

The Friendship Agreement between New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory (USA), Falsterbo Bird Observatory (Sweden) and Spurn Bird Observatory.

A perspective from Spurn 2016.

Nick Whitehouse, Spurn Bird Observatory Trust

The Spurn peninsula on the east coast of Yorkshire in the U.K. has long been renowned as a place to witness spectacular bird migration and to find rare vagrant species. Spurn Bird Observatory was founded in 1946, the first UK mainland bird observatory to be established, and has continued to monitor and report on this phenomenal birding experience to this day.

The committee behind the observatory's working have in recent years been actively updating their overall mission plans and amongst much else, a new annual migration festival has been established, a new observatory building built and a brand new book showcasing the entire ornithological history of Spurn has been published. The 'obs' at Spurn is without doubt more 'fit for business', forward looking and engaged with its Friends and the wider public than ever before. The birding too, remains absolutely top notch!

There is always a need though to look beyond our own boundaries for best practice, new ideas and try to open new doors. So it was in 2015 that the committee agreed the obs should endeavour to become more involved in wider partnership work. The idea of 'twinning' with another observatory was muted and so with little idea of how things might pan out, contact was made with New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory in the USA. Why think small when one of the world's most famous bird observatories might be tempted to work with us? To his great credit, David La Puma, director of CMBO responded very courteously and confessed very diplomatically that Spurn's eminence wasn't yet on his radar – but he was prepared to hear our case! So we persevered, telling him of our mission plans, our passion for bird observatory cooperation and what made Spurn so special. So it was that David began to do his homework on Spurn and he was clearly excited by what he found. Here was an observatory on the east coast of the UK (just like CMBO is on the east coast of the USA) with a fantastic history and pedigree in national ornithology. Great minds think alike, for at the same time, David had been reaching out to Europe, to Bjorn Malmhagen at Sweden's Falsterbo Bird Observatory in fact, with a view to forming an alliance with another world famous observatory. So it was that a series of three-way 'Skype' meetings were then arranged between the chairman and directors of CMBO, Falsterbo and Spurn. Immediately, the top guys found a rapport, a shared sense of opportunity and of the positives that might be gained by just reaching out and working together. Ideas bounced around the 'virtual' meeting room and a bonhomie began which forms the essence of the new accord. A written Friendship Agreement was drafted and signed off providing the framework for mutual cooperation between the three observatories with three key goals its heart. 1. To foster, encourage and collaborate on broad comparative studies of selected bird populations and associated conservation priorities.

2. To share knowledge, experience and best practice in bird observatory operations and management.

3. To increase awareness between members, and amongst the broader international public, of the mission and accomplishments of our respective bird observatories.

For Spurn this was a very proud moment, to be so closely aligned on a global scale to two highly respected bird observatories. It was a first for Britain!

Then began the job of turning the friendship agreement into a reality. It was agreed that as soon as practicable, we would visit each other and so it was that in September 2016, Spurn welcomed David and Bjorn to Spurn's annual migration festival (" MigFest"). David and Bjorn filled the traditional Saturday evening prime presentation spot with a terrific talk on a "Tale of Two Peninsulas", a look at the amazing bird movements which occur at Cape May and Falsterbo. The packed audience loved it and appreciated the time they took to talk with everyone, particularly Spurn's young birders throughout the weekend. David was joined by Michael Lanzone, a leading US expert on avian satellite tracking. David presented us with a glimpse of the future and how we will soon be able to follow birds, even the smallest of species on their intercontinental journeys, just by logging in to our mobile phones. The unravelling of some of Spurn's mysteries (e.g. mid-summer Swift movements or autumn Yellow-browed Warbler migration) is now within reach. The British Trust for Ornithology, our partners at MigFest, are keen to work with Spurn and progress project work using this latest technology. No stay at Spurn would be complete without some socialising in the iconic Crown and Anchor pub and more ideas and friendships were developed amongst the new 'threesome' and the BTO after a few pints of English beer!

Another idea stemming from the new Friendship Agreement is to have a 'Young Persons Exchange Scheme'. For Spurn this would mean being able to send young ornithologists to both CMBO and Falsterbo for a few weeks. What an experience! What ideas and new friendships would be generated, furthering the ideals of the Friendship Agreement even more. Spurn in turn would welcome a young person from CMBO and from Falsterbo. We're all now seeking the funding to try to make this happen as a pilot scheme later this summer. Another first for Britain!

So, it's a big 'thumbs up' to our first year of the Friendship Agreement. You know it doesn't take much to extend the hand of friendship across the globe, and the returns are many fold.

Should any of our Friends of Spurn intend visiting either CMBO or Falsterbo, then they are guaranteed that bit of special attention and support. Equally if any Members of CMBO or Supporter of Falsterbo wishes to visit us at Spurn, we'd ensure they got the warmest of welcomes and the best advice and information to make their visit with us as memorable as possible. A personal touch to make your overseas visit the most enjoyable experience. It's just one of the mutual benefits we've agreed on.

Rob Adams the chairman at Spurn and Nick Whitehouse a fellow committee member will be visiting the International Bird Observatory Council meeting, hosted by CMBO, in October this year. It's hoped Bjorn can be there too. Our special Friendship Agreement will no doubt get an airing, and we'd like to think it sets an example for others to follow by raising aspirations between the bird observatories of the world for greater mutual cooperation. Where there's a will, there's a way. A massive thank you from everyone involved with Spurn Bird Observatory to David La Puma and Bjorn Malmhagen for showing great vision, leadership and belief and joining with us at the start of this new journey.