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Scotland's Bird Club Ayrshire Branch

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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 2009 is available from Dick Vernon (Tel. no: 01292 442 195) and also from the Sandgate tourist office, Bearing Gifts in Newmarket Street in Ayr and RSPB Lochwinnoch. Great value at only £5!

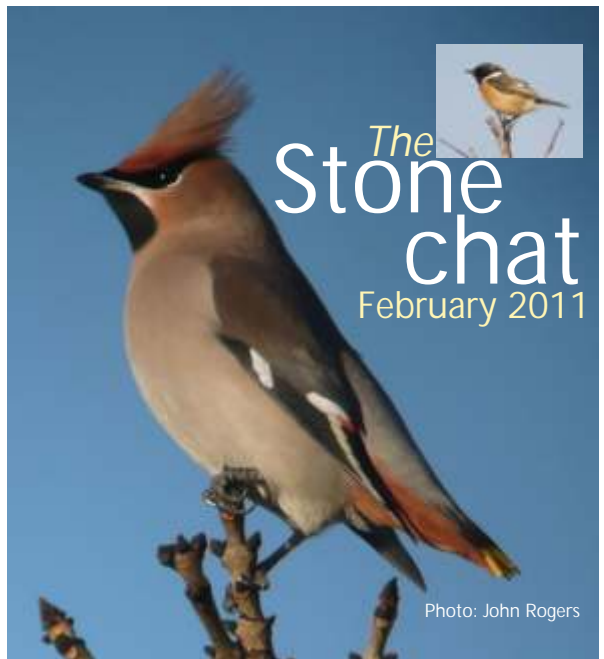


Photo: John Rogers

Welcome to the winter edition of *TheStonechat*. With so many waxwings around this winter, it seemed appropriate to say "roll over stonechat" to our usual cover bird and feature this lovely waxwing taken by John Rogers in December. With all the bramblings and siskins that are around now - and not forgetting just how many skylarks and woodcocks showed themselves during the really cold and frosty weather at the end of 2010 we may well ask "Where are all the stonechats?" Keep a look out for them and please let the editorial team know when and where you find them. We certainly got off to a good start with our indoor meetings this January, with Liz Leyden whisking us off to the warmth of Madagascar. I noted a great atmosphere that night and everyone still appeared to be in a cheery festive mode, even though it was the 11th of January. Keep it up, and we'll get through the year famously. It just goes to show that birds, sunshine, exotic locations and a few cuddly lemurs can do wonders for our feeling of well-being. Thanks Liz!
In this edition we have an article by Gordon Riddle concerning the Ayrshire branch contribution to the SOC's 75th Anniversary; there is the first article in a new series by Angus Hogg entitled - "How to get the best out of Ballantrae" -. A different location will be covered in each edition of *TheStonechat*. I have also written an account of our most successful trip to see the common crane roosts on the island of Rügen on Germany's Baltic coast - and also in the Müritz National Park in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Best wishes, Tony Scott / Editor

Branch Contribution to the 75th Anniversary of the SOC



Gordon Riddle showing some of the pack contents to the children

The Ayrshire Branch has become involved in an exciting initiative to encourage nursery children in East Ayrshire to learn about birds in their local patch. Mike Howes brought the “Robbie the Robin” scheme to the Committee’s attention and it was decided to become a partner in the project with the RSPB and East Ayrshire Curriculum Outdoors. We provided the funding for 34 pairs of binoculars to go in the teaching packs. The packs contain fluffy birds with realistic songs, a bird singalong CD, identification sheets, a garden bird book and crucially, teaching materials targeted to the new curriculum for excellence. The binoculars, which cost £750.00, were paid for from the Birding Projects Fund.

The project was launched at the first teacher training day at St. Joseph’s Academy Outdoor Learning Base at Kilmarnock on 22 November 2010, which Mike Howes and I attended. Motivated teachers took part in the training day run by the RSPB, and it is hoped that its success will be rolled out into other Ayrshire schools. There will also be the opportunity for interested volunteers to visit pre-five establishments and speak to children about the birds, thus introducing a community angle. If the response of the teachers and children was anything to go by then the project has a great future, hopefully starting lots of children on the first rung of the ladder to develop an interest in a recreational pursuit which means so much to many of us.

Our involvement in the project is an appropriate contribution from the Ayrshire Branch for the 75th Anniversary of the SOC - working with another conservation organisation and fostering interest in bird watching at an early age.

Gordon Riddle Chairman

Launch of “Robbie the Robin” teaching packs for pre-fives in East Ayrshire

Mike Howes and Gordon Riddle with RSPB and East Ayrshire representatives at the launch



How to get the best out of.....Ballantrae *No. 1 of a new series by Angus Hogg*

This is the first of what I hope will be a series of articles offering tips on how to get a bit more out of your birding trip to various Ayrshire birdwatching locations. The basics are, of course, covered in the "Birdwatching in Ayrshire" leaflet (published 2003) which is also available online in the Ayrshire Birding website. However, the best thing is: everyone has a "patch" which they work regularly, and you all know the best ways to do this – so here's an opportunity to write about your own birding area and offer advice on the do's and don'ts.



Looking south from Ballantrae towards Downan Hill



Purple sandpipers dodging the waves at Ballantrae

As an example, I've used Ballantrae which is a fairly compact site, but often one which can provide little and prove disappointing. Moreover, it's a long way south for someone living in the north of the county! So, how can you maximise your opportunities?

1. Access. Best viewing spots are at the harbour, from the spit (north of the river) and from the southern bank and spit. Access to the first two is straightforward, but the area on the south side of the river often holds cattle till May and can be very untidy, with lots of farm waste. Once at the river, however, walking and viewing becomes much less demanding.
2. Where and when. The small bay at the harbour can be good for waders, and birds often roost on the seaweed-covered rocks to the north of this. A coastal path will take you closer to them if necessary. April, May, and July - October can be good for species such as ringed plovers, dunlins or sandwich terns on passage. There are also rocks which lie just offshore from the southern end of the harbour wall. These can also be good for roosting waders – in particular, summer-plumaged purple sandpipers in early May, pausing on their way to the Arctic.

The harbour can be a good spot to look out for divers (you really need a telescope for this), either to the north or south, and mainly from March till mid May when all three of the "regular" species can be seen, sometimes in good numbers.

The spit (north of the River Stinchar) plays host to a great variety of breeding and roosting birds, so care is required, especially during the breeding season. Ringed plovers and oystercatchers nest on the shingle, although the nesting terns are very irregular these days, largely due to disturbance. Small pools exist just east of this section of the spit – these can be excellent for passage hirundines in spring and should not be overlooked in late summer/autumn when migrant waders occasionally

use them. It's always worth checking through the birds offshore – large concentrations of auks, shags and gulls can often appear here on what is a fairly rich feeding area.

Getting to the southern part of the spit is a bit more difficult and involves getting back in your car and driving down the A77, taking the first right after the bridge over the river. After a short distance on this minor road, take right at some bungalows, and go (carefully) past Holm Park and Kinniegar farms, before parking (not easy!) and walking down the track to the gate, and turning right at the sign, back towards the river. This latter part of your walk is, as mentioned above, likely to be strewn with farm rubble and debris including odd pieces of wire to trip on! Once you've circumvented the dung pile and got to the river bank, it's worth checking upstream for waders and wildfowl. The walk along the south bank is one you should do slowly since there are a few obstacles for the unwary, and birds on this section tend to spook easily. However, with patience, a spring visit can provide displaying common sandpipers and oystercatchers, the summer months can provide the occasional red-breasted merganser or goosander brood and the autumn is always likely to turn up a scarce migrant e.g. little egret, little ringed plover or wood sandpiper.



Little egret – a rare bird in the River Stinchar



Photos: left / Angus Hogg. Right / Jiri Bohdal

The large grassy area across the river to the north can be 'scoped for waders, but is generally disappointing apart, perhaps, for the occasional spring migrant like grasshopper warbler. If you turn left at the river and walk westwards on to the spit, along the line of a dilapidated fence, you'll get a good view of the lowest point of the river mouth and, by using a telescope, you won't disturb any birds. Arctic and little terns occasionally nest on this part of the spit, so please be aware of the situation, and keep walking near to the shoreline if necessary. Small summering groups of greylag geese gather on the spit as do large flocks of gulls, while waders can be worth looking at, particularly in the autumn. It's not absolutely essential to get the tides right, but one which is flowing and about half-way in can be fairly productive. You can continue southwards from the fence line and complete a circuit which will take you to an old holiday hut, before turning back to the track you came down from the minor road. The enclosed lagoon can often hold shelduck and common sandpipers in summer, while the builders' rubble often holds nesting wheatears. Finally, this can be a good spot in late spring through summer for butterflies such as wall brown and painted lady.

One of the main things to remember about this site is that the river mouth continually changes its shape. At present the Stinchar flows into the sea about midway along the length of the spit – in the early 1970s, it entered at a spot near the holiday hut mentioned above. What can look like a fairly quiet and bird-less site is well worth persevering with – it's more than able to provide the sceptical birder with a reminder of what they'd have seen, had they just spent a wee bit longer there!

The call of the cranes

Ten days on the Island of Rügen and the Müritz National Park in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. October 2010.

Report by Tony Scott

Photographs by John Rogers, Tony & Gerda Scott

We had planned this group holiday for Ayrshire birders and friends back in 2009 and Gerda and I had worked out the route and best places to visit with Angus Hogg. Sadly, because of a suspected medical condition, Angus (and of course Mary) were unable to travel. A big disappointment to all concerned. Nevertheless, the show had to go on - and our group of now twelve participants met at Glasgow airport on Friday 01 October for our flight to Berlin. Before we start to wax lyrical about where we were and what we saw, it is only right and proper that our thanks and appreciation go to Frau Gabriele Kratzsch of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Tourist Association (tour.bu) for the vast amount of work needed to carry out our proposed programme and also for not only booking accommodation, lunches, and our coach, train and boat travels, but also for finding local birders and national park rangers to meet us, show us the most likely roosting and feeding places for the common crane migration and for the many other species we encountered and enjoyed.



Cranes come in to roost at the Rederangsee, Müritz Nationalpark

We arrived at Berlin Schönefeld airport in sunshine in the early evening when temperatures were around 14 centigrade. Our driver, Wolfgang Richter, greeted us with a smile and brought us to our waiting coach from Boy's Reisebegleitung, a small company based in the spa and seaside resort of Binz on the Baltic coast of Rügen. We were staying in a tiny hamlet, Vilmnitz, a few kilometres from the elegant 'white town' of Putbus. Our hotel, the Landhotel Ulmenhof, was a modern, well-appointed property with everything going for it, great food, well furnished and spacious rooms, a wonderful position in leafy surroundings, and logistically ideal for our daily excursions. It was then, most unfortunate that the owner of the hotel had a most idiosyncratic way of conducting her business and interacting with her guests and staff. Let no more be said, we would not let this spoil our enjoyment!

Our first full day on Rügen dawned sunny with a chill wind blowing strongly from the east. However, temperatures rose to 15C as the day wore on. First though, we enjoyed an excellent buffet breakfast with fresh rolls, perfectly boiled eggs, a great selection of fresh fruit, fruit salads, yoghurt, cheeses, cold meats, fruit juices, teas and coffees. We were well set up for the day ahead as Wolfgang collected us at 09.00 hrs as arranged. We drove to the centre of the island and its main town of Bergen, then on to the picturesque village of Schaprode with its low, thatched roofed buildings which led down to the harbour. We boarded our very smart-looking modern motor ship MS "Insel Hiddensee" which took us across to the island of the same name and the 'capital' of this small island, Vitte. Before leaving the harbour of Schaprode, we saw large numbers of wigeon, tufted duck, greylags, cormorants and, as we pulled away from the harbour - our first sighting of common cranes, 300 or so of them, feeding on the grassy shores of the Bodden (brackish bodies of water similar to estuaries, occurring along the southern shores of the Baltic).

The island of Hiddensee has a population of 1300 and is known as the 'Pearl of the Baltic'. It lies to the west of Rügen and the island is 18 kilometres long but only 300 metres wide at its most narrow point. It is virtually car free and is well known for its protected natural landscape, flora and fauna. The thatched buildings give a homely feeling to "Dat söte Länneken" (The sweet little land) - a name the locals give to Hiddensee. The soft hills of the north rise to just 70 metres above sea level - but the chalk cliffs here still manage to impress. The landscape is given character by the many stands of sea buckthorn, elderberry, brambles and broom. There are large areas of sheltered reeds and marshes - ideal habitat for waders and for common cranes, too, of course. En-route across the windy waters, we encountered grey herons, mute swans (lots of these everywhere!), mallard, common pochard, red-crested merganser, black-headed gulls, yellow-legged gulls, great black-backed gulls, two Caspian terns, one sandwich tern, and overhead - common buzzard. On arrival in Vitte, we made our way from the harbour to the Vorpommersche-Bodden National Park Centre to find out what was about. On the way, we had enjoyed all the barn swallows, more greylags, two pink-footed geese (as well as Canada geese, naturally), lapwings, curlew, house martins, white wagtails, willow warbler and linnets. We walked on along a raised bund, which gave us fine views to each side of the island, with the open sea to the west of us, and the shallow waters of the Bodden to the east. On the shoreline we had great views of red knot, turnstone, dunlin and common redshank. In the areas of scrub, sea buckthorn and wild roses, we saw six northern wheatears, one whinchat, meadow pipits, and in the saltmarshes to the east, 10 greater white-fronted geese, one bean goose, a hundred or so barnacle geese, plus more greylags and Canada geese. After such a good start we were now ready for lunch at the little village of Kloster, a popular resort in summer. One of the specialities on Hiddensee are products made from sea buckthorn (Sanddorn in German), so Sanddornkuchen is a popular cake here, but even better, Sanddornrogg, a hot drink made with lots of rum - is highly recommended. Fish, of course, as you would expect, is a dish of first choice all around the Baltic coast and islands, so both of these specialities were enjoyed today - the smoked and cured fish washed down with some great local beer and coffee with the cakes, of course. From Kloster, our transport of delight was one of the island's famous horse drawn wagons, which took us all the way

down to the south of Hiddensee at Neuendorf, from where we returned by ship to Rügen and our hotel.



Sunday the 3rd of October and a sunny start - still windy and then light cloud and 14C. Good bracing weather for a short sea crossing from nearby Lauterbach harbour, and we were collected today by Udo, 'ein echter Rügäner' in his own words - a true Rügen Islander! Udo was to be with us for the next three days and he even showed us his home village on one of the days. This morning we left Lauterbach at 10.00 on board the diminutive MS "Julchen" for the short crossing to the island of Vilm. The island was declared a nature reserve in 1936 and since October 1990, has been part of the BIOSPHERE RESERVE OF SOUTH-EAST RÜGEN. It is 2.5 km in length and around 94 hectares in overall size. Its highest point is merely 37.8 metres above sea level. The island is mainly wooded and the beech woods of the north end (Der Große Vilm) are some of the oldest and important natural woodlands in north-eastern Germany. Birdlife is rich, with all five species of woodpecker present and they use the many holes and hollow trees to nest and roost. They have some quite odd neighbours too, as the red-breasted mergansers also use the hollow trees as roosts. The steep (but not high) coastal areas offer nesting opportunities to sand martins and shelducks. We spent most of our two hours on the west side of the island, as such a strong wind was blowing from the east. Our avian highlights included shelduck, goldeneye, goosander, black woodpecker was heard, wrens were seen, as well as song thrush and over 20 goldcrest. More exciting though was a sighting of firecrest, two were seen in fact. We also enjoyed nuthatch, Eurasian treecreeper, spotted flycatcher and reed bunting. A number of great crested grebes were noted off the west shore with large numbers of wigeon, mute swans and herring gulls to the east. We were back in Lauterbach for 13.00 hrs and time for some lovely fresh or smoked fish rolls and a beer from the 'Räucherschiff Berta' one of a few fish boats and fish stalls down at the harbour.



Ian on board MS "Julchen"



The west coast of the island of Vilm



Lunch at "Räucherschiff Berta"

After lunch we drove to nearby Putbus railway station to take the narrow-gauge steam train "Rasender Roland" to the resort of Göhren. During this 90-minute nostalgic journey we saw huge finch flocks, with linnets, goldfinches, greenfinches, chaffinches and yellowhammers billowing alongside us like the clouds of fragrant white steam being emitted from our mighty tank engine! On arrival at Göhren, we walked along the shore for mew gulls, yellow-legged, herring and black-headed gulls. Then into the woodland where jays, Eurasian treecreepers, blue, coal and great tits, and more goldcrests were seen. We returned to our hotel in Vilmnitz for dinner at 19.30 hrs - and a choice of a fine fish (Rotbarsch) in an almond crust and a mustard sauce Hollandaise - or a Jäger-schnitzel - pork schnitzel with a spicy mushroom and cream sauce. Nice wines from Baden and local beers too. A really great day rounded off with a most pleasant and convivial evening.



Monday the 4th of October and another clear, sunny day. We met Kirsten Wiktor, a local all-round naturalist at the Lidl car park in Bergen. She was leading us today and we were first of all heading down to a shallow lake called Nonnensee near Bergen. Here we met an old friend of hers called Joachim Kleinke, and he had been involved with nature conservation in this area before, during and after the DDR communist days. He was responsible for restoring the lake we were visiting, and helping to manage it both as a place for birds and other wildlife and for people. He has been hugely successful. We spent a good 90 minutes here and enjoyed some wonderful sightings. Top sighting was a white-tailed eagle which appeared on cue. Joachim was telling us that around 11.15 each day - it usually appeared and did a fly-past. It obliged, and not only did it fly past - it did a complete circle of the lake passing close overhead. Brilliant views were had! We also saw eight great crested grebes, gadwall, shoveler, teal, common pochard, tufted duck, goldeneye, coot, barn swallows, chiffchaff and more. Leaving the Bergen area, we drove down to the Kleine and Grosse Jasmunder Bodden and in an area of meadow, found a group of 250 or so common cranes feeding happily, until a cyclist drove past and sent them up in the air. A nearby field held a large number of white-fronted geese, as well as greylags. We were booked in for lunch at the nearby Gaststätte am Jasmunder Bodden, a very friendly place in a village called Polchow and run by family Lemke. Fish was the speciality again here and we enjoyed some beautiful fresh halibut. A treat! The afternoon found us successfully searching for more cranes (over 300 again), initially in the fields around Polchow, and we also found large finch flocks.



Joachim.....



Kirsten.....



and the white-tailed eagle

As evening approached, we moved from the higher areas above Polkvitz and Kampe (more cranes here again) down to the Bodden and the waters edge near Schloss Spyker. Kirsten took us to an official viewing area to see the masses of cranes coming in to roost at dusk. Around 2,000 arrived and settled beyond the reeds, which meant the folk who had the best view were those on board a crane watching trip on the main area of water on the Bodden. It was still a truly spectacular sight though, and we were to have more - and even better - sightings. It was soon time to say goodbye to Kirsten and head back to Vilminitz and our hotel for a later dinner, around 20.30 hrs.



Nonnensee



Cranes near Polchow



and even more in the afternoon

Tuesday the 5th of October. Udo collected us at 09.00 today, and we headed for the most south-easterly parts of the island at the MÖNCHGUT PENINSULA, and the villages of LOBBE, THIESSOW, KLEIN ZICKER and GROSS ZICKER. A day of easy walks and meanders through this most lovely area of coast, meadow, inlets and reeds. The ZICKERSCHEN HILLS are full of wild flowers in spring and summer - and now, the autumn colours invited us to tread the grassy paths with their panoramic views across this beautiful part of Rügen. The neat whitewashed cottages of Klein and Gross Zicker are mainly thatched and their gardens attract many birds - as do the woodlands beyond. First though, we drove into a field (!!!) above Neu Reddevitz and the bay of Stresow. At this high vantage point we could look out across the water and see the Island of Vilm in the distance, and to the east - the Mönchgut Peninsula, and farther around to the west, the imposing structure of Schloss Granitz on one of the highest points of the island. Across these open fields, we saw flocks of twite, linnets, chaffinches, greenfinch, redwing, and mistle thrushes. Later, we drove down to Gross Stresow, Udo's birthplace around 65 years ago, where he was pleased to point out his beautiful, thatched family house on the shore. On from here through Middelhagen, Lobbe, and out to the village of Klein Zicker, where we had a walk to the harbour and across the scenic headland. We found a great egret in the reeds on the Zickersee, a salt-water inlet where fishing boats are hauled up. Beyond here, through the meadows and up to the highest point of the headland, we had great sightings of large flocks of goldcrests, so hungry they allowed us to get very close to them. A feeding frenzy was in progress. One lesser whitethroat was heard and seen, blackcap too, house martins, barn swallows, and out on the water, lots of wigeon and many, many mute swans. Great crested grebes were also present and a fallow deer ignored us totally as we walked past just a few metres away. Along this coast in summer, thousands of sand martins nest below the cliffs, but of course there were only their empty residences to view today. In the village we had, as in most urban areas, black redstarts, but there were more goldcrests, as well as serins and goldfinches. It was soon time to drive back to Lobbe, where lunch was booked in a favourite fish restaurant of ours, Gasthaus zum Walfisch. Pike, flounder, zander (a favourite of Jamie Oliver), fresh herring and much more were enjoyed this lunchtime, washed down with a Rostocker beer or a glass of fragrant Grauer Burgunder wine from the sunny southern Land of Baden.



Above the Stresower Bucht



Klein Zicker headland



Goldcrest at Klein Zicker

After lunch we were all given a glass of the local Sanddorn liqueur (sea buckthorn), and could not resist buying some more at a stall in the village of Lobbe, where they also had Sanddorn juice, jam and even a schnapps made from this local wild fruit. The remaining part of the day was spent in the extensive town park of Putbus, with its remarkable white buildings. The park has some wonderful, huge mature trees, and these are home to great spotted woodpeckers, treecreepers, both short-toed and Eurasian, jays, magpies, ravens, great, blue and coal tits (we had willow tits near our hotel in Vilmnitz some mornings), siskins, serins and blackbirds. After a short walk around the town and a visit to the post office, we were back at our hotel a little earlier tonight for a well-earned rest before dinner (the pork fillet in a fig and mustard crust was very good indeed).

Wednesday the 6th of October and a long day of cranes, buzzards, white-tailed eagles, red kites and golden plovers, all over on the mainland and coast around the Darss-Zingst peninsula. Driving back over the new bridge from Rügen to the town of STRALSUND and beyond, we headed first for Prohn and the village of GROSS-MOHRDORF where the Crane Information Centre is located (arriving at 11.30). We were given a talk and short film about cranes, before meeting Ranger Ann who took us out to the GÜNZERSEE crane watch-point, one of the feeding areas for cranes. This proved to be a wonderful spot, with a viewing tower overlooking the meadows and the lake and wet meadows, where around 1200 or so cranes were gathered. This area was also amazing for the vast numbers of buzzards and red kites. This afternoon between here and the coast, we counted over 50 common buzzards, eight red kites, four white-tailed eagles, three kestrels, ringed plovers, over 300 lapwings in the fields beyond the cranes, 400+ golden plovers, three white-fronted geese, 200 or so barnacle geese and more greylags.

We had a late lunch around 15.00 hrs down at the harbour of ZINGST, where we would join the MS 'Schaprode', a vessel of the WEISSE FLOTTE for a special 'Crane Cruise' which allowed us to get up close to the crane flocks with the minimum of disturbance. We reached the first roost within around 100 minutes of departure. For those who wished, there was an opportunity to see a slide presentation by Herr Karsten Peter from the Groß Mohrdorfer crane centre on the lives and breeding habits of common cranes. Needless to say, most of us stayed out on deck to view the thousands (yes, 6,000+) mute swans, great crested grebes, little grebe, hundreds of wigeon, common snipe, mew, yellow-legged, lesser and greater black-backed gulls, black-headed and herring gulls, common terns, and two Caspian terns. We were fortified with glasses of beer and wine, until we reached PRAMORT, where the spectacle of roosting cranes began. Eventually (we were told) there were between 17,000 and 18,000 cranes at the roost. Data came in via mobile 'phone from rangers and others at watchpoints around the peninsula. This was indeed a spectacle of mammoth proportions and one of nature's big wildlife events. We were privileged to witness it. Dinner was served on board ship during the return leg of the journey, and we arrived back in ZINGST at around 20.30 hrs. Our coach awaited us for the journey back to our hotel via Barth and Stralsund. Quite a day to remember.



Ranger Ann



and birders at Günzersee



and the feeding cranes



Caspian tern from MS "Schaprode"



Roosting cranes at Pramort



Tony, John and Robin enjoy a beer

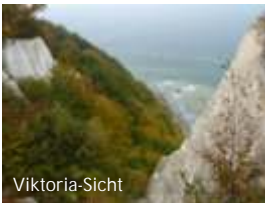
Thursday the 7th of October dawned overcast following a night of high winds, which had started to abate by the time we departed Vilmnitz a little later at 10.00. We had time to wander through the village and visit the leafy churchyard, which was home to nuthatches, great spotted woodpeckers, black redstarts, tits, robins, blackbirds, jackdaws, short-toed treecreepers, goldcrest, greenfinch, chaffinch, fieldfare and white wagtail. Wolfgang was our driver once again from today onwards and we headed north towards Sassnitz and Jasmund National Park. On the way, I had a 'phone call from Gabriele Kratzsch to say our cruise on board MS "Cap Arkona" had been cancelled due to high winds. We were booked to leave the port of Sassnitz at 10.45 for a sail along the chalk-cliff coast of the Jasmund National Park. Other options, such as heading for the most northerly tip of the island at Kap Arkona were suggested, but I had a sneaking feeling that another vessel may well be brave enough to venture out today, so we made straight for Sassnitz as planned. On arrival, as half-expected, we found the booking office of Brauns Seetouristik open for business and the MS "Alexander" - already out on a cruise and would sail again at 11.15. The booking was made and Frau Kratzsch contacted by mobile 'phone. She confirmed that the cost would be re-imbursed and wished us luck! Our little ship soon arrived and was playing a once popular tune over the loudspeakers - "Sail Away" by Hans Hartz, this was made popular as the theme for Beck's Bier TV publicity. A good crowd was waiting to board and off we went onto this roller-coaster ride on the open Baltic Sea. Hanging on to the railing, it was not easy to focus on any seabirds which may have been about. There were not many, but Robin managed a great skua and the usual great black-backed gulls, herring gulls and black-headed gulls were more or less the only ones to be apart from a wind-blown white wagtail and a hooded crow perched on one of our masts. We returned safely to the harbour at Sassnitz, where we had time for some smoked fish with rolls and a beer from one of the popular harbour fish boats.



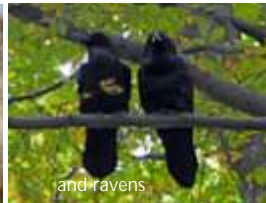
Cruise from Sassnitz



Jasmund National Park centre



Viktoria-Sicht



and ravens



After lunch we drove on to the superb interpretation centre of JASMUND National Park - where, using modern technology, the wildlife of the park was brought to us in a truly stunning format. We then embarked on a bird walk through the woodland to various viewpoints out across the Baltic from the impressive chalk cliffs at Viktoria-Sicht and Königstuhl. The park is famous for the number of ravens which breed here. Crested tits inhabit the woodlands too and the unmistakable calls of the nuthatches could be heard echoing through the woods. Mention must also be made of the painter Caspar David Friedrich (born 1774 in Greifswald), his evocative paintings of the chalk cliffs, the woods and seascapes in all the wonderful light conditions are legendary. Another good day!

Friday the 8th of October and today we left the island of Rügen for the mainland and then heading south to the Müritz National Park and the town of Waren for three nights. We arrived at the friendly little Hotel Ingeborg for 11.30 and amazingly, our rooms were ready for occupation. We noticed quite a different attitude in the 'can-do' approach of the owners and staff who exuded a warm and pleasant atmosphere from the moment we set foot in the place. We were very happy here. At 14.00 hrs we were to meet Hans-Jürgen Jessel of the Müritz Nationalpark ranger service, but before this we had a look at the nearby harbour and found quite a number of pleasant cafes and restaurants for lunch. We returned to meet Herr Jessel who walked us over past the harbour once again to the bus terminus. (Buses are not allowed to pass through the harbour area during the day). Our friendly hotel owner offered to drive Charlie and Anne over to the bus, which was most appreciated. We had a full-size 50 seater service bus at our disposal, and after a brief tour of the town, headed out into the national park area in search of cranes and other species. We saw three red kites, two rough-legged buzzards, around 20 jays, 12 ravens, tree sparrows, one white-tailed eagle, flights of bean geese, lapwings and of course, cranes. Hans-Jürgen told us that huge numbers of jays move across from Russia in the winter, as well as vast numbers of coot. We were to witness these numbers on a Sunday cruise. The whole national park area has over 100 notable lakes and many more rivers, streams and ponds. The region to the south of Waren has a wonderful landscape of wooded wilderness where ospreys, white-tailed eagles and common cranes abound. In addition of course, a wide variety and numbers of waterfowl and other birds.



The town of Waren in a wonderful lakeland setting



Our own service bus!



The harbour of Waren



Hans-Jürgen Jessel



Hotel Ingeborg

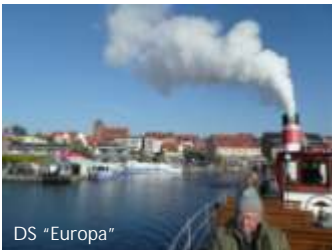
We returned to Waren and our hotel at around 18.00 hrs. As the 'Ingeborg' is an hotel garni, we were booked into town centre restaurants for our evening dinner for the next three nights. Tonight and Sunday night we enjoyed the friendly attention of Stefano Stanzani and his team at the small, welcoming Italian restaurant "Carpe Diem" in the cobbled and narrow Kirchenstrasse. His food was excellent and we rounded off our long day with garlic cream soup, home-made ravioli with wild mushrooms (ceps), rosé veal fillet in a gorgonzola sauce, or maybe fritto misto pesce - a selection of deep-fried seafood with tomato rice. Needless to say, there were some sumptuous desserts as well, not to mention the Italian wines, coffees and grappa! Cheers! Zum Wohl!

Saturday the 9th of October in Waren (Müritz), and a lovely sunny day with temperatures up to 15 centigrade. After a delightful buffet in the bright and welcoming breakfast room of the Hotel Ingeborg, we met Hans-Jürgen once again at the bus terminus for a day's birding in the Müritz Nationalpark. Our first place of call was only a short drive from Waren, deep in the woodlands to the south of the town. A walk of 30 minutes or so brought us to the hide at WARNKER SEE, a small lake surrounded by reed and mainly deciduous trees. A vast number of ducks were on the water, but unfortunately at the far side of the lake and, to make things just a little more difficult, the sun was against us. Nevertheless we did manage to see gadwall and red-crested pochard, as well as great crested grebe, Eurasian wigeon, over 200 common pochard, scaup, tufted duck, three white-tailed eagles (at the lake and walking to and from), two red kites and coot. In the woodland nearby we heard black woodpecker, saw four great spotted woodpeckers, eight goldcrest, two firecrest, six crested tits, six long-tailed tits, and numerous, blue, coal and great tits. We then drove on to the national park centre at FEDEROW, where we first had lunch at a great little café called "Die Bunte Kuh" (the colourful cow) where they made a wonderful, thick pea soup with Rote Wurst. After lunch we had a talk by Hans-Jürgen over in the centre, and saw footage of film taken this year of the ospreys and their nests around the national park. In the afternoon through the forests to the villages of SPECK and BOEK. At the latter, we viewed the old fish ponds from one of two hides. We had good views of two more white-tailed eagles from here, as well as three red kites, more coot, mallard, grey heron, cormorant, little egret, wood pigeon, one great grey shrike, jay, and raven. We returned to Waren for 17.30 hrs. This evening we would have dinner in a local restaurant, appropriately named "Alt Waren" and serving regional dishes. After dinner we met Gabriele Kratzsch and her husband, as well as her sister and husband who live in Waren (Gabriele lives in Rostock to the north, and had made this journey especially to meet us). We had a most convivial evening at the bar-café near the lake - the "Alte Tankstelle." (Old Garage).



Looking at crested tits and firecrests in the woods near Warnker See

Sunday the 10th of October, and an even brighter and sunnier day than yesterday - not a cloud on the horizon (but a bitterly cold wind - even at 14 centigrade!). We boarded the steamship "Europa" in Waren Harbour at 09.30. for a cruise across three of the nearby lakes. Our Kapitän knew where to find the birds, but if only he'd have kept his awful jokes to himself!! At least he didn't sing, as did the erstwhile captain of the famous motor vessel "Gay Queen" which cruised from Rothersey to the Kyles of Bute in days gone by. We had wonderful views of white-tailed eagle, and also a juvenile osprey. As we entered the Elde-Reekkanal, our captain told us this was the place he usually got kingfisher. No sooner had he spoken, when the electric-blue bird shot across our bows and, after a double fly-past, disappeared into the reeds! Later, off the village of Klink, we were amazed at the number of common coots we saw - rafts of around 3,000 in total! All these birds had recently arrived from eastern Europe. There were good numbers of greylag geese and mute swans on the water - and more flocks of common cranes noisily passing overhead to their feeding grounds beyond Waren, where we also returned for lunch before setting out later in the day for the National Park centre at Federow. When we arrived there, Hans-Jürgen awaited us once again and at 16.30, we set off to walk to the hide at REEDERANGSEE to await the evening arrival of the cranes. Some were already there, but over the following two hours, we enjoyed a constantly changing scene, ending in a dramatic sunset with clouds of cranes flying overhead to drop amongst the reeds which fringe the lake. We also had good views of great egrets, plus one whooper swan - our only sighting this trip. We also saw grey heron, mute swans, three white-tailed eagles obliged, one red kite, mallard, coot, collared doves, wood pigeons, and more. A number of deer and young stags were visible drinking from the lake as well. This magical evening more or less rounded off our holiday, but we still had dinner to look forward to at the Italian restaurant, "Carpe Diem" later this evening in Waren, and a few good sightings on the way back to the airport in Berlin tomorrow afternoon.



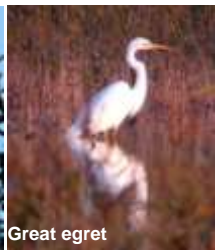
DS "Europa"



Unser Kapitän



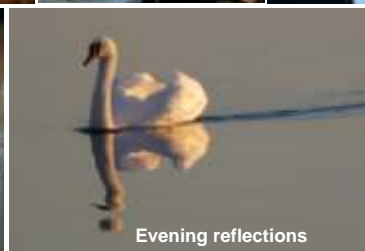
Osprey



Great egret



Cranes roost at Rederangsee



Evening reflections



Monday the 11th of October, and a change in the weather - grey, cold and misty. We had time to acquaint ourselves with the town of Waren this morning and to have a coffee and a snack before we were collected by our coach at 12 noon. On our way to the airport we saw huge flocks of starlings, the sort of massive clouds we hardly see at home any more; fields full of common cranes; large flocks of lapwings and another juvenile osprey. We arrived at the airport to check in for our 17.35 hrs flight to Glasgow. It was on time and we arrived safely after a truly wonderful holiday with all the common cranes we would ever wish to see - and much more besides!

Ayrshire Bird Report 2009

The new edition of the Ayrshire Bird Report is now available, at 120 pages it's bigger and better than ever! Angus has provided his usual chronological survey of the year plus an article 'Kilkerran re-visited- what's happening to our summer visitors.' There are reports on kestrels and sparrowhawks by Gordon Riddle and Ian Todd respectively and descriptions of recent rarities by Bruce Kerr. As promised last year, Fraser has produced a combined report for butterflies covering both 2008 and 2009.

One important change, after many years at £4, we have decided to increase the price to £5 (£6 by post to cover p&p). So now it's on to the 2010 edition! When sending sightings for either birds or butterflies it really helps Fraser if the information is sent as an Excel file, using the headings: Species*; Date*; Count*; Location*; Notes; Observer*; Grid Reference; E-mail (headings marked with * are essential, others are optional). If you don't have access to Excel, just contact Fraser (recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk) and he can direct you to a website that provides an equivalent framework which you can use to send records. Of course if you don't use a computer then written records are perfectly acceptable. Bird recorders are all given Bird Track records for their area (SOC and BTO are collaborating on bird recording in Scotland), so this is another way of passing on sightings to Fraser. The important thing is to send him your records!

Copies of the Report can be obtained from: 'Bearing Gifts' in Ayr and Troon; RSPB Centre, Lochwinnoch; and possibly Visit Scotland, Sandgate, Ayr (still being negotiated). Copies can also be obtained at meetings of the SOC Ayrshire branch and RSPB Central Ayrshire Group, and from Dick Vernon (01292 442195)

49 white-tailed eagles hunt off Hiddensee

from Ralph Sommer

[Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany](#)



Hiddensee, 21st January 2011. The ice is broken. A stiff north wind pushes out the ice floes from the entrance to Schaprode harbour. The ferry boat, MS "Vitte" thunders through the desert of ice on way to the island of Hiddensee. On board, biologist Silke Steiner looks through her binoculars and focusses on her quarry. Majestically, a full-grown white-tailed eagle lifts off the ice and soars low over the ferry. The shipping company has just learned about the influx of eagles and has contacted Frau Steiner to ask if she would come aboard to interpret the amazing natural spectacle which has unfolded over the past few days. The company operates a number of wildlife trips throughout the year, and is used to making snap marketing decisions such as this. It pays off, as lots of passengers come aboard just to get close up views of these beautiful white-tailed eagles. The National Park district manager, Frank Mastitz agrees that the sighting of 49 eagles is a record for the island and for the park. Following the long period of extreme frost and ice, the eagles had arrived from the eastern European mainland to seek out more food, as countless seabirds have died in these Arctic conditions farther north over the past month or so.

SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire field trips

Saturday 19 February 2011 [Greenan Shore and Doonfoot](#)

Meet at 10.00 hrs at Greenan Castle car park. Trip finishes at 12.00 noon.

Saturday 26 March 2011 [Threave Wildfowl Refuge and Bellymackhill red kite feeding station](#)

Meet at Castle Douglas main car park (toilets here) at 10.30. Please bring picnic lunch, all day trip. Entry charge at the red kite feeding station (currently £3.00).

Saturday/ Sunday 16/17 April 2011 [Weekend trip to RSPB Leighton Moss Reserve and Morecambe Bay by coach](#). Meet at Dodds coach depot, East Road, Ayr at 07.15 hrs. At Leighton Moss for lunch (café here) until 18.00 hrs. Overnight in a nearby hotel. Sunday visit to WWT's Martin Mere Reserve. [Cost - including coach, bed and breakfast - around £87.00](#) depending on numbers. Booking now - please 'phone Tony Scott on 01292 281 085. We hope to get 20 participants. *Six places left.*

Saturday 23 April 2011 [Early morning birdwatch at Glen Afton](#)

Meet at the Burns Memorial just outside New Cumnock on the Glen Afton road - at 07.00 hrs. Don't forget to bring breakfast! We intend to finish around 11.00 hrs.

Saturday 21 May 2011 [RSPB Wood of Cree Reserve](#)

Meet at the reserve car park at 11.00. All day trip, so please bring a picnic lunch. Finish ca.16.00.

Saturday 18 June 2011 [RSPB Mull of Galloway Reserve](#)

Meet at Ardwell Bay picnic area (toilets) at 11.00. All day trip, picnic lunch advisable, or try the lovely café at the Mull. Finish at around 16.00 hrs.

SOC Ayrshire evening meetings

Tuesdays at Monkton Community Church Hall 19.30 hrs. Doors open 19.00.

08 February 2011

[BTO's Mandy Cook](#)

BTO Nest Record Scheme

08 March 2011

[RSPB's Anne McCall](#). Futurescape

12 April 2011

[AGM followed by Russell Nisbet](#)

How Good is Your Bird ID?



Field trip to Wigtown and Portpatrick - June 2010