



Ormen Lange
23 August – 19 September 2006
SV Geosund
N 63.5°, E 5.6°



Ormen Lange at dawn, 16 September

The reason we were here is to assist in the development of the Ormen Lange field, some 100km north west of Kristiansund, Norway. This deep water gas field will supply gas to the U.K. from 2007.



In the picture above the largest pipelay vessel in the world, Saipem's S7000 is laying a 30" pipeline in around 850m of water. The nearest ship is an ROV Survey and construction support vessel and in the background a construction vessel installing spoolpieces at the subsea template.

Not exactly the place one would expect to get up close to a wide variety of land birds. Despite the time spent birding being restricted to whenever I happened to be on deck and a short period in the evening 27 species were recorded during the four weeks I was onboard – including two rarities from the east – a Red-breasted Flycatcher and a Yellow-browed Warbler.

This was a real opportunity to experience the gritty side of migration; to witness the perils of migrating over the sea, the vagaries of the weather and chance happenings making the difference between life and death. It also illustrated the adaptability of the migrating birds and how they made the best out of what was available.

The arrival of insects often preceded the birds – making me wonder if the birds actually time their migration to coincide with insect movements. This would seem a sensible tactic as these flying insects can be caught during active migration and, of course, wherever they happen to land.

In turn the small insect eating birds became a source of food for the larger ones – a Common Kestrel took a Northern Wheatear. The Wheatear had turned up with several other birds during



the night, no doubt exhausted and lost during poor visibility and rain – finding the vessel was an initial stroke of luck. It managed to feed on bugs and drink fresh water from the deck – lucky again. Later in the day the weather cleared and most of the migrants moved on – this one remained, trapped by its leg in some equipment – not so lucky. I found the bird and released it – another turn of luck for the unfortunate migrant. Unfortunately the southerly wind picked up again in the evening forcing a migrating Common Kestrel to take shelter, the hungry bird of prey quickly spotted the weakened Wheatear and made short work of it. Lucky for the Kestrel, not so good for the Wheatear.

A more tragic end was met by a rarity from further east, a Red-breasted Flycatcher. This bird arrived during a period of relatively calm and settled weather; there were plenty of insects on board and the bird should have had an excellent chance of continuing its journey south. However, the fine weather also enabled the deck to be painted – the bird became stuck in drying paint and succumbed.

Pictures

All the pictures below were taken using a standard digital camera and most of them without any telephoto lens at all; the remainder were taken using binoculars as a telephoto lens.



Grey Heron / Gråhegre



Common Kestrel / Tårnfalk



Common Kestrel / Tårnfalk – immediately after catching and eating a Northern Wheatear / Steinskvett. The Wheatear's feathers can be seen still stuck to its talons and beak.



The remains of the Kestrel's dinner – a Northern Wheatear.



Purple Sandpiper / Fjæreplytt on the helideck



Northern Wheatear / Steinskvett





Red-breasted Flycatcher / Dvergfluesnapper



Pied Flycatcher / Svarthvitfluesnapper



Species list

English Name	Norwegian Name	Comments
Northern Fulmar	Havhest	Numbers built up to around 200 on 17 September
Sooty Shearwater	Grålire	Singles on 16 and 19 September
Northern Gannet	Havsule	Small numbers (1-8) most days
Grey Heron	Gråhegre	A first year bird turned up onboard 16 September and stayed for three days. A first year bird was onboard briefly on 17 September. Another, probably a female, killed and ate a Wheatear on 19 September.
Common Kestrel	Tårnfalk	One on the back deck 02 September
Ringed Plover	Sandlo	One typically tame bird onboard 18 September
Purple Sandpiper	Fjæreplytt	Two flew past 03 September
Dunlin	Myrsnipe	One on the back deck 28 August. Unusual offshore
Ruff	Brushane	1-2 on 02-03 September
Arctic Skua	Tyvjo	Singles noted on four dates 02-19 September
Great Skua	Storjo	Only observation were two on 28 August
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Sildemåke	One on the sea 18 September
Herring Gull	Gråmake	Small numbers present daily (usually < 10)
Great Black-backed Gull	Svartbak	1-2 seen on several dates. Unusually uncommon. Only one juvenile.
Black-legged Kittiwake	Krykkje	One diving in the thruster wash of the vessel on 19 September. Small numbers of auks seen earlier in the trip were probably also this species.
Razorbill	Alke	Two on 11 and 15 September
Meadow Pipit	Heiplierke	1-3 daily 11-17 September
White / Pied wagtail	Linerle	A single onboard around dawn on 18 September
European Robin	Rødstrupe	Commonest passerine. 1-3 onboard daily 08-19 September. Undoubtedly different birds most days
Northern Wheatear	Steinskjett	One on the evening of 17 September
Song Thrush	Måltrost	Singles on 25 August and 15 September
Garden Warbler	Hagesanger	One 16 September
Blackcap	Munk	One on board 18 September.
Yellow-browed Warbler	Gulbrynsanger	One found dead 17 September undoubtedly came onboard the previous day.
Red-breasted Flycatcher	Dvergfluesnapper	Singles on 16 and 18 September
Pied Flycatcher	Svarthvitfluesnapper	Three on the helideck 18 September, one remained on 19 September
Snow Bunting	Snøspurv	



And here are some of the insects these birds were feeding on:



Moth resting on grating.





These bugs were seen to be eaten by both Northern Wheatear and Snow Bunting and were probably eaten by many of the other species onboard. They came in all kinds of colours including a pale yellow, brown and the most common brightly coloured green and red individuals.



Silver-Y moth

For more offshore birding see: <http://www.naturalbornbirder.com/offshore/offshore.php>
More about birding at Ormen Lange: http://www.naturalbornbirder.com/offshore/N_N_N_sea.php

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