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## Where is it? Viewranger: a special review

Steve Gantlett

It's here at last! Now is the time to upgrade your mobile phone! Viewranger has produced the GPS software that birders have been waiting for. This amazing software, combined with one of the latest mobile phones, will carry the entire British Isles on the standard 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey maps in your phone! It will pinpoint your exact position (to an accuracy of about 10 metres) and display it on the map, wherever you are in the British Isles, and it will update the map automatically as you travel.

Furthermore, the Viewranger software also contains an instant gazetteer to almost every minor name featured on the entire OS map set – some 250,000 place names! The potential value to birders of this feature alone makes Viewranger well worth obtaining. Just heard about a bird at some obscure site anywhere in the country? Just take your mobile from your pocket and tap in the first few letters of the place name, and the OS map display immediately jumps to it. It will thus display both where you are and where you want to be! On a recent test, a TomTom sat nav failed to know where Nottingham, Weymouth was, but Viewranger not only knew where Nottingham was, but instantly pinpointed on the OS map where Holwell Farm, Nottingham was (the precise location of the Cattle Egrets), and showed the public footpaths around it.

Viewranger is easy to use, and has a host of other features. For birders, perhaps the most useful of these include:

- the maps fully zoomable, from larger than OS map life-size to cross-country route-planning;
- supplementary OS 1: 25,000 maps also available for the whole country (except the Isle of Man; once installed, these mesh seamlessly when zooming and searching the 1:50,000 maps and, of course, they show the country in even greater detail);
- displaying your current location's (or any location's) altitude and grid reference at the top of the screen (you can choose from a range of formats, including 6, 8 or 10 digit OS grid reference and various forms of longitude & latitude);
- tracking and navigating (the former a line drawn on the map showing where you have been, and the latter showing your bearing – could be very useful if you are wandering about well off-road somewhere);
- a unique Panoramic Viewpoint feature (which labels the hills and other features looking



The Nokia 6110 Navigator, running the Viewranger 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map. The in-built GPS will display your exact position (to an accuracy of about 10 metres) and the map will show your surroundings in incredible detail: here, even the private drive on which the White-crowned Sparrow fed (and the boundary of the scrubby paddock opposite, which it also frequented).

horizontally, exactly as you see them from your viewpoint – superb for hill-walking);

- sunrise and sunset times at the locations centred on the map (which can be surprisingly different on Fair Isle and on St Agnes at different times of the year!).

Amongst the other features, a unique feature of Viewranger, which could be useful on occasions, is 'Buddy Beacon'. This shows your friend's location on-screen, or you can publish your location to specific friends to see on their handsets or view on the web (with your permission, of course).

Viewranger works on a number of mobile phone models: either those with built-in GPS, or those with a Bluetooth GPS receiver connected. The Nokia 6110 Navigator is particularly recommended; it has built-in GPS and it takes 'micro SDHC' memory cards. Many other phones do not take these and do not allow the storage of as much data on one card, but a 4Gb micro SDHC card allows the Nokia 6110 to store, all at once:

- the Viewranger software, with the entire Great Britain 1:50,000 OS maps and gazetteer;

- the complete Route 66 turn-by-turn Britain & Ireland sat nav (including up-datable audible speed-camera alerts);
- MP3 sounds of all the birds of Europe (loop-playable at a good volume and easily downloadable from *eg* the Birdguides or Schulze CDs);
- extras, such as supplementary 1: 25,000 OS maps covering all your favourite areas).

And, if all this is not enough, the Nokia 6110 is fully compatible with the new 8Gb micro SDHC cards, which will allow the easy addition of a huge choice of 1:25,000 maps (though the entire set requires some 11Gb, so would need to be split over two cards) and full Route 66 sat nav for the whole of western Europe (and many other parts of the world) onto the same card!

So what are the costs? Well, remarkably good value and affordable. The Viewranger software with the entire GB 1:50,000 OS maps costs £150, but if you require mapping only for your local region or favourite birding areas, the costs are much less (just £50 for the whole of southern England, for example). The supplementary 1: 25,000 maps may be chosen individually as required and downloaded from the Viewranger website. The entire set would cost several hundred pounds, but they can be purchased in batches from £20 (which, for example, will cover the North Norfolk coast from King's Lynn to Cromer and to some 10km inland). The price of the Nokia 6110 Navigator phone will depend on your mobile phone contract, but will be between about £200 and nothing (and it will probably have the Route 66 Britain & Ireland sat nav software pre-installed). This phone also incorporates a 2mb camera and connects to the internet – as well as making ordinary telephone calls very easily. None of the Viewranger or Route 66 GPS features require an internet connection, so there are no hidden usage costs (although one can connect to the internet through Viewranger, *eg* to access information associated with points-of-interest, such as to book local accommodation, and to use the Buddy Beacon, and for this you need a GPRS or

Viewranger displaying the area around Fair Isle Bird Observatory at 1: 50,000 (not at full zoom).



3G internet subscription from your mobile network provider).

Maps of similar quality to British Ordnance Survey are already available for Viewranger for Finland, and other countries are sure to follow.

So what are the down sides? The battery life of the phone when running the software must be considered. It is fine to run it from the battery for two or three hours or so, or to run it intermittently as it is actually needed during the course of the day, but it will not run all day long without draining the battery. It may be run all day from the car charger, or recharged intermittently from the car, of course.

One minor improvement could be suggested to any updates to the software: the maps could be searchable to six figure OS grid references.

The gazetteer is wonderful. Almost all OS 1:50,000 localities are indexed. Tap in 'Saito' and the map jumps to the precise rock where the Black-browed Albatross used to live (how useful this would have been!). Tap in 'Reeva' and it jumps to a well-known rocky cleft on Fair Isle. Tap in 'Loch na Liana Moire' and it jumps to the tiny Hebridean Loch where the Pied-billed Grebe used to be. Tap in 'Wingl' and it jumps to Wingletang Bay, St Agnes. It is not perfect though. Lisvane Reservoir is not labelled on the 1:50,000 OS map, so is not indexed. The adjacent, larger Llanishen Reservoir will find it, however, as will just Lisvane. Also, a very few localities that are newly named on the most up-to-date editions of the paper maps, but do not appear on the slightly older editions, are not indexed. Howden's Pullover is one such example, where the gazetteer does not have it indexed, but it does appear on the screened map when you look just north of Saltfleet. Once you know where a site is, you can add it to your own 'points of interest' index for future reference.

Some of the Nokia 6110 and the Viewranger Settings (and the Route 66 Settings) menus definitely could be better explained in the manuals. The software is incredibly versatile and so necessarily quite complex. Better indexes and simple full menu addresses to each customisable option would make setting up and understanding the instructions much easier in the first instance.

Once installed and set up, however (perhaps with a little help from the help line), even technophobes will find it extremely easy to use and, on occasions, absolutely invaluable. It is highly recommended for all birders. For more details, visit your mobile phone supplier and [www.viewranger.com](http://www.viewranger.com).

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