



06) An Introduction into Choosing Optics (B)

SPOTTING TELESCOPES:

The old draw tube type of telescopes, of the Nelson era, are no longer manufactured but are still very occasionally still seen in the field.

Unlike binoculars you should not be in any hurry to rush out and purchase a spotting telescope (or 'scope', as you will inevitably hear it called) immediately when you take up bird watching, but you may wish to at some time in the future as it will add another dimension to your enjoyment. The extra magnification they offer makes viewing waders, seabirds and wildfowl, in particular, that much easier and more rewarding.

Many if not most of the same things stated about binoculars will also apply to telescopes in exactly the same way, but you will also need to bear in mind the following extra considerations:

STRAIGHT or ANGLED – This is purely down to personal preference. Spotting telescopes with a straight-through eyepiece are generally easier to find a particular bird with, because the telescopes view is straight along your eye-line. On the other hand, telescopes with an angled eyepiece offer more flexibility and adjustment, especially if you are likely to be sharing your telescope with someone of a different height. They are also better to use for looking up a cliff faces. It is important to try both and see which you prefer and find the easiest to use.

SIZE – As with binoculars you will see that all spotting telescope models come with designation numbers such as 52, 65, 80. This number is the diameter of the objective or front lens. The larger this is the more light can get in, and the brighter the image will appear.

As spotting telescopes are usually mounted on a tripod the issues of being hard to hold 'still' is reduced considerably, except in very windy conditions. For these reasons the most popular sizes tend to be: 80, but smaller 60 are also becoming popular.

FIXED or ZOOM EYEPIECES – These days, zoom eyepieces account for the greater amount of sales, usually offering magnification in the range of 20x up to 60x. This gives you extra 'reach', but you do lose a little of the field of view and some definition, as you zoom into the subject. Fixed eyepieces (usually around 30x magnification) offer a wider view and are popular for taking photographs (i.e. digiscoping) through the telescope.

WEIGHT – Weight is even more of an issue for telescopes. It is essential that you will be happy and comfortable to carry the one that you select around all day in all conditions.

FOCUS – As with binoculars you need to consider how easy it is to find focus quickly and how fine an adjustment you can make. Focusing is undertaken by either a wheel on the body of the telescope or by rotating a section around the body of the telescope. This is vital if a bird is moving around a lot. Personal preference again comes into play. Some bird watchers like a focus wheel while others prefer the body section. Try focusing with a pair of gloves on and check that this can be undertaken without difficulty for cold conditions and winter use. Also consider this operation when the telescope is fitted with a protective cover.



ACCESSORIES – Most telescopes come with a protective cap / rain guard for both lens, but without a case, a strap or a tripod. However, you can easily purchase a good wide, elasticised strap to fit any telescope / tripod combination to spread the load on your shoulder depending on how you decide to carry it. Back carrying 'ruck-sacks' are becoming very popular, which leave both your hands free to use your binoculars and sometimes incorporate a small bag for incidentals, field guide book, note book, map, lunch, drink, etc.

PRICE – Because of the increased size of telescopes their prices reflect this. For this reason alone you need to make sure that you are going to buy something that is right for you and covers all your bird watching needs for a long time. You can purchase a telescope for £250.00 or less, plus an eyepiece for £120.00, a strap for £20.00, a case for around £60.00 and an aluminium tripod for £100.00.

However, you can pay anything up to ca.£4,500.00 or even more for a top of the range telescope with 'ED' glass, an eyepiece for £450.00, a case for £160.00 and a lightweight 'carbon-fibre' tripod for £600.00. These are for the serious bird watcher, are used very regularly and come with distinct advantages. For a start they are nitrogen filled making them totally water-proof and give excellent bright views in all light conditions. They can still produce a bright image even in the murk and they can stand up better to rough handling, though not recommended. Secondly you will get the back-up for years to come from the manufacturer should you have any problems. If you do decide to splash out at this end they will retain a lot of their value and you will be confident in the knowledge that you will never need to do so again, unless you wish to have the most up-to-date model.

Please note that no matter how much you pay for your equipment it will not help you identify the species seen, only to give you the ability to see them that much better. Identification of species only comes with experience from the time and effort you put into your hobby. The more time you devote the better you will become and you will get so much more enjoyment and satisfaction.

Make a list of your sightings (i.e. for each outing, for each site visited, a year list, an Essex list and a 'Life' list) and please remember to send in all your sightings to the Essex Birdwatching Society County Recorders such that your data can form a part of the trends and be included in the '*Essex Bird Report*' produced annually by the Society. Details where to send your data can be found on the Society's Website – www.ebws.org.uk or by contacting the Society's Secretary by e-mail at – Info.EBWS@gmail.com