



A five-minute interview with Ronnie Coombes Group Leader



What first got you interested in birds, Ronnie?

I used to jog down Prestwick shore with my dog Kerr; at Bellrock I would see all these little birds on the shore but didn't know what they were. While in the library one day, I noticed a tape entitled "Ayrshire's winter shore birds". I took it out and listened to it. At the end it invited anyone looking for more information to telephone Angus Hogg - which I did.

What do you think is the best thing about bird watching?

Apart from birds, being able to get out and about - seeing new places, meeting different people and making many good friends (as well as trying to do my best for birds and their habitat).

Who is your favourite singer?

Opera star Elina Garanca.

Your favourite book?

"Birdsong" by Sebastian Faulks. This book gave me an insight into what my dad went through in the first world war. He was wounded at the battle of the Somme but never talked about it.

What is your favourite poem?

"The Whistle" by Charles Murray.

Your favourite food?

Roast beef and all the trimmings.



If you were a bird what would it be?

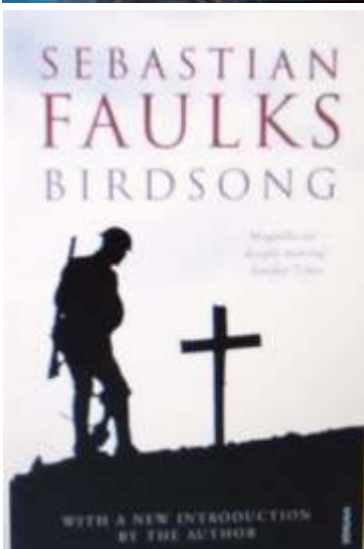
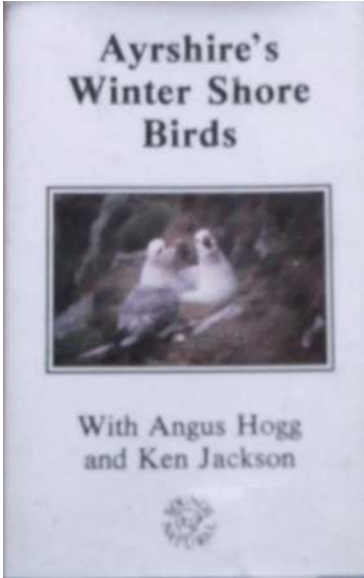
A skylark soaring high above and singing to all the birdwatchers.

What is your most memorable wildlife moment?

There are so many, but seeing and hearing a nightjar close up, flying around my head in fact - was one of the best!

What are your bird watching hopes?

To add many more species to my list and to see more young people interested in the subject, and also of course, that the persecution of birds of prey would cease.



Oberbürgermeisterin Sabine Becker saves the eagle owl

From the Bodensee area newspaper "Südkurier" (12 July 2013)

Article sent to us for **TheGannet** by **Inge Kern**, Nussdorf (Bodensee)



Report from Stefan Hilser

Überlingen. Normally, one never gets as close to an eagle owl (Uhu) as this! These huge owls would usually not be attracted by light or noise. As nocturnal and silent creatures gliding through the air, a family of eagle owls found a little piece of wild nature in the historic part of Überlingen. However, on Saturday 06 July, one of the young birds was out testing his wings for the first time when he crashed into a street festival in the town - and landed right at the feet of Sabine Becker, Oberbürgermeisterin (Mayor).

The 1.7 kilo eagle owl chick was in luck! Without delay, Sabine Becker alerted the veterinary authorities who were on the scene in a matter of minutes to help, creating a Happy End to the day for this beautiful creature (and also allowing some wonderful close-up pictures to be taken). "Yes, my motherly feelings sprang into action immediately" said Überlingen's town boss (who had already saved a young calf which had fallen into a manure pit just last year!). Frau Becker suggested that the bird probably became so disorientated by the noise and lights from the street festival, that its flight ended in a downward spiral to land right in front of her. Her first action was to get the correct telephone number of the authorities in charge of wildlife from the local fire service. One could imagine when she reported that "An eagle owl flew into the street festival" that this was (at first) treated as a joke! It was not however, and by the time help arrived, the young owl had crawled under the beer barrels for safety!

With its razor-sharp bill and equally sharp claws - this was not a bird to be messed with. With gentle coaxing - our big chick was soon back in safe hands to be delivered into the family nest high in the trees below the town wall. Before this, the young bird was delivered into the hands of Dr. Michaela Scherrer and Dr. Gottfried Scherrer, who have never had an eagle owl in their practice before! Apart from a few parasites which they treated, they were able to give this little Uhu a clean bill of health. Sabine Becker was then able to hand the owl over to forest ranger Rolf Geiger, who was able to get him back to his parents in the deep cutting below the town walls. Soon, the young birds will be looking for a home of their own. Rolf Geiger thinks they may head out into the valley of the Donau (Danube) or the Linzgau area where eagle owl sightings are common.

An Orcadian Odyssey

Report by Kenneth Smith



In May this year we had the good fortune to spend ten days in Orkney.

The car journey north was interesting to say the least. A blizzard at the Drumochter Pass had us wondering if we should have packed our winter woollies. Next day, however, as we were approaching the RSPB reserve at Forsinard the sun came out and almost immediately we were treated to a pair of golden eagles circling overhead. This was followed by a great telescope view of black-throated divers and a few minutes later a pair of common scoters appeared round a little promontory on one of the lochs. Common snipe were drumming and golden plover calling. There were stags on several of the knolls nearby. What a magic spot!

While staying near the Castle of Mey we heard that orcas had been seen at Duncansby Head so we made our way there but none in sight that evening. We did see the small passenger ferry from Scrabster rolling and skewing rather alarmingly in the cross currents! Our first great skua nearly gave us a haircut too.

A calm sea next morning provided a smooth passage from Gill's Bay to St Margaret's Hope in Orkney. Two great northern divers were seen, several bonxies and loads of auks. A small raft of Manx shearwaters appeared; a little bit outside their usual territory but they can travel 100 kilometres to feed.

The main tour was with Orcadian Wildlife run by Steve Sankey formerly the SWT chief executive, now a farmer and our guide. We stayed on the island of Burray now linked to mainland Orkney by a causeway. Our first group outing was on the ferry to Westray passing by the islands of Shapinsay, Egilsay and Eday. Quite a few seals about, both common and grey. The light in this part is quite special and gives some very atmospheric views.

On Westray we headed for Castle o'Burrian where we had great close ups of 'tammie-norries' (puffins) to rival the Farne Islands. Our picnic lunch was on the edge of the 150 metre cliffs at Noup Head. For Steve this was a first in ten years that it was sunny and calm enough to allow this. Bonxies sailed by every few minutes looking for their lunch opportunity in the kittiwake and guillemot colonies. One or two 'sooty-Allans' (Arctic skuas) crossed inland behind us over the moor.

On our return journey to Burray we heard through the local birding network that there was a really unusual visitor nearby - so off we set. Five minutes later we reached a steading near the sea and there was a woodchat shrike on top of a gate post! It promptly caught and devoured a local bumble bee. What a start!

Next morning although still dry and sunny the wind was gusting 70kph plus so were mainly looking at things archaeological but still had time to see a little tern diving by the Churchill Barriers, a dark-bellied Brent goose in a sheltered bay while a brief stop at RSPB's Loons reserve yielded a pair of garganey, four shovelers, a little grebe and coot.

A free day allowed us to cycle round the hilly island of Rousay. It has Iron and Bronze age buildings to equal Skara Brae but with fewer visitors. Nearby is an RSPB hill reserve where we saw our only elegant pale phase Arctic skua of the tour partnered by a dark phase one. Our lunch stop on the breezy west side of the island was near a colony of 'pickie-ternos' (Arctic terns) which called non-stop as they fished in the bay. A big grey seal nearby yawned away seemingly quite unimpressed by our yellow and red cycling gear. The high moorland of the island holds hen harrier and red-throated diver but these had to wait for another day.

Our next island was Hoy, one of the highest and wildest parts of Orkney with little agriculture. Golden eagles last bred here in 1984 but are seen occasionally, especially in winter. White-tailed eagles are regular visitors. En route to the Old Man of Hoy we were treated to marvellous close ups of red-throated divers. The male at one point had to see off a rival and a great flurry of wings took place. An east coast viewpoint gave us a quartering ringtail which kept appearing then vanishing amongst the hummocks. The walk out to the Old man itself was well worthwhile. At the stack, the air was alive with puffins, kittiwakes, fulmars and guillemots. A peregrine was clearly about as we came across two recent kills.

On yet another sunny day with light breezes we set off to the moors above Finnstown. This produced the best ever views of both male and female hunting hen harriers. The male obligingly crossed the road just in front of us (see photo). This performance continued for more than thirty minutes much to the chagrin of a nearby curlew whose calls gave us a haunting background. A short-eared owl was seen but did a vanishing act in the rough terrain.

Orkney in late May has some great flowers too. The two inch high Scottish primrose is present at Yesnaby and the shorelines produced the beautiful blue flowered oysterplant.. Another twenty species are easily found. Our stop that day was by an old World War II gun emplacement near a pair of very tolerant black guillemots (see photo).

The best for me at any rate was kept till last. On our final day we went off to see Steve's organic farm with its Shetland cattle. (These hardy beasts stay out all year and enjoy rough pasture and don't need to be stuffed with barley in winter like some of the modern breeds, as they give tender tasty meat.) On returning in the mini bus we saw the resident short-eared owl (photos below) close by and floated back and forward for ten minutes giving us some great photo opportunities. During the week we saw 84 species of birds, not bad for the far north. The presence of over fifteen late staying great northern was a surprise as were the turnstones, sanderlings and purple sandpipers in full breeding plumage. I liked seeing the unique Orkney vole too.

Orkney has much to offer in birdlife, botany and archaeology. It is well worth an extended visit but make sure your hat is tied down!



Hallowe'en on the Isle of May by Ian Thomson

Roger the ranger was having a nap.
Fair exhausted he was, such a poor, sleepy chap,
When a rapping and slapping woke him in mid-snore;
He'd been woken up - by an auk at the door!

Roger knew that no bonfire was lit on May Isle.
Hallowe'en was ignored by the students, no piles
of wet, slimy driftwood to form a blazing heap;
Then was shocked as the puffin coughed out,
"Twick or Tweet!"

Puffin spat out a sand-eel, spent ten minutes coughing,
"I'm giving them up, they're too wet for good puffin".
The last time I tried, I cut down by a few,
but my beak looked as if it was dipped in brown stew!"

Roger knew right away that the puffin was nuts,
that he should have gone south with all of his mates;
But how could he throw out this strange, talking auk?
He's decided to keep him - disguised as a stork!



Birds, steam and real ale in North Yorkshire

RSPB & SOC Ayrshire's
long-weekend.

Saturday 24 to Tuesday 27
May 2014

Staying on half-board at a 3* Best Western hotel (such as the Forest & Vale Hotel in Pickering or the Bell in Driffield.) Coach travel from Ayr. Inclusive cost of coach travel and half-board - around £360.00 per person.

We intend to visit the following reserves: [RSPB Saltholme](#) - the award-winning new centre and a huge wetland with breeding colonies of common terns and lapwings. Little gull, little tern, peregrines, skylark, sand martins and wide variety of waders. Café on site.

[Bempton Cliffs](#), with its wonderful views of over 200,00 seabirds including gannets, guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, fulmars etc.

[Fairburn Ings](#) for kingfishers, garganey, little-ringed plovers, reed warblers, green sandpipers and a host of other species.

[Blacktoft Sands](#) - where 270 species of birds have been recorded, including breeding avocets, bittern, bearded reedling, marsh harriers. Spoonbills also seen here.

The [Wykeham Forest raptor viewpoint near Pickering](#) for honey buzzards and more.

Another highlight will be a trip on the [North Yorkshire Moors steam railway](#) from Pickering all the way to Whitby, for raptors, sea birds, sea breezes and maybe a boat trip.

Another boat trip [will be from Bridlington to Flamborough Head](#).

Real Ale (and good food) will of course feature in this as in every one of our trips, and we invite you to join us.

Look out for the full programme of details which will be available from the very first evening meetings of SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire local group.



giving
nature
a home

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654.

Field Trips 2013

Saturday 28 September

FAIRLIE, PORTENCROSS & NORTH AYRSHIRE COAST

Meet at Fairlie car park (toilets) at 10.30hrs. Visit shore and lagoon before moving on to Portencross, Hawking Craig and the coast southwards. Please bring picnic lunch.

Saturday 26 October

RSPB MERSEHEAD RESERVE

Meet at 11.00 hrs at the reserve car park. Whole day birding trip, please bring a picnic lunch. Information centre with hot & cold drinks and toilets on site. Finish c. 16hrs.

Saturday 23 November by COACH

RSPB LOCH LEVEN RESERVE

Meet at DODDS coach depot, Ayr at 07.45 hrs. At the reserve from 10.30 to 14.30. Café on site - or bring picnic lunch. Birding the Kinross area from 15.00 to dusk. Dinner will be arranged and then back to Ayr for around 21.30 hrs. Coach tickets £24 - available from 16 September.

Saturday 07 December

LOCH RYAN, STRANRAER & WIG BAY

Meet at Ballantrae car park (toilets) at 10.30 hrs. Whole day trip, please bring a picnic lunch. A garden centre with café and toilets is a short drive from Wig Bay.

2014

Saturday 18 January

RSPB KEN-DEE MARSHES & RED KITE CENTRE

Meet 10.30 hrs at New Galloway main street (toilets). On to Ken-Dee for 11.00 and the red kite centre for 14hrs (Entry £3.50). Drinks & snacks available here. All day trip, please bring packed lunch. Finish c.15.30.

Saturday 15 February

GREENAN SHORE AND DOONFOOT.

Meet at 10.00hrs Greenan Castle car park. Trip lasts until 12.00 hrs.

Saturday 15 March

CASTLE KENNEDY GARDENS, STRANRAER

Meet 10.30 at Ballantrae seafront (toilets). On to Castle Kennedy for the whole day - birding the lochside, woods and gardens. Café and toilets on site. Entry charge. Finish around 16.00hrs.

Saturday 26 April

DUMFRIES HOUSE PARK & GARDENS, CUMNOCK

Meet Dumfries House car park at 10.30 (toilets, café and visitor centre on site). Birding the woodland and the riverside paths. All day trip. Finish around 15.00hrs.

Saturday 24 - Tuesday 27 May

NORTH YORKSHIRE LONG-WEEKEND BY COACH

Visiting Wykeham Forest raptor viewpoint; Bempton Cliffs; Flamborough Head; Blacktoft Sands; Saltholme; Fairburn Ings; North Yorkshire Moors steam railway & Whitby. Cost around £360 for coach travel+dinner bed & breakfast. Cars may be left safely at Dodds coach depot, East Road, Ayr. Meeting here at 07.15 for an 07.30 departure. Staying at 3* hotel in either Pickering, Driffield or Beverley.

Saturday 18 June

RSPB WOOD OF CREE RESERVE

Meet at reserve car park for 11.00 hrs. All day trip - please bring picnic lunch. Nearest toilets, café and shop at the Glen Trool centre - about six miles from the reserve. Finish 16.00 hrs.

Central Ayrshire Local Group Meetings, Outings & Holidays Season 2013-2014



TheGannet

is the official newsletter of Central Ayrshire Local Group of RSPB Scotland. Registered charity no. SC037654

All indoor meetings take place on Monday evenings at 19.30 hrs - in Hall B of Newton-Wallacetown Church, 60 Main St., Ayr.

Indoor Meetings 2013

Monday 16 September

CHANGES AT RSPB LOCHWINNOCH A talk by **MIKE MITCHELL**. Membership registration precedes the talk.

Monday 21 October

BIRDING IN THE GREATER GLASGOW AREA
An illustrated talk by **JIM COYLE**

Monday 18 November

SARAH BROWN with an illustrated talk on **WHALES AND THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT**

Monday 16 December

RSPB's CHRIS ROLLIE talks about **OSPREYS IN AYRSHIRE** at our festive Christmas meeting

2014

Monday 20 January

GLOBAL SEABIRD SURVEY. An update of the many recent events by **RORY CRAWFORD**

Monday 14 February

TO BE CONFIRMED

Monday 17 March

GORDON MACDONALD with a talk on the **BIRDS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN WEST COAST**

Monday 21 April

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by our **CLUB NIGHT** when members show a selection of images from the past season.

Please note: Talks subject to alteration

Did you know that.....

Mark Cocker has spent the last seven years collecting stories about birds from people all over the world. Here are just a few of the facts he unearthed for a recent Guardian article (27.07.13).

The Inuit still make rattles from puffin beaks. In the Santa Cruz islands near Samoa they use the scarlet plumes from a gorgeous little scrap called the cardinal myzomela to make carpet like scrolls of red cloth that once functioned as money. Or that ortolans are still much loved by French gourmets. The buntings are fattened on oatmeal and drowned in Armagnac (the tiny lungs then supply a "liqueur-scented flower of taste" for the epicure diner. The number of ortolans has now declined dramatically but they are still served illegally in certain swanky French restaurants at around 2,000 Euros a kilo.

Some good things too.....time after time, country after country, people spoke of their love for swallows. Hardened Argentinian workmen would not finish the wiring of a porch until the martins had fledged their brood. One British family thinks of the first swallow of the year at their farm as their returning granny (it was her favourite bird). The lucky member of the clan who spots the early arrival sends a text to all the relatives. It says simply: "Granny's back."

To order a copy of Mark Cocker's book "**Birds & People**" with photos by David Tipling (published by Jonathan Cape), you can call Guardian book service on 0330 333 6846 or go to: guardian.co.uk/bookshop - it costs £29.00 post free.

The meetings are open to everyone interested in birds and wildlife. Please come along and join us.

If you enjoy our meetings and field trips - local membership costs only £6 single or £10 double. There are eight indoor meetings and nine field trips.

If you would like more information - please telephone:

Ronnie Coombes

Tel: 01292 521 522

Anne Dick

Tel: 01292 541 981

Tony Scott

Tel: 01292 281 085

Ian Clark

Tel: 01292 441 940

We will be repeating our annual bird walks in Rozelle & Belleisle Parks in Ayr each for one day only in spring 2014.

All field trips are held jointly with the Ayrshire branch of the SOC (Scottish Ornithologists' Club). The trips are open to everyone interested in birds and wildlife. Please come along and join us on any of these outings.

We generally car share and if anyone requires a lift or is willing to share their car, please telephone any of the committee mentioned below.

Ronnie Coombes, Group Leader. 01292 265 891

Anne Dick, Deputy Group Leader. 01292 541 351.

Ian Clark, Treasurer. Tel: 01292 441 940.

Jim Thomson, Outdoor Leader. Tel: 01292 570 351

Anne Thomson, Secretary. 01292 260 816.

Tony Scott, Newsletter Editor & holidays. 01292 281 085

Gerda Scott, Publicity. 01292 281 085

Kenneth Smith, Special Projects. 01292 442 085

Peter Halbert 01292 261 674