

WINTER 2009



VOLUME ONE. ISSUE TWO.

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Christmas is almost upon us once again, and as 2009 draws to a close we are pleased to deliver our second newsletter bringing you recent tour news and availability as well as one or two tips to improve your winter birding. Shorter days mean making the most of your birding time over the festive period, so why not join Oriole Birding for a day out in Norfolk and enjoy the spectacle of huge numbers of wintering wildfowl? See page six for further details.

2009 has been a busy year for Neil and Ashley as Oriole Birding has finally come to fruition, and we await our first tour under the new banner with great anticipation as we strive to continue producing the quality birding tours that our clients have come accustomed to over the years. We would like to take this opportunity to thank clients new and old for your support and advice during this critical time and of course for the flood of bookings we have received for our 2010 tours! See page three for an update on current availability.

You can find full details of all our birding holidays including itineraries, tour reports, photos and testimonials on our website www.oriolebirding.com—be sure to check out the ‘latest news’ page for tour updates and the birding diary from our UK tours.

Please feel free to contact us about any aspect of our tours by email to info@oriolebirding.com or by calling our office on **01656 645709** and we will be pleased to assist with any enquiries you may have. In the meantime enjoy the newsletter and we look forward to birding with you in 2010. Above all, have a very Merry Christmas and bird-filled New Year!

PANAMA 1ST—9TH DECEMBER 2009



Black-throated Trogon

“I arrived in Panama city on the afternoon of December 1st with great anticipation having read so much about this bird-rich Central American country, though I was feeling a little out of my depth with over nine hundred species on the national list and with only a week following my return from The Gambia in which to try and familiarise myself with the most likely species! Dusk was already falling, so our forty-five minute transfer to the legendary Canopy Tower produced little more than hundreds of Great-tailed Grackles outside the terminal building. I had been invited to Panama by proprietor of the two well known ecolodges—Raul arias de Paria—to check out the well-known ecolodges Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge, and what an incredible experience it turned out to be!

Dawn over the Rainforest in Central Panama viewed from the observation deck of the Tower (an old US military radar station), freshly ground coffee and binoculars in hand, is surely one of the Worlds great birding experiences. From this elevated position, one has a unique opportunity to view canopy dwelling species otherwise very difficult to find. Blue Cotinga, Green Shrike-Vireo, Keel-billed Toucan and Red-lored Amazon were among such species, and all viewed to the soundtrack of calling Red Howler Monkeys. With a selection of wintering North American

Wood-warblers outside the window during breakfast, we soon set off on our first guided expedition down Semaphore Hill road. Rainforest birding is perhaps a trifle more difficult than people expect, as you tend to hear a lot more than you see, but the guides at the Tower were excellent and picked out such gems as Black-throated Trogon, Rufous Motmot, Collared Forest-Falcon and Golden-hooded Tanager among a host of other species. Flycatchers, Ant-wrens, Ant-shrikes, Antbirds, Ant-pittas, Tyrannulets, Pygmy-Tyrants, Elaenias and Woodcreepers, many unfamiliar families to the British birder, are all here, producing some truly outstanding tropical birding when mixed with the wealth of migrants which spend the Northern winter here such as Northern Waterthrush, Summer Tanager, Canada Warbler and a host of shorebirds. A half day excursion to the Panama Canal was an amazing experience and one which will hopefully be incorporated into our itinerary for 2011.

Our second base was the Canopy Lodge nestling in the caldera of an extinct volcano in the picturesque village of El Valle de Anton, about three hours west of Panama City. The wealth brought in by the canal means transport networks are far better here than in neighbouring Costa Rica and travel was never a chore. We arrived at the Lodge to find a tropical paradise—beautiful rooms, stunning location, well prepared meals and fruit filled feeders attracting a sunning array of colourful birds to within feet of the observer.

Hummingbirds buzzed effortlessly around flowering shrubs and the gushing forest stream even hosts the rare Sunbittern, while a small ‘marsh’ in the garden attracts such visitors as Green Heron and Amazon Kingfisher. Excursions from the Lodge took us into lush forest on the Continental Divide, where we saw the rare Orange-bellied Trogon among a huge range of other species, giving us a trip list of well over two hundred species in just eight days. We are currently working on the itinerary for this exciting tour, which will be offered in 2011 and staying at the Canopy Tower and Lodge, with three nights also in the highlands of Western Chiriqui giving an expected species total of around four hundred. Group size will be limited to six, so please let us now if you might be interested. In the meantime, view the full trip report online by visiting the ‘latest news’ page”

Ashley Saunders



The endemic Vereguas Mango

Rufous Motmot



TOUR AVAILABILITY UPDATE

Cornwall Winter - Full

North East England - **ADDITIONAL DATES** 24th - 30th May 2010 due to demand. Please book as soon as possible - three places remaining.

Cornwall/Scilly - Full

Israel - owing to an unforeseen cancellation, we are now able to offer a single room on this tour.

Romania - Four Places. Please note that there is a £125.00 per person surcharge on this tour. This is entirely out of our hands and applies to those already booked as well as new bookings.

Extremadura - Full.

Mull - One Place

United Arab Emirates - Two Places

Norfolk January - One Place

Norfolk February - Full

Norfolk Complete - Three Places

China - One Place

South Wales Summer Wildlife - Three Places

Cyprus - One Place

Mallorca - Full

Iceland - Three Places

Norfolk June Rare Breeders - both tours four places

New Forest - Three Places

South Wales May Migration - Three Places



Jack Snipe

IDEAS FOR WINTER BIRDING

Pink-footed Geese



With the Christmas holidays offering a window of opportunity for birders to get out into the field, there is no better way to spend your time than by scanning the vast flocks of wintering geese which visit the British Isles each winter from the frozen North. Pink-footed Geese arrive in Norfolk each winter in huge numbers, with around 140,000 birds spread around the county between September and March. Holkham Meals is as good a place as any to get to grips with the travelling masses, since birds often loiter here throughout the day as well as arriving en masse at dusk to roost in front of the Washington Hide. The birds exact pattern is unpredictable, and governed by the weather, tides and availability of feeding, though good numbers

are invariably present at the site. Such large numbers of birds are always likely to contain something more interesting, and careful scanning could well reward the observer with views of rarer species such as Snow Goose, Barnacle Goose, Tundra Bean Goose and Greenland White-fronted Goose. Another tactic for locating feeding flocks is to drive slowly along the back roads between Holkham, Burnham Market and Choseley looking for flocks of Geese in the air which might lead you to a group feeding on the ground. Careful positioning is necessary to view the birds without causing disturbance, though with patience the birds will normally settle to your presence. With the recent splitting of Lesser and Greater Canada Geese, this is also a good time to look for one of the smaller races such as the diminutive *hutchinsii* known as Richardson's Canada Goose, recorded a few times among goose flocks in Britain. The Lancashire Mosslands, Scotlands Solway Coast and the island of Islay as well as Aberdeenshire are all great Goose-watching spots, so why not make your way to one of these hotspots over Christmas and let us know what you find! Alternatively, you can join one of our tours to Norfolk or Holland in search of large numbers of winter wildfowl during January.

European White-fronted Geese



Tundra Bean Goose



FEATURED TOUR—POLAND

POLAND – ENCHANTED FORESTS & PRISTINE MARSHES 1ST – 8TH JUNE 2010

White-winged Black Tern



TOUR LEADERS: *Neil Donaghy, David Gilmore and Local Guides.*

Take a step back in time with Neil and David and our good friends Mateusz and Artur to the primeval forests, wildflower meadows and pristine marshlands of Eastern Poland. Target specialities include the globally threatened Aquatic Warbler and Great Snipe, while other interesting breeding species include Corncrake, Hazel Grouse, Barred, Savi's, Grasshopper, Icterine and River Warblers, Citrine Wagtail, Red-breasted and Collared Flycatchers, Eurasian Pygmy Owl, Common Rosefinch, Black Stork, eight species of woodpeckers, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, European Bee-eater, Hawfinch, Golden Oriole, Thrush Nightingale, White-winged, Black and Whiskered Terns and raptors including White-tailed, Short-toed, Greater and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Montagu's and Marsh Harriers and Honey Buzzard. The forests and marshes are also fantastic wilderness areas that sustain some of the rarest mammals in Europe including European Bison, Beaver, Elk,

Red Squirrel, Wild Boar, Wolf and Pine Marten. Any of these are possible on our special dawn excursions to the secret heart of these areas, but we will still require extreme good fortune to see them as they are exceptionally shy as well as being rare! Traditional, high quality Polish manor house accommodation and excellent local cuisine are offered at our two hand picked bases for our stay. All in all, this holiday offers a fantastic introduction to birding and general natural history of Eastern Europe that will be hard to better. You can expect to see 150+ species.

GROUP SIZE: Seven. **COST:** £1199.00. **Single Room Supplement:** £100.00. **Deposit:** £300.00

Bluethroat



STOP PRESS—FAIR ISLE

An update on our Fair Isle Autumn migration tour in 2010. Many of you will be aware that the new Fair Isle Bird Observatory is currently being built, and we are pleased to announce that the project is in its latter stages as 2010 approaches and will be ready for the autumn migration season. We have provisional dates with the observatory for 11th–18th September. Price of £899 [no single supplement] includes seven nights full board accommodation, ferries from Aberdeen—Lerwick and Good Shepherd crossing to Fair Isle. Transfers from Aberdeen to Norfolk can be included at no extra cost, and we can offer the flight option from Shetland to Fair Isle at a supplement. We are urging interested parties to contact us as group size is limited and we cannot hold the rooms indefinitely. Thank you.

Olive-backed Pipit



ORIOLE BIRDING CHRISTMAS BIRDWATCH

Barn Owl



With the official launch of Oriole Birding on 1st January 2010, we thought it would be nice to catch up with some of our clients old and new over the festive period as Neil and his family will be visiting Norfolk during this time. On December 29th, we invite you to join Neil and Ashley for a days birdwatching on the North Norfolk Coast to sample the exciting winter birding this bird rich county has to offer, and to take the opportunity to meet up with us both. Anyone interested should contact us as soon as possible by emailing info@oriolebirding.com, and we will inform you of the meeting point and time. There will be no charge for the day, though participants are asked to bring a packed lunch and wrap up warm! With the return of a wintering flock of Shorelarks to Norfolk this winter, we will be hoping to connect with this beautiful bird during the day, as well as the large numbers of wintering wildfowl. In the evening, guests are welcomed to join us at the White Horse East Barsham for informal drinks and a social evening, though anyone requiring meals or accommodation should contact the Inn direct on 01328 820645.

We do hope you are able

to make it along, and look forward to seeing you all soon on an Oriole Birding tour!

Shorelark



MYSTERY BIRD COMPETITION

Photograph by Steve Hinton



This new feature to the Oriole Birding newsletter invites everyone to have a go at identifying our mystery bird depicted in the photograph on the left. We invite all participants to email their answer to info@oriolebirding.com with the email subject 'Mystery Bird' by 31st December 2009. The first correct answer out of the hat will win a £50.00 voucher towards an Oriole Birding tour (minimum three days) to be taken during 2010 subject to tour availability.

The draw will take place on January 1st and the winner will be notified by email shortly after. Please remember to send us your name and address with your email, and we look forward to receiving your entry! *No correspondence will be entered into and our decision is final*