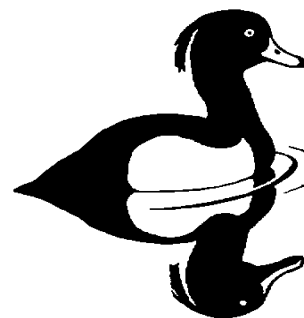


# READING ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

## ROC Newsletter

Autumn 2002

No 19



### Introduction

Well there goes another year! This newsletter is included in the annual membership mailshot along with details of all the Club's events for the next year. The committee has put together a good selection of indoor and outdoor events, which I hope you will support and enjoy. In addition to our calendar of field trips there is also a proposed foreign trip – see later in this newsletter for more details.

I also hope that you have all been completing your summer sheets and will continue with the winter survey. Please return all completed forms to John Farnsworth.

On the subject of email I now send out the newsletter to about a dozen members. I know that some people like to have a paper copy of the newsletter and will continue to send it out to those that prefer it that way. However if you do wish to receive it in Microsoft Word form via email please let me know via an email to my address below.

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Many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter. Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

### Midweek Walks

Due to unforeseen circumstances the walk planned for Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> September will not now take place. Hopefully these informal gatherings of members helping one another to see and identify birds will recommence on **Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> October**. Meet at Dorney Reach near Maidenhead – a new area that is getting good reports. Car parking considerations mean that it will be essential to ring Harry Matthews the evening before on 01628 624440, to be told the precise meeting point.

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November** – meet at 10 am at Moor Green Lakes – car park at SU 806628. Ring John Roberts on 0118 9482137 for details or in case there is a change of plan.

Dot Lincoln

### ROC Gourmet Birdwatching Break to Belgium/Holland with Waxwings Tours

At last years' AGM a good number of people expressed interest in a foreign birdwatching trip. As a result we have got together with John Wyatt of Waxwings, who has come up with an attractive package with a number of possible dates.

The tour is by minibus and normally starts at Dover Harbour at about 9.15 am on a Thursday morning, although local pickups may well be possible. The tour normally ends back at Dover at about 4.30pm on the following Sunday. The base is a family-run hotel in Knokke-Hiest in North-western Belgium and includes one special fish and one seven-course gastronomic dinner at no extra cost. The total cost for the trip is £335 per person, which includes full board in twin bedded rooms with en suite, drinks with all three dinners, three picnic lunches, all transportation costs, gratuities and reserve entry fees. Meals on the ferries, transportation to Dover and holiday insurance is not included. £25 supplements apply for single rooms or optional larger twin/double bedded rooms.

There will be birdwatching en route and at various sites around the area, with the birds seen on the trip varying with the time of year :-

In January around 100 species can be expected, including divers, grebes and geese along with Black Woodpecker, Firecrest and Tree Sparrow. In June some 120 species can be seen including White Stork, Spoonbill, Garganey, Honey Buzzard, Black Woodpecker, Bluethroat, Marsh Warbler and Golden Oriole. In September about 110 species can be seen including White Storks, Cranes, waders, Tree Sparrows and Ortolan Buntings. Various dates are possible including mid-January, late May through to early June, mid-September and late November.

If you are interested in joining up with other club members (normal number of participants is 5-10) on one of these trips please contact me (with some preferences for dates) as soon as possible so that the level of interest can be gauged. Please also contact me if you need further info or you can contact Waxwings directly on 01442 823356. It is worth noting that John Wyatt will be talking to the club on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December, so further information should be available then.

Ted Rogers

### Golden Oriole in Caversham/Emmer Green

Clayfield Copse is located just 2 miles north of Reading and is a small urban wood, mainly deciduous, with a good number of mature oak trees. Traditionally the wood has been a reliable place to see common woodland birds and spotted flycatcher.

On the morning of Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2002 I visited the wood to look for spotted flycatcher. Having been in the wood for only a few minutes, I heard a brief snatch of song that I was absolutely certain was a Golden Oriole.

I waited for another 30 minutes before it sang again, this time more continuously. And yes it was a Golden Oriole! I immediately telephoned a number of friends and both local and national birdlines to release the news.

Clayfield Copse is of free public access and has a large car park so there were no visiting problems.

The bird was frustratingly difficult to see as it fed and called high in the oak canopy. However with patience, the bird was seen by some 50+ observers. It was last seen at 7 pm and was gone by the following morning.

Golden Oriole is rare in Berkshire, there have been just 12 previous records and this appears to be the first occasion that it has been available 'en masse'.

And no I never did see Spotted Flycatcher.



Brian Bennett

### Ecuador - "Green's green apogee"<sup>1</sup>

In January, representing the Suffolk-based World Land Trust, I spent ten days in Ecuador on a working trip with Bob Ridgely (whose massive field guide "The Birds of Ecuador" had just been published). Bob, together with Nigel Simpson from the UK, some US colleagues and a core of Ecuadorean ornithologists, set up the Jocotoco Foundation three years ago to save endangered bird species by protecting their habitats. This Ecuadorean NGO has set up six reserves, engaged the local communities in their management and protected over 90 endemic bird species, 30 of them globally endangered to some degree.

My overwhelming memory of the country is green-ness – forests ranging from the huge cathedrals of the lower warmer rainforest, through Podocarpus, to steep hillsides of tree fern and bamboo and, at the Andean tree-line, cool forest of gnarled and stunted Polylepis. Though much of the country is wet, in cloud all year, rain-shadows create sparse dry forests in other shades of green. With so many habitat types, it is not surprising that Ecuador is the most species-dense country in the world – for example 1,600 of the world's 9,000 species, in a country not much bigger

than England. But, as elsewhere, the forests that once covered the country are increasingly fragmented and in many areas may soon disappear.

The problem was brought home to me most clearly at Tapichalaca in the south of Ecuador on the Amazon slopes of the Andes, near the Peruvian border. Four years ago Bob Ridgely and friends found a bird new to science, a football-sized antpitta with a distinctive call – a series of short hoots – from which derives its name, the Jo-co-to-co Antpitta (*Grallaria ridgelyi*). It was to protect the bird that the Jocotoco Foundation was first created. It bought the mountain-side on which the bird had been found and the reserve now covers about 2000 hectares and the people who had sold their land became part of the local team employed to look after it.

The Jocotoco Antpitta inhabits bamboo forest in a narrow altitude range, around 2300-2600m. Its habits are not well understood, but it seems likely that it is reluctant to fly significant distances, instead exploring new territory on foot. However, clearings made for cattle break up the forest and can present many species with impenetrable barriers to dispersion and colonisation of new areas. So far this year just ten birds – the known world population – have been heard calling in the reserve. I had spectacularly good views of one bird responding to tape playback of its call (not a practice that everyone would approve of, but until that day, the only way the bird had been seen) and then, a few hundred metres further on, I, literally, stumbled across one, becoming the first ornithologist to see the species without using a tape lure!

Currently we (the World Land Trust - [www.worldlandtrust.org](http://www.worldlandtrust.org)) are helping the Jocotoco Foundation ([www.fjocotoco.org](http://www.fjocotoco.org)) to acquire land linking suitable habitats: although there is habitat in the nearby Podocarpus National Park that appears suitable, it is separated from the reserve by 1000 hectares of cleared land that they want to bring into the reserve and, hopefully, create a corridor for dispersal of the antpitta to new breeding areas.

Renton Righelato

<sup>1</sup> from "Credences of Summer", Wallace Stevens



Jocotoco antpitta  
(*Grallaria ridgelyi*)  
from a photograph by Nigel Simpson

## **News from the TABCG**

Happily, the group has been able to purchase two replacement boats. They were bought from the Berkshire Sailing School and were previously used as rescue boats. The school needed to get them off site quickly and they are now in place at Hosehill Lake – one moored offshore, the other securely fastened up on the bank. They have been used and are an improvement on the old one as they can carry more and are more stable.

At Hosehill Lake vegetation has been trimmed round the edges of the footpaths and access points. Encroaching reed has been removed from the Dragonfly Pond, along with some bags of aquatic garden plants from the lake (there were several non-native and invasive species of plants among them). Someone had also planted a Leylandii species near the pond. This has also been removed with a little help from a mole. Members on the work party saw the tree shaking and when they investigated a mole was burrowing underneath. The loosened soil made removal much easier! It was felt that people “donating” plants in this way probably thought they were helping and did not realise the damage non- native species can do if they get into the wild. The group uses only native species in any planting work. At Moatlands the car park has been cleared of rubbish yet again and the pathway down to the spit trimmed back. Some clearance work will also be carried out on the island.

The first quarter results of the Hanson Challenge has seen the club's area placed 5<sup>th</sup> out of twelve with a total of 95 species seen. Everyone is asked to ensure that all sightings at Moatlands, Field Farm and Main Pit are put in the book to ensure accurate totals. There have been several cases where species have been missed because they were not put in the book.

The Theale Area Bird Conservation Group always welcomes new members and anybody who can help out at work parties - please contact Brian Uttley for further info. (tel. Work - 01189 783783, Home - 01189 832894)

Information courtesy of TABCG (with thanks to Cathy McEwan)

## **Birdwatching in Bulgaria**

The British-Bulgarian Friendship Society organises a number of special interest tours including several focusing on birdwatching and natural history. The 2003 calendar includes the following tours :-

Winter Wildfowl Tour, 5<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 2003, with Maurice Waterhouse - £799

West Bulgaria Tour, 27<sup>th</sup> April – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2003, with Maurice Waterhouse - £850

Spring Birdwatching Tour, 3<sup>rd</sup> -17th May 2003, with Bob & Ann Scott - £885

Birds of Bulgaria Tour, 18<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2003, with Tony Mainwood - £850

Spring Natural History Tour, 25<sup>th</sup> May – 8<sup>th</sup> June 2003, with Maurice Waterhouse - £895

Two Autumn Migration Tours :

6<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2003, with Bob & Ann Scott - £885

13<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2003, with Maurice Waterhouse - £865

Further details from: Dr Annie Kay, BBFS Tours Organiser on 0207 237 7616 or via email on [dranniekay@aol.com](mailto:dranniekay@aol.com)

## **ROC Trip to Pagham Harbour on 7th April 2002**

Five of us met up at Selsey Bill on a bright cool morning in a fairly brisk NE wind.

Sea watching was quiet, scoter, red breasted merganser, gannet, sandwich tern and a pair of fulmars being the main players. Those who checked the Ferry Pool at Sidlesham on the way to the Bill saw green sand. High tide was at 8:30am and being low tides generally, was receding well by the time we regrouped at Chuch Norton. We checked the pools and scrub on the way to the sea--no firecrest but a flock of linnet feeding amongst curlew, peewits, oystercatcher and a stoat. Starting the walk along the West side path we got good views of whimbrel.



A quick but peaceful check of the churchyard proved fruitless apart from a fleeting glimpse of a martin....no firecrest tho'.

Nothing of note along West side path save for a colony of solitary bees which I know the Assistant warden is keen to protect. Didn't seem very solitary to me, there being about 200 all flying about 2 inches from the ground!

Nearer the Ferry Long Pool, we picked up reed bunting, bar-tailed godwit, dabchick, skylark, meadow pipit and heard sedge warbler and chiffchaff. The Ferry Pool produced, amongst others, ruff, ringed and LRP, black-tailed godwit and avocet.

We then drove round to Pagham Spit, making use of the free car park (recently opened again), near the Lagoon where there was possibility of bonapartes gull and red kite both of which had been seen over the preceding few days. However, even the sight and sound of the recommended paper bag full of bread did not entice the bonapartes to appear as had been the case earlier in the week. Some time was taken to examine all the black headed but to no avail and so we went home.

John Lakin

## **ROC Weekend in Wales (June 2002)**

In 2001 the ROC had planned to return to Wales following a gap of several years, but the foot and mouth outbreak affected much of Wales, and so the visit was postponed until 2002. I had enjoyed several Anglesey weekends, and was keen to go again, so I accepted the role of leader, a small price to pay to make sure not to miss out.

We have always fixed the date of our trips more than a year before the event (so they can go in the club programme) so we have to accept that the birds and the weather will not necessarily be optimum, and so it was on this trip. On the first day the weather forecast was dire, but we set off down the M4 through frequent heavy downpours and made for our traditional journey breaking stop at the Elan Valley near Rhayader in mid Wales. This attractive little reserve is set in a steep valley with bare, craggy mountain slopes and scree on one side, and classic upland sessile oak woodland on the other, which provides the perfect mix of habitat without having to walk far. Wiping our glasses regularly as we went, we splashed up the track that winds steeply into the oak woodlands, the rain easing to a steady, penetrating drizzle. Fortunately, Welsh birds are a hardy breed, so they were out in numbers, and we soon found grey wagtails, wheatears, both flycatchers and redstarts. Wood warblers were singing, but hard to pin down, and it took a good 20 minutes to locate one that never went more than 30 metres away from us. As we walked back we watched ravens flying across the valley and red kites cruising along the ridge in front of us. Sadly, the ring ouzel population in Wales has crashed (said the warden) so we did not see one all weekend.

The rain stopped, and we moved on to the Gilfach valley, just north of Rhayader, for another short walk, adding a selection of scrub and heathland species to the list, but soon we had to press on for Anglesey. We drove through heavy rain for the rest of the day to arrive at our destination, Gadlys House Hotel in Camaes Bay on the north coast of Anglesey, in time for a very pleasant meal. On the way we stopped at a picturesque bridge near Capel Curig in heavy rain to hunt for a dipper, getting very wet in the few minutes it took to find one.

On Saturday the weather improved steadily, remaining dry all day, and eventually getting quite bright. We rose early and went to Cemlyn bay, 2 miles from our base, to look at the tern colony. We saw lots of sandwich terns, a few common terns but no arctic or roseate terns, which once bred here but no longer do. After breakfast, South Stack RSPB reserve near Holyhead was our destination. The area is covered in maritime heathland ending abruptly at the high cliffs that form small sheltered bays. These cliffs hold the most interesting seabird breeding colony I have visited (in the UK). It has good numbers of auks, including puffin, within easy viewing range. Razorbills outnumbered guillemots this year, puffins were much less common though we found several, but there were very few

kittiwakes. In addition to the auks there were all the usual seabirds – gannets, shags and fulmars – while close offshore, gliding manx shearwaters clipped the waves and searched for shoals of fry or formed feeding flocks where they had found them. We had no trouble in finding the birds of the trip – loud musical calls soon led us to several small flocks of red billed choughs feeding on the heath and they were quite tolerant of people so I got some good close up pictures. We stood for some time on the cliffs above the lighthouse taking it all in. We added a patrolling peregrine and two tumbling ravens to the tally before moving north east to Britain's most southerly colony of black guillemots. We found one near Puffin Island after a moderate walk and a bit of searching. While they are very smart birds with their black and white plumage and bright red feet, this was in all other respects a rather dull bird. It sat on the water for at least half an hour doing exactly nothing but it was good to confirm that they are still in the area. We were all quite tired by late afternoon, so we returned to base fairly early at the end of a most satisfying day.

On Sunday it rained again, in short showers at first but soon it became a steady downpour. Between showers, we made it to the hide overlooking Lake Cefni in central Anglesey, where we found a selection of fairly common water birds (it is said to be a better site in winter and in autumn passage). We soon moved on and made the long journey through the Snowdonia mountains and past Lake Bala to our final destination, the remote Lake Vyrnwy. The plan was to stop on the way in the hills and look for upland species but cloud and driving rain persuaded us otherwise, so we made for the coffee shop next to the reserve centre and hoped for a break in the rain, encouraged by the local advice "it usually brightens up in the afternoon". Good advice as it turned out, because after an hour it eased off and gradually turned into a beautiful, sunny afternoon. There are several well marked trails near the centre and more at the other end of the valley, but time constrained us to explore only two of the shorter paths. We found all the Welsh woodland specialities that we had found on Friday, another dipper plus a good selection of other birds. The walks were pleasant and the scenery was certainly the most inspiring of the weekend. We did not have time to go up the valley to seek willow tits and whinchats, which are present in reasonable numbers.

For those of you who like statistics, we found 89 species over the three days. Pied flycatchers were especially common this year: we saw about 20 at three places: but cuckoos were scarce, we heard only two.

The weekend was most enjoyable in spite of the rain. Our hotel was comfortable, if not luxurious and the meals were very good. We found most of the Welsh birds that we hoped to see, and had several fine walks along tall cliffs and through wild hills.

Bill Nicoll