

BIRDWATCHING HINTS: 2

WHAT'S THE JARGON I SHOULD KNOW?

- **Bins:** (not feeding bins) – your binoculars! ‘Got your bins?’
- **Scope:** (not a range, or scale) – your telescope! ‘Set up your scope, quick!’
- **Booting up:** (not starting your computer) – putting your boots on. ‘Hurry up and boot up!’
- **Juvs:** yes, they're the young birds – juveniles: who are fledged and surviving their first and second years.
- **LBJs:** (and a drink) – Little Brown Jobs: refers to any small brown bird you can't see properly (too fast; too far away; looking into the sun; as the light fades)

THE BIRD AUTHORITIES IN BRITAIN and Reserve Owners:

- **BTO: The British Trust for Ornithology**
- **RSPB: The Royal Society for Protection of Birds**
- **NWT: The Norfolk Wildlife Trust:** There are Associated Wildlife Trusts all over Britain, many of whom will let members from other Trusts onto their land.)
- **NT & SNT: The National Trust & Scottish National Trust:** both share their free entrance to sites. They have land as well as estates: much of the coastline.
- **EH: English Heritage:** more involved with buildings, but still own a lot of land
- **Also:** Song Bird Preservation Society; Wetland Birds; specialist and local Societies

WHO IS WHO IN THE BIRD-WATCHING WORLD?

1. **Birdwatchers:** people like you and me who watch birds in our garden, feed them regularly; take part in THE GREAT GARDEN BIRDWATCH; start to have some interest in birds around us when we're out, but don't go out of our way to look for birds.
2. **Birders:** people, like me, who make a specific effort to go out just to Birdwatch in a specific area – a reserve, or general countryside, or a reservoir in a town or city. AND START TO GET HOOKED!
3. **Twitchers:** seen particularly when there are Strong onshore winds at migration times. That is when the 'Twitchers' are rushing about, having heard that a 'life-time tick' has been seen on the coast. Their pocket bleepers record from the various Birdlines: 'a lesser-spotted-blue-Whatsit from America seen in the second bush from the right off the path in scrubland at Who-knows-where-by-the-Sea! A carload revs up to Scotland, back to Norfolk on the way to Cornwall from where they fly over to the Scilly Isles. They are not really interested in what else is about.
 - Some twitchers get birders a bad name as, in their haste, they don't respect private / farm property; break down fences; leave gates open and let out stock; trample crops.
 - There are long arguments between 'Birders' and 'Twitchers' as to who is what!
 - However, Twitching might be about one-offs, but many of them are normal – though expert – 'Birders' most of the time, recording for their counties, producing beautiful photographs, having spent hours in a hide or hidden under a bush, asking permission to go onto land and respecting property.
 - If you can get an expert to point out what is what in front of you, do so. Ask him to explain how he recognises one from the other. If he is intent on something, that is the time to keep quiet.
4. **Recorders: often BTO** – work professionally or voluntarily for the BTO; many others voluntarily record their Birdwatching lists + sites online at BirdTrack, the results of which are entered into a National database and eventually produce the official Bird Atlases of the country. YOU CAN DO THIS!

5. **Ringers: registered (BTO, RSPB) – (No they don't ring birds' necks!)** they capture birds in a certain area in a 'mist net' (always watched); they untangle, record species weight, size, sex etc. then they put a series of numbered and coloured rings on their legs, very carefully and send them on their way, no worse for wear. The numbers on the rings or colour-sequence can be recognised at a distance (with binoculars or telescopes) and the new location is registered for that bird. So much has been learnt about migration habits and routes since this has been started. The addition of tiny trackers – and even cameras to certain birds (cuckoos, for example) has been a stunning advance for science in understanding birds.

• **Visiting a bird hide – AS I HAVE SEEN SUCH BLUNDERS IN HIDES...**

A few rules:

- Enter it cautiously to see who is there and what is going on;
- Don't 'click' the latch noisily;
- Get that door shut quickly behind you; if the shutters are up and the door is open, the birds will see the humans in silhouette and fly off;
- Therefore, don't open a shutter until the door is shut, if you are the first
- Always whisper. It's not the place for gossip – though a quiet conversation is fine –
- Respect others; don't start a conversation if people are intent; it's OK to ask what is about, however.
- Bashes and crashes with daysacks, setting up 'scopes', dropping a shutter before it is fixed at the least alert birds and make them nervous, at the most empty the 'scrape' (small, shallow pool); NOT POPULAR!
- There are usually two levels of shutters: one comes down for when you are sitting on the bench; the other goes up for when people are standing or using their tele'scopes'. You may not need the top one open unless you are looking out for marsh harriers or osprey etc. flying in.
- On leaving, reverse the action; shut shutters; then open the door.
- HOWEVER, HIDES ARE GREAT – And yes you can eat your sandwiches there as long as you don't take up much space!

Coastal Migration Routes: SPRING, & AUTUMN + JUVS.: EXCITING TIME!!

- SPRING: arrival of Summer birds FROM SOUTH: Winter birds travel north to breed. A few each year (as climates change) decide to stay and breed in the UK!
- AUTUMN: Summer birds go south: Winter birds come from the North.
- Autumn has the additional interest of Juvenile birds migrating for the first time, so numbers are much greater.
- Arriving birds and those passing through take advantage of jutting-out bits of land to stop, rest and feed before moving on.
- If the winds are strong during this time, out-going birds will wait by the coast for weather to cross. This is when numbers build up and 'Birders' get excited.
- Those coming in, having waited on the continent, will all come over in a rush often in their thousands with mixed species.
- Birds follow specific aerial 'highways', only varying if the winds or storms force them into a different crossing.
- Strong winds cause birds from other continents to be blown off-course. Rare sightings are then recorded: firsts for the area, county or even the country. Birders and, especially, Twitchers are on the scene within minutes.
- Rarities: Estuaries, beaches, and woods: resident: *waders and gulls joined by skuas offshore*
- Sand dunes: *nesting terns, shelducks, pipits, skylarks, now have migrant dotterels, pied flycatchers, wheatears, Richard's pipits; woodcocks*
- Rough ground: *Rarities: barred warblers, wrynecks, red-breasted flycatchers, bluethroats, icterine warblers, and occasional birds from Siberia, great grey shrikes, bramblings, crossbills in nearby pines*
- Skies Above: *clouds of starlings in their thousands; pink-footed geese (hundreds – listen for them entering Norfolk in November!); tired long and short-eared owls;*
- Willow scrub: *exhausted goldcrests, (spring) willow warblers, chiffchaffs, rare yellow-browed & greenish warblers*
- Sea Buckthorn, blackberry, wild privet fruits: *eaten by hungry blackbirds, song thrushes, fieldfare and redwings*
- Marram grass, fences, open spaces: *tired meadow and tree pipits, whinchats, redstarts, linnets*
- Small freshwater pools near beaches: *snipe, wood and green sandpipers, ruffs, little stints, wagtails, shore larks*
- Scilly Isles: rich in birds, but especially during migration: *shag, common terns, kittiwakes, tawny pipits, firecrests, American golden plovers; buff-breasted sandpipers; wagtails; ringed plovers, curlews, and every sort of small bird.*