



## ARMY ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN 2004

### EDITORIAL

The Bulletin has been issued at a later date in the year to take into account the publication of the Osprey. I trust it has been worth waiting for. There were no Letters to the Editor from the last Bulletin so I can shoulder the blame for mistakes this year and let the contributors bask in praise for submitting articles<sup>1</sup>. Our members do get out and about as you can see from the various reports included from around the world. This publication does span the world with an impressive number of bird listings. It never ceases to amaze me the expertise we have within our Society. I for one have benefited immensely from articles and talking to the individuals. The more I find out the more that my appetite is wetted. We all have to balance our commitments but birding does have a way of taking over; I now travel with a small pair of binoculars and a guide book, just in case.

In this year's Bulletin there is an article from Ascension. The more technical aspects of the different surveys will feature in the next Osprey. The highlight was the Brown Noddies on the fair. Though they were not successful in breeding it was an encouraging start and I feel that the AOS can look back on the work it has done with a self satisfied pat on the back. The other main AOS expedition was to Penang in Malaysia. Again Tim Hallchurch has organised another bird feast in a fantastic part of the world. Our world traveller, Hilary Nash has provided us with a taster from different habitats. I am already preparing my list for a trip to Canada next year. Our Africa correspondent, Anne Nason, again provides an insight to the wonderful bird life that abounds on that continent. Mark Easterbrook provides a list from another part of the sub-continent that will interest many of our membership. There are articles from AOS weekends to Holland, Somerset and Portland. There is a series of local articles from our Chairman. I always enjoy reading local articles and remember the readers' articles on their back gardens for the Millennium edition. I have also added 'My favourite walks' to the must 'do when in the area' list. I encourage members to submit articles on a local theme. Finally there are some observations about the Long Eared Owl from Simon Strickland. Again if you have any interesting aspects about a bird local to you but restricted in distribution I will be pleased to publish them. A guidebook provides only basic information but it the observations of individuals that are often crucial to identification.



As you will see the Bulletin covers many aspects all with birds as its theme. The strength of this Bulletin is the mix of articles and styles. I am sure that all our members will find something interesting in them. I know that I keep stating it but this is a very friendly Society. Everyone is encouraged to write an article whether it is a private trip home or abroad, with another organisation or local. If you need some help please ring me and I can always find a 'ghost' writer if needs be. Finally I would like to take the opportunity to thank my friend Paul Holder for various photographs. We went to Portugal for the European Football Cup in June

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All photographs are subject to copyright and are not to be reproduced without permission. Details can be obtained from the Editor. Contributors are Andrew Bray, Roger Dickey, Mike Vincent, Tim Hallchurch, Dave Foley & Paul Holder.

The picture is the editor resting at the top of Broken Tooth Crater, Ascension Island.

and I dragged him out bird watching a few times as he had the car. He was kind enough to take photographs for me, some of which are re-produced in the Bulletin.

### **EX BOOBY DRAGON IX – ASCENSION ISLAND**

(Maj Andrew Bray)

This was the 9<sup>th</sup> expedition by the AOS to Ascension. Sooty Terns are the only sea birds to still nest on the mainland as all other birds have been forced off by man and cats. The remaining seabirds live on inaccessible cliffs and off shore stacks as well as Boatswain Bird Island (BBI) which has a no landing policy. The Ascension Island Government (AIG) has signed up to a conservation policy in line with the UK Government. The data collected by the AOS over the years has provided evidence to support the AIG Conservation Plan including the Sea Bird Restoration project. This was funded by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Part of the project was to carry out a cull of all feral cats. This programme was unique, as it was not a complete cat eradication programme as domestic cats were still allowed on the Island. This programme has been followed up with a rat control programme in reducing the rat population to small numbers. There is a Conservation Officer on the Island (Tara George) with an assistant (Stedson Stroud) and the Island is trying to generate Eco-tourism. Further details are at [www.ascensionconservation.org.ac](http://www.ascensionconservation.org.ac).

Expedition members included Andrew Bray, Roger Dickey, Mark Easterbrook, Dave Foley, Colin Holcombe, John Hughes, Richard Seargent, Mike Vincent plus Colin Wearn (RAFOS) and Pete Carr (RNBWS).



Colin Holcombe and Colin Wearn

The expedition was classified as Adventurous Training based on hiking. This allowed us to make maximum use of military facilities that included free flights for military personnel. We were looked after by RAF Ascension who provided us with accommodation, food and transport. We were accommodated in a transit block and ate in the Mess. We had a Safari Landrover and a Defender 90 that gave us the flexibility to carry out our tasks around the Island. All in all we were well looked after despite a panic on flights. I arrived back in UK on the Friday ready to fly out to Ascension on Sunday. Seats are not confirmed until 48 hrs before

the flight. I rang the Services Booking Centre to find out that we were not on the flight – doom and gloom was not what I wanted after travelling to the office after a restless transatlantic flight. I then rang Richard Seargent with the bad news as he was the other point of contact only to find we were on the flight and that it had been confirmed on Thursday! Rang back the Booking Centre and spoke to the person dealing with me to find out a mistake had been made their end and that yes, sorry, you are booked on the flight. Talk about relief, now I could go home and sleep.

We had worked out to go slightly later than normal for this expedition so that we could ring the chicks. It was a good job we did so as the birds had also decided that an extra week at sea was required before coming in to nest. It was a bit of a shock to discover this on our first day. We had walked down to Mars Bay expecting to find a vibrant colony of birds with a mix of chicks and eggs only



to discover a small fair of newly arrived birds with still more arriving. Our fear was confirmed the next day at Waterside fair. There was a small group of about 80 nests with chicks starting to hatch but otherwise all the groups on the fair were new and expanding. We were unable to ring any chicks from the small isolated group as none survived the Frigate Birds looking for a snack. On digesting the news we quickly came up with Plan B for the Sooty Terns helped by a cold beer on the Mess veranda. The really good news was sightings of Brown Noddies perched on the fair.



The main effort was concentrated on the Sooty Terns. This involved full surveys of both fairs which was very hot work. The birds on the fairs were not heavily bunched together but were more spread out than on pervious visits. On Waterside fair the birds were in about 4 main groups. Now whether this is a result of the removal of the cats as a predator remains to be seen. This something we will have to look out for on our next visit. All in all there were 160,000 breeding pairs

covering 8.5 hectares. We ringed 2,000 birds and re-trapped 72 birds from the previous 5,000 that had been ringed. Surveying takes time and traversing the fair carrying out quadrats is everyone's idea of fun! In addition to our normal activities we carried out a surveillance operation at dawn and dusk. We had taken some Night Vision Goggles with us. The only thing is that they need some light from stars or the moon to be effective. The period we chose came with cloud cover making it very dark. It was not that successful however we were able to confirm our thoughts on behaviour. Terns are 24 hour birds with no let up in their movement and activities. Sitting there observing the birds did allow us to make notes on the handover/takeover rituals between the pair. Of course if your two hour stint started with a rain shower which did not finish until the next watch then the report is pretty short and succinct; Colin and Mike!



During our stay the Island Conservation Officers and Tara's sister, Emma, who had travelled up by ship from St Helena (works for the Fisheries Department), joined us in many of our tasks. The reason being was that they would learn about surveying and that Colin and Pete

Colin teaching Tara and Stedson

could train them on ringing.



Also visiting the Island during our stay was Sarah Sanders, an RSPB International Officer. It is worth pointing out that the RSPB paid for the flights for John and Colin. Anyway we put her to work on the fairs as she had not done this sort of work before. We even had her doing quadrats and she was delighted when a Tern used her head as a resting place. She also had some lessons on ringing. Hopefully she went back full of enthusiasm for the work the AOS is carrying out

on Ascension. During her stay she briefed the Islanders on the work of the RSPB on Ascension to explain the cat cull and its importance. The expedition swelled the numbers attending. It was after that meeting that we were given a private tour of Pan American Beach to see the Green Turtles laying eggs. Later on in the trip we had an early morning start to see the turtles returning to the sea at dawn on Long Beach. It is an amazing sight to see these large amphibians hauling themselves to the sea exhausted by their egg laying. There were so many it was like being on an English 'A' road.



Sarah Sanders and Andrew Bray on Quadrat Duty



Turtle heads for sea

During our stay we also carried out a full survey of the White Tern (otherwise known as Fairy Tern). Mark Easterbrook was put in charge of this. Not only did we have to ensure that we checked all areas from the land it involved a boat trip as well to Boatswain Bird Island (BBI). Now counting birds on a cliff through a pair of binoculars standing on a boat in a swell is not easy and is not comfortable on the stomach. Fortunately there is a leeward side to the Island! Whereas we managed to do the Island we were not able to survey the steep cliffs at Letterbox as the swell and tide was too strong for the boat to get close to the cliffs. On our trip to BBI we had superb sightings of turtles and were joined by dolphins. On the way back to port a pair enjoyed bow running with the boat. On BBI we were able to survey and get superb views of Red-foot Boobies. BBI is a major conservation site and is covered in birds from top to bottom.

We were also able to get good views from our customary walk to Letterbox, the remotest part of the Island. We had to cover the whole Letterbox area and take random samples of old guano for analysis. As ever it was very hot and tiring however the views of the birds travelling around the coast more than made up for any discomfort. Mark even managed to get a Shearwater in the scope.



Andrew Bray  
John Hughes  
Colin Holcombe  
Mark Easterbrook  
Roger Dickey

I have already mentioned that we completed a full land survey of birds. Splitting into pairs we managed to cover the whole Island during our time there. We even checked areas where we did not expect to find birds and were not disappointed in our analysis. The Island is covered in letterboxes with stamps. Hence an unofficial stamp collecting race started with ribbing of the contestants, especially if they were close to a stamp and did not realise it. We also had a trip up Green Mountain and covered a lot of the trails. The ascent to the summit was hard work as in places it was very muddy. There was a mix of curses and laughter as we made our way up and which increased in tempo for the descent. An interesting sight was a white Tern nesting in a tree using the join of two branches as a nest (no twigs, just the apex!). On a more serious note covering the whole Island meant just that and if we did not walk the area then we had to be able to observe the area and count the birds. That meant going to some extreme places besides peering into gardens of the settlements. The distance may not be far on the map but the average speed could be 1km per hour. The map also shows contour lines whereas in reality some of those slopes are actually cliffs. We had to cover all areas, which did include the rubbish dump and sewage farm. Of note is that we were able to confirm observations on a Myna Bird study we had carried out on the previous expedition; they do like their rubbish!

We did carry out some miscellaneous tasks. We collected blood samples from Tropic Birds and a Red-foot Booby for analysis. We sampled the ice creams at the shop and checked the visibility of the water at English Bay (snorkel and mask are essential kit list items). On our last day we had a BBQ on the beach eating fresh Grouper and Moray Eel (caught that morning off a stack). An interesting note is that the bones of the Moray Eel are blue. It was a cause for celebration as we had achieved all our aims even if our timing was slightly out. So we ringed adult birds rather than chicks but even that had a scientific purpose. We ringed whole neighbourhoods to see whether or not birds nest together year on year or do they have new neighbours each year. Sooty Terns on Ascension often break the rules that apply to these birds in other parts of the world. We re-surveyed the spread of Mexican Thorn on Waterside Fair that had not been done for a while. During this time we still had time to sit and observe, something which is not always planned but is very important. It is this that allows us to

observe how Sooty Terns drink and keep cool; Frigate Birds hunt for chicks; Mynas work in small gangs selecting eggs to eat. It is anticipated that more articles on the scientific results will be published in the Osprey.

### **FLEVOLAND TRIP** **22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2004**

(WO2 Richard Seargent)



During my nine years in Germany I had classed Flevoland, an area of reclaimed polders North East of Amsterdam as one of my favourite birding areas. I had visited a number of times each year, in every season, and in all weather and never had a bad day.

My last visit was in 1995 prior to my posting back to the UK and I had wanted to return ever since. It was a rather rash statement volunteering to organise a trip to the Continent that allowed me to return along with six other members of the AOS. The plan was simple, hire a minibus, book a place on the channel tunnel rail link, organise a couple of pitches on a campsite, meet up with expectant members carrying various tents, sleeping bags and burners and map read through three countries.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> April Lt Col Roger Dickey, Major Andrew Bray, Major (Retd) Hilary Nash, Bob Hayward, Dave Pentelow and myself drove from Farnborough for a rendezvous with Geoff McMullen at a Tesco's car park near Folkestone. After a quick bite to eat and views of a Yellow-legged Gull feeding around the cars the group boarded the train and within 35 minutes were on French soil. We left Calais at around 2200hrs and arrived four hours later at our first intended birding spot – the world famous Oostvaardersplassen.

My initial observation once we crossed the bridge onto Flevoland was how much it had changed in the nine years since I last visited. The fields, interspersed by small manageable towns had disappeared and Flevoland's two main towns, Almere and Lelystad had turned into mini conurbations with large housing estates and industrial areas. The map I had brought along was drastically out of date but luckily it transpired that the main birding areas were still there. Once we had found our way around Lelystad we parked up at the car park at the De Grauwe Gans hide, unpacked our sleeping bags and in good army fashion slept wherever we could, some outside and others in the minibus. All around was the sound of various birds, most notably Grasshopper Warbler, Nightingale, Sedge Warbler and various wildfowl. Two and a half hours later, the alarm clocks sounded and sleeping bags were packed away. Bacon, sausage and egg sandwiches were quickly produced on a number of burners and after a couple of coffees the group shot off in search of migrants in the reed beds surrounding the Oostvaardersplassen. Birds quickly appeared in rapid succession, the Grasshopper Warbler continued to call, a Tree Pipit passed through and in the distance we 'scoped a wonderful male Montagu's Harrier along with Buzzard and Marsh Harrier flying in the background. The reeds resonated to the sound of Sedge and Reed Warblers and once in the hide we quickly found Egyptian Goose, Avocet and numerous other species of wildfowl and waders.



After almost an hour we left the hide with the Montegu's Harrier still sat in front, and walked back via another route to the minibus. On the way back we added to our list and managed to find a beautiful male Redstart. Within one hour we had seen 50 species. This was going to be an excellent trip. We drove via two extremely obliging reeling Grasshopper Warblers to our next stop the Staatsbosbeheer information centre and its wonderful circular route into the Oostvaardersplassen reserve. This route had been inaccessible nine years ago. The day continued as it started with excellent views of birds that would be normally hard to find in the UK including a fly past by a Goshawk and spectacular views of Bluethroat, one of the birds I promised the group we would see. Booming Bitterns sounded from the reedbeds in numbers that would be unimaginable in most areas of England. Wheatears were passing through and in the distance we got our first views of Great-white Egret, a bird which we would see in large numbers over the weekend and one which was rare nine years previously.



We added Ruff, Greenshank and Spotted Redshank to the list and returned to the minibus for lunch and some excellent information on where to watch birds further down the road. The afternoon was spent watching birds in semi flooded fields west of the Oostvaardersplassen where we added more wildfowl and waders to our list. During the afternoon it became apparent that my map was indeed drastically out of date after it took us almost two hours to navigate our way through

Almere to the campsite. In true army style I would like to blame the Officer who was reading the map but it wasn't his fault, the map was useless and needed to be replaced.

Once our tents were pitched we met up with Dave Denton, an old friend of Geoff and myself who we knew from our time in Germany. Dave is a successful ex-pat businessman who has lived in Germany for many years and has the habit of switching to German mid sentence. It was great to see Dave again and we recounted many tales of our exploits over a few beers and a wonderful meal in an American steak house in Almere Harbour. We returned to the camp for a couple of tins of beers and slept soundly despite the extremely loud Nightingale singing just yards from our tents.

Early morning found us heading towards the Lepelaarplassen, an area of reeds and woodland named after the Spoonbill that breed in the area. Within five minutes of arrival the first two Spoonbill flew in together with excellent views of another male Montegu's Harrier quartering the fields. From the hide we picked up more Spoonbill and saw the thousands of Great Cormorant that nest in the trees. The Cormorants already had young in the nest and the whole atmosphere was filled with the sound of noisy young Cormorants and their attendant parents. As we watched the area a very obliging Purple Heron flew in and landed within yards of the hide. Another promised bird had been seen.

We left the Lepelaarplassen and headed west towards flooded fields which produced more Bluethroat, Garganey, Bearded Tit and many Great-white Egrets. We were running out of birds to see at that point having seen 89 species and decided to try our luck back at the Oostvaardersplassen in the hope of finding Penduline Tit and Common Rosefinch, birds which I had seen on numerous occasions in the past. We managed to find Marsh Tit there and

received some excellent intelligence from some Dutch Birders as we were overflown by White Stork. Ten minutes later we were looking at a magnificent Great-grey Shrike in an area we had covered the day before.

At this point we decided to leave the island in search of Black Woodpecker and drove via a rather disappointing reserve called the Harderbroek where there were numerous Marsh Harriers but little else. It is amazing how blasé you can get on Flevoland. The search for a Black Woodpecker in an ancient Beech wood proved almost fruitless, we heard the landing call of one after Geoff had tried to 'become' the Woodpecker and had tapped on every tree he could find in order to try and attract one but did managed to see Short-toed Treecreeper and Raven.

Roger Dickey  
John Hughes  
Dave Denton  
Geoff McMullen  
Bob Hayward



On our return to the campsite we bid farewell to Dave Denton who had to return Germany for a party and then headed back to Almere Harbour for a wonderful Greek meal and a surprisingly uneventful call-over. We left the following morning in fog and whilst travelling back to Calais saw a wonderful Short-eared Owl. We arrived back in the UK during the mid-afternoon and by early evening I was sat recounting the weekends events with an uninterested Mrs Seargent.

The trip proved to be easy to organise and was extremely cheap. It cost each person £70 for transport, channel crossing and camping fees. The restaurants were extremely inviting and value for money and the atmosphere and company was great. Commercial birding trips charge up to £600 for a similar weekend in Flevoland and it proved that the AOS could arrange a budget trip to the Continent with little fuss. However to the members of the trip I apologise for promising Penduline Tit and Common Rosefinch; they were easy to find nine years ago. Next years trip will be in February to Fountainbleu in France for White-Tailed Eagle and Common Crane. It will be cold so next time we will use a motel. I hope to organise a trip to Germany the year after to the Rieselfelder, my old stamping ground in Munster. I thoroughly recommend the now soon to be annual AOS weekend trips to the Continent. The company is excellent, the beer smooth and there will be a chance to see birds not normally seen in the UK. If you don't fancy budget trips there are plenty of good Hotels on Flevoland and being only four hours from Calais it is well within reach of the UK. Just make sure you buy a current map before travelling!!



**SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRDS SEEN ON FLEVOLAND****22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2004****Total Species Seen - 101**

Little Grebe	Ruff	Short-toed Treecreeper
Great-crested Grebe	Common Gull	Great-grey Shrike
Great Cormorant	Herring Gull	Eurasian Jay
Grey Heron	Yellow-legged Gull (UK)	Magpie
Purple Heron	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Carriion Crow
Eurasian Spoonbill	Black-headed Gull	Raven
Great Bittern	Common Tern	House Sparrow
Great-white Egret	Stock Dove	Chaffinch
White Stork	Wood Pigeon	Greenfinch
Mute Swan	Eurasian Cuckoo	Goldfinch
Greylag Goose	Short-eared Owl (Homeward leg)	Linnet
Canada Goose	Common Swift	
Barnacle Goose	Great-Spotted Woodpecker	
Egyptian Goose	Black Woodpecker	
Common Shelduck	Eurasian Skylark	
Eurasian Wigeon	Barn Swallow	
Gadwall	House Martin	
Common Teal	Tree Pipit	
Garganey	Meadow Pipit	
Mallard	White Wagtail	
Pintail	Yellow Wagtail	
Northern Shoveler	Eurasian Wren	
Common Pochard	Dunnock	
Tufted Duck	Robin	
Common Eider	Nightingale	
Marsh Harrier	Common Redstart	
Montegu's Harrier	Bluethroat (White Spotted Race)	
Sparrowhawk	Northern Wheatear	
Goshawk	Blackbird	
Buzzard	Song Thrush	
Rough-legged Buzzard	Grasshopper Warbler	
Kestrel	Sedge Warbler	
Hobby	Reed Warbler	
Common Moorhen	Blackcap	
Common Coot	Garden Warbler	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Common Whitethroat	
Avocet	Willow Warbler	
Little-ringed Plover	Chiffchaff	
Northern Lapwing	Bearded Tit	
Common Snipe	Long-tailed Tit	
Black-tailed Godwit	Marsh Tit	
Spotted Redshank	Coal Tit	
Common Redshank	Great Tit	
Common Greenshank	Blue Tit	
Common Sandpiper	Eurasian Nuthatch	

## **BELIZE BIRDING IN 2003**

(Hilary Nash)

I was fortunate enough to join a sub-aqua adventure training exercise to Belize from 16 November to 8 December last year. We were based at the British Forces Adventure Training Centre on **St George's Caye**. The Caye is almost due east of Belize City, a 40-minute run in a water taxi. As with the AOS trip, we flew out with an overnight stop at Houston, but continuous rain during our stay meant no birds were sighted.

St George's Caye is small and pretty heavily built upon, so there was not a great range of birds to be seen. **Brown Pelicans**, **Double-crested Cormorants**, **Laughing Gulls** and **Royal Terns** loafed in groups on the many private jetties, whilst **Magnificent Frigatebirds** soared overhead. On land, **Great-tailed Grackles** were everywhere, and a **Palm Warbler** would hop round the dining huts pecking at crumbs.

Along the shore you could see both **Great** and **Little Blue Herons**, **Belted Kingfishers** and **Black-bellied (Grey) Plovers**. Other birds seen in St George's Caye included a pair of **Red-breasted Woodpeckers** inspecting a nest hole in a palm tree and both **Yellow Warblers** and **American Redstarts**.

Aboard the diving boat there were fewer opportunities to bird-watch, though we saw **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and several juvenile **Brown Boobies**. A lunch break taken on **Goff's Caye**, a postcard coral island beloved of cruise ships, produced **7 Ruddy Turnstones** and **2 Sanderlings**.

On my day off, a degassing day (no diving), I arranged to visit **Jim** and **Dorothy Beveridge** on **Caye Caulker**. Jim was our guide on the AOS trip to Belize in 2002. They kindly fixed a hotel for me and the following day I had a guided tour of their patch. As you can see from the attached list, that day on Caye Caulker features regularly. I suppose the highlight must have been Jim feeding his 'flock' of **Rufous-necked Wood-rails**, with 18 so close that I could not even get my binoculars to focus on them. Most birders would happily settle for a glimpse of one skulking in the Mangroves. They were joined by a **Common Yellowthroat** and a delightful **Ovenbird**, the latter always reminds me of a miniature Thrush. We also caught up with other local rarities such as the **Caribbean Elaenia** and the **Black Catbird**. I also got good views of a **Bananaquit**, a bird I had great difficulty seeing on the AOS trip. Other good sightings were a **Marbled Godwit** and the **Yellow-Crowned Night Heron**.

We hired a liveaboard to visit and dive the famous "Blue Hole" and the walls of Lighthouse Reef. We moored up on **Half Moon Caye** for an overnight stop; It is a nature reserve and holds a very large colony of **Red-footed Boobies**. Most were the classical White Morph though there were 3 or 4 pairs of the White-tailed Brown Morph. **Magnificent Frigatebirds**, always ready to steal a Boobies' catch haunted the colony. The Caye also held a pair of **Ospreys** breeding in the ruins of the old lighthouse and several **Yellow-rumped Warblers** flitted around the base of palm trees.

We took a day off at the end of our stay to visit the Mayan ruins at **Lamanai**. To get there we traveled by boat up the New River and though it was not a birding trip, our guide did point out a **Lesser Nighthawk** sitting on a branch and a **Snail Kite**. There was also a beautiful **Violaceous Trogon** in the ruins themselves.

On our final day we departed at midday so I spent some of the morning wandering around **Price Barracks**. There I caught up with a **Bat Falcon** and a brilliant **Hooded Oriole**. My final bird list was 69 species. Good for a diving trip, where I also identified 92 species of fish.

**EXERCISE MAYAN DIP TO BELIZE**  
**17<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER TO 7<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2003**  
**BIRD CHECK LIST**

<u>English Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	Common round St George's Caye
Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	Common round St George's Caye & large numbers on Half Moon Caye
Double-crested cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	Common round St George's Caye
Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>	Small numbers seen on the New River 6 Dec
Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	One seen on the New River on 6 Dec
Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	2 or 3 seen most days around St George's Caye. All juveniles
Red-footed Booby	<i>Sula sula</i>	Large numbers at the Caye Half Moon colony. 2 or 3 pairs were the dark morph Seen on 3 & 4 Dec
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	One on St George's Caye and one on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	6 to 8 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	c15 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Tricoloured Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	3 or 4 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	One on St George's Caye and 3 or 4 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	c20 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>	4 or 5 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	3+ on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	8 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Roseate Spoonbill	<i>Ajaia ajaia</i>	6+ on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Common along the New River on 6 Dec.
Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	c.6 seen along the New River on 6 Dec.
Snail Kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>	One seen on the New River on 6 Dec
Common Black Hawk	<i>Buteogallus anthracinus</i>	One seen on the New River on 6 Dec
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	One pr on St George's Caye, 2 Prs on Cay Caulker on 27 Nov and one pr with 2 juv on Half Moon Caye on 4 Dec
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	One on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Bat Falcon	<i>Falco rufigularis</i>	One at Price Barracks on 6 Dec.
Rufous-necked Wood-rail	<i>Aramides axillaris</i>	18 incl 4 juvs on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Northern Jacana	<i>Jacana spinosa</i>	c.10 seen on the New River on 6 Dec.
Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanleuca</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.



Willet	<i>Catptrophorus semipalmatus</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	One seen on Caye Caulker on 26 Nov.
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	7 on Goff's Caye on 21 Nov 03.
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	2 on Goff's Caye on 21 Nov 03.
Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Laughing Gull	<i>Larus atricilla</i>	Common around all the Cayes
Royal Tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>	Common around all the Cayes
Pale-vented Pigeon	<i>Columba cayennensis</i>	Medium sized flock at Price Barracks on 7 Dec 03
White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Aztec Parakeet	<i>Aratinga astec</i>	Small flock seen at Price Barracks on 7 Dec 03
White-fronted Parrot	<i>Amazona albifrons</i>	Flock of c20 seen at Price Barracks on 7 Dec 03
Lesser Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>	One seen on the New River on 6 Dec
Violaceous Trogon	<i>Trogon violaceus</i>	One seen in the ruins at Lamanai on 6 Dec.
Ringed Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle torquata</i>	One seen on the New River on 6 Dec.
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>	Seen on both Caye Caulker and St George's Caye
Green Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle americana</i>	One seen on the New River on 6 Dec.
Red-vented Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes pygmaeus</i>	One on Caye Caulker and a pair at a nest hole in a coconut palm on St George's Caye
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>	2 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Vermillion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	One female at Price Barracks on 7 Dec.
Tropical/Couchs Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus sp</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Social Flycatcher	<i>Myiozetetes smilis</i>	Several at Price Barracks on 7 Dec.
Greater Kiskadee	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>	2 at Price Barracks on 7 Dec.
Caribbean Elaenia	<i>Elaenia martinica</i>	One on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	Numerous at Price Barracks on 6 & 7 Dec.
Mangrove Swallow	<i>Tachycineta albilinea</i>	Numerous on the New River on 6 Dec.
Black Catbird	<i>Melanoptila glabrirostris</i>	One on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Gray Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	2 on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov & 2 at Price Barracks on 7 Dec.
Tropical Mockingbird	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>	Seen on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov & at Price Barracks on 7 Dec
Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveloa</i>	One on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Yellow /Mangrove Warbler	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>	One on St George's Caye on 22 Nov and several on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	4 on Half Moon Caye on 4 Dec 04
Palm Warbler	<i>Dendroica palmarum</i>	2 around the dining area on St George's Caye
Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>Dendroica dominica</i>	One on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	2 on St George's Caye on 22 Nov.
Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>	One on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov.
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	One on Caye Caulker on 27 Nov and one at Price Bks on 7 Dec
Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	Abundant on St George's Caye and on the others.

Hooded Oriole	<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	One at Price Barracks on 7 Dec.
Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>	One at Price Barracks on 7 Dec.
White-collared Seedeater	<i>Sporophila torqueola</i>	Several at Price Barracks on 7 Dec.

Names and identification were taken from  
***“The North American Bird Guide”***  
 by **David Silby**  
 Pica Press ISBN 1-873403-98-4  
 &  
***“Mexican Birds”***  
 by **Roger Tory Peterson and Edward L Chalif**  
 Houghton Mifflin Company ISBN 0-395-97514-X



## **10 DAYS IN MALAYSIA FEBRUARY 2004**

(Tim Hallchurch)

Three members, Tim Hallchurch, Catherine Shephard and Patricia Davies, went to Penang in Malaysia in February 2004 for a break and as a recce for the 2005 expedition to the country.



White-breasted Sea Eagle



Black-capped Kingfisher



Brahminy Kite

Penang Island is about two miles from the Malaysian mainland off the North West coast. The island is connected to the mainland by a bridge and there are also ferry services. The state of the Penang comprises Penang island with an area of 285 sq km and a narrow strip of land approximately 760 sq km on the mainland known as Seberang Perai. The return journey to the mainland by bridge or ferry costs just over £1.

Penang Island or Pulau Penang in Malay is dominated on the East by Georgetown that has a worse traffic problem than the M25 on a Friday night. The town has many fascinating old buildings dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1786, Englishman Francis Light landed on the island at what is known as the Esplanade today. He later managed to persuade the Sultan of Kedah to cede the island to the British East India Company. The island was renamed Prince of Wales Island and the major town on the island was named Georgetown after King George III. In 1800, the Sultan of Kedah further ceded a strip of land on the mainland across the channel which Light named Province Wellesley, after the then Governor of India. Penang later became part of the Straits Settlement, along with Malacca and Singapore, and flourished to become a major trading port. It remained under the British colonial rule until 1957 when it became part of the independent Federation of Malaya. The town of Butterworth is opposite on the mainland with its former RAF Airfield now operated by the Malaysian Air Force.

The island is mostly surrounded by mudflats, although there are some beach areas on the North and West, coast reached by a winding road over the hills. The west is relatively unspoiled with rice fields and some jungle but also large groves of palm oil palms that are almost devoid of wildlife. The hills are mainly jungle where it is difficult to see any birdlife but the Botanical Garden that extends into the hills from Georgetown provides excellent bird watching.

We flew direct to Penang and stayed at the Copthorne Orchid Hotel (number 4 on the map) in the north of the Island. The hotel garden and swimming pool was an excellent bird watching spot with Brahmy Kites, White-bellied Sea Eagles seen daily as well as Bee Eaters, Orioles, and masses of Hirundines and Swifts.

We hired a guide for three of the days who took us to the forest, and marshes near the airport and a day on the mainland visiting rice fields, palm plantations and jungle. A guide is absolutely essential especially when it comes to the sounds of the jungle.

We also had a day trip to Langkawi Island, 112km to the north or about a two hour boat ride. Langkawi is a less densely populated island with sandy beaches compared with Penang mudflats, making Penang better for waders but less good for swimming.





The trip to the mainland was very worthwhile travelling through rice fields and some jungle to the coast where we saw thousands of waders on the shore including a thousand Terek Sandpipers, Pacific Golden Plovers and others listed below.

Once place on Penang that gave excellent close views of waders was Penang airfield marshes with good views of Pacific Golden Plover, Rufous-necked, Long Toed and Little Stints, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Cinamon Bittern, Chinese Pond Heron and many more even a Common Kingfisher. This site we would never have found without the guide and despite the heat, traffic and aircraft noise it is probably the best birding site on the Island. There are no other strong reasons for visiting Penang, hence Langkawi chosen for a part of our 2005 expedition and an excellent place to unwind and relax.



Langkawi North Coast



Male Brown-throated Sunbird



Jungle walkway near Butterworth Mainland

Living in Malaysia is amazingly cheap. The nightly rate in the Copthorne Orchid Hotel was £6.40 per night and dinner with as much as you can eat under £4. Lunches in local Chinese run restaurants with soup then duck with rice came to less than 50 pence.



Patricia Davies admiring the sunset on the boat back from Langkawi



Roosting Black-naped Orioles Orchid Hotel

The hotel had two restaurants, a Chinese and Malaysian. The Chinese had an amazing choice of dishes some to be cooked by yourself in boiling water on the table. The Malaysian buffet had a good choice while at breakfast one could have English Breakfast, or Chinese, Malaysian and other choices. The Chinese omelettes cooked to order were especially good. The only complaint was that the air conditioning made the restaurant too cold and it was more pleasant taking the food to the poolside.

Our return flight was via Kuala Lumpur then directly back to Gatwick in an almost empty Malaysian Airways 747. The flight back over India gave us good views of the Taj Mahal and Red Fort.

PENINSULAR MALAYSIA CHECKLIST - February 2004		
<u>HERONS, EGRETS, BITTERNS</u>	<u>DRONGOS</u>	<u>SHRIKES</u>
LITTLE HERON <i>Butorides striatus</i>	BLACK DRONGO <i>Dicrurus macrocerus</i>	BROWN SHRIKE <i>Lanius cristatus</i>
CHINESE POND HERON <i>Ardeola baccus</i>	ASHY DRONGO <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	TIGER SHRIKE <i>Lanius tigrinus</i>
CATTLE EGRET <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	CROW-BILLED DRONGO <i>Dicrurus annectans</i>	LONG-TAILED SHRIKE <i>Lanius schach</i>
CHINESE EGRET <i>Egretta eulophotes</i>	BRONZED DRONGO <i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	<u>STARLINGS, MYNAS</u>
GREAT EGRET <i>Casmerodius albus</i>	LESSER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO <i>Dicrurus remifer</i>	PHILIPPINE GLOSSY STARLING <i>Aplonis panayensis</i>
LITTLE EGRET <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO <i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	WHITE-SHOULDERED STARLING <i>Sturnus sinensis</i>
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		PURPLE-BACKED STARLING <i>Sturnus sturninus</i>
YELLOW BITTERN <i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	<u>ORIOLES</u>	CHESTNUT-CHEEKED STARLING <i>Sturnus philippensis</i>
CINNAMON BITTERN <i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>	DARK-THROATED ORIOLE <i>Oriolus xanthonotus</i>	BLACK-COLLARED STARLING <i>Sternus nigracollis</i>
	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE <i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	COMMON MYNA <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
<u>GEESE, DUCKS</u>	BLACK AND CRIMSON ORIOLE <i>Oriolus cruentus</i>	JUNGLE MYNA <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
LESSER TREEDUCK <i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	BLACK-HOODED ORIOLE <i>Oriolus xanthornis</i>	WHITE-VENTED MYNA <i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
	<u>FAIRY BLUEBIRD</u>	CRESTED MYNA <i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>
<u>KITES, HAWKS, EAGLES, VULTURES</u>	ASIAN FAIRY BLUEBIRD <i>Irena puella</i>	HILL MYNA <i>Gracula religiosa</i>
BLACK BAZA <i>Aviceda lophotes</i>		
BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		<u>SUNBIRDS, SPIDERHUNTERS</u>
BLACK KITE <i>Milvus migrans</i>	<u>JAYS, MAGPIES, CROWS</u>	PLAIN SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes simplex</i>
BRAHMINY KITE <i>Haliastur indus</i>	CRESTED JAY <i>Platylophus galericulatus</i>	BROWN-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes malaccensis</i>
WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	GREEN MAGPIE <i>Cissa chinensis</i>	RED-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes rhodolaema</i>
CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE <i>Spilornis cheela</i>	BLACK MAGPIE <i>Platysmurus leucopterus</i>	RUBY-CHEEKED SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes singalensis</i>
PIED HARRIER <i>Circus melanoleucos</i>	HOUSE CROW <i>Corvus splendens</i>	PURPLE-NAPED SUNBIRD <i>Hypogramma hypogrammicum</i>
JAPANESE SPARROWHAWK <i>Accipiter gularis</i>	SLENDER-BILLED CROW <i>Corvus enca</i>	PURPLE THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Nectarinia sperata</i>
	LARGE-BILLED CROW <i>Corvus macrorhynchus</i>	COPPER-THROATED SUNBIRD
<u>RAILS, CRAKES, COOT</u>		OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD <i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>
WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>		BLACK-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Aethopyga saturata</i>
WATERCOCK <i>Gallicrex cinerea</i>	<u>TITS</u>	PURPLE SUNBIRD
<u>PLOVERS</u>	GREAT TIT <i>Parus major</i>	CRIMSON SUNBIRD <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>
GREY PLOVER <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	SULTAN TIT <i>Melanochlora sultanea</i>	SCARLET SUNBIRD <i>Aethopyga mystacalis</i>
PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER <i>Pluvialis fulva</i>		LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER <i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>
LITTLE RINGED PLOVER <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	<u>NUTHATCHES</u>	THICK-BILLED SPIDERHUNTER <i>Arachnothera crassirostris</i>
KENTISH PLOVER <i>Charadrius</i>	VELVET-FRONTED	LONG-BILLED SPIDERHUNTER



<i>alexandrinus</i>	NUTHATCH <i>Sitta frontalis</i>	<i>Arachnothera robusta</i>
MONGOLIAN (LESSER SAND) PLOVER <i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	BLUE NUTHATCH <i>Sitta azurea</i>	SPECTACLED SPIDERHUNTER <i>Arachnothera flavigaster</i>
GREATER SANDPLOVER <i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>		YELLOW-EARED SPIDERHUNTER <i>Arachnothera chrysogenys</i>
	BABBLERS	GREY-BREASTED STREAKED SPIDERHUNTER <i>Arachnothera affinis</i>
<u>CURLEWS, GODWITS, SANDPIPERS, SNIPE</u>	PUFF-THROATED BABBLER <i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	STREAKED SPIDERHUNTER <i>Arachnothera magna</i>
WHIMBREL <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	BLACK-CAPPED BABBLER <i>Pellorneum capistratum</i>	
BLACK-TAILED GODWIT <i>Limosa limosa</i>	BUFF-BREASTED BABBLER <i>Trichostoma tickelli</i>	<u>FLOWERPECKERS</u>
BAR-TAILED GODWIT <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	SHORT-TAILED BABBLER <i>Trichostoma malaccense</i>	SCARLET-BREASTED FLOWERPECKER <i>Prionochilus thoracicus</i>
SPOTTED REDSHANK <i>Tringa erythropus</i>	WHITE-CHESTED BABBLER <i>Trichostoma rostratum</i>	YELLOW-BREASTED FLOWERPECKER <i>Prionochilus maculatus</i>
COMMON REDSHANK <i>Tringa totanus</i>	FERRUGINOUS BABBLER <i>Trichostoma bicolor</i>	CRIMSON BREASTED FLOWERPECKER <i>Prionochilus percussus</i>
MARSH SANDPIPER <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	HORSFIELD'S BABBLER <i>Trichostoma sepiarium</i>	THICK-BILLED FLOWERPECKER <i>Dicaeum agile</i>
COMMON GREENSHANK <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	ABBOT'S BABBLER <i>Trichostoma abbotti</i>	YELLOW-VENTED FLOWERPECKER <i>Dicaeum chrysorrheum</i>
WOOD SANDPIPER <i>Tringa glareola</i>	MOUSTACHED BABBLER <i>Malacopteron magnirostre</i>	ORANGE-BELLIED FLOWERPECKER <i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
TEREK SANDPIPER <i>Xenus cinereus</i>	SOOTY-CAPPED BABBLER <i>Malacopteron affine</i>	PLAIN FLOWERPECKER <i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
COMMON SANDPIPER <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	SCALY-CROWNED BABBLER <i>Malacopteron cinereum</i>	SCARLET-BACKED FLOWERPECKER <i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>
COMMON SNIPE <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	RUFIOUS-CROWNED BABBLER <i>Malacopteron magnum</i>	BUFF-BELLIED FLOWERPECKER <i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>
EURASIAN WOODCOCK <i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	GREY-BREASTED BABBLER <i>Malacopteron albogulare</i>	
RUFIOUS-NECKED STINT <i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	LARGE SCIMITAR-BABBLER <i>Pomatorhinus hypoleucos</i> Fraser's	<u>WHITE-EYES</u>
LITTLE STINT <i>Calidris minuta</i>	CHESTNUT-BACKED SCIMITAR-BABBLER <i>Pomatorhinus montanus</i>	ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE <i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>
LONG-TOED STINT <i>Calidris subminuta</i>	STRIPED WREN- BABBLER <i>Kenopia striata</i>	EVERETT'S WHITE-EYE <i>Zosterops everetti</i>
CURLEW SANDPIPER <i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	LARGE WREN-BABBLER <i>Napothera macrodactyla</i>	
SANDERLING <i>Calidris alba</i>	MARBLED WREN-BABBLER <i>Napothera marmorata</i>	<u>SPARROWS, WEAVERS</u>
	STREAKED WREN-BABBLER <i>Napothera brevicaudata</i>	EURASIAN TREE-SPARROW <i>Passer montanus</i>
<u>STILTS</u>	EYE-BROWED WREN-BABBLER <i>Napothera epilepidota</i>	PLAIN-BACKED SPARROW <i>Passer flaveolus</i>
BLACK-WINGED STILT <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	PYGMY WREN-BABBLER <i>Pnoepyga pusilla</i>	BAYA WEAVER <i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
	RUFIOUS-FRONTED BABBLER <i>Stachytis rufifrons</i>	
<u>GULLS, TERNS</u>	GOLDEN BABBLER <i>Stachyris chrysaea</i>	<u>PARROTFINCHES, MUNIAS</u>
BLACK-NAPED TERN <i>Sterna</i>	GREY-THROATED BABBLER	PIN-TAILED PARROTFINCH

<i>sumatrana</i>	<i>Stachyris nigriceps</i>	<i>Erythrura prasina</i>
LITTLE TERN <i>Sterna albiglrons</i>	GREY-HEADED BABBLER <i>Stachyris poliocephala</i>	TAWNY-BREASTED PARROTFINCH <i>Erythrura</i> <i>hyperythra</i>
SAUNDER'S TERN <i>Sterna</i> <i>saundersi</i>	CHESTNUT-RUMPED BABBLER <i>Stachyris</i> <i>maculata</i>	JAVA SPARROW <i>Padda oryzivora</i>
	BLACK-THROATED BABBLER <i>Stachyris nigricollis</i>	WHITE-RUMPED MUNIA <i>Lonchura</i> <i>striata</i>
PIGEONS, DOVES	CHESTNUT-WINGED BABBLER <i>Stachyris</i> <i>erythroptera</i>	WHITE-BELLIED MUNIA <i>Lonchura</i> <i>leucogastra</i>
PINK-NECKED PIGEON <i>Treron vernans</i>	STRIPED TIT-BABBLER <i>Macronous gularis</i>	SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA <i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
ORANGE-BREASTED PIGEON <i>Treron bicincta</i>	FLUFFY-BACKED TIT- BABBLER <i>Macronous ptilosus</i>	CHESTNUT MUNIA <i>Lonchura</i> <i>malacca</i>
LARGE GREEN PIGEON <i>Treron capellei</i>	BLACK LAUGHINGTHRUSH <i>Garrulax lugubris</i>	WHITE-HEADED MUNIA <i>Lonchura</i> <i>maja</i>
ROCK PIGEON <i>Columba livia</i>	CHESTNUT-CAPPED LAUGHINGTHRUSH <i>Garrulax</i> <i>mitratus</i>	
SPOTTED DOVE <i>Streptopelia</i> <i>chinensis</i>	CHESTNUT-CROWNED LAUGHINGTHRUSH <i>Garrulax</i> <i>erythrocephalus</i>	FINCHES, BUNTINGS
PEACEFUL DOVE <i>Geopelia</i> <i>striata</i>	SILVER-EARED MESIA <i>Leiothrix argenteauris</i>	BROWN BULLFINCH <i>Phyrrhula</i> <i>nipalensis</i>
GREEN-WINGED PIGEON <i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	CUTIA <i>Cutia nepalensis</i>	CHESTNUT-EARED BUNTING <i>Emberiza fucata</i>
	WHITE-BROWED SHRIKE- BABBLER <i>Pteruthius</i> <i>flaviscapis</i>	YELLOW-BREAATED BUNTING <i>Emberiza aureola</i>
CUCKOOS	BLACK-EARED SHRIKE BABBLER <i>Pteruthius</i> <i>melanotis</i>	SHRIKES
PLAINTIVE CUCKOO <i>Cuculus</i> <i>merulinus</i>	WHITE-HOODED BABBLER <i>Gampsorhynchus rufulus</i>	BROWN SHRIKE <i>Lanius cristatus</i>
COMMON KOEL <i>Eudynamis</i> <i>scolopacea</i>	BLUE-WINGED MINLA <i>Minla</i> <i>cyanouroptera</i>	TIGER SHRIKE <i>Lanius tigrinus</i>
GREATER COUCAL <i>Centropus sinensis</i>	CHESTNUT-TAILED MINLA <i>Minla strigula</i>	LONG-TAILED SHRIKE <i>Lanius</i> <i>schach</i>
LESSER COUCAL <i>Centropus</i> <i>bengalensis</i>	RUFOUS-WINGED FULVETTA <i>Alcippe</i> <i>castaneiceps</i>	
	BROWN FULVETTA <i>Alcippe</i> <i>brunneicauda</i>	STARLINGS, MYNAS
SWIFTS	MOUNTAIN FULVETTA <i>Alcippe peracensis</i>	PHILIPPINE GLOSSY STARLING <i>Aplonis panayensis</i>
EDIBLE-NEST SWIFTLET <i>Aerodramus fuciphaga</i>	LONG-TAILED SIBIA <i>Heterophasia picaoides</i>	WHITE-SHOULDERED STARLING <i>Sturnus sinensis</i>
BLACK NEST SWIFTLET <i>Aerodramus maxima</i>	WHITE-BELLIED YUHINA <i>Yuhina zantholeuca</i>	PURPLE-BACKED STARLING <i>Sturnus sturninus</i>
HIMALAYAN SWIFTLET <i>Collocalia brevirostris</i>	MALAYSIAN RAIL- BABBLER <i>Eupetes macrocerus</i>	CHESTNUT-CHEEKED STARLING <i>Sturnus philippensis</i>
BROWN NEEDLETAIL <i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>		BLACK-COLLARED STARLING <i>Sternus nigracollis</i>
WHITE-THROATED NEEDLETAIL <i>Hirundapus</i> <i>caudacutus</i>	THRUSHES	COMMON MYNA <i>Acridotheres</i> <i>tristis</i>
WHITE-VENTED NEEDLETAIL <i>Hirundapus cochinchinensis</i>	LESSER SHORTWING <i>Brachypteryx leucophrys</i>	JUNGLE MYNA <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
SILVER-RUMPED SWIFT <i>Rhaphidura leucopygialis</i>	SIBERIAN RUBYTHROAT <i>Luscinia calliope</i>	WHITE-VENTED MYNA <i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
FORK-TAILED SWIFT <i>Apus</i> <i>pacificus</i>	RUFOUS-HEADED ROBIN <i>Luscinia ruficeps</i>	CRESTED MYNA <i>Acridotheres</i> <i>cristatellus</i>
HOUSE SWIFT <i>Apus affinis</i>	SIBERIAN BLUE ROBIN <i>Luscinia cyane</i>	HILL MYNA <i>Gracula religiosa</i>
ASIAN PALM SWIFT	MAGPIE ROBIN <i>Copsychus</i>	

<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	<i>sauularis</i>	
	WHITE-RUMPED SHAMA <i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	<u>SUNBIRDS, SPIDERHUNTERS</u>
<u>TREESWIFTS</u>	RUFIOUS-TAILED SHAMA <i>Copsychus pyrropygus</i>	PLAIN SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes simplex</i>
GREY-RUMPED TREESWIFT <i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>	WHITE-TAILED ROBIN <i>Cinclidium leucurum</i>	BROWN-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes malaccensis</i>
	CHESTNUT-NAPED FORKTAIL <i>Enicurus ruficapillus</i>	RED-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes rhodolaema</i>
	SLATY-BACKED FORKTAIL <i>Enicurus schistaceus</i>	RUBY-CHEEKED SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes singalensis</i>
<u>KINGFISHERS</u>	WHITE-CROWNED FORKTAIL <i>Enicurus leschenaulti</i>	PURPLE-NAPED SUNBIRD <i>Hypogramma hypogrammicum</i>
COMMON KINGFISHER <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	STONECHAT <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	PURPLE THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Nectarinia sperata</i>
STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon capensis</i>	WHITE-THROATED ROCK- THRUSH <i>Monticola gularis</i>	COPPER-THROATED SUNBIRD Kuala Kurau 12/97
RUDDY KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon coromanda</i>	BLUE ROCK-THRUSH <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD <i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>
WHITE-THROATED KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	MALAYAN WHISTLING THRUSH <i>Myiophoneus robinsoni</i>	BLACK-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Aethopyga saturata</i>
BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon pileata</i>	BLUE WHISTLING THRUSH <i>Myiophoneus caeruleus</i>	
COLLARED KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon chloris</i>	CHESTNUT-CAPPED THRUSH <i>Zoothera interpres</i>	
<u>BEE-EATERS</u>	ORANGE-HEADED THRUSH <i>Zoothera citrina</i>	
CHESTNUT-HEADED BEE- EATER <i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	SIBERIAN THRUSH <i>Zoothera sibirica</i>	
BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER <i>Merops philippinus</i>	EYE-BROWED THRUSH <i>Turdus obscurus</i>	
BLUE-THROATED BEE- EATER <i>Merops viridis</i>		
<u>ROLLERS</u>		
DOLLARBIRD <i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	<u>WARBLERS</u>	
	FLYEATER <i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>	
<u>BARBETS</u>	CHESTNUT-CROWNED WARBLER <i>Seicurus castaniceps</i>	
LINEATED BARBET <i>Megalaima lineata</i>	YELLOW-BREASTED WARBLER <i>Seicurus montis</i>	
COPPERSMITH BARBET <i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	YELLOW-BELLIED WARBLER <i>Abroscopus superciliosus</i>	
BROWN BARBET <i>Calorhamphus fuliginosus</i>	DUSKY WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>	
	ARCTIC WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	
<u>WOODPECKERS</u>	INORNATE WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	
COMMON GOLDENBACK WOODPECKER <i>Dinopium javanense</i>	TWO-BARRED WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus</i>	
	PALE-LEGGED WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus tenellipes</i>	
<u>SWALLOWS</u>	EASTERN CROWNED WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus coronatus</i>	
SAND MARTIN <i>Riparia riparia</i>	MOUNTAIN LEAF- WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus trivirgatus</i>	
BARN SWALLOW <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	ORIENTAL REED WARBLER <i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>	

PACIFIC SWALLOW <i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	BLACK-BROWED REED-WARBLER <i>Acrocephalus bistrigiceps</i>	
RED-RUMPED SWALLOW <i>Hirundo daurica</i>	PALLAS'S ARBLER <i>Locustella certhiola</i>	
	LANCEOLATED WARBLER <i>Locustella lanceolata</i>	
CUCKOO-SHRIKES MINIVETS	COMMON TAILORBIRD <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	
BLACK-WINGED FLYCATCHER-SHRIKE <i>Hemipus hirundinaceus</i>	DARK-NECKED TAILORBIRD <i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>	
IORAS, LEAFBIRDS	ASHY TAILORBIRD <i>Orthotomus sepium</i>	
<b>GREEN IORA <i>Aegithina viridissima</i></b>	RUFIOUS-TAILED TAILORBIRD <i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>	
COMMON IORA <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	MOUNTAIN TAILORBIRD <i>Orthotomus cuculatus</i>	
GREAT IORA <i>Aegithina lafresnayei</i>	RUFESCENT PRINIA <i>Prinia rufescens</i>	
LESSER GREEN LEAFBIRD <i>Chloropsis cyanopogon</i>	YELLOW-BELLIED PRINIA <i>Prinia flaviventris</i>	
GREATER GREEN LEAFBIRD <i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>	ZITTING CISTICOLA <i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	
BLUE-WINGED LEAFBIRD <i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>		
ORANGE-BELLIED LEAFBIRD <i>Chloropsis hardwickii</i>	FLYCATCHERS	
	BROWN-CHESTED FLYCATCHER <i>Rhinomyias brunneata</i>	
<b>BULBULS</b>	GREY-CHESTED FLYCATCHER <i>Muscapa umbratalis</i>	
STRAW-HEADED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>	DARK-SIDED FLYCATCHER <i>Muscapa sibirica</i>	
BLACK AND WHITE BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus melanoleucos</i>	ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER <i>Muscapa daurica</i>	
BLACK-HEADED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>	BROWN-STREAKED FLYCATCHER <i>Muscapa williamsoni</i>	
BLACK-CRESTED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>	FERRUGINOUS FLYCATCHER <i>Muscapa ferruginea</i>	
SCALY-BREASTED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus squamatus</i>	VERDITER FLYCATCHER <i>Eumyias thalassina</i>	
GREY BELLIED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus cyaniventris</i>	YELLOW-RUMPED FLYCATCHER <i>Ficedula zanthopygia</i>	
RED-WHISKERED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	NARCISSUS FLYCATCHER <i>Ficedula narcissina</i>	
PUFF-BACKED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus eutilotus</i>	MUGIMAKI FLYCATCHER <i>Ficedula mugimaki</i>	
STRIPE-THROATED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus finlaysoni</i>	RED-THROATED FLYCATCHER <i>Ficedula parva</i>	
YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	RUFIOUS-BROWED FLYCATCHER <i>Ficedula solitaria</i>	
OLIVE-WINGED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>	SNOWY-BROWED FLYCATCHER <i>Ficedula hyperythra</i>	
STREAK-EARED BULBUL	RUFIOUS-CHESTED	



<i>Pycnonotus blanfordi</i>	FLYCATCHER <i>Ficedula dumetoria</i>	
CREAM-VENTED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus simplex</i>	<u>WHISTLERS</u>	
RED-EYED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>	MANGROVE WHISTLER <i>Pachycephala cinerea</i>	
SPECTACLED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos</i>		
FINSCH'S BULBUL <i>Criniger finschii</i>	<u>WAGTAILS, PIPITS</u>	
OCHRACEOUS BULBUL <i>Criniger ochraceus</i>	WHITE WAGTAIL <i>Motacilla alba</i>	
GREY-CHEEKED BULBUL <i>Criniger bres</i>	GREY WAGTAIL <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	
YELLOW-BELLIED BULBUL <i>Criniger phaeocephalus</i>	YELLOW WAGTAIL <i>Motacilla flava</i>	
HAIRY-BACKED BULBUL <i>Hypsipetes criniger</i>	FOREST WAGTAIL <i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>	
BUFF-VENTED BULBUL <i>Hypsipetes charlottae</i>	OLIVE TREE-PIPIT <i>Anthus hodgoni</i>	
MOUNTAIN BULBUL <i>Hypsipetes maclellandii</i>	RICHARD'S PIPIT (Paddy Pipit) <i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	
STREAKED BULBUL <i>Hypsipetes malaccensis</i>	RED-THROATED PIPIT <i>Anthus cervinus</i>	
ASHY BULBUL <i>Hypsipetes flavela</i>	<u>WOOD-SWALLOWS</u>	
	WHITE-BREASTED WOOD-SWALLOW <i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	



India – Goa  
Trip Report  
20 December 2003 - 4 January 2004

(WO2 Mark Easterbrook)



**References:**

Trip reports posted on the Web.

*A Birdwatchers Guide to India* by Krys Kazmierczak & Raj Singh.

*Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp.

**Introduction**

This was our first visit to the Indian Sub Continent and served as an excellent introduction to the kind of species that may be encountered. It was not intended to be a 24/7 birding holiday, but we gave it a good go none-the-less. Gary Hulbert and I saw a total of 209 species. Considering that we didn't venture far from Goa ie Backwoods Camp and the other inland sites this seemed like a fair total. We did visit the Taj Mahal and Delhi for four days where we saw a few extra species, however during the next visit it is likely that we will visit Backwoods Camp (which was highly recommended by the other birders that we met during our stay).

**Travel & Currency**

The flight from Gatwick was the usual Monarch dreary affair with no legroom but effective enough.

The rate of exchange was between 77 and 82 Rs to the £, depending on whether you were changing cash, visa or Travellers Cheques. The latter was by far the easiest and negated the need to carry lots of cash, although theft and crime did not appear to be very prevalent.

A days birding with a guide including transport will cost you between 500 and 1000 Rs depending on how far you travel and what birds you want to see. Some guides charge by the bird, somewhat like Israel and the Striated Scops Owl or Hume's Tawny Owl for those who are familiar with the arrangements.

Beer costs 66 Rs for a large bottle and a curry and rice about 400 Rs – great value. European meals like steak etc are more expensive.

### **A guide to the guides**

Most guides will offer you the world and all the birds you mention, many fail to achieve 60%. They are however very good value for money.

Bruno – found at the Beira Mar. He was a little aggressive and pushy: We didn't use him.

Santosh – found at the Beira Mar. A taxi driver who knows the sights but admits he is no birder. He seemed like a reasonable honest chap and we would have used him if we were staying at the Beira Mar. He gave us tips on sites to visit.

Abi – Reputed to be the best guide and birder. We had booked him to visit Carambolim Lake. He failed to turn up!! It seems to me, it's not much use being the best birder if you're unreliable and not present to guide. We didn't entertain him after the non-appearance episode.

Raymond – Was accompanying another pair of birders. We met him twice when he was always helpful and friendly. He knows the sites and the birds. He found the Blue-faced Malkoha and a Savannah Nightjar. We would probably use him next time if he's available. He knows the unusual sites for the difficult birds.

**Papa** - found at the Marinha Dourada, Arpora. We stayed here and used him. He was reliable and honest with remarkable eyesight. He knows the sights and most of the target species. He is developing his Birdwatching skills; we left him a new field guide.

### **Daily Itineraries**

#### **Day One**

The flight from Gatwick to Goa via Bahrain took about 12 hours and was very tiring, from the airport to the resort took another hour. We arrived at about 1700, checked in and did a bit of birding around the hotel, which produced numerous Black and Brahminy Kites, a Wire-tailed Swallow, Osprey, 8 Small Pratincole flying to roost and an Oriental Magpie Robin by the swimming pool.

#### **Day Two**

Up at first light for a walk around the paddy fields next to the hotel Marinha Dourada (an excellent place to base yourself and a varied birding location). We encountered our first Stork-billed Kingfisher, Pied Stonechat and several Chestnut-tailed Starling. We later had excellent views of a Blyth's Reed Warbler, discovered an Oriental Turtle Dove and sorted out the Paddyfield Pipits. Meanwhile in the hotel grounds the *trisybillic* call soon revealed a Green Warbler. At dusk a Spotted Owlet was seen sat on a telegraph wire. Birding between 1030 and 1600 is fairly unproductive as the birds head for the shade and become less active.

#### **Day Three**

A look around the hotel area before heading off for a boat trip revealed a Black-lored Tit. The boat trip was fairly eventful (out of the Mandowri River and around Vasco de Gama Island in

the Arabian Sea). The boat trip produced Brown-headed Gull, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Lesser Crested and Swift Tern, plenty of Gull-billed Terns and at least 6 Dolphin in the mouth of the river.

An evening around the hotel produced 2 Black-rumped Flameback, an Asian Paradise Flycatcher and 1 Brahminy Starling.

#### **Day Four**

Before our visit to Anjuna market we had to book our trip to the Taj Mahal. The woods near the travel agents produced Koel, Greater Coucal, Brown-headed Barbet and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. Whilst walking around the market a White-bellied Sea Eagle was seen, as was a Besra.

An afternoon walk across the paddy fields on the way to the Beira Mar produced Pintail Snipe, Richard's Pipit, Tree Pipit, Short-toed Larks and good views of a Malabar Lark. Later at the famous Beira Mar swimming pool viewpoint all the specialities were noted; Cinnamon Bittern of course, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Slaty-breasted Rail a surprise Spotted Crake and a couple of Bluethroat.

#### **Day Five**

Another early start for a walk around Baga Hill near to the Club Cabana for the search for Indian Pitta which proved unsuccessful on this occasion. Numerous birds were present and for the inexperienced Indian birder it was very challenging birding indeed. In any event, highlights were Indian Robin, Small Minivets, several Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike, a Grey Bushchat and a White-throated Fantail. A Woodpecker was drumming, some tapping on the tree with a stick bought it closer and it was quickly id'd as a Yellow-crowned Woodpecker. My tapping on the tree also bought 2 Greater Flamebacks in to investigate – a fairly effective tactic. Our return to the hotel soon had us looking skyward at a raptor over Baga Hill which we soon realised was a Crested (Oriental) Honey Buzzard.

Another visit to the Beira Mar revealed a Peregrine, the same species as the previous night plus a Baillon's Crake. The regular Black-capped Kingfisher and Painted Snipes also put in an appearance.

#### **Day Six**

An early morning start for Carambolim Lake (as we thought). The guide we had booked (Abi) failed to show. We thought we were left high and dry when another taxi driver/guide appeared named Papa. We negotiated a price and got going at about 0715. He initially took us through Carambolim village to a house, where 2 Spotted Owlets were roosting. Also along this lane we had Black-hooded Oriole and Blue-tailed Bee Eater. The highlight however was when the guide also said he knew where 2 Jungle Owlets could be found. Sure enough on queue they flew and allowed fantastic scope views as they sat quietly in nearby trees. 2 Sparrow type birds were probably Yellow-throated, however they did not reappear to allow for a positive ID.

The lake itself was a fantastic site and produced most of the birds that we expected including Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-tailed Jacanas, Darter, (Grey-headed) Purple Swamphen, Comb Duck, Lesser Whistling Duck and Cotton Teal. Noticeable by their absence were Sacred Ibis



and Asian Open-billed Stork. A short trip to the Ciba Geigy chemical factory revealed very little and entrance was refused.

Baga Woods in the evening gave us our first Indian Peafowl with 5 young and a Large Cuckoo Shrike.

### **Day Seven**

An early morning drive to Mojim Beach for the high tide roost proved to be time well spent. An idyllic setting gave amazingly close views of Small Pratincole, Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, with the latter being more numerous. Careful scanning of the Plovers revealed a first winter male Caspian Plover whilst the Gull roost produced our first Great-black Headed Gull (Pallas's) and only Oystercatcher.

An afternoon flight to Delhi was uneventful, however the weather in Delhi was a bit of a shock. Thirteen degrees and a heavy fog, which is prevalent in the North between about December the 20<sup>th</sup> and January the 15<sup>th</sup>. All did not bode well for our trip to the Taj.

### **Day Eight**

An early morning walk in the fog around a near by park opposite the City Park hotel which is where we were staying for the duration of our stay in Delhi, gave us a few new species including Large Grey Babbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Red-breasted Flycatcher and Greenish Warbler, easily discernable from Green by call. Greenish seemed to be more numerous in the North than Green, which appeared to be more common in the South around Goa.

Sightseeing for the rest of the day. Pied Mynahs were seen during a visit to Ghandi's Memorial, whilst an Egyptian Vulture circled India Gate. In the centre of Delhi 5 Brahminy Starling and a Large-billed Crow were seen. On our return to the hotel 2 Painted Stork were seen heading for the Jamuna River.

### **Day Nine**

The very early morning (0600) train to Agra for our visit to the Taj Mahal. As it became light and the fog began to lift, a Painted Stork and a Black-necked Stork were seen from the train. As we arrived in Agra the sun was shining, our guide said it was the first time it had penetrated the fog for 8 days. He also said that without it our visit to the Taj would have been a fairly miserable affair.

We entered the Taj Mahal and it did not disappoint. It is a truly breathtaking experience and one that I shall always remember. Not to detract at all from the main reason for the visit, it is very fortuitous that the Yamuna River runs along behind the famous mausoleum. Binoculars were quickly trained on the river and 2 of the species we had hoped for were present, River Tern and River Lapwing. A Citrine Wagtail made an appearance and 8 Ruddy Shelduck were also present. As we were leaving the Taj we stopped to look at some Large Grey Babblers. This proved to be very lucky as under a bush near them was a game bird. Close scrutiny ensured that we were able to identify the bird as a Jungle Bush Quail, which was a real bonus!

At Agra, a Shikra and a Blue Rock Thrush added to the trip list and several hirundines, which were too distant to be identified conclusively, were probably Streak-throated Swallows.

After lunch we headed for Fatehpur Sikri (an old palace). On route semi-feral Indian Peafowl were everywhere and at the palace another target species, Brown Rock Chat put in an appearance.

### **Day Ten**

We caught our flight back to Goa, which was delayed due to fog (surprise surprise) to conclude our holiday in the sun.

An evening walk around the paddy fields next to the hotel rewarded us with very close views of a Black-capped Kingfisher, 2 Pied Kingfishers and several Ashy-wood Swallows.

### **Day Eleven**

A leisurely walk up Baga Hill gave us some more new species. This site always produced new birds and is well worth visiting as many times as possible. New birds included a Blue-winged Leafbird, Orange-headed Thrush, Loten's Sunbird and a real highlight was a Grey-necked Bunting sat on a dead tree at the top of the Hill. A Crested Honey Buzzard sat in a tree was a shock and many of the by now common birds were also present.

The evening was spent once more near to the Club Cabana looking for Indian Pitta again without luck. However all was not lost as Common Babbler and Blue-faced Malkoha was added to the growing trip list.

### **Day Twelve – New Years Day**

We headed for Maem (Mayem) Lake this morning stopping on route at a nearby wood. The woods proved productive and gave us our first lifer of the New Year an Emerald Dove. A Besra was also perched in a nearby tree.

Maem Lake itself failed to produce the Brown Fish Owl. Apparently it's not as reliable as it was. The roost site has changed due to the bird being disturbed and is not as easily viewable. A nearby call alerted our guide to the presence of the requested Changeable Hawk Eagle – right on queue. Despite much searching the bird could not be located, it was obviously perched in a tree out of sight. We scrabbled up the wooded hill, which proved to be quite hard work in the heat and were rewarded with fantastic views of the bird. This was mainly due to the guide knowing which tree it favoured. Our only Yellow-footed Green Pigeons were also seen here.

That evening we made a visit to the famous Saligo Zor. Having dipped on Brown Fish Owl earlier in the day we were not overly optimistic about the Brown Wood Owl. We searched intently and thought our worst fears were coming true. Then a movement in the trees that was a Malabar Whistling Thrush and then the guide said and the Owl. The Thrush was mobbing it. Both birds were seen in the same scope view – a fantastic site and a quality bird to end the day with. How the guide managed to pick out the Owl was amazing, his eyesight was phenomenal.

### **Day Thirteen**

This morning we paid a visit to Fort Aguada adding Pale-billed Flowerpecker and Syke's Warbler. Several Indian Peafowl were also noted. A Tawny Eagle sailed by near to the cliffs, which was unexpected.

On our way to Dona Paula our guide picked up a slight movement, which soon turned into a Rufous Woodpecker whilst the Indian Pitta site proved unsuccessful, but another Slaty-breasted Rail and Ruddy-breasted Crake were noted nearby.

We arrived at Dona Paula too late and the only birds seen were Red-wattled Lapwing, we would have to return tomorrow.

A stop at Santa Cruz lagoons allowed views of another 2 Small Pratincole a Marsh Harrier and our first Pacific Golden Plovers of the trip.

Now follows a very sad tale. This evening we visited the Pitta site once more near to the Club Cabana. Our guide had sighted the bird in a fowl smelling gully type trench, full of leaf litter. Rather than rush about we decided to sit quietly and wait. The bird appeared in the trench at about 1815. The only problem being it was at the part of the trench that Gary was watching and not I. Consequently I never saw the bird. I staked out the area the night after but to no avail.

As a consolation we heard 2 Nightjars calling and soon located them. The distinctive call of Jerdon's Nightjar was soon identified and we returned to the hotel happy (well one of us).

**Pitta directions:** Park at the Club Cabana. Walk to the end of the wall. Go past a clearing and path on the right and take the left hand fork into the forest. The track splits again. Take the right fork and continue for about 5-10 yards. Opposite a clear patch on the left go through the hedge on the right. This comes out onto a terraced type area. In front of you there is a trench between two rows of trees with leaf litter. This is where the Pitta appeared and seems to be the (favoured) area. This area was also good for Orange-headed Thrush.

### **Day Fourteen**

A return to Dona Paula. We arrived here at about 0800 and were not disappointed. We soon discovered 14 Yellow-wattled Plovers (the main target). I then noticed a Lark in front of them. After scoping the bird closely, I was delighted to have discovered a bird that I had searched for several times in the Emirates, An Oriental (Small) Skylark. We soon found several more and next to one another target species Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark. What a difference a couple of hours had made to what was yesterday a dreary site.

Stopping at Santa Cruz once more we scoped at least 6 Terek Sandpiper and then carried onto Charao Island (Bird Island) this gave us a new species for the trip in the form of a male Montague's Harrier, but little else.

We were nearing our hotel on our return when 2 large soaring birds were sighted. These proved to be Woolly-necked Storks.

We were back at the Pitta site again but the bird failed to materialise! New birds were added however in the form of Common Woodshrike and a Grey Nightjar hunting from telegraph wires.

## **Day Fifteen**

An early morning walk up Baga Hill prior to what proved to be a very long; delayed and miserable flight home produced only one new bird, which was a small “gaggle” of Tawny-bellied Babblers.

### **3. Consolidated Systematic Species List**

Little Grebe	1 at Carambolim Lake
Cormorant	A large roost at the Ciba Geigy factory and common behind the Taj Mahal
Indian Cormorant	Several seen at Carambolim Lake
Little Cormorant	More numerous than Indian and seen at almost at wetlands
(Oriental) Darter	2 seen at Carambolim Lake
Grey Heron	1s & 2s seen on wetlands
Purple Heron	1 behind the Beira Mar, several at Carambolim Lake and 1s & 2s at other wetlands
Striated Heron	2 in the Marinha Dourada paddyfields and swamp
Indian Pond Heron	Widespread and very numerous
Cattle Egret	Widespread and numerous
Great White Egret	As Above
Intermediate Egret	Individuals positively identified at Marinha Dourada paddy fields and Carambolim Lake
Little Egret	Fairly common but not as numerous Cattle Egret
Black-crowned Night Heron	A small roost at Mojim Beach, 1s & 2s at the Marinha Dourada and a roost at the Kalwi River ferry crossing on route to Maem Lake
Cinnamon Bittern	1 behind the well known Beira Mar at dusk
Painted Stork	2 deffinates flying over Delhi and one from the Agra train
Woolly-necked Stork	2 soaring near to the Marinha Dourada
Black-necked Stork	1 from the Delhi to Agra train in flooded fields adjacent to the railway track
Spoonbill	8 were seen behind the Taj Mahal
Lesser Whistling Duck	Good numbers at Carambolim Lake and at least 3000 opposite Charoa Island
Ruddy Shelduck	11 seen behind the Taj Mahal on the Yamuna River
Cotton Teal	A dozen or so at Carambolim Lake
Comb Duck	5 at Carambolim Lake
Crested (Oriental) Honey Buzzard	1 seen on two occasions at Baga Hill
Black Kite	Very common and numerous everywhere
Brahminy Kite	A fantastic bird and very common in the Goa area
Shikra	1 at Agra Fort and one flyby at Fort Aguada
Besra	1 near to Anjuna market and one perched near to Maem Lake
Changeable Hawk Eagle	1 extravert at Maem Lake
Booted Eagle	1 at the Kalwi River ferry crossing on route to Maem Lake
Tawny Eagle	1 at Fort Aguada
White-bellied Sea Eagle	1s at the coast and at a nest behind the Club Cabana
Egyptian Vulture	1 over India Gate – Delhi and numerous behind the Taj Mahal
Montagu’s Harrier	1 male seen over Charao Island
Marsh Harrier	1 at Santa Cruz, 1 at Mojim and one at Carambolim Lake
Osprey	1 resident at Marinha Dourada and 1 at Santa Cruz
Peregrine Falcon	1 seen flying over the Beira Mar on the first visit
Kestrel	1 seen hovering on arrival at the airport on the first day
Jungle Bush Quail	1 in the grounds of the Taj Mahal
Indian Peafowl	A family group near the Club Cabana, 1s & 2s on Baga Hill, 1 at Fort Aguada and numerous semi-feral birds in Delhi and near Agra.
Slaty-breasted Rail	1 behind the Beira Mar and 1 near the Pitta site at Fort Aguada
Baillon’s Crake	1 behind the Beira Mar
Spotted Crake	1 behind the Beira Mar on 2 occasions
Ruddy-breasted Crake	2 behind the Beira Mar and 1 near the Pitta site at Fort Aguada
White-breasted Waterhen	Common around Goan wetlands

Moorhen	Numerous at Carambolim Lake and one on Charoa Island
(Grey-headed) Purple Gallinule	100s at Carambolim Lake
Coot	Numerous at Carambolim Lake
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	8 at Carambolim Lake
Bronze-tailed Jacana	More numerous than the above at Carambolim Lake
Eurasian Oystercatcher	1 at Mojim Beach sand bar
Greater Painted-snipe	1 or 2 behind the Beira Mar
Black-winged Stilt	Several at Carambolim Lake and numerous in the north near to the Taj Mahal
Little (Small) Pratincole	8 over the Marinha Dourada, at least 450 at Mojim beach (early am) and 2 at Santa Cruz
Red-wattled Lapwing	Common around Goa
River Lapwing	2 stunning birds behind the Taj Mahal
Yellow-wattled Lapwing	14 birds at the usual Dona Paula location (early am)
Pacific Golden Plover	4 or 5 at Santa Cruz and half a dozen at the Marinha Dourada
Greater Sand Plover	Not many compared to Lesser at Mojim Beach
Caspian Plover	1 first winter male with the other Plovers at Mojim Beach
Little Ringed Plover	Several on the Marinha Dourada flooded paddy fields
Kentish Plover	Small numbers with the other Plovers at Mojim Beach
Lesser Sand Plover	Numerous at Mojim Beach and Santa Cruz
Eurasian Curlew	1 at Panjim mud flats and 2 at Mojim sand bar
Black-tailed Godwit	Several near to Carambolim Lake
Bar-tailed Godwit	1 at Mojim sand bar
Redshank	Numerous near wetlands
Greenshank	Numerous around paddyfields
Green Sandpiper	1 behind the Beira Mar
Wood Sandpiper	2 at Marinha Dourada and several behind the Beira Mar
Terek Sandpiper	At least 6 at Santa Cruz
Common Sandpiper	Very common near paddyfields
Pintail Snipe	1 positively identified in flight near the Beira Mar
Common Snipe	Common behind the Beira Mar
Little Stint	2 at Carambolim Lake and 1 Santa Cruz lagoons
Dunlin	1s & 2s at Santa Cruz, Mojim Beach and Marinha Dourada
Ruff	1 behind the Taj Mahal on the 29th
Yellow-legged Gull	Several at the Mojim Beach high tide roost
Pallas's Gull	1 adult at Mojim roost and 1 3 <sup>rd</sup> Winter behind the Taj Mahal
Brown-headed Gull	Numerous at Mojim and around the coast
Black-headed Gull	Common near to the coast
Gull-billed Tern	Several at Carambolim Lake and numerous around the coast and Mandowi River
River Tern	1 stunner behind the Taj Mahal
Swift Tern	Several around Vasco de Gama Island from the boat trip
Lesser Crested Tern	Numerous at Mojim and at sea
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	Only 5 at Maem Lake
Rock Dove	Widespread and numerous (if you want to tick them)
Oriental Turtle Dove	One seen near the Marinha Dourada Hotel on the first day
Eurasian Collared Dove	Several seen in Delhi
Spotted Dove	Common around the Marinha Dourada and Baga Hill
Laughing Dove	Several around Delhi
Emerald Dove	2 in a wood near to Maem Lake
Ring-necked Parakeet	Numerous going to roost near to the Marinha Dourada
Plum-headed Parakeet	Several around the Marinha Dourada and 6 at Maem Lake
Koel	Numerous around Goa
Blue-faced Malkoha	1 near to the quarry behind the Club Cabana
Greater Coucal	Surprisingly quiet for a large bird but common around Goa
Jungle Owlet	2 at roost near to Carambolim village
Spotted Owlet	As above but can be seen at night on any telegraph wire
Brown Wood Owl	1 at the well known Saligo Zor site
Grey Nightjar	1 hunting from wires near to the Club Cabana on our last night
Jerdon's Nightjar	2 calling and flying around just below the Club Cabana
Alpine Swift	One over Baga Hill



Little Swift	Widespread and numerous the most common
Asian Palm Swift	Common around Goa
Pied Kingfisher	A pair fishing at the Marinha Dourada ponds
Common Kingfisher	Common around the paddyfields and other suitable water courses
Stork-billed Kingfisher	1 regularly seen on wires above the Marinha Dourada pools
Smyrna Kingfisher	The most common seen everywhere
Black-capped Kingfisher	1 behind the Beira Mar, one at Marinha Dourada pools and one at Charao Island
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	5 at Fort Aguada and Several at Carambolim village and Lake
(Little) Green Bee-eater	Widespread and numerous
Indian Roller	Only singles seen over grassy fields
Hoopoe	1 at the Beira Mar paddyfields and 2 near Carambolim Lake
Brown-headed Barbet	2 seen around Baga – Nikkis travel agents, in the woods opposite
White-cheeked Barbet	Seen in ones on Baga Hill
Coppersmith Barbet	Always heard calling and seen well on Baga Hill and behind the Marinha Dourada Hotel
Rufous Woodpecker	1 in Aguada village and one on Baga Hill – others heard
Black-rumped Flameback	2 behind the Marinha Dourada Hotel
Yellow-crowned Flameback	1 at Maem Lake and one on Baga Hill – both drumming
Greater Flameback	2 on Baga Hill and 2 near Carambolim village
Indian Pitta	1 below the Club Cabana – directions included
Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	1s & 2s at Dona Paula (early am)
Greater Short-toed Lark	A small flock at the Beira Mar paddyfields
Crested Lark	1 seen near to the Marinha Dourada on telegraph wires on 2 occasions
Malabar Lark	1s & 2s seen at Marinha Dourada and Baga Fields
Oriental Skylark	Crippling views of several at Dona Paula (early am)
Plain Martin	Several over the Marinha Dourada
Barn Swallow	2 seen at Carambolim Lake on Boxing Day
Wire-tailed Swallow	The second most numerous swallow – seen everywhere
Red-rumped Swallow	The most common swallow around the Goa area
Long-tailed Shrike	The only Shrike seen and quite common in the Goa area
Golden Oriole	The most common on Baga Hill
Black Hooded Oriole	1s & 2s on Baga Hill and near Carambolim village
Black Drongo	Very common in Goa
White-bellied Drongo	1s & 2s on Baga Hill
Ashy Woodswallow	Always on the wires around the ponds at the Marinha Dourada
Chestnut-tailed Starling	Common around the Marinha Dourada and Beira Mar
Brahminy Starling	1 roosting in the scrub near to the Marinha Dourada and five stunning adults in Delhi
Rosy Starling	1 behind the Marinha Dourada
Pied Mynah	2 at Ghandi's Memorial and several at the Taj Mahal
Common Mynah	Small numbers around Goa and 2 behind the Beira Mar
Jungle Mynah	The most common Mynah around Goa
Rufous Treepie	Common in small numbers on Baga Hill but can be seen in any wooded area
House Crow	Widespread and numerous
Large-billed Crow	1 on Baga Hill, 1 behind the Marinha Dourada and 1 in Delhi
Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike	Half a dozen on our first visit to Baga Hill – not seen again
Common Woodshrike	1 behind the Club Cabana near the Pitta stakeout
Large Cuckooshrike	1 behind the Club Cabana, and 1 at Maem Lake
Small Minivet	Fairly common on Baga Hill
Common Iora	Common and widespread in small numbers
Golden-fronted Leafbird	3 on our first visit to Baga Hill
Blue-winged Leafbird	2 on Baga Hill
Red-whiskered Bulbul	Common and numerous on Baga Hill
Red-vented Bulbul	In the same kind of habitat as the previous but not as numerous
White-browed Bulbul	Heard everywhere and fairly common in wooded areas – Baga Hill / Aguada Fort
Puff-throated Babbler	Fairly common and noisy in leaf litter on Baga Hill
Tawny-bellied Babbler	The last new species seen with a small “gaggle” on Baga Hill
Common Babbler	1 seen in a thicket behind the Club Cabana
Large Grey Babbler	Common in the park in Delhi and at the Taj Mahal
Jungle Babbler	Common on Baga Hill

Spotted Flycatcher	Faairly common in suitable habitat
Red-breasted Flycatcher	1 in the park opposite the hotel in Delhi
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Fairly common but inconspicuous in the woods around Baga
White-spotted Fantail	1s and 2s with a pair displaying on Baga Hill
Asian Paradise Flycatcher	Seen singularly all around the Baga area
Grey-breasted Prinia	1 on Baga Hill and several at Fort Aguada
Plain Prinia	Fairly common in small numbers near trees and scrub
Ashy Prinia	Common in scrub habitat
Common Tailorbird	Seen in 1s & 2s everywhere
Clamorous Reed Warbler	2 behind the Beira Mar and 3 at Charao Is
Blyth's Reed Warbler	Widespread and numerous in almost any habitat
Syke's Warbler	At least 3 at Fort Aguada
Lesser Whitethroat	3 seen in the park opposite City Park Hotel- Delhi
Greenish Warbler	Several in the park in Delhi
Green Warbler	Common in trees around the Marinha Dourada
Bluethroat	2 seen on consecutive days behind the Beira Mar
Oriental Magpie Robin	Common in 1s & 2s near habitation
Brown Rock Chat	4 at the old palce at Fatehpur Sikri
Siberian Stonechat	The females looking like Whinchats. Common in scrub
Pied Stonechat	Small numbers on scrub land outside the Marinha Dourada
Grey Bushchat	1 - A surprise in Baga Woods
Indian Robin	Common on Baga Hill
Blue Rock Thrush	1 at Fort (The Red Fort) Agra on the 29 <sup>th</sup>
Malabar Whistling Thrush	1 at Saligo Zor mobbing the Brown Wood Owl
Orange-headed Thrush	Seen singularly on Baga Hill and Aguada village
Black-lored Tit	Several on Baga Hill and 2 behind the Marinha Dourada Hotel
Tree Pipit	Several seen on Baga Fields
Richard's Pipit	Fairly common on Baga Fields and by the Marinha Dourada
Paddyfield Pipit	Easily distinguished from all others by call when flushed
Tawny Pipit	2 seen in the grounds of the Marinha Dourada
Citrine Wagtail	1 behind the Taj Mahal
Grey Wagtail	1 seen at Carambolim Lake
White Wagtail	2 seen at the back of the Taj Mahal
White-browed Wagtail	Common around the Marinha Dourada Hotel
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	2 at Fort Aguada
Plain Flowerpecker	Several on Baga Hill
Purple-rumped Sunbird	The most common around Goa
Loten's Sunbird	1 female positively ID'd on Baga Hill (with comparatively massive bill)
Purple Sunbird	Fairly common on Baga Hill and in the park at Delhi
Crimson Sunbird	4 birds seen all behind the Club Cabana and past the quarry
House Sparrow	Widespread and common
Baya Weaver	Large flocks encountered around the bushes and swamp at the Marinha Dourada and at Carambolim Lake
Streaked Weaver	2 on the wires behind the Beira Mar
Indian Silverbill	2 in the scrub behind Mojim Beach
White-rumped Munia	Common on Baga Hill
Scaly-breasted Munia	Several on the wires behind the Beira Mar
Grey-necked Bunting	A very pleasing bird, found perched on a dead tree on the ridge at Baga Hill one morning

## **Summary**

What a great place! Friendly, inexpensive and lots of great birds. Another visit is definitely on the cards, with a trip inland being a must. Goa offers a great introduction to Indian birds, with many commoner recognisable species also being present. Difficult warblers to see in the UK are also present in good numbers so as familiarity becomes habitual. The beer is good the weather better and the curries authentic – what could be better? The Indian Pitta next time perhaps?

## The Southern Red Sea – 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004

(Hilary Nash)

I headed again for the Red Sea this year to do a bit more fish watching. This time I decided to repeat the trip to the south of Egypt and booked on a boat sailing from **Marsa Alam**. They have now opened an airport there so we were spared a 4-hour coach journey after our 5-hour flight.

There were few birds to be seen offshore, in fact none at all on the first day out. My first sighting was a pair of **Ospreys** (*Pandion haliaetus*), who were based on a small islet aptly named **Rocky Island**. The next sighting came at **Rocky Island's** equally barren larger neighbour called **Geziret Zabargad**, which produced splendid views of 3 **Sooty Falcons** (*Falco concolor*). This island also had a colony of **White-cheeked Terns** (*Sterna repressa*) and 2 **Brown Boobies** (*Sula leucogaster*). From here on we had a following of **White-eyed Gulls** (*Larus leucophthalmus*).

Apart from the **White-eyed Gulls**, there were only two other occasions when there was anything to record. The first was at a reef called **Small Gota**, where a few coral heads provide dry perches. Here 6 **White-eyed Gulls** shared these with 15 **Lesser Crested Terns** (*Sterna bengalensis*). The other occasion was a sand bank at **El Naba** where we were moored up at dusk. It was a roost for a mixed flock which comprised **Caspian** and **Bridled Terns** (*Sterna caspia* & *S. anaethetus*) as well as **Lesser Crested Terns**. Here I also recorded more **Brown Boobies** and the only **Sooty Gull** (*Larus hemrichi*) of the trip.

We spent the last 24 hours in a brand new beach-resort hotel, which was pretty depressing. It was a birding disaster having only some 20 pairs of **Laughing Doves** (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) and 5 pairs of **Barn Swallows** (*Hirundo rustica*) present. An **Osprey** did make a pass over the hotel beach. We flew out from **Marsa Alam** so the 4 hour day time coach trip was replaced by a 15 minute night time ride, 10 out of 10 for comfort - Nul punkt for birding.

Still only 11 species, but the **Sooty Falcons** were a red-letter tick and it was a fish-watching trip!

### BIRDS SEEN ON A SOUTHERN RED SEA TRIP - 24 Jun to 1 Jul 04

<u>English &amp; Scientific Names</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Brown Booby ( <i>Sula leucogaster</i> )	26 Jun. 2 birds at <b>Geziret Zabargad</b> . 29 Jun. One bird seen at <b>El Naba</b> .
Osprey ( <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> )	26 Jun. 2 birds at <b>Rocky Island</b> . 1 Jul. One bird over the hotel beach at <b>Marsa Alam</b> .
Sooty Falcon ( <i>Falco concolor</i> )	26 Jun. 3 birds at <b>Geziret Zabargad</b> .
Sooty Gull ( <i>Larus hemrichii</i> )	29 Jun. One bird seen at <b>El Naba</b>

White-eyed Gull ( <i>Larus leucophthalmus</i> )	Seen throughout the trip at most locations. Numbers usually between 10 and 20.
Caspian Tern ( <i>Sterna caspia</i> )	29 Jun. c.15 birds seen at <i>El Naba</i> .
Lesser Crested Tern ( <i>Sterna bengalensis</i> )	27 June. 15 birds at <i>Small Gota</i> . 29 Jun. c.30 birds seen at <i>El Naba</i> .
Bridled Tern ( <i>Sterna anaethetus</i> )	29 Jun. c.15 birds seen at <i>El Naba</i> .
White-cheeked Tern ( <i>Sterna repressa</i> )	26 Jun. Large colony on <i>Rocky Island</i> . 29 Jun 04. c20 at <i>El Naba</i> .
Laughing Dove ( <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> )	30 Jun and 1 Jul. c 20 Prs breeding in the Hotel complex at <i>Marsa Alam</i> .
Barn Swallow ( <i>Hirundo rustica</i> )	30 Jun and 1 Jul. c 5 Prs breeding in the Hotel complex at <i>Marsa Alam</i> .

English & Scientific Names taken from " Collins Bird Guide" by Killian Mullarney, Lars Svensson, Dan Zetterström and Peter J Grant. Published by Collins in 1999. (ISBN 0 00 711 332 3)



### VISIT TO WINSCONSIN USA

(Maj Andrew Bray)

On my business travels I had the opportunity to take some time off to get an afternoon's birdwatching in. I had purchased a second hand National Geographic North American Birds guide only the week before at the Wiltshire Ornithological Society AGM. One of the drivers from the company I was visiting picked me up from my hotel and we drove to Appleton on the north shore of Lake Winnebago (which is several miles long and wide). He took me to Heckrodt Wetland Reserve, an area of swamp and creeks just back from the lakeshore. It provided me with an opportunity to get used to my guidebook and find out some strange names. By the time I visited I was already used to the American Robin, Redwinged Blackbird and Common Grackle which were very abundant and loud. The reserve is small and the walks are well laid out with boardwalks for the swampy areas. There is also a centre that has a large collection of stuffed birds plus large tanks with the local fish and amphibians. The staff were helpful in helping me identify a Goldcrest as a Golden-crowned Kinglet. They also pointed us in the direction of a nesting Great Horned Owl which was clearly visible. The snow had only recently melted and the lake and rivers were now ice-free. (During the winter you can drive a car across Lake Winnebago). On arrival we disturbed a Hawk with its recently caught lunch. Water birds were taking up residence and there were lots of sightings of LBJs, woodpeckers

and nuthatches. On completion of the walk we sat in the Reserve centre to observe the birds on the feeders. The driver then took me to Lake Cap de Morts on the river near his house. On the way we picked up Turkey but did not find Sand Cranes. We parked the pick-up and then walked along a trail until we met the lake. The ducks were just returning and there were excellent views of the plumage. During my stay there were other sightings at different sites but I was unable to identify them at the time. I saw this as a taster of things to come especially for next year's expedition to Canada. My final list is:

Mute Swan	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Canada Goose	Downy Woodpecker
Mallard	American Crow
Northern Shoveller	Black-capped Chickadee
Blue Winged Teal	Brown Creeper
Wood Duck	White-breasted Nuthatch
Bufflehead	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Common merganser	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ring-billed Gull	American Robin
Herring Gull	European Staling
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Northern Cardinal
American Kestrel	Field Sparrow
Wild Turkey	Darkeyed Junco
Rock Dove	Redwinged Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Common Grackle
Great Horned Owl	American Goldfinch
Yellow shafted Northern Flicker	

## VISIT TO USA AND CANADA

(Hilary Nash)

In 2003 having spent almost all my leave allowance either birding or diving, I promised that in 2004 I would have a family holiday. On 29<sup>th</sup> April we flew to the USA to visit my cousin who lives in Frederick, some 50 miles WNW of Washington DC and then go on to see an aunt who lives in Peterborough, Ontario, which is 60 or so miles north of Toronto. We also wanted to visit the Algonquin National Park.

We arrived at Washington Dulles to experience the joys of US officialdom by queuing for over an hour to get through Customs and Immigration. (We had the misfortune to be stuck behind a jumbo load of Koreans), where we were met by my cousin. She then drove to her country house in West Virginia on the Blue Mountains Ridge alongside the Shenandoah Mountain Forest Reserve. It had spectacular views of the surrounding hills and valleys. It was also at its best as both the Dogwoods and Redbuds were in full bloom. The Icing on the cake as far as I was concerned was prolific wildlife round the the house encouraged by a plentiful supply of food. Regular visitors included **Downy Woodpeckers**, **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** and a **Chestnut-sided Towee**. There was also a very tame **Chipmunk** stuffing his cheek pouches. Walk round the house produced **Eastern Bluebird** and **Pileated Woodpecker**, with **Chimney Swifts** and **Ravens** overhead.

We visited several local parks where we caught up with **Cooper's Hawk**, **Scarlet Tanager** and **Yellow-rumped Warbler**; the latter seemed to be one of the first of the summer migrants to arrive. An after supper stroll produced a calling **Northern Saw Whet Owl**. Our final bird before leaving West Virginia was a **Bald Eagle** on its nest.



The next couple of days were in tourist mode looking at Washington DC before flying to Toronto to visit my aunt. Peterborough is not a bird hot spot though a drive out of town was good for raptors with sightings of **American Kestrel**, **Merlin** and **Northern Goshawk**.

We hired a car for our trip to the Algonquin and had a very pleasant drive there along almost deserted dead straight road with an universal 80kph speed limit. We spent one night in Barry's Bay before finally settling in Whitney a small town just outside the eastern border of the Park. We went for an early morning walk at Barry's Bay where it was quite cold with the car covered in frost and the trees still bare of leaves. We saw a pair of **Common Loons** in their magnificent summer plumage, for me a first, as all my previous records had been winter birds of the shores of the UK. The walk also produced a **Brown Thrasher** whose song reminded me of a Song Thrush. There were also lots of LBJs which finally nailed as **Savannah Sparrows**.

The Algonquin has a main road, Route 60, running through its southern portion. Off this the Park Management have set out a series of marked trails varying in distance from a gentle 2 km to an all day 16 km. Each trail had its own guidebook, which in addition to describing the features en route, developed a theme such as geology, glaciation, biomass, commercial history, etc. They were very informative and written in a very readable style, among the best I have encountered. As we were there in the week before the Park facilities open, the trails were practically deserted so we stuck to them as the walking was less difficult and there was no need for complex navigation.

Our stay coincided with a remarkable spring heat wave and we "endured" almost unbroken sunshine. From what were bare trees on arrival, we had a full canopy when we left five days later. Each day a different spring migrant arrived, the ever-increasing canopy transforming sightings from plain difficult to almost impossible. We caught up with the northern specialities of **Gray Jay** and **Spruce Grouse**, the latter giving us a full courtship display. Other good sightings included an **American Bittern** flying out of a reed bed. I also saw **Buffleheads**, a duck I had missed on previous trips to the Americas and we also found **Ring-necked Ducks** and **Hooded Mergansers**. New warblers appeared every day and we identified, **Tennessee**, **Yellow**, **Chestnut-sided**, **Black-throated Blue**, **Black-throated Green**, **Yellow-rumped** (again) and **Black-and-White**. I also succeeded in identifying one of the *Empidonax* Flycatchers, the **Least Flycatcher**.

Mammals were not easy to see, Bears and Wolves are scarce and shy, but we did see many **Moose** as these come to the roadside to eat vegetation covered in the salt used on the roads in winter. We hoped to see a Beaver, and although we saw many of their dams and lodges we did not see one out and about.

For those interested a list of our sightings is attached.

#### **CHECK LIST OF BIRDS SEEN IN USA AND CANADA - 29<sup>TH</sup> APRIL TO 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2004**

English Name	Scientific Name	USA	Canada	Remarks
Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>		X	
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>		X	
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>		X	
American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>		X	
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	X		
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	X		
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	X	X	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		X	

American Black Duck	<i>Anas rubripes</i>		X	
Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>		X	
Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>		X	
Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>		X	
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		X	
Turkey Vulture	<i>Catartes aura</i>	X	X	
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		X	
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	X		
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		X	
Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>	X		
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	X		
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	X		
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	X	X	
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		X	
(Wild Turkey)	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	X		Heard only
Ruffed Grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>		X	
Spruce Grouse	<i>Falcipennis canadensis</i>		X	
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	X		
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>		X	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		X	
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	X	X	
(Northern Saw-whet Owl)	<i>Aegolius acadicus</i>	X		Heard only
Chimney Swift	<i>Chaeta pelagica</i>	X	X	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>	X		
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle alcyon</i>		X	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>		X	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	X		
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>	X	X	
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides villosus</i>		X	
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>		X	
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	X	x	Not seen in Canada but drumming heard and there was much evidence of its activity.
Olive-sided Flycatcher	<i>Contopus cooperi</i>		X	
Eastern Wood-Pewee	<i>Contopus virens</i>	X		
Least Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax minimus</i>		X	
Eastern Phoebe	<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>	X		
Great Crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>	X		
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>		X	
Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>	X		
Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	X		
Blue-headed Vireo	<i>Vireo solitarius</i>		X	
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	X	X	
Gray Jay	<i>Perisoreus canadensis</i>		X	
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	X		
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	X	X	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	X		
Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>		X	
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	X	X	
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapilla</i>	X	X	
Tufted Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>	X		
White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	X		
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>		X	
Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		X	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>		X	
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliophtila caerulea</i>	X		
Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>	X	X	

Scarlet Tanager	<i>Piranga olivacea</i>	X		
Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	X	X	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>		X	
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	X		
Gray Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	X	X	
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	X		
Brown Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>		X	
American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>		X	
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	X	X	
Tennessee Warbler	<i>Vermivora peregrina</i>		X	
Yellow Warbler	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>		X	
Chestnut-sided Warbler	<i>Dendroica pensylvanica</i>		X	
Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Dendroica caerulescens</i>		X	
Black-throated Green Warbler	<i>Dendroica virens</i>		X	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	X		
Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>		X	
Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	X	X	
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>		X	
Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>		X	
Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolni</i>		X	
Swamp Sparrow	<i>Melospiza georgiana</i>		X	
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>		X	
White-throated Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>		X	
Baltimore Oriole	<i>Icterus galbula</i>		X	
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	X	X	
Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	X	X	
Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>	X	X	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X		
Evening Grosbeak	<i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i>		X	
American Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>	X	X	
House Finch	<i>Caropacus mexicanus</i>	X	X	
Purple Finch	<i>Caropacus purpureus</i>		X	

English and Scientific names taken from "**Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America**" by David Sibley.

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## BIRDING TRIP TO SOUTHERN AFRICA

(Anne Nason)

At the end of February Ian and I left behind the snow and ice in Wiltshire and headed south with British Airways on a direct flight to Zimbabwe. We spent the first and third weeks with the family who have now bought a Lodge in Harare, but the middle week birding in South Africa. Amanzi Lodge in Harare will be ideal for birdwatchers when the garden is fully landscaped and it is opened for visitors in May. In spite of the presence of hordes of gardeners, thatchers and painters, the garden was full of birds in the morning and we were woken to the calls of **Heuglin's Robin**, **Blackeyed Bulbul** and the harsh croaks of the **Purplecrested Lourie** (Turaco). **Miombo Doublecollared** and **Yellowbellied Sunbirds** fed on the flowers of Golden Shower and once, while swimming in the pool, we spotted a **Little Banded Goshawk** (Shikra) plucking a small bird on a branch high above us. **Crested Barbets** called repetitively and a **Bar-throated Apalis** was nest-building in the shrubbery. However, we had little time for serious bird-watching in Harare, apart from Borrowdale Brook golf course which is a haven for birds. As the course was sodden from the unusually heavy rains, the birds had it almost to themselves. **Abdim's Stork** were still present, before their migration north of the Equator, and **European Swallows** were in pre-migration moult. Around the lake three species of **Plover**; **Wattled**, **Crowned** and **Blacksmith** were common, as were **Sacred Ibis**, **Black-headed Heron** and **Egyptian Geese**. In the tall grasses beside the lake male **Red Bishops** were still in their scarlet mating plumage, and **Red-collared Widowbirds** flaunted their long tails. Less obvious were the **Levaillant's Cisticolas** and the **Orange-breasted Waxbills**. **European Bee-eaters** could be heard calling overhead as they hawked for insects. Occasionally a **Malachite Kingfisher** darted across the lake and even a **Giant Kingfisher** was spotted in the unusual habitat of a suburban garden.

Our second week was a dedicated bird photography trip to South Africa. On the 7<sup>th</sup> March we flew South African Airways to Johannesburg, picked up our hired car and drove to Wakkerstroom for a couple of days in the beautiful Highveld area. Wakkerstroom, about 300 km south east of Johannesburg, is a renowned birding area and BirdLife South Africa have an ornithological station there. We stayed at a delightful Guesthouse called Toad Hall and it was no surprise to find that the owners were an English couple, John and Diana Osborne, who had lived in South Africa for many years. They treated us as personal friends rather than paying guests and made us feel very welcome, as well as being a mine of information on the local birds. As if to emphasise their birding credentials, a **Greater Striped Swallow** was building its nest above their front door. Toad Hall is recommended by Birdlife SA and they arranged an excellent guide called David Mbongeni Nkosi. He had started life as a cattle herdboys, but had then been hired to help an ornithologist locate certain study species. His natural ability was recognised and he was subsequently trained by BirdLife as a guide.

Wakkerstroom Nature Reserve is close to the village, and includes marshes (vlei) and a lake. The surrounding hills are mainly grassland, so there is a wide variety of species in the area. There are several hides in the Nature Reserve but unfortunately, owing to the very high water levels as a result of the heavy rains, it was impossible to reach them. However, this did not impair our enjoyment, as we could see many species from the back road, and also from the bridge across the wide river. **Southern Bald Ibis** are common in the area, and one evening at dusk we watched from our car as over a hundred flew in to roost on a tree beside the lake. We thought that our presence was disturbing them as they wheeled around noisily and kept landing

and taking off from a steep bank some distance away, before finally coming in to roost. However, we were assured that this is their usual behaviour.

**European Swallows** were again in abundance, and I was struck by the enormous number we saw during our whole visit to Southern Africa. **Long-tailed Widowbirds** were the commonest species of Widow in the area, although **Red-collared** and **Red-shouldered** were also present. David explained that the male **Long-tailed Widow** sometimes grasps his tail with his feet in flight, to enhance his display. Another of the ornithological sights in Wakkerstroom was the many **Eastern Red-footed Falcons** flocking together on the wires. On occasions there would be up to 12 birds on the crosspiece of one telephone pole, gathering together before their migration to the Indian sub-continent.

David guided us around the hills above Wakkerstroom in our hired car, as Ian wanted to use the car as a hide with a beanbag on the window to support his camera. One of the highlights was a **Ground Woodpecker** which was in a rocky area quite close to the road. Other specialities were **Blue Korhaan**, **Stanley's Bustard** (Denhams), and both **Southern Crowned** and **Blue Crane**. In one vlei there were up to a hundred **White Storks**, mingling with flocks of **Bald Ibis** and **Hadedda**. We failed to see two of the local "specials," **Rudd's Lark** and **Botha's Lark**, as the weather was too misty in the area they frequent, but we did see **Spike-heeled Lark**, **Orange-throated Longclaw** and several **Buff-streaked Chats**. **Pied Starling** arrived in huge flocks to roost in the marshes in the evenings, but surprisingly **Indian Mynahs** were common around the village. We caught a brief glimpse of a **Red-throated Wryneck** in the garden, and a **Cape Robin-Chat**. Much of the low-lying land near the village was covered with pink and white Cosmos flowers, which may be considered a weed by the farmers, but add a brilliant burst of colour to the landscape.

The second afternoon we took a road that traversed a scrubby hillside. David heard a **Bokmakeirie**, an attractive Bush Shrike with a yellow breast and a broad black breastband, so we stopped to try and get a photograph. While we were observing it we saw more **Buff-streaked Chats** and a **Drakensberg Prinia**. Driving along the flat summit David knew exactly where to find **Yellow-breasted Pipit** and **Yellow-throated Longclaw** as well as two species of **Cisticola**, **Ayres** and **Pale-crowned**. On a rocky outcrop he picked out a **Sentinel Rock Thrush** and a shining **Malachite Sunbird**. I was surprised to see a sunbird in such a barren area, but David explained it feeds on the nectar from aloe flowers, which grow in the area. There is no big game as this is cattle farming country, but we saw three Meercats, and two varieties of Mongoose.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> March we drove on through the Highveld via Luneberg and Vryheid to Ithala Game Reserve. From Luneberg there was a dirt road for about 30 km but otherwise the roads were good. Ntshondwe Camp is a pleasant camp on the side of a steep hill but unfortunately we were unable to find a bird guide there, so had to drive around on our own. **Secretary Birds** were surprisingly common, and we were delighted to see a pair of **White-bellied Bustards** near enough to the road to get reasonable photographs, but with the grass quite high, it was difficult to get a good view of terrestrial birds. As the weather was overcast we used some of our time at Ithala to "chill out" but around the camp there were plenty of birds, and we also spotted **Black Eagles** soaring over the cliffs above us. We watched a **Cardinal Woodpecker** excavating a nesthole in a Euphorbia cactus, and saw **Mocking Cliff-Chat**, **Southern Black Tit**, **Black-collared Barbet**, and **Black-headed Oriole** to mention a few. Semi-tame Dassies, or Rock Hyrax were in great evidence around the camp, and as the grapes left in a bowl on the table in our chalet had been partly consumed by the morning we suspect the "thief" may have



been a Bush Baby. Big game in the reserve include Elephant, White and Black Rhino, Giraffe, Wildebeest, Zebra, Kudu, etc. but no large predators except for Leopard.

Our premier birding destination was Ndumu Game Reserve right on the border with Mozambique, about an hour from Kosi Bay on the Indian Ocean. We set off early from Ithala and drove down from the Highveld with its cattle ranches onto the humid plains near Pongola where sugarcane is the main crop. The hills rising to the east form the border with Swaziland. Shortly after stopping for fuel and a picnic lunch at Pongola, we got onto the N2. Unfortunately a crazy driver overtook us on a bend and masked the road in front, so we were caught by a huge pothole which bent the wheel rim and the air gushed out of the tyre like a pricked balloon. Luckily a kind young South African stopped to help us change the tyre, as he realised we were vulnerable on the side of the road, and we were soon on our way. At Jozini, near the huge dam, we found a garage where the wheel was quickly hammered back into shape, and we were greatly relieved to have a spare tyre again.

Arriving at Ndumu Game Reserve after the last 30 km on a laterite road, we were met by our Zulu guide for the two days at Ndumo Wilderness Camp. Philip was a real character and in an exchange of banter he was happy to remind Ian that on a memorable occasion the Zulus had beaten the British Army! He was a skilled “wind-up merchant” and his nonchalant reply when asked if he was to be our promised bird guide, was “A bird is a bird”! It did not take us long to realise he was a brilliant guide and knew exactly where to find the most interesting species. The reserve is mainly covered in brachystegia woodland with some grassland, but the camp itself overlooks a river. The main platform serves as the dining and sitting area and a walkway leads to the tents on stilts. Under the walkway Warthogs and the pretty little Nyala antelope search for food, and in fact Nyala are the commonest antelope in the Reserve. That night we were taken for a drive round the pans, stopping to look for **Green Coucals** on the way. Philip pointed out a **Cuckoo Falcon** on its nest and a **Southern Banded Snake Eagle**. There were a variety of waterbirds round the pans, including **Openbill Stork**, **Hadedda Ibis** and **African Spoonbill**. One of the most interesting sights was the co-operative fishing between a **Little Egret** and a **Reed Cormorant**. The **Reed Cormorant** was swimming close to the edge of the water and the Egret was stalking along in the shallows beside it and we actually watched it successfully catch a fish. It cannot have been coincidental as another pair were using the same technique. Palearctic waders were still around, including **Common** and **Wood Sandpipers** and **Greenshank**.

We enjoyed our sundowner beside the lake, keeping an eye out for the crocodiles which had slid into the water on our approach. While sipping our drinks we watched a **Woolly-necked Stork**, a **Yellow-billed Stork**, a **Hamerkop** and a pair of **Fish Eagles**. In the dark going back along the bush trail we came face to face with a huge giraffe illuminated in the lights of our safari vehicle. We had to wait for him to move, but it made a change from the usual confrontation with over-sized lorries on the narrow Wiltshire lanes! That night as we sat enjoying our after-dinner drinks on the Lodge veranda, hosted by Darren and Melissa, the raindrops began to fall, and we suspected that once again, like Nduna on the AOS expedition to Zimbabwe in 2000, the unseasonal weather might prove a problem for Ian’s photography.

Dawn broke with light rain and an overcast sky, but we decided to go out even if the light was not suitable for photography. Safari vehicles are restricted to the main roads in the Reserve when it is wet, but even so we saw some interesting species. Several flocks of **Crested Guinea-fowl** were spotted on the roads. This is a species of Guinea-fowl which prefers forested areas and we had not come across it before, but each flock numbered between 15 and 20 birds. A **Pink-throated Twinspot**, one of the specials for the area, darted across the road and

**Sombre Bulbuls** called from the bushes. A White Rhino family, bull, cow and calf were browsing only 50 yards from the road, and a Buffalo herd seemed curious to inspect the vehicle.

The fig trees around the camp attract a variety of birds and at “brunch” several **White-eared Barbets** were feeding on the fruit, along with **African Fruit Pigeons**. **Tawny-flanked Prinia** clung to the reeds below us and **Black Crake** scuttled about at the water’s edge, whilst a very damp **Little Bee-eater** sat preening its feathers on a sturdy reed. That evening, because of the rain, the only alternative was to go outside the camp and do some off-road motoring, but this proved to be quite profitable. On the airstrip **Kittlitz Plover** were feeding alongside **Crowned Plover** and **Grassveld Pipit**, but then Philip drove off with great confidence through the waist high grass and I kept wondering when we would fall into an Aardvark burrow or something similar. At one moment I thought he had got us completely “bushed” as we were surrounded by dense acacia bushes, but after some skilful manoeuvring he managed to steer the cumbersome safari landrover out onto the road. We saw **Black-bellied Korhaan**, **Black-shouldered Kite**, several **European Rollers** and a variety of smaller species.

The next morning in spite of a light drizzle we went out in the boat with Philip and cruised slowly along the river. The large patches of water lilies held **Purple Swamphen** (Gallinule), **Lesser Swamphen** (Allen’s Gallinule), **Openbill Stork** and **African Jacana**. Several **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** were hawking from the tall reeds, and a **Goliath Heron** took off and slowly flapped along the river. After a late breakfast we finally set off with Philip to the gate where our car had been parked. He escorted us some of the way along the laterite road in case the rains had made it impassable, but luckily it was still negotiable. We continued on our way south to St. Lucia, via Mbazwana and Hluhluwe along a brand new road with very light traffic.

In St. Lucia, a small seaside resort, we stayed at the Igwalawala Guesthouse, hosted by Tricia and Bruce. This Guesthouse is also recommended by BirdLife South Africa and once again proved to be an excellent place to stay. Within 15 minutes of our arrival, Alpha, a local bird guide who is just completing his training, had been summoned and agreed to go with us to find **Blue Cheeked Bee-eaters**, which he succeeded in doing in no time. We then drove to the beach, but by this time it was raining again, although even a brief scan through the binoculars turned up **Caspian Tern** and **Kittlitz Plover**. Around the suburban gardens of St. Lucia we could hear the **Livingstone’s Louries** calling, but unfortunately they remained hidden. However, both **Trumpeter** and **Crowned Hornbills** made themselves visible by calling from the tops of trees. Near the Estuary there were big notices saying “Beware of Crocodiles” which was just as well as the neatly mown lawns and parkland belied the fact that there were dangerous predators around! The following morning we went out briefly with Alpha and in the surrounding trees he found **Yellow-bellied Bulbul**, **Terrestrial Bulbul**, **Rudd’s Apalis** and **Natal Robin**. Our brief stop in St. Lucia only gave us time to scratch the surface, but Harare beckoned.

Later that morning we left for Richards Bay to catch the plane back to Johannesburg and thence to Harare. A few miles out of St. Lucia we spotted a **Long Crested Eagle** sitting on a fencepost. Our final week in Zimbabwe was mostly spent doing family things, but on the last Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> March, we went with them to a farm just off the old Bulawayo road to buy some cycads for Amanzi Lodge. The owners had put up a birdtable in the garden with seeds and fruit, and as we sat on the verandah, we were surprised at the number of species visiting the feeding station, including **Heuglin’s Robin**, **Redfaced Mousebirds**, **Cutthroat Finches** and **Arrowmarked Babblers**.

Altogether during our trip we saw over 200 species, although we could have seen many more if we had not been concentrating on photography. It was a wrench to leave the family, but like the swallows, we will be flying south again in the autumn.



### **A.O.S PORTLAND WEEKENDS**

(Hillary Nash)

The Portland weekend is an annual event in the AOS (mini) expeditions calendar. Support for it has varied from an all time low of 3 in 1998 to a convivial group of 16 in 2003. It always has something to offer; the Observatory at the Bill can produce spectacular movements of migrating birds or good sea watches. Like any observatory it can have its dull moments, but with the RSPB Reserves of Radipole and Lodmoor within easy reach there is always something to look at. Ferrybridge, conveniently placed midway between the Bill and Weymouth, is always worth a scan and even if there are no birds around, a sharp look out for the Yellow Headed Ticket Sticker is necessary. We have a night out on the Saturday which has always proved successful, even if it makes the dawn chorus a bit of struggle.

### **LIST OF BIRD SPECIES SEEN 1999 TO 2004**

<u>English Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			X			
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	X					
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	X	X	X			X
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	X	X		X	X	X
Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	X	X	X		X	
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>		X				
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>			X	X	X	
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>			X			
Gannet	<i>Sula bassana</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	X	X	X		X	X

Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristorelis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			X	X	X	X
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		X	X		X	X
[Black Swan]	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>					X	
Canada Goose	<i>Anser canadensis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
[Barnacle Goose]	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	X	X	X		X	
[Snow Goose]	<i>Anser caerulescens</i>		X			X	
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			X			
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	X	X	X		X	X
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			X			
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>		X	X	X	X	
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	X	X	X		X	X
Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>				X		
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>					X	X
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	X			X	X	
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	X	X		X	X	X
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	X		X	X		
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	X		X		X	X
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		X		X		
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	X		X		X	
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			X	X	X	X
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ringed Plover	<i>Chararius hiaticula</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
Knot	<i>Calidris canuta</i>	X					X
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>					X	
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>					X	X
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	X	X	X		X	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	X		X	X		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	X				X	
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	X		X		X	
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				X	X	
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	X		X		X	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>						X
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			X		X	X
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	X	X		X		
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	X		X	X		
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>						
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>						X
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>						
Parasitic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		X	X			
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	X	X	X			
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		X				

Sandwich Tern	<i>Stena sandvicensis</i>		X		X	X	
Common Tern	<i>Sterno hirundo</i>						
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>				X		X
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			X	X		
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>						X
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>				X		
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			X	X	X	
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>					X	
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			X	X	X	
Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	X		X		X	
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	X	X	X		X	X
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	X	X	X		X	X
Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Mtacilla cinerea</i>						X
Wren	<i>Trolodytes troglodytes</i>	X		X	X	X	X
Hedge Accentor	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	X		X		X	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola ruberta</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	X	X	X	X	X	
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			X	X	X	
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	X		X	X		
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	X			X		
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			X		X	
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>					X	
Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>					X	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	X			X		
Icterine Warbler	<i>Hippolais icterina</i>					X	
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	X		X		X	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>					X	X
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				X	X	X
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>			X	X		X
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					X	
Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	X		X			
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	X					X
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>						X
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			X	X	X	X
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rose-coloured Sparling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>					X	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X

Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	X	X	X		X	X
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>			X			
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	X	X				
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>					X	
	<i>Total Species</i>	84	72	93	77	97	74



### **Portland 2004**

(Maj Andrew Bray)

Portland is always a delight and was one of the events in the diary for September that I was looking forward to. There is always something that turns up that I do not have on my list. I still have lots of blanks in my British List, never mind the rarities that turn up. We tend to meet up on Friday and like all good meetings some of the group arrive early and some drift in when they can. The meeting point for all is the Pulpit and this year they did not have advance warning of the AOS and when we left they were down to one type of keg bitter left on tap. The food is good, the drink flows and the chatter constant as we all catch up on what is happening. The next morning is an early start and for a weekend it is early. We are up, dressed, refreshed with a cup of tea and standing at the quarry as the light wakes the bids up. An early morning stroll around the Bill and it is back to the Observatory for breakfast. It was mild when we set off but the wind decided to blow and after Breakfast we had all added layers of clothing. This year the Bill was very quiet as it had been for all September. The only birds in any numbers were Swallows and Linnets. As there were no rarities to hunt we decided to head to Ferrybridge where to our horror the café had yet to open. We picked up a few species of waders (including a hopping Knot) and then off to Radipole Lake. At the office we picked up



David Vaughan, Richard Seargent, Roger Dickey, Bob Hayward, Dave Pentelow, Di Hayward

Water Rail, Snipe and Bearded Tit. It was still early in the day so a walk around the site was required. The only stranger to the normal life around the reserve was the chap with the dyed hair and badly applied lipstick! It was then a trip to Lodmoor that was bereft of birds adding only a couple of more species to the list. We did pick up a tick of another society who had crammed into the shelter; it had started to rain. The decision of back to the cars and join the traffic to get through town was good. We were going back to Ferrybridge for lunch. The rain was lashing down and the wind was blowing straight into our

faces if we wanted to look at the birds. Lunchtime of burgers and tea in the lee of the wind

under the café shelter was a drawn out affair. Eventually the rain died down and we went back to the Isle stopping at the Verne. (The lead car did try to take us to one of Her Majesty's homes but the drawbridge was fortunately up). Here we looked down the cliffs onto the old naval barracks that was in the process of being destroyed. The only sight was the flock of mixed hirundines swooping about below us. There was time for another walk around the Bill before we headed into town for the Saturday Night curry. I definitely did not drink enough beer as at 0130 hrs I gave in and de-camped from the dorm to find a quiet space to get some sleep. The noise from the other bunk in the room was over-powering especially as the duo had a half-beat tempo going on. Now I thought I was the wimp only to discover that the hardened Marine who joined us had to do the same minutes later. From now on all those who emit loud noises are to be specifically allocated their own room, hopefully out of earshot from the rest of us. On Sunday morning I had to drag myself out of bed ready for the early stroll to confirm that there were lots of Chif-Chafs around in the scrub. I'm sorry, some of them were Willow Warblers but I was on default setting. Sea watching went badly, Gull, Gull, Shag, Gull, Gannet, Gull so the group headed off. I walked along the cliff for a short while only to see Hillary with bins looking down at the rocks gesturing for me to join him. At last my new bird, a Purple Sandpiper. I had missed it last year but it gave us a great display in full view. A smile on my face, I went to catch up the others. Some were striding out and I eventually caught up with two stragglers for us to be given a display of flying as a Peregrine and two Herring Gulls had a 'barney' in the air. They took it in turns mobbing each other that ended in a draw. Then there was the strange bird which we eventually decided was a Dunnock though much lighter than normal. Of course today the sun was shining and the wind had dropped. My final event was eating breakfast at the Observatory looking out to sea to pick up the passing traffic – Gull, Gull, Gull, Gannet, Gull, Gull. It was time to go home via the bookshop!

## **BIRDLIFE IN WYBUNBURY**

(Rodney Walker)

The village of Wybunbury, in Cheshire, existed well before Norman times and was once of considerable importance. It has seen many a battle between the English and the Welsh and later between the Roundheads and the Cavaliers. It is surrounded by battlefield walks. Its rolling countryside hides a number of lakes most of which are dedicated to fishing, a river, a large ex-quarry and a number of bogs of which more later.





I live on the edge of a newish housing estate with a tenth of an acre of grassy garden which is all on a 45° slope. But I overlook fields down to the river and have a tiny wood and a small boggy area just outside my boundary at the bottom of the garden; overgrown in Summer the latter is a water source of great excitement for the birds in Winter. I set up a number of feeders on my two small trees this winter, above cat height (and I pelted any squirrel which came near me!) and waited to see what might happen. The result was remarkable and every day I saw over 20 species of garden birds in this small area. Regular visitors included a large family of tree sparrows, coal and marsh tits, a marauding sparrowhawk pair, a pair of bullfinches, siskin, nuthatches and greater spotted woodpecker. One morning I was thrilled to see a common snipe in the bog totally ignoring a large ginger tom which, in the end, was chased away by an angry cock pheasant. 8 March produced my best day with 35 species seen in and around my garden – not bad for a wee garden. The bog that day brought in a passing cormorant, four common gulls, a reed bunting, two greylag geese, and a number of Canada geese. At one stage there were 5 very red-breasted robins on the fence. In the trees my favourite song thrush was singing his heart out – the collared doves were practising their love-making with gusto – and families of goldfinches, greenfinches and long-tailed tits were attacking the teasels and the hawthorn buds. Above this scene the local buzzard, a kestrel and a jay were taking it in turns to keep everyone on their toes.

Just after I returned at the beginning of May 2004 from a month's journeying in Brazil, Ecuador and Texas I and a close friend spent an afternoon wandering around the village looking for the Spring wildlife activities. We started off towards the Tower of Wybunbury. This 500 year old church tower has been both a landmark and a point of ridicule for centuries. It has outlived 5 churches – “as crooked as Wybunbury steeple” being a common turn of phrase – and has been kept standing, even though the underlying soil is an aqueous fusion of salt and sand, by engineering ideas which were then passed on to Pisa.



In the village we passed canoodling pigeons and collared doves (it was that time of the year), a gang of cheeky jackdaws (most of whom live in the Tower) and the normal mixture of garden birds. Once out in the lower lying countryside we met the local fox who was stalking a cock pheasant and some red-legged partridges all to no avail. The giant oaks close to the old maternity home were full of chaffinches, chiffchaffs, greenfinches and tits. Then across the

fields to some new ponds (an entrepreneur farmer offered the soil to some developers and got 3 free ponds in return!) where Canada and Greylag geese were feeding along with mallards, coots and moorhens. The lapwings were back and swooping overhead and a pair of buzzards were being attacked overhead by a brutish gang of rooks, the local bully boys. One Canada goose was on its nest and well camouflaged amongst the rotting tree stumps but I could see it watching me as I moved around the pond playfully testing it. The pond is all of 6 weeks old and it was great to see mallard, tufted duck, coot and common sandpiper already in occupation.

Next we moved on to the farmland of our tame rare breeder. He has managed to produce some of the most powerful silage I have ever met presumably to feed his mixture of special hairy cattle, long-horned sheep, bad-tempered goats and huge rabbits. Lambs of all ages were harassing their tired mothers whilst wild rabbits were rushing in and out of the banks evading the next pair of buzzards. The farm hedgerows were teeming with dunnock, wrens, goldfinches, sparrows, blackbirds, great and blue tits. And the robins were in multitudinous numbers; all are almost tame and enjoy a good chat with passing walkers! Soon we were passing another of Wybunbury's natural treasures, Wybunbury Moss.



The Moss is a Nature Reserve and the 26 acre site is too dangerous to enter as it holds one of the finest examples of floating bog in the country. It consists of a deep, water filled hollow with an overlying raft of peat. Pine, birch and alder grow on the deeper sections with rushes and reeds elsewhere. Oh how I would like to get inside it for it is a real Aladdins' cave of wildlife and rare species of flora and fauna. As we walked past it the first swallows of the year were arriving and looking for nesting sites as were the house martins. On our way back up the hill to the village we had a marvellous view of a bullfinch pair pecking at the hawthorn buds and we heard a cuckoo calling from within the Moss.

So back home for a well-earned cup of tea – we had covered over 4 miles in a couple of hours and we had only been round half the village. The song thrush was already giving it zip from the tree top as if to say where have you been? And in the fields black-headed and herring gull were bug-hunting. And not far away are the hidden treasures of The Wirral and the Dee Estuary on one side and Leek on the other. Come and see us soon.



## **FURTHER TALES FROM THE NORTH WEST**

(Rodney Walker)

This weekend (19/20 June) saw me enjoying the wildlife on Anglesey (or Mon as the Welsh call it). Although the forecast was appalling the weather turned out to be sunny and refreshing, with a few showers. It was such fun to return to the island and to see so many birds that I felt I ought to write my findings down in the hope that others may wish to spend a bit of time there.

But before I begin I must just tell you about the previous weekend which I spent at home. It was the weekend of the annual Wybunbury Fig Pie Wakes. [And before I forget, those of you who are coming to the 2005 AGM at Leek Camp should learn up about the local tradition of “well dressing” before you come.] Since writing my previous article I have found out that Wybunbury was originally called “Wigbeorn’s stronghold”. Later the village became very poor and home-made pies were vital to the survival of the inhabitants. These were so important that in due course, I understand, the village held an annual wake which included fig pie races. Whether you believe any of this or not, today the Fig Pie Wakes have been resurrected. The celebration takes place in the graveyard of the old church between the two pubs! Morris dancing, tug-of-war between the clientele of the pubs, and lots of drinking warms everyone up before the rolling of the fig pies takes place. This year we also had a wonderful display from the “Biesada” Polish Song and Show Group – there was a large Polish refugee camp set up just outside the village just after the war. Anyone can enter the fig pie race provided you pay £1.50 for the privilege of obtaining the recipe (the contents cost a fiver and I am told the secret is to bake the pie as hard as you can). Over 200 competitors took part rolling their pies down the main road which has terrible cambers. It is more dangerous for the spectators than the competitors as many of the pies break up! The winning distance this year was about 50 metres! And I had the chance to climb the Tower (see my earlier article) and find out where the jackdaws nest. They live in amongst the bells a fact which probably explains why they make so much noise when they are together outside!

And so full of good cheer I set off to join friends on Anglesey. We started on the Saturday morning on the north western end of the Menai Straits at Newborough Warren and the Braint Estuary (SH425633) and first visited Llyn Rhos Dhu, a small inland lake. Here we saw Mallard, Little Grebe, Ruddy Duck, Tufted Duck, Coot, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, House Martins swooping to drink, and a family of Great Crested Grebe. To our amazement a Sedge Warbler displayed right in front of the hide.

We then set off for the beach alongside Newborough Forest. A Kestrel was working hard and not far away from it was a buzzard sometimes hovering in the high winds. The inland area which before Queen Elizabeth I’s reign was used for farming was then planted with marram grass to hold back the dunes. A combination of weaving marram grass and culling the rabbits gave the local plenty to do. Today between the dunes the grazing land is full of Marsh Orchids in all shades of pink and purple, Butterwort and Yellow Bird’s Nest. And the rabbits are back – we saw a lot of black bunnies amongst them too – someone has been let loose! We came

across a cuckoo sitting on its territorial post and Meadow Pipits galore on the dunes. In the shrubs there were Song and Mistle Thrushes, Whitethroat and Goldfinch families and flying overhead Lapwing and Swift. Once we reached the Forest we were serenaded by Wren, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Dunnock and Spotted Flycatcher families – parents and young enjoying the sunshine together. And on the beach dunes there were dune pansies, sea spurge and sand cat's-tail. I shall long remember the splashes of colour throughout the protected area; a haven for a wild flower enthusiast and a joy for all to see. This is a huge area including Llanddwyn Island and a must for anyone at this time of the year. But you need to be fit and prepared to wander long distances. We chickened out after 5 miles – we required sustenance.

Next we popped in to Llyn Parc Mawr on the East edge of the Forest which held Heron, Coot, Moorhen (thank goodness – I have still not recovered from not seeing a moorhen during our trip to Poland last year!) and Oystercatcher. A pair of Little Grebe had built a raft and were glued to it as it moved around the lake.

The afternoon and early evening ended in complete joy for the feminine members of the group with views of Puffin at South Stack (SH203823). This again is a must for anyone on the nature trail and we were lucky to see many of the expected breeding species. The Razorbills and Guillemots were in fine voice but still sitting tight as were the Puffins, Kittiwake and Lesser Black-backed Gulls; the Herring Gulls had lots of fluffy young around them as did a family of Shag. For me it was the flight of the Fulmars and the cavorting activities of two pairs of Chough which made my day. This perfect evening came to an end in Holyhead with a nice piece of fresh sea bass and an ale or two.

The next morning we returned in less clement weather to the RSPB site called Penrhosfeilw (“The Ranges”) where we were treated to an air-sea rescue training exercise on the cliff tops. But in amongst this excitement the Skylarks and Meadow Pipits continued their aerial displays and we had good views of Stonechat and Linnet and in particular the latter's young brood. One pair were clearly starting their second family, mating all of two metres from me. What bare-faced cheek! Again the seaside flowers were in full bloom and we were only sorry that we had forgotten our flower book. Furthermore we came across a multitude of butterflies including the silver-winged blue – I really must invest in a butterfly book too!

Lunch was missed in the excitement of the Tern colony at Cemlyn Bay (SH335935). The Sandwich Tern and Black-headed Gull chicks were thick on the ground and some were already swimming. Watching them was somewhat hazardous with parents flying close overhead with mouths full of fish and the noise reminded me of adventures with Sooty Tern on Ascension Island. The Arctic and Common Terns were still sitting tight. A rather bemused Sanderling and Redshank were wandering in amongst the chicks I reckon wondering what had hit them.

Over 60 species of bird were seen by us, “beginners”. Maybe we should try an AGM weekend on Anglesey but if not it is definitely worth a visit at any time of the year. We just happened to pick a warm, productive and fun weekend during the breeding season and we only visited a few of the opportunities the island offers.

## **BIRDLIFE IN WYBUNBURY – JULY SEQUEL**

(Rodney Walker)



When I last wrote about Wybunbury birdlife I mentioned some new ponds in the vicinity. On 10 July we took another stroll (2 hours) around the village and what we saw is worth recording. Wandering through the old quarries (which I am determined should become a wildlife park - one day – soon!) we first came across two young families of tufted duck on one of the fishing lakes – no sign of the male in either case – and a mute swan. Then to our surprise we came across a juvenile (but already large) cuckoo flitting around the shale piles, with strong marks on its grey chest and brown back. On the next lake we saw coots, moorhens, Canada geese, black-headed gulls and a tufted duck pair – no chicks this time.

But as usual I have gone down a “rabbit hole” and must now return to the new ponds. What a change there had been in only a couple of months. Fortunately most of the Canada geese seemed to have moved on leaving one young family only (ugh - next year I suppose there will be a multitude!). On the main new pond we saw coots, moorhens, mallard and tufted ducks. Swooping and drinking there were swallows, swifts, house and sand martins and then to our delight a little grebe with a youngster appeared. How do they find their way to a new pond especially as I have never seen one on any of the other lakes in the area? A solitary lapwing was flapping over the pond and landed nearby so allowing the photograph. Suddenly on the fence beside us appeared a pair of reed buntings both in full distinct plumage. Wow!

So on to the final pond where again we saw a young tufted duck family – and guess what there was no male to be seen. So do we have only one male in our district? – lucky chap! On our way home we were surrounded by house martin families flying low over the fields clearly talking to each other and then a different, agitated sound - in the distance we could hear a pair of buzzards calling – they appeared to be under attack as last time by a gang of rooks. They were soon wheeling around the sky above Wybunbury Moss.



## **TWO LOCAL SURPRISES AND A JOURNEY DOWN MEMORY LANE**

(Rodney Walker)



Before I begin my latest tale I have to tell you what I saw out of my kitchen window last week. The local farmer had just cut his grass and it was laid out in lines in the field. To my utter surprise there walking up the field in perfect line abreast (à la Horse Guards Parade) but in separate lanes, from left to right, were a hare, a pheasant and a fox. They appeared totally oblivious of each other. Or were they having me on? They all survived to tell another tale as have I! And now as I am writing this the cock pheasant has returned to the field with his hen and young family perhaps for him to tell them the story I have just told you – what is the pheasant equivalent of “swinging the lamp”?

A couple of weeks ago a friend of mine called out a washing-machine man to repair a faulty machine. It was merely a matter of clearing the fluff which quickly done meant that he had to chat for a while to get his money’s worth! He said that he loved fishing and that his favourite spot was catching salmon on the Dee at Bangor-on-Dee or Bangor-Is-y-Coed (Bangor below the wood). He also told her that he had seen kingfishers close to the bridge over the river. As she had never seen one she persuaded me to join her last Sunday on a kingfisher hunt. So off we went to Bangor (Ban means “place” and gor means “choir” – place of the choir) where parts of the church dedicated to St Dunawd were built in 1300. Today’s rector is the Reverend Iris McIntyre de Romero, an interesting combination of names with no doubt some history attached! But Bangor’s history is much older; the Romans (50 to 400 AD) called it Bovinium; the Saxons - Bancornaburg. The bridge over the Dee, built in 1660, is still magnificent and beside it today is one of the few coracle makers still working. On arrival we saw lots of house and sand martins swooping over the river. A chirping under the bridge led us to a family of grey wagtails flitting around the shingle bank. We wandered upstream along the river bank seeing goldfinches, green finches, house and tree sparrows bathing together on the water’s edge but no sign of a kingfisher. It then began to rain and we almost called it a day. But we are made of sterner stuff and decided to give downstream a bit of a chance. Immediately one leaves the village you see tall sandbanks on the north side of the river and as we approached it was clear that these banks were the home of tens of sand martins – the river and the fields were under permanent patrol by these lovely birds who flew very close to us on their way home with bugs in their beaks. I suddenly stopped, having seen what I thought might be a heron perched

on an old tree which had fallen into the water. I grabbed the binos but it was only a piece of straw – so I went on my way. A few moments later I was summoned back – “what is that under the tree?” “Oh it’s a piece of straw”. “No it isn’t you stupid old b....”. One glance through the binos and there it was, cool as a cucumber, surveying us and the river and wisely keeping out of the rain. Both banks of the river and the area which is under-visited will be worth another trip soon.

At the beginning of July I decided to return to the west coast of Cumbria where I had lived 40 years ago. The first afternoon (whilst Maria Sharapova was winning her Wimbledon title!) was spent at Hodbarrow lagoon, a RSPB site south west of Millom. The reserve occupies the site of a former iron-ore mine and is a haven for wildlife, birds and plant species. The marsh and bee orchids were in abundance but it was the colony of breeding terns which made the day. Sandwich, common and little terns were feeding their young on a sandbar whilst large families of great crested grebe were floating in amongst the reeds. I am told that a day on the reserve, which is totally open to the public and the elements, will produce upwards of 40 species. But it was the next morning’s visit to Eskmeals which was the main purpose of my journey. My father had commanded the P&EE range there in the 60s and I had not been back since. The house we lived in is now almost derelict but there is a brand new shiny red post box outside it! But the Eskmeals Dunes Nature Reserve made up for any sadness at that.

It wasn’t a reserve in the 60s but today it is a must for any visitor to that beautiful part of the country and becomes one of my favourite walks. One can spend a whole day there provided the ranges are not being used. It is home to the natterjack toad. At this time of year the flora is magnificent, tucked in amongst the marram grass.



Birds foot trefoil, hearts easy pansy, verbascum negram, restharrow, biting stonecrop, red clover, and wild thyme are in abundance mixed with sea bindweed and 3 types of spurge. It was interesting to hear about the campaign to remove the buckthorn from the reserve. Guess who introduced it? Yes the War Office planted it to stabilise the sand dunes on the range and it has spread and swamped the natural inhabitants; I was reminded of mesquite on Ascension Island! Gatekeeper and common blue butterflies were competing with small pearl-bordered fritillaries on all the flowers. And in the dunes a young family of stonechats were watching my every move. I also saw a family of kestrel – 5 of them – rather like the Red Arrows - patrolling the sky above. Meadow pipit and skylark were skydiving whilst rock and water pipits were dipping in and out of the marsh and the heron stood imperially on its piece of ground. Out on the estuary were a young family of redshanks competing for dry land with great blacked back and lesser black backed gulls, black-headed gulls, rooks and oystercatchers. In the muddy alleyways a curlew and common sandpiper were having a field day. In the hedgerows goldfinches and green finches were skittering about and under the railway viaduct I surprised a sparrowhawk devouring its meal. And in the fields as I left were small flocks of fieldfares. It was worth the journey down memory lane and maybe Eskmeals is a future spot for an AOS meeting.





### **SOMERSET GATHERING – 25 JANUARY 2004**

(Lt Col Roger Dickey)

This annual event is evolving at each ‘gathering’ with the only common theme being meeting up for a beer or two on Saturday night in the Three Old Castles, Keinton Mandeville, supper with Roger and Helen Dickey and a ‘full English’ the following morning.

Having successfully tried Seaton Marshes the year before, a disastrous decision to twitch a Dusky Warbler and Siberian Chiffchaff at Taunton delayed the business of getting into the Levels to see what was around. There are some superb sites on the Levels for waterfowl and waders, and raptors are always evident, but whatever the weather, the Levels are worth visiting early in the day for maximum activity. This year a spurious sighting of Penduline Tits from ‘outsiders’ coincided with sightings of Bearded Tits by the local warden but the group had only distant calls to record and no positive sightings.

Rather than provide a full account of the day, a list of birds seen on Sunday 25 Jan 04 is attached, with side notes. For 2005, the intention is once more to meet up on Saturday (early arrivals get a guided tour of the fields and tracks of Keinton Mandeville), gag Richard Seargent’s siren calls to go and look at ‘rare LBJs’, restrict Dave Pentelow to only 2 pork sausages, rashers, eggs and mushrooms for breakfast, and head out to the Levels early.

Ham Wall, Westhay Moor and Catcott Lows, all within close proximity, between them provide a huge variety of birds and a mix of habitat from reed-beds, through ponds to hedgerows and woodland, including at the Lows, controlled flooding to encourage waders. Should this not be enough, Cheddar Reservoir is only a short distance to the north and will be worth checking during the afternoon if time permits.

## BIRD RECORDS FOR SOMERSET GATHERING – 25 JANUARY 2004

(Collator: R C Dickey, Keinton Mandeville, Somerton, Somerset)

SPECIES	REMARKS
<b>Great Crested Grebe</b> <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Several birds seen on larger ponds.
<b>Little Grebe</b> <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Seen in small numbers on ponds.
<b>Cormorant</b> <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Regular over flights and small numbers in and roosting close to ponds.
<b>Little Egret</b> <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Seen towards end of day as single birds.
<b>Grey Heron</b> <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Common bird across the Levels.
<b>Mute Swan</b> <i>Cygnus olor</i>	Most common swan seen in singles, pairs and flock of up to 20 birds.
<b>White-fronted Goose</b> <i>Anser albifrons</i>	Two seen with Greylags on Ashcott Heath.
<b>Greylag Goose</b> <i>Anser anser</i>	Seen as above.
<b>Wigeon</b> <i>Anas penelope</i>	Seen and heard at Westhay.
<b>Mallard</b> <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Common on all ponds
<b>Gadwall</b> <i>Anas strepera</i>	Small numbers seen in most ponds.
<b>Shoveller</b> <i>Anas clypeata</i>	Seen in most ponds and waterways.
<b>Teal</b> <i>Anas crecca</i>	Seen in numbers, widespread.
<b>Pochard</b> <i>Aythya ferina</i>	Quite large numbers of birds at Ham Wall and Westhay.
<b>Tufted Duck</b> <i>Aythya marila</i>	Concentrated in one pond at Westhay.
<b>Goldeneye</b> <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Very good views of male birds at Westhay.
<b>Marsh Harrier</b> <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Only brief views at Ham Wall. Normally seen more frequently over the reeds.
<b>Sparrowhawk</b> <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Two birds seen in different locations, female hunting the open fields of the Levels. Always a hunting pair at Keinton Mandeville.
<b>Buzzard</b> <i>Buteo buteo</i>	Frequently seen across the Levels but only as single birds at this time of year.
<b>Kestrel</b> <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common across the area and 2 birds seen roosting at Buscott Lane, N of Ashcott.
<b>Merlin</b> <i>Falco columbarius</i>	One dark bird seen flying close to ground near Greylake. Put up Lapwings. Over-winter on the levels and move back north to the Mendips in summer.
<b>Pheasant</b> <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Not many birds seen and only males.
<b>Water Rail</b> <i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Heard but in area where several previously seen at Westhay.
<b>Coot</b> <i>Fulica atra</i>	Common on the larger ponds .
<b>Moorhen</b> <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Common on all waterways and ponds.
<b>Lapwing</b> <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Fairly common and seen in flocks of up to 50 birds.
<b>Snipe</b> <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Seen only as split flock of 10 and 25 birds coming in to pond at London Drove, Westhay.

SPECIES	REMARKS
<b>Black-headed Gull</b> <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Regular sightings especially in built up areas.
<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b> <i>Larus fuscus</i>	Occasional birds as pairs and with Herring Gulls.
<b>Herring Gull</b> <i>Larus argentatus</i>	Flocks across the levels and small numbers in transit.
<b>Great Black-backed Gull</b> <i>Larus marinus</i>	More common in close proximity to Taunton. Also with Herring Gulls.
<b>Stock Dove</b> <i>Columba oenas</i>	Only pair seen at Westhay late in day.
<b>Woodpigeon</b> <i>Columba palumbus</i>	Very common all over the Levels
<b>Collared Dove</b> <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Common but in built up areas.
<b>Little Owl</b> <i>Athene noctua</i>	After searching in early morning, one bird found in orchard at dusk at KM. Can virtually guarantee this bird daily in KM.
<b>Green Woodpecker</b> <i>Picus viridis</i>	Seen and heard at different locations across the Levels.
<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b> <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Only sporadic views including at Ham Wall.
<b>Pied Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla alba</i>	Not common on Levels but seen in Taunton.
<b>Grey Wagtail</b> <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Good view of single bird at Westhay. Not uncommon on the streams running down to the Levels.
<b>Wren</b> <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Common sightings across area.
<b>Dunnock</b> <i>Prunella modularis</i>	Quite large numbers throughout the hedgerows.
<b>Robin</b> <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	More common off the Levels but still large numbers of single birds.
<b>Stonechat</b> <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Uncommon sighting but seen on a couple of occasions.
<b>Blackbird</b> <i>Turdus merula</i>	Common and in large numbers.
<b>Fieldfare</b> <i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Seen throughout day in flocks up to 12 and single birds. Also with Redwing.
<b>Song Thrush</b> <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Not rare but only few birds seen.
<b>Redwing</b> <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Seen with Fieldfares.
<b>Mistle Thrush</b> <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Occasional bird seen.
<b>Cetti's Warbler</b> <i>Cettia cetti</i>	Heard in several locations at Westhay.
<b>Chiffchaff</b> <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Several seen throughout day with lighter birds (Siberian?) seen at Taunton.
<b>Goldcrest</b> <i>Regulus regulus</i>	Good views at Shapwick.
<b>Long-tailed Tit</b> <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Small numbers when trees and high hedges around.
<b>Coal Tit</b> <i>Parus ater</i>	One bird only seen at Westhay.
<b>Blue Tit</b> <i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Common across region.
<b>Great Tit</b> <i>Parus major</i>	Common across region.
<b>Bearded Reedling</b> <i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	Families of up to 8 birds but only heard on this occasion.

SPECIES	REMARKS
<b>Jay</b> <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Not common as lack of oak woods but one bird seen above Levels near Ashcott.
<b>Magpie</b> <i>Pica pica</i>	Common sighting.
<b>Jackdaw</b> <i>Corvus monedula</i>	Up to 20 pairs around rooftops in KM.
<b>Rook</b> <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Common in sown fields and treetops.
<b>Carrion Crow</b> <i>Corvus corone</i>	Pairs common across Levels.
<b>Starling</b> <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Very common and in considerable numbers. Roosting flocks in the Levels of up to 100,000 birds during the winter.
<b>House Sparrow</b> <i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common around habitation.
<b>Chaffinch</b> <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Widespread across Levels.
<b>Greenfinch</b> <i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Not particularly common but seen in KM.
<b>Goldfinch</b> <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Small flocks widespread and with Redpoll.
<b>Redpoll</b> <i>Carduelis flammea</i>	High feeding flocks at Westhay and Taunton.
<b>Reed Bunting</b> <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Quite numerous but especially females in reedbeds.



### **ATHENS PARK – LONG-EARED OWL *ASIO OTUS***

(Col Simon Strickland)

Near my house in Greece (during my last tour) is the large Syngrou Park with numerous mixed habitats; olive, figs, pistachio and almond groves, open low heath, kitchen garden areas, thick low coniferous woodland and old mixed open woodland. Although it is surrounded by urban areas not that many people use it although dumped rubbish is a problem. Fortunately through a lack of funding it is left alone and does not suffer from the over-development of other parks. It is a haven for birds.

Over the last two winters I took to dusk and night walks, partly due to office hours, partly for the dogs and mostly to track down Scops Owls *Otus scops* and Little Owls *Athene noctua*, of which there are many. During these walks to my surprise and delight I came across Long-eared Owls. There is plenty of prey for all these species; insects, little birds, frogs, bats, voles, lizards and rats.

From these observations of thirteen sightings over fourteen months I can make some tentative points;

- Never heard to call, once clicked its bill.
- Eleven static sightings and two flying; eleven times seen sitting hunched on low (3 to 5 m) but open branch of mature coniferous tree; no ears visible except on one occasion. Never took up alarmed posture.
- On one occasion two, probably a pair.
- Once seen actually eating on perch; rat?
- Appears to live in old Magpie *Pica pica* nest, not confirmed.
- Only moved on very close approach and then a short distance to new low perch. Not concerned by dogs sniffing about.
- Seen in January, February, September, October, November & December.
- Flight slow but direct. Appears almost grey-ghost like and difficult to follow. Is the local species lighter than north European?
- Only seen in one small area of park of mature open mixed trees. Best method of sighting is to pick a clear night and spot the bird on a branch against the open sky. Avoid looking too high and concentrate on open bare branches. Silhouette is long but not too thin; plenty of body/tail below perch. Best period would seem to be dusk and just after.

