

Falcon and perhaps a White-tailed Eagle or two, both of which have increased in recent years.

Over the sea, migration is dominated by Common Eiders, which pass Nabben's southern tip in long, winding flocks. The growth of the Måkläppen spit and the establishment of a connection between it and the land has affected duck migration somewhat but most still pass over the spit rather than around it. However, Common Eiders sometimes make a couple of circuits before passing. This can be to the bird-watcher's advantage since it gives more time to check the flocks for King Eider. Brent Goose migration also peaks at the end of September and it is possible to observe passing flocks and resting groups of birds on the golf courses and on Måkläppen, Ängsnäset or Skånörs revlar.

In fresh southerly winds Little Gulls appear in the passing flocks of Black-headed and Common (Mew) Gulls, while skuas can be seen pursuing gulls and Sandwich Terns. Good numbers of waders can still be seen on the banks of seaweed.

Among the irruptive species, i.e. species that only migrate when food resources are too low for a large population, tits are generally the most evident. In some years they may occur in thousands. Blue Tits are the most frequent, but Coal Tits and Great Tits



An Arctic Skua pursuing a Sandwich Tern for its prey.  
Below: Eiders in a headwind flying close above the surface of the sea. Photos: John Larsen.



may also be seen flying out to sea. In headwinds, the tit flocks fly low over the ground and when land suddenly ends at Nabben they settle on any available perch, whether bushes, fences, telescopes or birdwatchers. After a short break the flock lifts again, either venturing out over the sea or turning back inland. It is indeed a peculiar sight watching a typical forest bird such as the Coal Tit foraging on the shoreline at Nabben!

Even more peculiar is perhaps the spectacle of Jays fluttering out to sea only to blow back across the shoreline again and then plunge down into the sanctuary of trees beside the lighthouse or in a Falsterbo garden. In many ways, Jays' behaviour at Falsterbo mirrors that of Blue Tits, the only difference being that the Jays' larger size magnifies the drama. Jay irruptions are caused by a crash in the acorn crop and their scale depends on the size of the overall population. The last major invasion was in 1994, when 18,800 migrated out from Nabben in five days at the start of October. The flocks were sometimes so large that a steady train of birds could be seen far out to sea. The peak of the passage saw more than 1,000 birds passing per hour. On other days the birds only attempted to migrate, the air was filled with fluttering wings and the lighthouse garden became a favourite resting site. Thus more than 1,000 Jays were ringed. Although acorns are a staple food for Jays, the species has catholic tastes and always finds something edible. Migrating Jays have been seen eating rosehips, apples, elderberries, frogs and Goldcrests, sometimes carried in the beak in packed-lunch form!

During spells of high pressure, the migration picture changes and visible passage is dominated by raptors and Wood Pigeons (in October). Passerines migrate in large numbers too, but the diurnal migration is hardly visible to the human eye, not even with binoculars, as the birds fly at a high altitude. However, the migration of passerines is also revealed by the



Irruption birds. Top: Great Spotted Woodpecker on the navigation marker at Måkläppen. Below: A flock of Jays around the rose-bushes at Nabben. Photos: Jan-Åke & Björn Hillarp.



Dawn at Falsterbo Lighthouse. After a night of strong migration many nocturnal migrants land in the lighthouse garden at daybreak. Species like (left to right) Robin, Goldcrest, Chiffchaff and Wren are among the commonest in late September and early October. Photos: Jesper Thomelius (dawn), P-G Bentz (Goldcrest) and John Larsen (others).

large number of resting nocturnal migrants. Even before dawn the ticking calls of a Robin break the silence in the lighthouse garden. Soon they are joined by another, and then another, and... Suddenly, within minutes, the garden is full of life and Robins are everywhere. If a “fall” has occurred there may be up to a thousand Robins present, along with numerous other

nocturnal migrants such as (Winter) Wrens, Song Thrushes, Redwings, Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests. These provide a rich harvest for the observatory ringers, and the number of ringed birds can reach four figures on such days, especially if irruptive diurnal migrants like Blue Tits or Siskins are also present (see Ringing pp. 84-91).



Migrating pigeons. To the left, Wood Pigeons, easily recognizable by their white wing-bars. To the right, Stock Pigeons (Stock Doves), which look blueish and have no wing-bars. Photos: John Larsen.

But back to diurnal migration. Passage of pigeons and doves (the majority of which are Wood Pigeons) is often most intensive in the wake of a cold front and in clear, chilly weather with northerly winds. Huge flocks several thousand-strong migrate with a tail-wind at high altitude and on a broad front. When the light falls on them they can liken glittering swarms, while others recall diffuse puffs of smoke far out to sea. In less clement conditions, like in head-winds, the pigeons, just like other migrants, fly lower and in denser flocks.

One day stands out in the annals of pigeon migration at Falsterbo: on 12 October 1990 no less than 120,000 individuals were counted passing Nabben. The weather conditions was not optimal on this day but had been preceded by several days of even less favourable conditions. The morning dawned cloudy and with a light breeze from east-south-east. The pigeons formed huge flocks, most of which were initially seen far out to sea from Nabben as "puffs of smoke". Gradually the passage became concentrated to Nabben and a near-surreal show began with a gigan-

tic swarm of some 16,000 birds flying out from Nabben at 8 a.m. The flock was so huge that it stretched from Måkläppen back past Ljungen, thus covering half the peninsula! The birds flew quite low and their wingbeats were audible to observers as a murmur. As visibility deteriorated, the spectacle suddenly ceased shortly after 10 a.m., when another huge flock of approximately 20,000 pigeons came in off the sea and returned inland.

Pigeon and dove passage usually peaks during the morning and sometimes has a second peak at around lunchtime. The birds fly at a speed of about 70 km per hour and the later peak can therefore be ascribed to birds that started their migration in the early morning from the arable plains of Östergötland or Södermanland.

In the second half of September Common Buzzards pass in ever greater numbers. Passage continues until well after mid-October, and indeed has tended in recent years to peak somewhat later in the season. Common Buzzards are rather choosy about what constitutes suitable migration weather. In order to see



Common Buzzards over Falsterbo. Inset: A close-up of a Common Buzzard. The plumage of this species is highly variable from dark brown till almost white. The bird in the close-up is quite typical, with a light band across the breast and a finely barred tail. Photos: John Larsen (close-up) and Arne Schmitz/N.

large numbers of birds one has to be at Falsterbo when thermal air currents are good (see also p. 20). In such conditions, the buzzards put on a magnificent performance in the art of migration without active flight. Several hundred birds may collect in a thermal up-draught and, soaring on outstretched wings, rise ever higher in the warm airflow until almost out of sight. All of a sudden, one bird will break from the group and start gliding towards the south-west, whereupon the others follow suit in a narrow band.

As the birds head out to sea, another spiral may be taking shape further inland. Ljungen is a prime spot for thermals and on good days hundreds of birdwatchers may be present to watch the buzzards gaining height over the heath. Less favourable weather conditions make the birds hesitate at the prospect of a long sea crossing, and at such times large numbers may also be seen over the peninsula. Indeed, sometimes the number of birds present may exceed days of heavy outward passage.

Included among the Common Buzzards may be other raptor species. The ubiquitous Sparrowhawk also utilises thermals and is the second commonest raptor after Common Buzzard. The past 20-30 years have seen a strong increase in Red Kite numbers – so much so that it is now the fourth commonest bird of prey at Falsterbo in autumn, with daily totals sometimes reaching three figures. It definitely increases the aesthetic quality of the raptor migration to see flocks of elegant Red Kites pass over. Red Kite passage peaks at the end of September and beginning of October. Hen Harrier and Rough-legged Buzzard are also noted frequently at this time, along with Kestrel, Merlin and Hobby. The second half of September is the prime time for Peregrine Falcon, while late Honey-buzzards, Marsh Harriers and Ospreys can also be recorded. A day's watching can produce an impressive species list, the present record being 17 different species seen at Ljungen, and may include scarcities such as one or more eagle species, Black Kite or Pallid Harrier.

In reality, raptor migration is often more complex than the above text might suggest. Especially in north-westerly winds, several different flight corridors may be in operation, creating a criss-cross passage that makes counting difficult. Some birds may drift with the wind south of the peninsula out over the Baltic, while others head into the wind and traverse the peninsula diagonally in the direction of Copenhagen. It was long thought that these birds eventually headed back inland across the outer edge of Höllviken. However, observers on the Danish island of Amager outside Copenhagen have noted incoming raptors from the south-east that clearly have crossed the Öresund Strait.

Whether such niceties concern the average observer is another matter. Many are simply content with seeing large numbers of migrating raptors – just as the tourist guides promise they will.



Lesser (top) and Greater Spotted Eagle are seen almost every year at Falsterbo. The size difference is quite small, despite the names. Silhouette and plumage determine the species. Photos: Jens B Bruun (top) and Tommy Flies.