

Emma Hughes's profile

A fond childhood memory of mine was during a trip to Strumpshaw Fen with my Dad. We heard a very loud, abrupt eruption of song from in amongst the alder carr unlike anything we had heard before which stopped us in our tracks. The bird called again, closer this time, and we crouched down and waited, hoping for it to show itself. When it did, we realised it was a warbler, but very unlike a reed or sedge. Looking through our bird book we identified it as a cetti's warbler (for ages afterwards we pronounced it "settee's" warbler). I've had a fondness for LBJ's ever since!

As a teenager, I didn't do much targeted birding outside my local area in Norfolk. My sister and I turned one of my Stepdad's old sheds into a make-shift bird hide, and that served us very well. During my years at college, birding was one of the few activities that completely took my mind off my studies and the worries of getting a place at University. I also made connections with a local bird ringer, Malcolm Turner, who was kind enough to take me on as a trainee. My Dad still reminds me of the pre-dawn starts to drive me across to Malcoms!

I moved to Sheffield in September 2010 to start a Zoology degree and have been based in the city ever since. During my undergraduate years I worked on projects which increased my scientific knowledge of bird behaviour, evolution and ecology (e.g. the effects of urbanisation on bird distributions in the UK). I also founded the Sheffield University Birdwatching Society, which some of you may remember! I joined as an U21 member of SBSG around this time, finding the recent sightings section of the website most useful in identifying new areas to bird.

I had my first experience of tropical birding in 2012, when I was lucky enough to travel to Borneo for a field course. Unfortunately, this trip was also my biggest birding disaster. I'd been advised by our course coordinator that expensive items like cameras and binoculars would be damaged by the humidity of the rainforest. I couldn't afford to replace my decent pair of bins if they were damaged, so I regrettably left them behind, thinking that I could probably make do with a cheap pair as there would be tons of birds flying around all the time in a rainforest right? Wrong - tropical birding isn't as easy as that! I completely missed out on the canopy birds, but got excellent views of rhinoceros hornbill, Argus pheasant, scarlet-rumped trogon to name but a few.

Despite the leeches, humidity and stomach bugs, I was hooked. Ever since, the main aim of my savings has been to go on the next birding adventure, something which my other half has wholeheartedly supported and very much got into himself! So far, we've birded tropical forests in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and most recently Ghana. We saw white-necked picathartes on our most recent trip - what a bird!!

After my undergrad degree I started working for Dr Gavin Thomas at the University of Sheffield. I spent most of my time based at the ornithology collections at the Natural History Museum at Tring. Tring's collections represent over 95% of the world's 10,000 bird species - many collected during the 1800s at a time when we weren't as conscious of our impact on biodiversity as we are now. For any bird lover, this was a dream come true and I absolutely loved my job collecting data from every species of the world's birds. Museums are a fantastic

resource for scientific research! We also have two citizen science websites based on this data collection - MarkMyBird.org and ProjectPlumage.org. Please do check them out if you're interested.

I am now based back in Sheffield doing a PhD with my previous boss, Gavin Thomas. The title of my thesis is "Global change and the future of avian diversity" - very broad, so lots of wriggle room! Due to my lack of time and availability, I had to give up ringing with Malcolm during my undergrad degree, but Steven Samworth, an SBSG member himself has taken me on as a trainee. Seeing as I work predominantly with large datasets on the computer, ringing with Steve constitutes the majority of my 'birding fix' during the week. I find the ringing scheme run by the BTO a rewarding way to contribute to our scientific knowledge of UK birds.

I was approached in 2016 by SBSG committee member Martin Hodgson regarding U21 membership of SBSG. It turned out that I was the first U21 who 'graduated' to full membership and the committee were seeking ideas to try and increase youth membership within the group. Martin and I put our heads together, with the result being that 2017/18 saw the highest levels of youth membership in the groups history (albeit in part due to the U21 membership being increased to U25 membership). We have also used the group's social media channels more extensively, for the U25s as well as for general publicity. You can follow this by searching "Sheffield Bird Study Group" on Facebook and @shefbirdstudy on Twitter.

I am particularly passionate about getting younger people excited about natural history, and I believe that the enthusiasm and knowledge we all have as members of SBSG is one to be celebrated and passed on to the next generation as best we can. I hope that in part I can help contribute to that goal by being a part of the SBSG committee.