



SHEFFIELD BIRD STUDY GROUP
BULLETIN

ISSUE 219

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**TWO-BARRED
CROSSBILL**

The local bird story of the summer, plus all the other latest recent sightings.

JON HORNBUCKLE

Interview with Sheffield's big lister

RAPTOR REPORT

The latest on the Peak District's birds of prey

PLUS!

The birds of Islay

Peru and Galapagos lecture reports

Latest news and dates for your diary

Word-botching

Our esteemed Membership Secretary, Martin Hodgson, has set us a rather fiendish quiz.

Due to a jam-packed issue there's no room for the answers (which have some rather detailed explanations!) so they'll be in the next issue or - if you can't wait that long - I'll put them on the SBSG website.

1. Which bird family has a Margaret and a John in it?
2. Name other British birds which have been given human first names
3. Many birds have a white rump, but which bird is named for it?
4. Which bird likes playing in Yorkshire?
5. How is the linnet connected to a Class B drug?
6. Which member of the Columbidae family spoonerises into a rich American?
7. Why is the oystercatcher St Bridget's emblem?
8. Which bird is an Antipodean idiot?
9. Where does the nightjar keep its jar?
10. Identify ten British birds whose official (not colloquial or dialectal) names are onomatopoeic
11. In which country did the birds live in Aristophanes's comic play "The Birds"?
12. And which bird was ruler of the rest? *[Add a mark each for giving the Greek or Latin name.]*
13. What is the connection between petrel and petrol?
14. Which bird featured on the coinage of ancient Athens and why?
15. The Ring Ouzel's name looks to be connected with the French word oiseau. Is it?
16. Why did seamen name petrels after St Peter?
17. What does the peregrine's name tell us about its origin?
18. Which people used the same word to name the sparrow and the ostrich?
19. Do quails quail?
20. Finally, why *did* the chicken cross the road?

News in brief

100,000th website record

In July a record from S Guymer of two Arctic Terns at RVCP took us to a milestone of 100,000 records received via the SBSG website. A big thanks to David Williams and Andy Deighton for their work behind the scenes, and of course to all the members who take time to send us records, which are the lifeblood of the group and its work.

Readers' survey

I was going to put results of the Bulletin reader survey in this issue, but run out of space, so this will be in the next. One of the feature ideas that seemed popular was interviews with prominent local birders, so this issue sees the first - with Jon Hornbuckle. Next issue will see a chat with Martin Garner. If you have any nominations for future interviewees - or would like to conduct an interview yourself - then let us know by the usual channels.

Cover photo

This issue's excellent cover photo is by Andy Deighton.

New members

We welcome **David Woodhead, Simon Brook, Mandy Gamsu, Ian Sharp, Andrew Bilton, Chris Bragg, Richard & Natalie Turnbull, Julian Crooks, Catherine Smith, Isaac Reardon, Edward Cox** and **Zack Whitehead** to the group.

Deadline for next Bulletin

The next Bulletin will be issued at the November indoor meeting. Please note that any items for inclusion must be received by Pete Mella at peterjmella@googlemail.com (for preference), or 21 Lump Lane, Grenoside, Sheffield, S35 8PL, no later than the **31st October**.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Tristan Reid - "Giving My Right Arm For Turkey"
Weds Oct 9th 2013, Sheffield University Arts Tower
Lecture Theatre 5, 7.15pm

Tristan Reid, known as The Inked Naturalist, has dedicated not only his time, but his skin, to the beleaguered birds of Turkey - by having 20 of the country's most iconic species tattooed on his arms. A professional ecologist, Tristan was so moved by the plight of birds during a wildlife holiday to Turkey - where fragile biodiversity is threatened by private Hydro Electric Power Plants - he decided to commit to his unusual conservation initiative to raise funds and awareness for [Doğa Derneği](#), the BirdLife International partner in Turkey.

If the tattoos weren't enough, Tristan is also embarking on a 4000km walk across Turkey, and tonight will be describing his inspiration for his remarkable dedication to Turkish conservation.

Dave Gosney - Finding Birds With A Camera
Weds Nov 13th 2013, Sheffield University Arts Tower
Lecture Theatre 5, 7.15pm

Sheffield's Dave Gosney will be familiar to many not only as a long-standing member of the SBSG, but as one of the co-founders of BirdGuides, a tour guide, and the author and film-maker behind the influential and invaluable birding travel booked and DVDs in the 'Finding Birds In...' series. Tonight he takes us through some of his experiences and photographs.

Other groups' dates

27th September - DOS Indoor Meeting. Mark Sisson talks on 'The Secret Life of Puffins'. Evergreen Club, Allestree, 7.30pm, £1 members, £1.50 non-members.

3rd October - RSPB Sheffield Group Indoor Meeting. Dr Michael Leach gives a talk entitled: "It's a funny way to make a living". 7.30pm, Central United Reformed Church. £2 for members, £4 for visitors.

15th October - DOS Indoor Meeting. Joint meeting with Carsington Bird Club. Chris Ward will talk on the birds of Morocco. 7.30pm, Henmore Room, Carsington Water. £1 members, £1.50 non-members.

7th November - RSPB Sheffield Group Indoor Meeting. Jeff Clarke on Biscay and Picos. 7.30pm, Central United Reformed Church. £2 for members, £4 for visitors.

Field Meetings

Forthcoming field meetings are a visible migration watch at Redmires in October, and another trip (TBC) in December. Please see the Bulletin for more details nearer the time.

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South Peak Raptor Study Group Annual Report 2012

The South Peak Raptor Study Group (SPRSG) was formed in 1998 to monitor breeding success of scarce raptors in the South Peak. Broadly speaking, their study area extends northwards into the Upper Derwent Valley, and southwards into the whole of the White Peak, including the Staffordshire Moors, south Derbyshire, and central Derbyshire as far as the Nottinghamshire borders. In 2012, for the second time, they have combined their Annual Report with that of the Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group (PDRMG) whose study area includes the Dark Peak (excluding the Upper Derwent Valley), the Goyt Valley and the Macclesfield Forest. Both groups work within the Northern England Raptor Forum (NERF). In the following summary of their report, the table shows data for the SPRSG study area, to enable comparison with previous years, but PDRMG data is included in the species accounts where appropriate.

The Report was introduced by Trevor Grimshaw (who has taken over from Mick Taylor as co-ordinator of SPRSG) and Steve Davies (PDRMG). They began by pointing out that 2012 was the wettest year since the groups began collecting records, and the wet weather together with the heavy April snow inevitably impacted on breeding success. However, persecution is another major factor in parts of the recording area, and the report welcomed the conviction of Glenn Brown, the gamekeeper who was found guilty of using a live pigeon in a cage trap to capture birds of prey (and who had accused the RSPB of planting evidence). Martin Harper, RSPB's Conservation Director, was quoted as saying that "Crimes such as these illustrate links between driven-grouse shooting and the illegal killing of birds of prey". He believes that land managers and owners should be held legally accountable for any wildlife crimes committed by their staff, as is the case in Scotland.

The report also quoted Jon Stewart, the National Trust General Manager for the Peak District, who

confirmed the NT's concerns regarding the persecution of raptors, and outlined their major project to review management of the moors owned by the NT in the High Peak (see <http://www.high-peak-moors.co.uk/public-consultation/>).

Another important initiative is the formation of the Peak District Initiative on Birds of Prey. This was set up by the Peak District National Park Authority in an attempt to facilitate co-operation between shooting interests and raptor workers, with the aim of boosting raptor numbers in the Dark Peak, and 2012 was the year that the project first went "live". In particular, they have set five-year targets for sustainable populations of Merlin, Peregrine and Short-eared Owl, and it is hoped that other species will be included in the near future. Mike Price reported some early positives from the initiative, including ongoing excellent relationships with keepers on the south side of Glossop, and an improving relationship with Broomhead Moor estate. One Jamie Horner has been appointed as an independent field worker to ascertain accurate breeding data and to facilitate co-operation between raptor workers and shooting interests. More about this can be found if you enter *Peak District initiative on birds of prey* into your favourite web search engine.

The table below summarises the data for breeding success over the past five years; in general, the number of fledged young can be assumed to be the minimum.

As in all recent years, there was a noticeable lack of breeding success for **Goshawks** in the Upper Derwent Valley, where three territories were

located but none were successful. One nest was pulled down from the tree, and the eggs were found on the ground; another nest contained nine eggs (normal clutch size for this species is 3-4), all from the same female, suggesting she had "lost" two partners during the season. Elsewhere in the SPRSG recording area, eight pairs were located, four were successful, fledging nine young. PDRMG reported a number of sightings of the species, including a pair displaying, but there were no confirmed breeding attempts. The report noted that, nationally, the species continues to face persecution, particularly from sites associated with commercial game shooting but also from egg collecting and theft of young. Insensitive forestry operations, and the felling of trees in occupied territories present a growing threat.

Peregrines are targeted by four groups: egg collectors, gamekeepers, pigeon fanciers, and people who take chicks or near-hatching eggs. It is clear that many of the large number of breeding failures near grouse moors can only be attributed to human interference. In Upper Derwentdale, where disturbance has been rife in recent years, none of the three traditional sites were occupied. Elsewhere in the SPRSG area, where the species is normally more successful, breeding attempts were made at 21 monitored sites but only six were successful, fledging eleven young; of the remaining 15 sites, most failed due to poor weather. In addition to the above, city centre pairs in Sheffield and Derby were both successful, and birds were regularly seen on the Chesterfield crooked spire. PDRMG reported that of nine

	08	09	10	11	12	08	09	10	11	12	08	09	10	11	12
Goshawk	24	13	21	24	11	11	7	12	8+	4	27+	13+	25	18+	9
Buzzard	80+	100+	?	?	?	40+	27+	?	?	?	50+	41+	?	?	?
Merlin	9	9	9	9	9	7+	6	5	2	4	24+	24	21	4	9+
Hobby	35	34	41	51	54	25	28	28	33+	37+	61	64	64	70+	73+
Peregrine*	32	29	32	32	26	19+	17+	18	20+	6	41+	35+	40+	55+	11
Barn Owl	18	18	20	10	9	12	18	20	9+	9	27	55+	49+	28+	24
LE Owl	8	2	3+	4+	0	1+	1	2+	3+	0	2+	1	4+	6+	0
SE Owl	9	8	4	5	5	2+	3	1+	?	1+?	5+	6	1+	?	14?
Raven	42+	/37+	49	37+		15+	12	11+	11+		48+	44+	47+	41+	

*includes North Staffordshire sites

sites checked, there were only two breeding attempts, three young were ringed but follow-up visits brought no confirmation of fledging; a third nest discovered late in the season, had three young on the point of fledging.

Merlins had a mixed breeding season in the SPRSG area in 2012, being slightly better than in 2011 but less successful than in the previous few years. There is concern amongst raptor workers about reduction of prey species such as Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and Starlings, whilst recent years have seen chicks dying from hypothermia due to protracted spells of cold and wet weather. There is some concern that climate change may cause the range of the species to contract northwards, and hence bring about the loss of the species in the southern limits of its range. The PDRMG area fared better with twelve occupied sites, at least eight of which were successful and produced at least eight fledged young.

Hobbies continued to gain ground in both study areas although there is continued threat from egg collectors. Anthony Messenger has suspected that the species has increased in density as well as range, and this was confirmed by his long-term intensive study on a core area of 100 square km which found that the number of pairs has increased from an average of 3.67 during the period 1991-2001 to an average of 8.67 during 2011-2012. PDRMG reported 18 young fledged from 11 nests, with south and west Yorkshire being noticeably more successful than Cheshire.

Buzzards are now so widespread that it is no longer possible for SPRSG to monitor all known nests. However, it is known that unexplained failures continue to occur in the Upper Derwent Valley, and PDRMG also report a lack of breeding birds "in perfectly suitable habitat adjacent to heather moorland managed for game shooting", even though the species continues to expand elsewhere in their study area. The report also noted the attempt by Pheasant shoots to persuade the government to introduce controls on "problem" Buzzards near Pheasant release pens but, in the face of much opposition, and the absence of any scientific evidence, the proposals were withdrawn at the end of May.

Two traditionally common species are not closely monitored by SPRSG. The **Sparrowhawk** continues to thrive in

urban areas, but the report noted that there are continued calls for the species to be controlled as it is thought by some to be responsible for long-term songbird declines, despite the lack of scientific evidence. The **Kestrel** population is known to fluctuate according to vole numbers but the 2011 British Bird Breeding Survey reported a 32% reduction in the UK between 1995 and 2010, thought to be associated with farming practices reducing their food supply, and the species is now Amber listed.

Three non-breeding species were also mentioned in the SPRSG report. There were increased sightings of **Red Kites** throughout both study areas and, very interestingly, a pair was reported to have bred in western Nottinghamshire. There continued to be records of **Marsh Harrier** from both study areas, mainly in April/May and from late July through to September, and it is interesting that the uplands are used on migration. Although there is an abundance of suitable breeding habitat for **Hen Harrier**, it has not bred successfully since 2006, when the event was marred by the unexplained disappearance of both adult males. Since then, birds have been present in suitable breeding areas in the spring and, in 2011, a nest containing seven eggs was located in the Buxton area but the eggs were subsequently found smashed. There was no breeding behaviour seen in 2012, although a male was present in the north Staffordshire moors during the breeding season. The report noted that, in recent years, and particularly in 2011, several English grouse moors have yielded their highest grouse "bags" since the war and, given the species' close association with grouse moors and Red Grouse, one would expect this to be mirrored in an improvement in Hen Harrier populations. This has not been the case, and there was only one confirmed successful breeding in England in 2012; illegal persecution in breeding and wintering grounds would seem to be linked.

Nationally, the **Barn Owl** is threatened by loss of habitat, and hence loss of food supply and potential nest sites, whilst the effects of two cold winters has further exacerbated their problems. Because of the poor weather, only three-quarters of known sites were monitored, and a total of 19 young and five adults were ringed. In addition, evidence of possible

successful breeding in recent years was found in the Glossop area, where there has been no confirmed breeding for 20 years. There were no records of breeding in the PDRMG area.

Despite much effort, SPRSG were unable to locate any active nests of **Long-Eared Owls**, and there was no evidence of successful breeding. PDRMG located five nests but only one subsequently held eggs, and this site failed after high winds felled neighbouring trees.

SPRSG located three pairs of **Short-eared Owl** in the Staffordshire moors, and two pairs in Upper Derwentdale; only one of these were known to be successful, and the number of fledged young were unknown. The report expressed concern that the species is absent or scarce from several areas where it has traditionally bred. PDRMG located three nests containing a total of 17 eggs, and two further sites where nests were not located but birds were seen defending territories and carrying food. At all five sites, activity ceased at about the same time, and human interference seemed the only explanation.

Two owl species are not systematically monitored by SPRSG. PDRMG monitored one nest of **Little Owl** but it failed at the small young stage; they noted that a number of traditional sites were unoccupied. The report noted that there is some evidence that the **Tawny Owl** is declining in some parts of the UK, possibly due to secondary poisoning from the new generation of rodenticides.

Ravens were not systematically monitored in 2012 but are thought to be doing reasonably well in the SPRSG area, despite the heavy snow in early April. However, PDRMG believe that the number of unoccupied traditional sites suggests that persecution is limiting the species' expansion in their area.

***Some Acknowledgments:** The membership of SPRSG in 2012 was: Trevor Grimshaw (Co-ordinator), John Atkin, Roy Frost, Mick Lacey, Geoff Mawson, Anthony Messenger, Stephen Moores, Steve Samworth, Ken Smith, Jack Street, Mick Taylor and Paul Tooley. The membership of PDRMG was Steve Davies (Co-ordinator), Carl Ashford, Nick Corley, Andy Platts, Mike Price, Paul Stafford and Mark Watson. The authors of the report expressed their thanks to the organisations and landowners who allowed access to their property.*

Wendy Thompson

Interview: Jon Hornbuckle

We're in the none-too-glamorous heart of Sheffield's post-industrial East End. Although much tidied up in recent years, with new offices and apartments ever more prevalent, some scars of the decline of the steel industry remain, with old, abandoned factories and warehouses still in evidence.

It is here I meet Sheffield-based birder Jon Hornbuckle, who's exploring the area looking for evidence of Black Redstart, a species that benefited from the city's industrial downfall, moving in to breed in the nooks and crannies among the dereliction. Since redevelopment, these rubbly places have largely been lost, and with them the redstarts, but enough potential habitat remains for Jon to search for any lingering on.

With Jon's local knowledge, and desire to spend his Sunday morning scouring Sheffield's backstreets, it's perhaps hard to imagine he's one of the most well-travelled birders alive, and has seen more birds than virtually any other person on earth, with a total tally (at the time of writing) of 8,979, currently second in the ranking of world listers.

"I just like seeing new birds, and travelling and so on," says Jon. "So I hadn't seen all that many when I started travelling a lot, and I just kept one list, my world list, and it kept going."

Originally from Nottingham, and moving to Sheffield in the 1960s to work in the steel industry, Jon was highly active in local birding, being a founding member of the Sheffield Bird Study Group, and co-editing the group's first breeding atlas in the 1980s. He also had some success finding rare birds in the region, including the area's first Common Crane, and most notably a Dark-eyed

Junco during his lunch hour while working in Rotherham.

"That was a pure fluke and I didn't even know what it was," says Jon. "There was a flock of House Sparrows, and I suddenly noticed there was an all-black one with what looked like a pink bill, and I assumed it was some kind of escaped bird so I didn't bother any more about it. It was only two or three years later when I got more interested in foreign birds that I realised what it was, so I sent a note to the secretary of the Rare Birds Committee, saying I saw this bird, and just wanted to know if they thought it was a genuine wild bird or just an escape. And about two months later I got a card back saying congratulations on seeing this wild bird, which turned out to be the first ever record in the winter period."

Remarkably his world listing only started properly around twenty years ago, when he took early retirement from the then-declining steel industry, and immediately went to Ecuador for six weeks. Jon says he doesn't list competitively, and that numbers don't really mean that much.

"The big problem is with taxonomy and all that sort of stuff, it's really very difficult to define how many you've seen," he explains. "I want to get to 9,000 now, because I never thought I'd get to 5,000. I'm actually over that on one of the taxonomies, so it's a bit meaningless on absolute numbers."

He does realise that in the listings there are others snapping at his



heels. "A friend of mine in America is really keen," he says, "and doesn't seem to be interested in anything but seeing new birds. He'll overtake me, because he's twenty years younger than me, but I don't mind that because he's a younger guy."

Taxonomic changes also mean he ends up with a few "armchair" ticks when subspecies are elevated to species rank, although this can also cause frustrations, citing a pitta split in Borneo as a particular example.

"I'd seen it elsewhere and hadn't really tried too hard to see in Borneo," he says, "and I wasn't planning on going there again, but I might have to go there for that, because that is a special bird as it were!"

And of course there are a few birds that got away, with one in particular springing to mind.

"One of the main reasons for going to northern Peru was to see a bird called the Long-whiskered Owlet," he says, "a very small owl. Nobody had ever seen it but a few

Americans that had caught it in mist nets”.

“I failed on that, and nobody else found it, until a few years ago that suddenly the Americans went back and caught one or two and recorded it, and that led to other people to go and tape it out. So now it’s a bird that anyone that goes to the right place is guaranteed to see. So it’s a bit annoying that I haven’t seen that!”

Jon has seen a huge percentage of all the world’s birds, so how does he go about finding ones that he hasn’t yet seen?

“I think it would be fair to say that virtually everywhere I go now I have a list of what I want to see,” he says. “Mostly it’s something like twenty species in three or four weeks, and I’m happy if I see fifteen. That’s how it works.

“I could get more in South America. When I retired I’d never been to South America, so the next ten years I spent a lot of time there, but then I sort of went off it and spent a lot of time elsewhere, so I haven’t done much there in recent years. I most like southeast Asia and that part of the world, that’s where I’ve been going to these places where I’ve only got a dozen or so new birds, whereas in South America I could get 20 or 30 in that period.”

When I meet Jon he’d just come back from a trip to Africa, visiting Ghana and Burkina Faso, where a dozen or so new birds such as Yellow-throated Cuckoo, Black-throated Coucal and Capuchin Babbler had been added to the list. However the favourite birds seen on this trip were ones he’d seen before.

“I saw a few new birds in Ghana, but the two best birds I’d seen before,” he says, “Picathartes, that’s a really neat bird, and Egyptian Plover.”

Jon’s travels haven’t all been about seeing new birds. A great

deal of time has been taken up with conservation, carrying out ringing and survey work in the countries he visits, including six summers spent ringing birds in Bolivia.

“Another project I particularly enjoyed was in northern Peru,” he says. “I went on a trip there with a few friends, and we found a very nice area that was just opening up because they’d recently made a big road there. And people were moving in and chopping the forest down, and I thought blimey, this is going to get wrecked if we’re not careful.

“So I did then put some effort in to get some funding, and to get some local people involved, and went back for three weeks by myself with the help of a chap who lived in Scunthorpe actually, but had moved to northern Peru. So we did some quite good survey work there, and got a lot of support of people saying, ‘what a good idea’.

“Eventually after about five years, some of the Americans had got stuck in and they’ve now built a lodge and made a reserve out of it and so on. So it seems completely changed. But I like to think in some extent it’s because I put some of the effort in in the past.”

Jon’s seen a lot of changes to the world since he started travelling, and admits to finding the destruction to the world’s habitats depressing. Apart from well-known areas such as the Amazon, he’s seen vast logging activities in the forests of some of his favourite countries, including the Philippines and Papua New Guinea.

“Undoubtedly the same thing is happening in central Africa,” he says, “because nobody gives a toss about it there. The only good thing about it I suppose is it’s pretty difficult for loggers to get stuff out, if it was made easier the whole thing would be flattened. I find that very depressing I must admit.”

Is there anywhere left Jon hasn’t explored? He expresses regret he probably won’t ever be able to visit Mali, a country he’s always wanted to visit, due to the political situation there, and says he has his sights on Polynesia, and the Karakoram region of Pakistan. He was also preparing to embark on a trip to China when we met.

Another future plan is to write a book chronicling his travels, but only when - in his own words - he’s too “crooked up” to travel further. As well as the birds he’s seen he’s got many stories to tell, including a plane hijacking over Pakistan, and being inches away from treading on one of Papua New Guinea’s most venomous snakes, which would have killed him within three hours.

Ironically for one of the world’s most well-travelled birders, Jon rarely travels within the UK, and never twitches birds in Britain, with most of his time in Britain spent watching and photographing birds locally in the Sheffield area.

“People think I’m barmy because I won’t go to the coast, for example,” he reflects. “It’s only because I can’t be bothered to drive that far, which does seem a bit odd!”

We never do find a Black Redstart during our morning in the decidedly non-exotic South Yorkshire streets, but this time spent in the city centre illustrates a remarkable birder - a man who has seen a staggeringly high percentage of the ornithological wonders the world has to offer, and continues to seek out new birds in far flung corners of the globe, but is still content putting less glamorous hours in contributing to the knowledge of his local area. A great birder, with a fascinating birdwatching career.

Pete Mella

Observations on Islay Birds

Islay is the southernmost of the Inner Hebrides, on a clear day within sight of Northern Ireland, windy with a good sunshine record, and a population of 3,500, down from 20,000 in 1861. You must go!

Of course many birds are very different from Sheffield's, but some of the common bird contrasts are quite instructive. They are partly positional and environmental, but partly a time-warp, back to our homeland of forty years ago.

The island has seven breeding pairs of Golden Eagle. Our visit in April was our eighth, and all we have heard and read show that the locals are proud and protective of them, do not persecute them, are glad that tourists come to see them and spend money while doing so, and accept that an eagle eating a lamb is highly unlikely to have killed it.

On the other hand, Magpies are a rarity - there is no breeding on the island (the same for Jays), a vagrant is seen once every five years or so, and is of note in the Islay bird record. On any decent day you are likely to see an eagle, but I've never seen or heard a Magpie there.

The reasons are not obvious. The island is within sight of the mainland, a thirty minute jaunt for a bird, and there are small woods, scrub, farms with hens, cattle, sheep, tatty outbuildings and all the rest that Magpies need.

For anyone who remembers the days when Starlings and sparrows were taken for granted, and considered safe from decline, the Hebrides are a delight. Every settlement has them, down to individual farms in size. At any time, six or more sparrows were socialising, scrapping or posturing by our cottage window. In any

village, their chirping was a constant background.

Starlings were found in all these environments, but in others too, in groups of from ten to a hundred; this at the population low-point before breeding starts. There would be fancy formation-flying round every croft or farm, dozens among the sand dunes, others strutting their jaunty walk around sheep and cattle. Even over the moorland, which reaches down to near sea-level where the rocks are acid gneiss, you would come across flocks.

Of course, Islay is far more traditional than Sheffield or lowland England. there are far fewer deliberate or unintended attacks on what Starlings and sparrows need, to feed, breed, survive the winter.

Local Blackbirds have not declined in the same way, and they also were widespread and numerous. This is to be expected in woodland, towns and villages, but they were on the pastures, in heathland and furzy areas, by the shore, along the moorland edge. For an island too windy and salty for trees to do well, I found the numbers surprising.

Even more so was the Song Thrush population, which was not far below that of Blackbirds. Again, pastures and heath were well frequented, unusual for a species that evolved in, and theoretically prefers, woodland, or at least the presence of trees. To observe any stretch of pasture would be to see both birds pacing in search of worms and surface small fry, with no sign of Blackbird persecuting the thrush, which happens all the time in Sheffield.

Rooks and Jackdaws are found in the sort of numbers we have locally, and crows are replaced by characterful Hooded Crow, either a

subspecies or a separate species, far commoner in eastern Europe and with this off outpost in northern Scotland. This trio's numbers makes the lack of Magpies and Jays all the more notable.

Meadow Pipits, Wheatears, Stonechats and Whinchats are common, more so than in The Peak currently. Farmland and heath harbour Skylarks and Lapwings, again in the numbers we used to have before the intensification of farming.

Some birds I used to think of as rare and/or hard to find were common in the right environment, and by no means hid themselves away. One example is the Black Guillemot, which disports itself around the pier and even gets under the feet of tourists on the promenade.

Another is the Great Northern Diver, which as late as April is present in all the sea lochs. One was continually within twenty metres of our cottage window at Port Charlotte.

John Kirkman

Lecture Reports

The theme of April and May's meetings were the South American experiences of some of our committee members, starting with David Wood's travels to Peru, followed by Rod Hinchliffe and Neil Porter's trip to the Galapagos.

David's talk began at his in-laws' near Pantanos de Villa nature reserve, where an enviable garden list included such delights as Vermillion Flycatcher, Bananaquit, and hummingbirds including the endemic Amazilia Hummingbird. We were also introduced to the Croaking Ground Dove, or "farting bird" as it was nicknamed for its distinctive call.

We were taken on a trip round the lagoons and beach, with way too many species to list, with highlights being skimmers, and various waders, terns, gulls and herons. The most unexpected find David made was a beached Waved Albatross, which was sadly unwell and was washed back to sea.

From there we travelled to Paracas, where the birds included Humboldt's Penguin, Inca Tern and the endemic Peruvian Diving Petrel, as well as more familiar birds such as Turnstones and Sooty Shearwater. The hills north of Lima provided further habitats, with species including Black-chested Buzzard Eagle, Mountain Parakeet, Least Seedsnipe, Torrent Duck and Thick-billed Miner, another endemic, as well as viscachas.

At the iconic Machu Pichu, birds were less plentiful, but David still encountered endemics in the form of Green and White Hummingbird and Inca Wren, with other species including Giant Hummingbird and Rusty Flowerpiercer.

One of the final stops was the Amazon, where amazing birds such as Hoatzin, Anhinga, Snail Kite, Sunbittern and Rufescent Tiger Heron were almost upstaged by other wildlife including Howler Monkeys, Ghost Bats, Agoutis, caimans, tarantulas and - perhaps best of all - Giant Otter.

Rod and Neil began their talk with a stopover in Ecuador, where some incredible birds were seen before their cruise of the Galapagos even started. This included Sword-billed Hummingbird, Andean Condors and a very tame Giant Antpitta called Maria.

Then started an itinerary which took our duo on a tour of the Galapagos archipelago. First stop was Baltra, where they got their first experience of the islands' famously tame wildlife, which included sea lions, iguanas and birds including Swallow-tailed Gull, Lava Gull, Cactus Finch and Yellow Warbler. There was also the first Darwin's finch - thought to be a Medium Ground Finch, although this group are the ultimate "little brown jobs" and are quite an ID challenge!

The second hop took us to the uninhabited, desert-like island of Genovesa, home of such birds Nazca and Red-footed Boobies, Red-billed Tropicbird and Galapagos Dove, as well as nesting frigatebirds. Then on to Isabella - which was said to strongly resemble High Peak moorland - and featured Galapagos Flycatcher, Woodpecker Finch, Galapagos Penguin and Flightless Cormorant, among other species.

Fernandina, a young and more volcanically active island, was next, and had a good population of Marine Iguanas, plus Semi-Palmated Plover and American Oystercatcher. Santiago added

the familiar and ubiquitous Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling, along with Lava Heron and Galapagos Hawk - the island's only diurnal raptor.

Bartolome was good for dolphins - and have Neil the experience of a Galapagos Penguin swim between his legs - and North Seymour was excellent for Blue-footed Booby and Magnificent Frigatebird.

Santa Cruz saw Rod and Neil fail to find Dark-rumped Petrel, but they did finally catch up with Vermillion Flycatcher - sat on the back of a giant tortoise! Black-necked Stilt, White-cheeked Pintail and Greater Flamingos were among the birds of Floreana, and Champion Island held Charles Mockingbird, Medium Tree Finch (IDed by a method named the "Hinchliffe-Porter taxonomy") and Red-billed Tropicbird.

Finally the highlights of Espanola included Hood Mockingbird and Waved Albatross, including many immatures.

Both David's, and Rod and Neil's, talks were enthusiastically received by the audience, and they were thanked for sharing some great experiences illustrated with some amazing photographs, of a wide range of species this report barely does justice to.

Also thanked was Martin Hodgson, who gave a short talk on China after Rod and Neil's lecture, chronicling some of the great birds he encountered while in the country to meet his new in-laws in the Central province of Henan, and surrounding areas.

Pete Mella

RECENT SIGHTINGS

1st May - 31st August 2013

These records are largely unchecked. Records in bold require supporting details.



When a juvenile Two-barred Crossbill was found and photographed by Andy Hill, drinking from an inlet at Broomhead Res on the afternoon of 12th August, it would have been a great find in itself. However this was just the start of a remarkable series of records that saw confirmed numbers swelling daily over the course of the next week, with a final tally of nine birds - six juveniles, two adult females, and one cracking adult male.

Coming during something of an influx of Two-barred Crossbill into the country, this was a remarkable count for the species, and certainly the largest group ever recorded in mainland Britain. The birds were enjoyed by a large number of birders, many of which travelled far to see them. They required some patience as they disappeared for several hours at a time, with a flock of several hundred Common Crossbill also present, but they rewarded those who waited with confiding views as they regularly visited a clearing south of the reservoir.

At least one of the birds is still present at the time of writing (4th September). (Pics - Andy Deighton)

Bittern - One was viewable from the roadside at Catcliffe Flash on 27th August, until 20:45 when it flew SW over Orgreave.

Little Egret - One was on the river at Yorkshire Bridge on 1st May. On 11th June one was sighted at Waingate in the City Centre, before flying upriver at Lady's Bridge, and another was seen SE over Damflask Res. In August two were at Orgreave Lakes on 2nd, one at Thrybergh CP on 11th, and one W at Heeley City Farm, and one at Orgreave Lakes, on 24th.

Great White Egret - One at Orgreave Lakes on 2nd August.

Whooper Swan - The last of the year were three N at Thrybergh CP on 8th May.

Garganey - A female was present at Orgreave Lakes on 1st August, and an eclipse male at Catcliffe Flash on 30th, lingering into (at least) early September.

Common Scoter - Seven were at Orgreave Lakes on 19th June, and a male at Midhope Res on 20th. Five were at Thrybergh CP on 23rd July, three at Wentworth Lakes on 23rd, and a female at Thrybergh CP on 27th and 28th. During August three were at Orgreave Lakes on 24th, and one was at Thrybergh CP on 28th,

Red Kite - Widespread records throughout the period, with sightings from Langsett Wood, Fulwood, Norwood Allotments, Thrybergh CP, Aston, Owlbar, Broomhead Moor, Dukes Road, Upper Commons, Harley, Barlborough, Trolley Moss, Nether Green, Parkhead, Rushup Edge, Perry Dale, and Moss Valley. All

were singles, bar two at Broomhead Moor on 14th July.

Marsh Harrier - Records from Upper Commons, Broomhead Moor, White Edge, Broomhead Res, Whitwell Moor, Ewden Height, Agden Beck and Upper Midhope. Two were at Broomhead Res on 24th August.

Hen Harrier - A ringtail was at Spout House Hill on 27th July.

Osprey - Records of single birds at Upper Midhope and Agden on 19th May, Totley on 21st May, Sheffield University (mobbed heavily by Peregrines) on 15th June, Broomhead Res on 22nd August, and Hurlfield on 30th August.

Peregrine - Three chicks successfully fledged from the pair on St George's Church.

Quail - One heard at Onesmoor on 5th June.

Water Rail - Singles at Blackburn Meadows on 4th May, Thrybergh Tip on 30th June, and Poolsbrook Marsh on 29th August.

Dotterel - Four birds were reported at Rud Hill on 6th May, with a single bird sighted on 7th.

Grey Plover - One in summer plumage at Orgreave Lakes on 24th August.

Knot - Five partial summer plumage birds N at Orgreave Lakes on 15th May.

Sanderling - Various reports from Orgreave Lakes between 9th and 15th May, peaking at an impressive ten on 15th. Elsewhere in May, singles were at Middleton Moor on 4th and 18th. In July, three were present at Orgreave Lakes on 22nd.

Curlew Sandpiper - One at Orgreave Lakes on 28th August.

Black-tailed Godwit - Orgreave Lakes saw three on 15th May, one on 23rd July, one on 27th July, and two on 14th August. At Middleton Moor, six were present on 24th July, and two on 27th. One flew N at Rawmarsh on 7th August.

Whimbrel - The highest count was 11 at Moorgate on 23rd July. Elsewhere one was at Middleton

Moor on 2nd and 4th May, 2-3 at Orgreave Lakes on 10th and 11th May, one near Pilsley on 20th May, one at Orgreave Lakes on 20th May, one at Thrybergh CP on 2nd June, one at Redmires Bottom Res on 1st July, two at Spout House Hill on 20th July, one at Middleton Moor on 26th July, one at Thrybergh CP on 29th July, one SW at Redmires on 4th August, one at Firsby Res on 17th August, one at Orgreave Lakes on 18th August, and one at Thrybergh CP on 24th August.

Greenshank - In May two were at Orgreave Lakes, and one was at Silverwood Lagoon, on 15th. One was at Middleton Moor on 20th July, and August saw singles at Orgreave Lakes on 3rd, 18th and 20th, Silverwood Lagoon on 9th, and Rawmarsh on 22nd, with a count of two at Orgreave Lakes on 24th.

Green Sandpiper - Three at Aldwarke SF on 4th August was the highest count, with singles reported at Orgreave Lakes, Forgemasters Tip, Thrybergh CP, Canklow, Silverwood Lagoon, Aldwarke SF, Firsby Res, Upper Midhope, Canklow and Blackburn Meadows.



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This Long-tailed Skua was at Orgreave Lakes on 24th August (Mark Reeder).

Wood Sandpiper - One at Orgreave Lakes on 15th May.

Turnstone - Seven were at Orgreave Lakes on 15th May. Four were at the same site on 16th August, with one present on 18th, 20th, 21st and 24th.

Arctic Skua - A probable dark phase bird was seen over a Fulwood garden on 3rd June.

Long-tailed Skua - A juv was on Orgreave Lakes on 24th August, photographed just in time before it was flushed by dog walkers.

Great Skua - Pager report of one at Midhope Res on 27th July.

Mediterranean Gull - Juvs at Middleton Moor on 27th July, and Orgreave Lakes on 10th August.

Little Gull - Adult summer at Orgreave Lakes on 22nd and 23rd July.

Caspian Gull - 2nd summer at Middleton Moor on 13th July.

Arctic Tern - Singles at Thrybergh CP on 11th May, Orgreave Lakes

on 15th May, and Thrybergh CP on 14th June. Two were at Rother Valley CP on 23rd July.

Little Tern - One was briefly present at Thrybergh CP on 15th May, with two at Orgreave Lakes later the same morning.

Short-eared Owl - One at Thrybergh CP on 25th May.

Nightjar - A male was churring at Wharnccliffe Heath, although none were present at two other expected locations. A dead juv was found at Emlin Moor on 27th August.

Waxwing - A few sightings into May, with five at Hunter's Bar on 1st, 10 at Hillsborough Park on 3rd, and finally five on Pomona St on 13th.

Black Redstart - A male was recorded singing from rooftops on 21st May, and again on 20th and 21st June.

Fieldfare - The last record was a lone bird at Stanage on 18th May.

Golden Oriole - An immature male was at Padley Gorge on 15th June. There was another

report of a bird at Ridgeway on 23rd.

Two-barred Crossbill - Up to nine birds (six juveniles, two females and a male) at Broomhead Res from 12th August - see page 10 for details.

Crossbill - By far the biggest flock was at Broomhead Res in August, peaking at 300+ on 25th. Elsewhere 10 were at Lady Canning's Plantation on 2nd May, 25 at Westend Valley on 22nd June, 22 at Midhope Res on 30th June, 35 at Chatsworth on 25th July, and 30 at Howden Res on 8th August.

Hawfinch - One was reported flying low over Weston Park on 16th July.

Black Swan - Two were at Middleton Moor on 5th May, with one sighted on various further dates in May and June.

Eastern Rosella - One add an air of the exotic to Thrybergh CP on 11th August.

Pete Mella

This issue's observers, with apologies for any omissions:

CD Abell, C Almond, MG Archer, J Atkin, B Bailey, S Bailey, J Barnaby, R Barnard, SJ Barnes, AR Bell, AS Bilton, M Blagden, RP Blagden, C Bonnington, K Bower, P Bowker, RJ Bradley, SJ Branch, PL Brown, P Burke, RV Burton, R Butterfield, DJ Buttle, BM Carr, EO Chafer, I Chapman, J Clarke, L Coates, B Cole, J Crooks, N Cross, A Deighton, W Dudhill, CM Dunhill, H Egan, KL Evans, MG Fenner, P Flackett, D Gains, D Gardiner, P Garrity, KA Gehring, C Gibson, DN Gill, G Grant, R Green, P Greetham, D Griffin, T Grose, S Guymer, R Harris, M Hibbert, A Hill, AA Hill, RD Hill, DJ Hitchen, A&V Hobson, M Hodgson, J Hornbuckle, K Horton, J Houseden, G Hunt, R Hutty, P Jackson, G & J James, M Jarvis, Anne Johnson, A Jones, C Kelly, S King, J Kingsland, N Kipling, K Knowles, M Kramer, D Langston, MR Langston, P Lawson, P Leonard, P Lockwood, J Luis, F Maddock, JL Marriott, P Mella, TH MInskip, K Mosley, JA Mountford, D Mowbray, L Nelson, MG Oxlade, PH Pearsall, M Pearson, R Platts, NR Porter, M Purslow, MN Reeder, P Ridsdale, L Riley, B Roberts, K Roberts, D Roddis, SJ Roddis, S Samworth, L Sanders, R Scally, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, A Siddall, D Simmonite, MA Smethurst, M Snook, G Speight, B Spencer, D Stables, MJ Sweeney, M&L Taylor, SG Tebbutt, P Thomas, A Thompson, W Thomson, M Timms, R Twigg, C Tyler, SE Vickers, EC Vincent, D Warburton, R Watkinson, AD Watson, M Wells, G Wheatley, RDR Williams, JB Wilson, P&A Willson, S Winslow, M Winter, D Wood, D Woodhead, D Woodriff, P Wragg, Thrybergh CP Blrd Log.