



THE HARRIER



NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ORNITHOLOGIST'S CLUB
No 20 WINTER

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CLUB NEWS

THE SAM PENNEY MEMORIAL LECTURE.

6th February 2002

Each year the club marks Sam Penney's memory by a prestigious lecture, often given by one of the leading wildlife photographers. In recent years the Sam Penney Memorial lecture has been given by Dutch, Irish, Scottish and English photographer/lecturers and on every occasion members have been delighted with an outstanding talk with superb pictures. This short article is intended to persuade those members who have previously missed this annual treat not to let it happen this season.

First of all, a word or two about Sam. He was a very old friend and a leading birdwatcher back in the 1940's and 50's. When Ivor McDonald and I were schoolboys trying to identify juvenile waders with books a modern birdwatcher would have a cardiac arrest laughing at, because of their inadequacy, Sam was always here to help and give us tips and advice on our ID problems. He was always very generous with such assistance, not just to us but also

to anybody requesting help. He had a lifelong interest in Northern Ireland's birds and he was extremely aware of the loss of important habitats here; a problem he recognized, with continuing concern, very early on and which caused him to carry out surveys of breeding species all over the Province. His particular interest was Lough Neagh's birds, both breeding and wintering populations, and he was extremely supportive to the young members of the club, in the 1960's, when a series of important winter and summer wildfowl surveys were carried out on the Lough. I'm proud to say he became the club's first President and I believe it is true to say that the NIOC was the only organization in this country to honour his place in Irish ornithology. Sam always loved a good talk on birds with plenty of slides so when the club was considering the most appropriate manner in which to celebrate his memory, the proposal of a prestigious memorial lecture was adopted with unanimity.

This seasons lecture, Modern Wildlife Photography, will be given by leading English bird photographer, Mike Lane. Mike is a fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and a full-time professional wildlife photographer. He has achieved success having his images placed in the BBC Wildlife/British Gas competition and he travels throughout the world each year visiting a variety of habitats and photographing species (and he calls it work!).

Come and enjoy Mike's talk and see the fruits of his labours. As the advertisement says you know it makes sense.

Tom Ennis.

Exciting Opportunity for the over 50's!

The Earthwatch Millennium Awards

The *Earthwatch* organisation in Oxford supports over 140 environmental field projects in 50 countries, using volunteers to support their scientists. They are now are running a fully-funded award scheme, supported by the National Lottery and Royal & Sun Alliance, targeted at and seeking the involvement of, those born before 1950 who are interested in the environment. Briefly the *Earthwatch* Millennium Awards include:

- An overseas project placement, normally lasting two weeks, in which one would work in a multi-cultural team, as an assistant to an *Earthwatch* scientist, gathering research data. All costs are covered including flights, transfers, food and accommodation.
- All relevant briefing and training - no specific skills or experience are required.
- A personal allowance of £150 towards the cost of equipment, visas, inoculations etc.
- Enrolment as a member of *Earthwatch* for three years.

The 15 current projects covered by the scheme include: Exploring *Kenya's Rift Valley Lakes* (Flamingos), *Soaring Birds of Eilat* (Raptors), *Wildflowers of Spain*, *River*

Otters of Chile, Spanish Dolphins etc.

In return for gaining an award, one is expected to design and implement a Community Action Plan locally, utilising the experience gained from the placement. A Community Action Grant of, initially, £200 is available to fund this plan, and this may be supplemented with a further grant to a maximum total of £450. An *Earthwatch* Community Officer will provide advice and support through the various stages of the Action Plan. If you are interested in, or if you know someone who could be, feel free to get in touch for more information.

Alternatively you can obtain an Information Pack and Application form from *Earthwatch* at:

Address: 57 Woodstock Road
Oxford OX2 6HJ

Tel: 01865 318850
Fax: 01865 311383

Email:
millennium@uk.earthwatch.org

Website:
www.earthwatch.org/europe/millennium

Dave Craig.

The Work of Northern Ireland Bird Photographers

Number Twenty-Nine



It will soon be time to see and enjoy once more the work of Northern Ireland's top photographers.

On 6th March 2002, at 7.30pm in the Ulster Museum, the club will present the twenty-ninth showing of local bird photography. Everyone is invited to come along and, because we run this as a public meeting, you

can bring all your friends with you. For those of our members new to this or who have never attended one of these shows I can only suggest that you ensure that you go to this one. You'll be doing yourself a major favour and you can bet on a wonderfully, enjoyable night.

So what's it all about? Well the club organized the first show back in the early 1970's and they have been going steadily since then. It was agreed from the outset that entry would be open to all bird photographers in Northern Ireland, regardless of whether or not they were members and it's been kept that way ever since. You should know that we try to get as many of our local bird photographers as possible to submit up to six colour slides of birds they have photographed anywhere in the world in the previous 5 years. The entries are then assessed in *Advanced*, *Intermediate* and *Beginners* categories, by an independent judge (usually a professional wildlife photographer) from outside Northern Ireland. The judge will select from each category what are considered the best slides and he will also select from each category a top portfolio of 6 slides.

This year's Judge is Mike Lane, FRPS, who will also deliver this season's Sam Penney Memorial Lecture. His photographs are regularly featured in the bird watching press and may be familiar to those of you who read magazines like *Bird Watching*. His images have been used in a number of books and he has produced a guide to photographic sites, which are of particular interest to wildlife photographers. Mike travels frequently throughout the British Isles in pursuit of wildlife and is often away for long periods visiting other parts of the globe to photograph more exotic quarry.

The programme in the Ulster Museum normally takes about two hours and provides a wonderfully entertaining evening. The Club's presentation team will show the complete entry and as well as this

dazzling display of stunning images the judge's comments will be relayed to you.

Do try to join us at this outstanding event.

Tom Ennis.

A WEE DEUK AROUND THE FOUR CORNERS

The following is an account, submitted by Ray Bennett, recounting his recent trip to Western America.

On the 8th January 2001 four of us set out for a two-week bird and scenery photo trip to the U S A. The party were all NIOC members, Tom Ennis, Terry Lee, Jim Megarry and me. Activities were confined to an area around the "four corners" where the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Arizona meet. After a somewhat eventful flight during which we were re-routed we arrived at Albuquerque in the small hours considerably ahead of our luggage. It didn't help that our hotel had changed its name since we had booked our rooms. However a friendly and helpful taxi-driver found it and next morning after picking up our Cadillac hire car we were reunited with our luggage and it all fitted into the trunk. We then headed for Socorro (it was now Tuesday 9th) and Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Jim started to find out a few things about the car (we were still learning a fortnight later). Socorro is a stretched out sleepy wee town in the semi-desert of New Mexico. At this stage we realised that the atlas had been a bit optimistic about the average January temperature. It was often below 25F and I don't think it reached 35F anytime during the fortnight. This led to a bit of windscreen scraping every morning but the sunlight was generally brilliant with a deep blue sky and

in warm clothes it was very pleasant.

Bosque is a large reserve beside the Rio Grande with a drive right round it and a visitor centre where feeders bring in a range of smaller birds.

On ponds near the entrance we saw *Neotropic Cormorants*, *Great Blue Herons*, *Greenwinged Teal*, *Lesser Scaup*, *Common Merganser* (*Goosander*), *American Wigeon*, *Canada Geese*, *Mallard*, *Pintail*, *Shoveller*, *Ruddy Duck* and *American Coot*. Rather splendid were the *Bufflehead* and *Hooded Merganser* and of course the main target species, *Snow Goose* and *Sandhill Crane*.

Flying around or perched in the magnificent Cottonwood trees were many raptors; *Bald Eagle*, *Northern Harrier*, *Cooper's Hawk*, *Red-tailed Hawk*, *Ferruginous Hawk* and *American Kestrel*. While driving round we saw *Greater Roadrunner*, *Northern Flicker*, *Ladder-backed Woodpecker*, *Mountain Bluebird*, *Loggerhead*



Shrike, *Western Meadowlark* and *Red-winged Blackbird*.

Red-winged Blackbird

On Wednesday morning we set off very early to be at Bosque for dawn. It was dark and cold but when we arrived at the reserve there was plenty of company already there; all equipped with either expensive or very expensive camera gear and driving either 4x4s or camper vans the size of buses.

Of course there were thousands of *Snow Geese* too, often at a range of a few feet. They ignored photographers and the road traffic. Up to 50,000 *Lesser Snow Geese* and some *Ross's Geese* winter on the reserve.

As dawn arrived some of the local *Bald Eagles* started to wander around looking for breakfast. When one would get too close to a goose flock there was a noisy blizzard of birds taking wing. On the side of the road near the

entrance were a few shallow icy ponds stuffed full of *Sandhill Cranes*. As they took off in small groups they gave excellent opportunities for flight photographs in the wonderful light. They are quite confiding and enormous too which helps. A little pond on a golf course had around a hundred very tame *American Wigeon*. An *American Robin* hung around close by but was hard to photograph among the branches.

Before sunset we returned to Bosque where we added to our list; *Rock Wren*, *Pied-billed Grebe*, *Sharp-shinned Hawk*, *Ruby-crowned Kinglet*, *American Tree Sparrow*, *Song Sparrow*, *Yellow-headed Blackbird* and *White-breasted Nuthatch*. We also had *Blacktail deer* and *Coyote*. Thursday saw us again at Bosque for a beautiful dawn in a clear sky followed by another day's great bird photography. New birds included *Say's Phoebe*, *Belted Kingfisher*, *Ring-billed Gull*, *Long-billed Dowitcher*, *Greater Yellowlegs*, *Great-white Egret*, *Black-crowned Night Heron*, *Harlan's Hawk*, *American Crow*, *White-faced Ibis* and *Raven* (probably *Chihuahuan*).

On Friday, dawn again found us at Bosque where we added *Peregrine* and *Rufous-crowned Sparrow* to our list.

On Saturday we had the usual Bosque species and a new one; *Great-tailed Grackle*. After breakfast (a regular appointment in the Owl Café at San Antonio) we headed south to Alamogordo, whose claim to fame is as the site of the first atom bomb blast. It is also the town nearest to Roswell (re; aliens) and White Sands National Park. This is an amazing area of Gypsum, which looks like snow and behaves like it if you have a sleigh handy. Of course the temperature was still well below freezing and there were very few birds about apart from a nice little group of *Horned Larks*, which posed for the photographers.

We arrived at dawn on Sunday at Whitesands and found the place shut until a little later. The yuccas and other desert plants were particularly spectacular in the early morning light

encouraging the exposure of even more Fujichrome on the weird but beautiful landscapes.

In the afternoon we walked along the shore of Holloman Lake, which appears to be the sewage treatment facility for the nearby airbase. We had views of *Bufflehead*, *Kildeer*, *Least Sandpiper* and a really hard-to-get *American Pipit*.

Next day we drove north to Albuquerque. At the Nature Reserve we had great opportunities to photograph *Wood Duck* and *Ring-necked Duck*. The feeders attracted a cloud of *Dark-eyed Juncos*, *Red-winged Blackbirds*, *House Finches*, a few *Chickadees* and *White-breasted Nuthatches* and a beautiful tiny *Downy Woodpecker*. On Tuesday we left Tom to the airport for his flight home to the U.K. and his son's wedding. We headed north for the scenery. The weather was very poor with blizzards along hundreds of miles of empty motorway but as we got further north the storm had moved on leaving much better visibility and lying snow. Once we were in Utah we started to see the fabled mesas and buttes, as well as *Magpies* (*Black-billed* as here) and *Kestrels*. There were *Ravens* by hundreds along the road with a few *Red-tailed Hawks* on the power cables.

That night we booked into a motel in Moab. On Wednesday morning we drove the five miles up the road to Arches National Park to photograph the magnificent red sandstone arches against the deepest of blue skies with lying snow and an even lower temperature (down to 11 F). To reach Arches required short walks—a wonderful experience in the snow. Delicate Arch however required a long uphill walk with the last two hundred yards along a narrow and dangerous ledge covered with snow. However the view was superb and I will always be indebted to Terry for dragging me along. At least we had the place to ourselves for half an hour or so. We saw some very friendly *Pinyon Jays*

and Ravens. Although it wasn't signposted we found a panel of petroglyphs- Indian rock writing. On Thursday we drove into Canyonlands, the 'Island in the Sky', passing lots of excellent scenery and more pictographs, some of them desecrated with festoons of climbing gear. The park appeared to be empty; we were the first to the visitor centre, eighteen miles from the gate, and didn't see any other cars until late afternoon. There was lying snow on deep red rocks, a few arches and wonderful vistas of mesas and buttes from the canyon rim. I walked a couple of miles along the canyon edge in crisp snow with the trail winding in and out through huge red rocks – straight out of a Western. There were wonderful views across the enormous canyon of giant features eroded by wind and water with snow-capped mountains at a tremendous distance on the horizon. Photographs just fail to convey the enormous sense of space and distance or the desolate emptiness.

On Friday we upped sticks again and headed south for Mexican Hat, a small settlement just inside Utah and then on across the state boundary to Arizona and the little village of Kayenta. On the way we almost picked up an eagle. Jim suddenly braked, hard, I looked up and there was an eagle appearing to stretch right across the horizon, with an enormous beak and eye right at windscreen level. If Jim hadn't braked so hard I would still be combing it out of my hair. I don't know how close it was but it was certainly less than twenty feet and the closing speed around ninety miles an hour.

When we got accommodation in Kayenta I had such a bad cold I went to bed but Jim and Terry sussed out Monument Valley.

There was a bit of a culture shock here as it is Navajo territory and they deal strictly in cash. Needless to say there wasn't much left by this time.

On Saturday I was still suffering but the three of us did Monument Valley and the Goosenecks and the

Valley of the Gods, taking a gander at Mexican Hat too. The 'hat' is a striking rock structure with a circular cap on a column of red sandstone. This was a desert of rock and sand with the occasional ancient gnarled pinetree. The rock formations were spectacular, as depicted in the westerns although the colour was a bit duller than up at Arches. John Ford must have had a better class of Velvia. The Goosenecks was a series of tight river meanders, which have cut down hundreds of feet in the soft sandstone. Sunday was the long haul back east to Albuquerque. The only birds we saw on the trip were hundreds of Ravens and a few Red-tailed Hawks. Monday was our departure day. We packed up and the very dusty car was returned to the hire company. And then we headed for the airport and the beginning of our long and boring flight home.

I had had a marvellous holiday with plenty of food, drink and good crack. The scenery was absolutely stunning with wonderful light and a deep blue sky; the bird photography opportunities were amazing with the bonus of seeing a large variety of new species.



Cooper's Hawk

The 'four corners' area is wonderful and if you don't like excessive heat or crowds January must be the ideal time to visit.

R Bennett

R Bennett 5/10/01

Obituary

TERRY LEE 1948-2001: An Appreciation.

I have the sad task of informing club members of the death of Terry Lee which occurred on 8th May 2001. His many friends in the club may wish to know the circumstances. Sunday, 8th May, was a fine, sunny day. Terry, Brian McKenna and I

spent the greater part of it on Ireland's Eye, photographing seabirds.

During our time on the island we had a very enjoyable day but in the late afternoon, as the result of a boating accident, Terry was taken to a south Dublin hospital by the emergency services where he was found to be dead on arrival.

The only crumb of comfort I can offer to his friends in all of this is that he spent his last day doing the thing he loved doing best, photographing birds.

I trust you will agree that a few words of appreciation are called for. I feel certain that our friend Terry would prefer this to be kept short and to the point. A long-winded eulogy would have horrified him; it just wasn't his style.

Terry joined the Northern Ireland Ornithologists' Club in the late 1970s carrying on his membership until the present year. During this period he served on the committee from time to time and held down the thankless task of honorary Secretary for a period. Terry also served on sub-committees where he assisted in organizing the annual Work of Northern Ireland Bird Photographers and the Club's Annual Programme.

Terry was a popular member of the club, never seeking the limelight and just as content to be off stage in any gathering enjoying the craic. He seldom missed the winter meetings and was often along on week-end trips where he was happiest when in the company of a group of long-term acquaintances and old friends whose company he enjoyed every bit as much as the birding.

During the current year Terry was back again serving on the Club's committee. His contribution to the Club was considerable and he will be missed greatly by all of the members who were also his friends.

Tom Ennis, 51 Rannoch Road,
HOLYWOOD.