► 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

Clouds

Diurnal migration can occur

when there is light or moderate

cloud cover, and this often makes

birds easier to spot compared to

clear skies. However, movement

normally ceases during periods

of low cloud or foggy weather

- in such conditions, look for

Hills

grounded migrants instead.

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

Leading lines

Birds often use landscape

features to navigate during

migration, including rivers,

lines of trees and even

roads! Try using a satellite

mapping tool to look for

any potential 'leading lines'

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'

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

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.

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

► Filey and Flamborough Ringing and Migration Week: 12-20 October 2019

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). 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 Trektellen (www. trektellen.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. Trektellen data from the UK flow into BirdTrack.

Bridges

Landscape features that provide a 'bridge' across otherwise inhospitable habitat can act as a funnel for migratory birds; Spurn Point is one of the most famous such spots in the UK, where many landbirds are concentrated as they cross the Humber Estuary.

along the coast. Cliffs

Offshore winds

Most passerines prefer to fly over land

rather than water, whenever they can.

For that reason, visible migration at

the coast is often best with offshore

winds, as these concentrate birds

Places where the orientation of the coastline changes are often good places to witness visible migration. Hunstanton Cliffs are a good example, at the point where the north Norfolk coast turns abruptly into the Wash

Offshore wind

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: birdsin-flight.net

► For a huge collection of sound recordings (filter by e.g. 'type:flight'), visit: www.xeno-canto.org

act as a barrier around which weakerflying species must pass. Wind direction plays an important role — if the wind is blowing towards the high ground, this will tend to push birds up against it. Redmires Reservoir in the Peak District is

High ground not only provides a good

vantage point to scan from, but can also

a good place to observe this.

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