

72 On song

May's hedgerows and woods are alive with bird song, so this month's photo challenge is to snap a singing warbler.

73 Suited and booted

Vango's latest footwear collection could be ideal for long days out in the field.

73 Journaling just got better

A comprehensive listing app has now added complete Apple compatibility.

75 A family affair

This comprehensive new tome from Lynx Edicions provides an overview of all the bird families of the world.

76 The nation's favourite

The ever-popular Robin gets the full treatment in this updated version of David Lack's book.

76 What's on the Bookshelf?

Get to know Scotland's wonderful wildlife better with these two new titles.

THIS MONTH'S EXPERT PANEL



DOMINIC MITCHELL is *Birdwatch*'s founder and Managing Editor. He has been birding in Britain and abroad for more than 40 years.



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MIKE ALIBONE is *Birdwatch*'s Optics Editor. He has been testing binoculars and telescopes for more than a decade.



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STEVE YOUNG is Photographic Consultant for *Birdwatch* and an award-winning wildlife photographer.



ROB HUME began watching birds as a child. He worked for the RSPB for many years and has written several books.

and curvature of field is nominal.

The image is sharp, with only a modicum of softening at the edges, but I would describe it as average in terms of brightness. However, depending on your point of view, this could be interpreted as simply being richer with a considerable depth of colour. This was most evident when viewing swathes of different habitat with, for instance, beds of *Phragmites* appearing somewhat warm-toned rather than light straw, while grass presented as deep and generously lush. At the same time my local Siskins were vivid and alive and the Mealy Redpoll which visited my garden feeders throughout the winter appeared anything but dull through this binocular.

For the price, the Mistral is conservatively good value. It comes with a soft carry case, an articulated rainguard and tethered objective lens covers, which I thought were far too loosely fitting, although they did not fall off during use. The neckstrap is a basic lanyard, broadening around the area in contact with the neck and without padding, but adding your own is always an option. ■

Further info

- Price: £110
- Size: 145x130 mm
- Weight: 682 g
- Field of view: 129 m at 1,000 m
- Light transmission: 85 per cent
- Close focus: 2 m
- Gas-filled: yes
- Waterproof: yes
- Guarantee: 5 years

Verdict

- ✓ Image is sharp with only a little softening at the edges
- ✓ Curvature of field is nominal
- ✗ Image is only average in terms of brightness

Micro machines

Is small really beautiful? **Mike Alibone** evaluates the world's first 'micro' spotting scope from Celestron.

REVIEW

Celestron Hummingbird 9-27x56 ED spotting scope

CAN a spotting scope get any smaller? When I visited Celestron back in March and Dave Murray pulled out the two new Hummingbird models from the top drawer of his office desk – the one normally reserved for pens and small miscellaneous items – I was amazed at how tiny they were.

Dubbed by the manufacturer as 'the world's first micro spotting scope', Celestron's diminutive Hummingbird series comprises two angle-bodied models with 50 mm and 56 mm objectives delivering zoom magnification ranges of 7-22x and 9-27x respectively. The series' name was chosen to reflect some of a hummingbird's famous characteristics: very small size combined with high mobility and the capability of long-distance travel.

It's the last of these three attributes that Celestron had foremost in mind when designing these tiny scopes, which look set to take the 'travelscope' concept to a new dimension. I can vouch for the portability aspect as I took the larger of the two models to Israel in March to test alongside my 'regular' birding optics. The 27x top magnification is not the 60x that birding sometimes calls for, but the Hummingbird still worked pretty

well and generated both curiosity and genuine interest among contestants in the Champions of the Flyway bird race, who were gathered at Eilat's North Beach on presentation day.

To lighten the load, deliver compactness and reduce cost, the generally accepted practice for the manufacture of small lightweight optics is to skimp on functionality and, to a certain extent, this is true with the Hummingbird. There is, for example, no lens hood and no rotating tripod foot in either model, but the absence of these two features is relatively unimportant in the grand scheme of things and it's more than made up for by the inclusion of ED glass, full multi-coating and a fully waterproof, nitrogen-filled body.

This last is manufactured from tough polycarbonate and wrapped in a thin layer of rubber which, enhancing the aesthetics, has a slightly raised, non-slip textured area to the body's underside.

With the objective more than adequately recessed to protect it from damage, along with the integrated helical focusing ring, this scope has the look and feel of a quality product.

There is a single zoom eyepiece which fits both this model and the even smaller 50 mm version, in which it produces the lower magnification range of 7-22x. The eyepiece is simply inserted into the body and locked in position by turning a ring at



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STEVE YOUNG'S PHOTO CHALLENGE



STEVE YOUNG (WWW.BIRDSONFILM.COM)

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the insertion point, while the lens itself is a generous 19 mm in diameter. I was expecting something smaller.

The eyecup twists out, click-stopping at one point mid-way between fully retracted and fully extended, giving an eye relief of 15 mm, at which the full field of view is visible. I found the eyecup felt a little hard against my eye, but the rubber is actually quite soft, and on closer examination I discovered the rim is raised around the edge instead of being more rounded, which I believe would increase the comfort factor a little.

The thumb-width magnification adjustment ring (zoom) shares the broad, deep rubber

milling of both the eyepiece locking and the central focus rings. Turning it clockwise, smoothly and freely, through approximately 110° takes the magnification from lowest to highest. The integrated focusing ring turns less freely, although both mechanisms offer enough resistance to necessitate combined thumb and forefinger operation. I am told the adjustment rings on the production models will be more freely turning, allowing single-finger operation, when they go on sale in early June.

Focusing the Hummingbird at the highest magnification is a sensitive process and achieving a sharp image requires practice and patience. There is a good degree of tolerance at the lower

levels of magnification, and the image is sharp almost to the very edges of the field. The manufacturer's close focus figure of 3 m is spot on.

Being critical, there is a hairline yellow ring around the periphery of the field and a slight 'fish-eye' effect on panning, but neither of these is particularly noticeable nor detracts from the overall viewing experience.

The image itself is relatively bright. A contributory factor to this is the extra light-gathering capacity of the 56 mm objective when compared to standard 50 mm travel scopes – assuming all other optical specifications are equal, of course. I would describe the level of chromatic aberration in the image as average and not unduly intrusive.

I liked the colours in the image returned by this scope. They are very natural and free from the effect apparent in many optics which renders colours a shade darker than they actually are.

Amazingly compact and practically pocketable, the Hummingbirds are smaller and of a higher specification than the existing small Celestron travelscope, the Landscout (*Birdwatch* 274: 70-71). The

eyepieces of both models are angled – there is no straight version – and they allow easy hand-held viewing in the absence of a tripod. Both come with a soft carry case, a rubber objective lens cover and a loose-fitting eyepiece cap, which is prone to falling off.

At £350 (£300 for the 50 mm model) the Hummingbird represents solid value and it would appear there is a ready market for eco-tourists and birders who don't want to carry standard equipment when travelling. ■



Optics Editor Mike Alibone testing the Hummingbird in Israel.

DAVID CALLAHAN

Further info

- Price: £350
- Size: 210x120 mm
- Weight: 590 g
- Magnification: 9-27x
- Field of view: 74-32 m at 1,000 m
- Light transmission: not available
- Close focus: 3 m
- Gas-filled: yes
- Waterproof: yes
- Guarantee: limited lifetime

Verdict

- ✓ Image is sharp almost to edge of field
- ✓ Chromatic aberration is not intrusive
- ✗ Eyecup is a little uncomfortable against the eye