird responded well to "pishing" and provided us with exceptional views. Our last **Varied Tits** of the trip were equally obliging. From here we moved on to the rice paddies and scrub at Sondu-ri in search of passerines. Searching the brushwood produced good numbers of **Rustic Bunting** accompanied by a single **Black-faced Bunting**. An illusive **Siberian Accentor** revealed itself to some of the group, but unfortunately eluded others.

The bunting flocks in the reedy ditches and channels proved hard to get to grips with, but again, persistence paid off and we were eventually rewarded with our only **Japanese Reed Bunting** accompanying mixed flocks of **Eastern** and **Pallas's Reed** and **Chestnut-eared Buntings**. This extensive search also flushed at least four **Japanese Quail**. Several **Naumann's Thrushes** and our last **Vinous-throated Parrotbills** provided the accompanying cast.

From here we searched the extensive mudflats on the southeast shore of the island, where we found a small number of wintering **Red-crowned Cranes**, surely the most elegant of this attractive family of birds. They were accompanied by a single **Hooded Crane**, which further emphasised the majestic proportions of the Red-crowned. We then travelled to the west bank of the Han River, where we found a few **Daurian Jackdaws** secreted away in a vast flock of **Rooks** feeding in the neighbouring fields. Also of interest here were a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** and at least 109 **White-naped Cranes** on the river.

On our final day, we headed back to Song-do, prior to our flight. The tide was rising rapidly and pushing the flocks of gulls across the mudflats towards us. Eventually we located our target species that had eluded us until this, the eleventh hour! In amongst a large group of **Kamchatka Gulls** was a solitary, adult winter **Relict Gull**. Other birds of interest included at least 50 **Saunders' Gulls**, an adult **Heuglin's Gull**, along with 4 **Kentish Plover** and presumably, the same 4 **Oystercatcher** that we had observed here on the first day of the tour. We headed to the airport where our flight was delayed, providing time to reminisce about a tour with many memories, excellent birds and spectacular sights.



VISITS TO EASTERN HUNGARY IN MAY AND OCTOBER 2002

(Lt Col (Retd) Patric Baird)

Having paid many visits to the Odra valley in Poland during my 4 year posting to Berlin in the early 90's, we got used to seeing wildlife in countryside relatively unaffected by modern agriculture. Although a move to Rheindahlen provided easy access to the wetlands of northern Holland, we began to suffer from withdrawal symptoms for the unspoilt lands. A visit to the Hungarian website led to the purchase of Gerard Gorman's excellent book 'The Birds of Hungary' (1) and Dave Gosney's 'Finding Birds in Hungary' (2) and the next step was deciding on the location and finding accommodation. Although there is a wide choice, we settled on going to the east and basing ourselves in the Hortobágy/Tokaj area.

The road system is good, but off the main roads expect some rough going. Motorways are very good and not particularly busy. You need a vignette for motorway travel, but these are available at garages and border entry points. If you stop for a meal on the motorway, be prepared for large helpings of good food.

Accommodation is easy to find and, in our experience comfortable and good value for money. The food is first class, spicy and plentiful helpings are the order of the day and wine and beer are good, too. All the staff are cheerful, very helpful and most speak English and German. Away from the hotel there was no problem in getting rations, most large towns have Tesco stores. We found them to have a much wider range than those in UK, and most have bank and exchange facilities and a 'hole in the wall'. Petrol is expensive, but the Mol service stations have good quality snacks and expect your car windows to be cleaned whilst you are paying for the petrol.

The drive from Rheindahlen to Tokaj is about 1500kms, so we had to break the journey. In Hungary, we settled on Tata, just off the M1 Vienna/Budapest motorway and about 1 hour (1.5 hrs cross country) from Budapest.

I will divide the rest of the report into the areas visited. To do much more than list the birds and the locations would take up too much space, so tabular form is probably the answer. Birds seen throughout the area are in the final table. Throughout eastern Hungary, Sousliks, which form a major part of the diet of raptors, can be seen on the pastures and steppes.

TATA

Tata is a lovely old town on the banks of the Öreg-tó, with some nice hotels, restaurants, museums and historic buildings. It is on the migration route for wildfowl and the lake is therefore best from late Oct/early Nov, particularly for Bean Geese. About half way down on the eastern shore, there is a MME (the Hungarian Bird Society) lodge with hide overlooking the lake. This is open from the beginning of November throughout the winter wildfowl season. There is a smaller lake, Cseke-tó, which, although in a park (The English Park), had some flocks of wild mallard - the offer of bread sent them off at great speed.

In spring no wildfowl were seen, but there were plenty of birds about. The surrounding hills are good for birds of prey, and it is well worth planning a cross country route to Budapest.

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Mallard	x	x	Winter flocks on lakes in autumn
Greater Crested Grebe		x	
Black Woodpecker	x	x	Heard in woods at south end of , Cseke-tó,
Green Woodpecker	x	x	
Black headed gulls	x	x	Larger flocks in autumn on Öreg-tó
Yellow-legged Gull		x	
Bean Geese		x	Arrived in the last week of Oct flocks of hundreds flying in to roost on Öreg-tó.
Mute Swan	x	x	
Hooded crow	x	x	
Long-tailed tits		x	

THE HORTOBÁGY

This really is an outstanding area of over 110 sq km of grassy desert and water. The Hortobágy was declared a nature reserve in 1973 and was the only national park we went to that required a permit to enter some (the best) parts. Permits can be obtained in the village of Hortabágy and cost about 2,000Hfl for 2 days. These not only allow you to travel around the park, but allow free entry to the Shepherds Museum and bird info hut, in the village. You also get a detailed, large scale map and a very full briefing on what to see and where to see it.

The main fish ponds (Hortobágy-halastó) are well worth a visit. You need to allow a full day to get round all of them, which means taking your own rations (plenty to drink on a hot day). There are 9, well positioned, hides and each has an info board. Not surprisingly the best pond is the Kondás, which is the furthest from any parking area. White-tailed Eagles are most numerous in the winter months and are fed by the park wardens. Do not ignore the smaller ponds dotted around the park.

There are a number of demonstration areas and trails showing the history and life of the puszta and allowing close up views of Hungarian Grey cattle, water buffalo, Mungalica pigs and Racka sheep. You can also enjoy the meat of these in some good and traditional eating houses. The Hortobágy Csárda, opposite the Herdsmen Museum, is particularly good and they have staff and musicians traditionally dressed. Whilst in the village, take time to look at the Nine Span Bridge over the River Hortobágy.

In October we had a guide for one day. He gave us an incredible amount of detail about distribution and habitat, which would have taken us weeks to accumulate on our own. There is also the advantage that, with a guide, you gain access to areas that not even the permit will let you near.

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Purple Heron	x		
Grey Heron	x	x	
Squaco Heron	x		
Night Heron	x		
Little Egret	x		
Great White Egret	x	x	Flock of 100+ came in to land on fish ponds
Spoonbill	x		
Great Cormorant	x	x	
Pygmy Cormorant	x	x	Large numbers on drained fish ponds in autumn
Ducks	x	x	
Mallard	x	x	
Shoveller	x	x	
Teal	x	x	
Pochard	x	x	
Tufted	x	x	
Gadwall	x	x	

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Shelduck		x	
Wigeon	x	x	
White Stork	x		
Great Crested Grebe	x	x	
Little Grebe	x		
Geese	x		
White-fronted		x	
Lesser White-fronted		x	
Greylag	x	x	
Bean		x	
Avocet	x		
Crane	x	x	Fields covered in autumn and thousands flying in to roost on Halasto. Late Oct 60,000 reported on the Hortobagy
Long-legged Buzzard	x	x	
Rough-legged Buzzard		x	They make full use of well poles as perches and it is worth stopping every so often to scan for these.
Marsh Harrier	x	x	
Hen Harrier	x	x	
Saker Falcon	x	x	
Kestrel	x	x	
Red Footed Falcon			
Coot	x	x	
Moorhen	x	x	
Reed Bunting	x	x	
Corn Bunting	x	x	
Sedge Warbler	x	x	
Bearded Tit		x	
Penduline Tit			Nests only
Yellow Wagtail	x		
Stonechat	x		
Rose-coloured starling	x		Large flock, probably passing through
Cuckoo	x		
Whiskered Tern	x		
Black Tern	x		
White-winged Black Tern	x		
Black-headed Gull	x	x	
Yellow-legged Gull	x	x	

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Little Owl			Can be seen on farm buildings, but we only found feathers
Barn Owl			There are many derelict farm buildings which these have taken over as their homes - many feathers and pellets showed the number of owls and the length of their habitation.
Curlew		x	
Great Snipe		x	
Redshank		x	
Greenshank			
Lapwing	x	x	
Grey plover		x	
Golden Plover		x	
Dotterel		x	
Kingfisher	x		

TOKAJ AREA

A very nice wine town lying on the confluence of the R Badrog with the larger R Tisza, Hungary's second river, with hills to the north and wetlands to the south and east. It is not that easy to get on to the wetlands, but you can get good sweeping views from the roadside. We had hoped to see black stork, but no such luck – bee-eaters made up for it though. This is a first class white wine area and there are many family vineyards. We found a very good one, the Himesudvar (3), owned by the family Várhelyi - they are extremely helpful and speak very good English. They have a wide range wines and you can have a tour of the cellars and enjoy coffee and some very tasty pogácsa (a local delicacy).

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Bee-eater	x		Odd birds, and a good colony with 64 breeding burrows
Sand martin	x		Many breeding colonies, some sharing sand quarries with the bee-eaters.
Great White Egret	x	x	
Lesser Grey Shrike	x		

THE AGGTELEK HILLS

These have a wide range of flora and fauna and, in the spring, we spent more time filming wild flowers than birds. The hills are mostly covered by oak and hornbeam. Wolves established residence in the 1980s, lynx the following decade. In October we were lucky to see a wolf

sunning itself in a forest clearing. Herds of goats wander over the hills and all have a goatherd. Although the herdsmen have as little English as we have Hungarian, with the use of a bird book in Hungarian (bought from a wide range sold by Tesco) and maps, they proved helpful and friendly, as were their dogs.

The valleys have interesting villages and small farms. In the autumn bunches of red chillies can be seen drying under the eaves of the cottages. Particularly recommended is a walk up the valley running north from the village of Josvafo. There is a wide range of flowers, birds and butterflies. In the village there is a pond with a backdrop of wooden houses. In spring, house martens and swallows swooping over the water, making a wonderful photographic scene.

The park is famous for its limestone caves, and guided tours are available throughout the year.

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Dipper	x	x	There are only 10 recorded pairs in Hungary and we were lucky to see the same pair on each visit
Nuthatch	x	x	
Tree Creeper	x		
Syrian Woodpecker		x	
Middle-spotted Woodpecker	x		
Great-grey Shrike		x	
Tree Sparrow		x	Large flocks - particularly on sloe bushed
Imperial Eagle		x	
Blue-headed Wagtail	x		
White Wagtail	x		
Nightingale	x		
Wren		x	
Goldfinch	x	x	
Jay	x	x	Large numbers in Oct
Stonechat	x		
Golden Oriol	x		Only at a distance
Redstart	x		

THE ZEMPLEN HILLS

These very the most impressive rugged hills in Hungary, but we only spent a short time there.

	Spring	Autumn Not visited	Comments
Goshawk	x		
Imperial Eagle	x		

	Spring	Autumn Not visited	Comments
Saker Falcon	x		
Serin	x		
Red-backed shrike	x		
Rock Bunting			
Spotted Flycatcher	x		
Collared Flycatcher	x		

THE BUKK HILLS

These are covered in wonderful beech woods and are most striking in October. If you go in the winter months, snow chains/tyres are mandatory at the higher levels.

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Black Redstart	x	x	
Imperial Eagle		x	
Willow Tit		x	
Bullfinch	x		
Wryneck	x		
Middle-spotted Woodpecker		x	
Nuthatch	x	x	
Tawny Owl			Heard in woods
Long-eared Owl			Heard in woods

BIRDS SEEN THROUGHOUT EASTERN HUNGARY

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Song Thrush	x		
Mistle Thrush	x	x	
Blackbird	x	x	
Hawfinch	x	x	
Chaffinch	x	x	
Greenfinch			
Linnet	x	x	
House Martin	x		
Swallow	x		

Type	Spring	Autumn	Comments
Swift	x		
Buzzard	x	x	
Kestrel			
Magpie	x	x	
Rook	x	x	
Jackdaw	x	x	
Turtle Dove	x	x	
Collared Dove	x	x	
Wood Pigeon	x	x	
Starling	x	x	
Crested Lark	x	x	They frequent many motorway rest places
Sky Lark			
Pheasant	x	x	
Great Tit	x	x	
Blue Tit	x	x	
Marsh Tit	x		
Yellowhammer	x	x	
White Stork	x		To be found in most villages, on lamp posts and chimney tops and foraging in the nearby fields.

NOTES

Books

1. The Birds of Hungary by Gerard Gorman published by Christopher Hulme (0-7136-4235-1). Available from amazon.co.uk
2. Finding Birds in Hungary by Dave Gosney. A GOSTOURS Guide from Bird Guides Ltd, Jack House, Ewden, Sheffield S30 5ZA. These guides are really good value, and have first rate maps for all the areas covered. (www.birdguides.com)

Wine

3. Himesudvar Cellars at Bem utca 2, Tokaj. Park by the big church and walk up the hill for about 3 minutes. Look out for the cellar logo – a bee-eater. They are open from 0900 – 2100 daily (until 1900 Nov – Apr). (www.himesudvar.hu)



KEOLADEO NATIONAL PARK (WORLD HERITAGE SITE), BHARATPUR.
OBC INFORMATION SHEET BBWF 2003.

[This may be of interest to some of our readers who have visited this National Park previously]

‘In the absence of specific preventative action, in five years time Keoladeo National Park will be an area of dry grassland overgrazed by (cast off) domestic cattle, whilst villagers destroy the remaining trees for firewood and collect grass as forage for their productive domestic animals. Occasionally in times of abundant monsoon rainfall, pools will form which may be visited by wintering wildfowl and other water birds.’

Prediction in December 2002 by Col Shyam Singh, Hon. Wildlife Warden, Keoladeo National Park and OBC Co-representative, India.

The condition of the Park preceding the 2003 monsoon was due to the ongoing drought (monsoon rains failed or virtually failed for the last four years) affecting much of India and Rajasthan in particular. This situation in itself was not particularly threatening or unusual and had occurred several times in the past century. The pumping of water to provide a few small pools for wildfowl had the side effect of making the area attractive to domestic cattle turned out by their erstwhile owners. By December 2002 large numbers of cattle were grazing in the Park, but the Park authorities were unable as well as unwilling to control them. The situation is complicated as scientific research indicates that total eradication of these beasts may be detrimental to the habitat, although other scientific workers apparently challenge this finding. By June 2003 the efforts of the villagers to obtain fodder for their animals had effectively stripped the pasture, grass cutting had ceased and the number of cattle had fallen sharply due to starvation and predation by hyena and jackals, now present in the Park in large numbers. The native grazing animals, better adapted to survive the conditions, were still in good health.

In past times the above problems would have been alleviated as soon as there was reasonable rainfall and water catchments were replenished. Now the future water supply to the Park appears to be under threat even when normal monsoon rainfall occurs due to radical changes to water extraction and supply in the area.

Historically the region was an extensive swamp and during the 16th century aided the defence of the region from Mogul invaders. Later in the 18th century the Rajput regime constructed a barrage (Ajan Bund) to retain the seasonal rains so that the area could be flooded as a defence against attack by the British invaders. Since then this barrage has been the main source of water for the Park and the Bharatpur area. In this earlier period too the local river system was linked to the Yamuna-Ganges complex and water flowed year round. Geo-physical upheaval

changed the courses of the waterways and today the local rivers flow only in the period following the monsoon rains. The situation has been worsened by increased extraction for agricultural purposes. Villagers are increasingly dependent on bore holes for watering crops as well as for potable water. Shallow bores are mainly polluted and it is now necessary to bore to a depth of more than 100 metres for potable water.

Since the construction of the Ajan barrage and notably during the 20th century serious seasonal flooding has been a rare event. In recent times extensive flooding occurred only in 1972 and 1996. The 1972 flooding was serious and led to public outcry and demand for flood prevention measures. Ever keen to win electoral votes, the Rajasthan politicians lobbied for these and after many years of argument it was agreed to construct a major barrage with nine times the capacity of the Ajan Bund some 100km up stream as a flood control measure. The construction was protracted and the barrage was finally commissioned in 2000. Other barrages and check dams have also been put in place on other rivers in the system. Thanks to the low rainfall, at the end of the 2002 monsoon the new barrage was filled only to some 20% of its capacity and the supply was retained for use in the adjacent heavily populated area. No water was released down stream and for the first time in memory, the Ajan barrage supplying the Park received no seasonal water. In former times even in a year of poor rainfall some water replenishment would have occurred.

The highly populated areas adjacent to the new barrage benefit greatly from its existence, but the down stream areas (less heavily populated) around Bharatpur are suffering. The longer-term implications are obvious! Today, not surprisingly the villagers resent the extraction of water from bore holes by the Park authorities to maintain a few pools for waterfowl as they perceive this as a waste of their dwindling resources. A critical part of local awareness education is to make sure villagers understand that an effective water supply for the Park and the seasonal flooding of the Park would lead to a stabilisation of the water table in the surrounding areas to help sustain their agriculture and livelihood.

Driven by this understanding they need to join in a united demand for a more equitable distribution of water resources both by a proper management of the new upstream barrage(s) and by implementation of a new central government project. The proposal is to bring water from the Chambal river to Bharatpur, Dholpur and 1000 villages en route. This is not without controversy as the Chambal river is also a sanctuary for endangered species such as river dolphins and the water extraction would be limited to potable water only. As the plan meant interfering with a protected area, it required the approval of the Task Force for the Indian Board for Wildlife. Asad Rahmani, Director of the Bombay Natural History Society and OBC Co-representative, India is a member of this committee and thanks to his lobbying, it made the suggestion that a special pipeline should be laid to the Park to allow it to receive water in years of drought or insufficient supply. The Government has accepted this proposal, but the pipeline is yet to be built. It is predictable that without some sort of pressure, procrastination and political chicanery will delay or even prevent the construction.

After consultation with Asad Rahmani, Syham Singh and other colleagues, OBC decided to mount a signature campaign basically congratulating the Indian Government for taking appropriate action to protect this World Heritage Site, yet at the same time indicating that the international community would anxiously monitor the progress of the project until successful completion and inauguration. It is planned to deliver the petition to the Indian High Commission in London during the Autumn and follow up with press briefings as appropriate.

OBC August 2003.

LANGFORD LAKES IN WILTSHIRE

(Anne Nason)

Langford Lakes is a new Reserve of the **Wiltshire Wildlife Trust** opened last year (2002) by Bill Oddie. Originally gravel pits, they were later flooded and stocked as fishing lakes. At present the Trust owns two of the lakes, but intends to buy the third. The reserve was closed for several months for habitat reconstruction, but it is now open for visitors again, although some reconstruction work continues, and it will take a year or two for the vegetation to mature, when the ugly plastic fencing can be removed. Reed beds have been planted and shallow areas created for waders. Three hides are being constructed and access to all three will be possible by the end of June 2003. Apart from the waterfowl, the surrounding vegetation provides excellent habitat for summer migrants, especially warblers. A Bittern was present for a few days last winter. During the breeding season access has been limited, to prevent disturbance, but the three hides should make it possible to see many species of birds. Organised groups will be given greater access, but it is an excellent site for anyone whose mobility is impaired, and also suitable for a quick stop when passing on the nearby **A36** as access to the first hide from the car park is less than 5 minutes.

It is located off the **A36** (roughly halfway between Salisbury and Warminster) down a minor road connecting Steeple Langford and Hanging Langford. Driving from Steeple Langford the Reserve is on the left about 200 metres before the T- junction at Hanging Langford.

YATELEY COMMON

(Hilary Nash)

I live right in the northeast corner Hampshire within walking distance of both Surrey and Berkshire in a town called Yateley. It is archtypical suburbia and my house must have provided the inspiration for Pete Seeger's song. In spite of its most unpromising location there is excellent birding 10 minutes walk away, on Yateley Common. Our favourite bit is where the dispersal area of WW2 RAF Blackbushe was located. Nature has now regained it in the form of Gorse and Silver Birch scrub. There are parts where local volunteers and the Hampshire Heathlands Project have cleared this away to allow the Heather and Ling to re-establish itself. Even the concrete taxiways and parking area are being hidden by carpets of bright yellow Stonecrop with Common Century growing in the widening cracks. The part used by the present day Blackbushe Airport has large expanses of open grassland.

Enough of the tourist sales pitch, what about the birds. The main excitement each year is the rivalry in the Nash household over the first **Nightingale**. I usually lose, as Ros makes a daily pilgrimage there in April. The site holds 3 or more singing males who move round to keep us guessing. Other migrants include **Chiffchaffs**, **Willow Warblers**, **Blackcaps**, **Garden Warblers** and **Whitethroats** and later on a pair of **Nightjars** will take up residence. A **Hobby** is also likely to appear overhead. Residents include **Skylarks**, **Woodlarks**, **Dartford Warblers**, **Stonechats**, **Linnets** and **Bullfinches**. Winter visitors will include **Siskins** and **Redpolls** and on one occasion a **Ring-necked Parakeet**. The grassy area with its thriving ant population attracts a number of **Green Woodpeckers**. Mid June is great for flowers with a large colony of Common Spotted Orchids on a grassy patch.

It is not the place to get away from it all, as it is surrounded by busy roads and under the flight path of Backbushe Airport with trainee pilots doing endless "circuits and bumps". It does however provide a wealth of interest for both flowers and birds, and like Mr McCawber, "*You never know what will turn up*".

LLANGOLLEN

(Hilary Nash)

My mother-in-law lives in Llangollen in the Dee Valley. Her house is on the north bank at the base of a hill on top of which sits Dinas Brân Castle. The latter is situated to dominate the valley and anything moving through it. There is a road, which allows you to circumnavigate the hill, which takes about an hour and half to walk provided there are not too many birds en route!

The first stretch starts off with a recreation ground on one side and a bank on t'other. The ground has a thicket beside the road, the home of **Garden Warblers** in spring and all the usual garden species. The road then starts a gentle climb through pasture fields inhabited by sheep. Thick old hedges bound the fields and the verges are very good for wild flowers, such as Yellow Deadnettle, Stitchwort and Wild Arum. There is a wood on a steeper bank, a carpet of Bluebells in May, as well as home to **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**, **Nuthatches** and **Treecreepers**. Climbing further up the hill the ground opens out and the stream alongside the road will produce a **Grey Wagtail** if you are lucky. You will be unlucky if you do not hear and see both **Buzzards** and **Ravens**.

On a memorable 31st December I saw a flock of 30+ Corvids wheeling round a hill. I thought they were Carrion Crows, but the binos confirmed they were **Ravens** indulging in courting display flights with various pairs indulging in spectacular aerobatics as they chased each other. One was playing with a small object, I suspect a fir cone, which it would carry to a height and drop, then swoop down and catch it before it hit the ground, repeating this manoeuvre many times.

Further on the route takes a track where it joins the road; by now you are fairly high and the vegetation is mainly stunted hawthorn and ash trees. The track runs along the base of an escarpment called the Eglwyseg Rocks and there are a lot of bare rock face and scree slopes. Inevitably the bird life is thinner, but it has produced some real gems. One day a ringing call confirmed the black bird was not a Jackdaw but a **Chough**. **Peregrines** hunt round this area and get into exciting dogfights with the resident **Buzzards**. I have seen a **Woodcock** here and in summer that unfamiliar (for those in the SE) song of the **Redstart** can be heard. **Ring Ouzels** sometimes put in a winter appearance and **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** feed amongst the sheep. By now you will have reached the base of the Castle Hill and a steep climb is rewarded with some superb views of the Dee Valley and perhaps a **Wheatear** on the grassy slopes.

CONSERVATION WALK ON SALISBURY PLAIN, 5TH JANUARY 2003 BY THE SALISBURY PLAIN CONSERVATION GROUP (BULFORD AREA)

(Ken Wright)

We met at 11am by tank crossing V at the southern end of Everleigh Down and there were approximately 55 people present, plus about 8 dogs. The Leader for the day was Beverley Heath who was accompanied by his wife. The plan was that we would walk on the Plain for about 3 to 4 miles, taking about 2 hours. Whilst at the meeting place, we could see hot-air balloons in the distance.

All present then and we set off up to Weatherhill and up there we stopped to give the leader a chance to give us all some information about the area of the Plain that we were to walk through. He stopped on the right of the track where we had a good vista across Snail Down, Cow Down, Barrow Plantation and we had a good view of Sidbury Hill. The main archaeological points were made and we were advised of some do's and do nots. When this was done he explained the make up of the area and gave us an idea of the route and what we were likely to see. These included a flock of Fieldfare, Short-eared Owls, Fresh-water Shrimps, Deer and maybe some Grey-legged Partridges.

At the start my first sightings were of a solitary **Woodpigeon** and a few **Rooks** over in Weatherhill Firs. We moved off in a southeasterly direction along the ancient road towards Sidbury Hill Camp. The information we had been given made the walk more interesting. Down at the bottom of the track we moved over to the right and into a gully to start climbing up towards the old Marlborough Road. At this stage, a solitary **Buzzard** flew over towards Sidbury Hill. It was in this gully that we had hoped to see the flock of Fieldfare, but no luck. As the ground was so frozen, there was not much chance of the birds feeding and they were not there. However, I did see one in the near distance on top of a bush. When we arrived at the top of the gully we crossed 2 tracks and eventually arrived at the old Marlborough Road where we all gathered to view the distant horizon. It was so clear that we were able to see over to Upavon, Netheravon and even to Larkhill. However, there were no fresh-water shrimps to be seen because all the ponds were frozen over.

From the top of the road we turned left towards Bulford and continued down to the bottom where, once again we turned right into another gully, which we followed in a westerly direction. After about 100 yards we put up 9 **Short-eared Owls** up on the right of the gully. We were now on Haxton Down. It was really a marvellous sight - certainly one that I have never seen before. It was explained that they usually are in the area over the winter for the feeding, but they nest elsewhere. We continued down the gully and over in the distance I spotted a **Roe Deer** just as we were climbing up on to the Down to commence our homewards walk. Up on the top we disturbed 3 **Grey-legged Partridge** and could see some **Rooks** and **Blackbirds** flying in the distance.



After a short while we arrived back at tank crossing Y. It had been a very interesting and pleasant walk in glorious weather. I look forward to repeating the activity next year - but in a different area of Salisbury Plain.