

An Englishman scattered abroad

Craig Brookes

Craig Brookes har varit två hela säsonger (2011-2012) i Kvismaren och då haft huvudansvaret för verksamheten där. Craig har gjort sig känd som en mycket kunnig fåltornitolog och ringmärkare. Läs här hans reflexioner över säsongerna i Kvismaren och över stationens verksamhet.

Arriving in Kvismaren for the first time in April 2011, I was a little unsure what to expect, at that time there was very limited information about the reserve to be found online or indeed in English. I was however, very excited.

In a way, it was like stepping back in time, I'd seen the spring migrants arriving back at home and the trees blossoming, but here in Sweden, it was bleak; the leaves were yet to open and the grass to green. This however, was perfect for the start of our survey work. In 2011 one of the main projects involved mapping and visiting all possible Hooded Crow nests within the reserve and monitoring their success rates. We also mapped Ravens and Birds of Prey which were present throughout the reserve.

The work rate was hectic in 2011. As well as the Crows we also studied Marsh Harriers, all wetland species, Ortolan Buntings, Starling and small passerine nest boxes, Farmland birds and the singing territories of Reed and Sedge Warblers along the Kvismare kanal. In 2012 we repeated almost the same surveys as 2011 but also concentrated a little more on Wetland and Farmland studies; in particular Ortolan Buntings. We were also joined by a 3rd surveyor this spring, Maggie from Germany, who was a great help.

Being out and about so much on the reserve was taxing. I must admit; both myself and the other surveyors had days when we felt like staying in and just cat-

ching up on rest, but out we went. All this time in the field inevitably meant we saw some amazing things, like the time we were out in Kilsgården looking for crow nests and two male Three-toed Woodpeckers appeared in front of our eyes and gave amazing views – a first sighting in Kvismaren since the mid 1990's. Or the time when out on Wetland surveys a Moose blocked my exit route for 20 minutes and left me sat there, alone in Värstamaden.

As soon as the spring surveys are over, or at least coming to a close, it's time for the ringing season to begin, again a strenuous task for a small team, but well worth it. The ringing season brings a new lease of life to the station as workers gather from all corners of the world to partake in the ringing activities.

The ringing season is a busy time in Kvismaren, there's always something extra to do if you have the time and energy. As well as the standardised ringing sessions, we also caught waders through late July and into August. By late August a massive Hirundine roost builds in Fågelsjön and we managed to catch nearly 1000 birds in ten days in 2012, whilst maintaining standardised ringing sessions in the morning. Over the past two seasons we have ringed over 12 000 birds of more than 80 species. Many of which were new species for me, coming from a UK based ringing background. Notable species ringed include Pygmy and Long-eared Owls,

River, Savi's, Great Reed and Grasshopper Warblers, Penduline and Crested Tit, Bluethroats, Ortolan Buntings, Knot and Curlew Sandpiper to name but a few.

From a British birder's point of view, Kvismaren is an ideal place to bird, whether just visiting or living and working, there's always something new to see. Personally I have seen over 200 Species in Kvismaren, including some very scarce sightings. There's an opportunity of some big Swedish birds such as Three-toed Woodpecker and Great Snipe if you're lucky. Whilst out looking/listening though, I'm sure you can't fail to see/hear

Black Woodpeckers which boisterously roam around the many wooded islets within the reserve. Ortolan Buntings sing from May to late July and can be found easily if you know where to look. Throughout the late spring/summer Great Reed warblers dominate the reed beds with their veritable cacophony of song whilst Bitterns boom monotonically throughout. The late summer wader passage is sometimes phenomenal; Hundreds of waders can be grounded in the correct conditions. One occasion in particular sticks in my mind when there were 400+ mixed Wood/Green Sandpipers, 90+ Dunlin, 10 Cur-



Craig ringmärker starungar. Foto: Elin Andersson.
Craig is ringing Starling chicks. Photo: Elin Andersson.

few Sandpipers with a scattering of Stints all sat on Hammarmaden, a supporting cast of 10 nesting Black Terns were also welcome. The autumn migration of Raptors is unimaginable in Sweden and ever present in Kvismaren during late summer, it serves in whetting the appetite ahead of the big passerine surges; 100'000s of finches can be seen at peak times during September and as summer turns to autumn the unmistakable croaks of some 10 000+ Common Cranes returning to the traditional migratory staging site echo around the reserve as they feed, rest and roost during their long migrations South.

Having visited Bird Observatories across Scandinavia and indeed Europe I feel I have a basic understanding of the works undertaken at each, in particular the project work. In my opinion Kvismaren has by far the cleanest Ornithological dataset stretching back well into the 1960's, such a vast knowledge of the birdlife within Kvismaren and throughout Narke means that there is a great platform for any new studies going forward. The survey work is both enjoyable and enthralling often in fact, groundbreaking. Although Kvismaren celebrated it's 50th Anniversary back in 2012, I believe this Bird Observatory has kept very well with the times and is highly regarded amongst other Observatories as being at the forefront of many Ornithological studies. Kvismaren boasts the longest running scientific study worldwide on one particular species, the Great Reed Warbler; with a pedigree dataset since 1983. Now however, the project is wholly run by Lund University and has generated six doctoral dissertations along with many more scientific articles, again reiterating the importance of studies undertaken within the reserve.

Aside from all the work and the amazing places, birds and wildlife I saw, one thing really struck me about Kvismaren;

the people. I was lucky enough to work with and meet some absolutely amazing people during my time here and I hope to remain in contact with them for many years to come. The colleagues were great, passionate and always fun to be around but the most outstanding thing for me was the support of the locals. Maja and Anita deserve a mention in anything regarding Kvismare Fågelstation staff. They are always on hand to help, whatever the situation, time or weather. They are experienced with all problem situations at the station and have no qualms going out of their way to help out. In addition to their supportive roles around the station, their regular culinary contributions were always gratefully received. This in turn boosted moral around the station which I believe was Maja intention, ensuring all staff were in good health and content.

Svensk summering

När jag anlände första gången i april 2011 visste jag inte vad som väntade men jag var mycket nyfiken. Våren hade inte kommit så långt som den gjort hemma. I England var det grönt men i Sverige var det bleka färger. Ett av de viktigaste projekten 2011 var inventering av kråka. Arbetstempot var hektiskt och förutom kråka arbetade vi med våtmarksinventeringar, stare, ortolansparv och flera andra projekt. Nästa år var likartat men utan kråkor och med mer arbete med ortolansparv.

Att arbeta ute i så stor utsträckning är tröttande och jag måste erkänna vissa dagar kändes det som om man bara ville vara kvar i sängen, men arbetet kallade. Under arbetet fick jag många spännande observationer, t.ex. tretåig hackspett helt nära och en älg som blockerade min väg ut från Värstamaden i hela tjugo minuter. På sommaren efter vårens projekt börjar ringmärkningen och personal kommer från hela världen. Det är en hektisk

tid och det finns alltid något extra att göra. Förutom den standardiserade märkningen fångade vi vadare och svalor på eftersommaren. Totalt under de två säsongerna jag arbetade ringmärkte vi över 12 000 fåglar av över 80 arter.

Som engelsman finns det många intressanta arter att se i Kvismaren, själv såg jag över 200 arter och vissa arter är ovanliga hemma som dubbelbeckasin, ortolansparvar och alla tranor som rastar på hösten. Trots att det är en inlandslokal är sträcket av såväl tättingar som rovfåglar bra under hösten. Om vädret är rätt är även antalet rastande vadare högt.

Bland de fågelstationer jag arbetat vid har Kvismaren en av de längsta och bästa dataserierna, speciellt beträffande projektarbeten. Det är en mycket bra plattform för framtida studier.

Vid sidan av området så var det fantastiskt med människorna runt fågelstationen, och jag hoppas att jag även i framtiden kommer att ha kontakt med dem. Kollegorna var passionerade över arbetet och vi hade ofta roligt. Jag måste särskilt nämna Maja och Anita som alltid hjälpte till och såg till att personalen mådde bra och trivdes.



Craig Brookes, Ulrica Ronquist och Heather McGinty ringmärker vid Vallen. Foto: Magnus Persson.
Craig Brookes, Ulrica Ronquist and Heather McGinty is ringing at Vallen. Photo: Magnus Persson.