

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



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Bulletin

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Dates for your diary

INDOOR MEETINGS

Wednesday 14th January 2009 – 7.15 pm – Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

Mick Taylor will speak to us about **“Peak District Raptors”**.

Mick is an active North Derbyshire birder, and has travelled extensively as an ornithologist, photographer and writer. His main passion, however, is raptors and in particular the raptors of Derbyshire. He is co-ordinator of the South Peak Raptor Study Group, and has a lifetime's experience of birds of prey in this area, and their fluctuating fortunes. Mick has agreed to come “north of the border” to speak to us and it should be a talk not to be missed.

Wednesday 11th February 2009 – 7.15 pm – Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

Tim Birkhead will give us a talk entitled **“An Ornithological Feast – How we know what we know about birds”**.

Tim is Professor of Evolutionary Biology at the University of Sheffield, is a member of the Darwin Correspondence Project Committee, and he regularly contributes to radio and science television programmes, newspapers and magazines. He's an international expert on sperm design and selection in birds and he also runs a project that studies long-term population changes in Guillemots on Skomer. He has published many books and papers on ornithology and his latest book is entitled “The Wisdom of Birds”. He has a long-standing association with the Group, including as referee for our successful Lottery fund award for digital equipment. This should be a very interesting and informative evening.

FIELD MEETINGS

Saturday 13th December, 1.00pm Poolsbrook CP Visitors' Centre

Poolsbrook has become known as the best place around to watch gulls, with white-winged gulls a regular feature during winter months, as well as Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls. This will be a trip to concentrate on gulls, hopefully turning up some of the more unusual species, which can offer very good views as they bathe and rest on the lake. It will also be a chance to sift through the commoner species in different plumages, with expert help on hand. The light is far better than at an evening gull roost, and there's coffee on tap in the cafe in the visitor centre! Gull watching in luxury...

The Lecture

Highlands and Islands

The September lecture was given by Pete Brown, long-time and renowned stalwart of the SBSG. He described several trips he made to the Scottish highlands and some of the western isles as part of his "Gap Year(s) Birding" when he made up his mind to do at least some of the things he had been promising himself he would do "one day".

The first expedition was in March 2007, and began with a ferry trip from Kennacraig to Port Ellen on Islay. Islay is renowned for wintering geese, mostly Barnacles, but also smaller numbers of Greenland Whitefronts. Two visits to the RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart were memorable for some wild and desolate saltmarsh and moorland, as well as farmland, and a total absence of people on both occasions. Unfortunately it was very windy, and geese although numerous elsewhere on Islay were hard to come by on the reserve. However there were a few Greylags (origins unknown), plenty of ducks, and flocks of Chough and Twite. The island is mostly low-lying, but is good for raptors including Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin and – commonest raptor of all – Hen Harrier. The intention was to go on to Mull, but unfortunately, car damage sustained prior to boarding the ferry meant that trip ended prematurely with a tow back to Sheffield.

The next venture was a fortnight in June as a volunteer warden at the RSPB Loch Garten reserve. In addition to the regular wardens there are six other volunteers, and they work a three-shift system so that a round-the-clock watch is kept on the Ospreys. It may be remembered that 2007 was the year when the long-term male, Henry, arrived back late from his spring migration to find his mate, EJ, with another male and three eggs. Henry set about kicking the eggs out of the nest, and Pete had some astonishing film footage of him doing this. Henry then mated with the female himself, but again kicked out the first two eggs that she laid, before permitting three more eggs to be incubated. None of the chicks survived, and it was thought that the effort of laying eight eggs meant that these last three were weakened. [When the first chick died, Pete found himself the unwilling participant in a re-run of the "dead parrot sketch" when he was asked to keep the unpalatable truth from the highly sceptical public.] However although Pete was not able to enjoy the sight of adults bringing food to healthy chicks, the other local wildlife (abundant breeding waders, Hobbies, Divers, Grebes, Capercaillies, etc. etc. together with up to seven red squirrels on the feeders at the reserve) made it all a wonderful experience.

Early June 2008 found Pete on a four-and-a-half hour ferry trip to Stornoway in the Isle of Lewis, en route for Harris, North Uist and South Uist, before returning to Oban. They were fortunate with the weather on this occasion, and enjoyed an idyllic four days of picture postcard scenery, crystal clear waters, and profuse bird life. Lewis is low-lying in the north, then rises in the south to 2,500 feet when it turns into Harris. Lewis is covered in lochans, and is in fact about fifty percent water. There are also quite large human communities, and Pete was surprised by how "built up" it was (although everything is relative). Some of the time they stayed in converted

traditional "black houses" run by the Gatliff Hebridean Hostel Trust. Notable bird life included the usual waders - although they heard surprisingly few Corncrakes - Little Terns, and Great and Arctic Skuas, which were not in fact breeding, so somewhat less malevolent than they are when defending nests. Moving south to Harris, they found Greylag Geese on the east coast, the waders again, and an occasional White-tailed Eagle - guaranteed to upset the waders and spur them into an amazing spectacle of sight and sound as they rise as one to mob the intruder. Moving on to North Uist, and the famous machair - an expanse of shelly sand covered in flowers. Pete found this only "quite spectacular" but again appreciated the huge numbers of breeding waders, especially Lapwing. Surprisingly, there was still a noticeable passage of Arctic bound waders (Sanderling, Dunlin and Bar-tailed Godwit) In the north-west a minor road across North Uist offers excellent raptor watching: Short-eared Owls, Golden Eagles, Merlins, Buzzards, also seen by other people there were White-tailed Eagle and Peregrine. The six-and-a-half hour ferry trip back to Oban also provided the usual seabirds together with Bottlenose Dolphins and Basking Sharks. Pete said that the memorable aspect of this trip was that there were "Birds everywhere, all of the time".

Pete ended the talk with an account of some of his "Munro bagging" adventures during the year. Climbing some of Scotland's mountains over three thousand feet in height is not a particularly birding motivated pastime but close encounters with some of the high level specialities such as Snow Bunting, Ptarmigan and Dotterel make the effort well worthwhile.

Pete has always had a reputation for "singing and dancing" and this evening's talk was no exception. His photographs were wonderful as, of course, was his subject matter.

The translocated birds are released 2-3 weeks after arriving at Rutland, giving them about 6 weeks before migrating south. Fish was provided for the birds until they migrated (replicating what happens at natural nests where males feed their chicks until they leave), but some were seen to catch fish before departing on migration. During the post-release period the birds would frequently disappear for several hours at a time as they familiarised themselves with the area.

In order to throw light on their migration routes, 13 Scottish birds, including 7 adults, and 14 Rutland birds (all juveniles) have been fitted with transmitters. Tim illustrated the benefits (for us) of satellite tracking by describing two migration journeys. The first was by a male who was translocated in 2000, and left Rutland on 2nd September. He passed west of the Brittany coast on the 3rd, and continued over the Bay of Biscay, making for northwest Spain. Very sadly, his signals disappeared as he attempted to come in towards land. Local birdwatchers in the area have given anecdotal evidence that Ospreys were often mobbed by Yellow-legged Gulls as they came in from the sea, and frequently forced down into the water and drowned. It was believed that this was the fate of this bird.

The second example was of a juvenile female from Scotland who was tracked southwards through Wales, Devon, and past the Brittany coast, but was then met with strong winds when making for Spain, and was pushed far out to sea. She made landfall 64 hours later in SW Portugal, an astonishing feat, and she stayed there for the rest of the winter. She has since bred successfully in Scotland.

Another formidable barrier to migrating birds is the Sahara Desert. Adults usually fly to the west, thus minimising the stretch of such hostile terrain that they have to cross. Juveniles sometimes fly south, right across the widest part of the desert and, of five juveniles who are known to have attempted the longer crossing, only one has survived.

Of the 64 birds originally released, 10 have returned to Rutland, and a further 2 males have bred in Wales. A small number have been reported dead, and the fate of the others is unknown. They could be living their lives in respectable obscurity in Scotland or elsewhere, since their whereabouts is only known if someone is able to read the coloured ring, and report it.

In the remainder of his talk, Tim gave details of the two translocated males who have bred successfully at Rutland. The first is known as 03(97). He returned in 1999 and 2000 as an immature bird, and then bred in 2001 and 2002, with an unringed female at a location away from the Rutland Water reserve. In 2001 they successfully raised one chick, but in 2002 were thwarted by exceptionally bad weather and, although at least one chick hatched, none survived the cold wet weather. In 2003 this female failed to return but her place was taken by a translocated female, 05(00), and this pair has bred every year since then, at the same site, and have raised 14 chicks over the five-year period. Both these birds are back together this year, and hopes are high.

The other male, 08(97), also returned in 1999, and every year since. Up to and including 2006, he attracted a succession of females but they all subsequently departed again - in 2006, the female left after the nest collapsed as she landed on it. In 2007, however, his nest was bigger and better, and he successfully bred with a

Rutland female, 5N(04), and they fledged two chicks. Again, both these birds have arrived back this year.

A major point of interest, is the extent to which the Rutland-fledged young return and breed. So far, there have been no sightings of the chicks fledged prior to 2004 but, out of the 5 chicks fledged in 2004 and 2005, four have returned, so clearly the habitat is providing them with plenty of food to ensure strong healthy chicks. This year is looking good so far, with both of last year's breeding pairs back on territory, and expecting eggs shortly. Other (as yet unmated) birds are also present. Recent adverse weather has held up migrants further south, so other returning birds are expected.

For the future, the hope is that there could be 10+ pairs at Rutland, and other pairs could spread out to other water bodies not only in Leicestershire, but also Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. It is also hoped to gain more knowledge of migration and other movements by the use of a new generation of solar-powered transmitters which should last for 3-4 years. In addition to the conservation benefits to the species itself, it is also beneficial to enthuse the general public with these birds. Persecution of raptors is only too well known, and anything that increases public awareness in a positive way must be a Good Thing.

Tim also summarised two other Osprey relocation projects in Andalusia in southern Spain, and in Tuscany, which have benefited from the experience gained at Rutland

Tim was thanked for telling a fascinating tale, and adding a lot of interesting detail to the basic story. We already have Scottish birds moving through our area in good numbers, and perhaps we can look forward to an explosion of numbers at Rutland, and even have them breeding in our recording area one day!

For a lot of very detailed information about the Project, and about Ospreys in general, including their migration journeys, see the website www.ospreys.org.uk.

Wendy Thomson

The Lecture

Indonesia: Birds & Conservation in the World's Largest Archipelago

The October speaker was Algirdas Knystautas, a freelance writer and conservationist, and author of the acclaimed "Natural History of the USSR". Today, he spoke about the land birds of Indonesia, and their significance in our understanding of evolution, and also of the threats facing both the human and non-human populations.

At the time when Darwin was in the Galapagos islands, one Alfred Wallace was studying and exploring Indonesia, and coming to the same conclusions as Darwin, although he has never become so well known for it. The archipelago comprises many thousands of islands, the five largest being Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan (the Indonesian part of Borneo), New Guinea (shared with Papua New Guinea) and Sulawesi. They are of

great interest to naturalists, as they offer such a clear demonstration of the evolutionary process. Wallace defined a dividing line between the distribution the Asian and the Australasian species, known as the Wallace Line, and running roughly north-south between Kalimantan and Sulawesi, and between Bali and Lombok. West of the line, the flora and fauna are more Asian, then moving east from Lombok, they are increasingly Australian. The term Wallacea refers to the transitional zone, and incorporates the island of Sulawesi, the Lesser Sundas and the Moluccas. The whole area has a remarkable variety of wildlife, with hundreds of endemic species. This is especially true of the east of the region, where almost every bird you see is different, and a persistent ornithologist can be almost certain of discovering a new species!

All the main islands have their own endemic species, but unfortunately, many are endangered. Although there is an ongoing programme of captive breeding and release, in some cases the required habitat has been destroyed.

Pressures on the environment come from logging, and from the capture of wild birds for the lucrative cage birds trade. The logging is supposed to be regulated, but it seems to be not too difficult to get around the regulations, and logging continues apace. There seems to be no way to stop the trade in wild birds, which involves many rare and endangered species. In addition to the cruelty of caging the species deemed to be suitable for interior decoration, others are caught, transported, and sold live in the markets for meat.

Algirdas also touched on the desperate plight of tribal peoples in West Papua, who inhabit a disputed area bordering on Papua New Guinea, which is also rich in mineral deposits. They suffer frequent attacks and atrocities carried out by the Indonesian Army, together with unrestrained plundering and despoliation by international mineral companies, and are labelled "terrorists" for attempting to resist them. This is a matter which Algirdas clearly finds deeply upsetting.

Algirdas was thanked for a memorable and instructive, albeit at times disturbing, evening. Needless to say, the photography did ample justice to the landscape and astonishing variety of bird species.

Wendy Thomson

BIRDS OF LATIN AMERICA

Tucacas, Venezuela, March 2006

My partner took sabbatical leave from her work in 2005 and off we went to Latin America for 16 months. Birding was only one of the aims. Sue isn't even a birder and, anyway, we couldn't have afforded professional bird tours. But that was the challenge: to see what I could without a local guide and a checklist to tick. I'm not knocking the stallion-sized trip-lists one finds on the Internet; for those with sufficient money and insufficient time, foreign bird tours are great. In Tucacas, a Caribbean resort on the coast of Venezuela where we spent a week, I met two Belgian birders with their guide. They were nearing the end of their second day with a list of 170 birds, more than I had seen after ten weeks in the country. I consoled myself by telling them where to find a family party of **Wilson's Plover**, a large-billed, long-legged charadrius. Face saved.

Anyway, no birder could ever be downhearted in such a place. The lagoons behind the bathing beaches were seething with birds, mostly easy to identify: **Scarlet Ibis** putting their dull cousins, the **Green Ibis**, to shame; **Roseate Spoonbill**; **Egrets (Great, Reddish, Snowy** and, of course, **Cattle**); **Hérons (Green, Little-blue, Tricoloured) Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**; **Wattled Jacana**; **Black-necked Stilt** ... whoops, I'm lapsing into list-mode. I believe it was Oscar Wilde who said that the best contraceptive is other people's children. How mean! But maybe the best cure for twitching is other people's lists. On the seaward side, skeins of **Brown Pelican** flapped heavily up and down the coast while **Magnificent Frigatebird** drifted overhead like cartoon Pterodactyls. Surely they belonged on Fred Flintstone's list, not mine. And there were other bizarre gems, like the Bruce Forsyth birds, **Black Skimmers** that scoop up insects from the surface with their protruding chins. Sitting beside the road to the beach, I marvelled at the holidaymakers passing by without a sideways glance at all this treasure. How do they do that?

When the large, the conspicuous, the colourful and the boldly patterned are identified, one moves on to the slightly less obvious: **Lesser Yellowlegs** and **Greater Yellowlegs** for example. But I needn't have worried. This was wader-identification school with both these tringas present at fairly close quarters. And they were calling: generally one or two syllables from the Lesser

Yellowlegs and three or more from the Greater. How considerate!

After bagging some more easy-peasies, **Willet**, **American Oystercatcher**, **Turnstone**, **Grey Plover** and **Spotted Sandpiper**, I moved on to the smaller waders, which were of several different types and clearly from a more advanced class. By the end of the week, I had reaped a good crop of definites from among the possibles. The **Western Sandpiper** tended to hang out with **Semi-palmated Plover** while the small numbers of **Least Sandpiper**, a bird I was familiar with from Mexico, preferred the animated flocks of **Semi-palmated Sandpiper**. With the addition of **Wood Stork**, **Sandwich** and **Royal Terns** and **Neotropic Cormorant**, that just about winds up the water birds. Now to start on the land birds ...

This is where the head really begins to spin. For example, before even reaching the fabled abundance of a tropical rainforest, serious numbers of New World tyrant-flycatchers are encountered. More than four hundred species of this enormous catch-all family occur in South America. Common over wide areas are **Tropical Kingbirds** and **Cattle Tyrants**, the former sitting out in the open like European flycatchers, the latter feeding on the ground like thrushes. Then there are the kiskadees, the **Great Kiskadee** going around in noisy groups shouting 'kiskadee' at each other. I saw one of these kingfisher-like birds actually dive into water like a kingfisher. And in Tucacas I also managed to identify the **Lesser Kiskadee**.

A curious feature of the tyrannids is that species of different genera can have essentially the same coloration. Both the kiskadees have yellow underparts, brown and chestnut upperparts, a dark eye-stripe, white superciliary and concealed yellow crown patch – yet they belong to different genera. Two smaller versions that were also seen, the **Social Flycatcher** and **Rusty-margined Flycatcher**, are of a different genus again. The smart **Grey Kingbird** and the in-your-face-gorgeous **Vermillion Flycatcher** were also in town.

Some are notoriously difficult to separate, like the myiarchus flycatchers for example. In Tucacas, the only

one I could pin down was the **Venezuelan Flycatcher** although I managed a few others elsewhere. The excellent *Birds of Venezuela* by Steven Hilty contains row upon row of elaenias and tyranulets, all impersonating female Chaffinches – I managed to pick **Forest Elaenia** from the line-up.

The English names are fascinating in themselves. Except there aren't enough to go round so they have to be double-barrelled. I saw **Common Tody-flycatcher**, **Pied Water-tyrant** and **Pale-eyed Pygmy-tyrant** in Tucacas. In all, there are about fifteen 'prefixed' tyrants in Latin America. I saw two of the five species of *bush-tyrant* during the trip – but not the same ones that have inhabited Washington DC in recent years.

Moving away from the flycatchers, for flamboyant names the hummingbirds are tops. I only identified one at Tucacas, the **Glittering-throated Emerald**. *Picaflora* or *colibris* in Spanish, hummingbirds whiz around the streets so fast, anyone not looking for them doesn't see them at all. Then they sit on a wire for the exact time it takes to raise a pair of binoculars.

The cute little **Scaled Dove**, the rather drab **Eared Dove** and the **Ruddy Ground-dove** were common in Tucacas. Ironically, I found the **Common Ground-dove** to be, in all areas, less common. More exotic was a boisterous group of **Green-rumped Parrotlets**, the ASBO kids of parrot-dom – and rather curiously named since the rest of the bird is green too.

Woodpeckers are well represented in the Americas, not surprising given the number of trees around. The only one spotted in Tucacas was the mainstream **Red-crowned Woodpecker** but not far away at our stop-over point, the spa at Trincheras, was a **Lineated Woodpecker**. This fine example of the two genera of mainly-black New World woodpeckers has a bright red bouffant and staring white eye. So do all the others of course, but they can be separated by the differently configured white line on face, neck and back. **Lance-tailed Mannikin**, almost the only member of this primarily forest family I saw anywhere, was at both Tucacas and Trincheras.

Now for the tanagers. The seaside life had attracted three members of the nominate genus, the **Blue-grey Palm**, and **Glaucous Tanager**, as well as **Summer Burnished-buff** and **White-lined Tanager**. I was familiar with all of these from elsewhere in Venezuela as well as many others with names as gaudy as their plumage – **Silver-beaked**, **Beryl-spangled** and **Crimson-backed Tanager**, to name a few. A gate-crasher to the tanager family, the cheeky, warbler-like **Bananaquit**, is widespread across much of Latin America. It has no particular association with bananas but does say 'quit'. And I was very pleased to get a good glimpse of the mangrove specialist, **Bicoloured Conebill**, a mere frisbee-thing from the noisy beach.

After Mexico, the density of New World wood warblers (parulidae) had thinned considerably. Only **Golden Warbler**, a split from Yellow Warbler, was seen at Tucacas. Both show up a wonderfully brilliant yellow against dark green foliage. **Yellow Warbler** and **Three-striped Warbler** were at Trincheras, along with **Scrub**

Greenlet, a warbler look-alike that is actually classified with the vireos.

The mockingbirds are apparently most closely related to starlings and are invariably present around human habitation. Between the Northern Mockingbird of North America and the Patagonian Mockingbird, the **Tropical Mockingbird** with its beautiful thrush-like song is common although seriously maligned by its name. I never heard one doing any mocking.

A couple of hirundines were present at Tucacas, **Southern Rough-winged Swallow** and the mainly wetland **White-winged Swallow**. **Greyish Saltator**, a cross between a grosbeak and a thrush was around, as well as the pretty **Saffron Finch**. The diverse icterid family was represented by one each of most of its sub-groups, **Shiny Cowbird**, **Oriole Blackbird** and **Carib Grackle**. A pair of **Crested Oropendolas** were building their hanging string-bag nest in full view of the main road at Trincheras.

Also at the hot springs was **Pale-bellied Thrush**. This was the only thrush seen, although generally the turdids thrive in the New World as much as the Old. But, as if to bolster the location's tropical credentials, I got excellent views of **Orange-chinned** and **Brown-throated Parakeet** inside hotel grounds.

Over large parts of the Americas, look up at any time and you will very likely see **Black Vultures** or **Turkey Vultures** or both, often accompanied by those falcon-like scavengers, the caracaras. In Tucacas, **Yellow-headed Caracara** and **Northern Crested Caracara** were present. **Osprey** too, that most international of birds, is widespread in winter in the South, but doesn't breed. I saw **Common** and **Great Black Hawk** too and, although more restricted in range, they are not uncommon.

Commercial bird tours seek to offer the birds their customers won't see anywhere else, the endemics. My Tucacas list contains no endemics, indeed, I saw none in the whole Latin American trip. But what did I get instead? I got a feast of hundreds of wonderful birds in downtown parks, squares and gardens or patches of waste land on the fringes of towns. Hundreds more were seen a short bus or bike ride from the apartments we rented. The few occasions when I did find a local guide to a more remote spot, it was the icing on an exceedingly rich cake.

And the future? Well, the good news is that massive areas of Latin America remain in a pristine state – possibly a greater proportion than any other major zone on the planet. And many species of birds have learned to live alongside humans in much of the remainder. (Not true for the unfortunate mammals.)

The bad news is that natural habitats are disappearing at an accelerating rate, despite the proclaimed policies of governments and not-for-profits. And, sadly, life is very hard for a lot of people; so bad that the overwhelming majority would cut down every forest and drain every marsh if they could in order to secure a better life for themselves and their families. I can support this bleak assessment in the case of Bolivia in particular, and it appears to be almost as bad elsewhere on the continent. Nevertheless, the poor are not the biggest problem,

although they will need to be central to any solution. That honour goes to us, or to 'our' multinational companies to be more precise. A fleet of giant bulldozers can clear more forest in a day than a dozen squatter families in a year and, even then, much of the wildlife will survive alongside subsistence farming.

Now that the media has woken up to global warming, the world's attention has turned to the oxygen-replenishing forests of Latin America. If we halt the destruction quickly, we won't just save hundreds of sensitive forest-dwelling birds, we could just save the planet as well.

Dermot Smyth, 5 August 2008

TEN DAYS IN PROVENCE

I never much cared for Peter Mayle's writings on Provence but I'm happy to amend the timescale of one of his titles. It's mid September and we're enjoying our first visit to this spectacular region of France. Not a birding trip, there's too much to see and experience in too short a time but a pair of binoculars are usually to hand and the itinerary does take in some tasty locations.

We're in Arles for the first couple of nights. It's a city crammed with an impressive variety of Roman and medieval monuments. It's also a convenient gateway to the Camargue and that superb haven for wildlife occupies much of our first day. Not the ideal time of year for a visit to see the best of the birds, the reed beds and ditches are largely silent except for ever-vocal Cetti's Warblers, many of the summer visitors have moved on, the ducks are only just coming out of eclipse plumage and the passage waders have long since moulted into non-breeding attire. It doesn't make the slightest difference. The Camargue is about spectacle. There are thousands of Greater Flamingoes, all over the Etang du Vaccares, the largest area of open water, or scattered in smaller groups in the salt marshes and in the pools that fringe the coastal dunes. I've watched flamingoes at a distance in two of their other Mediterranean strongholds but here they're much nearer to the roads and paths and seem unconcerned by our close proximity. Big gatherings of Cattle Egrets, appreciating the bulls and white horses as much as the tourists do and smaller numbers of Great and Little Egrets add to the spectacle especially when one of the many hunting Marsh Harriers causes unnecessary panic amongst them.

And despite a rather gloomy sky there is plenty of colour. We stop by a bridge, the stone parapet gives the only bit of height to enable us to see over the reeds, and we latch on to three Kingfishers close by. Further along the road a Roller, perched on a wire shows well but all too briefly and overhead there's a constant stream of southbound Sand Martins and Swallows. Whether or not they're taking advantage of the hirundine glut or instead harvesting the abundant dragonflies, Hobbies patrol the salt marshes and etang shores and in the distance, shapes that momentarily seemed like more Hobbies metamorphose into Alpine Swifts.

We've been mindful that one unwelcome feature of the Camargue is the threat of mosquitoes but the morning breeze has kept them at bay. We stop at the La Capeliere reserve information centre and resolve to walk the 1.5 km trail there. It takes in a good selection of the Camargue's habitats. There are hides that give reasonable views of a variety of waders and there are trees that cut out the breeze. We don't see them and they ignore me but despite a smearing of chemical weaponry the mosies take a liking to Margaret and she leaves the Camargue with some unwelcome souvenirs.

For the bulk of the holiday, eight nights, we're in a fairly isolated gite two kilometres from the medieval hilltop village of Simiane-la-Rotonde in the Alpes de Haute Provence. The house has a wooded garden and sits at 2,000 feet near to the summit of a col that crosses an east-west running ridge to the south. Much of the terrain is covered by low oak and pine scrub which gives way lower down to scattered lavender fields and pastures separated by substantial hedgerows and small copses. During the night prior to our arrival there'd been some pretty interesting weather with thunderstorms and heavy rainfall. It was only at lunch-time after a first morning trip to the market in Apt and after the first welcome glass of local wine on the terrace that I work out the equation: mid-September plus bad overnight weather plus a pass through the hills equals..... And there's the answer all around us. Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Redstarts, Blackcaps, Willow and Garden Warblers feasting on the abundance of garden insects, just like an East Coast "fall" only with sunnier, warmer weather, more scenic views and much more wine than I ever recall drinking at Spurn.

I resolve to be out at first light the following day, a Sunday, to see what else is about. It's a mistake. Instead of finding birds I find people, they with guns and dogs, me with binoculars. They're uncomfortable and unproductive encounters for both parties. We take a later walk when the shooters have gone, a slow stroll up to Simiane. I needn't have worried about the delay. There are plenty of birds about if not in the same numbers as the previous day. In the more open terrain Wheatears and Whinchats adorn the wires and fence posts. Along the hedgerows we browse upon the sweetest blackberries that I've ever tasted and share the harvest with numerous Blackcaps and a smattering of Whitethroats and Garden Warblers. Two Nightingales, several Black Redstarts, a couple of Sardinian Warblers, a family of Cirl Buntings and a party of Serins give the walk a more Mediterranean feel but the soundtrack to this and indeed every morning is provided by the local Woodlarks, in full song despite the time of year. Margaret comments that one of the regularly repeated phrases reminds her of Swedish Chef from the Muppet Show. It's not an aide-memoire that I've come across in the literature but I can just about make out the connection.

For most of our stay we're travelling to visit historic towns and villages or to enjoy some of the most spectacular scenery that Europe has to offer. The birds are largely incidental but difficult to ignore. The Pont du Gard is incredibly impressive and so to is the Short-toed Eagle that drifts across the valley. The Gorges de la Nesque are enhanced by soaring and tumbling Ravens, 20 in the air at once though a local tells me that she's seen up to a hundred. By contrast the bare summit of Mont Ventoux is birdless, the main colour provided by the slightly bizarre collection of over a hundred cyclists' water bottles left in tribute at the memorial to Tommy Simpson who died

here from heat and drug induced heart failure during the Tour de France in 1967. I can't help feeling that the Mistral, which has been recorded at blowing at 250km per hour up here, must produce an amazing multi-coloured plastic snowstorm around the summit every winter. The northern slopes of Ventoux are steep and well forested. Frequent stops on the descent produce a nice altitudinal transect of bird species. Higher up there are Rock Buntings, Crossbills and Crested Tits. Lower down we get sightings of Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and Honey Buzzard

But back to Simiane and swarming around the village and indeed around most of the settlements that we visit during the week are hordes of House Martins and Swallows while every day I'm aware of a steady southerly passage of hirundines over the gite. And then, on the last day of our visit they're all gone. We do the same walk that we did at the start of the stay and that's not the only change. There are far fewer common migrants about but Chiffchaffs have appeared, and on

the wires in the village there are plenty of Starlings which weren't there earlier. The stay finishes on a high with a Great Grey Shrike a hundred metres from the gite and in the garden, two Bonelli's Warblers.

Ten days, no really serious birding to speak of, but 97 species encountered at a time of year when the majority of birds are at their quietest and most skulking. What must the other seasons be like? Spring passage and the breeding season in the Camargue, raptor watching over Les Alpilles, finding the arid plain specialities in La Grande Crau, winter visits for Wallcreeper at Les Baux or Snow Finch, Hazel Grouse and Nutcracker on Mont Ventoux.

"A year in Provence"? I guess Peter Mayle had it right. He just chose the wrong subject matter.

Pete Brown

RED LIST YEARBOOK 2009

The completely revised Rare Birds Yearbook 2009 is out now. The previous edition of Rare Birds Yearbook was a success according to reviews from all over the globe and on November 15th the totally revised 2009 edition was published. It features the world's 190 Critically Endangered birds, according to the latest IUCN redlist, <http://www.iucnredlist.org>.

Over 130 photos of the world's rarest birds have been replaced since last year. New features this year cover varied topics such as the reintroduction of the Californian Condor, philosophical conservation issues, the Preventing Extinctions initiative, an exciting encounter with one of the world's rarest birds of prey and much more. A selection of a number of Endangered species (illustrated with nice photos of course) are presented in a special feature. The species' texts themselves have been fully updated in the majority of cases and are accompanied by distribution maps. The updated species-

per country list is in there and the threats to each species are graphically presented.

The Rare Birds Yearbook is a "Species Champion" which means that £4 per book sold go to saving the birds it covers. Read more about the Preventing Extinctions project at BirdLife International's website <http://www.birdlife.org>. Rare Birds Yearbook is the only publication that gives a comprehensive overview of these, the rarest birds of the world.

As a contributing photographer, I get a 25% discount on any I buy, making the cost £14.20. I am happy to pass this on to anyone who wants me to buy them a copy, knowing that £4 of that £14 will go to the protection programme. Please contact me on jonhornbuckle@yahoo.com.

Jon Hornbuckle

RECENT SIGHTINGS

1st October – 26th November 2008

These records are largely unchecked. Those in bold require submission of full supporting details.

Red-throated Diver	One at RVCP on 2nd Nov
Red-necked Grebe	A first-winter was at Ulley CP on 2nd Nov remained until 10th
Black-necked Grebe	One at Thrybergh CP on 2nd Oct
Bittern	One at Pit-house West on 22nd Nov
Whooper Swan	One W at Thrybergh Banks on 5th Oct, one at Redmires Res on 18th, two W at Thrybergh CP on 19th, three S over Millhouses on 23rd and one at Thrybergh CP on 28th
Pink-footed Goose	A period of passage in Oct began with 166 E at Redmires Res on 8th, peaking on 12th with 1,488 NW at Waverley Opencast with skeins recorded passing over several other parts of the city. Other large counts included 1,080 over Thrybergh CP on 17th, 680 ESE at Redmires Res on 28th and 420 NW at Ramsley Res on 18th
Shelduck	One at RVCP on 11th and 22nd Oct
Wigeon	Max counts included 74 at Blackburn Meadows NR on 8th Oct, 80 at Catcliffe Flash 11th and 120 at Renishaw Lakes on 5th Nov rising to 185 by 13th
Gadwall	140 were at Renishaw Lakes on 13th Nov
Teal	85 were counted at Thrybergh Banks on 5th Oct
Pintail	One was at Aldwarke SF on 19th and 26th Oct, with one at RVCP on 18th Nov
Shoveler	46 were at Thrybergh Banks on 5th Oct
Red-crested Pochard	A drake was at Ulley CP on 2nd and 5th Oct, with presumably the same bird at Catcliffe Flash on 4th
Goldeneye	The first was at Thrybergh CP on 21st Oct with small numbers at a range of sites subsequently and a max of eight at RVCP on 18th Nov
Hen Harrier	A ringtail was at Bamford Moor on 4th Oct with a grey male at Leash Fen on 27th Oct and two there on 12th Nov. A ringtail was at Ramsley Moor on 18th Nov
Hobby	A late individual was seen at Tankersley on 18th Oct
Black Grouse	Birds from the reintroduction project were reported from Moscar on several dates, with five there on 4th Oct
Water Rail	One was found dead in the Royal ail yard at Brightside on 4th Nov. Elsewhere 2 were at Bolehill Flash on 14th Nov and at least three were at Pit-house West on 22nd
Dunlin	One at Thrybergh CP on 3rd Oct with two there on 14th
Jack Snipe	One at Waverley Opencast on 10th Nov and one at Silverwood Pit Top on 23rd Nov
Woodcock	One at Redmires Res and one at Canklow Woods on 7th Oct, while more unusual records involved one in a Fulwood garden on 1st Nov that arrived after a morning hailstorm, and one which flew down the middle of Parkway Market at 0725h on 18th Nov
Redshank	Five were at RVCP on 18th Nov with two at Blue Man's Bower on 21st, two at Ulley CP on 23rd and one at there on 25th
Green Sandpiper	Singles at Blue Man's Bower on 21st Nov and Thrybergh Tip on 23rd
Mediterranean Gull	An adult at Thrybergh CP on 26th Oct left to the S at 0835h
Lesser Black-backed Gull	The roost at Redmires Res consistently held 410-490 birds throughout Oct
Yellow-legged Gull	Adults were at Redmires Res on 5th, 24th and 25th Oct, with a 3rd-winter and a 1st-winter there on 19th. One was also at Waverley Opencast on 12th Oct
Caspian Gull	An adult was at Redmires Res on 19th Oct
Woodpigeon	Visible migration recorded at Redmires Res included peaks of 1,060 S-NW on 31st Oct, 5,000 NW on 1st Nov, 4,655 S/SW on 16th Nov and 1,100 on 22nd Nov
Short-eared Owl	An influx saw an impressive seven hunting at Leash Fen on 12th and 13th Oct with four still present at 17th Oct. Elsewhere one was at Agden on 12th Oct and one was at Silverwood Pit Tip on 18th Oct and 23rd Nov
Swallow	Late records involved four SW at Ecclesall on 8th Nov and a single S at Thrybergh CP on 16th
House Martin	One at Thrybergh CP on 15th Oct was the latest recorded
Meadow Pipit	A few records of visible migration included 100 SW at Redmires Res on 2nd Oct, 45 S at Wharnccliffe Chase on 6th Oct and 70 S at Redmires Res on 12th

Rock Pipit	One was at Thrybergh CP on 10th Oct with another W at Ramsley Res on 24th Oct
Yellow Wagtail	One flew SW at RVCP on 6th Oct
Waxwing	Increasing numbers in the area following two at Nether Edge on 11th Nov. 31 were at Crosspool on 20th Nov and 20+ were at Greystones on 22nd Nov rising to 40 on 25th
Black Redstart	One was at Woodhouse Mill on 26th Oct
Stonechat	Well reported from the W with a peak of six at Agden on 12th. Records from the E included one at Thrybergh CP on 15th Oct, two at Silverwood Pit Tip on 18th Nov and two in the Shirebrook Valley on 17th Oct and 6th Nov with four there on 19th Nov
Wheatear	Late migrants were at Agden on 12th Oct and Stanage Edge on 13th Oct
Ring Ouzel	Two were at Redmires Res on 18th Oct with seven at Ramsley Res on 22nd
Fieldfare	After the first record, of 26 at Ramsley Res on 8th Oct, numbers increased with counts from visible migration watches including 89 at Ulley CP, 228 at Thrybergh CP and 1,500 at Redmires Res on 18th Oct; 725 WNW at Redmires Res, 430 at Ramsley Res, 130 at Ulley CP and 220 at Thrybergh CP on 31st Oct, 1,800 at Agden Side on 8th Nov and 930 S/SW at Redmires Res on 16th Nov
Redwing	120 flew W at Redmires Res and 275 were at Ramsley Res on 8th Oct, after which peaks in passage at visible migration watches included 100 SW at Black Moor, 500 at Redmires Res, 350 at RVCP, 141 at Ulley CP and 98 at Stubble Hollow on 18th Oct, 1,720 WNW at Redmires Res on 31st Oct and 700 S/SW also at Redmires Res on 16th Nov
Blackcap	Singles were at Ulley CP on 4th and 9th Oct, Endcliffe on 12th Oct, Wisewood on 19th Oct and Brincliffe Edge on 21st Nov, with two at Bramley on 4th Oct and three at Beighton Marsh on 14th Nov
Yellow-browed Warbler	One was at Woodthorpe Hall on 12th Oct with another present in the Limb Valley on the same date
Chiffchaff	Nine were at RVCP on 2nd Oct after which the only counts of more than one were four at RVCP on 6th, three in the Limb Valley on 12th and two again at RVCP on 22nd Oct. There were no records in Nov.
Goldcrest	60+ were in the Limb Valley on 12th Oct with 20+ at Whirlow on the same date
Firecrest	One was reported to have been brought in by a cat at Whiteley Wood on 10th Oct, on which date two were recorded as still present at a breeding site in the W of the area. One was at Broomhead Res on 9th Nov.
Great Grey Shrike	One at Big Moor on 5th Oct relocated to Ramsley Res the following day and was still present on 18th Nov at least
Chaffinch	Max counts on visible migration at Redmires Res included 74 W on 19th Oct and 200+ E-SW on 16th Nov
Brambling	Two W on 2nd Oct preceded a trickle of migrants with max of 14 at RVCP on 18th Oct and 12 W at Redmires Res on 16th Nov
Linnet	100 were in the Mayfield Valley on 2nd Oct with 40+ at Treeton Dyke on 10th Oct and 120 Thrybergh CP on 21st Oct
Common (Mealy) Redpoll	Two were trapped and ringed at Ramsley Res on 8th Oct, with another there on 17th
Lesser Redpoll	50 were at Redmires Res on 2nd Oct and 120+ were at Ramsley Res on 9th Oct. The flock at the latter site then increased to a max of 700+ on 17th Oct. Elsewhere 64 were at Blacka Moor on 18th Oct and 300 were at Wharcliffe Chase on 2nd Nov while passage included 19 S/SW at Thrybergh Banks and 20 W at Redmires Res on 12th Oct, 34 W on 28th Oct and 90 SW on 16th Nov also at Redmires Res
Crossbill	There were a handful of records during the period, mostly of single birds. The exceptions were five W at Redmires Res on 2nd Oct, six at Midhope Res on 26th and two W at Redmires Res on 28th Oct
Bullfinch	Birds recorded on passage included 11 SW at Redmires Res on 12th Oct and 16 E-SW on 16th Nov at the same site

Records were received from the following observers, with apologies for any omissions:

MG Archer, S Bailey, SJ Barnes, K Bower, PL Brown, DM Bye, A Deighton, P Eades, G Featherstone, MG Fenner, RA Frost, M Garner, P Garrity, A Hill, RD Hill, H Hipperson, J Hornbuckle, C Hurst, Alan Johnson, Ann Johnson, J Kingsland, P Leonard, C Measures, P Mella, J Middleton, M Miller, TH Minskip, M Pearson, NR Porter, MN Reeder, P Ridsdale, SJ Roddis, S Samworth, L Sanders, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, MA Smethurst, D Smyth, D Stables, M Timms, R Twigg, RDR Williams, D Wood, D Woodriff, P Wragg, BTO BirdTrack, Rotherham and District Ornithological Society, Sorby-Breck Ringing Group, Thrybergh CP Bird Log.

DATES TO NOTE

Time/Date	Group	Location	Speaker	Title
7.30pm 13 th December	DOS	Hope and Anchor, Wirksworth	n/a	Members' Evening
7.30pm 30 th January	DOS	Evergreen Club, Allestree, Derby	Peter Smith	Seagulls to Eagles
7.30pm 5 th February	RSPB Sheffield Local Group	Central United Reformed Church	Geoff Facer	Taj, Tigers and Birds

NEW MEMBERS

The Group welcomes the following new members:

David Martin Andrew Hill Richard Pethin Valerie Hobson

We hope you enjoy your membership, and good birding!

ARTICLES FOR BULLETIN

We are always looking for articles for the bulletin, and if you have anything you wish to include then please send it along to us. Details on where to send it, and copy deadlines, are below.

COPY DATE FOR FEBRUARY BULLETIN

The next Bulletin will be issued at the February Meeting. Please note that any items for inclusion in the Bulletin must be received by Pete Mella at peterjmella@googlemail.com (for preference), or 396 Loxley Road, Loxley, Sheffield S6 4TJ, by **Thursday 30th January**.

BULLETIN BY EMAIL

More members have now agreed to take their Bulletins by email. This is now about one-third of membership and this will help funds in cutting down the cost of sending out Bulletins. It is appreciated that not all members have the email facility but many thanks to those who have and are willing to receive their copies in this way.

SPEAKERS 2009

Date 2009	Speaker	Speaking on
January 14	Mick Taylor	Peak District Raptors
February 11	Tim Birkhead	An Ornithological Feast: How we know what we know about birds
March 11	AGM plus Bob Croxton	Texas Revisited
April	Mike McKavett	From Mitilini to Antalya – My Quest for the Balkan Ten
May 13	Mick Turton	Kamchatka – Ring of Fire
June 10	Members' Night	
September 9	John Mather	Uganda – Pearl of Africa
October 14	Peter Brown and David Wood	Cuba – Revolutionary Birding!
November 11	Mike Carrier	A Look at Migration
December 9	Nick Williams	From the Dummersee to the Camargue

GIFT AID AND MEMBERSHIP

In recent years there have been changes to Gift Aid legislation, making it easier for charitable organisations to reclaim income tax on the contributions, including subscriptions, made by members.

The group is constantly looking for sources of income to offset the increasing costs of running the group, such as printing the excellent Annual Report, (the better it gets, in terms of photos etc, the more it costs) and also room hire for our Indoor Meetings.

Gift Aid is a means by which every basic rate tax-paying member can contribute to the group's income, courtesy of the Inland Revenue (what an incentive!). If you are about to pay your 2009 subscription and have not already filled in a Gift Aid form, please complete the tear off slip below, and return it to any committee member at an indoor meeting or send with subs to Jenny Kingsland by post. Alternatively, please send it to me at:

Anselm,
White Edge Drive,
Baslow
Derbyshire
DE45 1SJ

At the end of the tax year I can then recover 22/78 of your subscription (£3.95). If you are a higher rate taxpayer, you can include the payment on your tax return, and get higher rate tax relief yourself.

Please take the time to do this, as we can potentially raise hundreds of pounds for the group.

*Ron Blagden
Treasurer*

GIFT AID FORM

NAME

Are you a basic rate taxpayer? YES/NO

Do you agree to Sheffield Bird Study Group treating your membership payment for 2009 and future membership payments, as a Gift Aid contribution?
YES/NO

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for 2009 became due in January. Some subscriptions remain unpaid!

As you will have seen from the list in this Bulletin we have a good programme of speakers planned for next year, and many local and more distant field trips are also in the pipeline. A copy of the Annual Report for the year prior to membership is also included. The subscriptions remain the same at £14 for individual members, £16 for family membership, and £7 for juniors (up to age 16), which I am sure you will see as good value for money. A subscription form is below. To renew, please see Jenny Kingsland at any meeting, or send your cheque payable to Sheffield Bird Study Group, together with a stamped addressed envelope for return of your membership card, to Jenny Kingsland, 52A Riverdale Road, Sheffield S10 3FB. For new members an application form is available at meetings, on the website, by phone to 0114 2660759 or by e-mail to jkingsland@tiscali.co.uk

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION 2009 RENEWAL FORM

Name(s).....Date.....

Address.....

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Email..... Telephone No.

Please indicate whether you would like to receive your Bulletin by e-mail Yes/No

Please include a stamped addressed envelope for return of your membership card.

To: Jenny Kingsland, 52a Riverdale Road, Sheffield S10 3FB