

Birdwatch

The home of birding

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February birdfinding

Forest of Dean, Druridge Bay, Galway and Ouse Washes

More ID answers

- Glaucous and Iceland Gulls
- White-billed Diver

Better birding

What you need to know this month



Happy returns!

The mega-rarities that came back to Britain in 2005



More prizes in Bill's birding quiz



Dream team for rainy digiscoping

Review: Samsung i5 digital camera and Focus DA-1 digiscoping adapter

FOLLOWING ITS SUCCESS with the Digimax V50 and V70, Samsung has entered the 'ultra-thin and stylish' digital camera market. Its first offering is the beautifully crafted five megapixel Digimax i5, which is only slightly bigger than a birding pager and only 17 mm thick, yet has an enormous 230,000 pixel 2.5-inch TFT LCD screen.

The i5 has an internal zoom lens providing 3x optical zoom magnification and up to 5x digital zoom, so is ideally suited for digiscoping. The image goes to maximum zoom in around 2 seconds in several stages. In macro mode the lens focuses down to 5 cm – great for insects and flowers.

Powered by a single SLB 0737 rechargeable Lithium ion battery, one charge is good for around 180 photos. On the review model I received, the camera was charged by plugging an AC cable into the camera, like charging a mobile phone. A separate battery charger (SBC-L5) and a very useful docking station that allows easy transfer of images to your PC while charging are available as extras. A spare battery would also be essential for a full day in the field.

The layout of the controls is neat, with buttons well spaced alongside the monitor. Some of the buttons have dual functions, for example the trash-can button provides access to another menu when in shooting mode which allows you to alter the ISO setting (options available are auto, 100, 200 and 400),

the RGB settings, white balance and exposure compensation. This last setting can be altered in half-stop intervals to two stops +/-.

Multi-zone or spot metering modes are available. These are accessed by the main menu navi-button. You can alter the shooting mode from single to continuous here too.

When in single-shot mode the camera will take one shot and is able to take another almost one-and-a-half seconds later. In continuous mode it shoots at a very sluggish 0.9 frames a second at shutter speeds of up to 1/2000th sec but blacks out the monitor while doing so. Although this can be irritating it is no worse than having the shot



confirmation flash up on the monitor, as happens with most other cameras.

The very useful 'M' button allows the user to quickly change from automatic shooting to manual or video. It is in video mode that this camera really excels. With the i5 you can shoot video in VGA resolution, compressed using MPEG-4 technology. Up to two hours of video with sound will fit on a 256 MB SD card.

It may be an ultra-thin compact camera but inside there is a very generous 50 MB of internal memory – enough for 17 maximum resolution photos or three minutes of video.

Samsung has produced a fully waterproof housing for this camera complete a set of camera buttons that will enable it to be fully functional to a depth of five metres. The

housing is made of tough, lightweight clear plastic and has a safety lock to prevent accidental opening.

The camera does not have a tripod bush or a filter thread and yet can still be used for digiscoping. This is because innovative Swedish company Focus Trading AB have utilised the waterproof housing and added their own rapid-fit digiscoping adapter and cable release bracket. The adapter is a neat one-piece cut-away tube that allows you to zoom in on the target bird with the scope. The test model fitted quickly, securely and perfectly over my Swarovski 20-60x eyepiece, providing a rock-solid platform for the i5.

Overall this is a fine camera with some excellent features. The waterproof housing and digiscoping adapter means I can now digiscope in the pouring rain, should I want to!

Chris Galvin



Tech spec

Price: approx £499 for the complete kit (includes camera, waterproof housing, DA-1 adapter, cable release, 1 GB SD card, charger and spare battery).

Camera size: 89.6x59.8x17.3 mm

Weight: 133 g

LCD screen size: 2.5 inches

Effective pixels: 5 million

Maximum image size: 2,592x1,944 pixels

Lens: 39-117 mm

Guarantee: 2 years

Further information: contact sole

UK distributor In Focus on 01485 210101

Birding in a wader wonderland

Reader break: Mauritania and the Banc d'Arguin National Park

OUR SECOND READERS' break to Mauritania gave birdwatchers the rare opportunity of experiencing the fantastic Banc d'Arguin National Park. This wilderness covers 7,500 square miles, of which about 50 per cent is water, and is the largest wintering ground for waders in the Western Palearctic, holding up to three million birds at any one time in winter.

Our tour started in Senegal, where we soon saw Striped Kingfisher, Little Bee-eater, African Black Crake and Caspian Tern before heading north into Mauritania. In the Diawling National Park, we added Yellow-billed Stork, huge flocks of Greater Flamingos, Senegal Thick-knees and much more. The air was full of birds here, and before reaching Nouakchott, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Long-legged Buzzard, Black Bush Robin, Long-tailed

Nightjar and Hoopoe Lark were all seen well.

All of the commoner wading birds had been seen during the journey and, after leaving the coastal areas, we added Black-crowned and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-larks and our first Brown-necked Ravens. At km 235 we turned towards Ten-allou, where we saw a few Desert Sparrows before continuing to the national park.

Our base in the fishing village of Iwik was very remote, and knowing that probably fewer than 30 people from the UK have ever visited this place added to the atmosphere. Waders were everywhere and we also soon added, for our Western Palearctic lists, Long-tailed and 'White-breasted' Cormorants, Western Reef Egret and Grey-headed Gull. A possible White-fronted Plover was seen briefly from our

boat but unfortunately could not be confirmed. The numbers of shorebirds were literally uncountable and a flock of 21 Common Shelduck that flew over our boat on one afternoon was an extremely rare sighting.

After leaving the Banc d'Arguin, we found several Desert Wheatears and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. In Dawling NP, on our return, an exceptional sighting was a Lizard Buzzard about 250 miles north of its known range. Abyssinian Rollers became noticeable as we neared the border and we saw huge flocks of Red-billed Queleas as we returned to our base near Saint Louis in Senegal. A good find early on the last day was a River Prinia, and later we saw Temminck's and Cream-coloured Coursers, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Saville's Bustard, Spotted Thick-knee, African Fish Eagle and Brown Snake Eagle, all adding up to an excellent end to a great tour.

Richard Cruse