



Scottish
Ornithologists' Club
Waterston House
Aberlady, East Lothian
EH32 0PY
Tel: 01875 871 330
www.the-soc.org.uk
Charity no: SC009859

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: dascott4@outlook.com

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 and welcome to our new autumn edition of 'Stonechat'. We have a great selection of talks and field trips for you this season, including a winter weekend to SWT Montrose Basin, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, Ythan Estuary, Loch of Kinnordy, and RSPB Loch Leven by coach from Ayr (16 - 18 November 2018). Articles include 'Random musings from the Chair' (Pat Gibbs); 'How long is your list' (Dick Vernon); Migrating birds and their integrated GPS (Brian Lennox); 'How are birds faring in Ayrshire' (An appeal from Ben Darvill of BTO); My own report on last November's winter weekend in Lancashire; plus all the dates of indoor meetings and field trips; Contributions from Eleanora Forrester and a number of relevant (hopefully) newspaper articles. We hope you have enjoyed the (relatively) long, hot summer and we look forward to interesting talks and trips over the winter months. Good birding and we hope you enjoy this newsletter.
Tony Scott newsletter editor

Random musings from the Chair



Pat Gibbs

I have found that the astonishing prolonged warm weather we have experienced this summer has, without doubt, been conducive to more 'pondering' than usual. With evening temperatures approaching 30 degrees it has been a real temptation just to sit outside and let random thoughts come and go. As a fellow allotment holder said in passing – 'sometimes I sits and thinks and other times I just sits' – how right he was.

One re-occurring thought I have experienced this summer is what contrasting emotions our relationship with birds can bring us. It is almost a love hate thing.

The pure joy of observing, whilst out sailing, large groups of shearwaters glide skimming within wave troughs or the occasional petrel 'tap dancing' a wave crest.

In Edinburgh we love to watch swifts swooping and screaming almost down to ground level as they chase insects between the old tenements. What a remarkable short term visitor the swift is, feeding, sleeping and mating on the wing only resting when egg laying and whilst feeding young. It should be noted that Edinburgh has a very active swift support group that encourages the provision of nesting sites within the city. The swift is one of our last visitors to arrive and the first to leave so the whole of its life seems to be spent 'at the double'. Even in Africa, its winter home, it gathers in huge concentrations and spends its life flying and feeding above the tree canopy of the Congo area.

Watching a peregrine stooping to catch its prey, fulmars hang gliding off a cliff or choughs' aerobatic wheeling displays all provide moments of pure joy on our annual Islay holidays. It is worthy of note how increasingly interrelated our birds are becoming with the built environment. Reports indicate that choughs are choosing to nest in derelict farm buildings rather than cliff faces; fulmars nesting on bridge superstructures and peregrines nesting and living on tall buildings in our cities and towns. Even ravens on our own Town Hall.





In contrast to these experiences anger can result whilst standing on Millport pier from having your ice cream cone stolen by a passing gull. Deposition of guano on a newly washed car results in the same feeling. As a gardener I really do object to blackbirds getting into my fruit cage and gorging themselves on my precious blueberries.

This year we have had magpies nesting in adjacent trees and the continual squawking of the parents and their offspring and also their pillaging of local nests has not endeared them to me. Despite them being magnificent birds I and the local bird population are glad to see the back of them. I know that nature can be 'red in tooth and claw' but I did object to watching a pair of St Kilda bonxies systematically drowning puffins.

I am sure that we all have our preferences for what we call 'good birds'. Is it possible that we are all guilty of 'bird snobbery'? I know that I am. It is just a Canada goose is the derogatory cry, yet we travel miles to see a flock of barnacles. It's only a buzzard but a few years ago it would have been a highlight. I think it was James Fisher who said that 'if chaffinches, blue tits and teal were rare we would travel the earth to see their beautiful plumage'.

Two very recent experiences with common birds I have really enjoyed and found uplifting: watching a family of five newly fledged wren chicks sitting quivering on the top of a privet hedge whilst being fed by their parents. Also when weeding vegetables, with a young robin scuttling around my feet, it came to take grubs from my hand. Neither of these encounters are important in themselves but they do make you feel better!

In closing can I ask for your continued support of the Ayrshire Branch. Brian Dodson has put together a very varied and exciting programme for the winter and spring evening meetings. Can I also add my personal thanks, and I am sure yours, to all the committee for the excellent and enthusiastic work they carry out.

Pat

PS. Did have one very rare sighting recently a Bluebird of the Campbell strain rapidly flying up the length of Loch Fad on Bute.

Bird counters all aflutter as romantic wetlands work their magic

Atessa Akerman
The Weekend Australian

This article appeared in
December 2016



Dawn in the Winton Wetlands, Australia



Fairy wren, poised for action

From the watery runway of the Winton Wetlands in central Victoria, ducks take flight, their splashes adding to the din of nature waking at sunrise. The wetlands are not the hub they once were for birdlife, though, with waterbirds being recorded in far fewer numbers than 30 years ago. The University of New South Wales has carried out an annual aerial survey of eastern Australia since 1983, observing about 2000 wetlands and estimating numbers of more than 50 species of waterbirds; this year (2016) was the second-lowest count on record.

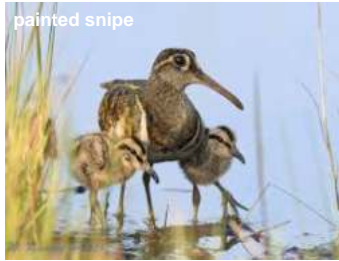
UNSW centre for ecosystems science director Richard Kingsford said, however, that the team spotted more waterbirds breeding than in recent years. “What we tend to find is in the big years when there’s a lot of water around, they tend to spread out and breed,” Professor Kingsford said. “It’s been a good year in terms of waterbirds and we expect that next year we will get a bounce-back in numbers.”

He said environmental flows were important in keeping not just waterbirds alive but also trees and smaller wildlife like frogs, so that when the floods come the waterbirds can increase their population.

According to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder report *Reflections*, 40 small wetlands received environmental water flows in the Wimmera-Mallee area in 2015-16, resulting in hundreds of straw-necked ibis being seen in October 2015 at Corack Lake, in northwest Victoria. *Australian Birdlife* editor Sean Dooley agreed the environmental flows were not sufficient to replace natural rain but were just enough to keep waterbirds at baseline breeding levels. “If we didn’t have the environmental flows, you would wonder how long the birds would keep breeding,” he said.



Australian



painted snipe



Australian bittern

“Even the threatened waterbirds, the really rare ones threatening to disappear like the Australian bittern and Australian painted snipe, it turns out that these flows are getting those birds to turn up.....with only about 600 brolgas in Victoria, every individual breeding event becomes significant.” (Note: *The broлга, formerly known as the native companion, is a bird in the crane family. It has also been given the name Australian crane, a term coined in 1865 by well-known ornithological artist John Gould in his Birds of Australia.....It is the official bird emblem of the state of Queensland. Wikipedia).*

Sean Doolan said the rain had fallen in good measure and at the right time of year in Victoria in 2016 and could be considered a godsend. “This year gives you a lot of reason to be hopeful. There is a big attrition rate of younger birds. If they’re able to mature (with) environmental flows for the next 12 months, you may be able to get those younger birds breeding instead of waiting for the next 10 to 15 years.”

Simon Starr, who runs bird-spotting tours around Victoria, said in drier years the wetlands receiving environmental flows become refuges for birds. Many small wetlands, he said, had disappeared after being cut off by roads. “They all add up to loss,” he said. “They’re all important.”

This article was kindly supplied by Dr. Sheila Cameron



Budgerigar



Fairy wren



Winton wetlands



Broлга



Australian bittern



Broлга

How long is your list?

Dick Vernon



Down by one in some cases! There was a flurry of e-mails on the Ayrshire Yahoo site recently when the sad news came through that both Clements and IOC had decided that Iceland and Thayer's gulls were the same species. Tears were shed for the poor American (and some British birders) whose lists were reduced by one – 'so retrograde'! This was certainly an unusual event – the norm is news of yet another split providing an armchair tick for the lucky.

This raises the question of what is a 'species'? We all know that robins and rooks are different species of birds and we also know that corgis and great danes are different breeds of the same species – but a definition that covers these observations – tricky! The old definition I was taught when studying biology at school (a very long time ago), was that if individuals couldn't hybridise, or if they did, and the offspring were sterile, then they were of different species. Classic examples were horse and donkeys – producing sterile mules. One great advantage of this definition is that if applied to *Homo sapiens* with our plethora of different peoples (Pygmies, Masai, Chinese, Inuits, etc ,etc), as very well demonstrated, all can interbreed successfully, so all are the same species. Rather important as we are all too fond of killing each other and classifying some as different species would just be a provocation. Also, the native peoples of Australia demonstrate that races can develop in isolation for long periods without becoming a separate species. The problem with this definition though is that it is impractical for testing possible species on a large scale.





Steve Jones (Professor of Genetics at University College, London) discusses the problem very thoughtfully in his book 'Almost Like A Whale'; this is an up-date on Darwin's 'Origin of Species'. Physical appearance (phenotype), behaviour, geographic distribution and DNA analysis are all useful factors, but none provide a robust definition. Totally unrelated species can look very similar because of their environment (fish and cetaceans being a very obvious example). Humans and dogs (*Canis canis*) reminds us that there can be a huge range of physical appearance within a species. Co-existence in mixed colonies where like only breeds with like is useful evidence, but not conclusive, likewise long term geographic separation, as evinced by our own species' does not necessarily lead to a new species.

The advent of DNA sequencing has provided a mass of invaluable data re relationships, sometimes, but not always, confirming family trees based on physical appearance. However, it has not solved the species problem. Jones gives examples of physically very similar species having marked differences in their DNA and vice versa.

The use of DNA in taxonomy is covered in an excellent review by Maclean, Collinson and Newall 'Taxonomy for Birders – a beginner's guide to DNA and species problems', published in British Birds in 2005. DNA is complex; it is a polymer of four different units (bases, denoted by A, C, G and T) and it is the varying sequences of these bases that makes each DNA polymer unique and is the basis of DNA finger-printing. Most DNA is found in the nucleus of the cell where it is the key component of the chromosomes. A small amount of DNA is found in mitochondria, organelles within cells which have the key role in generating energy. DNA can be crudely divided into three sorts: some sequences comprise the genes which code for specific proteins, which determine physical appearance and function; other sequences comprise regulatory units which determine if their target genes are switched on or off; however, by far the largest amount of DNA does not seem to have any function, and just seems to act as 'packing'! Thus there can be large differences in this 'packing' DNA without any obvious change in appearance. By contrast a small change in a regulatory sequence can have a very profound effect. For example, a change in the section regulating the growth hormone gene can have a substantial effect on the size of the organism. Likewise changes in the sequences coding for specific proteins can change form or function of the individual.

When looking for relationships between species taxonomists focus on limited sections of DNA, not the whole damn lot (DNA of vertebrate cells has over a billion bases!). Both chromosomal and mitochondrial DNA sequences have been used. Frustratingly a family tree derived by comparing sequences from one region of DNA isn't always identical to a family tree derived from studying a different region of DNA and can differ from a family tree derived from comparing physical appearance; fortunately this is the exception rather than the rule, but emphasises the need for caution!

So, while we have good methods of identifying family trees, none of them provides a robust definition of a species – how different does the physical appearance and the DNA sequence have to be? Taxonomists have to look at all the bits of evidence and then come to an opinion - and opinions can vary and change! Steve Jones illustrates this with a rather extreme example of the mouse, or more properly the mouse genus 'Mus'. At one time about 100 species of mouse were proposed; reassessment then reduced this down to just one (with some sub-species)! Further study brought the number up to seven.

All this was based on physical appearance – DNA analysis would probably have avoided some of the changes. Steve Jones doesn't even try to define 'species', but reminds us that evolution is about change – there will always be species where there are groups changing and which will eventually become separate species. The challenge is knowing when a group has passed the point of no return!

For Maclean and colleagues, taxonomic decisions are hypotheses and suggest that 'it is not necessary to wait until evidence becomes overwhelming before proposing a taxonomic change (ie split); it is sufficient that the proposal is justified after taking into account all relevant known facts, or alternatively, to await more facts when the conclusion is improbable'. Much of biology is based on statistics – with a common threshold being 95% (if there is less than 5% chance of things being the same, then they are probably different). So when considering potential splits it should be a case of has that 95% certainty been achieved?

So, one or two species? It's not always certain; bird watchers, as Jones notes have our foibles, in particular our love of lists, which provides an incentive to split. A split is always popular, and taxonomists like other scientists are only human. It is thus quite reassuring when controversial species, like Thayer's and Iceland gulls are reassessed and lumped. It might reduce our lists, but it should give more confidence that when others are split and we get another armchair tick its ok!

Migratory birds and their integrated GPS



Brian Lennox

My friend Alan has been interested in aviation for years but I've never been able to convince him that watching birds might inform and enhance his understanding of flight, and, by the same token he's never managed to get me enthusiastic about flying metal tubes! What did surprise me though was that Alan's interest was sufficiently intense for him to subscribe to Navigation News, the bi-monthly publication from the Royal Institute of Navigation. Didn't know there was such a body? You're not alone but my interest was caught by an article with the above title therein and I thought it might prove interesting to have a precis made available for Stonechat.

The journal is not available online to non-members so I can't give a link but it is fully referenced and if anyone would like a photocopy, I'd be happy to oblige. The author is Anne Depping, a Ph.D. student, Carl von Ossietzky Universität, Oldenburg.

With navigation devices widely available in vehicles and in smart phones there's really no reason any of us should get lost on even the most complicated journey. That's with the technology available but how do birds navigate in sometimes thousands of kilometres and manage to get to a specific site. It's been shown that birds use three navigation strategies that complement each other: the sun, the stars and earth's magnetic field. For fine tuning in shorter journeys, they can also use landmarks and odours.

Now for a bit of necessarily technical stuff. Birds (and humans for that matter) take cues as to their position from the position of the sun and stars. We have to understand the concept of the azimuth and here's a definition: the direction of a celestial object from the observer, expressed as the angular distance from the north or south point of the horizon to the point at which a vertical circle passing through the object intersects the horizon. Birds use changes in the azimuth to help define their position, that is, the positions of the sun and moon in their diurnal variation are utilised to inform the navigation process.

It is thought that birds establish their sun and star compasses during the first few months of life. The movement of the sun relative to the bird's position is imprinted on the bird's brain. For the star compass, the bird identifies the centre of rotation of the stars and this centre is defined by the bird as "north". "What happens if it's cloudy?", I hear you ask. No problem! Birds have a magnetic compass which works in all conditions.

Having a magnetic compass is all very well but if you don't have a map.....Here's more technical stuff, this time about the earth's magnetic fields. Magnetic field lines leave the earth vertically at the magnetic North pole and re-enter it vertically at the South Pole. At least four pieces of information can be derived from these lines:

- * the direction of the field from north to south
- * the inclination of the field lines, that is their angle to the earth (90 degrees at the poles, 0 degrees at the equator)
- * the declination of the field lines which is the angle difference between the geographic pole and the magnetic pole
- * the intensity of the field, maximal at the poles, weakest at the equator.

Birds use the second of the above, inclination, to determine whether they are travelling poleward or equator-ward. Important to note here that the bird doesn't distinguish between north and south as such. The magnetic field's intensity contributes to a bird's map sense.

At this point you might quite reasonably be asking "How do we know these things and if they're true, how do birds know them?"

Several pieces of research elucidate these points:

- * captive migratory birds typically show a migratory restlessness around the time that they would normally migrate. Researchers looked at the direction in which a bird would attempt to leave a specially constructed tube which recorded scratch marks indicating that direction. This direction was able to be manipulated by rotating the magnetic field around the bird.
- * many migratory birds have an innate clock and compass system which tells them when and where to migrate. The first time a bird migrates, it doesn't have a map so can overshoot its destination. But if it makes it once, it has imprinted a map and can repeat the journey with accuracy again and again, even if a storm blows it off course.
- * findings suggest that birds use light to sense magnetic fields. It has been shown that part of the light-processing part of a bird's forebrain is involved in magneto-reception, so the bird's eyes must be involved in this. It's all got to do with light-induced transfer of electrons between two molecules.
- * photopigments called cryptochromes seem to be most likely involved in the bird's sensing of the magnetic field through its eyes. They've been found in the retinae of birds.

This leaves us with map sense. How does a bird develop a detailed map which can be called upon to aid migration? Research suggests that the bird's trigeminal nerve which innervates the beak, is implicated in developing map sense. Studies looking at birds with intact or surgically transected trigeminal nerves were able or unable to migrate in the right direction respectively. What hasn't been shown is what the primary receptor is that is responsible for developing this sense. In summary, birds have developed a highly successful navigation system for migration. Various cues are used but magnetic field perception is perhaps the most intriguing and would seem to be important in the migration of many different species e.g. turtles, molluscs and lobsters.



How are birds faring in Ayrshire?

Ben Darvill



Most information about the changing fortunes of our birds comes from surveys, mostly organised by the BTO (often in conjunction with other organisations including RSPB and SOC.) Sadly, coverage in Ayrshire is less than in any many other areas. The BTO are looking to improve matters in the region - perhaps you could help in one of the following ways?

BTO would like to increase their [representation in Ayrshire](#) in order to reach more people, and to provide improved experiences for supporters. They would warmly welcome additional offers of help. A team approach could work well, so by stepping forward you will not necessarily find yourself doing everything! Please drop Ben Darvill a line if you think you may be able to help in some capacity (ben.darvill@bto.org).

Autumn 2018 sees the launch of the [tawny owl point survey](#). This national survey aims to improve our understanding of changes in occupancy and population size as well as habitat associations and geographical patterns. The first survey period will run from 15th August until 15th October 2018. During this time participants will make between one and three short evening visits to their chosen tetrad to listen for owls.

There are a [range of other BTO surveys](#) which run every year, which you might enjoy taking part in. The **breeding bird survey (BBS)** is the main scheme for monitoring the changing fortunes of the UK's commoner breeding birds, and requires two visits to an assigned 1km square each year (April - June). If you're looking for something to get you out in the fresh air in the autumn and winter months, have a look at the **wetland bird survey (WeBS)** which requires monthly visits September - March to an assigned wetland site.

For more information on these and other schemes and surveys which may be of interest, visit the volunteers surveys are of the BTO website: www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys

Dr. Ben Darvill
Development and Engagement Officer
BTO Scotland

Unit 15 Beta Centre Stirling University Innovation Park Fk9 4NF
Email: ben.darvill@bto.org
Tel: 01786 458023

SOC/RSPB Ayrshire Birders winter weekend in Lancashire

Report by Tony Scott
Photographs by Angus
Hogg and Tony Scott



Saturday 18 November 2017

Meeting at Dodds coach depot in Ayr at 07.15 hrs, we were surprised (and delighted) that our usual 22-seater Salvador Caetano/Toyota coaster coach had been substituted for a 51-seat Van Hool/Volvo. So much more comfortable (if a bit more difficult to park in tight spots). John Cairns was waiting to greet us and ready to load our luggage into the cavernous boot of the coach. We were away by 07.30 with the full complement of passengers on board. 16 of us and 51 seats to choose from! The weather was wet to start, but we ran into sunshine farther south and a pleasant 10 celsius as the day moved on.

Our first stop was at Annandale water services on the M74, one of the more pleasant service areas. Arriving at 09.05 we had ample time for breakfast and to spot a kingfisher darting across the lake. Pied wagtail, mallard and great spotted woodpecker were seen too. We left at 10.00 and continued south along the motorways to join the A6 at Milnthorpe and on through Beetham to arrive at RSPB's Leighton Moss reserve at 11.55. John impressed all on board by reversing our large coach into a small parking space behind the visitor centre with (what appeared to be) ease. A friendly RSPB ranger boarded the coach to explain what today's highlights may be and to hand out reserve maps. We then enjoyed a pleasant meander along the new reedbed board walk, where grit trays had been placed to encourage bearded reedlings to feed, but early and late in the day is best to observe these inhabitants of the reed beds.





Pintails, Leighton Moss

AH



Marsh harrier

AH



Robin

AH

We spent some time at the Causeway (Public) hide and had good views of the black-headed gull colony - quite a noisy affair! There was a good variety of waterbird species including shoveler, pintail, tufted duck, coot, moorhen, and pochard. The weather was glorious for the time of year, and we had a most relaxing (if short) time here before moving on to Lilian's hide - our last port of call before lunch. Lilian's hide is extremely spacious with panoramic views of the reedbeds and wooded hills beyond. Marsh harriers were most certainly a highlight here, as well as more mallards, pochard, tufted duck and many other species. It was then time for a light lunch at the RSPB café, where food from local producers is always on offer.

After lunch we walked down to the new sky-tower for stunning wide-angle views across the whole reserve (and this included more sightings of the magnificent marsh harriers). In the woodland and at the feeders, we got marsh tit, nuthatch, bullfinch, chaffinch, robin, blue, coal and great tits, long-tailed tits, jay, pheasant and more. At the Griesdale hide we saw great egret, little egret, cattle egret, grey heron, pink-footed geese, greylag, Canada geese and mute swans. There was still time left to have a look around the RSPB shop before boarding our coach at 16.15 and headed over to the M6 and south to the A6 and A59 through Much Hoole and Banks to our overnight stop at the seaside resort of Southport.

We arrived at our Best Western Royal Clifton Hotel at 17.40 and were warmly welcomed and given our room keys. We eventually found our rooms as we wandered the labyrinthine corridors of this one-time splendid and spacious hotel. We met for drinks in the bar at 19.00 hrs and some of us just had to sample the local Southport Brewer's Golden Sands ale, a session beer at 4% vol. We noted the arrival of many people in ball gowns and evening suits, heading for a dinner dance no doubt, in the still grand ballroom where standards had most certainly been kept up. We were seated in the dining room at 19.30 hrs and enjoyed a very traditional dinner of home made tomato soup, oven-baked salmon with sauce Hollandaise, roast potatoes and huge platters of (rather overcooked but plentiful) vegetables, including broccoli, carrots, green beans and courgettes. Other options were available for starters and main courses, which included roast turkey and a vegetarian dish. Desserts included lemon tart, bread and butter pudding with custard or ice cream. All followed by coffee and tea. Still time for another little drink before bed!



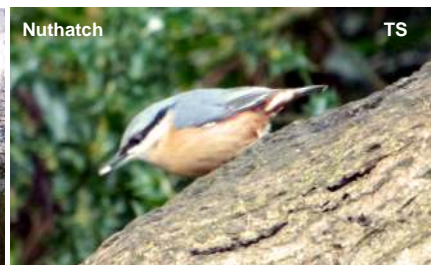
View from the sky-tower

TS



Sky-tower

TS



Nuthatch

TS



RSPB Marshside reserve, Southport

TS



Marshside visitor centre hide

TS

Sunday 19 November 2017

Up quite early and a little walk before breakfast at 08.00. An excellent buffet selection with plenty of fresh fruit, fruit salad, yogurts and cereals, Danish pastries and an extensive selection of hot food. Fried, scrambled or poached eggs, bacon, sausage, black pudding, tomatoes, mushrooms, hash browns, toast, tea and coffee, mineral water and fruit juices.

Well sustained for the day, we left the Royal Clifton hotel and its friendly staff at 09.15. A crisp, sunny November morning and a short ten-minute run along the Marine Drive to the excellent RSPB Marshside reserve. From the two hides we saw little egret, lapwing, wigeon, buzzard, kestrel, golden plover, mallard, tufted duck, black-tailed godwit and large flocks of pink-footed geese (as well as Canada geese), curlew and more. Leaving at 10.35, we boarded our coach for the short drive along the A565 to Banks and Mere Brow, the B5246 and an unclassified road to WWT Martin Mere reserve and wetland centre for 11.00. Here until 15.30, we had lots of time to enjoy all the bird life both wild and in 'The Collection.' A WWT ranger joined us to give details of what was about and to inform us of the special event today - the North-West Birdfair, where talks, demonstrations and numerous sales stalls were available to attract and entertain the avid birder.

From the hides we saw plenty of whooper swans, massive flocks of shelduck (newly arrived from Germany we were told), pintail, pochard, teal, mallard, gadwall, tufted duck, greylag, pink-feet, kestrel, marsh harrier, buzzard, tree sparrows, kingfisher, ruff, redshank, greenshank and many more common park and woodland species. Catering at the Mereside café fulfilled our culinary needs for morning coffee and lunch, and we departed on time as planned at 15.30 hrs.



Pochard, WWT Martin Mere

TS



Whooper swans

TS



Kestrel AH



Life on the pond...



....and in the sky. Flock of pink-foots over Martin Mere

Before that however, we just had to take advantage of the theatrical 'feeding time' event from one of the main hides. A ranger fitted with microphone kept all the viewers informed of what had been happening with birding arrivals and departures, all the while throwing out substantial amounts of grain for the whooper swans, but the show was most certainly stolen by the mind-boggling numbers of shelduck, which appeared to have taken over the reserve! If nothing else - this was a not-to-be-missed spectacle towards the end of daylight hours. Impressive.

All aboard! We set off as planned and found that traffic was a bit heavy to begin with, but thinned out the farther north we drove. Through Burscough Bridge and over Parbold hill to the M6, driving non-stop to Dumfries and dinner at the Solway Gate restaurant for 18.15 hrs. Plenty of time to relax and enjoy dinner before departing for Ayr at 20.15. We were back safely at Dodds coach depot by 21.50. John had excelled himself once again, and as always, he enjoyed looking around at the reserves we visited - he had his binoculars with him as he usually does. So we all said our goodbyes after a most successful and enjoyable weekend.

Taking part in the weekend were Tony and Gerda Scott who had organised the whole thing; Jim Thomson (our bird leader); Anne Dick; Angus Hogg; Geoff and Jean Sheppard; Eleanora Forrester; William McKie; Brian Lennox; Brian and Maureen Dodson; Ken and Sheila Smith, and Jim and Margaret Sutherland.



The march of the shelducks!



Alert over global warming's radical impact on UK birds

Damian Carrington
Environment editor
The Guardian

This article published 05.12.2017



Climate change is radically altering the mix of Britain's birds, with some species disappearing and others moving in. Timings are being reset too, with eggs laid earlier in the year and autumn migrations delayed by up to a month. The State of the UK's Birds report for 2017, (published 05.12.17), reveal the profound impact of global warming on Britain's bird life, which is expected to become even greater in the future.

Average temperatures in the UK have increased by almost 1c in recent decades and familiar birds like swallows, which migrate to Africa every autumn, have responded by leaving up to four weeks later. Others, such as garden warblers and whitethroats, are also enjoying warmer British weather for longer.

The migratory birds are also arriving and breeding earlier in the spring than in the 1960's. The great tit is a full-time resident, but is also laying its eggs 11 days earlier than 44 years ago. The increasingly warmer and wetter winters have induced some short-distance migratory birds to give up their usual journeys and remain in the UK. The number of blackcaps and chiffchaffs have both more than doubled since 1970.

But the warmer conditions are posing a serious risk of extinction in the UK for many of the nation's rarer birds, particularly those found in the north of the country. Among these the dotterel, whimbrel and common scoter have already seen significant population declines. But while cold-adapted birds suffer, those preferring warmth are taking advantage. Those currently limited to southernmost regions, such as the quail, little egret and hobby, have increased their numbers. Ornithologists expect other species, including the little bittern and zitting cisticola, may colonise southern England in coming years as they escape the rising heat in continental Europe.

The report is produced by the RSPB, British Trust for Ornithology and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, together with Britain's statutory nature conservation bodies including Natural England. Michael Morecroft, of Natural England, said: "Climate change is undoubtedly going to be one of the greatest influences, both positive and negative, on the future status of birds and other biodiversity in England and the UK." He added that it was therefore vital that wildlife habitats were both expanded and better protected to help species better survive extreme weather and help them spread to newly suitable areas.

Pass notes

No.3,583

From The Guardian



Ruff sex

Age: Up to four-and-a-half years, on average. **Family:** Sandpiper.

Appearance: Drab, mottled brown in the case of the female birds: brightly tufted heads, orange faces, black chests and a large ruff of ornamental feathers in the case of most males.

Why only most males? Well, that's the thing. Ruff's also have very elaborate gender politics.

Birds have gender politics? These ones do. Most male ruffs gather together each breeding season in great, mass displays of their spectacular neck feathers and physical prowess. These gatherings are called leks, and the females enjoy looking around them, responding to the best males by bending over and presenting their genitals in a fairly unambiguous sign they are willing to mate. **How heteronormative.** I guess. Although among male ruffs there are other lifestyles. A small proportion of males don't bother with spectacular plumage or engaging in displays, but instead wander around the lek looking for any females who, you know, happen to be bending over. **Um.....**And a third type of extremely rare male goes even further, thanks to an inverted section of its genome, which has just been identified by scientists in Britain and Sweden. **Oh yes?** Basically, it looks just like a female, albeit a rather big one, and it, too,

wanders around the lek looking for any real females that have made themselves available for mating. "The female bows down, and sometimes it's a case of which male gets there first," explains Terry Burke of the University of Sheffield, who led the British team behind the discovery. "It's not necessarily a highly aggressive act." **Well, that's a relief.** Nevertheless, the cross-dressing males known as "faeders", also have unusually large testes, probably to help them get the job done. **Yikes!** What's more, in all the confusion, the conventional-looking or "independent" males then often end up mounting the faeders while they in turn are mounting the females, in what a colleague of Burke's calls "the sandwich". **In the "confusion" eh?**

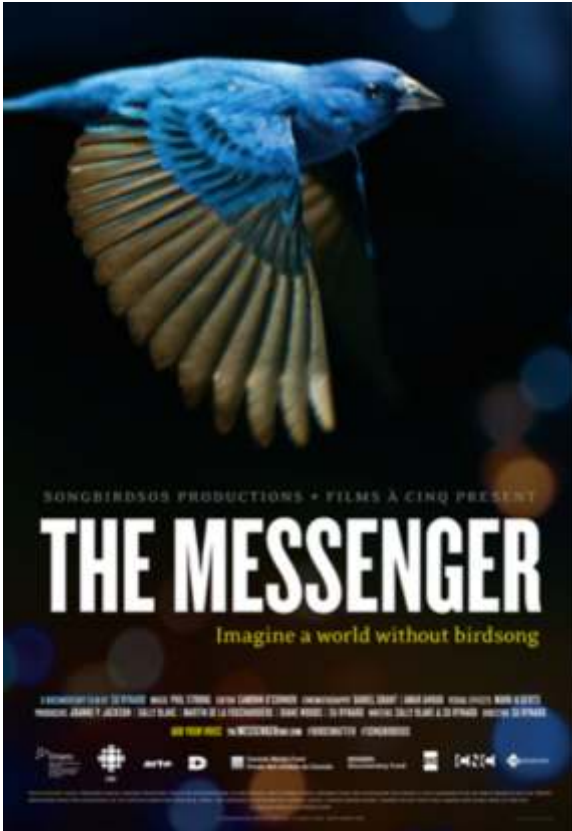
That's their story and they're sticking to it. **Do say:** "No, I don't want no ruffs. A ruff is a bird that can't get no love from me." **Don't say:** Let's talk about leks, baby."

Twittering *in the garden*

by Eleanora Falcon

Getting up in the morning to the view of the increased build up of autumn leaves, I told myself, "c'mon, just **do** it. Just sweep them up." After donning the wellies, I set out with great resolve to tackle the mountain of debris of fallen leaves on my yard. Constantly during the operation, I was taunted by two pied wags perched high on the farm barn. "Do it, do it," they called. "Okay, okay," I grumble back.

From the old quarry area, I could hear the distant calls of ravens, buzzards and a kestrel, plus the greylags down at the loch. "Ugh well, it's no' a' bad." (nature's music while I work). Suddenly, I was almost deafened by the dreadfully high volume of a frenzied drum of wingbeats. All at once, the surrounding trees were absolutely drenched in fieldfares. Downing tools, (any excuse), I grabbed the bins to count. 350 in this bedlam flock.



SPECIAL EVENT

AYR TOWN HALL
Thursday 31 January 2019
Screening at 19.30 hrs.

RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group in conjunction with Ayr Film Society present the award-winning documentary
The Messenger

in support of RSPB Scotland and helping to save endangered species and habitat loss in South-West Scotland

Tickets £5.00 each - available at all RSPB and SOC Ayrshire meetings from October 2018

Please support us by encouraging your friends and family to come along and see this astonishing film



Ortolan bunting, as seen in 'The Messenger'. Photo: Kino Lorber

The film takes us to France, where we learn about the illegal hunting and trapping of ortolan bunting, for what some people consider is a gourmet dish. Hunting and trapping throughout the Mediterranean causes the deaths of 25 million birds annually, and of hundreds of species, not just one! We visit Canada's boreal forest where the impact of oil drilling and related development has a devastating effect on bird habitats. This is an important and long-overdue documentary - we hope it has the impact it deserves to have.

The Messenger

Director: Su Rynard
Canada/France/USA/Germany/Netherlands/
Turkey/Costa Rica 2015 1h24m

The Messenger is an amazing documentary, revealing the struggles of song birds worldwide. At its world premiere at the Hot Docs International Film Festival in Toronto, audiences voted it their third favourite. Ancient cultures viewed songbirds as messengers from the gods. Today, the film argues, birds are delivering an urgent message about Earth's health - one that we ignore at our peril. Visually, the film is stunning. We see indigo buntings, Blackburnian and black-throated blue warblers, and other species flying in slow motion. Plus: a selection of RSPB short films to complete the programme.

**Evening meetings at
Monkton Community Church Hall
and Pioneer Café
Tuesdays 19.00 for 19.30hrs.**

- 11 September 2018 IAN GIBSON *Hen harriers of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park*
- 09 October 2018 STAN DA PRATO *The changing wildlife of the East Lothian coast*
- 13 November 2018 JEREMY BROCK *Overland to Caucases for the birds*
- 11 December 2018 GORDON RAE *Iceland and eagles of Norway*
- 08 January 2019 TOM HASTINGS *Bats around Ayrshire*
- 12 February 2019 EDMOND FELLOWES *From the Isle of May to Bardsey Island*
- 12 March 2019 PEADAR O'CONNELL *RSPB's seabird conservation work:
Tackling national and international challenges*
- 09 April 2019 TOM BYARS *"Strawberry Fields Forever" - and an update of
the birding and conservation situation in Irvine*



**TAYSIDE & GRAMPIAN
WINTER WEEKEND**

Friday 16 - Sunday 18 November 2018
visiting SWT Montrose Basin and
RSPB Loch of Strathbeg by **COACH**
from AYR **Leader: Jim Thomson**

A joint SOC Ayrshire and RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group WEEKEND TRIP. **Leaving Dodds coach depot, East Road, AYR at 08.10hrs on 16 November.** We will be driving to SWT MONTROSE BASIN & later to LOCH OF KINNORDY. **We will stay overnight on a Dinner, Bed and Breakfast basis at a 3* hotel in Dundee.** Next day we will visit RSPB LOCH OF STRATHBEG and the YTHAN ESTUARY. On day three we will visit the EDEN ESTUARY & RSPB LOCH LEVEN. **Returning to AYR for around 21.00 hrs and stopping en route for dinner in Livingstone.** Registration will be from September onwards or register earlier by e-mailing Tony Scott on : dascott4@outlook.com or telephone 01292 281 085. **The cost should be in the region of £220.00 per person.** This trip will operate with numbers of 15 to 20 people. **A full information leaflet will be available at the first and subsequent meetings of RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group and SOC Ayrshire.** **Please book as early as possible in order to obtain the best prices.**

Field Trips and tours jointly with RSPB Central Ayrshire Local Group

Field Trips 2018

Saturday 22 September

RSPB MERSEHEAD RESERVE Meet at the reserve car park for 11.00 hrs. Please bring a picnic lunch. All day trip. Finish c.16.00 hrs.

Saturday 20 October **STRANRAER, LOCH RYAN & WIG BAY**

Meet at 10.30hrs at Ballantrae (toilets). On to Stranraer and Loch Ryan. All day trip - please bring a packed lunch. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

Friday/Saturday/Sunday 16/17/18 November. **WEEKEND TRIP by COACH from AYR SWT MONTROSE BASIN, RSPB LOCH OF KINNORDY, RSPB LOCH OF STRATHBEG, THE YTHAN ESTUARY, THE EDEN ESTUARY & RSPB LOCH LEVEN**

Meet 08.00hrs at Dodd's coach depot, East Road, Ayr. Weekend trip with DBB for two nights at a 3* hotel in Dundee. Return to Ayr around 21.00hrs Sunday. Cost including DBB and coach - around £220.00 dependent on numbers. Hope to book the Best Western Invercarse Hotel or similar.

Saturday 15 December **IRVINE HARBOUR AND BEACH PARK**

Meet at 10.30 hrs. at the old Harbourmasters office, Irvine. Food available at Harbour Arts Centre or the Ship Inn, or bring a packed lunch. Finish around 15.00 hrs.

Field trips 2019

Saturday 26 January **GREENAN SHORE AND DOONFOOT.**

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

Saturday 23 February **MAIDENS HARBOUR, CULZEAN AND THE COAST**

Meet at 10.30 hrs at Maidens Harbour car park (Toilets available). Move on along the coast to Culzean or south to Girvan. Please bring a packed lunch - trip finishes c.15.00 hrs.

Saturday 23 March **FULLARTON WOODS AND TROON HARBOUR**

Meet 10.00 hrs at Fullarton Woods car park (toilets). Here until around 12.00 and then drive to Troon Harbour. Time here and at the Ballast Bank. Please bring packed lunch - or plenty of cafes in Troon. Finish around 15.30 hrs.

Friday 19 April **LOCH DOON & NESS GLEN WOODLANDS**

Meet at the Roundhouse (Loch Doon) for 10.30. Please bring a picnic lunch or food and drink available at the Roundhouse (toilets for customers). Finish c.15.30 hrs.

Monday 27 May to Wednesday 05 June **A ten-day coach holiday from Ayr BIRDS AND LANDSCAPES OF NORFOLK by COACH**

Coach travel from Ayr. Staying at three or four-star hotels on a DBB basis. Full details this autumn. We will be visiting all of the top reserves in the areas we stay in, and our hotels will in all likelihood be in the Best Western group.
