

### Birdwatch

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## Raising the Barr

This scope from Barr & Stroud sets a new standard for entry-level optics. *Mike Alibone* is impressed.

Review: Barr & Stroud Sahara 20-60x80 telescope

THE ORIGINAL BARR & Stroud produced its first binoculars for the British Navy in the early part of the last century and supplied optical equipment to the British military during two world wars. The first telescopes launched under the Barr and Stroud name came in the latter part of 2009.

The new product hits the ground running and represents a complete contrast to anything the company previously produced.

simply pushes onto a nodule on the hood to prevent it from flapping in front of the objective or being inadvertently snagged and ripped off. It's a great idea, but I suspect this will ultimately wear and become ineffective over time.

The zoom eyepiece, which is an integral part of the scope, is small, basic and functional, with a fold-down rubber eyecup. There's no incremental scale between the extremes of 20x and 60x, but the zoom system is linear and it's

distance of 6 m, but I was not able to focus on anything closer than approximately 8.7 m. I discovered the focusing knob required a lot of turning to alternate between close and distant birds, but if it is adjusted to a 'mid-distance' setting, coupled with the reasonable depth of field offered by this scope, then focusing either side of this point can be achieved without too much wheel turning.

Reasonably bright, the image takes on a 'warm' or yellowish colour rendition. Contrast and colours are acceptably good, but somewhere between 40x and 50x magnification and beyond I was not easily able to obtain a sharp image. At low magnification the image is nice and sharp virtually to the edge, but an increasingly wide periphery of the field of view is subject to softening as the magnification is ramped up. Colour fringing is evident in the periphery and extends to a lesser degree to the centre of the image.

An acceptably bright image in poor light is a pleasing feature of this scope which, at one point, provided me with some nice views of Short-eared Owls just prior to dusk without too much loss of light, albeit at the lower end of the magnification range.

The black stay-on case initially supplied, and included in the price, is made from a thin, weather-resistant material, but it is shortly to be replaced with a much improved olive-green padded version. The focus knob cover and eyepiece cover flip together to meet and hold each other in place with velcro, and the latter, when not covering the eyepiece, can be secured beneath the scope to prevent it flapping about. A screw-on plastic cover further protects the eyepiece when it is not being used.

The Sahara, also available as a 15-45x60 model, is a good-value budget scope and as such performs well within its remit. Barr & Stroud is also intending to introduce straight-bodied versions of both models by August this year. Hot on their heels, the ED version will be launched before the year's end. It will have a rotatable tripod shoe, which the current models do not have, and a wide angle eyepiece of 25x magnification will be available as an accessory.



Make no mistake – this is a value-engineered product which combines modern material manufacturing and design with low-cost production, resulting in an amazingly inexpensive entry-level scope which will appeal strongly to the cost-conscious.

The first thing I noticed about this scope was its low weight, which is down to the polycarbonate body. At 1,270 g, including the eyepiece, this is one of the lightest 80 mm scopes on the market. A taut rubber covering serves further to keep the weight down and the similarly covered objective lens hood slides very smoothly out to offer generously deep protection to the lens from the elements. Attached to this is a rubber lens cover, which

relatively easy to estimate the intermediate magnification points. I found it quite stiff to turn, especially when wearing gloves, and the focusing knob, though generously proportioned and much smoother in turning, is similarly more difficult to operate with gloved hands.

The manufacturer gives a close-focus

### Tech spec

**Price:** £189.95  
**Length:** 443 mm  
**Weight:** 1,270 g  
**Field of view:** 29.6-15 m at 1,000 m  
**Close focus:** 6 m  
**Gas-filled:** yes  
**Waterproof:** yes  
**Guarantee:** 10 years

## Happy apping

Review: BirdGuides Birds of Britain and Ireland Pro

This field guide for the iPhone is available from the iTunes store. Covering 271 species regularly seen in Britain and Ireland, it includes all those birds likely to be seen throughout the year.

The guide really is very useful, and certainly one of the most space-saving ways of getting nearly 300 species in your pocket. Birds are arranged either by family or alphabetically and there's also a search option. Each species has several illustrations, including many subspecies, as well as male and female breeding and non-breeding plumages, juveniles and flight shots. There are

also photos, distribution maps and complete species accounts from *BWP*. Usefully, it also plays songs and calls for each species.

At £14.99 the guide is more expensive than most iPhone apps, but there is a lot of information here. It won't replace *Collins* or please hardened twitchers, but it's an excellent guide to have handy to remind yourself of important ID features.

*Rebecca Armstrong*

### Details

**Price:** £14.99  
**No of species:** 271  
**Size:** 194 MB  
**Contact:** BirdGuides 0800 919391;  
[www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)