



# Sunbird

'The best of birdwatching tours'

February 2012  
Newsletter



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**ATOL Protection.**  
Don't forget that this ATOL stamp is your guarantee that the money you send to Sunbird is safe and protected.



### NEW TOUR: Portugal 28 September - 2 October with James Lidster and João Jara

Following on from the success of his short winter tours to the Netherlands, James is adding a new destination to his 'shorts' programme with this autumn tour to Portugal. This will focus on seeing some of the region's special birds such as this handsome Azure-winged Magpie (pictured) and Great and Little Bustards, as well as hopefully connecting with some of the many migrants moving through the country at this time. The tour starts and ends in Lisbon, allowing you to add time to the tour if you wish.

**The cost is £1250 (Lisbon to Lisbon) with a single room supplement of £160. Full details can be found on our website or obtained from the Sunbird office.**



Photo by Faisca

### PRICE REDUCTIONS. South Africa: the Kalahari to the Cape

**1 - 16 September with Steve Rooke.** This elegant Blue Crane is just one of a host of memorable sights waiting for you in South Africa. Our 16 day tour begins with a

flight from London to Upington (via Johannesburg), gateway to the Kalahari and the beautiful Namaqualand. We then travel right down the west coast and through the vast Karoo to end with four days in and around Cape Town - and beyond as we take to the sea in search of hordes of albatrosses and petrels. The cost is now £3030 plus flights about £860 (which includes the internal flight). Single supplement £200.



**NEW WORLD TOURS - we have also be able to reduce the cost of all our tours in North America and a significant number of tours in Central and South America. Please see the website for details.**

Email: [sunbird@sunbirdtours.co.uk](mailto:sunbird@sunbirdtours.co.uk)

[www.sunbirdtours.co.uk](http://www.sunbirdtours.co.uk)

\*\*\*\*\* GET AWAY THIS SPRING - LATE AVAILABILITY \*\*\*\*\*

The following spring tours are all running and have space at the time of going to print.

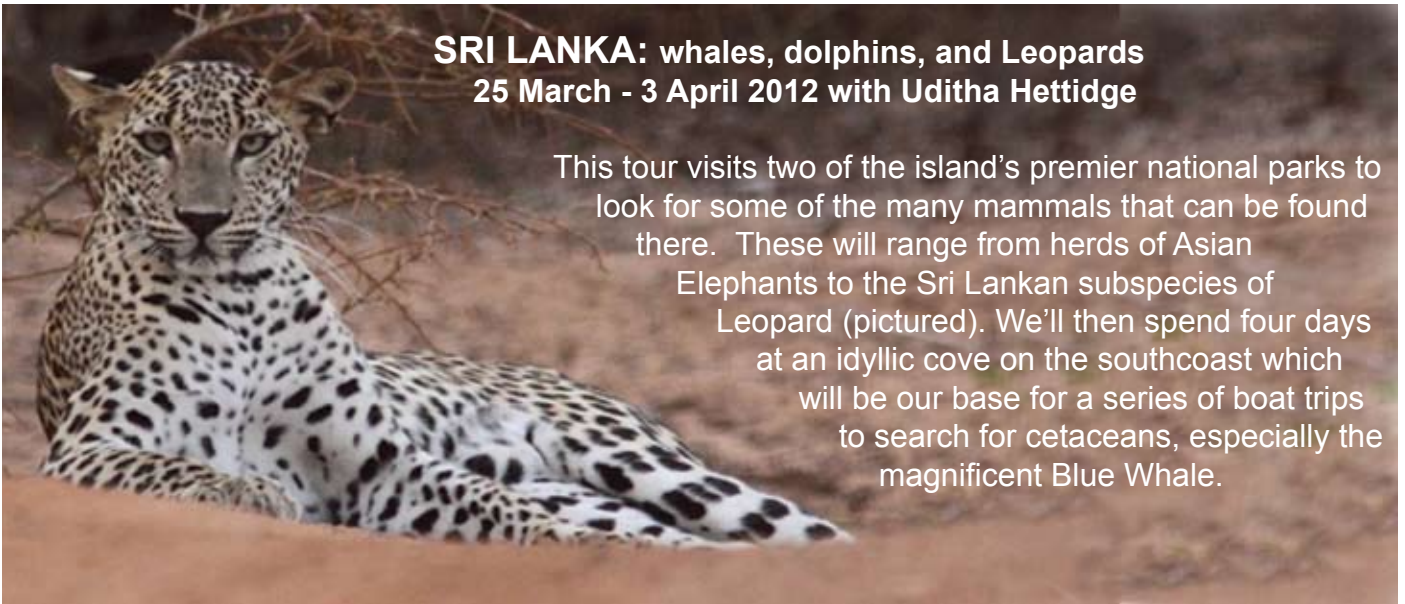
**MOROCCO 21 - 31 March 2012**  
with James Lidster

This bird-filled 11 day tour of Morocco is proving to be highly popular - our first departure filled up some time ago and this second departure is set to go the same way, although there are some spaces available at the time of writing. From Marrakech we travel high into the Atlas Mountains to look for Crimson-winged Finch before heading down to the edge of the mighty Sahara Desert to look for some classic species such as Cream-coloured Courser, Egyptian Nightjar, and Desert Wheatear (pictured). We then travel to the coast, home to the rare Bald Ibis where we'll also look for Audouin's Gulls on the Sous estuary and Barbary Partridge, Black-crowned Tchagra, and Tristram's Warbler among the scrub-covered hillsides.



**SRI LANKA: whales, dolphins, and Leopards**  
25 March - 3 April 2012 with Uditha Hettidge

This tour visits two of the island's premier national parks to look for some of the many mammals that can be found there. These will range from herds of Asian Elephants to the Sri Lankan subspecies of Leopard (pictured). We'll then spend four days at an idyllic cove on the southcoast which will be our base for a series of boat trips to search for cetaceans, especially the magnificent Blue Whale.



**BHUTAN 25 March - 12 April 2012**  
with Paul Holt

Bhutan remains one of the great birding destinations. Nestled deep in the heart of the Himalayas, it is secluded from the rest of the world by some of the highest mountains on earth. It is probably not surprising therefore that Bhutan has retained much of its historic culture, its centuries-old rituals and its fascinating heritage, as well as some pristine habitat that is home to such iconic Himalayan species as Blood Pheasant (pictured), Himalayan Monal, Satyr Tragopan, Ward's Trogon, Beautiful Nuthatch, or Fire-tailed Myzornis. Our tour will take you right across this magical land in search of its birds and wildlife.



**TAIWAN 14 - 28 April 2012  
with Paul Holt**



Our 2011 Taiwan tour saw all 17 endemics, and almost 90% of endemic subspecies. These figures do not do justice however to such stunning birds as Mikado and Swinhoe's Pheasants, and this smart Collared Bush Robin (pictured). Not all the highlights were endemics: there was a nice mix of palearctic migrants from globally-threatened Black-faced Spoonbills to a variety of waders including Grey-tailed Tattler, Great Knot and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Not only did we see some amazing birdlife, we also enjoyed the breathtaking scenery of Taiwan and tasted some mouth-watering delicious food.

**LESVOS 19 - 28 April 2012 with Killian Mullarney**

Normally a scarce bird on Lesvos, this Collared Flycatcher was just one of many seen by the group on last year's tour, an influx that also brought two Semi-collared Flycatchers. Other impressive gatherings included a mixed flock of Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns, up to 14 Little Crakes in the same place, five Golden Orioles, and 34 Lesser Kestrels.

2012 will see our eleventh visit to this magical island. As usual we avoid charter flights, using instead scheduled services for more sociable flight times! If numbers warrant, Killian will be joined by fellow artist Ian Lewington as co-leader.



PRICE REDUCED

**UKRAINE - birding the Crimea  
9 - 17 May 2012 with Paul Goriup**



One highlight of our 2011 tour to the Ukraine was a fall of literally thousands of Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes around the Opug mountain - almost every shrub and pole had a shrike atop it. Other memorable sights included White-tailed Eagles, displaying Great Bustards, a flock of 15 Demoiselle Cranes soaring overhead, breeding colonies of Red-footed Falcons, Eurasian Rollers (pictured), and Rose-coloured Starling. We also found time for some sightseeing, including a visit to the Livadia Palace, venue for the post-war Yalta conference.

**\*STOP PRESS\*:** We have a few places left on our successful tour to Mongolia 27 May - 10 June with James Lidster.

# CHILE

October 2011

Gavin Bieber reports on last autumn's tour to Chile

*'This great country maintained its fine birds and amazing weather right through to the end, with numerous highlights on the last section including tiny male Chilean Woodstars, the little-known Canyon Canastero, raucous flocks of Gray and Franklin's Gulls, the bizarre Peruvian Thick-knee, and simply the rarified experience of birding amidst the mind-blowing scenery at Lake Chungara, the highest lake in the world, its surface dotted liberally with Giant Coots and Andean Silvery Grebes, the surrounding slopes and bogs home to elegant wild Vicuñas and herds of domesticated Alpacas. A fine dinner with pisco sours and Chilean wine and a relaxed last morning's beach walk (producing a surprise Elliot's Storm-Petrel close in) rounded out the tour before we headed home.*



*There is just so much to look at in Chile. Here are just a few images from the 2011 tour - Magellanic Woodpecker, Gray Gull, Peruvian Thick-knee, Diademed Sandpiper Plover, Wandering Albatross, and Chucao Tapaculo. Main photo, birding in Lauca National Park.*



*Before this we had a fabulous visit to the temperate rain forests of the Lake District, home to the iconic Magellanic Woodpecker and some incredible scenery such as Volcan Puntagudo. We enjoyed an unparalleled 'tapaculo fest', seeing all four forest species well in less than an hour - and in sunshine! The added bonus of the active Puyehue Volcano contributed an amazing juxtaposition of clear and ash-laden rivers, the latter still with Torrent Ducks.*

*Elsewhere we watched a confiding Diademed Sandpiper-Plover feeding on a bog surrounded by huge lilac and green talus slopes, overlooked by a couple of hanging glaciers, and to the backdrop of numerous hooting Gray-breasted Seedsnipes! Our venture into the Humboldt Current produced a bonus young Wandering Albatross as well as the more usual Northern Royal, Salvin's, Southern Buller's, and Black-browed Albatrosses. The Sperm Whale wasn't bad either and we celebrated the magic pelagic with a glass of wine as we returned to port.'*

**The dates for our next tour to this amazing country are 27 October - 14 November 2012 with Gavin Bieber leading.**



\*\*\*\*\* RECENT TOURS \*\*\*\*\*

Sunbird leaders have been very busy in recent months. Here is a brief round-up of some of the tours that took place last autumn.

**ETHIOPIA** - October 2011. With the end of the second of two tours to Ethiopia, Steve Rooke notched up his 16th trip to this endlessly fascinating country. Both tours saw all the hoped-for endemics including such charismatic species as Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, Harwood's Francolin, Stresemann's Bush Crow, Sidamo Lark, and White-tailed Swallow along with a tantalizing range of other species more easily seen in this corner of Africa than anywhere else, such as the elusive Arabian Bustard. There were Ethiopian Wolves hunting Giant Root Rats on the Sanetti Plateau, Gelada Baboons scrambling over sheer cliffs and a stag Mountain Nyala staring back at us in dense juniper forest. There were some surprises – such as a pair of Cheetahs near Yabello and Ethiopia's second record of Citrine Wagtail at Lake Awassa. As always Ethiopia presented an amazing array of birds, mammals, truly spectacular scenery and an insight to a fascinating culture.



*Birding in the shadow of Fantale, an extinct volcano*

**GOA** - November 2011.

A trio of these smart Amur Falcons provided the perfect fly-past one evening, bringing the bird of prey count to 30 species, which included the scarce Red-necked Falcon.

Elsewhere the group enjoyed a nice selection of tropical birds amidst wonderfully tropical settings - Cinnamon Bittern, Greater Painted-snipe, Brown Hawk-Owl, the bizarre Ceylon Frogmouth, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Malabar Barbet, Orange-headed Ground Thrush, and Verditer Flycatcher to name but a few. The Amur Falcons are of course famous for their amazing migration route, and other visitors from the north included Greater Spotted Eagle, Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, Pintail Snipe, Great Black-headed Gull and Blyth's Reed and Paddyfield Warblers.



**We have revised our itinerary for 2012 and will be spending a few night at the famous Backwood's Camp. The dates for the tour are 3 - 18 November with Paul Holt leading and the cost is £1590 plus about £700 for flights. The single room supplement is £290.**

Remember that you can find a full day-by-day itinerary as well as a bird list for each of these tours on our website. If you do not have access to the internet, just call the office and we'll post a paper copy to you.

**GHANA** - November 2011. We were possibly the first birding tour group in Ghana to ever set eyes on the elusive Nkulengu Rail, a fitting tribute to a tour that also saw Yellow-headed Picathartes, and the rare Hartlaub's Duck (with ducklings). We also enjoyed amazing views of Rosy, Black, and Blue-headed Bee-eaters, Chocolate-backed and African Pygmy Kingfishers, Rufous-sided Broadbill, African Piculet, Red-billed and Black Dwarf Hornbills, Cassin's Hawk-eagle, Red-thighed and Black Sparrowhawks, Fraser's Eagle Owl, and Plain, Black-shouldered, and Long-tailed Nightjars. Our 2012 tour takes place from 3 - 17 November with James Lidster and Robert Ntakor as leaders.



Nkulengu Rail photographed by David Fisher

**AUSTRALIA** - October 2011. Sometimes it's not a bird that steals the show - this stunning lizard, a Perentie, was a highlight of our visit to Alice Springs, along with outback specialities such as the beautiful Spinifex Pigeon. In the humid surrounds of Darwin we found a Rufous Owl roosting amongst a colony of flying foxes and a gorgeous male Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove in mangrove forests. This tour to Central Australia is part of a trio of tours that run back-to-back, the first of which is to Southeast Australia which this year starts on 30 September.



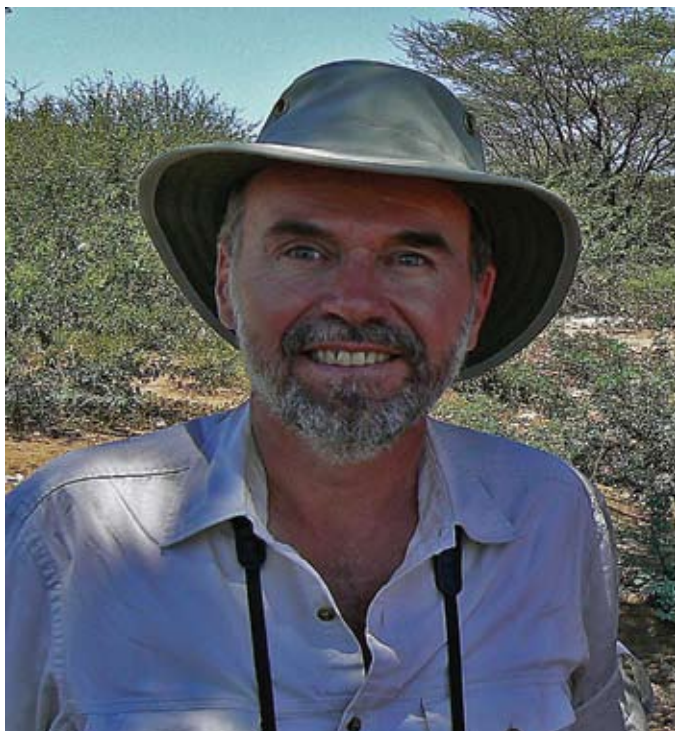
**GAMBIA** - November 2012

Why did the Plover cross the road?



The latest Sunbird tour to the Gambia was as good as ever, with highlights many and varied. One of our most sought-after birds was Egyptian Plover which we saw well, not least when one walked across the road right in front of us (pictured), and this on a day when we saw over 160 other species! Raptors featured strongly with our final tally reaching 31 species which included Beaudouin's and Brown Snake-eagles, Bateleur, Martial, Wahlberg's, and Long-crested Eagles. Of the colourful birds for which Gambia is so famous we saw four species of roller, seven bee-eaters, eight kingfishers, and eight sunbirds. Add to this the Grey-headed and Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrikes, Vieillot's Barbet, Four-banded Sandgrouse, Black Scimitarbill, White Helmet Shrike and a couple of surprises in the form of Black-bellied Bustard and Yellow-bellied Hyltiota.

**Our next tour to Gambia runs from 16 - 23 October 2012 with James Lidster leading his tenth tour there.**



### LEADER PROFILE - David Fisher

David is Sunbird's longest serving tour leader having been with the company right from the start and leading his first tour - to Greece - in 1980. In 1981 he became Sunbird's first staff leader and developed a programme of tours that he led through the '80s to Greece, Israel, Siberia & Mongolia, Kenya and Trinidad & Tobago. As time passed he spread his wings somewhat and developed tours to Australia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, some of which - along with Kenya - he still leads to this day. His depth of knowledge in some of these countries is now hard to beat, with, for example, 29 tours to Kenya and 25 tours to Australia under his belt. In between tours he

has also travelled extensively privately and has now visited 81 countries in search of birds (most recently Kuwait in mid-January this year) and has seen in excess of 7,500 species. With the addition of Grey Hypocolius on his most recent trip he has now seen representatives of all the world's traditional bird families. In addition to birds, David also has a keen interest in most other types of fauna - specifically, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and dragonflies and enjoys sharing his interest in these creatures with his tour participants.

In between travelling, David tries to put something back into wildlife and conservation by working in a voluntary capacity for various charities. He was a council member of Ornithological Society of the Middle East from 1978-1989 and edited their bulletin for five years, he helped establish the East African Rarities Committee and the Seychelles Bird Records Committee in the '80s and '90s respectively and now serves as Chairman of both, he has been a council member of the Neotropical Bird Club for more than a decade serving as its Chairman for 18 months and currently as its Meetings Officer. And he is currently vice-Chairman of the British Ornithologists' Club.

In the coming year David will be leading tours to Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, and Australia, returning to Kenya in early 2013. In between all of that he will be making a private trip to Ecuador and taking part in the Western Pacific Odyssey.

### BUTTERFLY DISCOVERIES DURING OUR COLOMBIA TOUR

During last year's Sunbird tour to Colombia, one of the participants, Leif Gabrielsen, photographed this distinctive butterfly at Chingaza. On returning home it was discovered to be a hitherto undescribed species. Experts are planning on visiting the site this coming August to see if they can find more.

Another species photographed by Leif on the tour turned out to be *Hypanartia charon*, a butterfly previously known from only 5 specimens in Ecuador.

