Another Club first has been notched up by Lennie Simpson on Maersk Curlew.

On 2 March this year, Lennie describes the day as starting off with light easterly winds with rain fronts passing through. At 1.45 pm he looked out of the mess room window to see 2 Common Cranes about a quarter of a mile away. They circled and flew closer until they were directly above him. They got into the warm air from the engine exhausts and flare and circled up to 600ft before flying away in a north-westerly direction.

Given the number of Common Cranes that turn up in Britain it is very surprising that this is the first Club record. It may well be that they are flying very high and consequently are difficult to pick up.

Remember, this Bulletin can be found in colour on our website (see page2).
From the Recorder

An urgent request for support

The Annual General Meeting of the NSBC was attended, as often in recent years, only by Bill Sterling (Chairman), John Wills (Treasurer) and myself and anyone wishing a copy of the minutes (don’t all rush) is welcome to receive them from here. The main item that was discussed is the financial plight which the Club now faces in the light of declining sponsorship over the last four years. Anyone looking at the list of sponsors’ names will see the effects of amalgamations and takeovers.

In a fuller report later in this bulletin more detail is given as to the situation which the Club faces in the immediate future. Quite simply the Club can not continue in its present set-up as the income does not cover the expenditure. This clearly has given cause for us to urgently seek a solution which will allow us to continue to operate with the on-going support of our 11 sponsors. In the mid-1990’s the Club was in a similar position and had to cut back on salaries and therefore for a while only input non-seabird records and doubled-up on the production of the Annual Reports. Fortunately when things picked up, all the records were updated and salaries restored.

Ideally, we would like to find new sponsors, perhaps from the support companies and if anyone reading this can provide leads please contact us.

Corporate Membership

The Club currently has eleven corporate members. The Club is funded entirely by its member companies, and their continued support is vital for the survival of the Club. If you work for an oil or gas company or support company which is not listed below, please speak to your Public Affairs representative and ask them to contact us for details of how to become a sponsor.

Amerada Hess Ltd.
BG International
Hydrocarbon Resources Ltd. (part of Centrica)
ChevronTexaco
ConocoPhillips
Marathon Oil (UK) Ltd.
ExxonMobil
Shell U.K. Exploration and Production
Talisman Energy (UK) Ltd.
TotalFinaElf
John Wood Group PLC
The Club’s future - a summary of the NSBC AGM

The AGM of the Club was held as usual at the Culterty Field Station in Newburgh on Wednesday 23 April 2003. Unfortunately none of the representatives of the oil company sponsors was able to attend and so the meeting comprised the Chairman, Bill Sterling (retired from Conoco), John Wills the Treasurer (retired from BP Amoco) and myself, the Recorder.

Chairman’s Report The Chairman made reference to the Club’s website and publications and the colour production of the 100th Bulletin. He observed that it was regrettable that tight financial constraints prevented the bulletin always being produced in colour as it is more attractive. The Recorder agreed to contact Dr Martyn Gorman at the University to provide more pictures for the website and incorporate a “latest findings” page. It was agreed that the Club’s mailing list be reviewed to see whether all current recipients are appropriate.

Recorder’s Report The Recorder commented on I.T. progress within the Club and thanked Marathon Oil for their generous donation of a computer, monitor and keyboard. A CD Re-writer had been purchased as was used to back up data. The upgrading of the database was a considerable benefit and the Recorder demonstrated how reports etc could be produced from it. A series of events had meant that the Annual Reports were running behind schedule and in view of the financial situation it may be necessary to combine the 2001/2002 reports. The Recorder proposed that he write to the Chairman of BP Amoco in Aberdeen with reference the regrettable decision by them to no longer sponsor the Club after 22 years of support.

Treasurer’s Report The Treasurer drew attention to the serious financial situation in which the Club finds itself following the loss of some sponsors. We currently have 11 sponsors each paying an annual subscription of just over £1000 each. Apart from some bank interest there is no other main source of income. In the coming year expenditure will exceed income by almost £1800. The main items of expenditure are salaries (75% of total), payment to Aberdeen University for premises etc and costs of publications. With increased salaries for inflation and increased N.I., clearly the loss of a single sponsor would be dramatic. What is more worrying is that even if 2 more sponsors were found, with increasing costs, the Club could not cover it’s costs.

The Treasurer went on to propose 4 theoretical options:

Option 1: In order to cover the current expected level of spending, and assuming we get no more sponsors we would need to raise our subscriptions by 43%! Clearly this is unlikely to be saleable to our current supporters.

Option 2: Increase annual subscriptions by (say) 10% and reduce costs. Either (i) Move out of Culterty Field Station and maybe operate the Club from a private home, thereby saving the annual maintenance payment to the University..or..
(ii) As was done in 1996, take the cut entirely in salaries - this would involve an approx. 27% reduction. This would require a corresponding reduction in the output of the Club.

Option 3: Amalgamate with a similar organisation e.g. Royal Navy Birdwatching Society or an association with Aberdeen University School of Biological Sciences. This would require agreement on sharing of costs/responsibilities.

Option 4: Disband the Club and donate the database to a similar organisation. All current sponsors would need to agree to the move and ownership of the data would need to be clarified.

Clearly the Club has to address the current shortfall of income to expenditure as a matter of urgency. In the meantime we are exploring possiblilities within Aberdeen University to try and secure a more long-term future for the Club which relies much less on the vagaries of the oil market. At present there are no assurances as to the likely outcome of this and all members and supporters of the Club should be aware of the seriousness of the present position. Any thoughts and comments you may have would be welcome.
Another “quick-fire trip” report from our relentless birding Chairman, Bill Sterling.

**TEN DAYS BIRDING IN POLAND**

Way back in 1994, just weeks after changing our working pattern from a week on/off to that of 2&2, the lads in the North East Lincs Bird Club decided on a birding trip to Europe which enabled me to join, without having to use any of my family holiday time. Not for us a quick trip to France or a package holiday to the Mediterranean but a near 1400 miles drive to the Belarus/Polish border. On leaving Conoco “Loggs” gas platform on the 16th May, I had until 2000hrs on the 19th to confirm any last minute changes before setting off for Dover in a hired Toyota Previa with five others from the club.

We arrived in Calais at 0530hrs on the 20th and began our drive through France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and into Poland. As a result of delays (4hrs) on the German/Polish border and after taking a wrong turn in Germany we decided to make up some lost time by pressing straight on to our first birding site in the **Biebrza marsh** area in North East Poland. We arrived there at 1100hrs on the 21st after a journey of 1360 miles in 39hrs - only made possible by rotating the drivers every 3 to 4 hrs and sleeping on the move. A far from ideal way to start our holiday but by way of consolation there were stunning views of some excellent birds seen on route.

Species seen in the old East Germany included:
- **White Stork**, **Red** and **Black Kite**, **Thrush Nightingale** and **Hawfinch**.

Species seen whilst driving across Poland included:
- **Common Crane**, **Marsh and Montague’s Harriers**, **Hoopoe**, **Red-backed** and **Great Grey Shrike** and **Golden Oriole**.

Five minutes after checking in to our hotel “Energetic” we were on the move again sampling the local birds. After an early night, we rose at what was to become our regular time of 0530hrs to begin a full days birding until 2100hrs. This routine only varied once when we finished at 0200hrs (after tape luring into view **Corn Crake** - but we failed with the same technique and narrowly missed **Spotted Crake**) only to be up and out again next morning at 0400hrs for lekking **Black Grouse**, which we failed to see but heard calling in the long grass.

Species seen in the area included:

The only birds heard but not seen were **Black Grouse** and **Spotted Crake**.

After spending five marvellous days in the marsh area we moved to our second hotel the “Hunting Lodge” inside the Park Palacowy located half a mile from the **Park Naradowy Bialowieza’s** primeval forest. Entry into the oldest parts is strictly controlled by permit and only with a park guide. Our guide was a botany professor attached to the local University of Forestry. He had a good grasp of English but not all the guides are as fluent. He had an exceptional ear for bird calls and songs and even managed to call a family party of wild boar close to us.

Species seen in the area included:

We had spent a magical 10 days in Poland but now had to start our return journey. The first 12hrs were spent birding whilst we drove back across Poland. We had a good nights sleep in a hotel just one hour drive short of the German border and after two hours of early morning birding we set off again at 0715hrs for the drive back to Calais.

This time we crossed back into Germany and pressed straight on to Calais and back to Dover. We finally arrived home at 0400hrs on the 31st May after a drive of 21hrs from our last hotel inside Poland. A May visit is definitely to be recommended as most of the species were in breeding plumage, on territory and singing, the trip was well worth the effort involved, with us seeing 145 species of birds and a good number of animals, the best being European Bison.
News and comment...

Ringed birds and corpses..!
One incredible ringing recovery sent in recently shows how long-lived Fulmars can be!
**Found:** 4 March 2002 in N Atlantic 62 25N 05 05E caught in fishing net
**Ringed:** 7 August 1966 in South Ronaldsay, Orkney as a nestling

This bird appears to have lived for 35 years and 7 months (12993 days)!! It was recovered just 596km from the place of ringing but must have covered thousands of kilometres in the intervening years.

**Corpses**
With much help from two students who are ringers at Aberdeen University a lot of corpses from last autumn were recently processed. A total of 79 birds have been identified and measured and the main species involved are as follows:

Chaffinch 9, Brambling and Meadow Pipit 7, Wren 6, Blackcap and Crossbill 4, Willow Warbler, Robin and Greenland Wheatear 3. In addition to this, singles of Golden Plover, Woodcock, Kestrel, Water Rail and Common Tern were sent in - which with other more common species gave an overall total of 33 different species. Many thanks to the following bases and related observers for taking the trouble to send in birds: Alba North, Brae Bravo, Buchan A, Maersk Curlew, M/V Putford Protector and FPSO Uisge Gorm.

Breeding birds return to Morecambe
Records from Graham Brown on Morecambe noted that on 5 March this year Kittiwakes were starting to occupy nest ledges and that a pair of Herring Gulls were back at last years nest site on 6 April. I am sure Graham will inform us later this year of the nesting success of this unique situation.

Blast from the past
Thanks to Dr Bill Bourne for sending me a copy of “A guide to the Birds of Scotland” by E Hardy published in 1978 - i.e. pre NSBC days! He refers to a list sent to him by a graduate on a rig 207 nautical miles east of Dundee during a six week spell in September and October. The list states that “Snipe and redstart were common; others included...shorelark, great grey shrike, little bunting... also undetermined species of owl, stint and crake and a possible merlin.” Whilst other common species were also listed, assuming the observer had got his identification correct, this would be a list that many current offshore observers would be more than delighted with in six years observations!!

Nightjars offshore
In the past month we have received 3 records of Nightjars. Previously we had received only 5 records in total, four of which were in June. Two of the recent reports came from Ian Howard on MSV Toisa Polaris (at the Brent Field 61 08N 01 44E) on 19th and 22 May. It is not known if this was the same bird or not, but the one on the first date was a female. The other sighting came from Ian Moig at East Brae (58 52 N 01 31E) on 28 May where the bird was identified as a male from the white wing markings. The 1986 and 1993 birds were photographed. Maybe this will be a good year to check your local patch of clear-felled forestry!

Annual report 2000
I must apologise to all readers for the late production of this report. The first proof is just back from the printers and it should be despatched in a few weeks. The 2001 report is now three-quarters complete!

Bulletins in colour
You can get a copy of this bulletin in colour by logging on to our website and downloading it. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader, but can download this too free of charge - it’s worth having anyway.
Recent Reports

This report covers the period from January to May 2003, but excludes reports previously published. The reports here are as submitted and await verification. A full report will appear in the Annual Report in due course.

Seabirds

Fulmar

numbers were low until May when at least 3 “Blue” Fulmars were at Ekofisk and MSV Toisa Polaris in early May. Lesser Black-backed gulls appeared regularly from early March with 50 at M/V Putford Aries on 7 April being the best count. A pair of Herring Gulls were back at last years site on Morecambe on 6 April and may attempt to breed again hopefully. Similarly, Kittiwakes were also there on 5 March and starting to occupy ledges. Terns were scarce with just one Sandwich and ten Common Tern reported in late April at M/V Putford Aries (53 0N 0216E). One Little Auk and one Puffin remained near FPSO Uisge Gorm for much of March.

Waterbirds

Three single Grey Herons were seen during the period and geese were scarce with 30 Brent geese at M/V Putford Aries on 28 Feb. being the only record of note. Three Water Rails were reported, two of which were at Hewett on 1 and 23 March. The first ever Common Cranes for the Club were at Maersk Curlew on 2 March (see above).

Birds of Prey

Sparrowhawks were seen in each of March, April and May, Kestrels were at Hewett and Leman A in late April and a single Peregrine report came from Maersk Curlew on 12 April.

Owls

Long-eared Owls were at FPSO Uisge Gorm (19/03), Maersk Curlew (09/04), East Brae (11/04) and Alba North (25/04). Short-eared Owls were at Hewett, Maersk Curlew and MSV Toisa Polaris on dates between 15 April and 23 May.

Waders

Small numbers of Oystercatcher, Ringed and Golden Plover were reported, whilst Lapwing moved in March with 60 at FPSO Uisge Gorm being the best count on the 5th. A similar number of Dunlin also there on 19 March as were the only Jack Snipe (2) on 6 March and Woodcock on five dates in March. The only Greenshank was at Maersk Curlew on 24 April as was a Bar-tailed Godwit on 4 March.

Passerines

A total of 21 Wood Pigeon records were received with a count of 12 at Ekofisk 1 on 3 March being the best. An incredible three reports of Nightjar were received with possibly two different birds at MSV Toisa Polaris on 19 and 22 May and another at East Brae on 28th (see above). The first Swift reported was at Morecambe on 2 May, the first Swallow at Maersk Curlew on 21 April, the first House Martin at Leman on 20 April and no Sand Martins. A flock of 21 Skylarks were at Maersk Curlew on 2 March. A steady passage of Meadow Pipits in April, Pied Wagtails in March and Robins in both months was also reported from a variety of bases. Two Black Redstarts were at Maersk Curlew on 17 April, whilst the only Redstart was at Alba North on 3 May. Spring passage of Blackbirds was noted throughout March, with “dozens” at Hewett on the 21st and an estimated 90 birds at FPSO Uisge Gorm on the 6th. At the former site and date, an estimated 100 Fieldfare were also noted. In contrast only 3 Redwing were recorded in the period! Chiffchaff was first seen at Maersk Curlew on 10 March and the first Willow Warbler was there on 17 April highlighting the later arrival time of this species. A single Waxwing was at Maersk Curlew on 21 February. There were 29 Chaffinch records compared to only one Brambling record, the latter being at Maersk Curlew on 11 April. A report of a Crossbill came from Buchan A on 18 January.

Non-avian reports

One Angle Shades moth and a SilverY were reported at FPSO Uisge Gorm on 22 March and the remains of a spider on Marsk Enhancer were believed to be an Orbweb spider. Alba North reported a Pilot Whale on 11 March and an unidentified whale on 24 April. A single Minke Whale was seen at Brae A on 7 April.
Typically this period is one of the quietest offshore and only by late March were the first reports of common migrants being received.

Seabirds

For details on how to send in dead birds to the Recorder please refer to the relevant page on the Club’s website
Recent Reports

This report covers the period from February 2001 to June 2001 but excludes records for the period previously published. The reports printed here are as submitted and some may as yet be unconfirmed and awaiting fuller descriptions. A full report will appear in the relevant Annual Report in due course.

Seabirds

Waders

Passerines

Cetaceans

Wildfowl and Waterbirds