



Wadden Islands Bird Festival and the Texel Big Day to help House Martins

Visit Texel, the municipality with the most bird species in the Netherlands.

Anyone who still thinks that birdwatching is the preserve of grey-haired men should think again. Birding has become hip and is growing in popularity among a wide range of people. For evidence of this, look no further than the Wadden Islands Bird Festival held on the Dutch island of Texel each May. This accessible annual event is focussed on birdwatching for a good cause. It attracts enthusiasts from various countries and of all ages.

Wadden Islands Bird Festival 12th–13th May 2018

The Wadden Islands Bird Festival is organised by Marc Plomp, owner of the Bird Information Centre on Texel, and Monica Ralling of the National Park Dunes of Texel. An avid birder, Marc had already been organising a birdwatching day since 2010 and in 2016 he joined forces with Monica to develop the Wadden Islands Bird Festival. The event highlights the diversity of Texel's bird life and raises awareness and money for bird conservation. The 2018 festival will put the House Martin at the centre of attention. The Wadden Islands Bird Festival has something for everyone. Discover the island's bird life by following the route along the marked birdwatching points where enthusiastic volunteers share their knowledge of the special birds. Join one of the organised excursions or visit the optics show for a chance to test and buy the latest binoculars and telescopes, or simply have your own optics cleaned free of charge. Or how about participating in the Texel Big Day? a 24-hour bird race for charity.

Texel Big Day 12th May 2018

In 2017, a total of eight teams participated in the first Texel Big Day, a 24-hour bird race on foot and on e-bike. Teams competed for prizes

for the most species and the most money raised. With 149 species, the winning team achieved a new record for Texel. A second team triumphed by raising more than € 1100 in sponsorship. In total, more than € 7500 was raised during the weekend to help vulnerable beach-nesting species. The idea of a Texel Big Day comes from the Champions of the Flyway, which has been run in Israel for a number of years. Texel also lies on an important migration route and is easily accessible for many people. The Texel Big Day provides a great opportunity to get outside alongside fellow birders. Sightings are shared and teams help each other, so whether you join for part of the day or the full 24 hours, you can make a contribution towards helping birds.

Texel's location and range of habitats makes it the municipality with the most bird species in the Netherlands. The Big Day provides a great opportunity to discover the bird life of the island while at the same time contributing towards its protection. In 2018, attention will be on the House Martin. As throughout much of Europe, House Martins have declined in the Netherlands during the past decades. By providing information about this species to home-owners and by creating mud pools and offering artificial breeding opportunities, we will hopefully be able to improve the outlook

for this species on Texel. BirdLife Netherlands and Sovon Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology have named 2018 the Year of the House Martin and have focussed projects to help this species further.

Join the Texel Big Day and help this enigmatic visitor remain part of our future summers. It doesn't even cost you 24 hours; you can take time to rest and eat, or simply go birding for a few hours. All you need to do is submit a species list at the end of the day and commit to raising as much money as possible.

Exciting

Texel is perfectly suited to an event like a big day, not only because of its location on major migration routes, but also because of the diversity of species: almost 400 species have been recorded on the island. The island also has an excellent network of cycle paths meaning that you can birdwatch in a sustainable manner on e-bikes.

Teams of three to four record all observed species (seen and heard) via a dedicated website or mobile app (waarneming.nl). Special observations are also shared with all other participants via a group app, so that everyone gets the chance to see the species. A number of vulnerable species have been

precluded in advance to prevent any chance of disturbance. We are hoping for at least 15 teams in 2018.



Tactics

Many teams have well-thought-out tactics, drawn up by analysing observations in the days leading up to the Big Day. Other teams just head out and see which species cross their path. The Texel Big Day is characterised by being a highly social event. All observations are shared, so that every team knows what the other teams have seen. This may at first seem counterintuitive, but it can lead teams away from their planned route. When a sighting of a scarce species is shared, you have to decide, stick with your plan or deviate to try for the species. Teams are forced to constantly make such decisions and this ensures the excitement is maintained throughout the day.

You will have to search hard to find the stereotypical, grey-haired, birdwatcher during the Wadden Islands Bird Festival and the Texel Big Day. The events attract a range of participants including both men and women, of all ages. Marc is not at all surprised, 'Watching birds in this way is fun and exciting. There is no hiding for hours behind a bush in the hope that you see something, instead you are actively searching and embracing being outdoors among nature. But of course, you want to score better than the other teams,' laughs Marc: 'In every person there's a birdwatcher. If you see a bird and want to know what kind it is, then before you realise it, you yourself are a real birdwatcher!'

Newbies

You don't need to be an expert to participate in the Texel Big Day. 'Even novice birdwatchers can easily reach a hundred species on Texel', Marc assures us. He also emphasises that anyone who watches birds can participate in the Texel Big Day on 12th May 2018. 'The first two weeks of May are the best time to see the most species, so it would be difficult not to enjoy yourself.'

Join in

If you want to join the 2018 Texel Big Day, sign up now! We are aiming to have at least 15

teams and already have interest from teams from Spain and Finland and of course we hope for many more teams from other countries. One of the few requirements in order to participate is that we ask teams to collect sponsorship money towards the good cause. We have previously raised over € 7500 in sponsorship money and donations. This money has been used to help protect beach-nesting species through increasing awareness and protecting their breeding sites.



House Martin. Photo: Marc Guyt/AGAMI

There's not only a prize for the team that records the most birds but also for the team that raises the most money. We want to draw attention to the beautiful wildlife in our National Park and above all to be able to help the birds that make Texel their home.'

For more information contact:
(Bird Information Centre) Vogel Informatiecentrum Texel, Kikkertstraat 42-44, De Cocksdoorp, tel. 0031 (0) 222 316249, info@vogelinformatiecentrum.nl, or visit www.waddenvogelfestival.nl/en /www.texelbigday.nl

www.facebook.com/TexelBigDay
www.twitter.com/TexelBigDay

Photos: Harvey Diek

Special observations

Species seen during the Texel Big Day in 2017:

Typical species to be expected on Texel in mid-May include Garganey, Eurasian Spoonbill, Northern Goshawk, Hen and Marsh Harriers, Ruff (among hundreds of other waders in breeding plumage), Long-eared Owl, both Mediterranean and Little Gulls, Icterine Warbler, Bluethroat and Ring Ouzel.

Teams participating on the day also saw several rarities including Pallid Harrier, Red-necked Phalarope, Black-winged Stilt, Black Brant, Great Egret, Red-rumped Swallow, Caspian Gull, Osprey, Wryneck, Dotterel, Kentish Plover, Golden Oriole and Hooded Crow.

All observations of 2017 can be found on <https://waarneming.nl/tbd17>. Maps showing the routes taken by the teams can be found on the team pages. In 2018 the teams observations can be seen here: <https://waarneming.nl/tbd18>.

'Participating in the Big Day is challenging and exciting!'

It's the morning of Sunday 7th May, the day after the Big Day. In the restaurant *De Robbenjager*, near Texel's lighthouse, the prize giving ceremony for the Texel Big Day is taking place. Eight teams of keen birders cycled across Texel for 24 hours throughout Saturday searching for as many species as possible. The atmosphere is electric despite the tired faces. After a day of intensive birding there are plenty of red eyes and white faces, but this doesn't stop the fun. Despite this fatigue, everyone is still alert, watching the sky outside and hoping for one last special observation.

In the speech leading up to the prize giving ceremony, the jury proclaim this first Texel Big Day a huge success. This was in no small part to the camaraderie between the teams, helped by the teams sharing their observations in the group app. Participants, the jury and organisers alike were all very pleased.



And then for the excitement of the award ceremony. In third place, with 146 species, team *Dutch Knights*. In second place, the youngest team consisting of four boys from Texel all aged between 13 to 17 years, the Jonge Hondjes (*Young Dogs*) have 147 species. First place goes to team *Rock around the Clock*, the current Dutch record holders, with 149 species. Wow, what a close finish!

After the ceremony we speak with a few teams. Jeroen Breidenbach of the winning team *Rock around the Clock* and holder of the Dutch national record with 201 species in a single day is delighted. 'It was very exciting and great fun. The atmosphere was fantastic. We continued until the end. Our team did not arrive at the finish line until 23:50.' Tim Schipper and Jarne Kompier of the *Young Dogs* are also very proud and satisfied, despite being exhausted. Jarne tells how he first

became interested in birds at a very young age through his grandfather. 'I went with him every weekend.' He now spends his time birding with his friends most days, and spent the Easter holidays preparing for the Texel Big Day. The boys scouted out the best sites, finding territories of birds they knew would be present during the Big Day. Tim recounts how they were out near a reedbed in search of a Reed Warbler just half an hour before the end of the Big Day at 23:30. The bird sang and that gave them one more than team *Dutch Knights* in the closing minutes.

It was great that there was a good mix among the teams, including both men and women. Birding is a hobby for everyone and it was good to see this represented during the Big Day. It's wonderful to be outside, enjoying nature together.

Three of the four team members must have seen or heard the species in order for it to count. Between the teams it goes on trust. 'But I can tell you that as a participant, it can be painful if you are the only person in your team to have missed something,' says Marc Guyt from the team *Dutch Knights*. This happened to him with the Spotted Flycatcher. 'I was greatly disappointed but we had to continue to our next location. Spending too much time searching for one species is one of the biggest pitfalls. It just costs too much

time.' Marc describes the Texel Big Day as a continuous rollercoaster of emotions. 'You get impulses all the time: do I detour from my route, or do I stick to the plan? It can be difficult, especially if you are going to miss out on common species; you become fanatical. But you have to learn to let go and stick to your plan.' Jeroen reveals some of his tactics: 'You have to get nocturnal species during the first part of the night because everything you record at night saves time during the day.' For example, during the first night his team heard Bluethroat, Spotted Crake and Woodcock. The team *Young Dogs* recorded both Long-eared and Barn owls early during the night. When asked whether they are they going to participate again? 'What do you think? Of course! As a birder you simply do not want to miss this!'

