

About me

Contributed by Jos
Last Updated Friday, 29 May 2015

A birder born and bred, I can't really claim to ever have been anything else! I have to confess to not being the best of kids a mother could desire - by the age of 12 I was already wandering beyond the borders of the Gwent I then lived and at 13 I was hitch-hiking up to Scotland, over to Norfolk and basically everywhere else too! I do remember a rather displeased mother once or twice when I telephoned to say I would not be able to get home as I was just north of Perth! Those were the happy days of sleeping bags in bus shelters, soggy waits at midnight whilst hoping to get home or wondering where the next day would take me. At about 15, by now a young veteran on the UK scene, I did my first proper foreign trips - Spain, Portugal and the Camargue, all of which I am sure caused further distress for a mother back home. But they were the making of me, the bug had bitten. All then went steadily downhill - I took a want for world hot spots and headed off to Afghanistan, El Salvador, Gaza and other such nice spots, all in the name of birding, but somehow getting myself into countless scrapes, including a bus hijacking, adventures with the locals and various other things that probably turned my mother ever greyer. How I ever survived that period I do sometimes wonder, but at this point I should confess, I rarely actually would say where I intended to go, a warped idea of saving those back home of undue worry! With the World's Hotspot Tour more or less over, I then got all serious and went to university - brilliant, it gave me the time and, thanks to student loans, the money to really start to travel - more of Central America, West Africa, parts of the Middle East and bits of Europe soon followed. Also, being the real academic type, my choice of university had been heavily swayed by location ...Exeter University, probably the best university in the world - the gateway to four years of fantastic birding in the South Hams, a few minutes from the M5 for UK twitching and just a short skip from the Scillies!!! What more could one want? On finishing university, there was time for one final fling - a fling that would last two years and cover over 76000 km! It was my Cape to Cape journey, a voyage across Africa, but starting in the far north of Norway! From the Arctic Ocean at the Nordkapp, I about turned and began my journey south, down through Europe, across to the Middle East and thereafter into Egypt, then directly south via the Nile Valley into the Sudan, before taking a left turn to end up in the Horn of Africa. Many months later, with the wildlife delights of East Africa also behind me, I did the chicken alley run through Mozambique and entered enchanting Zimbabwe and thereafter Namibia and finally across the border to South Africa, my final port of call and the end destination, the Cape of Good Hope. Got chopped up by a three machete-welding guys en route. Content with my travels, I turned tail, returned to Zimbabwe and ran a safari outfit for six months before finally returning to Europe. It was supposed to be the final fling, but it just didn't turn out that way! I managed less than two months in the UK and I was off again - somehow I made a wrong turning and I ended up in Lithuania, a state I knew next to nothing about! A decade on and, bar the frequent sorties I still make worldwide, I'm still stuck in that little pleasant land! So, home is the frozen expanses of the Baltics, lands that shudders to temperatures down to minus 30 and below for much of the winter, has a little hiccup of a summer each year, then begins its slide back to the sub-zero. Somewhere in amongst this, the birding is amazing and life is okay - juggling the hours of birding, I've managed to carve out my living and am now the proud owner of a nice chunk of forest and meadow, a little nook to build into my own nature reserve! And, for all its sins and its few drawbacks, Lithuania does have a good airport! So not all is lost, the world and its adventures are still out there - I've popped back to Africa several times, tops being a seven-month stint in southern Africa and a month each in Uganda and the Western Sahari. Also extensive wanders in Asia - another part of the world that can be described as nothing but amazing! Anow Leopards in the high Himalaya, Tigers at Ranthanbore, Asian Lions in Gujarat and Leopards at various localities in India and Thailand, pure magic! And then there are those scrapes, I still get into a fair few - I timed my Sri Lanka trip just perfect to coincide with the tsunami, had many a pleasant night with various animals breathing down on my tent and had to be mountain rescued off the top of a fog laden Table Mountain at night! With the world out there beckoning, travel in the last few years has become ever more frequent - fantastic times in the USA, including an epic overland trip from the Mexican border to the Arctic coast in Alaska, winter trips to Oman, Japan and Thailand, a summer quest to find Polar Bears in Arctic Canada, along with occasional wanders back to the UK and journeys throughout Europe to track down Brown Bears in Scandanavia, Iberian Lynx in Spain and raptors galore in Georgia. And that takes me to today, a content birder and mammal enthusiast, happy on the home patch, even happier to be wandering far afield, other recent trips including three trips to the amazing Iran, truly fulfilling a lifelong ambition. Future plans? More of the same, trips to the Sahara in the pipeline, maybe to the USA and Canada in the near future. Also pondering a return southern Africa, perhaps a saunter through the Far East. Watch this space!