

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



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Bulletin

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Dates for your diary

INDOOR MEETINGS

Wednesday 9th Sept 2009 – 7.15 pm – Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5
John Mather will be giving a talk entitled '**Uganda – Pearl of Africa**'. John is the author of the indispensable 'Where To Watch Birds in Yorkshire', but will be sharing his experiences further afield with this talk about the East African country of Uganda and its rich bird life. (For a preview of what kind of birds to expect, see Jenny Kingsland's account of the country on page 5).

Wednesday 14th October 2009 – 7.15 pm – Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5
David Wood and **Pete Brown** will be giving a talk entitled '**Cuba: Revolutionary Birding**'. Our current and former chairmen will be recounting their adventures in the Communist State of Cuba, and telling us of some of the fantastic birds they saw there.

FIELD MEETINGS

Weds 1st July 2009, 8.45pm-11pm. Wharnccliffe Heath

After a run of very successful trips in previous years, we will once again hope to find the nightjar in one of its local strongholds. A fine, warm evening is hoped for to catch sight of this elusive bird, with previous years' trips also turning up woodcock and hobby. Nightjars do not show until dusk so this trip may not finish until 10.30/11.00pm; bring a torch if you want to find your way back to your car! From the A6102 from Hillsborough turn right at the traffic lights in Deepcar. Then, after the road passes under the A616 Stocksbridge by-pass, take the left turn signed to Thurgoland and Green Moor. Park almost immediately on the right, either side of the bridge over the river Don (SK295987). Meet here at 8.45pm. Non-members welcome. **For more information on this field trip, contact Richard Dale on 0114 2862513.**

For information on minibus field trips please contact Paul Medforth on 01246 418120.

The Lecture

Mytilini to Antalya: Quest for the Balkan Ten

Mike McKavett's 'Balkan Ten' are not just species that are wonderfully exotic to West European eyes, but are birds with fairly (or very) restricted ranges that convey the flavour of birding in the Eastern Mediterranean. And his 'quest' was not simply to see these birds, nor even to photograph them for the record, but to get seriously good pictures. In this he certainly succeeded. As John Bannon said of them on *BirdBlog*, 'Can I have the ones you throw away to claim as my own please?'

Much of his talk pertained to Lesbos. From a succinct general introduction to the Greek Island (hence the Mytilini of his title) to Turkey (hence Antalya) and East Africa, Mike passed on to us his wealth of experience of the featured birds.

Number 1: Black-headed Bunting

A handsome yellow and black bird, it is not at all rare in farmland and scrubby areas around the Eastern Mediterranean, spending the winter in Northwest India. In Lesbos, they all seem to arrive back at pretty much the same time in late April, just as the island is greening over, rather than trickling back like most migrants.

A major feature of his talk was the information on the geography and culture of the areas he has visited in his photographic travels. His comments on the resorts often used by birders would be very useful for anyone planning a European trip.

Birder-friendly **Skala Kallonis** in the south of Lesbos is a good stepping-off point with several excellent bird spots nearby. For example, a 15 minute walk to the East River would likely give up **Squacco Heron**, all three marsh terns (**Black**, **White-winged Black** and **Whiskered**) with **Whitethroat**, **Olivaceous Warbler** and **Bee-eater**.

Further afield, but within easy biking distance of Skala, are salt pans, salt having being used in the olive trade. Here can be found an abundance of water birds, **Kentish Plover**, **Little Stint**, breeding-plumage **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Little Tern** getting a mention. Passerines are well represented too: **Crested Lark**, **Red-throated Pipit**, and the striking **Black-headed Wagtail** (another of the numerous races of Yellow Wagtail, **Grey-headed**, is also found on Lesbos). **Rufous Bush Robin** is common but can be difficult to locate in early spring as it is a late arrival.

Number 2: Rock Nuthatch

Mike reports that this rather pale, rock-dwelling version of our common Nuthatch is not difficult to find. He photographed one reinforcing the entrance to its nest hole, not with mud but with a paste of masticated insects. The fact that he was able to blow up this shot and see such detail is indicative of the extremely high resolutions that he works at.

Number 3: Cretzschmar's Bunting

This tongue-twister is restricted to a crescent from southern Greece and Turkey through to Israel. It sings from the ground and can generally only be located by its song. It is a smart, soft-grey headed version of the more familiar Ortolan Bunting.

Number 4: Olive-tree Warbler

The **Olive-tree Warbler** winters in East and Southern Africa. Although not shy, it spends most of its time hidden inside foliage and for this reason Mike found it the hardest of the Balkan Ten to photograph. He did get good shots, albeit by photographing a pair at the nest, something he has mostly given up doing because of the disturbance it causes.

Number 5: Sombre Tit

This larger version of the ubiquitous Coal Tit is neither rare nor shy, but very unobtrusive in the breeding season. It lives on rocky hillsides throughout the North East Mediterranean. Mike found a pair ten kilometres west of Skala.

Number 6: Masked Shrike

The **Masked Shrike** is also unobtrusive, in the breeding season at least. Mike presumes Masked Shrikes to be predated by corvids as they always go ballistic when Jays and Crows approach. Like the Woodchat Shrike, its much commoner cousin, it has a surprisingly warbler-like song.

Frustrated at a Masked Shrike that persistently perched on a high branch where he couldn't get a good picture, he cut off the branch and duck-taped another at a lower level. The bird was perfectly happy with his new perch and Mike got his picture. Mike is, however, generally very loath to interfere with wild birds and is sharply critical of those bird photographers who are less scrupulous.

Number 7: Cinerous Bunting

Not discovered until the 19th Century, this extremely rare bunting breeds on the arid uplands on the west of Lesbos. Elsewhere it is only found in isolated pockets in Turkey and Western Iran so naturally is much sought after by birders on the Island. Unlike most other buntings, which have bold features and prominent streaking, the **Cinerous Bunting** is generally plain with a yellowish head and grey body.

Number 8: Rüppell's Warbler

Restricted to Southern Greece and Turkey, this is a bird of arid, rocky hillsides with good patches of low scrub. The male looks very much like a Sardinian Warbler with a black throat instead of pale grey.

Number 9: Krüper's Nuthatch

Krüper's Nuthatch is possibly the rarest of the Mike's ten species. Rather pale with a rusty-red breast patch, it is mostly confined to Eastern Turkey and Armenia. Generally inhabiting upland conifers,

on Lesbos it is exclusively found in Turkish Pine but is also nomadic. Mike believes there may be undiscovered populations of this highly endangered bird.

Number 10: White-throated Robin

The **White-throated Robin** breeds in several locations from Turkey to Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. It is orange-breasted like a Redstart, but with a black tail and a white vertical patch in the middle of an otherwise black throat. Little is known about the migration of this upland bird except that it winters in East Africa. In fact, Kenya was where Mike saw his first one and resolved then to try to photograph it in its breeding area.

He did just that in the Korkuteli Hills near Antalya in Turkey. While agreeing with Dave Gosney that the bird is common in the area, he still found it very difficult to photograph. Mike says he spent half a day moving rocks from a track in order to drive his car close to the bush where he hoped to get his pictures. As is well known, birds are often less fazed by a slow-moving vehicle, or even a bicycle, than a human on foot.

He got his pictures, excellent shots of birds perched and in flight. On the 13th (and last) day of his Turkish trip, he got a shot of a White-throated Robin in a juniper tree, with its mouth wide open in full song. It had unexpectedly flown in and perched right next to his car. A lucky shot he says.

Mike used the word luck several times in his talk. He once spent almost three days photographing Sub-alpine Warblers, a bird that is widespread throughout the Mediterranean, but surely no easier to photograph for all that. Most of the time was taken up trying different spots and waiting. So I'm not sure the word *luck* is appropriate for any picture obtained after such an operation. The elusive lady visits most those with the skill, experience and dedication to be in the right place at the right time – and spend as many hours there as it takes.

As in other parts of Europe, spent shotgun cartridges are a distressingly common sight. As a result of the hunting, many birds are extremely shy, like the **Ruddy Shelduck**, for example, which breeds on craggy shores and slopes on Lesbos. More

surprisingly, even the **Blackbird** is wary of humans there!

Numerous other birds got a mention: **Corn and Cirl Buntings** and **Spanish Sparrow**, for example, are widespread on Lesbos. At peak migration times there are massive falls of **Red-backed Shrike** and **Whinchat** so that every post and weed seems to be occupied. **Turtle Dove** occurs on migration, although Mike believes it also breeds there.

Isabelline Wheatear is common all over. It is rather drab in appearance but has a great song and display flight and mimics the song of other birds, like Bee-eaters and gulls. It's repertoire includes car and scooter horns and colonies of marsh frogs! Isabelline often breeds in the burrows of a small local rodent, the mole rat. **Black-eared Wheatear** is also common throughout but extremely difficult to get close enough to photograph. It is one of the birds that Mike uses a hide for. He finds that even humans will often pass close by without appearing to notice the hide with him inside.

Little Bittern occurs on the Island. It is shy and also difficult to see but sometimes comes out in the early morning to sun itself.

Mammals and reptiles were covered too, like the rare **Monk Seal** that can be seen off the north of the Island. The endangered **Spur-thighed Tortoise** actually hisses when disturbed. Even stranger is the **Glass Lizard**, a metre long legless lizard. Apparently, the legless lizards, like our slow worm, can be told from true snakes by their ear opening, which snakes do not have.

His talk was peppered with many other asides. He had visited Lesbos several times before he found out why dogs are so often tethered at the gaps in the walls where the road goes through. It is to stop the sheep from wandering from one area to another – and are presumably cheaper than using cattle grids. Overall, Mike treated us to a fascinating and highly informative talk and his pictures were second to none. He would surely do well on Radio 4's *Just a Minute* as his rapid-fire delivery had very little 'hesitation, deviation or repetition'.

I've been to Greece a few times, but never to Lesbos or Turkey. Mike's inspiring talk left me with the strong urge to rectify this.

Dermot Smyth

The Lecture

Kamchatka – Ring of Fire

In May, the group welcomed back Mick Turton, a Barnsley birder who had previously informed and entertained us with a lecture of his birding exploits in China. This time he was giving a talk entitled 'Kamchatka – Ring of Fire', which chronicled a fantastic birding voyage in the North Pacific in 2002.

The story started with a tour of southern Japan, where Mick found some fantastic target species such as Ryukyu minivet, fairy pitta and ruddy kingfisher. Sadly he dipped one bird he travelled to see, the Japanese murrelet, although such spectacles as an unexpected lesser frigate-bird, displaying Latham's snipe, and the sight of a massive Blakiston's fish owl

chasing a fox, must have gone some way to making up for this.

Other birds seen in Japan included white-throated needletails, Japanese cranes (watched while eating breakfast), Middendorf's grasshopper warbler, narcissus flycatcher, Pacific swift, black and white-winged scoters, lanceolated warbler, mandarin and harlequin duck, as well as more familiar species such as hawfinch, wryneck and lesser spotted woodpecker. Slides were shown of several gull species (which Mick assured us would "interest at least one person"!), including slaty-backed, glaucous-winged and black-tailed gulls – birds to watch for at Poolsbrook in coming winters?!

All this was before Mick even set off on his cruise. It was originally booked for 2000, but unfortunately the cruise ship, World Discoverer, ran aground on an uncharted reef in the Solomon Islands, and it would be two years before he could book on to the next one. One of the first landings was the island of Iturup, a rundown former military post which yielded long-tailed rosefinch, among other birds. Much of the first week of the cruise was taken up exploring cliffs in inflatable Zodiac boats, with sightings including Steller's sea lions, sea otters and pods of orcas, as well as hundreds of thousands of blue-morph fulmars.

After navigating through kelp beds, the group landed on an abandoned Russian submarine base, which was evocative of somewhere a James Bond villain may reside. Despite its menacing appearance some cracking birds were spotted, including bluethroat, nutcracker and Siberian rubythroat, one of which posed for photos atop a disused cannon.

The cruise continued with even more fantastic birds – tufted puffins, crested auklets, whiskered auklets and pigeon guillemots were all encountered in good numbers, and a sighting of a stunning black-tailed albatross caused joy in those who saw it (including Mick) and severe envy in those who did not. Sadly the up-to-now good weather took a turn for the worse, and there were fewer landings at Kamchatka Peninsula itself than planned, but many birds were still found including oriental cuckoo and brown and red-throated flycatchers, plus Mick "proved a theory" by finding bear droppings in the woods, also catching a glimpse of a female and cub.

Best of all was the Steller's sea eagle, surely the king of all raptors, which Mick observed floating past his cabin porthole. Storm-petrels were much in evidence, with many fork-tailed and a few Leach's around.

From Kamchatka the cruise headed northeast to Bering Island, where waders such as lesser sand plover and rock sandpiper were found, along with Aleutian tern, bean goose and Pechora pipit. Sadly a trip to Attu Island could not be made, and the ship carried on through the Aleutians to Adak, sadly missing out on spectacled eider. Short-tailed, Laysan's and black-footed albatross were all found, as were mottled petrel and least and crested auklets. Adak turned up pigeon guillemot, gyrfalcon and the arresting site of juvenile bald eagles raiding crabpots on the harbour. Cetaceans were also seen, including orca and minke, fin and grey whales.

The cruise moved on towards Alaska and to St Paul Island, which had some amazing sights to see on its cliffs, including red-legged kittiwakes among the more familiar black-legged species, Brünnich's guillemot, parakeet auklet, ancient murrelet, horned puffin, tufted puffin, Kittlitz's murrelet, pelagic cormorant, red-faced cormorant and least auklet... somewhere to give Bempton a run for its money! Northern fur seals were also seen – their presence (and, more specifically their pelts) being the reasons humans settled there in the first place.

Final stops included St Matthew Island, where sandhill crane, least sandpiper and red phalarope were among the birds seen, and St Lawrence. The hunting culture of the latter was not to Mick's taste, with the remains and walrus and whales scattering the island, and locals proudly presenting the group with the heads of birds they were trying to find, including emperor goose and king eider.

Mick was thanked by the group for another entertaining and good-humoured talk, with some great photos and a rich selection of species. I'm sure I'm not alone among the audience in feeling more than a pang of jealousy at Mick's amazing Pacific adventure!

Pete Mella

Photographic hide for hire

Fancy yourself as a bit of a photographer or just want to get close up views of your regular garden birds?

Well here is an exclusive opportunity available only to SBSG members. Available to use is the Stealth Gear camo tree 360, a fully leaf camouflaged hide capable of seating up to three people. The base is 60"x60", assembly is of the pop up style and it comes with its own carrying case. The hide is available for a donation of £10 per day or £35 per week.

If interested contact Mick Sherwin on 07786 095095.

Uganda: A Preview

In September John Mather will speak to us on Uganda, Pearl of Africa. I was lucky enough to visit Uganda in January and as a preview to the lecture present some of the highlights. The tour was entitled "Shoebills, Gorillas and Chimps" and thus promised a mixture of birds, mammals and other wildlife. After an eight-hour night flight from Heathrow we landed in Entebbe on the shores of Lake Victoria in time for breakfast and were soon out birding in the hotel gardens with our guides from South Africa, Callan Cohen and Deirdre Vrancken. We were immediately greeted by Common Bulbuls whose "wake up Gregory" call is such a common feature of much of Africa. An hour or so later we had seen over 30 species. Yellow-billed Kite and Long-Crested Eagle circled overhead. A pair of Black and White Shrike Flycatcher was nesting close to our rooms. Black and White Casqued Hornbill and Habada Ibis were perched close by, and a Scarlet-chested Sunbird was foraging amongst the flowers. To provide a bit of familiarity there were also a Willow Warbler in the same tree and Barn Swallows and Common Swifts above.

After lunch and a break we headed for the local sewage farm, an essential ingredient of any birding holiday. Here there were waders including Common, Green, Wood and Marsh Sandpiper, plus other species such as Hamerkop, Open-billed Stork, African Marsh Harrier and Pin-tailed Whydah in all its breeding finery. The leisurely day finished on the lakeside at the Botanic Gardens which were established by the British nearly 100 years ago. More new birds were soon added to our growing list: weavers, warblers, Pink-backed Pelican, Steppe Buzzard, Palm-nut Vulture and our first African Fish Eagle.

The next day we had a long drive to the south-west corner of the country. Banana, coffee and tea plantations were interspersed with villages where garbage disposal was courtesy of Marabou Storks. There was the occasional nature reserve en route which gave us a chance to do a little birding. African Hobby, Grey-crowned Cranes and Gymnogene were highlights. Our destination was Bwindi Impenetrable Forest close to Ruanda and even closer to the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite the proximity to past and present trouble spots, Uganda is a stable and safe country and very friendly to tourists.

Our lodge at Bwindi looked out onto the forest and over breakfast we were treated to the sight of Black and White Colobus monkeys and the excited calls of a troupe of chimpanzees - something heard so often on TV but quite special to hear it for real. Lüdher's Bushshrike, Black Bee-eater and Levaillant's Cuckoo were seen nearby; Augur Buzzard, Ayres

Hawk Eagle and Black Sparrowhawk provided fly pasts. We spent a couple of days exploring the forest. Birding at the forest edges was relatively easy and we soon saw African Paradise Flycatcher, Bar-tailed Trogon, White-throated Bee-eater, Great Blue Turaco on its nest, and a colony of Viellot's Black Weavers at their nests. Deeper into the forest, the birding became more difficult and we entered the realms of Greenbuls and other brown jobs that are a major identification headache. The word "skulker" sums up most of these forest birds. Often the only way to see them was for our leader to "call them in" by recording their calls and playing them back. I'm not a big fan of tape luring but there is no doubt we would have missed many birds without it. When the forest birding got too much there were always the butterflies. I have never seen such a variety and in such quantities.

Although it is fantastic for birds, Bwindi's chief claim to fame - and major Uganda money earner - is its 30 groups of highland gorillas, three of which are habituated to humans. The group we saw contained about twenty individuals including two silverbacks. The trek to find them took over three hours as our local guides cut their way through the forest. As we went up hill and down dale I was glad of my Peak District training. When we came across the gorilla group they were foraging above us but soon came down and I was privileged to have a silverback pass within about 5m of me. Other primates in the forest included Blue, L'Hoest's and Red-tailed Monkey.

After Bwindi we travelled north to Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) and our lodge on a peninsular overlooking Lake Edward on one side and the Kasinga Channel on the other. This channel links Lakes Edward and George, both of which are part of the Albertine Rift Valley. Our journey led us from forest and farmland to savannah, and as we drove we encountered more mammals: Uganda Kob, topi, elephants, warthogs, waterbuck, baboons and a fleeting glimpse of leopard. They were accompanied by the scavengers including Lappet-faced, White-backed and White-headed Vultures. Three species of Snake Eagles - Short-toed, Brown and Banded - plus Bateleur were some of the other raptors we saw. My two highlights of QENP were first a game drive where we watched a family of elephants for over an hour. The second was a boat trip along the Kasinga Channel where we saw over 50 species of birds in about 2 hours: storks, herons including the impressive Goliath Heron, egrets and ibis, waders, kingfishers, African Skimmer and African Fish Eagles by the dozen. With all these birds plus elephants and buffalo on the shore and hippos in the water, it was difficult to know where to look next and the photographers amongst us were spoilt for choice of subject.

Our next destination was back to the forest and Kibale National Park. The journey took us on a spectacularly beautiful road past the small craters and crater lakes that mark this part of the Rift Valley with stunning views across miles of African savannah. It was patrolled by numerous raptors, often seen at close range: Wahlberg's and Long Crested Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Bateleur and vultures. The small patches of woodland held Gabar Goshawk and the aptly named Giant Forest Hog. Our lodge, situated beside a small lake, had grounds that were busy with Cinnamon-breasted Bee-eaters, Bronze Sunbirds, Black Bishops and Willow Warblers. Kibale is the best place in Uganda to see chimpanzees and our trek to find them was less arduous than the gorilla trek. We had a local guide who was a wealth of knowledge on the forest, its inhabitants and its ecology. We spent over two hours watching a group of chimps including two of the youngsters and a Red-tailed Monkey playing together, something David Attenborough has never shown me. Another part of the forest offered us a chance to find Grey-cheeked Mangabey, Red Colobus and the more common Black and White Colobus Monkey. Narina Trogon, more sunbirds, cuckoos and flycatchers were added to our bird list.

The last leg of our journey took us back to Entebbe and the final treat: a boat trip through the papyrus

swamp to look for Shoebill. Maramba Swamp borders Lake Victoria and is an important RAMSAR site for other papyrus specialities such as Carruther's Cisticola and Blue-headed Coucal as well as Shoebill. We were punted in three small fishing boats through the overhanging papyrus as Squacco Herons and colourful Malachite Kingfishers flashed past. After a while a large grey blob in the distance gradually transformed itself into a Shoebill. We watched it for some time: a prehistoric-looking bird with large blinking eyes and a huge clog-like bill, but not big on movement. For those who prefer more action, an African Marsh Harrier quartered the swamp close to our boats.

The birds mentioned are just a few of my highlights out of a group total of over 300. Of the ones I saw, over 100 were completely new to me since it was my first introduction to African forest birding. Add in the mammals and other wildlife, the scenery, relatively few tourists, friendly people, good accommodation and food, and Uganda becomes an exciting destination for those interested in wildlife. And if you can't get there in person, I hope I have whetted your appetite for John Mather's lecture in September.

Jenny Kingsland

Breeding Birds in the Peak National Park in 2009

An appeal on behalf of the Peak District National Park for all your records (particularly breeding records) for the species listed below. Records may be submitted as usual to the group and will be passed on to the Peak Park.

Peak District UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species

Lapwing, Curlew, Black Grouse, Red Grouse, Cuckoo, Nightjar, Skylark, Tree Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Dunnock, Ring Ouzel, Song Thrush, Wood Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Willow Tit, Marsh Tit, Starling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Twite, Lesser Redpoll, Bullfinch and Reed Bunting.

Also requested are all 'significant' records of raptor species (held in confidence), and records of Golden Plover, Dunlin and Redshank.

In addition, as this is the final year of fieldwork for the SBSG Breeding Atlas Project, please keep sending in any and all breeding records you have, whether from the Peak District or anywhere else in our recording area, so we can ensure that the Atlas has the most complete picture of the current distribution of breeding birds in the Sheffield Area.

Biomass Crops and Birds

Biomass crops are regularly in the news nowadays because of their advantages for clean energy production. However we hear far less about their impact on wildlife, and so a recent article in the Yorkshire Post on this issue caught my attention. Unlike many agricultural developments the message for wildlife seemed to be very positive, and this encouraged me to find out more.

Biomass crops grown in Yorkshire are generally sold to Drax power-station, near Selby, and are used to replace some of the vast quantities of coal traditionally burnt there. One of these crops is Miscanthus, also known as Elephant Grass, as it can grow up to 4 metres high. It is harvested each year during late winter when the stems are bare. This means that bare soil is available in early spring for ground-nesting species such as lapwings and skylarks. Later in the season as the vegetation becomes taller then typical reed-nesting species such as the reed warbler breed in the crop. Birdlife also seems to benefit during the winter months as the crop sheds its leaves during autumn. This produces large amounts of leaf mould rich in invertebrates, and this is proving to be a valuable food source for finches, tree sparrows and yellowhammers. As the crop gets older though, there does seem to be some doubt as to how much open ground remains in spring as each plant spreads sideways across the field.

The other common biomass crop is willow coppice, and this appears to support a wider range of bird species. Willow coppice is harvested every 3-4 years, and so farmers tend to grow it in several blocks harvesting one block each year in rotation. As a result willow of various ages is always available for wildlife somewhere on the farm. Newly harvested areas again provide open habitat for ground-nesting species, but as the willow matures then woodland species start to move in. Survey

work shows that song thrush, bullfinch, willow warbler, garden warbler and tit species breed in this new habitat, while in the winter yellowhammer, reed bunting, snipe and woodcock are all recorded.

Biomass crops thus appear to be a valuable addition to the agricultural scene. This is particularly true in areas subjected to intensive agricultural practices where they can form bird-friendly 'islands' in an otherwise hostile landscape. Research seems to suggest that twice as many bird species are present in these biomass crops and at higher densities than in the former arable or grassland fields that they have replaced. It is particularly encouraging that many of the species that benefit are of high conservation concern.

And so what of the future? Drax power-station is planning to increase its use of biomass crops so that they will produce 12% of all power generated on the site by 2011. This will require a significant expansion in Miscanthus and willow coppice cultivation within Yorkshire. A similar picture emerges in other parts of the country as power-stations try to reduce the quantities of coal required. As these crops are grown more widely then maybe we can look forward to an expansion in many of our less common farmland bird species.

Anne Johnson

While Anne has undoubtedly highlighted some positive results of fuel crop production, the topic remains a divisive one, with some environmental groups unconvinced by their benefits and concerned some aspects of their production may be detrimental to biodiversity. If anyone has any view on either side of the debate then please send them to the usual address.

PM.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

27th March – 31st May 2009

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

Whooper Swan One at Thrybergh CP on 3rd April.

White-fronted Goose One flew S at Pebley Pond on 14th April.

Barnacle Goose A long-staying bird at Carr Vale NR throughout.

Shelduck Successful breeding at Thrybergh CP with ducklings seen on 14th May.

Pintail One at Aldwarke SF on 5th April presumed to be the long-staying bird.

Garganey A male at Treeton Dyke on 10th April.

Red-crested Pochard Two at Graves Park on 3rd April.

Long-tailed Duck An imm male at Orgreave Lagoons on 28th-30th April.

Common Scoter Three at Thrybergh CP and two at Catcliffe Flash on 15th April.

Goldeneye 15 at RVCP on 15th April.

Black Grouse Males were seen at Moscar, Strines and Cowell Flat, while a female was picked up dead, having presumably travelled some distance on the front of a vehicle, at Abbeydale Road, Totley on 13th April.

Black-necked Grebe One was at Thrybergh CP on 11th April.

Little Egret One N at RVCP and shortly afterwards at Orgreave Lagoons on 15th April, with singles at Blue Man's Bower on 13th May and Rivelin Res on 17th May.

Red Kite Numerous reports from a variety of sites including Fulwood, Redmires Res, Agden and Stanage Edge relating to a wandering individual in heavy wing moult. Also reports from Barlborough on 23rd May, Millhouses on 24th and RVCP on 26th May.

Marsh Harrier One N at Carr Vale NR on 11th May with another S at the same site on 16th.

Osprey Ten birds moved N during the period: at Offerton Moor on 30th March, in the Upper Derwent Valley on 1st, 4th, 5th and 20th April, Agden Beck on 4th, Calver on 18th April, Damflask Res on 2nd May, Cowell Flat on 9th, Carr Vale NR and RVCP on 13th and Holling Dale Plantation on 24th May.

Merlin Away from breeding sites a female flew N at Redmires Res on 12th April, one flew N at Stopes on 18th and one attacked a Swift before heading N at RVCP on 26th April.

Hobby One caught a hirundine at Orgreave Lagoons on 4th May, one was briefly at Haywood Farm on 12th, one was at RVCP on 27th, one was at Raynor Clough on 28th and 30th and one was seen at Thrybergh CP on 31st May.

Common Crane One flew NW at Wharncliffe Side on 25th April.

Oystercatcher Records continue to increase, with max of three at RVCP on 13th April and Carr Vale NR on 24th.

Avocet Two at Thrybergh CP on 7th April.

Little Ringed Plover Reported from 14 sites, mostly to the E.

Ringed Plover Max of four at Centenary Way Riverside on 29th March and 8th April, Middleton Moor on 7th May and Redmires Res on 11th-12th May.

Dotterel A trip of six was present and well photographed at Stanage Edge on

12th-13th May, with three remaining until 16th.

Golden Plover	Max of 193 at Peat Pits on 17th April and 161 at Roper Hill on 18th April.
Knot	Three at Orgreave Lagoons on 22nd May.
Sanderling	Six at Redmires Res on 7th May, one at Orgreave Lagoons on 14th May and one at Thrybergh CP on 24th May.
Dunlin	Max of four at Middleton Moor on 7th May, three at Carr Vale NR and five at Orgreave Lagoons on 14th May, and seven at Redmires Res on 16th May.
Whimbrel	One SE at Woodthorpe on 13th April was the first, with max of three at Orgreave Lagoons on 24th April, four at Silverwood Lagoon on 30th April, four at Roper Hill on 6th-7th May and 12 N at Carr Vale NR on 15th May.
Redshank	Max of three at RVCP on 6th April.
Greenshank	Singles at Orgreave Lagoons on 30th April and Blue Man's Bower on 12th May, with two N at RVCP on 13th May.
Green Sandpiper	One at Centenary Way Riverside on 28th-29th March and 8th-12th May.
Common Sandpiper	Three at Redmires Res were the first reported, with 15 back at Derwent Res by 20th and nine at Redmires Res on 27th. Other records included one at Millhouses Park on 25th April.
Kittiwake	Singles at Thrybergh CP on 31st March and Orgreave Lagoons on 11th April.
Sandwich Tern	One E at Thrybergh CP on 4th April with one N there on 8th. Also one N at RVCP on 26th April.
Common Tern	Two at Ulley CP on 10th April were the first, with birds back at Thrybergh CP from the 13th. Ten at Thrybergh CP on 13th May included at least one sitting.
Arctic Tern	Three at Thrybergh CP on 15th April, seven at Carr Vale NR on 14th May and four N at Catcliffe Flash the following day.
Little Tern	One NW at RVCP on 30th April.
Black Tern	Four at Thrybergh CP on 13th May with one still present the following day. Also on 14th, five flew NE at Carr Vale NR.
Ring-necked Parakeet	One at Heeley Green on 11th April, one regular in the Endcliffe area throughout and two at Woodseats on 8th May.
Cuckoo	First reported from Rocher Head and Ewden Beck on 11th April and more widely from the W in the last week of April. Max of four at Wharncliffe Chase on 24th May.
Short-eared Owl	Scarce. Singles at Silverwood Pit Top on 1st April, White Lee Moor on 19th April and Strines on 21st May.
Swift	First reported from Houndkirk Moor on 24th April, with four at Wharncliffe Side the following day and 100+ at RVCP on 26th. Main arrival in early May with birds returning to breeding sites.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Recorded at six sites, including a pair feeding young in the Rivelin Valley on 12th May.
Sand Martin	Max of 120 at Thrybergh CP on 16th April with 100 there on 28th.
Swallow	Max of 200 at RVCP on 16th April, with 140 there on 27th.
House Martin	The first significant arrival was on 16th March with 30 at RVCP and Thrybergh CP. Reported more widely from late April.
Tree Pipit	Two at Barbrook Plantation on 10th April were the first, with the main arrival in the last week of April. Max included 13 at Ramsley Moor on 23rd April and 19 at Wharncliffe Chase on 24th May.
Yellow Wagtail	First reported on 15th April at Thrybergh CP. Notable records included one S at Redmires Res on 26th April and four at Carr Vale NR on 14th May and Silverwood Pit Top on 17th.
White Wagtail	One at RVCP on 6th April, with two at Orgreave Lagoons on 18th, one there on 27th and four present on 29th April.

Waxwing	60 were at Waterthorpe on 14th April but most records related to the flock at Hillsborough Park which peaked at 120 on 15th-17th April, declining to 92 on 29th April and sharply thereafter, with 12 on 5th May the final record.
Redstart	One at Rocher Wood on 3rd April was the first, followed by one at Monsal Dale on 5th and four there with six at Deep Dale on 11th. Max of singing males included eight in Monk's Dale on 18th April, eight at Rocher Wood on 24th and seven at Offerton on 30th.
Whinchat	First reported from Surprise View on 21st April and more widely in early May with a max of three at Big Moor on 3rd.
Stonechat	Reported in small numbers from the W throughout, with numbers perhaps reduced by the cold winter.
Wheatear	Widely reported, with max of 12 at Wharncliffe Chase on 7th May and 13 at Redmires Res on 10th May. Birds showing characteristics of Greenland Wheatear <i>O. o. leucorhoa</i> were reported from Redmires Res on 26th April and 9th May, Dukes Road on 2nd May and Stanage Edge on 15th May, with four together at Hordron Clough on 9th May.
Ring Ouzel	All reports were from breeding sites to the E, including two pairs at Alport Castles on 11th May and Stanage Edge on 15th May.
Fieldfare	Declined through April with max of 44 W at Ulley CP and 170 at Wharncliffe Chase on 5th. 70 were at Wharncliffe Chase on 19th and the final record was of two at Broomhead Park on 26th.
Redwing	Just a handful of single-figure records in early April, with three W at Ulley CP the last reported.
Grasshopper Warbler	One reeling at Redmires Res on 12th April was the first reported with a more widespread arrival in the last week of April. Good numbers reported, with max of four at Moorhole, Mosborough on 23rd April.
Sedge Warbler	One at Treeton on 14th April preceded the main arrival by over a week. Max were five at Moorhole, Mosborough on 24th April, six at Carr Vale NR on 12th May and seven at Blackburn Meadows NR on 30th May.
Reed Warbler	The first was one at Poolsbrook Marsh on 23rd April with five at Thrybergh Tip on 24th May and a max of six at Treeton Dyke on 4th and at Blackburn Meadows NR on 30th May.
Lesser Whitethroat	Two at Bolehill, Treeton and one at Treeton Dyke on 18th April were the first to arrive with singing birds widespread to the E by the end of the month and max of three at Ulley CP on 25th April and four at Owlthorpe on 29th April.
Whitethroat	First reported from Woodhouse Tip on 11th April and the main arrival at the end of the month. Max recorded included six at Thrybergh Tip on 26th April, six at Owlthorpe on 29th April, six at Ulley CP on 9th May, eight at Poolsbrook Marsh on 23rd and 17 at Blackburn Meadows NR on 30th May.
Garden Warbler	Singles at Ulley CP and Barbrook Plantation were the first reported, with subsequent max of three at Linacre Res on 17th May and at Blackburn Meadows NR on 30th and 11 at Wharncliffe Wood on 25th.
Blackcap	Widely reported, with max of 15 at Gleadless Valley LNR on 12th and 26th April, 11 at Ulley CP on 26th April and 9th May, and 16 at Wharncliffe Wood on 25th May.
Wood Warbler	One at Wyming Brook on 12th April was the first reported, with a more widespread arrival not until early May. Max were eight at Wyming Brook on 10th May and nine at Wharncliffe Wood on 25th.
Chiffchaff	Max singing males reported were 14 at Gleadless Valley LNR on 5th and 12th April and 15 at Wharncliffe Wood on 25th May.
Willow Warbler	First reported on 2nd April at Thrybergh CP with a typically sudden widespread arrival on 10th-12th April including 28 singing at Redmires Res on the latter date. Max elsewhere included 43 in the Ramsley area on 26th April and 54 at Wharncliffe Wood on 25th May.
<i>Phylloscopus</i> sp.	One at the top of Padley Gorge on 17th May was giving a perfect 50-50 mix of Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler song, 3-4 CC notes preceding the descending WW song.

Spotted Flycatcher	One was at Blacka Moor on 9th May three at Barbrook Plantation on 17th and 24th May and four at Wharncliffe Heath on 24th the only records of more than one bird.
Pied Flycatcher	One at Glen Howe Park and a pair at Padley Gorge on 12th April were the first reported. There were few large counts, with max of four at Hagg Farm on 19th May and six at Padley Gorge on 31st.
Great Grey Shrike	One was at Greave's Piece on 29th March, being seen again at Big Moor on 4th April. Another was in the Moscar area from 30th March until 13th April.
Brambling	A handful of records from garden feeders in early April, with the last being six at Dore on 14th April.
Twite	The only report was of two at Peak Forest on 9th May.
Lesser Redpoll	A flock of 200 in Wharncliffe Wood on 29th March was the max reported, with other records including 30 at Nether Padley on 1st April, 50 at Beeley Wood on 4th, 40 at RVCP on 16th and 50 at Broomhead Moor on 19th April.
Crossbill	Few reports, with no large flocks. Three were at Woodlands Valley on 1st April, one flew S at Greave's Piece on 6th, two at Beeley Wood on 9th, five at Wharncliffe Wood on 19th and one at Midhope on 20th April.
Corn Bunting	An outstanding count of 33 at Hooton Roberts on 20th April, with up to three singing at Loscar Common on 26th April.

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

MG Archer, S Ashton, S Bailey, W Bailey, J Baker, SJ Barnes, A Baverstock, J Beatty, MA Beevers, AR Bell, RP Blagden, K Bower, PL Brown, R Butterfield, DM Bye, EO Chafer, J Clarke, L Coates, NR Cross, R Dale, M Dallimer, A Deighton, M Dyson, M Earle, KL Evans, G Featherstone, MG Fenner, D Fowler, D Gains, M Garner, P Garrity, KR Gould, T Grose, S Guymmer, M Hibbert, A Hill, RD Hill, H Hipperson, M Hodgson, J Hornbuckle, C Hurst, G James, M Jarvis, Alan Johnson, Ann Johnson, CG Johnson, A Jones, L Kilby, J Kingsland, R Layton, P Leonard, R Lowndes, J Marriott, P Mella, M Miller, TH Minskip, J Mowbray, R Nicholls, MG Oxlade, PH Pearsall, NR Porter, B Reavey, MN Reeder, D Roddis, NR Roe, M Sanders, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, D Simmonite, MA Smethurst, D Smyth, M Snook, B Spencer, CG Stack, L Symonds, SG Tebbutt, A Thompson, M Timms, K Tupholme, R Twigg, C Tyler, D Vickers, SE Vickers, S Warwick, G Watson, D Wheeler, G Williams, RDR Williams, D Wood, M Wood-Bonelli, D Woodriff, M Woodward, BTO BirdTrack, Rotherham and District OS, Sorby-Breck Ringing Group and Thrybergh CP Bird Log.

DATES TO NOTE				
Time/Date	Group	Location	Speaker	Title
7.30pm 3 rd September	RSPB Sheffield Local Group	Central United Reform Church, Sheffield	Andy Warren	The Natural History of Patagonia
7.30pm 1 st October	RSPB Sheffield Local Group	Central United Reform Church, Sheffield	Richard Dale	The Peak Nest Watch Project

(Please note DOS meetings for the autumn have yet to be announced.)

BREEDING ATLAS PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

Dave Wood, leader of the Atlas team, is appealing to all keen digital photographers out there for images to enhance the impact of the new SBSG Breeding Atlas.

Specifically he's looking for high-quality photos of local breeding species which depict breeding activity (singing, display or courtship, carrying nesting material or food, fledged juvs). Note that actual nest shots are to be avoided.

If you have any images which could fit the bill, please submit them via the Gallery email link on the website, with your name and the species, location and date taken. Please ensure that each image is 3MB or less in size. Full acknowledgement will of course be given if your work is used.

NEW MEMBERS

The Group welcomes the following new members – **William Bennet, Gerry Bennet, Alan Goddard, Mrs EG Shaw** and **John & Ros Marriott**. We hope you enjoy your memberships, and good birding!

COPY DATE FOR NEXT BULLETIN

The next Bulletin will be issued at the October 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 **Sunday 27th September**.

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.