



**ROYAL  
AIR FORCE**  
ornithological  
society



**2017 AGM News and awards**

**NEWSLETTER No. 105 Spring 2018**



Best Overseas Photograph: Cape Bunting by Martin Routledge



Best UK Photograph: Great Grey Shrike by Dick Yates

Front Cover: Malachite Sunbird, by Martin Routledge



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*By John Le Gassick*

## THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 2017 RAFOS AGM

I'd like to start by once again thanking Dr Alex Banks for his presentation - I'm known as one who struggles with Gulls and often refer to them as 'Vermin' as you'll have noticed from the Fiendish ID Quiz posters so if he can keep my interest he must be doing a grand job - well done. We'll hear from Keith Cowieson later about how Alex's project may translate into some activity next year.

As most will know, the position of President of the Society remains vacant following Dolly Parton's retirement from the Service so it falls to me as a life vice-president and nearest available mug to say a few general words about the RAF. Maybe not a state of the nation address but at least something of an update which I hope many who have retired will find of interest. As a Service we remain very busy indeed on operations - predominantly in the Middle East where we're part of the coalition air effort against Daesh. Much of this goes unreported in the national media but I'm privileged to attend the Friday morning operations round up so I get to hear on a weekly basis about the number of combat sorties being flown by Typhoons, Tornados and the remotely piloted Reaper. We hear about their targets and the activities of the coalition of ground forces who are gradually squeezing Daesh out of their Syrian locations and all the other activity going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. But operations aren't all about the Middle East and I note we've got people in the Falklands, East and West Africa, supporting NATO Air Policing in the Baltic and soon back in Romania, training teams in all sorts of unusual places and of course supporting the broader Defence Exercise Programme. The Reds have recently completed a Middle East tour mainly in the Gulf area but making it to Karachi too; at home, we're busy preparing for the RAF100 events next year and then we'll have Saif Sareea III in the autumn. All this with an RAF that is a couple of thousand below strength but still steps up to the plate at very short notice to provide hurricane relief in the Caribbean. I'm delighted to report that the Reserves at Brize Norton were instrumental in meeting the initial surge of out-loading aircraft for that operation. Of note the final recovery of a Puma from there took place only last week. In such a busy Service it is perhaps not surprising that few have time for birding or to join a Society such as ours but we will keep plugging our message and try to recruit more serving members where we can.

I mentioned last year that in the last Strategic Defence Review the government decided to provision 2 more Typhoon sqns, a new Maritime Patrol Aircraft the P8, and extended the out of service date for Tornado and the Sentinel. Some of this is proving really difficult to deliver and of course money is tight as ever. But as we approach our centenary we're in pretty good shape and CAS is preparing to reset the Service for the next 100 years with a particular emphasis on delivering expeditionary air capabilities with a modernised workforce that draws on regulars, reserves, contractors and civil servants.

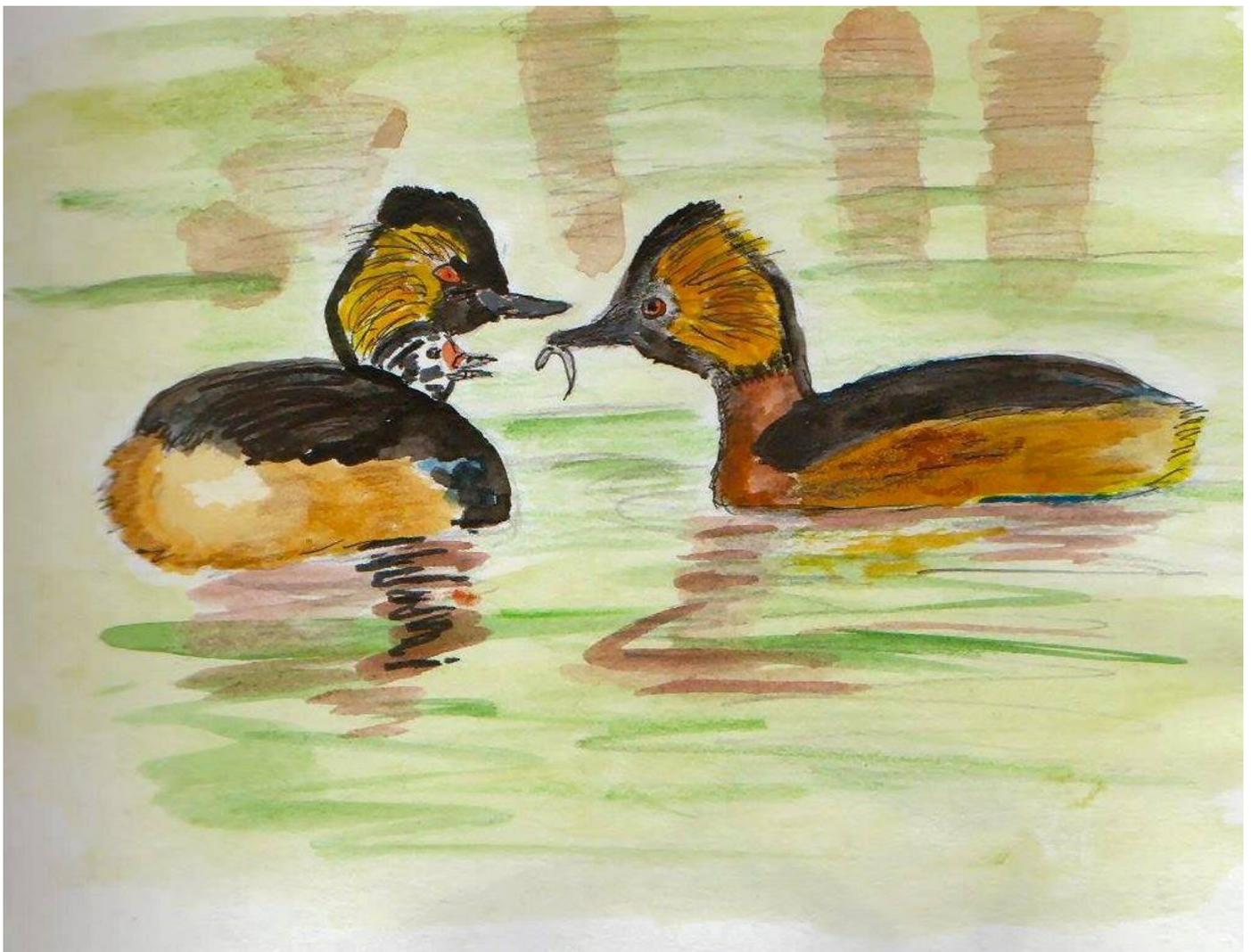
So to my task as Chairman; first of all let me thank you again for coming – it really is good to see the stalwart support we enjoy. We're going to discuss later whether we've got the format for the AGM right or whether there is room for development. I note, our membership may still be bumping along at around a hundred or so but it is encouraging that in this our fifty-second year that numbers are continuing to rise, albeit slightly, and the activities of the Society are as interesting and diverse as ever. I'm not going to eat the FALO's sandwiches but we have been very active this past year with some new events. Importantly, once again we've supported the citizen science activities of a number of organisations but in particular the BTO where our input is always welcomed and recognised in their publications. This year marks 75 years of wetland bird counting of one sort or another and the BTO WeBS team held a conference at Martin Mere in September where Keith Cowieson gave an outstanding (so he tells me) presentation of 20 odd years of RAFOS support through Expedition WINTER DUCK.

Now as usual I need to record formally some thanks:

Your Committee have worked hard this year and deserve your thanks as usual. Some posts are up for renewal and I'm grateful to those who will stand again to carry on the good work. One, the post of Membership Secretary, is open for offers which we will discuss under the appropriate agenda item; can I just say at this point a firm thank you to those who have completed their tours of duty on the Committee and record formally the Society's thanks for your efforts. Team Knight, with Dick back on his feet and re-harnessed to the task, have once again done a first-class job of keeping us all on our toes and I have to note Colin Wearn's hand, even though he has forsaken us to attend the AOS's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner in London, in sorting today's venue and catering out with the Mess Manager and his staff. Without all this support the AGM would not take place.

That said, the Society thrives on the activities of the Members every bit as much as the attention of the Committee. As I said, you'll hear from Keith Cowieson about some of the successes enjoyed on expeditions various - I was particularly delighted to see how much interest there was in the new idea of a weekend away to the Somerset Levels - a soon to be repeated adventure. But there is a diverse array of activities out there from serious surveying such as WINTER DUCK to more general birding such as our traditional New Year gathering at Slimbridge. Keith has some exciting opportunities to share for next year's plan but remember anyone, and I mean anyone, can propose, plan and run an event or expedition - variety is the spice of life.

And on that note I'll hand over to the Secretary Bird to get on with business.



Example of the artwork in John Le Gassick's painted calendar for 2018,

Winner of the Arts and Crafts Award



John Le Gassick receiving his prize for best written article 'Wintre Sun - 2017' in Newsletter No. 104. John also won the art and handicraft prize for his hand-painted calendar.



Dick Yates receiving his prize for best uk photograph



Martin Routledge receiving his prize for best overseas photograph



Brian Lyon receiving the prize for best novice photograph



### **Frank Walker Award - 2017**

In the recent past the Frank Walker Award has become something of a lifetime achievement award rather than, as originally conceived, the recognition of an outstanding contribution to the aims of the Society during the past year. The Committee, in trying to restore the Award to its original purpose, considered who had made an outstanding contribution during the 2016/17 period.

Scott Drinkel – conceived, initiated and presided over the photographic extravaganza that was Watch the Birdy generating interest through a dedicated Facebook page in photographing as many British birds as possible. The response was significant from members of the society, friends and in some cases members of the public. Not satisfied to rest on those particular laurels he went on this year to conceive, initiate and (yes you've guessed it) preside over the Big Base Birdwatch project. This endeavour was similar to the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch but expanded to technical and airfield sites of RAF bases. The project attracted interest from a large number of bases and a broad church of birders with all levels of ability took part with the results being logged under the RAFOS name in the BTO BirdTrack system. The Society's aims have been enhanced as a result and a useful contribution to the BTO's citizen science has been achieved as well. For these two outstanding and self-generated initiatives the Committee had no hesitation in agreeing that Scott Drinkel deserved public recognition through the presentation of the Society's premier award.

### **Frank Walker Award – Nominations for 2018**

The Committee felt it was worth reminding members that although the recipient of the Frank Walker Award is decided by the Committee we are always open to nominations from the membership at large. The easiest way for a general member to nominate an individual is by e-mail to any committee member before the end of September so that the nomination may be considered at the October committee meeting for award at the AGM. Any nomination should contain a brief rationale pointing out the particular attributes of the candidate that the Committee should consider.

# Birding the Rainbow Nation – A Game of Three Halves

*By Martin Routledge*

After I'd posted a few photographs from my recent trip to South Africa on the RAFOS Facebook page, our esteemed Newsletter Editor asked me to write a short article on my experiences there; if only to whet the appetite of others. So, on a wet windy Wednesday in November when I noticed the weather in the Kalahari was +31C and sunny I thought I'd muse a little on our latest adventure to the Rainbow Nation. First, this wasn't a birding trip as such – my foreign jaunts with the First Mrs R are never billed as birding trips (more wildlife trips) - so the locations and time of year are not selected because the season is just right to catch the breeding antics of the lesser-spotted, black-backed, what-not bird. As an aside, when birding in Africa generally there are a couple of things to note about naming: first there are lots of different species in each family so saying, 'look there's a Swallow' just ain't good enough; and secondly there is a tendency to call it how it is so Red-throated Cliff Swallow and White-browed, Robin Chat .... you get the picture. Incidentally, while down this rabbit hole there are 18 different types of Swallow listed in Sasol's Birds of Southern Africa which covers the area south of the Kunene, Okavango and Zambezi rivers.

Our latest adventure took in 3 major habitats (hence the title) and I'll say a few words about each but first to dispel any myths, we believe South Africa is a beautiful country and we've always felt completely safe there even when driving off the beaten track. For the most part the road infrastructure is better than Britain; indeed in the Western Cape you'd be forgiven for thinking you were in the South of France. Prices are very good – of course you can find the very high end at European prices but on the whole this is a country where £35 will buy you a good dinner for two with wine. Boutique hotels and guest houses abound and they're excellent value for money. The place is well connected with wifi being common and e-business is the norm. That said, mobile phone reception can be patchy out in the farming areas but in no way is this a third world experience.

We flew overnight with the World's Favourite Airline (or so they'd have you believe) into Jo'burg – this is a highly competitively priced route with something like 5 direct flights a day from Heathrow with at least 3 different mainstream carriers, so you've lots of choice depending on your next move. On this occasion our onward flight was with a private air-taxi company into our Kalahari safari location but previously we've used internal flights which again are numerous and convenient. While on the travel arrangements, at the end of the trip we flew back to UK from Cape Town – this route is less well served and hence more expensive. The canny, cost-conscious traveller with time on their hands might instead route back to Jo'burg on an internal flight and fly home from there – worth thinking about.

First stop the red sands of the Kalahari on a private game reserve called Tswalu – owned by the Oppenheimer family of diamond mining fame. Something in the region of 110,000 hectares (about twice the size of the Isle of Man) of arid savannah with no more than 30 guests wandering about in it. Wildlife included all the usual desert species except for Elephant – so Lion, Cheetah, Leopard, Oryx, Sable, Roan, Springbok, Wildebeest, Giraffe, Cape Buffalo, Warthog, White and Black Rhino, Hyena, Zebra and the illusive Pangolin and Aardvark. Birding was great with a raft of species easily spotted without even trying. Around the lodge we had Chats, Martins, Swallows, Weavers, Sparrows, Bulbuls and Shrikes in abundance. Further afield the larger Bustards, some water birds and a slack handful of various raptors. All in all, a wonderful place.

Next stop was down to Cape Town (again private flight) where we picked up a hire car and stayed for a few nights – we've been to the city before and love the area. This time we managed to get up Table Mountain (last time the cable car was closed as it was too windy) but even so the cloud had rolled in so the view was non-existent. Top tip if visiting Cape Town is to book cable car tickets on line (you get a small discount) and the ticket is valid for 7 days so only use it if the weather looks set fair. On this trip we also took in the Cape of Good Hope nature reserve, the Botanical gardens (surprising good birding here) and the Penguin colony at Boulder Bay. All



Kelp Gull, Cape Town (above) & Cape Weaver , Cedarburg (below)

By Martin Rouledge



worth doing, as is a trip to the Constantia winelands and a winery or two (we did that last time). Lots of Cape Town hotels will also arrange city tours or tours out to the Stellenbosch wine region but organised tours aren't our thing. As for birding habitats this area is a mix of coastal, urban and fynbos (a South African scrub a bit like a more flowery version of Mediterranean scrub). Consequently, we added a few more to the trip list including Cape White-eye, Cape Robin-chat, Cape Spurfowl and Cape Sugarbird but the most intriguing was a Spotted Eagle Owl living in the tree just outside our room.

We drove from Cape Town (The Mother City as South Africans call it) north for about three hours on a decent road (the main route to Namibia) into the Cederberg mountains near a town called Clanwilliam – which is famous for wild flowers at this time of year. We were staying on another private nature reserve called Bushman's Kloof – this style of lodge is referred to as 'soft safari' because there are no predators and you can walk the game trails if you wish. This was a really tranquil retreat and while the wildlife was less abundant than in the Kalahari the scenery made up for it. The habitat here was transitional between three South African ecosystems, fynbos, arid savannah and Karoo. The region was settled years ago by the San people and one of the unique features of the area is the bushman cave art which has survived remarkably well. To the trip-list we added Rock Kestrel, Black-crowned Night Heron, Karoo Thrush and many more. Our final stop on this trip took us back in to coast and fynbos territory but this time on the west coast while wending our way back to Cape Town International. From Clanwilliam we made a beeline for the coast at Lambert's Bay where one can find Bird Island – a Gannet colony. Time of year wasn't quite right for breeding Gannets but there were still plenty about even if it wasn't quite Bass Rock. On the plus side, the South African Wildlife Authority has built a very good hide and visitors centre which gets you up close and personal for photographic purposes. The drive from here south to our destination at Paternoster took in some lagoons and estuaries (full of Pelicans and Flamingos) and our final stop was in another fabulous boutique hotel (The Sandloper Ocean) on the beach at this otherwise nondescript fishing village. Just down the coast was another small local nature reserve with good views of Cape Cormorant, Cape Bunting and the inevitable vermin species Kelp Gull and Grey-headed Gull. The hotel was set in the dunes and as part of their rodent management plan they'd put Kestrel boxes around the buildings – all were occupied by Rock Kestrels and we saw them take several furry things during our stay.

The final route back to the airport took in another nature reserve at Langebaan which was part of the West Coast Nature Reserve. Sadly, the weather had taken a turn for the worse and this day was overcast and breezy, but we had some great experiences with an Ostrich family, saw some Blue Cranes and found White-throated Swallows nesting in a bird hide we visited.

To misquote some actor stealing a line from some general ..... We'll be back!

Booted Eagle,  
Kalahari





Pictures from the Cape Town area: Grey Headed Gull (above) and African Oystercatcher (below)

By Martin Routledge



## FOR LISTENERS OF A NERVOUS DISPOSITION .....

### Or What Happened To Migration?

*By Dick and Jan Knight*

At a loose end for autumn we booked a chalet overlooking Scapa Flow on Orkney for 2 weeks. It started to go wrong on the trip out on Thursday 21 September! We were standing at the gate at Edinburgh Airport, waiting for the flight to Kirkwall with just 3 others: a lecturer in renewable energy from Heriot Watt University and a couple from California. We had an interesting conversation for half an hour before we were joined by the other passengers. At Kirkwall Airport we got to the hire car desk just behind the Californians. They presented their paperwork from a major rental company but were told that booking had never been approved by the subcontracted company on the island. The husband 'phoned the major company who spoke to the Kirkwall company. It seems that information had not been passed on by the major company but a car would be available the next day. Our booking was alright so we collected our Ford Ka. To help fellow tourists we offered to take them to the bus station in Kirkwall, 3 miles away, so they could get a bus to their hotel in Stromness. Four up with luggage, it was a tight squeeze and the Ka struggled up the hill into the town. Having dropped them off we went to the supermarket for provision then set off to the chalet. Just outside of the town we met a council lorry beside a road closed sign. With no obvious diversion, Jan grabbed the map and asked the council team for help. It appeared that there had been a near-fatal accident on the main road that morning. One of the council team showed Jan an alternative route on the map which involved 3 miles on a minor road then 1 ½ miles on a single track road to regain the main road. Not as bad as the 50 mile diversion in similar circumstances that some Islay Misters will remember but not what you want after a long day travelling. We unloaded our kit at the chalet, made a cup of tea and sank onto a sofa to watch the Gannets and Velvet Scoters fly past over Scapa Flow which was 400 yards away.



A Churchill Barrier, Scapa Flow

First light on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> was at 0620. We were awake so we had a cup of tea while staring out of the window. Gannets were plunge-diving, Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails played on the lawn with Swallows hunting above, 2 Hooded Crows stood on fence posts, a Raven flew by and a ring-tailed Hen Harrier shot past a foot above the grass and 10 feet from the window. Greylags and Curlew came in to a field by the water's edge and Herring Gulls plus a single Kittiwake kept the attention levels up. After a while a dozen dive boats and work boats made their way from Stromness to wherever they were going to work. And this was the view most mornings.

After breakfast we set off to tour the south-east. On the outskirts of Kirkwall we found a new road, not on the map, beside which a new hospital is being built. Why is it being built next to the funeral directors? At St Mary's, at the south end of Mainland, there is a lake where we found Mute Swan, lots of Wigeon, Mallard, Tufted Duck and some Eider. Then on to Bur Wick at the bottom of South Ronaldsay where the ferry from John O'Groats comes in, but with the wind blowing 25 to 30 mph from the south there were only a few gulls moving. St Margaret's Hope provided some of the common birds of towns and also over 50 Rock Doves on a sandy cliff. We carried on down a minor road to an art gallery at Hoxa where a young lady exhibits her paintings and her mother exhibits her tapestries. I fell in love with a monochrome picture of a view in a rain storm, but I couldn't justify the cost. As we left a Sparrowhawk flew up over a stone wall, across the road and along a field ditch at high speed. South Ronaldsay, Burray and 2 small islands are connected to Mainland by the Churchill Barriers. These are 4 embankments of concrete blocks built on the order of Winston Churchill after the blockships sunk in the channels failed to stop Gunter Prien getting his U-boat into Scapa Flow to sink HMS Royal Oak. The barriers now carry the road which gives access to these islands. They provide a little shelter for birds and we found Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Scoter, Oystercatchers, Redshanks, Turnstones, Sanderlings and a Grey Heron in the water or on the shore. Barrier No 3 has an old pier which is a good loafing spot for gulls and Cormorants.

The early morning stare out of the window the next day added a pair of Red-throated Divers and Guillemots to our garden list. As there was a large cruise ship due in at Kirkwall we decided to tour the west side of Mainland despite the rain and the southerly wind gusting to 45 mph. In a farm field near our chalet we found a large flock of Lapwings and Golden Plovers. The Bay of Skaill is a well-protected sandy bay which had Sanderlings, Ringed Plovers, Oystercatchers and Black-headed Gulls with a small flock of Pintails flying over. On to Marwick Bay, which is owned by the RSPB, where we added Common Gull, Snipe, Wheatear, Rock Pipit and Linnet to our list. A mile inland from there is another RSPB reserve, The Loons (not to be confused with The Loons just outside Stromness). This area of wetland can be viewed from a small hide and had Mallard, Shoveler, Gadwall and Teal as well as Grey Heron and 2 ring-tailed Hen Harriers. We found our first Kestrel of the trip on the drive home.

We stayed in on the morning of Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> due to the wind and rain. We had good views of a Raven on a fence post as well as our regulars including the ring-tailed Harrier. The rain eased to drizzle after lunch so we ventured out, spotting a pair of Stonechats by the track to the road. Just over a mile away is Houton which has a small terminal for the ferry which routes around Scapa Flow. A couple of Black Guillemots were in the bay but nothing else new. Further east is Waulkmill Bay, another RSPB site that had a flock of Wigeon sheltering. When the rain increased we gave up and went home to stare out of the picture window whence Jan spotted a Peregrine dashing past.

Monday – wind southerly at 25 mph in drizzle. We'd been advised that a Red-breasted Flycatcher had been seen near the cemetery on Burray so that is where we went - needless to say we didn't find it. Back on Mainland we headed east. On a sandy bay near Upper Sanday there were 5 Great Black-backed Gulls feeding on a dead seal. The eastern most point of Mainland is Mull Head. It is a mile walk from the car park across grass with boggy patches. The view is magnificent, there were lots of Meadow and Rock Pipits but our only new bird for the trip was a Shag on the cliffs. Also out walking was a couple from Witney where we lived for a long

time before moving south - small world. Back at the chalet we watched a mixed flock of about 30 Common and Velvet Scoters heading westwards over the water; could they have been the same birds that headed east at breakfast time?

Low cloud and the southerly wind gusting 30 mph on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup>. As well as the usual suspects at breakfast time there were 5 Snipe in the longer grass by a barbed wire fence. We drove across the middle of Mainland to Finstown then up the east coast to Tingwall. There I tried and failed to get a decent photograph of a model Black-backed Gull on a porch roof. Walking back to the car I was exhorted to visit Betty's reading room, next door, by a Canadian woman who'd been born in Orkney and returns almost annually. Betty's reading room is a small cottage with only one room which has been turned into a library in tribute to the lady. All 4 walls are lined with books: if you take one out you are asked to return it after reading or swap it for another. Further up the coast is the Broch of Gurness. In the bay beside this ancient site were over 30 Eiders and over 30 red head Mergansers. At the north end of Mainland we found a field covered in lots of gulls, a mix of Black-headed, Common and Herring. On the way home we stopped at a field at Kirbister with lots of Lapwings and Golden Plovers and, trying to hide among them, 2 Ruffs.

There were 4 Ravens down near the water on Wednesday morning along with 20 Golden Plovers to start with, and more came in later. Houton was quiet apart from a field of Rooks and Woodpigeons. The Peedie Sea, a small artificial lake possibly connected to the sea at Kirkwall, had Mallard, Redshank and Herring Gulls. The MS Bremen, a small cruise ship with only 184 passengers, was due to sail at midday, the last cruise ship of the season. The piper seeing her off struggled in the wind but he had an appreciative crowd from the ship's rails. After a coffee to warm up, we went into St Magnus' Cathedral where our visit was accompanied by beautiful music. The organ had just been serviced and the 2 engineers were testing every part of it with a medley of pieces. After we commented on the sound they gave us a demonstration, gradually pulling out all the stops leading to a powerful and triumphal finale. The museum in Kirkwall is worth a visit, and watching 2 teachers trying to keep track of and control their class of primary school children had its moments. Waulkmill Bay on the way home had only a few Eiders and Turnstones.

The wind on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> was back to gusting 40 mph from the south in rain and drizzle. At breakfast time the field by the water had about 100 Curlew, 100 Golden Plovers, 50 Lapwings, a bunch of Greylags and some Godwits. Thankfully some more of the latter flew in so we could confirm both Black-tailed and Bar-tailed. A falcon shot past the window but was gone before we could confirm it was a Peregrine. The pair of Stonechats were back by the track to the road when we set off northwards. At Loch Skail we found a Long-tailed Duck, a few Goldeneyes and some Tufted Ducks. Speaking to an RSPB volunteer later, he said these may have been the first sightings this season of the first 2 species. The car park at Skara Brae was full of coaches so we skipped the cultural visit to this Neolithic village. Marwick Bay had the usual waders, gulls, pipits, a Wheatear and Jackdaws. The Loons produced a couple of new birds for the trip – a Robin was singing by the hide entrance and after a while 2 Short-eared Owls quartered a reedbed in the mid distance. Some Snipe in front of the hide insisted on demonstrating the effectiveness of their camouflage. We diverted to Stromness on the way home to visit the headland south of the town. The direct road was closed which led to an interesting navigation exercise round back streets and when we got there the only bird in sight was a Tystie (Black Guillemot).

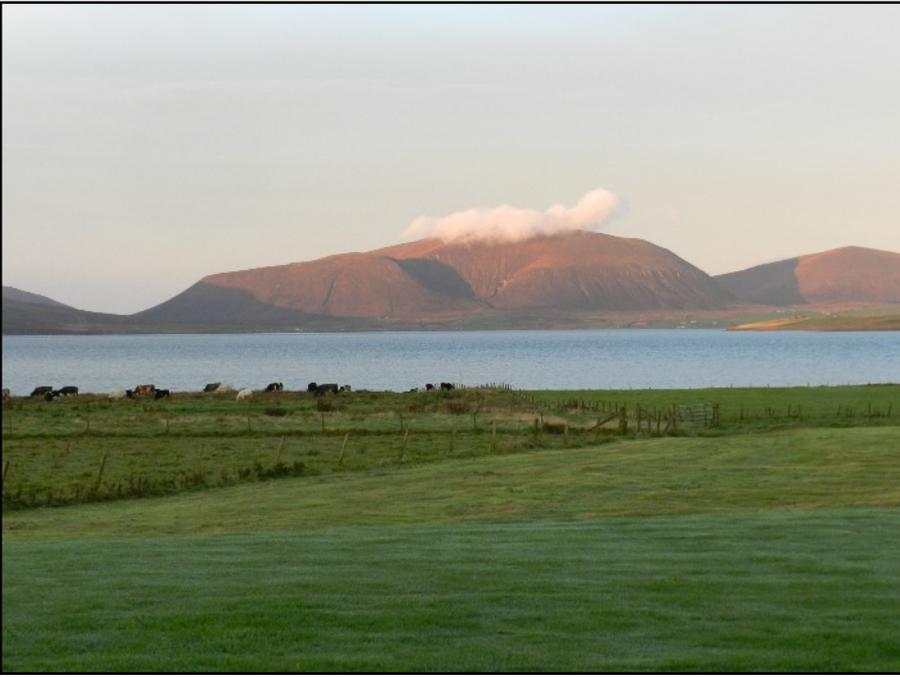
Still gusting 40 mph on Friday but only drizzling. The spy network reported a Red-breasted Goose in a field west of Kirkwall on the single track road we'd been diverted through on our arrival. We found the field full of Greylags and nothing else in sight. The RBG could have been hidden behind a wall or a fold in the ground but we couldn't find a spot to view the field legally from the other side and later rumours suggested it had moved on. The few times I've tried twitching it has always failed! Finstown produced a variety of common birds. In the bay was a

couple of Red-breasted Mergansers and a couple of grebes. We were happy that one was a Slavonian Grebe and eventually worked out that the other was a juvenile Slav. In another attempt at culture we walked round the Stones of Stenness and the newly found Barnhouse excavation. Just up the road is the Ring of Brodgar, another ancient stone circle. Between the 2 stone circles is the Ness of Brodgar. Over the last few years there has been an important archaeological dig there, with a grandstand for gofers – the dig closed for winter a few days before we arrived! We called in at Stromness for some supplies on the way home. In the car park was a Range Rover belonging to an outdoor activities company. The bodywork was covered with a picture of a reedbed, the number plate had a Scottish registration but the flag of St George! A quick stop at the Bridge of Waithe got us another new bird – Little Grebe.

Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> was actually a fine day with scattered cloud and the wind only southerly at 10 mph. The morning Curlew count in the field by the water was about 150 with all the usual species present or passing through. Waulkmill Bay gave us a Pheasant and some Hooded Crows. In the pool at St Mary's the duck species had been joined by Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser. Onwards to South Ronaldsway then a slow return with frequent stops. Wind Wick cliffs were beautiful and had only the second flock of Linnets that we'd seen although we'd had fleeting glimpses of probables previously, and our first Chaffinch. St Margaret's Hope Bay had Ringed Plover, Snipe and a Grey Heron plus a bird we didn't see often – a House Sparrow! Churchill Barrier No 4 has a small car park with a path to a sandy beach. Clinging to a Marram Grass stem was a Wren which dropped down into the clump, never to be seen again. The other side of the road had Oystercatchers, a Shag and some Tysties. At the top of Barrier No 1 onto Mainland we turned right at the totem pole (don't ask) to Graemeshall (again, one of several places with the same name) where there is a lake on one side of the road and a rocky beach on the other. There is a small pull-off on a mound beside the road which gives a good view over the lake. As well as all the gulls and ducks we found a new species – a Coot. The beach is good for Turnstones and Rock Pipits among the seaweed. Newark Bay had Bar-tailed Godwits and Sanderling. The farming calendar was running later than on the south coast. Given the good weather they were out everywhere busily harvesting and bailing before the weather changed. In the evening we went out to dinner at a restaurant on the road to Kirkwall. Coming down the hill at Houton a car shot out of the side road just in front of us, slowed to 30 mph and proceeded at that speed, weaving slightly unable to keep in their lane. One of us downed a large glass of wine when we arrived at the restaurant. Driving home after a lovely meal a hole in the cloud developed which cast an almost perfect circle of moonlight about a kilometre wide on the surface of Scapa Flow.

We listened to the weather forecast on Sunday and decided to have a day in and watch the grand prix. The Curlew numbers were up again and we counted 113 Cormorants on a beach on Graemesay. Two Hen Harriers flew past, one of which settled on a fence post for a while. By 11 o'clock we had very heavy rain with the wind gusting to 50 mph and white caps on the water. It eased somewhat at about 4 o'clock. A Wheatear tried for food on the lawn and 2 Snipe tried to hide in the long grass under the fence. Across the water on Hoy we were able to see a waterfall, which wasn't there before, tumbling over a cliff. That stretch of Hoy cliffs has some lovely names. In 2 miles there is Bring Head, Nose of the Bring, Candle of the Sale, White Breast, Red Geo and Flossy Groups.

Between 0730 and 0800 on week day mornings BBC Radio Scotland comes from Kirkwall, with local news, activities, club and society meetings, livestock market prices and the local weather forecast. It's well worth listening to, if only to get an ear for the accent, eg Charolais cattle are Charlies. On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> October, the announcer preceded the weather forecast with, "For listeners of a nervous disposition, it may include the words gales and severe gales!" - another day in. On Hoy the pop-up (pop-down?) waterfall was no more. The weather gradually worsened again with heavy rain and westerly winds gusting 60 mph but we got a garden list of 17 species including a ring-tailed Hen Harrier.



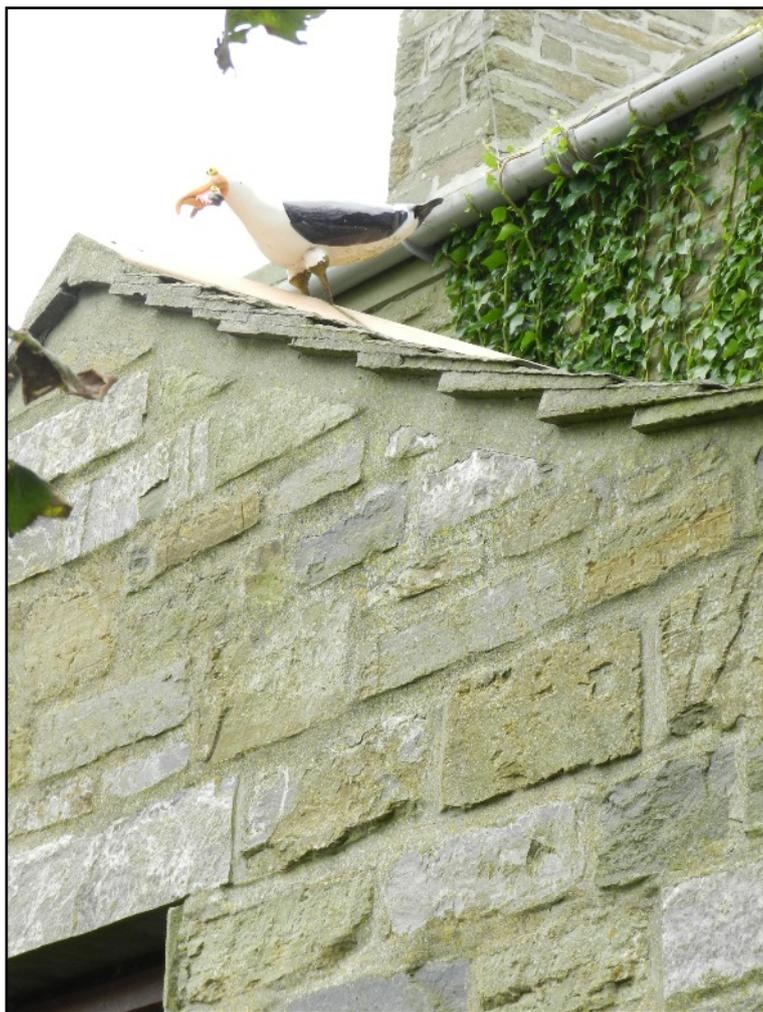
Above and Right; Buxa

Below: Burray



On Tuesday the local radio slot had the cruise ship stats: "There were 113,000 passengers this season. Next year a ship with 4950 passengers is booked for 2 May: whatever your views on cruise ships you may wish to put that date in your diary." By lunchtime the worst of the showers were over and the wind eased. We went into Stromness to see Tim Wootton, a wildlife artist (some of you will have seen his painting of Snow Buntings and a Rock Pipit hanging in our living room) but he was out: back at 1330 said the note on his shop door. We wandered round the Stromness art gallery that was founded with work by Barbara Hepworth and her school before they moved to Newlyn, had a cup of tea then mooched round the harbour, watching a dive boat prepare to leave with a party of French divers going out to dive on one of the German High Seas fleet notwithstanding the wind! We got food for supper, wasted some time in a book shop but still no sign of Tim so we went home. For the first time in our visit, that evening the 2045 ferry to Stromness from Scrabster sailed through Scapa Flow rather than round the west of Hoy, presumably because of the gusty gale force winds.

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> was our last full day on Orkney, with westerly gales to severe gales, and hail showers. The garden list for the day was 16 species. In a field near the water was a wooden structure like an over-sized bird table with an arched roof standing about 3 feet tall, presumably to hold food for sheep. The Hen Harrier landed on the roof, then slid gently down it in the wind and fell onto the ground behind the feeder, losing all dignity. Back to Stromness at lunch time where we found Tim in. He suggested we look at The Loons in the area of the reservoir, (not the RSPB reserve of the same name) for the chance of Lapland Bunting and Whooper Swan. The white caps were coming over the top of the reservoir, no swans or buntings but we did get another species for the trip – Great Tit.



We drove to the airport after breakfast on Thursday. At first we thought the road had been gritted but it was spillage from a grain trailer. In 100 yards we counted over 20 Ravens feeding on the grain. True to form the journey was not without incident. Our flight from Edinburgh was delayed while the incoming aircraft had 2 passengers removed by the police who then had to get statements from the crew. Pure coincidence that there was an international football match that evening.

You will have picked up a theme by now: strong to severe gale force winds from the south or west. When we visited Orkney in the autumn of 2009 we saw lots of summer birds passing through with, gradually, the numbers going down but the number of winter birds going up – we saw migration in action. On this visit it was imperceptible. Then, we saw 78 species: on this visit we saw 70 and the combined total is 90. Our bird of the trip was definitely the Hen Harrier. All the ones we saw were ring-tails and we got some very good views of them, sometimes close up. We hope Tim can capture it for us.

## **A Summer Spent With our Local House Martins**

*By John N Wells*

The House Martins that Sue and I have seen since we moved to this house in the centre of Ramsey, Cambridgeshire back in 2004 have always come and gone each spring and autumn and I have often wondered where they nested and not really followed it up in any great endeavour.

*What the BTO were doing and why?*

I knew there were a few House Martins on or around Bury Road not far from the house but after reading the Spring edition of BTO News, I saw that there had been 2 previous years' study on a small-scale between 2009-2013 on mapping House Martins helping to determine the survey strategy and methodology. Thus the full year's survey in 2016 went ahead, providing a robust population estimate. The summer 2017 season's data would assist in data gathering timing of nesting, the number of nesting attempts, and breeding success on how it varies across the UK. Furthermore, by additional information about nest sites, locations it was hoped to investigate what other factors influence nesting performance. The 2017 survey was a repeat of the 2016 survey following the same methodology.

*No2 Bury Road, Ramsey.*

After a little thought I went and looked where the birds were flying to and in the main they seem centred on an old pebble-dashed double eaves-fronted house opposite Blenheim Road. The house was double pitched at the front with numerous wooden roof trusses and the colony was using this house in the main. So with trepidation I knocked on the door of 2 Bury Road to ask if I could view the roof trusses to front sides and back. As I walked through the open driveway, I wondered if it was two houses, each with a double gabled front, but nobody was in. So I briskly looked along the eaves and lo and behold lots of Martins were exploring and some were in-build with quite a few early signs of 'cups' of mud attached to the newly painted white pebble dashed walls. The side and back also had scaffolding erected. So I went across to our house and got together a pack and a letter to leave for the householders to read. I thought this might be a good way to get them on side as I had no-clue who lived there or if they even wanted House Martins messing up their newly painted walls. On returning I left my plastic folder in the lovely, old front entrance that was sheltered by a pitched roof and lots and lots of deep red clay side-lying tiling both on the roof and in the brickwork detail where the walls met the roof work. The flat tiles were cut in such a way as to add details. This build detail was also mirrored higher up where the roof trusses were stepped into the walls and gave the house a really old but handcrafted appearance. I thought I best not over-stay my observations in case anyone was watching and thinking bad of me. So I thought I would go back when there were cars on the drive. Ususally I had seen, 2 BMWs lined up in front of the garage and both had been seen earlier in the week on the drive. Over the previous day or two, one was parked at the front as this also had space for an additional guest's car.

A couple of days later, when the 2 cars were back in the drive, I went and pressed the doorbell and introduced myself. To say the occupants were pleased about the project was an understatement. They were both more than happy with me to do the study and also offered some advice and numbers of breeding attempts from 2016. They had visitors planned for the weekend but I was welcome over any day after that.

On inspection it was a real shame was that the decorators had painted over the 'mud-rings', the evidence of nest count from 2016 but Bill and Marilyn had counted approx. 14 nests from 2016 they said, so at least I had a gauge-total of increase or not as the case may be. Whether these were all occupied and or successful they didn't know but they loved having the birds and

managed the droppings, noise, and very active colony pretty well, by all accounts - quite an achievement, with up to half a dozen nests outside your bedroom windows.

What I wasn't ready for was the view at the rear of the house. The back wall had a large conservatory and the centre between two rooms, with the scaffolding above to access the whole wall and roof areas above. Bill was at this point explaining how 'hacked-off' he was with the decorators, as he wanted the wall space freed up for the birds to build. He felt the scaffold was holding up breeding success and he had called the company on numerous occasions to get the walls finished at the rear as a priority. There must have been; I estimated 12-18 birds working away feverishly trying to build on the rear wall at any one time. I was speechless - the house was 'alive' with martins, coming and going and bringing mud for their nests albeit in the very early stages of nest build.

So we arranged a date for a chat, and I explained how the survey was undertaken and we arranged another date to have a go at counting. What was most unusual was that Bill said I could come and go, feely at any time of the day! They were obviously very trusting to let some 'random' in and out the drive and via their back patio gate, even providing garden furniture in the 3 locations to sit and observe the comings and goings and record the visits of the birds as they went about their business.

### *Methodology.*

There are approx. 7 pages of on-line data to record the birds and breeding success; so J have précised it down considerably for the article.

Step 1-SELECTING YOUR STUDY SITE. The primary aim was to monitor one nest, but with two or more on a building it was left to the observer to decide how much they could take on. In my case this house/site pretty much selected itself, as I felt it was hugely important with this many birds, especially as it is felt that House Martins are in a steep decline in the UK.

The survey method was to view from ground level, but the main criteria was to be able to monitor the site throughout the breeding season, starting around mid-April and ideally visiting each week, with a minimum of at least one visit once per-week. With holiday booked, the BTO allowed you some leeway to miss a week, but this was no problem for us, as we weren't going away until around the dates of the birds departing. There was a chance that birds continue breeding or with young in the nest right up until October but that was some-way off. So after some lengthy reading we started understanding the survey methodology and any hurdles in completing enough coverage of nest visits between the two of us. Reading the data, August could be tricky and determining deserted or 'non-active' nests did turn out more perplexing but more later on that. The paper described using sub-teams to help achieve best coverage. This would be tricky and although I counted 99% of the visits Marilyn did assist on the odd occasion whilst we both got to grips with how to count.

We coped easily once I had come up with a system for 'identification-Sub sites' and nest i/d itself; by either nest letter or number codes. I finally settled for letters followed by a number if 2 nests were in the confines of the gaps between roof trusses. This in the end turned out to be a 'red herring' as what I recorded as Nest A1 and A2, just turned out to be one over eager pair who built a very wide nest between a corner edge of the back wall and the first roof truss. Once I had the nest confirmed the occupants as one pair I dropped the code 'A2' and went on recording it as 'A1'. (See sketch below).

By lettering each nest from A to Q and then coming up with a naming convention for each sub group with the colony, I had a convention I could utilise. I came up with 5 sub sites, 4 of which

became active and one never really got 'going' as such, as the birds explored nest building but never got past small mud patches on the wall; thus giving the code 'N0' = No nest present. The five nest sites were named as follows:



#### Sub-site 1 - The Driveway

The total of trusses monitored with nil, partial, or completed nest building between the trusses were as follows:

Sub site 1: A to N. 14 nest sites.

Sub site 2: A to Q. 17 nest sites.

Sub site 3: A to L. 12 nest sites.

Sub site 4: A to D. 4 nest sites.

Many of the adjacent trusses and walls were explored but had little or no mud, so for ease of recording I kept the letters 'in-use' even though a nest was never actually started, or started but not completed. This data was what the BTO required, as failed or partial nest-building was to be recorded. A further problem for Bill financially was that the builders had erected a safe platform over the conservatory to gain access to paint the wall, but this was in the middle of the territory of sites 2 and 3. Bill made many a call to get the painters back to finish decorating to allow the adults to nest and use 60% of the rear wall. He thought that the birds were affected by the scaffolding. This may explain why they opted for the side driveway wall and extended the nest sub-colony here onto the driveway and on both front walls of the left gable.



Adult feeding chick

### Previous Totals.

Bill estimated there were 14 active nests on his house in 2016. This year we could compare against this total and ensure the numbers were accurately monitored. In hindsight, a survey in 2016 would have been a splendid project and gathering 2 years of data no-doubt would have been more beneficial to the scientists at Thetford. Still it was 2017, and this year's data for a colony of such a size would be valuable.

### STEP 2 – REGISTERING THE SITE

Initially, the BTO asked surveyors to register each site. This was mostly on-line but with a back-up paper option. The on-line version linked straight into the BTO and gave them readily viewable soft data. It also encompassed details about: 1. House or Building type. 2. Building Age. 3. Number of Storeys. 4. Number of completed nests, on first visit. 5. Number of occupied Nests in 2017 if known if you were not monitoring all the nests on the building. Giving estimates where possible, all of the data could be edited later in the season and changes made if you made an incorrect entry. This I did on many occasions, as it was troublesome remembering each code, each nest state from the previous visit, especially as or if I mislaid the MOD Form88 note book. On the BTO site under the House Martin survey are some great viewing applications. One was a map of UK similar to Birdtrack, with zoom capability for your region. It gave you access to each individual colony or nest site and enabled you to see its size and state of nest build and state of breeding and youngster age against local colonies in your region. I worked out from this map that my colony on No2 Bury Road had the most nests per single building in the area between Northampton and Norwich with my study being in the region of 24-29 monitored nests on one house! Not bad eh? Of course not all these sites came to full nest fruition as birds did not complete all sites between trusses and I assume that these none-completed moons or semi cups

were started by males tempting females or the pair just changing their minds on nest suitability, build strategy and or location proffered.

For STEP 2. My colony and Building Type, selection criteria were as follows:

- 1. Building Type:** Detached (Code; **DET**). A building containing one main unit that is not attached to other buildings, include inns, hotels, small blocks of flats and police stations in this category if they are located on a stand-alone building. Other categories on building types; were SEM; Semi-detached. TER; Terrace, BAR; Barn or an agricultural building. FAC; Factory/Industrial building. MUN; Municipal building or large complex structure. CLI; Cliff or other natural site. BRI; Bridge, OTH; Other man-made structure such as water tower, jetty.
- 2. Building Age:** My house, on speaking to Bill and Marilyn was built post war and in a part of the town that linked large Mansion properties in Bury along the Bury Road to High Street, Ramsey. Built (Bill knew) approximately 1944. Codes in this category were; **NEW** = BUILT SINCE 1990, **MOD** = 1945-1989, **MID** 1919-1944, **OLD** = BUILT BEFORE 1919, **UNK** = Unknown. Our survey house at number 2 Bury Road was thus; **MID**.
- 3. Number of Storeys.** On which the colony was located. Non-residential were recorded as '1' numerical one. Our study site was '2'. 2 Storeys.
- 4. Number of complete natural nest on first survey visit.** A completed structure fully built (apart from the entrance hole) and thus was ready to be used. My count in this category was '0' as none of the birds had yet got that far. A good time to commence the survey I reckon!
- 5. Number of nest occupied in 2017. (If Known).** This category was for the total of occupied nest on the building in this year. Remember this was the last of 4 years work so other folk may well have had other data. At the end of 2017 [in October I had completed data on 24 Occupied and successful natural nests and 1 occupied and successful artificial nest].

### STEP 3 PRELIMINARY VISIT.

The preliminary visit codes were to tell the scientists about the site and were initially to be undertaken before the start of any nesting activity, preferably by mid-April. I was a little late for that start date, as I hadn't even decided to take on the survey. I understand the date was to allow for birds arrival and determine start date if they arrived unexpectedly. My first visit proper with owners onside was 26 May - possibly late in comparison to other colony watchers. By mid-April; this allowed those who had partaken before to determine the birds' arrival, nest commencement date from the dates of preliminary visit. Forms in this section were available on-line to print and record. Also there was a site diagram and a plotter to put were the extent of the colony was on the building/structure and on which side(s) of the building etc.

I deemed myself to be inexperienced at the start, as I had never actually monitored a live colony, or even a nest from build to hatching. My counts whilst at RAF Odiham were just that; counts of nests – not monitoring everything that the BTO asked for. My first timed visit was recorded as 27 May 17 and from then on, I continued an average on one visit per week for each of the 4 sub sites albeit obviously on different days when time was tight, but by rotation it evened out over time.

The trials by the BTO showed that experienced surveyors could count 10 nests at any one time; more than this would give inaccurate data. I concur! At busy times it was nearly impossible to watch and count as the birds flooded in calling, streaming, squabbling and building, all in and around their partners and neighbours, on adjacent structures. It was hectic! Some days it was nearly impossible but after this busy period it did settle down and one thing I have taken from this study (and there are many) was that not all House Martins build full convex cups with holes at the entrance. Many of my nests albeit Code N4; Completed nest, had no entrance hole during the egg phase and even into early young hatching and being fed. Most were a basic cup shape at

- Is that because they left it too late to complete the hole? As the young were therefore hatched and young needed attention and feeding? Leaving nest completion duty till later or the second brood?
- Do they lay whilst the cup is open, closed or both?
- Maybe had the mud source run dry, so birds were unable to complete a full bowl-shape and nest entrance
- There was evidence of 3 possibly four mud colourations in nest 'rings' as the build progresses
- Who knows – the scientists will find from all this data

It shows that by taking part in surveys you increase your knowledge and understanding and start questioning through your observations.

#### STEP 4 the MAIN SURVEY VISITS.

During the breeding season the BTO aimed for weekly visits to the nest(s) or colony. During these visits it was hoped to pinpoint the precise timing of nesting. Twice weekly or daily visits would help here, but with such a large colony I was aiming for 1 or 2 visits a week at best to all 4-nest locations. Observation periods were set at 15 minutes or greater for each nest or group. The guidelines stated a visit for a few minutes would capture if young were still present in all nests. So flexibility was key. In the main my visits were between 10-20 minutes on average per group.

#### STEP 5 (OPTIONAL): 10-MINUTE TIMED COUNTS.

This was an optional count overing a 10 minute period to determine adults visiting the nest and determine build stage visits or activity and were assigned the codes ('AB') the other criteria for Timed Counts were during actively feeding young with Code ('AF'). The web site had a tab to show 'timed counts' with separate down-loadable data on each Sub-Groups' timed counts.

#### Nests Becoming Damaged.

Most of the nests stood up to task in holding and protecting young and were successfully built. The only real failure was nest A on Sub-site 1. Here a pair built a smallish nest right on a front corner of the driveway wall to adjacent front wall. Without any side support on the front RH edge, the nest fell away at the egg-laying stage. That apart I feel the rest were successful but did show signs of use late in September as small sections fell away, possibly by weight of young or age or fragility.

Nest failure Codes were available for this occurrence and 'EG' was assigned; nest gave way (collapsed) with eggs inside was assigned. There were many other nest failure codes.

a. Codes 'EG' – when eggs were in the nest.

All other Codes 'E\*' had 8 failures could be summarised; as nest damaged intentionally by man/unintentionally by unknown causes and or eggs predated or usurped by another species.

b. Codes 'J\*' (suffix) when young were in the nest.

All other Codes 'J\*' had 8 failures when young present in the nest.

c. Codes 'X\*' (suffix) At unknown stage.

Codes allocated for various reasons summarising 8 Intentional and unintentional damages caused by man/another species/predation and unknown stages.

#### Breeding success by each Sub Site

Breeding success was hard to gauge as a non-professional but my estimate of nests used and likely young hatched or seen was by counting young at the nest hole or when adults returned to feed and heads appeared. My estimates were as follows (with a caveat these are my assumptions):

Site 1 - Drive	Site 2 - Rear RH	Site 3 - Rear LH	Site 4 - Front Gable LH	Total
9 Mud nests ■ built	9 Mud nests built	4 Mud nests	2 Mud Nests	24 Mud nests
1 artificial nest; erected - successful	2 artificial nest; erected - not used	2 artificial nest; erected - not used	1 artificial nest erected; unused	6 art' 1 art-used
8 nests held young, (incl; 1 artificial)	7 nests held young	4 nests held young	2 nests held 2 young; Code 'VY'	/
1 nest collapsed Code site: A	Some x3 nests had broken elements in Sep (after fledging)	Nil broke	1 site unused- Code site 'B'; no nest built	/
Success rate: 16 young hatched/counted	Success rate: 13+ young hatched/counted	Success rate: 6 young hatched/counted	Success rate: x4 young hatched/counted	39 young (approx.)
1 artificial erected, during build period (§)	2 artificial nest erected when scaffolding up/during build period	2 artificial nest erected when scaffolding up/during build period	1 brood at both nests	

Key:

- 'VY' Visible Young (young observed at nest entrance).
- + Likely more young than visually apparent
- § possibly a pair on; take-up used. Possibly the pair from broken nest; Code A
- Mud nests at ■ Code: N4



### Predation and affects on Nest success.

The BTO instructions asked for signs and visuals on any predation by other species, either locally or directly at the nest colony. I had 2 such records, both were raptors but both were not actually affecting the nests but could have had an effect on breeding success as follows:

- Kestrel Date: 6 Aug, time 19:35-45 but right or rear garden – on a pass.
- Sparrowhawk Date: 29 Aug, time 09:10. Visual and audibly agitated adults overhead

### SUMMARY.

I thoroughly enjoyed the survey and it made me get out and do proactive local study. It was a push meeting the survey aims on visits but I feel for 4 active sub-sites and the number of nest building attempts and actual success of nests there will be considerable amount of data collected. Just running a data report on the BTO site shows the amount of data gathered as follows:

- Colony size: 57 possible or actual nest locations monitored and notified
- Visits: 74 visits to view Sub sites/Colony
- Dates Start 1<sup>st</sup> Visit: 26 May 17
- Date End last visit: 20 September 17

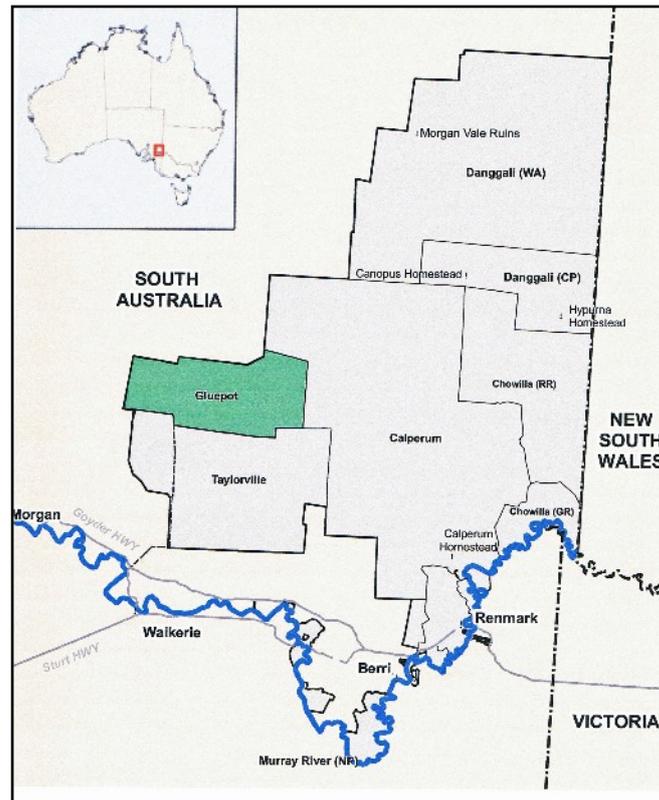
I wish to thank (via the Newsletter) Bill and Marilyn Price and their daughter Diana for allowing free access to come and go and sit quietly in their garden listening to the running fountain of the Pond and count birds which was lovely. On their part it was amazing letting a complete stranger into their home and garden, at most unusual times (05:30-21:00). I don't think the 2 Highland terriers minded me too much on their 'patch'. Although as guard dogs I did sneak past them on the odd occasions when they were fast asleep. I did enjoy the company of both hosts. Also meeting new friends and with Bill, as we shared a beer or cider on occasions. A terrific summer and I now feel I know a little bit more on how a colony of house martins behaves. But probably NOT as much as Bill and Marilyn, because they share a full summer night and day with 'The Visitors'.



# GLUEPOT

By Dick Yates

Gluepot!! Gluepot? I hear you ask. Yes – **Gluepot** – it is a 54,390ha, Birds Australia Reserve in South Australia (see map) north of the Murray River about 65km from the country town of Waikerie. It had been on my radar for a few years and as Daphne and I found ourselves driving from Canberra to Adelaide last October we decided to drop in and see what we could find.



But naturally it wasn't as easy as all that. Visitors are very welcome to the reserve: however, there is only very limited accommodation and if you wish to stay overnight you are expected to camp. Now bush camping and Mrs Yates, in computer terms, are mutually exclusive algorithms! I had to find a way of getting us into the permanent accommodation that is set aside for people doing approved scientific work on the reserve. For example, when we were there a ringing course was underway and while the 2 instructors were in the permanent accommodation, the students were bush camping.

I e-mailed the senior ranger and he suggested that I contact a chap called Rex Ellis, a well known local man and bit of a celebrity, who, in his younger days, ran camel treks into the desert and has written several books about his exploits. Apparently, he was well known and respected on the reserve and could probably get permission for us to visit and stay overnight in the accommodation, provided it was available. I did; it was; and Rex arranged for us to stay for the nights of 13/14 October 2016. Further, he suggested as we were driving from Canberra on 13 Oct we could stay on his Paddle Wheeler which he had moored on the Murray just below his property. For not a cheap price, all this was fixed up and on 13 Oct we left Canberra for Rex's place. For a few days previously we had been in contact with Rex because there had been heavy rain in the area and there had been a good deal of flooding, but Gluepot's substructure is very sandy and porous and the water had drained away: but not so for our journey west. The main Sturt Highway was flooded in several places so we had to take a more northerly route along the Western Highway, and when we dropped south onto the Sturt again we ran into some flooding. But we made it OK.



Not only were roads flooded but the Murray River was several feet above the normal level and the landing stage to Rex's Paddler was underwater, so he had it moored to a tree about fifty yards upstream. Getting to it involved a walk along a narrow, like 9 inch wide, rocky track, which disappeared completely for the last 5 yards, until directly above the vessel and then to slide on ones bottom about 10 feet down onto the deck, trying to avoid falling into the river. The 20 yards along the track gave Mrs Yates a bit of a stir, but the 'sliding on bottom' bit ended in revolution and you can see why.



So we returned to the half-submerged landing stage and Rex said his wife would drive us about half a mile downstream and he would get the 'tinny' and ferry us to the Paddler. That worked OK.



The Paddler – note paddle wheel at rear



Mrs Yates in 'tinny'



We settled into the Paddler, Rex cooked us an evening meal and we enjoyed a bottle of wine before settling down for the night.  
Dawn on the Murray next morning was bright and beautiful.



But did you see any birds? I hear you ask.



An Australian Shelduck swam by, a Peregrine Falcon stood guarding its nest from a perch just above the boat and a Pacific Black Duck looked out from its nest hole trying to decide on whether to jump. A moment later it did!



About 0800 Rex picked us up in the tinny and after meeting up with his mate Colin, who was to accompany us to Gluepot, we set out for the reserve. (All our gear, bedding and food was in the trailer.)

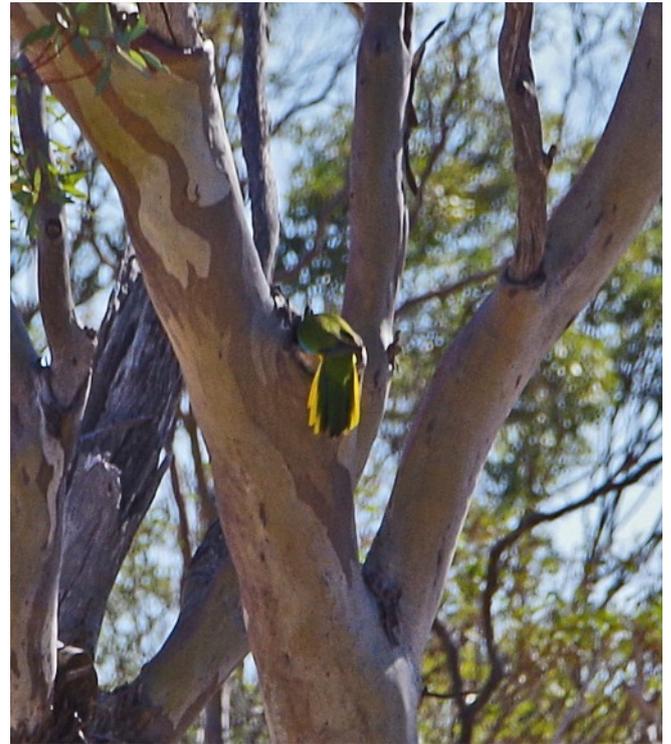
At this point I should mention our target birds for the venture. Gluepot is supposed to be one of the most reliable sites for Malleefowl, naturally we couldn't find one. However we did find 3 'lifers': Gilbert's Whistler, Chestnut-breasted Quail-Thrush and Scarlet-chested Parrot, among several others that we had only seen once or twice.



Gilbert's Whistler



Chestnut-breasted Quail-Thrush



This tree was where Rex had found a Scarlet-chested Parrot nest a couple of years earlier and the bird was reported to have used the same tree the previous year. We staked it out and for half an hour - nothing. Then Colin suggested the old snake/goanna trick - rub the trunk with a stick to simulate a predator climbing towards the nest. It worked a treat – a bird shot out and disappeared.

“What was that?” I asked.

“No Idea!” Was the reply, “But it should have been the parrot. It will return, we’ll wait”. So we waited. After about 45 minutes the female came back and sat in the tree above the nest mostly hidden by leaves. (I have a lovely photo of leaves and a very blurred head.) After a further 10 minutes or so she dropped to nest hole and went in. I just managed this shot as she disappeared.

That covers my target birds; now a bit more about the reserve and some other birds we saw.



This is the visitor centre, fairly new I think and containing a lot of info about the reserve and some of the activities that go on there. Accommodation consists of about 10 bedrooms and an adjacent ablutions block; there is also a dining-room kitchen and a recreation area. There are plenty of tracks throughout the reserve and 5 pretty good hides close to watering points which attract birds, especially morning and evenings. If you want to know a more about the reserve go to <https://gluepot.org/>



White-eared Honeyeater



A 'just left the nest' Dusky Woodswallow



Mulga Parrot



Australian Raven



Owlet Nightjar



Brown-headed Honeyeater



Yellow-plumed Honeyeater



Chestnut-rumped Thornbill (I think)

We saw quite a few more nice birds on the trip but not actually at Gluepot. Firstly, a quartet of Rosellas:-



Pale-headed Rosella



A pair of Crimson Rosella on our friends' feeder



Yellow Rosella



Adelaide Rosella



White-cheeked Honeyeater



New Holland Honeyeater



Little Wattlebird



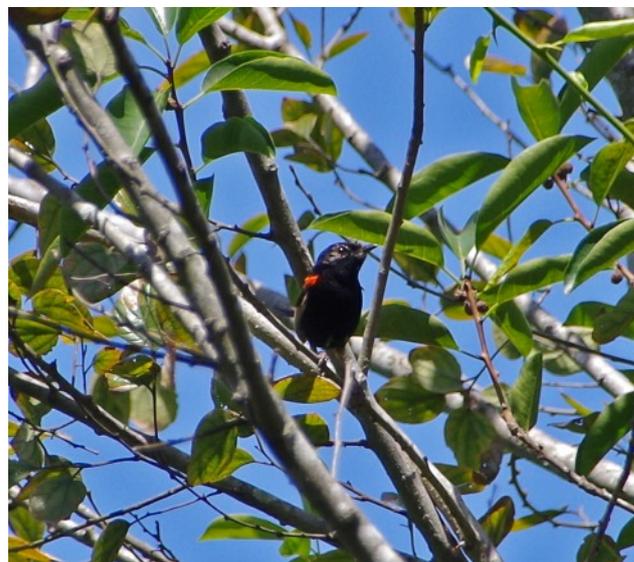
Red Wattlebird



Superb Fairy Wren



Variegated Fairy Wren



Male Red-backed Fairy Wren

## **'The Birds of Oman' by Jens Eriksen & Richard Porter**

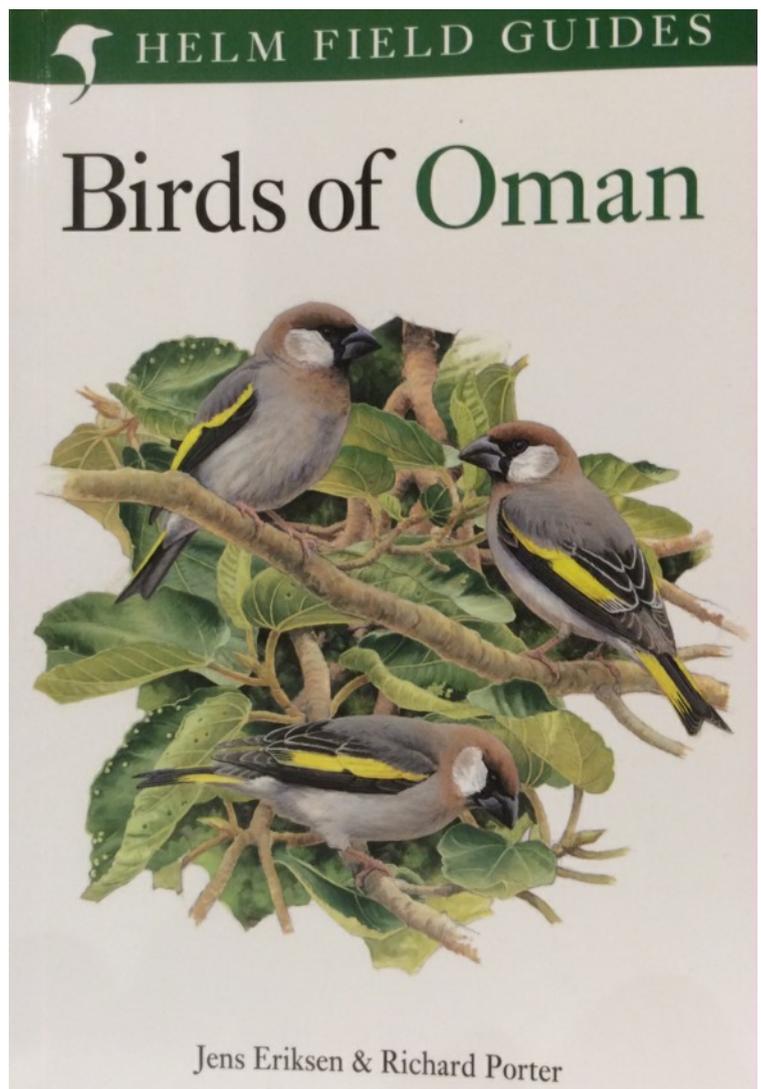
*Review by John Le Gassick*

I was fortunate enough to win book vouchers at this year's AGM and decided to buy a new publication which was due on December 14th "The Birds of Oman" by Jens Eriksen and Richard Porter. One of my book tokens was for the article that I had published in the Newsletter from my short visit to this ornithologically rich part of Arabia, which I believe is becoming increasingly popular with Bird Watchers as it is a safe country to visit in the present uncertain times in that part of the World. I am also hoping to return next year at a slightly later date to witness the Spring Migration, so I need to be prepared.

The book is a paperback in the "Helm Field Guide" series and is attractive in a glossy cover with a front cover illustrated by a picture of the "Arabian Golden-winged Grosbeak. Like most modern publications of this type the first few pages have the Foreword, Acknowledgements and Introduction before getting started on the list of species. These only occupy sixteen of the two hundred and sixty two pages. The Foreword is written by Khaled Anis Irani the Chairman of BirdLife International. In the Acknowledgements there is a list of familiar names including Mike Gallagher, Mike Jennings, Frank Walker and Mike Blair.

The illustrations of the 528 species are nicely presented in an uncluttered fashion and to my eye give an accurate depiction of the salient features. The species list follows that of the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) which is the list used by OSME. There is the normal two page section on Bird Topography, again nice and clear along with a few words on voice and habitat. A certain section of the membership I am sure will be thrilled by the illustrations on page 123 where the authors go to great lengths to explain the subtleties of separating Heuglin's, Steppe and Caspian Gull! All good stuff. The species maps are nice and clear depicting three categories: Resident, Migrant Breeder and Passage/Winter Visitor. Extensive use has been made of the excellent maps prepared for the "Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia". Beside each species there is a two letter code specifying the bird' status: Resident breeder, Migrant Breeder, Passage Migrant, Winter visitor, Vagrant and Escape.

In conclusion I think that the book is an ideal companion in field (or desert for the pedants amongst us). Nice size, clear illustrations, text brief and to the point. The distribution maps when in new territory I find very useful with species like the Palestine and the Purple Sunbird which I would be unable to separate in the field. At £30 it is a little more expensive than I would normally pay, but it is a specialist book probably with a reasonably small production run so it is probably worth every penny.



## Cruising on the Norfolk Broads (23 – 30 Sep17)

By John N Wells

Summer 2017 involved a new experience for Sue, Ashley (Ash) and myself. We booked a week's holiday cruising the Norfolk Broads on a 4-berth diesel powered boat. The holiday was going to be overseas but Sue wanted to stay nearer home. By doing less travel we were on site by mid Saturday afternoon to hire and learn the intricacies of the cruiser from the boat yard in Wroxham. We hired the boat via Hoseasons Ltd, the national holiday provider, with a caveat we had to have a lesson before we went out as we were 'newbies' and sailing the narrow broads and larger open broads. There are many old valuable sailing yachts and slightly tricky to handle coal carrying Wherries, none of which wanted to be crashed into by someone like myself with no water skills at all.

### *Day 1 - Saturday.*

I was looking forward to the adventure but at 4pm after taking the boat over at the yard and having a 2-hours lesson, the 3 of us gratefully accepted the yard's offer to stay there for the night! We definitely didn't want to bite off more than we could chew. The other option was to set-sail and find somewhere to berth inside 1.5 hrs before dusk but also run the risk of breaking the Broad's rules; that state: All boats are to be moored up no later than 5 pm! So we opted to moor up and take an evening meal in the town. Town was busy and we settled for the pubA chilled evening catching up with football on TV and chatting about the boat and being quite excited about taking it out 'for real' the next day. All this over two pints and Saturday football on TV was a decent enough start to the week.

### *Day 2 - Sunday*

We were up early and away with me driving or rather at the 'wheel head' and Ash and Sue watching for water traffic and any obstacles as we joined the main broad. We went back to Wroxham Broad, where we had had our lesson the day before. With plenty of open space we could get to terms with the boat and its directional capability as we got more confident with its handling, speed turns and reverse thrust! Sue wasn't quite so keen so we left that for another day, before agreeing on the destination of Ludham, via St Benet's Abbey and Draining Mill. On route an immature female **Marsh Harrier** was 200m to the right hand side as we approached the sidings and busy tow-path. Once safely moored we explored the old Mill with its unusual walled abbey confines. Out over the fields we encountered 2 **Hobby** chasing dragonflies and harassing young **Swallows**. A pair of **Mute Swans** came in low over the fields, but most unusual were the x2 **Common Cranes** that took off from the fields to our right and flew across in front of us. They must have been feeding or paired up in breeding habitat with plenty of cover-opposite on Ward Marsh. Terrific to see and most boaters were oblivious to them. Just into our walk we had brief glimpses and heard the chiming calls of x3 **Bearded Reedling**; quite exciting for me as I have not had many sightings of this species. We had deer as well on the open fields: a pair of Muntjac and a Roe deer (a female) opposite the Abbey ruins as well as the commoner birds and water species: **Cormorant, Herring Gull, Magpie, Moorhen** with 2 chicks, **Kestrel** and **Sparrowhawk**. We enjoyed the afternoon stroll across the field to learn the history of the Abbey on the interactive wooden benches with audio speakers. A very large cross was amongst the flint-like ruins of what were the outer walls of the old Abbey. At about 3 pm it was time to set sail so to and onward to Ludham for the night. Mooring the craft was tricky, as we soon realised a lot of the moorings were private and many signs and notices prevented hired craft like ours from getting a space near where we needed to be for the night. Luckily there was a separate berth slot at Womack Island with 2 spare berths. As it transpired we weren't the only sailors short of a place to moor up for the night and three boats doubled up on 2 sidings. We were at the far end with reeds and the shallows in front, therefore we had a slot to ourselves. Ash attempted some fishing that evening with no luck. There was a Tawny Owl box at the far end of the wood in someone's huge back garden and in the night we both heard it calling.

### *Day 3 - Monday*

Next morning, we set off for the short hop to the village and hoped there was a slot to allow us to moor-up, fill the water tank and make fresh tea-- essential! All this before heading out for the days adventure. That morning we saw **Long-tailed Tit**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Goldfinch**, **Kestrel**, and 7 separate sightings of **Kingfisher**. Notable were the many **Cettis Warblers** singing, very regular in many haunts and we heard 2 singing loudly on that stretch as we pulled out of the village heading towards Neatishead, via Barton Broad. We took the split in the River Bure to Ludham Bridge and joined the River Ant. En route we saw **Carrion Crow**, **Buzzard**, (180) **Lapwing**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Cormorant** (over) and **Black-headed Gull**, **Lesser black-backed Gull** and another 2 **Hobby**. Lunch was taken at How Hill and Mill House, where 2 **Sparrowhawk**, **Egyptian Goose** and a **Kingfisher** were spotted. **Reed Bunting** were flitting close to the water as we headed up to Barton Broad, the days' destination. An early moor-up was planned to get in somewhere safe for the night. Three fishermen were a little perturbed to see us want their water space as we saw a gap on the moorings, but we just had to apologise and muddy up the waters as we reversed in. Ash was deftest at the controls and it soon became the norm for him to manoeuvre the craft in on the parking slots! Once we were settled, the fishermen came back to do their thing at the end of the quay. Ash joined them to try at fishing in the late afternoon before 3-4 other cruisers came to view the moorings for a space but to no avail - all slots taken for the night. There is more to this cruising than meets the eye!. We were pleased we were safely moored up. Later still a lovely old sailboat came in close and decided his rear hull could just squeeze on the end of the boardwalk, adjacent to the fishermen again. They didn't seem too bothered then but as 2 other similar craft from the same group of friends arrived and that was the end of fishing for the day. Ash pushed on and fished to the right of the bow, but again with no luck. A little further down the moorings pair of lads were pike fishing and one caught a lovely 6-8lb fish and we both went down to have a look at the catch - nice fish too. He was released just before dinner time! The next highlight was a close view of a female **Kingfisher** that alighted to a sunken branch in the water and went about her fishing from there to the views of all the boaters-which was nice, letting non-birders share my 'Bins' and let them see it close-up. Its piping shrill call gave it away. The others were overjoyed to get such splendid views. My photos are nice but not quite AGM competition entry level. That evening we settled on a pub meal at The White Horse Inn, Neatishead, which was a classy Pub with an upstairs eating area and a fabulous choice of well prepared meals. Possibly the food highlight of the week and a lovely evening spent in quite and plush modern surroundings. I can't remember the real ale-but that went down ok too. The 1½ mile walk there and back was ok and in the dark on the way back we could see the lights of what I map read as the old RAF Neatishead Camp. **Tawny Owl** was heard regularly and **Chiffchaff** in the early part of the evening, with **Goldcrest** heard as we walked to the pub, and a **Jay** seen amidst the woods.

### *Day 4 - Tuesday.*

I was up early and decided a walk was in order, so I walked the adjacent lanes up as far as Grove Farm where the mist lay on the wheat field and the day broke with a sunrise in the mist which was lovely. Once I had walked about 2k and took in the peacefulness of the open fields and country lane, I backtracked to the boat moorings whereupon I disturbed a **Kingfisher** in the brackish pool at the back of the field behind the boats. We had a little breakfast and watched the 3 sail boats head out before following them across Barton Broad, where I caught sight of some movement in the waters edge and saw a large Otter hunting the reed edge. That morning Sue wanted to visit How Hill gardens and house, but the house was closed to visitors. We were allowed to walk the water gardens and they were fabulous with lovely trees and shrubs in great colours. Back at the moorings **Cettis Warbler** called out before we set off towards Turf fen were **Greylag Geese** were out in good numbers also two groups of 22, and 170 **Lapwing**,, **Rook**, and a further 2 **Cettis'** calling. A finch flock was put in the note book as **Linnet**, and others in the open fields included **Mallard** and **Egyptian Goose**, with a female **Sparrowhawk** and a juvenile **Marsh Harrier**, **Widgeon**, **Gadwall**, **Stock Dove**, **Pied Wagtail**, **Kestrel** and **Canada Goose**, **Cormorant** and **Coot** in that particular run back up the River Ant and River Bure past Upton Marshes. Under Acle Bridge we saw **Moorhen** and **Swallow**, **Collared Dove**, **Grey Heron**, **Jackdaw**, **Rook** and

**Lesser black-backed Gull**, and we settled at Stokesby for the night, outside another Pub, with Chef's homemade dinner for the night. The Public House was the Ferry Inn, which was popular and needed a table booking late in the afternoon for a 20:30 sitting. Late afternoon birds included **Marsh Harrier**, **Cettis'** again **Black-headed Gull**, **Kingfisher**, **Starling**, **Mallard** and **Magpie**. The little lady came along and collected our mooring fees before we chatted to a local boater or two and one gave Ash a freebie maggot feeder for his line. Watching the professionals was as close as we got to a fish! It was another fish-free session and now getting a tad frustrating for the lad. So I set off back to the little shop and bought a selection of new floats, a disgorger, and some ground bait for our next fishing session.

#### *Day 5 – Wednesday.*

Up at oh-cripes early and maggots started to appear from everywhere inside the craft, on upholstery on carpets along rails of the roof! Apparently someone hadn't fitted the lid on the maggot tub in the hold at the back of the boat and quite a few had made their escape in the night. The early morning game was Hunt-the-Maggot before we could even contemplate breakfast. All were safely shackled-up inside their plastic maggot box we had breakfast and then set out for the day. We decided a day-trip was in order and went to catch the bus to Great Yarmouth for a day at the seaside. It was sunny and bright but not warm enough to go without a jersey and coat. As we closed up the boat to go and catch the bus, a small party of 6 **Bearded Reedling** came along the broad and split 2 ways (a 4, and 2) over our heads. A single **Kestrel**, and **Jay**, **Starlings**, **Jackdaw** and **Rook** summed up all of the breakfast records before we caught the local bus on the village green. It was a busy morning apparently with most seats taken, as we made it on the only bus of the day into town. Not a great birding day and perhaps Breydon Water would have been better birding but I was in the minority of 1, so made do with counting 107 **Ringed Plovers** on the beach over coffee whilst Ash did the slot machines. We all had a look through the waders but there was no other species amongst them. That evening back at the boat, I had a nice **Snipe** zigzagging over the reeds opposite that lightened the spirits. 8 **Goldfinch**, **Black-headed Gull** and **Collared Dove** completed the day before we closed up the hatch and headed to the Ferry Inn again for a fish and chip supper.

#### *Day 5 - Thursday*

Early morning, we had another **Cettis Warbler** calling and a female **Sparrowhawk** sitting on the sign for the moorings and public house. We saw a couple of **Woodpigeon**, and **Jackdaw** but not a lot else, before setting off at 10:40 after a leisurely breakfast. **Lesser black-backed Gull**, **Carrion Crow**, 5 **Cormorant** and **Grey Heron** pretty much usual fare, before we pulled into Acle Bridge for water supplies and Sue helped an ungrateful old fellow moor-up his boat for the same. He never spoke a word to Sue! This was most unusual as all week we had some great laughs and much light heartedness helping each other along and crashing and banging (sometimes) into the banks. Here at Acle Bridge we had a nice group of 6 **Great-crested Grebes** very close to the boats and a pair of **Swallows** nested in adjoining boat yard garages. We were heading for Ranworth Broad for late afternoon moor-up, via Upton Marshes and the junction to South Walsham Marshes and Hackney Marsh. In between driver changes, I noted down the birds seen including; **Carrion Crow** mobbing a **Sparrowhawk**, also separately **Magpie**, **Robin**, **Black-headed Gull** and **Marsh Harrier** at South Walsham Broad and prior to that **Little Egret** 5, and **Egyptian Goose** 8 with a singleton **Rook** at Upton Marshes. Further along the waterways **Meadow Pipit**, **Starling** and **Jay** were seen near Horning Hall, shortly before cutting in left from the mainstream water highway into the broad itself. We circled Malthouse Broad and luckily saw a gap in the moorings at Malthouse, a very pretty landing with a teashop, gifts, ice creams and place for a leg stretch or a sit down amongst the many benches. Ash and I commenced fishing from the bow of the boat a good sized grey geese flock circled high over adjacent waters. I estimated 200 Greylag Geese going to roost somewhere over a nearby broad or wetland area with little or no disturbance, possibly near Cockshoot Broad. Heading in the same direction were 32 **Lapwing** possibly heading back to safe haven or roosting up on open fields. Late evening Ash' and myself struck up a good friendship with another boatman; 'Gilly' who was fishing on the next boat. He planned to do some night fishing later and gave Ash some great tips; he set his line and bait for

him and finally we had some success from the fishing the front bow of the boat, with Ash catching 2 to Gilly's 102!! Slightly more experience or better knowledge won the day. Still we were happy with our 2 and Ash felt the better for catching something. Both were Silver Bream of approx. 4-6 inches. Coot were plentiful as was a very noisy **Greylag Goose** with a broken wing poor thing. It missed its' mates I guess. It was honking loudly as the skeins crossed the sky. A couple of bright **Pied Wagtail** chased flies on adjacent lawns and 5 Swallow were seen skimming low over the water which was good, probably the last brood of this year for the adults. We cooked our own dinner that evening and kept ourselves entertained with a game of Bananagrams and cards before settling down for the night. In the adjacent boat Gilly was hunkering down for a long night of night fishing with all his luminous kit out and rods and torches and luminous floats at the ready. He was keen to get his hours in on his boating/fishing holiday for sure.

#### *Day 6 - Friday.*

Up fairly early we had the report from Gilly that he had a fairly successful night's work but also he said a nice pair of Otters had come in fairly close to the moorings and he had picked them up in his night sights. We had another leisurely start and then set out from the moorings about 10 am. heading for Salthouse Broad for the day with the intention of heading back to the boathouse later for the last night. It was a leisurely 'sail' back with **Goldcrest, Great tit, Long-tailed tit, Jay, Woodpigeon** and **Chiffchaff** on route. The broad itself had a good flock of **Graylag**, possibly the group from yesterday evening of 45 and a **Kingfisher** was heard but not seen as we moored up on the far side of the broad for lunch and a short walk around the moorings. After lunch we headed back to the yard and arrived at 15:15 to get straight and pack and clean the boat before heading out for dinner. Ash had a long spot of fishing that late afternoon and had a decent catch with about a dozen fish, but the real topic of the day was the large male Otter that swam in to the yard from the broads and headed into a redundant boat store up the short concrete slope past its 'scats' and hid up for an hour or so making the dogs around the yard sit up and take notice! I am not sure they knew what it was as they looked perplexed seeing the creature arrive from the water's edge and under the door of the garage building. When it did remerge it came alongside the moored boats and was not put off by the 6 humans who were well pleased with the sighting. I got some half decent views and pictures of it bringing its to the notice of other boaters in the yard as many would never get such an opportunity. The Friday evening was spent back at the same pub. I think the fact that Liverpool were on Sky TV won it for Ash.

The Saturday handover back at the yard went uneventfully with no scrapes or damage which was good! Boating on the broads was a terrific experience and one we all enjoyed. I put my hand up-to Ash as his boat skills were superior to mine. The birds at close quarters were nice as well and by being part of their usual surroundings you got to see species a lot easier and they seemed less bothered by the boaters, boats and other craft on their patch.



Broads Holiday Pictures,  
*By John Wells*



# WINTER DUCK 2018 – FIRST IMPRESSIONS

*By Martin Routledge*

Once again, an intrepid band of RAFOS birders set off for fun and frolics in North and Northwest Scotland for the annual excitement that is WINTER DUCK. This was our seventeenth adventure in the series and this year we had a strong showing of 13 members for the whole expedition and a guest appearance by Al Kennedy at Faraid Head on the final weekend.

This year we played the usual 3 team construct one doing the whole of the North Coast, another covering the far Northwest from Kinlochbervie down to Achiltibuie and the third roaming around Loch Gairloch, Loch Ewe Gruinard Bay and Lochs Broom down to Ullapool. The last 2 teams also took on some more southerly tasks around Loch Torridon and Loch Carron but more of that anon. This is a tried and tested formula but each year we tweak it a bit – seeking perfection (but failing to find it). So we did the usual thing with an East Coast van running North from Ramsey with John (who put the Elf in Elf 'n Safety) Wells at the wheel picking up Alan Brimmell, Jim Bryden, Maggie Sheddan, Vron Wooton and Keith (I didn't get where I am today without being able to tell a Golden from a White-tailed Eagle) Cowieson along the way to our RV at Newtonmore. Meanwhile the West Coast Warriors with the Chairman in charge routed from Aylesbury picking up Scott (mine's bigger than yours) Drinkel, Gerry (next time I'll test you without warning) Bilbao, Brian (Lump on Head) Lyon and Jerry (who let the goats out) Knights made it up the M6, M74, M73 and A9 in reasonable time to arrive to tales of derring do and Golden Eagles already ticked for the trip list in the Spey Valley by early arrivals.

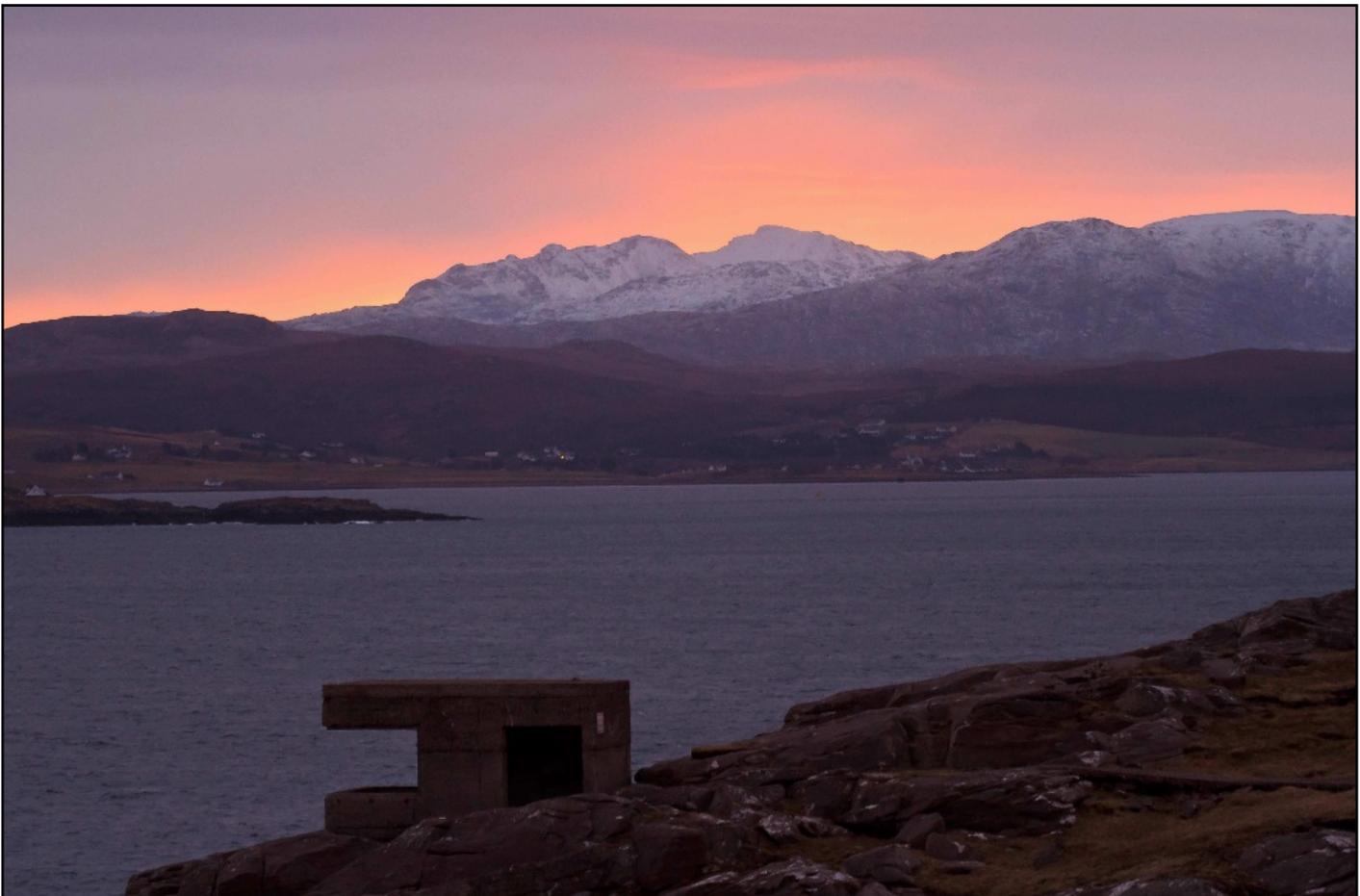
It turns out however that the confidently identified Golden Eagle was in fact a first winter White-tailed Eagle (as called by John and Vron but immediately over-ruled by someone ....) sporting a fancy wing tag in a rather fetching shade of blue; Blue-T, as the Eagle is affectionately known, was tagged by Owen Selly of the RSPB's Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme and he is also Vron (Ms Whiplash BEM)'s Squeagle monitoring contact who had ringed the bird last summer. A good record to get the juices flowing.

The next morning we pushed on to Inverness to meet the last 2 members: Tom Dewick and Richard (actually Scott I think you'll find mine's bigger) Somers Cocks and do the last minute dot com shopping and cross decking of supplies before splitting to the winds in our separate teams which were: Team 1 – Martin, Gerry, Jerry, Scott and Brian to the Joint Services Mountain Training Lodge at Dundonnell; Team 2 – Jim, Keith, John, Alan and Maggie to a nice cottage at Scourie; and Team 3 – Tom, Richard and Vron to another nice cottage near Wick. The bases were loaded – let the fun begin.

Over the next few days the Teams worked hard, put in long hours and recorded many sites for the Wetland Bird Survey or WeBS as it is known. There may have been some fun along the way and I'm told that some indiscipline was recorded with folks lingering over the odd gull sighting or two. Suffice to say all was going to plan with surveys hitting all the right planning milestones and then on the last day of surveying the weather struck. Team 2 were by this time down near Applecross having spent the night in a bunkhouse at Sanachan which they shared with the Scottish Ladies Mountaineering Club – an institution which I'm told they are now honorary members of! Getting back up to Dundonnell for the Last Supper was a slow and tortuous drive but they made it. Meanwhile Team 3 had encountered white-out and blizzard conditions coming off Cape Wrath and struggled to get down to Ullapool conditions were so bad Tom even had to select 4-wheel drive! South of Ullapool the Team 3 Terrano broke down with a major snag so the Team 1 van was despatched to rescue Ms Whiplash while Tom and Richard stayed behind to await the AA and a lift back to Elgin (thus missing the Last Supper which Tom had graciously provided the pies and veg for).



Team 3 at Faraid Head (*Richard Somers Cocks*)



Sunrise at Cove Gun Emplacement. Loch Ewe (*Scott Drinkel*)

Early next morning the southbound remnants had finished cleaning up the Lodge and set off in snowy conditions for home. The West Coast van had to be dug out of the snow in the car park and then once on the main road only made it a few miles before failing to get up a hill. We slid elegantly backwards and then turned about and went back to Dundonnell to wait for the gritter! Meanwhile the East coasters had managed to get past us and up the hill (all that extra weight must have helped traction) and were on their way to Inverness. After a pause of half an hour or so the West Coast Warriors had another go on softer snow and made it through. The teams were now on track for the long haul south – we were counted out and now all could be counted back.

So much for the calendar of events – now for some birding stuff. As usual we managed just about all our allocated WeBS sectors covering some 219 sites covering about 1700 road miles on the way and also recording 61 species lists across 50 ten-km squares for the BTO’s BirdTrack project. A total of 1488 BirdTrack records were created in the operational area with 105 species amounting to over 27,000 birds being recorded. Records of Ruff were a first for Winter Duck and 2 records of Little Gull were only the second year this species has been encountered. The BirdTrack record shows we recorded over 1,000 more birds this year than last. Of note, winter thrushes were noticeable by their absence probably reflecting favourable weather conditions in Scandinavia.

The most widely reported species shown by the percentage of 10 Km squares in which they were observed were:

Herring Gull	89%
Great Black-backed Gull	85%
Shag	85%
Oystercatcher	84%
Hooded Crow	72%
Common Gull	69%
Cormorant	69%
Curlew	69%
Great Northern Diver	69%
Mallard	69%

On the other hand, the most abundant species were:

Greylag Goose	4254
Herring Gull	2669
Common Gull	1931
Starling	1681
Mallard	1333
Rook	1182
Oystercatcher	1158
Widgeon	1060
Shag	94
Barnacle Goose	990

But as we all know one really big sighting can slew this sort of data.

Overall this was another excellent adventure with some great records. For some, the Little Gull sightings were the highlight – for others watching the antics of a Dipper in a fast-flowing stream were enthralling. The majestic sightings of White-tailed and Golden Eagles will stay with us for years and of course the banter, camaraderie and sheer joy of being out and about looking at birds can’t be beaten.

# More Winter Duck Pictures

Great Black-backed Gull

*(Scott Drinkel)*



Little Gull at Loch Kerry

*(Brian Lyon)*



Team 1 Scanning Mellon Udrigle

*(Scott Drinkel)*

Ruff at St John's Loch

*(Richard Somers Cocks)*



# Cuban Birds

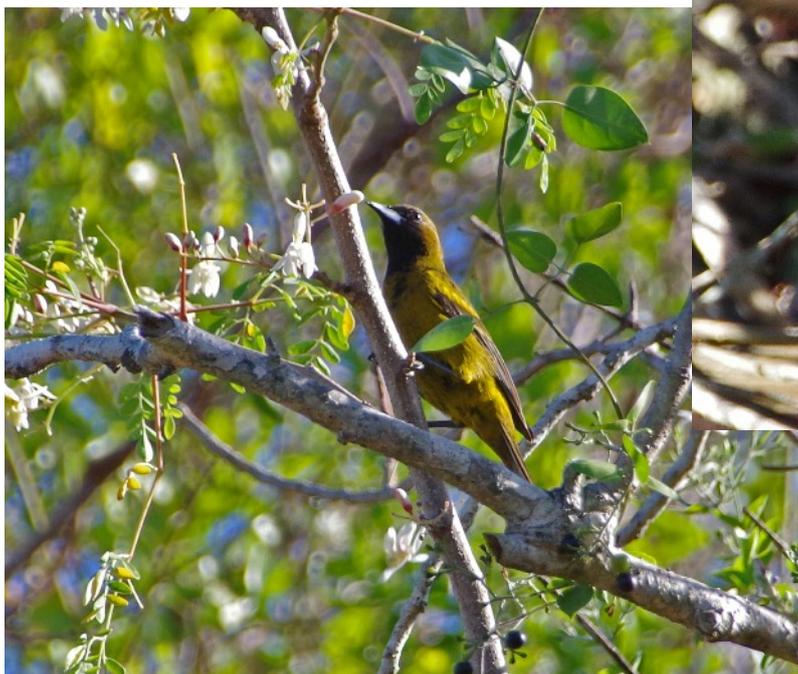
A collection of bird pictures taken by Dick Yates in Cuba in 2017



Common Blackhawk



Cuban Blackbird



Cuban Oriole



Cuban Tody

## Cuban Birds (Continued)



Ferruginous Pygmy Owl

Greater Antillean Grackle



Groove-billed Ani

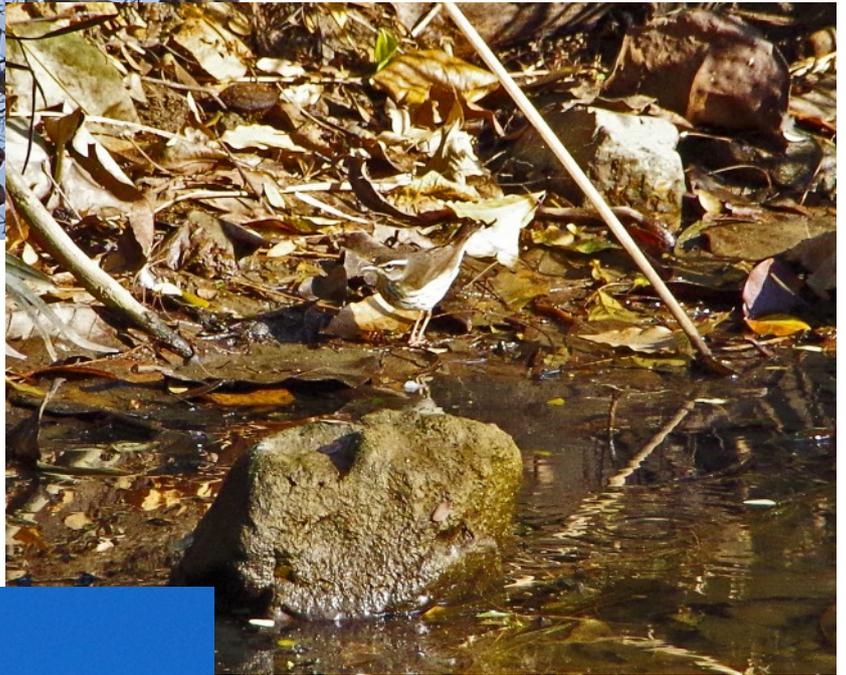


Lizard Cuckoo

Cuban Birds (Continued)



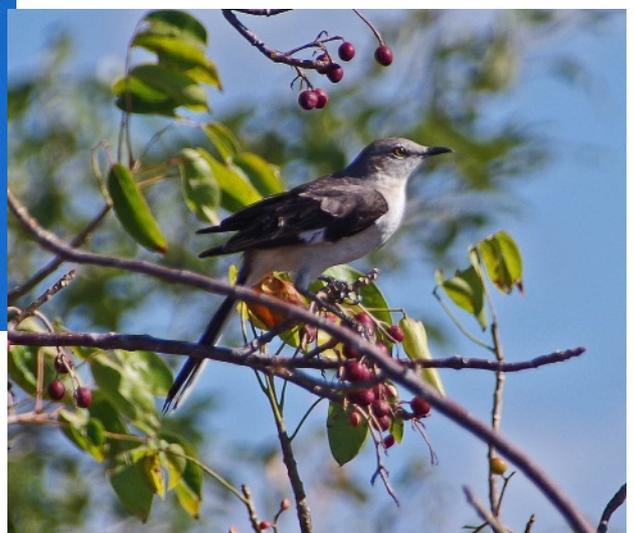
Loggerhead Kingbird



Louisiana Water Thrush



Magnificent Frigatebird



Northern Mockingbird

Cuban Birds (Continued)



Oriente Warbler



Red-legged Thrush



Sagres Flycatcher

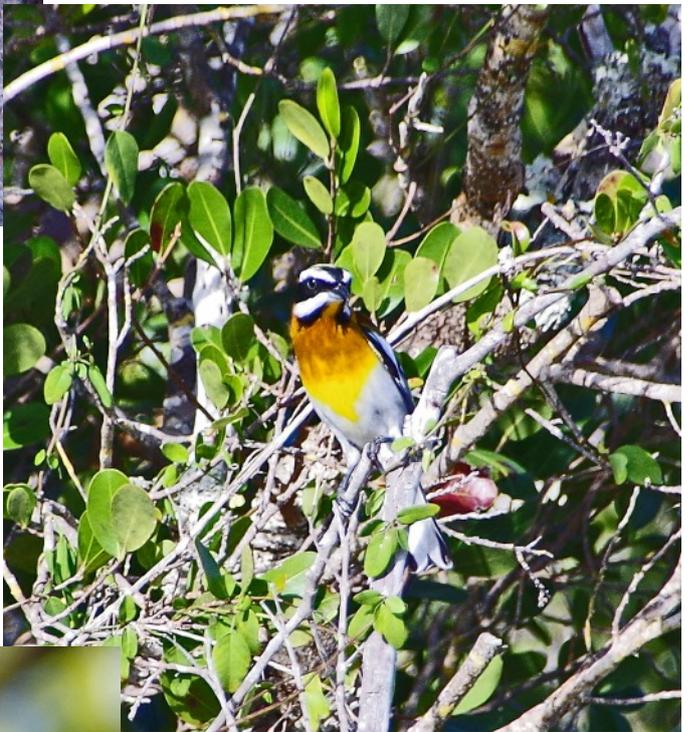


Palm Crow

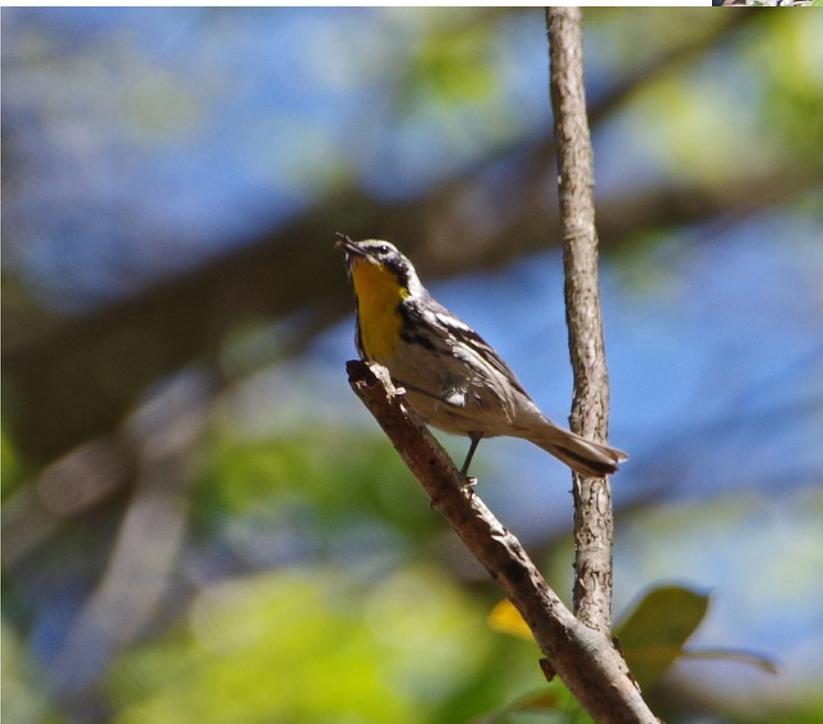
Cuban Birds (Continued)



West Indian Woodpecker



Western Pindalis



Yellow-throated Warbler

# The RAFOS Newsletter

Is published twice each year

The Editor will be most grateful for pictures and articles to grace the next edition.

Letters to the Editor to raise any issues, birding book reviews and details of goods for sale are always welcome too.

Please remember the following:

- Brief contributions are always welcome.
- Illustrations (photographs or art work) are always welcome
- Please send written work as soon as you can. If pictures are included, please send them separately from the text.
- Please avoid footnotes and tables – they are difficult to import with my software!
- Articles can be sent as attachments to emails, on a CD, DVD, memory stick or card.
- If pictures are sent as hard copies, please let me know if you want them back.
- Digital images should be in .jpg format.

**The closing date for inclusion in Newsletter 106 is 21<sup>st</sup> July 2018 and any contributions received after that date will be held over for Newsletter No. 107.**

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By John Le Gassick