
YANN TOUSSAINT

AFTERNOON TEA WITH THE GIBRALTARIAN
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Sparrowhawks, booted eagles, swallows, storks –
birds of passage, broken feathered

Leave Africa on thermals born of desert sand,
riding ragged on the bow of a high salt wind.

Flying slowly, in small, dissolute flocks
they do not block out the sun. We record each one;

Three hoopoe, seven bee-eaters, two cuckoos,
more cuckoos, sparse finches and chats.

Four score of kites arrive in waves,
tumbling, fork-tailed and gregarious

Eagles, distinguished by altitude, fly alone. A flash –
muskets and merlins, eight or nine, soon gone,

a vagrant pallid harrier, half a continent off course,
storks, in pairs, in search of chimneys in which to nest.

We could have stayed to bear witness
to these seasonal refugees straggling north

but instead we turned south. It was our honeymoon:
in Morocco we felt sure that flamingos lay before us.

