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Season's Greetings

BRUSH TURKEY FOR CHRISTMAS? Chairman Richard Poyer extols the work of award winning author Jennifer Ackerman who specialises in explaining and interpreting science for lay audiences, having written several books on interesting bird behaviour. If you are still looking for Christmas 'suggestions' perhaps you would enjoy the book rather than the bird! Turn to pages 2 and 3 for Richard's article.....

BIRD RECORDS for NOVEMBER on page 5

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IN THE SHADOW of KILIMANJARO on page 3.

Travelling abroad has been 'off the menu' for many people this year. One way of filling that gap is to 'revisit' a memorable holiday through photos, brochures, books, and rekindle the experience. Stewart & Alison McCormick recall the joy and excitement of their first visit to Africa on pages 3 and 4.

Barn Owl: photo Phil Hanmer

FROM the WEBSITE: At the end of each year, Phil gives his annual report on the breeding success of the Barn Owls he monitors. Check out **Ringer's Roundup** on the NNBC Website for more photos and details of how successful 2020 has been for the Owls including news of a remarkable pair who raised eight youngsters.

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS — BAMBURGH PAVILION

Indoor Meetings continue be cancelled at this time, but we hope to start our New Year programme with a ZOOM Talk to Members given by Rick Taylor, Community Outreach Officer with the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, on Friday, 8th January, 2021. Further details to enable access to the event will be sent to all members early in the New Year.

NNBC Subscription 2021 — A Message from our Subscription Secretary, Fiona Southern:

I would like to remind all members that the committee has decided that there will be no subscriptions due in January 2021. *It is hoped to move the subscription due date to September*, in line with our financial year. (However this will need to be approved at an AGM, which has not happened so far due to covid-19 restrictions.) We have no idea when we will be able to have a meeting in Bamburgh Pavilion so in the meantime all we can do is wish you all the best for Christmas and the New Year.

The Chairman and Committee of NNBC wish all our members a Very Happy Christmas & Good Birding in the New Year

A Bird Book for Christmas?

Richard Poyer on the Bird Books of Jennifer Ackerman

In June this year I read a review of a book titled **The Bird Way** by ***Jennifer Ackerman***. The reviewer ended by writing that it was " a book full of wonders large and small" whilst also recommending her previous bird book, **The Genius of Birds**, being "a surprise bestseller". As I had been catching up on birds of the USA by watching the Cornell Lab webcams, I was really eager to extend my limited scientific knowledge of birds: off went an order for **The Genius of Birds,** second hand, plus an order for her new book when it came out.

Interested to find out about the author, I discovered that she was an English graduate from Yale University in 1980. Her interest in science had led to a successful and respected career as an award winning journalist and writer, specialising in explaining and interpreting science for lay audiences. Her first book in 1995 was called "Notes from the Shore" and described the natural history of the Chesapeake Bay, her home for three years. (*Last year this was re-issued with the rather misleading title of "Birds by the Shore" - misleading because only a small part of the book is about birds in any detail. Rather it is a moving book about her personal circumstances set against the background of a changing natural landscape*.)

So to the bird books. To research these she has travelled many thousand miles to spend time with ornithologists and biologists all over the world. It is her skill to be able to inform the reader of the key research findings in the last twenty years in a way which is readable and understandable. The results of this research would normally only be available in the learned journals. Both books are organised around aspects of bird behaviour and life. The '**Genius'** examines technical, spatial and vocal skills, amongst others, whilst the **'Bird Way'** has talk. work, play, love and parent as its sections. The theme running through the books demonstrates that being a "bird-brain" is far from a derogatory term. Birds' brains, just like human ones, are capable of learning, innovation, adaptation and application. Each of the skills and behaviours is illustrated by examples from such as the cave-dwelling oilbirds of north-eastern Venezuela, the keas of New Zealand

and the honeyguides of Mozambique. In each of the many illustrations of scientists' work she shows how they have been able to identify “remarkable strategies and intelligence underlying these activities, abilities we once considered uniquely our own,”

Of the many studies in the books I have favourites. There is the **brush turkey** that builds an enormous mound of a nest, rather like a compost heap. Arriving in Queensland from New Guinea they thrive in urban areas, building nests in parks, gardens and backyards. The male builds the nest and the female goes around the area until it decides on a nest and male that she likes. After they mate, the female excavates a deep hole in the nest, tests the temperature and if it is ‘correct" (as yet no one has discovered how), lays her eggs then goes away. The male fills the hole and then watches over the nest, periodically adding material and checking on the temperature. After 45 days or so, the chick is ready to hatch. It lays on its back, thrusts through the shell with its feet, then spends the next two and a half days reverse excavating with its feet to get out of the mound. When it emerges it is fully capable of feeding itself.

Then there are the **bower birds** that spend days constructing the bowers only for the females to ignore them; the studies that suggest smell is very important for some species in helping them to navigate; the species of **antbirds** in Costa Rica that follow mini-lion ants and feed on the creatures that the ants disturb; the **western scrub jays** who cache several thousand acorns, steal from other jays and gather round a dead jay in a "cacophonous aggregation"; the vermillion female **eclectus parrot** of New Guinea and Northern Australia who finds and occupies a nest hole without leaving for eleven months and who may kill her male chicks if threatened by danger.

There is so much to learn from Jennifer Ackerman's books as she brings recent research to life with a series of stories that make the science accessible in a flowing style. I highly recommend all three of her books, perhaps one for a Christmas present**.** **Richard Poyer**

In the Shadow of Kilimanjaro

Having been lucky enough to explore many exciting places in the World, I still feel particularly attracted towards Africa. Perhaps my urban upbringing a few miles from the birthplace of David Livingstone in Blantyre near Glasgow has had something to do with it! His incredible work as a missionary and explorer in the 19th Century often featured in our school Assemblies, and visits to his birthplace and museum were always popular. That said, it was not until the mid-1990s that Alison and I read of an intriguing holiday based in a bungalow on a Coffee Plantation on the lower slopes of Kilimanjaro, which included a week of local activities followed by a further week on Safari. We jumped at the chance!

We flew to Kilimanjaro airport and transferred (in the dark!) to the little village of Machare on the lush southern slopes of the mountain. Next morning, we peered out over a garden full of flowering tropical shrubs and small trees, enjoying the warmth, the colours and the calls of many birds, all ‘new’ to us. Jewel-like Sunbirds flitted from

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In the Shadow of Kilimanjaro

flower to flower and the raucous calls of the Silvery-cheeked Hornbills from a large tree resounded through the surrounding forest. Later, a gentle local exploration took us along the dirt road we must have travelled the previous evening, past the little 'shambas' where the friendly villagers grew their bananas, maize, and root crops. [The plantation bungalows formed part of a twinning venture with a community in Cumbria, so the local *WaChagga* were well used to a succession of visitors from the UK, and we enjoyed the privilege and opportunity over the next few days to visit their local school and clinic, the nearest town, and experience something of life in rural Tanzania. Two daylong expeditions took us first to **Arusha National Park** where we had our first taste of a safari, everything from Warthogs and Giraffes to a group of beautiful Black-and-White Colobus Monkeys, plus the spectacle of many Lesser Flamingos in one of the nearby alkaline soda lakes. Even more exciting was the opportunity to walk the 'first day' section of the main trail leading to the summit of Africa's highest mountain, the snow-capped **Kilimanjaro** at 5895m.Climbing steadily upwards through the forest we eventually reached the alpine heathland where Giant Lobelias, Giant Groundsel and Tree Heathers abound.

Silvery-cheeked Hornbill at Machare

Photo: Alison McCormick

Our visits to local schools and to the health clinic were both enjoyable and moving. Who can fail to be lifted hearing a class of children proudly singing their national anthem 'Mungo Ibariki Afrika' ('God Bless Africa') or moved by the staff at the health centre discussing their limited range of medicines with Alison (a pharmacist.)

By the next weekend, the Landrovers were loaded up for our journey south to some of the finest National Parks in Africa. Our first stop overlooked the shores of **Lake Manyara** and the dramatic cliffs of the **Great Rift Valley**. Next day we travelled on across the **Serengeti** where we stayed for a couple of nights at a lodge, enjoying the spectacle of the migrating Wildebeest and the numerous predators such as Lions and Hyenas. (An interesting diversion took to the famous Olduvai Gorge where some of the earliest hominid remains were found.) the spectacular ten-mile wide **Ngorongoro** Crater was next up - the haunt of Rhinos and Lions, and herds of Zebra. Less well known is **Tarangire National Park** with its river flowing through an otherwise rather arid area (with massive Baobab Trees), drawing birds and animals from far and wide to access this precious resource. Elephants regularly came back up the steep slope from the river trumpeting as they passed within metres of our safari tents- what magnificent creatures they are!

Impressive and eye-catching as the animals undoubtedly are, the birdlife was equally rich and attractive, with well over a hundred new species encountered during our stay, including such 'stars' as Kori's Bustard, Crowned Crane, Secretary Bird, Bataleur Eagle, Fischer's Lovebirds, Hartlaub's Turaco…… I could go on…….. Even the *Starlings* in Tanzania include such apt descriptions as **Superb** starling, **Splendid**-starling etc, a gaudy, glossy riot of colour! We have been back to other parts Africa several more times, always memorable, but there was something quite magical about that first experience which was truly unique and special.

Hartlaub's Turaco– Tanzania *Photo: TNP*

Stewart & Alison McCormick

BIRD RECORDS NOVEMBER 2020

Brent Goose	1 at Stag Rocks on 12th (JPL), 265 at Fenham Flats on 25th of which 15 were dark bellied (SV&AJM), 10 at Boulmer on 27th (A&MG).
Barnacle Goose	8 at Outchester on 27th (DG&RHB).
Greylag Goose	200 between Harper's Heugh & Low Newton all month, many observers.
Pink-footed Goose	2000 at Harper's Heugh & 220 at Belford on 27th (DG&RHB).
Whooper Swan	7 at Budle Bay on 2nd (A&MG) & 14 on 5th (JPL,AB), 3 at West Ord on 15th (EH), 8 at Low Newton Scrape on 21st /24th (PA,JPL,AB).
Mandarin Duck	1 at West Ord on 15th (EH).
Shoveler	23 at Budle Bay on 12th (JPL).
Gadwall	29 at Hedgeley Ponds on 11th (I&KD).
Wigeon	900 at Budle Bay all month (JPL).
Green-winged Teal	1 at Budle Bay on 2nd (A&MG).
Pochard	1 at Branton Ponds 10th (I&KD).
Tufted Duck	1 at Monk's House Pool from 24/27th (JPL,AB,DG&RHB).
Velvet Scoter	1 at Beadnell Bay on 16th (JPL).
Long-tailed Duck	6 off Stag Rocks on 5th (JPL,AB), 2 off Newton Point on 13th (PA), 1 in Beadnell Bay on 16th (A&MG).
Goldeneye	2 off Newton Point on 13th & 15 in Embleton Bay on 26th (PA).
Grey Partridge	2 at Snableszes on 20th (A&MG), 10 near Cocklawburn on 25th (EH).
Red-throated Diver	2 off Stag Rocks on 5th (JPL,AB), 1 off Boulmer on 12th (A&MG), 6 off Football Hole on 21st & 1 in Embleton Bay on 26th (PA).
Black-throated Diver	1 off Stag Rocks on 5th (JPL,AB), 2 off Cheswick Beach on 7th (JJ).
Great Northern Diver	1 off Cheswick Beach on 7th (JJ), 2 off Ross Back Sands on 25th (SV&AJM).
Red-necked Grebe	1 off Ross Back Sands on 25th (SV&AJM).
Slavonian Grebe	1 off Ross Back Sands on 25th (SV&AJM).
Great White Egret	2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 11th & 1 at Branton Ponds on 12th (I&KD).
Little Egret	4 at Budle Bay on 2nd (A&MG) & 1 on 5th &12th (JPL,AB) & 2 on 27th (DG&RHB) plus 2 at Branton Ponds on 10th & 3 on 12th with 1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 11th (I&KD). 1 at Monk's House Pool 23rd /24th (JPL).
Goshawk	1 at Preston Hall on 4th (JPL).
Water Rail	1 at Branton Ponds on 10th (I&KD).
Golden Plover	200 at Low Newton Scrape on 24th (WMB,JPL,AB), 600 at Boulmer on 25/27th (A&MG).
Turnstone	70 at Stag Rocks on 5th (JPL,AB).
Purple Sandpiper	60 at Stag Rocks on 2nd (A&MG), 210 in 2 flocks on 5th (JPL,AB) & 150 on 27th (DG&RHB).
Woodcock	1 at Ross Back Sands on 25th (SV&AJM), 2 at Budle Bay on 27th (A&MG), 2 at Ford Moss on 29th (EH).
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 10th & 2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 11th (I&KD).
Spotted Redshank	1 at Budle Bay on 2nd (A&MG).
Black-headed Gull	1 Polish ringed T86W at Stag Rocks on 2nd (A&MG).
Blackcap	10 at Howick on 16th (PH).
Twite	76 at Long Nanny on 16th (A&MG,SVM).
Tree Sparrow	12 at Fenham on 8th (RD).

Observers Paul Ashdown (PA), Adrian Baker (AB), Winnie Banks (WMB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Ian & Keith Davison (IB&KD), Richard Dickinson (RD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Phil Hanmer (PH), Liz Harrison (EH), James Joicey (JJ), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM).

December records: please submit records no later than 31st December by e-mail, telephone or post to the recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, NE68 7WG. TEL:01665-720654 e-mail j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk or .com if difficulty. **many thanks.**