

► With its distinctive flight and plumage, and wide UK distribution, Lapwing is a good 'starter species' to see on migration.



**FIELD CRAFT**

# How to... Witness migration (part 1)

**Whilst the UK lacks the spectacle of raptors and other soaring birds at migration 'bottlenecks', you can experience some equally astonishing bird movements, if you know when and where to look – and listen. Training Manager Nick Moran expounds.**

You might have come across the mysterious-sounding terms 'vismig' and 'nocmig'. Both are more accessible than they might appear, and with just a little planning and preparation, you can easily get in on the action and witness these

impressive phenomena! This two-part series of Field Craft articles takes a closer look at these rewarding activities, starting with vismig.

**WHAT AND WHEN?**

Vismig, short for 'visible migration', is a broad term covering the observation of bird migration during daylight hours. On a global scale, the best-known vismig hotspots are where birds of prey, storks and other soaring birds concentrate before crossing physical barriers such as expanses of water or mountain ranges. Although

the UK lacks concentrations of migratory soaring birds, there are plenty of other diurnal migration spectacles on offer, involving such diverse groups as wildfowl, seabirds, waders, Swifts and a wide variety of passerines. All you need to do is be in the right place at the right time to witness them!

Certain weather conditions and landscape features encourage birds to move and increase the likelihood of being able to see or hear them. Time of year is important, too – whilst classic autumn movements of wildfowl, thrushes and

finches usually occur from September–November, waders and non-breeding Swifts can be on the move as early as June, passerines start dispersing from July, and August is a great month for seabird vismig (more commonly termed 'seawatching' – see *BTO News* 323). In spring, vismig can be productive from early March through to mid May. Resources such as the BTO Migration Blog and the BirdTrack reporting rate graphs can help you target your efforts on the peak periods of movement for particular species, and searching #vismig on social media is a great way to learn of any notable migratory movements as they are happening.

**HOW CAN I EXPERIENCE VISMIG?**

Migratory landbirds are most easily detected in numbers on days with good visibility and a light to moderate head- or cross-wind. The biggest movements are often on days when such conditions have been preceded by periods of 'blocking'

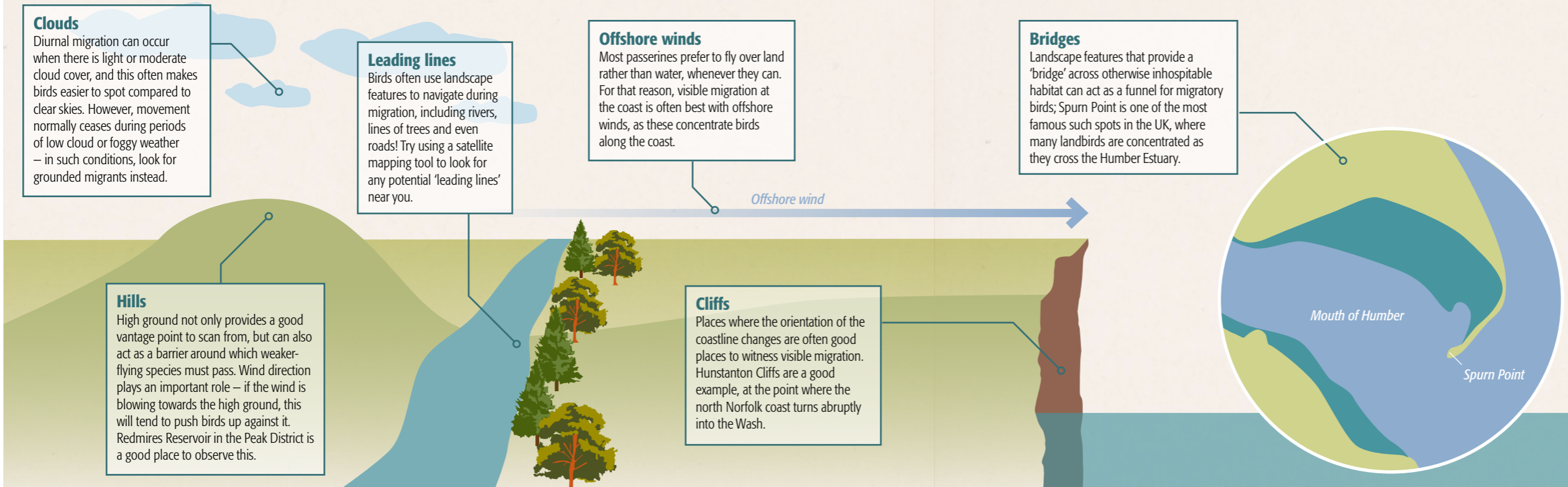
bad weather, such as rainfall, fog, wind speeds above about 15 mph (force 4–5) or an adverse wind direction. Look out for forecasts of a fairly rapid increase in air pressure and an associated improvement in the weather as the front passes through. Whilst it is worth checking the forecast for the near Continent or Scandinavia, remember that some of our best vismig 'events' comprise birds that were probably in the UK the previous day, such as Meadow Pipits movements in September.

Landscape features can play an important role in funnelling certain species or groups. For example, the sea presents a barrier to passerines, so if you are hoping to encounter vismig at a coastal watchpoint, choose a day when the wind is in an offshore direction, as this will concentrate birds along the coast. Similarly, you can look for conditions where the wind will push birds against high ground.

Leading lines are also important to consider. Rivers, strips of woodland and distinct 'edges' between two habitat types can all prompt birds to move along certain axes. Your nearest bird club may be able to direct you towards good local sites; failing that, the satellite view on any mapping application is a good way to check for local landscape features that could influence migration. ■

## Search for #vismig on social media to learn of migratory movements as they are happening

LAPWINGS: ALLAN DREWITT/BTO, COMMON CRANES: MOSS TAYLOR/BTO



## Migration-watch: get involved

**CAN I ATTEND A DEMONSTRATION OR TASTER SESSION?**

Bird Observatories are often great places to experience vismig. Check the observatory's website or contact the warden to see what activities are planned. There are also two fantastic migration-focused events on the east coast this autumn:

- **Spurn Migration Festival:** 6–8 September 2019 [www.spurnmigfest.com](http://www.spurnmigfest.com)
- **Filey and Flamborough Ringing and Migration Week:** 12–20 October 2019 [fbo.org.uk](http://fbo.org.uk)
- **Bird clubs, vismig groups and other local organisations** may also offer migration-based activities that you can attend.

**SHOULD I SUBMIT MY DATA SOMEWHERE, AND WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD I COLLECT?**

► Records of any birds positively identified by sight or sound can be logged in BirdTrack ([www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net)). This can be as simple as a date, place and species, though including a count and, better still, collecting a complete list of all the species identified adds value.

► If you 'catch the bug' and start vismig watching on a regular basis, consider using Trekellen ([www.trekellen.nl](http://www.trekellen.nl)). This Dutch website provides guidance on the information to record for different types of migration watches, and has been designed to accommodate the various types of structured migration counts. Trekellen data from the UK flow into BirdTrack.

**Find out more**

- There are a number of resources available to help identify birds in flight.
- For photographs and an increasing number of sound recordings, visit: [birds-in-flight.net](http://birds-in-flight.net)
- For a huge collection of sound recordings (filter by e.g. 'type:flight'), visit: [www.xeno-canto.org](http://www.xeno-canto.org)