The 21st British Birdwatching Fair will once again fund BirdLife’s Preventing Extinctions programme, and this year the focus is on those ‘lost’ species that may yet be rediscovered. Among their number is the Western Palearctic’s rarest bird, the Slender-billed Curlew Numenius tenuirostris.

Last year’s Birdfair delivered a huge boost to the Preventing Extinctions campaign with a record-breaking donation of £265,000. This is the largest sum raised by the fair in its 20-year history and represents a £39,000 increase on the sum raised in 2007. This year will be the third year running that the Birdfair has supported the global Preventing Extinctions programme rather than a specific project in a single country.

Birdfair organisers Martin Davies and Tim Appleton have announced that the theme of the 2009 Birdfair will be ‘Lost and Found’. Of the 190 species classified as Critically Endangered, 45 have no known population and require intensive searches to establish whether they still exist. The 2009 Birdfair aims to raise the profile of these ‘lost species’ and to fund expeditions to find them. ‘Preventing the extinction of species is a test of whether we are delivering conservation. As the extinction crisis continues to grow, it is fantastic to note that British bird-watchers are continuing to square up to the challenge – we hope that we can rely on even more support in future years,’ said Martin Davies.

The flagship bird for the 2009 event will be the Cebu Flowerpecker Dicaeum quadricolor, an example of a lost species that has only recently been rediscovered. This species is endemic to the island of Cebu, in the Philippines, and was feared extinct for much of the twentieth century. In 1992, it was rediscovered in forest fragments, but it remains Critically Endangered. Twenty thousand people visited the Birdfair at Rutland Water in 2008. This year’s Rutland Birdfair will be the 21st and will take place over the weekend of 21st–23rd August.

www.birdfair.org.uk
It may be an anniversary that went unremarked in his native Scotland, but 300 years after the real-life Robinson Crusoe was rescued, BirdLife reminded the world of his story – and the looming fate of the birds he left behind on his ‘desert island’.

Most people have heard of Robinson Crusoe, the castaway of Daniel Defoe’s famous novel, who spent 28 years on a remote tropical island off South America, encountering indigenous natives and mutineers before being rescued. But how many have heard of Alexander Selkirk, the real-life character on whom the story is believed to be based? On 2nd February 2009, it was the 300th anniversary of Alexander Selkirk’s rescue from the island of Más a Tierra (also known as Robinson Crusoe Island) in the Juan Fernández archipelago, 700 km off the coast of Chile. Selkirk spent four years and four months marooned on the island, surviving by killing and eating goats that had been introduced by earlier passing sailors.

His tale is a remarkable one of survival against the odds. Unfortunately, another story of survival from this archipelago hangs in the balance. Those goats – and other alien species – have caused untold damage to the fragile ecosystems of these islands. The archipelago is home to three endemic bird species, making the Juan Fernández islands one of only 221 endemic bird areas in the world. Two of these species, Juan Fernández Fire-crown Sephanoides fernandensis and Masafuera Rayadito Aphrastura masafuerae, are classified as Critically Endangered, the highest threat category. This puts them on the brink of extinction and unless conservation measures are implemented quickly, their fate may be rather different from that of Alexander Selkirk.

Long-term changes in the timing of breeding at seabird colonies

There is compelling evidence that the timing of breeding of many species has changed substantially in recent decades. The tendency among bird species in the northern hemisphere is for breeding seasons to become earlier, generally thought to reflect higher temperatures in late winter or spring. Most studies so far have looked at terrestrial species, but a recent paper in *Ibis* (by Sarah Wanless, Morten Federiksen, John Walton and Mike Harris; *Ibis* (2009) doi: 10.1111/j.1474-919x.2008.00906.x) looked at data on the laying dates of ten seabird species at two major breeding colonies, the Isle of May and the Farne Islands, during the last 35 years. For a given species, timing of breeding was positively correlated between the two colonies, suggesting that factors affecting the phenology of these species operate at a regional rather than colony scale. Comparison of time trends among the ten species revealed contrasting patterns, however, with some showing no systematic change (e.g. Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*), some becoming earlier and others later. The clearest species groupings appeared to be among the terns, with arrival and/or first-egg dates becoming earlier in Arctic *Sterna paradisaea*, Common *S. hirundo* and Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis*; and among the auks (Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*, Razorbill *Alca torda* and Puffin *Fratercula arctica*) and Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, where the trend was in the opposite direction, towards later breeding. This general trend towards later breeding in the latter group contrasts with correlational evidence from many other organisms indicating that breeding phenology is advancing in response to climate change. Given that sea temperatures are increasing particularly rapidly in the North Sea, and that several studies have indicated earlier peaks in both phyto- and zooplankton, progressively later breeding in some North Sea seabirds is unexpected and worrying. At present the reason(s) for delayed breeding remains unclear but these contrasting trends highlight the increasing risk of trophic mismatch (in other words, predators (seabirds) becoming out of synch with their prey), with potentially serious consequences for some seabird populations.

World bird names update

In my review of *Birds of the World: recommended English names* by Frank Gill and Minturn Wright (*Brit. Birds* 101: 264–265), I mentioned that the work should be considered as a first edition and work in progress. Anyone interested in further developments should consult the authors’ website at www.worldbirdnames.org, where amendments up to version 2.0 are posted, the latest in January 2009 (which lists 10,331 species classified in 42 orders, 226 families and 2,199 genera). In addition to downloadable lists in various formats, there is a line-by-line comparison with ‘Clements’, itself online and downloadable at www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist. Gill & Wright are also keeping an eye on developments at BirdLife International (www.birdlife.org/datazone) with their ‘under review’ taxa and adding them in anticipation that they may be raised to full species. Of interest to British birders, the official English name for *Aegithalos caudatus* has reverted to Long-tailed Tit (not Long-tailed Bush Tit) in deference to long-established usage. (Contributed by Martin Gauntlett)
Vacancy at British Birds

As part of its ambition to be the most respected and widely read ornithological journal in the UK, British Birds is recruiting a Business Development Officer.

The focus of the job will be to deliver marketing and promotional campaigns to attract new subscribers to the magazine. The part-time role will help to establish partnerships that are beneficial for British Birds readers – and see the journal reach new audiences.

Over the past 100 years, British Birds has established itself as a highly regarded source of birding information. The next 100 years pose significant new challenges, and BB is developing its plans to meet them head-on.

The successful applicant will bring enthusiasm to the post, and will be able to develop and implement a wide-ranging and innovative marketing strategy for the magazine. Experience in marketing and communications is desirable, and a passion for BB is essential!

British Birds is in good health, and we want to take that message to a larger audience than ever before. We have plenty of ideas about how we’ll develop the magazine. We are now on the hunt for the people to help us develop these ideas, and make them a reality.

For more information on this post, please contact Roger Riddington at editor@britishbirds.co.uk

Colour-ringed Hawfinches

During the last few years, over 150 Hawfinches Coccothraustes coccothraustes have been ringed in the Forest of Dean, in Gloucestershire. This represents some 10% of all Hawfinches ever ringed in the UK. In addition to a metal ring, most birds also have a single plastic colour ring, and resightings are beginning to give a clearer picture of numbers and movements. If you are one of the many birders who visit the Dean to look for Hawfinches (and the other specialities of the Forest), Jerry Lewis would be grateful if you could look for any birds with a colour ring. It’s not easy to get a good view, but April is probably the best month, when birds come down to the ground to feed. Jerry needs to know the colour of the plastic ring (which indicates the ringing site) and which legs have rings (the two rings may be on the same or different legs and their position represents the season when ringed). Any sightings should be sent to jerrylewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk. Seven colours have been used so far: red, yellow, pale green, sky blue, dark blue, black and white. The next report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, which will be published in next month’s BB, will highlight the apparent decline in the UK’s Hawfinch population, so the more we can learn about this shy but stunning finch the better.

African Bird Club annual meeting

The ABC’s Annual Meeting and AGM will be held in southwest London on Saturday 4th April. The meeting is open to both members and non-members. And the speakers include Vickie Jones (Wings over wetlands), Ian Fisher (Worldbirds... putting the region’s bird sightings on the map), Alex Hipkiss (Bird conservation challenges in Gola Forest, Sierra Leone), Guy Eldridge (A video tour of Madagascar), Michel Louette (Birds of the Comores), Herbert Byaruhanga (An update on Ugandan birds and communities) and Nik Borrow (Birds of the Horn of Africa). The venue is York House, Richmond Road, Twickenham TW1 3AA, and doors open at 10.30 hrs.

Rare birds in Portugal website

A new website that records sightings of Portuguese rarities has been launched. Raridades Online is bilingual (Portuguese and English) and provides information about recent sightings of rare birds in mainland Portugal. Pictures of the birds are included whenever available. See http://raridades.avesdeportugal.info