



**ROYAL  
AIR FORCE**  
ornithological  
society

## Newsletter 111 - Spring 2021



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Front Cover: Widgeon. Above: Barnacle Geese both Bill Francis

# **Marshal Sir John Baird KBE DL MBChB FRCPE FRCSE FFOM D Av Med FRAeS**

**25<sup>th</sup> July, 1937 to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2020**

*This obituary appeared in the Daily Telegraph and is published here with the permission of that publication*

Air Marshal Sir John Baird, who has died aged 83, was an RAF doctor with a special interest in aviation medicine; he rose to the top of his profession in the RAF before becoming the Surgeon-General of the Defence Medical Services.

During his early service, Baird was a medical officer on two of the RAF's busiest bases and this stimulated an interest in medical aspects of high-performance flying, including the effect of G-forces, decompression, anoxia, and the specialist clothing needed. In 1967 he took No 1 Course at the RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine at Farnborough, gaining the Diploma in Aviation Medicine.

In 1970 he was selected to join a small group of RAF officers engaged on what was then a top-secret programme at Edwards Air Force Base in California. These officers were assigned to an American unit operating the Lockheed U2 "Dragon Lady" reconnaissance aircraft. Baird was one of the flight surgeons who supported the global role of the entire unit. His special interest was in the life support equipment worn by the pilots on the very high-altitude flights, which were often of long duration. He closely observed all his RAF charges and became expert in this field, establishing an excellent reputation with all personnel on the unit, based on his professional knowledge, sympathetic approach, and engaging personality. One of the RAF pilots serving on this unique unit commented: "As a flight surgeon, medical practitioner and representative of his parent service, he was highly respected and admired by all who worked with him, none of whom were surprised by the trajectory of his subsequent career. "

John Alexander Baird was born on July 25 1937 in Blantyre, Nyasaland Protectorate, where his father was a doctor at the Church of Scotland Mission. After schooling in Southern Rhodesia, he attended Merchiston Castle School in Edinburgh. He started medical school at Edinburgh University in 1955 and graduated MB ChB in 1961. After residencies at the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, he did a six-month tour of longhouses along the Baram River in Sarawak, and while he was upriver the rebellion in Brunei broke out. He became involved in setting up a casualty clearing station in the small town of Marudi, organising 600 Kenyah and Kayan Dyaks into a force to bring in the fleeing rebels along the jungle tributaries of the Baram. Later in his tour, he was involved in the rescue of patients in the severe floods following a typhoon along the Sarawak coast. During each of these incidents, he was flown in RAF light transport aircraft and helicopters, experiences that convinced him to join the RAF as a medical officer.

In 1973 having returned from the US, Baird served as the senior medical officer on two "fast jet" stations. One of his pleasures was his close work with the aircrew, for whom he had the highest regard – and they for him. He regarded his ability to keep them flying safely as his highest priority. On many occasions he stuck his neck out at medical boards to avoid grounding aircrew, often in defiance of medical colleagues. Because of these views, he was held in highest trust by aircrew and this he valued above all other aspects of the job. He flew with them whenever he could and used to say he had the best of everything – medicine and flying.

He next went to the HQ Strike Command as the Command Flight Medical Officer, an aviation medicine role covering all aircrew roles in the large command. During this time he became deeply involved in aircrew issues on the very long-range missions during the Falklands war. For this work he was awarded

the Richard Fox-Linton Memorial Prize. In 1987 Baird assumed command of the RAF Hospital at Ely. While there, the Princess of Wales visited the hospital and it became the Princess of Wales RAF Hospital. On promotion to air commodore he went to RAF Germany as the Principal Medical Officer, and three years later, on further promotion, he filled the same post at Strike Command. This was followed by three years as the Director General RAF Medical Services.

Following a defence cost study instigated as part of "Options for Change", he was frustrated and dismayed over the closure of the RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine and the planned closure of RAF hospitals. In 1997 he became the Surgeon General Defence Medical Services, with responsibility for the health of all service personnel. The ramifications of the significant cuts from the major defence reviews of the post-Cold War era remained a major concern, and he now had to address this difficult situation across the whole defence medical arena. He was required to implement the severe cutbacks, with subsequent reduction in medical personnel, the final closures of military hospitals and the effect on morale, recruitment and retention in the service.

Baird worked closely with senior staff officers, civil servants and ministers and was never afraid to talk tough. Unfortunately, his words often fell on deaf ears. He had a mountain to climb in restoring morale in medical services but fought all the battles with great resolve.

In his Centenary History of the Royal Army Medical Corps J S G Blair writes: "In all of this, during the centenary year and until 2000, Air Marshal Sir John Baird came over as without doubt the most able and distinguished Surgeon General of the late 20th century – his arrival saw a sea change in our general situation – cessation of flannel and denial, and acceptance of problems with a clear effort to work to correct them. "As we in the Armed Forces Committee discovered, he alone was prepared to admit that things were badly wrong. Not for him the pretence that all was well for fear of compromising his career. He gained not only the highest respect, but also the real affection, of those representing the outside world of British doctors. His courage, in telling politicians that their Defence Medical Services had problems so serious that safe cover for a major enterprise abroad could not be provided, continued until the end of his time in post."

Baird was an Honorary Physician to the Queen from 1991 to 2000, when he retired to his home near Ely. He continued to be active in voluntary work and was a Deputy Lieutenant in Cambridgeshire. He was patron of the Far East Prisoners of War Association and served on the Royal Society of Medicine's United Services Committee and on the Royal Aeronautical Society Aviation Medicine Group. He was a Fellow of numerous learned bodies.

He was appointed KBE in 1999 and was a Commander Brother of the Order of St John.

An avid ornithologist, John Baird travelled the world birding – "never twitching" – and was for many years President of the RAF Ornithological Society.

Sir John Baird married Mary Clews in 1963; she survives him.

**John Baird, born July 25 1937, died November 11 2020**

## **Brian Little MBE.**

**25th February 1936 – 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

*By Brian Etheridge*

On the 9 October 2020 the legendary Geordie ringer and birder, Brian Little MBE, peacefully passed away after a short spell in a nursing home at Prudhoe-on-Tyne, only a couple of miles from his home in Blaydon where he spent most of his life. As a teenager in the early 1950s, Brian was taught to ring birds by Dr Eric Ennion of Monk's House Bird Observatory near Seahouses on the north Northumberland coast. In the late 1950s Brian was called up for National Service which he completed in Cyprus over a two-year period with the Royal Air Force. Despite the emergency that had plunged the island into conflict at the time, Brian continued to pursue his bird-watching and ringing hobby. He was also a volunteer with the RAF Mountain Rescue team whilst based there. In his later years, he was proud to be invited to march at The Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday with surviving members of the 1950s RAF Cyprus MRT.

Following demob, he returned to the northeast and by 1962 had formed the Northumbria Ringing Group (NRG) around a team of enthusiastic amateur young birders whom he had taught to ring. Led by Brian, they created a ringing station at Low Hauxley on the coast near Amble. Based in a small wood with adjacent overgrown allotments and consisting of two Heligoland traps and a second-hand workman's hut the ringing station rapidly became famous amongst the birding community for the numbers and variety of rarities that were caught and ringed there. Brian became chairman, and latterly Honorary President, of the Group and a large proportion of its current 35 members were trained by him. There are others, including myself, who no longer live in the area that were on the receiving end of his training, inspired by his knowledge and enthusiasm. Furthermore, he led ringing studies in Northumberland on several key species, in particularly Sparrowhawks, Goosanders, Merlins and latterly, Tawny Owls.

Brian served on several regional and national ornithological committees and in 1996 he received an MBE for his services to ornithology. In the following year he was awarded the highly prestigious British Trust for Ornithology Bernard Tucker Medal. Keeping pace with the nation's demands for a cleaner environment he began a programme of ornithological impact studies in the 1990's for wind farm developer Border Wind and spent several years on a long-term study around the onshore and offshore installations at Blyth. He was also consulted on bird behaviour studies at Newcastle Airport in the interest of air safety.

Brian joined RAFOS after my encouragement, and was a member of the Cyprus Akamas Expedition in Spring 1997. Brian loved to travel and over a period of some 30 years he visited all of the world's continents and oceans searching out some of the world's rarest bird species and taking with him and meeting many friends on the way. Expeditions were made to India, Japan, Russia, Alaska, USA, Australia, South Africa and the Antarctic and some of the stories from those trips were legendary. Brian's physical ability was curtailed in October 2000 after he survived a serious road accident, his expeditions to faraway places progressively came to a close. He even found it a challenge coping with the British winters and he eventually chose to spend those months with relatives and friends in warmer climes such as Australia, Spain and Cyprus. Despite his physical short comings his teaching was not done and in recent years he set up a bird watching group that met weekly with a base at Hauxley Nature Reserve. As well as his intense dedication to the subject of ornithology he did have other interests, not least in the history of the First and Second World Wars and he often made visits to several Commonwealth War Cemeteries in France and Belgium.

After the loss of his wife, Freda in 1998, Brian became an annual visitor to my home in the Highlands over the next 20 years. His week-long visits always coincided with my summer fieldwork on Honey-buzzards, Red Kites, Hen Harriers and Ospreys. He wanted to be there in the thick of action, ringing broods, taking notes and enjoying the birds close up. These visits cemented a close friendship that started for me as a school boy in the early 1960's and would last until his passing. We made several overseas trips together. In July 2000 we visited the Czech Republic and Slovakia joining local ringers in their study of breeding Lesser-spotted Eagles and other raptors. We twice went to Australia to join the Victoria Wader Study Group expeditions to cannon-net wintering waders at Broome on the north-west corner of the continent. At the end of the second visit, the two of us drove 5,000 kilometres back from Broome to Melbourne in the expeditions elderly 4 wheel drive Holden estate car, Brian navigating and bird spotting, myself driving. The vehicle had no radio but it wasn't needed as Brian kept us both entertained during the 7-day journey with detailed and accurate information on a huge variety of subjects. I recall hearing the history of the two world wars, an account of the Battle Agincourt, the story of the Border Reivers and much, much more. His memory for facts and figures, places and names were as legendary as his booming voice, raucous laughter and snoring. Yes, Brian could snore for Britain!

His enthusiasm for life and all things connected with birds was infectious, his knowledge and guidance liberally passed to generations of nature lovers wherever he went. Rest in peace Brian, your legacy will continue to shine brightly.



Brian Little taking notes during a Red Kite ringing session, June 2015.

## Memories of Malcolm Magee

*Malcolm was a long serving member of RAFOS, but left the society a few years ago. Like Tony Marter, I remember him from the Calf of Man Expedition. (Ed)*

*Here are some comments on Facebook following his death in August last year:*

### **John Le Gassick**

I realise that Malcolm Magee was not a member of RAFOS in recent years, but I know that quite a few members hold fond memories of him and his pipe from when he was a member of both RAFOS & the RAF Wyton Ornithological Society (RAFWOS). Malcolm was a Sqn Ldr Admin and a member of the September 1985 expedition to Neusiedlersee, where he ensured that we were in receipt of Cash In Lieu of Rations (CILOR) when he changed our sponsorship from Strike to Support Command, when we had changed our accommodation from tents to the (far cheaper) chalets and Strike Command withdrew their sponsorship. He was also a participant in the Calf of Man in September 1987 and in the RAFOS expedition to Ascension Island. He died at the age of 86 in Hinchingsbrooke Hospital on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020

### **Tony Marter**

Yes, I remember him being a staunch supporter of RAFWOS as well when I was Officer i/c - a kind and gentle man who never allowed anything to ruffle his calm manner. I remember him from the Calf of Man expedition too.

### **Iain MacKenzie**

Malcolm McGee was OC PMS at RAF Brampton when I arrived during 1985. He introduced me to RAFWOS.

Malcolm was Expedition Leader to Ascension Island during late 1988. I took part on this Expedition; we departed Brize Norton on 14<sup>th</sup> November and returned on 1<sup>st</sup> December, TriStar C1 ZE705 each way. An expedition report was never compiled, but I know we covered most of the island, even reaching the peak, as I did much of the driving.



Kingfisher, WWT Slimbridge, Bill Francis

# **GIBEX 2020 Joint Service Ringing Expedition to Gibraltar**

By Robin Springett

## **Background**

Gibraltar is generally well known to the Service community, who have been there at one time or another during their career. The RAFOS sponsored Joint Service Ringing Expedition which covered the period from 23<sup>rd</sup> September – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020, was the fourth in response to an invitation in 2012 from Dr Keith Bensusan, General Secretary of the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) and Director of Gibraltar Botanic Garden. The Expedition was scheduled and had been publicised to members of RAFOS, AOS and RNBWS for 2019, but insufficient volunteers came forward to make the expedition viable. Postponement by a year, when enough members would be available, seemed a sensible option. However, 2020 was the year of the Covid-19 Pandemic and social distancing rules on Gibraltar dictated that bedrooms couldn't be shared by non-family members. Furthermore, half of the 8 bedrooms at Bruce's Farm South were out of order, due to problems with the roof leaking. In addition, visits to go birding in Spain would lead to 15 days quarantine on return to UK. These facts limited the attraction significantly, and in the event, only 4 (the minimum number to make it viable) came forward, and there would be no leaving the Rock for any reason. When the first expedition was held in 2013, a lot of help was provided by HQ BF Gibraltar, in the form of a vehicle, other transportation and rations for the serving personnel; this was reduced to transportation to and from the airport in 2015 and no help at all in 2017 and 2020. Without a vehicle, the expedition is non-viable; RAFOS, RNBWS and AOS generously granted enough money to pay for the hire of a vehicle and fuel used.

## **General**

The expedition was planned, coordinated and led by Julia Springett, with help from Roger Dickey, both A - ringers and trainers; the other participants were Mark Cutts and Robin Springett, both C – ringers. All ringing activities were conducted under the auspices of GONHS, to the standards laid down in the BTO Ringers Manual. GONHS supplied mist nets, poles and BTO rings, all kindly organised by Charlie Perez of GONHS. (Due to a temporary shortage of nets from GONHS, each member was asked to bring a net from UK, which they did).

## **Aim**

The aim of the expedition was set by GONHS in the original 2012 invitation, and was to catch, ring and collect biometric data from migrating and local birds on an area of the Nature Reserve known as Middle Hill. It was shown from the data collected from the previous expeditions in 2013, 2015 and 2017, that ringing patterns on this North elevation of the Rock are not always reflected by data gathered from ringing at the Jews' Gate Bird Observatory, on the Southern tip; thus suggesting a slightly different migration strategy for some species. A supplementary aim was to record Raptor passage.

## **Day 1**

Julia and Robin arrived first, collected the vehicle and took over the self catering accommodation at Bruce's Farm from Eric Shaw and his assistant Tessa of The Helping Hand Trust, which manages it. Having had no income at all in 2020 before we arrived, due to the pandemic, the 4 of us, paying £20 per night each, were very welcome! The building itself, an ex-OMQ, was looking rather sad, but our 4 rooms were all OK and the water heaters worked. We later found that the kitchen was fine too.



Robin with a good haul



Erecting fire-break nets



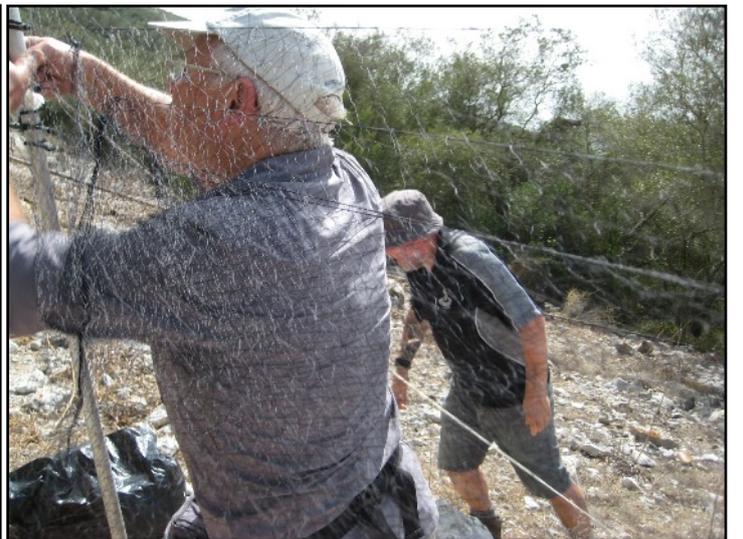
Common Nightjar



Red-necked Nightjar



Ringing Station



Putting up nets

# GibEx 2020

Julia and Robin shopped for supplies and collected the nets, rings etc from Charlie Perez of GONHS. Roger and Mark arrived on the midday flight, and Charlie had asked if we could help him remove vegetation from some of the net lanes at the Jews' Gate Bird Observatory, as he was putting up nets for the imminent arrival of ringers from UK. This did mean that we were quite late in the day getting to do a recce of the ringing site. Here we encountered our first problem. To get to the part of the nature reserve that we wanted, it is necessary to use Old Signal Road; no problem if you are on foot, but vehicles are controlled by the Tourist Office using padlocked barriers, and the key didn't work. Not able to get the car through, we walked up to the gated entrance through the fence, and tried the key supplied by GONHS; guess what, that didn't work either. We gave up and went back to Bruce's Farm and made a call to Charlie. The road barrier key proved easy; we were trying to open the lower barrier with the key to the upper!! The Tourist office changed the key immediately the problem was notified to them. (Both key fobs said "Old Signal Road Barrier" Lesson there!). To get through the fence, GONHS put a new padlock on and gave us the correct key first thing the following morning. From then onwards, we had no access problems at all.

## **Day 2**

Day 2 saw us cutting vegetation on the ringing site, before getting the poles on Eric Shaw's car to take them to the site entrance and begin setting up. The nets were set within the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, at intervals moving up the rock, using the experience gained on the 3 previous expeditions of areas which were generally found to be satisfactory for nets. These locations were used again this year, but modified by that experience to enable net rounds to be completed quicker with fewer deviations to better reflect the limited manpower. Nets were erected at Governors' Lookout overlooking the airfield and border with Spain (2 x 12 metres), along the Middle Hill WW 2 jeep track (6 x 18 metres), then down the fire break from Middle Hill (3 x 18 metres plus 1 x 12metres), and new for 2020, along the woodland edge parallel to the Old Signal Road (1 x 18 metres plus 2 x 12 metres). Approximately 240 metres of nets were erected, and each net round was measured as a distance of 0.5 kilometres and 65 metres up and down from the ringing station at 210 metres. Net rounds were done about every 20 minutes. All the nets were erected within the area designated as a Nature Reserve, and this year robustly fenced in; as a result, we were undisturbed by hikers and dog walkers. We did see the resident ape population once or twice, but they left us alone. Nets were furled and securely storm-lashed in preparation for starting in earnest tomorrow (Friday 25th)

## **Day 3**

Day 3 set the tone for the remainder of the expedition, with a 06.30 breakfast and departure at 0650 with provisions and drinks for the day ahead. The aim was to be on site (a 5 minute drive) by 07.00. The routine was 3 to open and Robin to follow round, having parked the car, and put out the calls. All usually completed by around 07.30. First light was around 08.00 and the first round happened shortly after. The first bird taken out was a Scops Owl, we really thought that this was a good omen! Weather so far since before our arrival had been hot and sunny; not particularly conducive to full nets. However, the first day wasn't bad, with 44 birds ringed, the best of course being the Scops! We had high hopes for the next day, as some east wind and some Levante forecast.

## **Day 4**

Day 4 with the promised Levante, produced full nets from the start and we ringed 125 new birds. Good numbers of Willow Warbler (Wilwa), Blackcap (Blaca) and surprisingly, Pied Flycatcher (Piefl), plus the odd garden Warbler (Garwa), Sardinian Warbler (Sarwa) and Redstart (Redst). As we were closing and furling, we caught an Orphean Warbler (Orpwa), one of the migrating rarities for which we were hoping! We had 2 re-traps, which were both from 2017, a Sarwa ringed on that trip by Robin and a Wren ringed

by Mark. Day 4 was also the best day for Raptors; we saw Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Griffon Vultures, Black Stork, Sparrowhawk (which we saw most days) and a single Black Vulture. We celebrated our excellent day with pizzas at Moma Mia's wonderful pizza restaurant in the Red Sands car park!

## **Day 5**

Day 5 was quite cold (well, down to 20 degrees) and what subsequently developed into a stiff breeze. We began to open around 07.00; some hour before dawn, put out the calls, and the birds didn't come! We only achieved 19 birds ringed plus 2 re-traps in the whole day, so we took the opportunity to fine-tune the location of some nets. We were called to the gate by two policemen, and were able to show the Royal Gibraltar Police (RGP) our permit from the Minister of the Environment allowing us to ring in the Nature Reserve. Both police constables were very polite and apologised for asking, but we were delighted, as it meant that access to the closed areas of the Nature Reserve were being looked after better than anytime since we began GibEx in 2013. We closed around lunch time and as our route on the way back to Bruce's Farm took us past the Observatory at Jew's Gate, we stopped to enter our data onto IPMR, and watch the tourists - of whom there aren't many!! However, that lack of tourists made getting around the Rock so easy. Even the Observatory was a bit empty, having had few people that year and most of the ringing done so far by Charlie and Jill

## **Day 6**

Day 6 and we were opening the nets as usual an hour or so before sunrise, but it was a strange day as the wind was veering and backing from westerly to easterly, through northerly, so all of our nets came in for some attention from it and we spent time furling and opening nets. Reasonable numbers of migrants were around in the vegetation, but quite a surprise that we have waited so long for our first Chiffchaff. This time of the year we would expect plenty of Chiffs and of those about 90% to be Iberian. So we did look very closely at this specimen, but the committee decided that we had just ringed the nominate! Given the difficult wind conditions, the total for the day of 46 birds ringed and 1 re-trap, a Sarwa from the 2017 Exped, wasn't bad. The results from the first 3 days ringing indicated that we were shaping up for a much more similar year to 2015, when the total ringed was 849 of 25 species, rather than the bumper year of 2017, but early days, and a lot would depend on the weather. With the relative lack of birds, our culinary progress was an important part of the day, and we had home cooked chilli con carne, followed by melon. Outside Bruce's Farm that evening we had a pair of Tawny Owls calling to each other. As Mark said "bonus bird" for the day. The light from the city and harbour was reflecting off some low cloud caused by a little bit of Levante, so fingers were crossed for the morrow!

## **Day 7**

Day 7 and we got up to find that the east wind had lasted all night giving Levante cloud, which reflected an eerie light from the city below, rendering our head-torches almost redundant. We made an effort to get the nets open and calls out 45 minutes before the dawn, and we waited expectantly for the onslaught! It didn't come on the first round, but from the second. The Blackcaps had arrived, but by just after lunch, it was all over. We had ringed 97 new birds, plus 1 re-trap, making 98 processed. Our totals after 5 days ringing were 335 birds processed of 19 species; not bad, but well behind 2017.

## **Day 8**

Day 8 and another day of Levante and low cloud; we couldn't have asked for better. We expected good numbers, and got them. We ringed 117 new birds and processed 1 re-trap bringing our total to 452. The Blackcap tap was firmly turned on with 92 of the birds ringed today Blackcaps, but we did add one new



Scops Owl aging



Scops Owl



Dizzying view down the Fire-Break



The Nature Reserve from our balcony



Male Redstart



Autumn Crocus

species to our total, making 20 so far. The bird in question being a juvenile Red-necked Nightjar, which was in the second group of nets on the Jeep track up to Middle Hill in the second round. Other birds included Redst, Greffi, Wilwa, Chiff, Bluti, Blabi, Sarwa, Wren, Garwa and Piefl. Sadly, we suffered our first loss in the net; a Blaca was killed in the net, but no sign of the feral cat nor Kestrel, and no damage to the net; a mystery? On the way back to our accommodation, we called at the Observatory to enter our data and also to meet the new folks at Jew's Gate who arrived this day and would be there for a week. It will be interesting to compare what we catch with their daily totals when they finish.

## **Day 9**

On the way to the car before dawn, we got great views of the Harvest Moon reflecting on the harbour. Sadly, the east wind had turned westerly during the night, but we hoped that enough migrants had been persuaded to stay to give us a good fall. As dawn was breaking, we began the first round, which could probably be described as "steady" with nothing special, but the second round produced a Common (European) Nightjar, our first and a new species for the trip. As we were taking it in turns to "ring" special birds, Julia was the lucky person to ring this one, which turned out to be a juvenile male, deduced by the markings on the primaries. In all, we had 46 new birds and 1 re trap from 2017, bringing our total to 499 of 21 species. We were still falling behind for numbers and species, and the weather forecast for the next day was poor. Named storm Alex was sweeping across Europe; in itself not good for migration, but rather more worrying, the tail would wag right across southern Spain and Gibraltar!

## **Day 10**

Day 10 and what a change in the weather this morning. We were up as usual and opened all the nets we could, but the tail end of Storm Alex was determined to spoil our day. There was a lull an hour or so after dawn, but as the wind speed increased, we closed nets progressively; they were not catching birds anyway. By the time we closed the final 3 nets, we had only caught 7 new birds, 3 x Blaca, 1 each Garwa, Bluti, Wilwa and Blabi. Running total is now 506. Storm Alex was due to go through in the afternoon, and from 17.00 things should improve. We would be up as usual before dawn on the morrow; full of expectations that were probably doomed to failure, but we still had pretty good temperatures and the whole of Europe, including UK and right up into Scandinavia was getting a pounding! On the personal front, the washing machine stopped working. Not a tragedy, but inconvenient, and no chance really of getting it repaired or replaced before we left.

## **Day 11**

Day 11 Wow! It was seriously cold this morning, down to 14 degrees with a northerly wind and wind chill of 16 (whatever that means), Anyway nets were open as programmed by 07.30 and we all stood around trying to keep warm. We weren't expecting much, but as usual lived in hope! The first round yielded a couple of passerines, plus a Scops Owl and another Common Nightjar; yippee! The Nightjar was a small female age 3 (hatched this year), in beautiful condition. The Scops was a 4 (hatched before this year) female, again in good condition. One effect of the rain last night was to bring on the flowering of Southern Autumn Crocus. This morning they were popping up everywhere. The rest of the day was very slow, and we ended the day with just 27 birds processed, all new except a Sarwa ringed at the Obs last year. It was no hardship to pack up early and in the afternoon, we went to Europa Point to do a bit of seawatch with GONHS. Saw Med and Audouin's Gull, Balearic Shearwater, etc and some lovely huge Tuna jumping. Total to date is 533 birds processed.

## Day 12

Day 12 and the weather had calmed down; this morning it was 16 degrees with a gentle north westerly wind. Given the battering Spain and France have taken with storm Alex, we were not expecting much to come our way, but hope burns eternal. So after opening our nets and waiting for daylight, we were discussing our most pressing problem - the washing machine which had broken down and we had heard that it wouldn't be fixed before we departed; so it was hand laundry from then on it seemed. However, it was a glorious day on Middle Hill, with a light breeze and blue skies. The sun didn't reach us much before 11, and then it was another hour or so before most nets were in the sun. The birds were very slow, but the second round produced a Grasshopper Warbler (Grawa); new bird for the trip, and we had one re-trap, a Blabi ringed as an adult female on 1 October 2015, was, of course, still an adult female, and in wonderful condition! Pied Flycatchers are still coming through, and we had a nice male Common Redstart as well. Our total was 37 birds ringed, plus the re-trap. Our running total was 571 of 22 species, and on our way back we stopped at the Observatory to find that they had been getting much the same birds (no Grawa though) and fewer Piefl, with a total of 75 for the day.

## Day 13

Day 13 and our last full day; the wind, although reasonably gentle, was from the north east, and when you are on the north east tip of the Rock, that doesn't suit at all. We opened, closed, opened, and eventually took down 2 nets being seriously harassed by the wind. Needless to say, bird count was pretty low. We only processed 33 birds, bringing the total to 632; with one day to go, this would be the fewest birds ringed on any of these expeditions. Best bird of the day was a 3 male Stonechat beginning its transition to adult breeding plumage. Well, that night we had pizzas out, as tomorrow we would pack up and leave, but as the flight wasn't until the evening, we were planning to ring in the morning, then take down the nets, return the poles to Bruce's Farm and everything else to Jew's Gate Observatory; settle our bills and head off to the airport.

## Day 14

Day 14 and we ringed this morning as planned before packing up. There had been Levante overnight and on the way up to the ringing site, we saw a Common Nightjar in the road, but failed to catch it on the road with a hand net, nor later with a tape lure. Not quite dripping birds, but by 10 when we were thinking about packing up, the Blackcaps and Robins were piling into our nets, so much so that we had to extract and close the nets, then go to ring them before returning to take down the nets. We processed 84 birds, mainly Blaca (64) and Robin (11), but also Piefl, Sarwa, White, Garwa, Chiff, Blabi, and best of all our second juvenile Orphean Warbler! This huge warbler is such a contrast with most other warblers, but especially the Chiff at the other end of the size spectrum. For sure, we could have caught more birds this day, and were all cleared away by 12.30 and stopped for our packed lunch before the long trek down the hill with all our kit, starting with the poles, which we carried to Bruce's Farm. By 14.00 all that we had left behind in the Nature Reserve were footprints. On to Jew's gate Observatory, to input IPMR and return everything else; then back to Bruce's Farm, hand back the accommodation, gather our bags and away to the airport for the evening flight.

Another great RAFOS trip; numbers were down, but given the weather, 716 birds processed of 22 species, wasn't bad. Our thanks to GONHS, for the ringing essentials, Helping Hands Trust for the accommodation, Gibraltar Government for permission to ring in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve; to RAFOS and RNBWS for their generous and much appreciated financial support to enable us to hire a suitable vehicle, and to Julia Springett, Mark Cutts, Roger Dickey and me for taking part. Thanks also to the people who sent supportive comments and liked our daily blog on Facebook. The invitation is still there from GONHS; perhaps we shall be back!

## **BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)**

*by John Le Gassick*

I suppose that I became interested in bird surveys shortly after I was posted to RAF Wyton from RAF Kinloss in 1979. This was the first time that I joined a bird club in the UK though I had had a brief association with the bird club at RAF Luqa in the early seventies. The club was the highly active RAF Wyton Ornithological Society (RAFWOS) a group of twenty or so “birders” the majority so much more knowledgeable than I was. It was then a natural progression to join RAF Ornithological Society (RAFOS) attending my first, of many, AGMs at RAF Northolt where I was fortunate enough to be seated at the same table as the late Frank Smith from whom I learnt so much over the years. I still have a pair of 8x30 Carl Zeiss Jena Jenoptems which I bought on his advice for £28.00, a daily reminder of a lovely man!

My first RAFOS expedition was to the Uists in June 1981, based on Benbecula at the Royal Artillery Range which was commanded by Major David Counsell who was also the RAFOS Expeditions Officer. The Uists consist of three islands North Uist and South Uist with Benbecula between them all linked by a causeway. The aim here was to carry out a Breeding Bird Survey for the BTO over the whole of Benbecula and I certainly was impressed with: Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Red-throated Diver and Short-eared Owl. Red-necked Phalarope were also breeding there but on North Uist where we also had a Woodchat Shrike, enough to wet any one’s appetite for surveying! Brian Etheridge the only ringer on the trip carried out a survey on the density of waders breeding on the Machair and subsequently had a paper published in in British Birds.

Bear with me for a moment while I just mention another of the great RAFOS Surveys that I was lucky enough to take part in. Alberta 25th May to 26th of June 1983. The joint leaders of this Expedition were a “Two Als” - Smith and Jordan, of course this was the Golden Age for RAFOS expeditions when they were still classified as adventurous training, which this one surely was. The British Training Unit Suffield, just north of Medicine Hat where the vast deserted area of prairie provided realistic training for Battle Groups based in Germany. One boundary is formed by the South Saskatchewan River (try saying that with a mouthful of compo rations, especially menu “C”) along the whole western Bank there is a Nature Reserve measuring 1.5 by 16 miles and it was here that we pitched our camp. We had qualified for a pallet on an RAF VC10, so we brought everything we needed: Field Kitchen, 10-man tents, folding chairs, tables etc. nearly all the comforts of home. We travelled with the troops from Germany outbound by British Caledonian DC10, returning eventually after some delays in a British Airways 747. We carried out surveys over this area daily recording all birds and animals seen whilst trying to avoid standing on a Rattlesnake or getting eaten alive by mosquitos. The temperature on the prairie was very hot during the day but freezing at night so we dressed to go to bed with every item of clothing we could find, and yes, we did remove our boots! We enjoyed a short R & R break from June 9th to 17th to the Belly River campsite in the Watertown Lakes National Park in the Canadian Rockies. Here of course we continued our recording, but we had proper cooking facilities, ablutions and a large campfire, bliss! We were transported to this relaxing, mosquito free, paradise by a Canadian Army low loader, lock, stock and telescopes.

When I retired in January 2001, I became the BTO Regional Representative for Cambridgeshire. One of my duties, perhaps the most important one, was to organise the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) for all the squares contained in the County of Cambridgeshire. This important survey is organised by the BTO in partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

In 1994, the BBS replaced the Common Bird Census, that started in 1961. One of the major differences was to introduce line transects that replaced the CBS system which used the more intensive territory mapping system. The transects system was much quicker and therefore became attractive to a larger number of volunteers. The Survey requires three visits annually in the Spring: a reconnaissance visit in March, an early



RAFOS Expedition to Alberta, 1983



Common Whitethroat



Corn Bunting Beside Water-Meadows



Green Woodpecker



Song Thrush

visit between early April and mid-May, and a late visit between mid-May and late June. There must be a space of at least four weeks between the early and late visits. The visit in March may not be needed once you are familiar with your survey square and have marked out the ten transects. The 1Km squares are chosen randomly using “stratified sampling approach”, please do not ask! In most cases these are the standard BTO regions. The recording sheet is very user-friendly, using the BTO two letter code for the bird names and divided up into the three reporting distances from the transect line within 25 metres, 25 to 100 metres and over 100 metres. After the visit, the sightings are totalled up for the ten sections on another provided sheet, before submitting the results online or by post. There is also a habitat recording form and again, once you have completed it on your first visit, it does not change very much from year to year. Birds in flight are recorded as such, but hovering Kestrel and displaying Sky Lark are reported in their respective distance bands.

I had a very enjoyable seven years recording TL1278, a square containing Grange Farm Hamerton a few miles to the west of the Alconburys. This square had plenty of hedgerows containing mature trees, a small lake and two small areas of mixed woodland. The varied habitats yielded a good variety of birds, in May it was extremely popular for breeding Common Whitethroat. A good relationship with the landowner (where applicable) is important, and I had good rapport with the farm managers, always willing to stop for a chat and every year I received permission from the owners who lived in Derbyshire. In 2011 the farm was sold to the Mormons, who surprisingly own quite a few farms in the fens, and contact was lost. I decided to stop carrying out the BBS in this square. The survey area was 15 miles from my home in St Ives, so with a preferred start time between six and seven in the morning it made for an early getting “up time”!

Fortunately, a square TL3071 was vacant in St Ives that was far more convenient, and I was more than happy to take it on. This was quite an interesting area along either side of the River Ouse, starting at the far end of the water meadow at Hemingford Grey with five transects ending at the Dolphin Hotel beside the historic St Ives Bridge, which annually hosts a breeding colony of Sand Martins that nest in the drainage pipes. The second five transects start at the Waites adjacent to the All-Saints Parish Church and follow the Thicket path that eventually ends in Houghton village. These transects go through quite a lot of different habitat types, the first five are through Meadow, quite a distance from the Ouse but along a hedge again with plenty of mature trees and a small stream. The second half, after a short break taken opposite the Holt Island Nature Reserve goes along the backs of large houses with well-established gardens, becoming a tree lined path with the old golf course on one side and the river and meadows on the other, eventually arriving at the Thicket that consists of unmanaged mixed woodland. This has been a good area for birds in the Spring that I have often visited during my forty years in St Ives. Here the story oops! I mean the survey ends.

I had another enjoyable seven years surveying this square. The one drawback is the distance walked. Parking in St Ives, you must walk out to the start point of transect 1 and then carry out the survey on the return leg, similarly with the second leg it is double bubble\*! In the past couple of years, I have begun to suffer from “collapsing knee syndrome” other medical classifications are available, so with being unable to carry out the BBS this year I have called it a day, or I suppose I should say early morning! It certainly was worthwhile and enjoyable, and I shall miss it. Every birder knows that the best time for seeing birds is to “rise with the lark” and you are back home by 0900 to submit your records. I commend it to the house!

\*A Double bubble is what you earn when working on Public Holidays, i.e., twice the money. If only they had that system when I was an airman, though I suppose it would have blown too much of the Defence Budget and we would not have been able to afford a whole nine Poseidons



Sand Martins



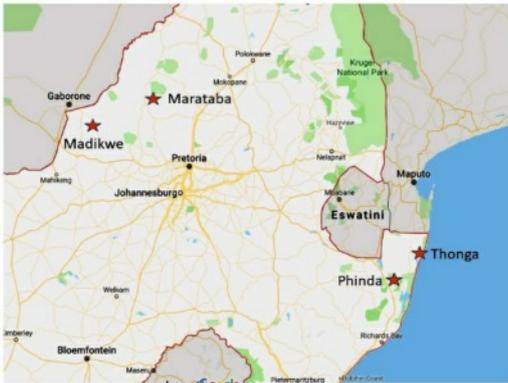
St Ives  
Thicket  
(Above and right)



## Return to the Rainbow

### *An adventure in Zuid-Afrika by Martin Routledge*

Avid readers of this august periodical may recall that in Issue 105 – Spring 2018 there was an article called ‘Birding the Rainbow Nation’ relating my trip to South Africa. I closed that piece with the line: ‘To misquote some actor stealing a line from some general ..... We’ll be back’. Well, guess what – the First Mrs R and I made a return trip in September 2019 so given the Coronavirus lock-down I thought I’d write it up and share some tips for enjoying an adventure in Africa’s southernmost nation.



Our outline plan this time was in and out via Johannesburg; by hire car to Madikwe Game Reserve up on the Botswana border; then on north-eastwards to the Waterberg Mountains and the Marataba Reserve; then back to Jo’burg to drop the car before flying down to Kwa Zulu Natal and Phinda Reserve; and then finally a few days on a deserted beach near the Mozambique border before finally flying back up to Jo’burg and home. Travel in South Africa is every bit as easy as Europe – the road infrastructure between main towns is first-class and internal flights are plentiful and connect to a wide variety of regional airports. Getting from London to Jo’burg is also easy with lots of direct flights although there are

some bargains to be had (or there were) by breaking the journey. For example, this time we went via Dubai, with Emirates, in business class for only a few pounds more than BA’s Premium Economy fare. First tip – shop around and check timings as this can make a big difference to which flight suits you best. Hiring a car is a good option in country but go for a robust 2 x 4 cross-over or a 4 x 4 SUV and make sure you have the e-toll system for auto charging tolls as the major motorway toll booths don’t take plastic and you’ll end up with a pocket of shrapnel. It’s also worth having a sat nav, even though the road signage is very good, it will give you that warm fuzzy feeling when out and about because it is possible to drive for miles without seeing anyone or anything other than glorious countryside. On that note the Support Helicopter Force motto of never passing fuel or a flushing loo without taking advantage is worth bearing in mind ..... My final top-tip would be to think carefully about your first leg after arrival. If you’ve had an overnight flight, it is really worth planning your first stop near the Airport as a long drive might just have you dozing off at the wheel.

We were fortunate enough to have friends living in a Jo’burg suburb so spent our first night with them before driving up to Madikwe Dithaba Lodge. The journey was a good 400 Km or so and certainly 5 hours driving with the last hour being inside the Reserve. Madikwe is a fairly new game reserve being only about 30 years old. The habitat is arid savannah and was farmland, but it was pretty unproductive. Therefore it has been managed back to excellent wildlife habitat (this is becoming increasingly common in South Africa where eco-tourism is generating more wealth than farming) – it boasts all the major South African species and we had some wonderful sightings. The Reserve is almost twice the size of the Isle of Wight and while there are several lodges you do feel the wilderness especially when watching Lions at a kill, Elephants playing at a waterhole or Rhinos staring you down while protecting their young. Birding here was good too with all the usual suspects including Lilac Breasted Rollers, Lapwings, Hornbills, Starlings, Spurfowl, Scrub Robins and Chats. A word or two about South African birding is perhaps in order. First off, local names abound in both English and Afrikaans, but the guides are extremely well trained and will always use the latest International name in English – even if they also use the local name in the same breath. Guidebooks keep being updated so you may have to use an old name to find the bird you’re looking at. I use Sasol’s Birds of Southern Africa by Ian Sinclair *et al* and I note their Fifth Edition is out on 1 Aug 20 at £20 from Amazon. That said, I note most guides use Robert’s Bird Guide by Hugh Chittenden *et al* which at less than

£13 is a good buy and reasonably up to date with their Second Edition having been released in late 2016. Other guides will be available, and all the lodges usually have a library to refer to as well as each tour guide having their own books and on-line phone apps.



*Left – Crowned Lapwing (Plover)    Right – White-browed Scrub Robin*

After 3 nights in Madikwe we set off through the backroads to our next destination in the Waterberg Mountains at Marataba Lodge in the Marakele National Park just north of Thabazimbi. On paper this should have only been a 3 hour drive of about 180 Km but the reality of driving country roads, few of which are surfaced when off the beaten track, meant this took nearer 4 hours – another top tip, set off early ensure you arrive before it get darks! This second park was in what is called the transitional zone between the arid and moist savannah; the latter being more typical of Western provinces of South Africa. In the local Tswana language Marakele means ‘a place of sanctuary’ which we found very appropriate because as well as the usual array of African wildlife the mountains were also a significant habitat for the endangered Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*.





*Cape Vulture*



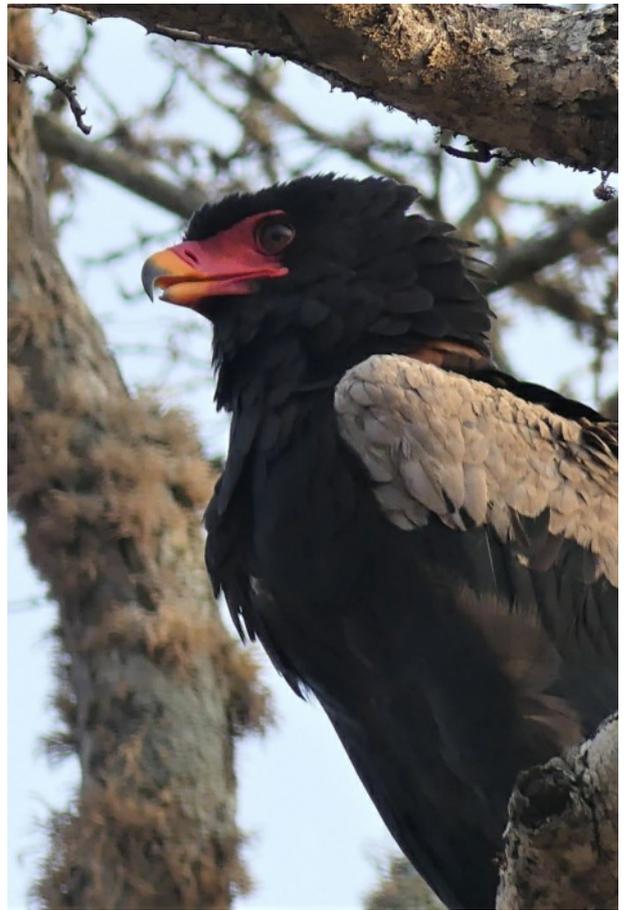
Another tip for planning adventures across South Africa is to visit different habitats. While the main mammal species are reasonably well represented everywhere there is much to be said for mixing it up a little between mountainous areas, the savannahs and the coast. Marakele had some glorious mountain scenery but also some decent water features with a dammed river system. The Reserve was about the same size as Madikwe and as a National Park there were camping areas and some open access areas. On the other hand, there were fewer guest lodges inside the Park and some, such as Marataba, had exclusive driving rights to certain areas which added to the sense of

wilderness. Highlights here (other than Lions feasting on a Cape Buffalo and our first Leopard of the trip) were the Cape Vultures but also a cracking encounter with a Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus* and our guide got all excited by a Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* which was a lifer for him. I'm going to drop the scientific names for now or this will get too long because that waterside drive also added Little Bittern and African Darter to the list along with African Fish Eagle, White-crowned Lapwing, White-fronted Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher and a whole host of other things. The usual routine at safari lodges is based around an early morning game drive, a bit of down-time around the lodge over the rest of the day then an afternoon game drive which takes in sundowners with a glorious sunset and a short night drive home. At Madikwe our down-time was spent watching Elephants at the waterhole from pool side sunbeds. At Marataba Lodge we spent the time by the pool watching the birds come and go. Here we had Striped Swallow, Cape White-eye, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Grey Lourie (or Go-away Birds as the locals call them) among others. All very confiding and often coming for a sip of fresh water from the irrigation sprinkler heads.



*From top to bottom:  
Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle Owl  
Golden-tailed Woodpecker  
Striped Swallow  
Grey Lourie (Go away Bird)*

Leaving Marataba Lodge after 3 nights, one of which was spent in a 'tree house' (but that's another story) was hard. Especially as we had an exceedingly early start for the four-hour drive back to Jo'burg. So early in fact we needed a guide to accompany us to the main gate because self-driving by night isn't permitted in the Reserve. Once through the gate we continued on our own on the public roads following the directions the Lodge staff had given us rather than Google maps or even the Sat Nav's instructions at this stage. Night driving was a bit disconcerting, but the sun was up as we approached the town of Thabazimbi and the rest of the journey to the airport went smoothly enough. Our onwards route was with Airlink, first by Embraer 135 to Nelspruit where we changed aircraft to a Cessna 208 Caravan for the leg southeast to the private strip within the Phinda Mkuze Reserve where we arrived just in time to dump our bags and head out on the afternoon game drive.



Phinda is a private reserve which at around 170 Km<sup>2</sup> is only about half the size of the Isle of Wight but then again it only has 5 lodges within it all owned and operated by &Beyond. The habitat is Lowland Sand Forest and as if half of the Isle of Wight isn't enough to drive around in there were arrangements to drive in to neighbouring properties and down to the beach if the game sightings warranted it. Our best sightings here were Cheetahs, a pair of copulating Lions and a good interaction with a Hyena family. The birds didn't disappoint either with an early encounter with a family of Bateleur (or should that be Short-tailed Eagle? It is hard to keep up with this re-naming malarkey at times), a Secretary Bird in flight, Crowned Hornbill, with Narina Trogon and Crested Guinea fowl around the basher. We also had good sightings of the endemic Pink-throated Twin Spot *Hypargos margaritatus* (I thought I'd treat you to this scientific name as it has a cocktail ring to it!) which, although relatively common locally, is pretty illusive and again had our guide all excited.



*From top to bottom:*  
*Bateleur*  
*Narina Trogon*  
*Pink-throated Twin Spot*

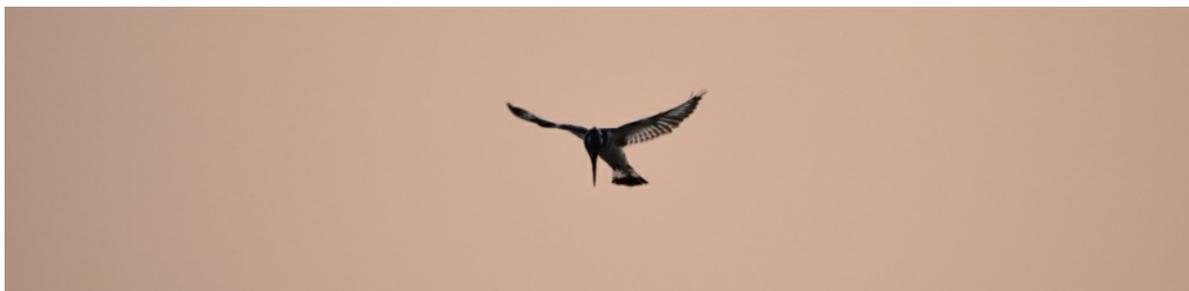


Our final stop on this trip to the Rainbow Nation was on the coast about 100Km Northeast of Phinda. We were taken by car to a Cashew plantation where the Lodge transport was to collect us for the last 25Km of 4 x 4 only through the dunes to Thonga Beach Lodge. Their strap line is 'a civilised distance from civilisation' and although there was a local village nearby it certainly felt like being on a desert island with wonderful views over the Indian Ocean and Humpback Whale sightings galore. This wasn't really a wildlife retreat, although they did offer guided walks and birding trips to the local lake, it was more a rest and relax on the beach venue. Still one makes the best of these things and whale watching from your bungalow deck has got to be done as has sundowners by Lake Sibayi in the iSimangaliso Wetlands (a World Heritage site) and walks along the beach. For Gull lovers (sad demented folk that they are) the nearest thing we got to *Larus verminus* was a rather smart Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*. Also new to the list on this leg were Reed and White-breasted Cormorants, White-fronted Plover, Red Knot, Cape Longclaw and an Osprey.

*Left – White-fronted Plover Right – Cape Longclaw*



Finally, it was time to head for Blighty. We knew it would take 6-8 hours to get to Jo'burg to connect with the Dubai flight and then on to London. We were offered the option of a road transfer – about 8 hours all in; or going down to Richard's Bay (about 3 hours) and waiting around for a few hours before flying north. In the end we opted for the internal flight even though it meant hanging around at a small regional airport with few facilities. All in all, another wonderful adventure in South Africa. This was our fifth trip here and we've visited all four corners but have yet to explore the big bit in the middle – perhaps next time. It is a vast and fabulous country and I highly recommend it - whatever your budget you can have a wonderful time.



*Pied Kingfisher joining for sundowners!*

## **A Summer full of House Sparrows in 2020**

*By John N Wells (at High Street, Ramsey, Huntington)*

The first RAFOS Newsletter article I wrote on my breeding House Sparrows, in nest boxes in my garden was written back in 2018. Back then we had a successful assumed 'pretty-normal' year of breeding activity. In fact, up to that time we had a few years of steady success in breeding House Sparrow totals in the 9 boxes or chambers, that I have put up for the birds. The sightings are recorded for The British Trust for Ornithology Nest Record Scheme (NRS) See: [www.bto.org/nestrecordscheme](http://www.bto.org/nestrecordscheme). Results are recorded on a card for each nest box or natural nest and an example is provided showing both sides of a card for you. See the examples below.

My earlier article, published in RAFOS Newsletter – Spring 2019, gives the location and type of each box. The 2 'terrace' boxes; on the side of my house each with 3 chambers are fairly productive. Since my last report, the upper of the two has had a complete refurbishment, with a fresh rear solid pine panel, a new pine lid and new hinges. 6 nesting chambers are available in these 2 'terrace' nest boxes with chambers for House Sparrows, and they do take readily to this design. I understand Tree Sparrows do likewise, but I am not lucky enough to have those as the habitat is completely wrong. My home is in the High Street on the approaches to town.

### **2020 Status.**

This breeding season, I felt a follow-up was required. Not only because I counted 34 House Sparrows of mixed age on my drive this late summer (Aug 2020). Many of them were juveniles that have stayed loyal to their parents' nest and my home, which is terrific. This is probably all due to the types and amount of food I put out for them all! There have been so many that have stayed loyal, the bird food price tag has risen accordingly.

The front drive of the house has become the centre of sparrow activity of late, as I have moved 4 feeders: 2 large seed tube feeders, 1 long fat ball metal feeder, and 1 bird cake wire feeder to the front drive and put them on the dying Cherry tree. The drive has better cover from the predators, which helps. Being on the drive, the birds also get good all-round visibility and thick cover in the Ivy strewn hedge and Virginia creepers covering the front garden wall along the main road. This nearby cover is essential for Sparrows. As I have witnessed many a time, they take fright and quickly hide. They are almost 'jumpy' in taking cover readily whether it be an overhead raptor, folks on the nearby pavement, being 'spooked' by a corvid's shadow, or just me going to the car. A question I ask myself is: are House Sparrows now more nervous now than they used to be when we were kids? They seem more nervous to me, in their decline. Also is the local Male Sparrowhawk hunting my group as his standalone bird predation site, his own feeding frenzy?

The feeders are hung in a dead flowering Cherry tree. This tree holds 2 nest boxes: a Stonecrete and the "Wooden slatted". This may change in future, as I may convert an open-fronted box that has never been used in its existing location, moving it from the rear garden.

Furthermore, I thought it may well be worth recording the highlights and facts on success (and failure) of each nest, but in a more readable way - like the previous article but less tiresome. This time I would be extracting each key visit as done last time but cut down to the essential facts. This report is by nest box and location, highlighting young at their growing stages and some additional highlights and scientific activity to try and understand why this popular little bird has declined nationally. Only my observations, you understand, no massive brain power or algorithms involved. I will also sum up my findings in red for ease of reading.

Species (Code) CARD 1	H O U S P				County/Region Code G B C A	2 0 2 0	Year 1/2	BTO Ref.
Observer Code W E L L	Locality (Place-Name) FRONT CHERRY STONEREVE				Altitude 4 m	For Ringers Use Only Female Parent Age: Ring No:		
Day	Mth.	Hour	Number of Live Eggs Dead Eggs Live Young Dead Young	Status Codes (A two-letter code per column - see Coding Card)	Grid Reference T L Z B 4 B 4 5	Male Parent Age: Ring No:	Young Ring Numbers	
09	03	07	- - - -	AB MB			COMMENTS SOME THINNING MATERIAL TO NEST BOX.	
31	03	10		AV FN			FEMALE AT ENTRANCE	
04	04	11		FV			FEMALE HEAD OUT OF HOLE IN BOX	
06	04	10	0 0 0 0	FV MN			NEEDS MORE EGGS IN NEST (NOT VISIBLY)	
08	04	10	0 0 0 0	N3			NOT YET HATCHED. FEW FEATHERS DEVELOPING. (NEEDS MORE)	
01	5	30	0 0 4 0	NA BL PV			DAY 1 OF 2 SINCE HATCHED (EST) DARK. MALE SHIMMER. APPROX. 3.5. MALE HUNGERS. DOWN 3. BLEDGET I DEAD CHICK (IN)	
09	5	13	0 0 4 0	FM AV			REMOVED FROM NEST. GUN OVER. DEAD (GUN) WAS AT FM SOME	
16	5	14	0 0 0 1	NE SO JD			BY YELLOW TAPE/ROLL STRONG.	

HABITAT			
Refer to Nest Record Scheme Coding Card for Habitat codes. Choose one letter for the main habitat type (H1/H2) and then one number from column A. More than one number may be chosen from columns B and C.			
FIRST HABITAT			
H1 (One letter)	Column A (One number)	Column B (One number per box Start in left-hand box)	Column C (One number per box Start in left-hand box)
F	2	2 5	2 6
SECOND HABITAT			
H2 (One letter)	Column A (One number)	Column B (One number per box Start in left-hand box)	Column C (One number per box Start in left-hand box)
F	1	5	2 8
NEST SITE			
In <input type="checkbox"/> On <input type="checkbox"/> Under <input type="checkbox"/>		CAREFULLY CROSS THROUGH BOXES THIS:	
Tree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bush <input type="checkbox"/>	Dwarf Shrub <input type="checkbox"/>	Creepers <input type="checkbox"/>
Reeds <input type="checkbox"/>	Herbs <input type="checkbox"/>	Grass <input type="checkbox"/>	Dead Veg. <input type="checkbox"/>
Floating Veg. <input type="checkbox"/>	Hedgerow <input type="checkbox"/>	Ditch <input type="checkbox"/>	Wall <input type="checkbox"/>
Building <input type="checkbox"/>	Field <input type="checkbox"/>	Near: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A	Centra <input type="checkbox"/> Margin <input type="checkbox"/>
			Field <input type="checkbox"/> Wood <input type="checkbox"/>
			Well Hidden <input type="checkbox"/>
			Part Hidden <input type="checkbox"/>
			Exposed <input type="checkbox"/>
			Nest Height above Ground <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 m
			Unenclosed <input type="checkbox"/>
			Hole or Crevise <input type="checkbox"/>
			Ledge <input type="checkbox"/>
			Nest Box <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			In another Bird/Animal Nest (give details below) <input type="checkbox"/>
			Over Water <input type="checkbox"/>
			Islet <input type="checkbox"/>
Give details of plant species and any extra comments on Nest Site			
FIRST HABITAT	NEST BOX (MODERATE)		
SECOND HABITAT	ON OLD FRONTING CHERRY TREE		
NEST SITE	BRANCH/BOX (NEAR COVER)		

Nest Record Card issued to nest recorders by The BTO (it is 2 sided).

There were some sizeable ‘date-line’ gaps, because I was away in Shropshire caring for my Dad under the lockdown, sharing caring duties with my brother on a fortnightly basis. But I feel there is enough of a picture to get a full understanding on just how successful, or not in some cases, the birds were this year.

### Hazardous Plastic.

Also I have found that my House Sparrows, were also being subject, and that parent birds are bringing in additional nest materials of a non-natural source, namely plastic and nylon string. Plastics in nest lining is not a good thing and subject to much science of late, some of which are listed below for you to read at your leisure, in scientific papers and articles as follows:

BTO – study literature and Papers

Birdguides (published articles), links to literature

University under-graduates’ papers:

- o University Study; The Environmental Research Institute, and Seabird Study Group (Reference 1).

ERI Research: Nest Incorporation of debris-monitoring form (Reference 2).

Furthermore, more recently our-own work; as a Society (RAFOS)

- o Support towards this project on visual observation on ‘Simmer Dim’ Shetland (2019)
- o Visual observation on Eday and Stronsay on Orkney (2018),

in both cases providing counts to Dr Nina O’Hanlon at North Highland College and submissions to the new global Database. (Reference 3).

Sadly, I had a case of losing a youngster. The dead chick was found in the nest checks in the breeding season the summer of 2019. It was found on nest removal after cleaning checks. The box concerned was the “Front Cherry slatted” box. The dead bird was hidden deep in the lower regions of a deep nest. It was removed for photographing; and taken with its plastic/string around the bird for completion of an on-line report. Plastic in the nest can also lead to fatal entanglement of either the adults and or chicks but both must die a horrible death not being able to move, feed, or escape.

The new database has been set up to record findings. It takes records now from around the Globe.

These records assisted the project massively with hard data.

My deceased Sparrow as such, was not now a wasted life, and was added to the global Database (Reference 3).

To me it looked like this youngster had become entangled in blue nylon bailing string that was brought into the nest. It was unable to extract itself, as the twine was tight and twisted around its tarsus. It would have died of starvation and was probably also unable to climb up to the entrance hole. It was probably abandoned, deserted by the adults with starvation being terminal I assume.

## Nest Box Records-2020

**Nest 1. Front Cherry - Stonecrete. (Brood 1).** This box has been busy with exploratory visits by birds going back as far as 9<sup>th</sup> March and a male was taking nest material to build at that time, shortly after backed up by a female on 4<sup>th</sup> April. I had no visits with eggs due to being away at Dad's. The nest had 4 young at stage naked/blind (Code; NA) on 7<sup>th</sup> May with both parents visiting and feeding the young (pairs visiting; Code; PV) seen. 3 successfully fledged and 1 dead juvenile was found with the empty nest cup, when I re-checked later (*date lost by photocopy of card!*) sorry. The dead youngster was removed to permit later broods. There is always a caveat we remove dead chicks in the NRS, as I feel it helps later broods, but also gives the adults a hand in keeping the nest clear of parasites and other 'nasties' for the chicks that do remain to progress to a healthy state as well protecting the brooding parents inside the box. **Outcome: 4 eggs, 1 died, 3 fledged.**

**Nest 2. Front Cherry - Stonecrete. (Brood 2).** On 24<sup>th</sup> May the first brood; female or another female had laid 3 eggs which were warm (Code; WA) and neatly covered with nest lining. The covered eggs are given (Code; CV). A high count for any nest was of 5 eggs by my 'finger-touch' method and counted on 31<sup>st</sup> May. Adults were undertaking regular visits on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> June. 11<sup>th</sup> June, bodies of 2 young were removed and the other 3 were outcome 'unknown'. (Code; OU) was annotated. Nil further visits were made until 18<sup>th</sup> June when the nest was found empty. Rather a blow this, as between the dates 2<sup>nd</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> June, whilst I was up in Ellesmere, something untoward happened. It is highly unlikely that young will have been raised over such a short timescale (2<sup>nd</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> Jun) and so the outcome was uncertain. I feel it was unlikely that 3 young would have reached full flight feathers and fledging age. Therefore, it was likely that all 5 Failed. Thus, a code of OU was selected for the form. **Outcome: 5 eggs, 2 young died, (suspect same for other 3). Assumption thus 5 died. Outcome unknown.**

**Nest 3. Front Cherry – Slatted Wooden box.** This box is showing sign of age and I had fitted a new hard-wearing plastic cover stapled to the hinged lid back on 8<sup>th</sup> Apr 2020 to keep the nest chamber dry. It probably needs replacement right now, ready for 2021. Things after the 8<sup>th</sup> of April then went rather quiet. The nest record cards total 3, so the birds did get busier. Building commenced in earnest late April with the nest size (Code; N3) up to and including 01<sup>st</sup> May. I saw a Female visiting on 9<sup>th</sup> May. The first eggs were estimated laid around then, and 4 eggs were counted on 16<sup>th</sup> May which were warm, and nest lined (Code; NL). A visit on 24<sup>th</sup> May, saw 4 eggs and 1 naked NA and (Code; BL), 'blind chick'. On 31<sup>st</sup> May 5 Young were healthy at showing (Code; FS), 'feather in sheath'. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> June, both adults were seen visiting (Code; AV), also audible young were heard from below the box (Code; AY). The same code AY was heard on the 10<sup>th</sup> June. Both adults were feeding (Code; AF), very busily and during the feeds audible young where obvious if you stood close to nest. On a visit on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2 exploded nest on opening – I never like this stage as you always wonder once they have 'exploded' (Code; EX), do they cope outside the nest, possibly for a day or two or maybe a few days before they would have left naturally. On the same visit the three remaining in the nest were allocated (Code; RF) meaning 'ready to fledge'. Heartening news was when adults were seen feeding fledged young nearby, on my neighbours drive in the Ash tree amongst leafy cover, and a few days thereafter, a very good sign. These Codes thus were added to a new entry line (Code; AF), Adult 'feeding' and young 'near nest' (Code; NN). My second to last entry for Brood 2 was on the 16<sup>th</sup> June - 3 young near

nest, both parents feeding near the now empty nest. The final visit on 18<sup>th</sup> June 3, confirmed Codes entered; NE, SL, and YC. Meaning 'nest empty', 'seen leaving' and 'young capable' of leaving on my previous visit. **Outcome: 5 eggs, 5 young fledged.** A first ever 5 hatched 5 successfully fledged; 2020 record.

**Nest 4. Eucalyptus (Rear Garden) - 1<sup>st</sup> Brood.** This box proved popular early in the season with a male House Sparrow showing interest on 6<sup>th</sup> March 20. By the 16<sup>th</sup> April we had a nest build (Code; N3) which is  $\frac{3}{4}$  built, with the 3 eggs laid, all 3 were warm (Code; WA) and covered, slightly unusual as in my opinion it that the nest wasn't the full N4 'nest completed' size code. 3 weeks later, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May, it proved very tricky deciding on how many of the 3 had hatched and fledged as they never gave me good views on all of the 7 visits in May. They all bunched up and huddled close together on each visit. Such was the indeterminate state of things! But a positive 2 definitely fledged and the nest was back in use for a second brood early in June. (See below). **Outcome: 3 eggs, 2 young fledged.**

**Nest 5. Eucalyptus (Rear Garden) - 2<sup>nd</sup> Brood.** On 13<sup>th</sup> June I recorded 4 eggs in the second clutch. Progression was to 3 of these ready to fledge and well hunkered down, which is a trait, that the well-advanced youngsters do as you approach or open the nest box lid. Quite what happens to failed eggs.

Q: Can adults remove them?

Q: Do vermin eat them?

Q: Do parents or the young eat them for nutrition?

Q: Do they rot inside the nest?

When I see the 'likely dead' eggs, I always leave them for as long as possible, just in case. I never assume cold eggs are 'dead' eggs. The youngsters fledged by the second week of July with a good success rate of 2 seen leaving at 16:00 on 16<sup>th</sup> July. These young stayed local in my garden and the front drive of my neighbours, as 2 hours later the last youngster was still being fed at the box before it left the box at 18:00. There is always a little bit of doubt on these things, hence the empty nest check. The later checks to confirm breeding finished is once you think all have departed the nest. **Outcome: 4 eggs, 3 young fledged.**

**Nest 6. Side of house access gate: Terrace-type Box: Upper Left compartment.** Throughout April (1 visit on 6<sup>th</sup>), in May 5 visits and June, 1 visit/check, the nest chamber contained a mixture of dry grass some thick stemmed vegetation, but it never got above the Code; N1 (Nest  $\frac{1}{4}$  built). The static sense can lead you to think they have abandoned but you still must record, I have found from experience. Rightly so, as on 2<sup>nd</sup> July there was a rapid nest build and increase of brought-in material, some even showing from outside the box. As I had not been at home and thus around much, it was a pleasant surprise to see this chamber had been accepted as a viable nest. Therefore, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July around 13:00 when opening I found 4 eggs were inside and all 4 were warm but uncovered. There was a lot of activity between 6<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July and all 4 young successfully increased weight with a feather (Code; FL), which is wing feathers more than  $\frac{2}{3}$  out of the sheath. I estimated the brood fledged around or on 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> July, as both agitated parents were in the adjacent Lime trees as I walked past, but did no further checks on them, not wanting to see them burst from the nest, as I do not like that aspect of the task. **Outcome: 4 eggs, 4 young, all fledged**

**Nest 7. Side of house access gate: Terrace-type box: Upper Centre compartment.** It is hard to determine what occurred with this box. On 6<sup>th</sup> April there were just remnants of over-wintering material inside (Code; N0 (zero)). On 1<sup>st</sup> May I had 1 live egg and 2 live young so the pair must have pressed on with the nest and laid quickly between visits. The 2 young were at the blind stage, and naked. On the 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1 chick was dead and this was removed. There was no sign of the other juveniles, so I am assuming a completely failed nest attempt. Three further visits in May with no sign of usage within the nest cup. **Outcome: 3 eggs, 3 dead.** Based on the unlikelihood of birds reaching full-term between 1<sup>st</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> May



Above - Group of House Sparrows in Cherry Tree

Below - Juvenile House Sparrow Dust-bathing



**Nest 8. Side of house access gate: Terrace-type box: Upper Right compartment.** Again, commencement of visits was on 6<sup>th</sup> April with signs of use with dry grass remnants. By 1<sup>st</sup> May there was a dry open bottomed start of a nest at (Code; N1). Two further visits 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May with little changed until 16<sup>th</sup> May when the female was observed sitting tight (Code; FN) 'female at nest' and nest code 'lined'. 2 eggs inside the nest on 24<sup>th</sup> May, both covered and warm. This increased to 3 eggs on 31<sup>st</sup> May and 2 live chicks at stage naked. On 11<sup>th</sup> June we had 3 young with feather (Code; FL) 'feather long' at 2/3rds stage, but no eggs seen. Two further visits in June, and on 18<sup>th</sup> the female was sitting tight on the young. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July, the young had fledged with an 'empty nest' (Codes; NE and NN) which is fledged young - 'near the nest'. **Outcome: 3 eggs seen, (but 2 further eggs). 3 young fledged.**

**Nest 9. Side of house access gate: Terrace-type box: Lower box – Centre compartment.** The front opening box has access for all three compartments to be checked concurrently which is fine, but also tricky if there's young at various stages and some are ready to go. Then it is good to use a cloth to protect a sitting female and or youngsters to prevent them falling or bursting out. Again, checks commenced on 6<sup>th</sup> April and 3 early May visits and at both times the nest was being progressed: at N1, and N2. I estimated the nest was completed approximately the second week around the second week of May, as on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2 warm eggs were present with both parents swapping the task between them on the 20<sup>th</sup> May. On 24<sup>th</sup> May it was still 2 naked blind young, estimated at 1-2 days old. 7 days later, on 31<sup>st</sup> May, I had 4 young at stage 'feathers long'. This was surprisingly quick growth spurt so an element of either 'hidden eggs' under youngsters or a mis-selection to 'Feathers medium' 1/3 to 2/3<sup>rds</sup> out of sheath was my assumption for rapid growth. Their feather sheaths were still at full extent; 'feather long' the 31<sup>st</sup> May and by 3<sup>rd</sup> June they had all departed safely. My next check was 11<sup>th</sup> June when the nest was empty and with well-trodden linings. **Outcome: 2 eggs counted, later 4 young, 4 young fledged.**

**Nest 10 - Side of house access gate: Terrace-type box: Lower box – Centre compartment - 2<sup>nd</sup> Brood.** Laying commenced very soon after the first brood left with 4 live eggs counted on 18<sup>th</sup> June. Before a big gap to the next check on 2<sup>nd</sup> July where successfully all 4 were well in good health, naked and blind. One further check on 13<sup>th</sup> July produced a disappointing 2 live and 1 dead (removed by me), and 1 'AWOL' - unknown. By 19<sup>th</sup> July, the young left had successfully fledged box and Code; NE recorded. But Code; NN also noted as young were in abundance 'near the nest' boxes, which obviously was indeterminate, given the numbers we have but a fair assumption based on juvenile's 'call' and begging behaviour. So, it is fair to say they were from this box, but recorded nonetheless. **Outcome: 4 eggs, 4 young hatched, 1 dead, 1 unknown. 2 young fledged.**

**Unused #1. Nest. Side of house access gate: Terrace-type box: Lower Box – Left compartment.** As with a lot of the compartments, the usual dry grass was placed or carried inside by birds looking to either tempt a mate or explore suitability. By 9<sup>th</sup> May there were lots of visits by both male and females, but the nest never got beyond the N1 stage. No further use after 11<sup>th</sup> June. **Outcome: Not used. No card submitted.**

**Unused #2 Nest. Side of house access gate: Terrace-type box: Lower Box – Right compartment.** Same findings and outcomes on same dates as compartment above. **Outcome: Not used. No card submitted.**

Summary Totals – 2020. The Summary Totals were as follows:

Nest completed with breeding attempts: **10 Active nests (boxes/chambers).**

Nest chambers not used: **2 chambers.**

Nests with Eggs laid: **Qty 39 eggs counted.**

Unsuccessful-perished-dead young: **Qty 10 (young) died.**

Successfully Total **26 fledged**.

**Eggs failed.** A number of unknown outcomes for some eggs. This is difficult to determine as eggs get perished/broken or are infertile.

### **Addendum:**

During the season, a sample of other interesting occurrences were as follows.

- 1. House Sparrow joins me for the Test Match.** Whilst sitting in our lounge watching the Test Match on TV, I heard the birds in the roof or chimney. It seemed to be the usual House Sparrow squabbling and commotion. Then I heard what sounded like something dropping down the chimney stack. Luckily, we do not use the fire as an open grate, it is a gas-fired 'look-a-like' coal burner that has not been used in anger for ages. We have just closed off the chimney stack with old newspaper to prevent draughts. I continued watching the game, thinking the birds had either dropped some food or knocked off a piece of moss or cement debris. Then I heard the fluttering and something rustling on top of the newspaper. I pulled out the old newspaper and a juvenile 'spuggy' flew out into the lounge and into the conservatory. I hastily opened some conservatory windows and before I knew it, the juvenile had made its escape. All was well, but it did make me smile to myself.
- 2. Male Sparrowhawk on front Cherry tree - chase/fail.** Sue told me she had seen a beautiful male Sparrowhawk sitting in full sun, on the front Cherry Tree perch that I had placed for the House Sparrows to gather and feed. Luckily for my 'gang' none had copped it! Sue said she saw the male fly away 'empty taloned'. The game of percentages, I guess.
- 3. Dust Bathing in Sand.** Another little trait the birds have done this year, was to dust-bathe in some building aggregate, sand and light gravel, that was pre-positioned by the builder's merchants in Summer, part of my DIY plans for a seating area and path I was building. On one occasion I had up to 15 Sparrows each creating their own shallow dust bowl in the building mix.

Hope you enjoyed my House Sparrow tales – John.

References:

1. Birdguides \_ 09 May 20: High levels of plastic found in Scottish seabird nests – Lady Isle
2. Environmental Research Institute (ERI) – and their; Form Nest Incorporation of Debris Monitoring Form. Email [nina.ohanlon@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:nina.ohanlon@uhi.ac.uk) <https://eri.ac.uk/research/major-projects/circularocean/nest-incorporation-of-plastic/>  
<https://eri.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-Nest-incorporation-of-debris-Monitoring-Form.docx>
3. Database of Plastic in Nests. <https://www.birdsanddebris.com> courtesy of Dr N O'Hanlon

## REPORT OF BREEDING BARNACLE GEESE ON RAFOS EXPEDITION ‘SIMMER DIM 2019’ – 22 JUNE 2019.

By J N Wells

During Expedition “Simmer Dim 2019”, the Northern sub-team whilst working in pairs on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee’s ‘Seabirds Count’, the periodic survey of breeding seabirds in UK and Ireland, located a breeding pair of Barnacle Geese (*Branta leucopsis*) in an apparent wild state in the Northmavine, area of mainland Shetland.

During the survey we were working as 2 teams (Northern and Western Teams), and from those teams the daily workload/survey task was split into independent sub-teams of 2 or 3 personnel, depending upon ease of ground terrain, daily tasking area visibility between teams and vehicular access.

The sighting was made by myself, alongside Mike Hayes, as we walked across open, hilly and fairly rough, peat-bog dominated terrain carrying out skua transects for the Seabird Survey. The pair of Barnacle Geese were first observed at a distance; approx. 800mtrs in 10Km Grid Square HU39 ‘Sandvoe’. (Sandvoe was a ‘named’ 10km Survey Square on OS map Sheet 1; Shetland-Yell & Unst - we had split each area of the Northmavine peninsula into 10km BTO Birdtrack reporting survey squares). The nest was located **on the shore of** the small dubh lochan at Whitler Hill, Grid Ref HU317 903, (dubh lochan is the Gaelic term for dark small loch). Our team considered this to be a significant find and for it to be sufficiently intriguing to submit a Rare Breeding Birds’ Panel (RBBP) report. The find, was felt to be significant for the following reasons:

- To all intents and purposes this appeared to be a wild breeding pair of Barnacle Geese – the first in the UK perhaps.
- As far as we were aware, there was no population of breeding feral Barnacle Geese in Scotland (although there are feral pairs elsewhere in UK, and the RSPB routinely culls them when they attempt to breed on their reserves, in order to conserve native birds of conservation concern<sup>1</sup>)
- Reporting our find to the Shetland Recorder, immediately, might allow a local follow-up visit that could potentially reveal the provenance of the breeding pair
- Research later (post expedition), confirmed it was worthy of a RBBP report. Research in published literature, was difficult at the time due to a lack of Internet facility.
- Any breeding report would be in addition to those shown at the time of [*Bird Atlas 2007-11 the breeding and wintering birds of Britain and Ireland*] <sup>2</sup>
- Could the birds have been an ‘undershoot’, heading for their Arctic breeding grounds in Svalbard or Greenland, but short-stopping for some unknown reason in the Shetland Isles? Migratory waterfowl do sometimes short-stop, often due to either illness, or injury e.g. from so-called ‘pricking’, that is from non-lethal wounds inflicted by wildfowlers’ shotgun pellets. In this case, the wild uninhabited peat land terrain of northern Shetland, north of 60 degrees north, is not dissimilar to ‘tundra’ goose habitat in Svalbard and elsewhere. Moreover, Barnacle Geese have been steadily colonising other more southerly habitats from their core breeding grounds base over the past few decades, in both Iceland and the Faeroe Islands, so Shetland would be the next logical stepping-stone south in their continued expansion.
  - Hence we debated, “Could this possibly be a wild breeding pair in Britain?”
- The pair was also wary of the 2 humans approaching, and the sitting female crouched low to the ground, with her neck extended, in a classic profile-minimising attempt to hide from us, i.e. “You

<sup>1</sup> Martin Harper’s blog - <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/martinharper/posts/the-conservationist-s-dilemma-an-update-on-the-science-policy-and-practice-of-the-impact-of-predators-on-wild-birds-6>

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 7: The Breeding Atlas of Britain 2007-2010

*can't see me, if I lie low like this*". You can clearly see this in one of Mike's photos (first published in the RAFOS Newsletter<sup>1</sup>).

- The nest site was relatively well hidden. The lochan was approx. 50 sq yds, located in a low-lying, boggy area of rolling hillside and peat moorland some 6km from the nearest human habitation, the tiny village of North Roe, and accessible only by foot or a very rough 4x4 track used by the local shepherd/crofter, 1 mile distant.
- The lochan was an eminently suitable breeding site, with tall stands of sedge with reeds fringing the water. This helped partially hide the sitting female from certain angles of approach.
- I first noticed the breeding pair, by spotting the off-nest bird (male?) who was swimming in the middle of the dubh lochan as we crested the high ground some 800 meters away on our transect, during a routine "stop-and-scan" from high ground -the technique we were using whilst looking for breeding terns, gulls and skuas on territory. The incubating bird was then picked up on the shore-line in a clump of bog cotton grass and other vegetation.
- The pair were reported mid-expedition to the County Recorder for his comment.

That evening, following call-over we did some further research, as best we could with available technology using our mobile phones and Keith's laptop, and drafted a RBBP Report, and a note on the finding for the Shetland Recorder - copy attached below - for those interested in rarity form compilation and submission.

**NOTE:** The finding was originally referenced by the Team Leader to our members in Newsletter No 109-Spring 2020.

Moreover, another territorial pair was spotted 2 days later, also by Mike Hayes and myself, in the vicinity of HU257838, location ID on map as Mus Wells, on the middle lochan of 3 at Gossa Water. Again, the habitat was in wild uninhabited terrain in a remote northerly peatland location, north of 60 degrees North. This pair remained attached to the loch whilst we counted all Seabirds for the survey task and all other species for BTO Birdtrack our ancillary task. They pair seemed to be holding a territory and during the 20 minute count, took off from and landed back on the loch on 3 occasions. No nest was located or searched for, as it was not the Primary Task.

The follow-up correspondence with the County Recorder, WWT SMEs and the BTO revealed that there were some historical/anecdotal reports of a presumed small feral / greylag-barnacle hybrid flock in Northmavine in the past, around 2009-10, including a breeding report from 2009 (6 goslings) but nothing recent or that he or we could find in the literature. These reports apparently referred to a small feral flock at Haggrister, in the north Mainland, in the summers of 2009 and 2010, but the Recorder was not aware of any reports of them since. The flock numbered 13 on 24th August 2009 and it was here that a pair raised the 6 goslings in 2009, but again he was not aware of any previous or subsequent breeding attempts. He went to state that were a couple of definite feral birds (originally part of a collection) at Kirkabister in Nesting around the same time but they have not been seen for a number of years either. And finally he informed us that there was a female at West Sandwick on Yell from 2013, which was thought initially to have been injured. It took up residence there and laid an infertile clutch in both 2014 and 2015 and was still present in at least 2016. Finally, the Recorder had spotted four barnacle geese at Tingon on June 10th 2019, commenting that they were a little bit approachable for his liking (i.e. not truly wild) although they did fly when he got to within 10 or so metres of them and were all fully-winged i.e. not pinioned. He assumed that the 2 x RAFOS pairs encountered were probably these four birds.

### **Research using BTO's 2007-11 Atlas of Breeding & Wintering Birds as my guide**

On the Islands of Shetland/Fair Isle: There was a sum **total of 14** unconfirmed breeding sightings of Barnacle Geese during the five-year period of (*Bird Atlas 2007-11*).

**No breeding** of Barnacle Geese was recorded in mainland Shetland over the Atlas period.

<sup>1</sup> RAFOS: Newsletter 109, Spring 2020

**The nearest confirmed recorded breeding pair** are shown in Grampian region, SE of Inverness- Page 176, BREEDING DISTRIBUTION 2008-11. (*Bird Atlas 2007-11*).

**With these comments in note form - from the Atlas;**

[NOTE 1]. Separation of breeding populations in the field cannot be determined between Greenland-breeding and Svalbard breeding; Barnacle Geese populations. Merging with a growing naturalised population. Furthermore: The naturalised population, which is found mainly in Britain has a much wider distribution, and accounts for many of the occupied 10Km square in inland areas. Particularly in England. (*Bird Atlas 2007-11*).

- *My Note:* Our pair were in Scotland, on a migration route and in an under-watched, very remote location with very few birdwatchers and or recorders to undertake BBS type or Atlas work. Was this area even covered?

[NOTE 2] Migratory Barnacle Geese also use inland feeding areas, but these are generally not more than a few Km from their wintering location

- *Therefore: Q: Could our pair have been there over-winter?*
- *After the event; We also considered whether the pair were injured? Not able to complete return flight? But without disturbing the sitting female, we could not – or rather did not, confirm that as such.*
- **The Gossa Waters pair were not photographed, or any nest searched for or located. For the reasons stated in the Report to The Recorder.**

Certainly, worth jotting down our findings and reporting them correctly through the proper channels as is the nature of our work and for which we get recognition.

Any thoughts on the above records can be sent via Society means.

John Nigel WELLS

**References:**

*Balmer, D.E., Gillings, S., B.J., Swann, R.L., Downie, I,S & Fuller, R.J., 2013. Bird Atlas 2007-11: the breeding and wintering birds of Britain and Ireland. BTO Books, Thetford.*

- Gillings, S., Balmer, D.E., 2013 Interpretation of species accounts

RAFOS Newsletter 109, Spring 2020. Francis, W., - Grant Report: Expedition SIMMER DIM 2019 – (RAFOS). Page 20 Article by K.R. Cowieson. Photo: M., Hayes. Titled Incubating Barnacle Goose, in an apparent wild state.

Dear Rob,

**Distribution:**

**Rob Fray - Shetland Bird Club Recorder**

Info copies to:

Carl Mitchel - WWT

Mr Nail Burton, Liz Humphreys and Dawn Balmer - BTO

RAFOS Committee. Field Activities Liaison Officer - K Cowieson, Chairman - M Routledge, (for Committee). (Publicity Member) - Jayne Lindley.

For information, during the course of Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS) surveying work for The Seabirds Group on Mainland Shetland during the period 17-30 June 19, a RAFOS colleague Mike Hayes and I came across a breeding pair of Barnacle Geese on a small dubh lochan out in the peatlands of far north-west Northmavine. Details for the RBBP and the Shetland Bird Report are below, as are my contact details just in case you require any further information.

**Barnacle goose, *Branta leucopsis*, Mainland Shetland, Grid Ref HU3170 9035. Occupied Nest (ON). RAFOS Seabirds' Count surveyor, John Nigel Wells spotted bird incubating on small grassy spit on edge of dubh lochan at Whitler Hill on 22/06/2019. RAFOS colleague Mike Hayes corroborated the identification. Off-nest bird was swimming on the lochan adjacent to the nest until it spotted the observers approaching when it swam to far side of loch and attempted to hide in marshy, reedy area and stayed committed to the incubating female. The incubating bird remained brooding, with neck outstretched to minimise profile and visibility throughout. Closest point of approach estimated to be 10 metres. Adults' shy behaviour and choice of typical 'tundra' goose nesting location – in wild uninhabited terrain in a remote northerly peatland location, north of 60 degrees North - suggestive of wild bird stock. Svalbard population undershoot perhaps? Photos attached taken by my colleague Mike.**

**Supplementary Sighting of same species - 24 June 19**

For further information, another territorial pair was spotted 2 days later in the vicinity of HU257838, location ID on map as; Mus Wells, on the middle lochan of 3 at Gossa Water. Again, the habitat was in wild uninhabited terrain in a remote northerly peatland location, north of 60 degrees North. This pair remained attached to the loch whilst we counted all Seabirds for the survey task and all other species for BTO Birdtrack our ancillary task. This pair seemed to be holding a territory and during the 20 minute count, took off but landed on 3 occasions. No nest was located or searched for, as it was not the Primary Task.

I hope this breeding record at Whitler Hill and the second pair at Gossa Water is of interest to you all, especially the Shetland Bird Club Recorder and the members.

For your information we previously sought advice and assistance from the BTO, the WWT of the observation and many thanks to those concerned for advice on the submission of this Rarity Report to the correct individuals. All of which who are copied in, to this email.

Qty 3 photographs of the record taken by Mike Hayes - RAFOS, are attached to accompany this submission.

Regards

John Wells

RAFOS Field Surveyor 'RAFOS Simmer Dim 2019' - Expedition to The Shetland Isles. In support to The Seabird Group

[johnwells699@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:johnwells699@tiscali.co.uk) [NOTE: Since changed to [johnwells699@icloud.com](mailto:johnwells699@icloud.com)]

Limosa, 12 High Street, Ramsey, HUNTINGDON Cambs PE26 1AE

COPY OF RBBP REPORT

**Barnacle goose, *Branta leucopsis*, Mainland Shetland, Grid Ref HU3170 9035. Occupied Nest (ON). RAFOS Seabirds' Count surveyor, John Nigel Wells spotted bird incubating on small grassy spit on edge of dubh lochan at Whitler Hill on 22/06/2019. RAFOS colleague Mike Hayes corroborated the identification. Off-nest bird was swimming on the lochan adjacent to the nest until it spotted the observers approaching when it swam to far side of loch and attempted to hide in marshy, reedy area. Incubating bird remained brooding, with neck outstretched to minimise profile and visibility throughout. Closest point of approach estimated to be 10 metres. Adults' shy behaviour and choice of typical 'tundra' goose nesting location – in wild uninhabited terrain in a remote northerly peatland location, north of 60 degrees North - suggestive of wild bird stock. Svalbard population undershoot perhaps? Photos attached.**

For further information, another territorial pair was spotted 2 days later in the vicinity of HU257838, Mus Wells, on the middle lochan of 3 at Gossa Water. Again, the habitat was in wild uninhabited terrain in a remote northerly peatland location, north of 60 degrees North.

Barnacle Geese - BBRC Rarity Form dated 26<sup>th</sup> August 2020



British Birds Rarities Committee  
Rarity Form

Email to: [secretary@bbrc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@bbrc.org.uk)

This form has been designed to be used electronically. Your submission will be processed far more quickly and accurately if it is typed rather than handwritten.  
To move to the next field simply press 'Tab' then 'End' and start typing.

**Note: If attaching images please send them as separate files and not within this Word document.**

Species: Barnacle Goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i>	
Date first seen: <b>22nd June 2019</b>	Date last seen: <b>22nd June 2019</b>
No. of Birds: <b>2</b>	Age/Sex: <b>Mature pair</b>
County: <b>Shetland</b>	Location: <b>HU3170 9035</b>
<b>Please fill in your email address to ensure that you get an acknowledgement</b>	
Finder: <b>John Wells</b>	Email: <b>johnwells699@tiscali.co.uk</b>
Identifier (if different):	Email:
Submitter (if different): <b>Alan Brimmell</b>	Email: [REDACTED]
Other observers: <b>Mike Hayes</b>	
Any who disagrees with identification? <b>No</b>	
Optical aids: <b>binoculars and telescope</b>	
Distance from bird: <b>Nearest approach 20 metres</b>	
Have you enclosed photographs? <b>Yes.</b>	Was the bird videoed? <b>No</b>
If photos are available on public websites ( <i>BirdGuides</i> & <i>Surfbirds</i> etc) then please give www address: <b>No</b>	
Have the photographs been published in magazines? If so, where: <b>No</b>	
Species present for comparison: <b>None</b>	
Which species were alongside the bird: <b>None on the pond</b>	
Finder experience of the species: <b>Annual Scottish bird surveys</b>	
Finder experience of similar species previously: <b>All British Goose species regularly sighted</b>	
Weather (general description): <b>Overcast but dry.</b>	
Wind direction and Force: <b>Force 3; direction not recorded</b>	
Light conditions (good, dull, etc & sun behind, side etc): <b>Good</b>	
Visibility (distance): <b>1 Kilometre</b>	
Rain, mist, etc: <b>None</b>	
Cloud cover: <b>9/10</b>	
Address of submitter: [REDACTED]	
Phone No: [REDACTED]	
<b>And finally, is the record 100% certain? - Yes</b>	

Please try to cover

1. Circumstances of finding the bird (if applicable) but keep it brief
2. Plumage, bare parts etc and call (if possible)
3. Jizz (that 'indefinable something' about the way it behaved)

**Description:**

1. Whilst conducting a JNCC Seabirds Count in in North and West Shetland, John Nigel Wells spotted a Barnacle Goose incubating on a small grassy spit on the edge of dubh lochan at Whitley Hill. RAFOS colleague Mike Hayes corroborated the identification. A second bird was swimming on the lochan adjacent to the nest until it spotted the observers approaching when it swam to far side of loch and attempted to hide in marshy, reedy area and stayed committed to the incubating female. The incubating bird remained brooding, with neck outstretched to minimise profile and visibility throughout. Closest point of approach estimated to be 10 metres. Adults' shy behaviour and choice of typical 'tundra' goose nesting location – in wild uninhabited terrain in a remote northerly peatland location, north of 60 degrees North - suggestive of wild bird stock. A Svalbard population undershoot perhaps?

Attach extra sheets if needed

## RAFOS Support to Defence Infrastructure Organisation's (DIO) Environmental Support and Compliance Team

by Keith Cowieson, FALO

Back in 2019, members may recall that the Chairman and FALO briefed AGM attendees of their intention to reach out to, and commence a dialogue with, DIO's resident ecologists, to offer the Society's assistance and support in helping them fulfil their statutory role of surveying and monitoring the biodiversity on the MoD's estate, both in the UK and overseas. Initial contacts with DIO's Environmental Support & Compliance Team were very encouraging, and mouth-watering opportunities of surveying were mooted; in Kenya, Cyprus and Belize, as well as on some under-surveyed, blue-riband sites in UK. This outreach bore its first fruit in early-2020, when Olly Howells, a senior ecologist at DIO, requested our support in assisting Footprint Ecology (an independent ecological consultancy) to assess potential disturbance impact on wader and waterfowl species in and around Northam Burrows and Saunton Sands, in N Devon. Saunton Sands is incorporated within the Braunton Burrows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), primarily designated for its sand dune ecosystem, and its dependent flora and invertebrate communities. It is bordered to the south by the Taw-Torridge Estuary SSSI, which is designated for its wintering water birds, in addition to nationally important wintering populations of waders. Northam Burrows SSSI, located on the southern side of the Taw-Torridge Estuary mouth (opposite Saunton Sands), is also primarily designated for its botanical interest but nevertheless provides supporting habitat for the estuary's wader and waterfowl assemblage. Those folk lucky enough to have served at RAF Chivenor will know the area well.



Taw & Torridge estuaries, Saunton Sands & Braunton Burrows - Source, Ordnance Survey



C-130 on low approach at Saunton Sands - ©Footprint Ecology

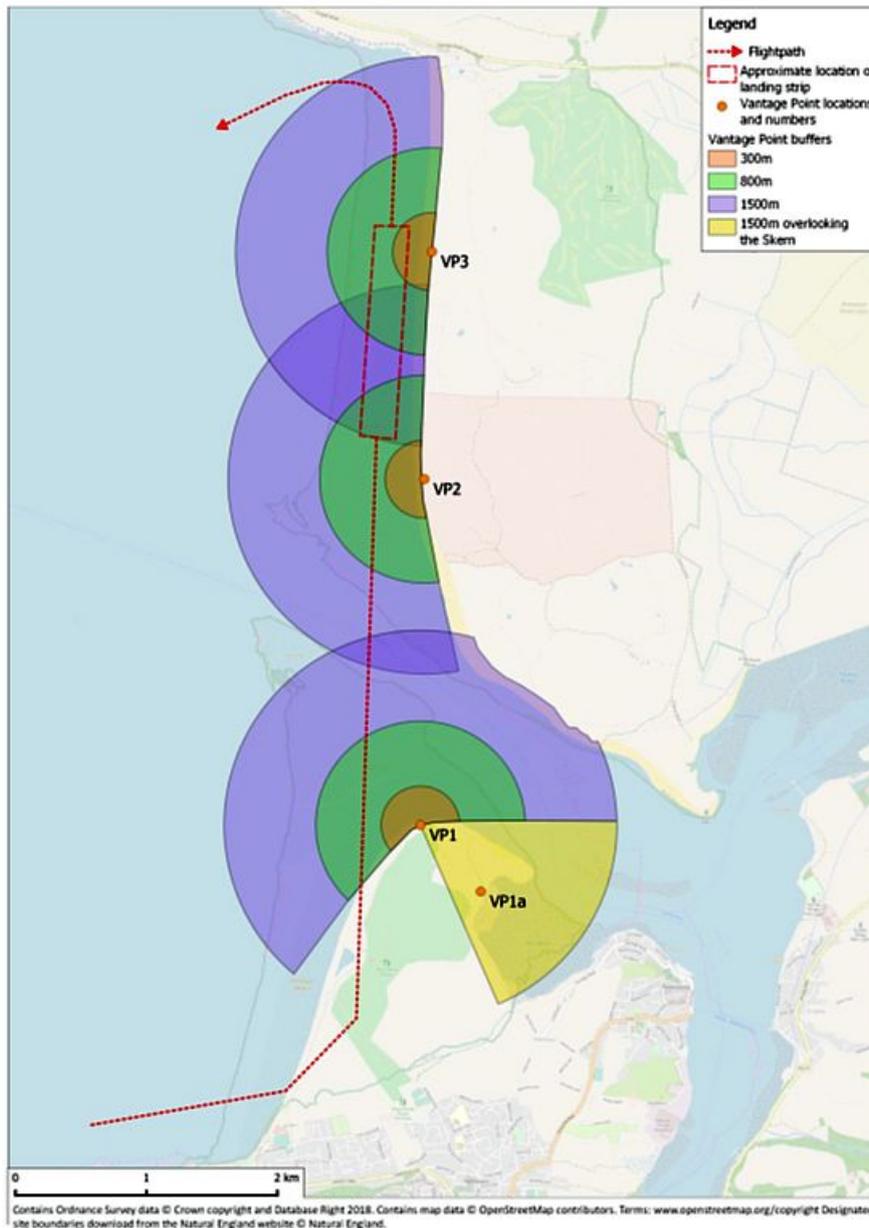
The RAF has assent from Natural England (NE) to carry out C-130 beach landing training at low tide using Saunton Sands, within Braunton Burrows SSSI, on an occasional basis. The Service is considering using it more frequently for such training, including in future by the A400M Atlas. Following consultation with NE, the DIO survey was designed to assess the level of bird disturbance caused by the practice beach landings, because as part of the adjacent Taw-Torrige SSSI, the 2 sites support important passage and wintering wetland bird assemblages of **Sanderling**, *Calidris alba*, **Oystercatcher**, *Haematopus ostralegus*, **Curlew**, *Numenius arquata*, **Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*, and **Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*, among others. That said, with the exception of Sanderling, the number of waders recorded using the inter tidal habitat of the beach landing strip at Saunton Sands itself is relatively low, and the site is subject to high levels of recreational disturbance throughout the year – by off-the-lead dogs, walkers, water-sports enthusiasts and tourists etc.



Sanderling - Keith Cowieson

Project conception to contract letting by DIO was swift, with little time available for mustering a team of volunteers. However, we were fortunate to have 5 x RAFOS members who live relatively close by – Karen Sims, John Towers and myself, and 2 others – and although the likelihood of a Covid lock down was getting inexorably greater, and closer, the Landing Trial period was set for the 17-20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, and Covid security measures agreed. The RAFOS survey task was to conduct paired daytime behavioural studies of birds and people/disturbance from strategic Vantage Point (VP) locations on 20<sup>th</sup> March, as well as high tide roost counts, after the landing trials themselves. Footprint Ecology staff were to conduct similar observations both before and immediately after landing trials, and snapshot counts during the landings themselves, over the whole trial period.

**Map 3: Location of Vantage Points, and their respective fields of view, in relation to the proposed flightpath and location of the low tide landing strip**



Graphic from Reference © Footprint Ecology

A reconnaissance and liaison visit was carried out on 17<sup>th</sup> March, but this was relatively unproductive as Footprint Ecology staff were sensibly avoiding close contact with others. My recce of the area carried out on foot was fine, but a shouted briefing from car window to car window, with maps and recording sheets tossed between vehicles, in a car park, during a rain squall, as light was fading, was the best in the way of pre-briefing that could be achieved with Footprint! Karen, John and I then shared information by phone and e-mail as best we could, and given that the 2 other volunteers had dropped out at late notice due to Covid concerns, we decided to split the task between ourselves with Karen and John taking the southern side of the estuary for both Low and High Tide Counts on 20<sup>th</sup> March, and me doing likewise on the northern portion. These surveys would hopefully provide valuable reassurance that the birds had not been displaced, or unduly disturbed, following the planned C-130 operations on the preceding days.



Fire, Rescue and Crash Combine at Saunton Sands - Photo Credit: Lynn Bell

In the event, bad weather and landing strip conditions meant that no actual landings were made, with the aircraft carrying out low approaches only. Not ideal, as the disturbance and noise following actual landings, subsequent take-offs and circuits would be much greater, as would the associated disturbance from ground crew activities. Nevertheless, data was gathered, and a modified trial event report was produced for DIO by Footprint Ecology. Preliminary findings from the (unpublished) report (at Reference) were necessarily limited, but nonetheless interesting. For example, it was observed that:

- Numbers of waders and wildfowl viewed from the 4 vantage point locations remained broadly similar during the low tide vantage point surveys (VPs 1 & 1a on the southern side of the estuary, and 2 & 3 on the northern side - see graphic above)
- Sanderling were the key species using the beach area where the landing trial took place and birds did respond by flushing/flying > 50 metres on many occasions during trial overflights, although subsequent numbers at low tide appeared to be little impacted, with similar numbers recorded throughout the majority of the study period

Golden Plover were recorded exclusively at a daytime roost at Northam Burrows (VPs 1 & 1a) and although overall numbers were not apparently effected by landing trial events, over-flights again produced major flights/flushes on almost all occasions



Golden plover roost - Keith Cowieson

Overall, landing trial event activities led to a large number of both flight/flush responses and number of birds flushed indicating clear behavioural effects upon both Sanderling and Golden Plover within the SSSIs. The area is also subject to significant levels of recreational activity pressure, particularly from dog walkers with off-the-lead dogs. Recent research now shows that disturbance to foraging & roosting waders and water birds can lead to a reduction in available foraging time; increased vigilance and energy usage; avoidance or abandonment of suitable habitat and increased stress levels.



Dog walker and water-sports disturbance – Keith Cowieson

Given that the trial was not completed fully, due to external factors, it is likely that a similar study may have to be conducted to address, more fully, the potential impacts associated with increased landing trial activities.

From a RAFOS perspective, this was a useful introduction to the statutory survey and monitoring activities that DIO's Environmental and Compliance Team commission or undertake, often with the assistance of conservation-minded volunteers like ourselves. As reported in the recent AGM Minutes, DIO's senior ecologist in SW England has requested any further support that we can give, to help them fulfil their duties in surveying and monitoring biodiversity on the MoD's estate in the SW. In particular, there are several MoD camps that abut or form part of the Dorset Heaths SSSI/SAC complex at Bovington, Lulworth, West Moors & Blandford that require survey e.g. breeding bird surveys and territory mapping. I am currently in dialogue with senior DIO ecologists in the region to scope the effort and numbers required, although the DIO team would welcome any contribution, however small or fleeting. The areas in question consist of a mosaic of habitats and hold breeding Dartford Warbler, Woodlark and Nightjar (and Turtle Dove in the past) amongst other species, and promise excellent birding, ringing and photographic opportunities for participants. Finally, given RAFOS' current demographic, can anyone interested in assisting with this task let me know ASAP, as it is possible that field work may be able to commence this spring if the Covid vaccination programme proceeds at current pace.

Reference:

Saunders, P. & Liley, D. (2020). Saunton Sands C-130 Aircraft Landing Trial Disturbance Study. Unpublished Report by Footprint Ecology.



VP 3 at Saunton Sands – Keith Cowieson

## A DANGEROUS ROAD – FOOTNOTE TO OUR BHUTAN TRIP

By Dick Yates

In my article in the last Newsletter you recall I mentioned a pretty scary and hairy drive between Nanglam and Yonkala. Our guide Sherab took a photo of the cliff face that we had just traversed but unfortunately the light was very poor and it was impossible to do anything with it. Sherab repeated the birding trip at the end of December 2019 and early January 2020 and a couple of months later he sent me some photos of the same route down the cliff face, this time in much better light.

The area that contains the “road” is outlined in red in the main photo . On the original you can just make out the concrete blocks that had been placed to mark the edge of the track. The track is just below the orange line in the photo. It should be noted that only the most dangerous part of the road had been guarded by these bollards, the remainder was just a sheer drop.

If you are interested in Bhutan there is a series of short (30-40 Minute) films on U-Tube made by a chap called Greg Baker. His group did pretty much the same trip we did but in the April/May of 2018. Early on in part 3 he describes this bit of road as “Not for the faint hearted”. It should also be remembered that the road had been completely washed away during the summer monsoon of 2019, some 4 months before we made the trip; not much had been done bar getting it open again, mostly just a single track.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvjuhcNaGfk> Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z02-ysvoDgc> Part 2

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ngc5X\\_wba78](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ngc5X_wba78) Part 3

These are beautifully filmed sequences accompanied by a very good commentary not blighted by continuous incidental music as is common with nearly all wildlife films on TV.



Oriental Turtle Dove



## RAFOS Assistance with Ornithological Research

Following an enquiry to our Librarian and the Newsletter Editor, resulting in the supply of historical information concerning RAF Gan in the Maldives, the following email has been received from Dr Charles Anderson:

*Dear Bill and Jerry,*

*The Maldives bird review that I have been working on has just been published:*

*[http://www.indianbirds.in/pdfs/IB\\_Mono3\\_Anderson\\_Shimal\\_Maldives.pdf](http://www.indianbirds.in/pdfs/IB_Mono3_Anderson_Shimal_Maldives.pdf).*

*Many thanks for your assistance! As you will see, the ornithological knowledge recorded by the personnel of RAF Gan personnel is still of immense importance in the Maldives.*

*Hope you and your families are keeping safe and well. With all good wishes,  
Charles*

**Note:** Dr Anderson is a British marine biologist who has been working in the Maldives since 1983, much of that time with the Marine Research Centre (now Maldives Marine Research Institute) of the (then) Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture. His research has included studies of the important pole-and-live tuna fishery, the shark fisheries, reef fishery and offshore fishery. More recently his research has concentrated on cetaceans. Throughout this time, he has spent over 2000 days at sea, which provided numerous opportunities to observe both seabirds, and land birds on passage. He has published several reports on Maldivian birds including several first national records and has a particular interest in migration (of birds, dragonflies and cetaceans). He has been Maldives representative of the Oriental Bird Club since 2006 and has recently been co-opted as eBird quality controller for the Maldives.



Water Rail at Slimbridge - Bill Francis

## Tailpiece

Just a few thoughts from me about this Newsletter.

Firstly, a sincere thank you to those members who have been good enough to supply me with such a variety of interesting articles to grace these pages.

I had thought that with the onslaught of the COVID-19 virus and the suspension of almost all RAFOS birding activities, there would be little to write about – how wrong can you be?

Most photographs have been provided by the authors of the articles to which they relate. I have taken the liberty of including as space-fillers some of my own pictures, taken over the years. A privilege of being the editor, I suppose.

I was interested to see whether the request for volunteers to fill the posts up for election at the AGM might add some new blood to the committee, but for most of the jobs on offer, there were no new candidates.

As far as the Newsletter is concerned, it seems that you will have to put up with the efforts of an octogenarian as its editor for a few more years.

Please note the request in Keith Cowieson's article for volunteers to help in providing RAFOS support to the DIO and respond as soon as possible if you can help.

**In the current situation it is useful to keep in touch. Please check the RAFOS web-site [www.rafnithology.org.uk](http://www.rafnithology.org.uk) regularly and confirm your current email address with the Membership Secretary at [rafos.membership@gmail.com](mailto:rafos.membership@gmail.com)**

Let us hope that the roll-out of the Covid-19 inoculations will allow a return to some limited semblance of normality in the not-to-distant future.

All best wishes for 2021.

*Bill Francis*

# The RAFOS Newsletter

## PLEASE READ THIS

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:

1. Brief contributions are always welcome.
2. Illustrations (photographs or art work) are always welcome
3. Please send written work as soon as you can. If pictures are included in word processed documents, please send them separately from the text.
4. .pdf files can be imported as they are received, including related pictures. Please include the author's name after the article's title.
5. Please avoid footnotes and tables – they are difficult to import with my software!
6. Articles can be sent as attachments to emails, on a CD, DVD, memory stick or card. Sticks and cards will be returned!
7. Digital images should be in .jpg format.

**The closing date for inclusion in Newsletter No. 112 is 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021 and any contributions received after that date will be held over for Newsletter No. 113.**

Please address contributions to:

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Churchdown  
GLOUCESTER  
GL3 2TA

Email [wgfrancis@btinternet.com](mailto:wgfrancis@btinternet.com)