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BIRDING QUESTION

We ask this month's contributors: What is the bird you most overlook?

TIM GAINEY/ALAMY



Bo Beolens: Goldfinch – they can suddenly appear on feeders and stick to them, sometimes nodding off stuffed full

CHRIS GRADY/ALAMY



Joe Harkness: The Dunnock. Beautifully marked and enigmatic, yet criminally overlooked

IMAGBROKER/ALAMY



Dominic Couzens: Definitely the Stock Dove, damned by being the acceptable one among a noisy and notorious family

LIAM BUNCE/ALAMY



Ian Parsons: The Dunnock is always overlooked, but it shouldn't be! A beautiful singer and a great bird!"

IMAGBROKER/ALAMY



Urban Birder David Lindo: Garganey. Lurking among flocks of Teal they can be hard to pick out – especially the females

Hobby



SIMON STIRUP/ALAMY

Welcome



Patience is a virtue, of course, and has certainly been essential to all of us in getting through these strange times of lockdown.

So, I want to start by thanking you all for your support, and for your patience – we know there have been delays to some magazine deliveries, and supply problems at some shops, hopefully now sorted out, but let us know if you encounter any and we will try to sort them out as soon as possible.

Your patience is also required for lockdown birding, but as we show in this issue, the rewards can be great. My own highlight this month was a pair of Hobbies displaying over my garden, so it just goes to show that scanning the skies every chance you get, does pay off.

So, stay safe, keep watching your gardens and the skies above them, and let us know what you find.

Matt Merritt, editor

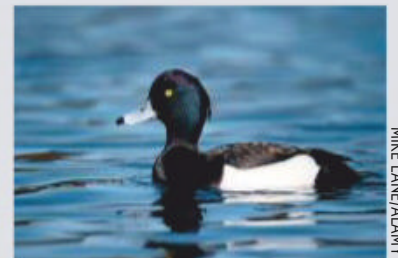


...and the Bird Watching team's choices



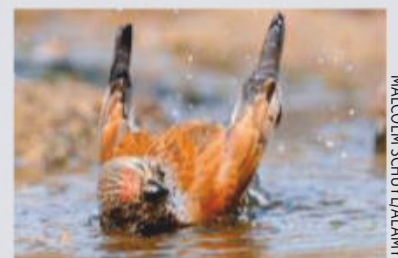
HLANDOWN/ALAMY

Matt Merritt: Jackdaw – full of character, and just look at that smart, subtle plumage!



MIKE LANE/ALAMY

Mike Weedon: Tufted Duck – a superb bird but so common it doesn't get a second glance!



MALCOLM SCHUY/ALAMY

Mike Roberts: Linnets – subtle yet, pretty, and forever tarred with the LBJ tag by some.

COVER: HOUSE SPARROW: ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY; GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER: CHRIS LLOYD/ALAMY; FIRECREST: SZYMON BARTOSZ/ALAMY

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TOO LATE...**

BIRDWATCHING.
CO.UK/MY200



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Matt Merritt, editor

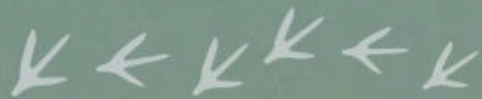
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YOUR BIRDING MONTH



JULY

BIRD OF THE MONTH

NIGHTJAR

We are blessed with some extraordinary birds in the UK. But is there a stranger one than the Nightjar, the good old 'Goatsucker'? Of course they are not so strange that they indulge in sucking at the teats of goats and cattle, as legend and ancient slander would have it. Better the name 'Bugeater', as that is what Nightjars are really about.

This nocturnally flying, cryptically-patterned insect-eater is the only member of its family that occurs with any frequency in this country, but it belongs to a family with nearly 100 species, worldwide. And these are in turn included in the same order as the frogmouths, potoos, owl-nightjars and the Oilbird (which is like a large, echo-locating nightjar).

They are not common birds, though, with about 4,600 singing males scattered rather thinly across suitable places (mainly heaths or recently clear-felled plantations), across our country. They appear from April onwards, staying to late summer (August), and this month is as good a month as any to see and hear one or more. And it is the seeing and hearing which lifts the Nightjar experience to another level. The song is a unique, mechanical yet musical, purring, so-called '*churr*'; a continuous musical rattling like a lower frequency version of the Grasshopper Warbler's song, but with shifts in pitch as the bird appears to breathe in and out. Males also have a croaky '*kooick*' call and indulge in a spot of wing-clapping in display flight, 'flashing' the white spots on the wing and outer tail at the same time.

The flight is light, buoyant and almost dancing, almost like one of those flying, flapping, wind-up toys rather than a real bird. Illustrations of flying birds just cannot convey the grace and magic of the Nightjar's flight. See it for yourself, if your eyes can cope with the gloaming, as this is the only time you will see them hunting; on the cusp of darkness.



A nightjar is perched on a thick, moss-covered tree branch. The bird's plumage is intricately patterned with dark brown, black, and light tan spots and streaks, providing excellent camouflage. Its long, thin tail feathers are visible, showing similar mottled patterns. The background is a solid, warm orange-brown color. In the upper right, there is a circular white graphic containing text. The branch is covered in bright green moss, and a small section of the bark is missing, revealing the lighter wood underneath.

DID YOU KNOW?

“All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars flying with the ricks” wrote Dylan Thomas in Fern Hill

FIVE TO FIND IN JULY

Traditionally, a quieter time of year, as birds are bringing up babies and less inclined to advertise their presence with song, July is also a time of relatively little migration. You may get the first returning waders from the Arctic breeding grounds, but otherwise, this is a time to enjoy the birds which are already around us. Like these five, for example.



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RARITY RATINGS

- ★★★★ Common, widely distributed
- ★★ Localised – always a treat
- ★ Very scarce or rare



1 RED KITE



In some parts of the country, such as where *Bird Watching* is put together, in Peterborough (Cambs), Red Kite is the most frequently seen bird of prey. The reintroduction scheme which started a few decades ago, has been a resounding success. From a handful of birds hanging on in Wales, there are now more than 1,500 breeding pairs in the country, mainly centred around areas of reintroduction and established populations (such as around the Chilterns and beyond, the East Midlands, Yorkshire, Dumfries and Galloway, near Inverness and so on, as well as across Wales). They are glorious birds, easily identified, with an easy languid flight on long drooping wings, a very long deeply forked rudder of a red tail and a pale head.

MARK SMITH/ALAMY

2 JUVENILE LONG-EARED OWL ★

The elusive Long-eared Owl is a widespread bird across the UK, but being secretive and nocturnal, and choosing out of the way woodland nest sites (usually in an old crows' nest), they are not often encountered and seem rarer than the 2,000-6,000 pairs that are estimated across the country. This is the time of year when night birding walks may reveal the famous 'squeaky gate' call of the rapidly growing fluffy, dark-faced youngsters. Listen and look (from a good distance), but do not disturb these wonderful and very sensitive birds.

DID YOU KNOW?

Even once able to fly and nearly full-sized, young Long-eared Owls continue to squeak!



SONJA JORDAN/ALAMY

3 COAL TIT



Of the commoner tits (and there are 680,000 pairs of these titches), the Coal Tit is the most fond of coniferous woodland. They really are tiny birds, smaller than a Blue Tit and almost (but not quite) down to Goldcrest size, and very cute, which is emphasised by their relatively large heads. That head is a bit like a Great Tit's, but there is a more obvious white stripe on the back. Coal Tits are grey and buff birds, though, lacking the greens and bright yellows of their larger cousins.



ALAN WILLIAMS/ALAMY

4 HOUSE MARTIN



Though it is tempting to say everyone loves House Martins, there are some house owners who don't see it as a privilege and an honour to have these 'black-and-white' beauties choosing to nest under their roof eaves. Some people even put up spikes and have been known to resort to the pressure hose to remove the 'offending' mud cup-nests (mainly because of perceived mess from the droppings). We know better, these are lovely, happy, joyous birds and their white rumps are one of the first proper ID features many a beginner birdwatcher gets to grip with. If you have House Martins near your home, spend a little extra time to enjoy them, this month.

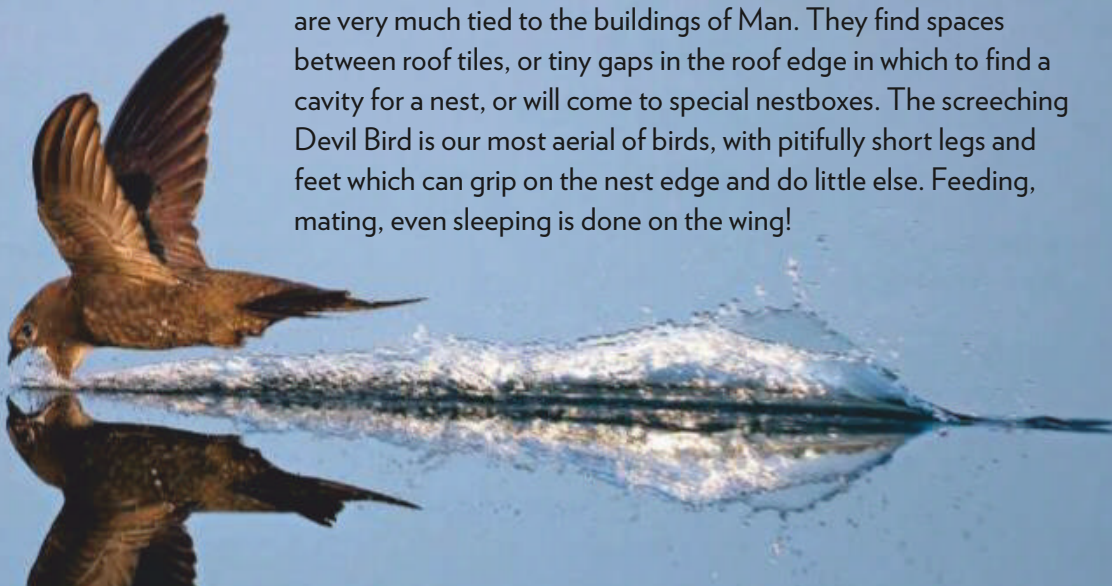


AN BUTLER PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

5 SWIFT



Like the House Martin, the nesting sites of the magnificent Swift are very much tied to the buildings of Man. They find spaces between roof tiles, or tiny gaps in the roof edge in which to find a cavity for a nest, or will come to special nestboxes. The screeching Devil Bird is our most aerial of birds, with pitifully short legs and feet which can grip on the nest edge and do little else. Feeding, mating, even sleeping is done on the wing!



ROBIN CHITTENDEN/ALAMY

RARITY PREDICTOR

It has been a very strange year for all sorts of reasons, and rare bird news has been severely curtailed and the bird news services have (sensibly) not been reporting birds which will spark a twitch. But we are still going to make rarity predictions!



FLPA/ALAMY

GREATER SAND PLOVER

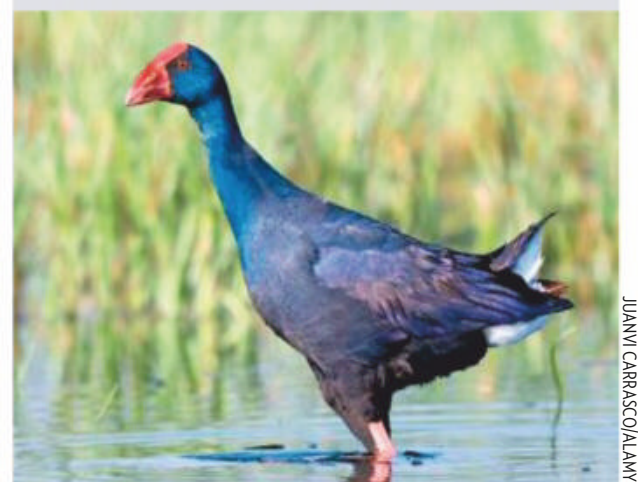
Most of the 20-odd Greater Sand Plovers which have occurred in the UK have been in summer (June to August), so now is as good a time as any to scan a suitable muddy beach for one of these chunky-billed Asian beauties.



GALLO IMAGES/ALAMY

AMUR FALCON

There have only ever been two Amur Falcon recorded in the UK. It is an Asian relative of the Red-footed Falcon, and the first example (in East Yorkshire, in autumn 2008) was initially misidentified as a Redfoot until it started to moult its underwing coverts. The second was a more distinctive first-summer female in south-western Cornwall, in July 2017.



JUANMI CARRASCO/ALAMY

PURPLE SWAMPHEN

This is a bird with only one accepted individual in the UK. It was first discovered at Minsmere RSPB, Suffolk at the end of July 2016, before relocating to Alkborough Flats, Lincolnshire (where it lingered into January 2017).

WHAT'S IN A NAME?



FULMAR

The Fulmar is a type of cliff-nesting petrel which looks, at a glance, a bit like a gull (being medium large, having a white head and grey wings). Indeed the 'mar' part of its name derives from an Old Norse name for a gull. The 'full' bit translates as foul; the whole referring to this gull-like seabird's habit of vomiting fishy stomach contents onto the faces of those who come too close to its nest!

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TRACKS & SIGNS

LITTLE OWL PELLETS

Many birds produce pellets: regurgitated packages of undigested material. Material that remains undigested includes things like fur, feathers, bones, teeth and chitin (ie insect skeletons). Most often when we think of pellets we think of owls. But we often forget the Little Owl. These tiddlers have slightly different diets from their larger cousins, and this is reflected in the pellets they produce. Little Owl pellets are smaller than other owls' (typically 2.5 x 1c.5cm), rounded at one end, and more pointed at the other. They usually contain insect skeletal elements, especially from larger insects such as beetles, which are a favoured food of Little Owls. In summer, this means the pellets often appear blue black. Look for Little Owl pellets beside or in buildings the owls roost in, or around hollow roosting or nesting trees. They can be dissected in the same way as other owl pellets, using tweezers and water.



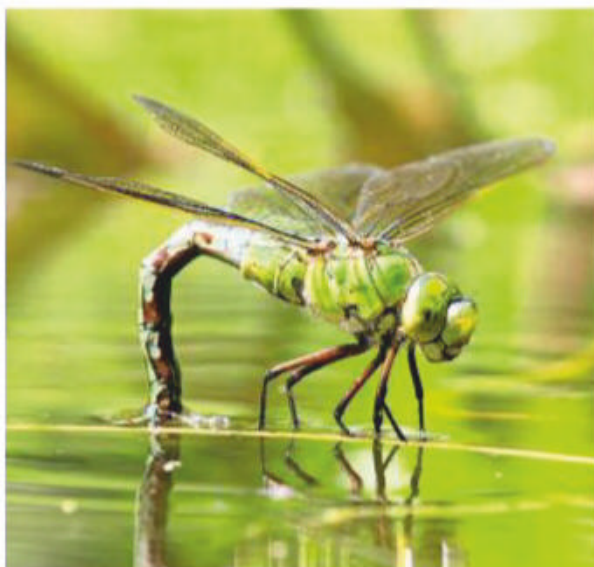
MINDEN PICTURES/ALAMY

FIELD CRAFT

PAN-SPECIES LISTING

During this year's extraordinary period of 'lockdown' many birdwatchers are increasingly becoming dependent on our gardens for a wildlife fix. Many of us are also looking beyond the world of birds and starting to notice other living things perhaps even for the first time. Why not embrace pan-species listing, concentrating on your own home patch?

Pan-species listing is all about identifying and recording all types of living organism you may encounter, including fungi, plants, lichen, and all sorts for animals including insects and spiders, crustacea (such as woodlice),



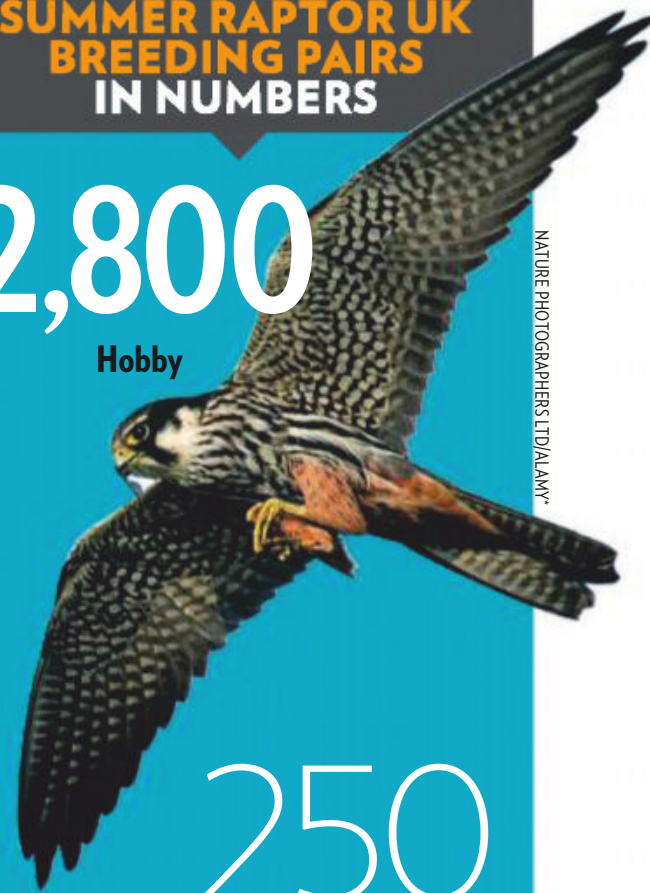
IAN WEST/ALAMY

myriapods, such as centipedes, worms and molluscs, and of course, mammals. You may be amazed by all the different things that live on you patch, no matter how small.

SUMMER RAPTOR UK BREEDING PAIRS IN NUMBERS

2,800

Hobby



NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

250

Osprey



BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

620

Hen Harrier

1,500

Peregrine and Merlin


Juvenile tits

Now is the time of year when strange looking birds appear. Not different species, just variations on what we are used to seeing. These are juvenile birds, not long fledged and often still hanging around with the rest of the family, partially dependent on the parents providing grub, or at least grubs! See if you can see any or all of the juveniles of our four commonest 'tit' species.



Great Tit

The theme with juvenile tits is that they tend to have the same basic patterns as their parents, but in slightly different colours. In the case of the Great Tit, the white bits (cheeks and wing-bars for example) are yellow; and the breast is a murkier yellow than the bright colour of the adults. Also the black colours of for example the head and throat are not quite black.



Blue Tit

Similarly to the juvenile Great Tit, Blue Tits look yellowish washed; so they have yellow (not white) faces and yellow wing-bars. They also lack the black bib of their parents and have duller greenish blue caps.



Coal Tit

And it the same story with juvenile Coal Tits, which look like look like miniature juvenile Great Tits, with a yellow wash on the face and underparts (and the 'white' spot on the nape). They also lack the broad black bib of their parents.



Long-tailed Tit

Long-tailed Tits are not, of course, true tits at all, and in accordance, their juveniles are not yellow-washed versions of the parents. Instead, the main distinctive feature is the dark brown head, apart from the whitish crown (adults have white cheeks). Juveniles also lack the pink feather tones of adults.

UK TIDES JULY

The times below are for high tide, when waders and wildfowl will be pushed closer to dry land...

Find the location closest to your destination and add or subtract the hours and minutes from the high tide time at London Bridge, below.

Date	Time	m	Time	m
1 W	10:05	6.46	22:33	6.46
2 Th	11:10	6.51	23:36	6.62
3 F			12:11	6.59
4 Sa	00:33	6.79	13:06	6.69
5 Su	01:26	6.94	13:54	6.76
6 M	02:15	7.05	14:39	6.80
7 Tu	03:01	7.09	15:22	6.79
8 W	03:45	7.02	16:01	6.69
9 Th	04:27	6.84	16:36	6.54
10 F	05:05	6.59	17:09	6.38
11 Sa	05:42	6.35	17:42	6.23
12 Su	06:19	6.13	18:20	6.08
13 M	07:02	5.94	19:06	5.89
14 Tu	07:55	5.78	20:11	5.73
15 W	08:58	5.72	21:28	5.73
16 Th	10:02	5.81	22:33	5.92
17 F	11:04	6.02	23:33	6.21
18 Sa			12:03	6.29
19 Su	00:26	6.50	12:54	6.53
20 M	01:14	6.74	13:42	6.69
21 Tu	02:00	6.93	14:26	6.80
22 W	02:45	7.08	15:09	6.87
23 Th	03:29	7.19	15:51	6.91
24 F	04:12	7.21	16:31	6.89
25 Sa	04:57	7.11	17:12	6.81
26 Su	05:42	6.91	17:56	6.70
27 M	06:33	6.67	18:45	6.56
28 Tu	07:29	6.44	19:45	6.42
29 W	08:31	6.28	20:54	6.33
30 Th	09:37	6.18	22:04	6.30
31 F	10:47	6.17	23:15	6.38

SOUTH WEST	NORTH WEST
Weston Super Mare (+5:05)	Whitehaven (-2:30)
Barnstaple (+4:30)	Douglas (-2:44)
Newquay (+3:32)	Morecambe (-2:33)
Falmouth (+3:30)	Blackpool (-2:50)
Plymouth (+4:05)	NORTHEAST
Torquay (+4:40)	Skegness (+4:29)
Bournemouth (-5:09)*	Grimsby (+4:13)
Portland (+4:57)	Bridlington (+2:58)
St Peter Port (+4:53)	Whitby (+2:20)
Swanage (-5:19)*	Hartlepool (+1:59)
Portsmouth (-2:29)	Blyth (+1:46)
Southampton (-2:53)	Berwick (+0:54)
SOUTHEAST	SCOTLAND
Ryde (-2:29)	Leith (+0:58)
Brighton (-2:51)	Dundee (+1:12)
Eastbourne (-2:48)	Aberdeen (-0:18)
Dungeness (-3:05)	Fraserburgh (-1:28)
Dover (-2:53)	Lossiemouth (-2:00)
Margate (-1:52)	Wick (-2:29)
Heme Bay (-1:24)	Lerwick (-2:50)
Southend on sea (-1:22)	Stromness (-4:29)
Clacton on sea (-2:00)	Scarabster (-5:09)
EAST ANGLIA	Stornoway (+5:30)
Felixstowe Pier (-2:23)	Gairloch (+5:16)
Aldeburgh (-2:53)	Oban (+4:12)
Lowestoft (-4:23)	Greenock (-1:19)
Cromer (+4:56)	Ayr (-1:44)
Hunstanton (+4:44)	Campbeltown (-1:12)
WALES	Girvan (-1:51)
Colwyn Bay (-2:47)	Kirkcudbright Bay (-2:25)
Holyhead (-3:28)	IRELAND
Barmouth (-5:45)	Londonderry (-5:32)
Aberystwyth (-6:11)	Belfast (-2:47)
Fishguard (+5:44)	Donegal (+4:20)
Swansea (+4:42)	
Milford Haven (+4:37)	
Cardiff (+5:15)	

*Approximate times due to large variance between the month's neap and spring tides. All times are GMT.

Beyond Birdwatching

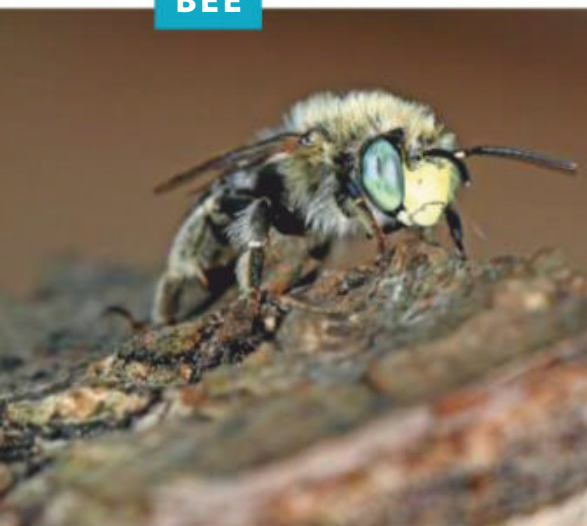
Focus on insects and flowers during July, **James Lowen** says – particularly if COVID-19 confines you to the garden

AWASH WITH ARGENTINE

One of our largest butterflies, Silver-washed Fritillary seems to be doing well, spreading to new areas and even being seen in gardens.



BEE



Flower fairy

Flower bees are robust bees, some of which nest in walls or cliffs. The UK has five species, although one is very rare indeed. Green-eyed Flower Bee is the most enchanting, with huge verdant gems for eyes flanking a largely yellow face. This is a specialist of southern England's heathlands, where it nests in sandy, typically south-facing slopes including small, soft cliffs.

INSECT

Heading northwards

July is the start of orthopteran season proper, inviting us to celebrate the geographical success of the Long-winged Conehead. Once considered rare enough in Britain to be part of the Red List of nationally-threatened animals, a warming climate has helped this small green bush-cricket spread northwards at quite a lick. With a name deriving from its steeply angled head, this insect inhabits rough grassland, woodland rides and dry heathland.

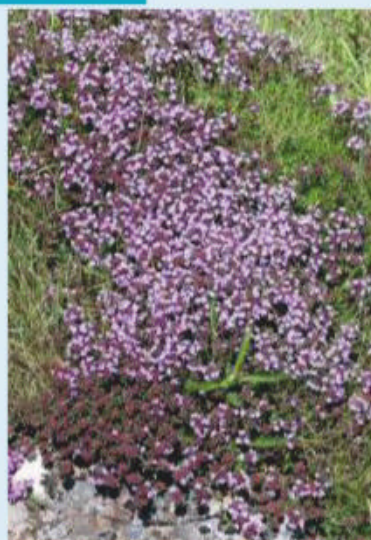


PLANT

Sting in the tale

Gasteruption jaculator may lack an English moniker, but the scientific name of this slender parasitic wasp more than makes up for it. 'Gast' means stomach and 'jaculator' is effectively a javelin; so the scientific name essentially means 'javelin that erupts from the stomach'. Both sexes have long bodies, including a distinct 'neck', but the female's ovipositor (egg-laying device) of the female is what makes the species very noticeable. It occurs throughout England and is a common visitor to garden flowers.

PLANT



PLANT

World of wonder

It may not be rare and it may not even be native, but spiky clumps of Weld (aka Dyer's Rocket) always please my botanist eye in mid-summer. Their thrusting lemon-lime flowers speak of determination, and their abundance on poor soils – road verges, field margins, waste ground and the like – inspires thoughts of resurgent nature.

Whale of a Thyme

Wild Thyme is a feature of a pleasing variety of landscapes throughout Britain, including short turf and bare ground on dry soils, chalk downland, upland grassland, rocky heathlands and cliff-tops. Attractively, it forms dense mats of vibrant pink – but, personally, I find it a shame that the foliage is only weakly scented.

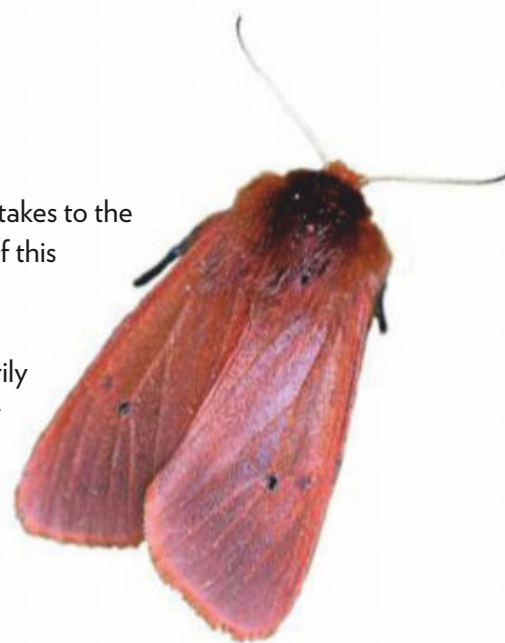


PICTURES: JAMES LOWEN

MOTH

Tyger, Tyger burning bright

The year's second generation of Ruby Tiger takes to the wing this month. Intriguingly, the new crop of this fiercely garbed moth is nocturnal – and thus commonly caught in garden moth traps – whereas their spring predecessors are primarily diurnal. Occurring throughout Britain (albeit locally further north), this attractive creature is twice as common now as in 1970.





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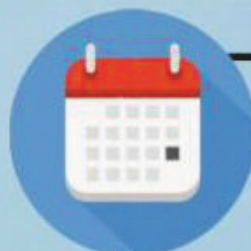


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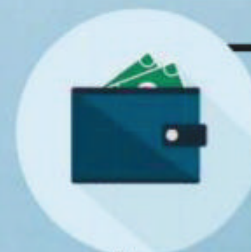
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Weedon's World

Thanks to the need to get his bike's bearings fixed, Mike just happened to find his best bird of the year!

As I said last month, Peterborough's easily accessible (by bike) Ferry Meadows CP, has been a key component of my 'lockdown exercise' routine. I have been going there just about every morning before work (at home, of course) and I've never enjoyed a spring in the park as much as this one! In the last month (it is, as I write, mid-May) I have added 15 birds to my FMCP year list. And these have included some great birds, such as Black Tern (x2), Hobby, Nightingale (x2), Whinchat (x2) and even a fly-through Whimbrel.

But my best bird of the lockdown period came on 1 May. In fact, it is also one of the best birds I have seen this year and certainly my best 'find'. You can, of course, guess what it is from the picture on the right.

Here is its story. Having been cycling every day for exercise, my poor bike was getting a bit of an extra working over. This was particularly true toward the end of April, when I had a couple of weeks' holiday and cycle-birding was the best thing to do! This, in turn, led to a bit of looseness in the bearings of the rear wheels...

My son Eddie and I had planned to do some slightly longer cycling expeditions over the first weekend in May, so I wanted a bike I could rely on. Hence, I phoned a couple of bike shops and found one that was open which happened to be on the main entrance road from the south into Ferry Meadows! So, I booked my bike in for 9.30am on 1 May.

Come May Day, I was in the park nice and early and birding, as usual. I enjoyed listening to the two wonderful Nightingales in full song in a scrubby, Hawthorn-packed area called Coney Meadow. I ticked Reed Warbler for my FM2020 year list. I even found a family of Grey Wagtails I hadn't previously known about (with fully grown young). By 9am I had already racked up more than 60 species, and was thinking of drifting down to the bike shop (intending to walk back into the park and do some more birding, while the cycle guys did their magic).

At 9.25am, I was just cycling out of the park, heading to the bike menders, thinking about nothing, when my ever-active birding ears thought they heard something unusual. I stopped and listened: "Probably a misheard bit of Wren song," I almost said out loud.

But then the bird sang again: it was the glorious 'spinning silver sixpence' song of a Wood Warbler.

I immediately phoned my friend Don, who lives very near the park (and I knew would strongly want to see a Wood Warbler!), but I told him my appointment at the bike shop was at 9.30am, so I wasn't going to be able to hang around for him. Before I took my bike in, though,



M KE WEEDON

I just fancied a quick wee look at this special bird (and Wood Warblers really are special!). I walked into the narrow strip of trees next to the road, from which the song was coming, and a minute or so later, I caught a glimpse of the singer in the canopy, its whole body quivering as it delivered this incredible shivering song. I looked round and, as if by magic, Don appeared!

I told him where the bird was, but he had already heard it, ticked it and added it to his enormous Ferry Meadows list (which he tells me is now 197 bird species!). Ten minutes later, I was back on foot (with my bike being mended) and again watching and listening to the Wood Warbler, with Don. It could be very hard to see, but when relocated, it stayed very loyal to its few perches and gave superb views.

Just to give you an idea how scarce they are here, it was just the fifth Wood Warbler I have seen anywhere in the Peterborough area in 20 years (and the second I have 'found'; both singing spring males). It wasn't the

brightest of birds (as Wood Warblers go), with a hint of greyish on the mantle, like the small picture in the Collins Bird Guide. But he was a Wood Warbler, and it was my 'find'!

The warbler hung around for less than two hours, singing

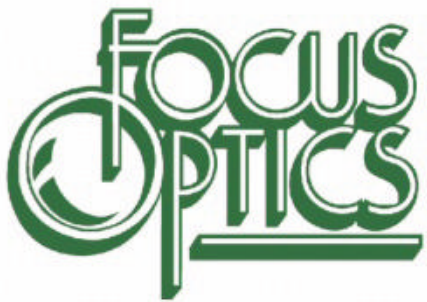
frequently, interspersed by catching little green caterpillars from the canopy. Mostly, it would do the shimmering trill song, but a couple of times, it did the introductory 'pew pew pew' before the trill. At 11.10am, it started repeating 'pew' calls, as if anxious. A Great Tit was also chattering, nearby; and it felt like there was a close predator, by the birds' calls.

Then, the Wood Warbler left its perch and was never seen or heard again. But it was great while it lasted!

“IT WAS JUST THE FIFTH WOOD WARBLER I HAVE SEEN IN THE PETERBOROUGH AREA”

Above
Wood Warbler,
Ferry Meadows CP,
Peterborough,
1 May 2020

Mike Weedon is an obsessive patch lister and keen wildlife photographer in his home city of Peterborough, where he lives with his wife, Jo, and children, Jasmine and Eddie. You can see his photos at weedworld.blogspot.com



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GARDEN BIRDS

Warmer weather gives birds a boost

Results in from
RSPB's Big
Garden Birdwatch

House Sparrows may be bouncing back after recent declines, in part thanks to mild winters, the results of this year's RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch suggest.

The species remained at the top of the Big Garden Birdwatch rankings, with almost 1.3 million sightings throughout the weekend in January, in which half a million people across the UK spent an hour watching the birds that visited their gardens or outdoor spaces.

Smaller birds such as Long-tailed Tits, Wrens and Coal Tits were also seen in greater numbers than in 2019, thanks to the milder winter.

More gardens reported seeing Long-tailed Tits (up by 14%), Wrens (up by 13%) and Coal Tits (up by 10%) in 2020, compared to 2019.

Over its four decades, Big Garden Birdwatch has highlighted the winners and losers in the garden bird world; for example drawing attention to the decline in Song Thrush numbers – the species was a firm fixture in the top 10 in 1979, but sightings fell by half by 2009, until this year it came 20th in the rankings, seen in



Long-tailed Tit

DREW BUCKLEY/ALAMY

just 9% of gardens. Daniel Hayhow, RSPB Conservation Scientist, said: "Small birds suffer during long, cold winters, but the warmer January weather this year appears to have given species such as the Wren and Long-tailed Tit a boost. Over the survey's lifetime, we've seen the increasing good fortunes of birds such as the Coal Tit and Goldfinch and the alarming declines of the House Sparrow and Starling.

"But there appears to be good news for one of these birds. While the overall decline in House Sparrow numbers, reported by participants, since the Big Garden Birdwatch began is 53%, in the most recent decade (2010-2020) numbers appear to have increased by

10%, giving us hope that at least a partial recovery may be happening."

Starling and Blue Tit were second and third in this year's rankings, respectively.

Children's involvement

Throughout the first half of the spring term the nation's school children took part in the RSPB's Big Schools Birdwatch. The UK-wide survey of birds in school grounds saw close to 70,000 school children and their teachers spend an hour in nature counting the birds. Blackbird was the most numerous species seen, with an average of five per school; and was seen in 85% of all schools that took part.

Beccy Speight, the RSPB's chief executive, said: "We know

that for many people, garden birds provide an important connection to the wider world and bring enormous joy. These are difficult and unsettling times for all of us, but we hope that nature can provide a welcome respite in whichever form and wherever you may encounter it.

"Despite everything that's going on in the world, nature is still doing its thing. Birds are singing and blossom is bursting. Watching wildlife, whether from a window or a balcony or even online, can offer many of us hope, joy and a welcome distraction, and so we are keen to help you carry on connecting with the natural world."

● For a full round-up of all the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch results and to see which birds were visiting gardens where you live, visit: rspb.org.uk/birdwatch

“MORE GARDENS REPORTED SEEING LONG-TAILED TITS (UP BY 14%), WRENS (UP BY 13%) AND COAL TITS (UP BY 10%)”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Garden survey

Since the beginning of April, more than 7,000 people engaged with the UK's most robust garden wildlife survey, joining 11,000 existing members and turning their observations into scientific data, by joining Garden BirdWatch (GBW), a long-term garden wildlife survey run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Garden BirdWatch membership was made free in April (it normally costs £17). The free membership offer will continue while the current movement restrictions remain in place, each free membership lasting for a year. Make your garden wildlife observations count at bto.org/gbw

App success

A year after its launch, more than 10,000 users have downloaded the Scottish Ornithologists' Club's free mobile app – Where to Watch Birds in Scotland. It contains details of 400 of Scotland's top birding sites and how to get to them, but has now grown to 560 sites. Just before the lockdown, individual site accounts were being accessed a remarkable 20,000 times every month. Even in confinement, birders have been using the resource to plan future birding trips or to search for places to exercise locally.

Public appeal

The Scottish Seabird Centre has launched an urgent public appeal, backed by Chris Packham and Simon King, to reach a target of £200,000 to ensure they survive the financial impact of COVID-19. Over 4,000 school-aged children and young people engage with the charity's education programmes annually, it runs year-round events for all ages, and its five-star visitor centre welcomes more than 260,000 visitors and locals each year. Public donations will support the charity through the lockdown period. Donations can be made through: justgiving.com/campaign/SeabirdSOS



GRUMPY OLD BIRDER

This month, Bo asks: "what are you prepared to give up to help our wildlife?"

I'm completely mystified by people being less concerned that the end of the world is nigh than they are that we should spend our final days deciding our own lack of future, independent of the EU.

Despite the fact that 81% of people believe we need to plant more trees, 63% of voters support the Labour manifesto idea of a Green New Deal. More than half of voters think fracking should be banned, but only 3% of us voted in the general election for the Green Party.

Ask us whether we support green policies from wind power to re-wilding and at least a majority, and sometimes an overwhelming majority, of us do. Yet every time it comes down to putting our crosses where our mouths are we vote with our pockets. Short-term financial considerations trump the world our kids or grandchildren will inherit, every time. Publicly, we castigate the selfish rich or the money grabbing corporations, and privately, we avoid paying our taxes and blame our neighbours for all our ills.

If you examine the causes of issues we become even less likely to act. Look at flooding as an example. We know that planting trees and not burning off heather for grouse is needed to enhance water retention, but instead of us pressing to ban burning or rushing forth to plant trees, we get annoyed by barriers not being high enough or that someone else's flood-barrier pushes the water down into our neighbourhood.

Short-termism, in all its forms, is encouraged in all the media. Lotteries and game shows invite us to get rich quick. TV shows, blogs and media show us how to be famous for wanting to be famous. Instead of cooking fresh veg we shove another over-processed meal in the microwave, and instead of taking on the totally exhausting chore of weekly watering of an aspidistra, we replace it with a plastic

pot plant. Even more worryingly, plastic hedges and lawns are a rapidly expanding 'must have', because we cannot set aside the time to clip and mow, presumably because we are too busy making unnecessary phone calls, or watching cats doing really cute things on video.

It's just about possible for a bird to nest in plastic privet I guess... but not to find any sustenance close at hand. Just when Song Thrushes sighed their melodious sighs at the trend away from decking, they will be bashing their beaks against acrylic grass under which the soil will be souring.

A few generations back we came out of a devastating war and had to rebuild a large percentage of infrastructure and housing. It could not be done overnight, and five years after hostilities ended, we were still having to ration certain foods. 1950s pre-fabs hung around long after their use-by dates, but we got our people into shelter, our factories fired up and the economy growing by saving and waiting, because we had to.

We waited patiently in line for stuff, whether it was pork sausages or postage stamps. Faced with an epidemic, we bought all the facemasks we could get from China, instead of making them ourselves, and, with imminent withdrawal from the EU, we stocked-up with paracetamol we didn't need. All our effort goes into getting what we individually want now, instead of collectively putting effort into what we all need to survive tomorrow.

Ask yourself what you are prepared to give up today to make your children's lives more bearable in the coming decades. What will you forgo to make sure there are birds and bees around to be enriching the lives of your grandchildren?

Bo Beolens runs fatbirder.com and other websites. He has written a number of books.



BUTEN-BEELD/ALAMY

GET IN TOUCH

Do you agree – or disagree – with Bo's comments? Email us at birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

Left A Song Thrush wrestling with a real earthworm from a real lawn



Lockdown birding

There's always something to do, see and hear during these times of not being able to get out and bird as you would normally do, says regular contributor and 'Grumpy Old Birder', **Bo Beolens**

Lockdown birding advice from naturalists with large gardens surrounded by natural habitat is all very well, but most of you, like me, will consider yourself lucky to have a tiny urban lung that attracts fewer than a dozen species.

Perhaps, like me, despite your efforts, the tit-box has hung unloved on a wall for a decade and your cleverly hidden sparrow boxes were shunned and have now fallen off the side of the shed, and joined the heap of rotting prunings left for the bugs and slugs. Still, they should make nice shelters for frogs.

Moving here two decades ago I inherited a concrete garden. I'm on a hill and a previous owner carved out a chunk and constructed a garage with its roof two feet above the rest of the garden. We fenced it in, tiled the top and turned it into a patio.

Lifting some pavers we found two inches of topsoil over solid chalk! Hard work and help allowed us to create some narrow borders and in one corner, we dug out a rotten tree stump and replaced it with a fig, a cherry, a mock orange and another slimline tree, in a patch six feet square! Even this tight-packed corner has sprouted other shrubs, such as Elder,

courtesy of visiting Woodpigeons. Luckily, one neighbour neglects the adjoining patch and a massive pyracantha gives us and the birds some privacy.

Pond life

One good thing we inherited was a pond, with two fish. A few years back we extended the pond and planted it with lilies and marginal plants. Then, a local birding friend donated some of the frogspawn from his Koi pond and, ever since then, we have had a crew of unpaid slug harvesters. This year, Hawkeye (Mrs Beolens) fashioned a barrier in the



LOCKDOWN BIRDING

pond to form a tadpole nursery keeping the seven fish at bay. Six large spawn masses appeared over two weeks, so we have a succession of tadpole sizes, a roiling mass every time the sun shines. Our two original goldfish are more than 20 years-old and bred, and we added some pond snails, but all other life colonised by itself. It doubles as a bird bath, drinking pool and insect service station, now.

Our tiny patch has numerous species of hoverfly, bees and bumblebees, although few beetles and butterflies. The pond attracts three damselfly and two dragonflies, too. I've already found a new hoverfly and new bee-fly this year. We have half a dozen 'bee houses' hung from the shed, attracting at least three species.

Heaven-sent space

Having a space to sit in, during weeks in which we only cross the threshold to haul in the grocery deliveries, is heaven-sent. We have already spent more time in our tiny haven this year than the last three combined. There is always something to do. Sitting in the sun with a cool drink only lasts a few minutes until you see a shrub that needs trimming, a weed crying out to be pulled, or a bare patch in a pot desperate for planting. I haven't counted them, but there must be a couple of hundred planters packed into an area the size of a couple of decent lounges.

We rarely get frosts, being so far south-east that we almost have French accents, but not everything survives from one year to the next. My Frogs may decimate the slug population; however, it's some years since I heard the early morning tapping of a Song Thrush



“AS WE SETTLE IN CHAIRS AND CHAT, OUR RESIDENT BIRDS ARE GETTING MUCH BOLDER...”

despatching snails. Snails love plant pots and, whenever I move one, I find the turned-over pot top packed with molluscs.

If you pop out after dark you can see the tiger slug trails and snails climbing the wet walls. Some plants never survive the snail onslaught... every lupin I've ever planted is eaten within hours... bedding plants have to be 'grown on' as plug-plants disappear overnight. We garden for wildlife, so don't mourn the loss.

As we settle in chairs and chat, our resident birds are getting much bolder.

Hawkeye's care has transformed a low of half a dozen sparrows to well in excess of 40 birds. Thank goodness for suet deliveries. Despite the provision of three birdbaths, they much prefer to drink from the pond and once the lily pads grow in spring, they stand on the pads to bathe.

We sit in the sun trap, a metre from the pond end. Over the first few weeks, the birds held back, then dared to fly into the buddleia even closer to us, but under cover. Now, they happily drop down to the tadpole nursery to drink.

Within touching distance

Ring-necked Parakeets are not shy birds; the top count in our garden (mostly on the phoneline into my study and on our washing line) is 17 birds. But most days we get visits of up to four at a time.

By March, its mostly squabbling males. They will go on feeders if they really must, but prefer the apples we suspend from the washing line, leaving their peelings all over the patio. In fact, when we run out, they sit on the wire and squawk until we replenish the stock!

I can now sit a metre from the line and, so long as I am still, or move very slowly, they join me. While watching them outside my shed door, the Dunnocks come down to the garage roof and slowly pick their way closer. At times, I could reach out and touch them.

Like most small urban gardens with lots of feeders, we get plenty of birds, but of very few species. In descending order, we





have House Sparrows, Starlings, Collared Doves, Feral Pigeons, Goldfinches, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Woodpigeons, Dunnocks, Blackbirds, Robins and Wrens.

Just a dozen regulars, but there is a supporting cast of seasonal or occasional visitors such as Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Sparrowhawk, Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blackcap, Long-tailed Tit, Herring Gull, Mistle Thrush, Chiffchaff, Kestrel and Song Thrush. Extreme rarities for us have included Redwing, Fieldfare, Brambling, and we just once had a Goldcrest but no fewer than five Firecrests – a species that winters locally.

Our rarest spot was down to Hawkeye, as usual. While sunbathing, she spotted

four White Storks circling overhead, until they tired of their seaside trip and headed off back to France without even touching down. I'm not swanking about the rarities, as it's all about serendipity and a mild micro-climate. As every birder knows, timing is everything; the more you watch, the more you see. Staying at home to save lives gives you lots of time to observe. Maybe it's lockdown easing pressure on nature, but birds seem tamer.

Maybe they are finding safe havens in old territories; for the last few days I've been delighted by a visiting Song Thrush picking over my shed roof and also taking a drink from the pond.

My lockdown birding also means

Catch up with Bo in his garden at:
<http://grumpyoldbirder.com/lockdown-diary>
 Follow on Twitter: @grumpyoldbirder

scanning the sky from my study window. I look down a valley of houses to distant allotments and a cabbage field, so have been hoping to get a migrant or two. I know there are plenty in the country, but I've not seen any yet. But if you watch often, even from a city flat you might get lucky. Scanning the skies I've seen a passage of Buzzards and daily comings and goings of gulls and Cormorants.

I can't wait for the Swifts to be back, the most birdy of birds and my personal favourites. We've had a few flyover specials before, so I'll keep my eyes peeled for Hobby and Osprey... you never know, a wandering White-tailed Eagle might decide to wander this way.

Until the lockdown lifts, I'll be in the garden if it's dry, enjoying the Blackbird song, scrapping Starlings and parakeet antics. If it's wet, I'll scan the skies from my study window, or watch the two Herring Gulls trying to build a nest on my neighbour's chimney stack.

BW

How have you been birding during the lockdown? Let us know by emailing birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk



THE HAMPSHIRE 150 PHOTO-CHALLENGE

MAY 2020 UPDATE



The Bird Photographer of the Year team are continuing their challenge to photograph 150 species within the county of Hampshire over the course of 2020. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 lockdown has been in place for six weeks, restricting the Hants 150 team to photographing in their gardens and local patches, always keeping social distancing and exercise protocol in mind.

This has proved extremely frustrating, with the spring migrants arriving in good numbers everywhere, except our immediate vicinities. Unsurprisingly, it has severely affected our ability to add to the species' list. The team is hoping that lockdown measures are eased shortly to allow a little more scope to travel and ensure that spring does not pass by without some key species being added.

Despite the restrictions, the team have added a few to the list. Rob managed to find a cooperative Barn Owl that hunted in the same meadow in the early evening for a week or so before moving on. Happily, this was on his regular walk with his dog, a few hundred yards from his house. Rob also managed to photograph Swallow from his back garden, numbers of which are arriving and are a regular feature in the sky over his house. Paul similarly managed to photograph House Martin from his garden.

Under normal circumstances, the team would have expected to have photographed species such as Cuckoo and Redstart by this time. Paul has come close to adding Cuckoo, a male regularly calling from his garden, but so far it has proved elusive. He'll keep trying, we are sure! Similarly, Willow Warbler is another bird the team would have hoped to have ticked off the list by now. Andrew Cleave has heard them singing regularly during his



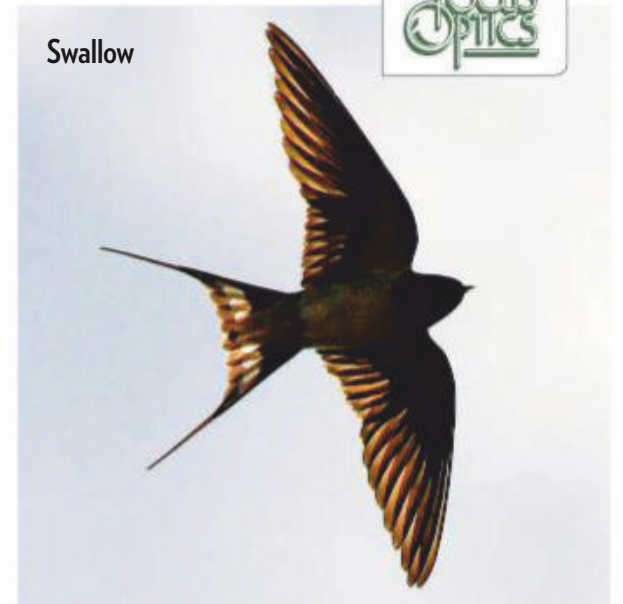
Barn Owl

daily walk, but so far has been unable to get one in front of his lens.

At the time of writing, the weather continues to be kind, with lots of high pressure and sunshine bathing the county of late. Some of the team have been using the early morning light to photograph their garden birds, and Rob managed some nice pictures of Robin, Blackbird, Starling, Rook and Stock Dove.

Paul has a hand-tame male Pheasant as a regular feature in his garden, providing him with a willing model.

The current total now stands at 117, leaving 33 species remaining to reach the target. The team will be making a



Swallow

renewed effort to add to their tally once the relaxation of restrictions allow this to happen, without compromising other people's health.

Bird Watching magazine is donating £2,000 to Birds on the Brink for the Hampshire 150 Challenge and we would like to call on the support of the readers, too. Visit the BPOTY website and follow the link to the Hampshire 150 page and click the donation link (donations taken via PayPal).

You can see some more of the images taken by the team as the challenge progresses at birdpoty.co.uk



Juvenile Robin

PICTURES: ROB READ/NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD

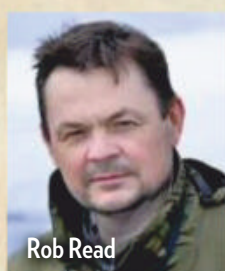
THE HAMPSHIRE 150 CHALLENGE TEAM



Paul Sterry



Andrew Cleave



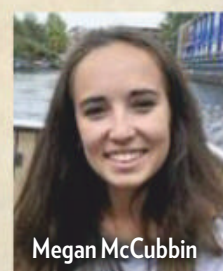
Rob Read



Andrew Cameron



Chris Packham



Megan McCubbin



Keith Betton



Janet Craig had this adult and juvenile Blackbird



Peter Brown has been calling out bird sightings to families in his part of Sheffield

Coping in LOCKDOWN

We asked you to tell us how you were birdwatching during lockdown, and we've been delighted by the many and varied responses. Here's just a few of the ingenious ways in which you've coped with not being able to get out and about birding. Other readers have shared their pics with us, too!

Many of you have suggested that birds have become less timid because of the lack of traffic, noise, and general human activity.

PETER CLOKE, of Holbrook, Suffolk, has had plenty to report from his own garden.

"I have been amazed at the huge diversity of birds feeding in my small garden since lockdown. Winter and early spring months were bleak, with often the occasional Blackbird or Robin the only visitors. Now, I have had Carrion Crows, Rooks, Jackdaws, Pied Wagtails, Goldfinches, Woodpigeons, Chaffinches etc. I even had a Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull feeding. I guess that the influx of gulls may be because scavenging on beaches is not very productive, with little food waste left by humans."

We think you're right, Peter – gulls are supremely adaptable, so changing circumstances rarely leave them baffled for too long.

79-year-old JANET CRAIG, said:

"I am doing more watching than I have ever done, both in my garden and on walks nearby.

"Yesterday was one of my most exciting days, with seeing about seven Stonechats feeding. At home I am lucky to have a male Pheasant with two females coming into my garden to feed several times a day, and I was getting Mallards, too.

"I have the thrill of calling several birds who all fly to me, including a pair of Pied Wagtails, Wren, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Blackbird and his chicks and Starlings."

VICTORIA SPENCER is one of the nurses whose work we've been more grateful for than ever during the current crisis, and made the point that birding during lockdown has a very beneficial effect on our mental and physical health, of which much more on page 28.

She said: "While I always look forward to *Bird Watching*, I have really appreciated it during lockdown, and the focus on birding

at home really made me smile. Although I am still a 'fledgling' birder, I have missed going further afield. A trip to see Puffins in Northumberland was one of my 2019 highlights. But, as you say, staying at home has made me really appreciate my garden visitors. I normally use hiking and nature to manage stress. As this is limited during lockdown, watching my garden birds has become an almost



Victoria Spencer was inspired to draw her garden visitors



Harriet Day recorded this evidence of nesting Starlings!



Ian Tooley photographed this family of Mallards

meditative component to my routine. It has certainly been good for my mental health and feeling connected to nature – benefits I am pleased to see you mention.

“You mentioned drawing birds you spot, and it inspired me to draw the pictures shown – the first being three of my favourite garden visitors, and the second being a regular I can always rely on to mop up the seed crumbs.”

DIANE BROOKER wrote to say: “I know I’m fortunate to have a garden and one of the of the benefits of lockdown is that I have time to sit back and appreciate it. The peace and quiet is wonderful and allows me to hear so much more. On 9 April, while sitting in said garden, the local gulls alerted me to the fact that they were far from happy about something in their air space, the local Buzzard, probably, but they don’t usually make that much noise so I hoped it might have been one of the Red Kites recently reported in the county. It turned out to be far better than that... an Osprey no less! It slowly headed north-east and out of sight, but what a garden tick.”

HARRIET DAY was another reader who has enjoyed discovering everything her garden has to offer.

She said: “I have learned so much about what comes to my garden. I live in a ground floor flat, with one tree and a small hedgerow, and I’ve recently planted some vegetation, adding feeders and nestboxes.

“This has encouraged a lot of wildlife to come to visit, so during lockdown, I have discovered in my garden, a pair of Song Thrushes, three Long-tailed Tits and one Goldfinch.

“All love my feeders, whereas before I would have never have known they had been visiting. The Magpie has nested in the tree, a pair of Starlings made themselves a home in my roof, and Great Tits are using my nestbox.

“On an evening, about 8pm, I’d been sitting in the garden for 20 minutes and came across two bats that circled around, a little Hedgehog that I’d never seen before and a pair of Tawny Owls calling.

“This lockdown has made me appreciate the birds more in my garden.”

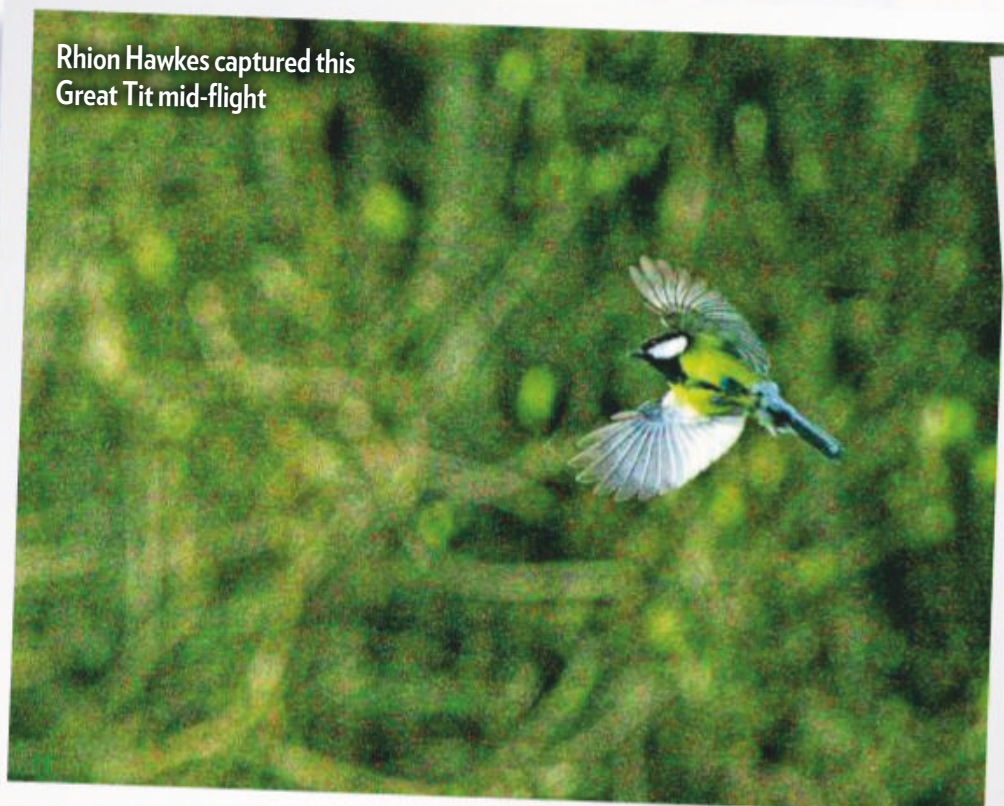
And local birding groups have taken up the theme. JOHN BIRKETT, of RSPB Croydon Local Group, wrote:

“To keep people’s interest during lockdown, we organised a ‘Croydon Lockdown Bird Watch’ (CLBW), asking people to send in weekly lists of the birds seen and heard either in their gardens or flying over.

“I have been very pleasantly surprised at what birds turned up during April. Over 60 different species were reported. There were the regular garden birds, but we also witnessed some birds migrating through, such as Swallow, House Martin, Garden Warbler and Chiffchaff. And, right at the end of April, the first of our Swifts returned from Africa! Several people were treated to Tawny Owls calling nearby. “

PETER BROWN, of Sheffield, wrote to say: “I’ve started a regular birdwatch/listen session for the families along part of the terrace where we live, in Millhouses, a district in the south-east of Sheffield.

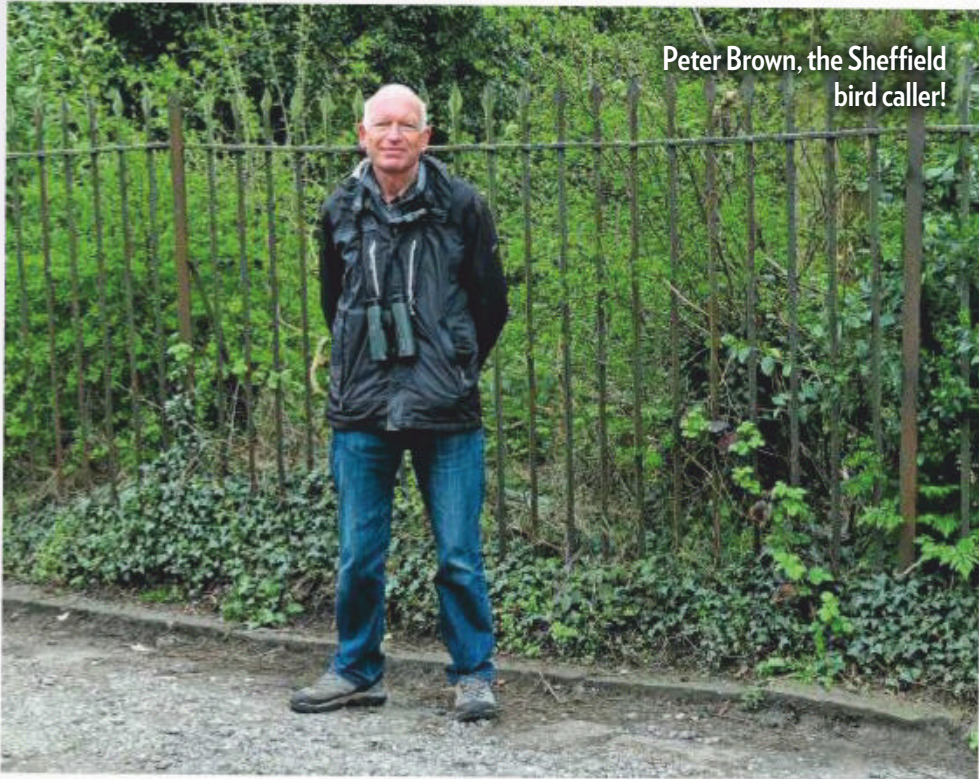
“It’s very simple and it seems to work. The terrace looks onto a belt of trees that



Rhion Hawkes captured this Great Tit mid-flight



Rob Porter also had Blackbirds feeding young



Peter Brown, the Sheffield bird caller!



Chris Robinson managed to take a shot of a Robin enjoying the bird bath

line the River Sheaf. Families along the road look out from their respective front doors or windows. I position myself on the side of the road opposite the houses at a good 12m from the nearest household, and let neighbours know about the birds that are singing or appearing around us. I've got a fairly loud voice, but this is the city, with a massive Tesco supermarket below us, so the birds are fine with a bit of noise.

"We watch/listen from 9am for about half an hour. It seems to go down well. We had about six families up for it last week, and complaints that I'm not doing it more regularly!"

RUPERT LITHERLAND wrote to say:

"I didn't start making a daily sightings record until the beginning of April. No matter, I am rather pleased because my Bird Journal entries suggest I have seen 53 species in the month, including a Great White Egret – a first for me in the area where I live.

"I am astonishingly lucky to live where I do, but could I claim to have 'seen' more birds? On the 22nd, I heard the unmistakable call of a Cuckoo, and I have

heard it almost every evening since; the bird sounds on my RSPB PC edition of Birds of Britain and Ireland also suggests I have also heard a Garden Warbler and probably a Grasshopper Warbler. Does an H for 'heard' warrant a tick and might I claim to have seen 56 species?

"A Grasshopper Warbler would be both a UK List and Life List first. Readers will gather from this that I am a 'birdwatcher minus': that is, a birdwatcher who is not very knowledgeable about the rules. Do the impressive numbers of birds some birders see include those they have heard but not actually seen?"

Some of you have ventured a little beyond your garden. IAN TOOLEY told us:

"I consider myself very fortunate to have a small local nature reserve (Pewitt Carr, Ilkeston, Derbyshire) within walking distance. Most of my birding has been on holidays, so coronavirus has given me an unexpected opportunity to explore locally for the first time. Early morning starts have been essential, as the area gets busy, but it has been so worth it.

"What a thrill to first hear, then see and finally photograph, a Cetti's Warbler (only my second ever!). I then spotted a very distant Kingfisher. What a privilege!"

And finally, some of you have been getting creative about how you birdwatch. NICK SUTTON wrote:

"It can be difficult to get out to your favourite birding sites, and your local patch or garden can be a little limited.

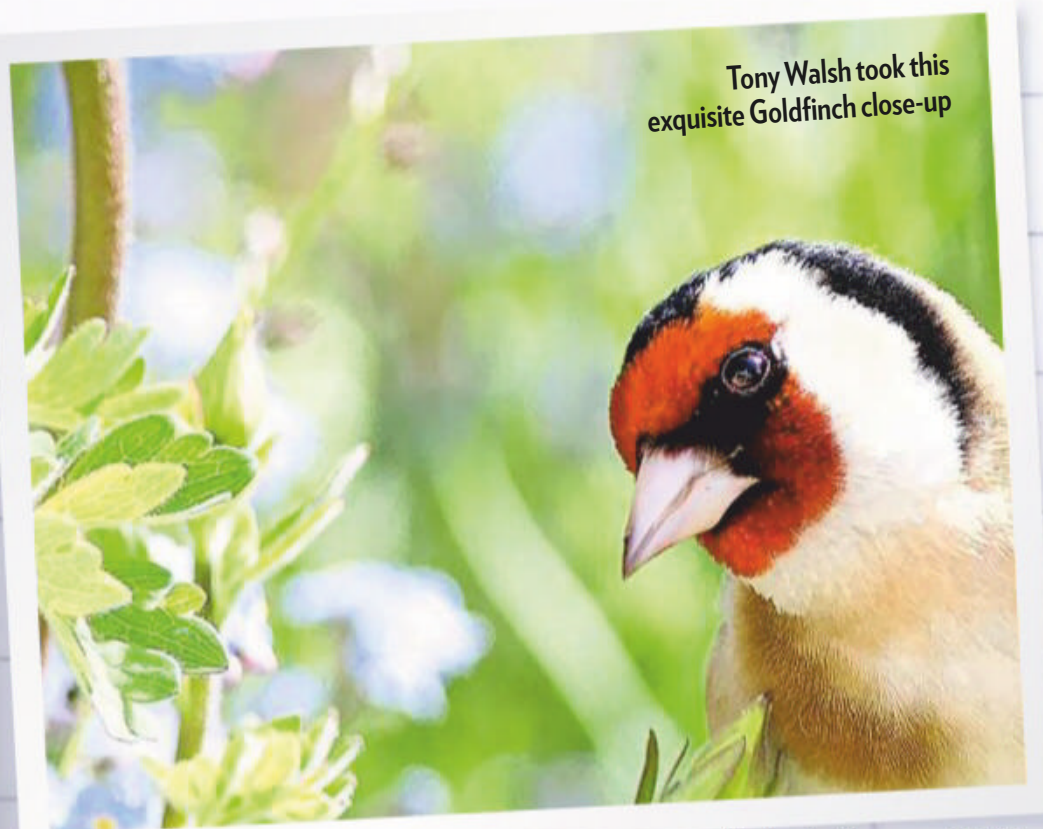
"I know it's not an original idea, but I've been getting much enjoyment from making an armchair bird list from species seen on TV. I don't allow birds seen on wildlife documentaries, that would be too easy. ID can be a real challenge from an often all too brief sighting (the pause button can be useful). It does allow me to refer to those all too often neglected world bird guides, and leads to an interesting list, including Australian Darter from Australian Masterchef and Nightingale from Good Omens."

BW

Visit birdwatching.co.uk/lockdown-birding-stories for more readers experiences and photos!



Rob Porter snapped this delightful garden Robin



Tony Walsh took this exquisite Goldfinch close-up

Natural THERAPY

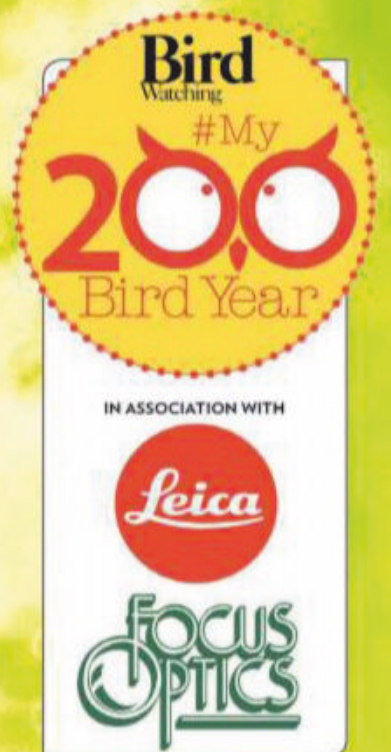
Long before COVID-19 took over the headlines, the potential benefits of birdwatching for mental and physical well-being were being talked about. The latter are, perhaps, obvious. Having a reason to get outside on a regular (preferably daily) basis, and then walk significant distances can only be good, whether you're a child,

a retired person, or someone who crams their birding into their lunchbreak. Birdwatching is an active hobby, however much it can seem as though we sometimes just sit and wait.

The way birding can also improve your mental health has been less well discussed in the past, but in the last few years has been the subject of a lot of articles and books, with

Joe Harkness's Bird Therapy being one of the most prominent and significant. In the next few pages, we've got the stories of several people who have seen birding improve their health, one way or another.

But first, it's back to Joe Harkness, who writes about how birdwatching has played a key role in helping him come to terms with the current health crisis and lockdown...





“IT HAS BEEN TOUGH AT TIMES, THOUGH. AFTER THE DAILY WALK, THAT IS ALL FOR THE DAY, AND AS THERE IS ALWAYS WORK TO BE DONE, I OFTEN DO NOT GET OUTSIDE ANY MORE, UNLESS IT IS TO PLAY”

By Joe Harkness



Singing Firecrest

I cannot do a huge amount personally to mitigate climate change. I have no choice but to drive to work, I choose to eat meat, and I chose to start a family.

However, one area of my life in which I feel I can make positive changes is in my hobby, birdwatching. At the turn of 2020, I made a decision to stop using my car to go birding and to designate myself an ‘eco-patch’ which is all accessible by foot and extends no further than 1.5 miles from our house. Much as I did with my

Joe Harkness writes and speaks about the benefits of birdwatching for mental health and wellbeing. As well as living with various issues himself, he works in special education and is highly experienced at connecting with vulnerable people.

previous patches, I researched the area – historically and geographically – to ensure my new stomping ground takes in a range of habitats. Obviously, this increases the chances of seeing a wider variety of birds, but the biodiversity is also good for well-being, especially the inclusion of water, which as I wrote about in Bird Therapy, is itself a natural tonic.

I set myself a target of seeing 80 species of bird, which I thought was a bit ambitious at the time. But, since the lockdown restrictions began on 23 March, I have already seen (on 3 May) 80 species – which also means our daughter has, too.

Brilliant walks

Like most people, we have had to work from home during this period and with a nearly two-year-old daughter to occupy us, as well, it has been challenging at times. One thing which has been beneficial for

her and us, is that we have been going for an exercise walk first thing every morning, and it has been utterly brilliant for us both.

While reflecting on this the other day, I realised how closely connected this was to many of the things I wrote about in Bird Therapy – especially my ‘five ways to well-birding’.

These are five things you can bring into your life, that promote well-being. Originally coined the ‘five ways to wellbeing’, they came out of the clunky findings of a Government foresight project from the New Economics Foundation and were developed by MIND, to make them more accessible. They are: to be active, to take notice, to learn, to give and to connect.

So, thinking about our exercise walks: we are being active, physically and mentally. We are noticing the

Ring Ouzel



NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

local avifauna, the landscape and the other wildlife nearby. I am learning about the area and its birds and then sharing that with my daughter – so she is also learning, and therefore, I am giving something back to her.

Finally, we are connecting – on many levels, both as people and with the area around us.

What have we seen? Spring migration has been wonderful around here, and as I write, we are not long home from our morning walk, where we saw almost 50 species of birds, including a local inland Wheatear. At the start of April, we heard a singing Firecrest in a nearby copse; and for most of April, a Ring Ouzel has been feeding on a well-manicured garden. We have found several pairs of Grey Wagtails breeding close to home, and three Lesser Whitethroat territories – it has been truly remarkable to discover what has been around.

Beautiful sight

The undoubted highlight was actually at home. I went down the alley that leads to our garage, to have a look at the sky for a bit, on the afternoon of 10 April. On our garage roof and then present all afternoon, feeding along our fence line and some adjacent industrial plots, was a beautiful Black Redstart!

It has been tough at times, though. After the daily walk, that is all for the day, and as there is always work to be done, I often do not get outside any more, unless it is to play. The irony is that I am outside more than I normally would be during work times, but it is hyper-focused on a small window of time, with the main priority being exercise and fresh air for both me and our daughter. Therefore, I cannot just stop and look at birds all the time, as I would on my own. It has also, as I mentioned, been very tough to work in shifts at home and provide engaging and fun things for our daughter to do; not to mention

not being able to see other people – especially family.

On the plus side, our garden birds have been a great source of entertainment. If we did not already know the characters and their personalities – we do now!

We keep the feeders stocked-up and although the visitors are the same most days, as I have written about before, that consistency and stability of knowing they are there still, is incredibly comforting. With the slower pace of life that we are all living in currently, the time and space to observe our garden visitors has been welcome. It has also given another angle of amusement for our daughter, who has learnt to say sparrow, Blackbird, woodpecker and pigeon, during lockdown.

Writing this now, the buzz of coming across the local Wheatear this morning still lingers. It is not just the consistency of birds that is so magical, but also that element of surprise they can bring; especially when birding away from your usual sites, with no choice but to remain in the ‘corona bubble’ we are all forced to stay in. I had hoped I would see a Wheatear on our walks – they pass through the area at the start of May every year – but it was still a wondrous thing, to actually connect with it.

This whole, unprecedented time has dramatically reinforced the ideas that I wrote about in Bird Therapy. There is so much joy to be found in the everyday – the Blackbird with the little panel of white in its wing feathers that comes up to the French doors; the House Sparrows chirping away in your gutters. These are things we usually overlook, that pass us by in the freneticism of modern life.

Lockdown has helped us to lock ourselves back down to the basics and fundamentals of birdwatching again, like going back to the heady days in which we first began to take notice. A light in all this darkness.

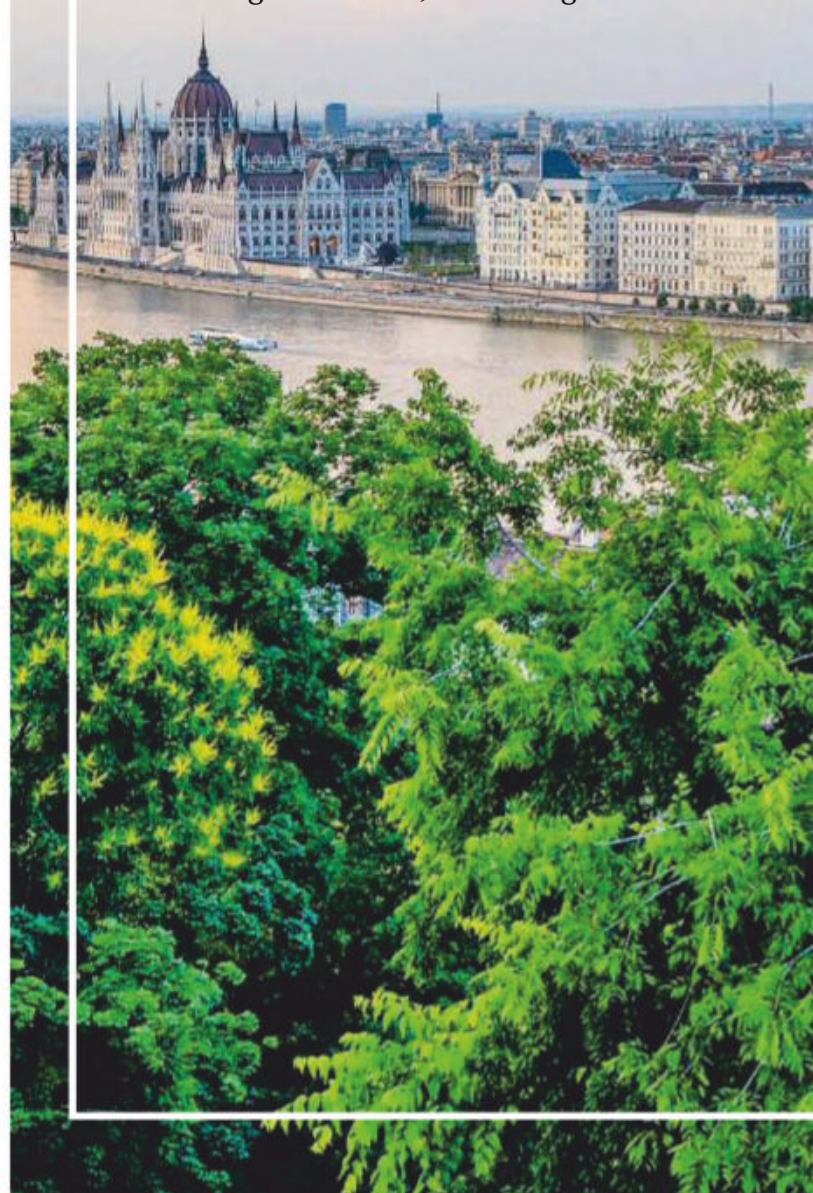
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The blackness had begun to lift before I flew to Budapest, but I knew from experience that it might be a false dawn. Depression is like that, unpredictable as well as debilitating.

That late October, I had gone to the Hortobagy in eastern Hungary to see if a spell of birdwatching in a country I knew little about would help me to find my equilibrium. During the first couple of days, our guide had taken us to various parts of the National Park and there, in and around the vast ‘fishponds’, and on the strange flatlands of the puszta, we had seen a myriad of species, many of them new to me – Pygmy Cormorants, White-tailed and Spotted Eagles, Stone-curlews, Penduline and Bearded Tits, the last two twanging and whistling in small noisy flocks.

Geese – Bean, White-fronted and Greylag – were everywhere, honking, restless flights of them, skimming over



“I STOOD APART FROM THE GROUP AND FELT THE DARKNESS IN ME PULL AWAY. COLOUR RETURNED. OPTIMISM GREW. I KNEW THAT THIS LATEST BOUT OF DEPRESSION HAD PASSED”

By Phil Dronfield

the lakes or whiffing down onto the glassy surfaces from high up in the cold, blue sky. I had also seen my first Ferruginous Duck, resting head in wing, as we came across a secluded bay in the swaying reedbeds; but it soon leapt into the air, showing its long wing-bars and belly, startlingly white against the overall chestnut of its body.

Sights and sounds

The feast of birds continued, enough to sate a glutton. Great White Egrets, Marsh and Hen Harriers, Goshawk and Merlin. Tree Sparrows were everywhere, like giant gnats among the phragmites, and Crested Larks blended into the grey-brown of the summer-burnt puszta. The Twite and Dotterel I knew from my home in the north of England were here in numbers, misplaced and ill-fitting to my narrow mind, on these endless monochrome plains and Curlews, no longer bubbling and inviting in the spring, and Little Owls,

thriving in a landscape bereft of trees, and Stonechat far from furze.

Later that day we stopped on the edge of a country road, between the puszta and arable land, where corn stubble stretched into the distance, with the occasional crop of unharvested maize.

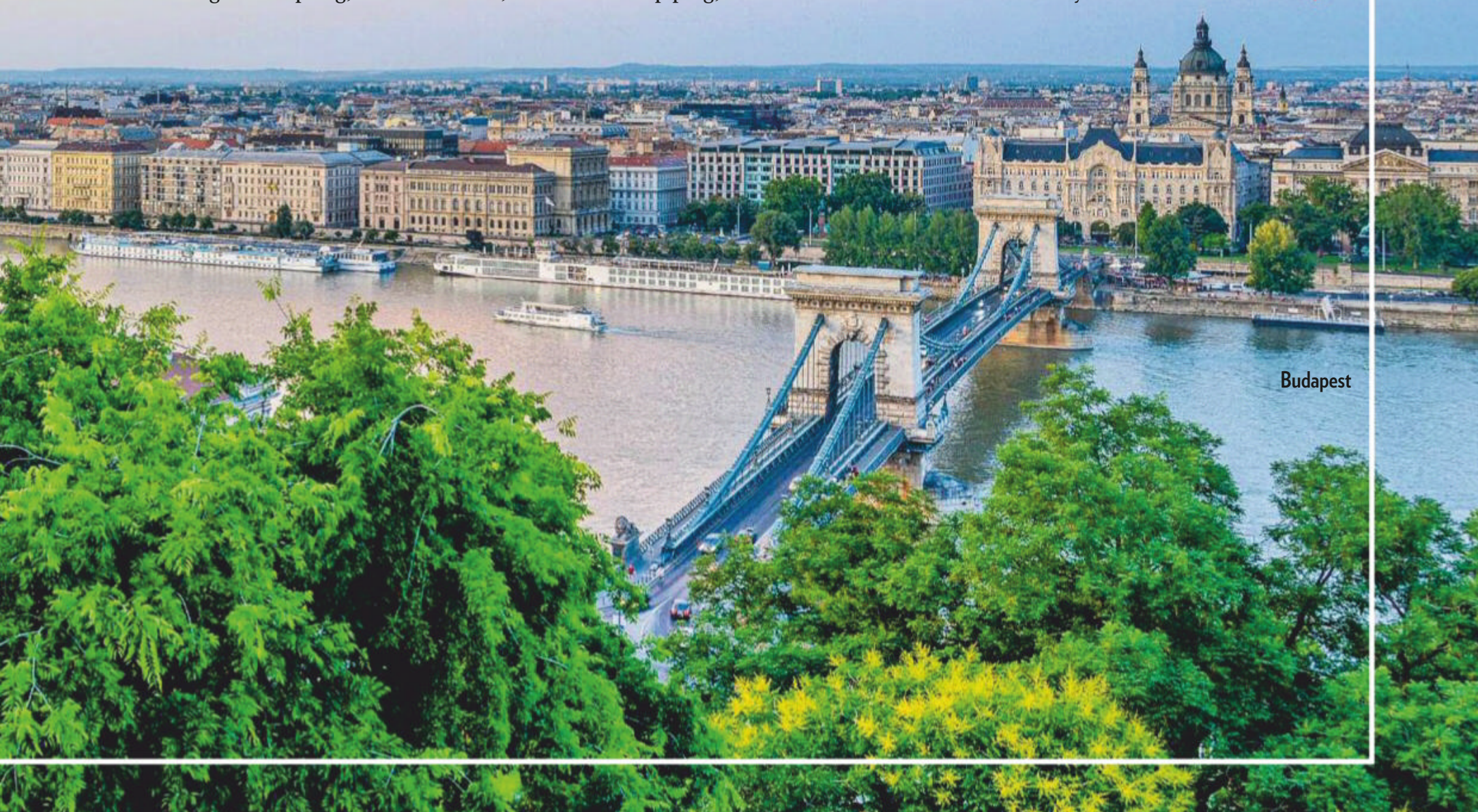
I had registered all the sights and sounds of the day, but as if through a thick-mist – a gauze which had filtered out a great deal of the colour, beauty and excitement. The light became mellow and a strange apprehension ran through me. Apprehension at the oncoming dark? Another night to survive? Another day gone without a return to my usual self?

And then came the Cranes. At first in neat Vs and long, ever-changing lines. Hundreds of them, their long necks extended in front and similarly long legs spread out behind; the mature birds called “krooh, krooh” in a deep, resounding trumpeting; the younger, browner birds an intermittent piping, the falsetto call of

immaturity. The oblique lines changed to immense patterns of scribbling across the sky, far into the distance against the fading of the day. Wave after wave of Cranes, 30,000 I was told, passed overhead in the hour before sunset.

I stood apart from the group and felt the darkness in me pull away. Colour returned. Optimism grew. I knew that this latest bout of depression had passed. I knew that the beauty of these Cranes, flying across an evening sky, heading for shelter in the lakes of the Hortobagy, would stay with me.

Their flight embodied timelessness and, in an indescribable way, put life with all its pain and anxieties into perspective. I knew I was healed. My neck might ache and my eyes might be sore with the sustained effort to watch this wonderful fly-past, but I knew the pain inside was fast fading and I knew the next day I would be well.



Budapest

ALLOVER IMAGES/ALAMY



“BIRDING FOUND ME AT A LOW POINT IN MY LIFE. IT’S BROUGHT ME MORE PLEASURE THAN I COULD EVER HAVE IMAGINED”

By Adrienne Hopkins

My story starts in August 2014. I was 41, very fit and seemingly healthy. I was a decent club runner who had represented my (small) county at cross-country, trained six days a week, cycled as my main mode of transport, and thought nothing of slinging a rucksack on and walking 15-plus miles.

I’d met my husband through our running club and our holidays generally involved hiking. You get the picture. I loved being outdoors and had a general interest in nature and wildlife, but would probably have struggled to ID more than a dozen birds.

On 14 August, I set off to cycle across town to a work meeting. I never arrived. I collapsed with what I now know to be a major episode of VT (ventricular tachycardia) and ended up in A&E. I was probably very lucky not to have a cardiac arrest. Within 24 hours I’d been diagnosed with a genetic heart condition called ARVC and been told that I’d never be able to do any strenuous exercise again. When I was discharged from hospital, two weeks later, it was with a defibrillator implanted in my chest.

Essentially, the ARVC has caused my heart muscle to become very damaged, putting me at risk of abnormally fast heart rhythms, which if uncorrected could lead to cardiac arrest. It is also a progressive condition, which can deteriorate over time, particularly as a result of exercise.

To say that my life was turned upside down is something of an understatement. Then, to

compound matters, I experienced my first ‘defib’ shocks a few weeks later, which shattered my confidence.

For weeks, I barely went anywhere, apart from to the office and back, lived in constant fear of my defibrillator firing, and didn’t know what to do with myself in my free time. It also soon became obvious that the doctors’ definition of ‘strenuous exercise’ was very different from mine and that my activity threshold was very low, and I saw more and more of my old life slip away from me. For several months, I struggled to come to terms with my diagnosis.

Noticing the birds

In early 2015, I started cardio rehab classes – controlled exercise under nurse supervision – and gradually started to rebuild my confidence. On my way home, I walked through our local park. I was still walking extremely slowly and at my slower pace noticed more around me. First it was the Long-tailed Tits, then the Redwings... I’d get home and start poring over the Collins Guide.

In April, our search for flat holiday destinations took us to Suffolk, where I found a poster advertising a ‘birdwatching for beginners’ session at Minsmere. We spent a fabulous morning with a volunteer called Margaret.

And my interest in birds really developed from there, and quickly filled a very large hole in my life. It’s difficult to describe what birding has given me in the last five years – a new interest, a sense of

purpose and satisfaction, a challenge, a passion. It gets me out in the fresh air and turns a gentle three-mile stroll into a full day out.

It’s taken my husband and I to places that we would never have thought of visiting before – too many to mention, but the Isle of May is a particular highlight. It’s given us a way to combine our interests (he’s still a runner) – we’ll often head up to the Ridgeway, where he’ll go for a long run and I’ll enjoy the Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings. It’s brought moments of euphoria on a par with running a personal best – I saw my first Bittern on Sunday! It’s helped me to accept a slower pace of life and shown me that it can be equally as fulfilling.

I’ve often said that one of the things I love about birding is that you never know what’s going to be out there, and I guess that’s the story of birding and me in a nutshell. I never set out to be a birder. Birding found me at a particularly low point in my life, and it’s brought me more pleasure than I could ever have imagined. It seems quite fitting that I’ll be spending the fifth anniversary of my diagnosis on the North Norfolk coast with a pair of binoculars. ➤

Isle of May, Scotland

Adrienne Hopkins has been birding for around five years since being diagnosed with cardiomyopathy. She lives in Oxford which, combined with an aversion to early mornings, an intolerance for the cold and an inability to identify warblers, makes #My200BirdYear a distant ambition but she was pleased to reach 150 species for the first time in 2019.

Taking time to put the binoculars down

The 21st Century has seen the advent of many technologies and social norms that have removed our ability to connect with the present and take real notice of the world around us. Birdwatching, particularly surveying birds, is one way to give purpose to such notice – but even then, it may not give an accustomed eye the opportunity to linger on the wonder of our whole experience in each moment.

Losing our ability to be ‘present’ inhibits our ability to relax, to switch off, which can have dramatic impacts on our mental health. With this in mind, the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) decided to invest to ensure the continued health of its members and the wider birdwatching community, with a bird-focused mindfulness exercise that can be downloaded from their website. The question you might now be asking yourself is, “what is mindfulness?”.

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present and aware of where you are and what you’re doing, without becoming distracted by it or judging it in any way. This awareness of the present is a natural human instinct. However, as with most abilities, it needs training to be honed into a skill.

Mindfulness

The skill of mindfulness can be trained through a light touch form of meditation, which can be done anywhere in the world. In teaching the mind to be present, we are teaching ourselves to live more mindfully.

By not being beholden to reactive thoughts and feelings, we can teach ourselves to live in the moment, which can greatly improve our mental health, as well as our ability to deal with challenging or stressful situations.

Where better in the world to



become present to yourself and your surroundings than outside, in nature, surrounded by wildlife?

That’s why BTO has created ‘Stop to Watch’, a podcast that helps us take time out to immerse in nature and notice the birdlife around us; a break from our busy lives to let our minds rest and linger on how extraordinary the ordinary things are! Whether you’re new to enjoying the wonders of wildlife or a seasoned birder, everyone can benefit from connecting with nature through mindful birdwatching.


The short podcast, narrated by actor Martin Shaw, introduces you to mindfulness and birds, which you can download to use at home or out on a walk. So whether you’re planning to take a walk through a local park or enjoying your garden during these difficult times, Stop to Watch could help you reduce your stress and anxiety levels to support you through the lockdown.

Put the binoculars and notebook away and give yourself time with nature with no other distractions. Watch, listen and notice all you see, hear, feel and smell. Let the stresses of the day melt away and try to be present in the moment where you sit or stand. Visit bto.org/podcast to find out more and download.

BW




7 ways birding gets you fitter



It's regular exercise. Not the most strenuous, perhaps, but there's nothing to stop you making sure that your walking between hides or around reserves is of the brisk variety, designed to get you a bit out of breath. As long as you stay alert to the sights and sounds around you, you won't miss anything.

TOM BAILEY


It's good for your bones and joints, too, being low-impact.



If you're a birder who never heads out without binoculars, scope, camera, guides, and a backpack full of paraphernalia, then it's probably good strength training, too.

TOM BAILEY


Why not take it a step further, or many thousands of steps further, and do all your birding on foot, for a year at least? *Bird Watching* contributor David Chandler is doing just that this year, and editor Matt Merritt lost three stone in weight while doing it 10 years ago. You could even take on our sister magazine *Country Walking*'s #Walk1000Miles challenge at the same time.



You could follow the example of *BW*'s Mike Weedon, and hop on your bike to do your birding. You cover more ground that way, and a few steep hills will do your legs, lungs and heart the world of good.

LOOP IMAGES LTD/ALAMY

It might improve your diet. OK, we know birders are notorious for existing off Cornish pasties and bacon sandwiches when in the field [though not Mike Weedon, who is a vegetarian!], but getting engrossed in your birding will reduce the temptation to snack, and it might also make you think about where your food is sourced, and how you can live more sustainably.



It makes you happy. We've talked elsewhere at length about mental health, but that can boost your physical health, too.

TOM BAILEY

DOMINIC
COUZENS
ON THE...



House Sparrow

The history surrounding and life of this commonly-seen bird is nothing short of extraordinary. And it's a bird that has suffered serious declines in recent decades...

SPECIES FACTFILE HOUSE SPARROW

Scientific name: *Passer domesticus*

Length: 14-15cm

Wingspan: 21-25.5cm

UK numbers: 5.3 million breeding pairs

Habitat: Widespread

Diet: Seeds and scraps



Not many parents would be alarmed if their children were invited to join a 'Sparrow Club'. The name evokes a respectability and wholesomeness, in line with the Scouts, Guides or Brownies. Indeed, in the US the Sparrow Clubs are children's fundraising groups and do a great deal of good.

Go back a couple of centuries, however, and the network of contemporary Sparrow Clubs here in Britain had a very different mission: to wipe the House Sparrow from the face of the Earth.

It seems hard to believe in our relatively eco-friendly days, but for centuries, House Sparrows were considered such a threat to the harvest that to kill one was part of a civic duty – indeed, the custom of bringing dead vermin to the churchwarden in return for a reward had been established since at least the Middle Ages. House Sparrows were also regularly eaten by the poor.

By the 19th Century, the killing of sparrows had morphed into a local sport. Sparrow Clubs formalised and incentivised a cull, by inviting adults and children to

compete against each other, wiping out the birds in whatever way they could. There would even be annual dinners to award the winners, who often killed thousands. These clubs became part of village life, and some were still in existence as recently as the War Years.

In the long history of strife between people and bird, the slaughter of House Sparrows in our country has been extraordinary. Roger Lovegrove's book *Silent Fields* details some of the numbers. Take this as an example: in the 1790s, just on the Isle of Wight, 275,000 birds were



killed in the decade. In 70 years on the island between 1758-1835, just in one small parish of 11 square kilometres (4.2 square miles), people despatched 248,000. Lovegrove has also made a very rough estimate for the total cull for the whole of the UK. He reckons that between the years 1700 and 1930 it was, at the very least, 100 million individuals.

It is important to realise that, well into the 20th Century, a failed harvest could still cause serious financial hardship. And to be honest, however hard people tried, House Sparrows proved to be astoundingly

resilient in the face of the onslaught. In the 1970s, the House Sparrow population was estimated at 12 million pairs, making it our commonest bird. The real winner in the competition between humans and birds was the sparrow itself.

Tough and adaptable

In some ways, this resilience epitomises the House Sparrow, a truly extraordinary species, tough and adaptable to its very core. A pair has been known to live 640m down a mine for more than a year. Sparrows in South America have hitched

lifts on boats to conquer land upriver, and they colonised eastern Asia by following the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

This is the bird that was introduced to North America in 1851-72 and by 1910 had spread all over the continent. It is a bird that, in contrast to many of our other garden species, seems to survive even the harshest winter weather effortlessly. While other birds feed feverishly from dawn to dusk, sparrows seemingly spend much of their days simply gathering in groups and chirping noisily.

WHERE TO SEE THEM

With a range spread widely across the UK, House Sparrows are mostly seen in towns, villages and farmland, and breed and feed near to people. Absent from parts of the Scottish Highlands and thinly distributed in most upland areas. Disappearing from the centres of many cities.

Sparrow life has its brutal side – although in reality it is probably no fiercer than another bird's. This past week I myself witnessed the aftermath of what appeared to be a fatal fight between sparrows; with its assailants having been flushed away, the loser sat forlornly by the roadside at the bottom of a hedge, not alert enough to fly away, unable to lift its head. Male House Sparrows, most unusually, are known occasionally to commit infanticide; unpaired males removing the already hatched young of a rival, to instigate the breaking of a pair bond.

In sparrow society there is a stark contrast between the best and the also-rans which, in males at least, is so obvious that we humans can see it for ourselves. Males have badges of status, the black patches on their throat and breast. The amount of black varies considerably, and those with the most (usually 4-5 square centimetres) are the dominant birds.

They have extraordinary advantages throughout their lives. The black is a true reflection on their fighting ability, so in the winter they are dominant over smaller-bibbed males and so have better access to food, and therefore enter the breeding season in better shape. They start breeding earlier, thus getting territorial claims in first. They probably have bigger testes and, as a result have higher levels of testosterone, making them more aggressive, more likely to take part in communal chases and angrier in defence of their partners. They also defend better territories, usually with a convenient nest-hole included, which is safer for the youngsters and thus makes a great impression on females. They are the chosen ones.

Male House Sparrow

KEVIN MASELL/ALAMY

“THE HOUSE SPARROW IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW BIRDS THAT IS TRULY DEPENDENT ON HUMAN BEINGS”

Universally loved

One thing that can be said of sparrow society is that it effectively sifts out the weakest. Today's living sparrows have all thrived within the severe strictures of their demanding social lives. They are über-birds, geared towards survival.

The great sparrow persecutions that lasted for hundreds of

years in Britain left the House Sparrow almost untouched. It has always seemed that only a true catastrophe could dent their success. Until recently, their dominance seemed untouchable.

But all of a sudden, it wasn't. After the 1970s, after 10,000 years of human-sparrow interactions, a chink appeared in the sparrow's armour.

Between the years 1977-2010, the UK population sank by 69%. Declines were across the board, not just in towns and cities but in rural areas, too, and they also happened in parts of Europe, such as Paris.

For the first time, House Sparrows looked vulnerable. And also for the first time, House Sparrows became almost universally loved. In 2010, The Independent newspaper put up a prize of £5,000 for a scientific paper that could convincingly explain the decline. It hasn't yet been claimed.

Despite this, evidence is stacking up. It seems that the problem in countryside areas is that first-year birds, trying to survive that stage between leaving the nest and breeding for the first time, cannot find

Male House Sparrow

MIKE OCARROLL/ALAMY

A male House Sparrow feeding a youngster



ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

enough to eat, due to that juggernaut known as agricultural intensification (especially the lack of winter stubbles.)

In towns, the main reason for the declines seems to be that breeding adults cannot find enough insects to feed their young in the stage between hatching and leaving the nest, which means that not enough youngsters even reach the first-year stage. Biological systems are always complicated, so there are, no doubt, a range of factors that are conspiring against House Sparrows.

However, the twin decline of sparrows in two quite separate habitats is ominous, and not just for our newly-loved street urchin. Something is so sick in our environment that it is doing what hundreds of years of extreme persecution couldn't do. The House Sparrow is one of the very few birds that is truly dependent on human beings. Whatever is happening to the sparrow is potentially happening to us, too.

It seems we have found the way, at last, to curb a bird that lives on our coat-tails. The Sparrow Clubs couldn't do it. Perhaps we should reinstate them, now, to help it to thrive instead. It could be more than our civic duty. It could be our means to survival.

BW

Reference: *Birds and People*, by Mark Cocker

Female House Sparrow; note the plain features compared to the male, and the broad pale 'supercilium' (eyebrow)

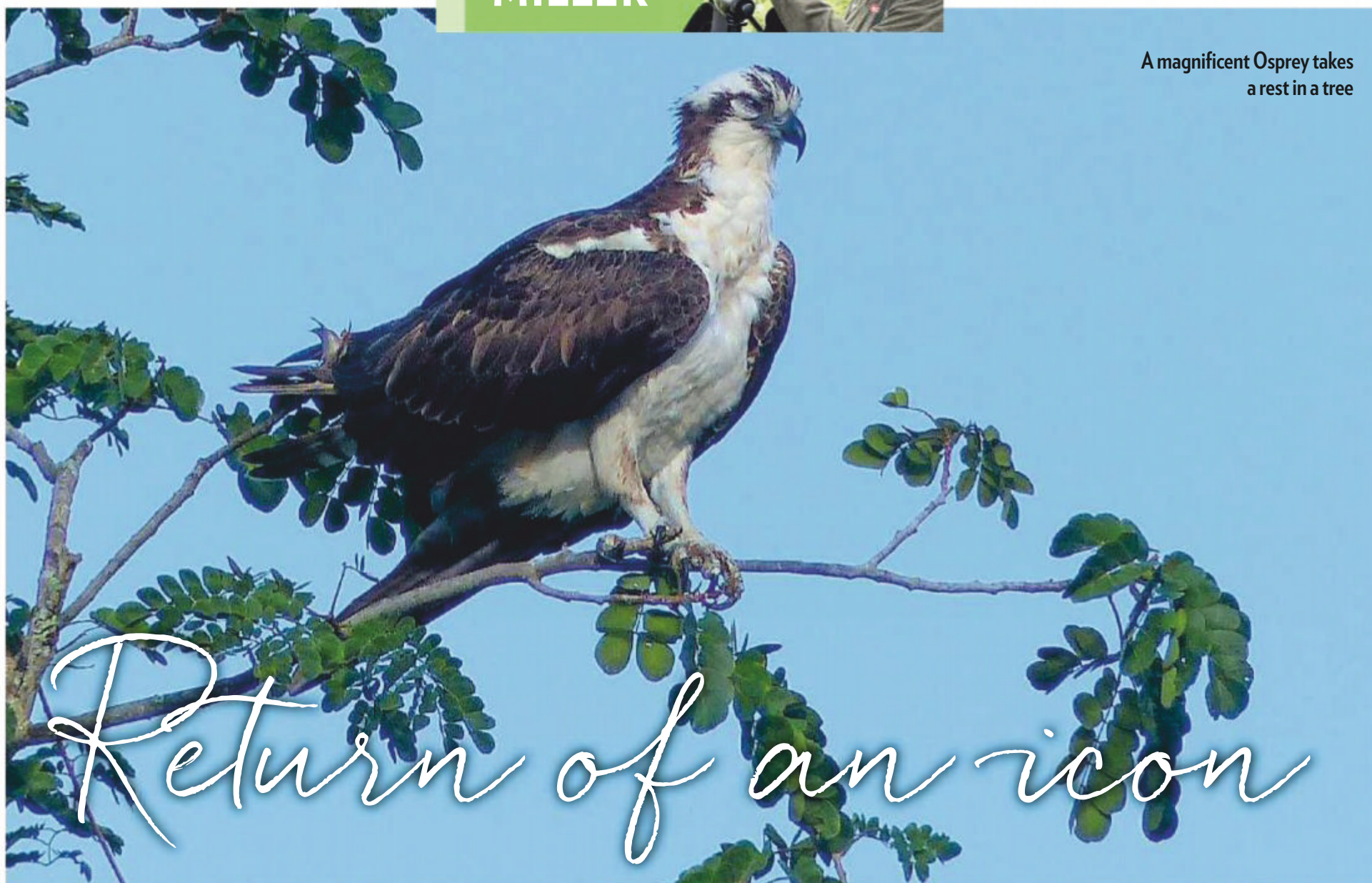


DP WILDLIFE VERTERATES/ALAMY

RUTH
MILLER



A magnificent Osprey takes
a rest in a tree



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Return of an icon

Here, Ruth celebrates one of the birding world's best success stories:
the rise of the Osprey

Picture the scene. We are quietly working on our computers when suddenly outside a commotion starts up. We rush to the window and look out across the rooftops of Llandudno.

Every single Herring Gull, and there are a lot in Llandudno, is up in the sky, wheeling and calling vociferously. Jackdaws are swooping around, and even Feral Pigeons are flapping about in panic.

We have learned to recognise the signs from our avian early warning system.

This pandemonium means just one thing: Osprey!

We scan the sky frantically, trying to work out from the panicking gulls which way the Osprey is coming. Then we spot it, deep wingbeats as this wonderful raptor powers across the sky, over the town and towards the limestone headland of the Great Orme behind us as it migrates north.

We follow the Osprey's progress from our window, getting a fantastic view of this beautiful bird until we lose sight of it over the headland. Gradually the gulls calm down and settle back among the chimney

pots, feathers ruffled but no harm done. It is incredible to think how much things have changed for the better in terms of UK Ospreys. Once persecuted to extinction in the UK, in 1954 a pair tried to nest near Loch Garten in the Scottish Highlands. For several successive years, the nest was sadly raided by egg collectors; but in 1959, an intense 24-hour watch over the nest prevented any egg thefts, and three chicks were successfully reared.

The then Director of RSPB Scotland, George Waterston, took the unprecedented move to allow public viewing of the nest site



Glaslyn chicks

BYWYD GWILT GLASLYN WILDLIFE



Pont Croesor

BECCI PHASEY



The long wings and short tail give the Osprey an almost gull-like flight profile

FACT FILE

[WESTERN] OSPREY

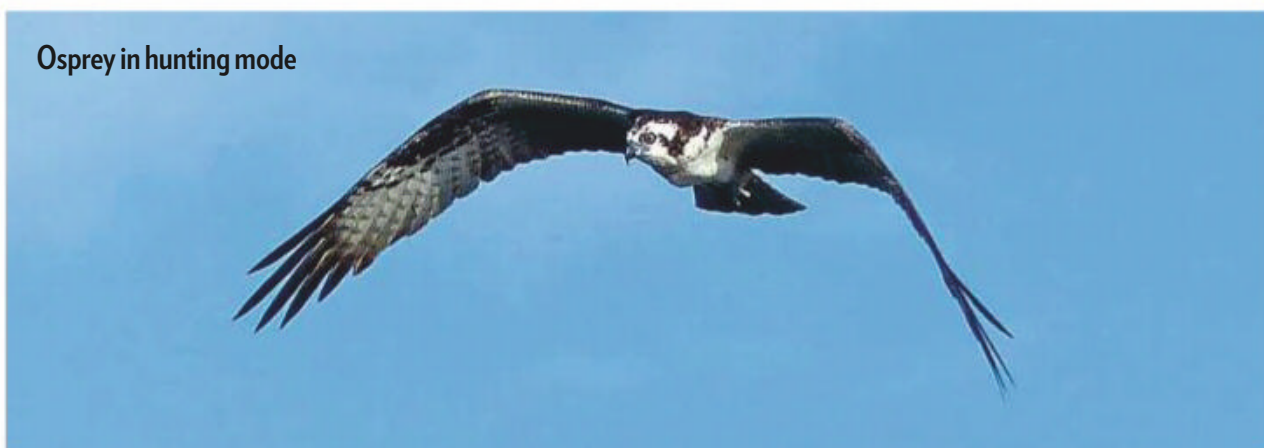
Pandion haliaetus

Vital Statistics: Length – 52-60 cm, wingspan – 152 – 167 cm. Females are up to 20% bigger.

Visiting times: March/April until September. Ospreys are incredibly date-faithful and will often return to their traditional nest sites on or near the same date, each year.

Maternity ward: Clutches can be one to four eggs, but the average is three eggs spread over an interval of a few days. Eggs usually hatch after 37-38 days' incubation. Young are fully grown at six weeks and leave the nest at eight to ten weeks.

Mealtimes: Ospreys only eat fish, they are piscivores. Most hunt by hovering 10-30m above water before plunge-diving talons-first to catch their prey. It takes huge strength to lift themselves and prey out of the water from a standing start. Females will catch larger fish. Osprey turn the fish to face forwards to make it more streamlined for aerial transport to the nest or a preferred feeding perch. If fish feed nearer the surface, Osprey may pluck their prey straight from the water.



Osprey in hunting mode

rather than keeping it under wraps. This not only indirectly increased the level of protection with so many people knowing about the site, but also raised awareness of Ospreys and their dire situation. Every spring since then, teams of volunteers have made the pilgrimage to Loch Garten to look after the nest site, while thousands of visitors come to watch from the visitor centre, as the Osprey family story plays out for the crowds.

Safe place to nest

Now, there are some 250 breeding pairs of Ospreys across the UK, a figure inconceivable back in the 1950s. We have four nesting pairs in mid and north Wales, that are known about in public circles; and perhaps our favourite Osprey Project is in the Glaslyn Valley.

Clearly Ospreys have taste: this is a particularly scenic part of Wales, comprising a lowland area in the bowl of the hills of Snowdonia, with the fish-rich Glaslyn River flowing through on its way to the sea, just beyond nearby Porthmadog. More importantly, it has just what an Osprey is looking for in spring: a safe place to nest and a ready source of food nearby.

A pair of Ospreys first nested here in 2004, with a watch being set up immediately by the RSPB to protect Wales's first breeding pair. That natural nest was

unfortunately blown down in a storm and the two chicks were sadly lost, so in preparation for the following year, a nest platform was created with a CCTV camera installed to relay the action to a viewing hide at a safe distance.

In 2005, two chicks were successfully fledged, and from then on, the Ospreys continued to return every year. In 2014, the project was officially handed over by the RSPB to the local community, with the charity Bywyd Gwyllt Glaslyn Wildlife created to manage the project and they, and the Ospreys there, have continued from strength to strength. Not only have the birds returned each year, successfully raising two or three chicks each time, but Glaslyn-bred Ospreys, both first and second-generation, have been logged returning to breed elsewhere in the UK. Of course, in the current restricted circumstances, we can't get our Osprey nesting fix in person, but thanks to technology, we can log on to the livestreaming camera glaslynwildlife.co.uk/live and enjoy great views from our own sofa.

Mind you, it seems that this year, the Ospreys are coming to us. Literally as I wrote that last line, I heard a sudden crescendo in the Herring Gull calls outside. I dashed to the window and there was an Osprey flying over the town heading north. Unusually, this bird did not fly

straight towards the Great Orme. Instead it circled over the bay, gradually gaining in height with a cloud of gulls and Jackdaws buzzing around underneath it like an ineffectual cloud of midges. We watched it circle higher and higher until we lost sight of it in the cloud. How amazing! Osprey number five seen from our window and just as I was writing about them.

That volunteer protection team in Loch Garten in the 1950s would probably have never have imagined in their wildest dreams that Ospreys would return to our country in such incredible numbers, but they should be proud that their efforts sowed the seed for the return of these iconic birds of prey, which the public have taken to their hearts.

Ruth Miller is one half of The Biggest Twitch team, and along with partner Alan Davies, set the then world record for most bird species seen in a year – 4,341, in 2008, an experience they wrote about in their book, *The Biggest Twitch*. Indeed, Ruth is still the female world record-holder! As well as her work as a tour leader, she is the author of the *Birds, Boots and Butties* books, on walking, birding and tea-drinking in North Wales, and previously worked as the RSPB's head of trading. She lives in North Wales. birdwatchingtrips.co.uk

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ID Challenge

In summer, birds can be at a premium, but they still need identifying, even the ‘forgotten’ ones...

July is a warm month with plenty of daylight, but birdwatching can be tough. No wonder many birders turn their attentions to flowers and insects (butterflies and dragonflies being favourites); as heat haze, secretive nesting behaviour and a general lack of migration combine to make birdwatching hard work. There are still plenty of birds out there, of course. And these include some species which get very little

attention, when fancy visitors like Swifts, warblers and Nightingales are grabbing attention in their own particular ways. Here are six of those ‘forgotten’ birds. None are rare, they are just not birds which occupy our birding imaginations at this time of year. Please try to name them, then turn the page for our solutions, and, as every month, turn once more for some tips about identifying birds, especially those which we all seem to forget when out birding!

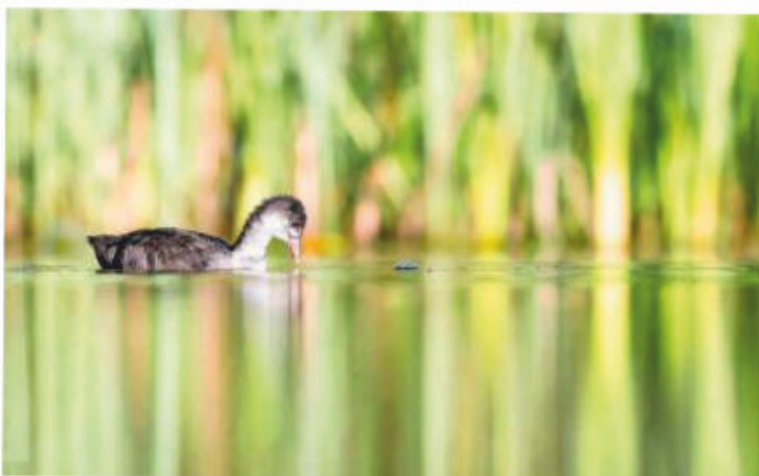
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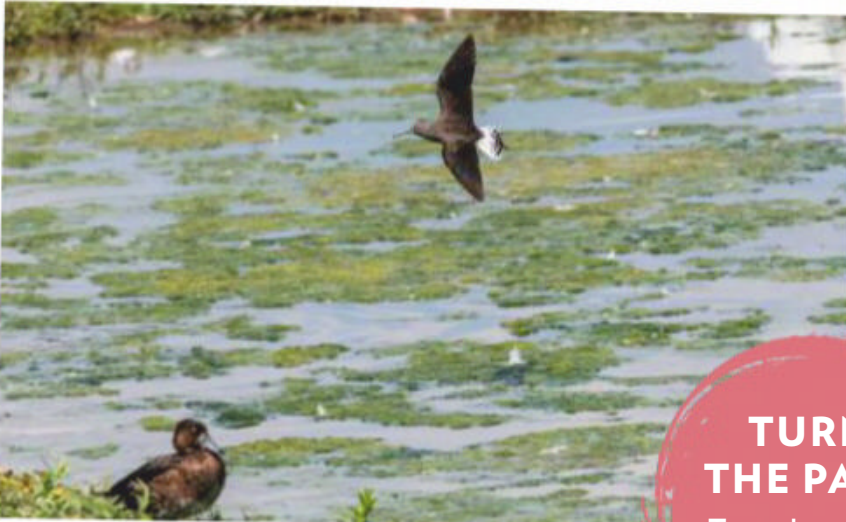
Bird 3:



Bird 4:



Bird 5:



Bird 6:

CAN YOU NAME THESE ‘FORGOTTEN’ BIRDS?



Bird 1:



Bird 2:

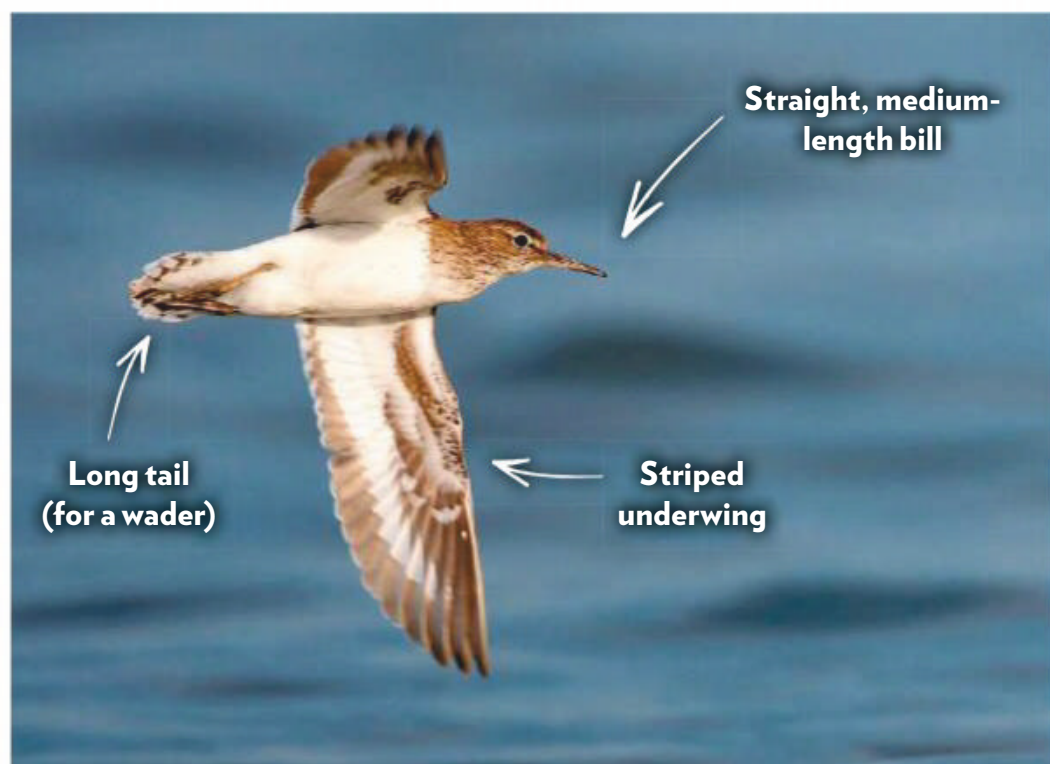
TURN THE PAGE
To see how many you got right!

Answers & solutions

Check your answers against our explanations. Remember, as ever, there are no 'trick' birds or extreme rarities among those here

ID TIP!

Don't forget that many birds have plumages which are not always illustrated in bird books, such as juveniles



BIRD 1

This is a flying wader, and like many waders it has a clean white belly and undertail coverts. The head though is brown, with a very little streakiness on the upper breast. There is a dark eyestripe, contrasting with a longish, pale supercilium (pale 'eyebrow' stripe). The medium-sized bill is straight or with a tiny amount of 'droop'. The tail is long enough to easily 'cover' the relatively short yellow-green legs and feet. The other distinctive feature is the striping on the underwing (hard to see). That underwing in itself should be enough to rule out many waders with medium length straight bills; indeed it should narrow it to the **Common Sandpiper**, a 'forgotten' bird which breeds by streams and lakes in the uplands of northern and western UK.

Key features

- Obviously a wader
- Straight, medium length bill
- Oddly barred underwing
- 'Long' tail and short legs

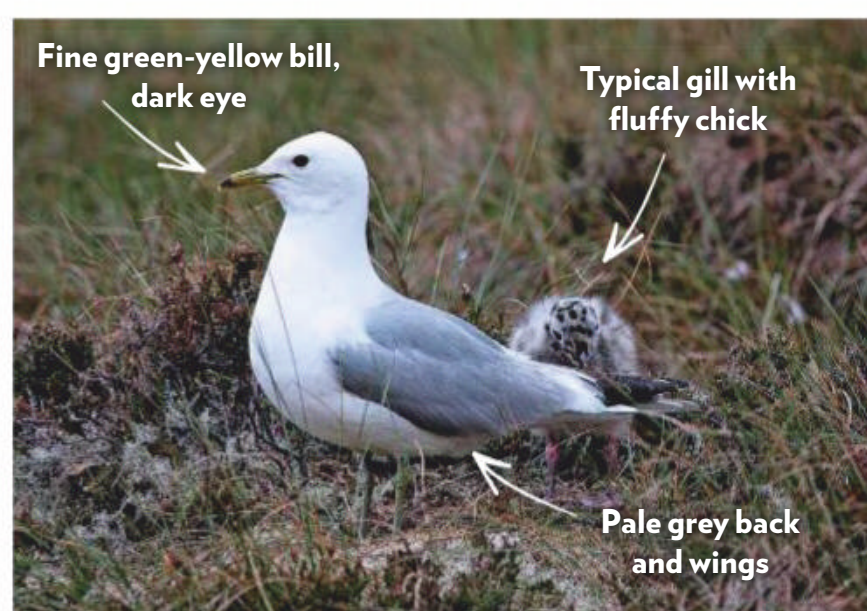


BIRD 2

Here is what looks like a green-coloured warbler. But which one? The green tones may point toward this being a *Phylloscopus* warbler (the genus to which Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Wood Warbler below). But they all have dark stripes 'through' the eye and pale supercilia. This bird has a plain greyish 'face'. But there are hints of blackish feathering on the sides of the crown, and if you look very closely, one or two orange-yellow spots on the centre of the crown. The wing pattern is distinctive, with a bold pale wing-bar and perhaps a smaller one further forward on the wing, plus pale tips to the tertials. This wing pattern combined with the head pattern and greenish plumage points to this being a **Goldcrest**; a juvenile, hence the poorly defined crown markings.

Key features

- Small, grey-green, warbler-like passerine
- Plain face
- Hint of black crown side stripes and yellow crown dots
- Prominent pale wing-bars



BIRD 3

Here we have a bird which is surely a gull. The general shape, the white head and body, the grey back and black wing tips all confirm this. But which gull is it? We have at least seven species which breed in this country, and judging by that fluffy chick, this is presumably one of them! Our commonest nesting gull is the Kittiwake, which nests on cliffs, but this looks more like moorland. The two 'black-backed' species have very dark mantles and wings. Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls have dark hoods (unlike this bird). How about Herring Gull? No, that species has a long, thick bill with a red spot on the lower mandible and a pale eye. So, we are left with the gull it is so easy to forget in the summer, the **Common Gull**, which can and does nest on moorland, in northern parts of the UK.

Key features

- Typical gull with fluffy chick
- Small yellowish bill, dark eye
- White head
- Pale grey back and mantle



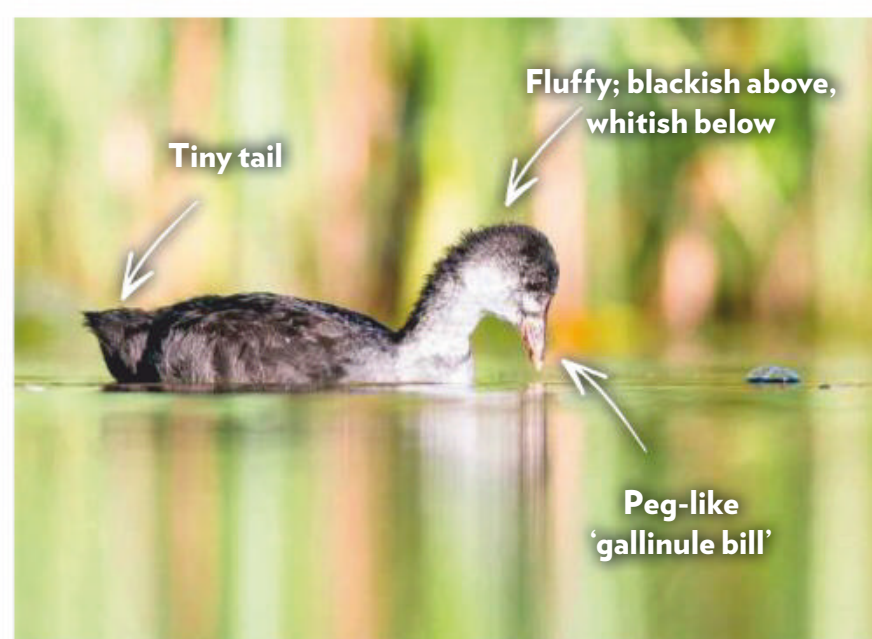
DAVID CHAPMAN/ALAMY

BIRD 4

Every year in *Bird Watching*, at around this time of year, we feature photographs of baby Robins, so you will have no trouble in identifying this bird. Except, of course, it isn't a baby Robin; baby Robins are brown with pale spots, this bird is heavily streaked with dark lines. It does look similarly proportioned to a Robin though (with a similar insect-eater's bill), making it look smaller than, say, a Song Thrush. And those streaks, as well as that pinkish gape mean you are right to go for a 'baby' bird. At this stage, it is probably best to look for hints of what the adult plumage will look like once the streaks have faded a bit. The long pale supercilium is a good clue, as its overall dark ground colour, and the pale spots forming a wing-bar. This is that perennial old Q&A favourite: the juvenile **Dunnock**.

Key features

- Robin-like structure
- Heavily dark-streaked all over
- Hint of pinkish gape
- Long, pale 'supercilium'



ED MARSHALL/ALAMY

BIRD 5

We swap a familiar yet easily forgotten, abundant, garden bird for a water bird, swimming in what looks to be still water. There is something oh so familiar about it, but what is it? The bill is an odd shape, sort of peg-shaped, not typical of a flattened bill of a 'normal' duck (or the fish-eating grasping bill of a sawbill); but not like the pointed bill of a grebe, or the hooked bill of a cormorant. No, this bird has the bill of a 'gallinule', a Moorhen or a Coot. But it is not an adult (or it would have a white or red bill, and the bird wouldn't look so fluffy). It is a juvenile, and the black-and-white plumage is characteristic of juvenile **Coot**, which is what this is. The similar Moorhen juvenile is a much browner bird all over.

Key features

- Swimming water bird
- Fluffy plumage of a youngster
- Black-and-white plumage
- Peg-like bill



NIGEL SAWYER/ALAMY

BIRD 6

We finish with a photograph featuring two species of bird. There is a dark brown duck at the bottom of the picture which is a Tufted Duck (itself a bird which is easily forgotten in summer, as are most ducks which go into 'eclipse' plumage during the summer moult). The higher bird is a flying wader. It is strikingly dark with an equally striking white rump and coarsely barred, black-and-white tail. The bill is straight and medium length and there is a pale line above the eye. These are hallmarks of a *Tringa* sandpiper. The very dark plumage and the striking square white rump point unquestionably to **Green Sandpiper**, a bird which starts returning from its breeding grounds, through the UK, in the early summer, sometimes as early as June.

Key features

- Small brown duck at bottom
- Black-and-white wader at top
- Very dark plumage
- Clean cut, square white rump



MY FAVOURITE SITE "FORGOTTEN BIRDS ARE UBIQUITOUS, SO I MAY AS WELL NOMINATE MY PETERBOROUGH BACK GARDEN." **MIKE WEEDON, ASSISTANT EDITOR**



ID Tips & tricks

Here are a few extra tips to help you to get to grips with 'forgotten bird' identification

ID TIP!

Forgotten species are everywhere. They could be hopping around your garden, or in a woodland, or on a lake, or at the seashore. Try to remember the forgotten!

Smaller grey pigeons: Feral Pigeon vs Stock Dove

Feral Pigeon

- Any colour goes
- Usually long black wing-bars
- Most often white rump
- White underwing



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Stock Dove

- Remarkably uniform in pattern
- Short, broken black wing-bars
- Always grey rump
- Grey underwing



DAVID TITLING PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY

Pipits: Meadow Pipit vs Rock Pipit

Meadow Pipit

- Small, with small fine bill
- Heavily streaked back
- Underparts pale with fine, neat, black streaking
- Pale eye ring, no dark eyestripe
- White outer tail feathers
- Pale bill and pale legs



WILDLIFE GMBH/ALAMY

Rock Pipit

- Large, with long, strong bill
- Almost unstreaked back
- Underparts dark with thick, smudgy streaks
- Broken pale eyering, dark eyestripe
- Pale grey outer tail feathers
- Dark bill and dark legs



AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

Don't forget juvenile Redshanks



OLIVER SMART/ALAMY

Some birds are forgotten at your peril. For example, the juvenile Redshank, when not quite fully grown, can cause confusion with other, similar waders, most notably the closely related Wood Sandpiper (or even the rare Lesser Yellowlegs). Learn this youngster's shape, structure, leg colour and plumage pattern and don't forget it, in the field!



SNAP IT!

Have you taken a great shot of a 'forgotten bird'? If so, why not share it with other readers; send photos to: birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

NEXT MONTH'S CHALLENGE

Juvenile waders revisited



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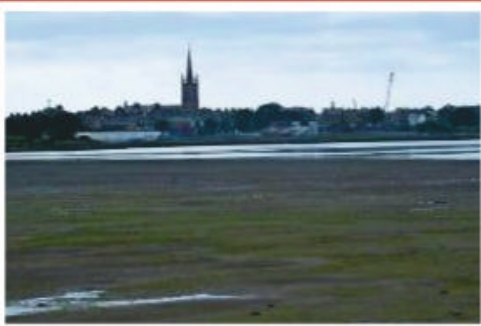
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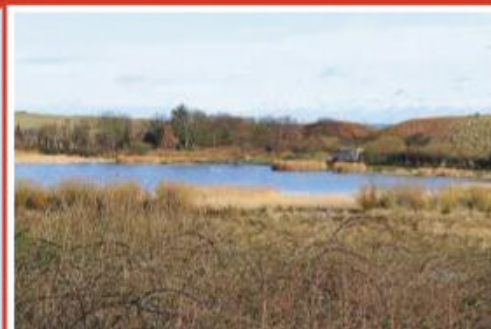
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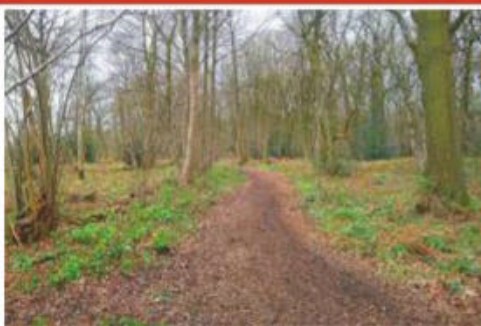
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LOW NEWTON



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EXMINSTER



GROVE



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birdwatching.co.uk/gbindex



ANGUS

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 MIN TIME: 4 HOURS

MONTROSE BASIN

A great site for birding, even in mid-summer

Red-breasted Merganser



INCAMERA/STOCK/ALAMY

Normally thought of as just a winter destination, the basin is very much a 12 months of the year location, with potential Ospreys fishing and even Quail heard in the fields as you walk to the hides, during the warmer months.

JOHN MILES

WHERE TO WATCH

1 Start at the visitor centre (when open) as this can give you information on where to see the birds present. There are great views across the basin, plus an artificial Sand Martin bank, a tern platform and chance of a Kingfisher.

2 Drive through Montrose and take the A935 and look out for the cemetery sign on the left. This is a great view point over the basin, and ideal for watching the geese come into roost.

3 Turn off the A935 at Mains of Dun and there is a small car park on your right. Walk across the road and take the path to join a farm track towards the west side of the basin. Check for farmland birds around the fields, especially Grey Partridge in the summer and Sky Lark high in the air.

4 This Wigeon hide gives great views over mudflats at low tide and marshes around the edge,

with wet hollows. More than 2,000 Wigeon have been counted, along with Teal and many waders in the channels.

5 The Shelduck hide looks onto the South Esk river where you might see a large concentration of Eiders and Red-breasted Mergansers, or even a passing Osprey. Check the reedbed for Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers in summer.

6 Continue on the minor road and keep a look out for Old Montrose, where you can drive along a lane to walk along the Lurgies with wet fields and reedbed, along with the river.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: DD10 9TA

GRID REF: NO 700 565

MAPS: OS Explorer 382,

OS Landranger 54

PARKING: Plenty, at several locations

TERRAIN: Farm tracks and fields

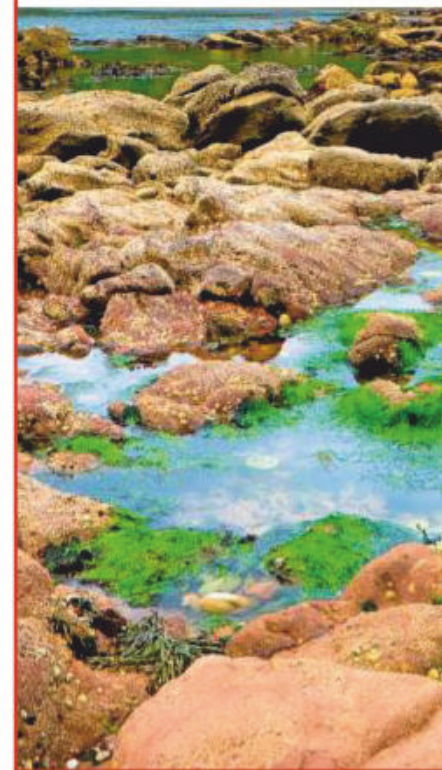
ACCESS: All year

FACILITIES: Montrose plus

scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/reserve/montrose-basin/

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Check the tides – some areas are ideal at low tide, and others at high, so there's always something of interest.



PRISMA/ALAMY



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TARGET SPECIES SPRING/SUMMER

- Sedge Warbler
- Grasshopper Warbler
- Quail
- Grey Partridge
- Sky Lark
- Osprey
- Marsh Harrier
- Eider
- Sand Martin
- Kingfisher

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Pink-footed Goose
- Whooper Swan
- Hen Harrier
- Merlin
- Dunlin
- Knot
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Curlew

MERSEHEAD RSPB

It's about a lot more than Barnacle Geese...

Marsh Harrier



NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

A great reserve to visit at any time of the year, with a whole variety of habitats as well as the famous Barnacle Geese, once reduced to just 360 birds left in the world. It is also noted for its Natterjack Toads in spring.

JOHN MILES

WHERE TO WATCH

1 As you drive towards the centre, check the reedbed for Reed Warbler, which is scarce in Dumfries and Galloway. Look over the fields for geese and raptors.

2 The centre has views over fresh water, with a good chance of Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit,

Redshank, Snipe and Curlew. Barnacle Geese will be here from October till April. There is also a feeding station which is good for Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrow.

3 The first hide is ideal for a mix of ducks and geese, with often good numbers of Shoveler, Pintail and Teal. Both Canada and Greylag Geese use the reserve. Look out for raptors like Marsh Harrier and Goshawk in summer and Hen Harrier, Merlin and Sparrowhawk in winter.

4 The second hide has deeper water, so look out for Little Grebe and even Otter, here. A big reedbed extends to the east,

often with a Starling roost in the winter. Scan for waders, with plenty of Lapwings nesting on the reserve, plus Snipe and Redshank adding to the list. Spoonbills once built a nest here.

5 A new section of reserve has a potential for a new hide and adding to the breeding birds.

6 A lovely circular walk takes you out to the Solway where plants like Sea Holly, Sea Milkwort and Sea Kale are found. Look for migrants, such as Wheatear, Whinchat and White Wagtail, while waders, such as Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher, will nest out here, so look for those, too.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: DG2 8AH

GRID REF: NX 928 566

MAPS: OS Explorer 313, OS Landranger 84

WHERE TO PARK: The main car-parking area is by the visitor centre

TERRAIN: A mixture of beach grassland, paths and tarmac.

Walking boots/shoes are essential

ACCESS: Open all year

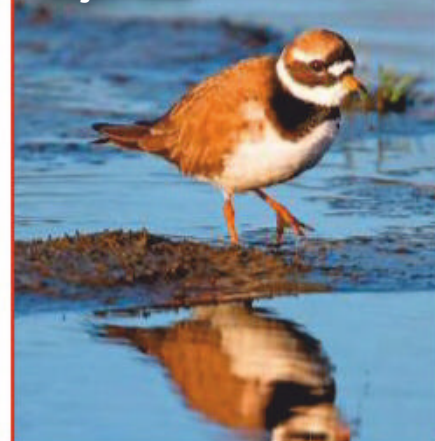
rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/mersehead/

FACILITIES: Toilets in the centre, other facilities can be found at New Abbey, Southernness

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Combine a visit here with a high tide at Southernness for seawatching.

Ringed Plover



ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES SPRING/SUMMER

- White Wagtail
- Reed Warbler
- Sedge Warbler
- Willow Warbler
- Wheatear
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Redshank
- Lapwing
- Shelduck
- Marsh Harrier

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Barnacle Goose
- Pink-footed Goose
- Whooper Swan
- Wigeon
- Pintail
- Shoveler
- Teal
- Little Egret
- Hen Harrier
- Peregrine
- Merlin



NORTHUMBERLAND

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

LOW NEWTON

An underwatched area offering excellent year-round birdwatching

Common Tern



ALAN WILLIAMS/ALAMY

The circular walk can be extended to the south by following the footpath westwards across the edge of the golf course for more views of the pools and grassland and scrub. To the north you can walk along the cliffs to Newton Point accessed by a path just below the corrugated iron church for seawatching.

STEVE NEWMAN

WHERE TO WATCH

1 Picnic Hill: Some 10 minutes' walk from the hide will bring you to a picnic table on front of an unusual World War Two pillbox

surrounded by gorse bushes. It has great views of the fields and reserve. In February, we got some 30 Whooper Swans, Stonechat, Yellowhammer, Redshank, Ringed Plover and Buzzard.

2 The Beach: The Carrs or rocks here are good spots to scan for Purple Sandpipers in winter and the whole beach can produce some excellent wading birds. Ringed Plovers, Redshanks, Oystercatchers, Sanderling and migrating Osprey can be seen.

3 The Hide: The hide is accessed by a path that is suitable for wheelchairs. Little Grebe, Mallard,

Mute Swan, Moorhen, Coot, Black-headed Gull, Reed Bunting, and Sedge Warbler can all be seen but phalaropes have also been recorded here as have Purple Heron and Bittern. Check the scrub behind the hide for Pallas, Barred and Willow Warbler.

4 Newton Point: Great seawatching, with Little, Common, Arctic and Roseate Terns all possible from the nearby colonies, as well as divers, grebes and sea ducks such as Eider. You can turn right and continue to head back to the village along the cliff top. Look for Yellow Wagtail along the way.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: NE66 3EP

GRID REF: NT 242 242

MAPS: OS Explorer 340, OS Landranger 75

PARKING Turn off the B1339 just north of Embleton signposted for Newton. Just before you enter the village there is a free car park for about 40 cars. You can also take the right-hand fork and after three hundred yards there is free parking on the left-hand side for some six cars. There is a pay and display car park some 150 yards above Low Newton. As you arrive at the square in Low Newton take the right-hand turn, following the road behind the square by the National Trust information board. There is an excellent new hide which has a ramp for disabled access.

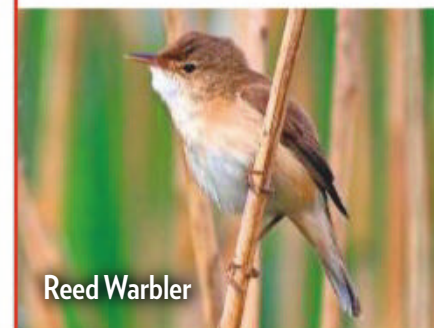
TERRAIN Flat walking. The first half a mile walk to Newton Pool hide has a surfaced track suitable for wheelchairs.

ACCESS Open all year round

FACILITIES Public toilets in Low Newton – food available in pubs

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Browse the reedbeds behind the hide for warblers.



Reed Warbler

ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES WINTER

- Purple Sandpiper
- Whooper Swan
- Common Scoter

SPRING

- Roseate Tern
- Wheatear
- Whinchat

SUMMER

- Barred Warbler
- Mediterranean Gull
- Black-tailed Godwit

AUTUMN

- Osprey
- Golden Plover
- Ruff

CO. DOWN

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

HOLYWOOD TO BELFAST

A coastal walk which really does have the WOW factor!

Rock Pipit



CALVIN DICKSON/ALAMY

This is an out-and-back walk from Hollywood via Kinnegar to the Belfast RSPB reserve (WOW: Window on Wildlife). The emphasis is on the coast, with its ducks, gulls, terns and waders there is some urban birding at the start, a sewage farm, a small stream, reedbeds, a small wooded area and feeders.

DEREK POLLEY

WHERE TO WATCH

1 Hollywood Station: Scan (scope recommended) across Belfast Lough for diving ducks, Cormorant, Shag, divers and grebes. Scan the sewage outflow pipe at the start

for waders and gulls, especially at high tide. The urban area inland will provide the usual mix of common/garden birds.

2 Sewage works: Usually holds Mallard, Tufted Duck and Gadwall, but at low tide scan the rocky shore for small waders, gulls, terns (in summer) and Brent Geese.

3 Kinnegar Lagoon: A very productive area. The lagoon is a high tide roost for waders and ducks and it is possible to see Little Egret, Little Grebe and Kingfisher here. The surrounding scrub and reedbeds are good in spring and summer for warblers. At low tide, waders and gulls spread out to feed over the

beach and the diving ducks out in the Lough come closer in to feed in the shallow water.

4 Car park: Have another look over Belfast Lough for ducks, divers, grebes and auks (in autumn).

5 Channel: Walk past Hide 2 to the channel. The trees will give finches, tits and warblers and the channel can give more views over the Lough and the best chance of Black Guillemots.

6 WOW: Hide 1 and the observation room give good views. Black-tailed Godwits winter there and the reserve has a good reputation for white-winged gulls.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: BT18 9JF

GRID REFERENCE: 395792

MAPS: Northern Ireland OS Map Sheet 15 (Belfast)

PARKING: Anywhere along The Esplanade in Hollywood

TERRAIN: Road and rough path, flat and level

ACCESSIBILITY: Year round. The observation room (usually) opens 10am – 4pm November to March, 10am – 5pm April to October. RSPB members free, non-members £3

FACILITIES: Everything you need in Hollywood, WOW has toilets and serves tea and coffee

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE:

The walk is best done at low tide, but the reserve is where the birds roost at high tide.



DAVID Tipling/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES WINTER

- Teal
- Wigeon
- Shelduck
- Gadwall
- Shoveler
- Eider
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Brent Goose
- Goldeneye
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Lapwing
- Knot
- Bar-tailed Godwit

SPRING

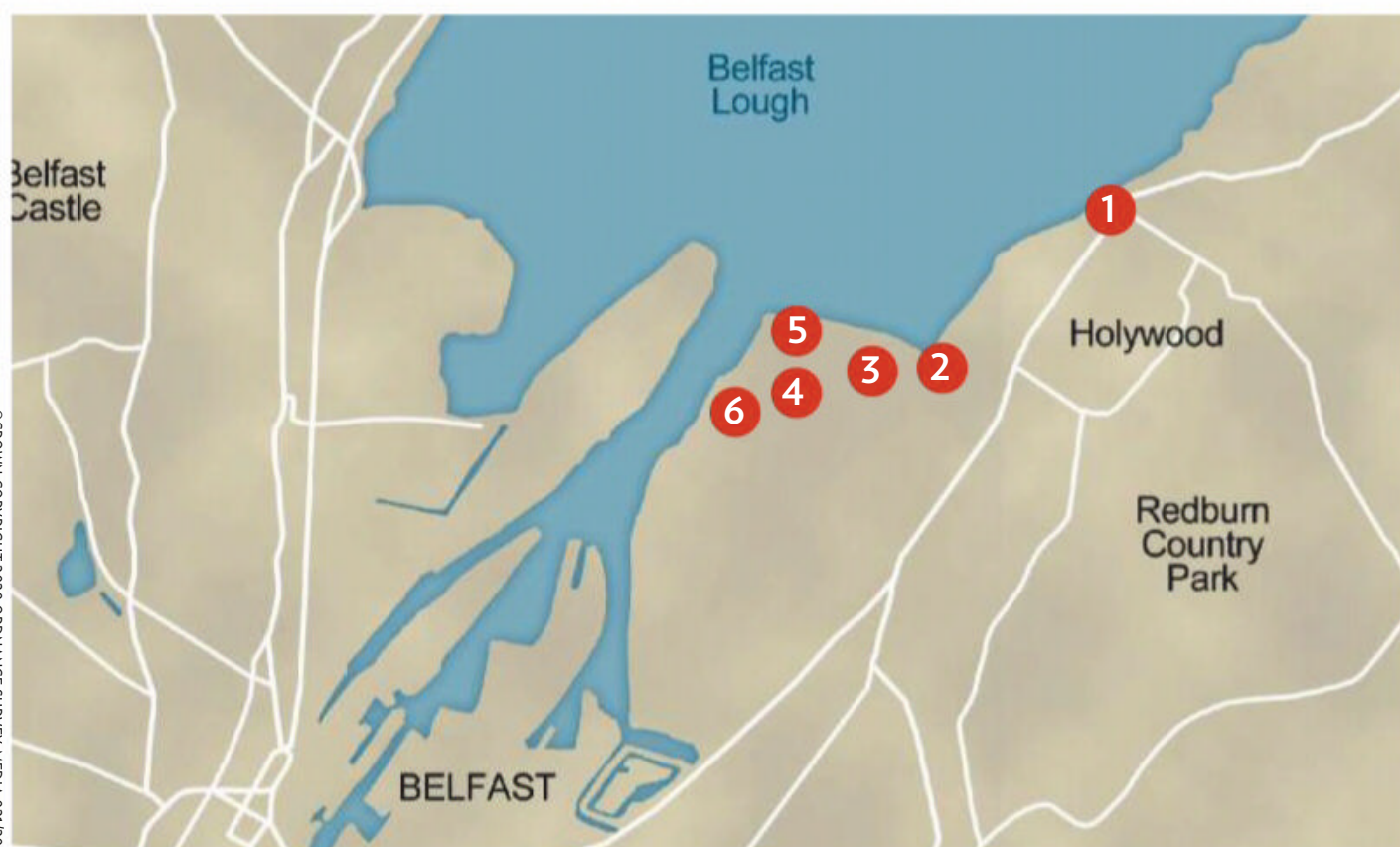
- Passage waders
- Common Sandpiper

SUMMER

- Black-headed Gull
- Mediterranean Gull
- Common Tern
- Arctic Tern
- Roseate Tern

AUTUMN

- Ruff
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Spotted Redshank
- Little Stint
- Pectoral Sandpiper



EAST YORKSHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

EASINGTON PONDS

Stop off here to start a great stay at Spurn

Oystercatcher



FRANCESCO PUNTROLLI/ALAMY

Easington is a great place to start your 'Spurn experience', with so many areas to cover. Many birders have moved here from other parts of Yorkshire and beyond, making the village very well covered on a daily basis.

JOHN MILES

WHERE TO WATCH

1 The Spurn Peninsula is a mega for birding but don't forget there are birds turning up all along this coast, and especially here at Easington. This lane is a good place to start checking the hedges and gardens.

2 To access the lagoons, it is best to walk past the 'Boat Yard'

checking the area for classics like Black Redstart and Ring Ouzel along with the odd rarity. Isabelline Wheatear was a great find in the fields but look out for geese and swans also grazing here. Waders like Golden Plover can drop in.

3 The banking provides views over the lagoons and back onto the fields. In summer, an area is cordoned off for breeding Little Terns, but look out for Arctic, Common and Sandwich Terns as well. Terns bring in skuas, with Arctic Skua being a classic. Breeding waders include Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher but rarities can be found with Greater Sand Plover found by the tern warden. Check the wader roosts, but do not disturb.

4 Although Spurn has its own seawatching hide, locals also watch this area, with classics including Balearic and Sooty Shearwater, Grey Phalarope, with Little Auk and divers in winter.

5 The gas terminal was made famous for the Siberian Accentor found there in October 2016, but having lights on all night draws migrants to this location, like Siberian Chiffchaff, Red-breasted Flycatcher and many more.

6 Just out of the village is a mixture of fields worth checking for geese and swans. Try Peter's Lane for even more migrants, with Hume's Warbler and Siberian Stonechat recently found.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: HU12 0TY

GRID REF: TA407187

MAPS: OS Explorer 292, OS Landranger 113

PARKING: The lane down to the boat yard is ideal, and then you can walk the rest of the area watching out for traffic in the village and along the road to Kilnsea

TERRAIN: Most of the area has some rough ground while road ways are smooth. Try and use pavements where possible when walking up the road. Best to use stout footwear

OPENING: Crown and Anchor, tel: 01964 650 276, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's new visitor centre at Spurn

INSIDE KNOWLEDGE

Check your weather forecast for an east wind for best results.



JOHN MILES



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TARGET SPECIES
SPRING/SUMMER

- Little Tern
- Sandwich Tern
- Arctic Tern
- Common Tern
- Ringed Plover
- Oystercatcher

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Yellow-browed Warbler
- Pied Flycatcher
- Redstart
- Divers
- Little Auk
- Brent Geese sp
- Harriers
- Red Kite
- Rough-legged Buzzard
- Wader roost

QUARRY FARM

A great example of 'edgeland' between the town and the surrounding countryside

Yellowhammer



FRANK HECKER/ALAMY

Popular with dog walkers, this former brickworks lies on the edge of Stamford. A range of habitats includes a deciduous wood, overgrown hedgerows, Hawthorn scrub and grassland, with some rough areas and Rabbit-grazed turf along with two ponds and the old clay pit.

TERRY MITCHAM

WHERE TO WATCH

1 Check the woodland for woodpeckers, Blackcap and Chiffchaff. Marsh Tit has occurred. Stock Doves breed. Good numbers of common woodland birds – Wren, Robin, Dunnock are present.

2 There are feeding areas for Green Woodpecker and Mistle Thrush on the short grassy turf. Scattered Hawthorns attract passage Whinchats and Stonechats.

3 Wheatears feed on bare ground in the old clay pit on spring and autumn migration. Breeding Meadow Pipits and Sky Larks on the surrounding grassland with hunting Red Kites, Buzzards and Kestrels regular.

4 This large area of dense Hawthorn scrub has breeding Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Linnet and Yellowhammer.

5 These small fields with their surrounding hedges are good for finches and buntings in autumn and winter – Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting, with the occasional Tree Sparrow. Grey Partridge, now scarce in Rutland, is present.

6 This high point to the north of the wood has extensive views and is ideal for migration watching in autumn – Golden Plovers, Sky Larks, winter thrushes, Meadow Pipits and finches all pass over. Hobby and Peregrine have been recorded. Abundant Teasels here feed large flocks of Goldfinches in autumn. A pond with a small reedbed attracts Sedge and Reed Warbler on migration.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE PE9 2YL

GRID REF: TF0 120 83

MAPS: OS Explorer 15, OS Landranger 141

TERRAIN: Generally level, or only gently sloping along tracks. Very muddy after rain, though, so make sure to remember to take appropriate footwear

ACCESS: Year-round and all hours, but stick to the footpaths

FACILITIES: Nothing on site, but everything you might need is in nearby Stamford and Great Casterton - pubs, toilets, shops and petrol stations

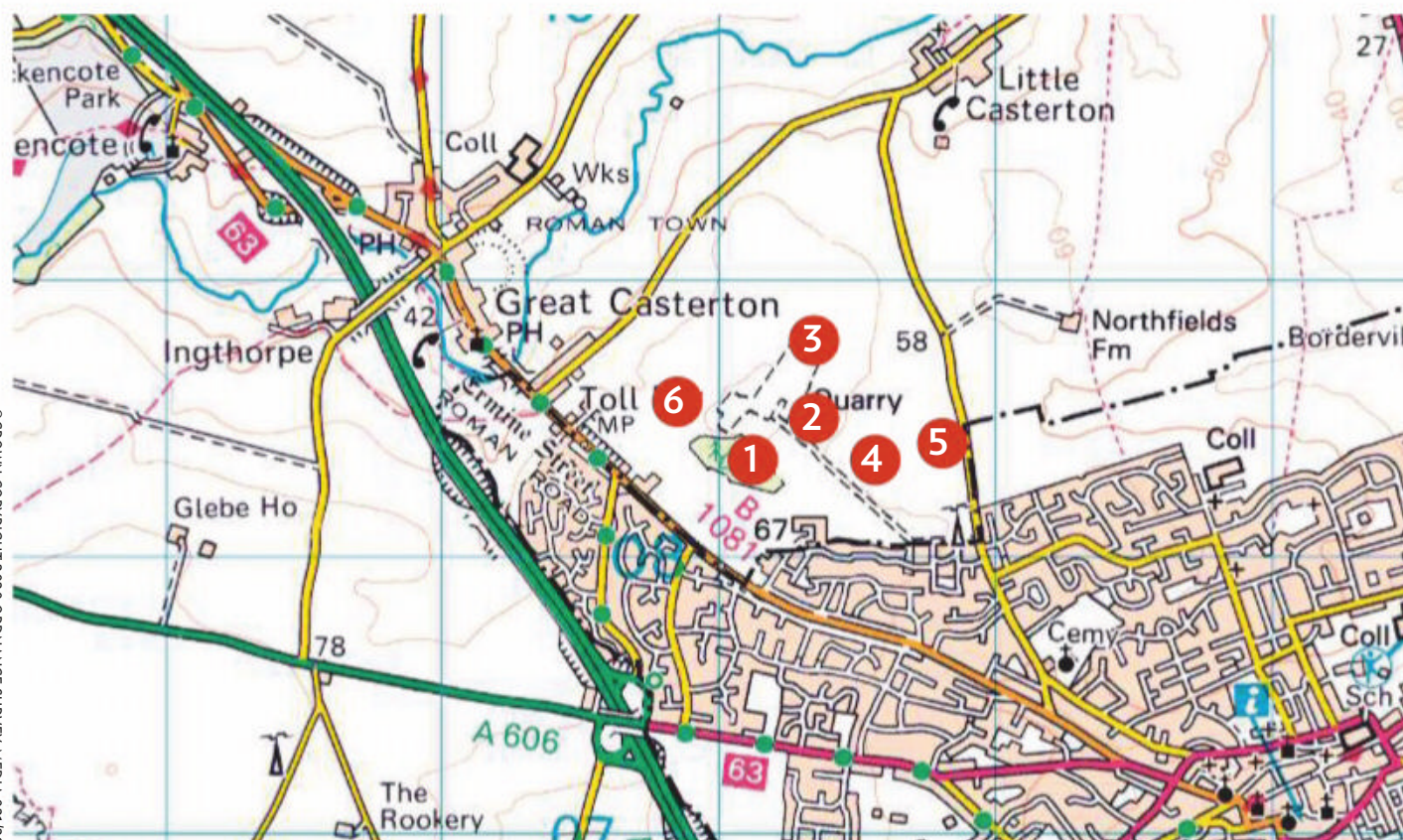
INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Visit early to avoid most dog walkers.

Chaffinch



ERNIE JAMES/ALAMY



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ALL YEAR TARGET SPECIES

- Grey Partridge
- Sparrowhawk
- Red Kite
- Buzzard
- Stock Dove
- Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Green Woodpecker
- Sky Lark
- Meadow Pipit
- Bullfinch
- Yellowhammer

SUMMER

- Willow Warbler
- Chiffchaff
- Blackcap
- Lesser Whitethroat
- Whitethroat

WARWICKSHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 2 MIN TIME: 2 HOURS

BRANDON WOOD

Plenty of birdlife amongst some varied habitat

Whitethroat



FLPA/ALAMY

Although planted with belts of Scots and Corsican Pines over the years, there is still a good mixture of oak and an impressive tree list of around 50 species. On the outskirts of the main wood are small areas of scrubland and some arable fields. Muntjac and Roe Deer may be seen, while this is one of the few sites in Warwickshire to reportedly have a population of Dormice.

PETE HACKETT

WHERE TO WATCH

1 The main woodland holds a small population of Marsh Tits, so brush up on their calls before you visit. Siskin, Lesser Redpoll and the occasional Brambling are present in winter. Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Creeper, Bullfinch and Goldcrest should be encountered. Chance of a roosting Tawny Owl. Both Purple Emperor and Silver-washed Fritillary have been recorded, so keep an eye out if visiting in summer.

2 Check the small pools for a variety of aquatic life and

dragonflies, and a chance of seeing a Great Crested Newt.

3 The more open areas of overgrown heathland attract Whitethroat, Linnet, Reed Bunting with hunting Kestrel and a chance of Barn Owl. Chance of a passage Whinchat or Stonechat. Don't forget to look upwards as many birds pass over the area commuting to Brandon Marsh.

4 Start or finish the walk at Brandon Marsh for extra species.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: CV3 3GW

(Brandon Lane)

GRID REF: SP 393 766

MAPS: OS Explorer 221, OS Landranger 140

PARKING: Park nearby in Binley Woods and access from Ferndale Avenue or the recreation ground or use Brandon Marsh and access from Brandon Lane

TERRAIN: Generally flat paths, although some can be very muddy

ACCESSIBILITY:

Open all year round

FACILITIES: Pubs in Binley Woods or visit Brandon Marsh which has toilets, shop and café

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Silver-washed Fritillary and Purple Emperor butterflies have been recorded.

Purple Emperor



NATURFOTO-ONLINE/ALAMY



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ALL YEAR TARGET SPECIES

- Marsh Tit
- Siskin
- Lesser Redpoll
- Woodcock
- Sparrowhawk
- Buzzard
- Red-legged Partridge
- Sky Lark
- Tawny Owl
- Barn Owl

SPRING/SUMMER

- Hobby
- Cuckoo
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Garden Warbler
- Willow Warbler

SANDY WATER PARK

A lagoon with easy access and a massive estuary beyond

Sand Martin



FLPA/ALAMY

A former major steel works, the 16-acre lake is now the centrepiece, together with reedbeds and woodlands, a great example of how a derelict industrial site could be regenerated. The water park separated only by the railway embankment from the vast expanse of the Burry Inlet and its ornithological riches.

DAVID SAUNDERS

WHERE TO WATCH

1 After parking head along the seaward side of the lagoon – note the tunnel which will provide access to the nearby shore. The flock of Black-headed Gulls needs

immediate, indeed lengthy attention, if you hope to add Mediterranean Gull to your day's list. Many of the Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls will likely to have come from the nearby rooftop colonies at North Dock, Llanelli.

2 In summer, the songs of Reed and Sedge Warblers announce their presence in the reedbeds, while even in midwinter Cetti's Warblers are likely to be heard, rather than seen, in all the coastal marshes and fen carr bordering Carmarthen Bay.

3 Quite a feature in late summer are the gatherings of Swallows,

and House and Sand Martins hawking insects over the lagoon, in preparation for their imminent departure on migration. The following morning maybe few or none are to be seen, no wonder many watchers, until the early 19th Century, thought they hibernated in ponds and reedbeds.

4 Having made a complete circuit of the Water Park, no visit will be complete without a little time spent a short distance away on the estuary shore, a shore where the Oystercatcher is the most numerous and most obvious of the waders present, nationally important numbers in many thousands winter on the Burry Inlet.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: SA15 2LF

(Sosban Restaurant, nearest building to the Water Park)

GRID REF: SN495 005

MAPS: OS Explorer 178, OS Landranger 159

WHERE TO PARK: In the pay and display car park at the eastern end of the Water Park

TERRAIN: A footpath/cycle path provides an easy circuit

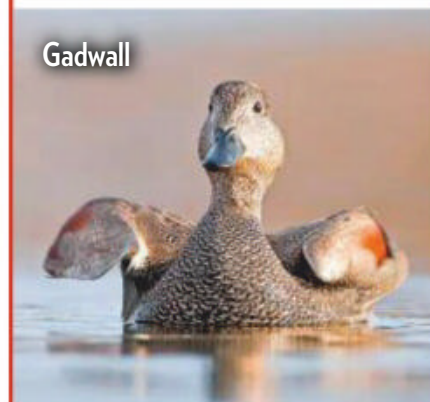
ACCESSIBILITY: Open at all times.

FACILITIES: All on site and nearby in Llanelli

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

A little to the west Ashpit Pond and Pwll Lagoon, relics of the Carmarthen Bay Power Station should never be missed.

Gadwall



IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY

SUMMER TARGET SPECIES

- Mute Swan
- Gadwall
- Mallard
- Tufted Duck
- Pochard
- Little Grebe
- Moorhen
- Coot
- Black-headed Gull
- Mediterranean Gull
- Kingfisher
- Sand Martin
- Reed Warbler
- Sedge Warbler
- Whitethroat
- Reed Bunting

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Shoveler
- Scaup
- Great Crested Grebe
- Little Egret
- Grey Heron
- Water Rail
- Cetti's Warbler



KENT

GROVE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

Search for wetland birds in the Stour Valley

Greenshank



PAUL TRODD

The Grove and Stodmarsh sections of the Stour River Valley have been much manipulated by mankind down the centuries; from medieval monks who used the valley for grazing horses, to the 20th Century coal mining industry. The resulting landscape is a mosaic of lakes, ditches, fen, reedbeds and wet meadows. The area has an enviable track record for rarities; typically, Spotted Crake, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis and Penduline Tit.

PAUL TRODD

WHERE TO WATCH

1 From the viewpoint, check the marsh and flooded fields for

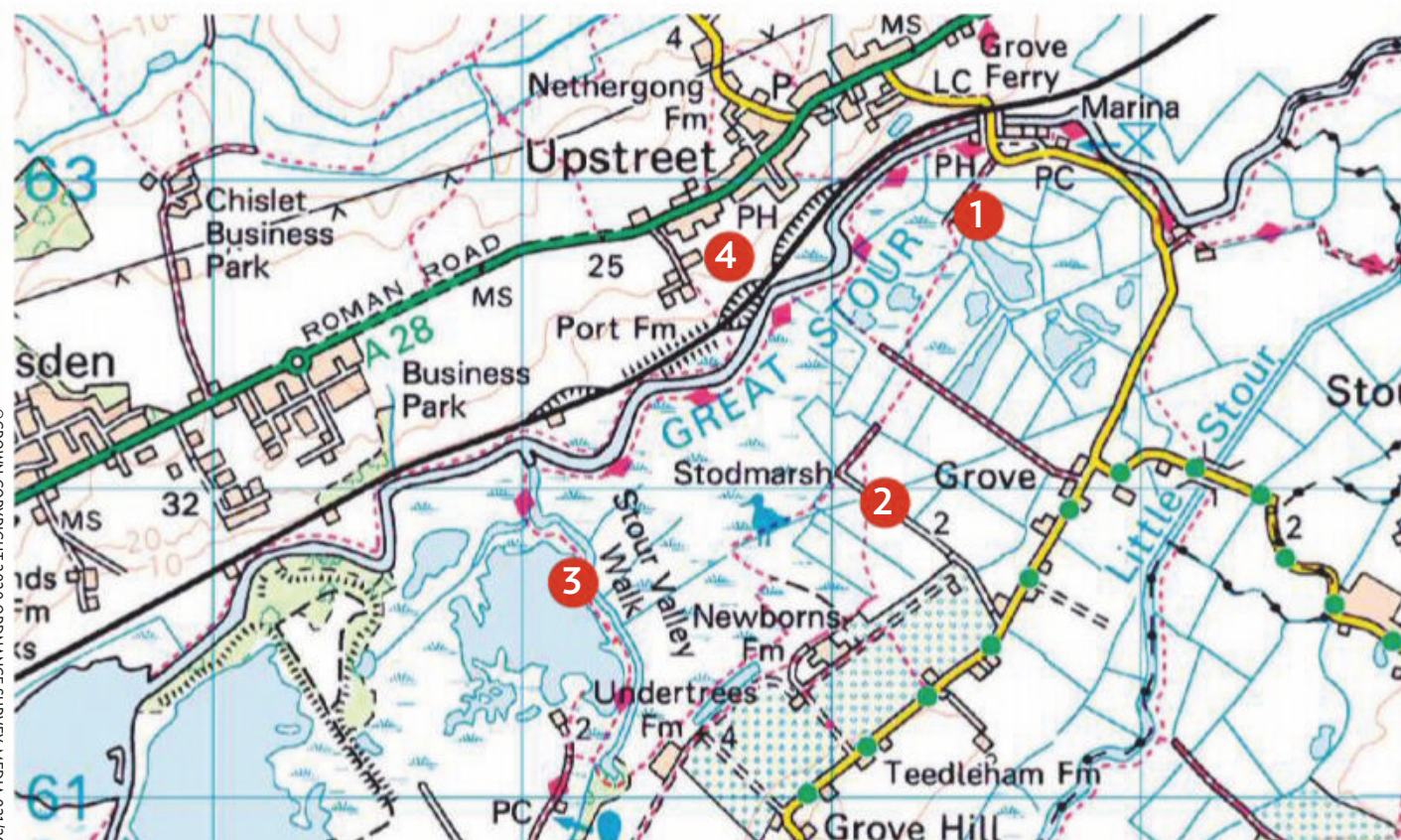
freshwater passage waders including Green, Common and Wood Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, and Whimbrel, plus Garganey, Shoveler, Teal and Gadwall, Wigeon and the occasional Shelduck. At dusk scan for hunting Barn Owl and roosting Starlings, thrushes, buntings and harriers. Nearby Feast's Hide overlooks a shallow lagoon surrounded by reeds and is suitable for photographing dabbling ducks, grebes, Snipe, Water Rail, Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail.

2 Various hides overlook grazing meadows good for Meadow Pipit, Sky Lark, Yellow and Pied Wagtail, Little and Great White Egrets, Teal, Snipe, Green Sandpiper, Lapwing and Redshank. Check over

lakes and meres for hirundines, Swift and Hobby and scrub for warblers, chats and finches.

3 The deep lake in front of Tower Hide supports diving ducks, grebes, gulls, Cormorant and passing Black and Common Terns, while Marsh Harrier and Bittern are often noted. Marginal reedbeds attract Reed, Sedge and Cetti's Warblers, Bearded Tit and Reed Bunting.

4 From the Lampen Wall footpath check the river for Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Little Egret, Grey Heron and Water Rail. Trees and bushes along the way can harbour passage Cuckoo, Turtle Dove, warblers and flycatchers, plus resident tits, finches and buntings.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: CT3 4BP

GRID REF: TR 236 631

MAPS: OS Explorer 150, OS Landranger 179

PARKING: Park in the signposted pay and display car park by the Grove Ferry Inn

TERRAIN: Mostly on the level with a variety of paths, some surfaced and suitable for the disabled to the viewpoint, others very heavy going when wet, particularly along the river and out towards Marsh Hide

ACCESS: Year-round access on public footpaths

FACILITIES: Information boards and toilets (RADAR key required) in the car park. Grove Ferry Inn serves food and there are further facilities in Upstreet

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

The wetlands are superb for a variety of dragonflies and look for Water Vole and Otter from the Lampen Wall.

Water Vole



DREW BUCKLEY/ALAMY

AUTUMN TARGET SPECIES

- Hobby
- Marsh Harrier
- Passage sandpipers and 'shanks'
- Black Tern
- Turtle Dove
- Cuckoo
- Yellow Wagtail
- Whinchat
- Passage hirundines, warblers and finches

WINTER

- Goldeneye
- Bittern
- Wild swans and geese
- Hen Harrier
- Short-eared Owl
- Water Pipit
- Bearded Tit

SPRING/SUMMER

- Incoming migrants, including a chance of Garganey, Osprey and Nightingale

DEVON

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 MIN TIME: 2 HOURS

EXMINSTER

Waders and terns feature beside the Exe Estuary

Juvenile Black-tailed Godwits



PAUL TRODD

Freshwater wetland habitats comprising flood meadows, streams, pools and reed-fringed drainage ditches contrast with the inter-tidal sand banks and mud flats of the wide, open estuary. The upper Exe Estuary area is notable for large feeding flocks of Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits. Following southerly gales, seabirds including the chance of Roseate Tern, Little Gull and skuas are possible. Always check passerines for Cirl Bunting.

PAUL TRODD

WHERE TO WATCH

1 Scan the wetlands for waders and wildfowl, including post-breeding flocks of Lapwing and Golden Plover, plus Hobby, Marsh Harrier,

hirundines, Swift, egrets and a chance of Spoonbill. Check the rocks by the ferry crossing for Turnstone, Wheatear, Black Redstart, Rock Pipit and Grey Wagtail. A good spot to scan for storm-blown seabirds forced into the estuary. At low tide check the estuary for waders such as Curlew, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot, Sanderling and Dunlin.

2 The footpath overlooks Exminster RSPB reserve, good for passage waders, typically Green, Common and Wood Sandpipers, Whimbrel, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Greenshank, Avocet and a chance of Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper. Scan along the canal for possible Kingfisher, Black Tern and Little Gull. Yellow Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Wheatear and Whinchat often pause in fields.

3 Check along the stream margins for Cetti's, Sedge and Reed Warblers, plus Little Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe and Reed Bunting. Open fields attract Lapwing, Redshank, Golden Plover, Sky Lark, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Stonechat and Whinchat. Check dry scrub for Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroats, Linnet, Goldfinch, Stonechat and Cirl Bunting.

4 The Turf Hotel provides an ideal viewpoint across the estuary. Following southerly winds check for seabirds, typically Gannet, terns, gulls and the chance of a skua. At high tide check the water for ducks and grebes, plus a hunting Peregrine or passing Osprey, and at low tide for roosting terns and gulls including Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gulls, Little and Roseate Terns.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: EX6 8DZ

GRID REF: SX 954 872

MAPS: OS Explorer 115, OS Landranger 192

PARKING: Park in the RSPB car park off Station Road near the railway bridge

TERRAIN: Mostly on the level with a variety of paths, some surfaced and suitable for the disabled along Station Road

ACCESS: Year-round access on public footpaths

FACILITIES: Information boards. Nearby pubs the Swan's Nest by the railway crossing and the Turf Hotel by the canal are both recommended. Full range of facilities in nearby Exminster

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

For best views of waders on the Exe estuary visit a couple of hours before high tide.



Curlew Sandpiper

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

AUTUMN TARGET SPECIES

- Hobby
- Osprey
- Little Stint
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Greenshank
- Avocet
- Black Tern
- Little Gull
- Roseate Tern
- Whinchat
- Cirl Bunting

WINTER

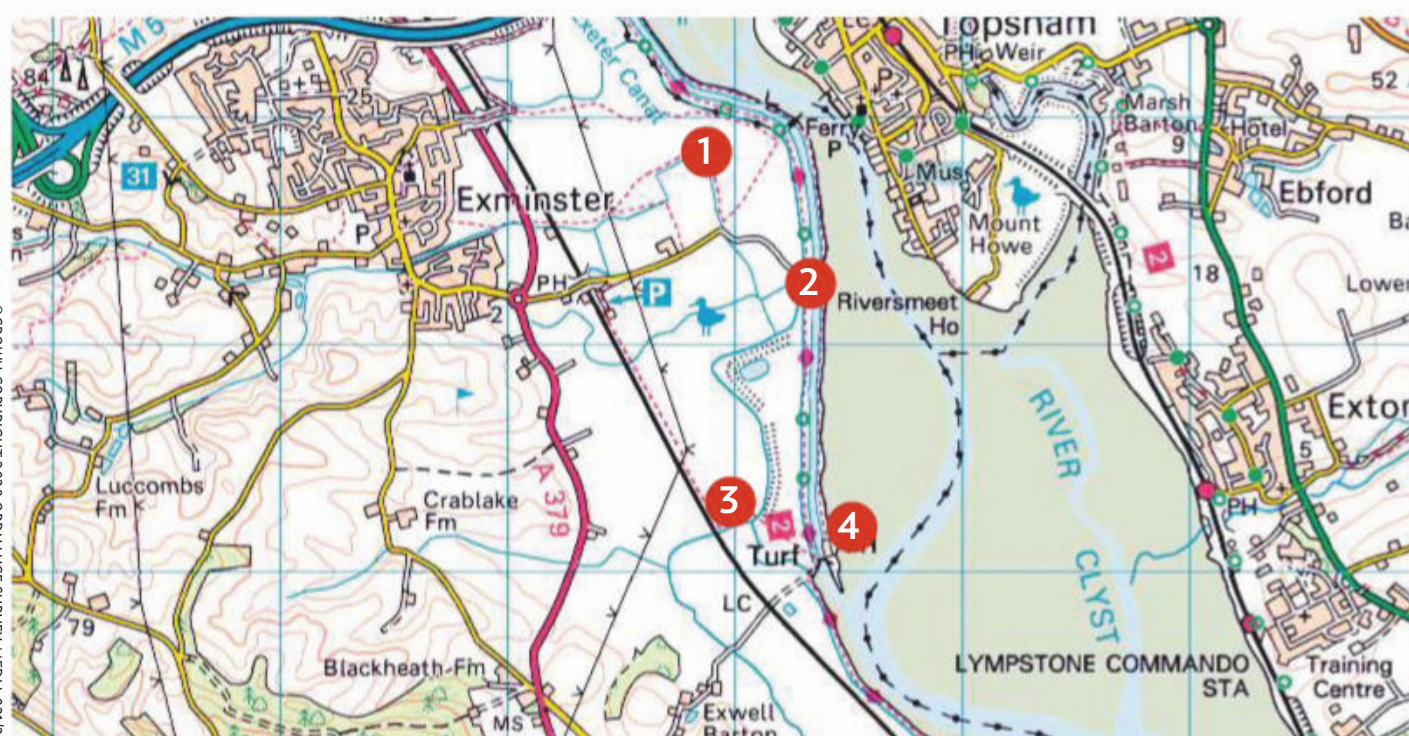
- Slavonian Grebe
- Brent Goose
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Avocet
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Black Redstart
- Cirl Bunting

SPRING

- Garganey
- Passage waders
- Wheatear

SUMMER

- Breeding waders and warblers



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PEAT BOGS

The important role that peat bogs play in helping our birds and other wildlife should never be underestimated. But many need restoring, which is a painstaking process...

WORDS RICHARD SMYTH

PROFILE PEAT BOGS

My first steps scare up a Snipe: it goes rocketing upwards in a steep ellipse, briefly throwing a long-billed silhouette against the pale sky, before dropping back down to the heather. Somewhere overhead, Sky Larks ride the wind, spilling out their spring songs. My boot nudges something soft and grey out of the heather-bents: a Short-eared Owl pellet. I break it apart to find an ossuary of tiny vole bones, bound up with vole fur.

“We seem to see Short-eareds every time we’re up here,” says Jenny Sharman. Jenny is a Peat Conservation Officer at the Yorkshire Peat Partnership. We’ve come here to take a look at Fleet Moss, a remote reach of upland peat bog in the valley of Langstrothdale, between the towns of Malham and Hawes.

It’s a wasteland. The birds here might be charismatic, but the reality is that this is an ecosystem on the brink.

“Many of the hillsides here in the Dales were drained in the 60s and 70s by putting in drainage ditches known as ‘grips’”, Jenny tells me. “It was done to try to increase the amount of grazing land for sheep. While it did do that, it also had a devastating impact on the peat. It dried out the surface vegetation, causing the

Marsh Helleborine



specialist water-retaining and peat-forming plants to die. The loss of this protective layer, and the drying of the peat itself, made it extremely susceptible to erosion. Before long, huge gullies began to form, drying out the land even more and carrying off vast quantities of peat down the slopes.”

Peat bogs are primarily defined not by their bird life but by their plant life. The quintessential peat bog landscape is carpeted with spongy sphagnum moss. A healthy blanket bog will be stabilised by a patchwork of different sphagnum species; with this in place, a diverse and thriving array of plants – from Crowberry and Bilberry to orchids, Bog Asphodel and carnivorous honeydews – can take root.

A landscape like this should be a damp, squelchy paradise for a wide range of

breeding birds, like Curlew, Golden Plover and Dunlin, as well as a fertile stop-over for passing migrants. But here at Fleet Moss, the peat bog has been ravaged. Water erosion has created towering ‘peat hags’, stark columns of exposed peat. Jenny points out the preserved roots of ancient trees jutting from the soil, and tells me that each metre of peat depth represents around a thousand years of gentle decay. To walk among these ‘hags’ is literally to walk among ancient ruins. Processes that took millennia have been undone in mere decades.

Drainage for grazing is only part of the story. Fire is another key threat. This relates, in part, to the legacy of World War II: there are places where wartime plane-crashes sparked wildfires that burned for months, leaving the peatscape scarred and lifeless. On some grouse moors, the present-day burning of heather to stimulate re-growth has had a similarly damaging impact. Then there’s overgrazing, afforestation, acid rain... those working to restore these habitats face an overwhelming array of challenges.

At the offices of the Yorkshire Peat Partnership in Skipton, I’m given an idea of the scale of the problem. A computer screen displays a sprawling moorland panorama, filmed by drone from high

Rewetting in a former peat cutting mire



CLASSIC PEATLAND SPECIES

Peat bogs can seem wild, desolate places – but they provide a home for a range of magical bird species.

1 SNIPE

You'll often get your first sight of a Snipe as a streaky, long-billed wader exploding unexpectedly into flight from a waterlogged peatland ditch. Drainage of moors and wet pasture has hit UK Snipe hard: numbers have crashed since the 1970s.

2 CURLEW

This is another totemic wader whose status as a UK breeding bird is increasingly under threat from habitat loss. It's hard to imagine the British uplands without the Curlew's haunting call and bubbling spring song – but as the declines continue, it's something we have to face up to.

3 MEADOW PIPIT

The 'Mipit' might be the classic upland LBJ ('Little Brown Job'), but that doesn't mean it's not worth watching out for. Moors and heaths across Britain ring with the pipit's evocative piping call; in spring the birds perform a plummeting 'parachute' display flight.

4 SHORT-EARED OWL

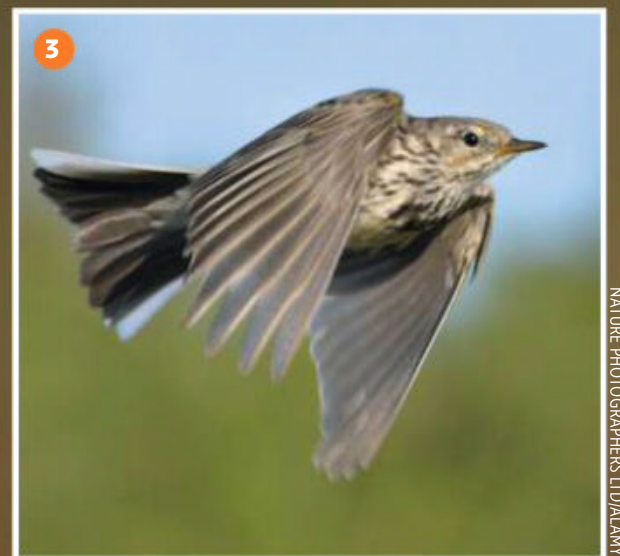
These charismatic vole specialists can often be seen quartering the moorland during daylight hours. Their conical bodies and steady flapping flight are noticeable from a distance; if you're lucky enough to get close, watch for their vivid yellow eyes.



NIGEL MCCALL/ALAMY



FILIP/ALAMY



NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

overhead; the software picks out the bare areas, the hundreds of grips and drains, the places that require damming or landscaping. It seems a vast space – an impossible task – but this is only one moor. This kind of landscape stretches for miles across the UK.

“Peat bogs are vital in connecting landscapes across the country,” Jenny says. “The more degraded they become, the more they lose their capability to act as corridors for wildlife – a role that is especially critical nowadays, with the impact of climate change driving species to the edges of their ranges.”

Out on the moor again, I’m struck by how the birds that are here – Meadow Pipits zipping across the heather tops, a hovering Kestrel battling the bluster, Red Grouse clucking worriedly from their nests – remind me of how much richer in bird-life this landscape could be. I imagine a thriving peat bog, humming with insects and ringing with the bright calls of breeding waders. I’m glad that there are people working hard to make this a reality again.

WAYNE HUTCHINSON/ALAMY

“MOST LANDOWNERS CAN SEE THE BENEFIT OF RETURNING WHAT IS EFFECTIVELY A DYING LANDSCAPE TO A LIVING ONE”

“There are increasing number of organisations trying to restore peatlands across the country,” Jenny tells me. “In Yorkshire, the Yorkshire Peat Partnership has been working for the past nine years to try to provide the right conditions for peatlands to heal.”

It’s a painstaking process. It’s not so much about rewilding as ‘rewetting’.

‘The first aim is to re-wet the moors by blocking the ‘grips’ using dams made out of peat, wood or stone. Next the areas of bare and exposed peat need to be turfed and revegetated to restore the protective surface layer and reintroduce peat-forming species such as sphagnum. Helicopters are used to bring in the brash, stone and timber to minimise damage to the bogs.

“It’s still a developing art – and science – with new techniques being trialled all the time, but the monitoring we do is showing that we are making a difference and blanket bog species are slowly returning to land that has been restored.”

Another organisation, Pennine PeatLIFE, will take the restoration forward. It’s all part of a peatland restoration movement that is gathering momentum across the UK. As so often in UK conservation, a lot of the conservationists’ time is spent on diplomacy, cajoling and encouraging landowners into giving their support to the project.

“Most landowners can see the benefit of returning what is effectively a dying landscape to a living one,” says Jenny. “Whether you’re a sheep farmer or a gamekeeper, you want your land to be as productive as possible. No one really wants to see it being eroded away.

“We really need to find a way to work together and come up with a solution that is mutually beneficial to the landowner, wildlife and society at large. I do feel this is starting to happen – it’s a very exciting

North Yorkshire moorland

time to be involved in peatland restoration!

“The landowners I know are proud when they begin to see species like Curlew and Golden Plover returning to their moors,” she adds.

Even on a peatland as degraded as Fleet Moss, the Sky Lark song, the occasional wader, and the ever-present signs of Short-eared Owl make clear the potential benefits of this place for birds and other wildlife – but peat bogs also have a major part to play in the wider scheme of things.

“Healthy bogs are not only a lifeline for so many species, they are also a lifeline for society at large, helping to prevent flash floods, providing clean drinking water, acting as phenomenal carbon sinks and supporting biodiversity in the uplands,” Jenny explains as we return to our cars.

“Above all, when people think of mitigating against the impacts of climate change, they nearly always think about the need to conserve forests – and mostly forests that are thousands of miles away from the UK in the tropics – when in actual fact, we have one of the greatest potential carbon sinks right on our doorsteps, which

is rapidly turning into a massive source of carbon, as it erodes away and disappears into the atmosphere and into our rivers and streams.

“Furthermore, with the ability to reduce the flow off the hills, a healthy peatland ecosystem, alongside other natural flood management strategies, will do a great deal to help prevent some of the horrendous flooding we’ve been seeing recently. As this knowledge grows, hopefully, our attention will be drawn to working out how best to protect what is one of the country’s most valuable resources.”

It’s always crucial in conservation to think about how the links in the chain fit together – about how, here, a few acres of sodden sphagnum moss can regenerate bird populations across a huge area, and about how what’s good for plants, insects and birds can also have incalculable benefits for human communities on a global scale. The Sky Larks are still singing when I leave Fleet Moss: a habitat in peril, but on the long road to recovery.

● What do you think? Email birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

BW

PEATLAND BIRDING

26 July is International Bog Day – a great opportunity to get out there, explore and find out more about the richness, beauty and ecological importance of peat-bog habitats.

■ Bankhead Moss, near Fife

A raised bog of this kind is a rarity in this area of Scotland. It’s a fairly small site, but classic peat species abound – and it’s a great place for fascinating bog flora.



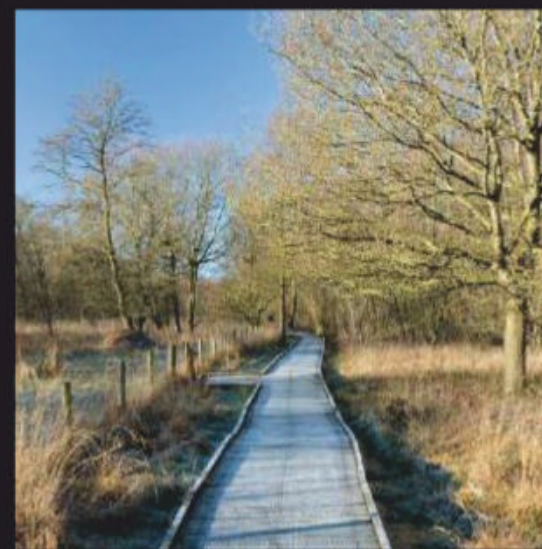
ALISON THOMPSON/ALAMY

■ Campfield Marsh, Cumbria

This rich mosaic of saltmarsh, peat bogs, farmland and wet grassland, on the Solway Firth, is a magnet for wintering Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese, as well as for breeding waders.

■ Risley Moss, Cheshire

Risley is a lowland bog that offers a mix of habitats, and some exciting raptors: Buzzards soar overhead and, in summer, the Hobbies arrive to hawk for dragonflies.



SHUTTERSTOCK

■ Askham Bog, Yorkshire

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BINOCULARS

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YOURVIEW

PHOTOS, LETTER, TWEETS, QUESTIONS – HAVE YOUR SAY

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Bird recording

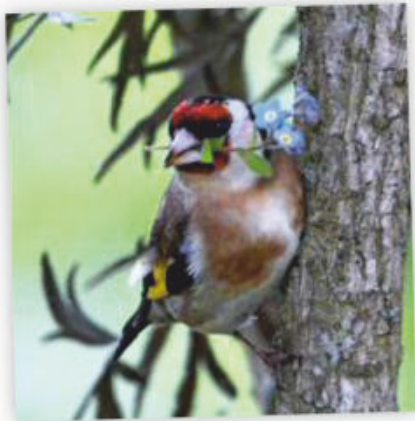
Alan Savage's account of his Nightingale memories (*BW* June) reminded me of one of my own. Years ago, while living in a little cottage in Suffolk, my girlfriend and I resolved to record the nocturnal song of a typically loud local Nightingale, audible in windless conditions at well over a kilometre distance.

Equipped with a decidedly low-tech small tape recorder, we set off late on a moonless night, and reached the spot where the bird was in full song. We waited for the conflicting sounds of an aircraft and a distant car to finish before I pressed the button on the recorder.

Unfortunately, in the pitch dark I had pressed 'play' instead of 'record' and Bruce Springsteen's Born to Run blasted out at top volume from the cassette I thought I had wiped. The bird was completely unfazed, so after we had finished laughing,

I made sure I was pressing the right button and made an amateur, but satisfying, recording.

Jonathan Elphick, Devon



Say it with flowers

During lockdown, I have been photographing my garden birds, and I was fortunate enough to recently observe, and photograph, some Goldfinches gathering blue For-get-me-not flowers!

The question could be: Are the flowers nesting material or has he a guilty conscience!? Has anyone else noticed this activity before?

Jeremy Eyeons

In response to Bo

Another excellent column from Bo Beolens in June's magazine. I did want to comment on his question about the moral difference between 'exploiting plants and exploiting animals'. If he is genuinely concerned about the difference, I would suggest that he consider that not only does a vegan diet exploit fewer animals but it also requires far fewer plants.

Approximately 36% of the world's crops (mainly soy, corn and wheat) go to feed farmed animals, not people, and the Feed Conversion Rate is very inefficient: it takes 25 kilograms of feed to produce just one kilo of beef. The ratios for other animals are lower but still it takes 15 kilograms of feed for a kilo of lamb, six for a kilo of pork and three for a kilo of chicken.

We can produce seven times more usable protein per acre by growing plants for humans instead of animals, and it takes 100 calories of plant matter to produce about 10 calories' worth of chicken or

just three calories of beef. That's part of what makes a vegan diet better for the environment: it simply requires far less in the way of resources. Look up the water ratios and not just the ones for feed next – I guarantee you'll be surprised!

Thank you, Bo, for another great column!

Becci (Northern Ireland)



Head turner

Here's a photo of a surprise visitor to my garden in Retford, Notts. It seems that this Blackbird suffers from leucism and certainly makes for a striking look. I am sure it turns many heads of people who see it.

Jon Knight, Notts



Reader Shots

Send your snaps to birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk to be in with a chance of seeing your photo in print. All images should be high resolution JPEG files.

1 Blackbird by Dennis Stinton

Camera: Canon EOS 750D Lens: 79mm
Shutter Speed: 1/4,000s Aperture: f/5.0 ISO: 1,600

2 Rook by Trevor Burch

Camera: Nikon D500 Lens: 500mm
Shutter Speed: 1/640s Aperture: f/8 ISO: 5,000

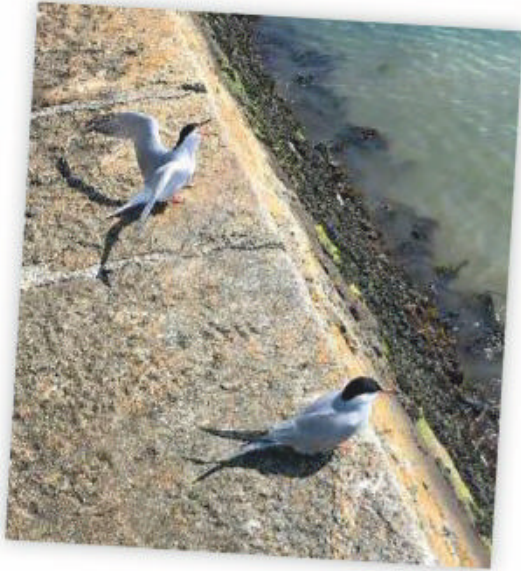
3 Siskin by Kevin Bowers

Camera: Nikon D500 Lens: 600mm
Shutter Speed: 1/2,000s Aperture: f/6.3 ISO: 800

4 Barn Owl by Trevor Partridge

Camera: Canon EOS 7D Lens: 480mm
Shutter Speed: 1/6,400s Aperture: f/6.3 ISO: 640





What a tern up

I read with interest the Camera School article on Common Terns in *BW* June. By coincidence, I had recently taken this photograph with my iPhone on the east pier of Dun Laoghaire harbour, before I had read the article. I was surprised how 'tame' they were and delighted that the image is very clear with no blurring. It's unbelievable that they may have travelled all the way from Southern Africa! *Gordon Birch, County Dublin, Ireland*

Puffin records

The fine article about Puffins (*BW* June) claims that the Farne Islands are the one place where numbers, in the words of the title, are 'bucking the trend' and increasing. This completely overlooks the situation over the past 30 years on the Pembrokeshire

islands. Here, numbers have steadily increased on Skokholm from 2,667 individuals in 1995 to a record 8,500 in 2018, and again, this spring. On Skomer, the increase has been even more dramatic, rising from 8,500 in the early 1990s to 13,000 by 2010, 22,500 by 2016 and 34,000 this spring. Easily reached and with a wealth of other seabirds not forgetting spectacular land birds, neither island should ever be overlooked.

David Saunders & Stephen Sutcliffe, Pembrokeshire

Why left out?

I read with interest the article 'bucking the trend' about the Puffin. It was good to read they are making a comeback on the Farne Islands, but when I came to read where one can see these beautiful birds I was amazed to see all the Pembrokeshire Islands left out! Can you explain why?

Ieuan Williams, Pembrokeshire

■ *The editor says: My apologies – I didn't realise, but am delighted to hear, that Puffins are bucking the trend there too. And we will certainly be featuring the islands in the future.*

WE LOVE

As always, the standard is very high, this month, but Trevor Partridge's Barn Owl photo is exceptional!



PICS FROM OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

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facebook.com/groups/My200BirdYear



Redstart by Phil Hazell



Sand Martin by Angela Lord



Robin by Paul Kaiser



Tufted Duck by Haydn Greenow

Your Questions

Send all your birding questions to birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk and our experts will give you the answers



Is this a shrike?

Q Being furloughed has enabled me to look through a few of my old photographs and I came across this one from 19 September 2019, taken at Dunstanburgh Castle, near Alnwick, Northumberland. It looks rather like a juvenile Red-backed Shrike to me, but that felt wrong at the time, and would seem unlikely. It was in the company of a sizeable flock of Linnets and pipits with juvenile Swallows also gathering on the fence wires. Your advice would be greatly appreciated – there not being any shrikes on my UK bird list to date!

David Capps, Cumbria

A Congratulations, David, on finding your first shrike! Your photographs do indeed show a Red-backed Shrike (and one of the ‘accompanying’ Linnets, in the background). However, the plain grey/brown head and clean looking breast, with relatively small amounts of ‘scaling’, suggests it is a (rarer) adult female than a juvenile or first-winter bird (which dominate the autumn passage of this scarce migrant). All shrikes are wonderful, and yours is no exception.



Which warbler?

Q I spotted this warbler last year on my local patch, near Chelmsford, Essex. It was very tuneful, but did not look like a Willow Warbler, so thought it may be a Garden Warbler. Hope you can give your expert opinion.

Chris Farrell, Chelmsford

A Chris, you are correct on all points. This is indeed a Garden Warbler, one of the best singers of all our warblers. The ‘chunky’ structure, plain grey-brown plumage and ‘featureless face’, with a big dark eye, plus the grey legs, all confirm this ID. They can be very shy even when singing, so you did very well to get such a good look, let alone a photo!

Odd finch

Q I live in a small village just outside Andover in north-west Hampshire, and have a range of finches that regularly visit my garden. The attached pictures show a bird that has been visiting intermittently (at all times of the year) for the last two years. It’s obviously part Goldfinch, but what else? I’ve never seen anything quite like it in more than 50 years of birding.

It’s slightly larger than Goldfinch, but smaller than Chaffinch. I get regular visits from Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Linnet and Siskin,



WHY DOES THIS DIPPER LOOK LIKE IT HAS WHITE SHUTTERS ON ITS EYES?

Q This is a picture of my local Dipper. I have noticed that it appears to blink, with what seems like a white shutter briefly blocking out the eyes. I have never seen this on a bird before and wondered what is happening?

Gail (by email)

A In short, Gail, Dippers have white eyelids. It is a feature shared with other species of dipper, such as the American Dipper, which also have otherwise dark feathering on the head, but the feathering on the eyelid is white. Some people get confused by this, and think they are seeing the translucent membrane (called the nictitating membrane), which is an ‘extra’ eyelid which birds have to protect and moisten their eyes, yet allow them to still see a bit. The white eyelid of the Dipper is a ‘proper’ feathered, top-to-bottom shutting eyelid, and no one knows exactly why it is so strikingly coloured, but perhaps it has a signalling function at some stage in the bird’s lifestyle, to communicate with other Dippers.

with occasional Bullfinch, redpoll and Brambling in hard weather, so wonder whether any of these could be one of the parents?

Kevin Haggard

A Your bird is fascinating and very beautiful, Kevin. It looks to have the characteristics in almost equal measure of Goldfinch (eg wing pattern, bill shape) and Linnet (mantle colour, red ‘poll’, grey nape etc). And if making an educated guess we would suggest it is a first generation hybrid between those two species (which used to be considered in the same genus, *Carduelis*; though more recently, based on molecular genetics, some authorities put Linnet in the genus *Linaria*).



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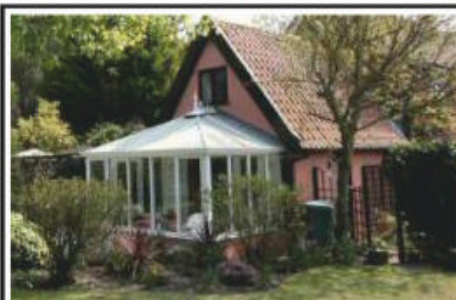
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*National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit, 2012. **134 of 166 respondents: Allergy UK Survey 2015.

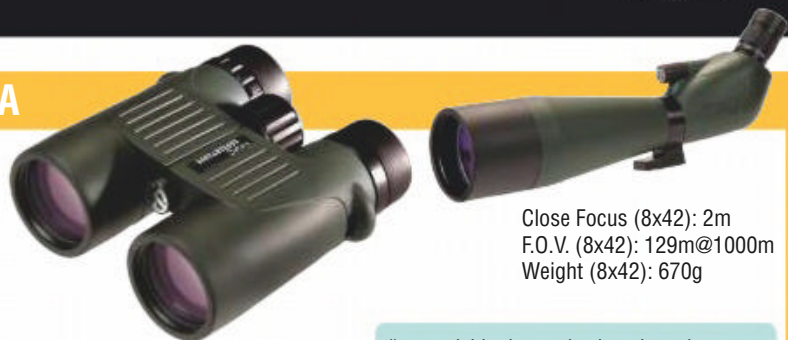


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F.O.V. (8x42): 129m@1000m
Weight (8x42): 670g

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Weight (8x42): 726g

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Weight (8x42 models): 819g

8x42, 10x42, 8x56, 10x56, 12x56 **SRP's from £174.95**
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Weight (8x42 models): 716g

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Capercaillie

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MARK MEDCALF/ALAMY

BW

Egyptian
Vulture



FIONLINE DIGITALE BILDAGENTUR GMBH / ALAMY

Griffon
Vulture



RADUS IMAGES/ALAMY

EUROPE'S

Vultures are so close to one man's heart that he's written a book about them. Here, the man himself explains why a trip to see them is a must... **WORDS** IAN PARSONS

A mass of vultures raining down from clear blue skies to land at a large carcass, lying out on the plains, is an image that one instantly associates with Africa. But it is also a European one. Our continent is home to four breeding species of vulture; these massive birds, dwarfing everything else in the sky, are very much part of our European avifauna.

I love vultures, they are my favourite birds. For me, they are a common sight, but it is always a sight that gives me a buzz. I love them so much, that I have written a book about them, *A Vulture Landscape*. Let me introduce you to our vultures.

The Bearded Vulture (aka Lammergeier) of Europe's more mountainous areas is a bird that is now, thankfully, doing well again in Europe. ➤

JAH/ALAMY



Bearded
Vulture

IMAGEBROKER/LAMY



Black
Vulture

PHILIP MUSENDGE/LAMY

VULTURES



“FAMOUSLY, THESE BIRDS WILL REDUCE THE LARGER BONES INTO SWALLOWABLE PORTIONS BY DROPPING THEM FROM GREAT HEIGHTS SO THAT THEY SMASH ON THE ROCKS BELOW”



Bearded Vulture picking up a bone

Full review
of **A Vulture
Landscape** in
BW's August
issue

WILDCOPHOTOS/ALAMY

Just a few decades ago, the Bearded Vulture was restricted to the Pyrenees, Corsica and Crete, and numbers were dwindling. But now, thanks to a fantastic conservation effort, the bird is breeding once again in many of its old European haunts, including the Alps of central Europe, where its comeback has been spectacular. Exterminated there in 1913, a captive breeding and reintroduction project saw its first success when, in 1998, the first wild-born Bearded Vulture chick fledged from its Alpine nest. Today, just 22 years later, there are now about 60 breeding pairs spread across this spectacular mountain range.

You may know this vulture by its Germanic name of Lammergeier, but this is a name that many are now moving away from – it implies that this bird kills lambs and the name and the reputation it brought with it led to years of intense persecution, wiping out the bird from the Alps and almost from all of mainland Europe. The name is wrong, and that is why we no longer use it. Bearded Vultures

don't kill lambs, they don't kill anything. Instead, they are highly-specialised scavengers, picking over carcasses, eating the bones and the marrow contained within them. Famously, these birds will reduce the larger bones into swallowable portions by dropping them from great heights, so that they smash on the rocks below. This has led to Spanish, Portuguese and French names for the bird that all mean Bone Breaker. If we really need to call the Bearded Vulture by a 'foreign' name, then Bone Breaker is far more apt.

Subject to conservation

The smallest European vulture is the **Egyptian Vulture**, a black-and-white bird with a curious yellow face and tweezer-like bill. Although the smallest, the Egyptian's wingspan is about the same as the Grey Heron. When it comes to vultures, words such as 'small' are most definitely relative! They can be found across southern Europe, but have declined steeply in many places and are now the subject of urgent conservation work.

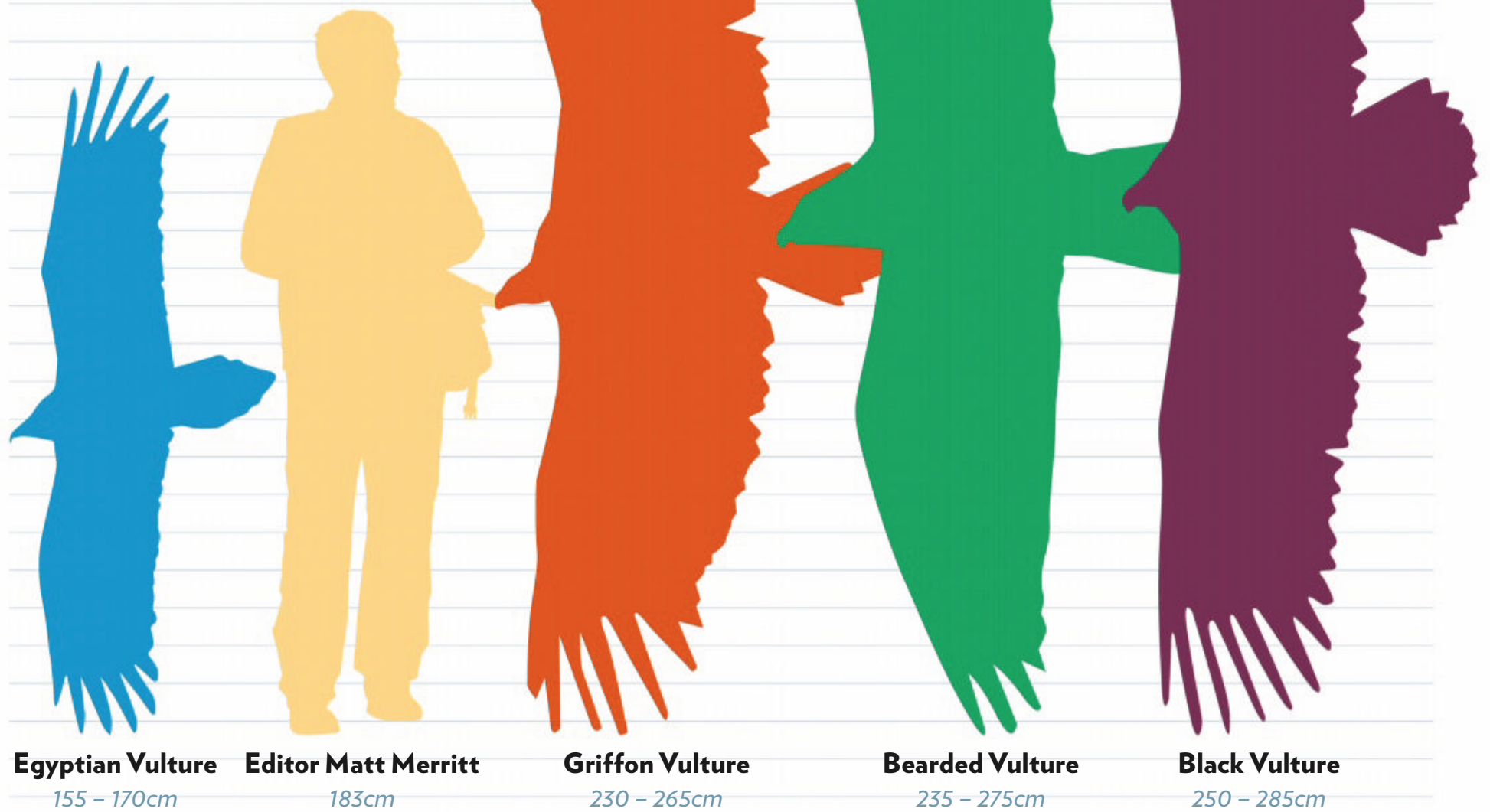
However, in Spain the population is stable with around 1,400 breeding pairs, and some of these Spanish birds are now changing their migratory habits. Egyptian Vultures are migratory birds, coming to Europe to breed and returning to Africa to overwinter. But, in the last few years, some of these Egyptian Vultures have been wintering in Spain; the numbers are still relatively low (about 100 birds), but they are increasing, year on year. Is the Egyptian Vulture on the road to becoming a European resident?

Egyptians are unable to tear open large carcasses (the name vulture comes from the Latin meaning to tear) as their bill is too weak to do so. Instead, they clean up the bits that the other vultures leave behind. They are also fond of afterbirth, left in the fields by livestock and large mammals and, as a local Spanish name of Dung Eater would suggest, they will also eat faeces! Vultures are nature's cleaners, and the Egyptian Vulture does the dirtiest of these clean-up jobs.

From the smallest European vulture

WINGSPANS

Vultures use their large broad wings to soar on air currents, enabling them to fly long distances and gain great height without expending large amounts of valuable energy. The Black Vulture of Europe has a wingspan of just under three metres, one of the largest wingspans of any bird.



to the largest, the mighty **Black Vulture** (also known as the Monk Vulture and the Cinereous Vulture). These are huge birds, one of the heaviest and largest of all raptors, with massive rectangular wings, perfectly adapted for spending the day soaring through the sky, riding the rivers of the air searching for carcasses below.

Again, their European stronghold is Spain, where more than 2,000 pairs can be found. Other, smaller populations are seen in France, the Balkans, Greece and also Turkey.

Gargantuan nest

Black Vultures are long-lived birds, living up to 30 years. They reach adulthood at the age of five and form a lifelong pairing with a mate. Once these birds have chosen their nest tree, they remain faithful to it, adding to its structure each year, until the nest becomes absolutely gargantuan in dimension – think a 6ft deep double bed suspended in a tree! Although they readily feed on large carcasses, such as cows and deer, they will also happily feed



Griffon Vulture
thermoregulating

IAN PARSONS

Egyptian Vulture close up

“THE EGYPTIAN’S WINGSPAN IS ABOUT THE SAME AS THE GREY HERON – WHEN IT COMES TO VULTURES, WORDS SUCH AS ‘SMALL’ ARE RELATIVE!”

TETRA IMAGES, LLC/ALAMY

on smaller carcasses, such as those of Fox and Rabbit; their large bills making short work of any carcass.

The fourth breeding European vulture is by far the most numerous – the **Griffon Vulture** is the archetypal vulture, big broad wings with a long bald neck, they can gather in huge numbers at a carcass, quickly removing the potentially diseased animal from the environment. I have watched Griffon Vultures consume a dead sheep in just seven minutes!

They can be found across much of southern Europe, but it is Spain that holds the most numbers, with about 20,000 pairs. In the central Spanish region of Extremadura, it is highly unusual to look up in to the blue sky and not see

a Griffon Vulture drifting by.

Griffons use their long necks to reach right inside the carcass, to get at the choicest morsels. They have relatively bald necks and this, coupled with their feeding behaviour, led us to believe that the lack of feathers on the neck was an adaptation to prevent the feathers from getting fouled by all sorts of bodily gunk!

However, research has shown that this is not the case, the bald necks are just part of a mechanism that the bird employs to keep cool. Summer temperatures in the Griffon’s natural range can often exceed 40°C, many species of bird migrate to avoid this, others seek shade, but the Griffon doesn’t migrate, nor does it seek the shadows. By simply adjusting its body

posture, a Griffon Vulture can expose a third of its skin surface to the air, allowing the body to maintain its cool with ease.

In the summer, a Griffon Vulture will rest with its neck extended, its ruff flattened, and the feathers on top of its chest parted. It will stand higher, exposing the bare skin on its legs, and allowing air to pass underneath it, as well as around and over it. In the winter, the opposite happens, the neck is pulled in, the ruff is up, the bird hunches its shoulders up, covering the bare skin at the top of its chest and hiding its legs and feet beneath its feathers. The Griffon is a thermoregulatory expert.

Vultures are fantastic birds, they are masters of the air, exploiting its currents and thermals to cover vast distances each day, expending the minimal amount of energy in the process. They remove carcasses from the environment, helping to prevent the spread of diseases, such as Rabies, TB and even Anthrax. If you get the chance, enjoy Europe’s vultures. Believe me, there is nothing better than a bit of vulture gazing on a sunny day! **BW**

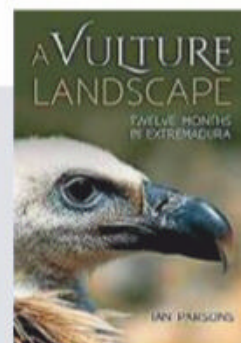


Black Vulture

AGEFOTO/STOCK/ALAMY

A VULTURE LANDSCAPE

● Ian’s book, *A Vulture Landscape*, is published by Whittles Publishing.





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BIRDER**



NEXT MONTH
David will spend these unusual times reminiscing about his favourite urban birding days!

Salamanca, Castile y León, Spain

An under-appreciated area of Spain that offers so much for the visiting birder. One for your 'must visit when things return to normal' list...

BILL HEATH

Salamanca is the beautiful capital city of the Salamanca Province, itself within the community of Castile y León. It is a city filled with international students and the home to one of the oldest universities in the country. Although not being the first

choice in Spain for visiting birders, the region has a wide range of birdlife to offer that is comparable to some of the more recognised and well-visited regions. It is possible to watch classic Iberian birds like Great Bustards and Black-bellied Sandgrouse plus Iberian Magpies and Black Wheatears and a whole lot more.

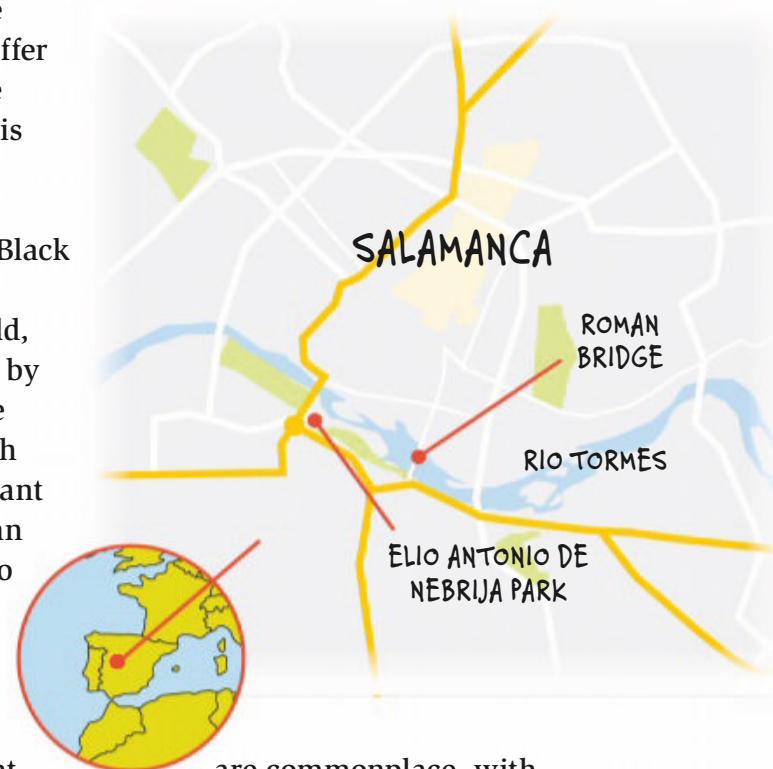
As with many cities around the world, Salamanca is relatively poorly covered by urban birders. The hotspot seems to be along the Río Tormes that runs through the centre of the city. A good spot to plant yourself along the river is on the Roman Bridge of Salamanca, sited very close to the old city, so it's a pretty location.

At the base of the bridge, close to the rushing water, look out for foraging Grey Wagtails, as they are a regular sight. Little Egrets also frequent the river along with the familiar Grey Heron, while a fly-by Night Heron is always a slight possibility, especially towards either end of the day.

Glancing skyward during the summer months should produce Bee-eaters, Swifts and House Martins and they themselves can be overshadowed by huge Black and Griffon Vultures.

There is an area of wet woodland on the left, if you are facing the old city, that is a good spot to watch for warblers and other passage migrants.

During winter, Blackcap and Chiffchaffs



are commonplace, with

Cetti's Warblers also being a staple species. During spring, you might be lucky enough to sight (Western) Bonelli's or Subalpine Warblers, circuiting the foliage, or a hunting Redstart.

Autumn is a better bet for scoring a decent migrant or two with Melodious Warbler, and Pied and Spotted Flycatchers all reported. At any point in the year, the wood can support Iberian Green and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Wryneck, Tree Sparrow and Hawfinch. In the summer, it could be possible to both see and hear Nightingale and Golden Oriole.

White Stork



RUBÉN CERRÁN

Black Vulture



RUBEN CEBRIAN

There is a small reedbed that fringes the woodland, plus there is another small stand on the other side of the bridge. The birds encountered here could include Penduline Tit, and Reed and Great Reed Warblers.

A closer look during the autumn may reveal a lurking migrant Sedge Warbler. The more unusual birds reported from the bridge include Dipper – which does not seem such a surprise given the speed at which this river flows.

Merlin, Little Tern, plus Little, Mediterranean and Common Gulls, Crossbill and even a Nightjar have been found here, so standing on the Roman Bridge could be a good place to while away some time.

Continuing across the bridge into the historic old city will not diminish your urban birding experience. During the summer, Pallid Swifts should be noisily wheeling above your head, entering their breeding sites in the crevices of the older buildings. White Stork is also a common breeder, standing impressively on a spire

or rooftop on their sometimes monstrous nests of twigs, that are often interlaced with the bits of rubbish that they find. Classically, their nests will also be cheekily occupied by House Sparrows. Spotless Starlings are also a feature of the city along with nesting Peregrine and Lesser Kestrel.

As with all cities, Salamanca has several parks for attentive urban birders to mooch through. Riverside sites like Elio Antonio de Nebrija Park may be well worth exploring. Many of the birds mentioned can be encountered in these green spaces – there is also the possibility of seeing other Mediterranean specialities, like Serin and Hoopoe.

Thanks to: Vega Barmejo Castelnau:
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KEY SPECIES

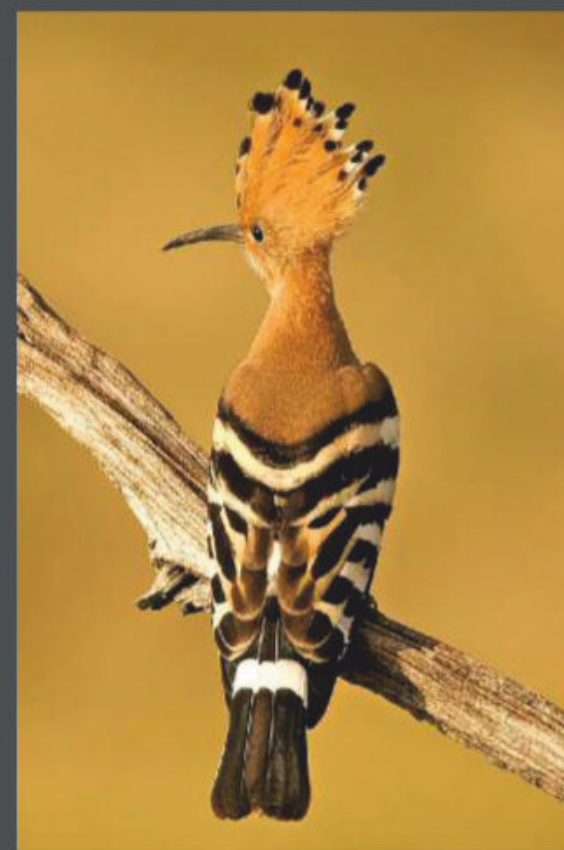
HOPOE

This odd-looking bird and taxonomic anomaly is a favoured target for many a visiting birder to the Mediterranean region. Who can resist that decurved bill, striking stripy crest, pink body and pied wings and tail? This distinctive bird has a range that stretches from Iberia, Europe as far north as Estonia, North Africa and Asia. The birds in sub-Saharan Africa have now been split by some authorities in two species: African and Madagascar Hoopoes. Both of these supposed species are richer pink with less white on the wings.

Hoopoes are hole-nesters and despite their beautiful appearance their nest holes stink! The female has sole responsibility for incubation and both her and the chicks have developed an anti-predator defence, that includes emitting a foul smelling liquid. The smell is likened to that of rotting meat.

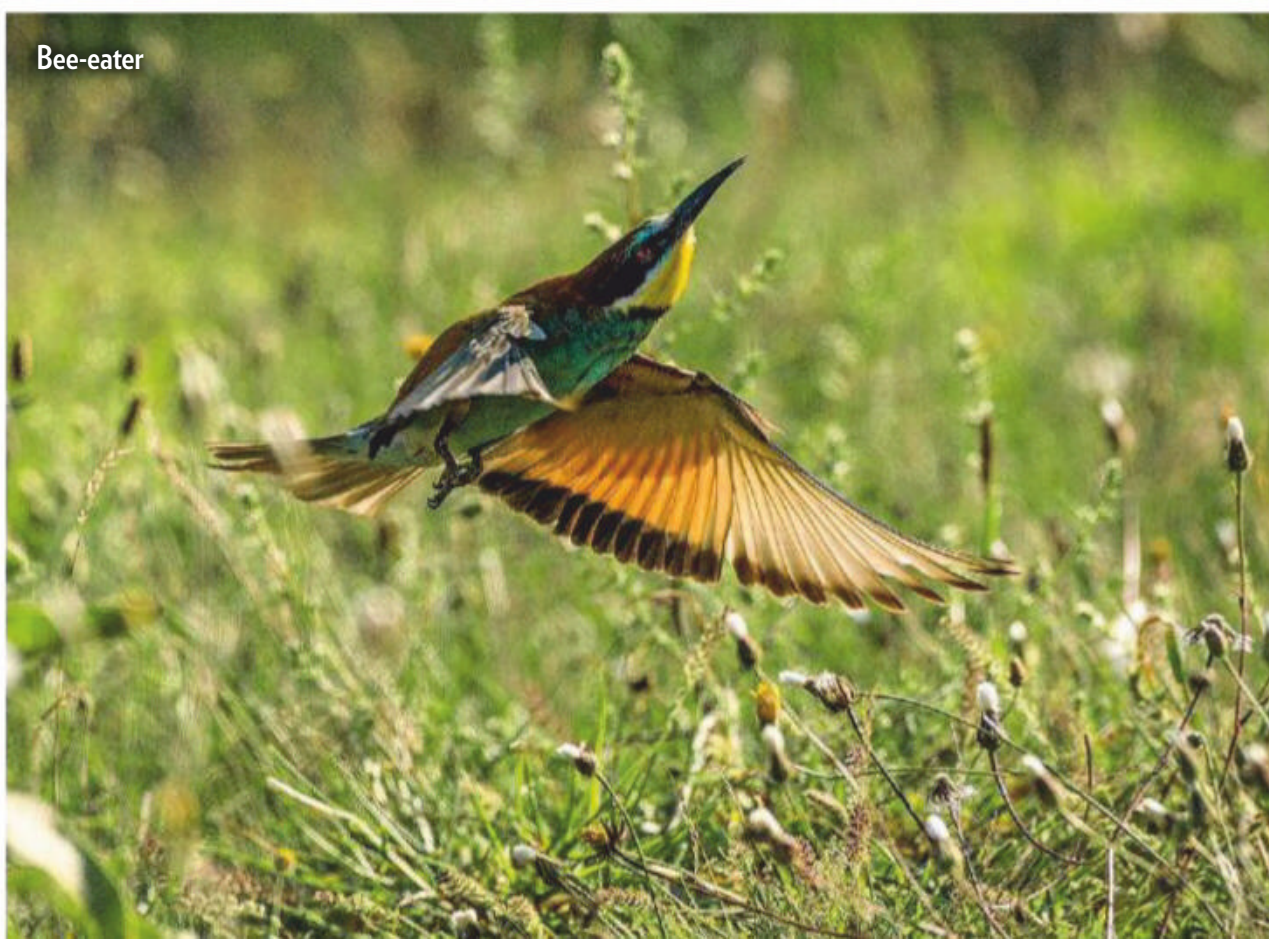
These enigmatic birds are believed to be related to kingfishers, bee-eaters and rollers. They are also thought to share an especially close familial relationship with the wood hoopoes of the African continent.

The popular consensus now is that both wood hoopoes and hoopoes belong to the hornbill family.



DAVID FETTES

Bee-eater



DAVID FETTES

MORE ABOUT BIRDING IN SALAMANCA

Reference Guide:
Collins Bird Guide
Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney
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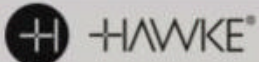
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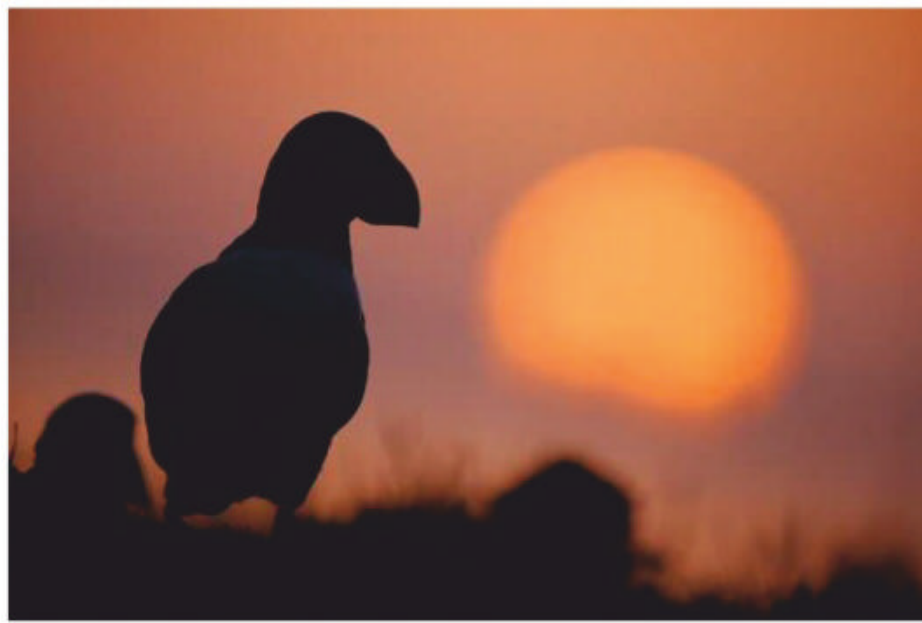
Here, we concentrate on individual species and provide insights into where, when and how to get the best images of them...

WORDS PAUL STERRY

*This month -
Puffin*



MICHAEL FOORD/NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD



LAURIE CAMPBELL/NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD

▲ There are plenty of locations on the Shetland Islands where Puffin colonies are accessible and worth visiting, although most come with a photographic health and safety warning: slippery grassy slopes and precipitous drops do not make for an ideal mix with eager, subject-focused photographers. Common sense needs to prevail. Anyway, great locations include the Isle of Noss, Sumburgh Head and Hermaness on Unst. Access to the latter two is not restricted in terms of time of day, so dawn and dusk photography allows for some creative use of light.



HUGH CLARK/NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD

▲ Some of Britain's most accessible Puffins are found on the Farne Islands in Northumberland. Regular daily boat trips will provide point-blank views during the breeding season, but there are drawbacks. The islands are usually thronged with visitors. And access is only possible from late morning to mid-afternoon when the light is unflattering. One option is to visit on an overcast day to avoid harsh shadows and contrast.

▲ At most Puffin colonies you can dispense with a long lens and use something much shorter. This is where mid-range zooms come into their own, allowing for creative composition – something in the 80mm to 300mm range is ideal. Fortunately for photographers, Puffins are star performers, their behaviour often bordering on comical. So you can expect plenty of interaction in crowded colonies where burrows are close together, with wing-stretching and preening all part of the entertainment.



LAURIE CAMPBELL/NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD

▲ If you have the privilege to spend time in a Puffin colony then take the time just to sit, watch and wait. Rather than trying to creep up on subjects, the chances are you will get much better opportunities employing patience: the birds will accept your presence and go about their business, oblivious to human onlookers. Give this patient approach time and before long you will have relaxed Puffins all around you, allowing you to use a much shorter focal length lens than otherwise would be the case – somewhere between 80mm and 200mm, perhaps. An image of a Puffin having a good yawn is a sign that the approach has paid off.



▲ Although the majority of photographic opportunities for Puffins are at colonies, they are seabirds after all, and to watch them at sea is to see them in their element. Buoyant and resilient, they obviously cope well with the worst the Atlantic can throw at them outside the breeding season. And you can get a sense of how well adapted they are to the marine environment, if you take a boat trip that ventures to waters off a seabird colony.

Opportunities can be had on the Isles of Scilly, the Shetland Islands and off the North Yorkshire coast. You will need a steady hand and a shutter speed appropriate to working on a moving boat, in a rolling sea – at least 1/2,500s. And you might want to try using a single autofocus point rather than array, to avoid shifting waves confusing matters.



NEXT MONTH:
How to photograph Dunlin

▲ The tiny island of Hørnøya, accessible by boat from the town of Vardø in north Norway, hosts a thriving seabird colony including some very photogenic Puffins. Early in the season, the island's slopes are often covered in snow, which creates beautiful lighting potential and an intriguing backdrop for photography. Later in the season, as Puffins come and go with fish for their chicks, the opportunities for flight photography are superb.

FACTBOX

Everyone loves a Puffin and this is reflected in the species' popularity with bird photographers. Although this iconic seabird only visits land for a fairly brief period – mainly April to July – there are plenty of opportunities to photograph them around Britain. And, what's more, in locations where visitor access is controlled, these colonial-nesters are typically almost completely indifferent to people, allowing observers to get up close and personal.



LAURIE CAMPBELL/NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD

▲ If you have the luxury of time at a Puffin colony, once you have had your fill of standard shots why not try something more intimate? Towards the end of the day and early in the morning off-duty Puffins often take a well-earned break. If you are similarly relaxed in your approach you will soon be accepted by the birds as part of the scenery, allowing up close and personal images to be captured.

GEARFINDER

The best optics and outdoor products tried & tested for you

BINOCULARS

KITE URSUS 8X32 £199

Reviewed by
David Chandler

Ursus is a new range of entry-level roof-prism binoculars from Kite, a Belgian company. There are four models in the range – an 8x32, 8x42, 10x42 and 10x50. I was sent the 8x32 for review – the smallest, lightest and, with a sub-£200 RRP, the least expensive of the bunch. It was a lockdown review – I didn't take the binocular beyond my house and garden!

Form

The Ursus has a standard roof-prism form and a narrow red 'eye-ring' beneath the left eyecup. At 520g this is a lightweight binocular that certainly didn't feel heavy. It has shallow, lightly textured thumb indents which I am not a fan of – I'll put my thumbs where I want, thank you very much – but these indents are subtle enough not to irritate.

This binocular sat naturally in my hands, the one-finger-wide focus wheel came to hand easily enough and build quality seemed pretty good. Focus wheel movement was lumpy at first, but with a bit of use this soon smoothed out – presumably once the lubricant had found its role in life. The wheel moves moderately stiffly through just over one turn, anti-clockwise towards the more distant birds.

For birding, mostly you won't need to move it more

than half a turn. There's a ring for adjusting the dioptre beneath the right eyepiece, which is stiff enough to stay in position once set, and twist-up rubber-coated metal eyecups. The mechanics on these seemed good. Kite's blurb says

these are '4-stage', but I could only find one intermediate click-stopped position, making them 3-stage. That's not a problem though. The eyecups are removable (you unscrew them) so can be replaced if necessary or to allow better

access for cleaning the eyepieces. Waterproof? Yes. Filled with nitrogen? Yes. Rubber-armoured? Of course.

One minor criticism – I'd like the strap-attachment lugs a little bit nearer the eyepieces to reduce the chance of them 'interfering' with my hands.

Function

The Ursus produced a very good image, though perhaps not quite so good at close range. Brightness and sharpness are good and I didn't notice any distracting edge-softness. The field of view is very good and focus-precision is good, with sometimes just a bit of 'searching for sharpest'. Close-focus, however, is disappointing. Kite say it's 2.8m but I found that to be seriously optimistic – I measured it at around 3.8m.





For most birding this won't be an issue, but don't buy this Ursus if you want to do lots of insect-watching.

Chromatic aberration on the other hand, aka colour-fringing, seemed to be well-controlled. Airborne House Martins and Swift in an overcast sky were colour-fringe-free, though I did see a little on a chimney-based Carrion Crow and a Starling on an aerial. It really wasn't bad, though – I was quite impressed.

The Ursus performed pretty well in low light, too – delivering a good image 10 minutes after sunset on an overcast day in early May, though it was beginning to struggle in the shadows.

Kite say “the short hinge design allows your fingers to wrap around the barrel, and use the instrument with one hand only”. You *can* use this binocular single-handed, but not because of the short hinge. Those words may be more applicable to the bigger binoculars in the Ursus' range.

Finally, the objective covers. As is pretty well the norm these days, these are tethered and removable. I thought these were a little loose fitting and could be lost as a consequence.

SPECS

Eye relief: 16.8mm

Field of view: 7.8°/136m@1,000m

Close focus: 2.8m

Weight: 520g

Width x height: 120x126 mm

RRP: £199

Warranty: 30 years

Supplied with: zip-up, padded

case; neoprene strap; objective

covers; rainguard

Web: kiteoptics.co.uk

VERDICT

This is a good, entry-level binocular, that is lightweight, easy enough to handle, and reasonably good-looking(!). Mostly, it delivers a very good view. It has an impressive field of view and seems to manage colour-fringing well.

Close-focus is disappointing, but not an issue for most birding scenarios. This Ursus is, however, priced a bit higher than some of the competition.

OPTICS ★★★★★

HANDLING ★★★★★

PRICE ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

BOOTS

HOKA ONE ONE WOMEN'S SKY TOA GORE-TEX, £160

If you're not a trail runner, you're unlikely to have heard of Hoka One One. And, unless you speak Maori, you will be wondering what the brand name means. Roughly speaking, it means 'fly over the earth'.



If these boots can help you do that, the price is justified.

Hoka One One started out in France and wanted to create a running shoe for going down hills faster. The result was a shoe with a big sole and deluxe cushioning. These days Hoka One One is California-based and also makes products for hiking – which should of course, work for birders. The Sky Toa is one of those products.

This is a very lightweight boot – one size 6.5 with a little bit of mud weighs around 370g. The synthetic uppers claim to be durable and breathable, the rubberised midsole foam provides cushioning, and the 'Vibram® Megagrip hi-traction outsole' has “multidirectional lugs for supreme grip on varied terrain”. And to keep the wet stuff out, there's a built-in GORE-TEX bootie. This boot, then, should cope from trail to tea-room.

So, how well does it perform? Most of this review took place during lockdown, with the local fen as the main testing ground. We'll need to get out of lockdown to try them on something significantly above sea-level!

The Toa is very lightweight, but its build quality couldn't be faulted. It was instantly comfortable and cosy, and provided soft but effective ankle support and plenty of space in the toe box. The sole is larger than you might expect and delivers plenty of support and 'bounce' – good enough to wear during a never-before-attempted Joe Wicks PE workout! After a fair bit of use, the shoe softened a little (not a problem), but was still supportive. Are they waterproof? Yes. They kept the wet out during a walking-through-wet-grass test and during the splashing-through-some-pretty-deep-puddles test.

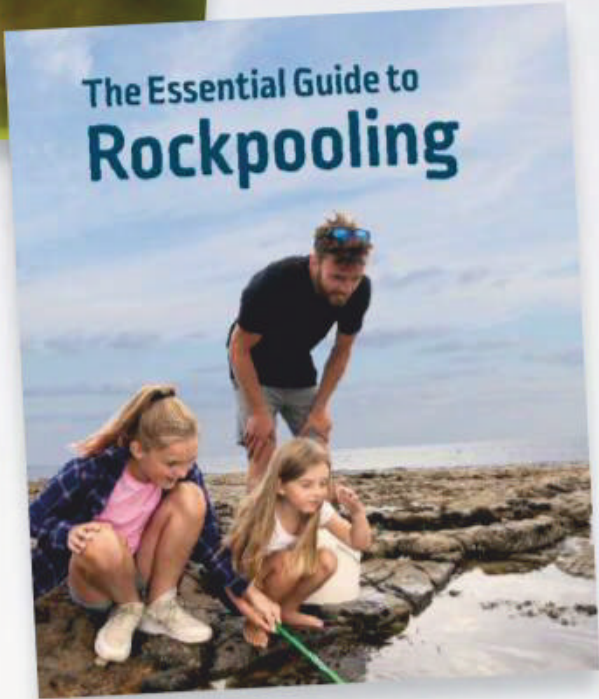
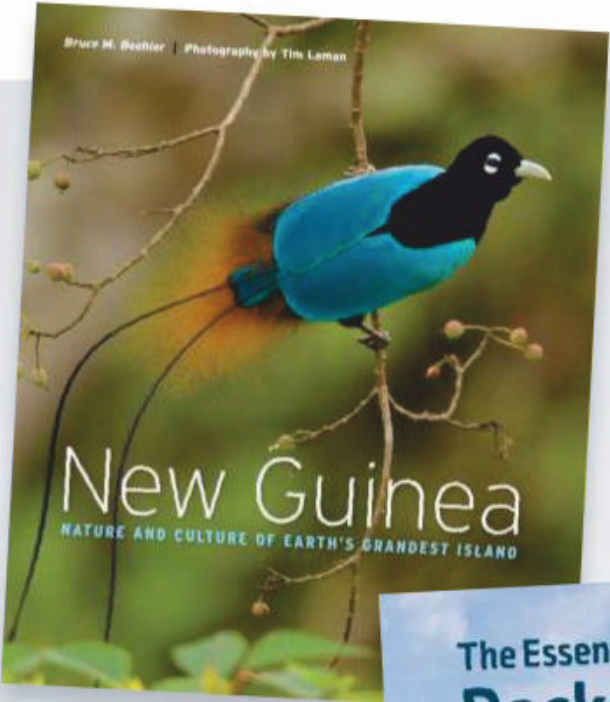
These have become my wife Ruth's go-to footwear. She did, incidentally, find wearing better than average socks (Bridgale Hike Ultra Lights) made the experience even better. On the downside, some people might find the Toas a bit warm, and the colour schemes on offer won't be to everyone's taste.

Are they worth £160? Time will tell. I almost forgot. The Sky Toa GORE-TEX is 100% vegan. No cheese with these, then.

Available in black/Antigua sand, black iris/aquamarine and dragonfly/aqua haze in sizes 3.5-9.5. Going up half a size from your normal is recommended. hokaoneone.eu/en/gb

VERDICT

To quote Ruth: “Sometimes, I find it difficult to get good quality boots that suit my feet and walking habits. I would never have considered these but now I have them I really love them.”



BookReview

The latest releases for wildlife enthusiasts

WORDS JOHN MILES



BRITAIN'S BIRDS – An identification guide to the birds of Britain and Ireland
ROB HUME, ROBERT STILL, ANDY SWASH, HUGH HARROP AND DAVID TIPLING, PRINCETON £20

The second edition has landed, and many new photos of birds have been added, as well as the 12 new species recorded in the last four years, since the first edition came out to great acclaim from everyone.

The book feels bigger, and there are indeed extra pages to fit in all these species and extra photos. This book series creates the ‘wow’ factor time and time again, and this volume is no different. It covers all the birds ever seen in Britain, along with a few that may be escapees, with 3,600 photos of the highest quality – giving you no reason to misidentify any species!

It starts with an easy thumbnail for families, and each family has a ‘starters’ section, helping outline the key aspects to identify the species. A must for anyone who loves birds!

NEW GUINEA
Nature and Culture of Earth’s Grandest Island
BRUCE M. BEEHLER
PRINCETON, HB £25

What a book to drop on your doorstep in the ‘lockdown’! New Guinea is a magical island with diverse habitats and amazing wildlife and is full of colourful birds. The award-winning photographer, Tim Laman, has many glorious photos of not just the wildlife, but the culture as well. Bruce has travelled to the island more than 50 times in his life, making it a ‘home from home’, and enabling him to give you the best of his knowledge here. There is not another book on the market to come

anywhere near this publication. Sit back and be drawn into such a landscape you can only dream of while at home!

The Essential Guide to ROCK POOLING
JULIE HATCHER AND STEVE TREWHELLA, WILD NATURE PRESS £34.69

How many times have you been to the seaside and looked into tidal pools and said “I wish I could ID that”? Well, now you can, using this book crammed full of species, which even presents the best ways to catch the species so you and the family can have a good look at them.

How many of you have heard of ‘Eco-Crabbing’? Well it is in here, and it saves damaging the crabs when you catch them for ID!

The species are all set out in their families and there is even a section on birds at the back. Enjoy.

WishList

More stuff to spend your hard-earned cash on

WORDS DAVID CHANDLER



KATHMANDU KANGSAR MEN'S BUZZGUARD TRAVEL HIKING SHIRT, £64.99

This will "keep you trendy during a night out on the town or in the bush". So it's good for looking for Pied Wagtail roosts in the city and wild country birding. It has a built-in, long-lasting insect repellent, a "moisture control system" – no one wants out of control moisture – a "collar visor" for extra sun protection, tabs to keep the sleeves up, and back armhole mesh to help keep things cool. 100% nylon. Honey, dark olive or warm grey. S-XXL. M weighs 190g. kathmandu.co.uk



CRAGHOPPERS WOMEN'S JACARA SHOE, £90

The Jacaras have an AquaDry Membrane to keep the water out and a NosiLife mesh collar to keep the insects out. The blurb says the uppers are 75% suede, 15% polyester and 15% rubber – so that's quite an achievement... The soles are Vibram, the toe caps are rubber and the collar and tongue are padded. These shoes are "grippy" and "super comfortable" and available in rubble, dark grey and wildberry. Sizes 3-8. 375g. craghoppers.com



MAMMUT LEFTOVER O T-SHIRT, £30

I think the 'O' stands for organic. Mammut (which is German for Mammoth) are using leftovers from their other products to make T-shirts. "Waste no Waste" is the idea, and future Mammut leftovers will be turned into midlayer jackets and bags. There are Leftover Ts for men and women, made from soft, stretchy, leftover organic cotton. Womens in XS-XL in six colour options. Mens in S-XXL in eight colour options. That doesn't seem fair. mammut.com

BUFF EUCALYPTUS MULTI INSECT SHIELD TUBULAR, £25.32

A tube of fabric that's more versatile than you might imagine. This one provides protection from the sun and from irritating insects. And there are no seams to rub or chafe. So, what can you do with a buff? Check out buffwear.co.uk/ways-to-wear. Here's another use – slide your bins inside your buff (not while you're wearing it) to give them a bit of protection when they're thrown in a bag. Plenty of other Buffs are also available. buff.com



GOTHIC ARCH WINDOW FEEDER, £18.99

Find out which birds are attracted to Gothic architecture with the RSPB's new window feeder. It sticks to your window with four suction



cups and has three windows of its own for you to view through, each with its own feeding compartment. The food tray can be removed to give it a good clean and has drainage holes to help keep your visitors' food dry. 15cm high and 24cm wide – so it can cope with a bit of simultaneous dining. shopping.rspb.org.uk

BIRDCARE TOKENS, £5/£10

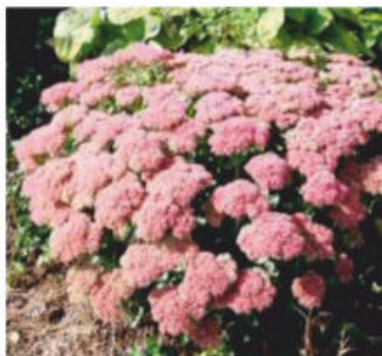
For those times when you really haven't a clue what to give a birdwatcher for their birthday, for Christmas, or whatever. This is an unimaginative present that they might actually prefer to some of the gifts more 'inspired' people choose for them. Available as £5 and £10 tokens, or a combination if you're feeling generous, these shopping vouchers work on anything at livingwithbirds.com.



Free delivery to UK addresses and if you want, you can add a personal message. livingwithbirds.com

AUTUMN JOY SEDUM, £2.99

Gardens need plants and this one is good for wildlife. It's a perennial with lovely succulent leaves and pinky flowers that attract bees and butterflies later in the season – it flowers in August and September. It's the nectar they're after, of course. You are buying a plant not seeds – and all being well, once the sun hits it, it will reach for the sky. Your Autumn Joy could grow to about 50cm high. How much joy can you handle? birdfood.co.uk



RAPTORS TOTE BAG, £15

This bag makes a statement. It is a statement bag. Stop the killing of raptors it says. That's a good message. Buy one of these to help BirdLife International's work to stop the killing of raptors, many of which are being trapped, poisoned or shot and have populations in steep decline. This bag is also good for carrying things. It's made of organic cotton, measures 37x42cm, has a 7cm gusset, is designed on the Isle of Wight and made in India. birdlife.teemill.com



OPTICRON EXPLORER WA ED-R 8X42, £229

The WA means wide-angle. Opticron's Explorers are available in 8x32, 8x42 and 10x42 models. The 8x42 has a 7.5° field of view – 131m @ 1000m – and close-focuses to 2m. It has ED glass and the latest multi-coatings, 17mm of eye-relief – which should work for glasses wearers, and is waterproof. It's supplied with a rainguard (I like to call them 'pickleguards'), a padded strap, objective covers and a soft case. 140x126x52mm. 670g. That's pretty light. 10-year guarantee. That's quite a long time. opticron.co.uk



SWAROVSKI PREMIER DEALER



ATX/STX 65
25-60x magnification
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ATS/STS 80
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£2140

65mm/85mm/95mm Module£675/£1160/£1459
BTX Module..... £1950
ATX/STX Module..... £1645/£1645
ATS/STS 65mm/80mm Body £1160/£1655
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BR Balance Rail £157
VPA Phone Adapter..... £150
AR Adapter rings for ATS/ATM/ATX/STX/BTX £25 to £33

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*Quote from Bird Watching review, May 2018

LITE OPEN BRIDGE

The open bridge design allows a reduction of materials & hence a marked weight reduction from more traditional models. High resolution optics couple with ergonomic, comfortable design allowing hours of pleasurable viewing. Lenses are multi coated, all models are fully waterproof and boast a generous field of view.

"Focusing is satisfyingly precise and quick"

"The colour feels very natural"

"Coped well on murky days"

Review from Birdwatching



8x32 **£189** 8x42 **£199**

10x42
£219

LITE COMPACT

8x28£189
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WINGED EYECUPS

Avian EyeShields are made of flexible rubber & fit most types of binoculars.

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TS-EX16S 1.6x Extender.....£259
TSN-501 (Angled).....£269
TSN-502 (Straight).....£269
TSN-553 (Angled).....£1549
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TE-11WZ 25-60xW.....£569
TE-14WD 30xW.....£229
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TSN-883/884 Package

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10x25 SV.....£92
8x32 SV.....£199
10x32 SV.....£209
8x42 SV.....£215
10x42 SV.....£225

The Kowa BD II 6.5x32 XD

The whole BDII XD range offer a generous field of view. The 6.5x32 offers a huge 10° field which gives a wonderful open feel to the image & makes finding or tracking subjects a joy. The focus wheel offers a precise, silky smooth action and with close focus of just 1.3m the miniature world of butterflies & other insects come in to sharp focus.

Don't just stick to the conventional – give the BDII 6.5x32 XD a try & widen your horizons.

BD II XD 6.5x32.....£359
BD II XD 8x32.....£369
BD II XD 10x32.....£379
BD II XD 8x42.....£429
BD II XD 10x42.....£439

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- TSN-553 15-45x Anniversary in Black
- C-553N Luxury Neoprene Case
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Genesis 8x22 Anniversary LIMITED STOCK



- Includes luxury brown leather case
- Available in black, brown and red

£599

TSN-883 Anniversary LIMITED STOCK



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UK BIRDSIGHTINGS

The best rare birds seen all around Britain in April

COMPILED BY MIKE WEEDON

Slavonian Grebe,
Attenborough NR,
Nottinghamshire,
8 April



APRIL'S FINEST

JOHN DICKENSON

In a full month of birding 'lockdown', news of some fine rare birds still got out

Needless to say, it has been a strange spring. With many of our lives being changed in so many ways, rare birds seem a little low in terms of importance. Indeed, rare bird reporting has also diminished considerably, with not only access to birding sites being 'complicated', but with many bird finders being understandably reluctant to encourage others to chase around the country ticking birds. So, the available rare bird news will almost certainly not be close to a comprehensive picture of the birds out there in April. But here is the best we can do to summarise what was in the public domain.

Probably the rarest bird of the spring (at least from what we know) was a Song Sparrow on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 9th and 10th. It comes just two years after one of these rare North American

sparrows on the same island (in 2018 of course); and will be the island's fifth (if accepted), which is an exceptional proportion of the UK total, which will reach just nine.

Challenging for second place in the best new birds of the month category was a singing male Sardinian Warbler at Porthleven, Cornwall, on 18th and 19th. With approaching 90 UK records, this is

not in the same rarity league as Song Sparrow, but is nonetheless a great bird in any year.

Best of the Rest

Star rare birds which remained into April included the glorious male Lesser Kestrel on St Mary's, Scilly, which remained on the island, or at least in the archipelago, until the end of the month. The lockdown which prevented anyone from visiting the islands did not stop the rare and scarce birds from arriving (for the exclusive enjoyment of the local birders!). Treats included a red-throated Red-throated Pipit, Serin, Eastern Subalpine Warbler, Night Heron, Short-toed Lark, Golden Oriole and Hoopoe, to pick out a few highlights from St Mary's, as well as a possible American Herring Gull.

Talking of which, a first-winter American Herring Gull (the same

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individual which was previously in Devon/Dorset) was found at Penzance, Cornwall (3rd to 4th). A Laughing Gull at Axminster, Devon, was presumably the Cheddar (Somerset) individual from March.

Hangers-on

And, continuing with rare birds which have been around for a while, the Steller's Eider was present at Papa Westray, Orkney, into early May. The same island had a long-staying White-billed Diver offshore, and a few more of this species were seen off Scottish shores later in the month.

Meanwhile, the White-winged Scoter continued its sojourn at Mussleburgh, Lothian. And the Ring-billed Duck was still at Priory CP, Beds for another month.

The last report of a Black-throated Thrush was of the Grimsby (Lincolnshire) bird on 2nd.

Broad-winged soarers

Raptors featured strongly during the month, with two species dominating proceedings, not least

because there was a chance that one or the other or both could and did fly over birders' gardens (where they were naturally spending much of their time during the 'lockdown'!). These were White-tailed Eagles and Black Kites. The former mainly consisted of a few youngsters from the Isle of Wight reintroduction, who having hit the mainland have been touring around searching for the best feeding grounds, and were constantly monitored by satellite tagging. However, there was at least one bird which was not bearing a tag, which was recorded flying over English sites by lucky observers.

Black Kites are migrants from the continent, of course, and there were good numbers of them recorded, a trend which continued into May, especially at sites in the southern and eastern sides of England. That other great broad-winged glider, the Crane, was also seen wandering (usually in small groups) over several lockdown gardens.

Perhaps the ultimate broad-winged record, though, was the

Clockwise from above left
Wryneck,
Cley, Norfolk,
19 April

Red-rumped Swallow,
Kilnsea, East Yorkshire,
25 April

Purple Heron,
Cley, Norfolk,
30 March

Wood Warbler,
Ferry Meadows CP,
Peterborough,
Cambridgeshire,
1 May

Ring Ouzel
Burnham Overy Dunes,
Norfolk,
24 April

Spoonbill,
Alkborough Flats,
Lincolnshire,
April

'one that got away', a possible pale-morph Booted Eagle being mobbed by Buzzards at Pegwell Bay, Kent on 27th. It was apparently always distant, however, and no photographs have emerged. So, we still await one of these small Eurasian eagles finally making it to The British List.

More classic spring fare came in the form of a fine influx of Hoopoes, and a few Bee-eaters plus a very decent number of Red-rumped Swallows. There was a good smattering of Purple Herons, the odd Black-winged Stilt (including two in Kent and one in Cambridgeshire). Also with a continental flavour was a singing Woodchat Shrike at Portland, Dorset, which showed hints of being of the eastern subspecies *niloticus*.

Otherwise, seemingly unseasonal spring specials included a Pectoral Sandpiper at Frodsham Marsh, Cheshire, and a Citrine Wagtail at Siddick Pools NNR, Cumbria (20th).

What will May's lockdown birding produce? Only time will tell.



JOHN HEWITT



GRAHAM CATTLEY



STEVE GANTLETT



RICHARD BROOKS



MIKE WEEDON

SOUTH WEST

Highlights

In association with



A male Lesser Kestrel stayed on St Mary's, Scilly, throughout the month. Other Scilly rarities included Red-throated Pipit and Eastern Subalpine Warbler. A Sardinian Warbler was at Porthleven, Cornwall. An American Herring Gull was at Penzance, Cornwall, and a Laughing Gull at Axminster, Devon.

AVON

HIGHLIGHTS: First dates included Ring Ouzel and White Wagtail (4th), Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and Grasshopper Warbler (6th), Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler (7th), Hobby and Yellow Wagtail (8th), Swift and Tree Pipit (9th), Cuckoo (11th), Whinchat (16th), Wood Warbler (17th) and Spotted Flycatcher (23rd). The last Fieldfares (18th) and Redwings (25th) left for points north. Recording nocturnal migration resulted in 40 reports of Common Scoters, far more than are ever seen in Avon.

CLEVEDON-WESTON-SUPER-MARE: A Whooper Swan was at Kenn Moor (1st). A 'nocmig' surprise was a Night Heron over Weston-super-Mare (11th). Uphill had a Stone-curlew (24th), Crane (4th) and Golden Plover (19th). Clevedon-Yeo had three Brent Geese (15th), a Common Scoter (27th), two Avocets, 42 Whimbrels, 16 Bar-tailed Godwits, 10 Knot, a Curlew Sandpiper (24th), Jack Snipe (15th), Wood Sandpiper (28th), Spotted Redshank, Greenshank and two Mediterranean Gulls.

Uphill had a Great White Egret and a regular Marsh Harrier. Sand Point had parties of Gannets (16th and 29th), two Fulmars (29th), 80 Whimbrels, two Mediterranean Gulls and three Wood Larks (9th). Two Short-eared Owls were at Nailsea Moor (3rd-4th).

SEVERNSIDE: Northwick Warth held two Brent Geese (19th & 21st), a Spoonbill (3rd), two Avocets, five Little Ringed Plovers, 280 Black-tailed Godwits, 70 Knot, a Spotted Redshank and two Greenshanks. Oldbury logged two Garganeys (16th), with one (21st), a Marsh Harrier, Short-eared Owl, 29 Whimbrels, three Little Gulls, six Sandwich Terns (5th) and a Black Redstart (10th). Severn Beach had 120 Bar-tailed Godwits and a Sanderling. Arctic Skuas flew upriver on several dates, as did a few Common and Arctic Terns, and a Kittiwake (30th).

THE RESERVOIRS: Two Pintails were at Chew (11th), with a Little Ringed Plover (18th), Black-tailed Godwit (9th), four Greenshanks (2nd), 19 Little Gulls (21st), and two Common Terns and 15 Black Terns (17th). Blagdon had a Goldeneye (5th) and Common Tern (14th). Barrow Gurney's wintering Long-tailed Duck remained (to 23rd), with 12 Black Terns there (17th) and three Whimbrels (23rd).

OTHER SITES: The Whooper Swan remained at Newton St Loe (to 14th). A Mandarin was in a Bristol park and two flew over South Stoke, Bath. Saltford logged a Goosander (8th), 55 Golden



Dotterel,
Les Landes, Jersey,
Channel Islands,
April

ALAN GICQUEL

Plovers (7th), four Whimbrels (16th) and a Siberian Chiffchaff (14th). Flyover migrants included two Cranes, 12 Ospreys, a few Goshawks, a Montagu's Harrier (24th) and more Whimbrels.

Hawkesbury Upton had 26 Golden Plovers (9th). Marshfield held 60 Corn Buntings and 40 Yellowhammers. Scarcer species included two Merlins, a Woodcock, Firecrests, two Nightingales, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, a Hoopoe at Ubley (30th) and a Serin over Bristol (27th).

Jane Cumming

CHANNEL ISLANDS

JERSEY: A White-tailed Eagle, the first for Jersey, was at Sorel (1st). Also there was a Fan-tailed Warbler (21st), 10 Black-winged Stilts (10th), Ring Ouzels, Wheatears, including Greenland-race birds, 18 Choughs, Dartford Warblers, Tree Pipits and thousands of hirundines. Les Landes had a Red-rumped Swallow (25th), Ring Ouzels and a Dotterel (22nd-24th). Grosnez had Manx Shearwaters, Kittiwakes and auks. Plemont had eight Puffins and 20 Razorbills. Honey Buzzards, Merlins, Hobbies and Ospreys moved through. Five Hoopoes were noted. A Hen Harrier flew over Gorselands. Firecrests were widespread. Five pairs of Cirl Buntings were on Grouville Common. There were 120 pale-bellied Brent Geese at Beaumont Marsh. Nine Ravens flew over Blanches Banques Grouville Bay held Gannets, Puffins, 10 Great Northern Divers, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwits, 10 Whimbrels, 15 Curlews, 30 Grey Plovers, Sanderling, Dunlin, Turnstones and Ringed Plovers. Three Great White Egrets flew over Saint Aubin's Bay (16th). Five Oaks had a Black Kite (26th). Le Hocq had Red-breasted Mergansers, 100 Oystercatchers and Sandwich Terns. Black Redstarts were in towns. Redstarts, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Whinchats, White Wagtails and Yellow Wagtails filtered through coastal sites.

Bertram Bree

CORNWALL

HIGHLIGHTS: Two Spoonbills flew over Hayle (1st), as did a White Stork (13th). A few Red Kites

and Ospreys flew through. An Iceland Gull was around Newlyn and Drift all month, with others at Loggans Moor (11th) and Pendeen (13th). Glaucous Gulls were at St Ives (5th-7th), Newlyn (13th-30th) and Newquay (1st-18th at least). Ten Hoopoes were logged (4th-20th). Wrynecks were at St Just (17th) and Truro (27th). Ring Ouzels passed through (1st-24th). A Sardinian Warbler was at Porthleven (18th-19th). A Serin was at Porthgwarra (17th). Four Lapland Buntings flew over Nanquidno (1st), with another at St Just (18th).

Sara McMahon

DEVON

LUNDY: Maxima included 11 Redwings, 184 Puffins, 23 Chiffchaffs, 877 Razorbills, 1,760 Guillemots, 98 Meadow Pipits, 82 Manx Shearwaters, two Peregrines, 90 Willow Warblers, 110 Blackcaps, two Pied Flycatchers, three Ring Ouzels, 92 Wheatears, two Tree Pipits, 143 Linnets, two Redstarts, two Whinchats, four Grasshopper Warblers, 34 House Martins, six Greenland-race Wheatears, 780 Swallows, 130 Sand Martins, seven Whimbrels, nine White Wagtails, 19 Sedge Warblers, 14 Whitethroats, a Great Northern Diver, Merlin, Firecrest, Jack Snipe, Mediterranean Gull, Black Redstart, Hoopoe and Hawfinch.

NORTH DEVON: An Osprey was at Northam, with two on the Taw Estuary. Braunton had 11 Black-tailed Godwits, a Bar-tailed Godwit, Marsh Harrier, Cattle Egret, Little Ringed Plover, two Red Kites, two Common Sandpipers, a Green Sandpiper, Glossy Ibis, 11 Whimbrels and two Greenshanks. Barnstaple had two Red Kites. A Spotted Crake called at Churchill, East Down.

Fremington had three Greenshanks, six Common Sandpipers, 20 Whimbrels, a Bar-tailed Godwit, six Grey Plovers and two Cattle Egrets. Bideford had two Red Kites over. Ilfracombe had a Pied Flycatcher and three Red Kites.

A Bee-eater was at an unnamed site. Saunton had a Merlin, two Whimbrels and a few Sanderlings.

SOUTH DEVON: Exminster Marshes had two

Pintails and a Whimbrel. Slapton had a Goshawk, 39 Buzzards, a Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, three Goldeneyes, six Sandwich Terns, 350 Swallows, four Whimbrels and a Bar-tailed Godwit. The canal area of Exeter had 20 Blackcaps, six Cetti's Warblers, 15 Chiffchaffs, a Green Sandpiper, Peregrine, three Water Rails, 15 Sandwich Terns, two Grey Plovers and five Whimbrels. Buckfastleigh had an Osprey and Red Kite.

Berrynarbor had 22 Willow Warblers, 20 Chiffchaffs, a Crossbill and Marsh Harrier. Plymouth had ten Sandwich Terns and three Red Kites. Paignton had two Red Kites, 25 Sandwich Terns and a Bar-tailed Godwit. Red Kites were at Marsh Green, Milber, Whimble, Teignmouth, Turnchapel, Dunksell, Lifton, Widworthy and Ivybridge. Ospreys were on the Exe Estuary, at Kingsteignton and at Aylesbeare. Torquay had four Red Kites, six Purple Sandpipers and two Great Northern Divers.

Berry Head had 300 Manx Shearwaters. A Whimbrel and Cattle Egret were at Dawlish. Brixham had nine Purple Sandpipers and two Great Northern Divers. A Firecrest was at Galmpton. Wembury had a Black Redstart, two Cirl Buntings and five Whimbrels. A Ruddy Shelduck was on the Upper Torridge. Hopes Nose had 15 Sandwich Terns. Fernworthy Reservoir had a Firecrest, two Redstarts and a Long-tailed Duck. West Charleton Marsh had a Marsh Harrier. A Nightingale sang in the Kingsbridge area. Crownhill Down had a Hobby and Whinchat. A Hoopoe was at Okehampton.

THURLESTONE BAY: Highlights included a Pintail, Eider, 328 Common Scoters, a Red-breasted Merganser, 18 Red-throated Divers, two Black-throated Divers, 14 Great Northern Divers, 435 Gannets, 19 Fulmars, 340 Manx Shearwaters, two Spoonbills, five Red Kites, a Marsh Harrier, Short-eared Owl, two Hobbies, two Little Ringed Plovers, 23 Grey Plovers, three Knot, a Sanderling, 20 Bar-tailed Godwits, 115 Whimbrels, a Stone Curlew, five Greenshanks, a Pomarine Skua, 12 Arctic Skuas, 15 Great Skuas, 12 Kittiwakes,

12 Mediterranean Gulls, a Yellow-legged Gull, Little Tern, 86 Sandwich Terns, two Common Terns, two Arctic Terns and a Puffin.

Harvey Kendall, Mike Passman
thurlestonebaybirds.co.uk

ISLES OF SCILLY

HIGHLIGHTS: The male Lesser Kestrel remained on St Mary's. Large numbers of common dolphins were to the south of St Mary's all month, with many Manx Shearwaters and auks feeding with them, plus the occasional Minke Whale, Great Skua and Arctic Skua. The long-staying Cetti's Warbler remained near the Dump Clump. A Snow Bunting was in Hugh Town (2nd-9th). A Short-eared Owl was in the Porth Hellick/Carn Friars area (3rd-7th).

Hoopoes were at Carn Friars (5th-7th), Kitty Down (11th-12th), St Martin's (11th), St Agnes (20th), Peninnis (21st) and at the Golf Course (22nd and 26th). Ospreys flew over St Mary's (5th), St Martin's (6th) and Tresco (15th & 23rd). The wintering Hen Harrier was over St Martin's (7th) and over Gugh later in the month. A fall of Willow Warblers, Blackcaps and Water Rails was noted (8th), when a Brambling was at Old Town and two Redstarts on St Mary's.

A Little Ringed Plover flew over Porth Hellick (9th), when a Cuckoo and the first of an influx of Ring Ouzels were on St Martin's. A Jackdaw arrived for a short stay on St Mary's (12th), when two Jack Snipe were at Porth Hellick. Great Northern Divers between the islands peaked at 38. Golden Orioles were at Peninnis (13th), Porth Hellick (27th-28th), Trenoweth (27th) and Bar Point (28th). A Hooded Crow commuted around St Mary's (from 14th).

Two Balearic Shearwaters were off Giant's Castle (14th). Large numbers of Wheatears were noted (15th). A Curlew Sandpiper and Bar-tailed Godwit were on Porth Mellon (16th). Wood Warblers were at Middle Town, St Martin's (16th) and in Higher Moors (27th-28th). Two Bramblings were at Trenoweth and a Turtle Dove near the Golf Course (17th). The Night Heron over Hugh Town (19th) may well have been the bird in Lower Moors (22nd). Serins were at Trenoweth (20th) and Longstone (30th).

A Black-tailed Godwit was at Porth Hellick (21st-22nd). There was a Short-toed Lark on St Agnes (21st). A Red-throated Pipit was on the Garrison (26th-30th), with a Pied Flycatcher nearby. A Purple Heron was in the Porth Hellick/Higher Moors area (28th), when an Eastern Subalpine Warbler was at Porth Hellick.

The first Spotted Flycatchers were at Salakee and Longstone (28th). A Corn Crake was on St Agnes (29th).

Will Wagstaff

WILTSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The remarkable inland passage of Common Scoters produced records of night-flying birds at Chippenham, Bradford-on-Avon, Hilmarton and Brinkworth. Ospreys were at Bradford-on-Avon, Charlton, Durrington, Landford, Lower Woodford, Ogbourne St George and Wilton. A Garganey was most unusual at Westbury Ponds, where the Siberian Chiffchaff was last seen (2nd). Ring Ouzels were at Cley Hill and Morgan's Hill. Black Redstarts were at Wylde, Salisbury and Bratton.

Cuckoos were reported from 23 localities, the best showing for some time. Nightingales were at the Water Park and Westbury. Pied Flycatchers were at Trowbridge, Warminster and Kington St Michael. Firecrests were at five sites and Common Sandpipers at seven. A Great White Egret was at Cricklade. A Greenshank was at Shrewton Water Meadows. Hawfinches were

at Avon Valley and Great Ridge Wood.

Common Terns were at Charlton and the Water Park. Fieldfares remained to mid month. Bramblings were at Southleigh Wood. Crossbills were at Great Ridge Wood and Cranborne Chase. There was a Hen Harrier at SPTA(E). A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at Savernake. A Little Ringed Plover was at Clarendon.

Rob Turner

SOUTH EAST

Highlights

In association with



A probable male Black-headed Wagtail was at Brading Marshes RSPB, Isle of Wight on 17th. A possible Booted Eagle was over Pegwell Bay, Kent, on 27th (but there were no confirming photographs).

BEDFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A White-tailed Eagle flew over Houghton Regis (2nd) and Sewell (3rd). Hoopoes were at Amptill Park (12th) and in Milton Bryan (12th). The drake Ring-necked Duck remained at Priory CP, moving to Longholme Island (from 28th). A Crane flew over Leighton Buzzard (2nd). A Wood Warbler was at Woburn Golf Club (26th). A Little Tern was at Grovebury SP (30th). Three Ring Ouzels were at Dunstable Downs (10th), with four at Warden Hill (16th-24th) and singles at Blows Down (6th), Barton-le-Clay (7th), Pulloxhill (11th), Brogborough Hill (13th) and Sharpenhoe (26th). Black Redstarts were at Blows Down (1st) and Stopsley (3rd). Six Black Terns were at Stewartby Lake (18th). A Wood Sandpiper and two Garganeys were at Broom GP.

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BERKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Crane flew over North Ascot (26th). White Storks flew over Moss End (23rd), Yateley (23rd) and Newbury (24th).

FOBNEY MEADOW, READING: Highlights included a Great White Egret (8th-21st), four Shelducks (23rd-29th), five Water Rails (2nd-17th), a Curlew (29th), Greenshank (19th-21st) and three Water Pipits (6th).

MOOR GREEN LAKES: There were two Red-crested Pochards (18th-26th), six Black-tailed Godwits (10th), a Little Gull (18th) and 35 Arctic Terns (18th).

THEALE GP: There were four Red-crested Pochards (10th-24th), an Oystercatcher (22nd-26th), Curlew (1st) and Little Gull (9th).

OTHER SITES: Common Scoters were heard calling at night over Emmer Green, Reading, Windsor and Palmer Park, Reading (2nd). Nocturnal sound recordings included a Stone-curlew at Finchampstead (24th), Curlew at Shottesbrooke (26th) and Whimbrel at Woose Hill, Wokingham (22nd). A Sandwich Tern flew

over Woodlands Park, Maidenhead (23rd). Redstarts were at Whitley Wood, Reading (8th) and Swinley Forest (25th). A Grasshopper Warbler was at Speen Moor Plantations (30th). Marek Walford (www.berksbirds.co.uk)

HAMPSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Night Heron was at Dibden Bay (19th). A Purple Heron was in Gosport Wildgrounds (22nd-23rd). Hoopoes were at Hayling Island (14th) and Plastow Green (24th). A Red-rumped Swallow flew over Posbrook Floods (5th). Black Kites were at Portchester (8th), Havant (11th), Leigh Park (11th), New Milton (12th), Long Valley (14th), Fishlake Meadows (25th) and Woolmer Pond (30th). A Pallas's Warbler was at Staunton CP (11th).

A Grey Phalarope at Pennington Marsh (16th) was the first spring record for the county. White-tailed Eagles, presumably all related to the Isle of Wight introduction scheme, were seen over Catisfield (4th), Wickham (4th), Liss (7th), North Boarhunt (7th), Godshill (21st) and Olivers Battery, Winchester (22nd). White Storks, again presumably introduced birds, were seen over Blashford Lakes (6th), Fishlake Meadows (7th), Petersfield (two on 12th), Hayling Island (23rd), Andover (26th) and Winchester (30th), with one lingering around Longparish (26th-28th).

A Crane flew over Kingsclere (25th), with a Cattle Egret over Sarisbury Green (30th). Ospreys were at 22 sites. The first Hobbies were at Southsea (4th) and Romsey (5th). Common Scoters, heard nocturnally, were at 13 sites (predominantly 2nd-4th). Another listener heard a Bittern over a New Forest garden (1st). By the end of the month, Whimbrels were heard over several sites. Totals of 12 Arctic and two Great Skuas were seen from Hayling Island, with two more Great Skuas off Hill Head (30th).

A Roseate Tern was at Hill Head (30th), following one at Testwood Lakes (23rd). A big movement of 86 Little Gulls was observed off Hayling (5th). There were daily reports of up to ten on Ibsley Water and three records from Fleet Pond. Three Black Terns were at Fleet (17th) and one on Ibsley (28th), while Fleet also had 11 Arctic Terns (28th). Garganeys were at Fishlake Meadows, Farlington Marshes, Pennington Marsh, Avington Lake and Ibsley Water. Curlew Sandpipers were at Farlington (24th) and Normandy Marsh (29th), with a Wood Sandpiper on Ibsley Water (27th). Two Spoonbills flew over Hill Head (30th). One was seen twice at Pennington, where there were two Spotted Redshanks. A Pied Flycatcher was at Havant Thicket (27th). There were eight reports of Ring Ouzels and six of Black Redstarts. A Long-tailed Duck was on Ibsley Water (23rd). A Hen Harrier was at Duckhole Bog (5th). A Short-eared Owl was seen twice in Langstone Harbour.

Tom Jordan

HERTFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A juvenile White-tailed Eagle remained at Wilstone Reservoir (to 2nd), with another over Bishop's Stortford (7th). Two Black-necked Grebes were at Wilstone Reservoir (12th). Six Arctic Terns flew over Royston (23rd), with five at Wilstone Reservoir (13th), and two at both Amwell and West Hyde GP (29th). A Little Gull was at Wilstone Reservoir (18th). Sixty Mediterranean Gulls flew over Panshanger Park (23rd). Ospreys flew over Watford (2nd) and Hemel Hempstead (19th). In the Lee Valley, a Smew was North Cheshunt GP (6th). Ring Ouzels were at Cole Green (5th), Bishop's Stortford (10th) and Royston (12th). Black Redstarts were at Baldock (15th) and Hoddesdon (22nd).

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KENT

HIGHLIGHTS: A White-tailed Eagle was seen over large parts of the county (1st-2nd), with two around Worth Marsh and Deal (3rd). Dungeness NNR had a Serin (2nd), a Stone-curlew (3rd), Black Kite (10th), Glossy Ibis (22nd), Red-rumped Swallow, 13 Little Gulls and two Black-throated Divers (24th). Dungeness RSPB had Red-rumped Swallow, three Garganey and a Spotted Redshank (19th), a Black-winged Stilt, Cattle Egret (21st) and a Glossy Ibis (21st). A Night Heron was at Sandwich Bay (24th). Two Cattle Egrets were at Folkestone (27th), and four were at Luddenham Marshes (30th). A Black Kite was over Margate (4th), with it or another at Sittingbourne (8th), Whitstable (16th) and Walmer (26th). Two White Storks were seen over Kearnsey, Bekesbourne, Dymchurch, Dover and Faversham (5th), with one or more continuing to be seen. A Rough-legged Buzzard was over Lympne (11th), with one at Broadstairs (23rd). Oare Marshes NR had a Montagu's Harrier (16th), with one at Conyer (20th). A Honey Buzzard flew north at Monks Wall NR (17th). A Cattle Egret was at Cliffe (18th).

SURREY

HIGHLIGHTS: White Stork sightings came from Hascombe (5th), Ashstead (6th), Tice's Meadow (two, 22nd) and Weybridge (26th). A Hoopoe was on Epsom Downs (29th). A Black Kite was at Warlingham (8th). An White-tailed Eagle was over Worcester Park (13th).

SUSSEX

EAST SUSSEX: A White Stork was at Hastings (5th), with other sightings at Bexhill (two, 7th), Willingdon (two, 7th), Eastbourne (8th), Hailsham (12th), Peacehaven (22nd) and Combe Valley CP (25th). A Hoopoe was in a garden at Fairlight (8th), with others at Eastbourne (10th), Camber (11th), Arlington Reservoir (11th), Piddinghoe (17th & 23rd), Tide Mills (20th), Ovingdean (25th) and Kingston (25th). A Purple Heron was at Arlington Reservoir (29th). A Rough-legged Buzzard was at Rye (10th). Rye Harbour NR had a Cattle Egret (15th). A Serin went through Beachy Head (10th). A Red-rumped Swallow was at Piddinghoe (17th),

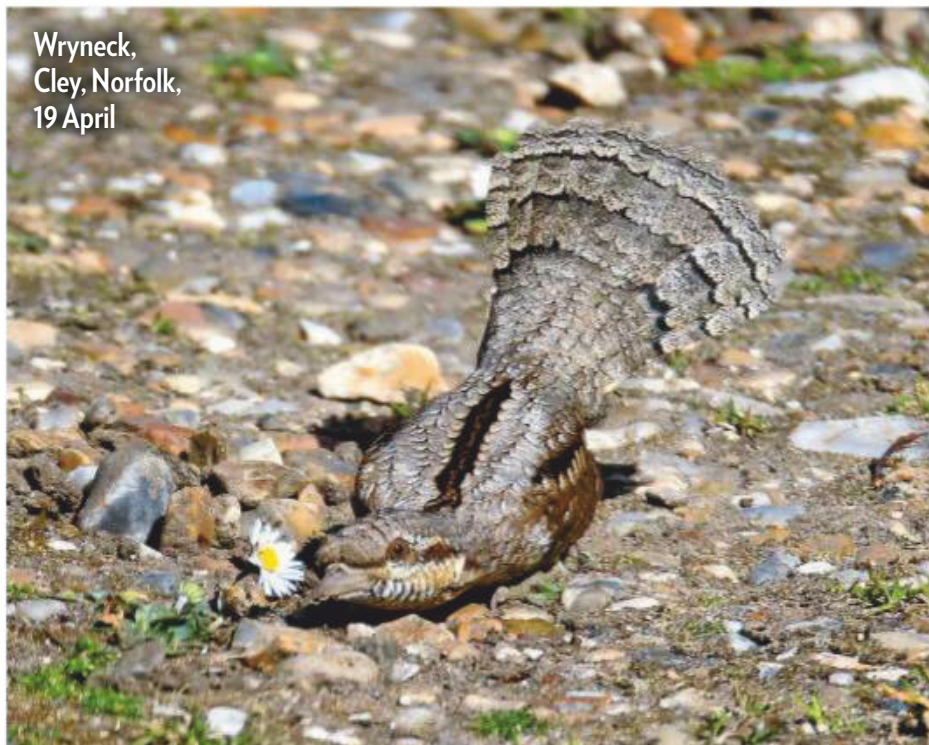
WEST SUSSEX: Hoopoes were at Goring-by-Sea (4th), West Chiltington (9th), Climping (16th-27th), Arundel (20th), Angmering (23rd) and Ferring (28th). White Stork were at Partridge Green (4th, & three, 26th), Haywards Heath (two, 6th), Rudgwick (12th), Midhurst (two, 12th), Pulborough (two, 13th), Horsham (two, 14th), Pulborough Brooks RSPB (two, 19th) and Southwater (24th). Two Cattle Egrets were at the mouth of the Arun (6th), one was at Rustington (10th), two at Sidlesham Ferry (19th) and Pagham Harbour LNR (two, 24th). A Serin was at Climping (7th), with a Black Redstart there (14th). A Black Kite was over Ashdown Forest (27th). A Serin was at Shoreham-by-Sea (16th). A Red-rumped Swallow was at Selsey Bill (19th), with a White-winged Black Tern (23rd). A Spotted Crake sang around Pulborough. A Ruddy Shelduck was at Pulborough Brooks RSPB (13th).

UK BIRD SIGHTINGS APRIL

Wheatear,
Little Eye, Salthouse, Norfolk,
April



Wryneck,
Cley, Norfolk,
19 April



EAST ANGLIA

Highlights

In association with



A Pallid Harrier was over north Norfolk sites on 22nd. An untagged White-tailed Eagle was over Peterborough on 19th. Black-winged Stilt sightings were at Kingfishers Bridge, Cambridgeshire and Welney, Norfolk.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Juvenile White-tailed Eagles flew over Grafham Water (2nd), March (16th), Werrington (19th) and Bolton's Pit (22nd). Hoopoes were at Hampton and over a garden in March (12th). Four Dotterels were near Landbeach (18th-23rd). Black Redstarts were at Eynesbury (12th) and Bassingbourne (17th). Black Terns included two at Ferry Meadows CP (18th), singles at Dernford Farm Reservoir (19th) and Maxey GP (21st), three at Fen Drayton Lakes (23rd) and 11 at Paxton Pits (23rd). Dernford Farm Reservoir held 40 Arctic Terns (28th), and eight Little Gulls (10th), with 12 (17th). Iceland Gulls were at Rampton (13th) and Tanholt GP (28th). Ospreys flew over Cambridge (3rd), Eynesbury (4th), Maxey GP (11th) and St Neots (two on 7th). Two Smew were at Needingworth Quarry (19th). Ring Ouzels included three at

Holme Fen (5th), three at Great Wilbraham (8th-16th) and others at Barton (7th & 27th), Wennington Woods (8th), Kings Ripton (8th), Devil's Dyke (12th), Little Downham (15th), Heydon (15th), Bythorn (16th-17th), Little Paxton (17th), Orwell (two on 18th), Foxton (18th-19th), Farcet Fen (22nd), Ellington (15th-22nd), Swavesey (23rd), Morborne Hill (23rd), Foxton (23rd), Eldernell (17th & 24th) and Marholm (19th-24th).

Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 from a landline or mobile phone cost 65p per minute plus your phone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia. For enquiries please call 0330 333 6946 or 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk twitter.com/BirdlineEA Anglia facebook.com/robinchittenden7

ESSEX

METROPOLITAN ESSEX: A Red-rumped Swallow and Black Redstart were at Sewardstone Marsh. A Black Kite flew over Hornchurch, with a White-tailed Eagle over Harold Hill. Over 100 Red Kites were reported. Marsh Harriers were at three sites and Ospreys at five. A Short-eared Owl flew over Wanstead Flats. Cattle Egrets were at Cornmill Meadows and near Upminster. Great White Egrets were over Upminster and Banbury Reservoir. A Bittern flew over Rush Green. Several birders picked up Common Scoters on nocturnal migration equipment. One was on King George V Reservoir, along with a Hooded Merganser, a Long-tailed Duck, two

Scaup, two Pintails, a Brent Goose, 13 Arctic Terns, a Sandwich Tern, three Black Terns, a Little Tern, 66 Little Gulls, 17 Bar-tailed Godwits and eight Whimbrels. Walthamstow Wetlands had a Little Gull, 10 Arctic Terns, four Sandwich Terns, 13 Bar-tailed Godwits and 12 Whimbrels.

A Garganey was at Dagenham Chase. Two Avocets were on Cornmill Meadows. A Wood Sandpiper was near Warley. A few Fieldfares, Redwings, Ring Ouzels, Wheatears and Whinchats were noted. Thirteen Nightingales were on territory. Redstarts were at four sites. Sixteen Cuckoos were heard. Wood Larks flew over Upminster and the Mardyke. A Blue-headed Wagtail was on Walthamstow Marshes. Tree Pipits flew over Purfleet and Wanstead Flats.

MID-ESSEX: Abberton Reservoir had two Whooper Swans, a Great White Egret, Long-tailed Duck, 20 Yellow Wagtails and five Nightingales. Three Cranes and an Osprey were tracked. One garden logged a White-tailed Eagle, two Ravens and a Firecrest. A Great White Egret was at Limbourne Creek. Another was at Old Hall Marshes, along with a Cattle Egret and 15 Whimbrels. Mersea had five Great Northern Divers, a Red-necked Grebe, two Eiders and a Shag. Nightingales and Firecrests were in Friday Woods.

NORTH ESSEX: Wix had a Red Kite, two Hen Harriers, a Raven and three Cranes. Black Notley had the first Spotted Flycatcher. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was in a Halsted garden. Two Ring Ouzels and a Great White Egret were at Holland Haven.

Frinton maxima included 656 Red-throated Divers, 261 Cormorants, five Shags, 1,867 Brent Geese, 25 Mediterranean Gulls, a Great Northern Diver, Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Hen Harrier, Eider, Whinchat, Great Skua, Arctic Skua, Redwing, Wheatear, Great White Egret, Hobby, Red Kite, 26 Buzzards, 388 Chaffinches, six Siskins, two Bramblings, 65 Little Gulls, two Garganeys, two Ring Ouzels, 18 Fulmars, two Kittiwakes, 12 Sandwich Terns, 46 Arctic Terns, five Little Terns, 196 Bar-tailed Godwits, 23 Common Scoters, 72 Gannets, 137 Whimbrels, 32 Knot, two Red-breasted Mergansers and a Pomarine Skua.

RAINHAM MARSHES: Highlights included a Spoonbill, two Great White Egrets, Lapwings, Redshanks, Oystercatchers, Avocets, Little Ringed Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits, a total of 37

Whimbrels, four Greenshanks, four Black-tailed Godwits, Common Terns, 60 Arctic Terns, a Sandwich Tern, Black Tern, numerous Mediterranean Gulls, a Kittiwake, a few Wheatears including six Greenland-race birds, two Whinchats, two Ring Ouzels, a Redstart, Marsh Harriers, four Red Kites, several Ravens and two Short-eared Owls.

SOUTH-EAST ESSEX: Cattle Egrets were at South Fambridge. Great White Egrets were at Great Wakering and Foulness. Spoonbills were at Paglesham Lagoon and over Westcliffe. The two Whooper Swans remained on the Lower Raypits. Hoopoes were at Foulness and Ingatestone. Ring Ouzels were near Rochford and in Gunners Park. Ten Nightingales were on Canvey Wick. Grasshopper Warblers were at Vange and Wakering. Ospreys flew over Rayleigh and Fobbing. A Black-throated Diver and Little Tern were off Gunners Park. Tilbury had 25 Arctic Terns. Turtle Doves were at Shoeburyness, and in Southend and Boreham gardens. Two Garganeys were at Hullbridge.

Howard Vaughan

NORFOLK

HIGHLIGHTS: A Pallid Harrier flew past Weybourne and Sheringham (22nd). A Montagu's Harrier flew past Felmingham (30th). A wild White-tailed Eagle flew over Thorpe St Andrew and Colney (3rd). Black Kites were seen over Mulbarton (8th), Scarning (9th), Arminghall (10th), Sparham (12th) and Briston (15th). An adult Lanner was again at Breydon Water (1st). Rough-legged Buzzards were over Horsey (7th), Stiffkey Fen (15th) and West Runton (25th). A Black-winged Stilt was at Welney (21st). A Spotted Crake was at Wheatfen (24th). A Hoopoe was at Blakeney (8th). Serins were at Sea Palling (21st) and over Thetford (23rd). A Wryneck was at Sheringham (9th), with another at Cley (11th-24th). A Richard's Pipit was at Trimingham (26th). Two Shore Larks were still at Holkham (12th). Pied Flycatchers were at Salthouse (6th) and Blakeney (19th). A Savi's Warbler was at Potter Heigham Marshes (25th).

BREYDON WATER: Highlights included four Great White Egrets, two Cranes (3rd) and a Hen Harrier (6th). Maxima included 29 Little Egrets, 18 Cormorants, three Spoonbills, 63 Greylags, 145 Shelducks, 150 Wigeon, 55 Gadwall, 1,069 Teal, 12 Pintails, 298 Shovelers, 10 Pochards, 16 Tufted Ducks, three Garganeys, two Common Scoters, 190 Avocets, 11 Ringed Plovers, 132

Ring Ouzel,
Gramborough Hill, Salthouse,
Norfolk,
April



Knot, 414 Dunlin, 658 Black-tailed Godwits, 144 Bar-tailed Godwits, 110 Whimbrels, three Spotted Redshanks, 19 Greenshanks, 1,000 Redshanks, a Wood Sandpiper and Jack Snipe. Red Kites were seen several times, while Buzzards, Marsh Harriers and Peregrines were regular. Four Short-eared Owls were seen to mid-month. There was an Arctic Tern (5th), with 10 (19th) and 51 (29th). A Sandwich Tern appeared (6th), with five (29th). There was a Black Tern (21st). Nine Little Gulls were noted. There were four Cetti's Warblers, four Wheatears, and the last Rock Pipit (23rd).

NOA HOLME: Maxima included 250 Brent Geese, 200 Wigeon, 45 Mediterranean Gulls, five Stonechats, three Common Scoters, seven Red-breasted Mergansers, two Great Crested Grebes, five Red Kites, 11 Ruff, six Buzzards, 10 Barnacle Geese, 55 Golden Plovers, 110 Curlews, 16 Black-tailed Godwits, three Snipe, four Sand Martins, 20 Swallows, four Cetti's Warblers, 20 Chiffchaffs, 20 Blackcaps, six Ring Ouzels, three Spoonbills, 14 Sedge Warblers, four Grasshopper Warblers, four Willow Warblers, five Cranes, 32 Sandwich Terns, 20 House Martins, six Yellowhammers, six Whimbrels, six Fulmars, five Lesser Whitethroats, 10 Whitethroats, three Reed Warblers, three Green Sandpipers, three Wheatears, five Jays, four Yellow Wagtails, four Little Terns, three Cuckoos, 14 Swifts and a Gannet, Great White Egret, Peregrine, Merlin, Greenshank, Turtle Dove, Barn Owl, Wood Lark, Tree Pipit, Fieldfare, Redstart, Black Redstart, Siskin, Brambling and Corn Bunting.

CLEY AREA: The first Cuckoo was seen (1st). Ospreys flew over Old Woman's Lane (4th) and the Glaven Valley (28th). A Firecrest was at Walsey Hills (4th). A Sedge Warbler was at Walsey and a Whimbrel at Cley (5th). A Ring Ouzel was in a Glandford garden (5th-6th). All three hirundines were noted (6th), when Cley had a Jack Snipe and two Yellow Wagtails. A Curlew Sandpiper was at Cley (8th). A Wood Lark flew over (11th). A Short-eared Owl hunted and a Yellow Wagtail flew over (23rd), when four Whimbrels flew east and Walsey had a Lesser Whitethroat. A Long-tailed Duck flew west (24th). A Little Stint was on Arnold's Marsh (26th). Spoonbills were seen regularly. *Pete Allard, Sophie Barker (www.noa.org.uk) and Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 from a landline or mobile phone cost 65p per minute plus your phone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia. For enquiries please call 0330 333 6946 or 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk twitter.com/BirdlineEAnglia facebook.com/robinchittenden7*

SUFFOLK

HIGHLIGHTS: Landguard had a Glossy Ibis (9th), Red-rumped Swallow (27th) and Melodious Warbler (30th). Two Black Kites flew over Minsmere (30th), with one, or both, of these birds also seen over Westleton Heath, Sizewell, Aldringham and Leiston. A White-tailed Eagle flew over Bramfield (4th), Bungay (6th), and Minsmere and Hollesley (7th). Others that flew over Ipswich, Bungay and Mendlesham (15th) and Needham Market (15th-16th) were from the Isle of Wight re-introduction scheme. The Green-winged Teal remained at Southwold (to 1st), with a Purple Heron (16th-22nd). A Hoopoe was at Felixstowe (23rd). A Glossy Ibis flew over Ipswich (30th). A male Pied Flycatcher was at Reydon (20th), with a female (24th). A Serin was at Hollesley (6th). A Wryneck was at Snape

Warren (20th). A Great Grey Shrike was at Ipswich (22nd). *Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 from a landline or mobile phone cost 65p per minute plus your phone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia. For enquiries please call 0330 333 6946 or 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk twitter.com/BirdlineEAnglia facebook.com/robinchittenden7*

MIDLANDS

Highlights

In association with



Rare birds for the region included one of the wandering White-tailed Eagles, tracked through various sites in Northamptonshire mid-month. White Storks also popped up here and there across the region.

DERBYSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A White-tailed Eagle from The Isle of Wight re-introduction scheme was near Rocester, over the northern suburbs of Derby and over Long Eaton GP (2nd). It flew over the Heath Junction of the M1, Chesterfield, the Eastern Moors, Ladybower Reservoir and then Glossop (19th). Two Cattle Egrets were in the Trent Valley (13th). Ospreys flew over Pilsley Green (4th and 20th), Derby Racecourse (10th) and Darley Dale (15th). An escaped male Golden Pheasant was at Belper (30th). A male Black Redstart was in Derby (22nd).

OTHER SITES: Whooper Swans were at Repton (3rd) and Long Eaton GP (7th). Long Eaton GP had a Scaup (4th & 8th), Green Sandpiper (5th), Kittiwake (17th) and Little Gull (15th). A Bar-tailed Godwit was at Ogston Reservoir (22nd). Four Black-tailed Godwits were at Willington GP (20th), with nine at Erewash Meadows (25th-30th). Whimbrels flew over North Wingfield (10th) and Erewash Meadows (23rd), with four over Carsington Water mid-month. Four Little Gulls were at Church Wilne Reservoir (23rd), with Arctic Terns there (18th & 27th). Black Terns were at Pilsley Green (20th) and Willington GP (22nd). Long Eaton GP had 31 Arctic Terns (20th), one (25th), four (27th) and two (30th). Five flew over Kirk Langley (21st). First dates included a Hobby at Morton (12th), Common Sandpiper at Longdendale (13th), Common Tern at Long Eaton GP (8th), with Sedge Warbler there (10th) and Reed Warbler (13th), Cuckoo at Langley Mill (22nd), Swift at Apperknowle (21st), Yellow Wagtail at Abbey Hill Floods (6th), Tree Pipit at Hathersage (15th), House Martins at Chesterfield and Bakewell (5th), Redstarts at Dethick and Kelstedge (7th), a Whinchat at High Bridge GP (18th), Grasshopper Warblers at Erewash Meadows and Willington GP (12th), a Whitethroat at Erewash Meadows (6th), Lesser Whitethroat at Walton-on-Trent (11th), Garden Warbler at Curbar (6th), Wood Warbler at Darley Dale (20th), Willow Warblers at Egginton and Pride Park, Derby (4th) and three Pied Flycatchers at Kinder Bank (8th)

Rod Key

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

COTSWOLDS: At the Cotswold Water Park, a Black-winged Stilt was at Shorncliffe (10th).



Slavonian Grebe,
Attenborough NR,
Nottinghamshire,
8 April

JOHN DICKENSON

There were two Garganeys, a Marsh Harrier (26th), Black Tern (19th), Nightingale and Grasshopper Warbler at pit 57. A Long-tailed Duck was at pit 125 (17th-21st), with a Greenshank, four Little Ringed Plovers (20th) and three Garganeys nearby. An Osprey flew over Bourton-on-the-Water (11th). Ring Ouzels included two at Leckhampton Hill (11th), three at Cleeve Hill (14th) and singles at at Charlton Kings Common (2nd), Stinchcombe Hill (6th) and Nailsworth (23rd).

Nailsworth also logged a Marsh Harrier (13th and 19th), Whimbrel, two Mediterranean Gulls, a Pied Flycatcher (29th) and two Crossbills. Another Pied Flycatcher was near Cam (14th). A Brambling was still at Draycott (9th). A Grasshopper Warbler and Whinchat were at Leckhampton Hill (18th)

FOREST OF DEAN: A Hoopoe was on a farm near Blakeney (26th-27th). Three Red Kites flew over Lydney (6th), with an Osprey over Berry Hill (21st). Two Hawfinches were at Newnham (8th), with a Firecrest nearby (12th).

LOWER SEVERN VALE: The Frampton Pools and Saul Warth area had a Spoonbill (4th), three Great White Egrets, a Goldeneye, two Marsh Harriers, a Merlin, Grey Plover, Knot, Greenshank, 38 Whimbrels, 12 Bar-tailed Godwits, three Common Sandpipers, two Wood Sandpipers, a Green Sandpiper, Arctic Skua (19th), Kittiwake, Mediterranean Gull, five Little Gulls, two Arctic Terns, a Grasshopper Warbler, Black Redstart (1st), Whinchat and Tree Pipit.

An Osprey flew over Berkeley (9th), as did a male Hen Harrier (23rd). Berkeley Shore had 13 Whimbrels, two Turnstones, a Grasshopper Warbler, Whinchat and Merlin (20th). A Marsh Harrier (17th), eight Whimbrels (21st) and three Common Sandpipers were at Elmore. Walmore Common had a fly-over Wood Sandpiper (24th), two Garganeys and two Grasshopper Warblers.

UPPER SEVERN VALE: A Savi's Warbler was at Hempsted (27th). A Great White Egret flew over the same area (15th). A Jack Snipe was in a Barnwood garden (2nd). Two Avocets (9th), 215 Black-tailed Godwits, a Bar-tailed Godwit (18th) and Green Sandpiper were at Maisemore Ham. Three Little Gulls were at Witcombe Reservoir (17th). Six Avocets were at Coombe Hill Meadows.

Andy Jayne (01452 506 502)

LEICESTERSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Cattle Egret was at Melton Mowbray (29th). An Osprey flew over Charnwood Water, Loughborough (4th). A Ring

Ouzel was briefly in a garden at Hugglescote (5th). A White Wagtail was at Burton-on-the-Wolds (5th). A Marsh Harrier flew over Groby (9th). A pair of Garganey were at Kelham Bridge (11th). An Osprey was over Tugby (12th). A Great White Egret was at Saddington Reservoir (12th-26th). A Wood Lark flew over Hugglescote (16th), when Warren Hills had five Ring Ouzels, with four there the next day. Seven Little Gulls were at Eyebrook Reservoir (17th), with one there (19th), an Osprey (21st) and two Avocets (23rd). A Ring Ouzel was at Aylestone (19th). A Hen Harrier was at Croft Hill (21st).

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A White-tailed Eagle was over Irthlingborough and Barnwell (14th), Towcester (9th) and Wadenhoe (17th). Rough-legged Buzzards were at Wicken Wood (5th) and Roade (7th). A Montagu's Harrier flew over Cottingham (21st). A White Stork flew over Brackley (29th). A Black Redstart visited a Spratton garden (2nd-3rd). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Boddington Reservoir (20th & 22nd).

A Blue-headed Wagtail was at Clopton (26th) and a 'Channel' Wagtail at Stanford Reservoir for a few days. Five Cattle Egrets were at Stanwick GP. Great White Egrets were at Barnwell Flood, Earls Barton, Kisingbury, Stanwick and Thrapston GP, with two at Pitsford Reservoir (27th).

BARNWELL FLOOD: There were two Spotted Redshanks (22nd-23rd), two Greenshanks, a Wood Sandpiper (27th), Bar-tailed Godwit, three Whimbrels, a Ruff, Green Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, Garganey and White Wagtail.

BODDINGTON RESERVOIR: There were four Ring Ouzels (5th), with another (8th), a Redstart, Greenland-race Wheatear, two Sandwich Terns (6th), with another (10th), two Mediterranean Gulls, two Little Gulls, a Caspian Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, 12 Arctic Terns (28th), three Grey Plovers, 18 Snipe, a Common Sandpiper, and an Osprey (9th).

BYFIELD: A Common Scoter was heard at night. There was a Ring Ouzel, Marsh Harrier (9th), Redstart, two Wheatears and the first Tree Pipit (10th).

CLIFFORD HILL GP: Three Little Gulls were seen, with two Common Scoters (18th), a Curlew Sandpiper (25th-27th) and the first Little Tern (29th). Arctic Terns peaked at 35 (28th). There were three Whinchats, four Wheatears, a few Yellow Wagtails, a Greenshank, Ringed Plover, two Dunlin and two Common Sandpipers.

UK BIRD SIGHTINGS **APRIL**

DITCHFORD GP: Seven Little Gulls, a Greenshank, White Wagtail and Wheatear passed through.

EARLS BARTON GP: There was a Garganey (from 2nd), Kittiwake (6th), 11 Little Gulls, a few Arctic Terns, Marsh Harrier, Wood Sandpiper (30th), Bar-tailed Godwit, four Whimbrels, two Curlews, 25 Snipe, eight Redshanks, three Ringed Plovers, three Dunlin, two Common Sandpipers, a Green Sandpiper, Wheatear and two White Wagtails.

PITSFORD RESERVOIR: Ospreys were recorded on seven dates. Arctic Terns peaked at 15 (20th) and Little Gulls at nine (23rd). There were two Scaup (1st), two Yellow-legged Gulls and a White Wagtail.

STANFORD RESERVOIR: Eighty Arctic Terns included a peak of 65. There were 14 Little Gulls, eight Bar-tailed Godwits, a Marsh Harrier, two Wheatears, a White Wagtail and small parties of Yellow Wagtails.

STANWICK GP: A total of 170 Arctic Terns visited (21st), with 30 more (29th). There were three Black Terns (18th), two Little Gulls, a Garganey, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Green Sandpiper and two Common Sandpipers.

THRAPSTON GP: Two Red-crested Pochards, two Black Terns, four Arctic Terns, a Hobby and Common Sandpiper were logged.

OTHER SITES: Common Scoters were recorded overnight at Desborough, Brackley, Oundle and Wellingborough (2nd-4th). A Marsh Harrier flew over Irthlingborough (7th). Ospreys were over Wollaston, Brixworth (two), Corby, Hanging Houghton and Kingsthorpe, Northampton. A Short-eared Owl flew over Brackley (9th). Ring Ouzels were at Newnham Hill, Clopton and near Hanging Houghton. Mediterranean Gulls visited Neville's Lodge, Finedon and Raunds.

Wheatears were at Deenethorpe (nine), Harrington Airfield (six), Brackley, Fardish and Brampton Valley Way. Stortons GP hosted a Red-crested Pochard and Jack Snipe. A White Wagtail was in Moulton. A booming Bittern at one site was the first confirmed for at least a century.

Bob Bullock (01604 627 262)

RUTLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: A White-tailed Eagle from the Isle of Wight reintroduction scheme was at Rutland Water (2nd-4th) and at Ketton Quarry and Empingham (19th). A Ring Ouzel was at Pilton (20th). A Black Redstart was at Quarry Farm, Great Casterton (16th).

RUTLAND WATER: Two Mandarins were at Normanton (4th). A Little Gull was present (16th), with seven (19th) when there were six Common Terns, four Arctic Terns and three Black Terns.

OTHER SITES: Mandarins were near Wing, at Horn Mill (4th) and Quarry Farm (13th). Two pairs of Shovelers were at Fort Henry Ponds (11th). Grey Partridge pairs were at Exton Park, Quarry Farm and Cottesmore Airfield. Curlews were at the airfield (25th), over Wing (3rd) and near Ashwell and Merry's Meadows. A Whimbrel flew over Quarry Farm (30th). The first Cuckoo was near Wing (8th). Little Owls were at Wing and Manton. A Cetti's Warbler called near Pickworth Wood (1st).

A Grasshopper Warbler was at Fort Henry

(11th and 18th). Two Nightingales sang in Pickworth Wood (from 16th). Redstarts were at Burley-on-the-Hill (12th), Manton (15th) and Beaumont Chase Farm (27th). Wheatears were near Pickworth (6th) and Quarry Farm (17th & 20th). A Brambling flew over Wing (2nd), as did a Siskin (25th).

Terry Mitcham

STAFFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Red-rumped Swallow was at Tutbury (10th), with a Great White Egret there (24th). A probable White-tailed Eagle drifted over Stafford (13th). A Scaup remained at Deep Hayes CP (1st-5th). A male Pied Flycatcher was at Fenton (6th), with one at Knypersley Reservoir (16th). A Ring Ouzel was at Bobbington (8th-9th), with others at Bignall Hill (10th), Berry Hill Fields (up to five, 11th-20th) and Wombourne (14th & 22nd). A Redstart was at Berry Hill Fields (12th-14th), with a Black Redstart there (19th) along with two Whinchats, a Redstart and an Osprey going over. There were three Whinchats (22nd). A Hawfinch was at Newcastle-under-Lyme. Radford Meadows SWT had a Wood Sandpiper (26th). A female type Black Redstart was at Keele (25th). A Jack Snipe was at Burston (23rd). Two Little Gulls were at Whitemoor Haye (22nd). Ospreys were over Huntington (5th), Stoke-on-Trent (10th), Coven (12th), Leek (14th), Endon (16th), Cannock Chase (18th), and Hanley and Whitemoor Haye (19th). The adult female Long-tailed Duck remained at Branston GP. A male Hen Harrier went over Cannock Chase (21st). A Little Gull was at Belvide Reservoir (18th).

WARWICKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A White Stork was the pick. Other birds seen during lockdown included Osprey, Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, Whinchat, Grasshopper Warbler, Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher, Brambling, Little Ringed Plover, Wheatear, Whimbrel, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Black Tern and Little Gull. Many Common Scoters were recorded migrating at night.

Clare Topping

WEST MIDLAND

BARR BEACON: A handful of Wheatears passed through. There was an adult and juvenile Raven. Twelve Sky Larks and four Yellowhammers were seen. Migrants included Garden Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat.

EDGBASTON RESERVOIR: A Whimbrel, Dunlin, Common Sandpiper and Common Tern passed through.

MARSH LANE: Waders included a Curlew, Greenshank, Ruff, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Green Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper. Several Mediterranean Gulls were noted. Two Egyptian Geese visited occasionally. Four Shelducks and a few Goosander remained. Red Kites and a Peregrine flew over. Cetti's Warblers continued to be seen, along with Water Rails and Snipe.

SANDWELL VALLEY: A White-tailed Eagle from the Isle of Wight reintroduction scheme flew over (13th), before heading east over Sutton Coldfield. A Garganey was in the RSPB marsh. An Osprey, Peregrine, two Red Kites and Ravens with young were noted. A Whinchat, Stonechat, two Redstarts, a Grasshopper Warbler and Ring Ouzel were seen at the month's end. Waders included six Curlews over Hill Top and one on Forge Mill. Green and Common Sandpipers, and

Little Ringed Plovers were on the RSPB island. An Osprey flew over.

SUTTON PARK: Stonechats were feeding young at the month's end. A Grasshopper Warbler, Snipe and Wheatear were in Longmoor Valley. Mandarins were still near Wyndley Pool.

STUBBERS GREEN: Dunlin, Little Ringed Plover, Yellow Wagtails, Raven, Common Tern and Stonechats were seen.

OTHER SITES: Hen Harriers flew over Norton, Stourbridge and Sutton Coldfield. A Short-eared Owl flew over a West Bromwich garden. Nocturnal flight calls of Common Scoters were heard over Oldbury, Bilston and Gornal. A Cetti's Warbler was the first site record for Sheepwash Urban Park, where there was also a Shelduck, Common Tern and four Little Egrets. Ring Ouzels and a Pied Flycatcher were on Netherton Hill. A Crossbill and Ring Ouzel were on Rowley Hill. Ospreys flew over gardens near Dudley and Sutton Coldfield. Lutley saw Red Kite, Peregrine and Hobby fly over. A Barn Owl was near Blythe Valley, Solihull.

Pete Hackett (0121 358 2454)

WALES

Highlights

In association with



Probably the rarest birds in Wales during April were the two male Eastern Subalpine Warblers, both in Pembrokeshire. One was on Ramsey Island on 16th and the other at Martin's Haven, on 24th.

ANGLESEY

HIGHLIGHTS: First dates included Blackcap (2nd), Swallow, Sand Martin and Sandwich Tern (3rd), Willow Warbler (5th), Grasshopper Warbler (6th), Whimbrel (7th), Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and Tree Pipit (9th), Garden Warbler, Cuckoo and Common Tern (15th), Reed Warbler and Common Sandpiper (16th), Lesser Whitethroat (17th), Ring Ouzel (18th), Yellow Wagtail and Swift (23rd), Whinchat and Arctic Tern (24th) and Roseate Tern (30th).

Cemlyn held two Long-tailed Ducks, six Mediterranean Gulls, a Garganey (23rd), two Little Ringed Plovers, a Black Guillemot, Merlin and Cuckoo (25th), Common Terns (20th), Arctic Terns (24th) and a Roseate Tern (30th). The Inland Sea had a Great Northern Diver, two Slavonian Grebes, four Mediterranean Gulls, 24 Black-tailed Godwits, three Cattle Egrets (14th), an Osprey (17th) and Cuckoo (25th).

Holyhead Bay had a Snow Bunting (7th), Marsh Harrier (22nd) and Red Kite (23rd). Cemaes had a Hawfinch (10th), Tree Pipit (11th) and Green Sandpiper (22nd). South Stack had three Hooded Crows, and a Ring Ouzel and Great Skua (18th). Two Avocets were at Malltraeth (9th). An Osprey was at Llyn Alaw (21st). A Short-eared Owl was at Rhoscolyn on (27th).

Ken Croft

CEREDIGION

HIGHLIGHTS: A Hooded Crow was at Penparcau (4th). A Bittern was by the roadside at Llangorwen (11th). A Great White Egret was at Ynys-hir (29th). First dates included a Pied Flycatcher at Cwm Einon (6th), Grasshopper Warbler at Pen Dinas (6th), House Martin at Blaenpennal (8th), Cuckoo at Ystrad Aeron (9th),

Manx Shearwater at Aberystwyth, Whitethroat at Furnace and Sedge Warbler at New Quay (11th), Redstart at Salem (12th), Sandwich Tern at Aberystwyth (13th), Wood Warbler at Cwm Einon (14th), Garden Warbler at Cors Ian and Reed Warbler at Glandyfi (17th), Lesser Whitethroat at Pen Dinas (23rd), Spotted Flycatcher at Llanrhystud (28th) and Swift at Taliesin (29th).

OTHER SITES: Six Purple Sandpipers and 30 Turnstones remained at Aberystwyth. The Pen Dinas area held a flock of 26 Choughs. Fifty Fieldfares flew over Llangwryfon (2nd). An Osprey flew over Trisant (5th). Whimbrel passage included 20 at Aberystwyth (16th), 15 at Borth (18th) and 45 at Ynyslas (28th). Four Common Sandpipers (24th) and a Red-throated Diver (30th) were at Aberystwyth.

John Davis (johndavis@midwalesbirdwatching.co.uk)

CLWYD

HIGHLIGHTS: A Ruddy Shelduck was at Rhuddlan (1st-9th). An Osprey was over Caergwrle (7th), with another high over Rhyl (26th). A flock of Common Scoter were heard going over Sealand (3rd). A Whinchat was at Shotton Airfield (20th), with another at Saltney (21st). A Redstart was at Holt (9th). A Yellow Wagtail was at Sealand (8th).

EAST GLAMORGAN

HIGHLIGHTS: A male Montagu's Harrier at Merthyr Mawr Warren (21st) was the first confirmed in the recording area since 1974. A Purple Heron was at Kenfig, where a Garganey, Red-crested Pochard, Greenshank and Green Sandpiper were also noted. Sker had a Blue-headed Wagtail, Little Tern and Black Redstart. Ospreys flew over Cardiff Bay, Nantgarw, Llantrisant, Maesteg, Bridgend and Kenfig. A male Hen Harrier was near Merthyr Tydfil. A Hobby and Merlin were seen from Bridgend gardens. Bar-tailed Godwits and Whimbrels stopped off at Sully and Barry.

Ogmore Estuary held a Water Pipit, Knot, Green Sandpiper, two Little Ringed Plovers, two Greenshanks, 20 Whimbrels, a few Bar-tailed Godwits, two Yellow Wagtails, a Cetti's Warbler, and two Grasshopper Warblers at Pant Norton. Other Cetti's Warblers were at Cadoxton Pools and Ewenny Moor. Cardiff Bay hosted a Little Gull, Black Redstart and two Yellow Wagtails. A Pied Flycatcher and Hawfinch were at Merthyr Mawr Warren. A Ring Ouzel was at Pant St Bride's.

Paul Roberts

GWENT

HIGHLIGHTS: Two Garganeys were at the Nedern (7th-16th), with a Great White Egret there (8th). An Osprey was at Wyesham, Monmouth (24th).

OTHER SITES: A Short-eared Owl was at Blackrock (1st). Five Common Scoters were at Newport (1st). Thirty Bramblings were at Maescoed Mawr (2nd). Firecrests were at Llanishen (3rd), Maescoed Mawr (16th) and near Pontypool (21st). There were 55 Little Egrets at Magor Marsh (9th). A Hobby was at Llantrisant (22nd). Two Willow Tits were at Wentwood (15th). A Hawfinch was at Sebastopol (23rd). A Red-breasted Merganser was at Llanfoist (27th). Three Common Terns were at Sudbrook (29th). Nocturnal migration recordings included a flock of Arctic Terns over Sebastopol, near Pontypool (18th).

Chris Hatch

NORTH WEST

Highlights



The Siberian Stonechat continued its long sojourn at Ashton's Flash, Cheshire, to 14th. A Citrine Wagtail was at Siddick Ponds NR, Cumbria on 21st. At least two Bee-eaters were over Birkdale, Lancashire, on 27th.

CHESHIRE

WOOLSTON EYES: No3 bed records included two Cetti's Warbler, Redshank, Peregrine and six Buzzards (4th), 18 Chiffchaffs, eight Blackcaps, seven Willow Warblers and Reed Warbler (11th), six House Martins, and Peregrine (14th), Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and four Cranes (16th), and three Marsh Harriers, three Little Gulls, two Greenland Wheatears, Whooper Swan, Mandarin, two Little Ringed Plovers and a Mediterranean Gull (18th). There were three Little Gulls and 25 Arctic Terns (21st), Marsh Harrier and Grasshopper Warbler (23rd), two Lesser Whitethroats, Common Tern, Swift and Black Tern (25th), Kingfisher, Marsh Harrier, 220 Sand Martins, 40 House Martins, 40 Swallows and a Hobby (28th), and three Whimbrels, Marsh Harrier, 460 Sand Martins, 60 Swallows and 40 House Martins (30th).

Dave Steel

CUMBRIA

HIGHLIGHTS: A female Citrine Wagtail was at Siddick Ponds NR (21st). A White Stork was at Ulverston (25th). A Crane flew over Loughrigg Fell (26th). A Whimbrel was at Allonby (6th). Two Hawfinches were at Beetham (6th). A Pied Flycatcher was at Tetwet Tarn (7th). An Osprey went over Kendal (8th), with another (19th). A male Black Redstart was at Castle Carrock (10th), with nine male Ring Ouzels (13th), and eight (17th). Two male Ring Ouzels went over Kendal (11th). An Osprey was over Crummock Water (11th). A Hawfinch was at Kendal (15th). A Hooded Crow was at St Bees Head (15th-16th). A Grasshopper Warbler reeled at Brigsteer (18th). Two Spoonbills went over Arnside (20th). Two Wood Warblers were at Brampton (23rd), and one at Derwent Water (23rd).

GREATER MANCHESTER

HIGHLIGHTS: A Stone-curlew was found injured at Hattersley (24th). A Wood Sandpiper was on Little Woollen Moss (23rd) then Chat Moss (25th). A Bar-tailed Godwit was on Chat Moss (24th). A Wood Sandpiper was on Rumworth Lodge (26th). Ospreys were at Horwich Moors (4th), Bredbury (4th), Hindley (8th), Little Woollen Moss (11th), Ashton-in-Makerfield (23rd), Orrell (24th) and Pilsworth, Bury (two, 6th).

ELTON RESERVOIR: A Red Kite went over (17th). There were two Black-necked Grebes (9th-27th), Mandarin (13th), four Little Gulls (5th), two (17th-25th), six Arctic Terns (20th), Grasshopper Warbler (16th), two Wheatears (18th), Swallow (2nd), and a Swift nearby (12th).

PENNINGTON FLASH: Ospreys flew over (7th & 8th). A Little Gull roosted (9th-10th). There were three Arctic Terns and two Little Gulls (21st).

MERSEY VALLEY: Two Garganeys were at Sale

WP (10th). Two Yellow Wagtails and three Wheatears were on Carrington Moss (20th), with two Mediterranean Gulls there (21st). Two Jack Snipe were at Stretford Ees (1st), with a Redstart there (15th). A Pied Flycatcher was at Trafford Park (21st). Green Sandpipers were on Broad Ees Dole (22nd-30th) and over Chorlton Ees (17th).

OTHER SITES: A Black-necked Grebe was at Blackleach CP (28th). A Redstart was in Alexandra Park, Whalley Range (9th). Horwich Moors had a Pied Flycatcher (22nd) and a Cuckoo. A Whinchat was at Cutacre CP (22nd). High Rid Reservoir had two Scaup (9th-22nd), a Little Gull (14th-22nd) and two Arctic Terns (22nd). Seven White Wagtails were on Little Woollen Moss (18th). Ring Ouzels included 14 at Horwich Moors and 12 past Dovestones Reservoir (13th), one at Wilderswood (5th), three at Holcombe Moor (6th-8th), nine at Hollingworth (10th), one at Ramsbottom (11th) and one at Blackleach CP (24th). Common Scoter passage involved 15 over Greenfield, 14 over Whitefield, three over Didsbury, three over Hazel Grove, three over Tyldesley, two over Swinton and two over Moss Side (all 1st), 15 over Stalybridge, nine over Hindley, nine over Bolton, nine over Whitefield, six over Lowton and three over Denton (all 2nd), two over Astley (4th) and two over Failsworth (12th).

Dr Paul Brewster (01606 590 491)

LANCASHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Two 'events' dominated the month: a superb, very early Arctic Tern passage with 3,571 (mainly 19th-23rd) with a day peak of 1,447 (22nd). The other was a noc mig fest of Common Scoter with about 15 new 'house ticks', including inland at High Tatham and Tarnbrook. A Cattle Egret was at Conder Green (from 19th) increasing to three (from 29th). A drake Garganey was at Aldcliffe (1st-3rd), and a female/immature Long-tailed Duck off Heysham (22nd). Five Greenland White-fronted Geese remained at Aldcliffe/Heaton Marshes (to 3rd). A Hooded Crow was on Burn Moor in the first week. The White-tailed Eagle seen at Fulwood (22nd) was observed later over Tarnbrook. A Wood Sandpiper was at Aldcliffe (25th). Wood Warblers were at Aldcliffe (26th-27th), Roeburndale (at least 26th) and Fluke Hall (28th). A Blue-headed Wagtail was at Aldcliffe (19th), followed by a 'Channel' Wagtail (21st).

LEIGHTON MOSS: There were three booming male Bitterns, with one seemingly transferring to Silverdale Moss at the end of the month. A single Great White Egret frequented Barrow Scout. Avocet peaked at 70 with about 30 nests. Other waders included a peak of 3,100 Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit (19th) and two Greenshanks. There were three pairs of Marsh Harriers.

HEYSHAM OBSERVATORY: Seventeen Arctic Skuas passed through (from 6th) with other highlights 150 Sandwich Terns (22nd), Black Tern (23rd), Little Gulls (20th & 23rd), adult Shag (10th) with 2CY in transit (29th). A Marsh Harrier (6th) and Osprey (8th) headed north. There were good numbers of warblers, especially at Middleton, where nine resident species could be heard regularly.

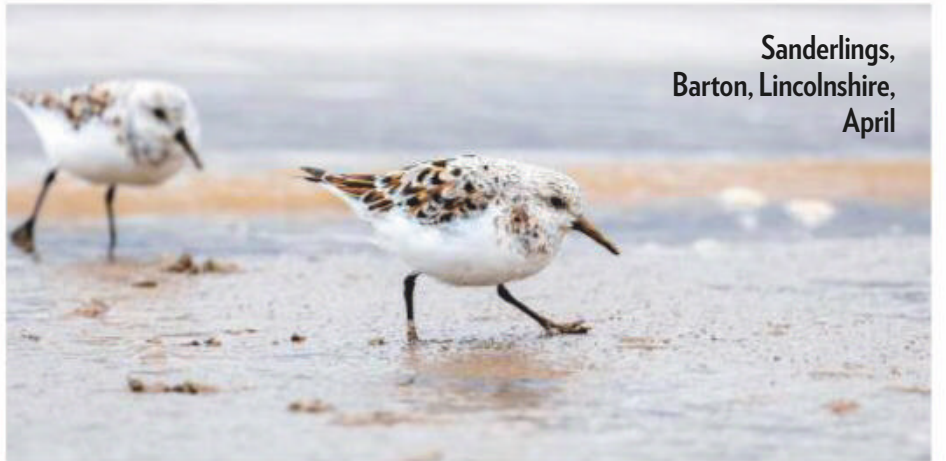
LUNE ESTUARY AND VALLEY: Sightings included four Osprey (from 1st), Ruff (5th), three Marsh Harrier, up to four flavissima Yellow Wagtail (peak, 18th), Red Kite (21st), Yellowhammer (18th), a new site for Cetti's Warbler and a summer Spotted Redshank (from 26th).

Red-rumped Swallow,
Kilnsea, East Yorkshire,
25 April



JOHN HEWITT

Sanderlings,
Barton, Lincolnshire,
April



GRAHAM CATLEY

NORTH EAST

Highlights

In association with



One of the rarest sightings from the region this month was a Caspian Tern which flew over Tingley, West Yorkshire on 28th.

LINCOLNSHIRE

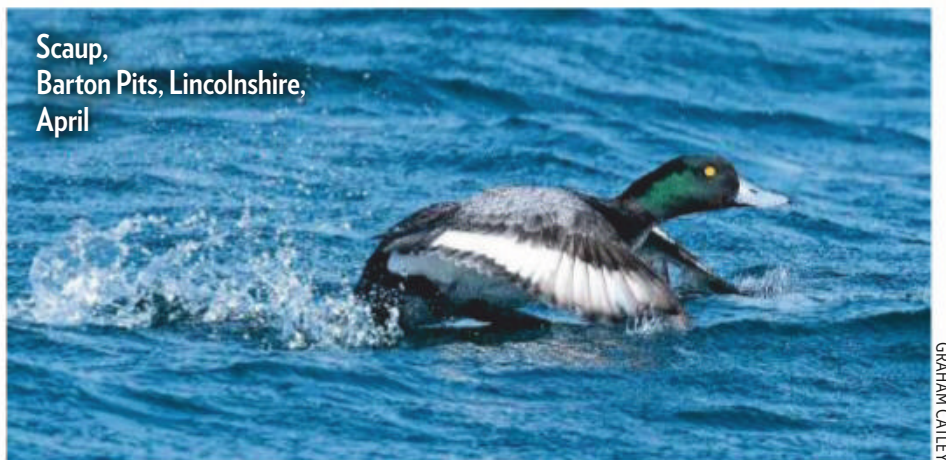
HIGHLIGHTS: A Bluethroat was at Gibraltar Point (9th). An Alpine Swift was at Far Ings (19th). A Richard's Pipit was at Anderby Creek (12th). An early Grey Phalarope was at Saltfleetby (5th). A White-tailed Eagle from the Isle of Wight reintroduction programme flew over a garden in Louth. A Wryneck was in an Alkborough garden (18th). A Crane was at

Baston Pits (25th), with two over Quadring (3rd), Gibraltar Point (17th) and Dunston (23rd), and four over Norton Disney (15th). A Blue-headed Wagtail was at Toft Newton (from 11th).

OTHER SITES: Common Scoters were noted flying overnight (2nd-3rd) at Louth, Wainfleet, Spalding, Legbourne, Lincoln and Fillingham. Boultham Mere held a Water Pipit (4th) and Little Gull (12th). Two Garganeys were at Anderby Creek (12th), with a Firecrest there (5th-6th). Black Redstarts were at Spalding (9th), Grimsby (6th) and Frithville (15th). Redstarts were at Barnetby (11th) and Swanpool (14th). Great White Egrets were at Bardney, Trent Port, Dunston, Rippingdale and Snipe Dales.

Ring Ouzels were widespread (from 6th), with records from Fillingham, Alkborough, Barton Pits, Grantham, Rimac, Barnetby, Kettleby, Somerby, Goxhill Haven, Brigg, Huttoft, Tetney and Garthorpe. A Hooded Crow was at North

Scaup,
Barton Pits, Lincolnshire,
April



GRAHAM CATLEY

Spoonbills,
Alkborough Flats, Lincolnshire,
April



GRAHAM CATLEY

UK BIRD SIGHTINGS APRIL

Ring Ouzel,
Barton Pits, Lincolnshire,
April



GRAHAM CATELY

Somercotes (7th-8th) and then Huttoft (9th). Highlights from Baston Pits included a Sandwich Tern (5th), two Black Terns (24th) and a Little Gull (19th).

Josh Hedley

NORTHUMBERLAND

BERWICK: There were seven Chiffchaffs around the East Ord area (5th). Seven Wigeon were at New Water Heugh (10th). A 'parliament' of 110 Crows gathered at New Water Heugh (12th), when a Willow Warbler sang at Clayholes Shiel. Two Sandwich Terns were at Calot Shad on the Tweed Estuary (15th), with eight there (29th). A Whooper Swan was at New Water Heugh (19th).

A Tree Pipit was at Berwick GC (21st), when two Siskins were at Flagstaff Park. A Common Sandpiper was at the Lifeboat Station (22nd). Two House Martins were at Cornwall Avenue (24th). A Buzzard was at East Ord (25th). A Garden Warbler was at Ord CP (26th). Two Reed Buntings were at Sandstell Dunes, Spittal (29th). A Whitethroat was at Clayholes Shiel (30th).

EAST YORKSHIRE

FLAMBOROUGH: There was a Firecrest (3rd), Iceland Gull (4th), Lapland Bunting (6th), Garganey (6th-25th), Hawfinch (8th), Tree Pipit (11th), three Hooded Crows (13th), three Cranes (19th) and a Richard's Pipit (25th).

HORNSEA MERE: There was a Great White Egret (7th), together with two Long-tailed Ducks and two Mediterranean Gulls.

OTHER SITES: A Hooded Crow was at Withernsea (1st), with a Firecrest there (4th). The Firecrest remained at Holmpton, where there was a Shore Lark (13th), Snow Bunting (19th) and Hooded Crow (20th). Waxwings at Hessle reduced to three in the first week. Two Spoonbills visited Blacktoft Sands (4th). A Black-necked Grebe (7th) and Hobby (20th) were at Southfield Reservoir. Great White Egrets were over East Cottingham (4th), near Driffild (10th), at Leven (16th) and at Skerne Wetlands (26th).

Two Cranes flew over Lissett (14th), before moving to Burton Fleming (17th) and increasing to four (18th). Two Dotterel visited Grimston (17th). Ospreys flew over Hull (18th and 25th) and Beverley (19th). A Hoopoe was at Aldbrough (27th), when a Wood Warbler was at Burton Fleming.

Ian Marshall (01482 627 446)

WEST YORKSHIRE

LOWER AIRE VALLEY: A Cattle Egret that flew over (13th) was a new bird for the site. Other fly-over birds included a Crane (23rd) and Osprey (5th). A Ring Ouzel was behind the Balance Reservoir (28th). There was a Little Tern (23rd). A Spoonbill dropped in (14th).

After the first Garganey (13th), there were a few more sightings. Avocets were seen twice. Black-tailed Godwits peaked at 24.

There was a Ruff (16th-18th), Whimbrels on three different days (from 5th), Dunlin on just three days, Ringed Plovers on four days, and a Greenshank (23rd).

Little Gulls were seen (11th, 17th-18th & 21st) with a Mediterranean Gull (14th) and Kittiwake (28th). Arctic Terns moved through (from 19th), including 70 (20th). There was a Black Tern (23rd). Wheatears arrived (1st) and Whinchats (20th).

Paul Morris

SCOTLAND

Highlights

In association with

As expected at this time of year, Shetland scored the rarest Scottish newcomer of the month with a Song Sparrow on 10th. It was also no surprise that it was on Fair Isle, the 'hotspot' for this very rare North American sparrow.



ABERDEENSHIRE

ABERDEEN: Waxwings included 100 at North Anderson Drive (4th), 40 in Bedford Place (5th), 40 in Balmoral Place (10th) and 20 on Hilton Street (26th). A Red-throated Diver was at Donmouth (16th).

FORVIE SANDS: There were eight Little Terns (27th). The King Eider was back on the Ythan (29th).

LOCH OF STRATHBEG: A Spoonbill was seen (26th).

OTHER SITES: A Greenland White-fronted Goose was at Slains (7th), when a Hawfinch was in an Afford garden. Two Mandarins visited a

nest box on the River Dee in the Milltimber/Drummoak area. A Black Redstart and Grasshopper Warbler were north of Stonehaven (12th). Cairnbulg had a Whimbrel and two Long-tailed Ducks (17th). A White-tailed Eagle was at Troup Head (20th). The northward spread of Nuthatches continued, with reports from Banchory and Huntley (27th).

Mike Chandler

ARGYLL

ISLAY: A Wheatear was at Finlaggan (4th). A Green Sandpiper flew over (5th). Four Sand Martins and a Swallow were at The Oa (6th), with a Black Redstart there (17th). A Little Tern was on the Big Strand (7th-8th). There were 100 Redwings at Portnahaven (9th), with a Grasshopper Warbler there (14th). A Sandwich Tern was at Bruichladdich (10th). A Little Egret was at Gruinart (18th). Twenty Whimbrels were at Claddach (22nd). Corn Crakes were in Machir Bay (16th), Portnahaven (17th), Gruinart (27th) and Cornabus (28th).

TIREE: The pair of Ring-necked Ducks remained at Loch Bhasapol (to at least 15th). A Great Crested Grebe was at Balephetrish Bay (1st-28th). A White-tailed Eagle roamed the island (from 13th). Loch a' Phuill had a Long-tailed Duck (9th) and Little Gull (27th). A Marsh Harrier was at Heylipol church (21st). Four Glaucous Gulls were logged, with an Iceland Gull at Gott Bay (20th). Nine Mealy Redpolls were at Balephuill (22nd), with two at Scarinish (20th) and one at Ruaig (22nd).

A Siskin was at Sandaig (24th). Seven Woodpigeons were at Balephuill (from 6th), with another at Scarinish (20th). A Greenland-race Wheatear was at Balinoe (26th). There was a good scattering of Goldcrests, Chiffchaffs and White Wagtails, including 45 wagtails between Baugh and Heanish (24th). Waders included 105 Black-tailed Godwits (11th), 5,500 Golden Plovers at the Reef (16th), plus 850 Dunlin at Gott Bay (20th), 550 Sanderling at Gott Bay (22nd), 42 Whimbrels between Baugh and Heanish (24th) and a Knot at Gott Bay (22nd).

There was a mass arrival of 1,000 pale-bellied Brent Geese (15th), including 550 at The Green. Corn Crakes returned (from 15th) with 50 back (30th). The Barnacle Geese and Greenland Whitefronts departed en masse (8th-10th), with just odd birds left thereafter. There was an unusual influx of 21 Pinkfeet (20th) with 13 remaining (to 30th). Eight Canada Geese were at Balephuill (14th). Fourteen Whooper Swans remained, as did Dunnocks at Scarinish and Balephuill, and a Robin at Balephuill.

First dates were Blackcap and Swallow (5th), White Wagtail (6th), Sand Martin (7th), Willow Warbler (9th), Whimbrel and House Martin (10th), Little Tern and Sandwich Tern (12th), Common Tern (15th), Arctic Skua (18th), Greenshank (19th), Arctic Tern (20th), Grasshopper Warbler and Common Sandpiper (21st), and Cuckoo and Sedge Warbler (24th). Sarah Bedford and John Bowler (john.bowler@rspb.org.uk)

CENTRAL

HIGHLIGHTS: Ring Ouzels were in Menstrie Glen (13th) and at Sheriff Muir (24th). A Spotted Redshank was at Powfoulis (22nd), with two at Skinflats Pools (25th). A Great Grey Shrike was at Lix Toll, Killin (24th). A Little Gull was on Kinneil Lagoon (25th). Garganeys were on Devonmouth Pool and Tullibody Inch (27th, possibly the same bird), when a 'blue-headed' Yellow Wagtail was at the head of Loch Tay.

First dates included House Martin at

Dunblane (5th), Swallows in Blackness, Blairdrummond, Dunblane, Larbert and Menstrie (6th), Sedge Warbler at Cambus (7th), three Common Sandpipers between Dollar and Tillicoultry (9th), Tree Pipit at Pisdah, Dunblane (11th), Grasshopper Warbler at Kippenrait, Dunblane (12th), Whinchat at Sheriff Muir (15th), Redstart at Killin (16th) and Cuckoo at Tyndrum (17th).

CLACKMANNANSHIRE: Five Gadwall, a White Wagtail and Garden Warbler were at Cambus Village Pools (18th). Thirteen Shovelers were on Longcarse (23rd).

FALKIRK DISTRICT: Blackness had a Mediterranean Gull (2nd), four Kittiwakes (4th), four Common Scoters (6th), a Brent Goose and Whooper Swan (13th), a Long-tailed Duck (14th) and a Fulmar (15th). Some 100 White Wagtails were at the Powfoulis (22nd). Two Whimbrels, and Sedge, Grasshopper and Garden Warblers were at Kinneil (26th).

STIRLING DISTRICT: A Black Grouse was in Balquhiddie Glen (1st). Ospreys flew over Blairdrummond and Dunblane (6th). A Long-eared Owl was at Earlsburn Reservoirs (8th). Up to 31 Waxwings were in Dunblane (10th-18th). Five Willow Warblers were at Kippenross, Dunblane (10th). Little Egrets were at Blairdrummond Ponds (11th) and Airthrey Loch (17th). There were several Goshawk sightings in Dunblane (14th-29th). Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Osprey, Sand Martin, Swallow, Redstart, Wheatear, Grasshopper Warbler, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff were all at Killin (by the 16th). Five Dunlin and four White Wagtails were at the head of Loch Tay (27th).

Neil Bielby

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

HIGHLIGHTS: Pinkfeet were seen in a Dumfries petrol station during lockdown. A Spotted Flycatcher was at Kirkcudbright. Wood Warbler and Goldcrest were at Threave Estate. Four Little Egrets were at Kippford. House. Sand Martins and Swallows returned.

OTHER SITES: Treecreeper, Goosander, Heron, Goldfinch and Reed Bunting were at Threave Estate. Oystercatcher, Goldfinch, Magpie and Mute Swan were at Kippford. Song Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Sedge Warbler were at Threave and Caerlaverock. Goldfinch and Goldcrest were at Lockerbie. Red Kite and Buzzard were at Kirkcudbright. The South Coast held Little Egrets, Curlews, Oystercatchers, Shelducks and Redshanks. Pam Woods (DumfriesandGallowaybirding@yahoo.co.uk)

FIFE

HIGHLIGHTS: The last Pink-footed Geese flew over Guardbridge (22nd), with the last Whooper Swans over Wormit (17th). Swallow, House Martins and Sand Martins were at several locations in the first week. The first Swifts were at Kirkcaldy (28th). Ospreys were seen at 13 locations, mostly in the western part of the county. A pair returned to their nest site near Carpow on the Fife/Perthshire border. Wheatears were at 20 sites (from 6th). Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers were widespread.

East Sands, St Andrews logged Black-throated Divers, Red-throated Divers, Long-tailed Ducks, Knot, Greenshanks, Turnstones, Razorbills and Guillemots. A female Surf Scoter was off Kinkell

Braes (28th). A Black-throated Diver flew over Anstruther (9th). Little Egrets remained in the Eden Estuary. A Spoonbill was at Lochgelly (13th). Two Marsh Harriers were regular on Mugdrum Island, with a Hen Harrier again at Loch Glow. Valleyfield Lagoons held Little Ringed Plovers.

A Common Sandpiper was at Methil, a Spotted Redshank at Guardbridge and Whimbrels at Kilrenny and Culross. Kingsbarns recorded a Sandwich Tern (5th). A Black Guillemot was at Anstruther (12th). Cuckoos were on East Lomond (two on 21st) and at the Bathmoor Plantation. A Long-eared Owl was at Ladybank (19th), with Tawny Owls at Lochmill (23rd) and Dunfermline, and a Short-eared Owl on Elie Ness. Devilla Forest held several of Tree Pipits. Twelve White Wagtails were at Kilrenny (15th).

Nine Waxwings were in Dunfermline (5th). Redstarts passed through Kirkcaldy (27th), Anstruther (26th) and Charlestown, with a Black Redstart at St Andrews. Thirty Fieldfares were on the Lomonds at Craigmead (22nd). A Lesser Whitethroat was at Melville roundabout (24th). Grasshopper Warblers were at Culross, Valleyfield Lagoons, Townhill CP and Dunfermline. Ravens were at Cults (two), Balmullo, Kilminning, Newburgh and St Andrews. Crossbills showed at Gale Slap plantation (5th), and flew over St Andrews. A Snow Bunting lingered at Anstruther GC.

David Heeley (dw.heeley@btinternet.com)

LOTHIAN

HIGHLIGHTS: Musselburgh's drake Surf Scoter was seen occasionally, and was joined by a female (10th). Marsh Harriers were at Dunbar (4th)

and Holyrood Park in Edinburgh (16th). A Red Kite was at Cramond Brig (9th). A White-tailed Eagle flew over Haddington (15th). Two Iceland Gulls were at Musselburgh (10th). Two Hawfinches were at Humble (11th). A Quail sang near Gladsmuir (22nd).

DUNBAR: There was a Ruddy Shelduck (3rd), an Osprey and two Sandwich Terns (4th), two Great Northern Divers (23rd-24th) and c200 Barnacle Geese (26th). Four Water Pipits were at Broxmouth (10th). A Great Northern Diver (6th), and Whimbrel, Sedge Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler (16th) were at Scoughall. Belhaven Bay had a pale-bellied Brent Goose (25th-26th) and a 'Channel' Wagtail (27th).

EDINBURGH: Twenty Waxwings were at Fountainbridge (8th-11th). Holyrood Park held Ring Ouzels (5th and 26th-29th), a Grasshopper Warbler (7th), Common Sandpiper (19th) and Cuckoo (30th). Duddingston Loch had a Sedge Warbler (18th) and Whooper Swan (22nd). Little France logged two Ospreys (5th), a Redstart (13th) and 11 Grasshopper Warblers (26th). Common Sandpipers were at Cramond (5th) and Easter Craiglockhart Pond (22nd).

GOSFORD BAY: Two Garganeys were at Ferny Ness (5th). Red-necked Grebes were at Seton Sands (10th) and Ferny Ness (29th-29th). A Little Egret was at Gosford Sands (12th) and Aberlady Bay (14th-15th). A Brent Goose was at Seton Sands (24th).

PENTLAND HILLS: Waxwings in Balerno peaked at 65 (3rd). An Osprey flew over

Damhead (3rd), with an early Whitethroat there (11th). Ospreys flew over Penicuik (5th & 10th). A Woodcock was at Penicuik Estate (16th), and a Black Redstart in a garden in the town (19th). A Ring Ouzel (12th) and Cuckoo (24th) were on Allermuir. Two Dotterels were on the summit of Scald Law (30th).

OTHER SITES: Thirty Waxwings were at Bathgate (6th). Tree Pipit passage over Haddington was noted (10th-17th), with a Yellow Wagtail there (15th) and Whinchat (24th). First dates included a Garganey at Fisherrow (5th), Willow Warbler at Philpstoun (6th), Redstart at Longniddry (12th), Cuckoo at Yellowcraigs (16th), Common Sandpiper at Kirkliston (19th), Garden Warbler at Humble (25th) and Swifts at Longniddry and Old Craighall (26th). A Merlin was at Yellowcraigs (10th). Three Ring Ouzels were at North Berwick Law (11th). A Redstart (13th) and Yellow Wagtail (29th) were at Old Craighall.

Jim Nicholson

OUTER HEBRIDES

HIGHLIGHTS: A female King Eider was in the south bay at Ardvule, South Uist (30th). The second Magpie for the Outer Hebrides was at Ardnamonie and Daliburgh, South Uist (28th), then Castlebay, Barra (30th).

OTHER SITES: Two Glossy Ibises were at Loch Bailfinlay (4th), with at least one still present (6th). A Red Kite flew north at Stoneybridge (6th). A Crane was in Garrabost (12th). A first-year Ring-billed Gull was at Nunton (21st). Little Gulls included a second-summer at

Ardvule (23rd-24th), a first-year at Stinky Bay (24th) and two adults through the North Ford (26th). Glaucous Gulls were at Loch na Meallaird and Coot Loch (12th), North Galson (14th) and Rubh' Arnal (18th).

Two juvenile Iceland Gulls were at Rubh' Arnal (18th). North Ford held the first Little Terns (12th), an early Common Tern (9th) and the first Arctic Terns (13th). A Sandwich Tern passed Brevig (8th). An early Sedge Warbler was in Carinish (21st). The first Grasshopper Warbler was at Brevig (22nd). The first Willow Warbler was in South Glendale (8th) before quickly becoming widespread throughout Uist.

Tree Sparrows were at Brevig (23rd) and South Glendale (24th-25th). A Brambling was at Carnan (19th). A Hawfinch was in a Brevig garden (17th-19th). Snow Buntings were at Ardvule (24th) and Brevig (30th). Lapland Buntings were at Rubh' Arnal (18th) and Ardvule (20th).

Steve Duffield (www.western-isles-wildlife.co.uk)

TAYSIDE

HIGHLIGHTS: A drake Green-winged Teal and a Bearded Tit were at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB (11th), with the duck remaining to 21st at least. Two drake Garganey were also there (4th). Around 100 Little Gulls were at Monikie CP (1st), with eight off Carnoustie (3rd), five there (4th), one off Barry Buddon (5th), seven off Carnoustie (6th), one at Monikie CP plus two House Martins (7th), four off Buddon Ness (8th), 28 off Carnoustie (12th), and small numbers to the end of the month. More than 30 Waxwings were at Kirriemuir (5th). An Arctic Tern was off Buddon Ness (19th). A Blue-headed Wagtail and 15 White Wagtails were at Hatton (21st).

BW

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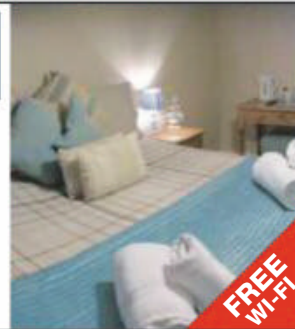
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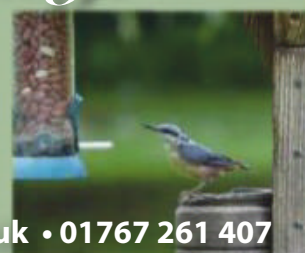
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BACK CHAT



A quick chat with...
Euan Buchan aka The Edinburgh Birdwatcher

What first sparked your interest in birdwatching, and when?

It feels like I've been birding a long time, but my first encounter with birds was in 1997 when Birding With Bill Oddie was shown on TV. I found the show relaxing and calming; my Grandpa built a nestbox which we put in the garden but, sadly, no birds showed an interest in it, and I lost interest in birds... Then, in 2001, Bill Oddie Goes Wild was shown on TV and I got the birding bug again!

Who was your birdwatching inspiration or mentor?

Bill Oddie. When I watched his programmes, I liked how relaxing he made the shows and his descriptions of the birds really helped me. I did write to him and he sent me a autographed picture and note saying 'Keep Birding'!

Do you bird alone or with a friend?

I like to go alone because then you can really look at a bird, properly.

Your dream bird to see?
King Eider.

Your favourite birding spot?

I love going to the Outer Hebrides. It has amazing birdlife and wonderful scenery – what's not to love?

Your classic birder's lunch, grabbed from the petrol station shop?

A sandwich, crisps and water.

Gannet or Arctic Tern?

The Gannet, when I visit the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick, or go on the Bass Rock boat trip, I love watching them soar and dive and listen to their call.

Favourite bird song or call?

I love the singing of the Blackbird. Nothing beats hearing its lovely song as part of the dawn and dusk chorus.

Birdwatching's biggest myth or misconception?

That's it's just for men. It's not, it's for everyone.

The best bird you've seen?

I never tire of seeing Waxwings!

Identifying gulls – nightmare or a nice day out?

To start with they can be a nightmare, because they look very similar. But, once you start noticing and studying them, you'll realise they are all different.

Your favourite bit of birding kit?

My binoculars and notebook. I have all my old notebooks, and it's nice to look through them and remember what I've seen. They are my treasured items, I'd be lost without them.

How do we encourage young people to watch birds?

Tell them "we are going to play a game – we are going to count how many birds we can see in the garden". The Big Garden Birdwatch is a good start.

Golden Eagle or White-tailed Eagle?

White-tailed Eagle. I have had some great encounters with them.

The one place you'd love to go birdwatching?

In the UK: Shetland, but elsewhere: Africa. I would love to do a safari.

One birding or conservation issue you feel strongly about?

Malta, where they shoot migrant birds like the Swallow: there's no need for it.

The bird that annoys you most?

Though I don't mind them here, it would have to be a Feral Pigeon. When I'm abroad and



I see them I think "I want to see a bird I don't see back home".

The bogey bird that still eludes you?

The Green Woodpecker – I've still never seen one.

The bird book you'd never be without?

I always take with me the RSPB's Birds Of Britain & Europe and the RSPB's Handbook Of Scottish Birds. If I'm traveling out of the UK, it will be a book dedicated to that place and area.

Why do you love birdwatching, in three words?

Calming. Joyful. Relaxing.

One piece of advice for birders taking part in our #My200BirdYear challenge?

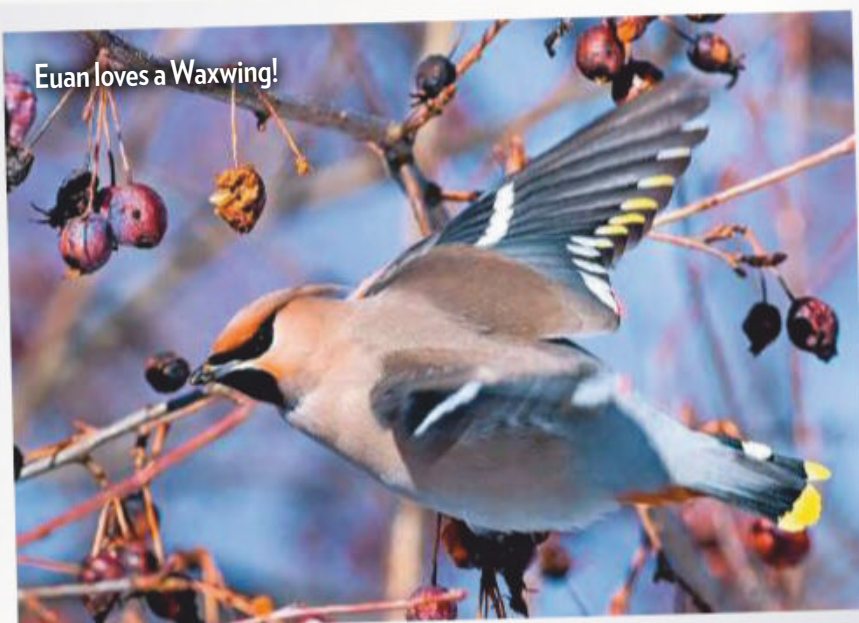
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About Euan

■ Euan loves birding in his local area but has a passion for travelling to see birds further afield.

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