

## 17) Staying Warm in Winter – or at any time of the Year

Enjoying your bird watching is all about dressing appropriately, and choosing what to wear for cold and/or wet days in the field is central to staying comfortable for long periods.

The key to keeping warm is to have the right amount of insulation using the right materials. Several layers of clothing, each trapping an insulating cushion of air, are the most effective way to keep warm. Two thin layers are often better than a single thick one, and the use of several layers means you can adjust your clothing to suit any situation and temperature. Always pack an extra covering just in case the temperature falls further and/or a rain/ice storm develops.

A base layer of long-sleeved and long-legged thermal clothing is advisable if you are planning on being outside for any prolonged periods. Synthetic materials can be warm, but they may not breathe well and can become damp from perspiration. Of the natural materials, fine wool, such as 'merino' is warm and also breathes well, while cotton is not as good as it absorbs moisture and dries slowly and can make you feel cold. If you opt for synthetic material, look for something which offers good 'wicking', in other words taking perspiration away from the skin.

Middle layers are essential for providing the main insulation. Wool is the best natural material, while synthetic fleeces are also very good today. A polyester fibre-filled layer is light and warm, but it may be thicker.

The outer 'shell' layer should be waterproof and windproof, but should also let moisture escape. A jacket made from a membrane material such as 'Gore-Tex' will not let rain in, but will let out water vapour. Some water-resistant fabrics are treated with coatings that will eventually wear off and they will require to be re-proofed. New materials are constantly being developed and coming onto the market, so shop around for something that suits your requirements. Outlets such as *Paramo* and *Rohan* offer a good selection of all layers of outdoor clothing. The Society also offers an excellent range of quality clothing (i.e. polo shirts, sweatshirts, fleeces, caps, etc.) all with fine embroidered logo, in a wide range of colours.

As well as keeping your body and legs warm, extremities should be looked after. Gloves are obviously essential, especially when there is a wind chill. Here layering can also be used, with thin fleece or silk gloves inside a thicker leather/quilted pair, as offered by *Seal Skins*. But remember thickness can hamper the smooth focusing of optics.

The correct footwear is critical to be comfortable in all conditions. Leather walking boots must be waterproof and rubber boots (Wellingtons) can lose heat readily, requiring extra thick socks. Wearing legging gaiters helps to keep you both warm and dry especially in long, wet grass and/or deep snow. Today some waterproof boots are fleece lined and/or made of neoprene, providing comfort and insulation.

Finally, do not forget a good pair of thermal, waterproof socks, a warm hat and a scarf of some sort. 'Buffs' are not bulky and are very useful in cold winds which can find any exposed areas or any little gaps! Wool is the best insulator and will help to keep you dry.

**Remember the unwritten rule** – You should consider that any site you visit, especially if on an open marsh or exposed coast, it could be a few degrees colder than at home and twice as windy! If you prepare for these conditions and take extra layers, even in summer, then you will remain comfortable at most times and not get caught out. It is easier to take layers off but you can't add them if you do not have any additional cloths with you.