

# BIRD HOLIDAYS

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## 2010 NEW YEAR NEWSLETTER

Hi Folks!

We would like to wish you a Happy New Year from all at Bird Holidays.

Despite economic worries, 2009 turned out well in the end. It was a huge relief for us that bookings returned to normal during the second half of the year, and we all had some fantastic birding and wildlife experiences. **Bird Holidays is proud of its record of *never having made surcharges to clients***, despite the weak Pound.

2010 bookings are nothing short of amazing. Many trips are either full or nearly so. We could have sold places on some tours three times over. Many of you have asked to be pencilled in for trips in 2011, before we have even begun working on the brochure!

In this newsletter, we give an update on the 'Reserva Bird Holidays' in Ecuador, including a photograph of a Puma that was taken at Yanacocha last year. We are introducing a new feature in the newsletter called 'Meet the Team', where one of our leaders answers questions about himself, both bird related and about his life outside of birding. There are a few other features, plus a summary of highlights from 2009. As always, there are masses of photographs from last year on our website, [www.birdholidays.co.uk](http://www.birdholidays.co.uk).

**In the current economic situation, it is important to remind you that your money is protected by our ATOL licence.** This is not a time to risk losing your money with people that are operating outside of a legal framework.

We look forward to seeing you on a future trip,

**Paul, Andy, Roger, Phil and John**



*Namibia's Elephants are the largest in Africa – would you argue with this one? (Etosha, Namibia 2009 )*

### **Birding in an Economic Crisis**

As we enter 2010, it seems like the recession is over, at least for many of our customers.

We are proud to say that in 2009, some 96% of people who booked with us travelled to their chosen destination. Of the few trips we reluctantly cancelled, most people were able to switch to others we could offer. It is pleasing to say that in 2010 every trip is likely to run, with the possible exception of the Antarctic Peninsula cruise in March.

By taking advantage of our early booking discount, you have enabled us to obtain the most appropriate flights and accommodation. Early booking is very important as it keeps the cost of flights down and ensures **you get the flights and hotels you want.**

### **Early Booking Discount**

There is still some availability on trips in the first half of the year. We have a few places on Costa Rica, the Coto Donana, Greece, Picos de Europa and Poland. We are pleased to say that we can extend the early booking discount on all these trips until 8<sup>th</sup> February (28<sup>th</sup> February for Poland).

### **Provisional Bookings**

We are always happy to accept provisional bookings. That is, you express an interest in a trip and we 'pencil you in' with no obligation until such time that you can firm up the booking. If the trip becomes almost full, we will contact you before giving those places to someone else. This is increasingly pertinent when many of our trips are almost full.

However, we should mention that if we try to contact you and you are unavailable (perhaps you are away on holiday), there is a chance that we will have to give those places to someone else. In such an event, we will leave messages on answer machines or by email, and if you do not reply your provisional booking may lapse.

The only cast-iron way to guarantee a place is to send your booking form and deposit.

### **Birds Un-caged**

Last month in Taiwan our group came across a Taiwan Barbet, a Japanese White-eye and a brilliant male Siberian Rubythroat in tiny cages outside a small shop. This used to be common practice but is illegal now in Taiwan. The birds were in surprisingly good condition, so must have been recently caught. Simon Liao, our local guide, telephoned the police and by the next day the birds had been released and the shop owner was in big trouble. Excellent!

### **Forthcoming Events**

We are delighted to be attending the new **British Leisure Show** which will be held from **Friday 19<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2010**, at the **Royal Windsor Racecourse** on the picturesque banks of the River Thames.

The British Leisure Show is a unique family-friendly event that offers a terrific day out for fans of the great outdoors.

We have negotiated a special '2 for 1' ticket deal for Bird Holidays' customers to enjoy a great day out! To take advantage of the special ticket price, simply visit [www.britishleisureshow.com](http://www.britishleisureshow.com) and enter the code 'birdholidays' when making your ticket purchase. Daily adult tickets are £10, family £20 and OAPs £5.

We will again have a stand at the **British Birdwatching Fair** at Rutland Water. The dates for your diary are 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2010. It is a fantastic day out. You can always make a long weekend of it as there is so much to see and do, plus some great birding nearby.

### **Binocular appeal and photos**

The response to our binocular appeal has been superb. Many of you gave binoculars, field guides and even telescopes. Thank you! One by one we are getting them to the people who will treasure them.



*Trevor Lovett presents a pair of binoculars to Kebba in The Gambia, November 2009*

There are many more photographs on our website of the guides with their new optics.

### **Puma photographed at Yanacocha**

As many of you will know, our tree-planting project in Ecuador was completed a couple of years ago. Paul visited again in 2008 to see fields full of small seedlings. Roger was lucky enough to visit when leading our 2009 Ecuador trip and the news was very encouraging. They are now metre-high saplings!

Our partners, the Jocotoco Foundation set up motion sensitive cameras in the area and here's the result. A magnificent Puma!



Whilst you are unlikely to see one on our Ecuador trip, there are masses of birds and other wildlife to see, from Sword-billed Hummingbirds to Humpback Whales, and Long-wattled Umbrellabirds to Waved Albatross. If you would like to visit Yanacocha and Western Ecuador there are still places on our 2010 trip. Please contact us for details.

#### **Highlights of 2009**

Picking out highlights is almost as tricky as answering what is your favourite bird or country. However we have all tried to think of a few things that spring to mind when we look back at 2009.

Paul's favourite finds were the Finsch's Wheatear and Cinereous Bunting both on the Turkey trip this April...or possibly the Terek Sandpiper and Freyer's Purple Emperor in the Danube Delta.. or was it the Great Knots and Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler on the Goa trip!

Roger loved the Toucan Barbets and of course the Waved Albatross in Ecuador. He also watched a Polar Bear catch a seal in Svalbard, had great views of the Great Pied Hornbills in Kerala and saw over 400 Steppe Eagles in Oman. It was also his best year for Rubythroats with great views in Nepal and Taiwan.

John found a new Bonelli's Eagle nest site in Provence where the group had great views as they watched the adults feed the young. He also found a new Eagle Owl site on the same trip. (We now have three excellent Eagle Owl sites in Provence.) On the Morocco trip the group were treated to fantastic close views of over seventy Bald Ibis.

We all love boat trips. Andy managed to fit in plenty last year; like the one on the Rio Lagartos in the Yucatan with incredible flocks of waders, terns, herons and pelicans and great close-ups of Bare-throated Tiger-herons. On the Caprivi and Okavango trip we did more than a dozen boat trips and had fantastic views

of elephants, hippos, otters and star birds like Slaty Egret. Then there were the Finfoots in The Gambia and the superb Emerald Basilisks on the Costa Rican boat trips.

Phil had some great mammal highlights including finding two leopards and a cheetah in Etosha. He also notched up a White Rhino, a rare animal anywhere in its range but particularly difficult in Namibia. Perhaps the least known mammal though was his Jameson's Red Rock Rabbit! Still in Namibia, the gorgeous Blue Cranes were located yet again and are one of the many thrilling species to see on this trip.

#### **Focus on Poland**

The entire area of eastern Europe was originally covered by an immense primeval forest of which Białowieża remains the last large portion. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the forest became the property of a king who declared it a hunting reserve for the protection of the Wisent (European Bison).

It remains a very difficult animal to see in the wild but we will once again keep our fingers crossed in May when we enter the forest.



*Nest building Penduline Tit (Poland 2009)*

In 2009, our Polish highlight was not a big hairy mammal, but a tiny but very noisy Pygmy Owl. It performed admirably after a day in the woods with White-backed Woodpecker, Wild Boar and Pine Marten among some of the oldest trees in Europe. This forest is a special place and the discovery of a rare Violet Copper Butterfly here was another good find for our group.

Our group saw over 4,000 Ruff dancing and jousting in the Biebrza Marshes last spring while 2,000 White-winged Black Terns hovered butterfly-like over the grasslands each day.

Yet again, we found Citrine Wagtail and Bluethroat as well as several Aquatic Warblers and Great Snipe here.

Special permission is required to enter the 'restricted zone' in the forest and so be sure to let us know soon if you want to join us in May.



*White-winged Black Terns (Poland 2009)*

### **Congratulations Roger**

Roger hit the big six zero in January 2010. On behalf of all the Bird Holidays leaders and families we would like to wish him all the very best. He's been mumbling a bit over the last few years about retirement, but we are pleased to be able to say that he'll be here for a few years yet.

### **Meet the Team**

We gave Roger a few questions to kick off a new, regular feature on our leaders.

### **Roger, How did you start birding?**

I was wildlife mad from a youngster; I kept terrapins, newts, insects, bred waxbills and rabbits, and went looking for birds' nests. I also bred maggots to go fishing. I think my parents were patient. When Mabel, one of the rabbits, died I skinned her for the pot. I am not especially sentimental about wildlife.

Later I was introduced to simply watching birds whilst staying at Bharatpur, India and I've been seriously hooked ever since.

### **When did you start tour leading?**

I did a little tour leading when on conservation projects in Paraguay. I enjoyed it but found the tour companies to be run poorly. I also led Birdwatching Magazine readers' weekends. When Andy suggested Bird Holidays I found it to be a very good company where my style of leading fitted in. I co-led a couple of tours, then it just took off about 10 years ago, since when I have especially enjoyed taking folk to the countries I know well.

### **Do you think wildlife tours are ethical?**

Yes, if done correctly. I am extremely pleased with our carbon balancing scheme and reserve creation – pretty proud actually. I am also pleased that so much of the tour money goes into reserve entrance fees, local guides and wildlife orientated lodges etc. Ecotourism has been a real boon to India and Bulgaria, for

instance, where we have also passed on binoculars and bird books to locals.

### **What are your other interests?**

I do some wildlife illustration and am involved with Leeds Birdwatcher's Club and other bird organisations. I shout loudly at Leeds Rhinos rugby league, and grow as much of our food as I can.

### **Do you have any other work?**

I trained as a silversmith/goldsmith, and still take occasional commissions and exhibitions – when I have the time!

### **What does your wife do when you are away so much?**

I'd like to think she pines at the window for my return, but I suspect she quite enjoys herself sometimes.

### **Favourite non-bird critter**

The spotted cats, especially Serval Cat.

### **Favourite birds**

Raptors and warblers.

### **What is your favourite country?**

This is difficult as I tend to get absorbed in the wildlife of the country I am in at the time. But I do have a soft spot for India as I have been visiting for 30 years. I sometimes think of it as my local patch.

### **Where would you like to visit that you have not yet visited**

I would love to take a pelagic from New Zealand's South Island. All those sea birds.....

### **What bird would you most like to see?**

No hesitation: I would love a decent prolonged view of an adult Harpy Eagle.

### **Best birding moment?**

Also difficult, as I have enjoyed so much. Perhaps one of many amazing days birding the Pantanal, Brazil – with **so many** exciting birds; or Spurn during a 'fall'; or finding the Helmeted Woodpecker; or my first Black Baza. I cannot decide which is best.

### **Most embarrassing wildlife moment...**

There are so many, but here's one:  
In Kenyan national parks if one jeep stops then others appear nearby in case something has been spotted. On one occasion I was driving around Nairobi NP when the previous evening's meal of offal, greens and Kenyan Guinness necessitated a 'field stop' in an area of very sparse cover. Within minutes of hiding behind a small bush I was surrounded by several bus loads of excited tourists who were trying to work out what this animal with an obvious white rump was...

**Thanks for sharing that one Roger.**