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Welcome *May 2015*

MEET THE TEAM



Mike Weedon, Assistant Editor, has been making us all laugh with tales of his hotel mishaps, p15.



Jack Thorpe, Production Editor, has been fielding your tweets and Facebook posts, see p44.

THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



Jonny Rankin takes a break from reviewing to take steps to save the Turtle Dove – find out how on page 18



Dominic Couzens finds out more about the Song Thrush on p24. Follow Dominic on Twitter at @DominicCouzens



Ben Macdonald investigates the species that have made their homes amid manmade habitats. See page 28



Richard Smyth is a writer, researcher, editor and cartoonist, who's been exploring wild West Yorkshire. See page 68



Ed Hutchings has been exploring Rainham Marshes, a wilderness on the edge of our capital city. See page 72



David Chandler finds out whether finding Zeiss binoculars for under £400 is just too good to be true. See page 80.

◆ If you would like to contact the **Bird Watching** team, the details can be found on page 112.

ON THE COVER

Peregrine Falcon
Terry Whittaker / naturepl.com

Cityscape
Sam Hobson

A Peregrine in flight, with prey in talons, at Norwich Cathedral



Copyright of FLPA/Robin Chittenden



THE first time I saw an urban Peregrine was a big day for me – as a child, they'd been ultra-rare, and found only in the remote areas of the UK, but there they were in the middle of my day-to-day life.

They've thrived since then, and in this issue we look at some of the birds that have learned to live alongside man in our cities and suburbia. Ben Macdonald analyses how this happens, on page 28, while on page 36 there's your chance to find out how you can help an urban species whose fortunes have gone the other way – the House Martin.

Our Garden Bird Guide, free with this issue, will help you identify and enjoy the birds in your garden, but it might also give you ideas about how you can help them thrive, too.

So, while you're enjoying the undeniable birding riches of May, remember that you don't have to be out in the wilds – it could all be happening just outside your back door!

Matt Merritt, Editor

ENJOY A YEAR OF
Bird Watching
AND GET A PAIR OF
BRESSER BINOCULARS
WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE
Turn to page 78 for more details

GIFT WORTH £55

What are our favourite urban birds?

Matt: The sound of Swifts outside in my street is THE sound of summer – I stand on the front doorstep watching them for hours.



Nature Photographers Ltd. / A amy



INSADCO Photography / A amy

Mike: "The crackle of the Black Redstart's song is one of the great European urban sounds. But it's absurdly scarce in Britain."



David Tippling / A amy

Jack: "When I've finished trudging round the supermarket, the Pied Wagtail's comical walk always puts a smile on my face."

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COVER STORY

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COVER STORY



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Bird Watching
100% BIRDS
URBAN SUPERSTARS
GET A PAIR OF BINOCULARS WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

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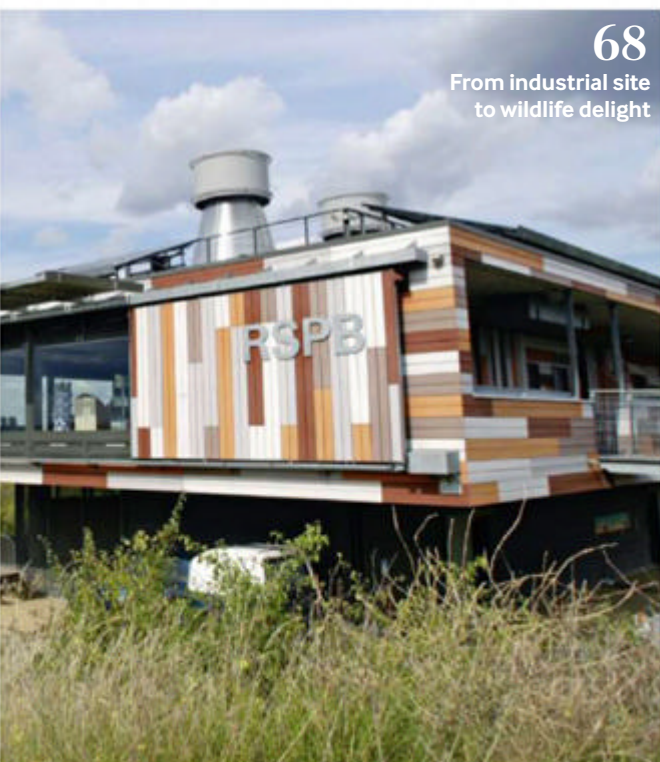
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From industrial site
to wildlife delight

UK BIRD SIGHTINGS

THE BEST BIRDS SEEN ALL AROUND BRITAIN IN FEBRUARY

▶ Turn to page 100 for all the county-by-county reports



YOUR Birding Month

Bird of the month: Black Tern

A dark delight

ARGUABLY, ONE OF our most attractive 'seabirds', the delightful, buoyant Black Tern, unlike its cousins, is not really a bird of the sea at all. Along with the rare Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns, it is what is known as a 'marsh tern'. These three small tern species breed in shallow freshwater or marshy habitats (hence the name) and feed by dipping and picking, or hawking, for insects. Though the Black Tern has bred in the UK, it is essentially a passage bird, passing the coast and inland water bodies on the way to the breeding grounds on the continent.

They pass through in late April and May when they are generally looking much more handsome than they do on their autumn return. In spring, they are silky black of body and silky grey of wing (sometimes with some retained winter white specks until later in the season). So, they are easily picked out by plumage, and also by size, as they are much smaller than, for instance, Common Terns, closer to the tiny Little Tern.

Individuals and groups (of varying size) stop by at inland lakes, gravel pits and reservoirs to dip and pick insects from the surface, before moving on. They are not common birds in the UK, numbering in hundreds on passage in total, rather than thousands. But they can turn up anywhere and can make your May day.



The darling birds of May

From soaring storks to purring Turtle Doves – what will you see this month?

May is the time of maximum diversity of birds in the UK. Many of our 'winter' birds are just about still here, while just about all the 'summer' visitors are in. Then again, there are many birds moving through on their way to their northern breeding grounds out of the UK altogether. Add in some fine weather and long hours of daylight and you couldn't ask for more. There are many, many great birds to look for this month, but here four of our suggestions. Go get 'em.

Here are four to find this month



White Stork

RATING **☆☆☆**

Large and just about unmistakable, the White Stork is one species which could be soaring overhead on a warm May day. Note the contrasting pattern, extended white neck and long red bill. A certain amount of caution is always appropriate with White Storks, as several free-flying birds have escaped from captivity. Check carefully for rings on the legs.

RARITY RATINGS

Common, widely distributed **☆☆**

Localised – always a treat **☆☆☆**

Very scarce or rare **☆☆☆☆**

▲ Turtle Dove

RATING **☆☆**

The lovely Turtle Dove is a once-familiar bird on the fast track to no longer being a British breeding bird at all, such is the rate of its recent decline. This is a huge pity, as it is a very attractive bird, soft and gentle looking, with a purring song which is the epitome of warm summer sounds. Turtle Doves are smaller than Collared Doves, with scalloped orange-and-black backs, blue grey heads and pink breasts.



Andrew Darrington / Alamy



Hobby

RATING **☆☆**

Once a very scarce breeder, the Hobby is a recent success story in the UK. Hobbies are long winged and slim, built for speed and agility so they can catch their prey of insects and perhaps hirundines while on the wing. In May, flying insects are the main prey, such as the abundant St Mark's Flies out now. Later in the summer, dragonflies will become the main prey.

Rolf Nussbaumer Photography / Alamy

Nature Photographers Ltd / Alamy



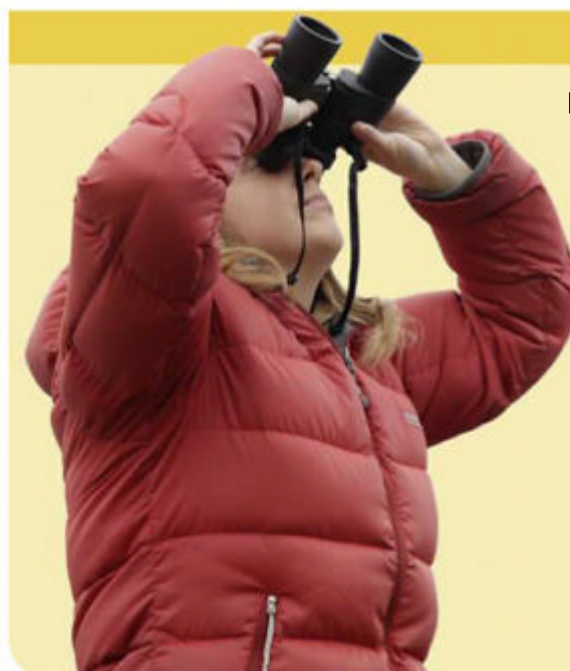
EXPERT TIP

Black-tailed Godwits are among our most easily recognised waders: large, very long-billed and with very striking white wingbars

▲ Black-tailed Godwit

RATING ↯↯

This bird is perhaps most familiar from the Icelandic subspecies which gathers in significant numbers in the UK in early spring, on the way to the breeding grounds. This subspecies is darker, more intensely coloured and slightly shorter legged than the nominate European birds. The latter breed in very small numbers in the UK, and at selected sites (notably the RSPB Nene Washes, Cambridgeshire) they can be seen and heard doing their rocking display flight, while whining 'godwit, godwit, godwit'.



FIELD CRAFT

Look up for soaring birds

May is one month when you really should follow Urban Birder David Lindo's advice and look up. Soaring birds are on the move on these warm days, where thermals can carry large birds without them having to expend much effort. With 'favourable' winds, long distance migrants can come over to the UK and could be soaring near you. High fliers could include both stork species (Black Storks are rarer), Crane, and raptors, such as Black Kite as well as Honey Buzzards and migrating Ospreys, plus the smaller fare of soaring hawks, harriers and falcons.

Rarity predictor



Marmora's Warbler

With just six records, the Marmora's Warbler is one of the rarest European warblers on the British List. It was first recorded in South Yorkshire in May 1982 and subsequent records have been in East Yorkshire, Borders, Norfolk, Suffolk and Gwent. All birds have been in May or June (with the South Yorkshire bird staying from 15 May to 24 July 1982). They have almost invariably been singing males. Marmora's Warblers are similar to Dartford Warblers, but without the red feather tones (instead they are black and grey).

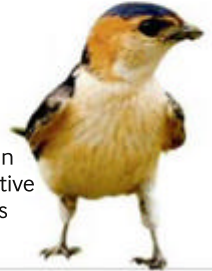


White-winged Black Tern

Spring White-winged Black Terns are rare but immensely beautiful. A bit like a Black Tern, but with pale wings contrasting with the sooty black body, and fore part of the underwing. Note also the white rump and tail.

Red-rumped Swallow

A few come to the UK every April and May. They are often found feeding over water with martins, Swallows and Swifts. Similar in size and shape to Swallow, but with distinctive pale rump and nape, dark undertail coverts and sweeping graceful flight style.



Beyond Birdwatching



James Lowen Tour leader James is the man behind the book *52 Wildlife Weekends: A Year of British Wildlife-watching*

SPRAWLED ON THE floor of a Kent woodland, elbows scratched and knees soiled, I admire a beautiful lady. Quite the Victorian dame, she wears a white petticoat, fringed magenta, and her face is shaded by a burgundy bonnet. A Lady Orchid, at her best.

Between 50 and 60 orchid species grow in Britain; the number varies with the rhythm of disputed taxonomy. Wherever the true figure lies, it is manageable: sufficient variety to get us hooked, without being overwhelming. As a first step into the plant kingdom, orchids excel.

For a start, orchids are widely distributed. You can see them from Cornwall to Orkney and the Hebrides to Sussex. They grow in beautiful places. Visit chalk downlands to enjoy Pyramidal Orchid, heathland mires for Bog Orchid, Chiltern Beech hangers for Violet Helleborine and Caledonian pine forests for Lesser Twayblade.

Diversity peaks in May-July, but orchids can be seen across most months. Dorset's first Early Spider Orchid typically blooms in March, and Berkshire's final Autumn Lady's Tress whirls through September. Orchid gatherings can be immense: 50,000 Green-winged Orchids turn Kent's Marden Meadows into a purple haze. Orchids vary enchantingly in size, shape and colour: be mesmerised by a bonsai Bog Orchid just 3cm tall or by a lissome Lady Orchid topping a metre.

Inspect an orchid flower spike closely for a treat. You may discern florets resembling monkeys, bees, spiders or lizards (in addition to Victorian ladies). This is pure evolutionary and ecological wonder: some orchids exaggerate features of insect pollinators to coax them into 'mating'.

Erotic and exotic in equal measure, orchids are also steeped in mystery. How did the Sawfly Orchid – a Mediterranean plant – discovered in Dorset last year get there? When, if ever, will Ghost Orchid flower again? Several species have distinctive

Continuing his series extolling the virtues of non-avian nature, *James Lowen* eulogises orchids.



↑BEE ORCHID

This orchid uses a bee-like flower to attract real bees

←PYRAMIDAL ORCHID

This elegant orchid can be found in chalk downlands

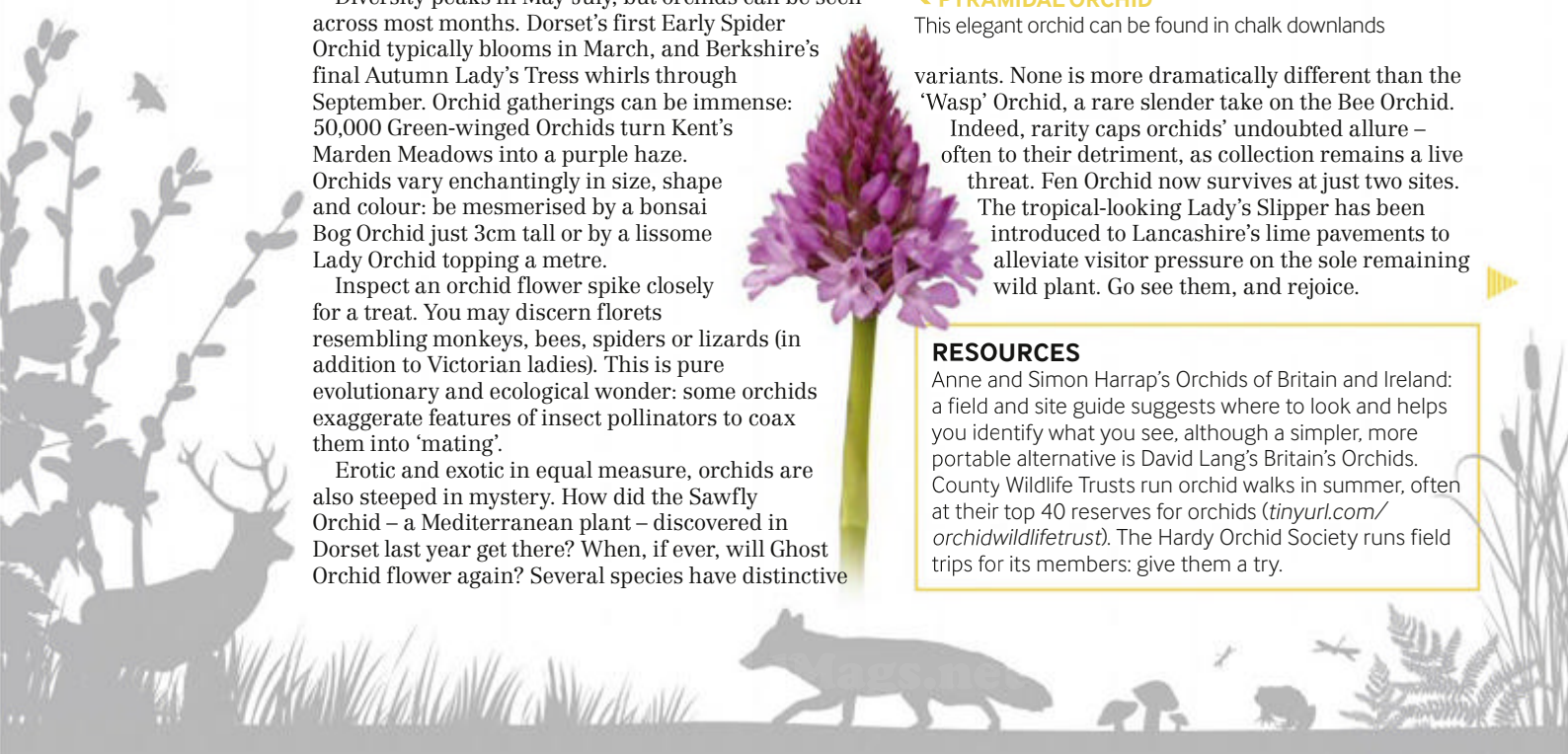
variants. None is more dramatically different than the 'Wasp' Orchid, a rare slender take on the Bee Orchid.

Indeed, rarity caps orchids' undoubted allure – often to their detriment, as collection remains a live threat. Fen Orchid now survives at just two sites.

The tropical-looking Lady's Slipper has been introduced to Lancashire's lime pavements to alleviate visitor pressure on the sole remaining wild plant. Go see them, and rejoice.

RESOURCES

Anne and Simon Harrap's *Orchids of Britain and Ireland*: a field and site guide suggests where to look and helps you identify what you see, although a simpler, more portable alternative is David Lang's *Britain's Orchids*. County Wildlife Trusts run orchid walks in summer, often at their top 40 reserves for orchids (tinyurl.com/orchidwildlifetrust). The Hardy Orchid Society runs field trips for its members: give them a try.





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UK TIDES

May

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 F	12:16	6:5
2 Sa	00:39	6:5 12:55 6:6
3 Su	01:16	6:6 13:30 6:7
4 M	01:49	6:8 14:03 6:9
5 Tu	02:23	6:9 14:37 6:9
6 W	02:57	7:0 15:12 6:9
7 Th	03:33	7:0 15:48 6:8
8 F	04:10	6:9 16:24 6:7
9 Sa	04:50	6:8 17:04 6:5
10 Su	05:35	6:6 17:51 6:3
11 M	06:30	6:4 18:49 6:1
12 Tu	07:36	6:3 20:03 6:1
13 W	08:53	6:3 21:21 6:2
14 Th	10:08	6:5 22:35 6:4
15 F	11:15	6:7 23:39 6:7
16 Sa	12:14	6:9
17 Su	00:36	7:0 13:06 7:0
18 M	01:25	7:1 13:52 7:1
19 Tu	02:10	7:2 14:35 7:1
20 W	02:54	7:3 15:16 7:0
21 Th	03:36	7:2 15:57 6:9
22 F	04:18	7:1 16:36 6:7
23 Sa	05:00	6:8 17:15 6:4
24 Su	05:42	6:5 17:54 6:1
25 M	06:26	6:2 18:37 5:9
26 Tu	07:16	5:9 19:32 5:7
27 W	08:16	5:8 20:42 5:6
28 Th	09:26	5:8 21:59 5:7
29 F	10:33	6:0 23:03 6:0
30 Sa	11:28	6:2 23:54 6:2
31 Su	12:15	6:4

SOUTH WEST	Swansea (+4:42)
Weston Super Mare (+5:05)	Milford Haven (+4:37)
Barnstaple (+4:30)	Cardiff (+5:15)
Newquay (+3:32)	NORTH WEST Whitehaven (2:30)
Falmouth (+3:30)	Douglas (2:44)
Plymouth (+4:05)	Morecambe (2:33)
Torquay (+4:40)	Blackpool (2:50)
Bournemouth (5:09)*	NORTH EAST Skegness (+4:57)
Portland (+4:57)	Grimby (+4:29)
St Peter Port (+4:53)	(+4:13)
Swanage (5:19)*	Bridlington (+2:58)
Portsmouth (2:29)	Whitby (+2:20)
Southampton (2:53)	Hartlepool (+1:59)
SOUTH EAST Ryde (2:29)	Blyth (+1:46)
SCOTLAND Brighton (2:51)	Berwick (+0:54)
Eastbourne (2:48)	Leith (+0:58)
Dunfermline (3:05)	(0:18)
Dover (2:53)	Fraserburgh (1:28)
Margate (1:52)	Lossiemouth (2:00)
Herne Bay (1:24)	Wick (2:29)
Southend on sea (1:22)	Lerwick (2:50)
Clacton on sea (2:00)	Stromness (4:29)
EAST ANGLIA Felixstowe Pier (2:23)	Scrabster (5:09)
Aldeburgh (2:53)	Stornoway (+5:30)
Lowestoft (4:23)	Ullapool (+5:36)
Cromer (+4:56)	Gairloch (+5:16)
Hunstanton (+4:44)	Oban (+4:12)
WALES Colwyn Bay (2:47)	Greenock (1:19)
Holyhead (3:28)	Ayr (1:44)
Barmouth (5:45)	Campbeltown (1:12)
IRELAND Aberystwyth (6:11)	Kirkcubright Bay (2:25)
Fishguard (+5:44)	IRELAND Londonderry (5:32)
	Belfast (2:47)
	Donegal (+4:20)

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

Where to bird

Lowland heaths

Lowland heaths (heathland below 300m, above which it becomes moorland) are landscapes of acidic soils, rich in shrubby plants like heathers and Gorse, and trees such as Scots Pine and Birch. Like most habitats in our country of smallish islands, heathland is almost certainly manmade in origin, only being prominent after deforestation and grazing a few thousand years ago.

There are currently less than 60,000 hectares of lowland heath left in the UK, which is only a fifth of what we had 200 years ago. It is a habitat very rich in invertebrates and plants, as well as vertebrates such as all six of our reptile species.

Bird-wise it is much lower in diversity, but what it lacks in species numbers it makes for in quality. Birds such as Dartford Warbler, Stonechat, Wood Lark, Tree Pipit and Nightjar thrive in this country. And it is these species which are the big draw for birders during spring into summer.

No birdwatching year is complete without at least one visit to a heath, and particular lingering into the dusk to see and hear the wonderful Nightjar.



David Tiping / A amy



What's in a name?



Savi's Warbler

FLPA / A amy

Savi's Warbler is a rare summer visitor and breeder in tiny numbers in the UK. It is a *Locustella* or grasshopper warbler, with a buzzing song similar to, but distinctly different from, that of the Grasshopper Warbler.

This unstreaked brown warbler was first recognised as something new by Tuscan mineralogist and biologist Paolo Savi when collecting for the Pisa Museum in 1821. Previous specimens (ie collected specimens, rather than those described by field observation) had been mistaken for Cetti's Warblers, but Savi realised he had a new bird.

Savi's Warblers are essentially birds

HEATHLAND BIRDS in numbers

3,200

Number of pairs of
Dartford Warbler
nesting in the UK
(almost exclusively
on heathlands)



4,600

Number of singing male
Nightjars in the UK

300,000

Approximate area of
heathland in hectares in UK
200 years ago

**Inset: Nightjar is a classic
heathland bird, which
occurs at sites such as
Thursley Common,
Surrey (background)**



Steve Taylor/ARPS / Aamy

of reedbeds (perhaps more so than Grasshopper Warblers, which prefer rank vegetation, scruffy rose bushes and brambles). Up to three or four pairs breed in the UK, mainly in the east of England (East Anglia) or the south-east, but singing birds can turn up almost anywhere.

Most singing occurs after the sun sets, but some Savi's Warblers will sing during the day. If you hear one, scan distant reeds for a bird a tad larger than a Reed Warbler, with a subtly different, structure. They sing with their bills open, turning their head from side to side, and so varying the volume and direction of the sound.



KATE RISELY'S

Species Update

Why keeping an eye on your garden
Great Tits provides valuable information

FLPA / Robin Chittenden

I WALKED PAST A Peregrine nest while shopping in the city last week. I didn't see the birds, but I did think about how incredible that statement would have been not so long ago. These city dwellers were in Norwich, but urban Peregrines are now found across the UK.

Those with a sense of style, like the Norwich birds, nest on cathedrals, but they're also happy with office blocks or industrial buildings; anything that gives them a vantage point over the landscape.

In our imaginations, large birds of prey are wild and fragile, inhabiting remote landscapes, but the success of Peregrines, Buzzards and Red Kites shows just how adaptable these predators can be where populations are released from persecution and pollution.

The bread and butter of urban Peregrines are Feral Pigeons, but analysis of carcasses at nests has shown they take a surprising variety of other species. Many of these are nocturnal migrants, such as Redwings and Woodcocks, which would normally expect to avoid predators by flying in darkness, but in urban areas they are fatally illuminated from below by the city lights, providing easy pickings for this ultimate aerial predator. The remains of a Lapwing ringed on the Thames estuary marshes were found in a Peregrine nest on the Tate Modern. Was the Lapwing caught over central London or did the Peregrine travel out of the city to hunt? Either possibility gives us a glimpse into

the constant activity in the natural world around us.

The lives of some urban Peregrines, however, are brought into our homes in brilliant technicolour through the use of webcams on the nest platforms. This surveillance is not just to make fascinating views of nesting birds available to the public; it also means nesting attempts can be monitored in detail, providing valuable information without the need to approach the nest.

Peregrines haven't just been increasing in cities; according to the Bird Atlas 2007–11 the breeding range has increased by 200% since 1968–72, with birds nesting in quarries and on pylons in lowland areas. Nevertheless, they are still rare enough to be surveyed by counting individual nest sites, and a census is carried out in every decade, organised by BTO, JNCC, RSPB and the Raptor Study Groups.

The last published survey, in 2002, revealed a population of 1,437 pairs across the UK and Isle of Man, a 12% increase since 1991. However, expansion into lowland areas has been partially countered by declines in traditional strongholds such as western and northern Scotland, thought to be due to declines in food availability, habitat degradation and illegal killing. We are now awaiting the publication of latest census, the BTO Peregrine Survey, carried out in spring 2014, which should give an up to date assessment.

Kate Risely is the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch Organiser

URBAN HUNTER

Find out more about our city-dwelling Peregrines on page 28



The BTO runs volunteer surveys to monitor and explain changes in bird populations. If you see a Peregrine, report it on BirdTrack birdtrack.net.



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Magnification	20x-60x
Object Lens Diameter	85mm
Field of view	2.1° - 1.1°
Actual Field of View	36m-20m@1000m
Eye Relief	20-18mm
Nearest Focus Distance	6m
Weight	1982g



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Specification	20-60x82ED
Magnification	20x-60x
Object Lens Diameter	82mm
Field of view	2.1° - 1.05°
Actual Field of View	39m-20m@1000m
Eye Relief	19.5-18mm
Nearest Focus Distance	13m
Weight	1885g

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Weedon's World

Mike has just got back from a great birdwatching trip to Jordan, where he also had one of the most embarrassing experiences of his life!

WITH THE SLIGHTEST of creaks and a tiny click, the door closed behind me. I was locked out. Some people think that the foreign trips members of the *BW* team take are 'holidays'. If only they knew the suffering we have to go through to research exotic destinations for their reading pleasure. On this occasion, the suffering was one of the most humiliating, embarrassing experiences of my life. I was in the superb country of Jordan on a birding tour. It was near the end of a great week birding around the diverse habitats of this relatively unexplored gem of Middle East birding. We had travelled from the capital Amman, east to Azraq wetlands, then south through the Dana Valley through the semi-mythical ancient city of Petra to Aqaba on the Red Sea.

Our small group listed some 155 species of bird, of which 17 were brand new for me. I readily admit this hardly amounts to suffering. That was still to come.

New birds included such eastern delights as Fan-tailed Raven (more fruit bat than bird), the gorgeous pink Sinai Rosefinch against the pink sandstones of Petra, the localised and lovely Syrian Serin, the fancy-Dan Dead Sea Sparrow and Tristram's Grackle, which is like the Alpine Chough of the rocky valleys.

Then there were larks such as Temminck's (like a pale, rufous Shore), Desert (as plain as a lark gets), six species of wheatear and the ubiquitous Blackstart. And last of all, down south on the shore at Aqaba, the quirky White-eyed Gull (which does not have a white eye). Aqaba was a fascinating place with tiny beach-side 'allotments' which were heaving with migrants, including Masked Shrike, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Tree Pipit, Semicollared Flycatcher and 'eastern' Whitethroat. The fine dry soil was heaving with



Mike Weedon

↑ PINK ON PINK

A male Sinai Rosefinch on the pink sandstones of the ancient carved city of Petra

absurd level in the corridor outside my room. Then, out came the football! It was 11.45!

At midnight, as I was about to reach breaking point, a door was flung open, and a woman's voice in clearly pronounced English, shouted "That's enough!!". The boys hurled what sounded like disrespectful abuse back at the disgruntled English lady and carried on kicking and shouting regardless. If the noise wasn't bad enough, the rudeness and disrespect made me crack.

I rose naked from my bed, hastily put my pants on (shorts, now you ask) and burst through my door bellowing "Oi!!!" Boys scattered terrified in all directions (back into their rooms) leaving one cowering, and near him the football. I saw my chance and went forth and grabbed the ball, growling at the kid as I did.

With the slightest of creaks and a tiny click, the door closed behind me. I was locked out of my room, holding a football, standing like a chump in my underpants. There was nothing for it, I tucked the ball under my arm and marched off the 150m to the reception desk, past dozens of people milling around, as well as more groups of excitable schoolkids rushing up and down.

Some 30 metres into my walk of shame, I realised to my horror I had put my pants on back to front and was walking with the Y on my backside! Here I was, a fat, self-conscious, pale Englishman waddling along in nothing but a pair of white boxers, on backwards.

A few minutes later I delivered the football to reception, explained my predicament to a very polite receptionist, and got a new keycard, before repeating the long walk of shame back. And despite losing their ball, the boys still shouted until 3.30 in the morning!

Jordan was a fantastic place to visit, travel around, and watch birds in. But please don't think we have it all easy. 🐦

“We were staying just up the road at quite a grand hotel with good access to the beach – to scan for gulls”

Chiffchaffs, and in one little 'field' no more than 5m by 10m we counted 18 Chiffchaffs on the ground.

We were staying just up the road at quite a grand hotel with good access to the beach – to scan for gulls. There was a larger than expected amount of boys aged about 14 running around the place in overexcited groups, perhaps a school trip. Night fell, and yet another sensational Jordanian meal was served. But we had to get an early night for the 5 o'clock start for the long drive north up the rift valley to the Dead Sea.

I went to bed at 10, but even at our corner of the hotel, some 150m from reception, we couldn't escape the teenage boys, running around and shouting and carrying on. I watched some TV and tried to go back to sleep. Come 11.30, though the noise was reaching an

Mike Weedon: Mike is a patch lister and keen digiscoper in his adopted 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

THE URBAN BIRDER

David Lindo gets away from the beaches to explore the urban Costa Del Sol



David Lindo
The Urban Birder is a familiar face on TV screens and is behind the Vote National Bird campaign

Málaga, Andalucía on the sun-kissed Costa del Sol seems like a very unlikely venue for enjoying the delights of urban birding. You may have visions of hordes of holidaying Brits around every corner kitted out with buckets and spades. The city, one of the oldest in the world, has been welcoming visitors for centuries. It is now also one of Spain's most popular tourist destinations. Before you recoil at the sheer thought of heaving streets let me tell you that I know a different Málaga. I mean, how many places do you know where you can watch Black Wheatear while enjoying a beer in a town centre?

“After dark, Red-necked Nightjars sing. But if you arrive before the mercury rises too high you would be rewarded with singing Great Reed and Sardinian Warblers”

I first visited Málaga with my mum during a winter in the late 1990s. We stayed at a family friend's apartment near the town centre and spent our week variously visiting attractions and soaking in the winter sun. My abiding memories were of the abundant Black Redstarts with their quivering red tails that seemed to be on every other rooftop aerial. I also remember finding a field full of around 160 wintering Stone-curlews at the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra Nature Reserve, 75km north-west of the city. To this day, I have never again witnessed a flock as large.

Málaga has changed immeasurably since my early days and has gone through a metamorphosis over the past 10 years. Gone is the choking traffic of old and in are whole new pedestrianised areas largely constructed for the comfort of tourists to facilitate easy access to the multitude of museums and restaurants that have since sprung up. The city council have also recognised Málaga's attraction to wildlife and as such have strived to corner-off portions dedicated to nature conservation.

The Guadalhorce River Mouth

The top urban birding venue in the whole city has got to be the mouth of the Guadalhorce River, the principle river in the Province of Málaga. Although the estuary itself covers a larger area, the reserve I visited takes up 67 acres and was declared a protected Natural Area in 1989. Its main feature are the branches of the Guadalhorce River that flows through it. There is also an artificial lagoon complex, reedbeds, scrub and wet woodland. The whole site is encircled by housing, sports complexes, a main road and of course, the sea. Despite the urbanity the birdlife here is pretty impressive. On my visit spring was still just around the corner and there were some lingering winter visitors present like Gadwall, Shoveler and a few Greater Flamingos on the lagoons. While early House Martins, Swallows and a sprinkling of Red-rumped Swallows swooped, I also discovered a Water Rail, several Bluethroats and a Booted Eagle. Up to four of these impressive buzzard-sized raptors winter in the area. I also made a surprise find in the guise of an unexpected immature

DAVID SAYS

While in Málaga don't forget to keep looking out for migrants during the appropriate seasons, as the city is part of the great migratory funnel that leads to and from Africa. While having lunch in the city centre I saw a Booted Eagle drifting over.

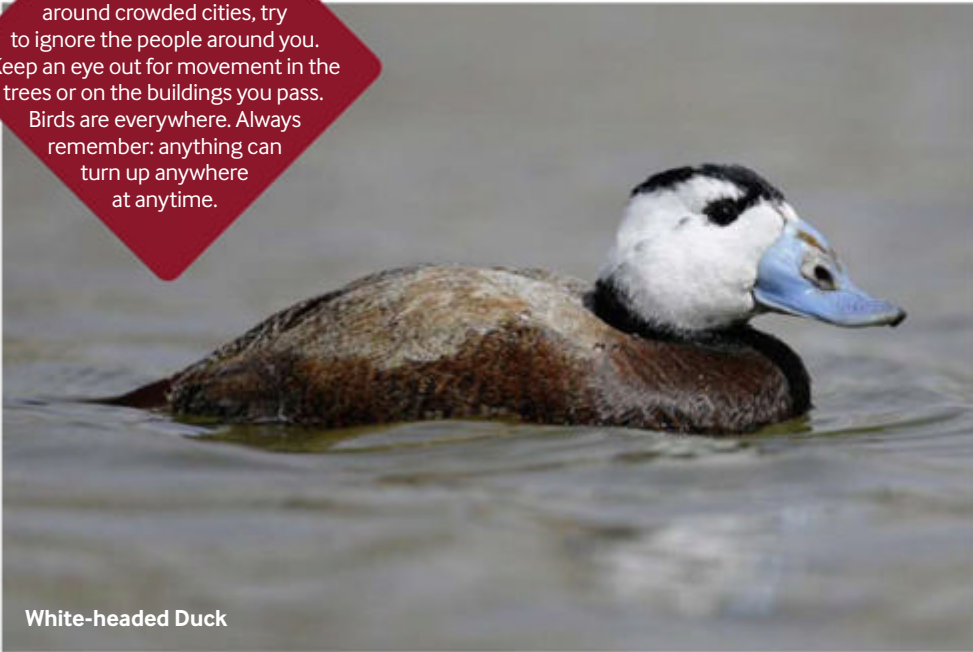
↓ HISTORIC

Alcazaba – not just a tourist attraction... watch out for birds here, including Sardinian Warbler



DAVID SAYS

When strolling around crowded cities, try to ignore the people around you. Keep an eye out for movement in the trees or on the buildings you pass. Birds are everywhere. Always remember: anything can turn up anywhere at anytime.



White-headed Duck

Nature Picture Library

Crane looking distinctly forlorn, standing on a tiny wet field.

The summer months are hot – well, we are talking about the Costa del Sol. After dark, Red-necked Nightjars sing. But if you arrive before the mercury rises too high you would be rewarded with singing Great Reed and Sardinian Warblers. The Zitting Cisticola's incessant and monotonous pipping electric alarm clock-like song is also commonplace. In the reedy environs, Little Bittern nest alongside Purple Heron, while Kentish and Little Ringed Plover raise their young in proximity to leggy Black-winged Stilts. It's also worth scanning the estuary for Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls – both absolutely gorgeous Mediterranean specialities.

The site's star birds are Purple Swamphen and around 15 pairs of White-headed Duck which was a major lifer for me. Much punching of the air and summersaults ensued after I saw six casually loafing close to the reeds.



Greater Flamingos

imageBROKER/ A amny

KEY SPECIES

WHITE-HEADED DUCK

The White-headed Duck is the prize bird of Málaga. It belongs to a family of ducks called 'stifftails' that contain six species found on all the continents bar the Antarctic. The male is fairly distinctive with a largely white head and bulbous blue bill. Although many of us think of this duck as a rare inhabitant of southern Spain (which it is) it is also patchily distributed across western and eastern Asia. Most of the population of this globally threatened bird is migratory, however the Spanish and North African birds are sedentary. It is the only stiff-tail to be naturally found in Europe. However, its smaller American cousin, the Ruddy Duck, has also established feral populations.

In Spain, the White-headed Duck had been decimated by habitat loss and hunting. Its plight was then further blighted by the problems caused by interbreeding with the more promiscuous and dominant Ruddy Duck. This led to the Ruddy Duck eradication scheme that resulted in its near annihilation in the UK and Western Europe.



David Lindo

TRAVEL FACTS



OTHER SITES

The roof terrace of Molina Lario Hotel

Why not enjoy a nice early morning cup of tea on the roof terrace of this well-appointed hotel taking in the gliding Yellow-legged Gulls, singing Spotless Starlings and the Peregrines that frequent Málaga Cathedral. In keeping with many towns and cities in Britain and Europe, this cathedral (also known as the One Armed Lady due to it only having one spire) is a magnet for this great falcon. The birds here are of the smaller, more reddish breasted and bluish backed 'brookei' race. hotelmolinalario.com/en

Alcazaba of Málaga

This impressive 11th Century fortress and Roman theatre set on a hill is a major draw for tourists. The surrounding streets house numerous bars and museums including the recently opened Picasso Museum. While walking around this landmark look out for Short-toed Treecreeper, Spotted Flycatcher, Crested Tit, Sardinian and Western Bonelli's Warblers, alongside Blackcaps in the wooded areas that flank some of the walls. Pied Flycatchers are common on passage. While on the streets below the fortress, scan the walls for nesting Pallid Swift, and if you are really vigilant, you could bag yourself both Blue Rock Thrush and Black Wheatear.

WEBSITES

David stayed at Barcelo Málaga Hotel barcelo.com

Special thanks to Javier Hernández, Antonio Montejo and Yingda Li from Málaga City Tourism malagaturismo.com.

Also thanks to Simon Harding (Iberrature Andalusia iberrature.es) and Málaga's very own Urban Birder Luis Alberto Rodriguez birdaytrip.com



COMPILED BY KIRK PARSONS

Newshound Kirk is on the lookout for bird stories.

If you have one, get in touch at birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

BEHIND THE NEWS

DOVE STEP HITS EUROPE



BW contributor *Jonny Rankin* tells us why he's walking, cycling and kayaking to Spain

LAST SPRING, ANDREW Goodrick, Robert Yaxley and I set out from Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve in Suffolk on a northward trajectory. Thirteen days later we arrived at Saltholme RSPB in Teesside having walked 300 miles and much of the east coast in the process.

In doing so we covered a large part of the UK Turtle Dove range, gave talks on Turtle Doves and Operation Turtle Dove at Frampton Marsh and Saltholme RSPB reserves, and raised £3,000 for Operation Turtle Dove. We called it Dove Step.

We were extremely proud of completing the walk and equally of having raised awareness and supported Operation Turtle Dove so directly, by fundraising. While walking we had a lot of time to talk, and among other things, we formulated this year's journey, which will see us commence emulation of Turtle Doves' Afro-European migration.

Our aim this year is to propel ourselves

the 700 miles from Suffolk to the Spanish border covering the whole of France. While the authorities are not allowing us to cross the Channel directly, we will make a Channel crossing equivalent, paddling 25 miles down the East Anglian coast, cycle more than 500 miles through France and then walk the remaining 175 miles or so to the Spanish border. This 700 miles journey is our take on a triathlon and constitutes the biggest challenge the team has undertaken to date. We hope to cover the distance in just 14 days.

As well as enduring distances of up to 90 miles a day we will be following up the journey with talks, specially brewed Dove Step beer (kindly brewed by Dove Step sponsor BlackBar Brewery) and as much awareness raising as possible for Operation Turtle Dove.

Dove Step stalwart Rob has offered the following reflections on last year's journey and also gives an insight of why we train and endure for Turtle Doves each year:



Turtle Dove

mike lane / Alamy



The team's route to Spain

BW What do Turtle Doves mean to you?

RY Turtle Doves are superb looking birds in their own right, but their tragic decline means they have also become an icon of modern times in nature conservation. Farmland in the UK has become unfavourable to their survival, and the relentless shooting of migrant birds through the Mediterranean has compounded their losses. If we do not act now, and make changes happen, they will be lost to the UK as a breeding bird, entirely as a result of human activity.

BW You walked 300 miles over 13 days for the first Dove Step journey last year. What were your highlights from that adventure?

RY The trip was epic. We walked through some fascinating and undervalued landscapes, such as the edge of the Wash and the north Lincolnshire coast. We saw some great birds as well! The journey was certainly hard on the feet, but it was very self-affirming to be able to keep going through the pain and reach the finish in style – I ran the last couple of hundred metres! It was also wonderful to get a lot of support from the public through social



Jonny Rankin and Rob Yaxley at Saltholme RSPB, after completing the first Dove Step

LYDIA TAGUE

media, and to raise £3,000 for Turtle Dove conservation.

BW Were there any low points?

RY On a long walk like that, there are ups and downs. There was one day near the start of the walk which was physically and mentally very tough, but I was cheered up by a beer or two at the end of the day! Also, it was a schoolboy error to underestimate the size of Scarborough, which added some unexpected miles on an already long day.

BW What drives you to continue with the Dove Step campaign and this year's journey?

RY We haven't won the battle yet! Anything I can do personally to assist the conservation effort for Turtle Doves has got to be worthwhile. To turn around the fortunes of Turtle Doves is going to require a massive effort, on so many fronts.

BW With the ultimate aim of the Dove Step campaign to draw a self-propelled line from Saltholme RSPB to sub-Saharan Africa, which upcoming journeys excite you the most?

RY I am particularly interested in the French and Spanish legs of the journey, which go through some amazing landscapes. My forte is walking (and birding!), so anywhere that is good walking country with lots of birds and wildlife interests me.

BW What would your dream outcome be for Turtle Doves as a result of the Dove Step campaign and Operation Turtle Dove?

RY Obviously Dove Step can only play a small part in restoring Turtle Doves as a familiar part of our avifauna, but I think if enough people become aware of the species' plight, we can make change happen. Dove Step is a great way to draw people's attention to Turtle Doves, and any

money donated can go straight to creating favourable feeding habitat.

BW Why should readers follow your journey via the Dove Step 2 blog?

RY They should follow for the thrills, the tales of derring-do, the high and the lows, the emotional rollercoaster that is Dove Step!

Tara Proud, Operation Turtle Dove manager at the RSPB praised the efforts of the Dove Step team. She said: "The Dove Step team's commitment to supporting Turtle Dove conservation is really inspiring. The funds that the team are generating through kind donations are really making a difference on the ground to help save Turtle Doves – through supporting the establishment of Turtle Dove foraging habitat within the core breeding range.

"As readers of *Bird Watching* are aware, without the continued efforts of the Operation Turtle Dove partnership, there is a very real chance that Turtle Doves will be lost from the UK."

As we head south, our Turtle Doves will be headed north to their UK breeding territories. We look forward to seeing them and it will no doubt spur us on during the most gruelling final days of our trek. As Turtle Doves arrive back in the UK you can add to Operation Turtle Dove's understanding of the ailing population by adding your sightings to BirdTrack (bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/about) the BTO's recording database.

From April 18, the team will be paddling down the east coast before cycling and walking through France in its entirety to get to Spain. You can follow the team's ups and downs via the Dove Step 2 website dovestep2.wordpress.com If you would like to donate to Dove Step 2, you can do so online at justgiving.com/DoveStep2

Drummer backs Druridge campaign

RAY LAIDLAW, EX-DRUMMER of Geordie rock legends Lindisfarne, has hit out at controversial plans to mine coal on the Northumberland coastline. Druridge Bay is at risk from plans by The Banks Group to opencast for more than 7,000,000 tonnes of coal, causing concern over risks to wildlife from noise, dust and light pollution. Ray is supporting the Save Druridge Group in their attempts to petition against permission being granted for the mine, and believes it is time to abandon fossil fuels and seek more environmentally friendly alternatives. The petition already has more than 4,000 signatures from local and worldwide supporters, but more support is needed.



To sign the petition, go to bit.ly/1sHhnFW (using both upper and lower case letters)

Keep an eye out for Hen Harriers

THE RSPB IS asking bikers and hikers to help them protect endangered Hen Harriers in the remote uplands of northern England. The Hen Harrier Hotline, now in its eighth year, is aimed at protecting these breathtaking and rare birds, which have almost disappeared from English moors as a result of illegal persecution.

By reporting any sightings, visitors to the moors can help the RSPB target round the clock nest protection operations, hopefully allowing the population to recover. Experts estimate that the English upland areas could support over 300 breeding pairs of Hen Harriers, yet last year only four pairs nested and bred.

Martin Harper, conservation director for the RSPB, urged anyone who sees a Hen Harrier in these sensitive areas to report the sighting as soon as possible. "We can only protect them if we know where they are," he said.

The Hen Harrier Hotline number is 0845 4600121 (calls charged at local rates). Sightings can also be emailed to henharriers@rspb.org.uk. Reports should include the date and location of the sighting, and a six figure grid reference where possible.

NEWS IN BRIEF

GARDEN NUMBERS LOW

Last year was not the best for garden birdwatchers, with numbers of sightings in our little fenced patches starting low and staying low, according to the BTO Garden BirdWatch. However, the absence was caused not so much by a lack of birds, but by an abundance of food and favourable weather. In fact, some birds, especially Blackbird, Long-tailed Tit, Song Thrush, and Robin had very productive breeding seasons. To find out how you can get involved, visit bto.org/gbw

FEEDING HELPS BIRDS

Researchers at the University of Kent have found that supplementing the natural food supply by giving handouts really does help endangered bird populations recover; but it can make them slightly more susceptible to disease. Using more than 20 years of data, the team concluded that Mauritius Parakeets given extra food fledged more chicks than those that relied solely on natural supplies, but that they were also less likely to hatch chicks during disease outbreaks.



PUFFINS ARE BACK!

Puffins have returned early to the Farne Islands for the second year running, and even earlier than last year. Boat companies from Salthouses reported their first sightings of the iconic bird on 8 March, nearly three weeks ahead of their usual return date. It is hoped that the mild weather and early returns could point to a successful breeding season.

RAT PLAN WORKING

The discovery of a nest containing the chicks of the South Georgia Pipit has proved that rat eradication projects on the south Atlantic island are working. The pipit was at risk of extinction due to the rats that had overrun the island before the eradication project began.



SOMEWHERE WREATHED IN mist and hidden by a time vortex is the schism that divided those who need to note their observations and those who are happy just to observe.

Like loving or hating manga, musicals and Marmite, you either love to list or are completely unable to understand why people bother. The obsession may be a relative of the collecting bug. There are those whose minimalist lives have no use for old theatre programmes or a stamp album let alone a lawn infested with gnomes or a wall covered in frog-shaped teapots.

I am by inclination on the listing side of one of human nature's grand canyons. I guess I need to collect sightings just as, when a boy, I needed to collect matchbox covers, stamps and coins. I even had a collection of cigarette packets, which I guess today would be just a series of blank paper adorned with health warnings.

When I started birding 'seriously' as a teenager, my diaries were full of lists of birds with 'lifers' underlined, year records circled and county newbies marked in red. I progressed from RSPB grey-covered printed lists to a series of 'Birdwatcher's Logbooks' replete with every sighting noted, primitively sketched and everything from the weather and the state of the tide, to my sandwich fillings and the books I had just read put down in detail.

I had summer lists, winter lists, year lists and patch lists, county lists and British lists, all of which are as useful, in general terms, as last year's railway timetable.

Like many things that time passing erodes, the urgency of listing wanes. Most of us grow out of binge drinking and obscure music, fashion following and TV soaps. I seem to be growing out of collecting and listing. My stamp album is in some forgotten corner and just about everything else I ever hoarded has been car-booted, charity shopped or chucked in a recycling bin.



Kitt Day / Alamy

However, I cannot quite wipe the slate clean. My world list may not be growing much, but it is constantly re-shuffled to accommodate taxonomic change. I have resolved to go to Devon this year to look for a Cirl Bunting, as it is not on my stagnated UK list, ignored because it sits somewhere on my world one. My county list will continue to be maintained and might grow, as I do very occasionally twitch a world or UK lifer if it turns up in my county.

Nevertheless, I still keep a year list. Year lists are different, an incentive to see the same old same old. Somehow, the fact that it is annually renewed remains an incentive and every year I set out to ensure there are 100 species or more on it by the end of January. When a Blackbird or Blue Tit is desperately 'needed' for a day or two there seems a point to listing still. Sadly, that need seems to lessen with each month and by the end of February the list may only have been extended by a bird or five after January's mad dashing. I guess the driving force is novelty. Each January the commonplace is novel for that year.

I may have put listing to one side but the need for novelty, to see something you have never seen before is almost hard wired into the human brain. Knowing what I have seen makes it easier to target seeing what I've never seen before!

Bo Beolens runs fatbirder.com and other websites. He set up disability group Birding For All and has written a number of books

LITTLE THINGS

The 'need' for Blue Tit can give your birding extra impetus



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Bird fair returns to Norfolk

THE SECOND NORFOLK Bird and Wildlife Fair takes place at Mannington Hall over the weekend of 16-17 May, with a wide range of exhibitors and events lined up for the two days.

Bird Watching will be attending, with great subscription offers, back issues, and the chance to chat to members of the magazine team – we're looking forward to trying to answer your queries on bird identification, birding destinations, and optical gear. Wild Sounds, who run *Bird Watching's* bookshop, will also be on hand with a wide selection of books, DVDs, and more.

There'll be a charity auction, with prizes including photography workshops and birding trips, and all proceeds from the Fair will go towards supporting a range of Norfolk wildlife charities.

Britain's best-known TV birdwatcher, Bill Oddie, will be the special guest on the Sunday, giving a presentation and signing books.

The Fair aims to build on the success of last year's event. Optics exhibitors are Bushnell, One Stop Nature Shop, Opticron, Vanguard and Wex Photographic, with Manfrotto, Canon and Swarovski attending in association with the latter. Wildlife blogger, photographer and *Bird Watching* contributor Tom Mason will be on the Wex stand to answer questions about wildlife photography.

The BTO, Butterfly Conservation, Falklands Conservation, the Hawk and Owl Trust, Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society, Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Wader Quest are among the charities and NGOs attending.

Mannington Hall near Aylsham



Fuller Photography / Alamy

Holiday companies include the Bird Watching and Wildlife Club, from our partners at the Grant Arms, plus the Briarfields Hotel, Titchwell, Swallow Birding, the Whale and Dolphin Company, and Ashley Boon, Botswana and India Safaris.

There are art and photography exhibitors, too, and a wide range of local food and drink if you're in need of refreshment.

Activities taking place across the weekend include lectures from the likes of Wader Quest, Simon Harrap, Tony Juniper, Robert Wilson, the Israeli Tourist Board and of course Bill Oddie, plus book signings, moth-trapping, pond-dipping, face-painting, geocaching, willow-weaving demonstrations, and raptor displays.

Even before the Fair starts, there's a sponsored bird race on May 9, to raise money for the BTO, with the trophy being presented to the winning team a week later.

If you're interested in taking part, sponsoring a team, or helping out with the running of the race in any way, please contact Andrew Whitelee by calling 07783 243183, or emailing andrew@racetosave.co.uk

Adult tickets for the event cost £8 per day, but there are discounts available for multiple tickets, and for disabled attendees with carers.

To get further information, please call 01603 219119, or go to norfolkbirdfair.com

Get involved at Scottish Birdfair

THE SCOTTISH BIRDFAIR, part of Scotland's Big Nature Festival, is now in its fourth year, and promises to be even bigger and better than ever.

More than 6,000 nature lovers are expected to attend over the weekend of May 23-24, at a new venue, Musselburgh Lagoons at Levenhall Links.

Access to the venue is easy, clean and green, thanks to an initiative from Active Travel and East Lothian Council. Visitors can join a cycle ride along the River Esk, with free



bike hire from Musselburgh railway station, or there's a free shuttle bus from Wallyford station.

There will be lots of free activities, including guided walks, talks, and workshops, plus storytelling and puppet shows. Kids can get hands on, too, with mini-beast hunts, pond dipping and a chance to take part in bird ringing. Highlights include ringing demonstrations and talks on a wide range of subjects.

There will be workshops on wildlife photography, and a live demo from wildlife artist Darren Woodhead, plus authors including Katrina Van Grouw, and Bill Oddie. The show also plays host to Scotland's largest optics demo and plenty of trade stands, as well as a new 'optics clinic' where you can get a free service from expert technicians.

Day tickets cost £12 for adults (£10 concessions) and £2 for children, with under-5s going free. Weekend passes are also available. For more information head to scottishbirdfair.org.uk

All eyes on Cranes

THE FAMOUS CRANE couple at WWT Slimbridge have prepared their nest again, raising hopes that this will be the year they successfully raise chicks. This will be the third year that hand-reared Cranes Monty and Chris have nested in full view of the public. None of the pair's previous chicks have survived for long, so this year, extra measures have been taken to help any chicks survive their perilous first few weeks. Dave Paynter, reserve manager at Slimbridge, says his team spent the run-up to the breeding season

digging a moat around the Cranes' usual nesting spot to make it less accessible to predators.



imageBROKER / Alamy

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Celestron's new Nature DX series is the ideal choice for the outdoors enthusiast. With the Nature DX, you'll get all the confidence-inspiring important features you're looking for, like fully multi-coated optics and BaK-4 prisms, while staying within an affordable budget. All models in the series are extremely portable and lightweight, yet are able to cope with harsh terrain and weather conditions with fully waterproof housings, purged of air and filled with nitrogen gas. Whether you're looking for a binocular with close focus of just 6.5 feet or one with high magnification, there's a Nature DX to suit your needs.



DOMINIC COUZENS ON SONG THRUSH

Is this Britain's most
misunderstood bird?

A FEW YEARS AGO I was leading a bird walk in a country park in south-west London. We were minding our own business, when a middle-aged man crossed our bows, sweating in running togs but actually power-walking. Without breaking stride (not good to do that), and without introduction, he saw the appearance of a binocular-clad audience as a chance to give his tuppence-worth on the subject of a much-loved garden bird.

"I haven't seen a Song Thrush around here for 10 years," he declared. "The Sparrowhawks have eaten them all."

And off he went, with a click of poles.

Wry smiles broke out among the group. It wasn't because we knew that there was no evidence to link Sparrowhawks to Song Thrush decline (there isn't a shred of evidence). The reason for the quiet mirth was that, for all the time that the man walked past us and made the comment, a Song Thrush was actually singing quite loudly in the background.

People, it seems, have considerable difficulty getting to grips with Song Thrushes. It isn't just among the general public, but among birders, too, that our whole perception of this species is wrong. It could be claimed that the Song Thrush is one of the most misunderstood birds in the whole of Britain. And there are good reasons for it.

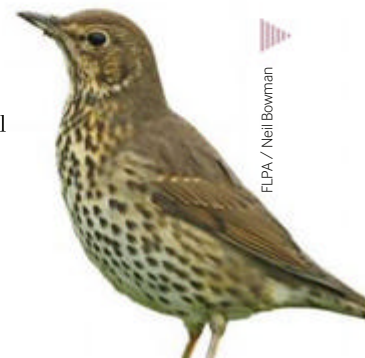
A glance at the BTO's Bird Atlas 2007-11 will show you that Song Thrushes did indeed decline in the UK by 54% between 1970 and 2010, which led to widespread and justified concern, but there has been something of a recovery since and the bird is still very common and widespread, found over 94% of the British Isles. This is a very popular songster, and the headlines about its decline resonated at the time with the public, resonated again and then rebounded like Chinese whispers to a point of hysteria. The publicity about Song Thrushes seems to have created the myth that they are somehow imperilled and in such retreat that they are disappearing from the landscape. We must never be complacent, but this is at best a distortion of the facts, and at worst downright misleading. Unless things change, Song Thrushes are safe and secure over much of Britain, and will be for the foreseeable future.

However, that does not necessarily mean that the man in the park was power-riding on a false bandwagon. On the contrary, his observations deserve analysis. Perhaps he hadn't seen as many Song Thrushes as he had previously noted, and maybe there was a good reason for that, even if it wasn't down to the depredations of Sparrowhawks. In fact, what might have happened reflects several interesting aspects of Song Thrush behaviour, which are remarkably little known.

Take the singing cycle of the Song Thrush, for example. As mentioned above, this bird is one of Britain's best-loved songsters, and with good reason. Its phrases are loud and proclamatory, and they often dominate a neighbourhood. The bird famously repeats sequences (actually 'strophes') several times at steady pace before moving on, making the song pattern easily recognisable. Many of the notes are icy-clear and well

← MISSING IN ACTION?

When did you last see a
Song Thrush?



SONG THRUSH

enunciated, and although the song lacks the mellifluous feel of a Blackbird's efforts, there will be many that swear it is the finest of all British bird vocalisations.

Yet, like many a quality product, the Song Thrush's song supply is rationed – by the bird itself. While in spring you can hardly ever stop a Chiffchaff, a Chaffinch or a Blackcap singing, such that you might wish to block your ears, you rarely get a sense of overload from a Song Thrush. And that is because of an intriguing behavioural quirk. The fact is that, as soon as a male Song Thrush is paired up, it tends to stop singing altogether, except at dawn and dusk. Females, for their part, don't sing at all. And that means that, pretty early on in the breeding season, the vast majority of individuals fall silent for most of the day. When many people's attention switches to bird song, at the height of spring, they won't be hearing many individual thrushes at all.

True, the dawn chorus can be overwhelmed with thrushes, but it takes an effort to get up early to witness this marvel. Many people's experience with Song Thrushes occurs much earlier in the year, from late January through to March. It is often in the form of a loud, disembodied voice heard from a person's bed in the pre-dawn darkness. Its clarity and vehemence is a

↓ LISTEN UP

Song Thrushes can be hard to spot in dense foliage

surprise, and registers. Later on, in April and May, the Song Thrush has more accompaniment and thereby less attention.

It is possible to hear a Song Thrush by day in spring, but such an individual is a bachelor, still working expectantly on its delivery, hoping to attract a mate. A study in Poland showed that conventional surveys, conducted by listening to voices after dawn, only picked up about two-thirds of the individuals present in a breeding population, and often fewer – this was measured by exhaustive checking for nests and other breeding proof. If you undertake a single visit during the day, even at the height of spring, you will only record about a fifth of what is there.

And of course, this propensity for daylight silence is particularly relevant to the general public's – and birdwatchers' – awareness of this species. The moral is that we are all seriously under-recording Song Thrushes, even when we know the vocalisation and pay it close attention.

But it isn't only in its singing patterns that the Song Thrush leads birders a merry dance. It's also in the fact that it doesn't perform any merry dances. Think about birds in spring for a moment. We have Sky Larks hovering in the sky, Whitethroats leaping from bushes, Great Crested Grebes head-shaking; even gulls make a display effort, with forward thrusts of the head and wings dangling. Robins and tits make a point of bringing food to their mates; and even crows,

SPECIES FACTFILE

SONG THRUSH

Scientific name:

Turdus philomelos

Length: 23cm

Wingspan: 34cm

UK numbers:
1.1 million territories in summer

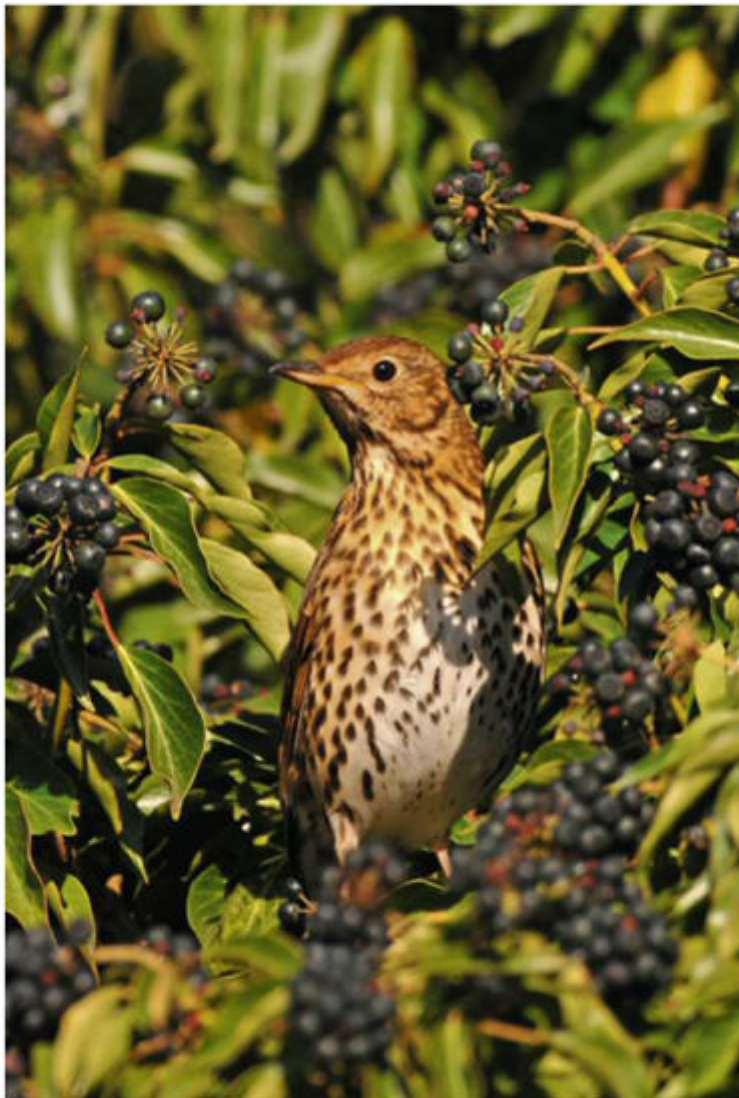
Habitat: Woods, scrub, gardens

Diet: Worms, snails, fruit

↓ ANVIL

Thrushes smash snail shells to get to the food within

“For a bird with such a loud and far-carrying voice, the Song Thrush's seasonal silence and lack of drama doesn't sit easily and doesn't quite make sense”



FLPA / Steve Young



FLPA / Roger Wilmschurst

↓ NAME THAT TUNE

It's not called a Song Thrush for nothing...

unromantically clad in leaden black, at least make a great deal of noise. Blackbirds are professional fuss-pots whose antics are like those of backstage human actors.

But what antics define Song Thrushes? Well, think about it. The answer is – well, nothing.

Even the familiar, dry tones of Birds of the Western Palearctic paint a sort of minimalist, modernist picture of this bird's pairing style. "Pair-formation is not accompanied by special display" it intones. Then it carries on: "a female may visit territory-holding males... associating with and feeding with each". Wow, big deal! That sounds like a red-hot date. Cover the children's eyes.

And then it goes on to the breathless, sap-rising

conclusion: "female returns to same territory and remains for longer". That is the sum total of passion – hanging around for a bit. This, let's face it, is no more than a couple of shades of brown on the current scale of sexual intrigue. If you're looking for an Attenborough moment of wildlife sex and violence, you'll need to ignore this particular garden bird. Of course, it doesn't mean that Song Thrushes don't do the necessary, but it does mean that they don't do it ostentatiously.

For a bird with such a loud and far-carrying voice, the Song Thrush's seasonal silence and lack of drama doesn't sit easily and doesn't quite make sense. And it also means that appreciating Song Thrushes most certainly isn't a walk in the park. 🐦



FLPA / David Tipling



Walter Soestbergen/Minden Pictures/FLPA RM



GOOD

How birds learnt to live with man – and how some are struggling to keep up with our progress. By *Ben Macdonald*



NEIGHBOURS?

← BRIDGE BUDDIES

A thriving Kittiwake colony nests on Newcastle's Tyne Bridge

↓ UP ON THE ROOF

Herring Gulls have taken to rooftop nesting

LONG BEFORE THE dawn of modern civilisation, Britain's seabird cities teemed with life – thronging with millions of inhabitants and festering with guano. And for thousands of years, all of the birds familiar to us today – Swallows, Swifts, gulls and Feral Pigeons – lived au naturel, making use of an often forbidding and inhospitable landscape. Then, slowly, as man emerged from his cave and began to build, many of our avian architects began to change their patterns of behaviour. Today, birds have colonised every aspect of our lives.

Living in Bristol, it's impossible not to be reminded of this on a daily, and nightly, basis. Home to more than 2,500 pairs of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Bristol's roofs now throng with colonies of gulls. Every multi-storey car park, warehouse and block of flats is adorned with noisy invaders, while new, enterprising pairs are now nesting between chimneys, in gutters, and even, if left long enough, on the roofs of abandoned cars. Our own terrace rings to the raucous peels of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and each season we have watched the precarious progression of chicks as they dawdle nervously on the edge of their urban cliffs, often tumbling unceremoniously into the street below. Rather fittingly, even the BBC Natural History Unit has its own pairs. Gulls in Bristol, as in many other cities, are everywhere, with a massively expanding population. They dominate every aspect of the city landscape – stealing crisps in the street, scolding from rooftops, leaving their mark on windows, cars, and pedestrians. Our cities have become theirs.

When you think about it, a mass shift from natural coastal sites to the artificial cliffs of cities and towns is truly remarkable. What's more, it's an extremely recent event. Peter Rock, who has studied Bristol's nesting gulls for decades, has described how this 'boom' took place largely from the end of the Second World War. Suddenly, with the passing of the Clean Air Act, in 1956, the burning of vast amounts of waste at rubbish dumps became illegal. As a result, new landfill sites created vast food resources for inland gulls, much in the same way as tips have fed kites across India for centuries. By 1980, 100 pairs were

nesting in Bristol. By the early 1990s, the population has risen to 1,000 pairs. As many natural island colonies, like Steep Holm – in the Bristol Channel – reached saturation, it seems that birds were swift to look elsewhere for new havens. And the roofs of Bristol – like many other cities across Britain – are, in many ways, the ultimate sanctuary for gulls. Cities have warmer temperatures than natural coastal sites; they have almost infinite availability of food, and, crucially, the roofs selected by gulls are almost entirely predator free. Excepting the occasional Peregrine strike, no Foxes, Badgers, Hedgehogs or other predators of ground-nesting birds can climb the sheer walls of the structures on which they nest. Freed from the usual constraints limiting population growth, Britain's urban gulls have boomed. By 2004, Peter Rock estimated that 100,000 pairs were nesting in the UK.

Unlike most of Britain's new avian colonists, gulls are far from welcome invaders. From plastic owls to replacement 'dummy' eggs, local councils are now making stringent efforts to control population growth. As much as I am a lover of all things avian, this does seem a sensible precaution. Gulls can cause millions of pounds of damage to buildings, provoke social disruption with endless calling and defecation, and often ruin the reputation of certain areas of a city.

We live on a shared planet, and solutions like dummy eggs allow us means of humanely limiting populations, allowing gulls to remain on top of our cities, but not in charge.

Swallow's success

Gulls are only some of the most recent avian pioneers in British history to take over the human landscape and make it their own. By the far the most successful and the oldest species to do so is also the most familiar – the Swallow. It's hard to describe quite how complete a transition Swallows have made from natural to human sites. Even in Roman times, birds were largely nesting on human structures, while the ancient Egyptians deified this bird as it nested around them in

“ Home to more than 2,500 pairs of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Bristol's roofs now throng with colonies of gulls. Every multi-storey car park, warehouse and block of flats is adorned with noisy invaders ”



Washington Imaging / Alamy



FLPA / Alamy

↑ HOUSE GUESTS

House Martin numbers are falling – more about that on page 36

→ NO WAY IN

New house-building styles have robbed Swifts of one of their preferred nest sites

Cairo. Long before Victorian times, when many pairs nested in old, wide chimneys – a practice largely abandoned today – natural sites were extremely rare. In North America, one of the more recent accounts of natural-nesting Swallows was written in 1878, when the naturalist Coues described “nests built on the ground, in little holes and crevices in the perpendicular face of a bank”. Today, however, in places like Canada, fewer than 1% of Swallows use natural sites. In Britain, it is widely believed that birds once nested preferentially in caves, but also holes in cliffs, riverbanks, sinkholes and (anticipating their later use of chimneys) the limbs of hollow trees. Today, there is just one site that reminds us of how Swallows once thrived in the time of the Wild Wood – and before. At Cresswell Crag, in Derbyshire, fossil evidence reveals that birds have nested for at least 15,000 years. They remained here until the 1990s – an amazing time-warp for a species irrevocably bound to human habitation. Like gulls, Swallows benefit in several ways from close human association. Airborne insects, generated by horses and cattle in particular, are their preferential food supply. Wooden beams, used in barns and houses for thousands of years, are rougher than many natural sites, making it easier to adhere a nest. And the interior of barns provide shelter from predators and a warmer ambient temperature than a cave. Swallows have turned their backs on the natural world. Like *Homo sapiens*, they have left caves to capitalise on buildings, livestock, warmth and shelter.

Swallows, House Martins and Swifts are three of the most familiar species to evolve, in the true sense, from natural to artificial sites. There are some magical stands of woodpecker-ridden Scots Pines in Abernethy Forest where Swifts still nest in tree cavities – as once they would have done across Britain – but, by and



FLPA / Alamy

“ Swifts could not have predicted the rise of PVC roofing any more than Dodos could have predicted the rise of the clipper ”

large, these species have made an almost complete transition to human sites.

Like all birds making that evolutionary gamble, this opens up the possibility of things going spectacularly wrong. In the past 40 years, Swifts have declined by 70%. A study of 3,400 nest sites by the RSPB revealed that 80% of these were on houses – more than half of which were built before 1919. Sitting in my garden writing this now, Swifts occasionally scream high overhead. They are coming from a nearby church – it was built in 1600. Yet my housing estate is a sterile wilderness for a species that once nested in deep hollows within trees. As much of Britain’s ancient forests gave way to an arable landscape punctuated with stone churches and, later, buildings with cracks, crevices and loose tiles, Swifts evolved to take advantage of a new landscape suitable for their needs. But no species has foresight – except, in some instances, human beings. Swifts could not have predicted the rise of PVC roofing any more than Dodos could have predicted the rise of the clipper. Committed to nest beside us, Swifts are now paying the price. We are modernising. They cannot.

Other species have, in recent decades, fared rather better as they’ve committed to our cities and other structures. Black Redstarts first colonised the bomb sites of London and Birmingham following World War II. To those who have birded in northern France, such a specialism might seem rather strange. In mainland Europe, Black Redstarts are common urban and semi-rural birds, nesting in sheds, attics, greenhouses and any sheltering structure that meets their needs. In Britain, however, they appear to have sought sites that mimic, far more closely, their truly natural habitat of cliffs and crags. Warehouses, power stations, dockyards – all provide Black Redstarts with the vertical structures around which they nest and feed.

What is strange is how particular they have become. More than 10 power stations in Britain hold nesting Black Redstarts, but village-nesting is virtually unknown, and only single pairs nest, occasionally, in quarries. Cliffs are used in Sussex and Kent, and it seems that the species is in some strange kind of transition – occupying both ancient habitat types and some of the most modern kinds of building in Britain. Black Redstarts are as transient and ephemeral as the landscapes they frequent. They vanish from cities, like Sheffield, only to re-appear when new development – or new abandonment – throws up insect-rich rubble and nest sites in abundance. It has often occurred to me, however, that some patterns do govern their movements in our country.

Strongholds for British Black Redstarts – the Thames docklands and industrial areas of East Anglia, for example – not only have the warmest, driest climates in Britain, but combine this with microclimates that

→ ROTTEN LUCK

Old wood sills, like this one in Germany, are perfect for nesting Swifts – but the rise of PVC has been disastrous

Blickwinckel / Alamy



HABITAT

A Peregrine's prey

Peregrines, of course, are another prime example of a wild species that has evolved to thrive and hunt beside us. We are all familiar with urban Peregrines. What is more startling is what they catch – and how they catch it. Recent footage obtained of Peregrines on Derby Cathedral show that Woodcock are intercepted at night in the same manner that a Spotted Flycatcher skewers an insect. A quick sally to strike the migrating bird – seen by the aid of street-lamp – and the Peregrine returns to its perch. Water Rail and Little Grebe have been some of the other extraordinary prey items on the menu. Across the Atlantic, on the Empire State Building, Peregrines now routinely intercept the nocturnal migration of passerines. Hunting from their newfound 'sky nests', the Empire State Peregrines breakfast at an altitude of 380 metres. For these masterful hunters, even our most modern buildings pose no obstacle to success.



↓ URBAN
PREDATOR

Peregrines have adapted to city living, by using cathedrals and skyscrapers in place of clifftops



HABITAT

closely resemble rocky Mediterranean habitats. They are rich in insects, sheltered, warm, and, in the eyes of a redstart, 'rocky' – filled with suitable nesting sites and places where invertebrates can flourish and find shelter too. Villages do not have the rocky aspect, nor the thermal resources, of a power station, or a sheltered cliff face on the Sussex coast. Perhaps our industrial sites mimic the rock faces of southern Europe more closely than we think.

Dependence on the human landscape, of course, extends far, far beyond our towns and cities. Hundreds, if not thousands of years ago, Corn Crakes forsook rapidly vanishing natural grasslands across Eurasia for the late-cut hay meadows of Medieval Britain. Even into the 1880s, they were among the most widespread and thriving birds of the wider countryside. Within a century, they were all but extinct, and remain so across most of industrialised Europe. Tree Sparrows once nested in tree hole colonies where vast tracts of drier marsh provided them with a year round diet of seeds and aquatic insect life. As farmland evolved, they surged into our fields and hedgerows, along with the Corn Buntings that once thrived in grasslands, and the Yellowhammers that abounded on natural heaths. Until the 1950s, they continued to increase, drawn to a profusion of insects and seeds, now sown, instead, by us. Since the seventies, we have lost a staggering 97% of our Tree Sparrows.

Having created Paradise, we have, in decades, destroyed it. Birds that attach themselves to humans do so at a risk they will never grasp. With great power, it is said, comes great responsibility. Having created the perfect homes for nature – often by accident, rarely by design – we must ensure that they remain, and evolve, like the species around us. If we do, then the Swallow's gamble will have paid off.



Dave Watts / Alamy

→ HOW THEY USED TO LIVE

There are still a few Swifts nesting in holes in trees

↓ HELPING HAND (BELOW)

Black Redstart has a habit of nesting in urban or industrial habitats – and an open-fronted nestbox can give them a hand

↓ NEXT GENERATION (BOTTOM)

Can we make changes to ensure the future success of House Martins and other species?



Natureslight / Alamy



FLPA / Alamy

“ There are some magical stands of woodpecker-ridden Scots Pines in Abernethy Forest where Swifts still nest in tree cavities ”







NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Keeping an eye on our local House Martins can make a big difference to the species as a whole, says *Ian Woodward*

↑ NO PLACE
LIKE HOME

House Martins
collecting clay for
nest building

Konrad Motte / naturepic.com

HOUSE MARTIN

LIKE ITS NEAR relative the Swallow, the return of the first House Martins is a welcome sign of spring for many, in particular those who have nests on their properties. The earliest birds usually arrive in March, with the majority of birds arriving in April. However, unlike many other summer migrants, which start competing for partners and territories immediately upon arrival, many House Martins do not appear to be in any hurry to nest. Some householders have reported that 'their' House Martins have disappeared for a couple of weeks after their initial arrival at the colony, before returning to breed. It is thought that breeding may be timed to coincide with changes in day length or insect abundance so that the first brood hatches when aerial food supplies are plentiful, usually from late May onwards.

The start of breeding also relies on a supply of mud close to the nest site, which is used by the martins to repair an old nest or construct a new one. A new nest takes 8-18 days to build, depending on the availability of mud and the urgency with which the birds are working. The choice of nest site seems to be variable, but in most cases nests are located underneath an overhang, such as under eaves or in a gable top. This may give protection from both inclement weather and predators. Previous research also suggests that a lower proportion of UK nests face the west and south, as sites facing prevailing winds or the midday sun may sometimes be avoided if surrounding structures do not provide shelter.

The habitat surrounding the nesting site is also important. As well as a supply of mud, House Martins also require a good supply of insects to feed themselves and their young. Colonies are often located close to water sources or livestock, or vegetation cover such as



Pete Cairns / naturepl.com

deciduous trees which has a high abundance of aerial insects. The need for this combination of suitable buildings and suitable foraging areas means that House Martin colonies are most likely to be found in areas with medium to low housing cover, such as villages and the edge of suburban areas. They are less likely to be found in dense urban areas, where suitable

↑ RARE OPPORTUNITY

You don't often get a chance to study the House Martin's plumage.

“The start of breeding also relies on a supply of mud close to the nest site, which is used by the martins to repair an old nest or construct a new one”

foraging opportunities may be absent, or in more rural areas, where the small numbers of buildings may provide limited choice of nesting sites. However, where suitable conditions do exist they can be found nesting in both city centres and on isolated farms. A few birds also nest on traditional inland and coastal cliff sites.

The parents share incubation and feeding duties, though the female is believed to incubate for longer periods. Although House Martins are monogamous (i.e. nesting in pairs), social interaction is complicated and both partners may take opportunities to mate with other birds 'outside the marriage'. During the egg-laying phase, the male may remain with the female while she is in the nest to reduce the chance of such

← GRAND DESIGNS

A House Martin pair on a partially constructed nest

↓ GLORIOUS MUD

A good supply of mud is essential for breeding House Martins



Fabrice Cahiez / naturepl.com

SPECIES FACTFILE

HOUSE MARTIN

Scientific name:
Delichon urbicum

Length: 12cm

Wingspan:
28cm

UK numbers:
510,000 pairs in summer

Habitat:
Countryside, towns

Diet: Flying insects



Markus Varesvuo / naturepl.com



Stephen Dalton / naturepl.com

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE PART IN THE BTO'S HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY, OR TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT THEIR WEBSITE: BTO.ORG/HOUSE-MARTINS

“The parents share incubation and feeding duties, though the female is believed to incubate for longer periods”

‘infidelity’. After the clutch has been laid, some males take the opportunity to visit other nests to look for lone females. Extra-pair copulations also occur frequently in Swallows, and the occurrence of single hybrid Swallow/House Martin nestlings in Swallow broods may have resulted from this behaviour (Randler 2006). House Martin chicks are unusual in that they fledge over an extended period, often returning to the nest to be fed and to roost for some days after first leaving the nest. After the first brood has fledged, many pairs go on to raise a second brood, with the earliest second

Where do they go in winter?

After leaving the UK, our House Martins head for Africa. Exactly where they go is a mystery. Just one British ringed House Martin has been recovered south of the Sahara. This was in Nigeria, hinting that at least some British House Martins pass through or winter in this part of Africa. It has been suggested that they may spend much of the winter high in the air, rarely coming down to lower altitudes where they can easily be caught. However, a record of a massive wintering flock of some 20-50,000 in January 2013, sent to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), shows that this is not always the case: these birds in Sierra Leone were at a fairly low height, with waves of birds also observed swooping down to a river to drink.

↑ MOUTHS TO FEED
With the right set-up, your home could host a family of House Martins



HOUSE MARTIN

broods typically fledging in August in the UK, but with some second broods still in the nest in late September or even into October. In some instances, juveniles from the first brood have been recorded helping to rear the nestlings from the second brood. This is unusual but does occur in other species (e.g. Moorhens in Europe and bluebirds in North America). Second broods are more common in the south of the UK than in the north. It is thought that this may be linked to shortening day length in the north later in the season, which gives the birds less time to provide food for their young.

Third broods have been reported, but it is difficult to be certain that these occur and that reported 'third' broods do not represent replacement clutches or late breeding attempts. Even where the same nest has been used for three successful breeding attempts in the same season, this may not provide conclusive proof that third broods occur as pairs are known to

“After leaving the UK, our House Martins head for Africa. Exactly where they go is a mystery”

occasionally move to other nests between breeding attempts. Research suggested that about 5% of broods at a site in southern Spain did raise three broods, although the breeding season at this site begins in March. As UK House Martins do not start breeding until May their opportunity to produce three broods may be limited.

Raising young can be physically demanding for the parents. Research by DM Bryant in the 1970s found that adults lose weight during the most demanding phase of nestling growth, and females that raise two broods suffer a higher mortality rate over the following winter than those that raise just one brood. Late nesting attempts occasionally meet a tragic end, with nestlings being deserted and left to starve, possibly as a result of food shortages. By continuing to attempt to feed the young, the adults may run a higher risk of lowering their body condition and dying during migration or over winter. They therefore have to make the unfortunate choice of abandoning their young in order to give themselves a better chance of surviving the winter and breeding the following year.



FLPA/Tony Hannlin

↑ EATING ON THE WING

House Martins are masters of aerial hunting – with a particular liking for aphids

How we can help

House Martin numbers are falling in the UK as a whole but are variable within its constituent parts. Declines of 28% have occurred in England over the last 10 years, but numbers have increased in Northern Ireland, are stable in Scotland after increasing in the 1990s, and trends are mixed in Wales. House Martins are difficult to survey using traditional methods, due to their habit of nesting in loose colonies which sometimes fluctuate in numbers. Over the next two years, the BTO will be carrying out survey work to attempt to find out more about our House Martins, and about some of the factors that may be causing the decline.

The first part of the survey this summer will produce a robust population estimate for the UK, and collect a small amount of information about nesting sites. Volunteers will visit 1km squares across the UK, which have been picked at random so that they can be used to produce the estimate. They will carry out two or three visits from mid-May to mid-July, to search for House Martins and their nests.

The second part of the survey, in 2016, will collect more detailed information about nesting activity and will be ideal for people who have House Martins nesting on, or close to, their homes. It will involve watching a nest, or a small number of nests, during the course of the breeding season to record what activity is observed.

↓ GET INVOLVED

You can take part in the BTO's House Martin survey to help safeguard the species



Gary K. Smith / naturepl.com



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Chew Valley Bird Fair

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Chew Valley Vortex Optics Day - 30th May. Contact Bath or Lakeside Optics for details.

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8x42

The birdwatcher's favourite. With 8x magnification the large 42mm front lens gives good light in most conditions.

RECOMMENDED

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Hawke Naturetrek £119.95
Hawke Endurance PC £179.95
Opticron Discovery £179.00
Nikon Series 5 £299.99
Viking FF £399.99



10x42

Great for walkers and those wanting long distance viewing. A steady hand is recommended for the 10x magnification.

RECOMMENDED

Hawke Naturetrek £129.95
Hawke Endurance PC £189.95
Vortex Diamondback £189.00
Nikon Series 5 £299.99
Hawke Sapphire ED £349.95
Viking FF £399.99



CHRIS SPERRING MBE
Leading Naturalist from the Hawk & Owl Trust & Radio Personality

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EYEPIECE MODULES	RRP	NOW	10% Dep.	Monthly Payment
ATX Angled Eyepiece Module	£1670	£1500	£150	£112.50
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CASES
2 Piece Stay on Case £192

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ATX/STX 25-60x65	£2340	£2103	£210.30	£157.72
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ATX/STX 30-70x95	£3130	£2814	£281.40	£211.05

ATX/STX ACCESSORIES
T15 APO Apochromat Telephoto Lens System for ATX/STX £362
DCB II Swing Adapter for ATX/STX £278
SSR II Telescope Rail £120
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85 °FL Angled c/w 20-75x Eyepiece	£2565	£1899	£190
			£45.60
			£61.90

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STRAIGHT c/w 13-40x MH3 Eyepiece RRP NOW £810.99 **£579**
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Light weight ideal for beginners. c/w 25-60x & SOC

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Hawke Sport Optics Endurance & Endurance ED Spotting Scopes

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Hawke Sport Optics Nature & Nature Trek Spotting Scopes

Nature 20-60x60 A	RRP £118.95	NOW £107.99
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Complete with a stay-on soft canvas scope cover

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12x25	RRP	£165.99	£95

Nikon

PROSTAFF

8x42	RRP	£219.99	£189.99
10x42	RRP	£239.99	£209.99
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10x32 Swarovision EL	£1630	£1467	£146.70
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10x42 Swarovision EL	£1980	£1782	£178.20
10x50 Swarovision EL	£2110	£1899	£190
12x50 Swarovision EL	£2130	£1917	£191.70

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Compact pocket binoculars for entry level.

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High performance optics for maximum performance in pocket format.

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10x56 HD	RRP	£1195	£1129
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MONARCH 5

8x42	RRP	£399.99	£349.99
10x42	RRP	£429.99	£349.99
12x42	RRP	£489.99	£399.99
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SLC 10x42	£1380	£1242	£124.20
SLC 8x56	£1830	£1649	£165
SLC 10x56	£1880	£1695	£170
SLC 15x56	£1930	£1739	£174

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Cystal-clear optics with a large field of view.

8x32	RRP	£1600	£1440
10x32	RRP	£1630	£1467
8x42	RRP	£1960	£1764
10x42	RRP	£1980	£1782
10x50	RRP	£2110	£1899
12x50	RRP	£2130	£1917

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The number one compact, lightweight binocular.

8x30	RRP	£370	£325
8x25	RRP	£350	£300
8x25	RRP	£350	£300
8x25	RRP	£350	£300
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8x25	RRP	£190	£165
8x25	RRP	£190	£165
8x25	RRP	£190	£165

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The brightest premium binoculars in the world with up to more than 95% light transmission for greater brightness and longer observation.

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10x32	RRP	£1582.99	£1359
7x42	RRP	£1531.99	£1299
8x42	RRP	£1633.99	£1399
10x42	RRP	£1735.99	£1499

Canon

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12x36	RRP	£669.99	£589
10x42L	RRP	£1949.99	£1299
15x50	RRP	£1329.99	£889
18x50	RRP	£1599.99	£1049

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Superb color and contrast, a bright & clear view and sharpest detail resolution.

Ultradivid HD 8x32	RRP	£1660	£1419
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Ultradivid HD 8x42	RRP	£1850	£1579
Ultradivid HD 10x42	RRP	£1890	£1659

DUOVID
BRILLIANT & FLEXIBLE

Allows observers to adapt readily to any situation. Offering a choice of two magnification factors.

8-12x42	RRP	£2130	£1799
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8x20	RRP	£390	£329
10x25	RRP	£420	£349

Opticon

Star Buy!

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Roof Prism Binoculars

SAVE £190

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Binoculars

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Hawke

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Premier
Lightweight, Roof Prism Binos

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8x42 - Camo	RRP	£64.95	£59.99
10x42 - Black	RRP	£69.95	£64.99
10x42 - Green	RRP	£69.95	£64.99
10x42 - Camo	RRP	£69.95	£64.99

Hawke

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8x32	RRP	£99.95	£89.99
10x32	RRP	£109.95	£99.99
8x42	RRP	£119.95	£104.99
10x42	RRP	£129.95	£109.99
10x50	RRP	£134.95	£116.99
12x50	RRP	£139.95	£121.99

Hawke

Sport Optics

Sapphire ED
Open Hinge Binoculars with dielectric prism coatings

Green or Black	RRP	£429.95	£389
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Opticon

Traveller BGA Mg
Pocket Binoculars

6x32 BGA MG	RRP	£260	£219
8x32 BGA MG	RRP	£279	£229
10x32 BGA MG	RRP	£299	£239

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Wide Angle Binoculars

Delivers an impressive wide-angle 7.5° (8x42) and 6.5° (10x42) field of view

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PHOTO
of the
MONTH

WREN
by Gary Jones



MARSH TIT
by Kieran Sayer



@birdwatchingmag: With the election campaign underway, what wildlife or environmental policies would win your vote?

@nevharvey: Not killing Badgers, or sacrificing any flora or fauna to make money.

@larry_shone: Saying a definite no to Fox hunting!

@HennyStDave: Genuine policies to support solar & wind, biodiversity action plans that work, extended marine conservation areas

@ChesterAstro: Ban building on Greenbelt

@TomMasonPhoto: Rewilding, tax on non renewable energy and a push towards green investment and green tax breaks

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 **GOLDFINCHES**
by Alan Price



 **STONECHAT**
by Mick Vogel



 **Bird Watching:**
Was there one bird or one particular experience that first got you into birdwatching?

Carolyn Pashby I don't remember a time when I didn't watch birds, but I remember being on a cliff in Pembrokeshire at the age of around nine or 10 and spotting a Chough. I shouted "a Chough!", not to anyone in particular, I was so excited. I remember there was someone near me who hadn't spotted it until I pointed it out. Made me feel very grown up.

Victoria Louise House Seeing a Cuckoo aged six and knowing what it was.

Toa Thiruvinothini I was lucky to witness the migration of a massive flock of Black Baza years ago in Malaysia (although it's an annual event). That moment charmed me into walking around with binoculars almost everywhere I go.

Conrad Ellam Seeing a Kingfisher on my way home from school 45 years ago.

Dave Soons When I was at junior school we had a Blackbird nesting in our gym stores room. They picked two children to make sure no other kids disturbed them during dinner breaks. I was one of them. Ever since then I've been hooked.

Adam Commons Sparrowhawk attack in the garden. I'm just bloodthirsty I guess!

Stuart Pike Watching the film Kes when I was about eight years old and wanting to watch birds of prey from then on.

Abhishek Mapara When I watched an owl at age seven and thought it was a flying cat!

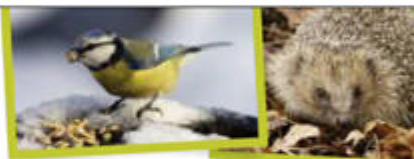
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Weasel vs heron!

I was leaving Elmley NNR to pay a quick photo trip to Oare Marshes. As I drove along the track from the farm at Elmley I noted a Grey Heron acting strangely. Through the windscreen, I could see a Weasel that was bothering the heron. The fight went on for a good few minutes, with photos being shot through the mucky windscreen. The Weasel kept biting the heron and the bird picked up and dropped the animal on several occasions – ample time for the Weasel to beat a hasty retreat.

I suspect Weasels aren't wired up for running away, so eventually the heron picked the animal up and flew to a small, nearby pond where it proceeded to drown the Weasel.

I was able to move the car, wind down the driver's window and get better quality shots in good light. The Weasel kept coming back for more, until eventually it appeared to be dead and was then swallowed.

The blood marks around the heron's beak are from Weasel bites.

Jonathan Forgham, email



City Ravens

I have seen Ravens on two or three occasions over Liverpool, but was fascinated to see a pair flying over Wavertree Technology Park recently, engaged in their fantastic tumbling courtship display.

The location is two or three miles from the city centre and the pair were headed roughly NW and towards The Mersey and I would guess ultimately, N Wales. Always worth looking up!

Don Wilson, Liverpool

THE MAGAZINE SOUNDS GREAT!

I just wanted to say what a great time I have had 'blipping' all the bird sounds in your April issue.

I've often thought that it would be perfect if bird photos in books and magazines could sing – it's a real help with ID, especially for a beginner like me – so this was literally music to my ears.

I do hope you'll be doing more like this in the future.

Mary O'Neill, email

Hunters not easy targets

I am somewhat surprised by John Hard's view that the RSPB are directing their campaigns against the "easy targets" of the Maltese hunters and aberrant gamekeepers (Your View, March 2015). There is nothing "small" about this opposition whatsoever. Both parties belong to powerful lobbies that have been repeatedly flouting the law for decades. It is not a question of wanting to continue an "age-old way of life" or "to protect their employment". Both are systematically and illegally killing protected species.

With regards the Red Kite cull at RAF Benson, the RSPB (in conjunction with Natural England and the airbase) has advised the local residents to stop feeding the kites, as this is bringing them into the vicinity of the airfield and causing airstrikes. While I don't agree with the cull, the Ministry of Defence has regrettably approached the matter as a last resort.

It is better that the RSPB works in harmony with them to ensure both the future of the Red Kites around RAF Benson and the safety of the aircrews and the surrounding human population.

Ed Hutchings, email

Youngsters get first taste of birding

I took a small group from Springfield Junior School, Ipswich, on their first birdwatching trip this afternoon, with some binoculars donated by *Bird Watching*.

Ensuring the pupils were keeping an eye out for birds on the way to Needham Lake in Suffolk, we began a list for the afternoon. After a few minutes by the lake itself, a short walk along the adjacent River Gipping saw our number of afternoon ticks increase.

Before we concluded, we visited a BTO ringing site and the boys viewed the recordings on the notice board. We logged 17 different species in the short, hour-long visit to Needham before heading back to school.

The highlight was a close-up view of a male Bullfinch, spotted in the trees above our heads as we walked back to the car park.

Mark Brewster, email



Q & A

This month's experts

Matt and Mike are joined this month by one of our go-to rare bird ID gurus



Brian Stone, keen patch birder and all-round wildlife clever clogs

There's not much Brian doesn't know about British nature, and he's our go-to guy when it comes to bugs and the like.

WHAT IS THIS WADER?

Q Can you please identify the bird in the attached photos?

Neil Bourdeaux, via email

A Waders can be tricky to identify in the field, and taking photos of them (or any bird you can't identify, for that matter) for later examination is never a bad idea.

This picture shows a fine example of the Common Sandpiper. It differs from the rather similar looking Green Sandpiper by generally being lighter in colour on its upperparts, and lacking the fine speckling on the back of the Green.

The Common Sandpiper is also slightly smaller than the Green, with shorter legs and bill. The biggest distinguishing feature, however, is that white gap between the wing and the



breast, which you won't see on a Green. Both birds are seen in similar habitats when on passage, although Commons are more often found on rocky shores and along streams.

What is this Redshank eating?

Q In February, a friend and I visited Deeside Nature Reserve, Connah's Quay, where, among other species, we saw and photographed both Redshank and Spotted Redshank. One of the Redshanks, feeding along the edge of a pool, found and swallowed a food item, which proved to be a green caterpillar. I would appreciate any help you can give concerning the ID of this caterpillar, which I wouldn't have expected to see at this time of the year. Do you consider it usual for Redshanks to take such items during winter? We also noted that the back of one of the Redshanks was much more marked than the one that ate the caterpillar; is this of any significance?

John Drakeley, via email

A We passed this creepy-crawly query on to our insect expert Brian Stone, who tells us that it's not unusual to see insect larvae in the UK in February, despite the temperatures.

Brian says "many species of Lepidoptera overwinter as larvae, often fully grown and buried a little," making excellent and convenient food for a Redshank at any time of year.

Brian further tells us that although he can't see enough on the pictures to give a definite ID on the larva, it looks like it could be that of the Angle Shades moth.

As for the difference in plumage between the Redshanks, we're putting it down to the birds being at different stages of the moult into their breeding plumage.



Are swan threesomes common?

Q I took these photos in March at Tehidy Country Park in Cornwall. I thought it seemed very unusual for three swans to be involved in mating. Is it unusual, as I have never seen it before.

Kevin Bowers, via email

A You're right Kevin; to have three Mute Swans mating together is very unusual behaviour. Although threesomes do occur relatively often

among small birds, we'd expect at least one of your swans to be violently taking exception to the presence of the third! Mute Swans tend to mate for life, and although 'adultery' isn't unheard of, it's usually a private affair.

This is the first time we've personally seen this among Mute Swans, but birds are complex creatures, and a wide variety of non-typical behaviours among many species have been reported.



WADER WAR!

Q I was at Rutland Water in late February and saw Curlew behave in a way I've not seen before. Five Curlew were facing into the wind when a pair of Shelduck landed very close. One Curlew reacted by turning towards the Shelduck and taking a step towards them. It bent its neck back into its shoulders so the bill point was aimed directly at the Shelduck. This is the first time I've seen aggressive, threatening behaviour directed towards a non-aggressive species. It clearly worked as the offending duck hastily retreated. Is this a recognised behaviour?

Robin Dobson, via email

A On the face of it this does indeed seem to be rather strange behaviour for Curlew. Shelduck don't really compete for food with these large waders, nor would they be seen as a predatory threat either.

That being said, Curlew, along with many other bird species, can become aggressive when their nest sites are approached, even by something harmless, especially if the approach is sudden or unexpected.

JARGON BUSTER ???

FLYWAY

This is a term you're probably hearing a lot at this time of year, when migration is in full swing.

Broadly speaking, a flyway is a route followed by large numbers of migrating birds – think of the route up through North Africa, across the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain, then up through France, or through Israel (where Eilat has become a top spring destination for watching migrants). That doesn't mean all birds use a specific flyway – individuals may wander – just that most do.

Flyways can also be seen on a more local level – river valleys, for example, attract migrating birds because higher ground takes more effort to fly over, and tends to get worse weather, and because rivers provide a landmark to navigate by.

Major roads can also play a similar role – birds can easily follow them (even at night), and the gravel pits left over from their construction often provide good habitat to stop off at, so a flyway doesn't have to be a 100% natural phenomenon.

TUFTY POCHARD

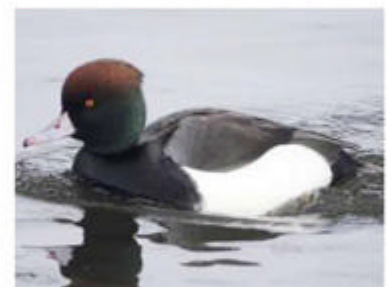
Q I spotted this little fella on one of the lakes at Bushey Park, London. I know that ducks often hybridise. After looking at this guy, it seems a perfect mix of Tufted Duck and Red-crested Pochard – the overall Tuftie colours mixed with the red of the pochard coming through on the crown, eye and bill. My Collins Bird Guide displays multiple possible hybrid combinations but none of them look anything like this. I would love to know if this is a common hybridisation, or even the right combination of ducks.

Ali B, via email

A As you say, duck hybrids are, as hybrids go, quite common, and the various pochard species seem far more willing to mate with other species than do other ducks. Being closely related, there's no reason at all that we can think of

that would prevent a Tufted Duck and a Red-crested Pochard mating and producing a brood, so while we wouldn't say it was a common occurrence, it's not beyond the bounds of credibility.

This bird definitely seems to be showing the characteristics you could reasonably expect from such a mating, so we're prepared to go along with your conclusion. And, we must add, it's a very handsome looking bird!



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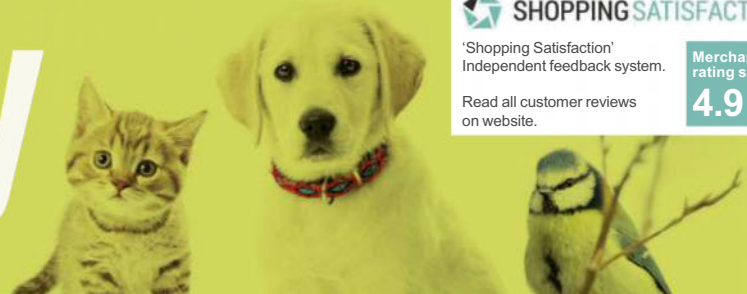
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MAY SEES THE arrival of our last summer visitors, so there's probably no busier time of year at most birdwatching locations. Our sites this issue take in everything from remote island locations to reserves in the heart of London, but they have one thing in common – they have a habit of turning up great birds of all sorts. Remember, we love to hear how you fared, so enjoy your birding, then please tell us all about exactly what you saw by emailing us at birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

Highlights

- ◆ Look for migrants, plus soaring raptors and woodland songsters at Dunkery Beacon
- ◆ Discover one of Britain's great spectacles – nesting Manx Shearwaters on Skokholm
- ◆ Find all sorts of great birds in a suburban setting at Totteridge Fields LWT

Dunkery Beacon (site 10)

Where to watch birds this May

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Orkney
Hobister | 6 Hertfordshire
Ashridge |
| 2 Highland
Rohay Hills | 7 Pembrokeshire
Skokholm |
| 3 Lincolnshire
Chowder Ness | 8 Greater London
Totteridge Fields LWT |
| 4 Shropshire
Shirlett High Park | 9 Kent
Westbere Marshes |
| 5 Norfolk
Berney Marshes RSPB | 10 Somerset
Dunkery Beacon |



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SITE 1 ORKNEY

MAX
DISTANCE:
2 MILES

John Miles



HOBISTER

Seabird colonies, breeding waders, and hunting raptors

THIS IS ONE of the prized RSPB sites on the island. The moor was once cleared by Bronze Age man, with an axe head found in the peat extraction, and several burial mounds have been found. The locals enjoy the area as well, as peat is extracted for making whisky!

I had a wonderful start to my visit to this site with a pair of Great Skuas displaying high in the sky, probably from the breeding pairs on Hoy. Hen Harriers were hunting around the toilet block on Waulkmill Bay and a Merlin flashed by chasing a Rock Pipit, making a change from Meadow Pipits!

This circular walk can add so many species as the moor is a bit restricted at times of the year. Look out for both Twite and Linnets. Sky Larks mob the Short-eared Owls hunting over the moor while the harriers are gifted with agricultural land over the road to hunt as well as the Loch of Kirbister. The Curlew come here to breed fattening up on the agricultural land next door, while both Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover nest around



Black Guillemot

Andrew Wainwright / Aamy

the bay. Fulmars use the low cliffs in the bay to breed while Black Guillemots search out the cracks in the cliffs to lay their two eggs.

Red-throated Divers can use the bay for fishing, sliding from their nest and flying the short distance to the bay. Autumn waders in the bay can include Turnstone, Dunlin and Sanderling. Winter can see Long-tailed Duck, Slavonian Grebe and Great Northern Diver drifting in from Scapa Flow at high tide.

John Miles

SITE GUIDE

Grid ref: HY 395 069

Postcode: KW17 2RA

How to get there: The reserve is off the A964 3.5 miles west of Kirkwall and 7 miles from Stromness.

Where to park: The main car-parking area is for four cars off the A964 and three cars at the viewpoint down towards Waulkmill Bay.

Distance and time: This circular walk covers two miles. You should give yourself two hours to enjoy the area.

Terrain: This is a walk along rough tracks, minor road and main road. Please watch out for traffic on the main road. There are ample areas to step into the side.

Facilities: None, but everything you need in Kirkwall or Stromness.

Public transport: Buses run along the A964 five times per day and will stop at either of the two main access points. 01856 872856 for local timetables. For national travelinescotland.com

Sites nearby: Loch of Kirbister, Ward Hill, Swanbister Bay.

Organisations: RSPB, 01856 850176, orkney@rspb.org.uk

The SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian, EH32 0PY.

Club contact: SOC Orkney, Colin Corse, Garrisdale, Lynnpark Road, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1SL, 01856 874484.

RSPB members group, Dick Matson, 01856 751426.

p.wilson410@btinternet.com

County recorder: Jim Williams, jim@geniefea.freeserve.co.uk

Maps: OS Explorer 461, Landranger 6.

EXPERT TIP

Both Common and Grey Seals can be found here.



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1 Park in the small car park just off the A964. Scan the area to see if any raptors are flying.

2 Follow the track downhill taking the right turn away from the peat works.

3 Walk down to the track above Waulkmill Bay checking the gorse for Stonechats and Linnets.

4 Walk back towards the main road checking for divers, auks and gulls in the bay.

5 To finish the circular walk you use the A964 making sure you know when the traffic is coming as this road is quite fast.

SITE 2 HIGHLAND

MAX
DISTANCE:
3 MILES



John Miles

ROHAY HILLS

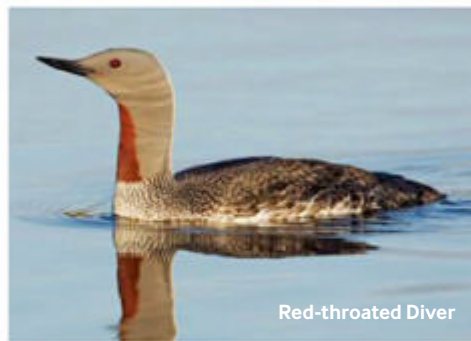
Wonderful woodland birds, plus fine raptors

GIVEN MANY OF you will be on the way to Mull by the Lochaline ferry, this reserve is en route and adds a nice mixed habitat on your holiday. This large area is a Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserve in conjunction with the Ardtornish Estate. It has been a reserve since 1975 and is a wild, remote area in the peninsula of Morvern.

It is 4,358 acres of moorland, bogs, mountains, woods and lochs. This walk concentrates on a small part of the reserve and adds some great landscape and of course, some great wildlife.

The oak woodland has a mixed bag, with plenty of Wood Warblers and brilliant Redstarts to add to the colour, along with Siskin, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Woodcock.

Raptors are always worth looking for with Buzzards, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel, but higher up are the potential eagles with a displaying Golden seen chasing away three White-tailed in 2014. Merlin and Peregrine use the area also.



Bl. Coester / Aamy

Red-throated Diver

Walking down by the river, look for Dippers and Grey Wagtail. Moving onto the loch look out for divers, with Red-throated nesting up in the lochans and feeding down here. Great Northern Divers use the area in winter and can linger even into May. Look out for Common Sandpiper and you might be lucky to find a nice summer plumaged Greenshank or Dunlin feeding here.

John Miles

SITE GUIDE

- Grid ref:** NM 703 506
- Postcode:** PA34 5XB
- How to get there:** Just off the A884 Lochaline -Strontian road.
- Where to park:** There is an informal car parking area at Acharn (grid ref: NM 703 506).
- Distance and time:** From here at the southern edge of the reserve a track leads north -east through the oak woodland of Gleann Dubh, and a mile-long footpath runs north-west from the bridge over the Black Water river to Arienas Point at NM 68512 on the north-eastern shore of Loch Arienas. Give yourself 2-3 hours.
- Terrain:** Generally rough and wet. If you intend to cover the upper slopes please inform the Ardtornish Estate Office on 01967 421288) or the Scottish Wildlife Trust Northern Regional Office (01463 714746) during office hours.
- Facilities:** None on site, but everything you need in Lochaline and Strontian.
- Public transport:** shielbuses.co.uk/timetable02.html or check Traveline Scotland, 0871 200 2233
- Sites nearby:** Lochaline, Gleann Geal, Strontian.
- Organisations:** Scottish Wildlife Trust, Glakemore, North Kessock, IV1 3UD, 01463 811497. The SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian, EH32 0PY, Scotland.
- Club contact:** the-soc.org.uk/whats-on/local-branches-2/highland
- Secretary:** Kathy Boniface, Alt Dubh, North End, Tomatin, IV13 7YP, 01808 511740.
- County recorder:** Peter Gordon, gordon890@btinternet.com
- Maps:** OS Explorer 383, Landranger 40.

EXPERT TIP

The area is well known for its butterflies (16 species) and dragonflies (11 species), not to mention alpine plants higher up the glens.

- 1** Park in the small car park off the A884 and view the oak woodland around you. A track takes you deeper into the woodland but return for the walk down to Loch Arienas unless you are heading higher into the hills.
- 2** Walk down to the bridge and check for Dipper and Grey Wagtail around the river. Goosander and Common Sandpiper are more likely to be around in summer.
- 3** Approaching the loch check out for raptors circling here as both eagles have been found in the area along with Buzzards and Sparrowhawks.
- 4** A boggy track takes you down to Arienas Point where you can check for divers and mergansers on the loch. Always look out for the tell-tale signs of Otter.



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SITE 3 LINCOLNSHIRE

MAX
DISTANCE:
3 MILES

Graham Catley



CHOWDER NESS

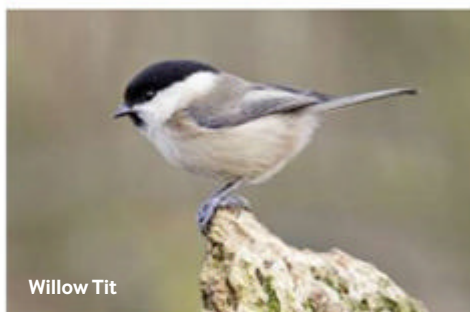
A combination of saltmarsh, inter-tidal and clay pits

THIS WALK TAKES in a variety of habitats, from reedbeds and scrub to estuarine mudflats and arable fields, plus a chalk quarry.

From Ness Farm car park cross the grass field that leads to Ness hide and take time to have scan for wildfowl and breeding birds in the reedbeds; search the reed edges for Bitterns that often perch straight across from the hide. Listen for the squeal of Water Rails and the explosive song of Cetti's Warbler.

Passing through the small copse there are two more hides overlooking Target Lake and a new scrape. Reaching the Humber embankment scan the estuary for waterfowl; in spring tern passage can be obvious with birds moving east after northerly winds and Common Scoters sometimes linger. Walking round Chowder Ness waders and wildfowl can be seen on the mudflats. The path follows the edge of the estuary then turns inland up the edge of the Wolds by a deep quarry with woodland good for warblers in spring.

Turning back west across the arable fields



Willow Tit

Graham Catley

sheep grazed annual crops often have Meadow Pipits, wagtails and a singing Corn Bunting has been regular. Turning left again down the side of another quarry a good variety of passerines include singing Yellowhammers and Whitethroats with Sky Larks aloft and Tree Sparrows possible. The new Blow Wells pits at the bottom of the hill are a good spot to scan for waterfowl and feeding Swifts, Swallows and Sand Martins.

Graham Catley

SITE GUIDE

Grid ref: TA 003 228.

Postcode: DN18 5RG.

How to get there: Turn off the A15 at interchange south of Humber Bridge and take A1077 west towards Scunthorpe, turn right after 500m and follow Gravel Pit road for 1.5kms; turn left and car park is on right after 350m. Where to park: Far Ings old Centre car park at Ness farm TA 012 229.

Distance and time: A total of 4.5km takes about an hour to 90 minutes.

Terrain: Mixture of grass covered hardcore paths but footpaths across fields can be muddy in wet weather.

Accessibility: Open all hours, some muddy areas.

Facilities: Toilets at Ness End Farm open all year; hides at Far Ings NNR open all year.

Public transport: Railway station and Bus terminal at Barton with regular buses to and from Scunthorpe and Hull and trains to Grimsby.

Sites nearby: Waters' Edge CP, The Grues, Alkborough Flats.

Club contact: Lincolnshire Bird Club, chairman@lincsbirdclub.co.uk; Membership secretary, michael@michaelharrison1.wanadoo.co.uk

Website: lincsbirdclub.co.uk

County recorder: John Clarkson, recorder_north@lincsbirdclub.co.uk

Maps: OS Explorer 281, OS Landranger 112.

EXPERT TIP

Always keep an eye up for visible migration of species passing westwards up the Humber and over the adjacent pits; birds always move west even in spring.

1 Ness hide offers views of open water and reedbeds that produce Gadwall, Shoveler, Coot, Tufted Duck, Pochard and with luck Bittern and Marsh Harrier. In summer Reed and Sedge Warblers sing and Cetti's Warblers are year round residents.

2 Chowder Ness managed realignment site offers views of Lapwing and Golden Plover with Shelduck, Curlew, Wigeon and Teal in winter. The expanding reedbeds sometimes hold Bearded Tits in autumn when Rock Pipits are frequent.

3 The chalk quarry has a thriving breeding colony of Jackdaws and Stock Doves with warblers in the scrub, Whitethroats breed in the field hedges along with Yellowhammers and Buzzards are often in the air.

4 Check the grass field edges for spring migrants like Ring Ouzel and Wheatear; the new pits have breeding Common Terns and waterfowl with a winter flock of Wigeon. The hedgerow that runs up to the Blow Wells is often good for Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcaps and Willow Tits with hirundines feeding over the water; in autumn watch for Hobbies feeding on dragonflies.



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SITE 4 SHROPSHIRE

MAX
 DISTANCE:
 5 MILES



Bernard Jones

SHIRLETT HIGH PARK

A woodland walk on the edge of the Jack Mytton Way

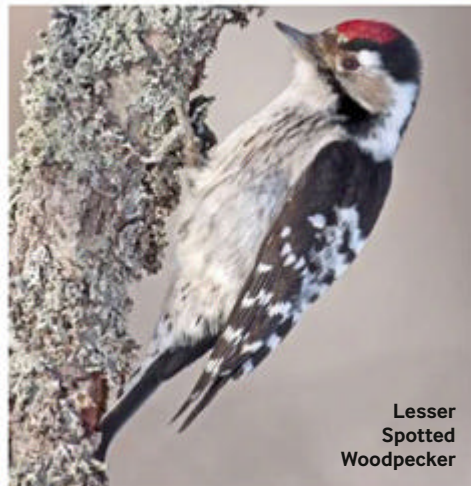
A COUPLE OF MILES from the famous Much Wenlock, where the modern Olympic Games started, is Shirlett Common and High Park. This is a hilly and wooded area with the Jack Mytton Way running between the two areas of woodland and there are plenty of optional tracks depending on your available time.

There are open areas too and some pools to expand the numbers of possible birds.

The access to the woods is rather limited by private ownership but keep to the public paths, byways and, of course, the Jack Mytton Way and you will see plenty and enjoy this walk.

Birds of prey are seen here and the Red Kite is moving more into Shropshire so you may be lucky if you see one in the more open areas. You'll certainly see Buzzard and Sparrowhawk and even Peregrine has been recorded in the area. A Kestrel hovering is very likely too.

The usual woodland birds will be around with all three woodpeckers likely and warblers



FLBA / Arny

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

and hedgerow birds. Depending on the time of day you may see Little and/or Tawny Owl and Sky Lark in the open areas with those visiting Swifts darting around the sky.

Bernard Jones

SITE GUIDE

- Grid ref:** SJ 668 977
- Postcode:** WA3 5PA
- How to get there:** From Much Wenlock take the B4376 towards Broseley then the minor road to the village of Barrow.
- Where to park:** Park in Barrow village near the church, grid ref: SJ 658 001.
- Distance and time:** About 4-5 miles with some optional tracks so allow three hours or so.
- Terrain:** Undulating. Some walking on minor roads. Muddy after wet weather.
- Accessibility:** Very limited disabled access ie on the minor roads only. Dogs allowed under control.
- Facilities:** None on site, but all in Much Wenlock.
- Public transport:** Nearest railway station is Telford, National Rail Enquiries 08457 700 240. For bus services call Traveline 08712 002 233.
- Sites nearby:** *Go Birdings:* Chelmarsh (February 2006), Ironbridge Gorge (November 2007), Wenlock Edge (February 2008), The Wrekin (May 2008) and Coalport (Autumn 2014).
- Club contact:** Shropshire Ornithological Society, tel: 01743 761 507, shropshirebirds.com
- County recorder:** Martyn Owen, 34 Peacock Hill, Alveley, Shropshire WV15 6JX, 01746 780336, soscountyrecorder@gmail.com
- Maps:** OS Explorer 217, 218 & 242, OS Landranger 138.

EXPERT TIP

Early visits are best for small birds, but later in the day for soaring raptors



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- 1** First check the church and churchyard for Swallow, House Martin, Blackbird, Robin and House Sparrow (and possible Tree Sparrow).
- 2** As you enter the Jack Mytton Way it's an open area with good hedgerows and single trees with Yellowhammer, Long-tailed Tit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Corn Bunting. Wheatear have been seen in the area.
- 3** Wandering along through the woodland check for Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Spotted Flycatcher, Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Chiffchaff, Coal, Blue and Great Tits or a Wood Warbler.
- 4** Crossing the pool you should see Mallard and Moorhen and possible Reed Bunting.
- 5** Lastly a variety of woods, hedges and fields where you may see Willow Warbler, Redstart, Pheasant and always the possibility of a Raven overhead. Remember to check the pines for that lovely little Goldcrest.

SITE 5 NORFOLK

MAX DISTANCE: 9 MILES

Matthew Merritt



BERNEY MARSHES PSPB

Breeding waders amid a scenic Broadland landscape

IF THE SIZE of Breydon Water is a bit too daunting on your first visit to this part of Norfolk, then Berney Marshes has plenty to offer, on a much more manageable scale.

Unusually, it can only be accessed by train (it has its own station), footpath and boat, and that distance from roads contributes to a feeling that you're back in the old-fashioned Broadland landscape.

In spring, the main attractions are the breeding Lapwings, and the Redshanks that display over the wet meadows, and raise their young there. Expect them to be as nervous as ever, and take care not to disturb them.

The wet meadows are also a good place to look for Yellow Wagtails, and if you're around late in the day hunting Barn Owls are always a distinct possibility. Garganey are the highlight among the wildfowl species.

From the embankment, next to the river, scan the wide open skies for raptors, especially Marsh Harriers, and along the water for waders and wildfowl – the muddy banks can attract the likes of more



ImageBROKER / Arny

Redshank

Redshanks, Avocet, or passing Curlews, especially during spring and autumn.

Sedge Warblers and Reed Warblers are also fairly plentiful, plus Cetti's.

In winter, large numbers of Lapwings are joined by Golden Plovers, while Pink-footed Geese and Wigeon are also usually present in their thousands. Hen Harriers are worth checking for at such times, along with possible Peregrine and Merlin.

Matt Merritt

SITE GUIDE

Grid ref: TG 465 050

Postcode: NR30 1SB.

How to get there: By train, get off at the Berney Arms station, and follow the footpath signs south-east. There are moorings for boats alongside the Berney Arms windmill, and you can walk to the reserve from Great Yarmouth along the north side of Breydon Water, or from Halvergate and Reedham.

Where to park: Not applicable.

Distance and time: Not much more than a mile at the reserve, but to walk to it is at least 3.75 miles each way, so expect about nine miles in total.

Terrain: The paths can be very wet, muddy and slippery in winter or after prolonged bad weather, but generally very flat, except for the short but steep climb up onto the embankment.

Accessibility: The above factors make this a difficult reserve for wheelchair-users. Open all hours, with dogs only allowed on footpaths and bridleways.

Facilities: None, except for a screened viewing platform – there is a nearby pub, the Berney Arms, but you need top check ahead for opening times.

Public transport: Trains run here on the Norwich-Great Yarmouth line – check connections on the National Rail Enquiries website – nationalrail.co.uk – or call 08457 484950.

Sites nearby: *Go Birdings:* Burgh Castle (November 2001), Great Yarmouth (October 2000), Mid-Yare Marshes (April 2003).

Organisations: RSPB Berney Marshes and Breydon Water, 01493 700645, berney.marshes@rspb.org.uk

Club contact: Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society, The Secretary, 22 Springfield Close, Weybourne, Holt, NR25 7IB, nnsns.org.uk

County recorder: Chris Allen, birdrecorder@nnsns.org.uk

Maps: OS Explorer OL40, OS Landranger 134.

EXPERT TIP

Look for Hares on a springtime visit, while Chinese Water Deer and Otter can also be present

1 The area around the embankment has bushes and scrub – look and listen here for small passerines, including Sedge Warbler. It's also a good vantage point to look for raptors such as Marsh Harrier, and goose and swan flocks in winter.

2 The banks of the Yare attract Redshanks at most times of year, plus other waders such as Avocet and Curlew outside summer.

3 The grassy meadows have breeding Lapwings and Redshanks - be careful to stay on the paths at all times, viewing from a distance. Look for Yellow Wagtails, too.



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MAY ID CHALLENGE

FLYING WADERS



THIS MONTH'S ID Challenge is all about waders in flight. For some birdwatchers, waders represent the best of birding – varied, characterful, sometimes colourful, often exhibiting fascinating behaviours. For others, they are the epitome of a birding nightmare, hard to identify, boring, sleeping brown jobs, which all look the same. Let us put this to the test. Here are six waders which are either in flight or about to be in flight. All you have to do is put a name to them. Then, turn the page to see the answers and explanations of how we reached these conclusions. As always, there should be enough clues in these photographs to be able to identify each bird, all of which are regular in the UK.

BIRD 1



FLPA / Alamy



WHAT AM I?

BIRD 2



FLPA / Alamy



WHAT AM I?

BIRD 3

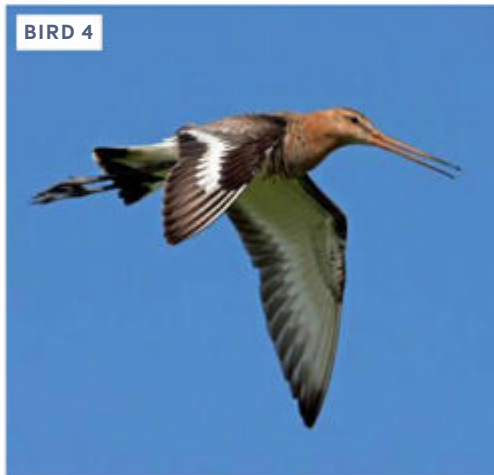


Robin Chittenden / Alamy



WHAT AM I?

BIRD 4



Arterra Picture Library / Alamy



WHAT AM I?

BIRD 5

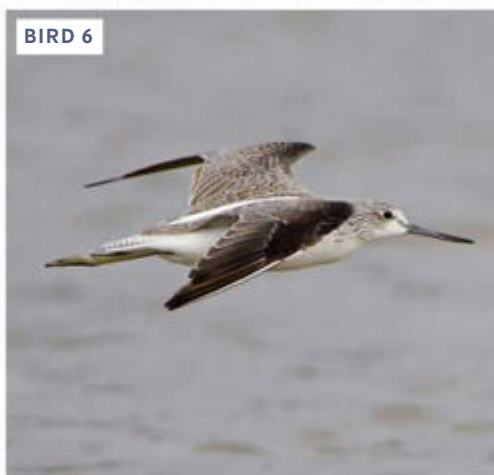


FLPA / David Tipling



WHAT AM I?

BIRD 6



FLPA / Alamy



WHAT AM I?

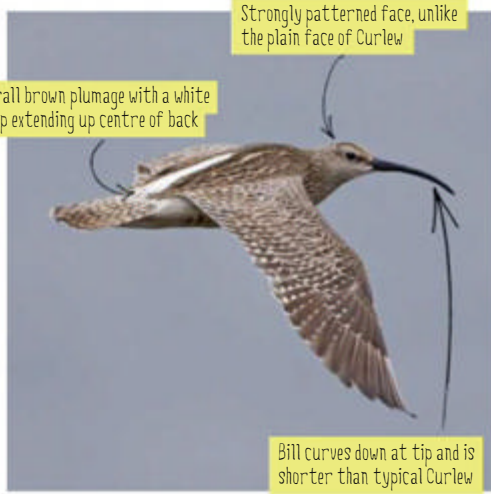
CHALLENGE



MAY ID CHALLENGE

FLYING WADERS

How many did you get?



Strongly patterned face, unlike the plain face of Curlew

Overall brown plumage with a white rump extending up centre of back

Bill curves down at tip and is shorter than typical Curlew

FLPA / A amy

BIRD 1

The long thin bill clearly shows that this is a wader, and a brown one at that, but what else can we see in this photograph to identify this essentially 'drab' bird? The first thing to note (apart from that bill) is that the head is quite small compared to the rest of the bird, implying it is quite a large wader. Otherwise (again apart from that bill), the structure is pretty 'vanilla' for a wading bird. If you look very closely indeed, you may see what appears to be the claws of the toes just about reaching the tail tip (though not protruding beyond). Plumage-wise, it is largely brown, spotted with white and streaked on the back, with a barred brown tail. The wings lack any wing bar. There is a striking white rump which reaches up the central back to the mantle. The visible underparts are also white, grading to what appears to be some heavy dark barring or scalloping. The final plumage clues come around the head. There is a dark brown line in front of the eye (lores) extending as an eyestripe beyond. Above it is a clearly defined pale supercilium (eyebrow) and above that a dark brown lateral crown stripe bordering what appears to be a central pale crown stripe. The combination of size, nondescript streaked brown plumage, white undertail and down-curved bill all point to this being one of the curlew species. Now it is time to examine the bill: it appears relatively short (too short for a Curlew), and a bit kinked down at the tip. This combined with that complex striped head pattern lead this to being a **Whimbrel**. They pass through the country in late April and May heading to breed in the north.

BIRD 2

There is an extra challenge with this bird, as it has been photographed halfway between flying and wading. But it does mean you get a better look at its legs than a flying bird. They are notably yellow and (especially looking at the rear of the two) look like they will be long enough for the feet to extend beyond the tail in full flight. Structurally, the head looks moderate in relative size (not small like the Whimbrel which is Bird 1), implying it is a smallish wader. The bill is straight or very slightly upturned and about the same length as the head (ie quite short for a wader). The neat proportions and bill shape/length suggest that this is a *Tringa* sandpiper, rather than one of the rounded, dumpy, often down-curved-billed sandpipers of the genus *Calidris*. The genus *Tringa* includes the redshanks, Greenshanks, Wood and Green and marsh Sandpipers, as well as the American yellowlegs species. This bird has yellow legs (like a yellowlegs or possibly a Greenshank or Green Sandpiper), so the redshanks can be ruled out (though juvenile Redshanks have paler orangey legs). The short, straight bill rules out Greenshank, and is also too short for either yellowlegs, too thick for Marsh Sandpiper. So we are left with Green and Wood Sandpiper. Green Sandpipers, despite the name, are almost black and white with particularly dark underwings. But this bird has largely pale underwings. It also has the bold long pale supercilium (eyebrow) and dark cap of Wood Sandpiper as well as the brown plumage and square white rump. That's because it is a **Wood Sandpiper**.



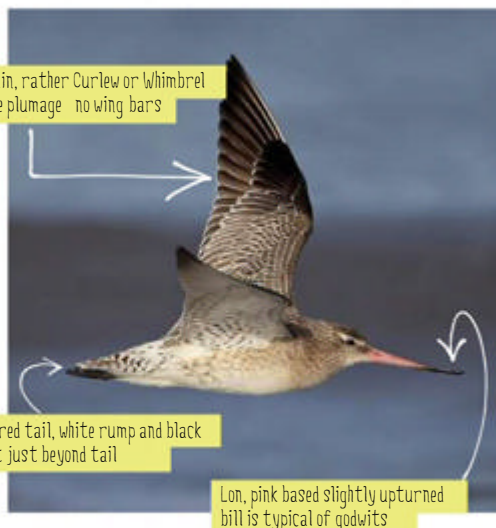
Obvious pale supercilium and short straight bill

Pale, not blackish, underwing

White rump just showing here

Longish yellow legs narrow it down to a few species

FLPA / A amy



Plain, rather Curlew or Whimbrel like plumage no wing bars

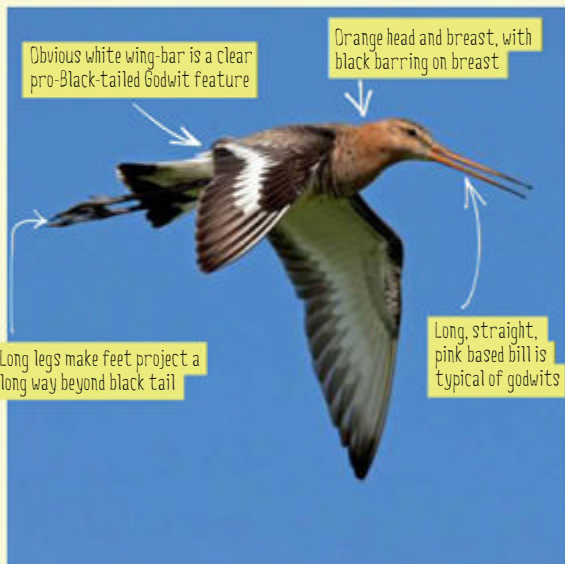
Barred tail, white rump and black feet just beyond tail

Long, pink based slightly upturned bill is typical of godwits

Robin Chittenden / A amy

BIRD 3

After a quick look at this photo, you may be thinking this wader looks very similar to Bird 1, apart from the long, almost straight, pink-based bill. If you were thinking this, you are thinking along the right lines. The head is relatively small implying a larger wader, the body and wings are streaked brown, the latter lacking proper wing-bars, and the tail appears barred with a white rump just showing. Even the face pattern looks similar to Bird 1, with a pale supercilium (stripe above the eye) contrasting with what appears to be a darker cap and dark stripe through the eye. So, this is a plain and streaky large wader with a Curlew-like plumage, but without the characteristic down-curved bill of a Curlew. We are left with a few possibilities among British birds (ie white-rumped largish waders with a long, slightly upturned bill and streaked plumage, lacking wing-bars). These possibilities include Greenshank and the very rare Greater Yellowlegs from North America and perhaps the Spotted Redshank. Greenshank is usually a greyer bird, it never has a pink-based bill and the feet are pale green, not black (as here). The same arguments could be made about the essentially brown Greater Yellowlegs, apart from the feet are yellow. Spotted Redshanks out of their black summer plumage are essentially pale grey and white, not brown and streaked (and juveniles are heavily barred brown on the underparts). They also have long red legs and lack the large amount of pinof this bird. We are left with **Bar-tailed Godwit**, almost certainly a female (the longer-billed gender). Even if you can't see the bill, look at the paler body and more contrasting wing.



Obvious white wing-bar is a clear pro-Black-tailed Godwit feature

Orange head and breast, with black barring on breast

Long legs make feet project a long way beyond black tail

Long, straight, pink based bill is typical of godwits

Alamy Picture Library/ Alamy

BIRD 4

This wader seems to be calling, perhaps even in display flight, rather than flying by, as most of the other mystery species are, which means it is in a slightly unusual 'pose'. But there is still plenty to go on to identify it. Like Birds 1 and 3 it is small-headed, implying larger size. It also has a strikingly long, orange-based, straight bill, a bit like that of Bird 3. Unlike that bird, though, the black feet project a long way beyond the tail. Also very striking, and quite unlike the other challenge waders, there is a striking white wing bar (on the upper wing) contrasting with the blackish rest of the wing. The underwing is clean white with a dark leading edge and trailing edge. The front end of the bird is richly brick orange with a well defined pale stripe above the eye and clear black barring on the breast. The tail base is white, contrasting with what appears to be a black termination. Even the apparent size and orange plumage, combined with that very long bill should point you to a godwit species. Male Bar-tailed Godwit is a rich brick colour, but lacks the white wing-bar, barring on the breast, black tail and white lower belly. This bird can only be a **Black-tailed Godwit** in breeding plumage, almost certainly a male. Two subspecies of Black-tailed Godwit occur in the UK. On passage we see mainly Icelandic race birds, and some 'European' birds, a very few of which breed. The latter are longer legged, slightly paler and more likely to have barring on the upper chest, like this bird, which was probably in display flight, or warning off an intruder with its 'godwit' call.

BIRD 5

This wader is flying away from us, which is making identification a bit more tricky than a side-on bird, but birds do not always behave just as you want them to. Again, the head (from what we can see of it) appears fairly small relative to the rest of the bird, implying it is a decent medium size and not a tiddler. And even from this angle, the bill appears long, narrow and straight, perhaps with a tiny 'droop' at the very tip. With respect to plumage, what do we have to go on? At first glance, despite the bright blue background, the bird to be in heavy shadow, making it look almost black. But, hang on, the back is sporting a bright white triangle, contrasting against the rest of the bird. So, this is not a bird in shadow, but a genuinely black, at least at the front end, and on the bit of flank we can see under the closer wing. The wings and tail are also very dark, almost black, liberally sprinkled with white spots and bars, with a finely barred lower rump. There is no wing-bar to speak of. The final clue comes with the feet, which are black and, though drooping slightly, seem to protrude beyond the tail. Luckily, there is only one black, medium-sized, straight-billed wader with a lozenge or triangle of white on its back, the **Spotted Redshank**. These elegant birds are only black for a short window in the breeding season, and this bird is as black as they get in this country, on spring passage. When in peak breeding condition, even the shanks are no longer red, but turn black, as here (perhaps it should be Spotted Blackshank). Look very closely and you can just make out the red base to the lower mandible (perhaps the last vestige of 'colour'), and even the white eyering of a Spotted Redshank ready for the breeding grounds.



Most significant white area is triangle, or lozenge, of upper rump and back

Straight, thin, black bill

Overall, a very dark, almost black bird, with black plumage and black legs

FLPA/ David Tipling



Cold grey upperparts with no wing bars. White in centre of back

Blue grey and black, almost straight bill

Long greenish legs and feet, projecting beyond tail

FLPA/ Alamy

BIRD 6

For the final bird, we are at least back to a side-on wader flying by. Once again, the head is relatively small (again implying a decent-sized wader). The bill is long (but not godwit long) and straight or slightly upturned and the feet protrude comfortably beyond the tail. Also, like several of the other medium to large waders featured in this month's ID Challenge, this bird has wings which lack an obvious wing bar and white rump and white extending along up the back. The upperpart colour is cold, grey and black with white fringing. The underparts are clean white, the tail white with fine dark barring. The face is pale, with plenty of white on the forehead and throat. Lastly, the long bill is moderately thick (for a wader) and is largely lead grey with a black tip and the legs and feet are distinctly yellowish-green, turning to almost orange-yellow at the toes. The structure of the bird suggests a long-legged, slim and neat sandpiper of the genus *Tringa*. But the bill is too long, the white in the back too extensive for Wood or Green Sandpipers. The lack of white trailing edge and grey tones (and leg colour) rule out Redshank, and the grey bill and green bill rule out winter Spotted Redshank. Neither of the (brownier) yellowlegs species have white backs (just small square white rumps). We are left with Greenshank and Marsh Sandpiper. The latter is a small wader with a larger wader's small head (bucking the trend) which has just about all the features of this bird apart the bill, which is very fine and dark in Marsh Sandpiper. This bird is a **Greenshank**, which pass through heading north in spring, returning from July. Listen for the distinctive shouted 'tew tew' call.



MAY ID CHALLENGE FLYING WADERS

General ID tips & tricks

TRINGA AND CALIDRIS SANDPIPERS

Waders come in lots of different shapes and sizes, from tiny stints to big Curlews. However, they can be grouped into broader categories, families, subfamilies and genera. Knowing which broad grouping a wader you encounter belongs to can be a significant step in identification. Plovers are the short-billed, large-eyed ones, godwits the tall, very long slightly-upturned billed waders, then there are snipe and Woodcock and a few odd birds such as Oystercatcher, Turnstone and Avocet.

Most of the rest, however, are small to medium sized waders which are known by the very general name of 'sandpipers'. And within the sandpipers, there are two dominant genera, *Tringa* and *Calidris*. Wader identification is much easier if you can sort out whether a sandpiper you are looking at is a *Tringa* or a *Calidris* species.

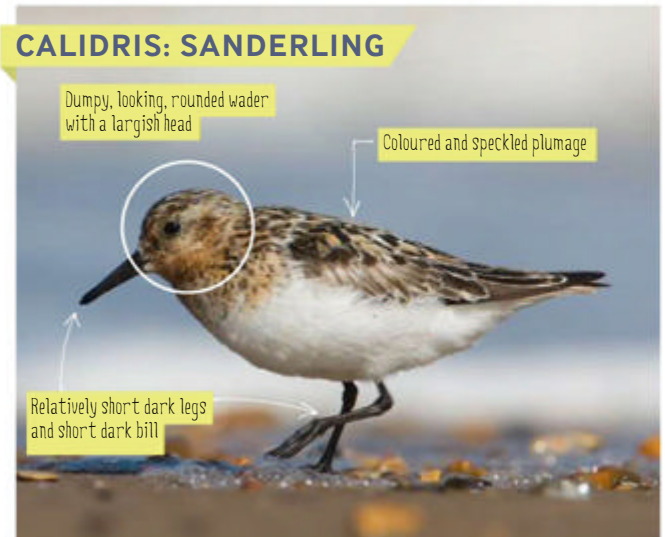
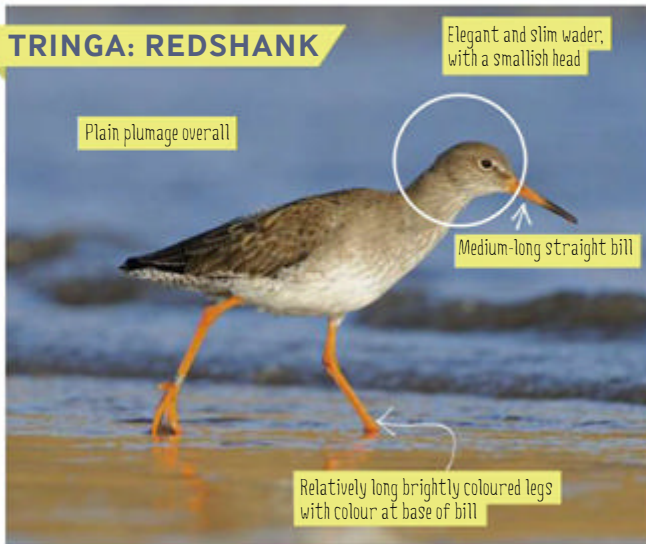
Tringa sandpipers are the slim, elegant neat, long-necked ones, with

longish legs, straight or slightly upcurved bills and often quite strongly coloured legs. Most *Tringa* species also have notable white rumps and lack obvious wing-bars. Many have loud, distinctive piping calls.

Tringa species include Wood, Green and Marsh Sandpipers, the redshank species and Greenshank.

Calidris sandpipers on the other hand are very small to medium-sized (varying from stints to Knot in size), rounded, dumpy, relatively short-legged waders, usually with slightly down-curved bills. Most have dark rump centres and most have clearly defined, white, longitudinal wing-bars. Most have purring or slightly rattling calls, usually less distinctive and clear than *Tringa* calls.

Calidris sandpipers included the stints, Dunlin, Curlew and Purple Sandpipers and Knot, as well as Sanderling, and rare birds such as the Broad-billed Sandpiper and the American 'peeps'.



CALLS ARE VITAL

Sandpipers, curlews and godwits all get their names at least partly because of their vocalisation. This is because the waders are among the most vocal of non-passerine birds, especially in flight.

Many are habitual flocks and contact calls are an essential part of their social behaviour. Many are essentially brown and streaky little bundles of energy flying by at pace, before settling down to bomb around like clockwork toys, feeding frantically.

So, a good knowledge of calls is a huge help when identifying flying waders. So, go onto xeno-canto.org and learn the calls of Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Redshank, Little Ringed Plover, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey Plover and Knot, Avocet, Curlew, Whimbrel, the godwits, the stints...

The more wader calls you can learn the better when it comes to getting a head start on identification. If you want to truly master wader ID, learn the calls of the lot!

WING-BARS AND RUMPS

Waders are not easy to identify in flight. They are very fast flyers; and perhaps more than most other groups of birds, the pattern of the upper tail/lower back ie the rump and the wings are important to note. For instance, though they have subtly different flight profiles, the easiest way to tell a Ringed Plover from a Little Ringed Plover in flight is that the former has an obvious wing bar and the latter has 'none'. A Curlew Sandpiper can be picked out from a flock of Dunlin by its white rump. Some waders have distinctive wing patterns, such as the bold white triangular trailing edge of the Redshank or the white wing-bars of Black-tailed but not Bar-tailed Godwits.



SITE 6 HERTFORDSHIRE



MAX
DISTANCE:
5 MILES

Paul Trodd

SITE GUIDE

Grid ref: SP 970 131
Postcode: HP4 1LX
How to get there: From Berkhamsted take the B4506 north to Dagnall. After two miles turn left off Moneybury Hill at the signpost to Ashridge NT Visitor Centre along Monument Drive.
Where to park: Park in the large free car park by the visitors centre or along Monument Drive.
Distance and time: Allow a full morning for the five mile route.
Terrain: A mix of rough tracks and bridleways, some steep inclines.
Access: Full access all year.
Facilities: National Trust Visitor Centre (open daily from 10am to 4pm) toilets, info boards, Bridgwater monument, Brownlow Cafe (open daily 8am-4pm)
Public Transport: Arriva Buses operate a service from Tring to Aldbury, half a mile from site. Contact 0871 200 2233. arrivabus.co.uk Tring railway station is one and three quarters mile away on the mainline from London Euston nationalrail.co.uk
Sites nearby: Tring Reservoirs for passage migrants, terns and wildfowl. College Lake for terns, warblers and breeding waders.
Organisations: National Trust Ashridge Visitor Centre, Moneybury Hill, Ringshall, Berkhamsted, Herts, HP4 1LT. 01442 851227 nationaltrust.org.uk
Club contact: Linda Smith, 24 Mandeville Drive, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 7JU. 01707 330405 secretary@qnhns.org
County recorder: Ken Smith (details as above). birdrecorder@qnhns.org
Maps: OS Explorer 181. Landranger 165.

ASHRIDGE

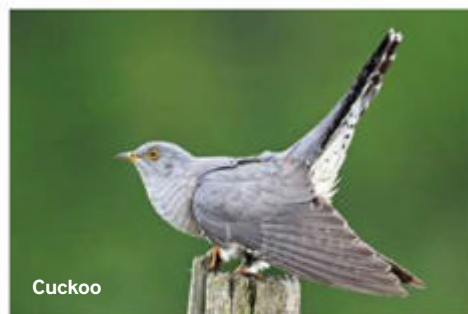
A spring woodland walk plus migrants on the Chiltern Hills

WITH OVER 5,000 acres of woodland and downland to enjoy the National Trust's Ashridge Estate is a place of immense atmosphere and essentially Chilterns in flavour. Old Beech hangars covering the chalk rim contrast with mature oak and ash on the plateau, along with limited conifer plantations, to deliver a wide range of woodland species. Downland scrub provides another habitat for migrants and the elevation provides spectacular views across the Vale of Aylesbury.

The usual range of common woodland birds can be expected on this walk along with an outside chance of finding the declining Marsh Tit, Hawfinch and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

The most numerous migrants should be singing Chiffchaff and Blackcap, but Spotted Flycatcher and Cuckoo are now scarce, and sadly Common Redstart and Wood Warbler lost as breeding birds.

On the plus side Red Kites and Buzzard are now commonly seen above the woodland



Cuckoo

Mike Aine / Aaimy

canopy and along the downs, while conifers are worth checking for singing Firecrests. Ashridge is noted for its display of Bluebells and there is a large herd of Fallow Deer, plus Muntjac and the squirrel-like Edible Dormouse or Glis to add the diversity of wildlife on offer.

On weekends the woodlands become very busy, so visit early. The perfect walk to take along that well behaved canine friend.

Paul Trodd



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EXPERT TIP
 Visit early on a weekday morning to avoid the crowds

1 Scan the paddocks and lawns around the monument for Mistle and Song Thrushes, Green Woodpecker, Stock Dove, Jay and Pied Wagtail. Passing Black-headed and Common Gulls drop in along with Meadow Pipit and the occasional Wheatear or Whinchat. Sparrowhawk and Kestrel often hunt here. Check the visitor centre feeders for finches, tits, Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

2 With views across open downland scan for migrants such as hirundines, Swift, Cuckoo and Turtle Dove. Scrub should yield Yellowhammer, Linnets, Bullfinch, Common and Lesser Whitethroats and Willow Warbler, plus Skylark overhead. Ring Ouzel and Whinchat are sometimes noted.

3 Ringshall Coppice is one of the finest bluebell vistas anywhere on the Chilterns.

4 The mature woodland attracts all the common residents such as Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Tawny Owl, plus migrant Chiffchaff, Blackcap. Check the damp rides for a Woodcock.

SITE 7 PEMBROKESHIRE

MAX DISTANCE: 2 MILES



David Saunders

SITE GUIDE

Grid ref: SM 735 049
Postcode: SA62 3BL
How the get there: From Haverfordwest take the B4327 to Dale, after 12 miles turn right at Mullock on the minor road for a further three miles to reach Martin's Haven.
Where to park: At Martin's Haven in the National Trust car park, fee payable, or for overnight visitors West Hook Farm, grid ref: SM 764 089.
Distance and time: The boat journey from Martin's Haven to Skokholm takes about 30 minutes.
Terrain: A gentle climb to the island plateau, the track leading all the way to the lighthouse at the western extremity of Skokholm. Footpaths follow sections of the cliff coastline and across the interior, great care must be exercised to avoid the often fragile areas of the Manx Shearwater colonies.
Accessibility: No day visits scheduled, but the 2015 programme provides a wealth of opportunities for overnight stays of three days or longer.
Facilities: Simple but comfortable accommodation and self catering.
Public transport: Mainline train services to Haverfordwest and Milford Haven from where there is a limited bus service to Marloes and Martinshaven. Traveline Cymru 0871 200 2233, traveline-cymru.info
Sites nearby: *Go Birdings*: Wooltack Point (October 2010), Skomer (June 2006), Marloes Mere (October 2004).
Organisations: Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales, The Welsh Wildlife Centre, Cilgerran, Cardigan, Pembrokeshire SA43 2TB 01239 621600, islands@welshwildlife.org
Websites: skokholm.blogspot.co.uk, welshwildlife.org/staying-on-skokholm
County recorder: Jon Green, Crud yr Awel, Bowls Road, Blaenporth, Cardigan, SA43 2AR, 01239 811561, jonrg@qtsicall.co.uk
Maps: OS Explorer 36, Landranger 157.

Andrew Darrington / A Amy

SKOKHOLM

A dream island which gives you much to dream about

SKOKHOLM WAS FIRST discovered, at least by ornithologists, in 1926, for it was then the young R M Lockley, searching for an island to live on, looked at its red sandstone cliffs and green plateau across seas too stormy to cross. The following year he returned, to an island "waiting to be loved and occupied". Four months later he obtained the island on lease of £25 per annum, and so began an extraordinary life which included studies of the Manx Shearwater colony on The Knoll. In 1933 he opened the Bird Observatory, the first in Great Britain.



Manx Shearwater

His vision lives on, Skokholm now being owned by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales. The most numerous of the breeding birds is without question the Manx Shearwater; the night time experience incredible, for tens of thousands nest in burrows across the island. Storm Petrels use crevices in the scree slopes and in field walls. Puffins occupy the coastal slopes with Guillemots and Razorbills on the cliffs. Migrant birds provide that spice of

enjoyment to a stay. New species added to the British or Welsh lists have included Semipalmated Sandpiper, Olive-backed Pipit, White-throated Robin, Pied Wheatear, Great Reed, Booted and Radde's Warblers, though will the autumn of 1967 ever be emulated for North American vagrants, Swainson's Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Baltimore Oriole all occurring during nine days in October.
David Saunders



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EXPERT TIP

Choose a new moon period for the best Manx Shearwater experience; a little drizzle will further help

- 1 From April until early August, rafts of Puffins will greet you.
- 2 The sheltered valley and Well Heligoland Trap always attract small migrants, as does the garden beside the Observatory.
- 3 Nesting Lesser Black-backed Gulls dominate parts of the plateau, and the North Pond is frequented by passage waders.
- 4 Great for nesting Fulmars, Guillemots and Razorbills. Out to sea Gannets are usually obvious. Harbour Porpoise and Common Dolphins frequent the Wild Goose Race.
- 5 Puffins nest in the slopes, while Choughs and Ravens use the cliffs close by. Do not overlook the Rock Pipits along the shore.

SITE 8 GREATER LONDON

MAX
 DISTANCE:
 1.7 MILES

Martin Hall



TOTTERIDGE FIELDS LWT

A wide variety of species at this suburban London site

THIS ENJOYABLE WALK begins and ends on the outskirts of Mill Hill – a relatively green suburb of north London. Footpaths lead you through gently rolling grassy fields and lightly wooded areas, and then on into Totteridge Fields Nature Reserve.

Managed by London Wildlife Trust, which has the land on long lease from owners Barnet Borough Council, the reserve comprises just under seven hectares of ancient hay meadows, criss-crossed with Hawthorn and Blackthorn hedges, ditches, sedges and a shallow stream that feeds into the nearby Dollis Brook. It all provides a haven for birds like Kestrel, Long-tailed Tit, Bullfinch and Jay, along with spring and summer visitors including Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and even Lesser Whitethroat, Hobby and Cuckoo.

Buzzard is seen fairly regularly in the area, placing this once dwindling species within around eight miles of central London. The site also attracts an array of moths, butterflies and amphibians.

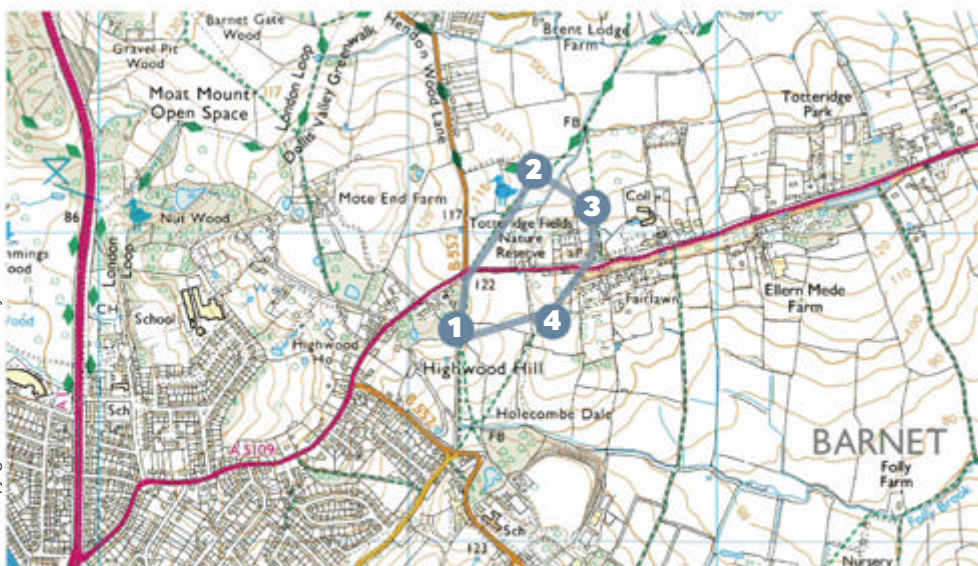


Chris Blagden / Arny

Buzzard

After leaving behind the reserve, farmland encountered on the way back to the start holds Swallow, Pheasant, Sparrowhawk and Pied Wagtail among others.

Martin Hall



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SITE GUIDE

Grid ref: TQ 220 933

Postcode: NW7 4JT

How to get there: Totteridge Fields NR is located within the London Borough of Barnet. This walk begins and ends just south of the reserve. From Totteridge and Whetstone tube station (Northern Line), head west along Totteridge Lane (A5109) for about three miles. At traffic lights by the Rising Sun pub, turn left down Highwood Hill (B552). At the bottom of the hill, turn right by a bus shelter and continue along Lawrence Street, then first right into Lawrence Gardens.

Where to park: Park considerably on Lawrence Gardens.

Distance and time: Just over one and a half miles. Allow an hour or two.

Terrain: Public footpaths over gently undulating ground.

Accessibility: Open all year round. Dogs should be on leads.

Facilities: LWT info board at the reserve entrance. The Rising Sun pub can be found at the top of Highwood Hill, or head into Whetstone.

Public transport: Bus 251 (Mon-Sun) stops close to the starting point, and also at several places along the A5109, including by the reserve entrance. The nearest tube station is Mill Hill East (Northern Line). For details call TFL on 0343 222 1234, or visit tfl.gov.uk

Sites nearby: *Go Birding*. Whetstone (May 2013).

Organisations: London Wildlife Trust, Dean Bradley House, 52 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF, 020 7261 0447, wildlondon.org.uk

Club contact: London Bird Club, lnhs.org.uk/ornithology/1.htm

County recorder: Andrew Self, a-self@sky.com

Maps: OS Explorer 173, Landranger 176.

EXPERT TIP

The best time to see Buzzards is from late morning onwards.

1 Hedges and trees beside the path hold Dunnock, Wren, Chiffchaff, finches and tits. Grassy areas to the right may reveal Mistle Thrush, Pied Wagtail and Green Woodpecker.

2 Cross the road to enter the reserve and spend time scanning hedgerows, trees, grasses and shrubs around the paths. Blackcap, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Whitethroat, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk may all be seen, while Lesser Whitethroat, Hobby and Cuckoo are scarcer visitors.

3 Check the stand of trees by the path at the edge of the reserve for Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Chaffinch.

4 As you drop downhill, look overhead for Buzzard, Kestrel and Swift. Swallows skim the grassy fields, with tits and finches darting between scattered trees.

SITE 9 KENT

MAX
DISTANCE:
1.5 MILES

Paul Trodd



WESTBERE MARSHES

A walk in the Stour valley looking for spring migrants

THE SECTION OF the Stour valley immediately to the east of Canterbury comprises an interesting mosaic of wetlands from flooded gravel pit lakes used for fishing and sailing to a large reedbed and marsh beside a damp woodland. The river provides another habitat, with flood meadows beside mature willows and alders. Views either side of the valley take in paddocks, hedgerows and Trenley Park Wood to the south.

This time of year can yield a wide variety of species, as resident birds are joined by summer visitors and passage migrants. Warblers should be in good voice along with Nightingale and Cuckoo in and around the large reed and willow swamp. If visiting at dawn or dusk, pay particular attention to the large, tussocky flood meadow across the river as it looks a prime spot for a singing crane.

Although the lakes are used for water sports and fishing they can still attract large numbers of migrants, particularly Swallows, martins and Swifts. Hobbies pick emerging insects off the water and the odd Osprey can



Simon Shirup / Aamy

Nightingale

stop off on passage. Similarly, Black and Arctic Terns and Little Gull are occasionally recorded on migration. It is also worthwhile scanning the skies along the valley for passing migrants, particularly raptors such as harriers, kites and Buzzards.

It really is worthwhile making the effort to visit Westbere Marshes at first light as the dawn chorus can be spectacular, and you just never know when that rare crane may sing.

Paul Trodd

SITE GUIDE

- Grid ref:** TR 196 610.
- Postcode:** CT2 0HG.
- How to get there:** Take the A28 from Canterbury to Margate. After 5 miles turn right at Westbere along Walnut Tree Lane.
- Where to park:** Park considerately at the end of Walnut Tree Lane by the railway line.
- Distance and time:** Allow at least two hours to walk the one and half mile route.
- Terrain:** A combination of rough tracks and surfaced lanes on mostly level and gently sloping ground but muddy after rain.
- Access:** Open access on well marked public rights of way throughout.
- Facilities:** None on site apart from interpretive boards.
- Public Transport:** Stagecoach operate a bus service from Canterbury to Broadstairs that stops at Sturry, as do South East trains. Traveline: 0871 200 22 33. travelinesoutheast.org.uk
- Sites nearby:** Stodmarsh wetland reserve, for Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Turtle Dove, passage migrants and Bearded Tit. Church Wood, Blean, for Nightingale and a range of woodland birds.
- Organisation:** Kent Wildlife Trust, Tyland Barn, Sandling, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 3BD. 01622 662012. kentwildlifetrust.org.uk
- Club contact:** Kent Ornithological Secretary, Dr Stephen Wood, 4 Jubilee Cottage, Throwley, Forstal, Kent, ME13 0PJ. 01795 890485. kentos.org.uk
- County recorder:** Barry Wright, 6 Hatton Close, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8SD. 01474 320918. umbrellabirds66@gmail.com
- Maps:** OS Explorer 150, OS Landranger 179.

EXPERT TIP

Visit at dawn for a true feast of birdsong

- 1** Scan the paddocks for feeding thrushes, corvids and gulls, also Green Woodpecker. Hedgerows beside the railway line attract Common Whitethroat, Linnet, Goldfinch and Yellowhammer.
- 2** The small wood is good for tits, including Long-tailed, Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Bullfinch, Chiffchaff and Blackcap. In the marsh listen out for Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler, Water Rail, Bearded Tit and Reed Warbler.
- 3** A good spot to scan along the river for Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail and across the wet meadow for Little Egret, Grey Heron, Snipe, Yellow Wagtail and Marsh Harrier.
- 4/5** Check both lakes for common wildfowl, grebes and Cormorant, plus passing Common Terns. Hobbies hunt flying insects over the water.



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SITE 10 SOMERSET

MAX
 DISTANCE:
 4.5 MILES

Alex Rhodes



DUNKERY BEACON

Open moorland and great views, plus deep, wooded valleys

STANDING PROUD AT 519 meters, the highest point in Exmoor National Park, Dunkery Beacon lies atop a mound of Devonian sedimentary rock, giving the surrounding earth its classic deep red colour.

With its scenic views up the Severn Estuary towards South Wales and the Bristol Channel and wide vista across the rolling moors below, on a warm sunny day there is arguably no finer place to be on Exmoor – and no finer place to watch for soaring raptors and visible migration.

Encompassed by the North Exmoor SSSI and neighbouring the Dunkery & Horner Woods NNR to the north the areas is unique and offers a range of species to see, including those passing through and over on migration, including potential rarities.

The classic western woodland trio of Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler are all found in the wooded combes, and Dippers are sometimes found along the streams, so take some time to check the water for these striking birds.



ELBA / Arny

Pied Flycatcher

The call of the Cuckoo is heard throughout the spring, while Wheatears can be found on the moorland.

Alex Rhodes

SITE GUIDE

Grid ref: SS 895 406

Postcode: TA24 7AT

How to get there: From the M5, leave at junction 25 for Taunton and follow signs towards Minehead on the A358. After passing through Bishops Lydeard, turn left onto the B3224 at Cedar Falls. Follow this road all the way to Wheddon Cross, taking note of a sneaky right turn in the road after nine and a half miles. Going straight over the cross roads at Weddon Cross, take the second right after 0.7 miles (hidden signposted 'Dunkery Gate') and follow this lane for another mile and a half to the car park.

Where to park: Ample parking is available at Dunkery Gate.

Distance and time: The suggested route is around 6.3km and should take 2-3 hours at regular pace.

Terrain: Route incorporates rough footpaths, open ground and steep terrain. Weather on the Moor changes quickly so be prepared.

Accessibility: Open year-round, all hours. Not suitable for wheelchairs.

Facilities: None on site. Neighbouring towns of Exford and Wheddon Cross have some amenities.

Public transport: Extremely limited. See Traveline southwest for details: travelinesw.com

Sites nearby: Horner Wood, Porlock Bay & Hurlstone Point.

Club contacts: Somerset Ornithological Society somersebirds.net

Jeff Hazell, SOS Membership Secretary, jeff.hazell@somersebirds.net

County recorder: Brian Gibbs, brian.gibbs@virgin.net

Maps: OS Explorer OL9, OS Landranger 181.

EXPERT TIP

Make an early start during migration periods for possible grounded birds

1 The expanse of heather-dominated moorland is alive with Meadow Pipit and Wheatear during the breeding season. Cuckoo can be heard singing in spring, possibly frequenting the pipit's nests as host. The occasional Dotterel can be seen on passage.

2 The vantage point of the Beacon is an excellent place to watch from. Wagtails, pipits, thrushes and an assortment of finches can be seen passing overhead in spring and autumn, with a few scarcities such as Snow Bunting occurring every few years.

3 Classic wooded valleys of Bin and Mansley Combe are alive with woodland birds in spring. The calls of Wood and Willow Warbler, Redstart and Pied Flycatcher resonate from the vegetation alongside Chiffchaff, Stonechat and reeling Grasshopper Warbler in the scrub. Lesser Redpoll, Siskin and possibly Crossbill can be found the pine stands while Marsh Tit are also worth looking out for.



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Staff Photo: Peregrine falcon - Simon Taylor - Canon 5D MK III & 70-200 F2.8 L IS Lens

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INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Bitterns and Black-necked Grebes thrive at a former coal mine in the heart of the industrial north.

By Richard Smyth



THESE ARE UNLIKELY lakelands. South-east of Leeds and just north of Castleford, locked within a humming triangle of major motorways, this is – or, rather, was – coal-mining country; the surrounding towns were coal-mining towns, founded on a northern spur of the sprawling South Yorkshire coalfields.

It's surprising, then, to learn that here is to be found the highest density of breeding Bittern in the whole of the north of England. It's surprising to be told that RSPB Fairburn Ings, a stone's throw from the A1(M), has the largest bird-list of any inland RSPB reserve. And it's surprising when, as you stroll through a former opencast coalmine just four miles from Leeds city centre, a Black-necked Grebe pops out of the water and eyes you beadily with one mad red eye.

This is St Aidan's, the RSPB's newest reserve.

"It was opencast up until round about 2001," explains Darren Starkey, the RSPB's senior site manager for the Aire Valley (a beat that incorporates both St Aidan's and Fairburn Ings). "Up until 10 years ago all this was a 70-metre-deep hole in the ground. The transformation from what it was to what we've got now, in pretty much 10 years – it's just an amazing story."

The St Aidan's wetland is part of a soggy stretch of

lakes and waterways that borders the River Aire and is well known to birders as Swillington Ings. The Ings maintains a strong and well-established birders' group (find out more at sibg1.wordpress.com) – but the team at St Aidan's are looking to extend the appeal of the new reserve beyond the birding fraternity.

"The site has been designed so that it can act as a nature reserve but also as a public-access amenity," Darren tells me. "It's got amazing wildlife spectacle – it's one of the most important sites in the north of England for certain species – but it's also a great place for people to come and have a day out, enjoying the open countryside.

"A lot of people who are visiting us are not particularly interested in wildlife or birds, they're here because it's just a great place to come and spend some time in the outdoors. Cyclists, walkers, dog-walkers, horse-riders – lots of different audiences."

Something for everyone

It makes sense for St Aidan's to position itself, not as an enclave for specialists, but as a place that offers something for everyone. There are, after all, some 30,000 people living within fifteen minutes' walk of the site. And at present this makes St Aidan's a pretty unique proposition; Darren suggests the Lee Valley Park, London's "green lung", as one of very few similar



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**↑ STAR
ATTRACTIONS**

The site has two breeding pairs of Black-necked Grebes

**← HUGE
HABITAT**

From the air you can fully appreciate the size of St Aidan's

UK projects.

The strategy fits with the RSPB's wider policy of seeking to promote wildlife conservation to a wider, more diverse audience.

"The State of Nature report showed us that nature is in serious trouble and something needs to be done to help it," says RSPB regional reserves manager Nick Bruce-White. "To do this, we need to engage the support of the wider public.

"The RSPB's new strategy, 'Giving Nature a Home', aims to inspire as many people as possible to get involved and provide homes for nature where they live. We're trying to appeal to anyone who values wildlife and nature – old and young alike. We want to reach new people, including younger families, while at the same time inspiring more support from our existing members."

So, that means cycle paths, bridleways and website marketing patten that invites visitors to "relax, unwind or exercise in a stress-free environment".

"St Aidan's, along with many of our other reserves, has been designed to appeal to a wide audience, giving people opportunities to see and engage with wildlife and teach a new generation about the importance of saving nature," Nick goes on. "The site provides a wonderful nature experience for all."

But there's no danger of birdlife and conservation



RSPB Images

needs being overlooked. Many years' hard work have gone into the creation of St Aidan's extensive reaches of reedbed and wet grassland.

"For the last five years we've been managing the habitat on the site," says Darren Starkey. "We've done a lot of work on the grassland, scrubbing the reedbed, clearing vegetation off the islands, work on invasive plants, monitoring work... We expect that there'll be tens if not hundreds of thousands of visitors to the site per year – but we believe that we can do that and manage it so that it'll be one of the best, if not the best, wildlife sites in the north of England."

The potential is certainly there. Three pairs of Bittern bred at St Aidan's this year (in fact there were four booming males). A huge Black-headed Gull colony of maybe 2,000 nests dominates the western approach to the reserve; two pairs of Black-necked Grebes breed amid the cacophony, and, for all their notorious standoffishness, appear to be little troubled by visitors (and *Bird Watching* writers) passing close by. Passerines – Reed Bunting, Sky Lark, Reed Warbler – are present in huge numbers. And as autumn approaches and the passage waders begin to appear, things get really interesting: St Aidan's spring list this



↑ IDEAL FOR BIRDS

The wetland habitat of St Aidan's

year featured Pectoral and Curlew Sandpiper, plus Black-tailed Godwit, Knot, Little Stint, Little Ringed Plover and Ruff in their splendid breeding plumage, while a Collared Pratincole was recorded a couple of years back. Come winter, flotillas of wildfowl darken the water and harriers quarter the reedbeds.

Fascinating remnant

One of the most interesting specimens at St Aidan's, though, isn't a bird at all. Nor is it a butterfly or a wildflower. It is, in fact, a BE1150 Walking Dragline Excavator, a 1,200-ton relic of St Aidan's days as a coalmine and a striking symbol of the site's industrial heritage. Preserved and maintained by enthusiasts, it looms magnificently over the fresh-timbered visitor's centre. It's said that when it was built, in the US in the 1940s, it was the largest machine in the world.

Today, it conceals a delightful secret: a Kestrel's nest, complete, on the day of my visit, with fluffy nestlings, tucked within its workings. I'm told that Little and Barn Owls have also made the Dragline their home.

"It's gone from being the biggest machine in the world," smiles Darren Starkey, "to the biggest nestbox in the world."

St Aidan's shares its industrial past with Fairburn Ings, its 'twin' reserve downriver (and indeed with many of the old bird-busy mines, quarries and gravel-pits with which this corner of Yorkshire is pitted). The two sites are also similar in terms of habitat, though they have a very different feel: Fairburn, strung out along the Aire, contrasts with the more centrally focussed St Aidan's. Fairburn is distinguished, too, by its long history: a reserve since 1957, it's been under RSPB management since 1977, and its list now numbers about 290 species (including rarities such as Glossy Ibis and Lesser Kestrel).

It's no coincidence that these two Aire Valley RSPB locations are home to similar species.

"A lot of the species that we have and are trying to encourage are linked with the area called the Humberhead Levels," Darren explains.

The Levels comprise 2,000km² of naturally wet landscape where the major rivers of the north meet the Humber Estuary. In partnership with groups including



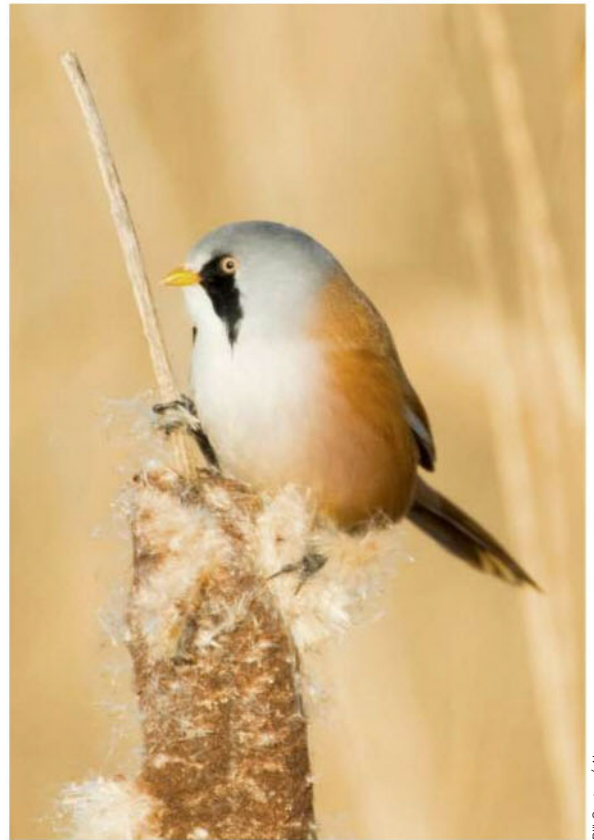
Margaret Weir by / A amy

← REEDBED BOOMER

Bittern is an iconic bird for the area



RSPB Images



Bill Coster / Alamy

Natural England, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and the regional Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB is working to link the 'islands' of wetland – the Aire Valley, the Derwent Ings, Thorne and Hatfield Moors – that have survived decades of drainage by agricultural interests.

The Society's strategy for the Levels is built around a portfolio of key species, such as Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Bearded Tit, and Crane. Sites such as St Aidan's will also play an important role in reducing flood risk by acting as 'washlands', areas where floodwaters can be harmlessly dispersed.

"Each site has its particular focus and management plan," Darren says, "but we're also looking at conservation on a landscape scale – what we call our 'Futurescapes' project. We very much see the Aire Valley as fitting in the Humber Estuary, as part of that river-corridor ecosystem."

It's an intriguing blend of roles and responsibilities

“10 years ago all this was a 70-metre-deep hole in the ground. The transformation is an amazing story”

that St Aidan's has taken on: country park, nature reserve, washland. But it's reserves like these that are necessary if the RSPB and other nature organisations are to promote an interest in wildlife and a love of the natural world; it has to reach out to the casual birders who thrill at the sight of a Kingfisher or Little Owl as well as to those who don't get out of bed for anything less than a Needle-tailed Swift.

"If only a small percentage of visitors go away feeling inspired about wildlife and wanting to take more of an interest in it, then that for me is why I do my job," says Darren Starkey.

"I don't do the job so I can attract rare birds for people to come and twitch – though don't get me wrong, I'm a twitcher myself. The job's about trying to inspire future generations of people."



Chris McLoughlin Wildlife and Nature Photography / Alamy

↑ FACILITIES
Bearded Tit is a key species in the RSPB's overall strategy

← COLONY
One of 2,000 Black-headed Gulls that call the reserve home



RSPB Images

← BOARDWALK
The RSPB's newest reserve is well equipped for visitors

7 MORE INDUSTRIAL BIRDING SITES

Starting with former firing range, turned wetland wonderland Rainham Marshes. *By Ed Hutchings*

THE THAMES IS England's longest river, and the marshlands surrounding its lower stretches have always been an important habitat for wildlife, though many areas have been developed as London sprawled eastwards.

But one area that escaped the attention of the town planners is Rainham Marshes.

This complex of wetlands had been closed to the public while in use as a military firing range for nearly a century. In the late 1950s, while serving at the Essex Regiment Depot, my father recalls putting National Service recruits through live firing at Rainham Ranges. He remembers it as being delightful during the summer, yet somewhat grim in the winter. Delicious picnic sandwiches made by the Officers' Mess Cook apparently softened the blow.

Rainham Hall stands beside a churchyard overlooking bleak Rainham Marshes. These downriver reaches were once used to unload heavy cargoes to shorten the journey upstream. Captain John Harle dredged the Ingrebourne inlet and built a wharf to receive coal, marble, timber and Delft tiles. From the proceeds, he built himself this house and a small garden. Now owned by the National Trust, they are an adornment to London's somewhat dreary eastern approaches. Dozens of such houses must have vanished from East London over the past century and the same may be said for the marshes.

After buying the site from the Ministry of Defence in 2000, the RSPB has worked hard to restore this landscape of wet grassland, pools and ditches into a



RSPB Images

← **WILDFOWL**
Teal is among the masses, which in turn attract the odd hunting Peregrine

haven for wetland wildlife, and somewhere that people of all ages can enjoy visiting. After years of behind the scenes work, the reserve was officially opened to the public in 2006. It has maintained much of its medieval landscape and is the largest remaining area of ancient lowland wetland on the upper parts of the Thames Estuary.

The site is home to an environmentally-friendly visitor centre which features solar panels, rainwater harvesting, natural light and ventilation, plus a ground heat exchange system. Completed at a cost of £2m, the building has won six awards for its sustainable design. The centre offers commanding views of the reserve from its walkways and café. Those inclined to bird while enjoying cappuccino and cake will not be disappointed.

Migration hotspot

Sitting on the urban fringe of London, the reserve is home to a remarkably diverse range of bird species, wetland plants and insects. It is an international stopover for thousands of migratory birds, as they navigate along the Thames Estuary each year. In spring, Wheatear, Whinchat, Sand Martin and other small birds pass through, while breeding birds sing and display. Migrating birds of prey, such as Marsh Harrier and Hobby, pass overhead. Amorous Marsh Frogs breed in the ponds and ditches, and Grass Snakes may be seen hunting the distracted amphibians.

From midsummer, a wide variety of waders visit the reserve, including Avocet, Lapwing, Ruff, Snipe, both godwits, Whimbrel and Greenshank. The delightful forms and piping calls of Avocets have become a more

← **BEACON FOR BIRDS**
Rainham Marshes offers a green haven on the edge of London

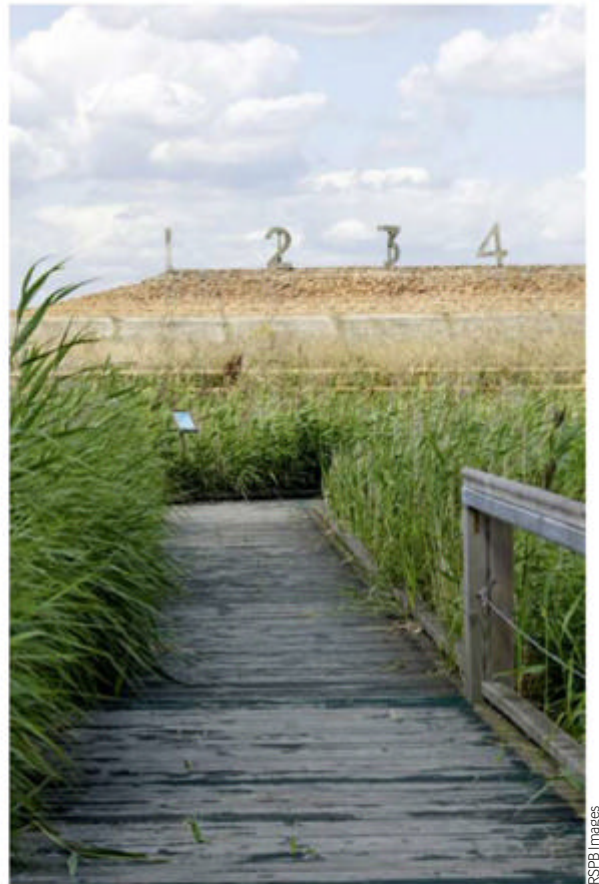


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SITE

1





frequent sight throughout the year, too. In 2014, Rainham Marshes was able to announce Lapwing breeding successes thanks to land management based on knowledge built up over decades across reserves in lowland England, and in December 2005, the site was visited by a Sociable Lapwing, a critically-endangered vagrant from the East, attracting more than 1,700 visitors. Water Voles are quite easy to see, too, as the reserve has one of the densest populations of 'Ratty' in the country.

In autumn, waders continue to pass through, while gull and duck numbers increase noticeably. Young birds and mammals disperse to search for new homes – this is a good time to see Marsh Harrier, Barn Owl, Bearded Tit and mustelids. Golden Plover potter on the Thames foreshore, distinctive with their stocky build and 'stop-start' running in search of prey. Generally seen in small numbers, flocks of this delightful wader form when there is a high tide. The neatly banded Ringed Plover can also be seen performing a similar feeding routine on the marshes.

By winter, large concentrations of wildfowl and waders flock, and birds of prey come to hunt them. One could see Short-eared Owl, Peregrine Falcon and even Merlin patrolling the marshes. This is the time to look for rare wintering visitors such as Water Pipit and Penduline Tit. Late in the Sociable Lapwing's stay, four of the latter were found. This is also a good time to observe the Little Egret, whose snowy plumage becomes more conspicuous due to a lack of vegetation. Dispersing juvenile birds lead to a sudden rise in numbers in late summer and autumn.

Butterfly bonanza

Entomologists will delight in the reserve's 33 species of butterfly, 13 species of orthoptera and 24 species of dragonfly; these include Hairy Dragonfly and Willow Emerald and Small Red-eyed Damselflies. In metallic green, the rare Willow Emerald Damselfly is a new coloniser and a real beauty. Mammalian residents run

the gamut from the tiny Water Shrew to Fox. Water-loving plants such as Deadly Nightshade and Flowering Rush will occupy any keen botanists.

On my visit I observed one of the most extraordinary exhibitions of bird behaviour I have ever witnessed. A Grey Heron, sitting quietly on the edge of a scrape, spotted a Little Grebe and took off purposefully towards it. On reaching the grebe, the heron pinned it down in the water with its dagger-like bill, stabbing it repeatedly. The unfortunate grebe was pushed underwater again and again as a protracted drowning process began. By turns fascinating and difficult to watch, the heron made intermittent attempts to swallow its victim. After an hour, it had still not succeeded. Grey Herons are known to have a catholic diet. Apart from lots of fish, they will take small birds such as ducklings, small mammals like voles, and amphibians. An adult grebe, though, albeit a little one, is most unusual.

Rainham Marshes are well worth a visit at any time of the day and year. There are weekly walks to help visitors discover the best of the reserve's wildlife through the changing seasons. If you can close your eyes to the encroaching development surrounding the marshes, you can lose yourself in this genuine wilderness on the very edge of the capital. The fact that nature is able to thrive here gives cause for hope – in a world that appears to turn increasingly more grey than green, these bastions of birdlife are irreplaceable.

↑ FACILITIES

The reserve is prepared for birders with hides, a visitors centre and café

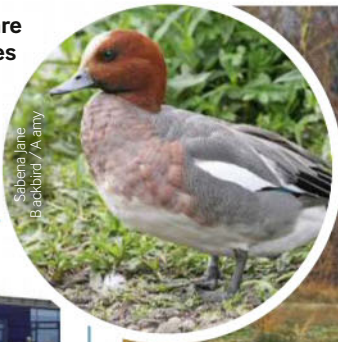
Where to stay

The Bell Inn is an award-winning 15th Century coaching inn at Horndon-on-the-Hill. It was voted one of the 10 best gastropubs in the UK. Rooms start from £50 per night on a B&B basis. Please visit their website – bell-inn.co.uk – or call 01375 642463 for further details or to book.

HABITAT

St Aidan's and Rainham Marshes are just two examples of great reserves created from, or amidst, former industrial land – here are six more that go to show you don't need to be way out in the wilds to find great birds...

Wigeon



Sabena Jane Blackbird / A amy

Little Egret



Papilo / A amy



RSPB Images

2 SALTHOLME RSPB

Breeding Lapwings, Common Terns and Yellow Wagtails are among the attractions at this superb Teesside reserve – autumn and winter see the visit of large numbers of waders such as Curlew and Golden Plover, with accompanying raptors such as Peregrines. State of the art hides and a fine visitor centre make any visit to this former industrial site a pleasure, as well as a learning experience. rspb.org.uk/saltholme



Mike Read / A amy

Barn Owl



Nature Picture Library / A amy

3 CATCOTT NATURE RESERVE

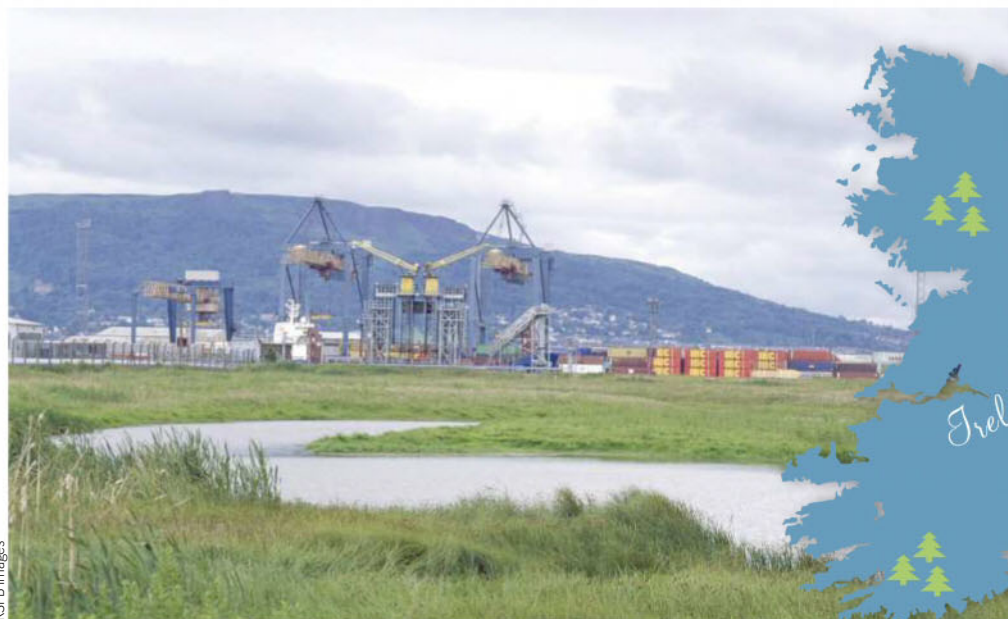
Created out of what were once industrial peat diggings, this site has attracted Great White Egret, and like other Somerset wetland reserves, could soon play host to other colonisers from the Continent, such as Night Heron and Little Bittern. avalonmarshes.org/Catcott



Short-eared Owl



Andrew Parkinson / A amy



RSPB Images

4 BELFAST HARBOUR RSPB

Tucked away between busy docks, an airport and main roads, this reserve attracts waders such as Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit and Oystercatcher, plus wildfowl such as Whooper Swan in winter. A hidden gem. rspb.org.uk/belfastlough



Oystercatcher

Chris Herring / A amy



Whooper Swan

Peter Barritt / A amy



Nightjar



Nature Picture Library / A amy



Bittern

David Tippling / A amy

5 ATTENBOROUGH NWT

Created from former gravel workings on the Trent just outside Nottingham (extraction continues next door), this reserve has a superb reputation as one of the easiest places in the UK to see Bitterns in winter. It's great year-round, though – the river attracts fly-through migrants, there's a mixture of habitats, and a wonderful new visitor centre and café.

attenboroughnaturecentre.co.uk



Green Woodpecker



Linnets

Simon Litten / A amy



Wostenholme Images / A amy

6 NEWPORT WETLANDS RSPB

Part of this extensive reserve is a reclaimed fuel ash disposal site, and it lies within site of docklands. A great place for passage waders and wildfowl, as well as warblers, Cuckoos and other summer visitors. Other notable records in recent years have included reedbed specialist Bearded Tit.

rspb.org.uk/newportwetlands



Andrew Darrington / A amy

2

Stonechat



David Chapman / A amy



Golden Plover

mike ane / A amy



David Bowman

7 WOOLSTON EYES

Alongside the Manchester Ship Canal near Warrington, this is the UK's best site for breeding Black-necked Grebes, while there's plenty of other wetland bird species. It's run by a voluntary conservation group, so access is by permit only.

woolstoneyes.com



Paul Haz ehurst



Curlew

Duncan Usher / A amy

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ROSAMOND RICHARDSON'S

Reflections

Some call it Green Wren, others Wood-Wren or Barrow-Bird or even Shaking Pettychaps. Whatever you call it, you can't beat a Wood Warbler

PERCHED ON A boulder high above the Cabo de Gata-Nijar Parque Natural in southern Spain, singing under a burning sun and cloudless sky, a Blue Rock Thrush looked down on a dried-up riverbed meandering across the valley. Cradled by hills verdant with Mediterranean Spurge, Asphodel and Tamarisk, the track led higher and higher to the crater of a volcano that had spurted fire and molten rock from below the Earth's crust 15 million years ago. We walked up into the hills through a landscape of prickly pears, Agave, Rockroses and wild herbs, past a deserted house and an abandoned car chassis, to where Clouded Yellow butterflies flutter along the path, where the Ocellated Lizard makes his home with grasshoppers and stick insects. Corn Buntings were piping their jangly-keys song, Crested Larks whistled, Black Wheatears flew from rock to rock with the giveaway flash of white tail feathers. Aromas of wild thyme and lavender wafted over phlomis in full flower – both yellow and white, and a Black-spotted Blue butterfly settled on Magenta Convolvulus that thrives everywhere on this terrain.

After a climb of about a mile we came to the now grass-covered crater. Seeking the shade of a solitary Almond tree, we lay on the baked ground surrounded by mountains. Looking up into the shiny green leaves I could see a nest – a large, wide raft of coarse twigs and dried mud. Within minutes, a female Red-backed Shrike fluttered into the other side of the tree, pale-fronted with a greyish-brown crown and eyestripe, chestnut-winged. She hopped along a branch for a few moments, balancing with a flicker of long brown tail bordered with white, showing surprisingly little sign of agitation at our presence.

“ The Wood Warbler is a bird more often heard than seen, with a passionate trill that shivers its little body as it sings... ”

Walking back down from the crater, something was moving in an even greener and shinier Almond tree. Blending with the leaves, a couple of Wood Warblers were hopping from branch to branch, perching briefly before darting on: two plump yellow-green birds on passage from West Africa where they had overwintered in the dense undergrowths and tree cover of Ivory Coast and Congo. On a three-week-long flight these tiny bundles of feathers had travelled for two-and-a-half thousand miles across the Sahara and up into Spain. From here they would fly on to Wales where, at the culmination of their journey, they would nest and breed in the canopies of oak and beechwoods in the west of England and Wales, spending the summer living alongside Pied Flycatchers that frequently share territory with them. A dead branch was sticking out



Our Wild Life Photography / Alamy

↑ WOODLAND WONDER

The Wood Warbler's song is often compared to a spinning coin

from the far side of our Almond tree, and perched on it was, indeed, a Pied Flycatcher in smart black and white livery: even during their short stay in this valley, the two birds had sought each other out.

The Wood Warblers hopped around in and out of the leaves, looking for beetles, flies and aphids, sometimes visible, sometimes not: *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, 'whistling leaf-explorer', 'leaf-watcher' searching for insects on the undersides of leaves. The tree seemed alive with sylvan sylphs, these beautiful 'yellow wrens' with lemon throat and eyestripe, olive-green back, long wings folded over the tail, and snow-white underparts blending into the dappled light of shifting leaf shadows.

The Wood Warbler is a bird more often heard than seen, with a trill that shivers its little body as it sings, music that's been called the song of the woods, a silvery piping trill followed by a whistling, sibilant 'zip'. It's been compared to the sound of a coin spinning on marble, or to raindrops scattering through the leaves.

We continued walking down the mountainside to the parched riverbed, under a scorching afternoon sun. Passing the wreck of the 1960s car that had driven up the track some 50 years ago, we heard how the driver had broken down and abandoned the car while he went to seek help. Overnight, flash-floods tore rocks and boulders from their moorings higher up, hurling them on to the car, smashing the windows and crumpling the metal. Over the years, walkers had added more stones to the cairn in the ruined chassis as it rusted away. Someone had placed a skull there. Golgotha in the sierras. 🍷

Rosamond Richardson is a freelance writer on wild flowers and birds. She is a regular contributor to The Countryman and is the author of numerous books about the countryside. Follow her on Twitter: @rosam_rich

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GEAR

OPTICS RATINGS EXPLAINED

OPTICS – Quality of optical image including sharpness, focusing etc

HANDLING – How the product looks, feels and ease of use

PRICE – Value for money against other models in its class

NEW PRODUCTS & GREAT SAVINGS FOR ALL BIRDPWATCHERS

A slice of Zeiss at a lower price

German designed, Chinese built – where do these entry-level bins fit in?

ZEISS TERRA ED 8X42 £360

REVIEW BY DAVID CHANDLER

First things first – this is a full-size Zeiss binocular that costs less than £400. And that isn't a typo. The Terra range includes 8x42 and 10x42 models and takes Zeiss into new territory. These are entry-level Zeiss, a way to get that iconic brand around your neck without having the bank manager on your back. But how good are they? Zeiss lent me an 8x42 pair so that I could find out.

In the brochure...

The price is attractive, and their spec is quite persuasive. Zeiss describes them as 'compact, light and sturdy' with 'finely detailed images' and 'completely natural colours'. They have Schott ED glass, a water-shedding, hydrophobic lens coating, and weigh in at a very respectable 690g. The 1.6m

close-focus is impressive and the 125m field of view isn't bad either.

In the hand...

The Terra is pretty well balanced and comfortable enough to hold. Its body is made from fibreglass reinforced polymer which keeps the weight down, and wrapped in smooth armour with no thumb indents. If you don't like the 'cool grey' version, you could opt for 'deep blue' instead, but I know which one I prefer... Overall, build quality seems good, though on my sample the two intermediate positions on the twist-up eyecups were not well-defined and the eyecups are a fairly hard rubber. The dioptre twist-ring doesn't lock but didn't drift out of place and its grooves provide basic calibration. Focusing is smooth and moderately stiff, with a bit less than one

revolution of travel, clockwise towards infinity. The wheel is one and a half fingers wide, with 'Designed by Zeiss' written on it. The Terras are designed by Zeiss but made in China, not Germany. I barely need to say it these days, but they are nitrogen-filled and waterproof.

In the field...

The image is good – with good brightness and very good sharpness, though they didn't seem quite as sharp at very close range. Their sharpness doesn't extend to the edge of the field of view – there is a soft peripheral ring, which was sometimes obvious. Focus precision was very good, but again, not as good up close. There is a slight yellow colour cast, and confusingly, as the January afternoon faded I noticed a pink colour cast on waterside willows and on a flyby Black-headed Gull. I didn't detect any troublesome colour fringing.

One highlight of the session was a close-up encounter with a Long-tailed Tit less than two metres away. It was so close I didn't bother to use the bins, but the Terras do focus close – I got them down to 1.73m, not quite as good as Zeiss claims, but hardly a problem. But if you want to get the rainguard off in a hurry, don't push it on too tight!

“The image is good – with good brightness and very good sharpness, though they didn't seem quite as sharp at very close range”



TESTED
IN THE
FIELD



I checked low light performance at the end of a mostly overcast January afternoon. The Terras did well – they pulled in a useable image 20 minutes after sunset.

In the box...

There's a rainguard, a wide neoprene strap, a peculiar articulated tie-on and clip-on cover for the objectives, a lens cloth and a velvety drawstring pouch to protect the bins.

VERDICT...

The Terras handle well enough and have pretty good optics. Peripheral softness is a downside, as are the mechanics on the eyecups – if that's a generic issue. If the Terra is in your price range and the spec is what you're after, try it against the competition. You can get a Zeiss for less than £400, but don't expect the 'punch' of a top-end binocular.

FACTFILE

Exit pupil diameter: 5.25 mm
Eye relief: 18 mm
Field of view: 7.2 degrees. 125 m @ 1000 m
Close focus: 1.6 m (quoted)
Dimensions (h x w): 142 x 120 mm
Weight: 690 g
RRP: £360
Warranty: Two years
Supplied accessories: Strap, rainguard, objective cover, lens cloth, drawstring pouch bag
Contact: Carl Zeiss Ltd, 509 Coldhams Lane, Cambridge CB1 3JS, 01223 401525
 ckarn@zeiss.co.uk, zeiss.co.uk

RATINGS

Features ★★★★★
Usability ★★★★★
Price ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

ISOPERLA BUTTERFLY ID £2.99

REVIEW BY MATT MERRITT

More and more birders are branching out into insect-watching, too, with dragonflies and butterflies the favourite targets – after all, they're colourful and large enough to make identifying them a pleasure.

Nevertheless, if you're a beginner like me, you're going to need plenty of help, and that's where this app comes in. I'm determined to make this the year I get to grips with Lepidoptera, so it'll get plenty of use.

The various species are arranged alphabetically, as well as by family, or you can search for them by name – which one of those you use will probably depend on how much of a novice you are, but it's good to be given all the options.

The species accounts include a short but useful summary, plus a longer, more detailed screen containing everything you're likely to need, and there are good ID photographs for each.

Best of all, there's an automatic ID feature, for those times when you're not even sure where to start looking. You enter the butterfly's main colouring and other characteristics, plus where and when you saw it, and the app suggests which species it could be, with a percentage likelihood for each one. In practice, it works very well, and it makes the whole app that much more attractive to the absolute beginner.

You can use it to record your sightings, too – the makers could tell you how you start the process a little clearer (tap the bar at the bottom of the sightings map), but that's a minor gripe, and once recorded, you can filter and sort your sightings easily.

VERDICT...

For £2.99, this is really terrific – plenty of features, logically ordered and easy to use, and all in all the perfect in-the-field complement to a larger fieldguide.

RATINGS

Features ★★★★★
Usability ★★★★★
Price ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

“Best of all, there's an automatic ID feature... In practice, it works very well, and it makes the whole app that much more attractive to the absolute beginner”



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COUNTRY
INNOVATION



Tom Bailey

SAVE 25% ON BRILLIANT NEW BERGHAUS BOOTS

BERGHAUS EXPEDITOR TREK, RRP £100 You Pay £75

ONE OF THE main features I'm looking for in walking boots is the ability to wear them straight from the box. Bad memories of 'breaking in' a pair on the North Norfolk coast, and the price I paid in blisters and missed sightings, have ensured that.

So, the Berghaus Expeditor Treks score heavily straight away. On a first walk along muddy Wye Valley paths, they were comfortable in the extreme, and remained so when scrambling up rocky slopes – they offer great support to the ankle, and the soles grip superbly while cushioning the foot.

They shrugged off rain, puddles and a couple of streams, too. The greatest compliment any birder can pay a pair of boots is that you forget you're wearing them, and that was certainly true here.

A nice bonus is that the split suede uppers look great – after a day in the field, they're smart enough after a brush-down to pass muster in the bar or restaurant.

Matt Merritt

Country Innovation has been chosen to be one of the few Premier Stockists of the new Berghaus range of footwear throughout the Country, and to celebrate the launch of this range they are offering all *Bird Watching* readers the opportunity to buy the new Berghaus Expeditor Trek for just £75! (usual price £100). It's an everyday multi-active walking boot with the Berghaus AQ® waterproof lining and their very own patented OPTI-STUD® sole providing unrivalled grip on any terrain. The ideal general all-rounder!

Available in mens (7–12 including ½ sizes) and ladies (4–8 including ½ sizes).

◆ To order, ring Country Innovation on 01934 877333, go online at countryinnovation.co.uk and enter the code BW15 in the checkout, or visit the Country Innovation shop at 1 Broad Street, Congresbury, North Somerset, BS49 5DG. Offer ends 31 May 2015.



Tom Bailey

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2
TO GIVE AWAY



THERE'S NO DOUBT the British weather is highly unpredictable, so preparation is the key when it comes to planning a day out birding.

This Wireless Weather Station, from gadget pioneers Oregon Scientific, lets you plan your birdwatching schedule more easily.

It features information-gathering sensors, and shows you at a glance what to expect; heat, fog, frost, rain and wind/storm, displaying both indoor and outdoor temperature, humidity, and a 12-24 hour Weather Forecast. The Weather Alert allows you to monitor local weather conditions on your smartphone as well as the

station itself, using Bluetooth technology.

The clock function automatically syncs with your smartphone, making it always accurate and automatically updates for the start and end of British Summer Time.

Priced £59.99, it is available from oregonscientific.com

We have two Oregon Scientific Wireless Weather Stations to give away. To be in with a chance of winning one, just go to birdwatching.co.uk and click on the 'WIN' tab.



BIRDS HAVING A BALL

WANT SOMETHING A bit different for your garden birds to nest in? Birdball's ergonomic, spherical shape offers safety and protection from the elements, and the hole is large enough for Blue Tits, Coal Tits, Marsh Tits and Long-tailed Tits, while being small enough to keep out predators. Slipcast in clay, it measures 180mm in diameter.

There's also the Birdball Bird Feeder, to help keep your garden birds fed throughout the year. The peanut feeder has a gravity-fed slot and the glossy surface deters larger birds and squirrels. Both designs are available in white and lime green.

The feeders and the birdhouse come with a stainless steel wire and tree protector for attachment.

Birdball Bird Feeders are £40, and the Birdball Birdhouse is £35 – both are available at Forever Contemporary, forevercontemporary.com



TEST CAMERAS AT BIG EVENT

LONDON CAMERA EXCHANGE'S LCE Southampton PRO Show will take place at the Novotel Hotel in Southampton on Thursday 30 April.



Visitors will be able to see, try and buy the latest digital SLRs, along with a wide variety of lenses and accessories from manufacturers such as Canon, Nikon, Sony and Manfrotto. The show will offer opportunities for professionals and enthusiasts alike to examine and invest in the latest kit, with special show-only offers and part exchange deals. There will also be expert advice and in depth demonstrations from manufacturer experts and LCE's highly trained staff.

Visitors can also take advantage of a free Canon and Nikon sensor clean, as well as taking part in various workshops. There will also be free seminar talks by manufacturer specialists and photographer ambassadors.

Entrance to the event is free, and doors are open 11am-7pm. All visitors will have the chance to win a Veho Muvi K2NPNG HD action camera in a free prize draw. For more information, contact the London Camera Exchange on 02380 632629

New kit for photographers

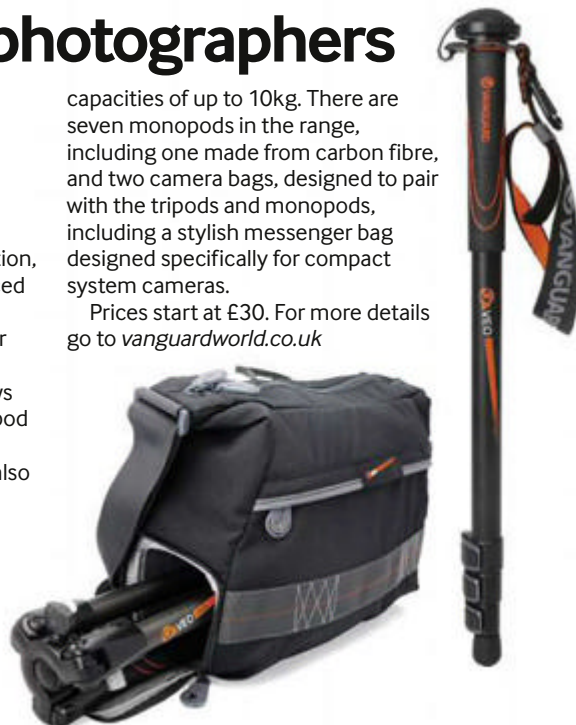
SPORTS OPTICS AND photo accessories firm Vanguard have introduced a new range of travel tripods and monopods, and camera bags.

The emphasis is on compact, lightweight and durable construction, while offering some of the advanced features of full-sized systems. The VEO tripod collection features four models, each with an innovative column rotation system that allows you to set up or pack away the tripod quickly, rather than having to individually reverse each leg. It is also possible to set all three legs at different angles, which when combined with retractable spiked feet allows the tripod to cope with any terrain.

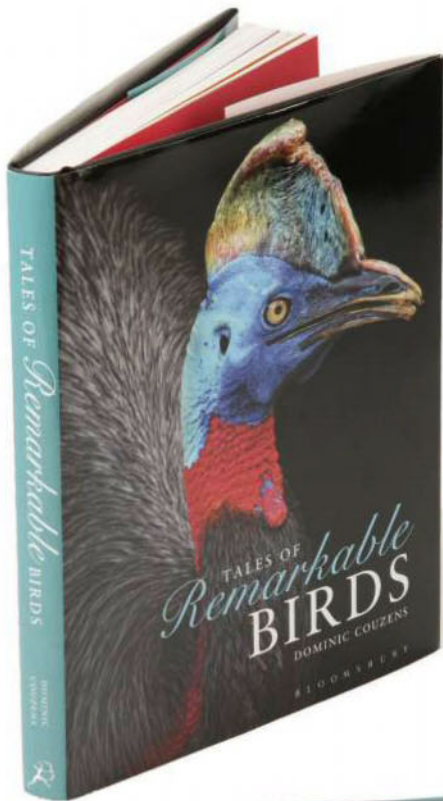
Strength isn't sacrificed, with extra-strong leg locks and load

capacities of up to 10kg. There are seven monopods in the range, including one made from carbon fibre, and two camera bags, designed to pair with the tripods and monopods, including a stylish messenger bag designed specifically for compact system cameras.

Prices start at £30. For more details go to vanguardworld.co.uk



BOOKS



TALES OF REMARKABLE BIRDS

Dominic Couzens

Bloomsbury, ISBN 978 1 4081 9023 4, HB, £20

BW BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.99 but only if you quote BW053



AS THE TITLE suggests, this is a book about behaviour, and the amazing things that birds get up to.

It covers birds around the world, with a mouth-watering selection of 120 pictures for you to enjoy, and as you'd expect from Dominic's articles in *Bird Watching*, it's written to try to encourage the more casual reader to get into birdwatching. But there's plenty for the more experienced birder to learn from, too. For example, we find out about the way sunbirds learned to hover like hummingbirds due to a shrub being introduced into South Africa from South America. It is just this sort of behavioural adaptation that makes birdwatching fascinating and gives the chance for even the novice to find something new in the bird world.

There's much more. Drongos calling up other birds to feed around them so it's easier to find food. Birds kidnapping the young of others to make their own flock stronger. Birds singing someone else's song so that they can 'cuckoo' their nest. Tree-nesting seabirds. There's even the wing length of swallows allowing them to dodge traffic.

The list of European species covered is only five, but that means there is scope for even more books to cover other species, showing us, as Dominic does superbly here, that birds really do remarkable things.

John Miles

We have five copies of Tales of Remarkable Birds, by Dominic Couzens, to give away. For your chance to win a copy, go to birdwatching.co.uk and click on the 'WIN' tab.



CUCKOO – CHEATING BY NATURE

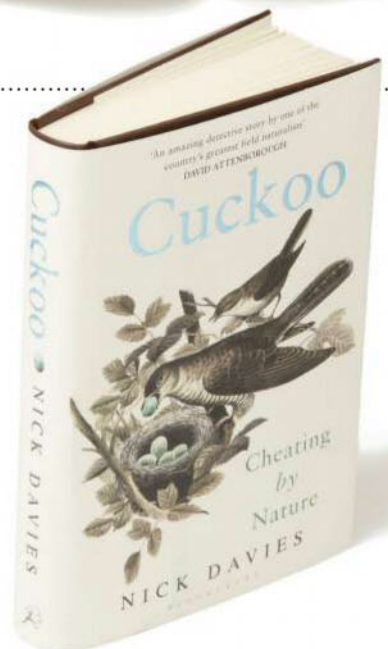
Nick Davies

Bloomsbury, 2015, ISBN 978 1 4088 5656 7, HB, £16.99

BW BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99 but only if you quote BW049

WHAT A FASCINATING book! Nick Davies has given 30 years of his life to studying this amazing species on Wicken Fen, with the results being presented here almost as a detective story. He looks back at the earliest research and information on the Cuckoo, from ancient Greece, following it right through to the 20th Century and the depredations of egg collectors, and considers all sorts of questions. Why and how does the Cuckoo lay its eggs so fast (times of 4-16 seconds recorded compared to 20-60 minutes for other birds)? Why do some Cuckoos fly as far as 15 miles from their territory to feed? The battle by Cuckoos to keep their egg mimicry working in their favour, and how other world cuckoos tried their own ways of deceiving their hosts also make fascinating reading. The excellent sketches are the work of James McCullum, and there are some great colour photos in the middle of the book. This is a real read, not a 'statistics' tome, and everyone should have a copy.

John Miles



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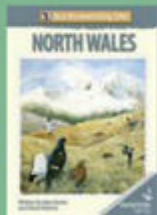


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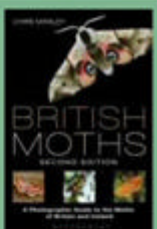
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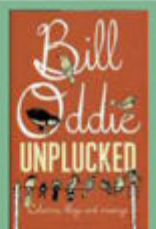
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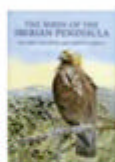
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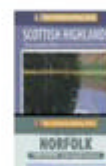


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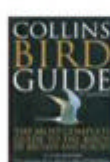
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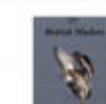
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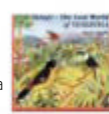
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David Chapman / Aamy

AUTUMN IN SCOTLAND means rich wildlife potential amid rugged beauty, and you can join us there for an exclusive trip from October 18-23, 2015.

Bird Watching editor Matthew Merritt and assistant editor Mike Weedon will be joined by UKBS editor and Scottish birding aficionado Gordon Hamlett to lead a week of wildlife watching, based at the Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown-on-Spey.

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Golden Eagle



Mark Hicken / Alamy

DETAILS

This five-day break is held in partnership with *Bird Watching* and includes:

- ◆ Five nights dinner, bed and breakfast
- ◆ Ensuite rooms are equipped with hairdryer, tea and coffee-making facilities, TV and toiletries
- ◆ Gala dinner
- ◆ Programme of evening talks and quizzes by *Bird Watching's* Matt Merritt, Mike Weedon and Gordon Hamlett
- ◆ Guided walks
- ◆ Films and entertainment
- ◆ No single supplement

Please note: a car is essential on this break.

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Read all about a previous Grant Arms Reader Holiday at birdwatching.co.uk/Articles/BW-blog/Highland-report-day-1



FLPA / Alamy

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As well as the great birdlife, there'll be the chance to see dolphins, Red Squirrels, Red Deer, Otter, Mountain Hare, and maybe even Pine Marten.

The Grant Arms Hotel is home to the Birdwatching and Wildlife Club and its expert staff will be on hand to guide you to the best areas, offer local knowledge and seasonal tips if you prefer to organise your own time. It's perfect for birdwatchers of all levels and a great way to meet like-minded people, share tips and make the most of this incredible time of year.

John Betts / Alamy

Snow Bunting



Pine Martin



Our Wildlife photography / Alamy

Call: 01479 872526 **visit:** bwwc.co.uk

BWWC Ltd, 25 The Square, Grantown on Spey, PH26 3HF. All programmes, talks, walks and rooms subject to availability and liable to change without notice.

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Andean Condor

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- ◆ **Deposit:** £600
- ◆ **Single Room Supplement:** £480
- ◆ **Leader:** Tim Appleton & Luis Segura
- ◆ **Includes:** Economy class scheduled return flights (UK-Buenos Aires-UK), domestic flights, accommodation based on twin occupancy, meals, boat trips, transportation in Argentina, entrance fees and services of leaders.
- ◆ **Excludes:** Airport departure taxes, travel insurance, drinks and items of a personal nature.

ARGENTINA

PATAGONIA & IBERA MARSHES

28 OCTOBER TO 13 NOVEMBER 2015

Francisco Bononato / Alamy

SIGN UP FOR a South American adventure, offering the opportunity to experience some of Argentina's breathtaking scenery, its immense environmental diversity and the wide variety of amazing birds and other wildlife found there.

The itinerary takes in the fantastic Ibera wetlands, then through the rugged sub-Antarctic landscape of Southern Patagonia, looking for a wealth of birdlife, with the possibility of seeing some of the world's most sought-after species.

The masses of penguins in Peninsula Valdes, breathtaking mountains in Tierra del Fuego, the high steppe plateau of Meseta del Tobiano, the awesome Perito Merino Glacier in the Los Glaciares National Park and the multitude of birds in the superb wetland of Ibera Marsh are just some of the amazing sights that await you.

Andean Condors, Tawny-throated Dotterels, Magellanic Plovers, Magellanic Woodpecker, Austral Pygmy Owl, cinclodes and canasteros are all present, while a boat trip in the Beagle Channel could bring close and unforgettable encounters with whales, albatrosses, sheathbills and sea lions.

Magellanic
Woodpecker

Michael Stubbsfield / Alamy

Itinerary

Days 1 & 2: An evening flight from UK to Buenos Aires, arriving on Day 2. After a morning arrival, you'll visit Costanera Sur Nature Reserve in the afternoon. Overnight – Buenos Aires.

Days 3-5: We fly to Pasadas and transfer to the Ibera Marshes. The whole area is teeming with birds, with hordes of ibis, storks and herons. The Ibera swamp and lagoons occupy a massive lowland area of grassland, rainforest and marsh, the largest in Argentina. This haven for nature has an extremely rich birdlife and is also home to many other interesting creatures, such as turtles, frogs, caimans, monkeys, deer and the enigmatic Maned Wolf. Overnights – Ibera Marshes.

Days 6-8: On Day 6 we'll fly to Trelew, set amid dramatic Patagonian scenery and where local lagoons are excellent for Chilean Flamingo, Southern Wigeon, Yellow-billed Pintail, Red Shoveler, Cinereous Harrier, Baird's Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit and Many-coloured Rush-tyrant. Later we travel to Puerto Piramides for a three night stay. We'll explore Peninsula Valdes, which supports an impressive array of marine and terrestrial wildlife, from whales to sheathbills. Mammals here could include Orca, Elephant Seal and Southern Sea Lion. We will have a boat trip into the bay to observe Southern Right Whales, and we may also see Imperial Cormorant, White-headed Steamer-Duck, Magellanic Oystercatcher, South American Tern and Brown Skua. Overnight – Puerto Piramides

Days 9-10: Morning flight to El Calafate on Day 9. Later we'll look for Magellanic Plover, Cinereous Harrier, Chilean Flamingo, Ruddy-headed & Ashy-headed Geese, Southern Wigeon, Tawny-throated Dotterel and Two-banded Plover. A visit to the Los Glaciares National Park and its awesome glaciers, which will provide a magnificent backdrop for observing the area's excellent birdlife. Overnights – El Calafate.

Days 9-10: On Day 11 we'll drive to Gregores for a two night stay. This is a unique region of high steppe in Western Patagonia and supports a number of rare and endangered bird species. We'll visit Meseta del Tobiano and the Strobel Plateau in search of two mega rarities and a number of other local species. At one time Austral Rail was believed to be extinct but fortunately this is not the case and we will attempt to encounter this rare species along with Hooded Grebe. Overnights – Gregores

Days 13-15: After driving to El Calafate, catch a flight to Ushuaia, gateway to the spectacular Tierra del Fuego National Park. During our stay in Ushuaia, we plan an excursion by boat on the Beagle Channel, which will take us closer to sea lion, penguin and seabird colonies. We will also visit Tierra del Fuego National Park and Ushuaia Harbour. Overnights – Ushuaia and Buenos Aires

Days 16 & 17: Return flights from Buenos Aires to the UK, where we arrive on Day 17.

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OCTOBER 3-7 2015

OCTOBER IS A wonderful time to visit North Wales with its exciting blend of resident, migrant, winter and summer birds. Add to this the wide variety of habitats and stunning scenery, ranging from mountains to coast, and you have the perfect mix for a birdwatching break.

Your guides for this tour will be local experts Alan Davies and Ruth Miller.

The tour is based at the Princes Arms Hotel in Trefriw, in the Conwy Valley. This lovely country hotel overlooks the Conwy River so the birdwatching begins right on the doorstep. See princes-arms.co.uk for more details.

The cost of this exclusive tour is £799 per person, no single supplement.

For full details, see *Bird Watching* April 2015.



Mark Salter / Alamy

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ◆ Guiding by Alan and Ruth
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- ◆ An evening presentation
- ◆ Transfer from Llandudno Junction railway station to and from the hotel can be arranged at no extra cost

Itinerary

Day one: Arrive at hotel in the picturesque Conwy Valley in time for lunch then visit RSPB Conwy where we can expect to enjoy waders and wildfowl at close range.

Day two: We visit Anglesey, where Chough and Black Guillemot will be high on our wanted list.

A visit to RSPB South Stack will be one of the highlights on this day.

Day three: A short drive takes us to the Great Orme headland. We also visit other sites along the nearby coast.

Day four: We head east to the Dee Estuary in

search of more raptors, wildfowl and waders and who knows, perhaps a Great White Egret or other scarce bird.

Day five: We spend the morning exploring the Conwy Valley and adjacent uplands before heading home after lunch.

SEE SCOTLAND'S BEST BIRDS

WHERE DO YOU go in the 'quiet' birding weeks of summer? Join *Bird Watching* for glorious scenery, long evenings and some of the best summer birding in Britain, as we visit Scotland in July. This unique holiday, designed especially for *Bird Watching*, is aimed at the enthusiast with some experience, who now wants to branch out and travel a little further afield.

Experienced birders will also enjoy exceptional days in the field, with a total of more than 100 species likely, including many Scottish specialities. The feeling of space and tranquility make the Scottish Highlands a great place to be!

We will watch Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Peregrine, fishing Osprey, Slavonian Grebe, Red- and Black-throated Divers, Scottish (Parrot) Crossbill, Crested Tit and many more! Breeding Ptarmigan and Dotterel guarantee a great day out on the mountains, and we also utilise the evening light to seek out quartering Short-eared Owl. Guaranteed excitement from

magnificent mountaintops to the scenic grandeur of Mull, where we enjoy a day-trip to look for eagles and Otter.

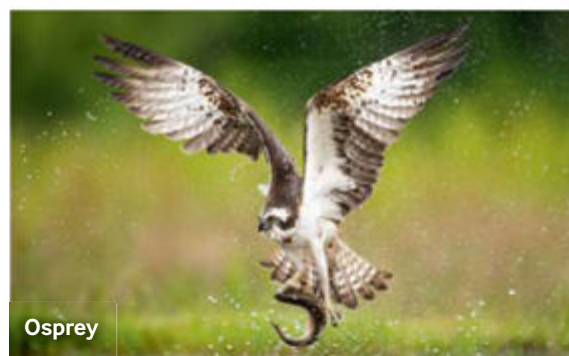
For full details, see *Bird Watching* April 2015.

About the holiday

Arranged by Heatherlea, one of the UK's leading wildlife tour operators, this one-week holiday is based at their three-star hotel in the Scottish Highlands, and is full inclusive of en-suite hotel accommodation, all meals including breakfast, packed lunch and dinner, transport during the holiday and expert guidance from a Heatherlea guide.

You have a choice of three dates in July. The fully-inclusive price of £895 offers tremendous value for money for a guided holiday, which includes many of the Britain's most iconic species British birders most want to see. Editor Matt Merritt will join the first departure beginning 4 July. Come and join us!

◆ heatherlea.co.uk/birdwatching-holidays-twenty-scottish-targets-july.asp



Our Wildlife Photography / Alamy

We have selected 20 specific targets to appeal those who want to see northern speciality species (actually 19 birds and a mustelid, though most birders do love Otters!):

Golden Eagle **White-tailed Eagle** Crested Tit **Red-throated Diver** (in breeding plumage) Black-throated Diver (in breeding plumage) **Slavonian Grebe** (in breeding plumage) Red Grouse **Ptarmigan** Dotterel **Short-eared Owl** Black Guillemot **Hooded Crow** Raven **Twite** Scottish (Parrot) Crossbill **Osprey** Peregrine **Corn Bunting** Gannet (close-up at mainland Scotland's only gannetry) **Otter**

DETAILS

- ◆ **Price:** £895pp. No single supplement. ◆ **Deposit** £100. Max seven clients per Heatherlea guide.
- ◆ **Dates:** 4-11 July, 11-18 July, 18-25 July
- ◆ **Book now:** 01479 821248, heatherlea.co.uk, info@heatherlea.co.uk



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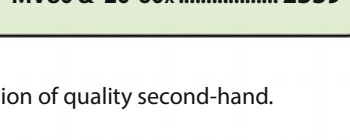
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UK BIRD SIGHTINGS

THE BEST RARE BIRDS SEEN ALL AROUND BRITAIN IN FEBRUARY



Still Laughing

Laughing Gull,
New Brighton,
Cheshire,
6 February

Rares keep coming in as January's birds hang on, reports Lee Evans



Lee Evans is the UK's most well-known and fanatical 'twitcher', having recorded 579 species in Britain and Ireland, 859 in the wider Western Palearctic and 386 in just one calendar year in the UK. For more details, see bbabirding.blogspot.co.uk

FEBRUARY FOLLOWED LARGELY in the same vein as January in terms of weather, with no snow or ice to speak of other than for a couple of days in Scotland and north-east England and little in the way of north-westerly gales. In fact, precipitation was particularly scarce, parts of the south taking three weeks out from rain! By the end of a relatively uneventful month, the tally for the UK's year list had increased to 264.

As the Seaton Park River Don (Aberdeenshire) first-winter drake Harlequin Duck remained in residence throughout February, a second individual was discovered on 22nd – a female-type offshore of Brora in Sutherland. Being on the open sea, this bird was far harder to see, but did remain until the month's end.

Runner-up for February's top prize went to a first-winter Laughing Gull

at New Brighton (Merseyside) from 3rd (until 28th March at least). Spending low tide among the rocks at Perch Rock Lighthouse, at high tide it was forced to pitch up with the roosting waders on the pontoon in the marine lake, where it gave observers with some sensational views. It was a particularly popular rarity, perhaps more so considering the species' relative scarcity in recent years in the UK. And to think that no fewer than 58 graced our shores in 2005!

In the south of England, the main attraction were the two male Serins at Gunners Park, Shoeburyness (Essex) from 1st – showing daily in the parkland thereabouts. At times, and when feeding, views could be had at just a few yards – both birds (often in full jangling song) remaining on site well into March. These are the first wintering Serins in Britain since when up to three

spent two successive years at RSPB Rainham Marsh, just 24 miles to the west.

Also highlights of February were three overwintering Little Buntings, with a male in Ashdown Forest at Old Lodge NR (Sussex) from late January to at least 25th and further singles at Forest Farm NR, Cardiff (South Wales) from 5th and at Gulval, near Penzance (Cornwall) from 10th, the latter two both surviving until at least the end of March. Although an overwintering Little Bunting is a regular occurrence, to have three such

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individuals, two of which were very showy, is something of a treat.

The adult Pacific Diver continued to wander between Penzance Harbour mouth and Marazion (Cornwall) throughout the month, generally on the sea between St Michael's Mount and Longrock, while a second individual, also recorded in previous winters, remained off Pender Beach, Gerrans Bay, from at least 1st-22nd. White-billed Divers included two in the Sound of Gruney, between Fetlar and Yell (Shetland) and another at St Margaret's Hope on Orkney, with a handful of sightings elsewhere in Highland Scotland.

The juvenile Night Heron remained at Youghal (Co. Cork) until at least 6th, with both Cattle Egrets at Dungeness (Kent) throughout and another nearby near the Royal Military Canal in Hamstreet (Kent).

Some 46 Great White Egrets continuing on winter territory, several being colour-ringed individuals from Loire Atlantique in NW France.

The free-flying pair of White Storks from Thrigby Hall (Norfolk) continued to wander, as did our (almost certainly genuinely wild!) overwintering Glossy Ibises, with one relocating to Nottinghamshire at Gonalston from 12th-28th and a second joining the long-staying bird at Tramore Backstrand (Co. Waterford) on 26th. Meanwhile, that at Fen Drayton Lakes RSPB (Cambs) stayed put all month.

A single adult Ross's Snow Goose remained with Pink-footed Geese in Northumberland throughout, with a vagrant first-winter Taiga Bean Goose in Teesmouth (Cleveland) from 20th-28th, a continuing influx of Tundra Bean Geese (including a flock of 12 at South Ferriby, on the Humber Estuary, on 28th). Six Richardson's Cackling Geese (one of the small Canada Goose complex) remained with Barnacles (on Islay and in Co. Sligo), 17 Black Brants and the three continuing Ruddy Shelducks (a long-staying pair at Pitsford Water, Northants, and a solitary female at South Huish Marsh).

The drake American Black Duck remained on Tresco Great Pool (Scilly) throughout; there were also 15 American Wigeons (predominantly drakes), an overwintering Garganey at Beddington Sewage Farm (Surrey) and some early arrivals of this spring migrant duck in North Norfolk.

A drake Blue-winged Teal was on Orkney at The Shunan, Loch of Harray, still, the drake Ferruginous Duck of unknown origin remained



Graham Catey



Rich Andrews



Graham Catey

at Kingfisher Lake, Blashford Pits (Hants) throughout and a female-type was at Slimbridge WWT (Gloucestershire).

Other wildlife included at least eight Lesser Scaups, 14 Ring-necked Ducks, six King Eiders including the first-winter drake off Cornwall at Maenporth Beach, both drake North American Black Scoters (that off Rossbeigh, Co. Kerry, and the other off Cheswick Sands, Northumberland), the Radipole Lake (Dorset) drake Hooded Merganser and up to 28 Surf Scoters, including a drake off Gosport (Hants) from 25th-28th and perhaps the most confiding drake ever off Filey Brigg (North Yorks) on 14th-15th, subsequently moving into Scarborough Bay, next day, where it returned to deep water until 18th.

↑ CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Black-bellied Dipper, Harpham, East Yorkshire, 21 February

Harlequin Duck, River Don, Aberdeen, February

At least 26 juvenile Rough-legged Buzzards were still to be found in Britain in February, with the odd white-morph Greenland Gyrfalcon being seen in the Northern Isles and in western Ireland.

Both American Coots continued throughout, with that on Lough Gill (Co. Kerry) and the other on Loch nam Feithean, Balranald RSPB, North Uist (Outer Hebrides).

A single Dotterel was identified within a flock of 4,000 Golden

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Paul Brewster



Graham Cauley



Simon Knight

Plovers on the Camel Estuary at Wadebridge (Cornwall) on 26th-27th, while other rare waders included three different Lesser Yellowlegs (two in Ireland and a long-stayer in East Sussex) and an overwintering Wood Sandpiper at Elmley Marshes (Kent).

The adult Bonaparte's Gull remained at Dawlish Warren NNR (Devon) all month, with another regular adult at Cardiff Heliport (Glamorgan); a further one in Caithness in Thurso Harbour, intermittently, and another at Loch Caolisport in Argyll, while the second-winter Laughing Gull continued at Ballycotton (County Cork) throughout.

At least 33 Ring-billed Gulls were sighted in February (including three in West Cornwall), with a first-

winter Smithsonian's Gull lingering on North Uist (Outer Hebrides) until 4th. A spell of NW winds saw the expected rush in Kumlien's and Iceland Gull occurrences, the Butt of Lewis and Stornoway Harbour, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) attracting no less than 85 individuals during the last week. The adult Forster's Tern ranged widely in Galway Bay (Co. Galway) throughout the month.

The Snowy Owl continued at Braade (Co. Donegal) until at least 15th. There were 19 overwintering Shore Larks and at least 15 Richard's Pipits, a 'black-bellied' (continental) Dipper at Kelk Beck, south-west of Burton Agnes (East Yorkshire) from 13th-28th, a belated arrival of some 55 Waxwings (including 31 in Aberdeen), five wintering Ring Ouzels still near

↑ CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Little Bunting, Forest Farm, Glamorgan, 15 February

Bonaparte's Gull, Cardiff Bay Heliport, Glamorgan February

Ring-billed Gull, Townhill CP, Fife, 21. February

Surf Scoter, Filey, North Yorkshire 15 February


Bethesda (North Wales), at least two overwintering Siberian Lesser Whitethroats, 42 Siberian Chiffchaffs and seven Yellow-browed Warblers.

The three Penduline Tits provided regular entertainment with their intermittent reedbed performances at Darts Farm RSPB, Topsham (South Devon) throughout.

In the best winter in a very long time for the species, no fewer than 51 Great Grey Shrikes were to be found across the country.

The first-year Rose-coloured Starling survived in Prudhoe (Northumberland) until 3rd. Meanwhile, a singing male Two-barred Crossbill was at Yew Tree Brake, Forest of Dean (Gloucs) from 15th-28th, in the company of Crossbills.

SOUTH WEST

Highlights In association with  It was a month when most of the key rarities were hanging on from earlier. These included the Pacific Diver at Marazion, Cornwall, Devon's Penduline Tits, Black Duck on Scilly, and the odd Lesser Scaup and Bonaparte's Gull. A new Pacific Diver was off Pendower Beach, Cornwall, with 15 Black-throated Divers.

AVON

HIGHLIGHTS: A Green-winged Teal on the Axe Estuary (5th-17th) moved between Avon and Somerset.

CLEVEDON AREA: There were two Lapland Buntings (3rd), a Short-eared Owl (22nd and 24th) and a Water Pipit (28th).

PORTISHEAD AREA: Unusual birds included a Black Redstart (13th), a Firecrest trapped and ringed (15th), a Mandarin (16th-17th), Short-eared Owl (24th) and Water Pipit (24th-25th).

SEVERNSIDE: The Green-winged Teal was seen again (21st). The Water Pipit remained. A flock of 26 Kittiwakes was seen (23rd).

THE RESERVOIRS: The Chew gull roost held a site record 14 Mediterranean Gulls (13th). The Great Northern Diver, Great White Egret, Scaup and two Siberian Chiffchaffs remained. At Blagdon, the Black-necked Grebe remained throughout.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE AREA: The high spring tides (21st-22nd) pushed out five Jack Snipe. A Bearded Tit was heard (11th). There was a Black Redstart (16th) and Water Pipit (21st).

OTHER SITES: A flock of 20 Waxwings flew over Paulton (22nd). A Firecrest was at Ham Green (25th). The only Brambling was at Abbots Leigh (10th). Red Kites were at Yatton (4th), Chipping Sodbury (5th) and Dunkerton (22nd).

Richard Mielcarek

CHANNEL ISLANDS

JERSEY: Two Peregrines were in St Helier. A Black Redstart was there, with two at Fauvic and La Rocque, and one at Gorey. The odd Merlin and Jack Snipe were noted. Grouville Bay and La Rocque logged Sandwich Terns, Shelducks, 100 Red-breasted Mergansers, 20 Common Scoters, Razorbills, 20 Great Northern Divers, 100 Red-throated Divers, 30 Great Crested Grebes, Black-necked Grebes, Slavonian Grebes, a Spoonbill, two Cattle Egrets, 60 Little Egrets, Cirl Buntings, hundreds of Linnetts and Chiffchaffs, and four Ravens. Hundreds of Fulmars were off the north-west coast. Wooded valleys held up to 20 Woodcocks, Siskins, Bramblings and Firecrests. Redwings and Fieldfares were widespread. St Ouen's logged a Wheatear (6th), Bittern, Bearded Tits, Cetti's Warblers, 100 Reed Buntings, Gadwall, 45 Shovelers, 100 Tufted Ducks, 50 Pochards, 100 Teal, Marsh Harriers, Buzzards, 20 Lapwings and 100 Snipe. Two Rooks were at Haute Croix.

Pontac held 100 Golden Plovers and 40 Mediterranean Gulls. Petit Port had six Purple Sandpipers. La Rocque held two Black Brants. Goose Green and St Aubins Harbour held 45 pale-bellied Brent Geese.

Lesser Black-backed Gulls moved inland from mid-month. Sixteen Choughs were at Devil's Hole. Two possible American Herring Gulls were at Gorey.

Bertram Bree

CORNWALL

HIGHLIGHTS: The Whooper Swan remained at Helston (to 11th). Two American Wigeon were on the Gannel Estuary (to 23rd), and the drake remained around Kingsmill Lake (to 15th). A Long-tailed Duck was at Swanpool (1st-26th). A Lesser Scaup was on Dozmary

Penduline Tit,
RSPB Darts Farm,
Devon, March



David Carr

(1st-6th), after visiting Siblyback (5th). A King Eider was at Maenporth all month. The Pacific Diver was in Mount's Bay intermittently, with a second bird off Pendower for most of the month.

A few Red-necked Grebes were noted around the coast. Black-necked Grebes peaked at 26 in Carrick Roads (18th). Two Bitterns were at Marazion. Eleven Spoonbills were on the Tamar Complex (to 11th), with another on Walmsley (15th). A Great White Egret flew over Truro (18th). A Dotterel was at Tregunna (26th-27th). A Little Gull was on The Gannel Estuary (28th). Ring-billed Gulls were at Hayle, Drift, Swanpool and Marazion.

Seven Iceland Gulls were at various sites round the coast. Two Kumlien's Gulls were on Hayle (7th-10th), with singles at Coverack (18th-22nd) and Helston (28th). A Yellow-legged Gull was on Hayle (25th). A Caspian Gull was in Newquay (13th). Glaucous Gulls wandered through the County and included three at Coverack (1st-24th). A few Water Pipits and Black Redstarts were recorded. A Richard's Pipit was at Coverack (3rd).

A Ring Ouzel was at St Ives (6th). Yellow-browed Warblers were at St Levan (2nd-3rd), Carminowe (15th) and Ponsanooth (23th). A Hooded Crow was at Helston (26th). A Little Bunting was at Gulval (10th-28th). Two Snow Buntings were at Gwithian (1st-7th). Seven Lapland Buntings were at Trevoze (1st-18th), and two at St Levan (20th).

Sara McMahon (01752 242 823)

DEVON

NORTH DEVON: The Taw Estuary logged 30 Sanderling, nine Grey Plovers, a Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, 2,500 Golden Plovers, 29 Pintails, 32 Shelducks, and 12 Goosanders. Braunton had four Spoonbills, two Merlins and a Short-eared Owl. A Water Pipit was at Heddons Mouth. Isley Marsh had seven Spoonbills and a Red-breasted Merganser. Wrafton had seven Spoonbills. Four Purple Sandpipers were at Ilfracombe. Lower Tamar Lake had 33 Goosanders and a Willow Tit.

SOUTH DEVON: Beesands held ten Common Scoters. Otterton had 21 Red-throated Divers and a Black-throated Diver. Torbay had eight Black-necked Grebes, a Velvet Scoter, 15 Cirl Buntings, a Yellow-browed Warbler and Hoopoe. Cator had 12 Bramblings. Topsham logged a Black Brant, 124 Common Gulls, four Mediterranean Gulls, 25 Snipe, a Grey Plover, two Goldeneyes, 18 Red-breasted Mergansers, three Water Rails, a Chiffchaff, six Pintails and 35 Shovelers.

A Siberian Chiffchaff, Yellow-browed Warbler,

Firecrest and 14 Cirl Buntings were at Paignton. Dawlish Warren had two Long-tailed Ducks and six Red-breasted Mergansers. The Exe Estuary had 36 Red-breasted Mergansers, 600 Avocets, 50 Knot, 100 Black-tailed Godwits and three Cetti's Warblers. A Scaup was at Newton Abbot. Soar had 45 Cirl Buntings, 310 Skylarks and two White Wagtails. Lopwell had a Blackcap, Common Sandpiper and a Greenshank.

Wembury had two Mediterranean Gulls, a Common Sandpiper, Black Redstart and Water Pipit. Red Kites flew over Exeter, Brentor and Princetown. Two Firecrests were at Longwood. Darts Farm still had three Penduline Tits and a Snow Bunting. Bowling Green Marsh logged 150 Bar-tailed Godwits, 650 Avocets, 400 Black-tailed Godwits, 20 Shovelers, four Pochards, a Blackcap, two Egyptian Geese, four Water Rails, nine Pintails and a Black Brant.

Torcross had a Black Redstart. Runnage had 100 Fieldfares and a Merlin. Exminster had seven Cirl Buntings. Smeatharpe had 53 Golden Plovers, 89 Snipe and 102 Fieldfares. Plympton had a Barn Owl and two Red Kites. Soussons had a Hen Harrier, two Bramblings and several Crossbills. A Great Grey Shrike was at Fernworthy Reservoir. Berry Head had 1,400 nesting Guillemots. Ivybridge had a Lesser Whitethroat. Brixham held 15 Purple Sandpipers. Slapton had a Yellow-browed Warbler.

THURLESTONE BAY: Maxima were two Eurasian Whitefronts, 10 Shelducks, a Ruddy Shelduck, 58 Wigeon, 80 Teal, six Gadwall, a Pintail, two Shovelers, 40 Common Scoters, a Red-throated and Great Northern Diver, three Black-throated Divers, a Great Crested Grebe, two Little Grebes, 60 Gannets, three Fulmars, a few Little Egrets, a Spoonbill, 18 Oystercatchers, 110 Lapwings, 100 Golden Plovers, six Ringed Plovers, a Sanderling, Jack Snipe, 110 Snipe, a Woodcock, Curlew and eight Turnstones. Buzzard, Peregrine, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Tawny Owl all hunted regularly.

There were 16 Kittiwakes, a Mediterranean Gull, 40 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, a Yellow-legged Gull, 300 Razorbills, 30 Guillemots, a Kingfisher, two Green Woodpeckers, Cetti's Warblers, 40 Chiffchaffs, two Siberian Chiffchaffs, 30 Fieldfares, 35 Redwings, two Black Redstarts, six Stonechats, 25 Pied Wagtails, 50 Meadow Pipits, 15 Rock Pipits, 150 Chaffinches, 13 Reed Buntings and a Cirl Bunting.

Harvey Kendall and Mike Passman

DORSET

HIGHLIGHTS: The Black Guillemot remained in Portland Harbour throughout, and the Poole

Harbour bird was last reported (8th). The Smew in the Holes Bay area were reported several times. The Studland Great White Egret was seen periodically. The Bewick's Swan was still at Tincleton (1st). A Crane was at Chesselbourne (2nd). A Hoopoe was at Piddle Hinton and a Scaup at Longham Lakes (5th). Four Long-tailed Ducks were at Rodden Hive (6th), before moving to Abbotsbury for the rest of the month. Abbotsbury held a Green-winged Teal (10th).

A Greenland White-fronted Goose at Overcombe Pool (6th), Lodmoor (15th) and Abbotsbury (19th) was probably the same bird. West Bexington held three Cirl Buntings (7th). A Ring-billed Gull was at Stanpit (8th). Great Grey Shrikes were at Godlingstone Heath, Morden Bog (14th) and Studland (21st). Gillingham produced a Yellow-browed Warbler (18th). Three Great Bustards were at Kimmeridge and a Dipper at Lyme Regis (22nd). Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were at East Holme and Brownsea.

CHRISTCHURCH HARBOUR: There were 39 Pintails (1st). Red-throated Divers and a Great Skua passed Hengistbury Head. Also recorded were Purple Sandpipers and a Red-necked Grebe. Stanpit Marsh hosted a Woodcock, Spotted Redshank, Water Pipit, Grey Plovers and Scandinavian Rock Pipits. Mudeford Quay produced four pale-bellied Brent Geese.

THE FLEET: There were Goldeneyes, Pintails, Wigeon and Scaup. Ferrybridge recorded a pale-bellied Brent Goose. Barnacle Geese, Brent Geese, Grey Plovers, Golden Plovers and Knot were in the Rodden Hive area.

POOLE HARBOUR/STUDLAND: Marsh and Hen Harriers, Merlins, Black-necked and Slavonian Grebes, Spoonbills, 700 Avocets, a Whimbrel, Spotted Redshanks, Greenshanks, a Green Sandpiper, a Bittern at Arne and 100 Fieldfares were noted.

PORTLAND BILL: Birds passing were Red-throated Divers, a Great Skua and Manx Shearwater. Portland Harbour held Black-throated and Great Northern Divers, Red-necked, Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes and an Eider. Radipole recorded a Bittern, Bearded Tits and Yellow-legged Gulls. Spoonbills were at Lodmoor.

OTHER SITES: Firecrests were at 12 sites, Red Kites at six and Green Sandpipers at five. Some 1,000 Golden Plovers and 50 Corn Buntings were at Maiden Castle. Martins Down had Yellowhammers and Sky Larks. Lytchett Matravers held 1,600 Linnetts (11th).

Goosanders were at Shapwick/White Mill. There were several reports of Black Redstarts and Jack Snipe.

Robin Trundle (robtrundle@live.co.uk)

ISLES OF SCILLY

HIGHLIGHTS: An Iceland Gull at Porth Hellick (1st) ended up around the Dump/Porth Mellon (2nd), and commuted between there and Porth Cressa until the end of the month. Three Black Redstarts were in the sheltered bays of St Mary's.

Two Long-eared Owls were at Trewince (2nd). The Black Duck was on Tresco (to 19th). A Spoonbill flew over Tresco. The Black-necked Grebes were off Carn Near (2nd and 11th).

The Barnacle Goose was on Tresco (to 11th). The Long-tailed Duck remained around New Grimsby until later in the month when it relocated to Porth Cressa. A Short-eared Owl was on Tresco. Four pale-bellied Brent Geese were off Tean (4th, 9th and 17th). Two Fieldfares were over Tresco (6th). A Whimbrel was at Pendrather and a Firecrest in Holy Vale (8th). Three Snow Buntings were on Round Island. A Firecrest was at Salakee (11th) and on Kitty Down (12th).

A Common Scoter was off St Mary's Quay (13th). A Kingfisher was at Porth Hellick (15th). Bryher (17th) held a Long-eared Owl and the long-staying Hooded Crow. A Firecrest was at Carreg Dhu Gardens (17th) and Salakee (24th). A Great Northern Diver was in Porth Cressa late in the month.

Will Wagstaff

SOMERSET

HIGHLIGHTS: A Green-winged Teal was on the Axe Estuary (5th and 15th-18th). A Ring-necked Duck at Ashford Reservoir (6th) relocated to Clatworthy Reservoir (from 21st). A Long-tailed Duck was off Stoford (from 22nd). A Black-throated Diver passed Hurlstone Point (14th). A Little Stint was on Berron beach (22nd). Lapland Buntings were at Wall Common all month, and on the Axe Estuary (to 7th). Three Twite lingered at the latter site (to 21st).

OTHER SITES: Whooper Swans were on Curry Moor (two on 21st), Shapwick Heath (2nd), and Steart Marshes (two, all month). The two Barnacle Geese at Catcott Lows and two Egyptian Geese near Westhay Moor remained. Two Scaup were intermittently at Cheddar Reservoir. Three Spotted Redshanks were in the Parrett Estuary.

Short-eared Owls included two at Steart Marshes, one at Huntspill Sluice (10th), and one at Westhay Moor. A Water Pipit was at Porlock Weir (14th). Firecrests included two at Westhay Moor (to 4th) and three at Hinton St George. A Dartford Warbler was at Westhay Moor (1st-7th). The Black Redstart remained at Brean Down, with others at Dunster Beach and in Yeovil.

Julian Thomas (SOS: www.somersetbirds.net)

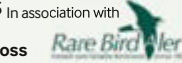
GLOSSARY

The following acronyms and abbreviations are used in the UKBS pages, for brevity:

- BONXIE:** Great Skua
- COMMIC:** 'Common or Arctic' Tern, when ID impossible
- CP:** Country Park
- GP:** Gravel Pits
- LNR:** Local Nature Reserve
- MED GULL:** Mediterranean Gull
- NR:** Nature Reserve
- NNR:** National Nature Reserve
- PINKFEET:** Pink-footed Geese
- RSPB:** Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (reserve)
- SP:** Species (eg. skua sp, used when precise ID impossible)
- SSP:** Subspecies
- SW:** Sewage Works
- WHITEFRONTS:** White-fronted Geese
- WP:** Water Park
- WT:** Wildlife Trust (reserve)
- WWT:** Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (reserve)

SOUTH EAST

Highlights



Rare goodies across the region during February included the Lesser Yellowlegs at Winchelsea, East Sussex, Great White Egret, Black Brant in Hampshire (with another in West Sussex) and a Surf Scoter off the same county; Cattle Egret in Kent, Siberian Chiffchaffs in London and Bedfordshire and Rough-legged Buzzards in Surrey and Kent. A Little Bunting was at Ashdown Forest, East Sussex from 5th.

BEDFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Glossy Ibis flew over Sandy (20th). An exceptionally early Whinchat was at Wootton (2nd). Great Grey Shrikes were at Pegsdon Hills (12th and 17th) and Sandy Smith (11th-15th). A Smew was at Brogborough Lake (from 28th). The Black-necked Grebe remained at Dunstable sewage works. A Great White Egret was at Roxton GP (1st-2nd), over Cardington (2nd) and over the A421 at Bedford (9th). A Scaup was at Chimney Corner South Lake (7th-10th). A Water Pipit was at Meadow Lane GP (14th). The Siberian Chiffchaff remained at Marston Moretaine SW.

Robin Chittenden - for the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 cost 61p per minute plus network extras. Calls from mobiles and some networks may be considerably higher. Services provided by Birdline East Anglia - for enquiries about 090 services please call 07941 333 970; www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk

BERKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The Ring-necked Duck remained at Bray GP (to 8th).

DINTON PASTURES CP: There was a Little Egret (9th-27th), two Water Rails, two Oystercatchers, a Little Owl (21st-27th), Cetti's Warbler and two Ravens (21st-25th).

MOOR GREEN LAKES: Highlights included three Little Egrets, two Shelducks (22nd-27th), a Scaup (2nd), three Smew, a Water Rail (2nd-10th), two Oystercatchers (21st-24th), a Barn Owl (27th), two Little Owls (22nd-27th) and three Stonechats.

THEALE GP: There was a Great Northern Diver (5th-25th), Bittern (7th), three Little Egrets, a White-fronted Goose (9th), Red-crested Pochard (14th), Smew (1st), Water Rail and two Oystercatchers.

OTHER SITES: Eight Red-crested Pochards were at Horton GP (12th), with two at Woolhampton GP (15th) and three at Lower Farm GP (21st). Three Smew were at Wraybury GP (12th), with two at Padworth Lane GP (7th-9th). Black Redstarts were at Queen Mother Reservoir (6th-15th) and Greenham Common (11th). The Firecrest remained at Whiteknights Park, Reading (9th-27th).

Marek Walford (www.berksbirds.co.uk)

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The Ring-necked Duck remained at Calvert (to 8th) and an Iceland Gull roosted there (20th). A Pink-footed Goose of unknown origin was at Gayhurst Quarry (13th-20th). An early Avocet was at College Lake (16th). The Siberian Chiffchaff reappeared at Little Marlow GP (from 24th). The Great Grey Shrike remained at Slapton all month.

CALVERT: Two Smew appeared (6th). Five Caspian Gulls were seen in the roost.

COLLEGE LAKE: There were three Red-crested Pochards all month, with five (1st and 14th), and a Pintail (22nd-23rd).

LINFORD: Two Bitterns were seen (3rd-4th), with one (8th and 20th). Two Smew were

present (8th-20th), with a Jack Snipe (20th).

LITTLE MARLOW GP: Two Caspian Gulls were seen (8th, 23rd and 28th). The first Mediterranean Gull of the year arrived (24th). A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was found (27th).

OTHER SITES: Two Bitterns were at Weston Turville Reservoir (9th-17th), dropping to one (to 24th). Seven Caspian Gulls were at Hedgerley Landfill. Stonechats were at seven sites, including four at Dorney Lake (25th).

Adam Bassett (www.bucksbirdclub.co.uk)

HAMPSHIRE

BLASHFORD LAKES/AVON VALLEY: A Bittern was reported (1st), with an Iceland Gull (2nd). There were further sightings of the Ferruginous Duck (to 8th), Long-tailed Duck, two Black-necked Grebes and Ring-billed Gull (to 11th). There were seven Mandarin, a Water Rail, Woodcock (17th), Green Sandpiper, nine Mediterranean Gulls, six Yellow-legged Gulls, a Little Owl (11th), Cetti's Warbler (12th), Firecrest (9th-12th), Raven, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll.

Exceptional counts included 220 Greylags, 1,630 Wigeon, 23 Goldeneyes, 81 Goosanders, 110 Cormorants, 15 Little Egrets, 7,000 Black-headed Gulls, 1,100 Common Gulls, 2,500 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and 500 Herring Gulls.

FARLINGTON MARSHES/LANGSTONE HARBOUR

There were 30 Barnacle Geese (14th-15th), a pale-bellied Brent Goose (11th and 14th), Black Brant (1st), three Spoonbills (11th), a Whimbrel (11th-15th), Spotted Redshank (11th and 14th), Green Sandpiper (14th), Dartford Warbler and five Bearded Tits. The harbour held a Slavonian Grebe (1st and 8th), nine Black-necked Grebes, 58 Avocets and 190 Knot.

LYMINGTON-MILFORD ON SEA: Visitors included a Bittern (2nd), Marsh Harriers (1st, 5th and 8th), a Merlin (17th), 500 Golden Plovers (15th), and Water Pipits (2nd and 17th). Regularly seen were five Spoonbills, eight Avocets, 50 Knot, six Ruff, six Spotted Redshanks, 11 Bearded Tits and a Raven. Offshore were 19 Eiders, a Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, five Slavonian Grebes, and three Red-throated Divers, a Great Northern Diver and Guillemot (8th).

TITCHFIELD HAVEN: There were four Spoonbills (from 10th) and Water Pipits (14th and 27th). Regularly seen were a Marsh Harrier, Peregrine, 11 Water Rails, 66 Pintails, 180 Golden Plovers, 281 Snipe, 13 Jack Snipe, two Kingfishers, a Cetti's Warbler and seven Bearded Tits. Avocets, Mediterranean Gulls and a few hundred Black-headed Gulls returned to their breeding areas. Offshore was a pale-bellied Brent Goose (20th-21st) and Slavonian Grebe (10th), with more regular sightings of Eider, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit.

OTHER SITES: A Surf Scoter was at Stokes

Bay (from 25th). A White-fronted Goose was at Hook-with-Warsash (28th). A Black Brant was at HMS Sultan-Gosport (24th). A Smew and Bittern were at Fawley Reservoir (6th). A Great White Egret was at Longparish (27th). Two Jack Snipe were at The Vyne (8th) and one at Fleet (22nd). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Eastleigh SF (1st-9th). Bransbury Common logged a Barn Owl, Short-eared Owl and Great Grey Shrike. A Black-throated Diver was in Chichester Harbour (2nd-11th), with a Red-necked Grebe there (17th). A Great Northern Diver was recorded at Hayling Island (2nd).

Richard Carpenter

HERTFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Six Hawfinches were at Bramfield, two at West End and one at Bencroft Wood. Two Siberian Chiffchaffs were at Maple Cross. Three Smew and a Caspian Gull were at Armwell. Smew were also at Stockers Lake and Stanstead Abbots GP. A Scaup was at Wilston Reservoir (from 27th). A Black-necked Grebe was at Hilfield Park Reservoir (12th). Two Avocets were at Tyttenhanger GP (16th).

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KENT

HIGHLIGHTS: A Great Grey Shrike remained at Chilham. Two Great White Egrets and seven Smew were at Dungeness RSPB (1st), with seven Great White Egrets there (2nd), and 11 (17th). Another was at Conningbrook GP. Two Cattle Egrets were at Dungeness RSPB and Scotney GP. A Bittern was at Dungeness early in the month.

A Richard's Pipit was at Shell Ness/Swale throughout the month, with a Hooded Crow there early in the month, plus a Hen Harrier and two Short-eared Owls (11th). A Rough-legged Buzzard flew over Rochester (7th). Walland Marsh had 13 European Whitefronts and 87 Bewick's Swans (12th). Scotney GP (4th), held two tundra Bean Geese, three Black-necked Grebes and a Scaup.

Robin Smith

SURREY

HIGHLIGHTS: A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Ravensbury Park, Morden (5th). A Pinkfoot was in the Dorking area (6th-13th). A Gannet flew over Holmwood Common (24th).

STAINES RESERVOIRS: Highlights included Black-necked Grebe, Caspian Gull, Glaucous Gull, Golden Plover, Great Northern Diver, Iceland Gull, Scaup, Slavonian Grebe and Water Pipit.

OTHER SURREY WATERWAYS: Tice's Meadow, Farnham hosted 14 Jack Snipe

Great Grey Shrike, Chilham, near Canterbury, Kent, 24 February



Malcolm Freeman

(14th), 32 Golden Plovers (25th) and a Black-necked Grebe.

Beddington logged Caspian, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, plus five sightings of Garganey during the month. A Smew was at Holmethorpe. A Red-breasted Merganser was at Walton Reservoir (15th).

OTHER SITES: The Great Grey Shrike remained at Thursley, with a Hen Harrier and Merlin also there. A Hen Harrier was below the A31 Hogsback (3rd). Two Firecrests were at Winkworth Arboretum.

Peter Bryant


SUSSEX

EAST SUSSEX: The Lesser Yellowlegs remained at Winchelsea and Rye Harbour (to 21st). Rough-legged Buzzards were at Jevington (to 23rd) and Ripe. A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Swanborough Sewage Works, Lewes (8th). A Little Bunting was with a small Reed Bunting flock in Ashdown Forest (from 9th).

WEST SUSSEX: The Kumlien's Gull remained at Littlehampton (to 8th). The Great Grey Shrike remained at Iping Common. Two Siberian Chiffchaffs were at Coldwaltham Sewage Works. A Great White Egret flew west at Rustington (8th). A Black Brant was recorded at Apuldram (9th) and Birdham (10th).

Robin Smith

EAST ANGLIA

Highlights In association with 

An immature Gyrfalcon would have stolen top billing in the region if the bird seen in Suffolk and Norfolk were wild. New birds of the region were of the 'scarce' rather than truly 'rare' category, with Black Brant, Great White Egret, Siberian Chiffchaff, Great Grey Shrike, wandering small flocks of Crane plus Rough-legged Buzzards.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The Glossy Ibis and Black-necked Grebe remained at Fen Drayton Lakes. A tundra Bean Goose was also there, with seven more at Kingfishers Bridge (24th). The Rough-legged Buzzard remained at Holme Fen. Great Grey Shrikes were at Dalham (11th-17th) and Swaffham Prior Fen (16th). A Great Northern Diver was at Paxton Pits (from 7th). Glaucous Gulls were at Witcham Gravel, Milton, Cottenham, Ouse Fen and Fen Drayton Lakes. An Iceland Gull was at Grafham Water (20th). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Godmanchester Sewage Works (9th).

Robin Chittenden - for the latest bird news

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ESSEX

METROPOLITAN ESSEX: There were 52 Goosanders in the Lee Valley. Four Smew were on the Seventy Acres. Two Red-crested Pochards were in the Ingrebourne Valley. Three Whitefronts ranged between the Valley and Belhus Woods CP. A Brent Goose remained at Waltham Marsh. Broods of Egyptian Geese were in the Lee Valley and Valentines Park where the Mediterranean Gull remained. A Bittern was around Seventy Acres Lake, with two at Berwick Pond. Seven Black-necked Grebes were on William Girling Reservoir. Three Scaup were on Walthamstow throughout, along with wintering Common Sandpipers. Becton held a Grey Plover, with 63 Black-tailed Godwits at Gallions Reach. A similar number were at Barking Bay, also a Caspian Gull. There were 41 Avocets at West Thurrock Marshes. Woodcocks were at several sites around Bedfords Park. Wanstead held 360 Gadwall. Two Ravens were at Upshire, with another over Cornmill Meadows. A Red Kite was at Great Warley Hall. Firecrests remained at Snaresbrook and Woodford Green.

MID-ESSEX: Abberton Reservoir held eight Smew, 28 Goosanders, five Red-breasted Mergansers, six Whitefronts, five tundra Bean Geese, a Merlin, Hen Harrier, Slavonian Grebe, Bittern, Jack Snipe and Mediterranean Gull. The Blackwater logged Black-throated and Great Northern Divers, a Slavonian Grebe and Shag. Old Hall Marshes had a Smew, 15 Red-breasted Mergansers, a Merlin, Greenshank and two Short-eared Owls.

A Bittern was at Fingringhoe Wick. A Hen Harrier was at Alesford. Goosanders were at Wivenhoe, Danbury and Colchester. Three Jack Snipe were at The Hythe. Two White-fronted Geese there may have been a new site record. Red Kites flew over Kelvedon and Rivenhall End. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at Shut Heath Wood.

N ESSEX: A Surf Scoter and 38 Red-breasted Mergansers were at Wrabness on the Stour. Three Short-eared Owls and a Spotted Redshank were at The Naze. A Black Brant was at Holland Haven. Eight Whitefronts were on Howlands Marsh. Three Tree Sparrows remained at Langham.

RAINHAM MARSHES: Highlights included 17 Brent Geese, eight Caspian Gulls, two Mediterranean Gulls, an Iceland Gull, three Ruff, 11 Black-tailed Godwits, two Spotted Redshanks, an Avocet, Turnstone, Jack Snipe, Oystercatchers, Marsh Harriers, a Bittern, six Blackcaps, Bullfinches, a Tawny Owl,



Waxwing,
Ipswich, Suffolk
8 February

Bill Baston

Short-eared Owl, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Ravens.

SE ESSEX: Wallasea Wetlands held a Rough-legged Buzzard, two Hen Harriers, four Short-eared Owls and 338 Corn Buntings. Stow Marsh logged four Pinkfeet, a Spotted Redshank, two Lapland Buntings and a Black Brant. Blue House Farm had two Black Brants, a pale-bellied Brent Goose, 2,248 dark-bellied birds and a Woodlark. There were 440 Cormorants off Bradwell, also two Hen Harriers and 41 Yellowhammers.

Two Serins and a Dartford Warbler were at Gunners Park. Short-eared Owls were there and over Canvey Heights. Two Glaucous Gulls and several Caspian Gulls were on Pitsea Tip or in Holehaven Creek. Three Mediterranean Gulls were at West Canvey Marshes. A Glossy Ibis was at Wat Tyler CP. Bitterns were there and at TTNP. Southend Pier logged a Slavonian Grebe. Red Kites flew over Billericay and Rochford. Eight Goosanders and an Iceland Gull were at Hanningfield Reservoir.

Howard Vaughan

NORFOLK

HIGHLIGHTS: Two Richard's Pipits were at Breydon Water. Three Shore Larks were on Burnham Overy Dunes and Scott Head Island (28th). An early Garganey was at Cley Marshes (6th-12th). The Black-necked Grebe remained at Snettisham (to 15th). Two tundra Bean Geese were at Snettisham Coastal Park (27th). Rough-legged Buzzards were at many sites, with Breydon Water and Burnham Overy Marshes having the most regular sightings.

Great Grey Shrikes remained at Roydon Common and Santon Downham. Two Iceland Gulls were east of Weybourne. Glaucous Gulls were at Sheringham, Cley Marshes, Salthouse, Breydon Water and Horsey.

BREYDON WATER: There was a Smew (8th). Thirty Short-eared Owls were in the area. Marsh Harriers, Hen Harriers and Peregrines were seen daily, with occasional sightings of Merlin. There were 12 Twite, seven Stonechats, 28 Meadow Pipits and several Kingfishers.

Maxima included 9,400 Pinkfeet, 14 tundra Bean Geese, 50 Whitefronts, 22,119 Wigeon, 145 Gadwall, 1,092 Teal, 124 Pintails, 734 Shovelers, 120 Bewick's Swans, three Whooper Swans, 61 Little Egrets, 561 Avocets, 61 Oystercatchers, 29 Ringed Plovers, 3,942 Golden Plovers, 63 Grey Plovers, 7,111 Lapwings, 1,231 Black-tailed Godwits, 89 Bar-tailed Godwits, 65 Knot, 1,837 Curlews, a Spotted Redshank, Green Sandpiper and 202 Med Gulls.

NOA HOLME OBSERVATORY: Maxima were 650 Wigeon, nine Eiders, 1,000 Common Scoters, two Long-tailed Ducks, nine Goldeneyes, two Red-breasted Mergansers, three Red-throated Divers, a Great Northern Diver, Slavonian Grebe, 11 Great Crested Grebes, three Fulmars, a Gannet, Gullinot, two Velvet Scoters and a Pintail. A Hen Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine and six Marsh Harriers hunted. There were 4,000 Pinkfeet, 120 Fieldfares, a Cetti's Warbler, two Stonechats, 100 Meadow Pipits, a Goldeneye, Barn Owl, 25 Snow Buntings, two Greenshanks, 12 Redwings, two Woodcocks, a Kingfisher, Spotted Redshank, three Redpolls, a Ruddy Shelduck, two Barnacle Geese, 30 Snipe, 1,000 Golden Plovers, 500 Lapwings, two Black-tailed Godwits, 64 Twite, five Rock Pipits and a Chiffchaff.

NOA REDWELL MARSH: There were 15 Black-tailed Godwits, five Bullfinches, Water Rail, Chiffchaff, Woodcock, and two Barn Owls.

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SUFFOLK


HIGHLIGHTS: The Surf Scoter continued to be seen on River Stour from Stutton Ness. The River Stour also held a Great Northern Diver,

four Slavonian Grebes and two Velvet Scoters. A Black-necked Grebe was at Alton Water (30th). Three Shore Larks ranged between Benacre Pits and Covehithe, and two were at Shingle Street (14th-27th). The Great Grey Shrike remained at Santon Downham, with another at Upper Hollisley Common (from 23rd).

Waxwings were in Ipswich, Kesgrave, Mildenhall, Lowestoft and Alderton. Glaucous Gulls were at Lowestoft, Elough Airfield, Covehithe Broad and Great Livermere. The Little Stint remained at Trimley Marshes (to 22nd). Two Scaup remained at Beccles Quay (to 6th). Six tundra Bean Geese were on Sudbourne Marshes (14th).

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MIDLANDS

Highlights In association with 

Probably the rarest bird in the region during February was a singing male Two-barred Crossbill with Crossbills at Speech House Woodland, Gloucestershire. Drake Green-winged Teals were seen at a couple of sites in the same county. Following the trends of the winter, there were inevitably Great Grey Shrikes and Rough-legged Buzzards spread around various sites in the region.

DERBYSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The Great Northern Diver remained at Carsington Water. Bitterns were at Aston-on-Trent GP (18th) and Willington GP. A Rough-legged Buzzard was in Longendale (16th-17th). A Crane was at Lower Hartsay (6th). An Iceland Gull at Ogston Reservoir on five dates was also seen at Pools Brook CP (4th-12th and 26th-27th, when it was joined by another), and at Carr Vale (5th).

A Glaucous Gull roosted at Foremark Reservoir (16th-18th). The Siberian Chiffchaff remained at Carr Vale, as did the Great Grey Shrike at Beeley Triangle. The Great Grey Shrike at Wilne Lane, Church Wilne was last seen (4th).

AMBASTON GP: There were four Shelducks, two Pintails, four Goosanders, a Goshawk, Peregrine, Jack Snipe, Woodcock, Green Sandpiper, Stonechat and Raven.

ASTON-ON-TRENT GP: Two Little Egrets, two Egyptian Geese, eight Shelducks, 36 Goldeneyes, eight Goosanders, seven Smew, a Pintail, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover and Stonechat were noted.

CARR VALE: There were 224 Pinkfeet over, four Goosanders, a Peregrine and two Chiffchaffs.

CARSINGTON WATER: A Shelduck, 16 Goldeneyes, three Goosanders, eight Oystercatchers, a Curlew, two Redshanks and a Golden Plover were logged.

DRAKELOW: There were 158 Cormorants, a Little Egret, two Shelducks, 59 Shovelers, four Goldeneyes, eight Goosanders, two Water Rails, three Oystercatchers, a Jack Snipe, two Woodcocks, two Green Sandpipers, a Yellow-legged Gull, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff and Raven.

EREWASH MEADOWS: Some 520 Pinkfeet flew over. There were two Shelducks, two Pintails, an injured Curlew, Barn Owl and Stonechat.

LONG EATON GP: A Little Egret, two Egyptian Geese, two Shelducks, a Red-crested Pochard, 14 Goldeneyes, 18 Goosanders and two Green Sandpipers were the pick.

OGSTON RESERVOIR: There were 130 Pinkfeet over, six Whooper Swans, two Shelducks, four Goldeneyes, a Goosander, Goshawk, Peregrine, three Oystercatchers, a Curlew, Woodcock, Yellow-legged Gull, a Caspian Gull hybrid and two Ravens.

WILLINGTON GP: Three Little Egrets, two Shelducks, 380 Wigeon, two Pintails, 52 Pochards, a Ferruginous Duck x Pochard hybrid, nine Goosanders, a Peregrine, four Oystercatchers, a Ringed Plover, two Dunlin, 28 Curlews, a Caspian Gull, two Yellow-legged Gulls and two Cetti's Warblers were the highlights.

OTHER SITES: A Whooper Swan was at Weston-on-Trent (8th-9th) and three flew South over Hasland (11th). A Scaup was at various localities in the Erewash Valley. A Red Kite was at Belper (10th). A Hen Harrier was at Avenue Washlands (2nd and 28th). A Mediterranean Gull roosted at Foremark Reservoir (4th and 16th). Twelve Hawfinches were at Cromford and 70 Bramblings on Screetham Lane.

Rod Key

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

COTSWOLDS: The Cotswold Water Park held a Red-breasted Merganser at pit 58 (13th-17th), a Smew at pit 44 and a Siberian Chiffchaff by pit 85. Hawling attracted five Short-eared Owls, two Barn Owls and a Hen Harrier (3rd). Another Hen Harrier was at Salperton (12th). A Green Sandpiper was recorded at Daglingworth and a Jack Snipe at The Camp.

FOREST OF DEAN: A Two-barred Crossbill was with 20 Crossbills at Yewtree Brake (15th). Great Grey Shrikes were at Crabtree Hill and Staple Edge. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were at Crabtree Hill, Parkend, Symonds Yat and Flaxley Woods. Two Willow Tits were at Brierley. There were 400 Chaffinches, 50 Bramblings and 200 Lesser Redpolls in the Serridge Ridge area. Goshawks included four at both Symonds Yat and Mallards Pike. A few Hawfinches were seen at several sites.

LOWER SEVERN VALE: Frampton Pools had a Red-breasted Merganser (from 22nd), Scaup, two Goldeneyes, a Mediterranean Gull (11th) and a Yellow-legged Gull. A Water Pipit was at Saul Warth (20th). Sharpness had two Black Redstarts. A Jack Snipe was at Berkeley Shore. Four Whooper Swans were at Walmore Common.

UPPER SEVERN VALE: A Green-winged Teal and a high count of 120 Snipe were at Ashleworth Ham (from 17th). The Dartford Warbler remained at Pittville Park, Cheltenham (to 15th). Coombe Hill Meadows had two Water Rails, 50 Golden Plovers, four Curlews, 55 Dunlin, 16 Ruff and a Jack Snipe. A Siberian Chiffchaff, Red-crested Pochard and Jack Snipe were at Horsbere Brook Flood Storage Area.

SLIMBRIDGE: Highlights included a Ferruginous Duck, Bittern, Whooper Swan, two Pinkfeet, 13 Cranes from the Great Crane Project, a Goshawk and Marsh Harrier. Two Sparrowhawks, six Buzzards, three Peregrines, two Kestrels, a Merlin, Barn Owl and Tawny Owl hunted. There were seven Great Black-backed Gulls, a Kingfisher, eight Ravens, six Cetti's Warblers, a Chiffchaff, two Stonechats, a Water Pipit, two Rock Pipits, 1,800 Jackdaws, a Siskin and 12 Bullfinches.

Maxima include 151 Mute Swans, 217 Bewick's Swans, 181 European Whitefronts, 194 Barnacle Geese, 411 Shelducks, a Ruddy Shelduck, 1,584 Wigeon, 50 Gadwall, 1,474 Teal, 287 Pintails, 80 Shovelers, 370 Pochards, 617 Tufted Ducks, two Great Crested Grebes, three Little Grebes, three Little Egrets, six Water Rails, seven Avocets, 13 Oystercatchers, 1,650 Golden Plovers, 2,400 Lapwings, 1,000 Dunlin, seven Snipe, three Jack Snipe, four Little Stints, 156 Black-tailed Godwits, 100 Curlews, 20 Redshanks and five Ruff. *Andy Jayne (01452 506 502), Martin McGill and The Glosster Birder (www.birder.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)*

LEICESTERSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The long-staying Great Northern Diver was again near Quorn (16th).

Another was at Eyebrook Reservoir (26th), with a Great White Egret there (8th-11th).

CHARNWOOD: Swithland Reservoir held 138 Pochards and 54 Goldeneyes (21st), a Scaup throughout and two Smew (1st). There were four Great Crested Grebes on Cropston Reservoir (2nd).

EYEBROOK RESERVOIR: There were maxima of seven Smew and 35 Dunlin. Two Pinkfeet remained all month. There was a Bittern (8th), three Red-crested Pochards (26th), a Ringed Plover (27th) and Stonechat (20th).

NORTHWEST LEICS: Albert Village logged a Glaucous Gull (19th-20th) and Mediterranean Gull (26th). Albion Landfill Site attracted 17 Ravens. Two Oystercatchers were at Hicks Lodge (27th).

OTHER SITES: Early Oystercatchers were recorded at Cossington Meadows (18th) and Brascode Pits (21st). A Mediterranean Gull was at Shawell (25th). Five Chiffchaffs and a Stonechat were at Asfordby Sewage Works throughout. *Steve Lister (01509 829 495, www.iros.org.uk)*

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Great Grey Shrike remained near Deenethorpe (to 17th). A Ring-necked Duck was at Clifford Hill GP (4th) and Billing GP (14th). A Glaucous Gull visited Ditchford GP (2nd), with an Iceland Gull at Pitsford Reservoir (19th). One or two Caspian Gulls were at Stanwick GP (1st), Stanford Reservoir (7th), Ditchford GP (12th-13th) and Rushton Landfill (22nd). Great White Egrets included five on the Summer Leys reserve, two at Ditchford, and singles at Pitsford and Thrapston GP and over Wellingborough.

DITCHFORD: There were 17 Egyptian Geese, two Peregrines, two Goosanders, two Yellow-legged Gulls, six Redshanks, a Curlew, three Green Sandpipers, 11 Chiffchaffs and four Stonechats.

EARLS BARTON: Two Pintails, a Smew and 300 Golden Plovers were seen.

HOLLOWELL RESERVOIR: A Scaup again spent time here, along with two feral Barnacle Geese, two Jack Snipe, 75 Golden Plovers, two Yellow-legged Gulls and three Stonechats.

PITSFORD: Three White-fronted Geese remained for most of the month. There were four Smew, a Pintail, two feral Ruddy Shelducks, two Goosanders, a Pintail, Mediterranean Gull (13th), two Jack Snipe, 59 Snipe, three Golden Plovers, a Peregrine and Stonechat.

RAVENSTHORPE RESERVOIR: The Scaup visited several times from nearby Hollowell. There were five Smew, five Mandarins, a Pinkfoot and 30 Golden Plovers.

STANWICK GP: Five Smew, a Pinkfoot, eight Barnacle Geese, 17 Goosanders, ten Redshanks, 15 Snipe, a Curlew, Green Sandpiper, Chiffchaff and Yellow-legged Gull were logged.

STANFORD RESERVOIR: Two Red-crested Pochards, eight Goosanders, five Golden Plovers, a Merlin, Chiffchaff and Yellow-legged Gull visited.

OTHER SITES: Red-crested Pochards were at Wicksteed Park Lake and Hardingstone GP, with five at Ringstead GP. Two Smew were at Stortons GP. Blatherwycke Lake hosted 24 Mandarins and a Peregrine. Deenethorpe Airfield had a Merlin. Five Jack Snipe were at Barnes Meadow. Peregrines were also at Rushden, Higham Ferrers and Hanging Houghton. Twelve Chiffchaffs were at Ecton SF. One or two Bramblings visited Wootton. Hanging Houghton and Harrington Airfield. *Bob Bullock (01604 627 262)*

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: An American Wigeon was at Holme Pierrepont (8th-25th). A Caspian Gull

was at Hoveringham (9th-17th). A Glossy Ibis was a long-stayer at Gonalston (12th-28th). A Common Scoter was at Kingsmill Reservoir (24th).

ATTENBOROUGH: There was a Bittern (3rd-27th), joined by a second bird at least briefly (8th), a Merlin (5th), 63 Pinkfeet over (6th), a Ring Ouzel (7th), Cetti's Warbler (9th) and Marsh Tit (28th).

IDLE VALLEY: A Merlin, Smew, Marsh Harrier, Short-eared Owl, 40 Whooper Swans, 11 Pinkfeet, a Red Kite, Stonechat, Cetti's Warbler, two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, two Ringed Plovers and six Ruff were logged.

NETHERFIELD LAGOONS: A Green Sandpiper, Chiffchaff, Stonechat, several Cetti's Warblers and a Barn Owl were noted.

OTHER SITES: Bennerley Marsh had a Scaup and Jack Snipe. Seven Smew and a Black-tailed Godwit were at Holme Pierrepont. A Goshawk was at Annesley and Newstead CP. Besthorpe had two Bewick's Swans, 14 Whooper Swans, a Merlin, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Green Sandpiper and Tree Sparrow. Rufford CP had a Garganey, seven Hawfinches and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Eaking Flash had a Garganey. A Great Northern Diver was at Kilvington Lakes.

Two Smew, a Bittern, two Ringed Plovers, two Jack Snipe, 120 Pinkfeet, and four Pintails were at Langford Lowfields. A Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, five Whooper Swans and 20 Corn Buntings were at Gringley Carr. Clumber Park had six Hawfinches and three Marsh Tits. Merlins were at Barton-in-Fabis and Bleasby. A Marsh Tit was at Bubby Pumping Station and two at Clifton Grove. A Hen Harrier and Marsh Harrier were at Idle Stop. A Willow Tit was at Kingsmill Reservoir.

Some 150 Pinkfeet flew over Kirkby in Ashfield, with 100 over Ravenshoe. Gedling Pit Top had a Short-eared Owl and four Stonechats. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were at Gonalston, Wollaton and Bubby Common. Two Goshawks, a Merlin, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, six Pinkfeet, three Ravens and a Marsh Tit were at Carburton. Two Ravens were at both Bilsthorpe and Thrumpton. A Short-eared Owl and two Ravens were at Silverhill CP. A Red Kite flew over Maplebeck/Winkburn.

Stoke Bardolph had four Smew. Southwell had a Merlin and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

Neil Glenn

OXFORDSHIRE

OTMOOR: Three Bearded Tits were present throughout. A Bittern boomed for two weeks from mid-month. There was a Marsh Tit (8th and 13th), two Black-tailed Godwits (11th), three Cetti's Warblers (17th), two Stonechats (20th), 50 Snipe (22nd) and 12 Common Gulls (24th). Two Curlews returned (17th). A Marsh Harrier was present all month, with two (16th). Three European White-fronted Geese stayed (to 16th). A Merlin was present (to 9th). Maxima included 1,134 Golden Plovers, 1,986 Lapwings, 23 Pintails, 71 Shovelers and 1,574 Wigeon.

Joe Harris (01865 352 033)

RUTLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: Rutland Water held a Great White Egret all month, a Greenland Whitefront (to 27th) and a Brent Goose (to 24th).

RUTLAND WATER: Two European Whitefronts were present (to 23rd), with a

Pinkfoot (to 28th). The count (8th) produced four Mandarins, 2,891 Wigeon, 375 Gadwall, 1,083 Teal, 78 Pintails, two Red-crested Pochards and eight Smew. Six Scaup were seen (6th). The two Black-necked Grebes and the Red-necked Grebe remained (to 28th). A Bittern was seen (21st).

Great Northern Divers were present (12th and 17th). A Peregrine flew south (2nd). Early wader arrivals were Oystercatcher (8th), Avocet (19th) and five Ringed Plovers (23rd). There were 12 Curlews and 27 Snipe (8th). A Willow Tit was near Lyndon Centre (10th), with a Chiffchaff and two Lesser Redpolls (8th). Two Siskins were recorded at Berrybut Spinney (17th).

OTHER SITES: A Greenland Whitefront (15th-16th) and two Pinkfeet (15th) were at Fort Henry Ponds. Peregrines were at Fort Henry (1st), Manton (5th) and Pilton (25th). Thirteen Snipe were at Banthorpe GP (6th). There were two Woodcocks near Leighfield (8th), with three in Tunneley Wood (15th). Ravens were at five sites. Willow Tits were at Manton, Ridlington and Pilton. Two Bramblings were at Leighfield (8th), with seven Lesser Redpolls near Pilton (11th) and 99 Yellowhammers in Exton Park (7th).

Terry Mitcham

SHROPSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Great Grey Shrike was at the Abdon Burf summit on the Brown Clee (28th). What was presumably the Venus Pool Greenland Whitefront was at Polemere (3rd-14th). A tundra Bean Goose was on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border between Hales and Chippnall (15th). Two Common Scoters were at Chelmarsh (28th).

MERES AND MOSSES: The Mere, Ellesmere held a Caspian Gull and three Mediterranean Gulls (15th), with four of the latter (25th). Three Yellow-legged Gulls roosted (5th). A Caspian Gull was at Colemere (6th). Two Short-eared Owls were at Fenn's Moss (7th). Another, plus a Hen Harrier, was at Whixall Moss intermittently.

TELFORD: A controversial gull, showing some characters suggesting Thayer's Gull, was at Trench Pool (3rd), with a Little Gull there (4th), Iceland Gull and Caspian Gull (2nd), Glaucous Gull (12th), and Caspian Gulls (1st, 11th and 18th).

OTHER SITES: A Little Gull roosted at Chelmarsh Reservoir (18th). Little Egrets were at Whittington (2nd), Wyke (5th) and Church Stretton (24th). A Green Sandpiper was at Polemere (3rd). A Hen Harrier was at Venus Pool (from 8th), with a Merlin there (21st).

Richard Moores and Martyn Owen

WARWICKSHIRE

BRANDON MARSH: There were three Pinkfeet (28th), four Shelducks, 71 Wigeon, four Goldeneyes, 12 Pochards, a Bittern, Little Egret, Water Rail, 295 Lapwings, a Green Sandpiper, Barn Owl, Willow Tit and Cetti's Warbler.

DRAYCOTE WATER: Sightings included a Whooper Swan (6th), two Whitefronts, a Pinkfoot, Brent Goose (10th), Egyptian Goose, two Shelduck, 77 Wigeon, 19 Gadwall, 55 Teal, two Pintails, 320 Tufted Ducks, 60 Pochards, 43 Goldeneyes, 16 Goosanders, a Smew, 130 Great Crested Grebes, 69 Little Grebes, a Black-necked Grebe, three Little Egrets, a Red Kite, Peregrine, Water Rail, 100 Golden Plovers, four Oystercatchers, a Dunlin, Redshank, two Chiffchaffs, 43 Meadow Piptits, 35 Tree Sparrows, a Mediterranean Gull, three Yellow-legged Gulls, two Caspian Gulls and four Iceland Gulls.

SALFORD PRIORS GP: Records included four Shelducks, 125 Teal, 102 Tufted Ducks, six Water Rails, two Peregrines, a Merlin, two Oystercatchers, a Woodcock, 50 Snipe, three Jack Snipe, a Dunlin, Common Sandpiper, Barn Owl, two Chiffchaffs and an influx of 10,000 Woodpigeons (22nd).

SOUTH-EAST: A Peregrine and Merlin hunted. Barn Owls were widespread. A Goshawk was seen. There were 140 Golden

Plovers and 12 Ravens at Ladbroke. Goosanders, a few Wigeon and Woodcocks were at Farnborough Park. Lighthorne Quarry held 28 Snipe and two Jack Snipe. Willow Tits were at five sites.

An influx of thrushes mid-month included 2,400 Fieldfares at Fenny Compton, where there were also 80 Sky Larks and a Chiffchaff. A flock near Wormleighton Reservoir held 110 Tree Sparrows, 160 Chaffinches and 120 Yellowhammers. There were 440 Linnets near Priors Hardwick and 200 at Fenny Compton.

TAME VALLEY: A Great Northern Diver visited Kingsbury and Coton (4th). A Marsh Harrier flew over Coton (25th). Siberian Chiffchaffs were at Ladywalk and Hams Hall. There were 355 Shovelers at Coton, 31 Goosanders at Shustoke, seven Oystercatchers at Dosthill, 30 Little Egrets roosting near Kingsbury and four Peregrines in the area. Ladywalk recorded a Mandarin, Common Sandpiper, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Mealy Redpoll (7th). The Wishaw area logged three Pinkfeet (10th), five Grey Partridges, a Merlin, 1,000 Golden Plovers, a Stonechat and three Corn Buntings.

OTHER SITES: Alvecote Pools held three Goosanders, a Little Egret, Merlin and Curlew. Earlswood Lakes hosted a Caspian Gull, Goldeneye and two Water Rails. A Goldeneye was at Naption Reservoir. Charlecote had a Merlin, two Red Kites (18th), two Stonechats and a now remarkable flock of 63 Corn Buntings. Morton Bagot recorded a Goshawk (1st), 20 Teal, 16 Jack Snipe, two Green Sandpipers and three Stonechats. Bubbenhall recorded three Caspian Gulls, a Mediterranean Gull and two Glaucous Gulls.

Neil Duggan, Matt Griffiths and Jon Bowley (07850 759 334)

WEST MIDLANDS

HIGHLIGHTS: Marsh Harriers flew through Marsh Lane and Sandwell Valley. Two Red-breasted Mergansers were on Forge Mill Lake, Sandwell Valley. The Great Northern Diver remained at Ryders Mere, Pelsall until mid-month. Caspian Gulls and Mediterranean Gulls joined the roost at Bartley Reservoir. Several Woodcocks and a Jack Snipe were in Sutton Park.

Pintails were at Marsh Lane and Sandwell Valley. Willow Tits were at Clayhanger Marsh, Pelsall North Common and Sandwell Valley, the last site also logging Marsh Tit. A Mediterranean Gull again visited West Park, Wolverhampton.

Pete Hackett (0121 358 2454)

WORCESTERSHIRE

AVON VALLEY: Two Red Kites flew over Bredon Hill. Three Little Egrets and a Red Kite were at John Bennett Wetland. A Hen Harrier flew over Tiddeley Wood. A Caspian Gull and two Yellow-legged Gulls were at Wyre Piddle.

CENTRAL: A Merlin was at Bredicot. Two Siberian Chiffchaffs remained at Powick STW. A Smew, five Goldeneyes and two Little Egrets were at Westwood Pool. A Long-eared Owl was along Hindlip Lane in Worcester. The Black Redstart remained on Worcester Cathedral throughout.

LOWER SEVERN VALLEY: A Red Kite flew over Clifton. A Black-tailed Godwit and 13 Pintails were recorded at Longdon Marsh. Three Red-crested Pochards were at Ripple Pits.

NORTH: A Caspian Gull and Little Egret were recorded at Bittell Reservoirs. A Black-necked Grebe, Bittern, Little Egret, Kittiwake and Mealy Redpoll were all at Hewell Grange. A Great White Egret flew over Hollywood. Two Little Egrets were seen at Redditch. A Caspian Gull was at Wildmoor. Red Kites flew over Areley Kings, Droitwich, Hartlebury and Lydiat Ash (two).

UPTON WARREN: Notable sightings during the month included four Little Egrets and 14 Avocets.
Brian Stretch (www.worcesterbirding.co.uk)

N. IRELAND

HIGHLIGHTS: A Green-winged Teal was at Ballycarry Bridge in Larne Lough all month. Another was at Anne's Point in Strangford Lough with a Spoonbill (1st), the latter returning to Castle Espie (14th-23rd). The Ring-billed Gulls remained at Portrush East Strand and Carrickfergus Harbour, with others in Derry (17th) and at Glynn (28th). A Sabine's Gull was at Burial Island (18th). Five Glaucous Gulls and 11 Iceland Gulls were reported. A Kumlien's Gull was at Ardglass Harbour (6th).

BELFAST/STRANGFORD LOUGH: Highlights were 100 Whooper Swans, five Long-tailed Ducks, 74 Red-throated Divers, nine Great Northern Divers, two Sandwich Terns, 17 Slavonian Grebes, 200 Knot, a Jack Snipe, 30 Grey Plovers and the wintering Spotted Redshank.

OTHER SITES: There were 188 Whooper Swans and seven Scaup at Oxford Island. Some 800 pale-bellied Brent Geese were at Myroe Levels. A Greenland Whitefront and seven Pinkfeet were at Ballynarry. Four Greylags flew in off the sea at Ballycastle. There were 138 Teal and a Garganey at Lough Mourne. Fifty Goldeneyes were at Glynn. Eight Pintails were at Quoile Pondage. Four Goosanders remained at Lough Island Reay.

Thirty Red-breasted Mergansers were at Larne. Long-tailed Ducks were off Carrickfergus and Newcastle Harbour. Two Black-throated Divers were at both Newcastle and Rossglass. Nine Great Northern Divers were at Portmuck. A Gannet was at St John's Point. Slavonian Grebes were at Larne and Macedon Point. A Crane flew over Holywood. A Little Gull was at Ballycastle Harbour.

Six Mud Gulls were reported. There were 280 Dunlin and 108 Curlews at Killough Harbour. Newcastle logged 350 Sanderling and 17 Purple Sandpipers. Lower Lough Erne held 74 Snipe. A Jack Snipe was at Dromore. A Woodcock was at Woodburn Forest. Lapwings included 300 at Tyrella, 300 at St John's Point and 500 outside Coleraine. There were 1,000 Golden Plovers at Killough Harbour, 800 at Tyrella and 900 at Myroe Levels. Grey Plovers were at Killard Point and Tyrella. Two wintering Whimbrels were at Orlock Point. Three Greenshanks were at Larne and three at Myroe Levels. Two Waxwings were near Larne. Twelve Redwings were at Ormeau Park. Forty Fieldfares were at Minerstown and 40 at Castlerock GC. A Black Redstart was at Newcastle Harbour. There were 140 Sky Larks at St John's Point. A Hawfinch was at Oxford Island. Some 350 Linnets were at Tyrella, with 49 Twite at Island Magee. Six Crossbills were at Woodburn Forest.

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WALES

In association with 

Highlights

An adult Bonaparte's Gull appeared off the Cardiff Bay Heliport at the beginning of the month. Not so many years ago, this would have caused a great stir. But long-staying, lingering and thoroughly obliging Bonaparte's Gulls have become almost a 'norm' in recent years. Also fitting into the 'rare' category, but even longer in its stay was the Cardiff Bay drake Lesser Scaup.

ANGLESEY

HOLYHEAD AREA: The Inland Sea held three Long-tailed Ducks, a Great Northern Diver, Slavonian Grebe, six Little Egrets, 111 Pinkfeet (6th), 21 Red-breasted Mergansers, 31 Goldeneyes, 184 pale-bellied Brent Geese, 29 Gadwall, 12 Mediterranean Gulls and three Greenshanks. Four Slavonian Grebes were in Beddmanarch Bay. A Black-necked Grebe, Great Northern Diver, 17 Red-breasted Mergansers and eight Black Guillemots were in Holyhead Harbour.

The Alaw Estuary had six Whooper Swans, 28 Pintails, 91 Bar-tailed Godwits, 118 Grey Plovers, three Greenshanks and a Jack Snipe. Fifteen Purple Sandpipers were in Trearddur Bay. A Glaucous Gull was in Holyhead Bay (15th). Soldiers Point logged four Water Rails and a Grey Wagtail.

Some 3,000 Guillemots were back at South Stack, alongside 22 Fulmars and 16 Choughs.

OTHER SITES: A Glaucous Gull, 1,300 Common Scoters, two Velvet Scoters, four Eiders, a Scaup, Black-throated Diver, five Red-throated Divers and three Great Northern Divers were in Red Wharf Bay (14th). Seventeen Greenland Whitefronts and a Bittern were at Malltraeth Marsh. Cemlyn held four Twite, 12 Grey Plovers, four Purple Sandpipers, a Whimbrel, Greenshank and Little Owl.

A Bittern, 28 Goosanders and a Jack Snipe were at Llyn Coron. Six Pinkfeet were at Llyn Padrig. Lligwy Bay held a Glaucous Gull (9th), 21 Brent Geese, three Black Guillemots and seven Sanderling. A Spotted Redshank and Kingfisher were at Malltraeth.

Ken Croft

BRECONSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A wintering Ring Ouzel was near Talybont Reservoir (1st-3rd), with possibly the same bird at Penwyllt Quarry (8th). Three Short-eared Owls hunted at Neuadd Reservoirs (5th), one remaining (to 11th). A White-fronted Goose was at Dderw Pool and a Common Sandpiper at Glasbury (8th). Llangorse Lake attracted four Little Egrets, three Great White Egrets, and a Lesser Scaup (to 24th).

BRECON BEACONS: A Kingfisher was recorded at Talybont (2nd), where maxima included 39 Wigeon, 26 Teal, 26 Tufted Ducks, four Pochards and 10 Little Grebes. Teal included 19 at Neuadd and 14 at Crai. Neuadd held two Bramblings, 25 Siskins and two Green Woodpeckers. Some 1,500 Herring Gull roosted at Pontsticill (5th).

LLANGORSE LAKE: There were 11 Pochards, seven Pintails, 185 Wigeon, 110 Teal, 220 Tufted Ducks, 400 Coots, two Mandarins, three Shelducks, an Oystercatcher, 53 Lapwings, and a record 102 Cormorants. Sixty Yellowhammers and 40 Reed Buntings on nearby farmland attracted the attentions of a Merlin, Goshawk and Barn Owl. Five Bramblings were seen (21st), with the first returning Curlew (22nd) and a Jack Snipe (27th).

OTHER SITES: Little Egrets were at Coldbrook (3rd) and Durlangoch (15th). Seven Lapwings near Llanwrtyd Wells were notable (7th), as was a Water Rail in a Beulah garden (8th). A Hen Harrier was at Coelbren and a Barn Owl at

Juvenile Iceland Gull, Pensarn, Conwy, 26 February



Austin Morley

Sennybridge (7th). At Brecon, a Peregrine hunted from St Mary's Church Tower on several dates. A Chiffchaff and Blackcap visited gardens. Ninety Pied and 17 Grey Wagtails fed at Brecon Sewage Works (22nd). By the end of the month, pairs of Red Kites were nest-building at several locations. Mynydd Illtyd attracted 31 Golden Plovers (27th) and a Merlin (28th). Fieldfares included 100 on Llandefalle Hill (28th), with five Crossbills, 15 Lesser Redpolls and 40 Sky Larks nearby.

Andrew King, Keith Noble and www.brecknockbirds.co.uk

CLWYD

HIGHLIGHTS: Shotwick Fields and Boating Lake had two Bean Geese (27th-28th), with 2,000 Pinkfeet and a Great White Egret. Up to 40 Bewick's and Whooper Swans were present, also three Goldeneyes. A Greenland Whitefront was there (21st). Five more were at Trefnant (11th-23rd), with five Whooper Swans. Great Grey Shrikes were at their usual wintering sites - World's End, Bronbannog and Cynwyd. Old Colwyn had four Surf Scoters and 11 Velvet Scoters.

There was a Little Auk at Rhos-on-Sea (1st), and a Scaup plus Great Northern Diver off Rhos Point (6th). Black-necked Grebes remained at Afonwen and Shotwick (to 10th). Twite numbers at Conna's Quay peaked at 100.

COASTAL SITES: Conna's Quay logged 2,000 Lapwings, 400 Wigeon, a Merlin, 2,500 Dunlin, 460 Pinkfeet, 77 Stock Doves, three Greenshanks, a Slavonian Grebe, two Ruff, three Jack Snipe, two Red-breasted Mergansers, two Rock Piptits and eight Spotted Redshanks. An Iceland Gull was at Pentre Mawr Park, Abergele or Pensarn beach (16th-28th). An early Arctic or Common Tern was at Point of Ayr (20th).

INLAND SITES: Llay Pool had five pairs of displaying Lapwings. Gresford Flash had six Goosanders (10th). A Red Kite flew over Marford (19th). Lavister had a Little Egret (8th). Garden birds in Wrexham included Goldcrest, wintering Blackcaps and nest-building Long-tailed Tits.

Norman Hallas, Rev Hugh Linn, Kevin Smith and Richard Smith

EAST GLAMORGAN

HIGHLIGHTS: A wintering Little Bunting and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker were at Forest Farm. The returning Bonaparte's Gull was at Cardiff Heliport. Cardiff Bay held a Lesser Scaup, Great Northern Diver and four Black Redstarts. A Long-tailed Duck was at Lisvane Reservoir. A Great Grey Shrike remained at

Coed Taf Fawr. A Glaucous Gull roamed around the Sker/Pink Bay area.

The Ogmere Estuary logged a Firecrest, Water Pipit, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Yellow-legged Gull and two Little Egrets. Nearby, 500 Lapwings were at Norton Farm.

There were 23 Brent Geese, of which 20 were pale-bellied, at Gileston. The Hendre Lake Little Egret roost held 29 birds, with others at Aberthaw and Sully Brook. Coity Common produced three Short-eared Owls, a Barn Owl, Hen Harrier and five Jack Snipe. Two Short-eared Owls were at Rumney Great Wharf. A Hen Harrier roosted at Rhaslas Pond. A Yellow-legged Gull was at Cosmeston. Ten Hawfinches were at Forest Ganol. An unusual record concerned a Cetti's Warbler in a Cardiff garden.

Paul Roberts

GWENT

HIGHLIGHTS: Great Grey Shrikes were recorded at Forest Coal Pit (13th) and the Gwyddon Valley (20th). Two Cranes flew over Newport Wetlands (17th). An impressive total of 17 Jack Snipe were flushed from Cleddon Bog (12th).

NEWPORT WETLANDS RESERVE: A Merlin was reported (2nd and 17th). Two Chiffchaffs were recorded (5th). A Marsh Harrier was seen several times (5th-12th).

OTHER SITES: Ten Red Grouse were on the Coity Mountain (1st). Two Short-eared Owls were at Waunafon Bog (1st). Approximately 15,000 Starlings were at Newport (3rd). There were 21 Bewick's Swans at Llanybi (4th). Two Jack Snipe were at Black Rock (4th). Two Water Pipits were at Peterstone (21st). A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at Gobion (21st).

Chris Hatch


GWYNEDD

HIGHLIGHTS: At Bangor Pier (27th), there were seven Black Guillemots, a Great Northern Diver, two Goldeneyes and a Slavonian Grebe. A Green-winged Teal was on the River Seiont at Caernarfon (24th). Foryd Bay had two Jack Snipe, two Greenshanks and a Spotted Redshank. A Ring Ouzel was at Nant Ffrancon (1st). Beddgelert (6th), logged a Goshawk and a small flock of Crossbills.

Criccieth held a Green Sandpiper and Water Pipit (6th). Five Long-tailed Ducks and a large flock of Common Scoters remained there (to 17th). Pwllheli had a Red Kite and a Kingfisher. Nefyn had 12 Yellowhammers, plus a flock of Redpolls, Siskins, Goldfinches and Greenfinches.

Shirley Roulston

NORTH WEST

In association with 

Highlights Easily the dominant rare bird news of the region in February was the discovery on 3rd of a first-winter Laughing Gull at New Brighton, Cheshire. This obliging lingerer from across the pond (North America, that is, rather than Ireland), was still present at the end of March at the time of going to press. Laughing Gulls have been very hard to twitch in recent years, so this bird was very welcome.

CHESHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Long-eared Owl was at Burton Mere Wetlands all month, with an American Wigeon there (5th). A Laughing Gull was at New Brighton (from 3rd). A Kumlien's Gull was on Richmond Bank and a Serin at Pickering's Pasture (3rd). A Black-throated Diver was off Hilbre (7th).

HILBRE: There were 5,000 Herring Gulls (4th), 12 Goldeneyes (5th), 25 Red-throated Divers (6th), two Eiders, 209 Great Crested Grebes, 4,000 Common Scoters and 11 Purple Sandpipers (7th), two Peregrines (9th), 350 Bar-tailed Godwits (12th), a Goosander (21st), and 192 Brent Geese plus 235 Sanderling (25th).

INLAND SITES: A Bittern was at Marbury and a Green Sandpiper at Arley (2nd). An Iceland Gull was on the Sandbach Flashes (3rd). A Smew was at Newchurch (10th).

MERSEY VALLEY: A Great White Egret was at Frodsham Marsh (1st), Pickering's Pasture (2nd) and Ince (3rd), with three in the Mersey estuary (20th). A Caspian Gull and Glaucous Gull were on Richmond Bank (3rd) with three Iceland Gulls there (7th). There were 28 Corn Buntings at Risley (4th). An Iceland Gull was on the Gowy Meadows (7th). Three Mediterranean Gulls (8th) and two Little Stints (20th) were at Pickering's Pasture. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at Moore (23rd). Four Yellow-legged Gulls were by the Runcorn Bridge (28th).

WIRRAL COAST: A Marsh Harrier (1st), three Hen Harriers (14th) and six Water Rails (20th) were at Parkgate. Two Great White Egrets were on Burton Marsh (2nd), with the first Avocet of the year there (18th). A Cetti's Warbler (3rd)

Red-throated Diver,
Fairhaven Lake, Lancashire,
18 February



Austin Morley

and a Greenland Whitefront (8th) were at Burton Mere Wetlands. There were 39 Scaup (5th), and 19 Goldeneyes, 7,000 Common Scoters plus three Eiders (6th) off Meols and Hoylake.

Some 640 Bar-tailed Godwits roosted at Heswall (16th), with six Short-eared Owls there (19th). Four Snow Buntings were on Wallasey shore (17th). Two Water Pipits were at Neston Old Quay (17th).

WOOLSTON EYES: Ringing on No 1 bed included a Great Spotted Woodpecker and Barn Owl, a Reserve ringing first. Records included two Bramblings, two Goosanders, three Ravens, three Snipe, a Tawny Owl, three Water Rails, a Woodcock and Peregrine. No 3 bed ringing had Moorhen, Coot and Redwing. Records included two Willow Tits, a Kingfisher, 18 Reed Buntings, four Sparrowhawks, two Lesser Redpolls, a Tawny Owl, three Woodcocks, 100 Chaffinches, a Marsh Harrier, 670 Black-headed Gulls, 41 Lapwings, five Buzzards and two Ruddy Ducks. Reserve-wide counts included 174 Mallards, 70 Gadwall, 78 Canada Geese, 21 Bullfinches, 780 Teal, 31 Shovelers, 879 Tufted Ducks and 400,000 Starlings.

Richard Smith (richard@deestuary.co.uk) and Dave Steel

CUMBRIA

HIGHLIGHTS: A Great Grey Shrike was at Torver Back Common (16th).

DUDDON ESTUARY: The saltmarshes hosted a Eurasian Whitefront (3rd-5th) and 11 Barnacle Geese among 800 Pinkfeet. Two Little Egrets, a Red Kite and Green Sandpiper were also in the area. Hodbarrow logged 16 Gadwall, three Scaup and seven Black-tailed Godwits.

ESK/IRT/MITE COMPLEX: The Esk hosted two Little Egrets, two wintering Common Sandpipers, a Green Sandpiper and Greenshank. Three Greenshanks remained on the Mite. Five Whooper Swans and a Short-eared Owl were near the Newbiggin viaduct.

INNER SOLWAY: Whooper Swans included 200 in the Wedholme Flow area. Pinkfeet increased to 16,000. A Eurasian Whitefront was at Raby Cote. Two Little Egrets and two Hen Harriers roamed the area. A Common Sandpiper was at Drumburgh.

OUTER SOLWAY: A Black-throated Diver was off Nethertown. A Scaup was at Soddy Gap with a Little Egret at Siddick Pond. Two Mediterranean Gulls were at Workington and one at Soddy Gap.

WALNEY BIRD OBSERVATORY:

Seawatching highlights included three Shags, and a few Red-throated Divers, Common Scoters, Razorbills and Guillemots. There were 206 pale-bellied and 20 dark-bellied Brent Geese, 145 Pinkfeet, 85 Pintails, 53 Barnacle Geese, nine Shovelers, two Scaup, two Long-tailed Ducks, 3,000 Knot, 1,000 Golden Plovers, six Greenshanks, four Jack Snipe, two Black-tailed Godwits and a Purple Sandpiper. At least 23 Little Egrets remained. A Little Owl and Short-eared Owl were logged, and there were regular Peregrine sightings.

A hint of spring was provided by a steady increase in the numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls on territory, an early Siskin passage which produced 23 birds, and a Long-tailed Tit. The long-staying Hooded Crow remained, and around 100 Twite were logged.

OTHER SITES: A Eurasian Whitefront associated with Pinkfeet near Linstock. Smew appeared on the River Eden near Linstock and on Derwent Water. A Great Northern Diver was on Windermere. A Water Pipit remained at Roa Island. The Black Redstart lingered at Carlisle airport.

Ian Kinley and Colin Raven

GREATER MANCHESTER

HIGHLIGHTS: A Rough-legged Buzzard was at Saddleworth Moor (17th-18th). A Hen Harrier flew through Horwich Moors (15th). A Ring-billed Gull was at Rumworth Lodge (18th). A Waxwing visited apples in a garden at Orrell WP (9th-28th). A Long-tailed Duck was on Elton Reservoir (16th-28th) with a ittiwake there (21st). Marsh Harriers were at Bedford Moss (7th) and Horrock's Flash (22nd). An Iceland Gull flew upriver at Salford Quays (12th), with others at Ashworth Moor Reservoir (12th), Elton Reservoir (12th and 25th) and Pennington Flash intermittently (15th-28th).

ELTON RESERVOIR: A Merlin flew through (14th). A possible Yellow-legged Gull was seen. Two Woodcocks were present. Goosanders peaked at 33.

MERSEY VALLEY: Two Jack Snipe and a Woodcock were on Barlow Tip, Chorlton WP. Three Ring-necked Parakeets remained at Chorlton WP.

PENNINGTON FLASH: A Little Egret was seen (13th-25th), with a Black-tailed Godwit (16th), Woodcock (18th) and Pintail (18th-22nd). The Cetti's Warbler and wintering Garganey remained throughout. Five Mediterranean Gulls roosted. Goosanders peaked at 48.

OTHER SITES: A Green Sandpiper and Woodcock were at Hope Carr (1st). Eighteen Whooper Swans flew into Horrock's Flash (1st), with 22 over Hollingworth Lake (10th) and four on Ashworth Moor Reservoir (7th). A Jack Snipe was at Pomona Dock, Salford (13th). A Yellow-legged Gull was at Castleshaw Reservoirs (7th and 10th). Two Mediterranean Gulls were at Rumworth Lodge (19th-28th). A Dunlin was on Church Lane Flood, Woodford (27th). There were 16 Ring-necked Parakeets in Stenner Woods. Seventy Goldeneyes roosted on Scotman's Flash (27th).

Dr Paul Brewster (01606 590 491)

LANCASHIRE AND NORTH MERSEYSIDE

HIGHLIGHTS: Great Grey Shrikes were at St Anne's (to 2nd) and at Grendleton Fell, Chatburn throughout. A Shore Lark remained at Rossall Point. A Green-winged Teal was at Stocks Reservoir (12th-24th).

DARWEN: Migration maxima included around 500 Starlings and Fieldfares, 360 Redwings, 230 Pink-footed Geese, 200 Lapwings, 126 Curlew, 110 Goldfinches, 70 Long-tailed Tits, 60 Oystercatchers and Teal, 40 Cormorants and Goosanders, 30 Siskins, Sky Larks and Shelducks, 20 Ringed Plovers and Snow Buntings, and seven Ravens. Highlights included Red Kite (9th), Long-eared Owl (22nd-23rd), and Marsh Harrier (27th). Regular flyovers included Mediterranean Gulls and Little Egret, with wintering Kingfisher.

EAST LANCASHIRE: The Great Northern Diver commuted between Rishton or Parsonage Reservoirs. An Iceland Gull roosted at Fishmoor Reservoir (15th). Two Lapland Buntings and seven Snow Buntings were east of Haslingden early in the month. A Gannet on the Ribble near Dunkley was unusual (28th).

FYLDE REGION: There were 10,000 Pinkfeet in the Over Wyre districts, along with two Brent Geese, two Barnacle Geese, a European Whitefront and two tundra Bean Geese. Over 300 Whooper Swans and 26 Bewick's Swans were near Cockersands. Some 10,000 Common Scoters were off Blackpool. Fifty Goldeneyes and 50 Tufted Ducks were around the Lune at Glasson or Conder Green. A Scaup and Red-throated Diver were on Fairhaven Lake.

Four Purple Sandpipers roosted at Fleetwood or North Shore. A Common Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank wintered at Conder Green. Two Green Sandpipers were in the Singleton-Mythop area. Warton Marsh had a Hen Harrier (1st-2nd), two Marsh Harriers, two Merlins, a Peregrine and Short-eared Owl. A Goshawk was at Lytham Hall (20th). A Great White Egret, 19 Little Egrets and three Water Rails were at Warton Marsh.

Iceland Gulls were at Marton, and Fleetwood, where there was also a Glaucous Gull. A Caspian Gull was at Knott End (11th). There were 100 Corn Buntings and 23 Yellowhammers at Eagland Hill and Skitham Lane. Twite included 12 at Rossall Point, 33 at Fleetwood Nature Park and 60 at Fluke Hall. A Water Pipit was at Fleetwood Nature Park. Four were at Warton Marsh (20th), with five Rock Pipits there (21st). Good numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings were recorded at Over Wyre.

MARTON FIRECREST: Highlights over the month included a Firecrest, Iceland Gull, four Long-eared Owls, a Treecreeper, Raven (25th), three Bullfinches, two Jack Snipe, two Woodcocks, four Siskins, six Cetti's Warblers and two Stonechats.

SW LANCASHIRE-N MERSEYSIDE: Two Great White Egrets frequented Marshside and Crossens, roosting on Southport Marine Lake. Another was at Alt Meadows, Maghull (4th). There were 100 Twite near Southport Marine Lake. A dark-bellied Brent Goose was at Birkdale (25th). A Hen Harrier was at Martin Mere (19th). It was a poor winter for Short-eared Owls, with singles at Marshside and Lunt Meadows. A Black Redstart was at Newton-le-Willows. A Water Pipit was at Marshside (21st). A Long-tailed Duck was at Crosby Marina. A Firecrest was at Gorse Hall, Aughton.

Maurice Jones, Mavis Smith

NORTH LANCASHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Leighton Moss held three tundra Bean Geese (to 5th), with one (25th), a Green-winged Teal (28th) and the family party of five European White-fronted Geese, first recorded on Aldcliffe in December, (from 14th).

HEYSHAM BIRD OBSERVATORY: A Cetti's Warbler was on Heysham NR (1st-12th). Two pale-bellied Brent Geese were by Heysham Head (4th). Large numbers of Pinkfeet flew over early in the month. Two wintering Chiffchaffs were in Middleton (5th). The Mediterranean Gull remained (to 28th). A probable Hooded/Carrion Crow hybrid headed north over the sea (17th). There were five Red-throated Divers (6th), seven Kittiwakes (17th), two Jack Snipe, six Gadwall, 11 Twite, 320 Eiders and three Pochards, increasingly scarce here. A Green Woodpecker visited occasionally.

LEIGHTON MOSS: Eight Whooper Swans were seen (6th and 28th). The overwintering Marsh Harriers remained. There were regular Bearded Tit sightings. Four Bitterns were seen, with two together (10th). Waders included Greenshanks (1st and 22nd), 200 Dunlin, a Spotted Redshank, 240 Black-tailed Godwits, Golden Plovers (6th and 15th), four Ruff (9th) and a good count of 13 Turnstones (20th). The first two Avocets appeared (22nd), increasing to seven (28th). There was a pair of Stonechats (9th and 26th), lingering Tree Sparrows, and a mixed flock of Siskins and Lesser Redpolls (20th).

Kevin Kelly and Pete Marsh

NORTH EAST

Highlights In association with



Last month's Black Scoter was still present until the 27th off Cheswick Sands, Northumberland, and was seen off Holy Island on 28th, from where it was in flight, then not found again during February. Also potentially very rare and from North America was a possible American Herring Gull (first-winter), seen at Rufforth, North Yorkshire on a few dates during the month.

CLEVELAND

HIGHLIGHTS: The Green-winged Teal remained on Dormans Pool all month. A Black Guillemot was at Hartlepool (9th-16th).

HARTLEPOOL: Seawatching (1st) produced 20 Little Auks, a Pomarine Skua, two Great Skuas and a Black-throated Diver. A Shore Lark was at Old Cemetery all month. A Great Northern Diver was offshore (4th).

NORTH TEES MARSHES: A taiga Bean Goose was with a small flock of Pinkfeet at Haverton (from 18th). A Greenshank and Spotted Redshank were wintering on Greenabella, with a Whimbrel recorded on nearby Seal Sands. A Bittern was on Dormans Pool (21st), with a Marsh Harrier seen there (from 24th). The first Avocets of the spring returned to Greenabella (25th).

OTHER SITES: A Caspian Gull was on Seaton Common (4th), with two Glaucous Gulls regularly seen there. An Iceland Gull was at Newburn (7th). Eight Velvet Scoters and three Long-tailed Ducks were off Redcar. Two Great Northern Divers were seen regularly off Seal Sands. Scaling Dam held a White-fronted Goose (from 20th).

Chris Sharp (01429 865 163)

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Black Brant was at Grainthorpe-Donna Nook throughout the month. A Green-winged Teal was recorded at South Ferryby-Read's Island (7th), with a flock of 12 tundra Bean Geese also seen there (28th).

ALKBOROUGH FLATS: There were seven European White-fronted Geese (13th-14th), nine Pintails (22nd), 592 Wigeon, 442 Teal, five Little Egrets, 1,500 Dunlin, four Ruff, 46 Snipe, ten Spotted Redshanks, 158 Black-tailed Godwits, 427 Curlews, a February record 253 Avocets, a Cetti's Warbler, 20 Bearded Tits and two Stonechats.

BARTON: A Raven (19th) was only the second record for the site. There was a pale-bellied Brent Goose (22nd), 71 Gadwall, 302 Pochards, 95 Goldeneyes, 125 Tufted Ducks, five Bitterns, 12 Cetti's Warblers, a Chiffchaff, Goosander (21st), Little Egret (14th), two Marsh Harriers, 281 Coots and a Water Pipit.

DONNA NOOK-PYES HALL: Pinkfeet heading north included 980 (9th) and 120 (17th). There were 1,627 dark-bellied Brent Geese, a pale-bellied bird, 59 Whooper Swans, two Peregrines, a Greenshank (20th), Guillemot (8th), 290 Skylarks, a Chiffchaff (18th), Water Pipit (to 18th), 85 Twite, six Corn Buntings and eight Lapland Buntings.

OTHER SITES: Barnacle Geese on Whitton Sand peaked at 1,000. Seventy Whooper Swans flew over Bardney, Brigg and South Ferry (28th), with an additional 24 at Ferryby. An Iceland Gull was on Grimsby Docks all month. Bonby Carrs held 880 Teal, 300 Wigeon, a Hen Harrier and Peregrine. Up to 10,000 Golden Plovers were at Read's Island with two Spotted Redshanks and a wintering Greenshank also there.

Graham Catley with Steve Lorand

NORTHUMBERLAND

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND: Thirty Snow Buntings were at Boulmer (1st), when 30 Little Auks flew past Craster. The Black Scoter remained at Cheswick. Black Guillemots were off the Farne Islands (7th) and off Holy Island (27th). A Hen Harrier was at Beadnell (20th-23rd).

SOUTH NORTHUMBERLAND: There were 130 Little Auks past Newbiggin (1st). The

Prudhoe Rose-coloured Starling remained (to 9th). The West Hartford Great Grey Shrike stayed (to 14th). The Tynemouth Iceland Gull remained (to 17th). An Iceland Gull continued to visit Swallow Pond, where the Bittern remained. Five tundra Bean Geese were at Bothal Pond (2nd).

Two Waxwings were at Morpeth all month. A Pomarine Skua flew north past Seaton Sluice (5th). A tundra Bean Goose was with Pinkfeet at Seaton Sluice (8th-10th). The Ross's Goose remained around the Stobswood area.

Thirteen Greenland Whitefronts were at Big Waters (from 14th).

Jonathan Farooqi (jonathanfarooqi@gmail.com) and Jack Bucknall (jackbuc@hotmail.co.uk)

EAST YORKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Green-winged Teal was at North Cave Wetlands (6th). A Caspian Gull was at Hornsea Mere (7th). A Black-bellied Dipper lingered near Harpham. Two Black Brants were in the Spurn area (3rd), with a Ring-billed Gull there (21st).

FLAMBOROUGH: There were three Great Northern Divers, an Iceland Gull, and three Little Auks (2nd), a Black-throated Diver, Red-necked Grebe and two 'Blue' Fulmars (3rd), and a Pomarine Skua (4th). A Greenland White-fronted Goose and Velvet Scoter were regular. A Yellow-legged Gull and Snow Bunting were noted (8th). Three Velvet Scoters were seen (21st), with a Glaucous Gull (22nd), Mediterranean Gull (24th) and Avocet (26th).

SPURN: A Glaucous Gull, Manx Shearwater, Great Northern Diver and four Pomarine Skuas were seen (1st), with a Red-necked Grebe and another Glaucous Gull (2nd). A Little Auk and a 'Blue' Fulmar passed (5th), with a Mediterranean Gull (7th) and a Pomarine Skua also seen (8th). A Long-tailed Duck and two Great Northern Divers flew by (12th). There was a Velvet Scoter offshore (16th), with five more (22nd), a Long-tailed Duck (23rd), five Little Egrets, and a Black-throated Diver (28th).

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OTHER SITES: A Pomarine Skua was off Mappleton (1st), when a Little Auk and Great Northern Diver were off Skipsea. An Iceland Gull roosted at Southfield Reservoir (2nd), with a Glaucous Gull at Hornsea Mere (5th). Twelve Waxwings were near Burton Fleming (2nd) and two flew over Sunk Island (14th). A flock near Wold Newton held a Lapland Bunting, 20 Twite and 50 Snow Buntings (8th), when three Twite were at Fraithorpe.

Two Bitterns were regular at Hornsea Mere and one showed occasionally at Tophill Low. The Rough-legged Buzzard remained in the Grindale area. Another one recorded at Buckton (20th) was probably passing through. A Great White Egret stopped off at Sunk Island (25th).

Ian Marshall (01482 627 446)

NORTH YORKSHIRE

SCARBOROUGH: A Surf Scoter in South Bay (20th-26th) was only the third record for the district. A Rough-legged Buzzard flew over Troutdale (8th). A Greenland White-fronted Goose was at Harwood Dale Lake (6th-11th). Four Eurasian Whitefronts were at Seamer Tip pools and two headed south past Long Nab (15th). Tundra Bean Geese at Wykeham South Lake peaked at 19 (4th). A total of six Little Auks were logged.

Both Black-throated and Great Northern Divers passed Long Nab, with Pomarine and Great Skuas there (1st). The Scaup remained

at Seamer Road Mere, with another at Potter Brompton Carr (23rd). Four Snow Buntings were reported. A Waxwing flew over Peasholm (9th), with a Twite over Wykeham Lakes (11th). The Richard's Pipit remained at Hayburn Wyke (to 21st). Eight Mediterranean Gulls were wintering in South Bay.

Nick Addey (www.scarboroughbirding.co.uk)

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

BROOMHILL AREA: Four Little Egrets and 50 Goosanders roosted at Old Moor. Signs of spring included the occasional Curlew, 12 Shelducks and four Pintails. Two Mandarin were at Bolton Ings (15th). A Bittern was there, and another began booming at Old Moor. A Red Kite flew west (23rd).

A returning Mediterranean Gull took up territory at Old Moor, where the Brambling remained on the feeders. Two Stonechats lingered on Bolton Ings. Three wintering Chiffchaffs and a Blackcap were seen and heard at Broomhill.

OTHER SITES: Two Smew were at Hatfield Moors sporadically and a tundra Bean Goose visited (17th). Three White-fronted Geese were at Scout Dike (from 20th). Twelve Shelducks, four Pintails and nine Ringed Plovers were at Edderthorpe Flash. Curlews began to trickle through. Two Ruff were at Adwick Wash (12th). A Bittern was seen regularly at Potteric Carr. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were there and in the Worsborough Valley.

Two Rough-legged Buzzards, a Red Kite and Hen Harrier remained on the Agden/Broomhead Moor. Iceland Gulls visited Hamphole tip, Attercliffe and Orgrave Lagoon until mid-month. The Great Grey Shrikes remained at Midhope and Thorne. Yet another was at Bawtry in what has been a great winter for the species.

The Snow Bunting remained at Orgrave until mid-month. The lean winter for Waxwings continued, with just a couple of sightings in the Sheffield area.

John Hewitt (yorkshirebirding@blueyonder.co.uk)

WEST YORKSHIRE

BRADFORD: Many skeins of Pink-footed Geese passed over Bradford mid-February with several hundred over Shipley, Keighley, Queensbury and Bradford City Centre (6th-12th). The two Little Egrets remained in the Ben Rhydding area throughout the month, a Woodcock was seen at Barden (8th), a Mandarin was at Riddlesden (19th) and a Shelduck at Thornton Moor Reservoir (28th) was unusual.

Bramblings remained scarce with the only sightings being one at Keighley (8th) and four that remained in a Riddlesden garden through the month. A high count of 90 Pied Wagtails was seen around Dowley Gap (12th).

LOWER AIRE VALLEY: January's American Wigeon reappeared on the Main Lake (14th, 18th, 21st and 25th). A Scaup was on Lemonroyd Lake (18th). The wintering Black-necked Grebes finally departed (7th). A Glaucous Gull was at Astley Lake (23rd). A Water Pipit and ten Stonechats remained. The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker continued to be seen in Temple Newsam Woods. Three Cetti's Warblers began to sing in the last week of the month. A Snow Bunting flew north (15th).

Chris King - Bradford Ornithological Group, Paul Morris (pmorris@wyjs.org.uk)

Rough-legged Buzzard, Grindale, East Yorkshire, 18 February



Steve Gamlett

SCOTLAND

Highlights

In association with 

Once more dominating the headlines was the first-winter drake Harlequin Duck in Aberdeen, which was still present on the River Don at the end of March. Other rarities of note included White-billed Divers off Orkney and Shetland, King Eider in Fife, Blue-winged Teal in Orkney, and American Coot on North Uist, Outer Hebrides.

ABERDEENSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The Harlequin Duck stayed all month on the River Don in Aberdeen. Waxwings in Aberdeen peaked at 30. Iceland Gulls were at Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Strichen and Donmouth in Aberdeen. There were four Glaucous Gulls in Peterhead. A Little Auk was off Kinaird Head, Fraserburgh (17th). An American Wigeon was on the Ythan Estuary (4th).

The two Little Egrets remained at the Loch of Strathbeg, with a Bean Goose (12th), 15,500 Pinkfeet, 123 Whooper Swans, 44 Mute Swans, 83 Goldeneyes, 222 Mallards, 35 Tufted Ducks, 846 Wigeon, 333 Teal, four Pintails, two Shovelers, nine Shelducks, eight Red-breasted Mergansers, a Scaup, 206 Curlews, 25 Dunlin, 411 Lapwings and two Golden Plovers.

Mike Chandler (chandler535@btinternet.com)

ARGYLL

ISLAY: Loch Gruinart logged four Greenshanks, a White-tailed Eagle, two Bullfinches, 54 Pintails, a Yellowhammer, Merlin, five Hen Harriers, 1,520 Golden Plovers and 335 Lapwings. A Glaucous Gull (2nd) and 41 pale-bellied Brent Geese (5th) were at Uiskentuie. Loch Indaal held 77 Scaup, 135 Bar-tailed Godwits, a Richardson's Canada Goose, nine Long-tailed Ducks and five Slavonian Grebes. A Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Brambling were at Kilchoman. Two White-tailed Eagles and a Golden Eagle flew over the Sound of Islay (14th).

Twelve Bullfinches were at Bridgend Woods. There were 200 Twite, two Peregrines and a Hen Harrier at Machair Bay. Thirteen Purple Sandpipers were at Bruichladdich. An Iceland Gull was near Bowmore (17th). Two Goosanders were on the River Laggan (18th). Six Yellowhammers were at Port Askaig (20th). There were 13 Great Northern Divers, four Black-throated Divers and seven Red-throated Divers seen from the ferry (27th).

TREE: The Ring-necked Duck remained at Loch an Eilein (to 7th), with the long-staying group of 15 Jackdaws and a Rook also there. Twelve Glaucous Gulls were logged. A Black-throated Diver and Common Scoter were off Traigh Bhi (6th). A Woodcock was at Balephuill (7th). A Jack Snipe was at Milton (9th). A Short-eared Owl was at Lehy'ol (3rd-6th). Two Gadwall were at Loch a' Phuill (8th-9th). A Brambling was at Kenovay (14th). There were eight wintering Dunlocks and four Water Rails. Two dead Puffins on the Beached Bird Survey (16th) were unusual.

Wintering finches included 15 Goldfinches, nine Greenfinches and seven Chaffinches. Spring migrants from mid-month included the odd Pied Wagtail, the first Lesser Black-backed Gull (20th) and 15 Black-headed Gulls (19th-20th). Forty Fieldfares and 300 Redwings remained. A count (16th-17th) found 4,291 Barnacle Geese, 2,119 Greylags, 660 Greenland Whitefronts, two pale-bellied Brents, a Pinkfoot, 100 Whooper Swans, 3,780 Golden Plovers and 3405 Lapwings.

Ian Brooke (ianbrooke14@hotmail.com) and John Bowler (john.bowler@rspb.org.uk)

AYRSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: There was a Jack Snipe at Maidens and two Black Grouse near Largs (1st). The Lesser Scaup was at Martnaham (2nd), when a Black Redstart was at Doorfoot. A Peregrine and seven Tree Sparrows were at

Dipple (4th). A Yellow-legged Gull was at Shewalton (5th). There were 15 Red-throated, 38 Black-throated and 73 Great Northern Divers between Lendalfoot and Turnberry Point (6th), when two Slavonian Grebes were at Lendalfoot.

Twenty Crossbills were at Glenafton Reservoir (7th). There was a Mediterranean Gull at Barassie Beach (9th). A Smew was at Barnshean Loch (14th), when a Little Gull was at Barassie. Two Barn Owls were between Blairbowie and Attiquin (16th). An American Wigeon was at Fairlie (18th). A Mealy Redpoll was in Troon (27th).

Andy Winnington

BORDERS

HIGHLIGHTS: Whooper Swans included 23 at Folly Loch (2nd) and 72 at Paxton House (4th), where there were also 17 Goosanders (9th), two Goldeneyes, a Kingfisher and Peregrine. Yetholm Loch had eight Goosanders, three Tufted Ducks, 20 Goldeneyes, 14 Gadwall and a Merlin. Westruther had 95 Canada Geese (19th).

There were 1,600 Pinkfeet at Westfield (19th). Another 1,150 were at Bernersyde Hide, also a Pochard and 86 Greylags. Hule Moss had 23 Teal, 16 Goldeneyes and three Shelducks (27th). A White-tailed Eagle in western Berwickshire was possibly the same bird seen late last year at Innerleithen.

James D Lough

CENTRAL REGION

HIGHLIGHTS: A sinensis-race Cormorant was at Gartmorn Dam (1st). A Ring-billed Gull was at Skinflats Pools (6th).

BO'NESS AND BLACKNESS: There were three Common Scoters and 12 Eiders (11th). Two Scaup were offshore (14th).

CLACKMANNANSHIRE: Eighteen Snow Buntings were on Commeneged Hill (1st). A Woodcock was at the Blackdevon Wetlands (11th). A Ruff was at the mouth of the Black Devon (28th).

FALKIRK DISTRICT: two 'blue morph' Snow Geese were with 1,000 Pinkfeet near Slamannan (10th). The overwintering Common Sandpiper was still at Higgin's Neuk (11th). A Jack Snipe was in the Railway Marsh, Bonnybridge (12th), when a Gadwall was a site first at Little Denny Reservoir.

KINNEIL: There were 91 Pintails, seven Scaup, six Eiders, a Spotted Redshank and two Greenshanks (7th). Four Scaup and a Spotted Redshank were present (21st).

STIRLING DISTRICT: A Jack Snipe and 33 Snipe were at Cambusmore GP (1st). A Smew was on the River Forth at the Carse of Lecropt (4th), Craigforth (10th) and Blairdrummond Ponds (22nd). There were 28 Whooper Swans on Loch lubhair (12th). Two Snow Buntings were on the top of Ben Ledi (9th). Two Common Crossbills were at Loch Rusky (21st).

UPPER FORTH ESTUARY: A count (8th) produced 16 Great Crested Grebes, two Little Egrets, 754 Pinkfeet, 513 Shelducks, 999 Teal, 93 Pintails, six Scaup, six Eiders, 34 Red-breasted Mergansers, 333 Oystercatchers, 81 Ringed Plovers, 2,620 Knot, 3,680 Dunlins, 211 Black-tailed Godwits, 28 Bar-tailed Godwits, 408 Curlews, a Spotted Redshank, two Greenshanks, 1,701 Redshanks, a Turnstone and a Ring-billed Gull.

OTHER SITES: Skinflats held 24 Pintails (6th), and a Greenshank plus Merlin (11th). Three Little Egrets were at Powfoulis (21st).

Neil Bielby (n.bielby@qsky.com)

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

HIGHLIGHTS: The White-tailed Eagle at Rhins, Rough-legged Buzzard at Mennock Pass, two Ring-necked Ducks on Carlingwark Loch, Green-winged Teal at Caerlaverock and Mersehead, the Cackling Canada Goose at Cults Loch, Smew at Souleseat Loch and Little Egrets at Caerlaverock, Mersehead, Whauphill and Isle of Whithorn all remained.

Mediterranean Gulls were at Cummertrees (3rd) and Bishopburn (8th). Iceland Gulls were at Stranraer (8th) and Mersehead (9th), with a

Glaucous Gull at Castle Douglas (21st). Greenshanks were at Glasserton (9th) and Drummore (17th). Whimbrels were at Powmillmount (15th) and Carsethorn (20th). Crossbills were at Dalbeattie Forest and Moniaive. Scaup were at Caerlaverock (20th) and Carlingwark Loch. Three Ruff were at Cummertrees (20th). Two Purple Sandpipers and Golden Plovers were at Southernness (22nd).

Maxima included 100,000 Starlings at Rigg, 13,000 Pinkfeet, 1,000 Knot and 80 Greenland Whitefronts at West Freugh, 200 Chaffinches at Moniaive, 250 Lapwings and 14 Gadwall at Glasserton, 150 Guillemots, 20 Razorbills and 150 Twite at Rhins, 34 Shelducks in Kirkcudbright Bay, and 92 Redshanks plus 30 Kittiwakes at Browhouses.

CAERLAVEROCK: Highlights included Barnacle Geese, Pinkfeet, Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler, Snipe, three Water Rails, Reed Bunting, Redshank, Mistle Thrush, Peregrine, Hen Harrier, Grey Wagtail, Goldcrest, Stonechat, Oystercatcher and Pochard.

MERSEHEAD: There were Barnacle Geese, Pinkfeet, Shelduck, Pintail, Teal, Goldeneye, Shoveler, Gadwall, Lapwing, Redshank, Dunlin, Grey, Golden and Ringed Plovers, Little Grebe, Water Rail, Snipe, Skylark, Twite, Meadow Pipit, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Stonechat, Hen Harrier, Barn Owl, Goldcrest and Tawny Owl.

OTHER SITES: Red Grouse and a Hen Harrier were at Langholm. A Kingfisher was at Brow Well. Three Peregrines, three Sparrowhawks, a Merlin, Buzzard and Kestrel were at Rigg. A Woodcock and Snipe were at Aryhassen. A Dipper was at Sanquhar. Seven Buzzards, a Kestrel, Red Kite and Lapwings were at Kirkcudbright Bay. A Nuthatch was at Brighouse Bay. Ten Buzzards and three Peregrines were at Cults Loch. Four Brent Geese were at Glasserton.

A Willow Tit was at Castle Loch. Grey and Ringed Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits and Turnstones were at Powmillmount. A Tree Sparrow was at Mainsiddle (18th). A Hen Harrier was at Threave Estate. Two Rock Pits were at Glencape. A Merlin was at Newbie. A Green Woodpecker was at Glenkens.

Pam Woods (DumfriesandGallowaybirding@yahoo.com)

FIFE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Ring-billed Gull was at Townhill Loch, Dunfermline (from 8th).

CENTRAL FIFE: There were 1,000 Pinkfeet at Letham Pools (20th). A Eurasian Whitefront was at Easter Kilwhiss, a Barnacle Goose at Rossie Bog and two Brent Geese past Pathhead (8th). Two Scaup remained at Beveridge Park. A Smew was at Lochore Meadows (16th and 25th). Loch Gelly held 25 Goosanders. Little Auks flew past Kinghorn and Buchhaven (2nd and 23rd).

Mediterranean Gulls were at Ravenscraig, Buchhaven, Balbeggie and Beveridge Park. A Bearded Tit was at Newburgh (6th). Ravens were at Balbeggie and Redmyre. Crossbills were at Redmyre (7th). There were 45 Snow Buntings on the Lomond Hills (1st).

EAST FIFE: Brent Geese were at Outhead, Anstruther and Guardbridge. The King Eider remained off Ruddons Point, as did the Surf Scoter in Largo Bay. Two Red-necked Grebes were at Levenmouth (20th) and one off Ruddons Point (22nd). A Little Egret was at Cocklemill Burn (8th). White-tailed Eagles were at Edenside and Reres Wood (5th). Edenside held two Peregrines.

Greenshanks were at Kinkell Braes (21st). A Glaucous Gull was off Leven (3rd). A Little Auk passed Levenmouth (7th). A Barn Owl hunted over Kingsbarns beach (24th). Earshall held ten Bramblings (22nd). Snow Buntings were recorded at Tentsmuir beach (3rd-23rd). There were 32 Corn Buntings at St Monans (24th).

WEST FIFE: Loch Gelly held a Smew (1st-24th) and 25 Goosanders (1st). A Great Northern Diver was off Kinghorn. A Green Sandpiper remained at Dalgety Bay. Mediterranean Gulls were at Pettycur, Dalgety Bay and Barns Farm

(12th). Little Auks were off Dalgety Bay (5th-10th). Ravens were seen at Inverkeithing (9th).

David Heeley (dw.heeley@btinternet.com)

HIGHLANDS

HIGHLIGHTS: A Harlequin Duck was at Brora (from 17th). The Water Pipit remained at Dornoch Point (to 5th). The Ring-billed Gull was at Dingwall throughout.

BADENOCH & STRATHSPEY: A White-tailed Eagle was in the Nethybridge area all month, with a Brambling in a garden there (25th). A Waxwing was at Grantown (to 15th). A Glaucous Gull was in the Aviemore area all month. Insh Marshes held two White-tailed Eagles, and a Peregrine (18th). Six Crested Tits were at Drumguish (8th). There were 122 Lapwings near Newtonmore (17th).

EAST SUTHERLAND: Two Glaucous Gulls were at Helmsdale (25th). Six Little Gulls were there (12th). A Peregrine was at Loch Fleet (11th), with two Greenland Whitefronts there (25th). Dornoch had a Red-necked Grebe, four Slavonian Grebes and a Hen Harrier (5th).

EASTER ROSS: An Iceland Gull was in Dingwall (from 23rd). Another was at Tarbat Ness (2nd), with 117 Red-throated and 14 Great Northern Divers there (1st), Black-throated Divers (13th and 22nd), a Puffin (11th), two Black Guillemots (13th) and a Great Skua (22nd). The Smew remained on Loch Eye.

INVERNESS-SHIRE AND BLACK ISLE: A Velvet Scoter and Great Northern Diver were off Chanonry Point (2nd). Two Black Grouse were near Loch Ashie (13th). There were 53 Curlews at Ardersier (15th).

NORTH WEST: Glaucous Gulls were in Skerry Harbour (5th) and at Ullapool, where two Bean Geese were recorded (9th). An Iceland Gull was at Ardmair (9th).

SKYE, LOCHALSH & SMALL ISLES: There were 72 Barnacle Geese at Staffin (8th), with 96 at Kilmaluag (10th). A Merlin was at Earlish (26th). There were 25 Golden Plovers at Feorlig (21st). Hen Harriers were at Ullinish (all month), Struan (9th), Portree, Portnalong and Heaste. Six Short-eared Owls roosted at Ullinish (9th). An Iceland Gull was at Portnalong (25th). Portree held 23 Bar-tailed Godwits and a Greenshank (9th).

A Glaucous Gull was on Loch Ainort (11th). Three Snow Buntings were at Suisnish (3rd). Seven Great Northern Divers were off Eyre Point, Raasay (7th). On Rum, eight Snow Buntings were at Kimory (3rd) and an Iceland Gull at Loch Sresort (15th). An Iceland Gull was at Kishorn (10th), with 45 Goldeneyes on the River Shiel (27th).

Tom Wells (tomjwells@hotmail.com)

LOTHIAN

HIGHLIGHTS: The Surf Scoter stayed off Musselburgh/Joppa all month. Water Pits were at White Sands (1st-7th) and Barns Ness (26th-28th). Two blue-morph Lesser Snow Geese were at Avonbridge (11th). A Green Sandpiper was on the River Tyne at Haddington (14th). A Glaucous Gull was at Skateraw (28th).

ABERLADY: A Long-eared Owl roosted by the Marl Loch (to 5th). A Little Auk and Black Guillemot flew past Gullane Point (8th). A tundra Bean Goose was with Pinkfeet at East Fortune (8th).

BARNS NESS: Three tundra Bean Geese (1st-4th) and a White-fronted Goose (4th-15th) were at Skateraw, with two Brent Geese past Barns Ness (7th), and three Whitefronts at White Sands Quarry (12th). Three Snow Buntings were at Barns Ness, with five Little Auks there (1st) and a Mediterranean Gull (20th). A Black Guillemot and two Snow Buntings were at White Sands (28th).

MUSSELBURGH: A Black Redstart was on the seawall (2nd-5th). Six Little Auks flew past the Eskmouth (3rd) where there was a Scaup (6th) and Iceland Gull (7th). Two Mediterranean Gulls and 25 Twite were seen (15th).

TYNINGHAME: The Mandarin remained at Seafield Pond (to 13th). A Little Egret was at Belhaven Bay and a Water Rail at Seafield Pond (12th).

OTHER SITES: Long-stayers included the Water Rail at Inverleith Pond, Black Redstarts at Dunbar and Seafield, and the Smew at Linlithgow Loch. A dark-bellied Brent Goose was at Dunbar (1st). Figgate Pond held a Shoveler, five Goosanders (19th) and three Gadwall (26th). Linlithgow Loch held a Long-tailed Duck (7th-12th), four Water Rails and a Gadwall (8th), and 14 Goosanders (26th).

Water Rails were also at Duddingston Loch (3rd) and near Penicuik (25th-28th). Forty Twite were at Gladhouse (15th). Mediterranean Gulls were at Cockmuir (15th), Middleton (18th) and Seton Sands (28th). Waxwings were at Dunbar (6th), and Musselburgh plus North Berwick (15th).

Jim Nicholson (jpnich@gmail.com)

MORAY

HIGHLIGHTS: Iceland Gulls were at Findochty and Lhanbryde. A Waxwing was in Elgin. Buckie had a Glaucous Gull. Lossiemouth had a Green-winged Teal, Grey Plover, Snow Bunting, Arctic Skua, Kingfisher, Snipe, Bar-tailed Godwit and Greenshank. Loch Spynie had Water Rail and Grey Partridge. A Short-eared Owl was at Portknockie.

Findhorn Bay logged Black-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Peregrine, Slavonian Grebe, Twite, Gannet, Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake, Red-throated Diver, Black Guillemot, Great Northern Diver, Long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Black-throated Diver, Velvet Scoter, Common Scoter, Whooper Swan, Pinkfoot, Fieldfare, Linnet, Skylark, Stonechat, Lapwing, Shelduck, Purple Sandpiper, Greylag, Goosander, Knot, Redwing, Dunlin, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Wigeon, Teal, Curlew, Barn Owl, Dipper, Blackcap, Woodcock and Goldeneye.

Yvonne Watson

ORKNEY

HIGHLIGHTS: There were 109 Great Northern Divers off Rerwick Head. The White-billed Diver remained in Water Sound. Fifteen Slavonian Grebes were on the Harray Loch. A 'blue' Fulmar was off Point of Buckquoy. A tundra Bean Goose was on North Ronaldsay, with 66 Greenland Whitefronts at The Loons, two European Whitefronts on the Loch of Tankerness and a Snow Goose near Barns of Ayre, Deerness.

Away from South Walls, the largest Barnacle Goose flock was 62 at the Loch of Skail. A pale-bellied Brent Goose was at Linksness, Tankerness. There were 46 Shelducks at the Oyce of Quindry. The American Wigeon was seen again at Shapinsay's Mill Dam, with 540 Teal there. Green-winged Teal were at the Loch of Skail, Loch of Tankerness and on North Ronaldsay, where 14 Pintails were noted. Forty Shovelers were at Brodgar Pools.

The Blue-winged Teal remained on The Shunan. The Harray Loch held 348 Mute Swans, 821 Tufted Ducks, 386 Pochards, 34 Scaup and 402 Coots. A Ring-necked Duck was at Loch of Skail. There were 225 Long-tailed Ducks and 27 Red-breasted Mergansers in Veantro Bay, Shapinsay. The Bay of Sandoyne, Holm held four Common Scoters and nine Velvet Scoters. Three Goosanders were recorded on the Loch of Bosquoy.

A Water Rail was at Millfield, Burray. Wader maxima were 88 Oystercatchers, 1,200 Golden Plovers, a Grey Plover, 68 Knot, 35 Sanderling, 75 Purple Sandpipers, a Ruff, Jack Snipe, Woodcock, 93 Bar-tailed Godwits, seven Black-tailed Godwits and 593 Curlews. A Little Gull was at Sandside, Deerness. Black-headed Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls began to return. One or two Iceland Gulls were in nine localities, with three on Westray. One or two Glaucous Gulls were at 15 sites, with three on Lamb Holm.

Puffins were at the Point of Buckquoy and in the Bay of Sandoyne. The wintering Great Spotted Woodpecker was seen again in the Hope. Singing Sky Larks were at Gerraquoy, South Ronaldsay and on Shapinsay, with 22 passage birds on North Ronaldsay.

Twenty Meadow Pipits were at Cottasarth and 22 Rock Pipits at Warebeth. A Grey Wagtail

and Waxwing were in Kirkwall. North Ronaldsay logged seven Robins, two Black Redstarts, 92 Fieldfares and 80 Redwings.

A Blackcap and 30 Greenfinches were at Norseman. Blue Tits have successfully over-wintered on Papay, in the Hope and at Hestily. A Brambling, 70 Snow Buntings and two Siskins were recorded on North Ronaldsay.

Eric Meek

PERTH AND KINROSS

HIGHLIGHTS: Two Smew were at Loch Leven throughout. A Waxwing was at Longforan (1st). Thirty Hawfinches were at Scone Palace (17th). Loch Leven logged 76 Whooper Swans, 10,000 Pinkfeet, a Barnacle Goose, two Pintails, 40 Goldeneyes, a Ruddy Duck and a Short-eared Owl. Sixty Canada Geese were at Cally Loch (10th) with 90 at Glen Turret (22nd). A Mandarin was at Loch Tummel (28th). Hen Harriers were near Crieff (15th) and Loch Leven (28th). Buzzards included ten at Carsebreck (9th) and seven at Glen Devon (22nd).

Merlins were at Dalnaspical (2nd) and Loch Leven (20th). Water Rails were at Loch Watson, Blairgowrie and Levenmouth (14th).

Oystercatchers returned to their inland breeding areas, including 76 at Lawhill. There were 200 Lapwings at Dull (28th).

Invergowrie Bay held a Knot (1st), 200 Redshanks (25th) and a Black-tailed Godwit (8th). A Green Sandpiper was at North Inch, Perth (14th). The first Lesser Black-backed Gulls returned to inland breeding sites, with four at Loch Leven (5th). A Barn Owl was at Glen Lednock (10th).

Kingfishers were at Braco (1st and 9th) and Loch Leven (28th). Fieldfares included 100 at Bankfoot (11th) and 50 near Kinross (2nd). A Chiffchaff was near Dunkeld (11th). There were 14 Tree Sparrows at Vane Farm (1st).

Bramblings included 90 near Braco (22nd) and 200 at Glen Lyon (28th). A mixed flock of 350 Lesser Redpolls and Siskins was at Loch Kennard (2nd). Flocks of 100 Snow Buntings were at Ardtalcraig (7th) and Ben Lawers (7th). **Scott Paterson (scottpaterson12@yahoo.co.uk)**

SHETLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: The wintering White-billed Diver was off Kirkabister (24th). An American Wigeon was at Norby (8th-23rd). The Smew remained at Snaravoe throughout. A King Eider was in Bluemull Sound (1st-13th). White-fronted Geese included three at Baltasound (7th), with seven there (21st), four at Hagdale (12th), three at Spiggie (25th) and singles at Hamnavoe (21st-28th), Quarff (22nd) and Quendale (28th).

Tundra Bean Geese were at Tingwall (8th), Cullivoe (1st-28th), Hillwell (15th-21st), Spiggie (two on 22nd) and Loch of Littlester (22nd-28th). Forty Iceland Gulls were recorded, including ten on Unst (19th) and nine in Lerwick (8th). Around 15 Glaucous Gulls included five in Lerwick.

Six Little Auks were off Sumburgh Head (4th) with 12 there (6th). A Waxwing was at Rompa (2nd). A Black-bellied Dipper was at Skaw (24th-28th).

Hugh Harrop (www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk)

TAYSIDE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Red-necked Grebe flew past Whiting Ness, Arbroath (2nd). A Hen Harrier was at Eassie (2nd). A Black-throated Diver was at Fish Town of Usan (2nd). An Iceland Gull was near Kinnordy (3rd), with two Bitterns there (17th), plus a Barn Owl. White-tailed Eagles were at Back Water Dam (4th), Panmure Estate (17th) and Barry Buddon (18th). A Hooded Crow was in Glen Lethnot (4th), with two Red Kites there (21st).

A Greenland Whitefront was at Lumley Den (5th). Cairngorm National Park, Angus, held two Golden Eagles and two Ravens (5th). An Iceland Gull was at Forfar Loch (8th). A Little Auk was in Lunan Bay (9th). Scone Palace held a flock of 20 Hawfinches (15th). A total of 60 Twite were at Pitmudie Farm (5th). A Spotted Redshank was recorded at East Haven (21st).

LOCH OF KINNORDY: There were 300 Greylags, a Shoveler, 25 Teal, 20 Wigeon, 30 Mallards, 75 Lapwings, 24 Oystercatchers,

four Curlews, four Snipe, and a Hen Harrier (23rd).

MONTROSE BASIN: Highlights included a Little Egret Lurgies (7th), Kingfisher (20th), Tree Sparrow, 20 Pintails, 17 Scaup (7th), nine Little Grebes, 16 Cormorants, eight Herons, 660 Pinkfeet, 380 Shelducks, 2,263 Wigeon, 104 Teal, 199 Mallards, six Shovelers, 716 Eiders, 16 Goldeneyes, 13 Red-breasted Mergansers, 1,914 Oystercatchers, 37 Lapwings, 20 Knot, 703 Dunlin, 105 Black-tailed Godwits, 43 Bar-tailed Godwits, 547 Curlews, 948 Redshanks, three Greenshanks, 213 Black-headed Gulls, 48 Common Gulls, 97 Herring Gulls and two Great Black-backed Gulls.

OTHER SITES: The Glaxo Factory area held a roost of 50 Pied Wagtails. A Great Northern Diver, six Red-breasted Mergansers, 12 Long-tailed Ducks, 47 Common Scoters and 12 Red-throated Divers were in Lunan Bay (7th). Forfar Loch (11th) held a Kingfisher, 46 Mute Swans, 18 Gadwall, 60 Goosanders and four Bullfinches. Balgavies Loch (11th) held a Water Rail, six Goosanders and 17 Cormorants.

Back Water Dam (25th) held two Crossbills, two Snow Buntings, five Goosanders, a Buzzard, eight Fieldfares, three Mistle Thrushes, two Little Grebes, a Raven and a Kestrel. Loch of Lintrathen (25th) held 150 Fieldfares. Glen Lethnot (20th) held eight Red Grouse, a Peregrine, two Fieldfares and six Buzzards. Arbroath Harbour held 17 Purple Sandpipers (22nd). The Linross Farm area hosted 1,000 Pinkfeet and a Barnacle Goose (22nd). Monikie CP held a Green Sandpiper, Kingfisher, 14 Wigeon, 13 Tufted Ducks, 15 Goldeneyes and 20 Teal (23rd). Monifieth Bay (14th) held six Bar-tailed Godwits, six Sanderling, 18 Ringed Plovers, 33 Dunlin, 19 Oystercatchers, three Turnstones, six Redshanks and a Grey Plover.

Montreatmont Forest (20th) held six Crossbills, two Redpolls, a Siskin, two Goldfinches and a Green Woodpecker. East Haven had two Stonechats (12th).

Bob McCurley



Hugh Harrop

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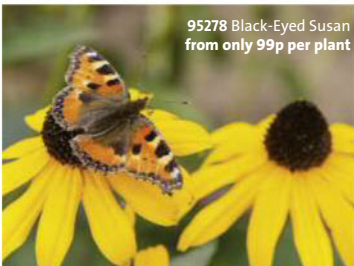
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This photo was taken by Sam Hobson, a wildlife photographer based in Bristol. To see more of his urban Peregrine shots, and other photos, visit his website samhobson.co.uk



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WELCOME TO THE GARDEN BIRD GUIDE



Whether you've just begun birding, or been mad about birds your whole life, your garden offers you the chance to begin and end every day

with some birdwatching.

In fact, for some species, our gardens have become the most important habitat there is, while for others, such as the House Sparrow, changes to our gardens have contributed to worrying declines.

So, feeding our garden birds and providing them with homes is taking on greater importance all the time. We can all play our part in reversing declines, conserving other species, and even attracting new birds into new habitats.

Best of all, we can do all that while enjoying watching wildlife close-up from the comfort of our own homes. Getting to know your garden birds thoroughly will not only help you learn many of the basic principles of ID, but also allow you to observe a wide variety of behaviour that the fieldguides don't always cover.

We're always keen to hear about the birds in YOUR gardens – send us your ideas and photos at birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

Matt Merritt, Editor

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How to make your garden bird-friendly

From the makers of Bird Watching magazine
Editor Matt Merritt
Assistant Editor Mike Weedon
Production Editor Jack Thorpe
Art Editors Emily Reynolds & Katie Wilkinson



With the right ingredients, brilliant birds such as Robins and Blue Tits could be a daily feature of your garden

FLPA/ David Tipling

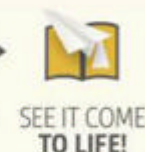
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10 DOS AND 10 DON'TS FOR FEEDING BIRDS

Birdwatchers in the UK spend more on feeding their garden birds than anyone else in the world. Read on for the golden rules of garden bird feeding...

✓ DO

1 Provide black sunflower seeds
They have a high oil content that makes them popular year-round, and superior to the striped variety.



Tom Bailey

2▲ Keep your feeders clean
To prevent the spread of disease. Use a 5% disinfectant solution, and consider moving feeders regularly, to avoid a build-up of droppings.

3 Use sunflower hearts
As well as being popular with many species, they reduce the amount of mess you get around your feeders.



Andres Rodriguez / Alamy

4 Buy your bird food from a reputable dealer
This will ensure food is free from toxins, is designed for the species listed on the packaging, and may well be grown in a wildlife-friendly environment.

5 Make sure any mealworms or insect food are fresh
In a dry summer, meaty dog or cat food can also provide vital protein for nestlings, but don't leave it for any length of time, as it will attract pests.



Gary K Smith / Alamy



Tim Gainey / Alamy

6▲ Take the mesh bags off fat balls and cakes, etc
Left on, they can injure or kill birds. Used properly, they're great for the likes of Starlings, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and Lesser Redpolls.

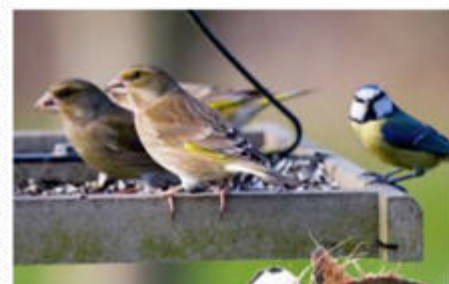
7 Put out raw pinhead oatmeal
It's a hit with many species. Never use cooked porridge, though, it's too glutinous to digest easily and can damage feathers.



Tim Gainey / Alamy

8▲ Provide water
Do this all year-round, even if it's only in an upturned Frisbee, or plant-pot saucer. In the summer, rinse containers out daily, and allow them to dry before fresh water is added.

9▼ Feed all year round
While feeding can be very important to get birds through cold winter spells, it also makes a huge difference in spring and summer – adults use feeders for 'fast food', leaving them more time to forage for food for nestlings.



david tipling / Alamy

10 Use fresh coconut shell halves to attract tits
Don't use desiccated coconut, which the birds could choke on.



Dorling Kindersley Ltd / Alamy

Try these specialist suppliers for everything you need to create a wildlife-friendly garden

Gardenature has everything from bird boxes to bat detectors and camera nestboxes.
gardenature.co.uk

Kennedy Wild Bird Food has a range of food to target certain birds, such as farmland species.
wildbirdfood.uk.com

Harrogate Bird Tables offer award-winning bird tables, encouraging a wider range of species to visit.
birdtable-birdtable.com

CJ Wildlife have the all-round answer if you're creating a bird-friendly garden, from plants

and to specialist bird foods.
birdfood.co.uk

Wild About Birds has feeders, nestboxes and a wide range of food, plus bug boxes to help provide natural food for birds.
wildaboutbirds.co.uk

Birds & Bees sources all the cereals for its seed mixes from bird- and bee-friendly farmers.
birdsandbees.co.uk

Ark Wildlife have everything from fat balls to wildflowers, giving birds what they need.
arkwildlife.co.uk

✗ DON'T



Robert Read / Alamy

1▲ Don't use loose whole nuts
Except in winter – young birds can choke on them. In summer, use a mesh wire feeder, as above, so birds have to take smaller amounts

2 Don't use a mixture containing coloured lumps
These are dog biscuits, and birds can only eat them once they're soaked.



Tom Bailey

3▲ Don't be discouraged if nothing happens at first
Or if regulars disappear for a while. Bird movements can be affected by all sorts of factors, and persistence pays off.

4 Don't put out soft animal fat
Such as turkey fat at Christmas, cooking fat, polyunsaturated fats or vegetable oil, as it can smear on and damage feathers. Pure lard or beef suet are fine, and give a vital energy boost.

5 Don't use wheat and barley grain mixes
Or lentils, dry rice, or beans, unless you want a lot of pigeons and Pheasants.



Alim Osmanaj / Alamy



Tom Bailey

6▲ Don't forget to provide a range of feeder types
And ideally, positions. Bold species such as Robins may come very close to doors and windows, but shy types like Coal Tits may need a more sheltered spot.

7 Don't throw away unwanted windfall fruit
Even if it does look a bit messy for a few weeks, thrushes love this rich food resource in autumn and winter.



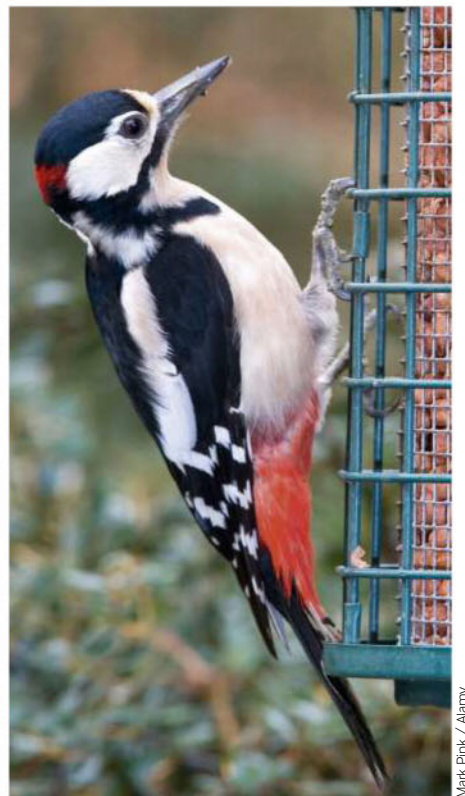
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8▲ Don't give milk to birds
It can even kill birds and other wildlife. Fermented dairy products, such as mild grated cheese, are fine.



Mark Pink / Alamy

9▲ Don't provide salted or dry roasted peanuts
In their natural state, though, they're great at attracting the likes of Great Spotted Woodpecker.

10 Don't put out mouldy food
If it's past its best for you, the same applies to the birds.

Try these specialist suppliers for everything you need to create a wildlife-friendly garden

Vine House Farm supply their bird food, feeders and nestboxes direct from the farm, and every sale supports The Wildlife Trusts. vinehousefarm.co.uk

Jacobi Jayne's Living With Birds catalogue contains everything you need for a bird-friendly

garden – feeders, food, nestboxes, cameras and more. livingwithbirds.com

Sue Lowell Natural History Books offer a wide selection of volumes to help you learn more about the wildlife in your garden – email sue4382@aol.com

Concept Research are leaders in the field of humane cat-, fox- and pest-repellents, ensuring your garden birds remain safe. conceptresearch.co.uk

Fawcett Pond Liners will help you turn a muddy hole into the greatest asset any wildlife

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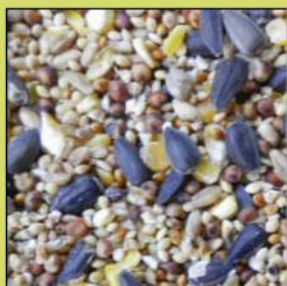


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Suitable for all small birds

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Won't grow mix

Blended with 60% bakery grade sunflower hearts, this energy rich mixture has been blended to ensure no re-growth under your feeding station. Suitable for all year round feeding. Best fed from seed feeder, scattered on bird table or from ground feeder. Contains no wheat. £37.25/25kg



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SONG THRUSH

Smaller than a Blackbird, and with a rather plain head pattern and neat, V-shaped spots on the breast. Main confusion species, Mistle Thrush, is larger, paler and has 'messier spots', while winter visitor the Redwing has rufous blush under wing, and distinct eye stripe. Song Thrushes typically sing from the tops of trees and bushes, often repeating phrases three or four times each.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Turdus philomelos*

Length: 23cm

Wingspan: 33-36cm

Diet: Earthworms and grubs, plus snails, smashed on an 'anvil'.

In winter, berries

Habitat: Hedges, shrubberies, parks and gardens, woodland; less common on farmland

Nests in: Trees, shrubs and creepers; occasionally on manmade objects

Feed with: Mealworms, windfall apples, pears and plums, placed on ground or on bird table



Krys Bailey / A Amy

BLACKBIRD

All-black male, with yellow bill and eye-ring, is distinctive, but dark brown female and lighter brown, mottled juvenile more confusing – watch for them hopping across lawns. Often very tame and bold. Males sing highly musical song from treetops and other vantage points, but listen too for 'clink clink' alarm call, and loud, rattling outburst when startled or frightened.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Turdus merula*

Length: 24cm

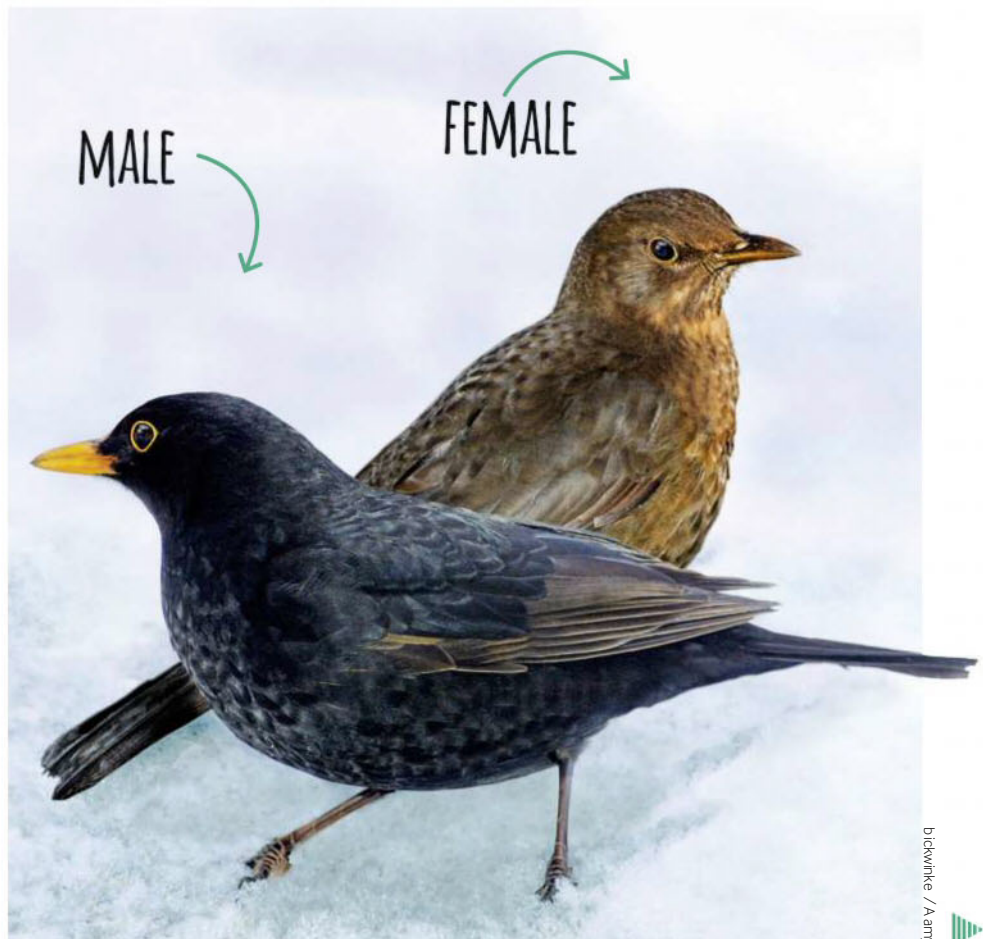
Wingspan: 34-38cm

Diet: Earthworms, grubs, insects and larvae, plus berries and fruit in autumn and winter

Habitat: Almost everywhere but bare upland areas

Nests in: Hedges and thickets

Feed with: Seed mixes with fruit, mealworms, windfall fruit, dog and cat food



Krys Bailey / A Amy



Ralph Todd / Alamy

ROBIN

Orange-red breast and face is unmistakable, as is bold, confiding attitude to humans and aggression towards other birds at feeders. Will 'shadow' gardeners to take advantage of earthworms dug up, and has been known to take food from the hand. Rich, rippling song, often sung long after dark, and even in the depths of winter.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Erithacus rubecula*

Length: 14cm

Wingspan: 20-22cm

Diet: Insects, spiders, and small berries in autumn and winter

Habitat: Gardens, parks, deciduous and mixed woods; avoids wide open spaces

Nests in: Banks, under roots, and in open-fronted nestboxes

Feed with: Crushed or grated nuts, mealworms

DUNNOCK

Grey face and breast, with brown cap and ear coverts – otherwise its subtle, streaky plumage and secretive habits, feeding around the bottoms of hedges, mean it is overlooked even by some keen garden birders. Fast, warbling song, rather less melodic than a Robin's. Frequent extra-pair matings mean it is a bird to watch closely in the breeding season.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Prunella modularis*

Length: 13-14cm

Wingspan: 19-21cm

Diet: Insects taken from ground and low vegetation, in summer; in winter, seeds

Habitat: Gardens, hedgerows, thickets of bramble, bracken and other low vegetation

Nests in: Bushes and hedges

Feed with: Small seed mixes (millet, etc), crushed or grated nuts



David Chapman / Alamy



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



HOUSE SPARROW

Noisy, active bird – the males have a grey cap and sharp black bib, but lack the white cheeks and black ear spot of their country cousins, the Tree Sparrow. Females are brown and streaky, but both sexes have white wingbars and plain tails. Distribution can be patchy these days, but where found, often forms busy, rowdy groups.



David Hosking / Alamy

Factfile

- Scientific name:** *Passer domesticus*
- Length:** 14-15cm
- Wingspan:** 20-22cm
- Diet:** Mainly seeds, plus shoots, buds and berries. Young fed on insects
- Habitat:** Declining in urban parks and gardens, but also seen in farmland, hedgerows and most rural areas
- Nests in:** Well-hidden nooks and crannies in buildings
- Feed with:** Small seed mixes (millet etc), peanuts

WREN

Tiny, rounded silhouette, with distinctive cocked tail – prefers to remain in low undergrowth and cover, but can startle the watcher with its loud, fast warble, as well as harsh ‘churring’ calls. At many times, the UK’s commonest bird – its shyness can hide its true numbers, and the extraordinary extent of its range.

Factfile

- Scientific name:** *Troglodytes troglodytes*
- Length:** 9-10cm
- Wingspan:** 13-17cm
- Diet:** Insects and spiders in nooks, crannies and dense vegetation
- Habitat:** Everywhere but high mountains and moors – usually stays hidden in undergrowth
- Nests in:** Low undergrowth and thickets
- Feed with:** Crushed or grated nuts, mealworms



Tim Gainey / Alamy



T.M.O.Birds / Alamy

STARLING

Upright, strutting walk is easy to recognise, and although it has declined in recent years, can form small, quarrelsome flocks in parks and gardens, or larger 'murmurations' at roost sites. Adult birds boldly spotted in winter, less so in summer, when dark, glossy sheen to plumage may be more noticeable. Orange-pink legs, unlike Blackbird's dark legs. Juveniles are browner and less well marked.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Sturnus vulgaris*

Length: 22cm

Wingspan: 37-42cm

Diet: Insects, grubs and invertebrates, plus food scraps, seeds and grain in winter

Habitat: Feed mainly in open ground, especially grassland, but found everywhere from city centres to reedbeds

Nests in: Holes in trees, under the eaves of buildings, and in large nest boxes with holes

Feed with: Mealworms, fat cakes with insects

SWALLOW

Dark blue upperparts, red throat, and white/buff underparts, while long tail streamers distinguish it from superficially similar House Martin. Also feeds at much lower level than House Martins or Swifts, often skimming just millimetres above the ground. Fast, agile flight, and often seen on telephone wires, giving a soft, twittering warble.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Hirundo rustica*

Length: 17-19cm

Wingspan: 32-35cm

Diet: Large flies, such as bluebottles, plus a few smaller flies and aphids

Habitat: Farmland, larger, more parks and gardens, especially with open areas nearby

Nests in: Barns, car-ports etc, or nestboxes fitted inside open buildings

Feed with: Insect 'hotels', ponds, etc can create natural food for them



Andy Myatt / Alamy



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



WOODPIGEON

Deep-chested and often plump, with rich pink breast. When disturbed, departs with loud clatter of wings, and white wing flashes always obvious. Display flight involves climb, sharp wing clap, and gliding descent. White flash on neck distinguishes it from Stock Dove, which may tag along in Woodpigeon flocks. Repetitive song, which seems to end unexpectedly – ‘Coo-COO-coo coo-coo. Coo-COO-coo coo-coo. Coo-COO-coo coo-coo. Coo’.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Columba palumbus*

Length: 40-42cm

Wingspan: 75-80cm

Diet: Seeds, grain, shoots, leaves, berries and acorns

Habitat: Farmland, mixed woods, parks and gardens

Nests in: Hedgerows and scrubby trees

Feed with: Larger seed mixes



John McKenna / Alamy

COLLARED DOVE

Black collar, edged with white, gives it its name. Smaller and slighter than Woodpigeon, with long tail tinged with white on outside corners. Colouring otherwise uniformly pale, buff-grey, with dark wingtips – main confusion species Turtle Dove (in summer) has bright orange-brown feather edges, on wings, and pink-blue throat and breast. Three-note song – ‘coo-COO-cuk’ – sometimes mistaken for Cuckoo.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Streptopelia decaocto*

Length: 31-33cm

Wingspan: 47-55cm

Diet: Grain, seeds and small insects

Habitat: Farmland and suburban parks and gardens

Nests in: Dense shrubs and conifers

Feed with: Most seed mixes



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Photostock Holdings Ltd / Alamy

GOLDFINCH

Sharply defined black, white and red head is unmistakable, though juveniles lack this, so broad yellow band on wings is most reliable ID feature across all age groups. Fast, bounding flight, with high-pitched, liquid calls – it is a gregarious bird, except in the heart of the breeding season. Small and delicate compared to other main garden finches – Chaffinch and Greenfinch.

Factfile

- Scientific name:** *Carduelis carduelis*
- Length:** 12cm
- Wingspan:** 21-25cm
- Diet:** Seeds, especially of thistles, teasels, alder and pine.
- Habitat:** Formerly mainly weedy farmland and waste ground, but increasingly seen in gardens.
- Nests in:** Tall, leafy trees
- Feed with:** Niger seeds, small seed mixes (millet, etc)

LONG-TAILED TIT

Long-tailed 'flying teaspoon' silhouette can't really be mistaken for anything else – Long-tailed Tits have a round body and short bill, and typically remain in family groups for much of the year. Regular garden visitors, they often tend to move through, hopping from bush to bush, rather than staying long. Quiet, indistinct song, but regular, high-pitched calls.

Factfile

- Scientific name:** *Aegithalos caudatus*
- Length:** 14cm
- Wingspan:** 16-18cm
- Diet:** Tiny insects, larvae, spiders and their eggs
- Habitat:** Mixed woods, farmland hedgerows, bramble thickets, gardens and parks
- Nests in:** Scrubby areas, bushes, hedgerows
- Feed with:** Peanuts, fat balls



FIPA / Alamy



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GREAT TIT

Yellow breast bisected by broad black stripe and white cheeks are distinctive. Heavy build means it is less acrobatic than the other tits, and more willing to feed on the ground or on tree trunks. Confident, two-note song in spring, but is also capable of an extraordinary range of variations and other calls.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Parus major*

Length: 14cm

Wingspan: 22-25cm

Diet: Seeds and small insects, mainly on tree trunks and larger branches

Habitat: Mixed woods, parks and gardens

Nests in: Holes in trees and walls, and especially in nestboxes with holes

Feed with: Sunflower seeds, peanuts, coconut halves



Chris Grady / Alamy

BLUE TIT

Small, active and highly acrobatic when feeding, often hanging upside down, and learning to take advantage of any opportunity (including, once upon a time, pecking through milk bottle tops). Quick, stuttery trill – ‘tsee tsee tsee trrrr’ – is often first clue to their presence. Will return to feeders again and again.

Factfile

Scientific name: *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Length: 12cm

Wingspan: 17-20cm

Diet: Insects, caterpillars, spiders, buds and seeds, often taken acrobatically from small branches

Habitat: Mixed and deciduous woods, hedges, parks and gardens

Nests in: Tree holes and cavities, nestboxes with suitable holes

Feed with: Sunflower seeds, peanuts, mealworms, coconut halves

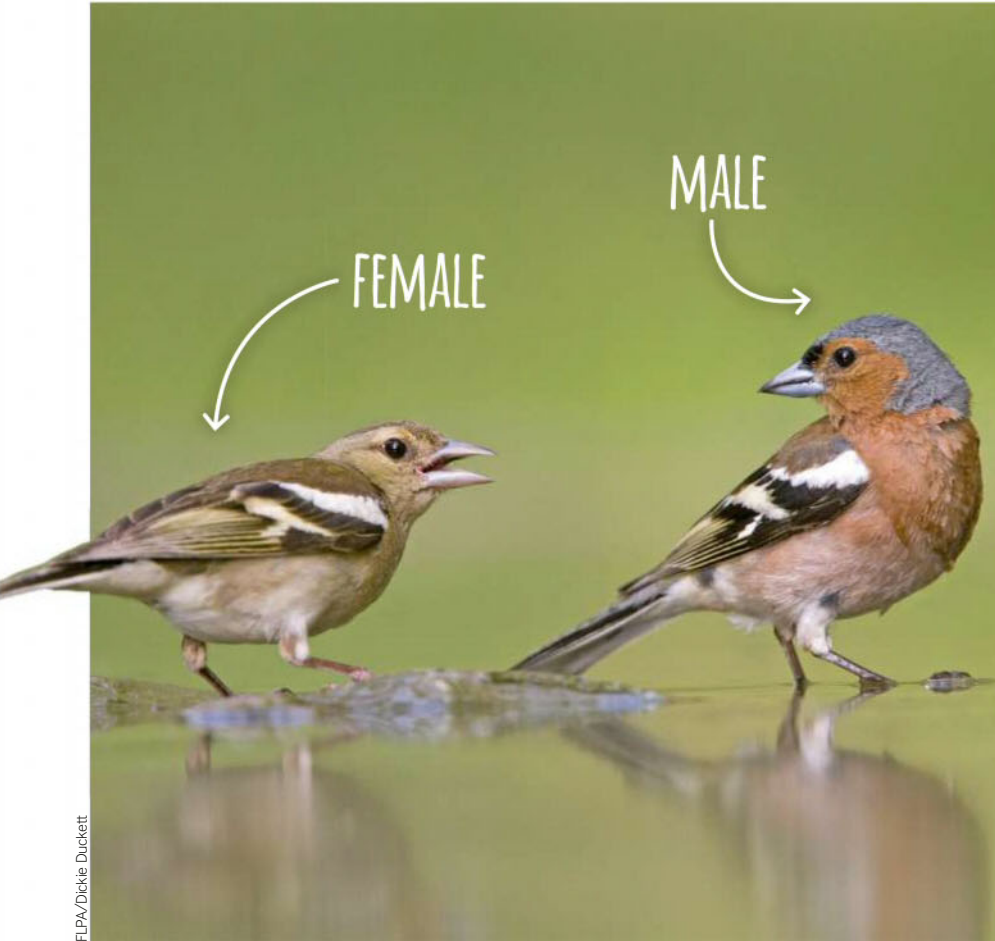


Nigel Dowsett / Alamy



CHAFFINCH

Male is glorious combination of reds, pinks, blues and greens, females duller brown, but both have distinctive white wingbars. Often feeds on ground, but will also visit feeders, and also uses other strategies, such as fly-catching from perches. Song is energetic but rather unmusical descending trill. Usually numerous, but can be patchy in its distribution.



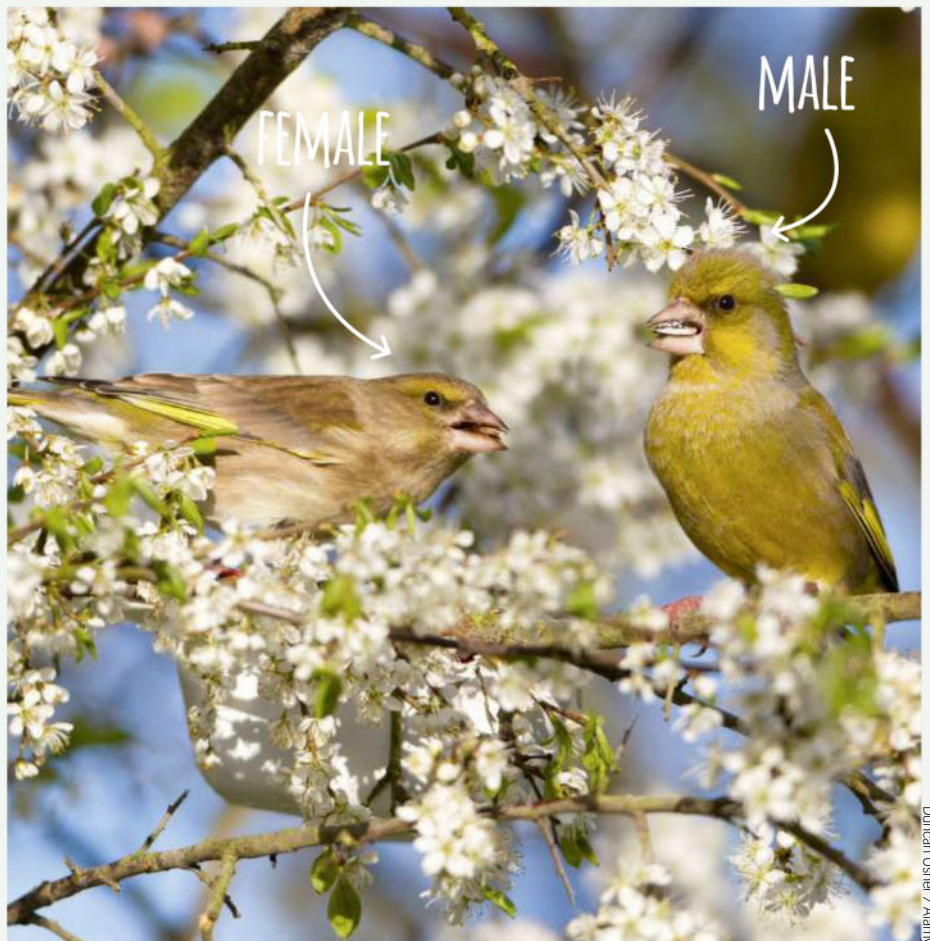
FLPA/Dickie Duckett

Factfile

- Scientific name:** *Fringilla coelebs*
- Length:** 15cm
- Wingspan:** 25-28cm
- Diet:** Caterpillars and insects in summer; seeds, especially beechmast, in winter
- Habitat:** Farmland, hedgerows, woodland, parks and gardens
- Nests in:** Trees and taller bushes
- Feed with:** Small seed mixes

GREENFINCH

Chunky, with relatively powerful bill. Female is less green-yellow than male – the latter has obvious yellow tail sides, and wing streaks. Can break into seedpods to get at the food inside, unlike the smaller finches. Regular visitor to feeders, but has suffered in recent years from disease outbreaks, so make hygiene a priority.



Duncan Usher / Alamy

Factfile

- Scientific name:** *Carduelis chloris*
- Length:** 15cm
- Wingspan:** 25-27cm
- Diet:** Seeds, especially large cereal grains, or from rose hips, etc
- Habitat:** Hedgerows, orchards, gardens and parks with tall, leafy trees
- Nests in:** The forks, or against the trunks of, hedgerow bushes and trees
- Feed with:** Small seed mixes (millet, etc), peanuts

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MAKE YOUR GARDEN A HOME FOR WILDLIFE

Whatever its size, your garden has the potential to attract plenty of birds, if you also attract the insects and other bugs they depend on for food. Try these ideas for planting...



a. Over images / A amy

OAK

You'd need plenty of space, but a single tree provides nesting opportunities for hole-dwellers, plus acorns for Jays and other species. The same goes for most larger deciduous trees, if you can fit them in.



FLPA / A amy

BRAMBLE

Essential, even if it's only a small patch. Attracts pollen-seeking insects to its flowers, lots of spiders, moths, and the likes of Blue Tit (above) to its fruit – the blackberry. Great nesting cover, too, for Wrens, Dunnocks, etc.

TEASEL

The seeds are a very important winter food source for a number of bird species, especially Goldfinches (right). The seedhead is very prominent and visible – expect great photo opportunities!



Sally Andrews / Alamy

SILVER BIRCH

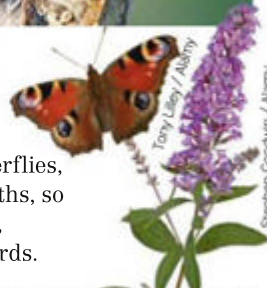
A great feeding ground for all sorts of birds, including Great Spotted Woodpecker (below) as they're exceptionally insect-rich.



Emile Janes / A amy

BUDDLEIA

Loved by bees, bumblebees, butterflies, hoverflies and moths, so suits insect-lovers, including many birds.



Tony Lacey / Alamy

Stephen Goodwin / Alamy



bickwinke / Alamy

HAWTHORN

Supports at least 150 insect species, provides dense nesting habitat for birds, butterflies and amphibians, plus haws that are food for thrushes, Greenfinches, Yellowhammers, Chaffinches and Starlings.

HONEYSUCKLE

Flowers attract a wide range of butterflies and moths, while Bullfinches and warblers will eat the berries.



Burke's Backyard / Alamy

BOXING CLEVER

Many hole-nesting bird species have suffered declines in recent decades, and although planting trees can provide a long-term solution, in the short term a variety of nestboxes can help make good the shortages. Different species, of course, like different sorts of boxes:

Hole-fronted boxes:

Great for tits, sparrows and even Nuthatches. Make sure your box is squirrel and woodpecker-proof by fixing a metal panel around the hole to stop them enlarging it to gain access to eggs and young. Boxes can be placed against buildings, on posts, or fastened securely to tree trunks.



Nature Photographers Ltd / Alamy

Open fronted boxes:

These are used by Robins, Wrens, Spotted Flycatchers and the like. They generally need to be situated in a more covered position, both for protection against the elements, and to deter predators.



Nature Photographers Ltd / Alamy

Wall-mounted boxes:

These suit eave-nesting species such as House Martin (below) and Swift, but some need considerable installation work – Swift boxes, for example, are sometimes built into a new structure. If you have outhouses or sheds which can be left partly open, Swallows, Wrens and other species may nest inside.

The best time to put a new box up, or to clean out a previously used box, is late summer or early autumn.



KEVIN ELSBY / Alamy



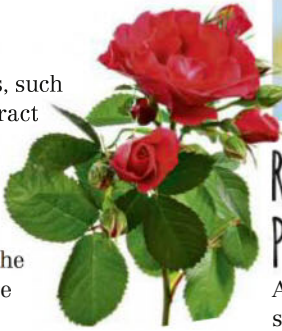
David Kilpatrick / Alamy

WILD FLOWER MIX

Available from many bird-seed firms, or any garden centre – a wild flower patch will attract a lot of pollinating insects, and the birds will follow, looking to cash in on a summer food bonanza.

ROSE

Older wild varieties, such as *Rosa rugosa*, attract lots of insects. The rosehips are good food for birds – don't prune immediately after the petals fall, to ensure they form.



Kislatiou Yuriy / Alamy



Paul Rapson / Alamy

GRASS

Try letting your lawn grow a little longer, at least in parts – it provides habitat for all sorts of insects, plus seeds later in the summer that are enjoyed by the likes of House Sparrows.



IVY

Great cover for unusual nesting species, such as Spotted Flycatcher, but especially valuable as its berries ripen well into winter, providing food for thrushes. Also attractive to insects seeking nectar.

Universal Images Group Limited / Alamy



david tipping / Alamy

ROWAN, GUELDER ROSE, PYRACANTHA, COTONEASTER

All provide berries that are food for all sorts of birds, including thrushes such as Blackbird (above) and, in an invasion year, Waxwings. The latter three also provide winter cover for birds, but you need to be careful they don't grow out of control.

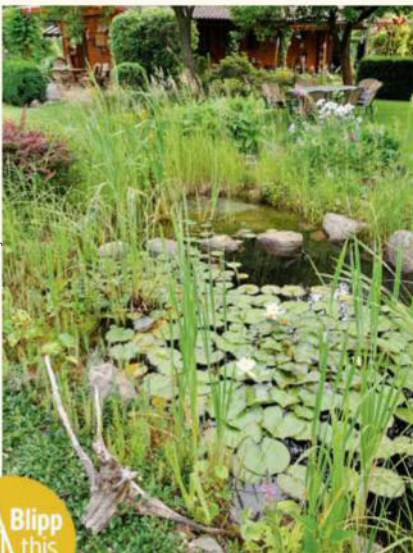
GREATER KNAPWEED, TICKSEED

The seeds of the former attract Siskins, Linnets and other finches, while the latter has fruits that provide food for redpolls, Greenfinches, Linnets and Goldfinches.



Tamara Kulikova / Alamy

BUILD A POND!



Steffen Hauser / botanikfoto / Alamy

Finally, we never get tired of singing the praises of garden ponds. Nothing is guaranteed to increase your biodiversity quite so much as even a small water feature.

They quickly fill up with insects, amphibians and other life (frogs find new ponds astonishingly quickly).

You'll need to put in a day or two of hard digging, then line the hole with a pond-liner (available at garden centres). Be careful not to make all the edges steep – leaving shallower areas allows birds to get to the water to drink, bathe, and take mud for nests.

Introduce vegetation into the pond itself, and around the edges, to give it a more natural look and provide cover for the wildlife that decides to visit it.



Get kitted out

Having attracted birds to your garden, you need to be able to identify them, and Viking have a range of binoculars and spotting scopes perfect for use in the garden, plus accessories that will let you record what you see.

More compact binocular sizes, such as 8x32, are often ideal, as they offer a good balance between brightness and magnification, while remaining handy enough to carry around easily. A scope will help you view extra detail on hard-to-ID birds, and could also allow you to read the rings on birds' legs – by recording these and sending them to the appropriate organisations, you might find that the birds on your garden feeders have a colourful, international past!

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