



Birding *For All*

Update

Walk 2500 miles in 2017

Raising money for BFA
through walking

New member experiences

Peter Bangs talks about his
experiences since joining BFA

Membership numbers increase in 2016



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Birding for All (registered charity 1091755)

Cover photo by Ashley Beolens

Chairman's Update

In many ways, this last year has been the best ever for BFA.

Funding has always been a struggle for us as we are an all-volunteer organisation with no membership fees to fall back on. Year on year with book sales, raffles and the like we have just managed to make ends meet. However, following Bird Fair 2016 we approach some of our regular commercial supporters and a few newbies and asked for their support. The response was very gratifying with donations often in the hundreds meaning that we can cover this year's Bird Fair costs, all our day to day running costs and have something left over towards replacing our worn-out exhibition kit. We are not quite there yet, and there's always the next year to worry about, but our really heartfelt thanks go to: Opticron, Swarovski Optik, Viking Optical, Birding Ecotours, Rockjumper Birding and Sarus Bird Tours. Thanks too, to a number of individual donors who have chipped in. As ever Fatbirder has supported us by covering some costs and our treasurer, Brian Anderson has, as usual made a generous donation.

We continue to get good responses from some of the major reserve providers – there are a few exceptions but most reserve managers are very willing to respond to the needs of those with mobility issues. Unfortunately, it's never a case of 'job done' as staff and trustee changes and maintenance issues continue to mean that even where there has been a really good response with physical changes on the ground we have to continue to be vigilant as its not yet totally built into the culture of conservation to think of public access at the planning stage, nor to see that public access means ALL the public not just the fully fit and able minority.

Part of this continuing education and promotion of our cause is assessing facilities. This year a number of members have been getting out there with our reserve assessment forms and doing a great job. The result is that the web resource is building nicely... especially for reserves in East Anglia and the Southeast. Members from further afield please note... it's a task anyone can do by carrying the form and a pen (plus tape measure) to their favourite reserve. You can fill the form in over several visits and when its sent to me to put on line think of all the other birders with mobility issues who will benefit! Photos are great too particularly shots of the interiors and exteriors of hides. At the moment, Scotland is really under represented – it would be great to hear from residents and holiday visitors alike... take a look at the reserves already covered, knowing what they are like may save you a wasted journey, or encourage you to go for it! Special mention here for a couple of members who have done a really good job – Lizzie Guntrip on Minsmere and Peter Bangs on several Norfolk reserves with terrific pictures too they are model reports! Well done guys!

Miles Without Stiles

Miles Without Stiles isn't a phrase I'd ever heard before. I was told about this by Matt Dowse of the South Downs National Park after he asked for our input on access. I don't know if this is a widespread initiative or their idea but, basically, it's about creating country routes suitable for wheelchair and disability scooters etc., so there are no barriers along the way.

See:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/explore/walking/>

Bird Fair Update

The 2016 British Birdwatching Fair (Or Bird Fair as it is known to most) was a great success for most attendees, at Birding For All however we had more of a mixed bag. Our regular raffle ticket sales, although down on 2015 still did very well, and membership sign up was at an all time high. We had our old friend Brian back on the stall for much of the weekend, but sadly lost Bo and Maggie half way through the weekend, due to untimely illness.



Henry Hen Harrier pays a visit



Chris Packham's book signing

This year we had an extra special event as well, as the legendary TV present, conservationist, author and patron, Chris Packham, had his first book signing of the 3-day event on our stand! Not only did he hot foot it straight to us from a plane but the crowds he drew really helped us to up our presence, and get our stand some much needed attention. Chris we are immensely grateful to you.

Of course we are always grateful to all our supporting patrons, members and volunteers, and look forward to seeing you all again at the 2017 event.



Chris Packham visits the stand

Walking 2500 Miles

At the end of 2016 I stumbled across a great challenge being run by Country Walking magazine to #walk100miles in 2017, the idea of which is to walk 1000 miles throughout the year, an admirable task when you consider that UK citizens walk under 200 miles a year for transport (on average). I quickly realised, however, that I already tend to walk more than that figure, so decided to up the ante and make it a real challenge for me, I now plan to walk 2500 miles during 2017.

Not fully satisfied with that as a challenge alone, and as a way of motivating myself a little more, I have also set the aim of raising £500 for Birding For All.

My plan with the walking is to count all the miles I do through the year, so my walk to work counts as much as a hike along the Jurassic coast would, so I

will be using my Fitbit Stats to assess my mileage (I've calculated my stride length, to make it as accurate as possible), and I also use the ViewRanger app for dedicated walks. I'm also hoping to fit in a few long distance challenge walks in, if I can.

As for raising awareness and funds, well I now have a couple of branded t-shirts I cobbled together in order to show off what I am doing and have set up a page on the Mydonate website to raise the much needed funds: <https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/walking2500milesin2017>

You can follow how I am doing on my various social media platforms or by visiting my blog <http://www.viewsfromanurbanlake.co.uk> I'd love your support, however it comes, from donations to just a friendly wave if you see me out walking, it all helps, and hopefully it will raise a little money and a little more awareness of this great charity.

Ashley Beolens

Walking 2500 Miles in 2017



Raising Money for Birding For All

Patrons

Birding For All is lucky to have recruited, over a number of years, some very well known or well-placed patrons who, behind the scenes carry our message to their various activities. Many are well-known TV faces like Nick Baker, Mike Dilger, Martin Hughes-Games, David Lindo, Nigel Marvin, Bill Oddie, Chris Packham and Iolo Williams; not forgetting film makers Angela and Jonathan Scott. Every year many of them can be seen at our British Bird Fair stand helping us publicise the cause.

There are other familiar names like ex-deputy director of RSPB and Hen Harrier champion Mark Avery, and current RSPB CEO and long-term friend of BFA Mike Clarke.

Then there are a number of artists and writers that you may or may not be familiar with like painters Clinton Banbury and Ian Griffiths and writers Stephen Moss (who is also a BBC TV producer) and Start Winter who is better known as a leading sports journalist. There are a few more names that will be familiar to some of you like naturalist and presenter Howie Watkins, and Tour Guide and Writer Neil Glenn.

Then there is Philip Merricks MBE, conservationist and farmer and long-time chair of the Hawk & Owl Trust.

I'd like to introduce you to some of our newest patrons too.



Garin Baksa



Christine Percy

Garin Baksa and Christine Percy both work for optics companies that have been supporters of BFA

from its earliest days. Garin is a partner at Opticron who have not only helped with donated optics for our raffles for many years but since the last BBF have been giving us major financial support. He's one of the un-sung good guys who has not only influenced optics development for, coming up to, two decades but is also a champion, through the company, of many conservation projects.

Christine has worked for another of our major sponsors, Swarovski, for more than two decades. She says of herself: "I'm not a birdwatcher but enjoy watching wildlife in its natural habitat; the most magnificent sight I have seen was watching condors flying overhead while on holiday in Chile. I've toured around the world, but, my favourite place is Interlaken. I love history (especially the mid 1800's to the mid 1900's). I'm a member of the Leyton Orient Supporters Club, although I prefer rugby union. I enjoy a game of cricket and as a good Essex Girl I go to the Oval to cheer them on when they play Surrey. I simply love the Olympic Games from start to finish. I'm a bit of a telly addict, watching drama, comedy, quiz shows, the natural world and never miss a dramatization of Dickens, such great stories. I'm also a lifelong fan of The Archers. I also belong to a local pub quiz team".



Charlie Moores



Tristan Reid

Charlie Moores and Tristan Reid are another couple of the good guys, unsung heroes of conservation.

Charlie doesn't take the limelight but has had a major part to play in the fight against wildlife crime. Based in Wiltshire, Charlie has been a birder for over forty years. Now freelance, Charlie formerly

worked for a major airline travelling extensively and birding continuously (in one memorable year he recorded over 1900 species, raising money for parrot conservation at the same time). Charlie has been writing about conservation and animal welfare issues since the 1990s. As well as developing BAWC, Charlie co-founded the NGO Birds Korea and is known for his Talking Naturally podcasts recently in association with Rare Bird Alert and Wild Sounds and Books. He has made well over 100 podcasts (currently in association with Lush) interviewing conservationists and researchers around the world. In 2013 Charlie became a trustee of the League Against Cruel Sports.

Some of you may know of naturalist and activist Tristan as the Inked Naturalist as he has many tattoos of birds about his person. Based in Cumbria, Tristan has been a birder and naturalist for over thirty years and currently works as a freelance ecologist. Earlier in his career Tristan worked as a nature reserve ranger/naturalist. He is a passionate conservationist and has embarked on some innovative projects to raise funds and awareness for several projects by walking hundreds of miles across Turkey and so forth. He currently sits on the council of Ornithological Society of the Middle East where he helps promote birding and conservation in that region. Tristan is also part of the BAWC admin team and committee.

And finally, we are pleased to introduce



Dawn Balmer

ornithologist Dawn Balmer. Dawn has been a keen birder since she was a child, and a trained bird ringer for over 20 years. She lives in Thetford (Norfolk) and enjoys local birding and other wildlife, with regular trips to the coast. She has special

interests in migration and gull identification. Dawn has worked for the BTO since 1992 on a wide range of census, fieldwork, ringing and online bird

recording projects. She was the Atlas Coordinator for the Bird Atlas 2007–11 project and is now Head of Surveys. Dawn also represents BTO on the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. In her spare time, she is on the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, the Editorial Board of British Birds, a Trustee of the Eric Hosking Charitable Trust and writes regularly for British Wildlife.

We are proud of our high-profile supporters and thank them for all they do to keep access for everyone high on the agenda... if the public are to be allowed to see the fruits of conservation it must be ALL the public not just the fittest and most able-bodied. Here's what one of our patrons said about Birding For All.

"I have just turned 77, and some days I feel it! Especially when I am trudging up Parliament Hill to get to the "viz mig" watch point. Everyone overtakes me : joggers, dog walkers, kids on scooters, and people in wheelchairs. Hampstead Heath is managed so that everyone can get around. The paths are smooth and there are plenty of benches to rest on. You could call it 'outdoors for all', and if it weren't so you can be sure that the citizens of North London would soon demand it. All Nature reserves should have such facilities - not just wheelchair ramps to the hides, but obstacle free trails, regularly spaced rest places and thoughtfully positioned viewing points. Oh yes, plus something Hampstead Heath doesn't always have – lots and lots of birds". ~ Bill Oddie, TV Presenter, Naturalist and BFA Patron.



New member Peter Bangs talks about his experiences since joining BFA last year.

I joined Birding For All at the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water last August. I had been vaguely aware of Birding For All before, but no more than that. After listening to the 'pitch' from Ann Davis, the membership secretary, my wife and I were more than happy to lend our support by joining – and it was free! When we received our 'welcome' email it contained a plea for members to get involved by making accessibility surveys of reserves that they visit. Ann said in her email that there were only two surveyed reserves in Norfolk – my home county. I was quite amazed at this. Norfolk is one of the most birdwatched counties in the country, after all. We have only lived in Norfolk for about three years, having moved from Derbyshire and one of the things that prompted this move was the opportunity to see more wildlife. Derbyshire has lots – but the one thing it doesn't have is a coast! Since we have been here in northwest Norfolk, we have been amazed at the number of birdwatching sites that there are in such a small area. To realise that none of the reserves in what is now my home area were included in the Birding For All survey database was very surprising, and a situation I thought I could do something about. I am fortunate enough to be generally fit and healthy, with no mobility issues, but I know wheelchair users (not birders), and others who have impaired mobility, and I know just how frustrating it can be for them to arrive at a location they want to visit and find that accessibility is a major issue for one reason or another. One person I know booked a holiday cottage (not in Norfolk) advertised by a letting company as wheelchair-accessible, with a wet-room bathroom. When they arrived at the cottage it was true that the cottage inside was wheelchair-friendly, but they hadn't mentioned that the only access into it was by going up two

steps to the front door! Clearly this cottage hadn't been independently inspected. Is it any wonder that some people just give up, and don't get out as much as they would like?

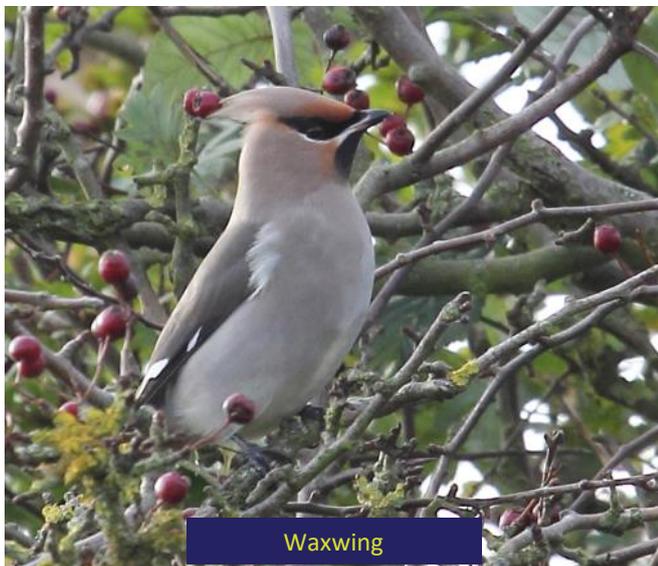


Having decided to try and increase the number of surveyed Norfolk reserves, the obvious place to start was the one I visit most frequently – the Bird Observatory reserve at Holme-next-the-Sea. It's run by the Norfolk Ornithologists Association (NOA) - "an independent Norfolk-based charity, dedicated to the scientific study of birds. It focuses primarily on bird migration and population dynamics through bird ringing and daily monitoring" (to quote their website - <http://www.noa.org.uk/>). That sounds like it could be a bit formal, but nothing could be further from the truth. The staff and other members are extremely friendly and welcoming, and go out of their way to point out features of the site and where latest sightings have been made. The reserve has a wide range of habitats which help it attract a lot of migrant birds.

My personal sightings at Holme this winter have included waxwings, bearded tits, stonechats and snow buntings, as well as many more common species.



Getting started on my survey couldn't have been easier. I downloaded the blank survey form from the Birding For All website, and quickly got the NOA's agreement – and encouragement – to carry out a survey. The NOA had done a lot of work as far back as 2009 to make the reserve wheelchair accessible, using funding from the Norfolk Coast Partnership and the National Lottery's Awards for All programme. Boardwalk ramps had been installed to bypass some steps and two hides adapted for wheelchair use. However, for all of the work that had been done, these access facilities remain very much under-used. The occasional birder using a mobility scooter does visit the reserve, but that is about all. This is a great shame, as so much of the reserve really is accessible to all. My guess is that this under-use is probably due to people who could make use of the facilities just not being aware that they exist. Perhaps getting a detailed survey report for the reserve included on the Birding For All website may be a start to putting that right.



Waxwing

To carry out the survey was really quite simple. All I had to do was work through the form, filling in each section as appropriate. Sometimes this meant a description of something, such as the state of a path or, in the case of hides, it meant using a tape measure to get the precise measurements of door width, viewing hatch dimensions and so on. At Holme, where there are several boardwalks, these

had to be measured as well. For distances along footpaths I counted my paces, then used some simple maths based on my average pace-length to convert the figure to metres. As there are seven hides at Holme (plus another at the NOA's nearby Redwell Marsh reserve, which I also surveyed) I made sure that I printed out enough copies of the section of the form for hides so that I could keep the various records separate. At times the questions on the form did seem a little pedantic, but I do understand that it is important to be sure to get the same information for each reserve, so that a consistent standard of reporting is achieved. As I carried out the survey I took some photos of salient points, such as hides and footpaths, to include in my survey report. When I thought it was complete I showed it to the NOA warden - partly as a courtesy but also to ask if she thought I had made any errors or omissions. Once finalised I emailed the surveys for the two NOA reserves to Birding For All. To say they were surprised would be an understatement, and they were certainly very pleased to get them. Bo Boelens then used the data from my reports to create an accessibility report for each reserve, in a style consistent with all their other reports. This included inserting the photos I had supplied. Once the surveys were live on the Birding For All website I was able to check them, and Bo was happy to make a few alterations where I thought facts had been confused or the meaning was not totally clear.



Sea Watching Hide

I could have done all the survey work in one visit, but with eight hides plus paths and boardwalks to

measure it would have made a long day. As Holme is less than 30 minutes from my home it was no problem for me to go back more than once. One thing that doing the surveys has taught me – accessibility issues are not just about people using wheelchairs. I did have to keep reminding myself that I was also trying to gather data that would be helpful to those who don't use a wheelchair, but who nevertheless can't get around too easily. It would have been easy to simply report that the Sea Watching hide at Holme, for instance, was not wheelchair accessible because it is on 3 metre-high stilts.



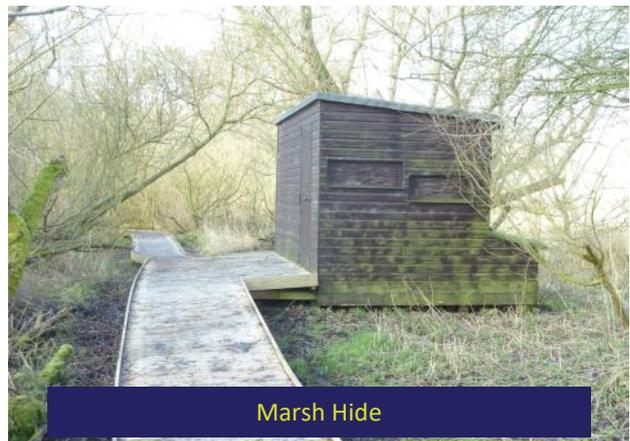
Board Walk

That would have done a disservice to those who might be able to manage the twenty steps up to the door. But my survey then went on to report that the seating inside the hide is a fixed bench with no gaps, so you have to lift your legs over the bench in order to sit down. Some may manage this, others may not. For the latter group, far better to know this in advance than to find it out after having climbed up twenty steps.

Carrying out these surveys has helped me look at reserves in a different way. When I spend time in a hide I like to be comfortable. If the window and the shelf below it are at the right height in relation to the seating then I can and do spend hours looking at birds or waiting for birds to turn up, and sometimes photographing them. If I am not comfortable then it is a different story. I spend a short time in the hide and then move on – probably missing the rarity that turned up just after I left! For

someone who uses a wheelchair, a hide with no knee space below the window immediately puts it into the 'uncomfortable to use' category. If, in addition, there is no window at a lower height, and with latches for the flaps out of reach from a chair, then the hide goes into the 'impossible to use' category. Just in case you are unsure what I mean, look at this hide. It is on the NOA's Hempstead Marsh reserve, near Fakenham.

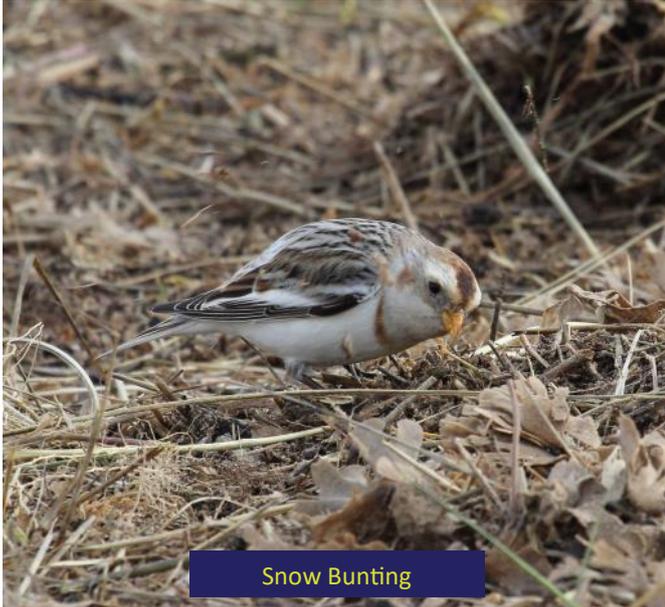
You will notice a generous knee space, so wheelchair users can get right up to the window. The viewing slots above it are lower than in the rest of the hide. The flaps are narrower – not to limit the view but to make it easier for someone in a wheelchair to raise and lower them unaided. The fastenings are easy to grasp and within reach. This particular hide is also noteworthy for having a similar, low, opening on the return side of the hide. All these features are in the corner of the hide that is straight on from the hide door, making them easy to access with a wheelchair. You may notice in the photograph that there are also two plastic garden chairs. These are lightweight, easy to move and have back rests for those that need them.



Marsh Hide

I've also learned a lot about access pathways on reserves. We all know that narrow gates and 'kissing gates' prevent wheelchair access. But there are more than a few reserves out there where there seem at first sight to be minimal obstructions to access, until you look closely and see that there are vertical planks fastened just above the ground across the entrance. These are usually to prevent access by 'off-road' motorcyclists. This is a difficult

issue. Leave the path unobstructed so wheelchair users can get into the reserve and bikers can also get in – disturbing the wildlife and causing damage to the paths. If anyone knows of a successful solution then please do let Birding For All know, so that good practice can be spread.



Snow Bunting

Talking of good practice, I recently came across a very good example of boardwalk access on a reserve. Again it's on the NOA's Hempstead Marsh reserve. As it's name suggests this is quite a wet site, with a wet meadow and some wet woodland. The boardwalk has been installed as a means for everyone to access the reserve, which otherwise would be impossible. Last autumn the boardwalk eventually succumbed to the wet conditions, and had to be replaced. Look what a splendid job was done.

The boardwalk is over 800 metres in length, and where it passes one of the hides its level has been carefully adjusted so that there is no threshold step at the hide door.

Sadly the nature of parking access for this reserve, and the very busy road, mean that access for unaccompanied wheelchair users to this reserve is out of the question!

If you know of new hides or boardwalks that are being planned, or old ones being renewed, have a word with those responsible and ask if their design

is truly accessible for all.

Having doubled the number of Norfolk reserves in the Birding for All reserve database I wanted to do more. At the time of writing in fact I have already completed the basic surveys for two more reserves, and the reports for them will be up on the Birding For All website before long.

In the meantime, how about helping out with some surveys of your own? No matter which region you live in there are still many reserves out there waiting to be surveyed. If you are reading this newsletter you must have more than a passing interest in the provision of access facilities. As Ann Davis said in her email to me:

"If every Birding for All member could let us have just one access assessment of their local reserve we could add hundreds of valuable reviews to our website which would be a huge help to current (and future) members."

Why not give it a go – it's not that difficult?

By Peter Bangs



Stonechat

Birding For All Would love to have more assessments carried out by our members, you can download a form here: <http://www.birdingforall.com/access-form/>

Pony Axe S

Inclusion is one of those words that can really frighten people. “What’s it going to cost?” and “won’t it ruin the environment?” are the two fears. Paths that work for all wheelchair users are almost impossible. Shifting sand dunes, tidal mud, rocky tracks, moorland and marsh cannot be tamed without massive infrastructure, expense, destruction etc. Hannah Cockcroft, the double Gold Paralympian, said on Country file, “We have to accept that some areas are simply out of bounds if you’re disabled and no one wants the countryside to be concreted over with paths. But many places could do better.”

Or you can let a pony do the work. Pony Axe S makes the countryside accessible without modification. We use ponies because they are the best propulsion system for all terrain access. Pony Axe S is not about ponies, it is about access. If you



Pony Axe S on Sand

want to watch Hen Harriers over the River Plym, near Cadover Bridge, or Kingfishers and Dippers working the River Teign, or Brent overhead on Exmouth Estuary, or Skylarks on the South Downs Way, from a wheelchair, I have beaten you to it.

I don’t use a wheelchair, and I am not a birder, but I spend loads of time testing where a person using a wheelchair can go, and that is best done from a wheelchair. I love wide open spaces and I love the



Pony Axe S crossing grass



Through the Woods

interesting birds, which will upset all the SBB enthusiasts out there. I am sure I have seen hundreds of really exciting warblers, I just can't tell them apart.

My mission is to make birding Inclusive. Not just the hides, though this is really important, but the joys of being in open untouched country, part of the habitat, going through mud or gorse or heather, across sand dunes, shingle, rocky tracks or forest paths. We can take people to hides, or the iBex, pony powered, wheelchair enabled vehicle, can be its own hide. We tow you out, and retrieve you



Over Hills

later.

Wheelchairs are brilliant, they give an incredible level of freedom on smooth surfaces. They don't handle cross country. For many people, transferring to an all terrain wheelchair, isn't an option, and none of the all terrain wheelchairs handle the range of terrain that the iBex cruises across. Mostly because ground clearance isn't a factor to Pony Axe S. The iBex is smooth bottomed. On uneven ground it is a sledge, until the wheels are back in contact.

Pony Axe S has taken a wheelchair the full length of the South Downs Way National Trail, across most of Dartmoor, lots of Exmoor, bits of Bodmin Moor, lots of West Country Beaches, and from Askham to over Ullswater.

Inclusion matters, Pony Axe S make it easy, affordable and we don't need to change the places you love.

By Simon Mullholland



Snow

You can find out more about Pony Axe S by visiting their website at <http://www.ponyaxes.com>

Or follow them on social media

Twitter: [@ponyaccess](https://twitter.com/ponyaccess)

or

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/simon.saddlechariot>

Opticron MM4 Travel Scope Review

What do you look for in a spotting scope? With back trouble, one key defining factor to me is the weight of the 'scope so when I was asked to review the Opticron MM4 50 ED/45 with SDL v2 Zoom and HDF T Zoom eyepieces) for Birding For All I thought it would be a great opportunity to try out this latest light weight travel scope.

For those desiring them I'll start off by offering up the specifications found on the Opticron website, so you can see weight, sizes and costs before getting into the meat of the review.

Opticron MM4 In Use

Right let's start out with the practicalities of the travel scope; the light weight and small size of the Opticron MM4 s the selling factor here, compact enough to slip into quite a small backpack and light enough (619 grams) to not give this guy a sore back (my back is not great with heavy weights, in fact a few hours walking and I can suffer pain).

Next to the weight, and probably more important to most people, comes the optical quality of the scope and eyepieces. In the few weeks that I've had the travel scope on trial I have been very impressed. Picking out the finer details on Little Ringed Plover on the far side of my local waterways, has been simple, especially with the zoom features on both eyepieces. Although as with all zooms you do lose light at the highest magnifications, and every movement is magnified so a good tripod is still important.

How does it compare to the bigger, more expensive, scopes out there? As with most modern optics there isn't much to fault. The contrast is

great, there is no noticeable colour fringing and you are getting crisp sharp views, place it side by side any of the optics out there and you won't be disappointed. At low zooms the light is perfect, the higher you zoom the less light you have but it is still excellent quality.

Comparing Eyepieces

Opticron offered me the chance to compare two eyepieces, the SDL v2 Zoom and the HDF T Zoom on the MM4 travel scope, and I have to say I can honestly say I struggled to see any noticeable difference between the two optically. The waterproof element of the SDL v2 is a useful feature, but with the SDL v2 being heavier, and larger, it has drawbacks (I like the nice padded case it ships with though, great for keeping it safe when travelling).

The HDF fits better (I think it looks better on the body as well) and is lighter, but has no mention of waterproofing. The eye relief on the SDL v2 is longer, and there is a larger opening in the end you are looking through, but unless comparing directly you are unlikely to notice. My advice would be to choose the eyepiece that suits you better.



Design

The looks and feel of the scope, with black rubber armour, is one of toughness, and makes hand holding possible (especially when combined with

the light weight). Adding the eyepieces does give the set up a slight top heavy feel, and makes the scope an odd shape in the bag, being almost as tall as it is long. Perhaps a straight through scope would have been easier than a 45 degree one, but I'm used to the angled scopes.

This doesn't in anyway distract from the use of the scope mind you it is purely a practical, carrying, issue. Of course, I could have carried with the eye piece off and attached in the field, which might have been easier.



Conclusion

Is it going to compete with the expensive models from Swarovski or Leica? Well yes and no, optically it is up there, although not quite at that level, but then not much is and those things cost well over £2000. What this is a scope designed for is travel (or those like me looking for a light weight alternative) and it excels over the competition here. The light weight nature and small size are ideal to throw in a suitcase or in a backpack, while not taking up room or adding too much weight. The optics are brilliant and will do you in most situations you are likely to encounter.

If you are in the market for a new scope, then check it out, you never know you might save yourself a lot of money and back pain!

By Ashley Beolens

First published on the Birding For All Website in May 2017.



Birding and Beyond

Mel Shepher-Wells writes on his BLOG:

At first, I was just a birder and nature lover, mostly a birder locally in Essex, but also around the country then some Twitching. Now I want to pass on my love, passion and knowledge to everyone who wants to join me. Young and old alike, novice to experienced. Please check out my latest birding bus 'Milomobile'.

I have this 5 seater VW Caddy with mobility access specifically with the lowered height floor to accommodate a wheelchair so mobility impaired nature lovers can see everything from their chair. When we asked him about it he said "Cheers – you're right I have a wheelchair vehicle and can accommodate one wheelchair user and up to 4 others (non-wheelchair) for bird and nature guiding or events like the British Bird Fair, or the Spurn migration festival etc."

Check out his website:

<http://www.birdingandbeyond.com/>

	<h1>Membership Form</h1> <p>Website: www.birdingforall.com</p> <p>Facebook: www.facebook.com/birdingforall</p> <p>Twitter: https://twitter.com/birdingforall</p> <p>Registered Charity: 1091755</p>
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PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

Title	
Forenames	
Surname	
Address	
Postcode	
Home Telephone	
Mobile Telephone	
E-Mail Address	

Please Return to Membership Secretary:	Membership Secretary - Ann Davies: 40 Woodman Close, Leighton Buzzard, Beds LU7 3NU
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GIFT AID DECLARATION

<p>I want Birding For All (Charity No. 1091755) to treat all donations I have made since April 1st 2016 and for all donations from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise as Gift Aid donations.</p>	
<p>Donation: £.....</p>	
<p>You must pay an amount of income tax and/or Capital Gains tax at least equal to the tax the charity reclaims on your donations in the tax year.</p> <p>You can cancel this Declaration at any time by notifying the charity.</p> <p>If in the future your circumstances change and you no longer pay tax on your income and Capital Gains equal to the tax the charity reclaims, you cancel your Declaration (see Note 1).</p> <p>If you pay tax at the higher rate you can claim further tax relief in your Self-Assessment Tax Return.</p> <p>If you are unsure whether your donations qualify for Gift Aid tax relief ask the charity, or local Tax Office for Leaflet IR65</p> <p>Please notify the charity if you change your name or address.</p>	
Signed:	Date: