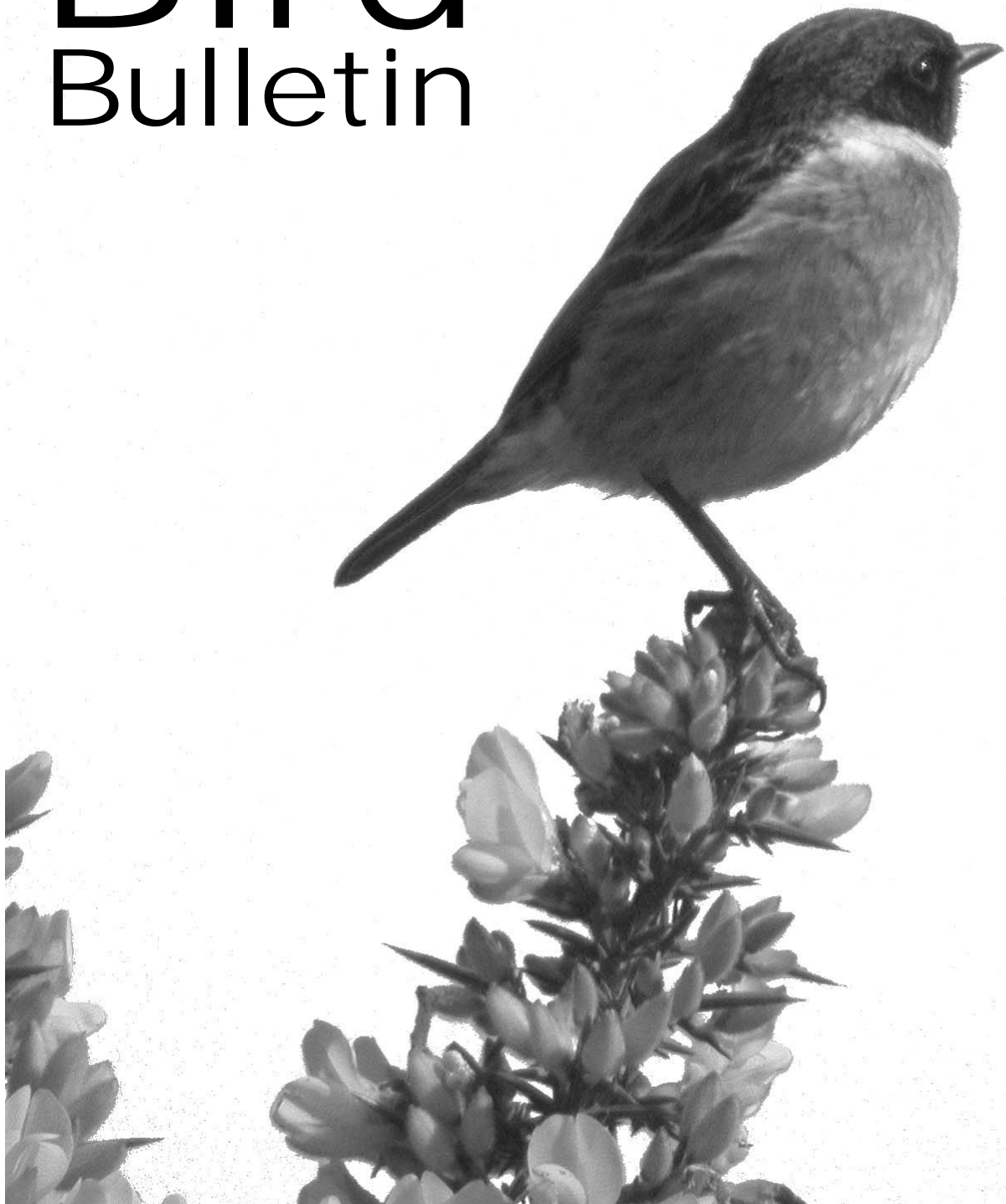


Lothian Bird Bulletin



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Editorial

Life can be hard when you're the editor of the Lothian Bird Bulletin. The other day I was admiring the newly completed LBB front page, featuring Graham Checkley's Stonechat photo. Next minute an envelope arrived containing the latest issue of 'Birding Scotland' - *with a Stonechat on the cover!* Of course I know there's no such thing as ornithological espionage...but just to be safe I've sacked all of the bulletin staff, and security guards have been posted outside LBB Towers. (As you can see I decided to keep the Stonechat on the front page anyway.)

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Lothian Bird Bulletin - my first attempt since Ian Thomson hung up his editorial boots. Please let me know what you think of it, and get in touch if you have any ideas for future issues. Even better have a go at writing something - perhaps about a favourite birding moment, a memorable holiday, a less well-known site, or a bird-related news item. Anything so that I don't have to write the articles myself! David Atkins has started the ball rolling with an excellent article on Spring Birding in Southern Spain.

Stephen

News

Lothian Bird Report

The long-awaited 2000 Bird Report is finally in the shops. It is available from Charles Frank, 101 Rose Street, Edinburgh. Copies can also be obtained direct from The SOC (see page 2), and from Ian Thomson (01875 870588). For anyone birding in Lothian, the report is an invaluable guide to where and when each of the region's species can be found.

Musselburgh Lagoons Development

Although details are sketchy at the moment, I understand that Queen Margaret University College has abandoned plans to build a "European Centre for Golf Tourism and Research" at the River Esk mouth. The decision doesn't affect the (more controversial) proposals for a sports centre next to the Musselburgh wader scrape. Watch this space...

Lothian SOC AGM

The Lothian AGM was held on 8th April at Meadowbank Stadium. Richard Birch (Chairperson), John Pringle (Treasurer), and Ian Thomson (Branch Development Officer) were all re-elected onto the committee, with John Hamilton remaining as Secretary, and Jacky Robinson taking on the role of Vice Chair. Stephen Hunter joined the committee, with responsibility for the Lothian Bird Bulletin. Ian Thomson agreed to continue representing Lothian Branch on the Regional Committee. With LSOC membership remaining at around 350, the branch had just enough funds to cover the cost of producing the 2000 Lothian Bird Report (see above).

The full AGM minutes are available on the Lothian SOC website (address on page 2).

SOC Mailings

SOC Vice President Mark Holling has asked for feedback on the material - such as 'Scottish Birds' and the 'Scottish Bird Report' - mailed to members. Is there too much or too little? Send your comments to the Lothian Bird Bulletin, and I will forward them to Mark.

Digiscoping Guide

Graham Checkley has produced an excellent guide to **digiscoping** - photography using a digital camera and a telescope. If you'd like a copy, you can email Graham at GrahamCheckley@aol.com. You can also visit Graham's website at www.pbase.com/grahamcheckley.

Outdoor Access Code

Scottish National Heritage has produced a draft Scottish Outdoor Access Code for consultation. Copies of the code can be obtained from SNH at

- 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 2AS (0131 447 4784)
- 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh, EH6 5NP
- Laundry House, Dalkeith Country Park, Dalkeith, Midlothian, EH22 2NA
- Publications Section, SNH, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth, PH1 3EW (01738 444177)

Alternatively it can be downloaded from the SNH website at www.snh.org.uk. Note that the consultation period ends on 30th June.

The Lothian List

Part 3: Birds of Prey - Bustard

This is the third part of an annotated checklist for all the species that have been recorded in the Lothians, currently totalling 342. It is aimed at providing a very general guide as to the status of these species in the area and thus your chances of seeing them!!

European Honey-buzzard

Black Kite

Red Kite

White-tailed Eagle

Eurasian Marsh Harrier

Hen Harrier

Montagu's Harrier

Northern Goshawk

Eurasian Sparrowhawk

Common Buzzard

Rough-legged Buzzard

Golden Eagle

Osprey

Common Kestrel

Rare passage migrant. Recorded less than annually.

Very rare passage migrant. Two records.

Rare visitor. Recorded less than annually.

No records this century!

Scarce passage migrant. Usually seen Apr-Sep; peak May-Jun.

Scarce resident and occasional passage migrant.

Very rare vagrant. Two recent records.

Scarce visitor. Occasionally breeds.

Common and widespread breeding resident.

Common and increasing resident breeder.

Rare winter visitor, usually inland. Less than annual.

Rare visitor to upland areas.

Scarce passage with peaks in May and Jul-Sep.

Common and widespread resident breeder.

Red-footed Falcon
Merlin

Very rare vagrant. Three records (one dead).
Uncommon breeder on heather moorlands. Coastal in winter.

Eurasian Hobby

Rare passage visitor. Recorded less than annually, usually in May-Jun.

Gyr Falcon

Very rare vagrant with two winter records in the last 30 years.

Peregrine Falcon

Scarce breeder. Regularly noted in coastal areas in winter.

Red Grouse

Common resident breeder in upland moorlands.

Black Grouse

Scarce and declining resident in uplands.

Western Capercaillie

Last record in 1956. Unlikely future visitor!

Red-legged Partridge

Uncommon and localised resident. Released on some estates.

Grey Partridge

Common and widespread resident breeder on lowland farmland.

Common Quail

Summer visitor in small but varying numbers. Seldom seen.

Common Pheasant

Abundant resident breeder. Also substantial releases on some estates.



Water Rail

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant. A few pairs breed.

Spotted Crake

Very rare passage migrant. Usually heard rather than seen.

Corn Crake

Extinct as a breeder in 1950's. Now a very rare passage migrant.

Common Moorhen

Common and widespread resident breeder.

Common Coot

Common and widespread resident breeder.

Common Crane

Very rare spring passage migrant.

Great Bustard

Last recorded prior to 1684!

With thanks to Ian Thomson.

Spring Birding in Southern Spain

Hot birds in a hot region, by David Atkins

For two and a half weeks in May, Jacky and I explored western Andalucía and the neighbouring province of Extremadura in southern Spain. This was an independent holiday which we had planned ourselves based on our researches from books and maps of the area.

The main focus was certainly on the birdlife - this beautiful region of Europe really has a great deal to offer both independent birdwatchers and those who prefer to go with a group. However, we combined the birding with a good dose of sightseeing, with detours to Sevilla, Córdoba, Cádiz, Ronda and Gibraltar, not to mention the other towns and villages we stayed in on our tour. It got progressively hotter as we travelled, especially away from the coast. With strength-sapping temperatures (we now realise why afternoon siestas are so popular!), a driving total of well over 1,500 miles, and overnight stays in nine different places during 18 nights, we returned home exhausted. But the birding was outstanding and the whole thing was a tremendous experience.

We began with a couple of days in the area bordering the Strait of Gibraltar, basing ourselves in Tarifa, which is the most southerly town in mainland Europe, from where the hills of north Africa seem only touching distance away. During migration periods, there is a constant passage of raptors across this stretch of coastline, and we saw a steady stream of honey buzzards, black kites and griffon vultures, as well as one or two other species. Tarifa also provided us with our first lesser kestrels. Gibraltar itself was a real disappointment - we even dipped on Barbary partridge in the only place in Europe where this species occurs.

From the most southerly part of our itinerary, we moved north-west to explore the 'Jerez triangle' and the east bank of the Guadalquivir river - and, yes, we did have a few copas of the local Jerez wines and ate tapas! The habitat is a mixture of lagoons, salt-pans, together with open fields and cork-oak woodlands.

In the wet places, there were large numbers of little and cattle egrets and black-winged stilts, plus purple gallinules, little bitterns and purple herons for good measure. We were lucky to see two of our top target species here - one red-knobbed coot and several white-headed ducks. We only saw one ruddy duck, so wondered whether the threat of interbreeding between these two stiff-tail duck species is coming under control. The white-headed duck was actually more attractive than we had expected. The dominant duck species, though, were common and red-crested pochards. The salt-pans and lagoons also provided us with greater flamingo and good numbers of little, black and gull-billed terns.

Away from the wet places, there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of crested larks, Sardinian warblers, fan-tailed warblers (or zitting cisticolas for the modernists), corn buntings, nightingales, serins and woodchat shrikes. These turned out to be the common birds throughout the whole region - distinctly different from our common list in Britain. In the more open areas, we found calandra and short-toed larks, collared pratincoles and Montagu's harriers. We even managed to turn up a small group of monk parakeets in the attractive but slightly faded city of Cádiz.

We then moved on to the jewel in the crown of Andalucian birding places – the Coto Doñana National Park. We spent three idyllic days here, staying right on the edge of the marshes in El Rocio, a real ‘wild west’ town where all the roads are made of sand – no traffic lights or road signs, and anything goes! The Coto Doñana is a vast natural wilderness in the delta of the River Guadalquivir, and is one of the big three such sites in Europe (the others being the Camargue in France and the Danube delta in Romania). Access within the park is strictly limited, although there are a few visitor centres around the edges, all offering signed walks and observation hides.

Driving to one or two of these centres was sometimes challenging due to the very poor state of the minor roads – the potholes were far worse than anything we’ve experienced in Britain - but it was worth the effort. Again, we saw large numbers of egrets (including great white), herons (including night and squacco), spoonbills and flamingos, plus whiskered terns and a second red-knobbed coot. Birds of prey were good here too, with red and, especially, black kites everywhere. Short-toed and booted eagles were not uncommon, but sadly we didn’t see a Spanish imperial eagle, which is the rarest of all eagles in Europe. Neither did we manage the local Iberian lynx, although they are rarely seen in daylight; and it was no surprise that we didn’t even get a sniff of the almost-mythical Andalusian hemipode. But we did have some good close-up and noisy views of great reed warblers and heard some Savi’s warblers reeling away. By the end of our stay in Doñana, we were even able to separate short-toed and lesser short-toed larks in the field !

After two very hot days in Sevilla, where we found a small party of ring-necked parakeets in the gardens of the Alcázar (before the Celtic fans arrived for their cup final), we headed north into Extremadura, where we spent four days exploring this rather remote and overlooked province. We based ourselves in the lovely hill-top town of Trujillo, where we were treated to lesser kestrels and huge numbers of swifts every evening, together with what was now becoming a very common sight – white storks on just about every rooftop. It was fascinating to hear and watch their bill-clattering as they returned to their nests for the night.

Extremadura provides a fascinating combination of habitats: there are mountains, the Parque Natural de Monfragüe being the best example; embalses (reservoirs); vast plains, which are home to the steppe species (La Serena is the top plains area); and, as ever in this part of Spain, the cork-oak and pine woodlands. This whole region is still being explored and opened up from a birding, and tourist, point of view, but it was clear to us that Extremadura provides one of the most outstanding and unspoilt areas in western Europe for birdwatching.

The mountains, especially the dramatic rocks of Monfragüe, provided us with all three European vultures (griffon, Egyptian and black), both white and black stork, Bonelli’s eagle and eagle owl, together with passerine species such as Spanish sparrow, rock sparrow, rock bunting and blue rock thrush. On La Serena, we managed to find great and little bustard, pin-tailed sandgrouse and stone curlew. We also saw our first rollers here, and a great-spotted cuckoo. Across the whole region, azure-winged magpies were common, and we did well to see four different types of swift – common, pallid, Alpine and white-rumped, the last being from a tiny European enclave of an African species.

After a day in Córdoba - the Mezquita (mosque) is one of the most extraordinary buildings I have ever seen - we called into the Laguna de la Fuente, which is home to the largest breeding colony of greater flamingos in Spain: an extraordinary sight, with gull-billed and black terns, and little ringed and Kentish plovers as a bonus. We spent the last couple of

days of the trip in the pueblos blancos (white villages) around Ronda. Our base was actually Grazelema, the very attractive and central village of the Grazelema National Park. This is reputedly the wettest place in all Spain, but it seemed pretty hot when we were there! Lots of narrow, winding mountain roads (a bit scary at times) and some walks in the local woods produced birds such as rock thrush, black and black-eared wheatear, plenty of vultures, and a number of good warblers such as melodious, Bonelli's and subalpine. We even managed to find a few choughs in this area, including some in the middle of Ronda, the biggest and most well-known of the white villages. We also spotted a couple of ibex on an evening walk.

In all, we notched up 160 bird species during the holiday, of which 25 were lifers. The flowers and butterflies were also fantastic. All of which goes to prove that not only is this an excellent area for birds, but that we have not done nearly enough birding in continental Europe! We are already putting our thinking caps on for more European birdwatching next year.

I would thoroughly recommend southern Spain as a great birding destination, either on a DIY basis or with an organised tour. To get the most out of the area, you probably need to cover quite a lot of ground, as we did, but the provinces of Andalucia and Extremadura do have so much to offer.

David Atkins, June 2003

Leith High Tide Tables

JUL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	0412	0448	0526	0607	0653	0745	0845	0950	1058	1207
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
0047	0145	0238	0327	0414	0458	0524	0624	0707	0751	0839
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
0932	1032	1137	0016	0111	0158	0240	0319	0356	0433	

AUG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	0510	0549	0632	0720	0816	0922	1038	1157	0034	0136
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
0229	0316	0359	0439	0517	0553	0628	0704	0742	0829	0932
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
1052	1211	0039	0133	0217	0256	0334	0411	0449	0528	

SEP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	0611	0658	0754	0905	1029	1154	0023	0125	0216	0300
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
0339	0415	0449	0521	0551	0621	0653	0734	0837	1010	1141
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
0001	0059	0146	0227	0307	0346	0426	0508	0553		

The tables show the first high tide of each day. Note that Lothian SOC cannot guarantee the accuracy of these times.

Lothian SOC Outings

Vane Farm - 23rd March

At Vane Farm we caught up with the long-staying Little Egret, which had been present on the reserve since 22nd December. The large flock of Pink-footed Geese was also much appreciated. Star bird was a superb male Marsh Harrier, spotted in Fife later in the day.

The Hirsell & Bemersyde Moss - 4th May

There was certainly no shortage of woodland birds for this outing to The Hirsell. Sightings included Blackcap, Garden Warbler, and Nuthatch - but top bird of the day was an Osprey, spotted flying over Hirsell Lake by a particularly observant member of the group. The estate's varied plant-life provided extra interest for the botanically-inclined.

On the way back to Edinburgh we stopped off at SWT's Bemersyde Moss reserve near Melrose. Sadly there were no Black-necked Grebes to be seen, but the visit was worthwhile for the large breeding colony of Black-headed Gulls.

Woodhall Dean and Skateraw - 25th May

I have to admit that I hadn't heard of Woodhall Dean before, but it certainly deserves to be better known. Situated about 6km south of Dunbar, the reserve is managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. It features a circular path - sometimes steep - in and around ancient oak woodland. The sun made a welcome appearance for our outing, along with good numbers of birds. These included Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Great Spotted Woodpecker, and glimpses of Redstart (pictured), Redpoll, and Jay.



We finished off the day with a visit to Skateraw, where we were treated to great views of the much debated Grey-headed/Ashy-headed Wagtail.

Coming Up...

- 6th Jul: Aberlady Bay. Birds, beasties & botany!
- 17th Aug: Fife coast & Hound Point. Skuas, terns & waders.
- 28th Sep: Northumberland coast. A few rare migrants?
- 19th Oct: East Coast Migrants. Who can tell...

Contact the Lothian Bird Bulletin for details.

A Day At The Races

Why would any sane person spend 24 sleep-free hours driving around Lothian counting birds? I really don't know, but on the 17th May I found myself doing just that when I took part in the **2003 Lothian Bird Race**. I joined Mark Holling, Chris McGuigan, and Graham Clark in the SOC team, competing against teams from the RSPB and the East Lothian Rangers. I have to admit that my presence had a lot to do with my availability at short notice, and sadly almost nothing to do with my legendary bird recognition skills!

The idea of the Bird Race is simple (just as well really) - to find more bird species in 24 hours than the other teams. Three out of the four team members have to see (or hear) a species before it can be counted.

Here's a 'diary' of what the SOC team got up to during the day:

00:00 Leave the glamorous surroundings of the A1 Services at Old Craighall.
00:30 Duddingston Loch, armed with big torch. Greylag Geese, Sedge Warbler, Heron, Mute Swan, Coot, Water Rail.
01:45 East Lothian. Two Barn Owls. Sadly we're only allowed to count one.
02:30 Longniddry-Haddington cyclepath for Grasshopper Warblers. No Grasshopper Warblers. In fact no birds at all. Excitement too much for Chris, who falls asleep.
03:45 Search for Black Grouse. Which don't turn up. (Two more Barn Owls did!) Lots of rain.
06:00 Crichton. Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Lesser Redpoll, Great Spotted Woodpecker.
07:00 Gorebridge. Grey Partridge.
08:00 Pentlands. Cuckoo (four!), Common Sandpiper, Whinchat, Stonechat, Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Grey Wagtail, Dipper, Peregrine, House Martin, Spotted Flycatcher, Red Grouse. Things are looking up.
09:15 Penicuik area. Wood Warbler and Treecreeper.
10:15 Back to the Pentlands. Teal, Stock Pigeon, Tree Pipit.
11:00 Across to West Lothian. Ruddy Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Sand Martin.
11:30 Linlithgow. Swift and Cormorant.
12:15 Back to Midlothian for Long-eared Owl.
13:45 Granton. Common Tern, Turnstone, and Eider. Sadly 'my' Purple Sandpiper is nowhere to be seen.
14:30 Back to Duddingston for the Canada Geese we missed earlier.
15:00 Musselburgh. Kittiwake, Sandwich Tern, Velvet and Black Scoter, Merganser, Guillemot, Gannet, and various waders.
16:15 Aberlady again. Tree Sparrow and Arctic Tern, but no sign of the 'Queen' Eider.
17:00 North Berwick. Shag, Puffin, Razorbill, Fulmar.
18:30 Tynninghame. Goldeneye, Ringed Plover, and Goosander.
19:30 Belhaven Bay. Black-tailed Godwit.
20:00 Coast south of Dunbar. No birds, but plenty of rain.
22:00 Inland for Tawny Owl and Woodcock.
23:00 Arrive back at Old Craighall (an hour early).

So how did we do? Well, we 'got' 112 species and finished in third place! (The East Lothian Rangers won. Again.)

Did I enjoy the day? I have to admit that birding by car isn't usually my cup of tea (and the bird race won't win any prizes for environmental friendliness), but it was certainly an entertaining 24 hours. It was also educational – I've learnt that I really must brush up on my bird call identification...

Lothian Bird Sightings

MARCH

At Aberlady, a **Great Northern Diver** was present on the 8th, a **Black-throated Diver** on the 16th, and 44 **Red-throated Divers** on the 21st. A total of 58 **Crossbills** were seen on the 6th. There were 6 **Short-eared Owls** and 25 **Snipe** present on the 16th. On the 26th, there were 35 **Red-necked Grebes**. At Barns Ness a **Water Pipit** was present all month. At Musselburgh a first-winter **Mediterranean Gull** was noted on the 12th and 15th, with 30 **Slavonian Grebes** on the 14th. An **Osprey** flew west on the 29th. A **Black Redstart** was present at Torness on the 22nd and 23rd. 3 **Waxwings** were in the Haddington area all month. 2 **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Cramond on the 10th, with one at Belhaven on the 17th and 22nd. An **Osprey** flew over Tynninghame on the 29th, with a **Firecrest** at Dungless on the same day. A **Ring Ouzel** was in the Faseny area on the 22nd.

APRIL

2 **White Storks** flew over Penicuik on the 8th, and were later seen over Floterstone. A single **White Stork** flew over Gosford then Prestongrange, and was seen on the ground near Linlithgow on the 12th. A **Little Ringed Plover** was at Tynninghame on the 13th. The 5th saw a **Black-throated Diver** at Aberlady, and a male **Surf Scoter** on the 14th. A **Tree Pipit**, a **Snow Bunting**, and 4 **White Wagtails** were present on the 15th, and a ringtail **Montagu's Harrier** flew over on the 17th. A **Spotted Redshank** was noted on the 23rd - 27th, with a **Lesser Whitethroat** and a **Grasshopper Warbler** on the 24th, a **Little Stint** on the 26th, and 4 **Grasshopper Warblers** on the 27th. At Musselburgh an adult **Iceland Gull** was noted on the 12th and 13th, with a second-year bird present on the 25th. 2 **Tree Pipits** were present on the 16th, a **Whimbrel** on the 17th, a **Mediterranean Gull** on the 20th, and a **Little Tern** and a **Greenshank** on the 21st. At Tynninghame 18 **Crossbills** were noted on the 12th, and a **Ring Ouzel** on the 23rd. Torness had a **Black Redstart** on the 19th. Some 30 **Bramblings** were noted at Bavelaw on the 12th. A **Ring Ouzel** flew over Yellowcraig on the 17th. Gladhouse held a **Green Sandpiper** on the 18th and 5 **Crossbills** on the 20th. A **Green Sandpiper** was at the River Almond Pools on the 21st. An **Osprey** flew over Gorebridge on the 4th, with one over the Pentlands towards Threipmuir Reservoir on the 27th. Threipmuir also held **Ring Ouzel** and **Cuckoo**. A **Yellow Wagtail** was noted at Barns Ness on the 18th, with a **Water Rail** seen on the 18th - 21st.

MAY

A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** and a **Crane** were at Aberlady on the 7th, with the female **King Eider** (pictured overleaf) present from the 13th to the month end, and a **Hobby** and a **Wood Sandpiper** on the 31st. A **Marsh Harrier** flew over on the 4th, with a **Yellow Wagtail** and a **Tree Pipit** present on the same day. A **Marsh Harrier** and a **Cuckoo** were noted on the 12th. At Skateraw/Barns Ness an **Ashy-headed** (*cinereocapilla*) or **Grey-headed** (*thunbergi*) **Wagtail** was present. At Musselburgh, a male and a female **Surf Scoter** were noted on the 19th, a **Little Ringed Plover** on the 22nd, a male **Garganey** on the 8th, 18th, and 19th, 20 **Manx Shearwaters** on the 11th, a pair of **Gadwall** on the 14th

- 23rd, and a **Wood Sandpiper** on the 16th and 17th. Two **Black Terns** were at Cramond on the 25th. A **Grasshopper Warbler** was noted singing to the east of the Seabird Centre in North Berwick. Two first-summer **Little Gulls** were noted at Tynninghame on the 17th, with a **Marsh Harrier** and 50 **Crossbills** on the 10th. A **Curlew Sandpiper** was present on the 11th and 26th, with 100 **Crossbills** also present on the 26th. **Ospreys** flew over Straiton on the 4th, Kirkliston on the 5th, Aberlady on the 11th, Loganlea on the 17th, Gladhouse on the 22nd, and Bavelaw on the 24th. Two **Wood Warblers** were singing in Lourie's Den on the 4th. A male **Garganey** was at Ratho from the 8th to the 12th.



Thanks to Eleanor Hurley for these records.

Mystery Bird

Identify the species pictured below. The answer will be published in the next issue.



(The March 2003 mystery bird was a **Surf Scoter**.)