



TheSOC

Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Waterston House, Aberlady,
East Lothian EH32 0PY
Tel: 01875 871 330
www.the-soc.org.uk

Scotland's Bird Club Ayrshire Branch

Some useful contact telephone numbers:

Outdoor trips leader
Jim Thomson: 01292 570 351

If you have articles and news items for the newsletter, please send these to: Tony Scott
4 Hilltop Place
AYR KA7 3PB
Tel: 01292 281 085
E-mail: da.scott@tiscali.co.uk

Sightings to:
Ayrshire bird Recorder
Fraser Simpson. E-mail:
recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk

For up-to-date information on all aspects of birding in Ayrshire, go online and visit our local website maintained by Kevin Waite:
www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk

The Ayrshire Bird Report 2008 is available from Dick Vernon (tel no: 01292 442 195) and also from the Tourist Info Centre, Sandgate, Ayr. The Bookshelf in Ayr and Troon and from RSPB Lochwinnoch.

The Stone chat

April 2010



Photo: Tony Scott

Welcome to this early spring edition of *TheStonechat*. First of all I would like to say a great big Thank You to Liz Leyden for all her hard work putting together so many editions of our newsletter. She has been a wonderful editor and worked tirelessly to involve members in writing articles. Not always an easy task! She has now encountered problems with production and this is why I stepped in to offer some help in the meantime. Henry Martin is in charge of our printing facilities and another Thank You to Henry for looking after these services. I would like to ask everyone to think about what they have seen and experienced over the summer months and I would encourage you to put down your thoughts and sightings in the form of small articles for this publication. I look forward to it! In this edition you will find two articles by Angus Hogg on our 'very own' Ayrshire species and a report on his recent trip to Thailand. Dick Vernon has a piece on the BTO-SOC Atlas and Roger Hisset's contribution is on Irvine Bay. You will also find details of events and trips and I have written a small piece on the Müritz National Park and the Islands of North-East Germany - where some Ayrshire Birders will be heading for the crane migration in October. If you are still wishing to buy a copy of the latest Ayrshire Bird Report, Dick has still copies available at £4 each. Have a wonderful summer. Best wishes, Tony.

The great stonechat hunt

Or, at least, it *could* be!

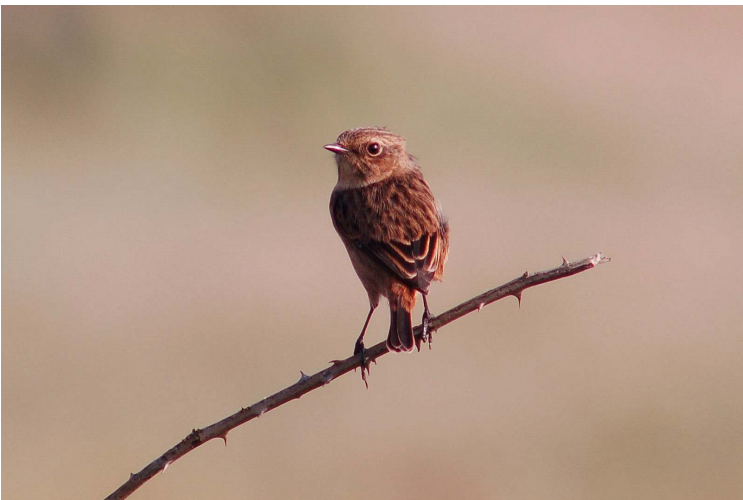
Remember that winter we've just left behind us (hopefully)? Well, it's probably had the biggest impact on small passerines for some time. Lots of wrens, dunnocks, robins and coal tits in upland forestry areas have gone. Some species, like blackbirds, have the capacity to move elsewhere, but even their numbers appeared almost non-existent during a series of recent visits to parts of southern Ayrshire. They'll bounce back of course, but many parts of upland Ayrshire are eerily quiet just now.

Perhaps one of the most obvious "missing" birds, though, is our own stonechat. After the winter of 1981-82, during which similar periods of snow and severe frosts occurred, the number of breeding pairs in Ayrshire dropped to around seven pairs.

The most likely populations to survive this Arctic onslaught are normally along the coast, but some surprises do happen. So far this year it would seem that coastal birds have been spared the worst of the decreases, but a pair somehow managed to get by at Loch Duisk, near Barrhill and were proudly proclaiming their presence during early March. However, that's the only inland pair I've seen so far.

So, how about making a point of simply noting down the location of any stonechats you see this year? Any additional information would of course, be welcome e.g. whether there was a *pair* or just a *single* bird, whether your birds looked like they might be *breeding*, and what your impression was of the populations of some of the other small birds, particularly vulnerable ones like wrens. This is an easy survey for everyone to take part in – and it'll provide important information on just how hard our 'county bird' has been hit.

Angus Hogg



A female stonechat lacks the white collar and black head of the male



A male stonechat on a typically prominent lookout

Irvine Bay update

Things seem to happen slowly in the Irvine Bay area, but changes rarely seem to favour the rich and varied populations of birds and other wildlife of the area. It is difficult to know where to start, but the main concerns at present are the Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company's (IBURC) plans for a large housing development at Irvine Harbour, NPL's plans for the Ardeer peninsula, and IBURC's plans for a golf course ("world class" as they all are!) as part of their coastal park project.

We were hoping to get the great potential of the Irvine area as one of the best, if not the best, areas for birding and other wildlife in Ayrshire recognised in the Strategic Environmental Assessment that appeared to be a legal requirement as part of IBURC's development of a masterplan for the 5 Towns area. When this masterplan was produced and work started to implement some of the projects, without the SEA being completed, local politicians seemed unconcerned at this apparent breach of the law. However, since Scotland's SEA legislation resulted from an EU Directive we decided to go to the top and referred the case to Stavros Dimas, the EU Commissioner for the Environment. His reply was a skilled piece of fence-sitting – you don't become a eurocrat without mastering this art – but the one possibly useful piece of advice was that the Scottish Government really should be able to decide whether IBURC was acting legally. So we sent a similar request for a definitive opinion to Roseanna Cunningham, the Scottish Minister for the Environment. Unfortunately the reply we received from one of her staff made it clear that they do not consider that an SEA was required in this instance, partly because IBURC is a private company. It seems that we will have to comment on each document and phase as they are announced. One does wonder how much public money was wasted in commissioning Envirocentre to carry out an SEA that was never completed.

Last week the provisional plans for the housing development at Irvine Harbour were revealed in a public exhibition. The proposed development would stretch from the Ship Inn almost to the point and provide 350 homes in a combination of flats and houses. The 3D model also included some yacht moorings on pontoons sticking straight out from the south bank of the R Irvine very close to the confluence with the R Garnock. The latter could cause appreciable disturbance to birds using the southern part of Bogside Flats. The architects who had drawn up the plans did not seem to be fully aware of the importance of the area to migrating and wintering birds. Some of us who visited the exhibition took the chance to raise the issue of obstructing the flight paths of water birds flying up the estuary. We also suggested the possibility of including a purpose-built birdwatchers' observation area in the plans, looking up towards Bogside.

NPL's plans for the Ardeer Peninsula include yet another golf course, in the area just to the north of the Big Idea building. This area contains some of the best remaining fragments of maritime heath, including some lichen heath, to be found in Ayrshire. Because the area was closed to the public for so long there is relatively little information on the wildlife of all types. However, Iain Hamlin has recently been catching some of the insects there and has already found some very rare species of bees and wasps and a dead Minotaur Beetle – a great Scottish rarity and mentioned in the original Gailles Sand Dune SSSI, though not recently recorded there. NPL does not seem to be in any hurry to "develop" the area during the current recession, so we may have more time to gather data.

It is clear that we shall have to comment, and perhaps sometimes object outright, to many developments in this area on an item by item basis. Having good records of the birds and other wildlife in the area will be important for this. WeBS counts for the main tidal stretches of the Irvine and Garnock were expanded last winter but one counter may not be available this year (any volunteers?). So it is important that everyone visiting the area sends in their records so that we have plenty of "ammunition" for use in any arguments.

Spooners and Pittas

A short trip to a vanishing heaven

by Angus Hogg



Black and yellow broadbill - a close relative of the pitta

Despite the rigours of an overnight stop at the Heathrow Budgetline Hotel, all of the outbound party met up, fresh-faced and hopeful in Terminal 3 on the morning of February 6th this year. For the seven of us taking part on the adventure (including Ayrshire "exile" Andrew Stevenson), most of the birds would be new – the country would be new! No amount of "cramming" was going to get the crucial features of the various flowerpeckers and spiderhunters lodged inside this ageing brain – so I slept well on the outward flight! Arriving at Bangkok airport in the early hours of the 7th, we quickly transferred to our short-haul internal flight down to Krabi: and so did all our bags. There, we were met by our guide for the next three days, Yotin Meekaeo, a cheerful middle-aged Thai who was going to find us all that we hoped for in our short stop down south. So, off to our lodgings, a quick hour's break and into the field! This maniacal bundle of energy who was our guide took us straight away into the nearby Morokot Rainforest just to give us an idea of what we should expect – and it wasn't bad! A banded kingfisher was quickly located, followed by several species of bulbul (yawn!) and then a collection of small birds which would make anyone's mouth water – Eastern crowned warbler, Siberian blue robin (OK, you've seen these before!), Asian paradise flycatcher, orange-headed thrush and green broadbill. We'd only spent about three hours in the field and my head was buzzing – ornithological overload approaching and time for sleep!

Our second day with Yotin took us back into the nearby rainforest and a chance to see something really special. For many years now, Yotin has been studying a species which is on the very edge of extinction and we were privileged to be shown into one of his hides to await the arrival of..... Gurney's pitta. With only 17 pairs at Morokot, and another small population in Myanmar, this was to be perhaps the rarest bird of the trip. Now, sometimes the Gods smile on you and you're spared all the self-inflicted angst which besets birders on occasions when birds are reluctant to show. We'd barely sat down when the very bird appeared – and then came to within a mind-blowing three metres of the hide. Some say "good old Buddha....." Although we were shown many other species that morning, the image of that male Gurney's pitta was still dominating anything that Yotin pointed out. However, an afternoon at Emerald Pool and a second, perhaps even more beautiful pitta, the banded pitta, almost sent some of us over the edge. The evening could not, of course, finish without another spectacular – stunning views of spotted wood owl, barred eagle owl and large-tailed nightjar. Evening meal at 20.30 – and back on the bus at 03.30 the next day.

continued ➡



Early morning at Krabi



Banded kingfisher at Morokot on our first day



Entrance to Krung Ching Rainforest reserve



Red-wattled lapwing

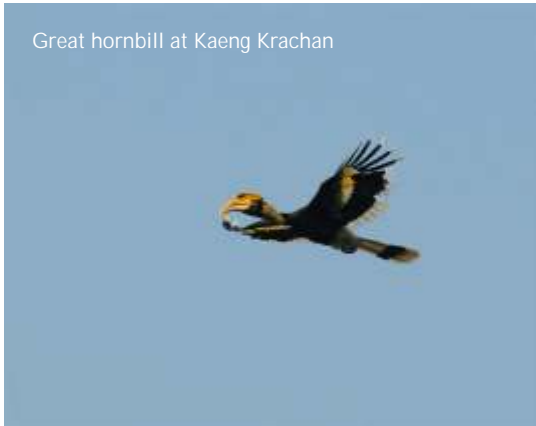
Perhaps a last chance to see. Two spoon-billed sandpipers with red-necked stints and curlew sandpiper in the foreground

Arriving at Krung Ching forest at 06.00, our first "excitement" of the day was a couple of buffy fish owls right by the reception centre. Rainforest birding can be hard work, but, with Yotin's outstanding knowledge of both the area and the bird-calls, we soon notched up a great selection of typical birds. From skulkers like black-capped babbler to exhibitionists like buff-necked woodpecker: from hard to see birds like white-crowned forktail to in your face birds like white-rumped shama this was yet another birding blitz. Being under the forest canopy meant that the blistering mid-day temperatures (35 C plus) were largely avoided or, at least, made more tolerable. Copious amounts of water were always on hand to save us all shrivelling up in the heat. Mammals were much more in evidence too, with the athleticism of *white-handed gibbons* being countered by the apparent clumsiness of a *palm civet* high in the upper branches.

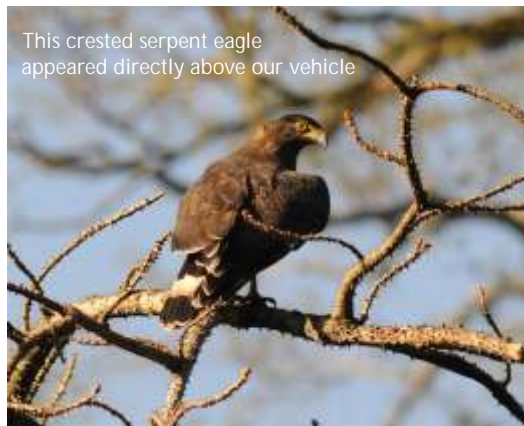
A reasonably late start on day four saw us embarking from the "shorefront" at Krabi to head for the mangroves at Phangnga. Here, there was the opportunity to go paddling – with a purpose of course – and it meant getting out of our motorised dug-out and walking through shallow sea water to the margin of the estuarine bar on which were about seven to ten Nordmann's greenshanks. One of two almost mythical waders to be seen on this trip, Nordmann's, like many other shorebirds which use the eastern Asiatic flyway to get to their Siberian breeding grounds, are finding that many of their once dependable coastal feeding locations are vanishing as the Chinese and Koreans reclaim mud flats for industrial purposes. The future for many waders on this route looks anything but bright. Our afternoon entertainment was provided by Yotin once more. Determined that we should all not just hear, but see mangrove pitta, he left the boardwalk at Ban Nai Chong and thrashed his way through what can only be called prolific undergrowth. Quite a guy – he had worked his socks off for us and had yet more customers arriving that evening as we boarded the plane back to Bangkok.

A brief overnight stop in a very plush hotel (this birder is definitely not used to such stopovers), and we met up with our second guide, Mark Andrews, a Brit who would look after us for the remainder of the trip. The endless salt pans of Pak Thale provide an overwintering location for thousands of waders – but there's one that is becoming very special. A curious quirk of fate has provided a stint-sized shorebird with a spatulate beak. This is the spoon-billed sandpiper, and it wasn't too long before we'd found our first in the baking heat of late morning. With the world population of this bird around 200, the problems facing it are almost insurmountable, though this doesn't stop ornithologists in many parts of the world trying to halt the decline. Breeding near the shoreline in Chukotka (you'll need an atlas!) one of the main problems facing it on its nest is predation by feral dogs. Add to this the drainage of one of its main stopover points in Korea, and you'll see that we could soon lose this bird. A more leisurely afternoon was enjoyed by the party after the frantic pace of the first 4 days, and we had time to take in waders such as long-toed stint and red-wattled lapwing at the King's Mangrove Project.

continued 



Great hornbill at Kaeng Krachan

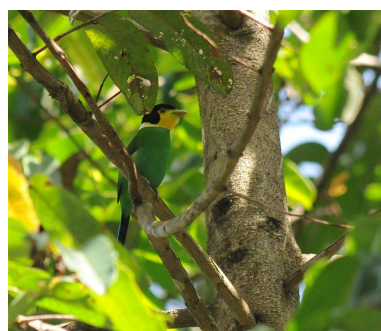


This crested serpent eagle appeared directly above our vehicle

Since the group was more than satisfied with the good views of “spooner” on the previous day, it was decided to visit another rainforest area on the Myanmar border. Kaeng Krachan just seems to go on forever and must be more representative of the vegetation cover once covering much of Thailand. The birds here ranged from the almost ridiculous red jungle fowl (and its “cock-a-doodle-do” call) through the exotic, such as long-tailed broadbill, to the downright magnificent like crested serpent eagle. Mark proved to be every bit as good as Yotin at picking up on bird calls, and lots of the smaller passerines might have escaped had it not been for his skill. One by one, species with fantastic names all fell into place: Verditer flycatcher, black-thighed falconet, wreathed hornbill and scarlet-rumped trogon.

With the last two days spent largely re-tracing our steps at Pak Thale, King’s Project and Lam Pak Bia, we had a little more time to take in the real value of this place for birds, particularly waders. Where else are you going to see a flock of 450 great knots or 300 marsh sandpipers? And there are the really special ones too, like Malaysian plover and the only recently (re) discovered white-faced plover. This latter species had been collected way back at the turn of the 19th century, but the specimen had been largely ignored until about ten years ago when visiting birders began to feel that this wasn’t just another “Kentish” plover. So, we all enjoyed watching the one which was present on a narrow sand-spit, bossing the few Malaysian plovers which were trying to set up their nests. Just where it would migrate to is anyone’s guess, such is the lack of knowledge surrounding this bird.

And I suppose it was that thought which stayed with me on the flight home. Just how much (or little) do we really know about birds in some parts of the world? Even Yotin had confessed that he’d no idea where young Gurney’s pittas went for the first couple of years. However, with this part of the world hosting a burgeoning human population, and the ever-present desire to develop the land for industrial purposes, I suppose we may *never* find out any more about some species. It had been a fairly hectic 8 days in Thailand, and one which left lots of happy memories, like the excellent food, the wonderfully cheerful and polite people, the superb rainforest reserves and even the *Indian elephant* walking along the road near our hotel one night with a mandatory flashing red light strapped to its tail! I’d like to believe that, even with all this rush to develop, there’s still going to be places to look at Gurney’s pitta and spoon-billed sandpiper in the coming 20 or 30 years, but.....[AH](#)



Our chalets at Morokot - complete with air-conditioning!

The much sought after long-tailed broadbill

Female Malaysian plover at Lam Pak Bia

BTO/SOC bird atlas 2007-11

Ayrshire update

Hopefully everyone is well aware of this ambitious project to survey wintering and breeding bird populations and distribution in the British Isles. In Scotland the survey is being organized by the BTO and the SOC. The project involves both 'roving records', which are already contributing a huge amount of information re bird distributions, and timed tetrad visits (TTV), which are designed to provide more quantitative information.

Just as a reminder. For TTVs, the whole of the British Isles is divided into 10x10 kilometre squares; these are subdivided into 25 2x2 kilometre squares (tetrads). The project requires that a minimum of eight tetrads is surveyed in each 10x10km square for a one hour period, once in either November or December and again in either January or February, for the winter bird part, and again in either April or May and in either June or July for the breeding bird part. For really remote areas one can do just one two hour survey in the winter and one two hour survey in the breeding season. For any tetrad the surveys need to be carried out just once during the four year period (2007-11) of the project.

Now Ayrshire is divided into 34 10x10km squares. Volunteers have agreed to survey at least eight tetrads in all the northern and central parts of the county minimum (although in many cases they have still to complete all the surveys of their tetrads they have signed up for. Completing these surveys is an obvious priority. However, the south of the county is a problem as there are still five squares where insufficient tetrads are being surveyed. These squares, with the number of tetrads needed to be done to achieve minimum coverage, are:

NS40 Straiton – Dalmellington – Loch Doon; reasonable road access throughout; two more tetrads need to be done in the breeding season.

NX08 Benane head – Ballantrae; entirely coastal; three more tetrads need to be done in both seasons

NX18 Colmonell – Pinwherry; short coastal stretch, reasonable road access; three more tetrads need to be done in both seasons.

NX19 Girvan south; coastal route; well served by road; three more tetrads need to be done in both seasons.

NX29 Pinmore - Barr – Old Dailly; very well served by road; three more tetrads need to be done in both seasons.

If you can take on tetrads in any of these 10x10 squares, then that would be a big help in ensuring that, in Ayrshire, we at least meet the minimum coverage for the Atlas. Of course if one is feeling strenuous one can do more than the minimum number in a 10x10 square, but the priority is minimum coverage and completing the tetrads you have signed up for!

continued 

Ideally if we are only going to achieve minimum coverage of a 10x10 square, then one should choose tetrads which, together, are representative of the different habitats/terrain of the 10x10 square. At some stage some wretched BTO statisticians are going to go through all the data and try to estimate bird populations. This is one of those rare occasions when there is a chance of getting estimates of numbers of common birds – the sort we see every day, but rarely grace the pages of bird reports etc! Ron Forrester, when he spoke to us on Birds of Scotland 3, said that the chapters on common birds were the most difficult to prepare because of the lack of data on numbers. Thus surveys like the atlas do help to fill in an important gap in our knowledge.

But good data requires thoughtful surveys. Minimum coverage of just eight out of 25 tetrads in a 10x10km square is about a third the total area. In an hour one will probably cover about a third of the tetrad (this will vary depending on terrain, fitness and skill of observer etc); a third of a third means that minimum coverage represents about 10% of a 10x10 square. Thus our statistical friends will be doing a lot of extrapolating to get total numbers! If we just choose bird hot spots and ignore areas with few birds, or if a 10x10 square is mostly high moorland and we just cover the wooded lowland bits, then our records will not be representative and so potentially misleading.

This is never going to be a perfect survey; there just aren't the resources available to achieve that, but a bit of thought in selecting tetrads will help to improve the outcome. Once the minimum number of tetrads has been surveyed in all our 10x10 squares, then if you're still feeling strenuous it would be very helpful to look again at the various squares and do some more tetrads if this would make coverage more representative.

If you want more general information about the project and how you can contribute you can find this on the Atlas website (www.birdatlas.net); this not only will show what tetrads are available, it also provides an up date of what has been achieved to date (for example there are summaries of bird distributions for Ayrshire). Alternatively you can contact the BTO rep (Brian Broadley – brianbroadley@onegreendoor.com, 01290 424241) or Mike Howes (michael_howes@lineone.net 01290 700382), or Dick Vernon (rgv_mcv@tiscali.co.uk 01292 442195)

Dick Vernon
March 2010

Going cool on global warming

by Mike Howes

So just when we've got a bit of a consensus on whether or not things are getting warmer...it starts to get cooler albeit from a record millennium high. What's going on?

As can be seen from the Hadley centre for climatic research graph there has been a recent decline in global temperature although the overall trend is still one of warming. With the concern about the impact human activities are having on our climate making headlines every day it may come as an unwelcome hindrance to 'the cause' if the climate suddenly becomes uncooperative! Already those with vested interests in debunking global warming are latching on to the recent data and the 'inter glacialists' who have been quiet for a while about their theory of an impending ice age have started to stir again.

continued 

Historically there have been major shifts in our climate and since the last ice age there have been periods when global temperatures were higher than they are now. These were at times when human influence was minimal, for example during the mediaeval period. Despite this however it is also clear that man is currently influencing atmosphere chemistry and acidifying the oceans. As politicians at last seem to be moving towards taking some difficult decisions it would be unfortunate if a 'new' piece of evidence came to light to give them an excuse to prevaricate.

An interesting variable which may hit the headlines shortly concerns the Maunder minimum. The what you may ask? Well this relates to the cycle of sunspots which regularly appear and disappear more or less every eleven years. The Maunder minimum named after the astronomer Edward Maunder is the period of excessively low sunspot activity that has in the past been associated with significant climatic events such as the 'mini ice age' from 1645 to 1715 . Now it just so happens that in March 2004 we entered a period of very low sunspot activity. It is believed that during such periods for example cosmic rays from the sun are less impeded and as a result stir up more evaporation on Earth, elevating the levels of water vapour, cloud cover and rain. The combined effect of more rain on the land and more clouds blocking the sun is more cooling. Changes to light wavelengths have also been observed.

So tracking the change in the number of sunspots may act as an indicator to emissions from and changes within the sun. These changes may in turn have effects on temperature trends on Earth. However it's not quite that straight forward. It would appear that there is a time lag between sunspot maxima and minima and climatic effects becoming noticeable. That period is approximately 1.5 years. Additionally, apparently, the maxima must be over 100 spots or the minima below 60 before the effects are significant. Also it is clear that if there has been a preceding warming event it takes time for a compensating cooling event to return things to status quo and vice versa. A prolonged period of very high or very low (as now) sunspot activity will however, taking into account the time lag, produce noticeable warming or cooling here on Earth.

Still with me?...well to summarise if you are interested you can keep track of sunspot numbers on the internet through sites such as www.nasa.gov and you can watch as events unfold over the next few crucial months. What you are looking for is (1) when do we come out of the current minimum sunspot period? and (2) how high does the next sunspot maximum reach? If the current minimum continues for any great length of time and the next maximum predicted to occur in May 2013 is below 100 (the prediction is 90) then we could be in for 15 -20 year period of cooling. Bringing me back to the opening remarks, I therefore can imagine the ammunition this will give to the anti global warming lobby and the ice age armageddonists! Of course the one variable that might make this all academic is if our influence on the climate mitigates the cooling effects. The debate continues.

MH

Ayrshire Bird Report 2008

Still only £4.00!

is available from Dick Vernon (tel no: 01292 442 195) and also from the Tourist Info Centre, Sandgate, Ayr; The Bookshelf in Ayr and Troon and from RSPB Lochwinnoch

The call of the cranes

Late autumn sunshine on the idyllic islands and forests of north-east Germany

Tony Scott

One of the most spectacular sights to be seen are the masses of common cranes on their migration south during the months of September and October. For anyone wishing to witness this incredible spectacle of nature, there is an opportunity to join Angus Hogg, myself and others from the 1st to the 11th of October this year as we travel east to the fascinating islands of *Rügen, Hiddensee, Vilm and Ummanz*, as well as the delightful *Müritz National Park* at this beautiful time of year when the woodlands are alive in the golden glory of autumn. The latter named area is part of the Mecklenburg Lake District. Forests, lakes and bogs form a natural scenario which stimulates our senses. Many people travel here to rejoice in this natural beauty. The area is well known for its great and impressive bird species list. In no other place in Germany do so many white-tailed eagles, ospreys and cranes breed as here in the *Müritz National Park*. In autumn, thousands upon thousands of common cranes gather at the east shore of the *Müritz Lake*.

An impression of how medieval forests might have looked is given by the forests around *Serrahn*, where we will find a unique forest 'wilderness'. The charm of this hilly woodland with lakes and bogs is especially revealed during foliage in May and during the leaf fall in the late weeks of September until November. Lakes are the highlight of the *Müritz National Park* and every lake has its own character, differing due to their size, shape and location. Today's lakes are remains of ancient rivers or wash-outs from glaciers during the last ice age and these lakes, forests and bogs are habitats of countless lichens, mosses, fungi, plants, birds and animals. The whole of this area caters extensively for those wishing to participate in wildlife watching, with good access to hides - some by a network of forest paths and some with short connecting paths to parking areas. The common crane roosts can also be viewed from the water, and this is also planned into our itinerary.

The island of Rügen is Germany's largest island (976 square kilometres). More precisely, it is an archipelago of around 30 small islands and peninsulas in what the Germans call the 'Ostsee' off the coast of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. *Rügen* is a remarkably diverse island of genteel seaside resorts, quiet little fishing villages, mile-long beaches, tree-lined avenues, wild sea buckthorn hedges, ancient megalithic graves, 100-year-old lighthouses, extensive beech woods, sparkling lakes and two National Parks which make this island and the smaller ones nearby a paradise for nature lovers. The expansive beech forests of *Jasmund National Park* and the *Granitz* ridge with their tall elegant trees are unique in Europe. The flora and fauna on the small island of *Vilm*, which lies a little way off the coast by *Lauterbach*, has remained virtually untouched for centuries and for this reason is now a protected area.

Hiddensee is a small, car-free island (19 square kilometres) just off *Rügen*. It is part of the *West-Pommeranian Boddenlandschaft National Park*. *Hiddensee* is shaped like a sea horse nestling against the larger island. It is a creation of the ice age and ocean currents. It is an island of snowy-white sandy beaches - some almost like the Caribbean - steep, rugged cliffs, beech groves flooded with sunlight, rustling pine forests and expanses of salt marsh. The sea is all around - nothing more than a gentle ripple at times, but at others tossing up wild, frothy crests of spray. The southern tip of the *Gellen* sandbank is a paradise for birds and large parts of the island are designated nature conservation areas. Bicycle bells and the sound of horses' hooves set the tone on *Hiddensee*. It is the largest island in the national park and the dune heath with its many trails and the hillier *Dornbusch* area part of the island, where stunning views across the wide expanses of salt marsh, sea and the small settlements of *Kloster* and *Vitte* can be admired.

The *West-Pommeranian Boddenlandschaft National Park* is the largest nature reserve on the Ostsee. A landscape of steep coastlines, dunes, spits of land and shallow waters, it extends from the Darss-Zingst peninsula to the west coast of Rügen. The term *Bodden* in the name of the national park refers to the shallow lagoons that are characteristic of this largely unspoilt part of central Europe; bays cut off from the sea with a mixture of salt water and fresh water. The region's flora and fauna is amazingly rich and diverse - it is possible to watch some animals up close, such as wild boar, red squirrel and red deer. The national park is also home to Europe's biggest common crane roost. Around 60,000 cranes fly in every autumn to stay for a number of weeks before heading south, and there are quite a number of watch points and hides set up in the whole region. Their roosting areas lie in the shallow waters of the *Bodden* and on the undisturbed smaller islands. Evening trips by boat make these places accessible in a way which does not disturb the cranes. It is also the most important overwintering place for waders and other seabirds in the greater region of the north-east coast and islands. During the spring and summer it is no less important for breeding birds, with over 163 species having successfully bred here - 70 of which are on the red list of breeding birds in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. 67 of these birds are on the German national red list of endangered species.

Here are just a few of the breeding and overwintering species to be found in the areas we will visit:

Black-throated diver; red-throated diver; great-crested grebe; red-necked grebe; little grebe; little bittern; great bittern; great egret; whooper swan; Bewick's swan; mute swan; greylag; shoveler; gadwall; teal; garganey; pintail; goldeneye; tufted duck; scaup; pochard; red-crested pochard; ferruginous duck; common scoter; velvet scoter; eider; long-tailed duck; goosander; red-breasted merganser; smew; shelduck; marsh harrier; red kite; black kite; rough-legged buzzard; common buzzard; honey buzzard; sparrowhawk; northern goshawk; white-tailed eagle; osprey; kestrel; merlin; peregrine; hobby; grey partridge; common crane; water rail; spotted crake; moorhen; corncrake; ringed plover; little ringed plover; lapwing; common snipe; woodcock; curlew; black-tailed godwit; common redshank; greenshank; green sandpiper; wood sandpiper; common sandpiper; dunlin; sanderling; purple sandpiper; great black-backed gull; herring gull; common gull; Mediterranean gull; black-headed gull; Caspian tern; common tern; little tern; Sandwich tern; stock dove; turtle dove; Eurasian eagle owl; barn owl; tawny owl; long-eared owl; short-eared owl; nightjar; kingfisher; green woodpecker; black woodpecker; great, middle and lesser spotted woodpeckers; wryneck; shore lark; woodlark; crested lark; skylark; sand martin; barn swallow.....the list goes on to include a wide range of songbirds etc.

If you would like to have more details of the trip and a detailed itinerary, please call me on 01292 281 085; or send an e-mail to: da.scott@tiscali.co.uk or write to 4 Hilltop Place, AYR KA7 3PB for a copy. You can also view the whole itinerary online at www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk

The cost of the holiday is £1386.00 and includes all flights from Glasgow; all coach travel in Germany; dinner, bed and breakfast in comfortable three-star hotels for ten nights; all boat trips; all entrance fees to hides and nature centres; local birders and rangers fees and the services of our bird leader Angus Hogg. It also includes a journey on the narrow gauge steam railway 'Rasender Roland' on the island of Rügen.. The weather at this time of the year is usually settled, with long sunny periods and still mild temperatures to at least the third week in October. Rain showers are of course, always possible. Finally, I would like to thank Frau Gabriele Kratzsch of *tour-bu* in Rostock for all her help setting up this exciting trip.



Cranes on Hiddensee



Hiddensee with Rügen beyond Photos: Nationalparkhaus Hiddensee

SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire events

Saturday 17 April 2010

[RSPB bird walks in Rozelle.](#)

Dawn chorus walks at 06.00 and 08.30 hrs.

Meet outside Rozelle House.

Everyone welcome. Leader will be Jim Thomson. Walks last ca. 90 minutes.

Monday 19 April 2010

RSPB at Carnegie Library 19.45 hrs -

AGM followed by a [talk by Jim Thomson](#) 'Bird life in the west of Scotland'.

Saturday 24 April 2010

Joint SOC / RSPB field trip.

[Loch Doon for the high ground dawn](#)

[chorus.](#) Meet at the dam at Loch Doon for 06.00 hrs. Finish around 10.00. Please remember to bring breakfast!

Leader: Jim Thomson.

Saturday 22 May 2010

SOC / RSPB joint field trip to the [Isle of Arran by public transport.](#)

Meet at 09.15 at Ardrossan Ferry Terminal for the 09.45 sailing to Brodick. Then by service bus to Blackwaterfoot (bird walk) and picnic lunch. Bus on to Lochranza (Distillery) for golden eagles and hen harriers (hopefully); time for a meal at the Lochranza Hotel before the bus to Brodick - connects with the 19.40 sailing to Ardrossan. Don't forget your concessionary bus pass if you have one!

Saturday 05 June 2010

[SOC Garden Party](#)

at 8 Dumfries Park, Ayr - Alloway.

From 16.00 to 19.00 hrs. Tickets cost £7

and are available at SOC and RSPB

meetings. The cost includes a superb buffet

by Kevan McCallum and a selection of

wines and soft drinks. Raffles and auctions -

gifts welcome. Courtesy of Margaret and

Tom Morrall.

Saturday 19 June 2010

RSPB / SOC joint field trip by coach to [Wigtown for birds and books.](#)

Tickets £20 - available at RSPB and SOC

meetings or 'phone Tony on 281 085.

Meet at Dodds depot at 08.45 and first stop is

Kirroughtree Forest (bird trail) from 09.15

to 11.00. Wigtown from 11.20 until 14.45.

(Ospreys on live camera and Wigtown Bay

LNR) plus great natural history book shops!

On to Luce Bay and Isle of Whithorn.

Dinner at Portpatrick. Back around 21.30.

Field trip to Scone Estate, Loch of the Lowes and Loch of Kinnordy on 27 March 2010

Following a few days of bad weather, we were lucky to have a dry (if cold) but mainly sunny day for our coach trip (organised by RSPB Central Ayrshire group). 33 people had booked for the outing which left Dodds coach depot in Ayr at 08.00. After a coffee stop at Stirling services, we got to *Scone Estate* by 10.45 for an hour's search for hawfinches. Difficult to see - but five were noted, along with long-tailed tits, mistle thrushes, a treecreeper and other species. We had a welcome introductory chat from the warden at SWT's *Loch of the Lowes* where we were happy to see the 25-year old female osprey back once again on her nest opposite the hides. Goosander, great crested grebe and tufted duck were on the loch, and from the viewing window at the centre - red squirrels, yellowhammers, great-spotted woodpecker and lots of tits and finches. The sun was warm enough for us to sit outside with our picnic lunches. On from here to RSPB's *Loch of Kinnordy* and another intro talk by the warden. Good to have a view of a marsh harrier here, plus a number of whooper swans, shovelers and a pair of gadwall amongst quite a number of other species. The day was rounded off by dinner at the *Bell Tree Inn at Broughty Ferry* where we met up with Mike and Gill Groves. Mike has given us a talk on hen harriers and has been on a number of overseas trips with our members. Time almost ran out (for our coach driver John Cairns) but he still managed to get us back to Ayr at 21.49 hrs, with just eleven minutes left on his tachograph!

Tony Scott



Great spotted woodpecker at Loch of the Lowes



The 'osprey tree' at the SWT reserve

