



LICHFIELD RSPB OCTOBER NEWSLETTER



SLAUGHTER IN THE SUNSHINE

This is the time of year when many of us take the opportunity for a week or two in the sunshine, the kids are back at school, prices have dropped, it's turning a bit nippy here and for the birders amongst us it's a great time for bird migration. So the thought of a sunny break in the Med could hardly be more appealing. Cyprus looks good - shortish flight, not too expensive, most of them speak English, plenty of caffs selling chips and on a major migration route.

Sounds ideal but would you really choose to holiday on an island where during the first half of September this year almost 400,000 birds were killed using mist nets and lime sticks and that's before the killing season gets into full swing. This appalling practice continues for at least two months every autumn.

In the same period in 2010 BirdLife Cyprus (RSPB's BirdLife partner on the island) estimated that 1.4 million birds were killed by trappers in the Famagusta and Larnaca Districts - the highest trapping levels since 2002 when BirdLife Cyprus began monitoring this activity.

The birds are killed to supply restaurants with the local delicacy *ambelopoulia*, pickled or boiled songbirds, and the trappers target birds migrating between Europe and Africa. This practice was once a way of supplementing the diet of subsistence farmers and is now stoutly defended as a country tradition but there is little tradition in the present day methods where acres of limed trees and permanently erected nets take an indiscriminate toll on passing birds. Many endangered species are caught including birds of prey which are attracted to the killing fields. With the tiny bodies selling at about £2 each this is now a multi-million pound industry. This slaughter is completely illegal under European and Cypriot law but demand for the delicacy is still strong.

Some law enforcement is having an effect so to keep supplies rolling in and profits healthy, there has been talk of importing container loads of frozen carcasses from Malta and Italy!

Most of the above information comes from an RSPB report on the Birdguides website but there's loads of information about this subject on line; just Googling *ambelopoulia* will provide plenty of disturbing reading.

You can do your bit by signing an on-line petition to the Cyprus Ministers of Justice; in 30 days over 8000 signatures have been collected from 55 countries. Again, use Mr Google, enter *BirdLife Cyprus*, click on *sign the letter*, then click on *sign the petition* then complete the form.

Can we really call ourselves birders and conservationists if we don't make this five minute effort to support this petition?

Bob

NOVEMBER MEETING

Pin back your ears for something different!

Roger Charters introduces us to the world of Wildlife Sound Recording

TUESDAY 7th NOVEMBER at 7.30

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A Boston Day Out

Back in the dark days of January, we received an e-mail from South Lincolnshire RSPB Group detailing their birdwatching cruises on The Wash. A range of dates was offered and 7 of us booked up for the sailing on Saturday 24th September, as we felt this was a good time to pick up migrants on passage and the departure time, being dependant on tides, was a civilised 2.00pm.

A pleasant 2 hour drive found us at the Boston Marina to board the Boston Belle, a comfortable and well-equipped boat with on-board bar, small kitchen and both indoor and outdoor seating. We were reassured that there had never been any instance of seasickness on this trip!

Our journey began as we were expertly navigated through the Black Sluice Drain - the lock is only about 45ft long, a tight fit for our craft, so careful manoeuvring and local knowledge of the tides were needed to ensure a smooth passage.

We passed by St Botolph's Church, the largest parish church in England, better known as the Boston Stump. Throughout our 5 hour trip, the Stump was a regular landmark.

We immediately began to pick up birds. Our guide for the trip, John Badley from the RSPB, was an excellent spotter and had set us a target of 70 species! He proved to have keen eyes and ears and the only frustration was that the birds always seemed to be on the opposite bank from where we were. Nevertheless, we had great views of dozens of Redshank, together with Curlew Sandpiper, Ringed Plover, Ruff and Curlew.

Continuing along the River Witham, we journeyed out into the Wash. This is the UK's most important estuary for wildlife and we had the privilege of experiencing the saltmarsh and mudflats from the seaward side. In addition to Common and Sandwich Terns we picked up Eider and Shelduck.

The magnificent sight of thousands of Knot, in Starling-like wheeling formation over the sea was a real highlight, as was the thrill of watching an Arctic Skua mobbing a Sandwich Tern.

As our journey continued into the River Welland, we could see the RSPB Frampton Marsh reserve, with Marsh Harrier and Peregrine showing well. Our experience wasn't restricted just to birds, many Common Seals were basking on the mudbanks in the autumn sunshine. The weather was kind throughout the day - and House Martins and Swallows helped us believe that summer wasn't really over.

The only downside of the day? The aroma of bacon butties being cooked in the galley, sorely tempting a vegetarian!

As we returned up the Witham into Boston a pair of migrating Swifts brought our total to 71species - target exceeded!

This would make a great Group outing for next year. At £14 for a long day's birding it's really good value. For more information go to: www.southlincsrspb.org.uk/ or ask Bob or Julie for details.

Julie Mitchell

INTERESTING FACT: We always think of RSPB reserves as places to go to see birds but the latest annual report reveals the fact that less than 3% of species recorded are birds! Collated records across the RSPB's 200 reserves show that of 13,400 species observed, more than half are insects, almost a quarter are fungi and just 12% are plants. This really does highlight the inter-connectivity of all living things and the need to create habitats suitable for a range of wildlife.