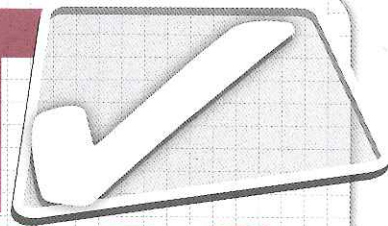


EXPERT REVIEWS



Your trusted guide to what's new in birding: bit.ly/birdwatchreviews



Kite flies high with Lynx HD

Kite's small and punchy Lynx HD binoculars seem set to become high flyers, says Optics Editor **Mike Alibone** after an exclusive pre-launch test.



REVIEW

Kite Lynx HD 8x30 binocular

BELGIAN optics company Kite has launched a new range of two 30 mm binoculars which are likely to find favour with fans of both compact and small-sized mainstream birding models. Weighing just 461 g, they are lighter than most binoculars at the lower end of this objective's size range. They're smaller than the majority, too, without crossing the border into compact territory.

Smooth simplicity marks their external appearance, while the Kite logo and model name, embossed unobtrusively in shiny gold, provide lift and add a touch of class to an otherwise rather plain-looking binocular. Don't be fooled, however, by the demure exterior, which gives nothing away in terms of performance. There's a lot of power shoe-horned into these tiny twin barrels, as I discovered the moment I took them into the field during November last year.

Apart from the fact that I hardly noticed I was wearing them – the slender neoprene-type neck-strap

lends comfort to the already light weight – I was immediately struck by both the crisp, bright image and the natural colours delivered by this binocular.

So, buoyed by favourable first impressions, what else did this new model from Kite offer? Its dual texture, soft rubber armouring is non-slip, as is the rubber covering to the finger-width focus wheel. The latter, although minimally ribbed, still provides enough grip to turn smoothly through little more than one clockwise revolution between close focus and infinity, so fast focusing is easily achieved.

My measured distance for the close focus was 1.5 m, just 0.2 m greater than that quoted by

the manufacturer. Even this figure is highly acceptable, as is the binocular's field of view – an impressive 151 m at 1,000m, which is truly exceptional for an 8x magnification binocular. For this price I would have expected significant curvature of field and a broad periphery of image softness: surprisingly, both are minimal.

The image remains sharp across the vast majority of the field, all of which I was still able to see while the metal, soft rubber-covered eyecups were fully extended. While these twist up in the conventional manner, I was

surprised to find there were no mid-point or full extension click-stops at which to lock them. This proved not to be a problem as they simply stayed put during viewing, although they did sometimes shift moderately when applying or removing the articulated rainguard supplied as part of the package. It's worth mentioning at this point that the eyecups are removable through a screw mount and the manufacturer will replace worn eyecups free of charge throughout the warranty period.

The dioptre adjustment ring, located immediately below the right ocular, can be turned without having to move the eyecup from its desired position. It cannot be locked and there is an incremental settings scale, although it is not denoted numerically.

Out in the field this binocular performs very well indeed, consistently delivering strong,

Did you know?

Many manufacturers are now applying hydrophobic (water repellent) coatings to the surfaces of their products' lenses. Measuring only a few nanometres in thickness, they reduce smearing and the adhesion of water droplets, grease and dirt to the lenses, adding a measure of protection and making them easier to clean. The application of such coatings has a negligible effect on light transmission.

72 Nikon bridges the gap

The new V2 camera is put through its paces – find out what Steve Young liked about it.

72 Digiscoping adapter

Nikon's latest accessory for the company's own fieldscopes and 1 series of cameras.

74 App comparison

Both the Sibley and Peterson guides are available for your smartphone and iPad, but which one is best?

75 BTO Atlas

Could this be the most important book of the decade? Read on to find out ...

76 Cracking the warbler code

This innovative guide to North American wood-warblers incorporates sonograms into the species accounts.

76 Introduction to bird photography

Tips and advice from some of Europe's best wildlife photographers.

THIS MONTH'S EXPERT PANEL



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



DAVID CALLAHAN Prior to joining *Birdwatch*, David trained as a taxonomist at the Natural History Museum.



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



SHARON STITELER is better known as BirdChick. She is a dedicated birder and the author of two birding books.



OLIVER SMART is a wildlife photographer and ornithologist. His images have been published in range of books and magazines.



REBECCA ARMSTRONG has been working for *Birdwatch* for five years and is a self-confessed app junkie.



natural colours against a generally warm colour rendition, at a remarkable degree of brightness – even in poor light conditions. On one occasion, while watching a Cormorant roost as the afternoon light faded, I was impressed at the level of detail still visible at twilight. Contrast is also very pleasing, as is the very low degree of chromatic aberration. It's present, as in all binoculars, but I've encountered significantly more in some models which sell at a much higher price than this one.

The outer lens surfaces are covered with Kite's new 'PermaVision' water- and dirt-repellent coating. This also offers more resistance to scratches and is said to increase their longevity, as well as rendering them easy to clean.

Both Lynx HD models are

supplied with a soft carry case and clip-in objective covers. The 8x under test is one of the best-performing small binoculars I have reviewed and, in my opinion, represents extremely good value for £459. ■

Further info

- Price: £459
- Size: 120x114 mm
- Weight: 461 g
- Field of view: 151 m at 1,000 m
- Light transmission: 89 per cent
- Close focus: 1.3 m
- Gas-filled: yes
- Waterproof: yes
- Guarantee: 30 years

Verdict

- ✓ Crisp bright image
- ✓ Low degree of chromatic aberration
- ✗ No click-stop positions to lock twist-up eyecups

Great tripod support

Scopac Plus

FOR those of us who go birding on public transport, bike or foot, the development of telescope-bearing backpacks has been a quiet revolution. We can walk anywhere, over any terrain and long distances with any size scope and tripod supported fully on our backs, leaving our hands free for bins and notebooks.

However, it takes some experience and practice to get the three main brands to fit comfortably, given the variability of human physiques and the tendency of the backpacks to ride up or their straps to loosen. There has also been an issue with capacities, with some bags not having quite enough room to accommodate a field guide, packed lunch, camera and lens (though a superzoom bridge camera can get round this last).

The favourite of many birders, Scopac, has updated its already competitive product with a main pocket that now holds around 4.5 litres, as well as extra straps, a small phone pocket and a plastic key fob. The greater capacity gives plenty of room for most of a birder's daily field accoutrements, meaning one problem with the earlier design has been satisfactorily resolved. Unfortunately, however, there is no bottle-holding side pocket.

A pair of extra straps that fit around the top of the tripod's legs means that there are now three points of attachment along their length, resulting in much less 'riding up' and the consequent awkward balancing angles. The front straps that go around the wearer's shoulders and chest are padded for

comfort. There is an additional map or document pocket which holds a field guide or notebook with ease. The result is improved comfort, with the bag also sitting lower on your back and simultaneously pulling less on your shoulders.

The Scopac upgrade compares well with rival Cley Spy's Mulepack, and is in some respects preferable, with its extra stability and carrying space. With the addition of a bottle pocket to keep fluids away from cameras and optics, the product would be near-perfect. **David Callahan**



Further info

- Price: £59
- Capacity: 4.5 L
- Colour: black
- Contact: call 07810 560916 or 01263 511587 or visit www.scopac.co.uk

Verdict

- ✓ Increased capacity gives plenty of room for a day's worth of kit
- ✓ Tripod is securely attached
- ✗ No water bottle pocket