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British Birds

January 2014 • Vol. 107 • 1–58



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The Great White Egret in Europe

Vocalisations of Ehrenberg's Redstart



British Birds

Established 1907, incorporating The Zoologist, established 1843

Published by BB 2000 Limited, trading as 'British Birds'

Registered Office: c/o McPhersons CFG Limited, 23 St Leonards Road
Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex TN40 1HH

ISSN 0007-0335

www.britishbirds.co.uk

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Annual subscription rates

Individual subscriptions: UK – £53.00
Overseas (airmail) – £60.00
Libraries and agencies – £99.00

Back issues

available from www.britishbirds.co.uk
or the subscriptions office.
Printed by Hastings Printing Company

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Front-cover photograph: North Norfolk under water: Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* swimming along the A149 at the Old Woman's Lane junction, looking out over Cley Marshes reserve, December 2013. *Robin Chittenden*



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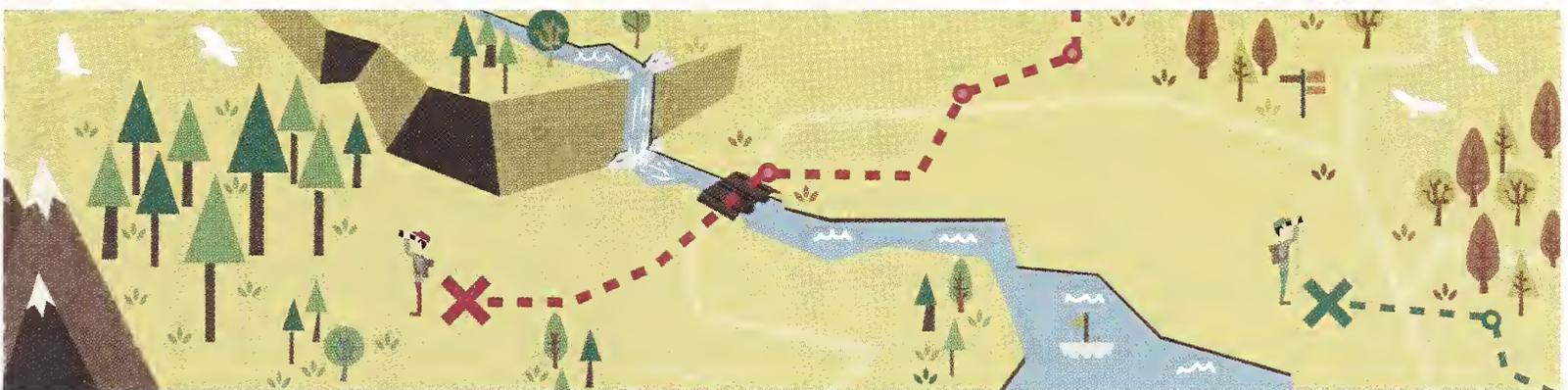
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British Birds

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The recently published *State of the UK’s Birds* report (www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/science/sotukb/) made sobering reading. The thing that made me sit up was not so much that various farmland and woodland species have declined by a third over the period concerned – but the fact that the period concerned was since the mid 1990s, which seems like no time at all! I suppose I have grown accustomed to the idea of massive declines in farmland birds since I was at school. Yet the realisation that such changes have occurred since Tony Blair took New Labour into power really brought it home that – for all our efforts to understand the mechanisms at work – we are making little or no progress in terms of actually doing anything about it. Add that to the current UK Government’s blatant contempt for ‘all that green crap’ and it doesn’t fill me with optimism at the start of the new year. Would those of us

north of the border be any better off under a separate administration, or even a different UK Government? I’m not wildly optimistic about those alternatives either. At the moment, green is definitely not the new black for politicians obsessed with the short term.

The burgeoning heron populations in Europe, while in no way making up for what’s happening in our farmland and woodland, do at least offer the possibility for graphs that go up rather than down, and the paper in this issue summarising the Great White Egret’s rise and rise in Europe builds on the articles that we published last year on the UK situation. Some of England’s watery places that rare herons like best took a hammering last month during the record-breaking storm surge that pounded the coast from Northumberland southwards. Even so, while the recovery period for some of our iconic reserves may be years rather than months, our wetlands still give us more reason for cheer than the wider countryside.

Roger Riddington



British Birds aims to: ❖ provide an up-to-date magazine for everyone interested in the birds of the Western Palearctic; ❖ publish a range of material on behaviour, conservation, distribution, ecology, identification, movements, status and taxonomy as well as the latest ornithological news and book reviews; ❖ maintain its position as the journal of record; and ❖ interpret scientific research on birds in an easily accessible way.

A place for the misfit

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the death of author T. H. White, probably best remembered by bird enthusiasts for his mini epic *The Goshawk* (1951), and by the general public for *The Once and Future King*, his Arthurian novels, and the blockbuster Disney and Broadway spin-offs that ensued. Like that of J. A. Baker, author of *The Peregrine* (1967), White's work has inspired a number of promi-

nent naturalists. It seems timely to remember the man, and reflect on his life and influence. J. K. Rowling, for example, acknowledged White's character Wart, the young King Arthur as depicted in his novels, as the 'spiritual ancestor' of Harry Potter.

White was born in 1906, a year before *British Birds*. He was a prolific writer, and some authorities – his agent David Garnett included – consider *The Goshawk* to have been his best book. It has featured on the recommended reading lists of many literature courses, and no doubt influenced J. A. Baker himself, as it was on his bookshelf. Intriguingly, White himself considered the hawk-taming saga described in the book as a failure.

White wrote *The Goshawk* in the mid 1930s but hid the manuscript until Garnett chanced upon it more than a decade later. Garnett managed to convince White that it should be published, even though the writer was sheepish about the various personal and practical imperfections his words laid bare. For if White was no expert ornithologist at this stage of his life, he was certainly no expert falconer either. But he did love birds, and animals in general, probably more than he cared for the grown-up world. 'I had only just escaped from humanity,' wrote White of his captive. 'The poor gos had only just been caught by it.'

White was an enthusiast – a 'smatterer', as



his biographer Sylvia Townsend Warner put it – and an avid learner of new skills. He was driven by a need to preoccupy himself, his discontent stemming from a traumatic childhood. 'Everything collapsed at a critical time in my life and ever since I have been arming myself against disaster,' he once confessed to Garnett in a letter. By the mid 1930s White had given up a teaching career to rent an old keeper's cottage, and he wrote to Germany for a Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*). Weary of society, he hoped to 'revert to a feral state' – thinking that somehow winning over the hawk might give him this.

He sought to train the bird using medieval methods, and make a living from his account of their relationship. But he had overestimated his ability to do this single-handedly. The archaic method usually involved more than one person 'watching' the bird – staying awake for days and nights while the hawk repeatedly 'bates' from the wrists to which it is tethered, until finally it must sleep, and thereby submit to its captive state. And maybe he underestimated the brute intransigence of the bird, taken as a well-grown nestling and already wired with a detestation of the human form.

The modern method of manning a hawk is much gentler on both parties, and takes longer, with the bird gradually accustomed to the proximity of humans and their paraphernalia, steadily overcoming its innate

suspicion. But that wouldn't have made such a compelling tale, or involved such an intense battle of wills. While the book tells us little or nothing about the Goshawk in its wild state – it was extirpated from the UK by the Victorians and only the occasional escapee was at large in the landscape here – it tells us much about the relationship between people and birds.

In later life White gave up field sports and contented himself with watching instead. He birded across North America between stages of a three-month lecture tour in winter 1963/64. He kept a journal of the tour, later published as *America at Last*, a revealing snapshot of the nation through a turbulent period in its history – including the Kennedy assassination – and decorated with descriptions of birds and other natural features he encountered.

On the tour he lectured about his work and his inspirations, sometimes to audiences of thousands in open-air stadiums: he was 'box office' in America. The Arthurian legends played well there, and the Disney deal had made him wealthy at last. This often shy, prickly and reclusive man had probably never been happier, more appreciated and liberated than in that vast continent – beset with social problems but, he discovered, so alive with openness, optimism and possibilities.

Tour over, he said his tearful goodbyes. He returned to Europe by ocean liner, partly because he hated flying (despite having trained as a pilot to learn another new skill and to attempt to overcome his fear) and partly so he could visit Athens. His ship docked in Piraeus harbour and on the morning of 17th January he was discovered dead in his cabin. The cause of death was recorded as heart failure. He was just 57 years old.

He never made it home. With no family in England, it was decided that he could be laid to rest in the corner of an Athens cemetery, within view of Hadrian's Arch. The Emperor Hadrian was one of his passionate interests.

Within White's oeuvre is a satire on field sports called *England Have My Bones*. He would have enjoyed the irony that England never got them. Nor did England get his archive, which is housed at the University of Texas. It seems that even in death he was ill-fitted to his native country: a misfit, much like the bird of which he wrote so vividly.

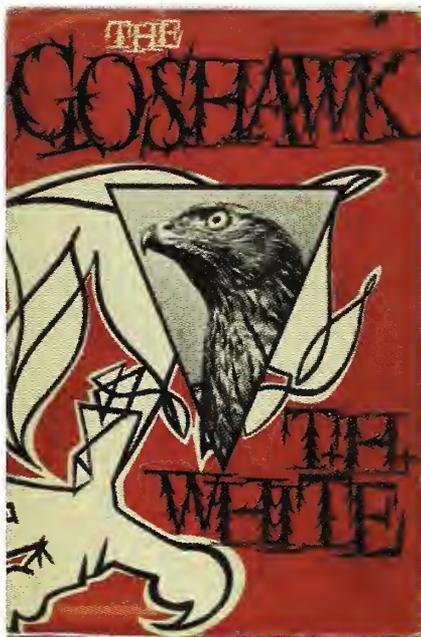
In part to correct this estrangement, it struck me that this year's anniversary of his passing might be formally recognised in some way, perhaps with a modest plaque or sculpture installed at one of White's many stopping-off points here in a nomadic life. Maybe Stowe in Buckinghamshire, where he taught, and near where he took the keeper's cottage and did his best work. Or Doolistown in Co. Meath, where he spent the war years. Or the Channel Island of Alderney, where he

lived last. But my enquiries and promptings have left me with no strong sense of a lasting appreciation of White here, or much appetite for resurrecting him.

If his literary legacy is not quite assured – I'm guessing because his most famous work was written for children – perhaps his contribution to natural history, albeit by an

unorthodox route, can be recognised now. *The Goshawk* may not add much to the sum of knowledge about the species' conservation status, but it is the only British book written in the twentieth century devoted to the bird. For *The Goshawk* alone we might doff our caps to Terence 'Tim' Hanbury White, and acknowledge the place – and the lasting legacy – of the misfit.

Conor Jameson



What do you think? Join the debate at www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/editorials

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

Slender-billed Curlew deleted from the British List

It was one of the most momentous – and controversial – decisions by the records committees of British ornithology: the acceptance, in January 2002, after four years of deliberations, of the record of a Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* that spent four days in Northumberland in May 1998.

Now, those same records committees have said they got it wrong. The exhaustive research that supported the acceptance of the bird as a first-summer Slender-billed Curlew has been set aside and the species has been removed from the British List.

The BOURC statement said: ‘Following a review by both BOURC and BBRC, the identification of the bird seen at Druridge Bay, Northumberland, on 4th–7th May 1998 (sight record, photographed, video) (*Brit. Birds* 95: 272–278 & 279–299) is no longer considered as proven.

‘Although the bird exhibited characters that would previously have been considered diagnostic for Slender-billed Curlew, both BOURC and BBRC were not convinced that the identification was sufficiently secure to stand as the only British record of this critically endangered, and probably now extinct, species.

‘The conclusion was not unanimous in either

BBRC’s or BOURC’s deliberations. BBRC requires a majority vote against to overturn a previously accepted record [whereas] BOURC requires only one vote against the proposed identification. There was also no clear consensus among those voting members who had seen the bird and those who had not, with votes in favour of, and against, continued acceptance in both cases.

‘We are extremely grateful to all the observers who provided field descriptions, photographic images and video footage. The digital file for this record extends to nearly 7GB and represents the largest collection of material relating to a rarity ever considered by committee members.

‘We recognise that this decision will be a disappointment to many of those involved in documenting the record. The conclusion of the review should not, however, be taken as a negative reflection on the field skills or the judgement of the observers. A manuscript on behalf of both committees explaining this decision more fully is in preparation.’

And you’ll be able to read that paper in *BB* later this year. The decision, announced formally in the BOURC’s 42nd report in the January 2014 issue of *Ibis*, brings the British List down to 596.

Nightingales saved

Natural England (NE) has decided to uphold the protection of one of England’s most important sites for the Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, a bird that has declined in the UK by 46% since 1995.

In March, NE notified the site known as Lodge Hill – in Medway, north Kent – as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for three key wildlife features, including its population of Nightingales – more than 1% of the UK population (see *Brit. Birds* 106: 432). The site’s notification has now been confirmed, leaving the RSPB and other conservationists delighted that the national importance of this site has been recognised. Lodge Hill – part of which is a former military engineering school – has also been protected for its nationally important grassland and ancient woodland.

Lodge Hill is currently being proposed as a major development site for housing and associated employment use in the Medway Council Core

Strategy, and the Ministry of Defence – through their land sale delivery partner Land Securities – has submitted an outline planning application for 5,000 homes and associated developments.

The RSPB is hopeful that the MoD will now reconsider its plans for Lodge Hill in light of NE’s decision to uphold the SSSI notification of the site.

Correction

Magnus Robb has asked us to point out that the Sound Approach team that discovered Omani Owl *Strix omanensis* (*Brit. Birds* 106: 648–649) did not describe the cryptic Monteiro’s Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monteiroi* from the Azores (although their recordings clearly helped to clarify the taxonomy of the group and thus distinguish the species). But it was Luis Monteiro who discovered the species and Mark Bolton *et al.* (*Ibis* 150: 717–727) who actually described it formally. *Eds*

Natural evolution? The tidal surge in north Norfolk

On the night of Thursday 5th December 2013, a tidal surge in the North Sea, coupled with exceptionally high tides and gale-force winds, ripped the ecological guts out of many of the famous wildlife reserves in north Norfolk. Near my home, Blakeney Point, the Blakeney Freshes, Cley Marshes reserve and grazing marshes between Cley and Salthouse were all seriously damaged and flooded, including Pope's Marsh (which the Norfolk Wildlife Trust had recently acquired following a £1m appeal that *BB* supported).

Will the seawater inundation of the freshwater grazing marshes and reedbeds be one of the big ecological disasters to hit north Norfolk in recent years? Or just a damp squib? How does it compare, for example, with the insidious pollution caused

by agricultural pesticides, which have seriously affected the populations of many of our farmland birds? Nature has a wonderful way of healing, in the absence of pollution, albeit over time. Will birdwatchers be visiting an ecologically very different north Norfolk in future?

Over the days following the surge, I took photographs, and some of these are included in this issue with extended captions to give my personal slant on the event – as far as it affected the Blakeney–Cley–Salthouse stretch – and some thoughts and hopes for the future.

(Contributed by Richard Porter – see more from north Norfolk on p.49.)



Richard Porter

1. Cley Marshes reserve, 6th December 2013. Although the reserve was completely flooded, the large, well-maintained sluice was highly efficient at getting water off the site quickly. Now, the freshwater springs will have to work hard to get the reserve back to a freshwater grazing marsh complete with scrapes. Much too will depend on the breach to the shingle bank being repaired and maintained, otherwise there could be regular saltwater inundation. Sadly the hides were all damaged; the Swarovski hide (North hide) was totally destroyed and is now in pieces 5 km down the coast at Kelling, along with sections of the boardwalk. My personal view is that the Cley reserve, including Pope's Marsh, will be 'back to normal' within a couple of years. Farther east, the dramatic breach at Salthouse has created a deep, wide channel from sea to marsh. If not repaired, this will remain tidal.

Sixty years of bird protection

Despite 2013 being the 60th year of legal protection for wild birds, the latest RSPB Birdcrime report told the continuing story of illegal persecution of the UK's birds of prey.

Birdcrime 2012 revealed 208 reports of the shooting and destruction of birds of prey, including the confirmed shooting of 15 Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, five Eurasian Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* and four Peregrine Falcons *Falco*

peregrinus. The report also includes over 70 poisoning incidents. Confirmed victims of poisoning include nine Buzzards and seven Red Kites *Milvus milvus*. The real numbers are almost certainly higher as many incidents are likely to go unnoticed and unrecorded.

This report follows on from the news that in 2013 Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* failed to breed successfully in England for the first time since the

1960s, despite there being enough suitable habitat to support *over 300 pairs*.

Some areas of the UK's countryside, including parts of the Peak District, Yorkshire Dales and Northumberland, have become 'no-fly zones' for birds of prey. Several studies have concluded that persecution on intensively managed upland grouse moors is the key issue affecting some raptor populations. This has prevented the populations of species such as the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* and Hen Harrier from occupying parts of their natural range, especially in England.

Martin Harper, the RSPB's Director of Conservation, said: 'There are few sights in nature as

breathtaking as witnessing a Peregrine stooping or Hen Harriers skydancing. These are sights we should all be able to enjoy when visiting our uplands. However, these magnificent birds are being removed from parts of our countryside where they should be flourishing... Current legislation has failed to protect the Hen Harrier. The absence of successfully breeding Hen Harriers in England [in 2013] is a stain on the conscience of the country. It is therefore vitally important that the Government brings forward changes to wildlife law in England and Wales that deliver an effective and enforceable legal framework for the protection of wildlife.'

Big Garden Beak Watch

Beak deformities in wild birds are not common but have been reported in over 60 species of birds worldwide. Thanks to observations from Garden BirdWatchers, the BTO's Garden Ecology team set up the Big Garden Beak Watch at the end of 2010 in order to find out more about the beak deformities among birds seen in British and Irish gardens.

To date, over 660 individual birds of 35 species have been recorded. The top five most reported birds are Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Great Tit *Parus major* and Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*, but these are also the most common garden species. The basic data from the year-round BTO Garden BirdWatch survey has helped to address any bias by producing a 'Beak Deformity Rate' (BDR) using average weekly counts per garden for each common species.

The BDR shows that Blue Tit and Blackbird still feature prominently but Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* have the highest rate of beak abnormality. These findings show striking similarities to ongoing research in Alaska where the Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus* and Northwestern Crow *C. caurinus* are the two species most reported with beak abnormalities.

Many different abnormalities have been reported, which can be grouped into seven main categories. The most common in all species (representing almost 30% of the records) is an overgrown or decurved upper mandible, which can occur when the tip of the lower mandible is broken. The next most reported irregularity is where both mandibles are overgrown, which can produce a 'curlew-type' beak. The third most common is crossed mandibles, which could be caused by slight asymmetry of the jaw.

About 40% of Blue Tits with beak deformities are affected by upper-mandible abnormalities. For Starlings and Great Tits, the majority of records

involve elongated mandibles (about 50% and 40% respectively). Some 25% of Blackbirds have fractured beaks, which has been included as a separate category since it would be interesting to understand why Blackbirds seem to be more prone to physical damage than other species.

In most cases, the bony parts of the beak are unaffected and the abnormalities occur in the dermotheca (the middle layer containing blood vessels and nerves) or the rhamphotheca (the outer keratinous sheath). Studies in Alaska have shown that the rhamphotheca was growing twice as fast, on average, among chickadees with beak deformities than among those without. So once the tips of the beak no longer meet properly, the keratin sheath can grow unchecked and no amount of wear can keep up with it.

A bird with a deformed beak has to cope with its disability. It can affect feeding behaviour and there are many reports of modified feeding strategies. More commonly these involve birds feeding with their head held sideways or using the edges of a bird table to push food in, though there are also more unusual observations, such as that of a Wood Pigeon that commonly continued to feed after dark during the winter.

The Big Garden Beak Watch is still a relatively young and small survey and more data are needed to help us to understand what it is about certain species that means they are more affected by beak deformities than others. If you have ever seen a bird with a beak abnormality in your garden, please fill out our survey form, which you can find online at: www.bto.org/beakwatch

(Contributed by Clare Simm)

Last year was the coldest spring for 50 years

After several decades of rising temperatures, the cold spring of 2013 harked back to the typical weather conditions of the mid 1960s. Information collected by BTO members shows that birds responded by delaying nesting for several weeks, resulting in a breeding season that would not have seemed out of place 50 years ago.

In 1966 Harold Wilson was re-elected as Prime Minister, The Beatles released *Revolver*, England won the World Cup and both Eric Cantona and *BB's* current editor were born. With so much going on that year, it is perhaps unsurprising that the initiation of the Nest Record Scheme's annual productivity trends remained largely unreported, yet to this day the data collected by BTO volunteers plays a vital role in underpinning research into climate change. And in many ways, the unseasonably cold start to the 2013 breeding season took us back to where it all began.

Spring temperatures have been increasing at an unprecedented rate since the 1970s. This warmer weather has caused vegetation to come into leaf earlier, triggering a comparable advance in the emergence of insects that feed on foliage. Data

show that birds dependent on these insects to provide food for their offspring have, in turn, brought their laying dates forward; studies of species such as the Great Tit and Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* show that failure to track changes in food availability can have serious consequences, leading to a reduction in the number and quality of fledglings produced.

In 2013, however, spring temperatures plummeted to levels comparable to those experienced in the mid 1960s. 'After three decades of advancement, laying dates reverted back to those recorded at the start of the Nest Record Scheme data run in 1966,' said the BTO's Dave Leech. 'Blue Tits and Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* were laying 11 or 12 days behind schedule and the average laying dates for Blackbird and Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* were the latest on record. This really is a remarkable demonstration of the flexibility of nesting behaviour in response to extreme weather; almost 50 generations have passed since birds last experienced these conditions, yet they have responded in exactly the same way as their ancestors.'



Dawn Balmer

2. The fiercely contested mystery bird photo competition at the BTO annual conference in December last year resulted in a tie. Ian (D. I. M.) Wallace and Paul Ashworth both correctly identified six out of six but it was Ian's name that came out of the hat. Here he is receiving the bottle of whisky prize from the chairman of the *BB* board of directors, John Eyre.

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The Great White Egret in Europe: population increase and range expansion since 1980

Łukasz Ławicki

Abstract The European breeding and non-breeding populations of the Great White Egret *Ardea alba* have increased dramatically since 1980. During this period the breeding range has expanded to the north and west, and the species has nested for the first time in 13 countries, including Sweden and England. Since 2000 there has also been a substantial increase in the wintering populations in western and central Europe, where it formerly wintered in small numbers or only occasionally, with flocks of several hundred individuals reported from some countries. Changes in the availability of foraging habitat and food, the cessation of persecution and related human-induced mortality, improved legal protection, and climate change have probably all played a part in the patterns described here.

The feathers of the male are much sought after as decorations, which in the East are a sign of great dignity and highly prized; formerly they were used in Europe as ornamentation by knights and the fair sex. (Taczanowski 1882)

The Great White Egret *Ardea alba* is a cosmopolitan species, found on all continents except Antarctica in a variety of wetland habitats where food (especially fish) is available: marshes, river floodplains, the margins of lakes, ponds and reservoirs, coasts, estuaries and mangrove thickets (Voisin 1991; Kushlan & Hancock 2005). The wintering grounds of the nominate race, which breeds from Europe to eastern and southern Asia, lie mainly in the Mediterranean, sub-Saharan Africa and the Persian Gulf, and eastwards into southern China and South Korea (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

In recent years, the Great White Egret's range and breeding population in Europe has expanded significantly. This article reviews the expansion of both breeding and non-breeding populations in Europe since 1980.

Historical status and distribution

It seems likely that Great White Egrets were common in central Europe in the past. In Poland, for example, they were commonly hunted using Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug* (Stajszczyk 2011). Historically, a core area of the population was probably present-day Ukraine and Hungary. The only known Pleistocene and Holocene fossil remains of the Great White Egret in Europe come from Ukraine and Hungary (Bocheński 1995), while the extensive floodplains and marshes that existed until the mid nineteenth century in the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers (which flow through these two countries) provided breeding grounds for many wetland birds (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1966; Stajszczyk 2011). The first evidence of nesting by Great White Egrets in Bulgaria comes from the mid nineteenth century,

when birds bred along the Danube, although the records contain little detail (Peter Shurlinkov pers. comm.). After the breeding season, Great White Egrets appeared regularly to the north of their breeding grounds. For example, in the early nineteenth century, they were seen most years in Silesia (southern Poland), where, in 1863, a nest with young near Głogów was the first breeding record for Poland (Tomiałoć & Stawarczyk 2003).

Firearms (which became readily available and technically more advanced in the second half of the nineteenth century) and the advent of large-scale flood control and wetland drainage led to the decline of many species, including the Great White Egret. At roughly the same time, the use of egret plumes in the millinery trade became fashionable, and many adult egrets were killed during the breeding season, a slaughter that ceased only in the second decade of the twentieth century, at least in eastern Europe (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1966; Voisin 1991; Kushlan & Hancock 2005; Kushlan 2007; Grishchenko 2011). The combined effect of these various factors on the Great White Egret population was catastrophic and in most parts of Europe the species was all but exterminated. In the Iberian Peninsula, for example, there were no sightings between 1894 and 1965 (de Juana & Ferrer 1996); the large breeding colony on Lake Neusiedl in eastern Austria also disappeared; while in Hungary, where in 1835 the population consisted of more than 230 pairs, a mere 25 pairs remained by 1916. Somewhat larger numbers persisted in the Balkans, especially in the Danube Delta, and in the south of the former Soviet Union, where some 500 pairs were breeding in the Volga Delta in 1935 (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1966; Cramp & Simmons 1977; Grishchenko 2011). In the 1950s it also bred at many sites along the Danube in Bulgaria (Hristov *et al.* 2008), but more widely the Great White Egret was generally a rare bird in western European in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there was increasing evidence of recovery, reflecting the implementation of protective measures for the species on its European

breeding grounds. Former breeding sites, abandoned in the late nineteenth century, were recolonised – some 100 pairs were breeding in the re-established colony on the Neusiedlersee in Austria in 1946, and the population in Hungary increased to 33 pairs in 1951. A pair nested in the Czech Republic in 1949, and the species returned to Greece to breed in 1968 (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1966; Cramp & Simmons 1977). Sightings increased in central and western Europe throughout the 1970s as numbers swelled at traditional breeding grounds. At this time 260–330 pairs were nesting in Hungary, and more than 300 pairs in Austria, while in Ukraine and Russia northward expansion took place along the large rivers – the Dniester, Dnieper, Don, Volga and Ural (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Grishchenko 2011). In the 1970s nesting was suspected in Belarus, and in 1977–78 breeding or attempted breeding took place in the Netherlands, Latvia and southern Poland (Stawarczyk 1984; Perrins 1998; Bijlsma *et al.* 2001). In the 1980s the species began to appear more regularly in northern and northwestern Europe.

The expansion of the breeding and non-breeding populations of Great White Egret in Europe

Iberian Peninsula

Up to the mid 1990s small numbers of Great White Egrets occurred in Spain, with 5–20 records annually (de Juana & Ferrer 1996). The first confirmed nesting took place in the Ebro Delta in 1997, where the species has nested regularly since 2000 (Martí & Del Moral 2003). Subsequently, other breeding sites became established: Doñana in 1998, Albufera de Valencia in 2001, Azután Reservoir, Toledo, in 2009, and Lake Sariñena, Huesca, in 2010. By 2011, the Spanish breeding population had reached 53 pairs at 13 sites, with 28 pairs in Andalusia, 12 in Catalonia and 10 in Castile–La Mancha (Garrido *et al.* 2012).

Great White Egrets began wintering in the Iberian Peninsula in the early 1990s (de Juana & Ferrer 1996); during a census in winter 2010/11, almost 1,500 individuals were counted in Spain, mainly in Catalonia and Andalusia (Garrido *et al.* 2012). The first



3. A flock of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in the Barycz river valley, Poland, October 2011. The fishponds in the Barycz valley are the most important area for this species in Poland during the non-breeding season, when more than 2,000 individuals congregate there.

record from Portugal was in 1971, the second not until 1988 (de Juana & Ferrer 1996) but after 1988 the species was recorded annually (with the exception of 1993) and in increasing numbers, for example 16 records in 2001.

Since 2000, small numbers have overwintered in Portugal but the current winter population is estimated at 100–200 individuals (Cтры *et al.* 2010; Paulo Cтры pers. comm.). In addition, the increasing regularity of spring records suggests that birds may soon begin to nest in Portugal (João Jara pers. comm.).

Italy

The first confirmed breeding occurred in the Valli di Comacchio, Emilia-Romagna, in 1992 (Piacentini 1993) and the total for Italy increased to 23–24 nesting pairs by 1995 (Brichetti & Cherubini 1996). More recently the species has colonised the Po valley, where 36–46 pairs bred in 1999–2002, mainly in Emilia-Romagna; currently, some 40–50 pairs nest in a number of colonies in the central and eastern Po Delta (Brichetti & Fracasso 2003; Spina & Volponi 2008; Gustin *et al.* 2009).

Until the late 1980s the species rarely

overwintered in Italy, but in winter 1989/90, 150 were recorded in the Po Delta (Volponi & Emiliani 1995). Since then the numbers wintering have increased rapidly, to an estimated 1,032 birds in 1991–95 and 2,830 in 1996–2000 (Baccetti *et al.* 2002). There has not been a more recent national estimate, but data from key areas suggest a further increase. In Emilia-Romagna, for example, the average winter population rose from 893 birds in 1994–2000 to 1,399 in 2001–05 and 1,840 in 2006–09 (Tinarelli *et al.* 2010). Sightings of colour-ringed birds wintering in Italy have established that these originate mainly from Hungary and Lake Neusiedl in Austria, but birds from colonies on the northern shores of the Black Sea also overwinter here (Spina & Volponi 2008).

Former Yugoslavia

The Great White Egret currently nests in Croatia and Serbia. In Croatia, the breeding population has increased from 7–15 pairs in 1993 (Perrins 1998) to 10–50 pairs in 2002 (BirdLife International 2004), then 115–180 pairs in 2004–10 (Tutiš *et al.* 2013; Jelena Kralj pers. comm.). The current wintering population is estimated at 1,000–1,500 birds, although in some mild winters it may reach

over 3,500 (Tutiš *et al.* 2013; Jelena Kralj pers. comm.).

In Serbia there were up to 15 pairs of Great White Egrets nesting in one or two colonies in the 1980s, but a census in 1998 revealed nine colonies holding 161–205 pairs in Vojvodina province (Puzović *et al.* 1999). Since 2008, an estimated 300–400 pairs are now breeding in Serbia, in at least 19 colonies (Marko Šćiban pers. comm.). During the January 2012 census, 1,921 birds were counted, but the wintering total is probably much higher, because not all suitable habitats were checked (Šćiban *et al.* 2011; Marko Šćiban pers. comm.).

At present, there are no breeding records from Montenegro, but more than 600 birds spend the winter there (Schneider-Jacoby *et al.* 2005; Darko Saveljić pers. comm.). The same applies to Slovenia, where 300–600 birds overwintered during 2001–10 (Božič 2008; Katarina Denac pers. comm.). In January 2011 and 2012, 130 and 279 Great White Egrets respectively were counted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but again these numbers are thought to be an underestimate because the count covered only parts of the country (Dražen Kotrošan pers. comm.).

Greece

From 10–15 pairs in the 1970s and 1980s, the breeding population declined to just five pairs in 1993 (Handrinos & Akriotis 1997; Perrins 1998), but by the late 1990s it had increased again to 10–30 pairs (BirdLife International 2004). A national census in 2003 revealed 31–42 pairs in three colonies: two on Lake Prespa and one on Lake Kerkini (Kazantzidis 2005; Legakis & Maragou 2009; Savas Kazantzidis pers. comm.).

From the early 1980s the wintering population began to increase: in 1982–92 an average of 1,030 birds was reported, with a maximum 1,875 in 1987. The main wintering site was Lake Kerkini with a peak count of 1,072 (Handrinos & Akriotis 1997). The latest published estimate of the Greek wintering population, in the late 1990s, is 1,250–1,950 birds (BirdLife International 2004; Savas Kazantzidis pers. comm.).

France

The first breeding record was in 1994, when two pairs nested in the Camargue (Marion & Marion 1994), and by 2000 the French population was estimated at 15–20 breeding pairs. This increased to 69 pairs in 2004, 142 pairs in 2007 and 160–200 pairs in 2008 (Dubois *et al.* 2008, 2012; Marion 2009). The most important site is Lake Grand-Lieu, Loire-Atlantique, in western France, where 144–165 pairs bred in 2008–10 (Reeber 2011; Sébastien Reeber pers. comm.). In 1998–2002 the wintering population was estimated at 900–2,500 birds (BirdLife International 2004) but it has since increased to 4,000–5,000 (Dubois *et al.* 2008; Frédéric Jiguet pers. comm.).

The Netherlands

The first confirmed breeding was in 1978 (the species probably bred in 1977), and one or two pairs nested irregularly during 1981–90. From 1991 to 1999, 1–5 pairs nested annually but after 12 pairs bred in 2000, a marked increase was evident. Between 42 and 151 pairs nested annually during 2002–09, and then 158–175 pairs in 2010–12 (fig. 1). The largest colony is in the Oostvaardersplassen reserve, Flevoland, where 143, 60, 78, 96, 154, 151 and 167 pairs (respectively) nested in the seven breeding seasons from 2006 to 2012. During this period, five other breeding colonies were established, each with 1–3 nesting pairs. Interestingly, some 7–10 mixed pairings of Great White Egret and Grey Heron *A. cinerea* have occurred, mostly before the year 2000, at least four of which successfully raised a brood (van der Kooij & Voslamber 1997;

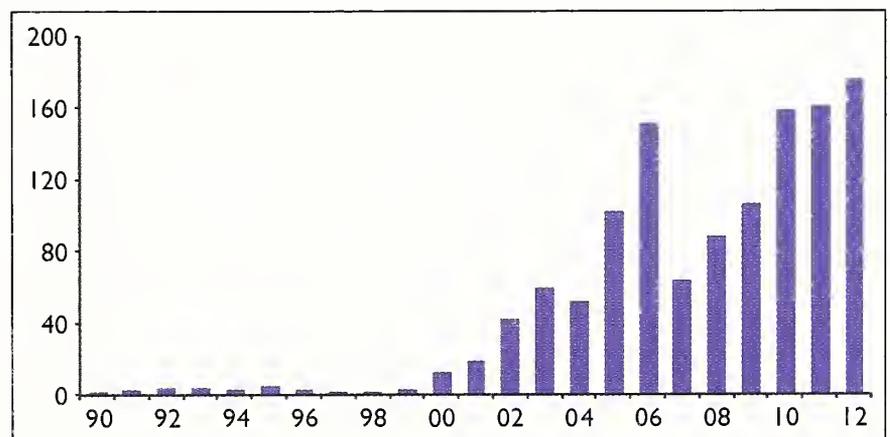


Fig. 1. Number of breeding pairs of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in the Netherlands, 1990–2012. Data from Arend J. van Dijk and Arjan Boele (SOVON Vogelonderzoek Nederland).

Bijlsma *et al.* 2001; van Turnhout *et al.* 2010; Voslamber *et al.* 2010; data from SOVON Vogelonderzoek Nederland; Arend J. van Dijk and Arjan Boele pers. comm.).

Winter counts in 1993–2011 revealed 1–35 birds in 1993–99, 44–181 in 2000–03, 249–744 in 2004–06 and 1,627–1,646 in 2007–09 (data from SOVON Vogelonderzoek Nederland; Arend J. van Dijk pers. comm.). Some 1,783 birds were counted in winter 2010/11 and the total winter population was estimated at 2,300–2,800 birds (Klaassen 2012).

Belgium

During the twentieth century there were just 110 records (of 122 individuals) from 1950 to 1995, while the largest flock on record was of seven birds, in 1997 (Wouter Faveyts pers. comm.). Since 2000 there has been a spectacular rise in numbers; for example there are c. 35,000 records for the period 2006–11, with the largest flock of 105 birds (<http://waarnemingen.be/soort/stats/115>; Wouter Faveyts pers. comm.). An average of 60 birds wintered in southern Belgium (Wallonia) in 2002–11, with a maximum of 114 birds in January 2011 and 216 birds in January 2012 (Loly *et al.* 2011; Jacob & Alvarez 2012). In the north (Flanders) the number is increasing annually, reaching 188 birds in winter 2011/12 (data from the Flemish Research Institute for Nature and Forests; Koen Devos pers. comm.; fig. 2). The current wintering population is estimated at 250–300 birds (Wouter Faveyts pers. comm.).

Unsuccessful nesting attempts occurred in

2006 and 2009, and the first confirmed breeding record was in 2012 when a single pair bred at Ploegsteert, Hainaut. The female was colour-ringed and had fledged in 2003 at Lake Grand-Lieu in western France (Tancrez *et al.* 2012).

Britain

Only 11 Great White Egrets were recorded from 1960 to 1979 but since 1977 the species has been seen almost annually (1987 was the only blank year) and in increasing numbers. In the 1980s a total of 24 birds were recorded, which included six in 1989, and this had increased to 72 birds in the 1990s (Holt 2013; Nigel Hudson/BBRC pers. comm.). Two birds together in 1996 constituted the first multiple sighting. During 2000–05, when the species was still a national rarity, a further 194 were recorded, including 52 in both 2002 and 2003. The increasing numbers ultimately led to the first breeding attempt – two pairs nested successfully in Somerset in 2012 (Anderson *et al.* 2013). Between 2006 and 2011 the wintering population in Britain was estimated at 34 individuals (Musgrove *et al.* 2013).

Ireland

The species was recorded here for the first time in 1984, but it was not until 1997 that the second appeared; subsequently, it has been seen every year except 2004. From 1997 to 2006, 1–3 birds were recorded annually, increasing to 4–8 per year in 2007–11, with a grand total of 48 birds to the end of 2011 (Fahy 2012; Kieran Fahy/IRBC pers. comm.).

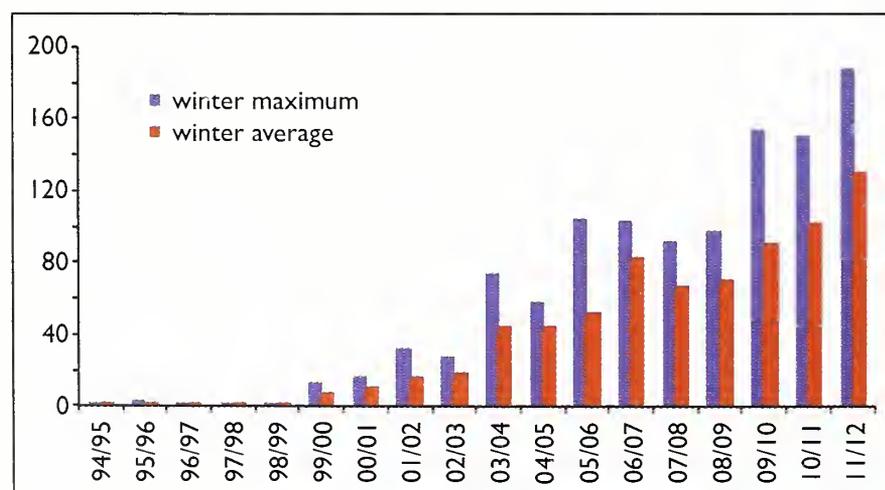


Fig. 2. Maximum and mean counts of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* during monthly surveys (from October to March) in Flanders, northern Belgium, 1994–2012. Data provided by Koen Devos (Flemish Research Institute for Nature and Forests).

Germany

Until 1993 no more than 60 Great White Egrets a year were seen in Germany, but since then sightings have increased rapidly: 150–300 per year in 1994–97, 550 in 1998, 689 in 1999 and 1,150 in 2000 (Barthel 2004; Peter Barthel pers. comm.). In 2000–05 the autumn population was estimated at 1,000–3,000 birds, in 2006–10 3,000–8,000 (Schmitz 2011; Johannes Wahl pers. comm.). Wintering birds increased at a similar rate, although overwin-

tering was not regular until the mid 1990s. In 2000–05 the winter population was estimated at 400–1,000 birds, and this increased to 1,000–3,000 in 2006–10 (Johannes Wahl pers. comm.).

Since the mid 2000s, sightings in the breeding season have increased, and nesting was suspected in 2007–09 in Sachsen-Anhalt. This was confirmed in 2012 when three pairs nested near Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, in northeastern Germany, and one pair successfully raised a brood (Feige & Müller 2012; Dietrich Sellin pers. comm.).

Switzerland

Between 1900 and 1971 there were just 15 records, but since 1980 there were ten or more records every year to 1995, including the first overwintering birds. A marked increase was apparent from 2000, with 200+ birds annually and the largest flocks consisting of more than 50 birds (Maumary *et al.* 2007). During November counts from 2001 to 2010, an average of 169 birds (range 76–338) were seen, while January counts revealed an average of 150 (range 67–195) (Keller & Burkhardt 2003–2011; fig. 3).

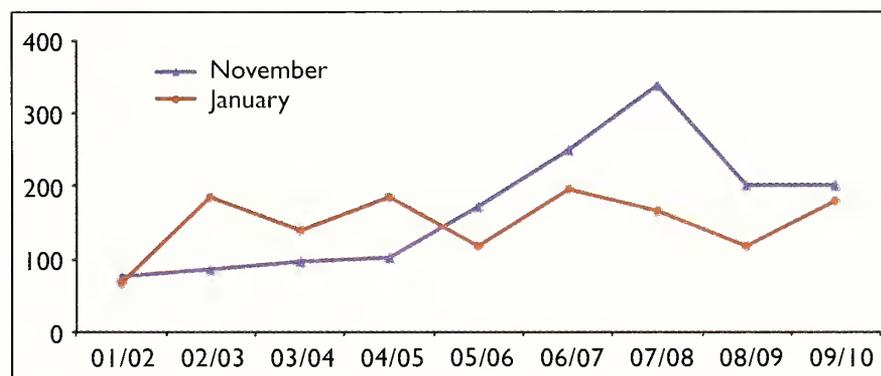


Fig. 3. Numbers of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in Switzerland in November and January, 2001–10. Data from Keller & Burkhardt 2003–2011.

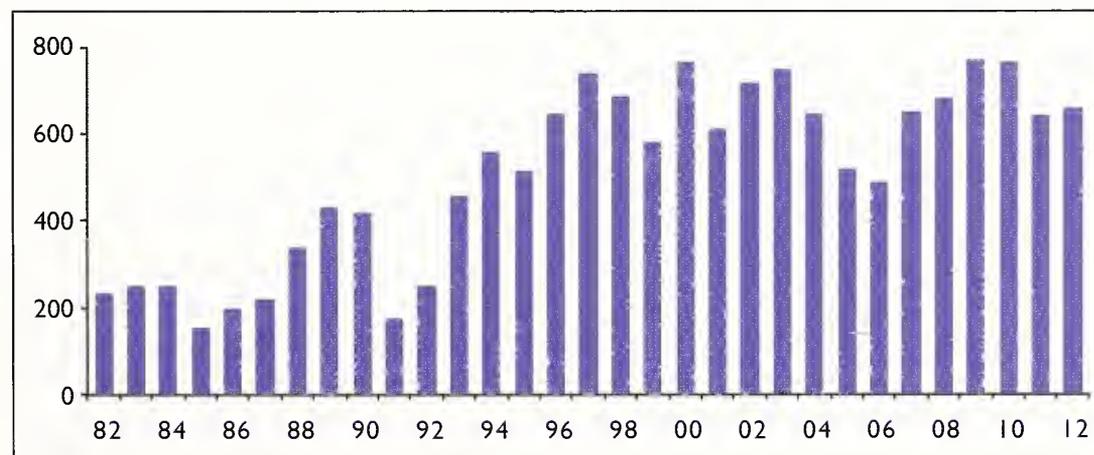


Fig. 4. Changes in the breeding population of the Great White Egret *Ardea alba* on Lake Neusiedl in Austria, 1982–2012. Data from Michael Dvorak and Erwin Nemeth (BirdLife Austria).

Austria

Great White Egrets have bred at Lake Neusiedl, the only known site, since at least the 1820s (Dvorak *et al.* 1993), but the population has shown a clear increase since the mid 1980s and the average was 663 pairs in the 2000s (fig. 4). Since the end of the 1980s, wintering has been regular, increasingly so since 2000 with, for example, 231 individuals counted in January 2005 (Wichmann 2005).

Romania

The main breeding grounds are in the south-east, particularly in the Danube Delta, where in 2001 and 2002 there were 257 and 209 pairs in nine and 11 colonies respectively (Platteuw *et al.* 2004). Exceptionally, a brood was found in the central part of the country, in Transylvania, in 2006 (Ionescu 2007). In 2000–02 the national breeding population was assessed at 900–1,000 pairs (BirdLife International 2004), compared with 300–400 pairs in the early 1990s (Munteanu *et al.* 2002).

Bulgaria

Up to five pairs probably bred in the early 1990s, and the estimated population in 1999–2002 was 4–20 pairs (Perrins 1998; BirdLife International 2004). During 2007–11, 15–30 pairs bred at four sites, two of which were used regularly: Lake Srebana on the Danube (2–6 pairs) and the Dragoman Marsh near Sofia (10–15 pairs) (Shurulinkov *et al.* 2007; Hristov *et al.* 2008; Peter Shurulinkov pers. comm.).

Based on winter census counts, the wintering population was estimated at 267–1,369 birds (Kostadinova & Gramatikov 2007). A more realistic assessment of the winter population is 2,000–4,000 birds and many sites, notably on the Danube, support



4. Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Głowaczewo, Pomerania, Poland, April 2009.

flocks of more than 100 (Peter Shurulinkov pers. comm.).

Hungary

The breeding population in Hungary increased in the 1970s and this trend has continued to the present. In 1980–93 the population was estimated at 500–700 pairs, in the mid 1990s it had risen to 700–800 pairs (Gorman 1996; Hagemeyer & Blair 1997; Perrins 1998), and by the early 2000s it was 1,800–3,000 pairs (BirdLife International 2004; MME 2008). The main breeding grounds are in Hortobágy, where over 1,000 pairs nest (Gábor Simay pers. comm.).

Czech Republic

The only certain breeding record was in Trebno in 1949, but more recently it is likely that the species breeds occasionally (although unconfirmed; Štastný *et al.* 2006; Jiří Horáček pers. comm.). A large increase in autumn and winter populations is evident since 2000. In late summer and autumn, flocks of more than 180 birds occur on many fishponds, mostly in southern Moravia and southern Bohemia (Štastný *et al.* 2006). Until the early

1990s only single birds were seen in winter, but by 2000 up to 50 were overwintering (Musil & Musilová 2010). In 2004–11 this had risen to 100–500 birds, most of them in southern Moravia (Musil *et al.* 2011; Musil & Musilová 2011).

Slovakia

The Great White Egret was rare in Slovakia until 1980, but has occurred increasingly regularly since. The first nesting attempt was in 1989 at the Senné ponds, and the breeding population in the country increased to five pairs in 1991, 9–10 pairs in 1992–93, 43 pairs in 1995 and 65 pairs in 1997 (Danko *et al.* 2002); it now appears stable at 65–80 pairs (BirdLife International 2004; Richard Kvetko and Jozef Ridzoň pers. comm.).

The first wintering Great White Egret was found in 1961, but regular overwintering by small numbers (up to 20) was not apparent until the late 1980s (Grujbárová 2005). In 1991–99 an average of 68 birds (range 9–235) overwintered in Slovakia, which increased to 260 (range 31–534) in 2001–10, while the current estimate is of 400–1,000 birds (Slabeyová *et al.* 2008, 2011; data from BirdLife Slovakia; Jozef Ridzoň pers. comm.; fig. 5).

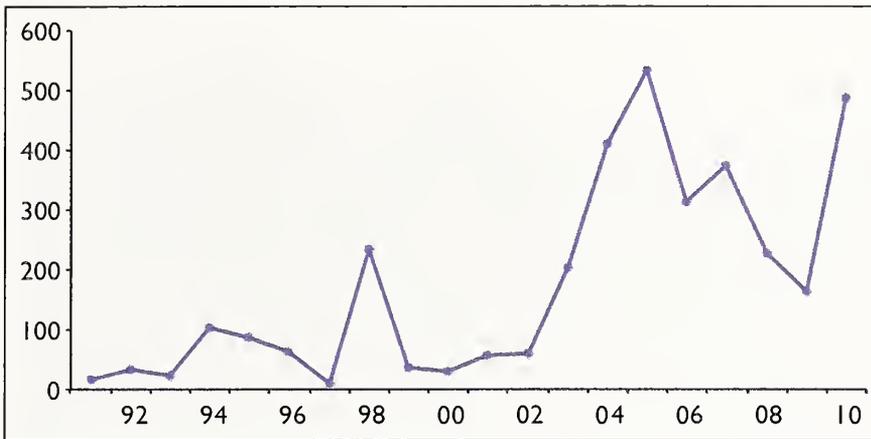


Fig. 5. Wintering Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in Slovakia, 1991–2010. Data from Jozef Ridzoň (BirdLife Slovakia).

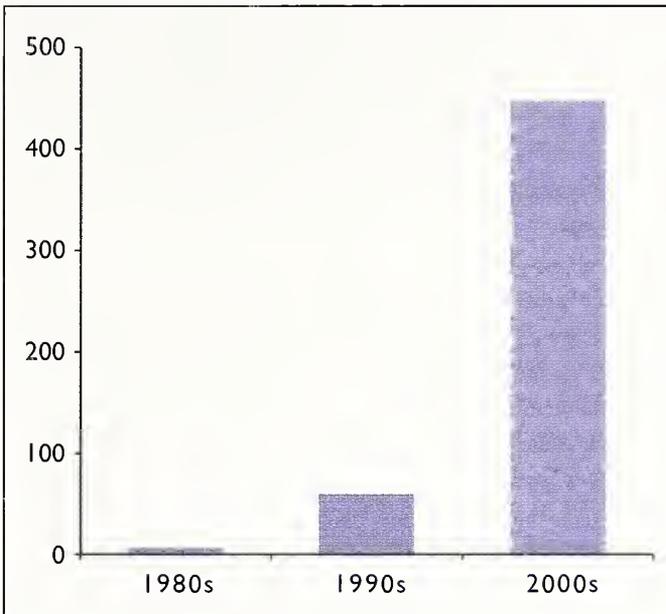


Fig. 6. The number of records of wintering Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in Poland, 1980–2010 (based on Ławicki 2009; note that a record may involve one or more birds at a single site).

Poland

The first confirmed twentieth-century breeding record was at the Biebrza Marshes in 1997 (Pugacewicz & Kowalski 1997) but by 2011 nesting had been confirmed at eight sites in the country, with the population increasing from 26–28 pairs in 2002 to 36 in 2010 and as many as 144 pairs in 2011. Nesting is now regular in the Biebrza Marshes, at the Jeziorsko Reservoir and in the Warta Mouth National Park. Other sites are not used every year (Tomiałojć & Stawarczyk 2003; Sikora *et al.* 2007; Komisja Faunistyczna 2012). An exceptional colony of 116 nests was found in the Biebrza Marshes in 2012 (Marcin Wereszczuk pers. comm.).

In 2000, the autumn population was estimated at 300–400 birds (Tomiałojć & Stawarczyk 2003), but in October 2010 this had increased to c. 4,500, including some 2,000 on fishponds in the Barycz valley in southwest

Poland (Ławicki & Lenkiewicz 2011). The numbers wintering in Poland have also increased. Very few occurred in winter in the 1980s but there were 65 records of wintering birds in the 1990s and 450 in 2001–10 (which included 73 records of almost 700 birds in January 2007); currently, the winter population may be in excess of 1,500 birds (Ławicki 2009; Chodkiewicz *et al.* 2012; unpublished data; fig. 6).

Ukraine

In the 1970s and 1980s, Great White Egrets began to colonise the north of the country, especially the valleys of the Dniester and Dnieper rivers, and by the early 1990s the population was estimated at 1,500–2,000 pairs (Mikhalevich *et al.* 1994). In 1994 nesting was confirmed in the Volyn region of western Ukraine, and in the last 5–6 years birds have bred at many sites in the west, usually in small colonies of 10–15 pairs and particularly at fishponds (Igor Gorban pers. comm.). The estimated breeding population in the 1990s was 4,500–7,300 pairs (BirdLife International 2004), but has since risen to an estimated 5,000–10,000 pairs (Grishchenko 2011). The species remains most numerous in eastern and central Ukraine, mainly in the valleys of the Dnieper and Dniester and on the Black Sea and Sea of Azov (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997; Grishchenko 2011).

Wintering birds are regular in southern Ukraine, and more recently in other areas – for example, up to 30–40 now occur in western Ukraine, even during periods of severe frost (Igor Gorban, Vitaly Grishchenko pers. comms.).

Belarus

The first colony (eight pairs) was discovered in 1994 on the River Pripyat, near the border with Ukraine. Since 1997 birds have nested regularly in the Pripyat valley, and by 1999 there were 6–7 colonies with 40 pairs in total (Samusenko & Zhurauliov 2000). In 2002–03, five new colonies were found in southern Belarus, making a total of eight colonies, and 110–140 nesting pairs, in that region (Abramchuk & Abramchuk 2005). In



Jerzy Kosior

5. Part of a flock of 116 Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* feeding in the shallows at the Siemianówka Reservoir, Poland, July 2011.

2000, the national population was around 200–300 nesting pairs (Abramchuk & Abramchuk 2005). Subsequently, in line with other countries, a marked increase followed: between 2003 and 2011, 170–370 pairs nested on fishponds (e.g. at Selets, Stradoch, Novoselki, Krasnaya Sloboda, Loktyshi, Luban and Tremlya), 150–300 pairs in river valleys (mostly on the Pripyat), 149–210 pairs on peat bogs (e.g. at Baranowicze,

Dobrush and Soligorsk) and 50–80 pairs on lakes (e.g. Chervonoye, Snudy) (Samusenko 2011). The breeding population in Belarus in 2011 was estimated conservatively at 1,000–2,000 pairs, although it could conceivably be two or three times higher (Samusenko 2011; Irina Samusenko pers. comm.). In late summer and autumn there may be up to 2,000 birds on various fishponds and the Belarusian population during the non-breeding season is estimated at over 10,000 birds (Samusenko 2011).



Marcin Wereszczuk

6. Ringed Great White Egret *Ardea alba* nestlings in a colony in the Biebrza Marshes, Poland. In June 2012, 182 nestlings were ringed, including 178 with yellow colour rings, in a large colony of herons on the River Biebrza. The Biebrza National Park is home to a major breeding site of the Great White Egret in Poland. Breeding first took place there in 1997, and by 2012 there were 116 nesting pairs.

Lithuania

The first for Lithuania was seen in 1959, and prior to 1995 the species was extremely rare with occasional reports of single birds or small flocks. Since then, numbers have risen rapidly, with 18 birds in 1996, 42 in 1998 and 370 in 2008 on just one fishpond complex. The first breeding record (of 2–3 pairs) came from Elektrenai in 2005. Subsequently, up to three breeding sites have been occupied (Elektrenai, Lake Druksiai, Lake Sennemunes), with a maximum of 20–28 pairs nesting in 2012 (Raudonikis *et al.* 2012).

Latvia

Prior to 2000, a total of 32 birds were recorded in Latvia, at most 1–2 individuals per year, but some 522 were reported in 2000–04, including 342 in 2004 (Celmins 2004). Since 2005, flocks of several hundred birds can now be seen at many sites. Nesting was suspected on Lake Engure in 1977, and in 1997 and 1999 mixed pairings with Grey Herons were confirmed there (Baumanis 1998; Lipsbergs & Roze 2001). The first pair of Great White Egrets bred on Lake Engure in 2000, after which numbers increased to at least ten pairs in 2007. In 2005–08 two new colonies were discovered: Lake Lubans (seven nests in 2007) and Lake Kanieris (ten nests in 2008) (Lipsbergs *et al.* 2001; www.ornitofaunistika.com/lvp/lvp_egralb.htm; Agris Celmins pers. comm.). By 2011, 40–50 pairs were nesting in these three colonies and by 2012 numbers had doubled to 80–100 pairs in four colonies (Karlis Millers and Antra Stipniece per Agris Celmins pers. comm.). There are at least seven winter records of this species in Latvia for the period 2003–12 (www.ornitofaunistika.com/lvp/lvp_egralb.htm; Agris Celmins pers. comm.).

Estonia

Following single records in 1914 and 1975, there were just four in 1980–89 (Leibak *et al.* 1994), but annual sightings from 1996 onwards. A large influx in 2004 brought 30 birds (Ots & Klein 2005; www.eoy.ee/node/63) and numbers continued to increase. Now hundreds of Great White Egrets are seen every year, mainly on the southeast and west coasts; in early autumn 2012 there were at least 500. The first confirmed breeding record followed this surge in numbers; in 2008 a pair nested at Tüki, in Tartu province, and 1–2 pairs were there in 2009–11. In 2012 a new colony was discovered at Valguta, in Tartumaa province, which held nine pairs (Uku Paal pers. comm.). Winter records are also increasing, with six in winter 2008/09 (Uku Paal pers. comm.).

Sweden

There were seven Swedish records of Great White Egret before 1950, five in total in the 1950s and 1960s, and 17 in the 1970s (SOF 2003). An obvious increase began in the 1980s, during which there were 68 records, and continued – there were 120 in the 1990s and 661 in 2000–11 (Eriksson & Strid 2012; Anders Wirdheim pers. comm.; fig. 7). The first breeding record was in 2012, when a pair nested on Gotland (Anders Wirdheim pers. comm.).

Sightings in winter have also increased in recent years; prior to 2000 only four wintering birds were recorded (in 1979, 1987, 1997 and 1998), but during 2000–12 there were 19, the northernmost at Umeå, Västerbotten (63°49'N 20°15'E) in December 2007 (Anders Wirdheim pers. comm.).

Finland

The first for Finland was in 1966 and by 1980 there were just eight records. The species began to appear regularly after 1980, with an average of 3.5 birds per year in the 1980s (including seven in both 1983 and 1989), six

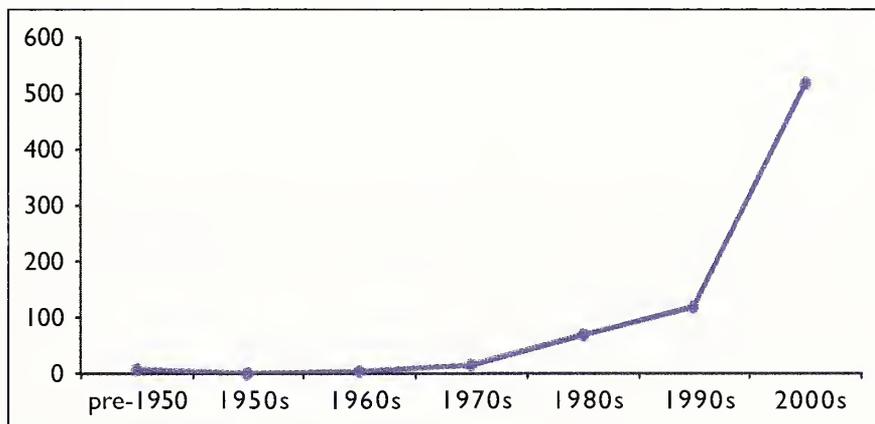


Fig. 7. Sightings of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in Sweden per decade (based on SOF 2003; Eriksson & Strid 2012; Anders Wirdheim pers. comm.).

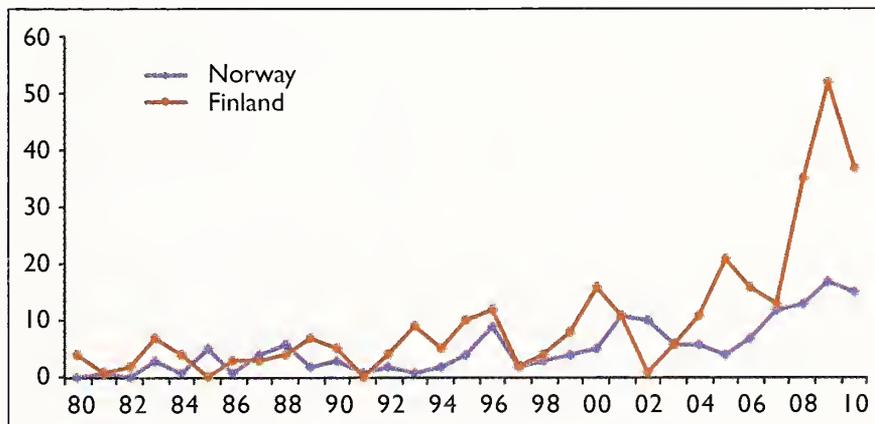


Fig. 8. Annual totals of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in Norway and Finland, 1980–2010 (based on data from the Norwegian and Finnish Rarities Committees; Tor A. Olsen & Aleksi Lehikoinen pers. comm.).

in the 1990s (including 12 in 1996) and 20 in 2001–10 (including 52 in 2009; data from the Finnish Rarities Committee; Aleksí Lehtikoinen pers. comm.; fig. 8).

Norway

The first for Norway was in 1970, and there were another seven in that decade. Twenty-three were seen in the 1980s (with the highest annual count being six) and 31 in the 1990s (max. nine). The upward trend was more marked after 2000, with 106 in the first decade of the new century (max. 17), and 12–17 each year after 2007 (data from the Norwegian Rarities Committee: www.birdlife.no/organisasjonen/nskf/rapporter.php; Tor A. Olsen pers. comm.; fig. 8).

Denmark

After the first in 1952, there were just four more before 1980. The increase began slowly in the early 1980s, with 1–3 seen annually after 1983, but then eight in 1988 (Malling Olsen 1991), and a grand total of 35 by 1990 (Frich & Nordbjærg 1992). About 40 were seen in the 1990s (Alex Sand Frich pers. comm.) but since 2000, Great White Egrets have been recorded in ever-increasing numbers: annual totals of 15–23 in 2000–05, 31–35 in 2006–07, 52–69 in 2008–10 and 126

in 2011 (based on reports in *Fugleåret*; Alex Sand Frich pers. comm.). A record flock of 21 was recorded in 2012 (Morten Bentzon Hansen pers. comm.).

Iceland

Great White Egrets (of the European subspecies *alba*) were recorded in Iceland in May 2000, and April 2002. A record of a third bird, photographed in April 2008, has yet to be formally submitted to the Icelandic rarities committee (Yann Kolbeinsson and Gunnlaugur Pétursson pers. comm.).

Discussion

The population of the Great White Egret has grown spectacularly throughout Europe in the last 30 years. Hudson (1975) estimated the European breeding population in the early 1970s to be 150–220 pairs (excluding the Balkan Peninsula and Russia), but by the early 1990s that had risen to about 3,500 pairs (excluding Turkey and Russia; Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). By 2000, that estimate was 11,000–24,000 pairs, including 3,000–10,000 in Russia (BirdLife International 2004). The period 2000–10 witnessed a further increase in almost all countries, and in the last two decades the Great White Egret has nested in 13 countries across Europe for



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7. Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Jeziorsko Reservoir, Poland, August 2006.

the first time, four of these in 2012 (tables 1 and 2).

Non-breeding and wintering populations have increased in line with the expanding breeding population (table 3). Until the 1980s, the major European wintering areas were in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, and sightings of Great White Egrets in central Europe in winter were rare (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997). Now, the

species is wintering in central Europe in ever-increasing numbers, the latest estimates being 2,000–6,500 (see table 3). The pattern is similar in northern and northwestern Europe, where until the early 1980s it was generally extremely rare but is now recorded regularly and breeding populations are



Janis Jansons/putni.info

8. Group of four Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* at Satini, Saldus, Latvia, September 2009. At present the Great White Egret is common in Latvia, and flocks of several hundred individuals are present at many sites, although prior to 1999 a mere 32 birds had been recorded in the country.

becoming established.

A range extension and population increase as significant as that described here may be the result of a variety of factors. Heron populations may be affected by climatic fluctuations both in the wintering areas and in the breeding areas, and also by

Table 1. Current breeding population of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in European countries that were colonised after 1978 (with year of first breeding).

Country	Year	Breeding population
Netherlands	1978	175 pairs in 2012 (Arjan Boele pers. comm.)
Slovakia	1989	65–80 pairs in 2000s (Richard Kvetko pers. comm.)
Italy	1992	40–50 pairs in 2008 (Spina & Volponi 2008)
Belarus	1994	1,000–2,000 pairs in 2011 (Samusenko 2011)
France	1994	160–200 pairs in 2008 (Dubois <i>et al.</i> 2012)
Poland	1997 ¹	144 pairs in 2011 (Komisja Faunistyczna 2012)
Spain	1997	53 pairs in 2011 (Garrido <i>et al.</i> 2012)
Latvia	2000 ²	80–100 pairs in 2012 (Karlis Millers & Antra Stipniece per Agris Celmins pers. comm.)
Lithuania	2005	20–28 pairs in 2012 (Raudonikis <i>et al.</i> 2012)
Estonia	2008	Nine pairs in 2012 (Uku Paal pers. comm.)
Belgium	2012	One pair in 2012 (Tancrez <i>et al.</i> 2012)
Germany	2012	Three pairs in 2012 (Fiege & Müller 2012; Dietrich Sellin pers. comm.)
United Kingdom	2012	Two pairs in 2012 (Anderson <i>et al.</i> 2013)
Sweden	2012	One pair in 2012 (Anders Wirdheim pers. comm.)

¹ One pair bred in 1863.

² Mixed broods with Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* were raised in 1977, 1997 and 1999.

Table 2. The breeding population (pairs) of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in selected European countries during 1990–99 (BirdLife International 2004) and since 2000 (this paper).

Country	Breeding pairs 1990–99	Breeding pairs since 2000
Austria	580–720	486–766
Belarus	10–30	1,000–2,000
Belgium	0	1
Bulgaria	4–20	15–30
Croatia	10–50	115–180
Estonia	0	9
France	15–20	160–200
Germany	0	3
Greece	10–30	31–42
Italy	37–45	40–50
Latvia	2–5	80–100
Lithuania	0	20–28
Netherlands	1–11	175
Poland	20–25	144
Serbia	200–300	300–400
Spain	0–50	53
Sweden	0	1
Ukraine	4,500–7,300	5,000–10,000
United Kingdom	0	2

One important factor may be the increased availability of food as a result of eutrophication and changing fishery management practices. Overfishing of large predatory fish has led to an increase in numbers of smaller fish, which serve as food for piscivorous species such as egrets and cormorants. In Europe, the last 30 years have witnessed marked population increases in several species of herons and egrets, together with the continental race of the Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* and an expansion of the Pygmy Cormorant *P. pygmeus* into central Europe (e.g. BirdLife International 2004; Fasola *et al.* 2010; Ławicki *et al.* 2012).

changes in human-induced mortality (including hunting), in the status of legal protection, and in the availability of foraging habitat and food (Fasola *et al.* 2010). In the case of the Great White Egret it is not clear which of these factors is the most important, although all of those listed may be contributing to the change in status to a varying degree in different areas of Europe.

Creation of new foraging habitats may be significant in some areas. For example, in the Netherlands, the extensive, shallow marshland created at Oostvaardersplassen offers herons rich food resources, mainly of small fish and tadpoles (Voslamber *et al.* 2010). In southern France, the area of land now devoted to rice cultivation in the Camargue has had a significant effect on the breeding populations of the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Little Egret *Egretta*



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9. Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* and Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* at Jeziorsko Reservoir, Poland, August 2007.

garzetta and Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (Tourenq *et al.* 2000). Similarly, the population increase of the Little Egret in northwestern Italy has been driven mainly by the greater availability of rice fields, which are the main foraging habitat of this species (Fasola *et al.* 2010). The foraging strategies of the Great White



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10. Juvenile Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in the colony at Jeziorsko Reservoir in central Poland, July 2011. A total of 150 nestlings were ringed at this colony during 2002–12. Most recoveries of birds ringed at Jeziorsko have come from southwest Poland (the Barycz valley), Germany and France (Tomasz Janiszewski pers. comm.).

Egret during autumn and winter have changed in several countries in western and central Europe in the past few years. In the Netherlands, Germany and Poland, birds have switched to land-based foraging on

farmland (e.g. on mown fields and stubble). Large flocks (up to 80 birds) have been observed in such habitats, where their main food is the Common Vole *Microtus arvalis* (Voslamber *et al.* 2010; Ławicki & Lenkiewicz

Table 3. Winter population (number of individuals) of Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* in selected European countries since 2000.

Country	Winter population	Source
Austria	100–230	Wichmann (2005); Teufelbauer (2011)
Belgium	250–300	Wouter Faveyts pers. comm.
Bosnia & Herzegovina	130–280	Dražen Kotrošan pers. comm.
Bulgaria	2,000–4,000	Peter Shurulinkov pers. comm.
Croatia	1,000–3,500	Tutiš <i>et al.</i> (2013); Jelena Kralj pers. comm.
Czech Republic	100–500	Musil <i>et al.</i> (2011)
France	4,000–5,000	Dubois <i>et al.</i> (2008); Frédéric Jiguet pers. comm.
Germany	1,000–3,000	Johannes Wahl pers. comm.
Italy	2,830	Baccetti <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Montenegro	450–600	Schneider-Jacoby <i>et al.</i> (2005); Darko Saveljić pers. comm.
Netherlands	2,300–2,800	Klaassen (2012)
Poland	500–1,500	Ławicki (2009); Chodkiewicz <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Portugal	100–200	Paulo Catry pers. comm.
Serbia	2,000	Šćiban <i>et al.</i> (2011); Marko Šćiban pers. comm.
Slovakia	400–1,000	Slabeyová <i>et al.</i> (2008, 2011)
Slovenia	300–600	Božič (2008); Katarina Denac pers. comm.
Spain	1,500	Garrido <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Switzerland	120–200	Keller & Burkhardt (2011)
United Kingdom	35	Musgrove <i>et al.</i> (2013)

2011; Peter Barthel pers. comm.). This shift in diet may have enabled birds to survive colder European winters, in particular when more traditional feeding sites are frozen.

The cessation of hunting, as well as the implementation of appropriate protection measures for many wetland areas, has led to the recolonisation of some breeding sites that had been abandoned long ago (Tucker & Heath 1994; Kushlan 2007; van Turnhout *et al.* 2010). Global warming, which has led to a northward shift of the July isotherm, is probably also a key factor in the northward spread of certain (thermophilic) species (Moss 1998); the rapid colonisation of southern England and Wales by the Little Egret is a good example (Lock & Cook 1998; Musgrove *et al.* 2013). Climate change has also affected migration routes, wintering areas and mortality rates. The overwintering by thousands of Great White Egrets in western and central Europe, often near their nesting sites, has increased spectacularly in the last ten years, enabling birds to avoid the hazards of migration, and to return to breeding sites earlier and perhaps also in better physical condition. Certainly, it seems likely that, in the immediate future, populations of the Great White Egret in the newly colonised countries in northern and western Europe will increase and lead to permanent settlement.

Acknowledgments

It would have been impossible to write this article without the help of many people from all over Europe. For providing me with unpublished data and literature and for some stimulating discussions, I would like to thank the following: Nicola Baccetti, Peter Barthel, Arnoud van den Berg, Zsombor Berényi, Arjan Boele (SOVON Vogelonderzoek Nederland), Paulo Catry, Agris Celmins, Przemek Chylarecki, José Luis Copete, Katarina Denac, Koen Devos (Flemish Research Institute for Nature and Forests), Jochen Dierschke, Arend J. van Dijk (SOVON Vogelonderzoek Nederland), Michael Dvorak (BirdLife Austria), Kieran Fahy, Mauro Fasola, Wouter Favelys, Alex Sand Frich, Igor Gorban, Vitaly Grishchenko, Radosław Gwóźdź, Morten Bentzon Hansen, Magnus Hellström, Jiří Horáček, Nigel Hudson, Dan Ionescu, Tomasz Janiszewski, João Jara, Frédéric Jiguet, Vytautas Jusys, Saulius Karalius, Savas Kazantzidis, Leander Khil, Janos



Julia Marchowska

Botond Kiss, Olaf Klaassen, Peter Knaus, Yann Kolbeinsson, Dražen Kotrošan, Jelena Kralj, Jan Król, Richard Kvetko, Aleksi Lehtikoinen, Ruslans Matrozis, Karlis Millers, Juan Carlos del Moral, Petr Musil, Erwin Nemeth, Tor A. Olsen, Uku Paal, Gunnlaugur Pétursson, Liutauras Raudonikis, Sébastien Reeber, Jozef Ridzoň, Irina Samusenko, Darko Saveljić, Marko Šćiban, Dietrich Sellin, Peter Shurulinkov, Gábor Simay, Marek Stajszczyk, Antra Stipniece, Alexandre Vintchevski, Petr Vorisek, Johannes Wahl (Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten), Mats Wærn, Marcin Wereszczuk and Anders Wirdheim. Thanks to all the photographers for providing excellent images: Wiesław Dzięgielewski (BirdWatching.pl), Janis Jansons (putni.info), Jerzy Kosior, Miłosz Kowalewski, Ryszard Szaśiadek and Marcin Wereszczuk. Special thanks to Julia Marchowska, who prepared the drawing of the Great White Egrets on page 22. Peter Senn kindly improved my English.

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Announcements

BB Bird Photograph of the Year 2014

The 38th BB Bird Photograph of the Year competition is free to enter and seeks to recognise the best and/or the most scientifically interesting photographs of Western Palearctic birds taken during 2013. In addition to the main awards, there is a digiscoping section. Up to three images may be entered for each competition. For full details of the rules and how to submit entries, go to www.britishbirds.co.uk/about/bird-photograph-of-the-year

The closing date for the 2014 competition is 1st April 2014.

The competition's main sponsor in 2014 will again be **Anglian Water**, to whom we remain extremely grateful. Collins, Christopher Helm/Bloomsbury and the Eric Hosking Charitable Trust will continue their long-term support of the Award too. The winning entries will be exhibited

at the British Birdwatching Fair in August, where the awards will be presented.

New county bird recorder

Gower Mark Hipkin, 6 Holly Road, Cimla, Neath SA11 3PE; e-mail markhipkin1@gmail.com

Changes to the BB list of names

Following taxonomic changes to the British List announced in October 2013 by the BOURC's Taxonomic Sub-committee, the BB list of Western Palearctic birds has been updated from the beginning of BB Vol. 107 – go to www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/the-british-birds-list to download the revised list. The TSC report can be found in full online (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ibi.12091/pdf>), and explains the rationale behind these changes.

The vocalisations of ‘Ehrenberg’s Redstart’

Raffael Ayé, Nicolas Martinez and Thomas Stalling

Abstract The vocalisations of ‘Ehrenberg’s Redstart’ *Phoenicurus phoenicurus samamisticus* are analysed and compared with those of the nominate race. There is considerable variation in the song of both races, but three parts can usually be distinguished: an introductory note; a repetitive, heavily modulated sequence; and a highly variable component at the end. In *samamisticus*, the introduction is variable and only rarely does it consist solely of a clear whistle similar to that of nominate *phoenicurus*. The song of *samamisticus* varies geographically but no large-scale geographical variation in the song of nominate *phoenicurus* was found. On its own, the call appears not to be an infallible means of separating the races because some *phoenicurus*, at least from the eastern part of the range, can give calls identical to *samamisticus*.

Introduction

As a breeding bird, the Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* occurs in most of western Europe, as well as in parts of north-west Africa, Turkey, the Middle East and Asia, where its distribution extends east to the Lake Baikal region (Menzel 1971; Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1988; Bauer & Berthold 1996). Nominate *phoenicurus* (hereafter simply *phoenicurus*) is found throughout much of the species’ range, whereas the race *P. p. samamisticus* (often referred to as ‘Ehrenberg’s Redstart’ but hereafter as *samamisticus*) is restricted to the Crimean Peninsula, the Caucasus region, and parts of Turkey, Iran and southwestern Tajikistan (Abdusalomov 1973; Stepanyan 2003; Kirwan *et al.* 2008; Ayé *et al.* 2012). This race probably also breeds in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Stepanyan 2003), and possibly also Afghanistan (Menzel 1971), although specimens and documented records from the last country seem to be lacking (Paludan 1959; Rasmussen & Anderton 2004). In addition, small numbers of *samamisticus* are reported from the Balkan Peninsula (Makatsch 1950; Bauer 1964; Bauer & Hodge 1970; Menzel 1971; Bauer *et al.* 1973; Iankov 2007), and some recordings from Greece are analysed in this paper. In the Crimean Peninsula, *samamisticus* occurs

sympatrically with *phoenicurus*, and the two races possibly intergrade (Martinez 2010). The situation in Turkey is also unclear: for example, Kirwan (2011) stated that intergrades occur there, while Small (2009) suggested that they do not.

The nominate subspecies is well studied in terms of both plumage characteristics (e.g. Cramp 1988; Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1988; Svensson 1992; Jenni & Winkler 1994) and song (e.g. Thimm 1973; Koepke 1986; Hegelbach & Nabulon 1998). Small (2009) discussed plumage characteristics of *samamisticus*, primarily males, in detail, and noted that *samamisticus* has a different call and a somewhat different song compared with *phoenicurus*, although Martinez (2010) found that in the Crimea the songs of birds resembling *samamisticus* and *phoenicurus* were not obviously different. Beaman & Madge (1998) and Jonsson (1992) suggested that the song of *samamisticus* is slower and harsher or more grinding compared with that of *phoenicurus*. In addition to Ayé *et al.* (2012), who presented preliminary results of the present study, these are the only published descriptions of the song of *samamisticus* known to us. The call of *samamisticus* is consistently described as flat rather than rising, as in

phoenicurus (Bergmann & Helb 1982; Bergmann *et al.* 2008; Small 2009; Svensson *et al.* 2010).

During several visits to the Caucasus and the Middle East since 2000, we had the opportunity to observe *samamisticus* in different parts of its range. Most of these birds sounded quite different from *phoenicurus*, in terms of both songs and calls. In this article we present the first detailed description and analysis of the song of *samamisticus*, and provide new evidence regarding differences in voice between the two races.

Material and methods

We analysed 421 song strophes of at least 22 individual *samamisticus* and 259 strophes of at least 19 individual *phoenicurus*. Where recordings of some strophes were incomplete, these were included only in the analysis relating to a particular component, so the total number of recordings may differ slightly between the various parameters analysed. Recordings were obtained from published bird-sound collections, and also from H-H. Bergmann, P. Kennerley, J. Martens, from the internet (especially the xeno-canto collection, www.xeno-canto.org) and from the private

collection of the authors. The recordings of *samamisticus* range from Sarakhs (in north-east Iran) to Greece in the west and include birds from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia. We analysed recordings of *phoenicurus* made throughout its range, from western Europe east to the Altai and the Tien Shan Mountains in Kazakhstan. Sonograms of the vocalisations were produced using Raven Lite version 1.0 for Mac OS X (Cornell Lab of Ornithology).

To describe the song, we use the term ‘strophe’ for the basic unit of song. Individual song strophes in the Common Redstart may differ considerably from preceding strophes and are given in series, typically with a pause of several seconds between each strophe. The term ‘phrase’ is used for repeated, identical (or almost identical) groups of elements. We distinguish three parts in the song strophe, following Menzel (1971), Thimm (1973) and Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer (1988). These are: the introductory note (which in *phoenicurus* is usually a rather high-pitched whistle); a repetitive, heavily modulated sequence; and finally a highly variable terminal component (figs. 1 & 2).

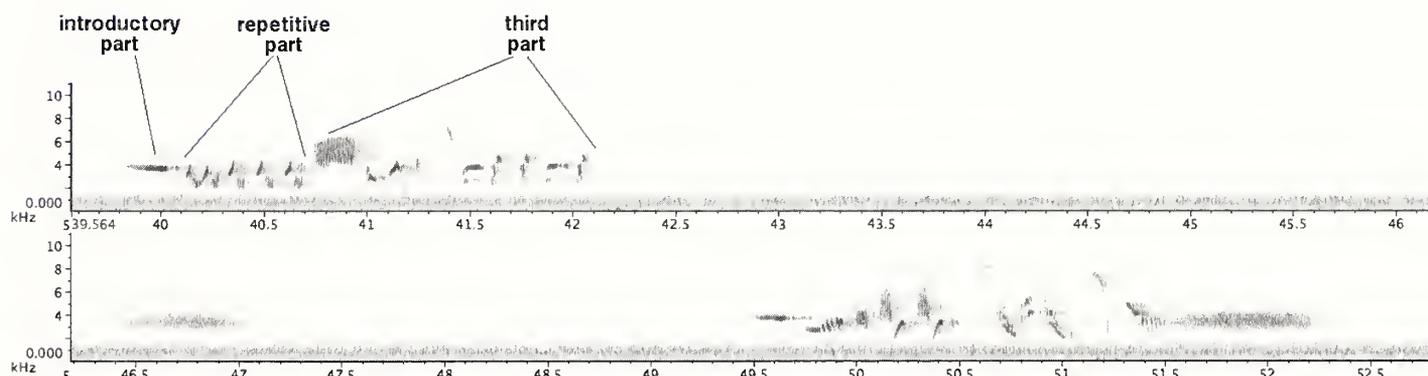


Fig. 1. Song of Common Redstart *Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus* from Ammarnas, Sweden, June 2009. The introductory whistle, repetitive (second) and variable (third) parts are clearly visible. Sonogram created by RA based on a recording by R. van Bemmelen.

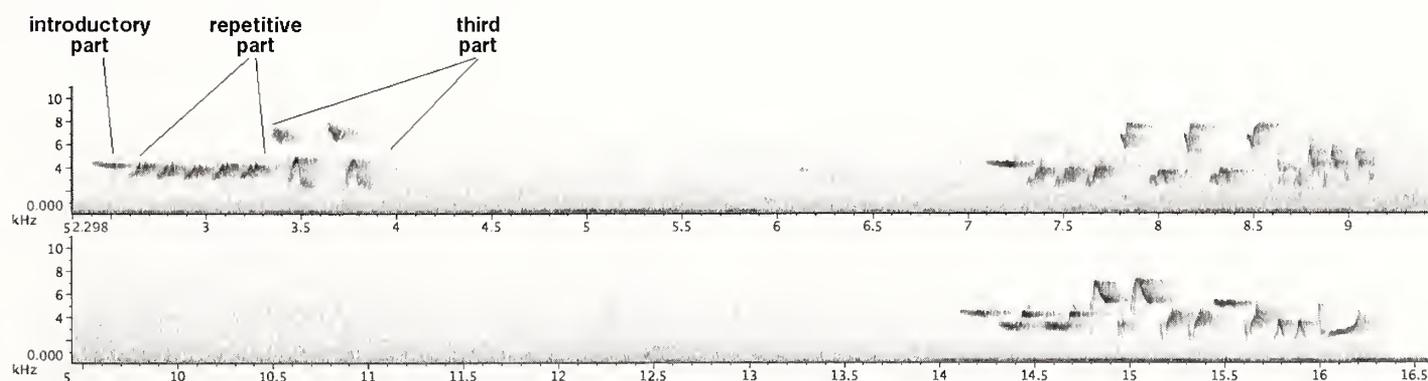


Fig. 2. Song of Common Redstart *Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus* from Castricum, the Netherlands, May 2002. The first strophe has two repetitive parts, since the third part is also repetitive. Sonogram created by RA based on a recording by S. Fisher.

Results

Whole song

In *phoenicurus*, the shortest song strophe analysed lasted c. 0.9 seconds and the longest c. 2.9 seconds. Some strophes contained two or more repetitive elements or lacked the terminal part, but identifying the three-part structure was straightforward in the majority of cases.

We found great variation between strophes of *samamisticus*, relating to structure, sound quality and, to some extent, speed. The shortest strophe analysed lasted c. 0.8 seconds (fig. 3 at 0.4 sec), the longest c. 3.7 seconds (fig. 4 at 1 min 7.5 sec). In many cases, the song of *samamisticus* was a scratchy warble, resembling that of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* or Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* as much as *phoenicurus*.

The three-part song structure typical of *phoenicurus* can often be recognised in *samamisticus* song. However, the song is even more variable than in *phoenicurus* – the

introductory note may be omitted, while some songs apparently consist of the third (variable) part only. The proportion of strophes containing two or three repetitive parts (e.g. fig. 4 at 59.5 sec) was slightly higher than in *phoenicurus*. A small proportion lacked the third part, slightly more than in *phoenicurus*.

The introductory part

The introductory note of *phoenicurus* is a rather clear whistle in 98.8% (256 of 259 strophes) of recordings analysed. Our study showed it to be usually high-pitched, often 4–5 kHz and almost invariably flat or almost flat in pitch. At least two birds gave lower-pitched whistles that alternated with a more typical, higher-pitched note, while a few birds also gave rising introductory whistles.

In *samamisticus*, the introductory part can take several different forms. Here we describe four that we found to be common, but we identified several more. One common intro-

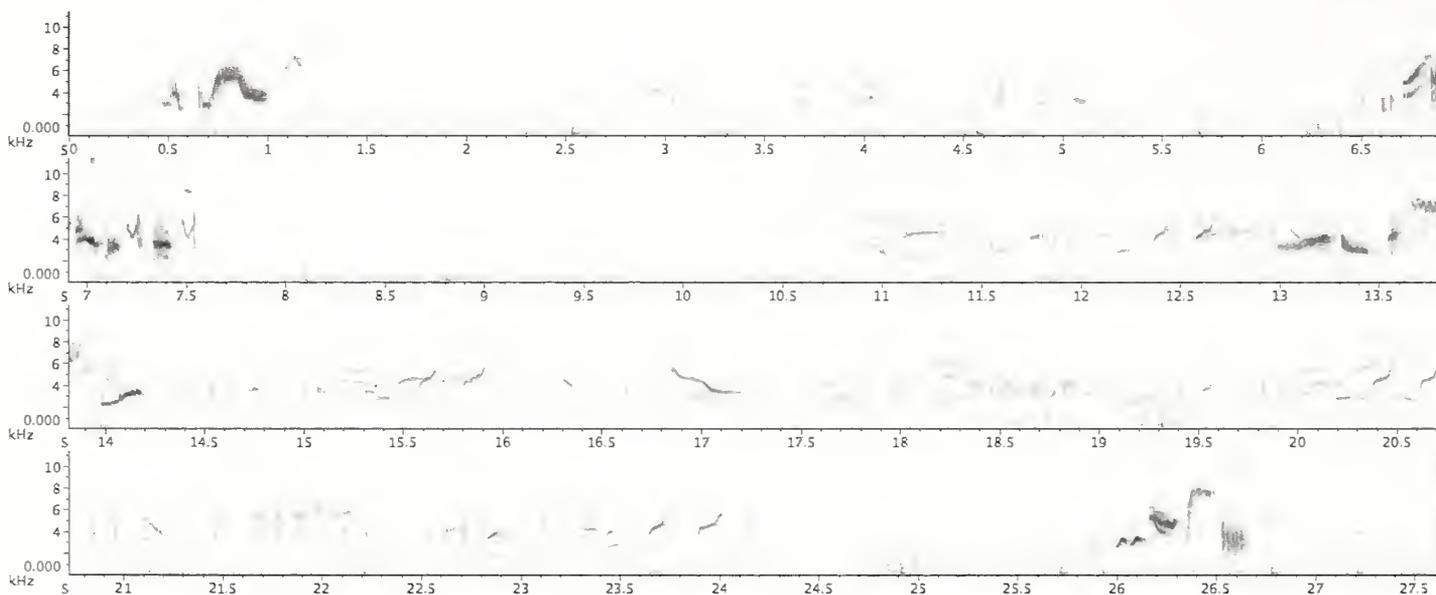


Fig. 3. Song of a male Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* from Kiyasar, Mazandaran, Iran, April 2004. These four unusually short strophes lack the repetitive parts. Based on a recording by RA.

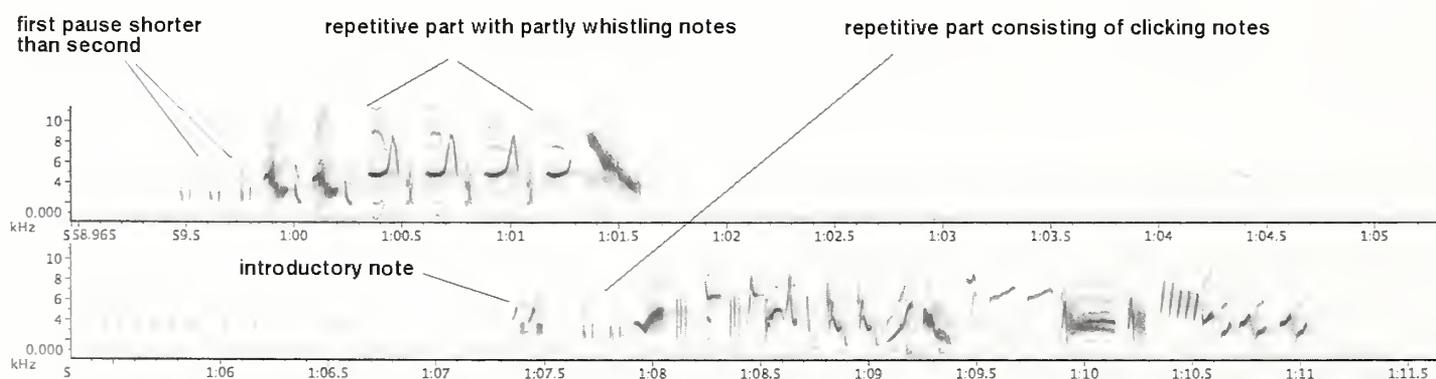


Fig. 4. In Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* the introductory notes are very variable; in these examples there are clicking notes in the first strophe and almost clangorous notes consisting of double elements in the second. Based on a recording from Kiyasar, Mazandaran, Iran, by RA in April 2004.



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11. Male 'Ehrenberg's Redstart' *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus*, showing the striking white wing-panel of this form; Al Abraq, Kuwait, March 2012.

ductory note comprised a modulated or twangy and wheezy tone (e.g. fig. 3 at 13.0 sec, and fig. 5). Another common type was a rattle or rolling trill, which in some cases rose in pitch in the last third and acquired a rather whistling quality towards the end (thus giving a passing resemblance to the introductory note of *phoenicurus*; figs. 6 & 7). Alternatively, the introductory part may consist of hard notes similar to the clicking call, often uttered as two or three double-notes (figs. 3 & 4). A fourth type contained short, almost clangouring phrases, which are identical to an element used in the repetitive part (e.g. figs. 4 & 8). This type of introductory note could be identified as such because (i) the

pause between the two phrases was consistently shorter than the pauses in the repetitive part and (ii) the rapid doubled phrases were followed by a repetitive part consisting of identical but better-spaced phrases, or by a different repetitive part.

Several birds gave typical *samamisticus*-like introductory notes but also included a *phoenicurus*-like whistle. One *samamisticus* gave only *phoenicurus*-like whistles on the short recording (six strophes) available. In total, 15% (61 of 418) of all *samamisticus* strophes began with a whistling note and the large majority of these whistling notes were *phoenicurus*-like.

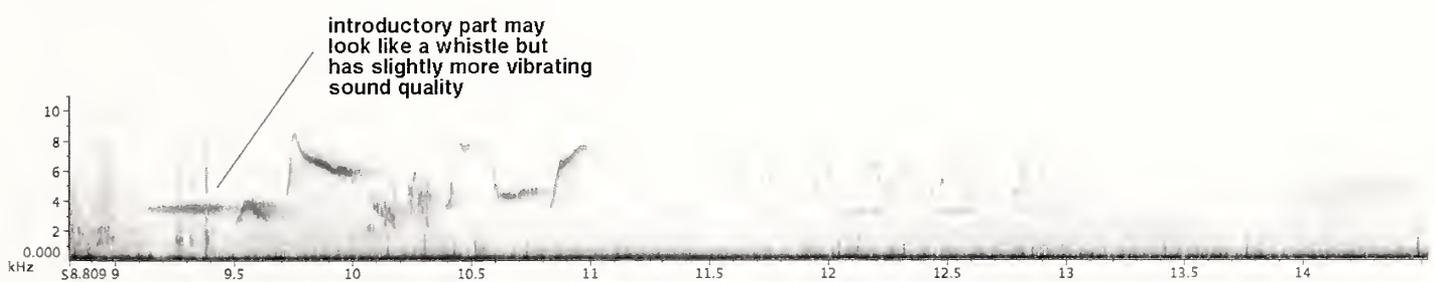


Fig. 5. Song of a male Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* from Quba, Azerbaijan, May 2011, showing an introductory note that may look like the initial whistle of *phoenicurus* in a low-resolution sonogram, but has a more vibrating sound visible at higher resolution and audible in the field with care. The vertical lines are artefacts of the recording. Based on a recording by TS.

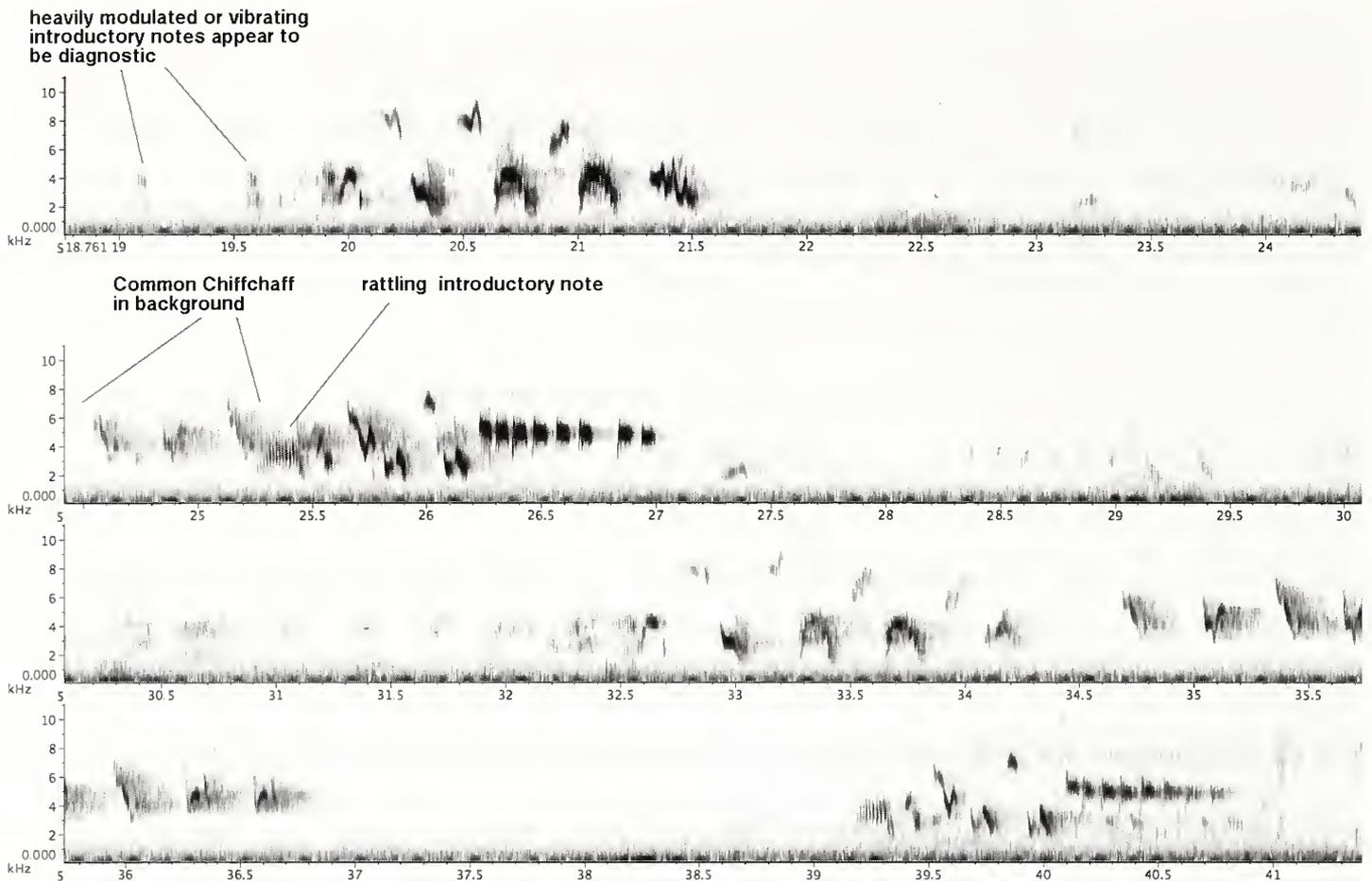


Fig. 6. Song of Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* from Mollah Deh, Semnan, Iran, April 2012. Vibrating or rattling introductory notes appear to be diagnostic of *samamisticus*. Background noise includes Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita menzbieri*. Based on a recording by RA.

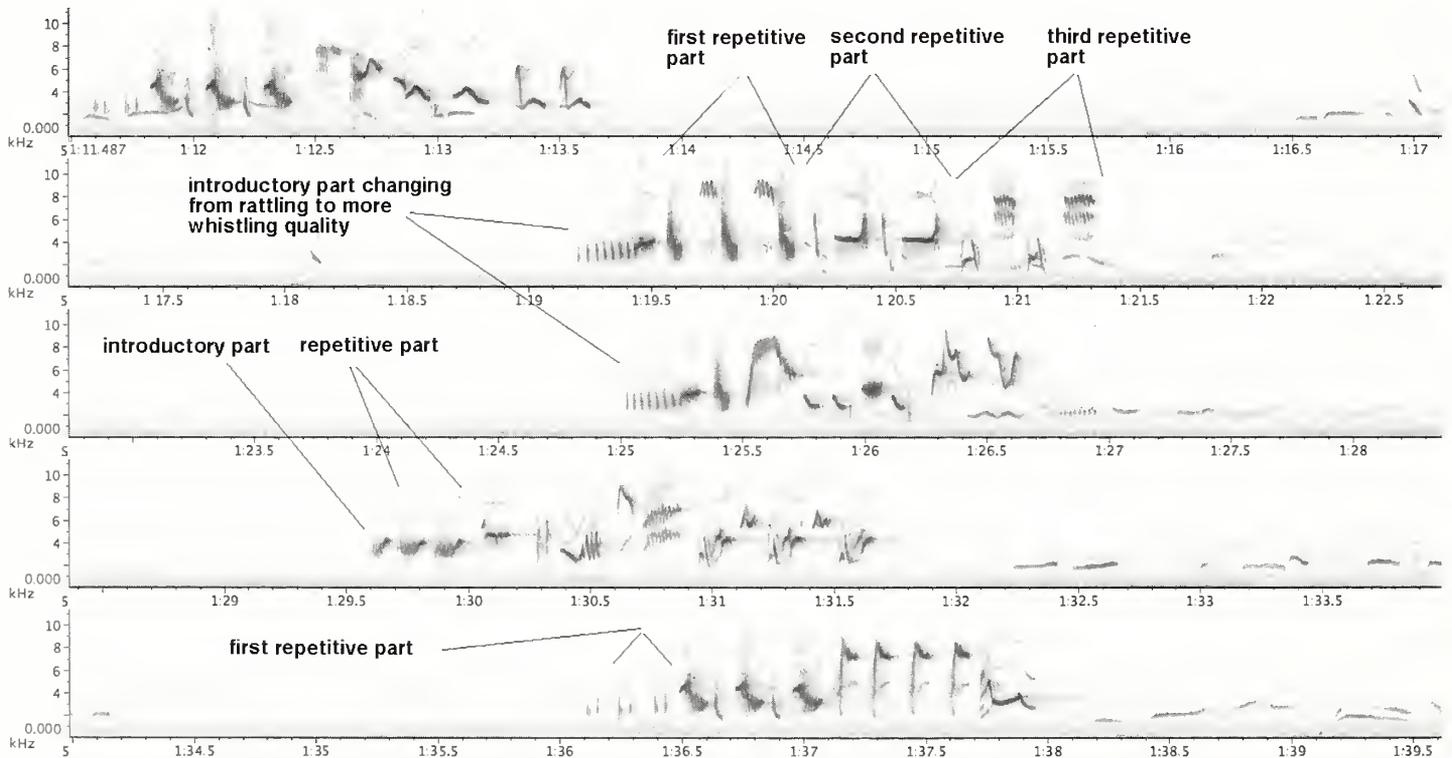


Fig. 7. Song of male Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* from Kiyasar, Mazandaran, Iran, April 2004. Introductory notes consisting of a rattle and changing into a whistle were repeatedly observed in *samamisticus* (1 min 19.2 sec and 1 min 25.0 sec). The repetitive (second) part sometimes contained whistled notes (e.g. at 1 min 20.3 sec). Based on a recording by RA.

The repetitive part

In both *samamisticus* and *phoenicurus* this typically consisted of a phrase that was repeated at least twice but often four or even five times. Some birds of both races did not include any repetitive sequences, while others included strophes containing two or more

successive repetitive parts (see fig. 4 and fig. 7 at 1 min 19.5 sec) – this was more common in *samamisticus* (19.8% of strophes) than in *phoenicurus* (14.7%; table 1). Owing to the variability of the third part of the song, we considered a strophe to contain two repetitive parts only when the second series

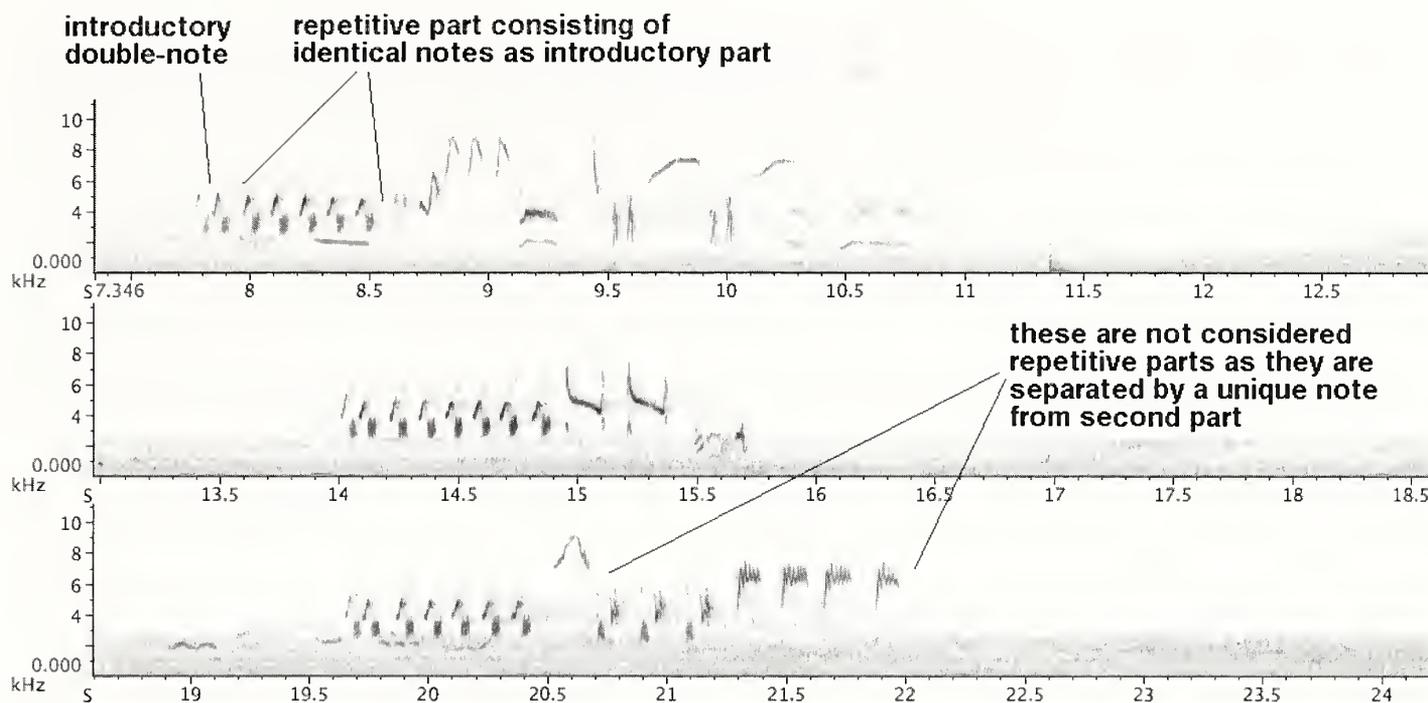


Fig. 8. Song of Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* from Kiyasar, Mazandaran, Iran, April 2004. The same notes or phrases used in the repetitive (second) part can also be used as an introductory part – recognisable by the different length of the pauses between double-notes. Based on a recording by RA.

immediately followed the first, without any other notes in between. Apart from the proportion of strophes with more than one repetitive part, we did not detect any consistent differences between *samamisticus* and *phoenicurus* in this part of the song.

For both races, the phrases that were repeated could consist of just one note or two clearly distinct notes. These notes could be simple (one element in the sonogram) or more complex with overtones. Many of the notes were strongly modulated, but others were more whistling (e.g. fig. 4 at 1 min 0.2 sec, fig. 7 at 1 min 20.3 sec).

The terminal part

Some strophes seemed to consist entirely of the variable third part (fig. 3), whereas it was absent from 5.5% of the strophes of *samamisticus* and 4.6% of *phoenicurus* (table 1). Variation in the third part was so extensive in both subspecies that it is hard to give a meaningful comparison and interpretation. The sonograms shown in figs. 3–8 illustrate the extent of this variation in *samamisticus*.

Our *samamisticus* recordings revealed several instances of mimicry, including of the following species: Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, Common Whitethroat *S. communis*, Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* and Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*. Based on our material and published sources

(e.g. Menzel 1971), *samamisticus* appears to be similar to *phoenicurus* in terms of its ability to mimic other species.

Geographical variation of the song in *samamisticus*

Recordings from the more southern parts of the range of *samamisticus* – Iran and Armenia – differed in several respects from those in the Greater Caucasus region – Azerbaijan, Dagestan (Russia) and Georgia. The proportion of strophes that began with a whistling note was 0.9% (2 of 216) in the south but 40% (57 of 144) in the Caucasus (table 1). Recordings from the south included greater variation in the introductory note than those from the Caucasus. Other aspects, however, were similar in both regions (table 1). Recordings from Greece were somewhat intermediate between these two groups; they also showed *phoenicurus*-like, whistled introductory notes, albeit at a lower frequency than those from the Caucasus.

Call

In all four countries in which we sound-recorded *samamisticus*, the calls were flat and corresponded with the call commonly described for this race. This is best described as an inhaling, flat 'heed' (fig. 10), which can resemble the call of Common Nightingale. None of the recordings of *phoenicurus* from Europe that we analysed contained an

Table 1. Quantitative differences in the song structure of Common *Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus* and Ehrenberg's Redstarts *P. p. samamisticus*; n = number of strophes analysed.

<i>Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus</i>		<i>Phoenicurus p. samamisticus</i>			
All localities		All localities	Caucasus	Iran and Armenia	Greece*
Song strophes starting with whistle	99% n=259	15% n=418	40% n=144	1% n=216	3% n=58
Two or more repetitive (second) parts	15% n=259	20% n=420	22% n=144	21% n=218	10% n=58
Missing variable (third) part	5% n=259	6% n=421	7% n=144	5% n=219	5% n=58

* Results of *samamisticus* from Greece should be viewed with caution as they are based on just two individuals.

aberrant call that in any way recalled the flat call of *samamisticus*. However, in eastern Kazakhstan, RA observed three typical male *phoenicurus* that gave calls very similar or identical to the call of *samamisticus*. Two of the three sang like typical *phoenicurus* but repeatedly gave the 'heed' call. The third bird gave predominantly flat 'heed' calls (fig. 10), but intermittently also the rising 'huit' call typical of *phoenicurus*. The last bird was seen at close range while preening its open wing, which showed no trace of white, or strong abrasion suggestive of a first-summer bird; moreover, in eastern Kazakhstan, it was more than 1,800 km northeast of the known

breeding range of *samamisticus*. Another apparently typical *phoenicurus* observed by RA in steppe habitat in Semnan province, Iran, in April 2012 gave both a *samamisticus*-like flat call and the upslurred call typical of *phoenicurus*. Finally, a *phoenicurus* recorded in central Kazakhstan in late April 2011 also gave calls of both types (Franke 2013).

Discussion

Small (2009) suggested that the song of *samamisticus* has a *phoenicurus*-like introduction. In fact, one of the most constant differences between *phoenicurus* and *samamisticus* lies in the introductory note. This is almost

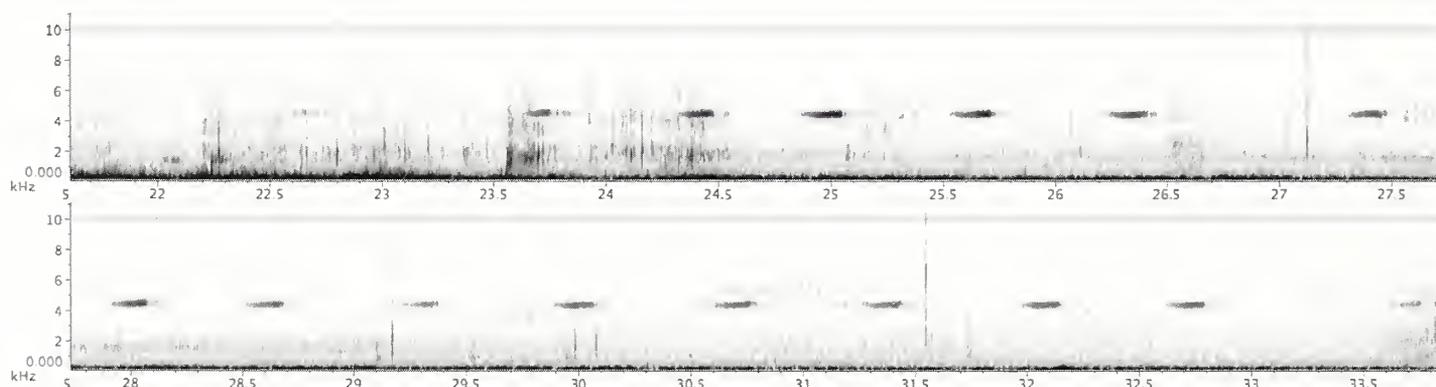


Fig. 9. Call of a male Ehrenberg's Redstart *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus*, Kojori, Georgia, April 2011. Based on a recording by NM.

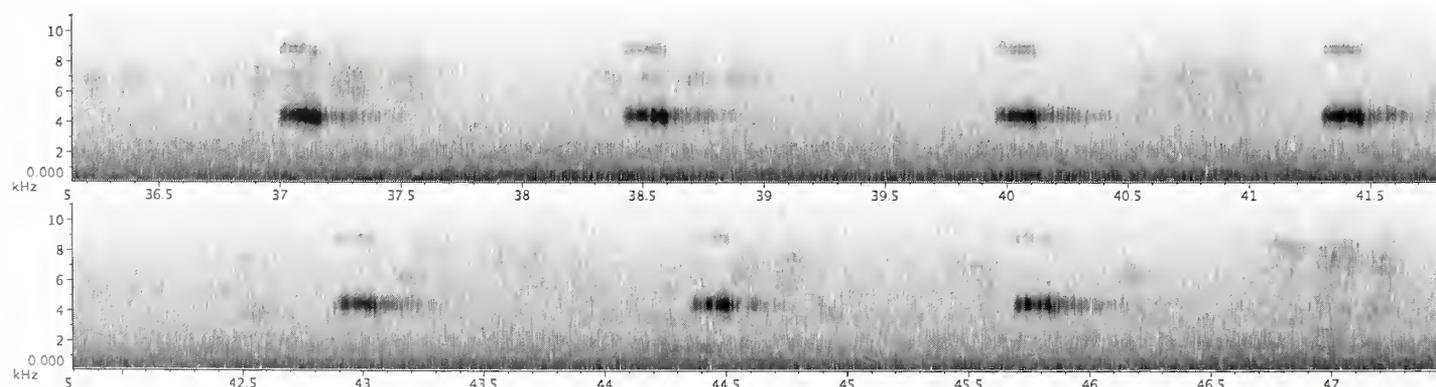


Fig. 10. Call of male Common Redstart *Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus*, Oeskemen, East Kazakhstan, June 2011. Background includes Great Tit *Parus major* fledglings and traffic. Based on a recording by RA.



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12. Probable female 'Ehrenberg's Redstart' *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus*, Kuwait, April 2013.

invariably a whistle given at constant pitch in *phoenicurus*, whereas this component is clearly much more variable in *samamisticus*. Only a minority of *samamisticus* start their songs with a whistle – and most of these birds begin only some, not all, of their song strophes with a whistle. Nonetheless, caution is needed when applying this finding in the field. For example, one *samamisticus* from Iran gave an introductory clicking note followed by a whistle that recalled *phoenicurus* – if the clicking note had not been heard, then the whistle would have been very confusing.

In both races, the second part of the song usually consists of one phrase, but sometimes two or more repetitive phrases may be combined. A more complex song seems to occur more frequently in *samamisticus* but observed differences are small and probably do not offer a reliable means of separating the two races. The final part of the song is the most variable, again in both races, and again there are no distinguishable differences between the two.

Geographical variation of the song

Chappuis (1969) showed differences in pitch between the songs of French and Moroccan populations of *phoenicurus*, and this has been

cited as evidence of more general differences between northern and southern populations (Cramp 1988). Our recordings of *phoenicurus* from the Kazakh Altai and the Tien Shan Mountains do not obviously differ from European recordings, however, and large-scale geographical variation in the song seems to be limited, or obscured by small-scale or individual variation.

Across the range of *samamisticus*, birds from the Caucasus showed some similarities to *phoenicurus*. Up to 40% of the strophes analysed contained a whistled introductory note resembling that of *phoenicurus*. However, the vast majority of birds (15 of the 16 individuals we analysed) presented some strophes with introductory notes that were typical of *samamisticus*. Birds from the southern parts of the range never presented introductory notes similar to *phoenicurus*; the only two whistling introductory notes of a *samamisticus* from Iran were not similar to the classical introductory note of *phoenicurus*, being heavily up- and down-slurred. In this sense, we interpret those notes as a result of the variation in *samamisticus* rather than as a similarity to *phoenicurus*.

Our material is too limited and the



13. Male 'Ehrenberg's Redstart' *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus*, Sakli, Georgia, April 2011.

differences too small for us to be confident that differences in the second and third parts of the song across the range of *samamisticus* are constant.

Call

The call of *phoenicurus* is a clearly upward-inflected 'huit', while the call of *samamisticus* is a flatter 'whi' (Small 2009; Svensson *et al.* 2010). Both subspecies often combine this call with clicking calls and we are not aware of differences in this regard. On the basis of the recordings we analysed, we disagree with Small (2009) that the call of *samamisticus* is less drawn-out than that of *phoenicurus*.

Our analyses showed a flat call given by *phoenicurus*, which differs from the characteristic anxiety call and is probably impossible to separate from the normal call of *samamisticus*. This has not been described in the literature but note that Buxton (1950) mentioned a flat call given by *phoenicurus* in Britain, a high-pitched 'see' given by the male in the presence of an intruder at the nest. NM is familiar with an anxiety call that sounds 'flat' to the human ear and may be flat even when viewed on a sonogram. It is given by both males and females (for example when nestlings were being ringed) and we assume it to be the call that Buxton referred to. It has a rather hissing quality, however, quite different

from that of *samamisticus*. In central Kazakhstan both calls were given by a male that was not identified to race – although *phoenicurus* is a regular migrant there while *samamisticus* is a vagrant, so it seems highly likely that this bird was a *phoenicurus* giving mixed calls. Furthermore in Oeskemen, Kazakhstan, this call was heard near a nest site of *phoenicurus*, while in the foothills of the Kazakh Altai, the same call was also heard from two singing males, and also from a male *phoenicurus* on migration in Iran.

Differences in vocalisations and taxonomy

There are some consistent differences in the songs of *phoenicurus* and *samamisticus*, although some introgression of typical *phoenicurus* elements occurs within the range of *samamisticus*. This suggests that the geographical boundaries of vocal differences may not correspond with those of plumage differences. Similarly, differences in calls do not correspond with the boundaries of plumage differences. It is generally assumed that calls have a stronger genetic component in their inheritance than songs. Whether the Common Redstart is an exception to this rule, or how the flat call heard in some of the easternmost populations of *phoenicurus* arose, is unknown.

Table 2. Overview of the differences in song and call between Common *Phoenicurus p. phoenicurus* and Ehrenberg's Redstarts *P. p. samamisticus*, based on the recordings analysed for the present study and on published data.

	<i>phoenicurus</i>	<i>samamisticus</i>
first part (introductory)	Almost invariably a clear whistle (>98%).	Variable start, rarely composed solely of a <i>phoenicurus</i> -like whistle.
second part (repetitive)	Usually one phrase, repeated at least twice. Approx. 15% of strophes with two or more repeated phrases.	Usually one phrase that is repeated at least twice. Approx. 20% of strophes with two or more repetitive parts.
third part (variable)	Very variable, with many imitations. Rarely lacking (c. 5%).	Very variable, with many imitations. Rarely lacking (c. 5%).
geographical differences in song	No major geographical variation at a large scale.	A <i>phoenicurus</i> -like introduction is given much less frequently in the southern populations than in Caucasus populations (<1% vs 40% of strophes, in our material). Possibly small geographical differences exist in the second part, with more than one repetitive part given, and in the proportion of missing third parts.
call	A rising whistle 'huit'. In the eastern part of the range, a level whistle virtually identical to the call of <i>samamisticus</i> is sometimes given. How widespread this call is and whether some <i>phoenicurus</i> give only this call is not known.	A straight, inhaling whistle 'heed' reminiscent of the call of Common Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i> .

Further research

More material is needed to determine whether *phoenicurus* can sometimes give introductory notes identical to those of *samamisticus*, and whether some *samamisticus* employ *phoenicurus*-like introductory notes exclusively. Further recordings from Turkey, the Caucasus, and southeastern Europe including the Crimea, along with details of the morphology of the recorded birds, would be particularly useful. A hitherto undescribed, straight call of *phoenicurus* was heard from several birds in the Kazakh Altai, as well as from migrants in Iran and central Kazakhstan, and may be more widespread. More recordings of the calls of *phoenicurus* from the easternmost part of its breeding range are needed, while playback experiments investigating the response of the two taxa to their respective songs would be revealing.

Conclusions

There are substantial differences between the songs of *samamisticus* and *phoenicurus*, which

are only partly masked by the striking variation in both (see table 2 for an overview). In the field, the introductory note is probably useful for identification, but only with caution and in combination with plumage features. Nonetheless, a bird within the range of *phoenicurus* starting its song with rattling, vibrating, clicking or clangouring notes, and rarely with a whistle, is worth careful investigation. We consider that call is not an infallible means of identification, given that some *phoenicurus* from the eastern part of the range appear to use a flat call identical to that of *samamisticus*.

Acknowledgments

We thank Hans-Heiner Bergmann and Jochen Martens for allowing us to use their valuable material and for inspiring discussions. Agris Celmins, Peter Kennerley and Filip Verbelen published their recordings on the internet. Simone Balbo, Tomas Belka, Rob van Bemmelen, Richard Dunn, Stuart Fisher, Louis A. Hansen, Niels Krabbe, Lars Lachmann and Aline Spriet published their recordings on www.xeno-canto.org. Tobias Roth kindly loaned his sound-recording equipment for many of the recordings analysed here

and helped with several aspects of this work. Four anonymous reviewers and the editors commented on an earlier version of the manuscript. We are grateful to all of them.

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The impact of human observers on nest success

I agree with John Eyre (*BB eye*, August 2013, *Brit. Birds* 106: 428–429) that the study of birds can be enhanced by finding birds' nests and following the progress of the fledglings. However, there may be situations where the influence of the observer could invalidate the conclusions of the study. I refer to such ground-nesting species as the Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, where the effect of predation may be attributable to the activities of the observer in the vicinity of the nest. Crushed grass, the displacement of leaves or even the scent of the observer, although not obvious to us, may attract the attention of potential nest predators. Experienced trackers can predict the passage of wildlife from disturbances to the ground vegetation – ask any safari guide. Although the presence of an observer is tolerated by most parent birds, this does not take account of possible harm to the young by attracting the attention of predators.

Published evidence and my own experience show that the productivity of watched Wood Warbler nests can be unexpectedly low. My own observations on a population of Wood Warblers in mixed woodland in northern Germany in 1951–52 influenced my thinking. The second year of my study was the worst for losses from predation. Out of 11 nests only two or possibly three broods fledged successfully. In five nests, the brood

was lost soon after the eggs hatched. These observations were supported by a note in *Bird Study* in December 1957 by L. J. Rainsford in which he referred to the effect of predation on birds ringed at the nest. Recently, an article in *BTO News* (Davis 2012) reported the results of monitoring 51 nests in an area of mixed woodland in the New Forest. Over half of the eggs in nests where clutch size had been recorded were lost to predation, resulting in a low value of productivity.

Now that technology and manpower are available – the use of PhD students was mentioned by John Eyre – may I suggest that it is time to investigate one possible cause of predation by comparing the predation of visited and unvisited nests. The latter should be viewed by cameras set as far as possible from the nests. It would also be interesting to find out whether predators are attracted to areas of disturbance where there is no nest but where activities associated with the study of nest contents are replicated. The results of such a project should be available before the rates of predation can be accepted as being natural and not affected by the human observer.

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Tony Davis has replied as follows: 'Harold Smith questions whether Wood Warbler nests have an increased risk of predation due to visits by researchers and quotes my study in the New Forest as supporting evidence. I can assure him that there is no such evidence from my study and that if there was, I would cease the study immediately.

'Mr Smith refers to the possibility that predators follow human scent trails to find nests. In the New Forest there are 13.5 million day visits per annum according to the New Forest Tourist Board. As far as I am aware, I am the only person visiting the nests of ground-nesting passerines in the Forest so logic alone suggests that any predator relying on human scent trails to find food would soon go hungry!

'Whether it be scent trails or physical disturbance to the vegetation, any increased risk of predation would be the same whether the nest contains eggs or chicks. In my study reported in *BTO News*, there were no predation events during the egg stage; the only nest failure at the egg stage was due to a tree falling on the nest during strong winds. Subsequent work using nest cameras kindly loaned to me by the RSPB has shown that there is no association between my visits to nests and the timing of subsequent predation events. If predators were using signs left by my visits, surely they

would be most likely to find the nests shortly after my visits when the signs would be most obvious?

‘BTO nest recorders follow a Code of Conduct to minimise signs remaining after nest visitation but the evidence could of course be too subtle for us to notice. In the case of Wood Warblers, many nest in areas with little or no vegetation, the nest being situated under dead leaves or twigs. If predators were following tracks left by a nest recorder, it would be expected that those nests in denser vegetation would be at greater risk. In my study there is no correlation between the nature of the nest site and the risk of predation. One nest camera during 2012 (located by a nest in relatively dense vegetation) showed both Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* and Badger *Meles meles* within 1 m of the nest before it was finally predated by a Jay *Garrulus glandarius*. Clearly neither of these predators noticed any trail that I may have left.’

Dave Leech, Senior Research Ecologist at the BTO, has replied as follows: ‘The potential influence of nest visitation on the subsequent outcome has received much attention from researchers. Götmark (1992) published an extensive narrative review of such “observer effects” based on published papers, but the analytical methods available at the time did not allow the evidence to be summarised statistically, and conflicting results were therefore difficult to interpret.

‘Meta-analyses are now commonplace in ecology, and Ibáñez-Álamo *et al.* (2012) incorporated data from 18 studies, covering 25 species, to determine the overall impact of approaching nests on success rates. The dataset involved three experimental approaches: comparison of outcomes for visited and remotely monitored nests, comparison of nest outcomes where eggs were touched or left untouched, and variation in visit frequency.

‘The results indicate that nest visitation does not significantly increase the likelihood of failure and that, for ground-nesting songbirds in particular, the success rate of monitored nests in the studies featured actually increased slightly, possibly due to the avoidance of human scent trails by mammalian predators. While good news in terms of welfare, the latter outcome is not ideal if the aim is to monitor natural failure rates; however, any positive bias is likely to be similar in magnitude between years and so trends in breeding success, as produced by the BTO Nest Record Scheme (NRS), will reflect temporal changes accurately.

‘The selection of species and habitats considered by Ibáñez-Álamo *et al.* was far from exhaustive, and publication of additional data is always to be encouraged, especially from methodological studies that may otherwise remain buried in the grey literature. It is also vital to adhere to the NRS Code of Conduct (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/coc) when visiting nests to ensure any disturbance is minimised.’

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The Seabird Group

In case Bill Bourne’s recent letter (*Brit. Birds* 106: 556) left any impression that relations between the Seabird Group and RSPB are less than cordial, it is worth pointing out that the current Secretary (Ellie Owen) and Newsletter Editor (Claire Smith) of the Seabird Group are both RSPB staff members, as was the previous Chairman (Norman Ratcliffe). RSPB staff have contributed seven

papers to the Group’s Journal *SEABIRD* since its relaunch in 2008 (which can be downloaded at www.seabirdgroup.org.uk). RSPB has also supported recent Seabird Group Conferences, financially and in kind (and will be contributing to the next, in Oxford in March 2014), and the two organisations are now closely involved in planning for the next national census of breeding seabirds.

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Notes

Black Kite drop-catching

On 23rd February 2011 at Nsuta Buem (07° 30'N 0° 28'E), 5 km south of Kadjebi, Volta Region, in eastern Ghana, I saw an adult Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (of the race *parasitus*, generally known as Yellow-billed Kite) drop-catching. Flying at a height of about 30 m on a clear, sunny day, the bird was carrying a stick. I assumed that the stick was for nest-building, since the birds breed in Ghana during the dry season from September to April (Grimes 1987) and in neighbouring Togo from November to May (Cheke & Walsh 1996). Suddenly, the bird dropped the stick, let it fall for a couple of metres and then dived to catch it. The bird repeated the same action six times before flying out of sight with the stick. The Black Kite is not

included among raptors listed in table 1 of the recent review of avian drop-catching (Hewitt 2013). Given the time of year, perhaps the behaviour I observed was not play – although that is possible – but a signal to territorial rivals or to a potential or actual mate that nest-building was in progress, an adaptive display category additional to those suggested by Hewitt.

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European Nightjar caught by Peregrine Falcons in London

Since 2003, I have been monitoring breeding Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* in central London, including a pair that has bred at the same location since 2006, described in *Brit. Birds* 100: 305–306. Over the course of the study, a wide range of prey species has been recorded at this site.

In early June 2012, when the young Peregrines were in the nest, the carcass of an adult female European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* was recovered from below a known cache site at a time of high winds (plate 14). The body was in good condition with just a few ruffled/missing feathers on the mantle and puncture marks on the back. Since this species is not normally recorded flying in daylight, it was surely caught either at

dusk, or sometime after dark, perhaps with the aid of streetlights or other artificial illumination. This central London pair has been recorded flying at night (*Brit. Birds* 104: 217), and as far as I can tell this is a new prey species for urban Peregrines.



Tony Duckett

14. European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* recovered from below a known cache site of inner London Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*, June 2012.

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Firecrest displaying to female Goldcrest

On 2nd May 2013, on the Holt–Cromer Ridge, in north Norfolk, I watched a male Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* singing. At one point I lost sight of it and, when it reappeared, it was obviously displaying to a second bird, which turned out to be a female Goldcrest *R. regulus*. The Firecrest certainly showed ‘ruffling display’ (as defined by Thaler (1979), described in *BWP*), with body feathers fluffed out and flicking of its wings, and possibly also ‘forward display’ when turned towards the Goldcrest with crest raised.

The female Goldcrest seemed reasonably receptive at first; it did not respond adversely to the male Firecrest being in very close proximity, but raised or part-raised its crest with body feathers held loose and tail part-spread, seemingly also in ‘ruffling display’. The behaviour of the two birds at one point also resembled the higher-intensity ‘ruffling display’ reportedly frequent during Firecrest pair-formation, with the male perched obliquely just in front of the Goldcrest, changing position abruptly and then freezing. The female Goldcrest continued to move slowly through the tree, apparently feeding but also possibly indicating appeasement behaviour, as the male Firecrest displayed in front of it. This went on for a couple of minutes before suddenly the two birds seemed to attack each other (I am not sure which of the two initiated the aggression) and fell from the tree locked together, breaking off a couple of metres from the ground and flying off into the wood.

I was rather puzzled, and wondered at first whether I had misread an aggressive encounter, but couldn’t rationalise this with the way in which the birds behaved at first. The text in *BWP* revealed that some display elements serve for both aggression and heterosexual behaviour in Regulids, including both

‘ruffling’ and ‘forward display’. Thus, the early stages of courtship are similar to territorial aggression, and when a female first arrives in a male’s territory she is treated as a rival male. However, the combination of display elements between male and female I observed still suggested courtship, particularly the high-intensity display and possible appeasement behaviour. While males may behave aggressively to females on initial contact, and females may repel an amorous male before they are receptive, actual combat (falling to the ground interlocked) apparently occurs between males only. In this case, such an aggressive encounter between a male and female seems unusual.

Thaler (referred to in *HBW*) conducted a long-term aviary study of a mixed pair of male Firecrest and female Goldcrest. This revealed that differences in display postures between the two species led to repeated misinterpretations of courtship and antagonistic behaviour during pair-formation in spring. As a result, attempted display continually broke down into ‘rough aggression’ and so prevented mating. Thaler concluded that interspecific differences in courtship behaviour were a much more significant barrier to hybridisation between Firecrest and Goldcrest than vocalisations.

I believe that the encounter I witnessed perhaps illustrated what Thaler observed in captivity – a misinterpretation of display, leading to aggression by a male Firecrest to a female Goldcrest, behaviour which is normally reserved for other males of the same species.

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Kleptoparasitism by a Robin

On the morning of 17th May 2013, a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* was searching for insects on the lawn of my

neighbour’s back garden when I noticed that an adult Robin *Erithacus rubecula* and one of its recently fledged young were in close

attendance behind the Starling. The adult Robin was clearly interested in the feeding Starling, hopping to keep close behind it as the Starling walked around probing in the lawn. The Starling found a prey item, possibly a leatherjacket (cranefly larva); quick as a flash the adult Robin darted in to snatch the insect and feed it to its young. The Starling simply carried on feeding, perhaps unconcerned since it was having no trouble obtaining food. Later the same morning, in my own garden, I saw an adult Robin (perhaps the same bird) closely following a Dunnock *Prunella modularis* that had caught

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Dunnock climbing dry-stone wall

On 21st June 2013, in my garden at West Bagborough, Somerset, I was watching an adult Dunnock *Prunella modularis* feeding on the ground. At one point, it flew to the base of a dry-stone wall and began to climb it. The wall was more or less vertical, with a total height of around 80 cm, average stones roughly 20 cm wide x 10 cm high, and gaps between stones of 2–4 cm. The Dunnock

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Grey Squirrel predating House Sparrow nest

On 3rd June 2012, I was searching for colour-ringed House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* at a farm in Kent where I run a RAS (Retrapping Adults for Survival) project. The site benefits from old buildings and trees with plenty of ivy *Hedera helix* so sparrows are plentiful and Grey Squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis* are ubiquitous in the surrounding area. On this occasion I was watching a pair of sparrows close to the top, and on one side, of a power-line post that was densely clad with old, dead ivy and that held a number of sparrow nests. Both birds appeared and sounded agitated. When I focused my binoculars on the opposite side of the pole, I saw a squirrel sitting upright and eating a naked nestling that was dangling from its claws.

Although Grey Squirrels, along with

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and was attempting to eat a noctuid moth caterpillar. The Robin tried to steal the Dunnock's prey and a chase ensued across the garden, until the Dunnock, still holding the caterpillar in its bill, gave the Robin the slip in dense undergrowth.

Although *BWP* mentions aggression by Robins towards potential food competitors, including Dunnocks, there is no mention of food piracy. Observations of a Robin attempting to steal food from a Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* have been published in *British Birds* previously (*Brit. Birds* 83: 207).

proceeded upwards by a mixture of scrambling and walking, pausing to search and sometimes glean at the crevices between the stones, before reaching the top and flying off to another part of the garden where it once more fed on the ground. I can find no published reference to such behaviour by this species.

corvids and other arboreal carnivores, are frequently cited as nest predators in the UK (for example Simms 1978, Davies 1992, Hewson & Fuller 2003, Fuller *et al.* 2005), I have yet to find published records of first-hand observations of this.

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Martin Withers (1946–2013)

The world of natural history photography lost one of its best-known and most eminent members when Martin Withers passed away peacefully on 15th June 2013. With typical stoicism and bravery, he fought a courageous battle against Parkinson's and motor neurone disease to the very end.

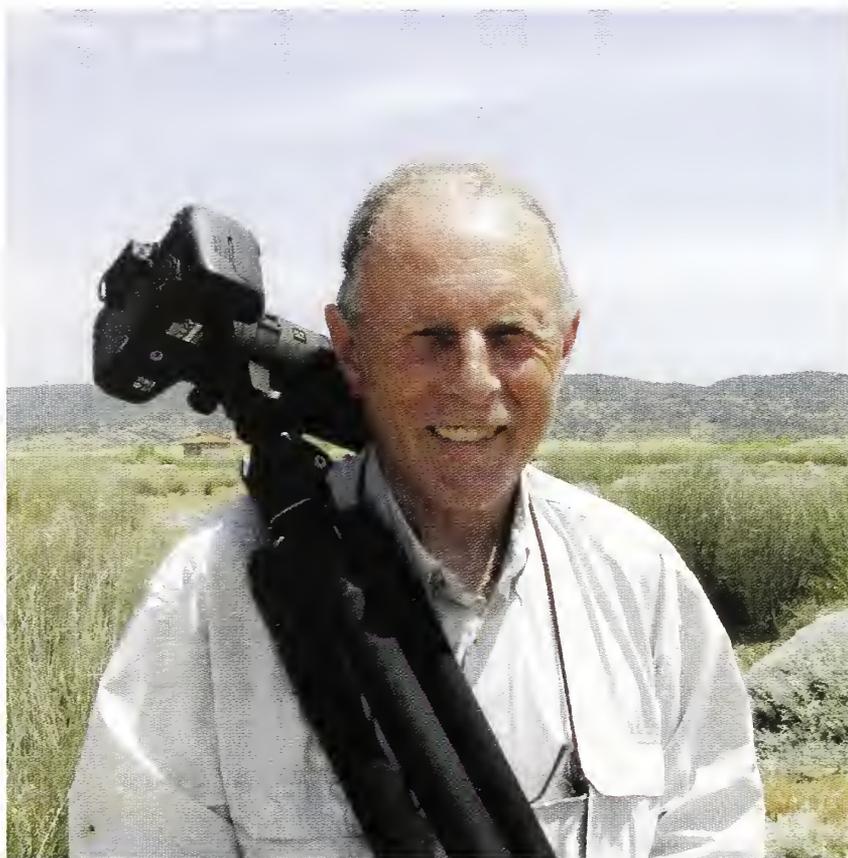
Martin was born in Leicester on 13th March 1946, the younger son of Ben and Margaret Withers. Martin and his older brother, Barry, enjoyed a happy childhood, roaming the fields and paths around their home, and it was here that Martin's lifelong love of nature and the outdoors first began. He left school in 1961, and was apprenticed as a printer with the local firm of Oldham & Manton.

At the conclusion of his apprenticeship, in 1967, Martin went abroad for the first time, to spend six months rock-climbing, mountaineering and exploring the Alps and Dolomites. He returned to the Swiss mountains the following year and in 1970, now accompanied by his future wife, Sally, they made a grand tour of Switzerland and Italy, visiting many famous locations, enjoying the wildlife and landscapes. That autumn, Martin found employment as a printer with Taylor & Bloxham, where he met his close friend and business partner to be, Barry Hanslip. Together they set up an in-house photo-lithography unit, which in time became extremely successful. The young independent company of Hanslip & Withers was launched during the miners' strike in 1973; times could hardly have been more challenging but, building much of their own equipment and making use of all Martin's contacts in the sporting world, they were able to move into premises of their own in Wordsworth Street and slowly began to make headway. Hanslip & Withers was a happy and successful partnership until Barry's sudden death in October 1979, after which Martin

was to run the business by himself.

In 1977, Martin and Sally fulfilled a long-cherished ambition to visit Africa. They joined a three-week photographic safari to Kenya, led by Eric Hosking, who was accompanied by his wife, Dorothy. The two couples quickly became firm friends. Martin was inspired by what he had seen in Africa and returned with a burning desire to pursue natural history photography to the very best of his ability. With his close friend Chris Measures, he had already begun taking photographs of the birds found around the gravel-pits near his home in Birstall. They found the nests of many species, erected hides and slowly acquired the basic knowledge, techniques and skills demanded. With the inspiration of his African experience behind him, Martin began to hone his skills and produce high-quality photographic work, with the determination and passion that he brought to everything he tackled.

In 1979, Martin saw an article about the Zoological Photographic Club, the world's oldest natural history photographic society (established in June 1899), and he wrote to the then Secretary, Donald Platt, for further



Sally Withers

15. Martin Withers in Lesvos, Greece, in May 2010.



Martin Withers

16. Male Common Pheasants *Phasianus colchicus* sparring, Leicestershire, March 2011.

details. The result was a reply from his old friend and mentor, Eric Hosking, inviting him and Sally to attend the ZPC Convention at Leeds later that same year. In September 1979, Martin was elected to the ZPC and he was to remain a member for life. He served as Secretary from 1982 to 2011 and as President during 1998 to 1999. Throughout his long membership, he submitted prints of a superb and unrivalled standard into the monthly club portfolios, becoming a master photographer and a printmaker of the very highest quality.

The other major strand in his photographic development was the Royal Photographic Society. Martin joined 'The Royal' in the late 1980s and achieved the much-coveted distinction of his Fellowship in nature photography in 1990. The following year he was elected to the RPS Nature Group Distinctions panel, on which he was to serve for a period of ten years, six of them as Chairman; he also served terms as Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the RPS Nature Group. Martin also found time to organise the Joint Conventions for Nature Photographers at Brooksby College in Leicestershire. These biennial conventions brought together members from across the entire spectrum of natural history photographic societies and helped to forge the excellent relationships between them that remain today. In the meantime, Martin continued to produce work of the very highest standard. He went on to become the winner of four RPS Gold Medals for the excellence of his natural

history prints (only one other person has ever won more) and he became the recipient of the first special Silver Medal from the RPS Nature Group. He remained a well-respected judge and selector until the onset of his final illness.

Photography became ever more important to Martin and during the 1990s his business activities assumed a less significant role in his life. In 1990, David Hosking asked Martin to lead a photo-tour to Tanzania for Hosking Tours. Martin was invited to join the company as a co-director and he subsequently led more than 100 tours worldwide. Africa was always special to Martin and he made over 50 trips there; his portfolio of African images was quite outstanding. David and Martin were invited to write and illustrate several guides to African wildlife by HarperCollins, a series that was extremely successful and is still in print.

For all his prodigious gifts and talents, Martin was the most grounded and down-to-earth man. He loved his wife, his daughter Amy, his family, his native county and Leicester City with a burning passion. One day not long ago, he quietly said to me that, looking back on his life, he wouldn't change much. And then, as a pensive afterthought, he said: 'You know, perhaps it would have been nice to have seen the Grizzlies catching salmon at Knight Inlet.' He was deeply satisfied and happy with his lot: a proud man of Leicester and a citizen of the world.

John Tinning

Michael Shrubbs (1934–2013)

Michael Shrubbs, farmer and ornithologist, died on 13th September 2013 at the age of 79, some 18 months after a major pancreatic cancer operation. He will be best remembered for demonstrating the pervasive and profound effects of farming practices on birdlife. He was the author of six highly individual books, two of which focused on that subject, and he served on the councils of both the RSPB and the BTO.

Mike combined an intensely enquiring mind with considerable skill as an ornithologist, and in his early twenties as a farmer he was already developing a first-hand awareness of the impact that changes in agricultural practices were having on bird populations on the family farm in West Sussex.

He was one of the small group of young birdwatchers who founded the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) in 1962, and he

immediately set about organising the first-ever surveys of key breeding birds in the county, which have continued ever since. The experience he acquired from this work qualified him well to later become the society's bird recorder, a post he held for seven years.

In 1979 Mike published his first book, *Birds of Sussex* (Phillimore), which dealt primarily with bird populations and used much of the detailed information gathered by the society. This book summarised the status of birds in the county up to 1976, and was to be the foundation of future studies and research by the SOS. It set him thinking about the effect of agriculture on birdlife, a theme that dominated his life after he retired from farming and left Sussex in 1986 to live and study birds in Wales.

Mike took to studying and writing about birds in Wales as the proverbial duck takes to water. He grabbed the ornithological establish-

ment there by the scruff of the neck, taking over the editorship of the *Welsh Bird Report*, and developing it into the well-respected journal *Welsh Birds*. Only last year, and unbeknown to most of us, he was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Welsh Ornithological Society. The citation for the award refers to his highly significant contribution to UK and Welsh ornithology, where he combined his academic interest with an active involvement in fieldwork and raised the profile of Welsh bird issues and conservation needs. The citation describes Mike's larger-than-life personality as being difficult to ignore, and his knowledge of birds and farming in Wales as being second to none. He had previously received the BTO's Tucker Medal.

Awareness that all was not well with farmland birdlife had been growing throughout the



Roger Ruston

17. Mike Shrubbs looking for White-billed Divers *Gavia adamsii* on Lewis, Outer Hebrides, April 2013.

1970s and 1980s. Together with the late Raymond O'Connor, then Director of the BTO, Mike produced his second book, *Farming and Birds*, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 1986. This book was something of a milestone, helping to raise the profile of the problem by combining Mike's knowledge of farming practices with an analysis of national BTO datasets. It also explored the diverse ways in which farming affects birds. Taking this theme further, in 2000 Mike was a co-author of a paper in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* that demonstrated just how closely the timing of changes in agriculture since the 1960s matched that of the decline in many farmland birds. This was recently listed as one of the 100 most influential papers to appear in the various journals of the British Ecological Society.

One of the species most intimately associated with farmland is the Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, and it was not surprising that Mike chose the bird as the focus of his studies, culminating in a major monograph published in 2007 (Poyser). In 1993 he had published a lesser-known book on the Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (Hamlyn), another characteristic bird of the farmed countryside.

In his later years Mike derived enormous satisfaction from delving into literature today regarded by most people as distant and obscure, which gave him insights into the historical interactions between people and birds. This interest led to two further books. *Birds, Scythes and Combines* (Cambridge University Press 2003) drew together a remarkable quantity of detail derived from extensive research on the history of birds and agricultural change. More recently his energies were devoted to writing *Feasting, Fowling and Feathers*, published by Poyser just a few weeks before his death, which provides extraordinary insights into the scale on which people have exploited birds over the centuries (see p. 50).

In an era when natural history and ecology have become highly professionalised, Mike Shrubbs's books stand as a remarkable example of how amateurs can continue to make unique and lasting contributions. His work was invariably lucid and thought-

provoking. Mike was never constrained by conventional thinking and his books were all the more valuable for his individual approach.

Mike was unconventional in many ways, but was always true to his principles of integrity, honesty and loyalty. He was great company, had a wicked sense of humour, and wherever he appeared, so inevitably did laughter. He was often politically incorrect (how he hated that phrase) and had a stentorian voice, commanding attention in public, where sometimes his companions would be embarrassed by his extrovert behaviour. Despite this, he was always quick to establish rapport, gain respect and attract real affection from those he encountered.

He had no time for 'bloody gadgets', even when these were what most of us now regard as the essentials for a comfortable life: television, microwave, mobile phone, and dishwasher. He didn't trust direct debits and we don't think he ever had a bank card. He waged incessant war with his computer, keyboard and printer. He ranted and raved at the tyranny of equipment straps and the design faults of foreign tripods. He once arrived late at a committee meeting, and asked the hostess if he might have a sandwich. She dutifully obliged with a huge pile of them on a very large plate, which minutes later he returned empty, unaware that they had been intended to feed the whole committee after the meeting.

His wife Veronica, who he met through the Sussex Ornithological Society, loyally and steadfastly supported and encouraged him in all his endeavours. She predeceased him by two years after a long period of ill health, through which Michael had patiently cared for her.

Michael has left a remarkable legacy over a total of 50 years. He won't be forgotten.

Tony Marr and Rob Fuller

British Birds grants to young birdwatchers

The *British Birds* Charitable Trust awarded £6,000 to conservation causes in 2012/13. A quarter of that was set aside to encourage young birders to visit bird observatories and/or take up ringing. Applications were invited via the journal, on Twitter and through the RSPB Phoenix Facebook page. Six grants were awarded; here is a selection of reports from four of the recipients, three of whom plumped for a stay on Fair Isle!

Kieran Lawrence and Daniel McGibbon, both aged 16 and from Northeast England, spent three weeks at Fair Isle Bird Observatory in July/August coinciding with Shetland's first Swinhoe's Storm-petrels. Here are some extracts from Kieran's enthusiastic report:

'The island... wow! It went above and way,



Daniel McGibbon

18. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*, on Fair Isle, July 2013.

way, way beyond my expectations. When we headed out to get a feel for our birding environment for the next three weeks we were simply blown away by the sheer number of Great Skuas: they were literally everywhere plus the occasional Arctic. It was just astounding. The added bonus of a Pectoral Sandpiper on Da Water kind of set the tone for the rest of the trip. The unexpected...

'The first night we went out storm-petrel ringing with both of us ringing our first European Storm-petrels; I even managed to get the only Leach's Storm-petrel of the night too. I was already beginning to like this place! After familiarising ourselves with the census routes on our first proper day, I was starting to get very excited about the prospect of what could turn up. It was only the next night before Dan got his first Leach's. I had had only one encounter with the species before and Dan none – and then we'd both ringed one within two days of being on the island. Unbelievable.

'After another late night of stormie ringing, we got up for lunch (!) and were quickly once again frantically dashing about upon news that there were two Two-barred Crossbills on Hoini. Just what we'd been expecting! After climbing up onto Hoini, it took us about 30 seconds to locate not two but EIGHT Two-barred Crossbills! We were standing in the fog on top of a 100-m-high cliff watching birds that should have been in Siberia and listening to their trumpeting calls rattling around the cliffs. This island never ceases to produce amazing experiences!

'On a serious note, this was possibly the best British birding I've ever done. Get yourself to Fair Isle! It's an absolutely magnificent place and upon writing this I'm already sorting out plans to go back next year. The experience would have been nowhere near as good if I hadn't been able to share it with the staff and volunteers

at the Obs. Not only are they incredibly kind, but they're all a great laugh and make every moment interesting.

'I would also like to say a huge thank you to *British Birds* – without their grant Fair Isle would have been completely beyond my grasp. I feel incredibly privileged and lucky to be involved with such a great scheme to help young birders. It would be great if many others get to experience what I did.'

And here's Daniel's account:

'When I received the *BB* grant that allowed me to go to Fair Isle to volunteer I was naturally ecstatic but I could not have even begun to imagine the almighty adventure and amazing experiences that were ahead of me. In the first week of the three-week trip the wildlife experiences just kept coming day after day, including getting bundled into the back of a van to rush off and see Killer Whales hunting seals just a few metres from us! Co-finding Two-barred Crossbills with the rest of the FIBO team was amazing.

'No doubt one of the best moments was sitting at the end of the net with Will Miles catching storm-petrels when all of a sudden Will whispered (quite loudly): "That's a Swinhoe's Petrel calling!" Within moments, a rather large petrel went into the net and in a trice Will had extracted the bird and delicately placed it into the bag without saying anything. The rest of the tale is a legend now as Shetland's first-ever Swinhoe's Storm-petrel was ringed at 01.55 hrs.

'The second week consisted of more bird ringing and doing some nest monitoring and entering data into the computer. Other activities through the weeks included catching Great Skua chicks and collecting nearby pellets to monitor the feeding habits of the birds. It taught me a vital lesson about how fast Great Skua chicks can run!

'One of my main

tasks was helping with the daily census to gather information on bird migration through the island. Although tiring, it was well worth the effort to see the visible migration of commoner species like Meadow Pipit and Northern Wheatear and getting to see rarities such as Citrine Wagtail. Furthermore, being outside every day and getting to explore Fair Isle's amazing scenery and meet such a welcoming community was a thoroughly enjoyable experience that I will never forget.'

Leanne Tough, 15, from Northamptonshire stayed at Spurn Bird Observatory in October:

'Researching sightings from previous years, I thought Spurn looked fantastic... and it delivered. On arrival we wandered down the road towards the canal scrape and a very noisy Dusky Warbler appeared shouting its distinctive call from the Sea-buckthorn. The thrill was immense! I'm familiar with a good few species now but this was a first to my ears and eyes.

'As it disappeared, our next significant sighting was a Jack Snipe. Two new species in about half an hour! Spurn Point was living up to its reputation. Signs of the winter migration came when Fieldfares and Redwings were seen stripping berries off the bushes and Blackbirds flew in off the sea. We had great views of waders like Turnstone, Common Redshank, Curlew and Dunlin too.



Leanne Tough

19. Leanne Tough, birding at Spurn, October 2013.

From the seawatching hide the next day we observed 11 species migrating, which included Gannet, Red-throated Diver and Rock Pipit. As I come from landlocked Northamptonshire, sights like these are priceless. Both Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits were spotted alongside European Golden Plovers and a Greenshank down on the point. The best sightings for our last day were Whooper Swans, Common Scoter, European Stonechat, a Little Owl and a brief view of an elusive Barred Warbler (another new bird for me). Overall we recorded 52 species, which, with nine new birds, was amazing.

‘I think my favourite aspect of this experience was waking up and walking such a short distance to the seawatching hide. A day birding is always a good day so being able to wake up and do what you’re passionate about was wonderful. This trip improved my identification of warblers and also birds flying far out at sea. Learning new facts and skills is always good. One day I’d love to be able to identify birds as quickly as some of the people I met at Spurn. Spurn Point was amazing and I’d love to visit again. I saw a lot but our attempts to find the Great Grey Shrike were futile. I guess you can’t win them all!’

Alex Rhodes, 17, spent two weeks on Fair Isle in August and constructed a mini-wetland during his stay:

‘I was given the opportunity to develop a set of small pools in front of the Obs into an attractive wader scrape complete with an island, shallow spit and an iris bed, all viewable from the observatory windows. For five tireless days, Jake (fellow volunteer warden Jacob Wood) and I created a system of sluices and extended the area of shallow mud fringes surrounding the water. Dunlins were feeding metres away from us as we worked away, dressed in our fetching blue boiler suits, swinging pick-axe and shovels into the ground. The signs were promising, and it is with great anticipation that I await news of the arrival of some rare wader photographed on *my* scrape!’



Alex Rhodes

20. Alex Rhodes, creating habitat for rare waders, Fair Isle, August 2013.

‘As the two short weeks came to a close, my final night will be one to remember forever. Up to this point, I had logged my fair share of ‘lifers’, including Booted Warbler, Thrush Nightingale and Greenish Warbler, during my stay. This was very pleasing indeed, but having arrived just two days late for Fair Isle’s biggest highlight of 2013 – the Swinhoe’s Storm-petrel – I came to reason that I would not get the chance to see this bird. I was scheduled to leave on the morning boat of 3rd September, and to start my final year of A-level study the day after that; and it was my very last full day on Fair Isle when a combination of weather and other factors meant that there would be another petrelling session that night.

‘Hopes were high that night as we set the mist-net up in the havens, reminding me of how much I had enjoyed the regular petrel ringing the previous summer. The first few stormies were caught and suddenly things became a blur as the call of a Swinhoe’s echoed from the havens one minute, and the next, Will Miles had the bird in his hand... I could hardly believe it. It was now 01.00 hrs and I would be starting school in just over 24 hours! Is there any more memorable way to end the summer holidays?’

‘I owe all the staff at FIBO a large debt of gratitude for making this another totally unforgettable trip. I must extend this thanks to the *British Birds* Charitable Trust for their generous grant which enabled me to return to this magic isle. The magic of Fair Isle has certainly bitten deep!’

More on the tidal surge in north Norfolk...

Blakeney Freshes When several hundred metres of the Blakeney floodbank breached, the tidal surge rushed to fill the Freshes – a large area of freshwater grazing marsh that has a good population of breeding Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus* and Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* as well as pairs of Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* and Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*; in winter it is an important feeding area for Pink-footed *Anser brachyrhynchus* and Brent Geese *Branta bernicla* and Eurasian Wigeons *Anas penelope*. Unlike at Cley, the sluices were not up to the job of emptying the salt water quickly and (at the time of writing) it has barely drained away. Unless the Environment Agency repairs the floodbank, the Freshes could become a tidal saltmarsh. The flooding of such an important freshwater grazing marsh could bring about the greatest long-term ecological change of the tidal surge as well as affecting the livelihoods of the graziers.

Blakeney Point Surprisingly, most of the Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* pups in the important rookery at the Point survived. Over 1,200 were counted the day after the surge and it may even turn out to be a record year, although some of the pups were displaced. The dunes were thoroughly ‘scoured’ by the surge, but the Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* breeding areas on Far Point may even have been improved through the opening up of vegetated areas. The greatest short-term problem is the deep smothering by shingle of the *Suaeda* and other vegetation on the shingle ridge, rendering it a barren landscape. This is an important breeding area for Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus*, Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* and especially Little Terns *Sternula albifrons* and it may be necessary to provide boxes, pipes and other shelters for their chicks, should



Richard Porter

21. Blakeney Freshes, completely under water; 6th December 2013.

the adults return to nest at a site that looks so different from the one they left at the end of the last breeding season.

Richard has told us about Cley and Blakeney. What about other parts of the east coast that were affected? Visit our website, where there are more photos, and add your story. *Eds*



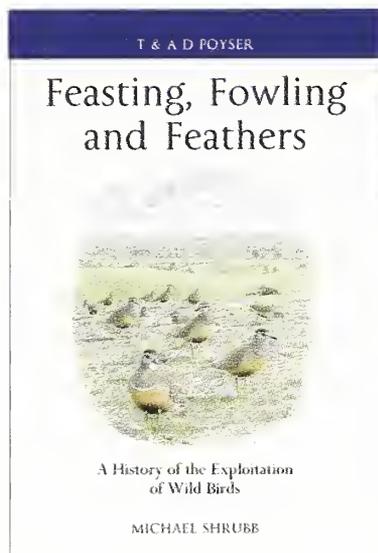
Richard Porter

22. Three-quarters of the *Suaeda* and other vegetation on the top of the shingle ridge along Blakeney Point was destroyed or buried; 9th December 2013.



Richard Porter

23. Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus* and pups in the inundated Lifeboat Station garden; 9th December 2013.



Feasting, Fowling and Feathers

By Michael Shrubbs

Poyser, 2013

Hbk, 264pp; colour and black-and-white illustrations

ISBN 978-1-4081-5990-3 Subbuteo code M21740

£50.00 **BB Bookshop price £45.00**

In his paper 'Some thoughts on the historical status of the Great Bustard in Britain' (*Brit. Birds* 104: 180–191) Michael

Shrubbs revealed that he was researching a book on the exploitation of birds. This book presents the results of that work. From its subtitle, *a history of the exploitation of wild birds*, the reader might be forgiven for expecting a worldwide review, but it is largely restricted to Great Britain, northern Europe and the North Atlantic.

The introductory chapter on the uses of wild birds highlights the excesses of the great medieval banquets, when vast numbers of birds, and other animals, were consumed. For example, when George Neville was enthroned as Archbishop of York in 1465, the banquet included 400 swans, 4,000 Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos* and Common Teals *A. crecca*, 2000 geese, 204 Common Cranes *Grus grus* and 104 Peacocks *Pavo cristata*, all washed down with 300 tuns of ale and 100 tuns of wine.

The major part of the book describes, by species group, the taking of birds, with chapters on herons, spoonbills and cranes, wildfowl, gamebirds, waders, seabirds and passerines. That on wildfowl includes information on duck decoys and an appendix lists no fewer than 202 decoys in England and Wales, mostly in eastern England. Although details are available for ten decoys, unfortunately little is available on the species and numbers of ducks taken. One of the ten was at Orierton, Pembrokeshire, where in a pioneering operation the decoy was restored in 1934 to catch ducks for ringing (see Mackworth-Praed & Gilbert, *Brit. Birds* 29: 167–171).

Perhaps of all fowling and feasting, the taking of seabirds is the most astonishing, the most hazardous, and for the most part the most remote. Standing on the clifftops at Bempton, Yorkshire, or sailing close to the great sea stacks of St Kilda, or

the west cliffs of the Faeroes, one can only marvel at the skills and bravery of those who climbed or descended such crags to harvest eggs, chicks and adult birds. Among the traditional fowling, the senseless shooting of seabirds for so-called sport in northeast England resulted in the Seabird Protection Act of 1869. The one location in Great Britain where seabird fowling still continues is Sula Sgeir, one of the most remote fragments of the Outer Hebrides. Ten men from Ness, Lewis, make an annual visit to catch the guga, the almost full-grown chicks of the Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*. Given the rich and unique history of this event, it is surprising that this Gannet harvest receives barely a mention in this book.

The book is, however, a tremendous source of information on the extraordinary activities, now mostly long past, at least in Britain, of the taking of birds. I was amazed to find that Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* were still being sold in London at 48d per dozen in 1941. A century earlier perhaps as many as 400,000 passed through the London markets annually. Other delicacies included the Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, described by Daniel Defoe as 'the most delicious taste for a creature of one mouthful that can be imagined', and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, the latter still taken in their thousands in southwest France.

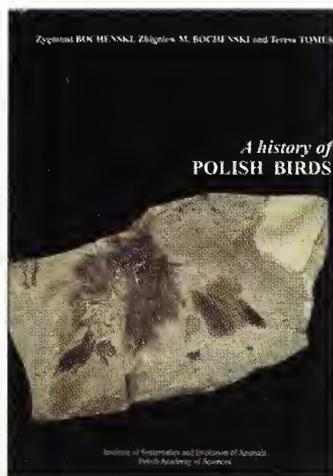
This is indeed a book to savour, and learn of the extraordinary means by which humans across the centuries have harvested wild birds, sometimes by careful management, sometimes by acts of wanton vandalism. *Feasting, Fowling and Feathers* deserves to be on all readers' shelves, as realisation of what birds our ancestors ate, how they obtained them and of how, despite their activities, our birds for the most part survived and even flourished (the Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis* being a tragic exception), only now to face the hazards of the twenty-first century.

David Saunders

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A History of Polish Birds

By Zygmunt Bocheński, Zbigniew M. Bocheński and Teresa Tomek
Institute of Systematics and Evolution of Animals Polish Academy
of Sciences, 2012

Hbk, 226pp; line-drawings and tables

ISBN 978-83-61358-44-2

Europe: €30, other countries: €40;

available from library@isez.pan.krakow.pl

This book is the first work to summarise knowledge of bird remains from all fossil and subfossil sites in Poland. These data are compared with published work on the Polish avifauna between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular emphasis on the changing status of each species.

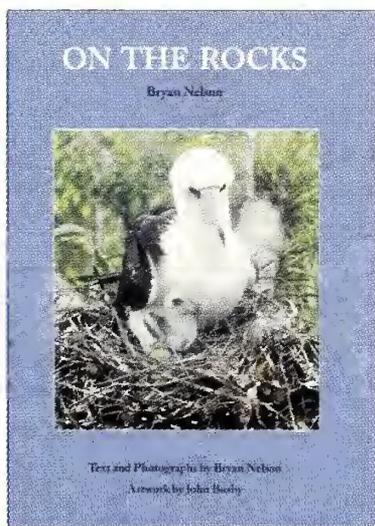
Prof. Bocheński, who died in 2009, pioneered avian paleontology research in Poland, and is also the co-author of descriptions of five new species of fossil bird (*Phasianus etuliensis*, *Pavo moldavicus*, *Otis khosatzkii*, *Otis paratetrax* and *Eurotrochilus noniewiczii*). The book includes data on 257 taxa found in the Polish Paleogene, Neogene and Quaternary deposits. Of these, 28 taxa are extinct. For me, the most exciting finds were the remains of the representative Procellariiformes (probably *Diomedeoides lipsiensis*) from the Early Oligocene (which was discovered in southern Poland); a bone of the Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis* from the Late Pleistocene (found in northern Poland and now housed in the Zoological Museum in Berlin); and, especially, a near-complete skeleton of the hummingbird *Eurotrochilus noniewiczii* from the Early Oligocene (found in southeastern Poland). Together with two

other specimens, these are the only hummingbirds known from Europe, and the oldest representatives of hummingbirds in the world (and now restricted to the New World).

Of the 381 bird species recorded from Poland on more than five occasions in the modern era, 226 have been found in fossil collections, including former breeding species which no longer occur in Poland, such as Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*, Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*, Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* and Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*. Interesting data point to the existence of large breeding colonies of the Alpine Swift *Apus melba* in southern Poland around 40,000 to 20,000 years ago.

The book includes entries on every species and summarises their occurrence in Poland from the earliest fossil records. The addition of charts and tables, and a complete list of fossil and subfossil sites complement the book. It is certainly an important resource for avian palaeontologists and ornithologists, as well as birdwatchers who wish to broaden their knowledge of the avifauna of historical and pre-historical Europe.

Lukasz Ławicki



On the Rocks

Text and photographs by Bryan Nelson, artwork by John Busby
Langford Press, 2013

Pbk, xii + 291pp; many colour and black-and-white illustrations
and photographs

ISBN 978-1-904078-56-2 Subbuteo code M21729

£20.00 **BB Bookshop price £18.00**

Bryan Nelson is one of the world's foremost experts on seabirds and seems to have led a

charmed life working on beautiful wildlife in exotic locations, following his own interests and at his own pace. In 1969, at the age of 37, he was

appointed (in his absence) to a lectureship at Aberdeen University and, just 16 years later, he retired from there, aged 53. He never had a 'proper' job, before or after.

Bryan was originally from Yorkshire, but an undergraduate project on newt behaviour took him to Oxford, where a false start working under David Lack at the EGI on Blackbirds *Turdus*

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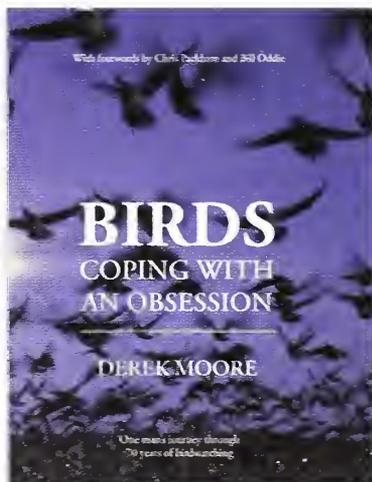
merula ('mere worm-eaters, one step up from barnyard fowl') led to a switch to the 'zest and informality' of animal behaviour with Niko Tinbergen and Mike Cullen. Bryan and his new wife June lived in a garden shed on the Bass Rock for three years in the early 1960s while unravelling the complicated behaviours of Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* and patiently answering questions from visitors, including one from the leader of a party from a Catholic seminary who asked if Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* stole Gannet eggs to eat or to hatch out.

On leaving the Bass in 1963, Bryan and June set off for a year living alone on two uninhabited islands in the Galapagos, where they studied boobies, living in a tent on the beach, naked for most of the time except when Prince Philip visited on the *Britannia*. A spell on Christmas Island in 1967 was followed by subsequent visits there and to Australia as Nelson led the fight to protect the breeding habitat of the endemic, canopy-nesting Abbott's Booby *Papasula abbotti* against devastating phosphate mining, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Christmas Island National Park. Desert islands were swapped for a desert

oasis when Bryan went to Azraq in Jordan as the first director of the research station there. A spell on Aldabra paved the way for work on frigatebirds by one of his students. However, Bryan Nelson's name is most firmly linked to the gannets and boobies on which he has written much, including a 1,000-page tome and the Poyser *Gannet* as well as innumerable scientific papers.

This book is the captivating story of that charmed life, though substantially more about the birds (in particular), places and other people than the author, told with gentle humour and a disarming modesty and the occasional short tirade against humankind's appalling impact on the environment. There are intimate glimpses into the life of the young boy and the adventures that free-wheeling ornithological research could bring before bureaucracy and health & safety overwhelmed it. The book is nicely produced and richly illustrated with Bryan's evocative photographs and over 100 marvellous drawings and paintings by his close friend John Busby. It's a delight.

Alan Knox



Birds: coping with an obsession

By Derek Moore

New Holland, 2013

Hbk, 272pp; colour and black-and-white photographs

ISBN 978-1-84773-952-0 Subbuteo code M21820

£14.99 **BB Bookshop price £11.99**

This is Derek Moore's autobiography. I read it in a single sitting (admittedly it *was*

quite a long journey, and I skipped some of the chapter on his foreign travels), which is almost unprecedented for me, the slowest of readers. Having met Derek several times, it was ever so easy to imagine him narrating the text in that Suffolk drawl of his. Unsurprisingly, 'good stories' abound; several of them made me laugh out loud, a few of them even Derek admits may not be entirely true – was Michael Seago *really* an MI5 agent? I was mildly disappointed that the band in which Derek played as a young man (Blackjacks, which became The Style and then Soul Concern, and supported the likes of The Kinks and The Who) merited little space, compared with other sections of his life.

The book is laced thick with anecdotes of this, that or the other good friend or influential worthy.

Many of these anecdotes are genuinely entertaining but in places there are simply too many of them – although if you can't write what you want in your autobiography, when can you? But – it becomes clear that this is Derek's *modus operandi*: he is a supreme networker and he has used his contacts, his people skills and his business acumen to get results. That is, results for conservation, for which his passion shines through this book like a lighthouse beam. The sections on his time at the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and his thoughts about nature conservation in this country are, by themselves, reason to read this book. The man has an obsession for birds but he has certainly made it count. And, in the final analysis, how many of us can genuinely say that?

Seemingly typically for this publisher, this is a nicely produced hardback, which is sensibly priced.

Roger Riddington

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A–Z of Birds

By Bo Beolens

Brambleby Books, 2013

Pbk, 240pp; numerous cartoons

ISBN 978-1-908241-23-8 Subbuteo code M23903

£8.99 **BB Bookshop price £8.00**

I have never met Bo Beolens, but I know of him in his Fat Birder guise and through the excellent little book *Whose Bird*, of which he is co-author, and which is a constant source of reference. When I first delved into the present volume, I wasn't quite sure what to make of it – but I pressed on and, in the end, found I had enjoyed it, had been amused by some bits of it, and had also learnt a few things.

Basically, it chooses some birds Bo has hunted down, in alphabetical order, and tells us how he went about seeing them (or not...). I would have liked a bit more detail of his encounters with the birds concerned, but even so I enjoyed the tales of his misadventures and amusing travails as he and his amazingly patient wife, Maggie, globe-trotted. The self-deprecating style can get a bit repetitive – but then you come upon the splendid account of Bo trying to grab a much-needed smoke on arrival

at Los Angeles and all is forgiven.

Unfortunately, sloppy editing or proofreading has not corrected some misuse of words and lapses in grammar. Nor is it good enough nowadays to let through such faux pas as 'duel carriageway', 'out of site', 'Pine Martin' and 'Great Spotted Curlew'! I'm afraid, too, that Bo may take a bit of stick when he says that Snowy Owls *Bubo scandiacus* (in our time) nested in the Outer Hebrides, and did he really find Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* breeding in Sweden?

I think some people might enjoy this book, but others may not. It seems a pity to say it, but I suspect it could go onto a bookshelf and never be looked at again.

Mike Everett

Norfolk Wildlife: a calendar and site guide

By Adrian Riley

Brambleby Books, 2013

Pbk, 300pp; numerous colour photographs and maps

ISBN 978-1-9082-4104-7 Subbuteo code M23902

£24.99 **BB Bookshop price £22.50**

Many naturalists will know already that Norfolk is a special location for birdwatching. This guide opens your eyes to the many other wildlife highlights the county can offer, with locations and advice given on how to see not only birds, but also butterflies, dragonflies, mammals, amphibians, fish and plants.

The book is split into three sections. The first is a calendar which gives a month-by-month account of what can be seen and where to look for it. The second (and largest) section is the site guide, which covers 35 sites throughout the county, providing a brief description of habitats, details of on-site restrictions, access, facilities, length of walks and useful equipment to take. This is followed by details of what species you might encounter and when, plus advice on how to find them. The final section is a year-planner for birds, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies and orchids, and is

followed by a checklist to all the above.

As a ranger working on Blakeney Point, I was a little surprised to find some major mistakes in the account for this site. For example, it is stated that the whole spit has unrestricted access – in fact, the west end of the reserve has been out of bounds to visitors for many years to protect breeding terns during the spring and summer, and Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus* when they are pupping during late autumn and winter. I was also surprised to read that the point has no visitor facilities, as I am sure I clean and sweep both toilets and visitor centre most mornings.

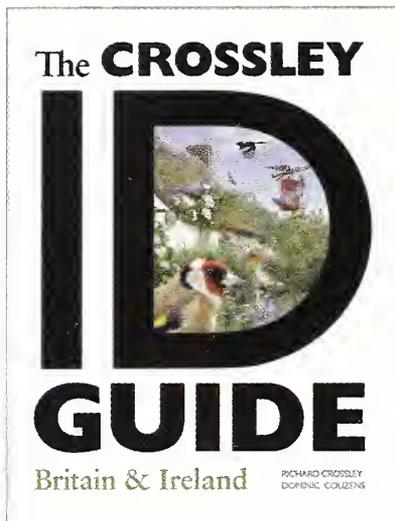
Despite a few inaccuracies, this book is well laid out and easy to use, it has many fine photographs, and is a useful guide for those visiting Norfolk for the first time.

Paul Nichols

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The Crossley ID guide: Britain and Ireland

By Richard Crossley and Dominic Couzens

Princeton University Press, 2013

Pbk, 304pp; 310 plates with colour photos, 250 colour distribution maps

ISBN 978-0-691-15195-6 Subbuteo code M21768

£16.95 **BB Bookshop price £15.00**

There have been several attempts down the years to utilise photographs rather than

artwork to illustrate field guides. These have generally not been very successful, largely perhaps because the quality of the material was inconsistent. With the recent explosion of digital photography, millions of images are now available and it was inevitable that someone would use them for a bird guide. Richard Crossley has combined his photographic and technical expertise to produce an innovative 'ID Guide' for Britain and Ireland. His approach, showcased first for North American birds, is to 'cut and paste' images of birds, in a variety of ages, sexes and plumages, into a montage against a background of 'typical' habitat. All the birds are in sharp focus, while images of breeding and non-breeding plumage are combined into a single montage – just as would be produced by a conventional artist.

Does it work? Well, yes, it does, and we have here an array of photographs of 300 of our commoner birds, clearly visible against their natural habitat. Some pictures are a bit weak (the Garden Warblers *Sylvia borin* are not very smart), but generally the standard is excellent. There is a useful image of a Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis* among a flock of Common Teals *A. crecca*; I wondered why American Wigeon *A. americana* did not merit similar treatment. Birds are arranged non-taxonomically, grouping together species that occupy similar habitats or ecologies: gamebirds sit alongside rails, and there is a heterogeneous grouping of 'miscellaneous larger and aerial land-birds' – everything from pigeons and woodpeckers

through corvids to swifts and hirundines. There are a few blank pages, inevitable to allow continuity, but slightly disconcerting: the first time I came across these, I worked through the adjacent species to see which ones the printer had omitted. The accompanying text by Dominic Couzens is as competent as you would expect, but squeezed into tight footnotes under each species montage. When combined with a distribution map and an indication of the size and abundance of each species, the pages end up looking a bit crowded.

Twelve introductory pages include a 'rogues gallery' of all the species included in the text. This is a clever innovation, but despite a claim that the sizes have been reproduced accurately, I found these to be inconsistent: Little Owl *Athene noctua* is surely not the same size as Short-eared *Asio flammeus*? In addition, the sizes given in the species accounts could have done with a bit of editing: some dimensions are metric, others in 'old money'. And I have yet to see a five-foot long Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*!

In summary, this is a valiant and groundbreaking effort. It will be especially valuable at the less-experienced end of the birding community, since it is restricted to the commoner species and shows the whole spectrum of plumages. It is not, and does not pretend to be, a 'field guide', being more a book to study in an armchair before or after a birding trip. I feel that it would have been better published in a larger format giving more space in layout. This might have reduced the cluttered appearance and enhanced what will make a brilliant supplement to most birder's libraries.

David T. Parkin

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook 2014

Edited by David Cromack; Buckingham Press, 2013; pbk, 328pp.

ISBN 978-0-9569876-6-2; Subbuteo code M23670; £16.50 **BB Bookshop price £14.85**

In familiar format this includes a guide to almost 400 UK reserves, contact details for virtually everything bird-related you can think of, updated checklists for birds, dragonflies and butterflies, tide tables, events, a diary and a series of special features including a nice account of the Great Fen Project.

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Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers the new arrivals in the period from early November to early December 2013.

Headlines Following a succession of outstanding rarities last month, the autumn had a final sting in the tail. Highlights included a Baikal Teal in Lancashire & N Merseyside, a Short-billed Dowitcher in Orkney, a small influx of Ivory Gulls (including two together in Northumberland), an Orphean Warbler in Pembrokeshire and an American Robin in the Outer Hebrides. More frustrating were a short-staying Brännich's Guillemot off the Yorkshire coast, a similarly brief Yellow-breasted Bunting in Norfolk and belated news of a long-staying Dusky Thrush in Devon. Exciting inland records included a Pied Wheatear in Nottinghamshire and a Hume's Warbler in Northamptonshire. New Two-barred and Parrot Crossbills were found at inland sites across England, and it would not be too surprising if plenty more were to be discovered in the coming months.

Ross's Goose *Anser rossii* Marshside RSPB (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 13th November to 4th December. **Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii* Islay (Argyll), 18th November, two 24th November; Lissadell (Co. Sligo), 28th–29th November. **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* Pennington Marshes/Milford-on-Sea (Hampshire), long-stayer to 24th November. **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* Long-stayers in Highland, Co. Leitrim and North-east Scotland, new arrivals in Co. Antrim, Cheshire & Wirral, Co. Donegal, Lancashire & N Merseyside and Outer Hebrides. **Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* Marshside RSPB, 30th November to 9th December. **Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* Long-stayer, Achill Island (Co. Mayo), to 8th December. **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* Boultham Mere (Lincolnshire), long-stayer to 14th November; Wellington GP (Herefordshire), 10th November; North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 5th–8th December. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Long-stayer in Avon, others in Hampshire and Kent. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Long-stayer Chew Valley Lake, to 18th November, same Blagdon Lake (both Avon), 9th November; Murlach (Co. Galway), 8th–28th November; Lough Owel (Co. Westmeath), 12th November; Lough Gill (Co. Kerry), 15th November to 1st December; Cardiff Bay Wetlands (East Glamorgan), 23rd November to 7th December; South Uist (Outer Hebrides), 24th November to 7th December; Ross Castle (Co. Kerry), 28th November. **King Eider** *Somateria*

spectabilis Bluemull Sound (Shetland), 10th and 20th November; South Uist, 11th November; Burghead (Moray & Nairn), 12th–15th November; Blacksod (Co. Mayo), 22nd November to 1st December. **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata* Long-stayers, Courtmacsherry (Co. Cork), to 30th November; two, Llanddulas/Pensarn (Denbighshire) to 8th December; others Caernarfonshire (two), Co. Cork, Dorset, Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, Co. Galway, Gwent, Co. Kerry, Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Sussex, Co. Waterford and Co. Wexford.

Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* Gerrans Bay (Cornwall), 16th–27th November. **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Kirkabister, 10th–13th November; Bluemull Sound (both Shetland), two, 14th November, one to 20th November.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Two long-stayers in Kent, others in Buckinghamshire, Co. Down and Norfolk. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Cley, then Holkham, 27th November, Titchwell, then Holme (all Norfolk), 28th November. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Records from Avon, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire & Wirral, Co. Cork, Cornwall, Derbyshire, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Highland, Kent, Lancashire & N Merseyside, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Outer Hebrides, Scilly, Somerset, Suffolk, Co. Waterford and Co. Wexford.

John Malloy



24. Juvenile Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*, Seahouses, Northumberland, December 2013.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* Achill Island, long-stayer to 15th November; North Uist (Outer Hebrides), 6th December.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* A wandering individual visited several locations in Kent during 13th November to 6th December, also Sussex, 14th November. 'Northern Harrier' *Circus cyaneus hudsonius* Long-stayer, Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), to 16th November. Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* North

Uist, 9th and 17th November; Ferriter's Cove, 24th November, same Dunquin (both Co. Kerry), 28th November; Liscannor (Co. Clare), 4th December.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* Up to three long-stayers in Cornwall to 13th November, and two in the Outer Hebrides to 9th November; others in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* Knott End (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 12th–13th November. Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* Lepe CP (Hampshire), 10th November to 8th December. Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* North Ronalds, 17th–23rd November.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Keyhaven Marshes (Hampshire), presumed long-stayer, again 13th–19th November.

Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* Filey (Yorkshire), 3rd December. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Long-stayer, Galway Bay (Co. Galway), to 4th December. Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea* Seaburn (Co. Durham), 30th November; North Uist, 4th Decem-

ber; Tarbat Ness (Highland), 5th December; Seahouses/Beadnell Bay (Northumberland), two, 7th December; Boddam (North-east Scotland), 7th December. Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Long-stayers Dawlish Warren (Devon), to 6th December, and Bamburgh and Farne Islands (both Northumberland), to 18th November; Swillington Ings

Ian Fisher



25. First-winter Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*, Beadnell Bay, Northumberland, November 2013.

(Yorkshire), 10th November. 'Thayer's Gull' *Larus glaucoides thayeri* Cley, 13th–14th November.

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandi-
acus* St Kilda (Outer
Hebrides), 24th Nov-
ember.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus
oriolus* Island Hill (Co.
Down), 15th November.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius
isabellinus* Lady's Island
Lake (Co. Wexford),
24th–25th November. Lesser Grey Shrike
Lanius minor Beadnell Bay, 13th–26th
November.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* Newport Wet-
lands (Gwent), long-stayer to 9th November;
Longham Lakes (Dorset), 27th November to
1st December.

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*
Holkham, 27th November; Gibraltar Point
(Lincolnshire), 28th November to 4th
December; Kelmash Hall (Northampton-
shire), 6th–8th December. Dusky Warbler
Phylloscopus fuscatus St Buryan (Cornwall),
10th November; St Agnes (Scilly), 10th–12th
November; Berry Head
(Devon), 11th–12th
November; Quendale
(Shetland), 22nd
November; Spurn
(Yorkshire), 23rd
November. Orphean
Warbler *Sylvia hortensis*
St Brides (Pemb-
roke-shire), 10th–24th
November. Subalpine
Warbler *Sylvia cantil-
lans* St Mary's (Scilly),
long-stayer to 8th
November. Melodious
Warbler *Hippolais poly-
glotta* Winspit
(Dorset), 6th–8th
December.



Graham Catley

26. Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, December 2013.

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus* Long-
stayers Cornwall to 2nd December, and
Norfolk to 8th December.

Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus* Brixham
(Devon), about 26th October to 2nd
November. Black-throated Thrush *Turdus
atrogularis* Gulberwick then Sound (Shet-
land), 9th–11th November. American Robin
Turdus migratorius South Uist, 17th November
to 3rd December.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* Westray
(Orkney), 11th–16th November. 'Caspian
Stonechat' *Saxicola maurus variegatus* St
Agnes, 17th November to 3rd December.



Richard Stonier

27. First-winter Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia h. hortensis*, St Brides, Pembrokeshire, November 2013.

Graham Catley



28. First-winter female Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Collingham Pits, Nottinghamshire, November 2013.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* Collingham Pits (Nottinghamshire), 9th–10th November.

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* Whixall Moss (Shropshire), 9th November. Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* Long-stayers at Hemsted Forest (Kent), to 9th December; Lynford Arboretum (Norfolk), to 8th December; Leith Hill (Surrey), to 8th December; Broomhead Resr (Yorkshire), to

Kevin Du Rose



29. Male Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*, Tunstall Forest, Suffolk, November 2013.

17th November, then seven 2nd–8th December. New arrivals: Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire), two, 9th November, then 17 on 16th, 12 to 25th, at least nine to 2nd December, five to 7th; Wyre Forest (Shropshire), three 28th–30th November, four 1st–7th December, one to 8th; also, Ashdown Forest (Sussex), 23rd November; Furzy Lawn Inclosure (Hampshire), 30th November to 1st December. Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyop-*

sittacus Hemsted Forest, up to two long-stayers to 8th December; Holt (Norfolk), 12, 11th November to 1st December, 23 on 2nd, 21 on 3rd, 12 to 4th, nine to 8th December; Slufers Inclosure (Hampshire), 19th–22nd November; Tunstall Forest (Suffolk), ten, 23rd–24th November, 16 on 25th, 12 to 29th November, six on 1st December; Ashdown Forest, 24th November; Lickey Hills (Worcestershire), 28th November; Wyre Forest, 2nd December; Goyt Valley (Derbyshire), two, 5th–6th December; Mayday Farm (Suffolk), ten, 8th December; Budby Common (Nottinghamshire), 13, 8th December.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* North Ronaldsay, long-stayer to 8th November; Unst (Shetland), 23rd November to 1st December; Oare Marshes (Kent), 28th November. Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* Blakeney Point (Norfolk), 18th November.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata* Southampton Western Docks (Hampshire), found dead 14th November.



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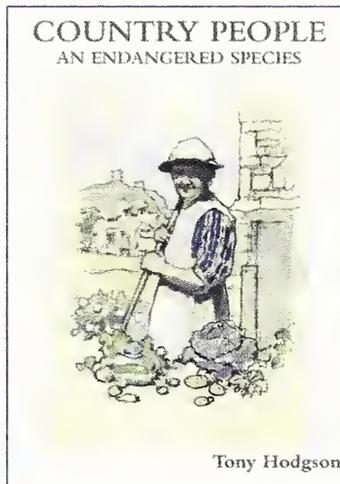
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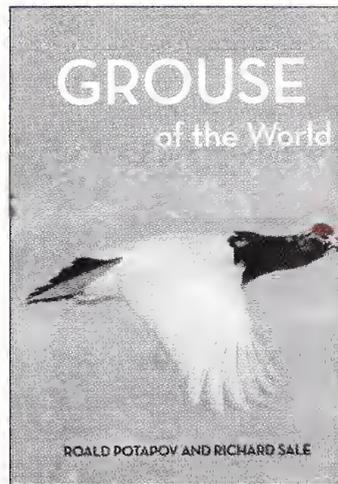
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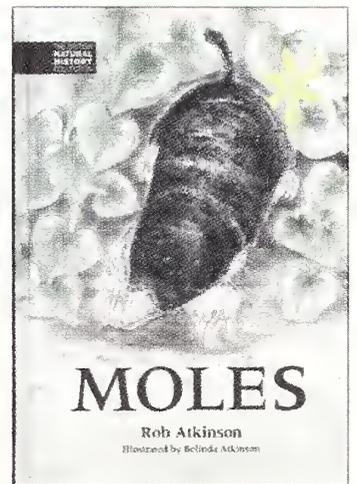


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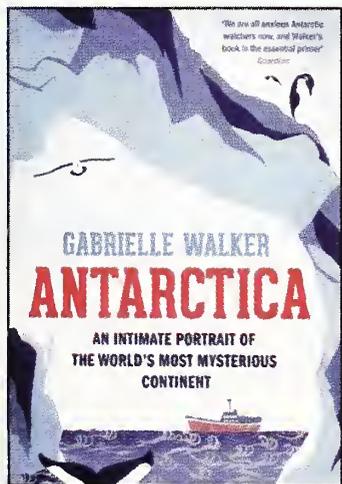
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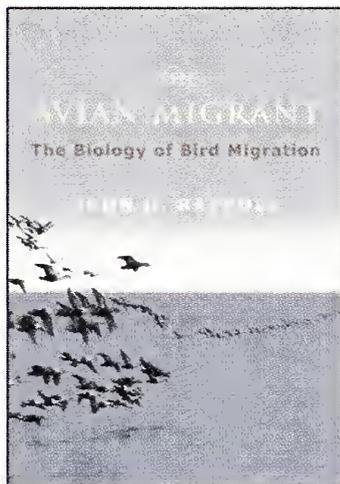
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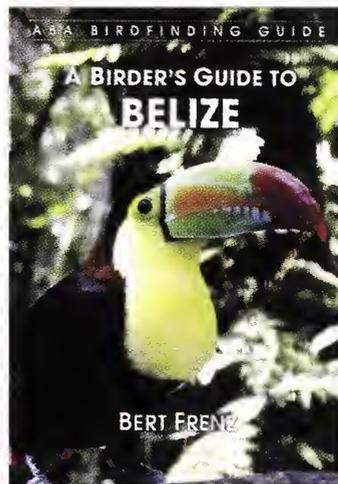
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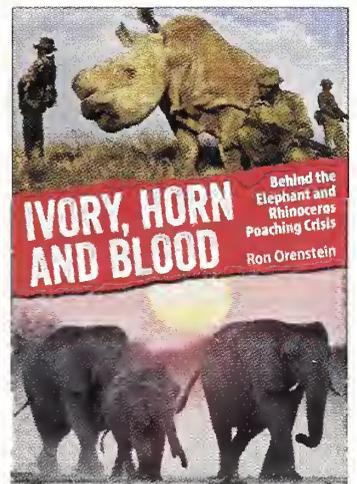
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