

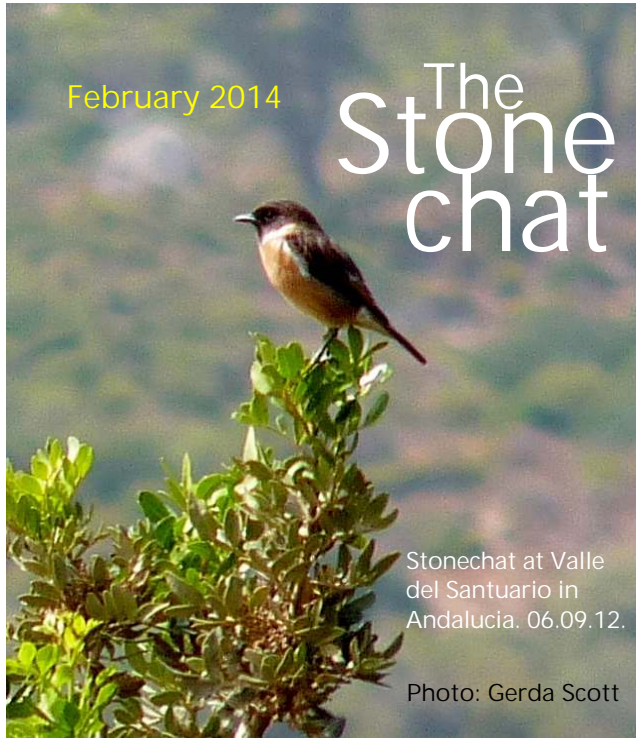


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Scotland's Bird Club Ayrshire Branch

We are always on the look-out for more articles, cartoons and photographs to include in the future editions of [Stonechat](#). Please think about contributing and send any work for publication to me: Tony Scott / Editor, at 4 Hilltop Place, AYR KA7 3PB - or e-mail me at: da.scott@tiscali.co.uk

Sightings to: Ayrshire Bird Recorder Fraser Simpson.
E-mail: recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk
For all local birding info: please go to www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk Thanks go to Kevin Waite for his excellent work in keeping this superb website on the go.



Hello again. Here is the first edition of our newsletter in 2014. We do hope this year will be a good one for you all, with many exciting birding experiences. This edition has the results of the Ayrshire stonechat survey from Angus - thanks to all who took part; Keith Martin has sent in another article on New Zealand - this time focussing on a family trip to find the North Island brown kiwi. From Henry Martin we have an article on blue tits - "Bright birds make good mothers", as well as a wee challenge for you - also from Henry. There is also a report about our excellent raptor migration trip to the Costa del Sol and Costa de la Luz in September last year. We hope you enjoy all of this and of course, the remaining talks lined up for you and the joint field trips with RSPB Central Ayrshire Local group. We can assure you that your committee will do their very best to bring you more top class speakers for the new season starting in September, and of course, an interesting range of destinations for our field trips and longer organised holidays / long weekends wherever they may be. Best wishes - Tony Scott [newsletter editor](#)



Stonechat coastal breeding survey 2013

by Angus Hogg

During spring and summer 2010 an attempt was made to count and record the breeding success of stonechats on the Ayrshire coast. This followed a severe winter, and one of the aims of this survey was to record the rate at which the population could recover from such an event. Earlier records had shown that this recovery rate could be quite rapid, providing favourable conditions existed during the breeding season, and the early 1980s had provided some evidence for this. However, most previous attempts to note the recovery rate of the population were patchy at best, and had no real focus on any specific habitat.

It had been thought that one of the habitats to be most rapidly re-occupied would be coastal scrub. Most of this habitat occurs along low lying dune systems or coastal cliff tops in Ayrshire, with a few areas of estuarine saltmarsh added to the mix. Hawthorn scrub, gorse and even rosa bushes are used for nesting in these areas, with most of the birds' feeding requirements being met in the nearby areas of grasses, saltmarsh and shoreline. With a run of consecutive mild winters, it's possible for many stonechats to remain on their coastal territories throughout the year, although some noticeable migration occurs during spring and autumn, involving young birds and also, probably birds from outwith Ayrshire.

So, in 2013, the Ayrshire coastline, extending landward for up to 1 km, was surveyed by a group of SOC and RSPB volunteers between March and August, with the main aims being to discover the occupation and, if possible, success rates of breeding stonechats. Coverage was almost 100%, with one or two "less suitable" stretches receiving a bit less attention.

After two relatively mild winters, expectations were high, and many Stonechats were soon reported back on traditional territories during February and March. However, our fickle weather played a strong hand once more, with cold, snowy weather setting in during April with many parts of south-west Scotland receiving particularly heavy snowfall. This resulted in breeding failure for many, early nesting species, including our stonechats. Occupied territories were soon deserted and birds simply disappeared, just as observers began their search.

With this unseasonal weather stretching well into May, most of the previously occupied coastal territories were never re-occupied, but some successes were reported from locations where birds had somehow managed to struggle through this difficult period. Occupation and breeding results are shown below (Table 1), with a comparison provided between the 2013 survey and the results of the brief survey carried out in 2010. Occupied territories are referred to by a site name, rather than a 6-figure grid reference – the latter will be used in future work.

Territory name	Month	2010 occupation	2013 occupation/result
Portandea	Feb-Aug	absent	2 mm present - breeding probable
Dove Cove	Feb-Aug	absent	pair B/2 - 2nd brood ongoing
Dykefoot	Feb-Aug	no records	pair present
Ballantrae	Feb-Aug	absent	absent
Bennane Lea	Feb-Aug	absent	2 mm February - pr March - no breeding recorded
Balchreuchan Port	Feb-Aug	absent	pair B/2
Rockhaven	Feb-Aug	absent	absent
Lendalfoot (S)	Feb-Aug	absent	pair February - March - no breeding recorded
Lendalfoot (N)	Feb-Aug	absent	absent
Pinbain	Feb-Aug	no records	pair B/2
Kennedy's Pass	Feb-Aug	absent	absent
Shalloch	Feb-Aug	no records	pr February - no breeding recorded
Girvan Mains	Feb-Aug	absent	absent
Dipple	Feb-Aug	absent	absent
Balkenna	Feb-Aug	pair	f March - no breeding recorded
Milton Burn	Feb-Aug	absent	juvenile in late July - no adults in area
Turnberry GC	Feb-Aug	absent	2 mm February - no breeding recorded
Maidens(S)	Feb-Aug	pair -> absent	absent
Maidens(N)	Feb-Aug	pair -> absent	absent
Culzean-Croy	Feb-Aug	no records	absent
Croy-Dunure	Feb-Aug	no records	absent
Dunure	Feb-Aug	2-3 pairs absent	f March, m June - no breeding records
Heads of Ayr-Fisherton	Feb-Aug	no records	absent
Greenan	Feb-Aug	absent	absent
Doonfoot	Feb-Aug	m in Mar	absent
Ayr-Prestwick	Feb-Aug	no records	absent
Pow Burn	Feb-Aug	2 pairs absent	2 pairs - breeding probable
Troon GC/S Beach	Feb-Aug	no records	absent
Troon-Barassie	Feb-Aug	no records	absent
Barassie-Irvine Harbour	Feb-Aug	4 pairs absent	2-3 pairs - min 2 x B/2
Bogside	Feb-Aug	no records	absent
Ardeer-Stevenston	Feb-Aug	2 pairs	pair B/2
Ardrossan-Portencross	Feb-Aug	3 pairs	pair February, 3 birds March - no breeding recorded
Portencross-Fairlie	Feb-Aug	absent - m in May	absent
Fairlie-Skelmorlie	Feb-Aug	no records	absent

Table 1. Territory occupation and breeding results for Ayrshire coastal stonechats 2013

In total, 36 sites were examined, with between 18 and 20 sites holding territorial birds between January to March at least (no significant change from 2010). 12 territories were occupied by pairs, and seven pairs were recorded successfully fledging young. Not surprisingly, the brood sizes recorded were small, but the improved summer weather meant that observers had a chance to catch up with results at most sites.

In summary, the results of the survey suggested that no improvement in stonechat breeding numbers occurred (since 2010) in coastal habitats during 2013 and that the population remained at a depressed level following the effects of the 2010 winter. However, although the spring weather played a crucial role in the 2013 results, a welcome re-appearance of stonechats to many of their former haunts happened during the autumn and , with the possibility of a mild winter during 2013-14, there may be an improvement this year.

My thanks are due to the many observers who took part in this survey. It would not have been possible to cover such a large area of coastline without your help. I would welcome any records for 2014 so that we can keep an eye on the future of our stonechat population.

Angus Hogg

Those who helped with survey work: F. Alison, J. & B. Anthony, G. Brogan, T. Byars, E. Forrester, A. & A. Gilchrist, R. Hissett, N.J. Lawrie, B. Lennox, H. Martin, G. McAdam, G. Macdonald, J. & S. Montgomerie, D. Rackham, G. S. Riddle, J. Rogers, T. & G. Scott, A. Simpson, C. Smith, J. Thomson, R. Turner, R. G. Vernon and D. Watt with apologies to anyone inadvertently omitted.

Photos - Angus Hogg/Tony Scott



North Island brown kiwi by Keith Martin

Some visitors to New Zealand seek the adrenalin-pumped thrills of a sky-dive or a bungee jump. Some are inspired to relive the landscapes of Peter Jackson's 'Lord of the Rings'. Others simply yearn to experience for themselves a perceived extremity of the world. I have a much more precise desire, in its own way a sort of combination of them all. I want to see a kiwi, in the wild.



What expectations can there be of a new land when you are only five? A break from school, a new house, perhaps an embryonic concept of adventure? Kyla has seen a kiwi in a book, a guide to the birds of New Zealand, where each species is carefully represented by a photograph. She also wants to see a kiwi. And, although her desire may be closer to a longing for an ice-cream, in terms of experiencing a real kiwi, she's currently as advanced as me.

I see my first kiwi in Whangerei, just before lunchtime. Wild kiwi are of course all asleep, but the Whangerei kiwi lives inside a light-controlled building. We're rushed into the kiwi house before payment is even taken because the bird has apparently begun a brief period of activity. Beyond the black drapes of the doorway, my eyes adjust to the pitch of the room. A pale amber glow reveals a bustling bundle of feathers, prodding the artificial forest floor. It's certainly a kiwi, but it's not the one I have in mind. Kyla is enchanted by the Whangerei kiwi in the way very small children are. It's cute, it's funny, but her kiwi moment quickly passes. The kiwi she very much has on her mind is in the shop. It is life size, cuddly and makes a kiwi call when gently squeezed. To me it vividly resembles a North Island brown kiwi, but confusingly sounds like a great spotted kiwi - I have a tendency towards unnecessary complexity. Kyla firmly hugs her kiwi and skips gamely from the store. It seems, seeing a kiwi is a much simpler mission to achieve.

I'm in a white minivan, crunching gears as it climbs a hill in darkness. Ahead lies Trounson State Forest, a remnant of mature kauri, home of the North Island brown kiwi. I once assumed that seeing a wild kiwi was close to impossible, but then I'd never conceived to even try. A bright-eyed possum scambles across the road as an unfathomable shadow of forest looms beyond the fields ahead.

Somewhere, in there, are wild kiwi. I cannot wait. We sit in a picnic shelter at the start point of the trail. Distant cattle bellow, possums rustle, and a morepork calls. Then a tremulous rising whistle, pitched somewhere between a mountain rivulet and a primeval scream. We can hear a wild kiwi singing just across the valley floor.

Kyla lies in bed, clutching, stroking kiwi. For sure, she's already there.

We traipse the narrow path in single file, through tunnels of tree ferns, torchlight to the floor. Our guide gently seeks out kauri cones, cave weta, snails and, by the river, giant eels. His red beam sweeps the undergrowth as we conduct our nocturnal march in an impressively disciplined almost silence. Kyla and kiwi, sleep.

Something rat-like streaks across the track. I am third in line and only catch the briefest of a glimpse. The guide barks for lights out as he probes a narrow gully with his night lamp. And there it is, for now a back-end view.

He loses it for a moment, but then relocates it in the grass. A living, bulging, kiwi is scraping five minutes from my feet. We jostle for position. Some, no doubt like Kyla, quickly have their fill. But I could watch for more minutes than I have, for soon it has scurried out of view. Our silent group now start to murmur, an easing of pressure has enhanced our social unity. Did you get a good view? Perhaps, but it's nothing compared to the next sighting. This kiwi stands obliviously by the boardwalk, pecking, grabbing, gulping, a live worm. Kiwi eat worms - existentially proved.

I was sceptical of Kyla's kiwi. For five years she has never faithfully loved a toy. Once there was a blue cat, but he didn't make the cut for long. However, kiwi is the one, for sure, and has become a constant companion. She sleeps huddled up to kiwi, his chewed, overly-adored beak has become a constant companion. She simply, truly, loves her kiwi. The next day we visit Trounson Forest in the dappled light of morning and, as a family, we walk the trail. Wild kiwi are all hidden, deep in burrows beneath the soft kauri mulch. Along the boardwalk I recognise the location where my kiwi ate his worm. We pause and take a photo of Kyla's kiwi (without worm) on the exact same spot. It's the closest I will need to a souvenir.

Kyla and I, we take our kiwi everywhere.



A wee challenge from Henry

The Gaelic language has close connections with the natural world. For example children may learn their alphabet (18 letters) by reference to the names of plants. The following version is from a poster produced by the Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.



A - Ailm	-	"ay-lim"	elm
B - Beith	-	"bay"	birch
C - Coll	-	"call"	hazel
D - Dair	-	"dahr"	oak
E - Eadha	-	"ehy-ah"	aspen
F - Fearn	-	"feh-arn"	alder
G - Gort	-	"gorsht"	ivy
H - Uath	-	"oo-ah"	hawthorn
I - Iogh	-	"ee-ogg"	yew
L - Luis	-	"looss"	rowan
M - Muin	-	"moon"	vine
N - Nuin	-	"noon"	ash
O - Oir/Onn	-	"ohr/ah-wyn"	gorse
P - Peith bhog	-	"pay voh-k"	downy birch
R - Ruis	-	"roosh"	elder
S - Suil	-	"sool"	willow
T - Teine	-	"chain-yeh"	furze
U - Ur	-	"oor"	heather

My challenge!

Can anyone do likewise for the standard 26 letter alphabet using bird names? [Answers to Tony Scott \(da.scott@tiscali.co.uk\)](mailto:da.scott@tiscali.co.uk) for the next issue of Stonechat. Deadline - 01 August 2014.

Bright birds make good mothers



Female blue tits with brightly coloured crowns are better mothers than duller birds, according to a new study led by the University of York

Unlike humans, birds can see ultra-violet (UV) light. While the crown of a blue tit looks just blue to us, to another bird it has the added dimension of appearing UV-reflectant. The three-year study of blue tits, which also involved researchers from the University of California Davis, USA and the University of Glasgow, showed that mothers with more UV-reflectant crown feathers did not lay more eggs, but did fledge more offspring than duller females. These brightly coloured mothers also experienced relatively lower levels of stress hormones during arduous periods of chick rearing.

The results of the study are published in the journal *Behavioral Ecology*.

[Author Dr. Kathryn Arnold](#), from the University of York's Environment Department, said: "Previous studies have shown that male blue tits prefer mates that exhibit highly UV-reflectant crown feathers. Our work shows that this is a wise choice. UV plumage can signal maternal quality in blue tits, so a male choosing a brightly coloured female will gain a good mother for his chicks and a less stressed partner."

Funded by the Royal Society and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the project was based in woodlands on the shores of Loch Lomond, Scotland and investigated the factors that affect breeding success in wild birds. In blue tits (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) both sexes exhibit bright UV-reflectant crown feathers. The birds are socially monogamous, with the female solely incubating the eggs and both parents feeding the chicks. The researchers looked at the relative UV-reflectance of the crown feathers of female blue tits and related this to indices of reproductive success - lay date, clutch size, and number of chicks fledged - as well as the birds' maternal state. Dr. Arnold said: "With up to 14 chicks to care for, blue tit mothers in our study were feeding their broods every couple of minutes. We showed that dowdy coloured females found this level of hard work twice as stressful compared with brighter mothers. Also, the mothers with more UV-reflectant crowns were highly successful, fledging up to eight more chicks than females with drabber feathers."

Sent in by Henry Martin

Raptor migration in southern Spain

Wednesday 04 to Thursday 12 September 2013



Trip report by Tony Scott
with extracts from Angus Hogg's report

Birding along the Costa del Sol and Costa de la Luz; a wonderful mix of fascinating flypasts by thousands of raptors; wandering through cork oak woods; driving along twisting mountain tracks with beautiful landscapes and many gastronomic delights along the way. Picturesque hill towns and villages and a truly excellent social gathering. All in all a great trip with Angus Hogg leading and all arrangements by Tony & Gerda Scott.

04.09.13. For once, our departure was not at the crack of dawn. 20 of us gathered at Glasgow airport in time for a late-ish lunch at Wetherspoon's "Sandpiper" before joining our easyJet flight to Malaga. Arrival in southern Spain was at 21.05 and we sped through passport control to meet our last remaining member of the party, Keith Martin, who had arrived just ahead of us from Gatwick. We were soon on our coach from Autocares Rusidir of Malaga, coasting along the highway to Torremolinos, Fuengirola, Marbella and finally the Estepona Palace Hotel - our home for the next four nights. "Welcome raptor migration group" announced a notice at the entrance. Registration was quick and we were soon enjoying a glass or two of chilled cava which was also awaiting us along with a few snacks; a nice touch. After examining our comfortable and spacious rooms, we still had time to chill out on the terrace with a relaxing glass or two of a local beverage before turning in for the night. A great way to start the trip!

05.09.13. Next morning, low cloud and mist was drifting around, with the occasional shaft of sunlight breaking through the gloom. Nevertheless, temperatures did rise to 25C later in the day. But first, breakfast at 07.30 and a wide choice of buffet dishes awaited us. We managed to hit the road at 08.45, after meeting our coach driver Pepé. He was a little perturbed that no local (Spanish speaking) guide would join us, so we were very much obliged to Kenneth Smith, our sole Spanish speaker - who oiled the wheels of communication whenever necessary. Pepé was an excellent driver but no doubt wondered where these somewhat strange birding folk were asking him to go. He tackled most things very well and was a credit to his company, Rafael Ramirez of Córdoba. Not always easy to manoeuvre a 55-seat vehicle such as this Irizar-bodied MAN along unpaved roads! Today however, we would be making no such demands, as we would keep to the main road up to Tarifa. We soon glimpsed our first (but misty) view of "The Rock" as we approached (appropriately enough), the town of San Roque. The area is largely an urban-industrial mix, but the houses eventually give way to rough mountain landscapes beyond Algeciras - and it was around here that our avian adventures began.

The low cloud was a blessing. The migration today was huge and something on this scale a complete surprise. Bad weather further north had been holding up proceedings, but now at last, the raptors had been able to carry on their pre-destined and annual journey south.

Climbing out of Algeciras we watched the raptor numbers slowly build and the cloud was keeping them low. A buzz of excitement passed through the coach and we desperately looked for a suitable place to stop our large vehicle. A wide driveway leading to an hotel was an obvious choice. We all poured out of the bus as quickly as we could with binoculars, 'scopes and cameras at the ready! As Angus says in his report: "OK, I'm not easily panicked, but the decision to ask Pepé to pull in at the first opportunity was born out of a rapidly growing feeling that something dramatic was happening. Honey buzzards everywhere, short-toed eagles hunting alongside the road, booted eagles, black kites and marsh harriers heading down towards the coast - numbers of each species could only be roughly estimated. We'd hit the jackpot on our first day! But then, I'm forgetting about the Rüppell's vulture which appeared out of the mist - tailing a griffon!"

After about an hour we moved on towards Tarifa, stopping first at the Mirador del Estrecho, with it's panoramic views down to the Strait. The café was most useful for various reasons, and we could watch the passing birds with a café solo, con leche or cortado in hand! Civilised. On from here to the best stop of all at the Cazella watch point just above Tarifa, where even more raptors were seen in a seemingly never-ending parade. Species we had seen earlier were all seen again, but in addition, there were Egyptian vultures, white and black storks, Montagu's harriers, black vultures, sparrowhawks, one goshawk, common buzzards, Bonelli's eagles, lesser and common kestrels, ospreys and much more! In the first four hours of birding today, we had chalked up more than 5,000 birds in total. Incredibly - from this viewpoint alone - the official count for today stood at over 17,000 raptors passing through.



Egyptian vulture



Above Algeciras

Exhausted but content, we drove down into Tarifa at 14.15 hrs. Pepé parked the coach at the harbour, where large fast ferries were shuttling to and from Tangier. North Africa was in striking distance. However, our thoughts were (mainly) on food. Nine of us chose to dine alfresco at the "Crêperie-Restuarant Santa Fe" on the pedestrianised Paseo Almeda. Angus again: "Lunch at Tarifa was frequently interrupted by remarks such as - 'Look, there are some more short-toes', 'Where are all those HB's coming from?', and 'I could murder another pint!' The movement continued all day, with diversions such as the flock of 300+ white storks, which got up late in the afternoon to test the air. Oh yes, and the swifts - well, pallid swifts - kept us busy too." So Norman got his first gazpacho of the trip here. (A souperman indeed is Norman); but most of us enjoyed the Menu del Dias - a three-course light lunch at only 8,90 Euros. Maybe brochetts de gambas to start; the duo de pescado con salsa la seco was very tasty, and most of us enjoyed a buckwheat crêpe to finish, with either a butter and sugar topping or, more extravagantly, chocolate or strawberry. Cool glasses of Estrella Damm ensured that the required amount of relaxation was achieved. So we then chose a brisk walk along the harbour wall or a saunter through the narrow streets of this Moorish town. We were back at the hotel for 19.00 hrs, in time for the bird list prior to dinner, which possibly was just as well!

06.09.13. The weather today was a little clearer with more sun and 26C. After breakfast we headed straight back to the watch point at Cazella - but things were much quieter now. Still, we did manage another 70 or so honey buzzards, 80 short-toed eagles, 50 or more Egyptian vultures, 15 marsh harriers, 60+ white storks, 50+ booted eagles, 10 kestrels.....and more. At 11.15 we headed off north of Tarifa and inland to the Valle del Santuario. It took a while to find a suitable parking spot along this narrow, tortuous road, but eventually we found somewhere to turn the coach around. We enjoyed a most enjoyable walk (great to move after standing so long in one spot), and slowly climbing uphill through beautiful cork oak woodlands. Angus comments: "Time for some 'small' birds. A great selection of passerines presented themselves, with woodchat shrike, black redstart, common redstart, short-toed treecreeper and a western Orphean warbler all being found. (Plenty of stonechats too!). Butterflies were also abundant - scarce swallowtail being the most spectacular." After a good 90 minutes or so we drove back to the coast, passing Tarifa and Algeciras and on to Palmones with it's wide estuary. The plan was to have lunch during the heat of the day, and Pepé was frantically searching for a parking spot. The first wasn't suitable so we searched again. Unfortunately we somehow got lost in a vast industrial estate and local help had to be sought! Eventually, hungry and thirsty, we tumbled into the rustic but welcoming "La Candela" bar at 15.30! The cool Estrella beers and the delightful food soon made up for the wait. However Gerda and I thought our food had been forgotten, but no. If you order something complicated it does take a while longer! Bob had already finished his pulpo alla gallega (a Galician dish of octopus with olive oil and smoked paprika) by the time our arroz nero arrived. This dish of Spanish rice melded with squid in it's own ink was a pure delight and well worth the wait. Norman was in a quandary - no gazpacho to be found! We suggested salmorejo with chopped egg and ham. The verdict - OK but not as good as the gazpacho. Out on the estuary, 17 Mediterranean gulls were seen amongst the many black-headed gulls, Sandwich terns and whimbrels. A group of 150 or so white storks were circling overhead. We were back at the hotel once again around 18.40. Bird list time, a drink at the bar and dinner. Norman recommended the pumpkin cream soup. He was right - it was excellent.



Jim at Cazella



In the cork-oak woodlands, Valle del Santuario



Gibraltar from Palmones

07.09.13. We managed full sun later today and temperatures climbed another degree to 27. Now we were heading inland from Algeciras to the wild and romantic Parque Natural los Alcornocales. Our first stop was the park centre at Al Ajibe. We received excellent local information from one of the rangers, including the best routes to take for our large coach. Jim soon found a large flock of bee-eaters as well as a few corn buntings in a nearby field with a very shy and difficult to spot brown hare. A few more raptors also flew over, and we enjoyed looking at the displays in the centre and there was even time for a café cortado!

We found the recommended stop and a parking area alongside the vast reservoir of Embalse de Barbate. Over to Angus: "(This) produced some interesting species - masses of glossy ibises, white storks, and little egrets. Up to five ospreys and at least 100 bee-eaters. Driving around this area we encountered over 40 stonechats - maybe this is where all the Ayrshire birds have gone!" It was also good to get our first sightings of hoopoes just beyond the reservoir, before heading around to Alcala de los Gazules where we hoped to stop for lunch. Sadly, Pepé could not find anywhere to park our large coach, so we had to head on into the hills. On and on and on, ever higher and the roads becoming increasingly tortuous. "No problem," said Pepé, but we are certain he was as relieved as we were when a roadside restaurant with lots of parking hove into view. The "Venta Puerto de Galiz" was another delight. Rustic yes, but it was obviously popular with the locals and especially for game dishes. Gerda took advantage of this and ordered partridge (red-legged no doubt), perdiz al salsa, but I stuck to an old favourite, rabo de toro (bull's tail). Choices varied widely, but everyone seemed to be happy, both with their purchases and for the chance to relax a while. Angus says: "Lunch was halted from time to time by people rushing out to see booted eagles or griffon vultures and a couple of two-tailed pasha butterflies. We eventually made our way up to another viewpoint at La Saucedá, where some of the group had added little owl into their notebooks - before discovering the guy with the MP3!" We headed back to Estepona for our bird list and dinner at 20.15. Lots of fish on the menu tonight. Smoked salmon and prawns with caperberries; salt cod with a green mojo sauce; sea perch; sole and also deep-fried fish for those who wanted a touch of the traditional British! The evening was rounded off with some fine Spanish brandy (Torres 10) until just after midnight in the Bar Atlántico with its many large and hugely comfortable couches and views - as the name suggests - out to sea.



White storks



Embalse de Barbate

08.09.13. Today we were moving on from Estepona and heading north to the famous port of Cádiz. We left before nine and would be birding, sightseeing and lunching en-route. The day was wonderfully clear and sunny with temperatures rising to 30C. Once more we headed past Algeciras and Tarifa, then north along the Costa de la Luz, with our first stop at the wetlands of Parque Natural de la Breña y Marismas de Barbate. Angus again: "(Here) we had our first real taste of wading birds. All the usual culprits were present - Kentish plover, dunlin, black-winged stilt andwhite-rumped sandpiper! This last wader was a bit of a surprise, but much appreciated nevertheless." Quite a find for Angus I would say! From here we moved on to the nearby coastal town of Barbate itself, where we stopped at a beach front café (mainly for the toilet facilities) but also the obligatory café solo or cortado. The road rose steeply from here and passed through the Barbate stone pinewoods which seemed to stretch indefinitely. A steep descent into the resort town of Los Caños de Meca, beyond which we searched for a place to park for our walk out to the lighthouse at Cabo de Trafalgar.



Lighthouse & spoonbill recorder / Cabo de Trafalgar Angus & Keith / lunch at "Las Acacias" Stone pine woods / Barbate

Pepe suggested a large car park at a nearby restaurant - "Las Acacias". He spoke to the management who were quite happy about us leaving our vehicle, as we said we would have lunch here later. Over to Angus: " We headed to Cape Trafalgar and walked out to the cape itself where we were to encounter a huge, but distant line of white birds heading south over the sea. Little egrets? spoonbills? flamingoes?? It was almost impossible to be 100% certain on what they were, but we then met a young Spanish girl whose job it was to count migrating.....spoonbills." The walk out and back to the cape was through an extensive dune system and, apart from the splendid views on this glorious day, we learned a little about our own history and that of Spain and France, as this was the location of the famous (infamous?) battle of Trafalgar. Back to "Las Acacias" for a longish lunch at 14.00 hrs. The heat had given us a thirst and this was pretty obvious by the speed at which pints of chilled Mahou beer were pulled for us at the bar! More great local food here - quite a find! Arroz con atún de almadraba was special. Lots of tuna are landed around here, so it seemed appropriate to try this most typical regional dish of tuna with rice and a fresh tomato sauce with plenty of herbs and a touch of garlic and smoked paprika. Delightful! Around 15.45 we headed back to the impressive stone pinewoods of Barbate, atop the gleaming white chalk cliffs which plunged to the azure sea below. "We stopped at the woodlands above the village of Barbate where it was evident that there were a few migrant passerines present. A few pied flycatchers were outnumbered by their spotted cousins, as the almost incessant "proop" of bee-eaters drifted down from the blue skies above." (Angus). This was a delightful place and the decision was taken to return here one morning. On then to Cádiz and our wonderful Parador Hotel Atlantico. Paradors are amongst the most stylish of Spanish hotels - and are all government run. They are either buildings of historic interest, or, as in this case, a fine example of the very best of contemporary Spanish architecture, with rooms, cuisine and service to match. Dinner was a revelation (as was breakfast). Despite the lack of choice, we had impeccable waiter service with the most innovative dishes imaginable. An example: Chilled cream of leek and potato with quail eggs and thinly smoked tuna; Timbale of ox cheek with apple, apricots and potato puree; French toast on pineapple soup with ice cream. Maybe something was lost in translation on the last item!

09.09.13. "Our hotel in Cádiz was well situated next to a park in the old part of the city. However, maybe the 30 or so Monk parakeets therein weren't really what we were looking for. The 9th had us on the road to Bolonia where a walk up a track behind the village may not have got us white-rumped swift, but did provide us with plenty of worthy alternatives. The old "juvenile subalpine or spectacled warbler" debate provided a bit of early entertainment (Western subalpine!), while Bob, whose mighty intake of raw carrots on the previous evening, conjured up a green woodpecker on a tree about ten miles away! Three golden orioles flashed by, a blue rock thrush teased us from a patch of rough ground and a few migrating raptors included up to ten sparrowhawks and another Montagu's harrier." Driving away from Bolonia, our coach climbed to a col which gave panoramic views from the raptor watch point here as well as the nearby café.

We were now about to visit one of the most picturesque hill towns imaginable - Vejer de la Frontera. We had scheduled 150 minutes to make the most of this quaint white town with its many labyrinthine alleyways, squares, and flower-filled balconies. We had also allowed time enough for lunch, where everyone could make their own arrangements. Bob, Gerda and me found a gem of a place (recommended in the Rough Guide), "El Jardin del Califa," renowned for its superb North African cuisine. A good choice for today as there are many Mudej r influences in Vejer. We didn't want to spend a lot of time, so we chose the chef's mezze. This included crispy fried goats cheese; Taratur - a cream of tahini and yoghurt; Tangier spinach with prawns; Sepia in a tagine; and breueats, triangles of warka pastry with spiced mincemeat. Together with a delicious 2011 Ribera del Duero DO Valdecuriel Roble - 100% Tempranillo. Unfortunately, we walked the wrong way when leaving and got totally lost! Most embarrassing as we were holding up proceedings. We then left for our next birding stop at Laguna de los Reales, which was a difficult decision for Pep , as we had to drive a few kilometres along a sandy track - not easy for a large coach. He agreed to try it, but was not happy about staying too long which is understandable. Still, many of the group managed to see what we had come for, white-headed duck, marbled duck and black-necked grebe. Pity it couldn't have been a more relaxed visit. We then headed back to our hotel in C diz for another fine dinner.



10.09.13. "September 10th at the San Fernando Marshes (there's an old Lonnie Donegan song in there I'm sure!) loomed large - very large in fact! Greater flamingoes, spoonbills and a few more waders including curlew sandpiper, grey plover and wood sandpiper were watched from the footpath or seen from the splendid reserve headquarters. This time we had cracking views of a couple of young spectacled warblers, as they worked their way through some saltmarsh vegetation. It was going to be a busy day, and we were soon on our way to Laguna de Medina where those who missed white-headed duck soon settled their account. A single purple swamphen lurked in the reeds and a couple of melodious warblers scolded from the hedgerow. Next stop was Arcos de la Frontera where the "energetic crew" headed swiftly up to the fort where both kestrels and lesser kestrels played around the buildings. Just when you think you have managed to get away from the madding crowd and achieved a modicum of peace in this harsh world, imagine what must have gone through the minds of a couple from Peebles at a local bar, when a bunch of unkempt and vocal Scottish birders plonked themselves opposite! All good fun." (Angus). Others who didn't make it up to the fort but, like Geoff and Jean, Kenneth, Jim, John, Eleanora, Bob, Gerda and me found a most individual and curious cave restaurant called "La Taberna de Boabdil" where owner Francisco and his wife presented us with some amazing little delicacies in the form of a hot and cold meze and most intriguing salad with fried bread.

We were also invited to wander into the caves behind the restaurant, where thousands of wine bottles were stored alongside a vast array of maturing cheeses - quite a find! The afternoon saw us back at the San Fernando Marshes, before returning to our Parador Hotel Atlántico. Today's bird list included (in addition to the species already mentioned today): Great crested grebe, cattle and little egret, grey heron, shoveler, pochard, moorhen, black-winged stilt, Kentish plover, sanderling, little stint, dunlin, redshank, gull-billed tern, Caspian tern, Sandwich tern, Mediterranean gull, Griffon vulture, short-toed eagle, marsh harrier, Montagu's harrier, booted eagle, common and pallid swifts, Alpine swift, bee-eater, hoopoe, red-rumped swallow, northern wheatear, Sardinian warbler and linnet.



Above: San Fernando Marshes, Cádiz. Below: La Taberna de Boabdil, Arcos de la Frontera.



11.09.13. Today, a number of us decided to stay put in Cádiz to discover the wonders of this coastal city and port. Seven of us went our separate ways to seek out our own personal preferences. Gerda and I wandered the narrow streets leading inland from our hotel. This route took us past the Gran Teatro Falla, the amazing Mercado Central - a vast market with an incredible range of exotic fruit and vegetables, and one of the largest fish and meat markets we have ever seen. We also took the open-top bus tour which allowed us to see the highlights in one round trip before alighting at the places which took our interest. Angus's group headed off after breakfast and he writes: " The birding group set off on the 10th for the woods at Barbate in search of passerine migrants. This proved a bit disappointing on the bird front, although a critical navigational error on the part of the leader resulted in a half-hour's "lost in the forest" experience! Never trust an ex-geographer when it comes to directions!! However, Keith had spotted a white-rumped swift near Zahara, so we headed back to the spot where he'd seen it. Some of us managed to catch sight of one whizzing past in company with a pallid swift, but the supporting cast was pretty good too - crag martins, red-rumped swallow and one or two raptors drifting along above the hills including Egyptian vulture and short-toed eagle. A brief lunch stop at La Zarzuela was followed by a walk down to part of La Janda marshes, where we had great views of little ringed plover, ruff and green sandpiper. More glossy ibises wheeled around in the distance, while Morag proved that you can become obsessed with watching distant dots and miss the "bleedin' obvious." Right in front of us, in the drainage canal, was a cracking Squacco heron. An excellent end to an 'interesting' day."

Upcoming events

Evening meetings

11 March 2014 Dr. Chris Wernham - Atlas and results

08 April 2013 AGM followed by Norman Lawrie - New Zealand birds

Field Trips and tours jointly with RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group

Saturday 15 February 2014 DOONFOOT & GREENAN SHORE, AYR

Meet Greenan Castle car park at 10.00. Birding the bay and coastal strip. Finish 12 noon.

Saturday 15 March 2014 CASTLE KENNEDY GARDENS, STRANRAER

Meet Ballantrae seafront car park for 10.30 (toilets), then to Castle Kennedy, where the rest of the day will be spent birding the lochside, park and gardens. Café and toilets. Leave c.15.30.

Saturday 26 April 2014 DUMFRIES HOUSE PARK & GARDENS, CUMNOCK Meet Dumfries

House car park at 10.30. Birding woodland and riverside paths. Café and toilets. Finish c.15.00.

Saturday 24 - Tuesday 27 May 2014 NORTH YORKSHIRE LONG WEEKEND Fully booked

Saturday 21 June 2014 RSPB WOOD OF CREE RESERVE All day trip. Meet 11.00 hrs at the reserve car park. Please bring picnic lunch. Nearest toilets/café at Glen Trool. Finish 16.00 hrs.

Raptor migration trip - conclusion.

12.09.13. Our last day in Spain, and a full one. Leaving Cádiz behind for the last time, we headed south and our first stop beyond Tarifa was at the Mirador del Estrecho. It was a very warm 31C today, but with really strong winds which hampered the raptors. After a brief stop, we doubled back to the Cazella watch point for a good two hours. The large birds, especially the vultures and storks, struggled in the winds and to avoid the multiplicity of wind turbines (a crazy place to site them anyway, right on the regular migratory flyway!). Angus reported a tally of 220+ Egyptian vultures, 80+ honey buzzards, 40 black kites, six black storks and a lesser kestrel. As he says: "Just think: if this had been our first day.....!" Yes, we would have been most impressed. Lunch was planned for 14.30 back at the Estepona Palace Hotel. We also had lots of time to relax in the lounges or out in the gardens before leaving at 18.00 hrs for our flight from Malaga. Here we had to say our goodbyes to Pepé, he had been a good friend and a great driver. The last word goes to Angus: "With so much of what happens on these trips depending on luck, we certainly couldn't complain. After all, we'd witnessed some of western Europe's most spectacular birds of prey. What is not left to luck, however, is the detailed planning that goes into such an adventure. Our thanks are due in no small measure to Tony & Gerda for providing yet another excellent trip for Ayrshire Birders. Thank you everyone for your companionship and good humour - even in a treacherous woodland situation!!"and our sincere thanks to Angus for his excellent leadership skills, as always.

Our group at Tarifa

Tony & Pepe

