

 **ROYAL
AIR FORCE**
**ornithological
society**

Newsletter No 95

SPRING 2013



BEST PHOTOGRAPH OF 2012

“The Welcome Guest of Settled Spring” by John LeGassick

Loch Gruinart, Isle of Islay, May 2012



BEST NOVICE PHOTOGRAPH 2012 “Sunlit Starling” by Scott Drinkel



BEST NOVELTY PHOTOGRAPH 2012. “Dad and Black-headed Gull” by Alex Parton

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PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL ADDRESS 2012

Mr Chairman, Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen – fellow birders! – good afternoon. As ever it is good to see so many of you here today, and I enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with a number of you over lunch – which as ever was a truly great spread! Over the next few minutes (and I promise it will only be a few as I know we have a lot to cover this afternoon) I will briefly talk about the RAF, RAFOS and bird-watching in that order before handing over to the Chairman for the rest of the afternoon's activities.

The last 12 months have been a pretty difficult period for all of government, and defence has certainly not been immune from that. One of the outcomes can be seen at the entrance to this very building, as the Chief of the Air Staff has his car-parking slot there as he is now based here at Air Command instead of Main Building in London, with which comes a consequent (and significant) change to the upper echelons of the Royal Air Force. We have also been through the last round of the current redundancy programme, and whilst this still has to work its way through, does at least mean that those who are left can have a little more confidence in their futures! On the positive side, the RAF continues to meet its wide spread of commitments with enthusiasm – everything from continuing support to the Army in Afghanistan to providing a range of key elements of support for the Olympics here in the summer. We still have some way to go though to meet the financial challenges that face us, and one thing that is certain is that by the end of this decade the RAF will be a lot smaller than it is now – around the 31 thousand mark – and those who are serving then will be operating in a very different Air Force, with much more emphasis on the use of Reserves, and a more static lifestyle for the majority of members. I am confident though that it will still be an Air Force of which you can be proud!

Turning now to RAFOS specifically, as always I want to begin by recognising the Chairmen and all the Committee members for their hard work and commitment over the last year. Being in such a position can seem a thankless task at times – all brickbats and no bouquets as the saying goes – but I am sure that you would wish me on your behalf to thank them for all of their achievements. I am not going to mention anything about the society's activities during the year, apart from those that I was directly involved in, as I know these will all be covered in detail during the rest of the meeting. However, I am still very much aware of the challenges that RAFOS faces in the future if it is to remain relevant – and indeed a going concern. Particular aspects have a recurring quality to them, such as the difficulty in recruiting serving members, and the complications posed by the particular status that RAFOS now has within the Service – and I know that these are issues that the Committee has been wrestling with for a number of years – and hopefully that work will bear fruit in the near future! As ever, I would ask you to make sure that the debates which take place here this afternoon are conducted in a friendly and good-humoured manner, as we are all on the same side!

Finally - turning to bird-watching matters specifically, I have to say that on a personal front this has been a great year! It started off well with the opportunity to do some birding in the New Forest at the New Year, followed quickly by the annual and most enjoyable RAFOS Slimbridge outing, and then took a significant upward swing with the opportunity to join the gang up at Burnham Overy. My son was able to come along as well, and we both enjoyed not only the opportunity to see some stunning birds but also the wonderful company ... as well as being able to muse on some of the imponderables of life such as – why is it that the only time you see a Bearded Tit (or Reedling if you prefer ... just to throw an element of birding controversy in) up close and personal is when you don't have a camera to hand?? I was somewhat suspicious of some elements of the weekend though – such as the allocation of the task of producing the post-visit report. My son and I were the last to turn up – as I had had to collect him from school on the way – and when we arrived I found that the 'drawing lots' approach had already taken place and by some bizarre quirk of fate it was either going to be my son or I who produced the report – and I immediately knew what that meant! However, the most outstanding part of the year for me –and one that I have written a report on for the journal – was a 3-week bird-watching (sorry – I meant to say security study) visit

to Africa as part of my time at the Royal College of Defence Studies. This involved visiting 4 countries in 3 ½ weeks – Botswana, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan – all of which provided great opportunities for seeing birds I had never seen before – even though in some countries (Sudan in particular) my activities were regarded with great suspicion. The end result is that 2012 has been a particularly memorable birding year, and my life list has been increased considerably by both the visits to Africa and Norfolk!

That is probably a good point at which to stop, as we need to move on to the main part of the meeting, which is where the real value of today lies. I should like to close therefore by reiterating my thanks to the Committee for their extraordinary efforts over the last year, and look forward to the usual lively afternoon as I hand over to the Chairman for his report.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL ADDRESS 2012

Air Commodore, ladies and gentlemen, first let me thank you for coming along today to take part in this year's AGM; your continued participation is absolutely key for the future of the Society and it is the concept of taking part that will form the basis of my short speech today. I should also like to welcome Lynne Millard from AOS.

Also thank you to Team Knight and to Colin Wearn for getting this all together today. AGM's require a lot of thought and work and most of it falls to the Secretary and her (not so) little helper, Dick; it's a great team and benefits us all.

Another thank you to the President for taking the time and care to keep us informed of where the Royal Air Force is going and the challenges it faces. This must be the year of the Bearded Reedling for RAFOS, because, like the Partons, one of my sons and I saw our first one (a really confiding male) only a few weeks ago over at Otmoor. If you haven't been to this RSPB site you might consider going as it is a great reserve, where in the summer you are almost guaranteed good sightings of Hobbies hawking for dragon flies and of being lulled by the purring of Turtle Doves.

One of the agenda items today is the election and possibly re-election of a large number of committee posts. Whatever happens there is going to be a great change in the Committee make up as 4 individuals are not seeking re-election and they are:

Ian Grove - the Journal Editor. Ian has had to resign due to work commitments. He was first heavily involved in Op OLYMPICs and then found himself deployed out-of-area without any sort of break, only completing his final deployment training the day he flew out. When he gets back next year he will be posted to a new job which has yet to be confirmed. Our thoughts are with him and his family. You will therefore gather the Journal has not progressed as much as any of us would have hoped, but we have an experienced volunteer to take Ian's place, subject of course to your approval.

Next is **Colin Wearn** our Ringing Co-ordinator and Production Member. Colin has been heading our ringing efforts for more than 10 years without break and he has decided to stand down. Someone new to the Committee is seeking your approval today, to take on Colin's Ringing role. The good news is that Colin has agreed to carry on as our Production Manager, a key function in getting out the Newsletter and notices, for one more year. So if there is anyone out there, who wants to help out and who is preferably based near High Wycombe, our current distribution hub, (sorry it's the loggie in me), please think about stepping-up in 2013.

Then there is **Jerry Knights** your energetic FALO and default stand-in Chairman. Jerry also wants a break; remember he was the Chairman before leaving the Service, and has some other interests he wishes to get more involved in. That said he has volunteered to lead next year's Winter Duck and he has agreed to continue to act as the Society's contact with the RAF College Cranwell library, something he set up and where all our publications are held. We all owe Jerry a lot. Again, subject to your approval, a previous long serving committee member and an experienced expedition leader has stood up to the plate.

Finally, and very much least, I am not seeking re-election as Chairman, primarily because I decided earlier in the year to leave the Service and I finish my time in under a month after 28 years in a blue uniform of which only 12 years and none of the last 13 years has been in the single service environment. Someone new to the Committee, but well known to a lot of you and someone of great influence in the RAF, unlike me, will be seeking election in my place. I have enjoyed my time on the Committee both as Chairman and before that as the Treasurer, largely because of the unequivocal support I have had from other committee members, which has enabled quite a lot of necessary changes to have been made over the last 10 years.

My next topic is our logo, a juvenile Golden Eagle (depicting the RAF's junior service status) superimposed over the RAF roundel. Despite a valiant rear guard action and some delaying tactics over a number of years it can no longer be used. Indeed, the sharper amongst you may have noticed that it did not appear on the Autumn Newsletter alongside our officially endorsed letter head as was previously the case. And you will see it does not appear as it usually did on your name badges today; the removal of which was yet another tedious task for Team Knight. Logos however appear to be important for organisations, just look at the WWT, the RSPB, the BASC and the BTO; they all have distinctive, and mostly rather clever, logos (although I am not a great fan of the BTO's effort). Therefore, we are seeking a new logo to take us forward and we would like all members to give it some thought and to participate by submitting entries in a competition, the details of which will be covered in AOB later this afternoon and in a Newsletter article. The plan is to have the new logo ready for next year's AGM, so please, get your thinking caps on.

Our membership remains steady; 116 ordinary/family members. But more of course would be welcome and with our relaxed entry criteria i.e. no current or previous association with the RAF necessary, it should be easier for any interested birders to join. This is where you all come in. The challenge is for you to get someone you know and who you think will fit in, to join in 2013 and a tear-off membership form will be enclosed in the next Newsletter to help you. (*See page 54. Ed*).

Next, the Newsletter needs a plug. **John Stewart-Smith** is doing a sterling job and he is trying to seek more engagement with all members via the new 'in tray' section and by running bird recognition quizzes; please get involved. In addition, he is always on the look-out for articles from new authors and for interesting photographs and artwork, so if you have an idea or a great picture and are unsure on how to proceed give him a call or send him an e-mail; he really is very approachable.

Finally my usual thank you to those making presentations today; Mike Blair on the Austrian exped (great article in the Spring Newsletter); and John Wells on the epic of Winter Duck. I should also thank Mike and Sue for the book auction which will take place at the end of our proceedings; please bid generously.

That's it from me. Thank you for listening.

Newsletter No.94 Waders Quiz.

Just in case everyone has been waiting with bated breath for the answers, and the results, of the wader identification quiz featured in RAFOS Newsletter No.94, here they are. Five entries came flooding in from RAFOS members (about 4% of RAFOS membership.) After careful scrutiny and several recounts, a winner emerged.

First, the answers.

Inside back cover,

Left column:

1. Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*, juvenile
2. Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularis*, juvenile
3. Broad-billed Sandpiper, *Limicola falcinellus*, juvenile (surrounded by Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*, adult non-breeding)
4. Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, adult (with Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* out of focus)

Right column:

1. Terek Sandpiper, *Xenus cinereus*, adult non-breeding.
2. Little Bittern, *Ixobrychus minutus*, central toe nail, left foot, dead bird after hitting the glass doors of my air-conditioned patio. (Had to keep the doors closed to keep out the bitterns.)
3. Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*, adult non-breeding
4. Red-necked Phalarope, *Phalaropus lobatus*, adult winter/non-breeding

Outside back cover,

Left column:

1. Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*, Immature first year non-breeding
2. Curlew Sandpiper, *Calidris ferruginea*, adult non-breeding
3. Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, adult male assuming breeding plumage

Right column:

1. White-tailed Plover/Lapwing, *Vanellus leucurus*, adult
2. Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, one day old chick 'hiding' in my footprint.
3. Greater Sandplover, *Charadrius leschenaultia*, adult male breeding

Nobody recognised the Little Bittern's toe nail! Nobody even recognised it as a heron's toe nail. Those serrations are for cleaning plumage after a fish supper. Guesses were either amusing or rude. One cunning entrant got the locations ('UAE/Oman') close enough for government work so gained an extra point for each picture they recognised correctly. In fact, all the pictures (except the Little Bittern) were taken in one small area on Abu Dhabi Island during the early 1970s. This area of mangrove creek was a great magnet for migrating waders and water birds, and lay within the grounds of the UAE Ruler's private residence on the edge of Khor Al Baghal. HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, a great conservationist and benevolent gentleman, gave me his personal permission to go there birdwatching. When I suggested the area might benefit from protection he had the whole area fenced off to stop any casual access or future development. If you look on Google Earth at 24 deg 27 min 45 sec North and 54 deg 25 min 12 sec East you can see the fenced off area that is still untouched and, I hope, is still attracting birds travelling along two great intercontinental migration routes that intersect just about there.

AND THE WINNER IS Dick Knight, with a very impressive score of 84%. Congratulations to you, Dick. Valiant runners up, not very far behind Dick, included Karen Sims, John LeGassick, Pete Evans and Dave Bodley. Thanks to those who entered. Perhaps a future quiz with raptor pictures may generate more interest? How about a few ducks? Sunbirds? Herons? Sea Birds? Any suggestions? Perhaps the message is "If at first you don't succeed -- give up!"

PS. Anyone who disagrees with my identifications please remember the editor's decision is final – but I'd still like your views. Meanwhile, why not try the seabirds on the back cover of this issue?

PORTLAND 2012

By Dick Yates

A small, but perfectly formed, dozen RAFOS members gathered at the Observatory over the weekend of 5-7 Oct for the annual Portland Field Meeting. *Dramatis Personae* were Dave and Anne Bodley naturally, Dick & Jan Knight, Daphne and me, Alex Smith, Ron Bowers, Scott Drinkel, David Tattersfield, Liz Mallinson and last, but by no means least, that orchestrator and conductor of all matters culinary, Val Kersley.

On Friday afternoon the weather didn't look at all promising. After a visit to Radipole on the inbound leg Daphne and I stopped off at Chesil Beach and we were rained off within minutes, so we headed for the Obs, arriving in pouring rain at about 1500. The rest of the party drifted

in rather soggy over the next few hours. All Friday night the wind blew and the rain rained, even entering the cottage under the door and flooding the hall; but Sat morning dawned bright and quite pleasant and for the rest of the weekend the weather just got better! This allowed us to gather a creditable list of 72 bird species, 7 Butterflies and 3 Dragonflies/Damselflies.

But let's start on Sat morning. I went for the traditional pre-breakfast walk down to the lighthouse and monument and back, and since we were in the middle of the political party conference season the gathering of birds put me in mind of just such an event. There was a large group of Pied Wagtail *delegates*, I got bored with counting after about 200 so there must have been 250+ milling around on the grassy areas. Interspersed among the *delegates* were a fair few Meadow Pipit *agitators* trying to stir up trouble, but they were ably supervised by a fairly strong contingent of Northern Wheatear *stewards*. Sniping around the rocky fringes were several *club reporters*, Rock Pipits, trying to pick up a snippet of political gossip. Security was provided by land and sea. On the water a Royal Navy vessel, later identified as HMS Richmond, which was being tasked by a pair of *maritime patrol* Northern Gannets, whilst the shore was guarded by a *squad* of Herring Gulls commanded by a single, very smartly turned out, Great Black-backed Gull, obviously the *RSM*. Finally, security from above was provided by a large, but fairly ineffective, contingent of *G4S* Starlings patrolling the roof tops. On my return to the Obs for breakfast, I was late by the way, I came across a rowdy *fringe meeting* of House Sparrows being stirred up by a pair of Dunnocks; and on the grass two Carrion Crows were feasting on the remains of what I presumed to be a former *party leader*, in the form of a dead rabbit.

But enough frivolity, what really happened.

The post breakfast walk round the headland, in now bright sunshine, gave us all the aforementioned birds plus lots of Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Linnet as well as a full set of corvids, stand-fast the Rook, who was notable by his absence. (Now don't be silly, Chough hasn't got as far round as Portland Bill – yet!) The raptor fraternity provided Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon and a prob Merlin, identified only as a small raptor, but what else could it be? Skylark, Robin and Blackbird were common and Woodpigeon abundant.

In and around the garden, the duty Little Owl was seen in the quarry, but missed by me, and most caught up with Common Chiffchaff and Blackcap. Martin Cade and his observatory team had the nets out and we were delighted to see Goldcrest, Whinchat, Grasshopper Warbler, and a real treat for us, Yellow-browed Warbler, in hand, but this year Firecrest proved elusive.





Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inomatus*

Over the Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning various groups visited the 2 RSPB Reserves at Radipole and Lodmoor, and Chesil Beach and on Sunday morning Dave, Anne, Ron and Alex walked the path by Ope Church. At Radipole the long-stay Hooded Merganser was seen by all, genuine vagrant or escapee? – who knows, and the Purple Heron reported to be at Radipole was in fact seen by Dick & Jan on their way home. At Lodmoor Dick, Jan, Scott and Ron caught up with the Short-billed Dowitcher. Our group took the other path and missed it! Of other water-birds, ducks included Mallard, Teal, Tufted, Gadwall, Shoveler, and Common Scoter was seen off the coast. Moorhen, Coot, Canada Goose and Cormorant were plentiful; Little Egret and Grey Heron showed well as did Med Gull at Radipole and Chesil Beach. Great Crested and Little Grebe were at Radipole and 3 Brent Geese turned up at Chesil Beach, near the Café, on Sunday morning. Waders were in quite short supply but there was a good gathering of Northern Lapwing at Lodmoor, along with a couple of Common Snipe, a single Common Sandpiper and a Dunlin. Cetti's Warbler was heard at both locations with a fleeting glimpse of one at Radipole. Chesil Beach had a few more waders – about 50 Dunlin and half a dozen Ringed Plover, 2 Bar-tailed Godwit and a Common Redshank. The Church Ope team walked down the old railway track towards Portland Harbour as far as the Prison. They had great views of 2 Peregrines, one making an unsuccessful stoop on a pigeon; 3 Ravens, 2 Kestrels and a variety of corvids, finches and gulls were all in the mix as well as nice views of Winter Wren.



Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

Hirundines were in evidence all weekend but especially on Sunday morning when there was a large movement of House Martins and mainly young Swallows and a few of us picked up the odd embedded Sand Martin. This year thrushes were absent, Blackbird being the only one seen but Great and Blue Tit were present. I think I can claim the final scoop. Daphne and I were having a coffee before we headed back to the Obs for lunch on Sunday. She went for the car and I said I would have a last look for waders. I went behind the café and a bird flew into view in my bins. Ah! We haven't had a collared Dove yet I thought and followed in the bins. It landed not 15 yards away. Hells teeth – European Turtle Dove! I dropped the bins, lifted my camera and just as I pressed the on button it took off, flew along the sea wall and finally up and over onto the seaward side. Just then 5 birders came round the corner. “Did you see the Turtle Dove?” they shouted. I told them it had disappeared over the sea wall. Much grumbling!

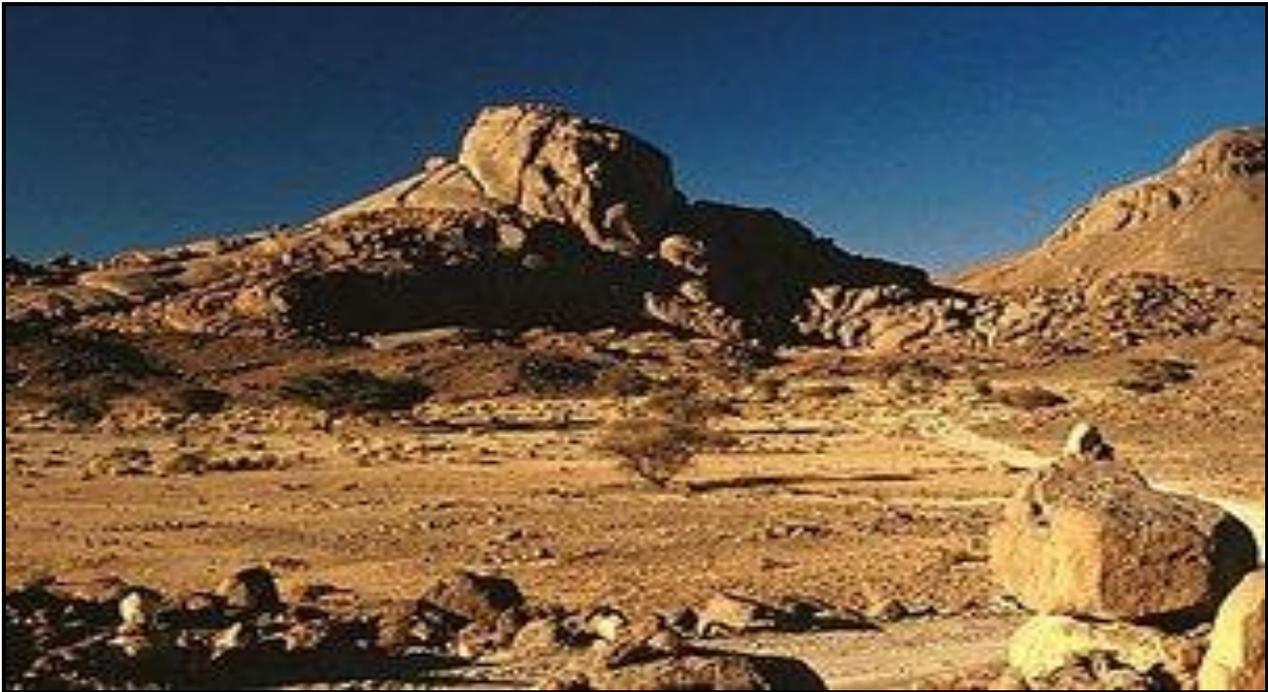
Evenings proved to be the usual cheerful gatherings. In addition to having a good stab at completing the 'kitchen wall challenge'; on Friday evening I showed some of my photos from the Brazil trip that I did with Al Jordan in July and on Saturday Dick talked us through the New Zealand trip that he and Jan did in January. All in all, this was a very convivial weekend with good friends, some nice birds and astonishingly good weather. Many thanks as usual to Dave and Anne for organising it and to Val for the marvellous meals. If anyone wants a full bird list I can provide.

Pictures by Dick Yates.

(The picture of the pathetic few wine bottles against the kitchen wall is not included to avoid embarrassing the participants. Ed.)

Birding on a Budget: Morocco and the Western Sahara

by Al Jordan



My friend Nick is a bit of a Twitcher. Consequently, I don't do much birding with him in UK but we had previously birded together at a few interesting hotspots in Europe: Extremadura and the Pyrenees; Hungary; and twice in Turkey. In March 2012 we selected Morocco and the Western Sahara as our next target. Some years ago Nick had birded the Atlas Mountains and as far south as Agadir but I had only visited the country on an annual holiday with Mrs J, when any serious observations were strictly off-limits!

The plan was to fly to Marrakesh, collect a car and head to the coast making our way steadily south, birding along the way. We would follow the coastal road to Dakhla and then strike inland into the desert as far as fuel and road conditions would allow. (Garages are few and far between in that region.) The first problem cropped up at the Gatwick check-in desk when the power supply for the luggage conveyor belts failed and resulted in absolute chaos. (Don't they have UPS at our international airports?) Passengers embarked without hold luggage and we were told before take-off not to expect our cases until the following day, or possibly the day after. This required some changes to our itinerary. We opted to head for the Atlas Mountains and hoped that our chattels would arrive soon without too many further difficulties.

Killing Time. After queuing for 3 hours or so at the lost luggage section to register our claims we were finally free to set off towards Asni and the mountains. It was a great relief to get going after all the frustrations since our early start that day. We paused at a few locations to look for Levaillant's Green Woodpecker along the roadside without success but did succeed in finding a small auberge for the night where heart-warming tajine was served in front of a roaring log fire. In the garden the following day we found North African Blue-eared Magpies, North African Blue Tits and North African Chaffinches, the latter sporting an unfamiliar washed out plumage. We then headed for the Oukaimeden pass and ski resort to pick up a few specialities. It was Sunday and lots of people were strolling by the ski lifts while local craft-wares were proffered by persistent traders. Nonetheless, we had good views of both species of Chough, Shore Lark, Rock Sparrow and 6 Crimson-winged Finches (a tick for me). At the reservoir just before the village we spotted Blue

Rock Thrush and 3 Common Sandpipers before phoning the airport to hear about our delayed luggage. The number we called was answered in Arabic so we decided to return to Marrakesh to physically check on progress.

Unfortunately on arrival at the airport we were disappointed so opted to drive to Essaouira on the coast, arriving just after dark to find a hotel. The next morning we birded the nearby road to Diabat (apparently the village was a favourite haunt of Jimi Hendrix many years ago) and Wadi Ksob. Here we spotted an adult Western Reef Heron by the bridge, Kentish Plover (including an albino bird), Serin, Brown-throated Sand Martin, Woodchat Shrike, Eurasian Spoonbills, Grey Heron, and my first Moussier's Redstart – a splendid little bird. Last but not least were hundreds of migrating *Phylloscopus* Warblers pausing to take breath in bushes growing along the river bank; migrating birds were to be a strong feature of the trip. Unfortunately we were too early in the year for Eleonora's Falcon which breed in their colonies on the nearby Ile de Mogador opposite the river mouth and hunt over the surrounding area. The colony is allegedly measured in hundreds and is one of the largest in the world. At mid day we called the airport once more to find that our luggage would *definitely* arrive on the 1400 hours flight. Far from confident, we set off back to Marrakesh to be pleasantly surprised by the sight of our bags piled high in the left luggage area and we were finally able to proceed on our long journey south.

Oued Massa. We took the motorway as far as possible towards Agadir, arriving after dark and eventually, after missing a few turnings, found a motel on the road leading south out of town. The only meal available was 'beef' tajine so we took it. Very tasty it was too, although we decided it was probably stewed camel meat. The following morning we set off to Oued Massa, a tidal creek with lagoon and small nature reserve. According to legend, it's also the place where Jonah was spewed up by the whale. A short distance from the car park we heard the distinctive call of the Black-headed Bush Shrike, or Tchagra, and were treated to excellent views of male and female birds (another tick). Moussier's Redstarts were showing well and a Marsh Harrier flapped effortlessly down the river towards the sea. Linnet, Goldfinch, Dartford Warbler and Common Bulbuls also flitted around in the low scrub. We made our way to a small hide overlooking the river mouth and from there spotted 8 Greater Flamingos together with a pair of Eurasian Spoonbills on a distant sandbank. The hide proved a good vantage point from which to observe migrant passerines dropping down to drink from pools by the river and, in particular, we had good views of several Sub-alpine Warblers and a Wryneck whilst a flight of Glossy Ibis glided past. All too soon it was mid-day and time to push on after a brief pause to watch Red-rumped Swallows and Brown-throated Sand Martins hunting over the river near the bridge, with African House Buntings and Cattle Egrets nearby.

Tiznit to Laayoune. Lunch was a tin of pilchards, flat bread and cheese (a diet that became all too familiar during our trip) as we watched Crested Larks and Hoopoes hopping along the road verges and squadrons of Barn Swallows battling northwards against the wind. As we progressed south we began to encounter police road blocks before and after built-up areas. We had been warned to prepare a page of personal details prior to the trip to hand over at check-points in order to save time and this generally worked well, with a few exceptions – see later! It was dark when we arrived at Tan Tan and we spent some time re-tracing our tracks after a wrong turning. Perhaps it was time to bed down for the night. Given the delays at Marrakesh we had taken a decision to sleep in the car when necessary to claw back some time. The vehicle was a three cylinder, 800cc Fiat hatchback – not the most comfortable for two portly chaps to share for the night. However we were whacked and despite Nick's sonorous grunting and snoring I was soon in the land of Nod. One might think that the night temperature would be pleasantly warm at sea level in that part of the world during March but I can assure you it was far from it. Several layers of clothing and a sleeping bag were required to prevent my teeth from chattering. Having pulled off the road in the dark I thought it wise to avoid driving too far into the bondu and so the noise from heavy trucks driving through the night together with the cold temperature prevented deep slumber. But staggering out of the vehicle to answer a call of nature I do vividly recall a black sky festooned with glittering stars from horizon to horizon.

The long drive South. The next day we were soon on the road again and saw that we were within a few hundred metres of a spectacular coastline but with a further 600 kilometres to cover before nightfall there was little time to explore - we had to crack on. We stopped for a roadside lunch south of Laayoune in what was now barren, stony semi-desert scenery with little green vegetation, except alongside the dry wadis. The ubiquitous Crested Larks scurried past the car, while a Hoopoe with flashing black and white wings flapped away from us and Red-rumped, Desert, Black-eared and Isabelline Wheatears showed well nearby.

We had our first 'bad experience' with local police at a road block entering Boujdour. After examining our passports a greasy-looking armed policeman invited us to make a contribution to the Moroccan Police fund, retaining our documents while leaning into the car. I handed over a couple of dirhams and he reluctantly returned our passports and stood aside. As we travelled southwards, police road blocks became a recurring obstacle at the entrance and exit roads to and from all major towns. We suspected there were a few reasons for this: a militant group known as the Polisario remains active in the Western Sahara, formerly Spanish Sahara; and refugees from Mauritania – bordering Western Sahara – are also a problem for the authorities. The presence of UN vehicles near what we took to be refugee camps as we drove south provided further evidence.

We pulled off the road again about 200 clicks north of Dakhla and drove for a mile or so along a dusty track towards a large radio aerial. This proved an excellent spot and we counted 5 pairs of Cream-coloured Coursers, some running in their distinctive way to within 20 metres of us, together with Thekla, Crested and Short-toed Larks scattered across the stony ground. Meanwhile, a Short-toed Eagle watched our intrusion from his perch on an electricity pylon high above. We continued our long lonely drive to eventually pass uneventfully through the last checkpoint at the Dakhla peninsular in late afternoon. Here we passed a large encampment of elderly, sun-worshipping Northern Europeans in enormous camper vans laden with wind-surfing equipment – a somewhat incongruous sight at an otherwise pristine location. Dakhla is just north of the Tropic of Cancer at the end of a sandy peninsular stretching 40 km from the main coastline. We chose a modest hotel on the high street at random (but perhaps based on the bill-board declaring bar facilities were available within) where we stayed for two comfortable nights, and yes, Spanish beer was on sale – the first alcohol we had discovered since leaving the Marrakesh area.



Into the Desert. The next day we re-traced our route back to the 'mainland' and headed south east towards Aoussard, about 230 km inland from the coast and not far from the Mauritanian border. The road provides access to various mining projects across the region; enables vehicles to reach the UN base at Aoussard; and, last but not least, helps birders to explore a fascinating area, albeit after a long, arduous and very hot drive.

The first stop was the water tower at Gleb Jedine where the leaking tower had created a large pool and therefore a prime drinking site for migrants and sandgrouse. We noted Trumpeter Finches, Spotted Sandgrouse, Southern Grey Shrikes, Little Ringed Plovers and White Wagtails as Barn Swallows and House Martins dipped in flight across the pool. Continuing further south, we had stopped at the crest of a low hill to watch a small group of Brown-necked Ravens when a pair of magnificent Lanner Falcons exploded into view flying rapidly away, low across the barren desert. We suspected the falcons had also been using the rise as an observation point before we disturbed them. After a further 50 km we decided to venture on foot into the desert whilst keeping the vehicle in view. By now the wind was blowing hard and hot and I tied a large bandanna around my face to avoid the worst of the sand-blasting on my already grizzled features. Apart from the battling migrants, little else was moving so we pressed on. Nick complained that the engine seemed to be lacking power and I suggested the air filter might be blocked with sand. At this point I took over driving duties and as I climbed into the driving seat noticed the floor carpet had slipped under the accelerator pedal thus restricting travel – no spanners required, what a relief – it sometimes takes a Ginger Beer to spot these things!

Our next stop by a small group of Acacia trees was more productive. Here we found a White-crowned Black Wheatear with small flocks of Black-crowned Finch Larks and Desert Sparrows, all three species being very attractive birds, with the latter probably my favourite bird of the trip. We followed both flocks around the sparse clump of trees but they proved elusive and not easily viewed through the thick thorn branches.

We pushed on to come across another pumping station at Oued Jenna where the attendant came to greet us. A single Black Wheatear accompanied by a strutting Hoopoe Lark both showed well. Eurasian Collared Doves and Crested Larks were also present but we failed to spot Cricket Warblers, one of the star attractions of the Aoussard Road. The weather conditions were far from ideal, time was passing and our fuel gauge was falling fast so we decided to begin the long journey back to Dakhla. The strong wind continued to blow sand across the road and there were few more sightings of interest apart from the occasional migrant Marsh Harrier and drifts of Barn Swallows desperately fighting their way through the teeth of the gale on their perilous journey north. Are these conditions typical at this time of year? I hope not! That night we treated ourselves to an excellent meal in the Spanish restaurant on the Dakhla seafront, washed away the sand in our throats with a few beers and reviewed progress.

The Return Journey. After an early start to spend an hour sea-watching at the tip of the peninsular – which yielded Northern Gannets, Pomarine Skua and Barbary Falcon flying by, together with several Audouin's and Yellow-legged Gulls – we set out back along the coastal road northwards. Great Black-backed Gulls were noted nearby but we saw no Kelp Gulls, a South American Gull which allegedly can now be found in the region. On the drive back one of the main features of the trip for me was the sight of small migrant passerines desperately flying against sand-laden winds. This surely required unbelievable stamina; many small birds dropped by the way-side to be plucked up in the talons of migrating Marsh Harriers, of which there were dozens flapping in off the sea during the first hour or so of the journey. Montagu's Harriers accompanied the Marsh Harriers in a ratio of about 1:10. At a petrol station one exhausted Barn Swallow flopped to the ground alongside a dozing mongrel dog, itself too weary to raise a head in interest. Another swallow, panting in the heat, clung to the open window of the car as we filled the fuel tank. Can this epic journey across the Northern Hemisphere, to spend the summer raising a brood in the increasingly inhospitable British countryside, continue to be worthwhile for these little creatures?

We took our customary lunch of sardines once more at the radio aerial site and enjoyed good views of the Coursers while a Chiffchaff joined us, flying through an open window to sit out of the sun on the dashboard. At Oued Kraa we briefly paused in a fruitless attempt to see the African Pied Crows which had been resident for some time but sadly it seems are no longer to be found. However our disappointment was short lived when a pair of Lanners cruised leisurely overhead in company with several Brown-necked Ravens. Our first and only Egyptian Vulture sailed by as we headed ever onwards towards our destination for the night at Khnifiss National Park, and more specifically the car park at Akhfenir. But first we had to negotiate the notorious checkpoints at Boujdour. We experienced hassle at the southern roadblock but were finally allowed to proceed; at the northern point the policeman was more insistent to receive his 'gift.' He opened the bidding at Dr1,000 (about £70), I laughed so he dropped to Dr300 and Nick suggested I offer Dr100 which was grudgingly accepted before our passports were returned. It left a nasty taste but I guess it's a case of 'when in Rome...'

Arriving at Akhfenir after darkness had fallen I was glad to at last pull over for another night spent in the confines of our trusty vehicle, feeling by now a bit like Monsignor Quixote from Graham Green's novel. We awoke at first light to find five large camper vans arranged neatly alongside but with no obvious signs of life as yet. After a breakfast bar washed down with a swig of water we began to explore the cliff-top and scrub overlooking a large tidal lagoon. A small hide clung precariously to the cliff face and from here we recorded 100+ Greater Flamingos; Eurasian Spoonbills; Grey and Purple Herons; Ruff and Knot; Audouin's, Slender-billed and Yellow-legged Gulls. An Osprey flew by clutching a large fish in its talons while a Black-crowned Night Heron crouched in an unlikely spot on the cliff-side. Moving through the scrub on the cliff-top we noted a Bluethroat, Sardinian Warbler, and I had my second close-up view of a Wryneck feeding on a low bush nearby. Nick was pleased to find two African Scrub Warblers which seemed to bounce lightly along the ground in front of us with their long tails bobbing. This was a tick for him but I had seen examples of the Middle Eastern race in Arabia where the birds appear significantly different.

It was late morning and time to move on. We stopped near a wadi bridge to see off the remaining tins of sardines and found a pair of Common Kestrels, Northern and Desert Wheatear, Linnets and Goldfinches. Soon after, we decided it might be wise to carry out some running repairs on the car since both front and rear bumpers were barely attached to the body! These components had clearly been lashed up previously with the aid of flattened beer bottle tops used as washers, but the proprietor of a small garage obligingly effected an acceptable fix with masking tape and replacement beer bottle tops – he'd clearly passed the BDR course with flying colours!

Agadir Again. We made for the same motel south of Agadir arriving well after dark and were soon tucking into another large dish of camel tajine. After a good night's sleep we set off to explore the estuarine area south of the city. Here we recorded Grey Heron, Moroccan Cormorant, Redshank, Black-winged Stilt, Common Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Ringed Plover, Little Egret and Eurasian Spoonbill.

After a few circuits of the ring road we finally located the road north towards Essaouira via the coastal town of Tamri. This is the only site in the world where Bald Ibis breed and can be easily seen throughout the year, apart from a remote site in Syria with a few pairs. (The site at Birecik in Turkey, which we had visited a few years before, comprises birds released from captivity.) On arrival we were initially disappointed but stopped after a short drive further north to survey the cliff-top meadows and scrubland where we saw several Bald Ibis dropping down towards an obvious breeding site below the cliff top but unfortunately out of direct line of sight. Nevertheless we enjoyed good views as the birds joined the glide path. Then it was on to Essaouira for a brief return visit to Wadi Ksob where we found the Western Reef Heron, Moussier's Redstart, Kingfisher and small but several mixed flocks of passerines dropping down from nearby scrub to a favoured drinking pool. No sign though of the vast numbers of warblers we had seen only a week before.

The Road to Marrakesh. It was my turn to drive as darkness fell but the road to Marrakesh was fairly quiet until we reached the city outskirts; thereafter, aggressive bumper-to-bumper tactics were required to make progress. We eventually found a reasonable-looking hotel close to the airport where a few (expensive) beers were quaffed over an (inexpensive) pasta dish as we reflected on the trip. It had been hard work at times but we had found some interesting birds while yet other, more familiar species had been seen under extremely harsh migratory conditions. We had covered about 4,500kms; each notched up a few lifers; and had enjoyed a memorable holiday for a modest outlay of around £500 – not a bad result in anyone’s book!



All pictures by Al Jordan.

The Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

John Stewart-Smith



Temminck's Stint

Cambridgeshire

John Wells

John Wells has provided this very nice picture of a juvenile Temminck's Stint taken last year in Cambridgeshire. As Temminck's is apparently an unusual tick for that area, I thought a few notes on the species may interest those of us who find waders fascinating and, perhaps, encourage others to look more closely at any little waders they encounter during their wanderings about the countryside.

Temminck's Stints are pretty nondescript at initial sight, and this is the first clue to recognition! If you're not sure what it is, it may be a Temminck's. They overlap in range with the Little Stint, and are very similar in size to them but look slimmer and more attenuated although they are actually fractionally larger than a Little Stint. The Temminck's tail projects just beyond its closed wings, (see above) its bill is shorter and finer and it also has shorter legs than the Little Stint. The legs are pale rather than black and are often dull green or yellowish. In flight it shows a shorter and narrower white wing-bar than the Little Stint. The Temminck's is never brightly coloured or distinctly patterned. Its plain head and upperparts, with a clouded breast, may recall a miniature Common Sandpiper. It has the darkest breast of any small sandpiper or stint in winter plumage. They will tower like a Common Snipe when flushed but their fast flight is fluttering and erratic. Their distinctive call is a quick, dry rattle that sounds a bit like a Grasshopper Warbler.

Their main breeding range stretches right across the arctic tundra from Norway to the Bering Strait with a few nesting further south in southern Scandinavia. There is reported to be a very small population of three or four pairs that breed in Scotland each year. Returning birds pass northwards through Europe between April and May and males begin their display by the end of May. Breeding is a complicated procedure involving bigamy by both sexes in a speedy double-clutch system where each male pairs with two females and fertilizes one clutch of four greenish eggs from each of two females. Not to be outdone, each female pairs with two males and lays her two clutches in separate territories. The males then incubate and tend the chicks of the first clutch and the female looks after the second family. Incubation lasts about three weeks and the young fledge about two weeks later. This complex and cunning scheme increases the potential offspring output from each pair. They may also be able to claim extra State benefits by following this breeding routine.

The adults leave the breeding areas in July and wander southwards at a leisurely rate. Juveniles leave two or three weeks later and don't reach their winter quarters until October. The main passage through western Europe occurs between July and early October. Unlike many waders, Temminck's Stints migrate mainly overland, pausing at inland waterways rather than frequenting coastal areas.

Insects and their larvae are their main food. These are taken from vegetation or the surface of mud with a careful pecking action similar to that of phalaropes. Temminck's Stints seldom probe for food. They will often crouch when approached, becoming even more mouse-like in appearance. They are less gregarious than most waders and, in Britain, are usually only seen singly or in small groups.

Well spotted John! Lovely picture.



Little Stint for comparison.

Abu Dhabi island

1970's

John Stewart-Smith



In 2009 Jan and I had a half day's introductory experience of falconry which we were given as a Christmas present. We enjoyed it so much that this year we were given a day's hunting with hawks. David Hughes runs Hawkwalk from his home near Didcot where he keeps birds of prey from a Little Owl to an Eagle Owl in size. Having booked a date in September we arrived at Dave's house at 1000 for a welcoming coffee at the large garden shed that he uses for his equipment, taken while watching the 3 Kestrels and the Peregrine Falcon on their perches in front of us. Because we'd previously done the half day with him we agreed that we didn't need to have the equipment explained again but we did want a refresher on the correct way to hold a bird on the glove. Gloves on, we were introduced to a selection of his birds. The Peregrine was first. He's called Wiggins because you could imagine his moustachial stripes as sideburns and he's one of very few pure-bred Peregrines in British falconry today. He was quiet on the glove but very alert to a Red Kite that drifted over the garden. Next was a male Sparrowhawk called Spindle. I'm used to seeing Sparrowhawks in the garden, usually females, but I was surprised how small this bird was close up. He was also a bit scruffy, apparently even after moulting into fresh plumage. Bob is an elegant looking Peregrine Saker cross, named for his habit of bobbing his head. The Goshawk was an angry-looking bird, glaring at you with his large orange eyes and frequently stretching his wings in the gusty breeze. Reg is the Little Owl, named after a friend of Dave's. The Long-eared Owl was named Leo by Dave's daughter – Long-Eared Owl – I didn't get it until it was explained. The Common Buzzard was another angry-looking bird which kept exercising his wings in the wind. His size on the glove was imposing although the weight didn't feel as much as I expected: his hunting weight is 2lb 4oz. Boo, the Eagle Owl was another matter. On the glove he looks down on you and after a while you are aware of his weight. Flint is a Tawny Owl. You or I can stroke his feathers safely but Dave admits that he has upset Flint somehow in the past, he doesn't know how, but Flint

clacks his beak at Dave if he's close and Dave is very careful about his ungloved arm. Throughout we were talking about all aspects of the birds, from the practical, like breeding and feeding, to the history of falconry via the esoteric, like birds in mythology.



“You’re going to do WHAT with me?”

Dave has a field behind his house, grazed by sheep and chickens, with a roped-off area about 100 feet square in the centre. We took the Peregrine out first. Dave hasn't had Wiggins long and is still training him. Jan and I stood at the entrance to the square while Dave launched Wiggins and swung the lure, pulling it out of reach on each pass. Wiggins was getting the idea of flying into the wind to get height but diving downwind for speed in the attack and using the hedgerow for cover at times. At one point he looked like landing on the house roof until Dave called and gave the lure more vigorous swings as he doesn't want a bird to think it can take a rest during a public demonstration. I have no idea of the time we spent marvelling at the speed and agility but it was probably after about 10 minutes when Dave could see Wiggins starting to pant so he was allowed to “kill” the lure. It's a balance in giving the bird a good workout but not exhausting it. We walked back to the garden and got Primrose, the Kestrel. This time Jan and I stood at opposite sides of the square. Dave put Primrose on my glove, walked to Jan, put a bit of food on her glove and Primrose launched herself for it. Food is bits of one day old male chicks, the waste from a local poultry breeder. Jan was at the upwind end of the square so she had the bird take off into wind and do an immediate turnabout whereas I saw the turnabout as the bird landed on my glove. We flew Primrose glove to glove about 4 times – Dave must walk miles. Again, it's a balance of exercising the bird without it getting much above optimum flying weight from the bits of food. The last bird we flew in the morning was Boo, the Eagle Owl. Seeing a bird that size flying low towards you is intimidating and I instinctively held my arm at full stretch as it landed but still got brushed by one wing in the process!

Having made sure the birds were settled on their perches in the garden or in their cages we went down to the pub for lunch. The current owners of his local took over at about the same time as Dave started Hawkwalk as a business so they support each other. That's how villages work. It also helps that it's a good pub.



Annoy this bird at your peril!

Back at the house after a splendid light lunch Dave loaded up his car with 2 Harris Hawks and a Spaniel and we set off for some fields about a mile away. Apparently he has permission to hunt over about 2000 acres in the area. Having parked inside the gate to the field Omar and Taffie were fitted with radio transmitters to their tails then transferred to our gloves and we walked to the boundary between 2 fields. The wind had got stronger and more gusty and Omar kept spreading his wings and falling off my wrist. Dave picked him up and repositioned him on my glove a couple of times then decided that the birds would be happier flying free in the conditions. The field boundary comprised a water-filled ditch with willow trees and thick undergrowth, mainly nettles and brambles. We started walking beside the edge of the ploughed area on the upwind side of the trees. Dobbie the Spaniel worked the undergrowth while the hawks flew from branch to branch watching for any prey, bird or mammal, which might be flushed. The theory is that the birds fly a leapfrog pattern so one is watching while the other repositions, but it took a while for them to get into the routine. Dobbie wasn't flushing anything despite frenetic searching of the undergrowth but after a while Taffie dropped onto something on the other side of the ditch. Dave managed to get over the water and through the brushwood with some effort to discover the "kill" was the very rotten carcass of a rat. He'd just about got Taffie separated from her "kill" and back into hunting mode when Omar dropped onto something. This time it was a kill – a vole. As we walked the field edge, as well as watching the hawks work we had views of Buzzards and a Peregrine, the latter perhaps from Didcot power station. At the end of the field we took the track over the ditch to the downwind side and walked slowly back to the car. The difference in the wind strength was noticeable despite the thin cover from the trees. Rather than fly from branch to branch all the time the hawks were happy occasionally to land on the ground and walk beside us. I don't know what I did to upset it

but one of them flew from behind me and clouted me on the head with a wing: I didn't hear a thing until it was too late. We had much discussion about hunting and the law. Each of his birds is licensed to take only certain prey, but how do you tell the bird that? And a bird you could legally shoot but isn't on the license can't be taken. The law is a ass, to quote Dickens.

Dave was apologetic that we didn't get to see the birds catch anything interesting, partly due to the wind, but we considered it a privilege and fascinating just to be out with the birds and to see them working, and you can't change the weather if it doesn't suit. We were about 100 yards from the car when the blue sky disappeared behind an enormous cumulo-nimbus which tried to break the local rainfall record. The willows provided no cover despite our attempt to find shelter so we tried to be the shelter for the birds and Dave fed them to take their minds off the rain as they sat on our gloves. Checking them over he discovered that one of them had managed to lose the battery from their radio transmitter. What a good job they hadn't decided to go independent! The storm blew through fairly quickly but we were drenched and we agreed there was no point in trying to continue hunting as the wind hadn't moderated and it was now 1630. In the short walk back to the car we managed to get a bucketful of mud on each boot while the hawks rode in style on the glove.

I have to declare an interest. In his other job (which pays the mortgage) Dave is a work colleague of our daughter's partner. Dave is passionate and very knowledgeable about his birds and we found the day with him educational and, at times, thought provoking. He tells it as he sees it rather than necessarily keeping to the party line. As important, it was fun. Since our kids gave us the half day experience in the first place, we returned the favour and gave them and their partners a half day which they took about a month before our day's hunting. They are not birders and were sceptical about it (eg I don't like flappy things), but the grins on their faces when we met them afterwards and the animated conversation over lunch at the pub made it worthwhile. If you'd never thought of trying falconry, give it a go.

Hawkwalk – www.Hawkwalk.org



All pictures by Dick Knight. (Captions by somebody else).

This trip to Brazil was Al Jordan's idea and a great idea it turned out to be. You will have read, in the Spring 2009 Newsletter, Robin Springett's comprehensive article about his and Julia's trip to the Atlantic Rainforest and the Pantanal over Christmas 2007. Inspired by this trip we decided to follow suit and visit both those areas, but also taking in the Falls at Iguazu, on the border with Argentina and rounding it off with two days R&R in Rio. (Well, one has to see Copacabana and Ipenema beaches hasn't one?)

Atlantic Rainforest 1

Our first port of call was Guapi Assu Bird Lodge (www.guapiassubirdlodge.com). Located in the Atlantic Rainforest about 80Km NE of Rio, it is the HQ of the Reserva Ecologica de Guapi Assu (REGUA) (www.regua.co.uk). REGUA is a registered charity in both the UK and US and is dedicated to the long term conservation of the region's rich biodiversity and natural beauty. Currently, REGUA owns and manages nearly 7,000 hectares of rainforest and wetlands which contain some 55 mammal and 420+ bird species, many of them endangered; it also holds many amphibian and reptile species and a vast array of flora, much of which is little known and poorly studied. The reserve and lodge are managed by Nicholas Locke, whose family previously owned the land and who set up the Trust in 2000. Nick will always give you a warm welcome should you wish to visit.

Al and I were very impressed with the reserve, its aims and ambitions and the remarkable progress that has been made in restoring and managing the area in the short time it has been in existence.

"But what about the birds", I hear you cry. We arrived at the lodge at lunch time on 1 Jul and the rest of the guests were out, so we settled in, had lunch and then went on a short acquaint walk around the wetlands with Sue, a lady who brings a small party from her local bird group in Kent and then stays on for 2-4 weeks to help out at the lodge. We quickly saw many of the commoner water birds, including Brazilian Teal, White-faced Whistling-Duck, Least Grebe, Capped, Cocoi and Rufescent Tiger-Herons and all the Egrets. On a small lagoon next to the main one we found 4 Masked Duck. In addition we got good views of Rusty-margined Guan, Black, Turkey and Yellow-headed Vultures, Roadside Hawk and Yellow-headed Caracara.



Brazilian Teal *Amazonetta brasiliensis*.

Around 1600 the other group must have returned for we were joined by one of the lodge guides, Ardilei, and he quickly found Black-legged Dacnis, a local endemic. Other good birds that afternoon were Reddish Hermit, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Chestnut-backed Antshrike, a female White-bearded Manakin and high in the trees Planalto Tyrannulet. To tell the truth, without the guide we would never have known it was there! It was then back to the lodge for a cup of tea, meet the other guests and watch the hummingbirds on the feeders. The other guests turned out to be two Danish couples on a 5 week birding extravaganza in Brazil. Over dinner that evening we decided that the next day we should take the Green Trail. This is a full day out walking/birding up to a waterfall on the reserve; our guide would be the other lodge guide Leonardo. Leonardo is an interesting character, he is a qualified vet and works 3 days a week in a local practice, but his passion is birds so for the other 3 days a week he guides at REGUA. An added advantage is that his English is good. After a 0530 breakfast, we left at 0615 for the short drive to the start of the trail. This is not a long walk; only 2.5Km to the waterfall, but it is quite rough underfoot and with my knees I found it quite tricky: particularly as I had left my walking pole behind! Smart move Yates! As you are all aware, rainforest birding is quite hard work and we didn't reach the waterfall until about 1230. It is a very picturesque spot and after we had had our lunch we made the return journey in much better time, arriving back at the lodge at around 1600. We had arranged for Leo to take us out at dusk to try for Giant Snipe, probably the rarest wader in South America. We got to the spot and waited for darkness and Leo started to call. Over the next hour we had 3 birds responding to his call but none showed themselves – but they are definitely there. The day yielded about 50 species including Black-goggled, Olive-green, Golden-chevroned, Flame-crested and Red-necked Tanagers; White-bearded, Blue and Pin-tailed Manakin; Lesser and Olivaceous Woodcreeper; Yellow-throated Woodpecker, Surucua and Black-throated Trogon; Rufous-breasted Leaftosser and Southern Ant-Pipit. In the evening, apart from hearing the Giant Snipe, we also saw Laughing Falcon, White-rumped Monjita, a cacophony of Chopi Blackbirds and scores of Yellow-headed Caracara going to roost, I gave up counting at 50. A profitable if tiring day.

The next day, while our Danish friends walked the Brown Route, self-guided, Al and I walked the Yellow Route with Leo. This route takes you round the wetland, and is again about 2.5Km but is much easier going and after a 0700 start we were back by lunchtime. We started off with a pair of Tropical Screech-Owl roosting in a tree in the garden and followed up with Ringed and Amazon Kingfisher; Guira Cuckoo; Blue-winged Parrotlet; White-barred Piculet; Burnished-buff, Sayaca and Palm Tanager; Limpkin; Gray-necked Wood-Rail; White-headed Marsh and Masked Water-Tyrant; and perhaps the best birds of the day Crescent-chested Puffbird; Black-capped Danocobius and a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl which was being given rice by various tanagers. The afternoon was spent in the grounds watching the comings and goings of the hummers on the feeders. In the evening we went owling but with little luck. Common Paraque was the only bird seen while Dark-banded and Mottled Owl responded to the tape but stayed well away.



Amazon Kingfisher *Chloroceryle amazona*

The following morning we all set off for the coast to a place called Cabo Frio where the main target was the very localised Restinga Ant-Wren. We found the wren and also got Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant; Lemon-chested Greenlet; Plain-breasted Ground-Dove; Double-collared Seedeater and Hang-nest Tody-Tyrant.

I should point out here, that a well-known fact amongst Brazilian bird aficionados is that all Brazilian birds have 4 names and the longer the name the smaller the bird. The Hang-nest Tody-Tyrant certainly lives up to this billing! As we were at the coast it was a rare opportunity to see some sea and estuary birds. We started out with Kelp and Gray-hooded Gull, Yellow-billed and Cayenne Tern – a sub-species of Sandwich Tern, and Brown Booby. Then the waders: Roseate Spoonbill, Black-necked Stilt; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Grey and Semipalmated Plover and a single Hudsonian Godwit. We also had our only view of the trip of White-cheeked Pintail and a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Not a huge list for the day and a long bus journey but some good birds. Our total for 4 days at REGUA was 159.

The following day after a quick morning walk round the wetland, we left REGUA just before lunch. I will gloss over the next few hours, the drive to Rio, a flight to Sao Paulo, a 6 hour wait for the flight to Cuiabá, where we were met by our guide Bradley Davies, and then a 2 hour drive to our lodge; arriving at 0100. Nuff sed!!

The Pantanal

I will not cover our 4 days in the southern Pantanal in detail, as we did much as Robin and Julia did in 07 and it is amply described in Robin's excellent article. We saw pretty much the same birds as Robin and for me the stand-out bird was Hyacinth Macaw, which was quite easy to find in the area near our first lodge.



Hyacinth Macaws *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*

We also saw several species of mammals, but we missed out on Giant Otter. July is well outside their breeding season and they could have been anywhere along the stretches of river that we travelled trying to find them. However, our highlight was seeing a Jaguar! We had been looking for owls, our only success being Great Horned Owl, when the headlights silhouetted an animal walking along the track about 100m in front of us. At first, Bradley thought it was a Crab-eating Fox, which we had seen already, but as we closed to about 50m it became obvious we had a Jaguar. We slowed right down and it continued on its way for about another 20m before it looked round, realised what we were and then walked slowly into the bush. An amazing encounter and an image that will live with me for a very long time. On our final morning in the Pantanal we had opted for one last chance at getting Giant Otter, we failed, but we did get both Sunbittern and Sungrebe by way of compensation and we also got Green-and-Rufous Kingfisher which completed our collection of all 5 Brazilian kingfishers. We did not visit Emas National park, instead we stopped a little closer to Cuiabá visiting Chapada dos Guimarães Park, where we stayed for 2 nights at the Pousada do Parque, a fairly new and well-appointed lodge actually within the park. The habitat of the chappada region is called 'cerrado' and consists of fairly low, open woodland with pockets of denser gallery forest. An early start on our first day, 10 Jul, and we were overlooking a vineyard on the outskirts of a village. First up was Curl-crested Jay, which we only saw briefly but had better views later in the day. Then came White-rumped and White-banded Tanagers; Coal-crested Finch; Plumbeous Seedeater, Black-throated Saltator; White-eared Puffbird and a very obliging female Rufous-winged Antshrike,

We moved on down the hill towards a more densely forested area collecting Lesser Elaenia, Chappada Flycatcher and Lettered Aracari en-route. On entering the forest we quickly got onto Rusty-backed Antwren and White-bellied Warbler, but a group of 3 displaying male Band-tailed Manakin were without doubt the highlight. Unfortunately, they were a fair way off and there was not enough light to get a photograph. On the way into the local town for lunch we found Gray Monjita on telegraph wires beside the road and then, feeding on some kind of nut tree in the town square, was a magnificent pair of Red and Green Macaws. Here there was a good photo opportunity. In the afternoon we visited a place called Bridal Veil Falls, a very picturesque spot and obviously popular with locals and tourists alike. In this area we picked up Blue-headed Parrot, White-eyed Parakeet, Scaled Pigeon and Swallow Tanager and had better views of the Curl-crested Jay. Back at the lodge we found 3 new hummers, Glittering-bellied Emerald; White-chinned Sapphire and White-vented Violet ear. At dusk we went to look for night birds again and the star of the show by a distance was the beautiful Scissor-tailed Nightjar. We also saw Rufous and Little Nightjar. That brought to an end our time in the Pantanal with a list of 233 birds of which 5 were heard only. Early the next morning Bradley drove us to the airport for our flight down to Iguazu to see the world famous falls.

Iguazu Falls



Yes! It is every bit as spectacular as it is reported to be.

We arrived in Iguazu about midday and took a taxi into the town to our hotel. This was the only part of our trip that we were entirely self-guided and it worked out well, but the birding was limited for reasons that I will elaborate on later. Iguazu is a typical resort town with plenty of hotels and places to eat catering for all budgets. That afternoon we just acquainted ourselves with the town, found the bus station, a bank and a place to do our laundry and the restaurant that AI had selected from a recommendation in Lonely Planet as the best place to get a big meat meal. It was certainly a very big and very good feed but the bill was also quite steep. We ate more cheaply after that.

The following morning we caught the bus to get across the border to the Argentinian side of the falls. The journey took just over the hour and was easy. Arrival at the entrance to the National Park was a bit of a surprise. It really has been commercialised and was almost like a 'Disney Theme Park'. But it was well done and the many paths and tracks were well marked and well maintained and the view of the falls was superb. However, with several thousand people visiting the park daily it is not a good place to go birding. There may well be lots of good birds there, but the park doesn't open until 0800 and by 1000 it is seething.

A few species, like Curl Crested Jay, have become quite habituated, and it was possible to find a few quieter tracks where we found Red-crested Finch, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Tropical Parula, and Yellow-billed Cardinal. Nearer the Falls we saw Great Egret, Cocoi Heron, Neotropical Cormorant, Anhinga and loads of Black Vultures circling overhead, but generally the birds were keeping a very low profile. Mind you, we had come to see the Falls, and we were not disappointed.



Chestnut-bellied Euphonia *Euphonia pectoralis*

The following morning, our last day, we had decided to check out the falls from the Brazilian side and find someone who could tell us about walking/birding one of the recommended trails. Another bus ride to the Park HQ arriving at 0800 and once inside we located a young lady who said all things are possible. THEY AREN'T!! The Brazilian side did not seem quite as crowded and was also well organised, but every activity inside the park had been franchised out to a company who was trying to make money out of it. Hence a nice 9Km walk could only be done with a guide and had to be paid for at twice the price of getting into the National Park. We paid, and thought that we had negotiated plenty of time to do it, but no, the guide had to be back by 1300 and therefore so did we. So we walked just over half the track and then we were picked up by a buggy and delivered to the end where we had about half an hour at a hide before we were instructed to remount the buggy for the drive back to the start of the trail. All rather disappointing, but we did find Rufous-crowned Motmot and Rufous-winged Antwren, both new birds as were the Great Dusky Swift that appeared in a swarm overhead. We also saw Black-goggled Tanager, Lineated Woodpecker and some more Plush-crested Jay, along with Blue-and-White Swallow, Brown-chested Martin and several familiar water birds near the river at the end of the trail.

After our rather abbreviated birding foray we caught the bus up to the falls to see them from the Brazilian side. You can't get quite as close as on the Argentinian side but they are probably the better for having a more distant view. They are an awe-inspiring sight and our detour down to Iguazu had been well worth it for the Falls alone. Next morning we checked out of our hotel and got a taxi to the airport for our flight back to Rio.

Atlantic Rainforest 2.

For our second visit to the Atlantic Rainforest we stayed at Serra dos Tucanos Birding Lodge. Robin and Julia stayed here for 12 days during their 2007 visit, the lodge is pretty much the same and so are the birding excursions and obviously they did more than us in our 5 days, but we still had some memorable moments. We did not meet Andy or Christina as her father was very seriously ill and they had returned to Romania to be with him, but we met them at the Bird Fair where they had taken a stand. The only other guests were a Dutch couple, whose names I am ashamed to admit I have forgotten, and an English couple, Dan and Dani Feel, Dan is an Operations Manager for Naturetrek and Dani a photographer. Since Robin and Julia's visit the Lodge had employed a new guide, Cerilo, and very good he was too.

Our first excursion, on 15 Jul, was the Theodoro trail and while it was dry when we set out at 0700 by about 0900 it was raining and we got pretty wet. The rain also kept the birds down so our list was not long, but we saw some great ones nevertheless. Among the new sightings were Yellow-browed and Yellow-eared Woodpecker, Planalto Woodcreeper, Variable Antshrike, Greenish Schiffornis, Golden-crowned Warbler and Uniform Finch. However, my favourite was the Slaty Bristlefront. It is a small skulking ground-dweller and it moved up and down the trail responding to calls before emerging on the track about 10m away and stood looking at us with its head on one side for about 5 seconds before scurrying back into the undergrowth. If you Google "Slaty Bristlefront photos" there are some great shots. I didn't get one as my camera was all waterproofed up in my rucksack. We were back at the lodge by midday with the rain bucketing down and the general consensus was that we should stay home that afternoon rather than going on the lodge trail.. So we sat and watched the rain and the feeders and managed to pick up Pale-breasted and Creamy-breasted Thrush and Plain Parakeet as new birds.

For the following day the group had decided on the Three-toed Jacamar Excursion. This involved quite a bit of mini-bus time but visited some great sites and best of all, it was a beautiful day. The daily total was 66 of which 16 were new birds. These included the Three-toed Jacamar, which gave us very good views; Yellow-browed, Long-tailed, Streamer-tailed Tyrant and Crested Black-Tyrant; Blue-winged Macaw, Slaty-breasted and Blackish Rail; White-tailed Hawk; Serra Antwren; Masked Yellowthroat; White-crested Tyrannulet and Black-necked Aracari.

We got back to lodge about 1730 tired but very content. Dan and Dani were to leave the next morning so the 4 remaining guests decided on the Serra dos Orgaos National Park for the next day's excursion.

Before we left the Lodge the next morning we had White-throated Treecreeper and Rufous-crowned Motmot in trees near the stream, but the Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper that Cerilo heard calling remained elusive and we never did catch sight of him. The bus ride up to the National Park is certainly impressive and Robin covers this area well in his article so I will not elaborate further. We also had a good day's birding with 45 species of which 13 were new: amongst these Hooded Berryeater, White-shouldered Fire-Eye, White-throated Spadebill, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Blue-billed Black-Tyrant, Pale-browed Treehunter, Star-throated Antwren and Spot-breasted Ant-Vireo stand out. We were also treated to a virtuoso performance by a Rufous-capped Ant-Thrush, not a new bird but what a show! Our Dutch friends were due to leave the next morning so for our final day Al and I were on our own and we decided to try the high altitude trail. I was in 2 minds about this as it is billed as being steep and I was not sure that my knees could take the strain, but it was well worth the effort.

Again a 0700 departure and after about 45 minutes we had climbed in the mini-bus to the start of the track and up into the clouds. The rain held off, mostly, but it was still quite damp and chilly and visibility was often reduced to only about 50m. Undaunted, we set off up what was a quite steep hill but the track was good. Our first bird led us a merry dance but eventually we both had good views of White-rimmed Warbler, a real skulker. Onwards and upwards and soon we were rewarded with Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet, Rufous-tailed Antbird and Orange-eyed Thrush. Calling we heard Brazilian Ant-Thrush and Serra do Mar Tapaculo, but neither would break cover and although their calls haunted us for time we did not see them. Finally, for me, the highlight of the morning, Diademed Tanager, a high altitude dweller and a really beautiful bird. Unfortunately, the light was very poor and photography was out of the question. At this point I was getting quite concerned about my knees, going up is OK but coming down might take quite a while, so while Al and Cerilo continued on up-hill I retraced my steps to the van, serenaded all the way by the Brazilian Ant-Thrush.

About an hour later they returned having seen Serra do Mar Tyrannulet and best of all Black and Gold Cotinga. Naturally, I was sorry not to see the Cotinga but glad that Al had. Then Cerilo said he could hear one calling nearby, so we followed the sound about 50m downhill and after a bit of searching I also got great views of the bird, a marvellous moment and our only Cotinga of the trip.

The weather was deteriorating so Cerilo suggested that we visit a couple of other places lower down to try and get out of the cloud. Rapid agreement saw us relocate to the entrance to a private park where, as we ate our lunch, a Red-legged Seriema hurled abuse at us from a fence post.

Our final stop was to look across a valley to trees on the far side where a Bare-throated Bellbird held a territory. By now it had started to rain again and we were just about to give it up when I spotted a white splodge on a palm tree on the far side of the valley. Scopes out again and this time it was the male Bell-bird, and luckily it stopped raining long enough for us to get good views. Also in this spot we saw Plumbeous Pigeon, White-throated Hummingbird and Fawn-breasted Tanager. We returned to the lodge in time for a cup of tea and as we were enjoying it Cirelo ran through calling Channel-billed Toucan, and there it was in a tree about 100m away. This bird had given us the slip on a number of occasions when it was reported nearby but we just missed it.

Here I must make mention of the hide and feeders situated around the garden at Serra dos Tucanos. Tables loaded with fruit are placed just outside the hide as well as along one side of the garden and nectar feeders for the hummingbirds are all around the place. All these feeding stations attract large numbers of birds and from the hide it is possible to get great photographs.

These just 2 of the regular visitors to the garden; other birds seen on a daily basis were Violaceous, Orange-bellied, Chestnut-breasted and Purple-throated Euphonia; Blue-naped Chlorophonia; Brazilian, Ruby-crowned, Sayaca, Palm and Golden-chevroned Tanagers; Plain and

Maroon bellied Parakeet and of course Bananaquit. Hummers included Brazilian Ruby, Sombre Hummingbird, Saw-billed Hummingbird, Violet-capped Woodnymph and Swallow-tailed Hummingbird.

We had come to the end of our time at Serra and on our last morning we had an hours walk through the woods with Cerilo. We saw several nice birds including Red-necked Tanager, Scaled Antbird and Plain Ant-Vireo but the only new one was Masked Gnateater. At lunchtime the car came to take us into Rio for a couple of nights R & R before heading for home on the Saturday night.

Rio

Well; you can't go to Rio without seeing that huge statue, going up the cable car to the top of the Sugarloaf and taking note of the delights on offer on Copacabana and Ipanema beaches can you?

We stayed in a nice mid-range hotel in the Flamengo district of the city which is handy for all these attractions. The cable starts running at 0800 and we arrived in time to be in the second or third car of the day. From the top it is truly a fantastic view of the city and beaches and it is interesting to watch the aircraft flying well below you to feed into the runway at the city airport. So as not to have a completely bird free day, at the top we found Brazilian Tanager, Blue and White Swallow and Rufous-collared Sparrow. We also had flybys by scores of Black Vultures, several Turkey Vultures a handful of Magnificent Frigatebirds and a Brown Booby or two to entertain us. It was quite hazy that day and by about 1030 it was also beginning to get very busy so we headed down again and caught a cab to Copacabana Beach where we strolled in the sunshine stopping for the odd beer and enjoying the sights.

At the end of the beach is the old Fort de Copacabana. It is now a military museum and has a number of cafes inside the battlements. We spent an hour looking round the military memorabilia and identifying a small group of South American Tern on the rocks at the water's edge. After that we continued walking round the corner to Ipanema Beach, which to be honest was a bit of a disappointment. By now we were hot, weary and ready for a siesta so we headed back to the hotel.

The following day we had decided to visit the Botanic Gardens. Again, we arrived as it opened at 0800 and wandered around for about 3 hours. The gardens are supposed to be good for birds and I suppose if you could get in at 0600 you might stand a chance of seeing a few more species than we did. However, we collected another new bird for the trip, Red-shouldered Macaw, and also several of the commoner birds we had seen before. By 1100 the place was heaving, it was a Saturday, so we visited one more garden just down the road before heading back to the hotel for a sleep before our night flight home at 2230.

Summary

This was a great trip, the birding mixed with a bit of pure tourism worked out well. We saw 388 species and had 6 heard only birds. Of course we didn't both see exactly the same birds so I think our individual lists were about 382, but we were both well satisfied. The daunting thing that one has to remember about Brazil is that we saw less than a quarter of the species in that country. Would I go again? Certainly! But it isn't cheap and to do what we did involved four internal air fares as well our international flights.

Finally, I must say a big thank you to Al Jordan who did all the organising for this trip.

All pictures by Dick Yates.

A Voyage across the North Atlantic in Autumn

John Le Gassick

We sailed from Southampton on the evening of the 19th September under the command of Captain Sarah Breton and maintained a westerly course until the early hours of September 26th when we arrived as planned in New York. Who said “Sat Nav” was a waste of money?

This leg was pretty uneventful and despite a lot of looking only Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, Leach’s Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* and Cory’s (or Mediterranean) Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* were noted. Cory’s was the most abundant species. Being a little short on Ornithology, how about some Etymology? The word petrel is derived from the name of St Peter because of the species habit of hovering just above the ocean waves, giving them the appearance of walking on water just as St Peter is supposed to have done. Common Dolphin were observed, a good identification point is the hour-glass pattern on the side making a dark “V” below the dorsal fin. There are short-beaked *Delphinus delphis* and Long-beaked *D. capensis*, not a lot of people know that unless of course you are a Marine Biologist. Flying fish *exocoetidae* were also seen on most days, the Northern Atlantic sub species have been known to “fly” up to 30 metres.



Common Dolphin with calf

Celtic Sea

John Stewart-Smith

In the wee small hours of September 26th we sailed into New York, unfortunately it was very early and very dark. We stayed for two days, and on the second afternoon paid a visit to Central Park and although we only visited a small part of it, enjoyed some stellar bird watching. The very bright and obvious Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*, American Robin *Turdus migratorius*, Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*, Grey Catbird (or should it be Gray Catbird?) *Dumetella carolinensis*, Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina*, Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*, Black and White Warbler *Mniotilta varia*, Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia*, Common Grackle *Quiscalus*

quiscula, Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*, Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*, Mourning Dove *Zenaid macroura* and American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*. We joined a small group of very expert and very American bird watchers who pointed out to our inexperienced eyes the reasonably obvious differences between White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis* & *S. canadensis*. I was surprised to see at least two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds *Archilocus colubris* this late in the Autumn (or should that be "Fall"), but neither Hank nor Hank seemed to be!

Continuing our journey North we stopped for a day in Newport Rhode Island where we had the magnificent Monarch Butterfly *Danaus plexippus* before continuing to Boston Massachusetts where I managed to photograph two of the most common species seen on this eastern coast: Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* and Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*. Our final port of call in the United States, Portland Maine, was marred by heavy continuous rain. The major part of the day was spent looking at the rafts of Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* and American Black Duck *Anas rubripes* which were quite close to the ship. Then at around three in the afternoon the rain suddenly stopped and I was able to go ashore and photograph some of the over fifty strong flock of White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis* feeding in the wet grass. Pine Warbler *Dendroica pinus* and Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* were also added to the list. The beauty of having bird watching as a hobby is the fact that that it can be carried out anywhere (*or nearly anywhere) and even a day of awful rain can give reward to the patient observer.

The next day the weather improved and we visited St Johns New Brunswick, our first port of call in Canada, here we visited the famous "Reversing Falls" and once back on board an hour and a half sea watch yielded: Black Scoter *Melanitta nigra* and a Pomarine Skua (Jaeger) *Stercorarius pomarinus* (mobbing a pair of Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*) along with Sooty *puffinus griseus*, Cory's and Greater Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*. The 2nd of October found us in Halifax Nova Scotia, the weather was bright and breezy a visit to the Public Gardens was rewarded with close views of Red Squirrel and Common Raven *Corvus corax*. The morning of Thursday October 4th was spent transiting the St. Lawrence Estuary to Quebec City, a very pleasant experience at this time of year as it was the first really good display of the much advertised Autumn colours. Distant views were had of several large flocks of Snow Geese *Chen caerulescens* (through a telescope) on their journey south, though we failed to see any Beluga (or White Whale). There is a population of around 1000 in the St. Lawrence Estuary which is the most southern population of this Arctic cetacean. It is not really a whale but more closely related to the dolphin. It is with the Narwhal one of the two members of the cetacean family *Monodonitae*.

On October 6th we transited the Gulf of St Lawrence and the Cabot Strait after a night time departure from Quebec where my only new record was of Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*. The sea was calm with a low sea state giving nice views of Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*, Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* and a Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*.

Our final port of call was Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island on a bright sunny day. Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*, Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina* and Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* were added to the list and a couple of reasonable photos were added to the album. The homeward bound voyage was reasonably rewarding, the dolphin that was most commonly seen going in this direction was the Atlantic White-sided Dolphin. Seabirds consisted of shearwater (Sooty, Greater and Cory's) and Northern Gannet. One highlight occurred on the 9th October when we were in the approximate position 47N 043W with a moderate sea state we began passing never ending small groups of Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*. Throughout late morning and early afternoon we counted, just those close to the ship, over 1500 birds.

The most interesting occurrences on this leg were the number of avian passengers that we welcomed on board. Outbound we had a close encounter with a Leach's Storm Petrel that came on board for a rest before being returned to the ocean. This does appear to be a reasonably regular occurrence with Storm Petrels. Possibly because of the bird's size and the proximity of an 87, 000 ton vessel travelling at 20 Knots which must create some considerably strong air currents. Of course Storm Petrels are the most prolific of all the pelagic species. My personal list was: 3

Leach's Storm Petrel, 1 Wilson's Storm Petrel, 1 Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, 1 White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, 1 Merlin *Falco columbarius* and a male Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*. The White-rumped Sandpiper was a real tease and stayed for two days. It would fly down the side of the vessel and disappear only to be reappear again some hours later. The Merlin and the Snow Bunting were both recorded on October 12th when we passed within 15 miles of the Isles of Scilly. They were never seen together but the Merlin had been seen carrying prey and various feathers on the deck beneath a convenient post were those of the Snow Bunting!

Field Guide

The Field Guide used was the National Geographic "Field Guide to the Birds of North America". On previous visits to the USA I have always used "Sibley" but only have a copy of "The Birds of Western North America". The National Geographic Guide that I bought at a recent RAFOS AGM was excellent. Nice illustrations (many of birds in flight), with good text and distribution maps. The "thumb" indentations for groups of birds, the fold out front cover for bird families and the fold out rear cover quick find index were invaluable in the field (or should that be deck).

(*The WRAC Accommodation Block at RAF Episcopi, where a pair of Scops Owls nested in 1990 is an example of a place where not to bird watch.)

This is a tale that had to told,
The trouble is I'm getting too old,
But while I still have the strength
To hold up my "nockies",
I'll be up on the deck checking out "Bonxies" (no I am not sure either!)



Sooty Shearwaters

John Stewart-Smith

Two new Ramsar sites in Portugal

The Ramsar authority in Portugal has designated two new Wetlands of International Importance, bringing that country's total to 30 Ramsar sites covering 132,471 hectares. As summarized by Ramsar's Assistant Advisor for Europe, Ms Laura Máiz-Tomé, based on the Ramsar information Sheets, **Pateira de Fermentelos Lake and Agueda and Certima Valleys** (1,559 hectares, 40°33'52"N 008°30'28"W) contains one of the largest freshwater lakes of the Iberian Peninsula with a mosaic of wetland habitats, reed beds and marshland as well as riparian vegetation. The site supports important populations of migratory and threatened bird species, like the *Ixobrychus minutus*, *Ardea purpurea*, *Circus aeruginosus*, *Milvus migrans* and *Sylvia undata*. In the lagoon and its adjacent water system, fish also find favourable ecological conditions for refuge and spawning during the breeding season.

The wetland has a major role in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping and maintenance of water supply for both natural and man-made ecosystems. The largest threat factors which might affect the ecological status of the site are essentially intensive farming, cattle raising, and contamination of water and soils by industrial and urban infrastructures. The Municipality of Agueda has implemented a Development Plan for the site which provides a set of strategies and actions aimed at the sustainable development of the area.

The second new site, **Vascao River (Ribeira do Vasco)** (44,331 hectares, 37°27'N 007°48'W) in the Algarve region, includes the biggest river without artificial interruptions such as dams or reservoirs in Portugal. Situated in the Mediterranean Region, it supports high concentrations of threatened species such as freshwater fishes as Jarabugo (*Anaecypris hispanica*), European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) and Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*).

The wetland area regulates the Vascao River floods. The riparian vegetation contributes to underground water infiltration and stabilization of different hydrological processes. Numerous archaeological remains from the Roman and Islamic periods are found in the area, and it is popular for outdoor activities, nature sports, and environmental education. The lack of sewage treatment plants in the adjacent villages threatens the ecological character of the site, but management plans have been implemented together with restoration activities and invasive alien species eradication strategies,

Dwight Peck
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran. 1971)
1196 Gland
Switzerland.

Proposed Expedition to The Gambia 3 to 17 December 2013

Robin Springett

As regular visitors to The Gambia, Julia and I would be happy to organise and run a birding trip there in December 2013, January or February 2014. The duration would be 14 days, and the cost should not exceed £850 per person per day plus flights, based on 2 sharing. My preferred dates are 3 to 17 December 2013.

The exped will consist of two distinct parts:

- Arrival and birding at coastal sites, and 4 nights up river bird watching trip with local guide (or guides)
- Survey work for the Kartong Bird Observatory.

I would only be using guides in whom I have confidence. Accommodation up river and at Kartong would be in local lodges. On the coast I hope to use Bakuto Hotel at Kotu. For more information see: <http://www.gambiabirding.com/index.html> and various other Gambia websites such as:

<http://kartongbirdobservatory.org/>

Essentially, I see this as self financing, but would welcome a RAFOS grant towards the £100 per day cost of a vehicle and driver.

Expressions of interest please to rloggy@yahoo.co.uk or juliaspringett@yahoo.co.uk stating your preferred dates.

Draft Programme:

- Arrive Kotu Area – Check into accommodation
- Day 1 – Arrival, check in housekeeping
- Day 2 – Kotu Local Birding
- Day 3 – Brufut and Tanji
- Day 4 – Marakissa and Darsilami
- Day 5 – Abuko and Lamin Lodge
- Day 6 – Drive to Georgetown
- Day 7 – Local birding Georgetown area
- Day 8 – Georgetown river trip and drive to Tendaba
- Day 9 - Tendaba Camp Birding
- Day 10 – Tendaba creek boat trip. Return to Coast
- Day 11, 12, 13 – Kartong Area – Bird Survey
- Day 14 – Depart

Bird Survey:

- Kartong Bird Obs: <http://kartongbirdobservatory.org/>
- Survey coastal lagoon & Senegal border area Tern roosts (2)
- Survey to include Herons, Ducks and Godwits area 1.5 x 1.5 km
- Survey and Record target birds and Record other Species
- GPS plot leg flagged Spur Wing Plovers
- Provide Survey Results to Bird Obs and publish findings

Likely Costs:

- Flights per person return - £500
- Guide <http://www.gambiabirding.com/index.html>
- B&B Accommodation, transport, guide, entrance fees etc £600 pp
- Meals and misc costs £250 pp
- Total for 14 days with flights - £1,350

Time Lines & Admin:

Maximum will be 12 people, all costs based on 2 sharing

Participants will book own flights

Deposit payment in sterling by bank transfer to bank in Gambia

Expressions of Interest to Robin soonest: rloggy@yahoo.co.uk

Go, no go decision by 30 June 2013, changes up to 30 Sep.

Hungary

21-28 July 2012.

By Karen Sims and John Towers



We'd heard and read about Hungary and the Hortobágy and how great it was for wildlife and birds in particular and when I saw an advert in a bird watching magazine for a week's guided bird watching and hotel accommodation all organised, we decided to go for it. The advertiser and guide was a retired Devon and Cornwall policeman who had been part of the wildlife crimes unit as well as serious crimes unit for those counties.

We flew to Budapest from Bristol with Ryan Air, not our first choice airline but not wanting to drive further than Bristol, the only choice. We arrived about 3pm after a 2 ½ hour flight which passed fairly quickly. After a little longer wait for baggage than usual, not in a great rush to unload the plane it seemed, we met our guide for the week, Roy Adams.

Roy has lived in Hungary for the past six years having spent many months over there in previous years before retiring researching Woodpeckers and Hawfinch in particular for the RSPB. He and his partner have a house in a small village close to the town of Eger where our hotel was.

He's continued his studies for the RSPB and Hungarian Birdlife since the move as well as leading trips for small groups. We were to be his only clients that week so had his full attention and hoped to learn a few things about the local bird life.

Our hotel in Eger was 140km east of Budapest and Roy drove us along the M3 stopping en route to look at any interesting birds that popped up. The first stop was a small motorway service station where a pair of Eastern Imperial Eagles had nested that summer in a small copse across a wheat field. There a few trees on the Hungarian Plain and so any copse or wood is likely to hold nesting birds of all sizes. There was no sign of life on that day but you could see the huge nest at the top of the tallest tree. We did have Crested Lark, White Wagtails, Tree Sparrows and Greenfinches around the station car park – not quite Eastern Imperial Eagles – and a tad smaller!

Our second stop at an old quarry which is a lake in the winter but dry and full of rushes in July yielded, a Bee Eater colony, Golden Oriole, Red Backed Shrikes with lots of juvenile, murmuring Turtle Doves and a juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker. The whole area was alive with bird song and there were youngsters calling to be fed from every bush.

We eventually arrived at our hotel on the edge of the town and set in its own landscaped grounds full of trees and bushes. Roy showed us to our room and we arranged to meet him at 6am the next morning. We had a lovely meal and a good night's sleep in spite of the wedding reception in the grounds going on to the early hours.

Day 2

The day started with a 6am rendezvous with Roy in the hotel reception area and a wake up coffee. It was cool, drizzly and a little windy – just like home!

The wind made birding difficult in the first place we stopped as it was high up in a clearing overlooking woodland and no sign of the expected woodpeckers. So we moved on to a more sheltered spot and a woodland village. Still no woodpeckers but Black Redstarts, Blue Tits and Nuthatch.

We went back to the hotel and after breakfast, which was an all you could eat buffet and included a huge choice of food and drink, we set out again for Tisza Lakes and the Borsodmezo/Heves Plain area.

En route we stopped in a small village and had great views of three Long Eared Owls in a large Silver Birch - in winter these birds congregate in huge numbers in many of the villages around the area and are well regarded by the local inhabitants.



In the wide flat plain area, made up of maize and sunflower fields as far as you could see, were large numbers of Marsh Harriers quartering the fields with Great White Egrets and White Storks on the ground. One of the best spots was a small area of woodland on the edge of a village called Mezokovesal. The area next door to the local Psychiatric hospital gave great views of Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Hawfinch in large numbers, Golden Orioles and Goldfinches. As we all went off in different directions I heard tapping coming from a large but very rotten tree, creeping slowly towards it the noise was louder and I was hoping to see the cause of it before whatever it was saw me. Then I saw a large black and red head sticking out from inside a large hole – a Black Woodpecker - busy hunting for it's lunch in the decayed bark. Walking slowly backwards I tried to catch John's eye without attracting the bird. John saw me and moved closer but the woodpecker flashed out of the hole into the next tree. John saw it but did not get the luxury of the close up view I had earlier, Roy had appeared by then and also saw it moving off to a wood the other side of a maize crop. However, John did manage to get a glimpse of a Goshawk from the car on the way back to the hotel but with me taking a turn in the back-set, I didn't see it, so my turn to miss out this time. Hey ho! But a great first full day in Hungary.

Day 3

Another early start - I thought we were on holiday!

It was still windy but much warmer and we went to a sheltered wooded valley for the pre-breakfast stroll. The birds were much more active this morning and we had really good views of Great and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers and you could clearly pick out the differences. Here were also large numbers of Coal Tits flitting through the canopy.

Rustling from higher up the wood revealed a very large Wild Boar on his early morning stroll through the trees. A real treat to see it moving slowly through the wood.

Back to the hotel, and after breakfast we went out on the Tisza Plain and into Tiszababalm village which had a huge number of White Stork nests all with multiple youngsters. It had been a good year for them apparently. As in many other European countries, these birds are actively encouraged to nest in the villages. In the same village a large conifer held five Long Eared Owls, including a youngster, all watching village life go by beneath them.

We moved on to a commercial fish farm which had numerous ponds with varied water levels or no water at all. There were herons everywhere, Grey and Purple with Great White Egrets hunting the margins. Overhead flew Common and Whiskered Terns. Moving further out on to the plain we walked a track between harvested fields shaded from the now very hot sun by Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), hybrid Poplar and Desert False Indigo (*Amphora fruticosa*), an invasive plant from the USA.

We saw plenty of European Roller which were well supplied with nest boxes by the Government agencies along with Lesser Grey Shrike. These beautiful pink washed Shrikes hover like Kestrels when hunting over the long grass in the field margins.

Working our way back to the hotel we came across four Eastern Imperial Eagles, two adults and presumably their two juvenile offspring. They were quartering the plain on enormous wings.

After another lovely dinner at the hotel and I heard a Scops Owl calling in the well wooded hotel gardens. A little late in the year for the call but it may well have been a youngster calling its parent.

Day 4

Gluttons for punishment another 6am start. Back to the original woodland area for Woodpeckers. This site had been a survey area for many years by the Hungarian Bird Society for

the study of Woodpeckers in particular. There had been records of 7 out of the 9 Woodpeckers in Hungary (the total including Wryneck). This particular morning we had Grey Headed, Greater, Middle and Lesser Spotted. We also heard Green and Black. There were large flocks of Hawfinch in the tree tops feeding on the seeds and flying across the woodland clearings.



Grey-headed woodpecker

Setting off back to the car a Short Toed Eagle came out of the wood being mobbed by a large female Sparrowhawk.

After another good breakfast back at the hotel, we headed east on the M3/A35 towards the Ukraine border to Polgar, crossing the river Tisza and onto the Tiszavasvay Saltlakes. These salt lakes gave us a chance to catch up on waders and ducks that so far we had not seen in the farmlands and wooded areas.

Hungary has large areas of salt laden ground with the Hortobagy being the largest area. This unique saline environment is caused by spring melt water seeping into the upper layer of marsh and coming into contact with the deeper saline ground water and it then takes up the salt. When these pools evaporate in the summer heat, the saline water in the upper soil layer is drawn upwards by the sun. This results in thin layers of alkaline salts over vast areas.

The salt lakes we visited today still had a good depth of water and plenty of birds. The highlights were 13 Black-necked Grebe, Night Heron, Black Stork, Garganey, Ferruginous Duck, White Winged Black Tern and Ruff in various states of undress!

Another nearby lake and village area held our seventh Woodpecker species, a Syrian in the tall trees around the village football field along with singing Serin.

On the way back to the hotel we stopped for a walk around Roy's home village which had masses of wild flowers teeming with insects with many butterflies including Eastern Clouded Yellow, Painted Ladies and huge numbers of Fritillaries which I wasn't able to identify.

Day 5

Another early start – this time to a working quarry. A very drizzly morning and no sign of the Rock Buntings which we'd hoped to see. The quarry also holds nesting Eagle Owls but these were well into the working area of the quarry and we had no access. The Eagle Owls are monitored but no public access is given for health and safety reasons.

The remainder of the day we spent on the Heves Plain and into a private fish farm at Kiskore called Dormand Tiszazolas. This beautiful site was full of waders, terns, gulls and warblers. The fish ponds are emptied in rotation so there was plenty of variety for the birds with different water levels. We had our first Little Egret of the trip, not a common bird here. There were Marsh Harriers everywhere you looked and yet another Eastern Imperial Eagle. In the distance was a beautiful female Red Footed Falcon, another first for the trip.

It was again a damp drizzly day but very warm. The light made birds seem a long way off and hard to identify, diffusing the colours. A very smart Spotted Redshank joined Greenshanks, Green, Common and Wood Sandpipers on some muddy pools by the side of a country road. A beautiful Black Tern flew in with the many Whiskered Terns over the largest fish pond. There were plenty of flies and Dragonflies for the hawking terns and we heard our first Savi's Warbler. Walking between the ponds through the surrounding reeds we had close views of a stunning male Bearded Tit.

Moving across the farmland we saw the nest box scheme that is set up for Saker Falcon and we had distant views of two birds on the large pylons that march across the countryside. These birds are doing well on the plain area and have readily taken to the nest boxes provided. There are also nest box schemes in place for Rollers and Red Footed Falcons.

We stopped at a farm for a look around the cattle sheds and found another uncommon bird for the region, a Jackdaw looking very bedraggled in the damp conditions, Lots of Tree Sparrows around the farm, far out-numbering the House Sparrows. But the most numerous birds of this area seemed to be the Rollers. The nest scheme had really helped this bird and Hungary is one of its strongholds. Elsewhere in Europe numbers have dropped quite considerably.

Day 6

A lie in this morning with breakfast first and then the trip to the Hortobagy. We made for the visitors centre and the little train that takes you past the old fish ponds into the heart of the reserve and the ground and tower hides. A huge herd of water buffalo had attracted hundreds of Sand Martins catching the insects disturbed by the moving herd. There were plenty of Squacco, Purple and Grey Herons in the ditches. Standing on top of the artificial Sand Martin bank were two Cattle Egret not at all common and caused great excitement amongst the reserve staff.

From the top of one of the tower hides I found a suspended nest amongst the reeds which looked like Pendaline Tit. We stood quietly nearby later and saw an adult feeding the chicks. The adult looked pretty ragged and the chicks well grown. This was right next to the train station building in the middle of the reserve.

This building was set up as a classroom for school groups and was fitted with a very handsome wood burning stove for the colder months.

Today it was very hot and sunny with lots of buzzing insects around. Glad I had remembered the anti-mosquito cream that morning! There were large flocks of Curlew and Lapwing in the fields around the reserve and we saw a very distant Bluethroat on top of a hedge bank.

One of the busiest ponds was on the entrance road, not easy to park there, but we had good views of Ruff, Spotted Redshank and Snipe. In a field close by were three White Tailed Eagles hunting on the ground like Buzzards.

On the way back to Eger we pulled off the road on to a farm track up to a beautiful range of thatched barns guarded by Hungarian Puli of varied sizes. This was one of the nest box scheme sites for Red Footed Falcon and the birds were everywhere with adults and well grown young in and out of the boxes. We had lovely views and spent a good long time studying all the various colours of these lovely birds.

We had a late lunch in local restaurant and a chance to rest in the shade. A great day, but not nearly long enough in a wonderful area.

Day 7

Our last full day and another early start of our choosing. We had good views of many woodland birds especially Grey Headed Woodpecker and lots of families of Hawfinch and Red Backed Shrike. We also had Honey Buzzard and Cuckoo fly through the woodland clearings.

We drove up into the Bukk National Park hoping to see the elusive White Backed Woodpecker and Wryneck which had also been absent from many expected sites. The park also holds good numbers of breeding Ural Owl but no sign of any of these birds for us today. We moved to a small wetland area and had more luck with many birds feeding in the shallows. There was plenty of Wood Sandpiper with Greenshanks. On the far shore a pair of Spoonbills feeding with Great White Egret and Grey Heron. Lots of hawking Martins and feeding Wagtails.

After lunch in a village café we went back to Mezokovesal to see if the Black Woodpecker was still around the site. We heard but didn't see it unfortunately so no photo for John! But the site was full of migrants feeding up in the trees and scrub that bordered the arable fields. We had lovely views of very bright Wood Warblers, Spotted and Collared Flycatchers. John was busy photographing and Roy and I moved off looking for anything else that might have been hiding in the bushes. John re-found us both and asked Roy to ID one bird he photographed. It turned out to be a juvenile Red Breasted Flycatcher and I had missed it!! It could not be found again but a great spot for all sorts of things to turn up.

Day 8

Our afternoon flight back from Budapest came on a very hot day with temperatures in the 30's. We made a few stops on the way to the airport but no new birds. A stop at a village cemetery gave us more great views of Collared Flycatchers.

All in all a good trip with 143 species and many firsts for us both. The countryside was not as appealing as Bulgaria in my opinion and we are not sure we would go again, but great birding nonetheless. The country has a very strong conservation movement and lots of work is done to preserve and prompt wildlife which is very encouraging indeed.

Full bird list available on request.

We stayed at Hotel Villa Volgy in Eger.

Our guide was Roy Adams of Hungarian Bird Tours.

BOSNIAN BIRDING

By Clive Watson

I started writing this piece back in January 2008 on a newly acquired lap top prior to a posting to Rome. Unfortunately packing for the move became a priority and once I had started the Senior NATO Staff Course in the Italian capital, which was then followed by tours in Naples, Brunssum, Afghanistan and at Shrivenham in rapid succession, it well and truly faded into the background. However, having retired from the Service in December, I found myself temporarily with a bit more time than usual and so I decided to finish it, before our move up to the Scottish Borders to start a new life became all consuming. I trust you find my ramblings interesting.

In 2007 the Service granted me an opportunity for some potentially interesting birding in Bosnia between May and November, but clearly, my function as head of Logistics and Infrastructure for the European Union Force (EUFOR), based just outside Sarajevo on an old Yugoslavian airfield would take precedence. However, with the 'safe and secure environment'¹ in place, everyone could reasonably expect a day off a week for personal administration/development and whilst many chose to use the time to recoup lost sleep or to spend more time in the bars of the city, I decided from the outset to get out as much as possible and do some birding, in what is after all, despite significant amounts of superficial pollution and destruction, still an area of outstanding bio diversity and physical beauty. In other words, if I could see past the plastic bags and old clothes clinging to the trees lining the superbly clear rivers and the burnt tyres littering even the most remote mountain top and if I could pick out the birds from the ever present plastic bottles floating on any stretch of water, I was in for a potential treat.

Besides limited time, there were other issues, such as access to a vehicle, the ever present and very real mine threat, a lack of information on where to go and no known kindred spirits. I got round these challenges in a number of ways, first by deciding to take every opportunity I could to make observations, so I would frequently just walk around the EUFOR camp in the evenings with a pair of binoculars (this for some reason seemed to disturb the Bulgarian Guard Force, but eventually they got bored challenging me) and whenever work took me to another location my bins and my note book went with me. Second, if I could get my hands on a vehicle on my day off and if I could find someone to come with me (no single vehicle occupancy permitted), we would head off to a remote looking area. Third, I joined an international walking group, which with the aid of an official Bosnian mountain guide, got itself relatively safely² into some very tasty places. But as it was a serious walking group, the aim was always to cover distance and get up high with no consideration for noise, so the birding was pretty limited, not least because the few rest stops taken were there for the very necessary reason of oxygen and water intake! My fourth and ultimately most productive and enjoyable scheme, was on occasion to persuade my boss's Hungarian driver to get up early on a Sunday morning and drive me close to the top of Mount Igman and drop me off. I would then spend the rest of the day walking back to Butmir (about 15 miles) down the heavily wooded slopes on any tracks that took my fancy. I could not find a EUFOR rule that prevented this course of action and reasoned that if I stuck to well trodden tracks the mines would not get me. Moreover, a good walking stick was handy in fending off the nasty looking dogs which could be a problem when I got close to human habitation. Finally, I acquired the occasional use of a bicycle and, again on Sunday mornings, I would get up early and ride to where the Bosna River emerges straight out of the base of Mount Igman. This was a scenic and quiet area until about 0900 when the crowds started to arrive. It produced a large number of bird species, but I reckon that it was most risky undertaking because of the dangers of cycling on Bosnian roads and because those nasty big free-roaming dogs mentioned earlier thought it great sport to chase bicycles and to try to take chunks out of the tyres.

I kept note of all my observations by species and location, but I did not count the number of birds I saw on each occasion. Thus, I have a reasonable record of what can be found in central and

¹ NATO created and EUFOR's mission to maintain.

² A whole new story.

northern Bosnia throughout the summer and autumn, overall I observed 93 species of which 16 were lifers for me. Below, I have summarised my findings listing the first occasion I first saw a species (and the last occasion for most summer migrants) and the percentage of times (out of a total of 44 occasions) each species was observed.

Species	First Observed	%
Mute Swan ³	2 Jun	16
Mallard	22 May	45
(Northern) Shoveler	3 Nov	2 (ie once)
(Eurasian) Wigeon	3 Nov	2
Hazel Grouse	29 Jul	7
(Common) Pheasant	22 May	2
Black-Necked Grebe ⁴	3 Nov	2
Little Grebe	23 Sep ⁵	11
(Great) Cormorant	23 Oct	5
Grey Heron	22 May	39
Golden Eagle	23 Sep	2
Booted Eagle	27 May ⁶	16
Hen Harrier	7 Oct	2 ⁷
Common Buzzard	22 May	50
(Eurasian) Sparrowhawk	5 Nov	5
(Northern) Goshawk	8 Jul	14
(Common) Kestrel	5 Aug	9
(Eurasian) Hobby	18 Aug	2
(Eurasian) Coot ⁸	3 Nov	2
(Common) Redshank	30 Sep	2
(Eurasian) Woodcock	23 Sep	2
Black-headed Gull	23 Oct	9
Yellow-legged Gull	3 Jun	11
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	20 May	98
(Common) Wood Pigeon	22 May	27
Collared Dove	22 May	5
(Common) Cuckoo ⁹	20 May ¹⁰	11
Long-eared Owl ¹¹	20 May	2
Little Owl	13 Jul	2
(Common) Kingfisher	15 Jul	9
(European) Green Woodpecker	8 Jul	11
Grey-headed Woodpecker	4 Nov	2
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2 Jun	20
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	4 Nov	2
Skylark	27 May ¹²	23
Crag Martin	7 Aug	2
Barn Swallow	20 May ¹³	43

³ All at Bosna Springs, on every occasion visited.

⁴ Along with the duck species seen on the same day (3 Nov) all observed on a area of temporarily flooded pasture.

⁵ Last seen 5 Nov.

⁶ Last seen 4 Aug.

⁷ Harriers (species not confirmed) seen on 2 other occasions in different locations but same habitat.

⁸ As per Black-Necked Grebe.

⁹ Heard 4 times and seen once (a fledgling)

¹⁰ Last seen 18 Aug.

¹¹ Three fledglings in a single tree being mocked by Hooded Crows (one found dead 2 days later).

¹² Last seen 7 Oct.

¹³ Last seen 29 Sep.

House Martin	20 May ¹⁴	57
Water Pipit	7 Aug ¹⁵	9
Tree Pipit	16 Sep	2
White Wagtail	2 Jun	64
Yellow Wagtail	2 Jun ¹⁶	7
Grey Wagtail	16 Jun	14
Dipper	2 Jun	20
Dunnock	28 Oct	2
Robin	3 Jun	23
Nightingale	3 Jun ¹⁷	5
Black Redstart	12 Jul ¹⁸	20
(Northern) Wheatear	20 May ¹⁹	18
Whinchat	7 Aug ²⁰	11
Song Thrush	16 Jun	18
Mistle Thrush	23 Sep	9
Blackbird	2 Jun	34
Blackcap	24 Jun ²¹	9
Whitethroat	20 May ²²	5
Cetti's Warbler	16 Jun	2
Icterine Warbler	16 Sep ²³	5
Chiffchaff	30 Sep ²⁴	5
Goldcrest	7 Aug	5
Wren	16 Jun	23
Spotted Flycatcher	8 Jul ²⁵	18
Collared Flycatcher	2 Jun ²⁶	5
Great Tit	2 Jun	39
Coal Tit	7 Aug	7
Blue Tit	15 Jul	18
Marsh/Willow Tit ²⁷	15 Jul	18
Sombre Tit	2 Jun	7
Long-tailed Tit	15 Jul	11
Nuthatch	16 Jun	18
Tree Creeper ²⁸	8 Jul	11
Lesser Grey Shrike	20 Jun ²⁹	7
Red-Backed Shrike	20 May ³⁰	41
Magpie	22 May	87
Jay	22 May	37
Nutcracker	3 Jun	11
Jackdaw	20 May	98

¹⁴ Last seen 29 Sep.

¹⁵ Last seen 10 Nov.

¹⁶ Last seen 30 Sep.

¹⁷ Last heard 16 Jun.

¹⁸ Last seen 11 Nov.

¹⁹ Last seen 15 Sep.

²⁰ Last seen 23 Sep.

²¹ Last seen 30 Sep.

²² Last seen 30 Sep.

²³ Last seen 28 Oct.

²⁴ Last seen 30 Sep.

²⁵ Last seen 30 Sep.

²⁶ Last seen 16 Sep.

²⁷ Not always positively differentiated, but both species present (Collins Bird Guide 2nd Ed).

²⁸ Glimpses only, but from distribution in Collins Bird Guide 2nd Ed most likely to be *familiaris*.

²⁹ Last seen 4 Aug.

³⁰ Last seen 30 Sep.

Rook	10 Jun	13
Hooded Crow	20 May	100
Raven	16 Jun	50
Starling	27 May	52
Golden Oriole	2 Jun ³¹	9
House Sparrow	20 May	98
Tree Sparrow	20 May	59
Chaffinch	2 Jun	39
Linnet	20 May	27
Goldfinch	20 May	21
Greenfinch	2 Jun	18
Siskin	4 Nov	2
Serin	20 May	18
Bullfinch	14 Oct	7
Hawfinch	16 Jun	14
Common Crossbill	29 Jul	5
Yellowhammer	20 May	9

So now for some observations to try to put some meat on the bones of the list above:

Despite the pollution and large human population around the area of the EUFOR Camp, plant and insect life flourished, providing a varied habitat and food source for a lot of bird species. Relatively primitive farming practices and many derelict buildings, along with a number of water ways, tended to create even more opportunities for birds. Thus in many ways I was surprised by the lack of certain groups of birds in particular duck, warblers and waders. However, most of my birding trips were fleeting and irregular and the thickness of the foliage in the height of summer, especially on the side of Mount Igman, meant I failed to positively identify a lot of glimpsed avian movements and my ability to recognise birds by their calls, whilst getting better, was and still is a weakness. Thus the species list for the area can only be greater than that listed above. However, from what I started to see at the end of my tour, grebe (over 50 Blacked-Necked in a flooded field along with hundreds of Black-Headed Gulls), duck and gulls and relatively large numbers of Nutcracker, I surmise that this area might be a significant stop over point for migrating birds (possibly to the coastal areas of the region), as I doubt they would stay long as it gets beastly cold around Sarajevo in the winter.

The lack of water birds in terms of number and variety was a big surprise given the area has plenty of rivers, boggy areas, ditches and a number of large, but mainly artificial lakes. I did not see a single Moorhen and only once spotted a Coot. Neither did I see a Cormorant on a lake; all those I spotted were associated with some of the larger rivers and further inland that Sarajevo, where they nest as well.

Moving onto the next group; herons, storks and ibises, again another disappointment given the amount of standing water. Only Grey Heron was seen and then only in small numbers until late October/early November, when I often saw larger numbers (more than 50) feeding in flooded/boggy fields; where had they all come from? I appreciate that some of the smaller herons can be hard to see, but I would have thought some of my early morning excursions to the Bosna Springs area would have produced a Little Bittern, a Night or a Squacco Heron (all birds I saw quite frequently in Italy in 2008/9), and what about Purple Heron and the more common egrets? No sighting of White Stork also surprised me given they are quite common breeding birds in central Kosovo (at least they were in 1999) less than 300 miles away to the south.

³¹ Last heard 7 Aug.

Moving onto birds of prey; Common Buzzard and Goshawk (certainly on the sides of Mount Igman) dominated. Whilst I recorded Booted Eagle quite a number of times (from May to August) it was always seen in the same place (over the airfield at Butmir) and only as a singleton. The lack of Kestrels surprised me given the amount of rough pasture which was alive with rodents and notwithstanding the Collins Bird Guide, I did not see a single Black Kite, again a surprise given the amount of carrion and potentially edible rubbish lying around. The one Hobby sighting (up at Tuzla) was particularly good as it involved a pair of adults returning frequently to a small area of wood amid a cacophony of calls to feed at least two fledged young.

In-land Bosnia is obviously not a place to go to see waders and I was very lucky to find a single Woodcock in September. Gulls were also not numerous except for Black-Headed Gulls which suddenly appeared in numbers towards the end of my tour presumably moving west towards the coast from somewhere further in-land. However, the environment appeared to suit pigeons well, with large flocks of Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon being present all the time, so much so that I suspect the few Collared Dove I saw suffered from the overwhelming competition. Moreover, whilst I saw Wood Pigeons frequently, the largest single flock consisted of less than 30 birds (much smaller than some of the flocks of Feral Pigeon), which surprised me given the abundance of wooded areas, a lot of which were dominated by Beech trees, backing onto rough arable farm land; maybe the Goshawks were having a significant impact?

Unfortunately I never had my scope with me when I came across a woodpecker and given the thickness of the tree cover where they were present, it does not surprise me that I only positively identified Middle Spotted and Grey Headed Woodpeckers once and then only after the leaf cover had fallen. I suspect some of those Greater Spotted and Green Woodpeckers (which are common in the right habitat) seen in the summer might, on occasion, have been their slightly smaller cousins.

Given the abundance of the insect life and the obvious breeding success of Barn Swallows and House Martins I am at a complete loss to explain why I did not see a single Swift of any type. I would have thought they would have been common both over the centre of Sarajevo and flying in the mountain tops (where I saw a flock of Crag Martins) like they do in Italy. Similarly, I was disappointed not to spot a Bee-Eater as they are (or were) quite common down in Kosovo and I would have thought the region might have been attractive to Rollers; obviously not where I went.

Robins were not common and, like those in northern continental Europe, tended to skulk about in the bottom of the undergrowth. Nightingales sang with gusto at the beginning of my tour and then went silent quite quickly. The lack of positive warbler sightings was not because of my innate inability to tell one 'LBJ' from another; there simply weren't mainly 'LBJs' present, again a bit surprising. However, it was nice to see 'Spot Flies' taking good advantage of the abundant insect life, especially as I found a successful brood of 5 fledged young being attended to by their parents. Collared Flycatcher was a first for me, and the initial detection was because of their unfamiliar call rather than because of their obvious black and white plumage.

Great Tits dominated the Tit family sightings and were abundant in the autumn moving about in large flocks in the wooded areas. By contrast, Blue Tits were seen less often and only in very small numbers. Like many, I could not always positively differentiate between the Marsh and Willow Tits because sometimes they behaved like good children should do; seen and not heard. Both species of Shrike were predominantly found on the top of the perimeter fence of the EUFOR base (just like in Iraq) as opposed to operating from bushes. I was a little disappointed not to have seen a Woodchat Shrike on my travels, as back in 1993, in another part of Bosnia, they were not uncommon.

Now for the dominant group; the Corvids. Magpies were common and behaved much like ours do in the UK moving around in family groups investigating all potential sources of food. That said, they looked slightly different; their white feathers were more off-white making them look dirty, and their tails did not appear to be quite as long as those of our UK birds. Jays were common in the wooded areas and their numbers definitely increased towards the end of the year. Nutcrackers were a rare site until mid October after which they became one of the most common and certainly the noisiest birds on the side of Mount Igman. Jackdaws abounded and formed huge (many hundreds) mixed flocks with Hooded Crows. Their plumage was different from the birds we see in the UK with the grey areas being much lighter, giving them an almost 'pied' appearance; however, I did not notice a 'distinct pale half-collar'³². Rooks were not common and were seen on only 6 occasions and the biggest group consisted of just 5 birds. This puzzled me until I read Mark Cocker's 'Crow Country' in which he explains the breeding range of the Rook is limited to areas where the ground remains soft enough for them to dig in year round. Hooded Crows were the most common Corvid but acted in two distinct ways. First, a minority behaved like our Crows do in the summer; patrolling a territory centred around a nest site, but the majority behaved like our Rooks, forming huge roaming flocks (with attendant Jackdaws) and when on the ground they moved forward like a plague snapping up large insects and the occasional small lizard (I presume they also feasted on the contents of the nests of ground nesting birds such as the Skylark), before flying onto the next patch of rough pasture. Ravens, whilst common, tended to keep away from habitation and instead constantly patrolled the slopes of Mount Igman, sometimes in small groups.

Both species of Sparrow were very common around human habitation and I found the much more endearing Tree Sparrow flocks to be very confiding, letting you pass to within a few feet of them as they fed amongst the weeded areas. The most notable finch was the Hawfinch and whilst I only found it in one discrete area (Bosna Springs) it was very numerous and quite confiding.

Birding in Bosnia gave me a great deal of satisfaction, helped save my liver, gave me something to look forward to on Sundays and gave me quite a lot of exercise. In the future, as the area opens up to tourists it could become an interesting and rewarding ornithological destination and it certainly deserves a good examination.



Black-bellied Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus aquaticus*) Bosnia Clive Watson

³² Collins Bird Guide 2nd Edition

PROFESSOR GEOFFREY MATTHEWS.

“It is with great sadness that the friends of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands have learned of the passing of Professor Geoffrey Matthews at the age of 89, a long-time advocate for wetland and waterbird conservation and recognised as one of the four “Founding Fathers” of the Convention (with Luc Hoffmann, Erik Carp and Eskandar Firouz). He was educated at Christ’s College, Cambridge, and following the Second World War, during which he served with the Royal Air Force in the Indian Ocean, he returned to Cambridge and received his PhD in 1950. He remained at Cambridge thereafter, pursuing the research in migratory bird navigation for which he was justly famous and on which subject his book “Bird Navigation”, published in 1955 with a second edition in 1968, became the classic reference.

In 1956, Prof Matthews became Director of Research at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, a post to which he dedicated the next 32 years of his life. As such, he was one of the leaders of the team of scientists at Sir Peter Scott’s side that made such progress in knowledge of waterfowl biology from the 1950s onwards. He became Honorary Director of what was then called IWRB (the International Wildfowl Research Bureau, then the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Bureau and now Wetlands International), succeeding Dr Luc Hoffmann in that role in 1969.

Geoffrey Matthews devoted a good part of his career to developing and promoting the concept of an intergovernmental convention on the conservation and wise use of wetland habitats and resources. The initial call for an international convention came in 1962 during a conference which formed part of Project MAR, a programme established in 1960 following concerns at the rapidity with which large stretches of marshland and other wetlands in Europe were being “reclaimed” or otherwise destroyed, with a resulting decline in numbers of waterfowl.

Over eight long years, a convention text was negotiated through a series of international meetings, held mainly under the auspices of IWRB, the guidance of Professor Matthews and the leadership of the government of the Netherlands and Prince Bernhart. Finally, at an international meeting organised by Mr Eskandar Firouz, Director of Iran’s Game and Fish Department, and held at the Caspian seaside resort of Ramsar in Iran, at which Dr Matthews served as Rapporteur-General, the text of the Convention was agreed on 2 February 1971 and signed by the delegates of 18 nations the next day.

For nearly two decades after that, Prof Matthews remained closely involved with the growth and mission of the Ramsar Convention. He remained active in matters of waterbird research long after his retirement in 1988. Following his retirement he wrote the definitive history of the negotiations for a wetland convention *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Its history and development* which has now been re-issued in PDF format in commemoration of his passing. (<http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/Matthews-history.pdf>).

Prof Matthews will be sorely missed by the Ramsar family, but his many contributions to our cause will always be remembered.”

Editor’s Note: I first met Professor Matthews while visiting IWRB from Arabia in 1969. I was particularly struck by the time he gave me, a casual amateur birdwatcher, as I was introduced to his team of scientists at Slimbridge. Among the team was Dr Malcolm Ogilvie who RAFOS “Islay Mist” participants have since met. I also met Erik Carp and Mike Smart and maintained contact with them for many years. At the end of my first visit to IWRB I found myself ‘volunteered’ to the just-invented post of IWRB Arabian Correspondent. Professor Matthews showed great interest when I described the SM-2 Snark missile navigation system that utilised star-matching mapping. He said birds have been doing that for millennia. Trident missiles (and ducks) still use a similar system today.

“Birds in a Cage” by Derek Niemann

A book review by John Le Gassick

I received a copy of this book for Christmas, I don't think that I would have chosen it myself, but I really enjoyed it. I felt that it proved what a marvellous pastime bird watching is and how, no matter where you find yourself, there is always the opportunity to indulge in it.

The four main characters in the book are: Peter Conder a 2nd Lt in the Royal Corps of Signals, John Barrett a Squadron Leader pilot in the Royal Air Force, George Waterston a 2nd Lt. in the Royal Artillery and finally John Buxton a 2nd Lt. in the 1st Independent Company. They were all young well educated and united in a love of birds, they were all detained in various prison camps for nearly the entire War apart from George Waterston who was repatriated in October 1943 through ill health. The book is nicely illustrated with line drawings of the pertinent species by Rob Hume and there is a map for each of the prisoners showing their movements between the different prison camps. The only occasion that all four were together was in Warburg in October 1941. Wherever they were they recorded the birds and kept detailed records of any nests within their compound, some nesting in boxes constructed by the prisoners. The habitat varied depending on which prison camp they were in. Warburg was in the middle of flat treeless plain exposed to bitter winds. James Cadbury who was stationed there for his National Service recalled “In Winter there were no birds, no Robins, no Blackbirds. Nothing” At the other end of the scale there was Eichstatt in a well wooded valley containing a reed fringed tributary of the Danube. No matter what the surroundings were, observations were made and meticulous records kept, this despite the fact they had no binoculars! I found the observations of Wryneck and the massive Spring migrations particularly interesting as well as a series of letters between one of the “supporting cast” AJB “Barney” Thompson and his brother Peter, they give a snapshot of a bird-rich British Isles in the 1940s. The book also contains some very fine pieces of poetry written by John Buxton whilst in captivity, sadly he did not continue with this after his release.

Post war John Buxton accepted a Fellowship in English at New College Oxford and in 1950 published a monograph in The New Naturalist series “The Redstart” using material gathered whilst a P.O.W. He was also a founder and council member of the Wildlife Trust and Editor of the Birds of Wiltshire. George Waterston established the Fair Isle Bird Observatory, was a founder of Scottish Wildlife Trust and ran the Scottish Ornithological Society. John Barrett settled in Pembrokeshire, as Warden at Dale Fort where he ran the Field studies Centre for twenty years before setting up the Pembrokeshire Countryside Unit. Peter Conder was Warden on Skokholm until 1954 when he joined the RSPB ending up as Director. He was Chairman of the Cambridge Bird Club (now the Cambridgeshire Bird Club) from 1975 to 1979, Vice President from 1981 to 1986 and President from 1987 until his death in 1993.

Note: Thanks for the “heads up” John. I also enjoyed this excellent read. It is now available from Amazon UK/books. Ed.

“THE WRITE STUFF”

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NOTICES.

1. The cost of mailing this Newsletter has risen and continues to rise. Your Committee proposes to offer members the option of reading the Newsletter on line instead of each getting a personal hard copy. The on-line version would have several advantages including full colour for all pictures instead of the limitation of 'covers only' colour of the printed version. The present proposal is to only produce a small number of printed copies to meet the needs of those members who do not have access to e-mail. This would greatly reduce the drain on RAFOS funds and, I think, enhance the appearance and durability of the Newsletter. Each member will get a message from the Secretary seeking views on this proposal. Please respond.

2. You may notice that a RAFOS Membership Application Form appears on a page of this issue. The idea is to encourage each member to pass this on to a friend while extolling the joys of RAFOS membership. Membership is now open to everyone. Those members who do not have a friend may pass the application to a passing stranger. If this cunning plan works perfectly we could double our membership this year. However, if lethargy continues to rule then RAFOS will gradually go the way of ash trees and dodos.

3. I thought the famous confusion on Islay between "corncrakes" and "cornflakes" was a one-off until I stood in our garden after a gale and said, "There are a couple of slates loose on the roof." Her puzzled reply was, "What are snakes doing on the roof?" Anyone got a spare hearing aid?

4. Maybe a bit too late for Christmas presents but still plenty of time for your next anniversary. A very clever piece of kit called "Bird Voice" is available from Mantra Lingua TalkingPen that records bird song and also plays back pre-recorded calls and songs of a large selection of birds. The small, hand-held battery-powered gadget is easy to operate and comes with simple instructions. See www.birdmike.co.uk. You may order by phone at 0208 44 55 123. Better still, if you mention RAFOS membership they will give you a generous discount. **Strongly recommended.**

5. On 10th August 2013 the Yorkshire Naturalists Union is having an excursion (VC62) to May Moss and Langdale Forest, North Yorkshire Moors, at which members of all the different sections of YNU get together to record wildlife at a particular site in each vice county. The area includes the tracker site at RAF Fylingdales and, as it is the 50th anniversary of the Station and parts of the site will be open, RAFOS members have been invited to join in. The area also includes the Hawk and Owl Trust Fylingdale Moor reserve. Mick Carroll, who works at RAF Fylingdales, has offered to show people around. For more information please contact him on mickcarroll47@btinternet.com.
6. RAFOS members are advised that the 48th AGM of RAFOS is planned for 16th November 2013 at RAF High Wycombe. Further details will be provided with the Autumn mailing of the Newsletter.
7. The next RAFOS visit to Islay is due to take place on 26th October to 2 November 2013, staying at Kilchoman Cottages as usual. If you are interested in joining us or would like more information, please contact Dick and Jan Knight at theknights@ntlworld.com or on 01993 840029.
8. The ninth Conference of the European Ornithologists' Union, EOU2013UK, will be held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich on 27-31 August 2013. Full details are available at www.bou.org.uk. Click on "Conferences" and scroll down to EOU2013UK for details.
9. The eagle-eyed new editor of the born-again RAFOS Journal tells me that there was an incorrect caption to a picture on page 15 of the RAFOS Newsletter No.86 Autumn 2008. The picture is of a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and not a European Bee-eater as printed. Thanks Ken. (Honest, didn't happen on my watch, sir!).
10. The back cover (inner and outer) features a few (i.e.16) seabird pictures to continue the bird recognition quiz feature. Entries to the editor asap. Common name and scientific name will do this time. Fantastic prizes may be arranged by the Committee.
12. I may have found THE new birding destination in Spain. How about a late October trip to Allucant which is about half way between Valencia and Zaragoza? This is a small village with good accommodation close to the shore of Laguna de Gallocanta. There you can see and photograph the 50,000 Common Cranes that winter there. Yes, 50,000 cranes! There are also 150 resident Great Bustard, Little Bustard, Rock Bunting, Dotterel, etc etc. The local bird list is impressive. Go to www.allucant.com and look around. Also click on 'Gallocanta' on Google Earth to look at the area and accommodation available. A single bed plus breakfast (and VAT) in a 6 bed dormitory will cost £86.17 PER WEEK. Posher accommodation is available. Sounds good to me.
13. The Sub-Department of Animal Behaviour at the University of Cambridge have asked RAFOS to participate in some ornithological research. Details of a short and simple survey are at www.surveymonkey.com/s/corvid_perceptions. Please check in there and complete the survey before the end of April. It takes about 10 minutes to complete.
14. As you will remember from the Chairman's Address (see page 7) RAFOS needs a new logo. Your brilliant ideas to The Secretary Bird, please. Rough sketches are acceptable. (No dodos.)
15. Would you expect to see a Sanderling high up in the Swiss Alps? The Wash Wader Ringing Group recently caught one that had been ringed at Col de Bretoler Ringing Station 1925m (6315ft) above sea level in the Swiss Alps, probably the highest Sanderling ever ringed.

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Do you/your family* object to the Society holding your membership record on computer:
YES/NO * (*Delete as necessary)

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YES/NO * (*Delete as necessary)

I agree to abide by the constitution of the Society: Signed:

Date:

Please return to: MIHAYES RAFOS Membership Secretary 3 Oakmead Rd Merios Valley Llanharan Pontyclun CF72 9FB	MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY: Please tick (3)
ORDINARY :	£20.00 <input type="checkbox"/>
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**ROYAL AIR FORCE
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To: The Manager: (Name & postal details of Bank or Building Society)

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Please pay to **Lloyds Bank plc, GLOUCESTER (sort code 30-93-48) Account Number 1890688**, for credit to the **Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS)**, the sum of _____ Pounds (£ _____), the first payment to be made on the _____ day of _____ (Month) 20____, and continue to pay that amount on the first day of January in every year to the debit of *my/our account until further notice.

This order cancels any previous order in favour of the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society.

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