

GEARFINDER

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BINOCULARS

KITE URSUS 8X32 £199

Reviewed by David Chandler

Ursus is a new range of entry-level roof-prism binoculars from Kite, a Belgian company. There are four models in the range – an 8x32, 8x42, 10x42 and 10x50. I was sent the 8x32 for review – the smallest, lightest and, with a sub-£200 RRP, the least expensive of the bunch. It was a lockdown review – I didn't take the binocular beyond my house and garden!

Form

The Ursus has a standard roof-prism form and a narrow red 'eye-ring' beneath the left eyecup. At 520g this is a lightweight binocular that certainly didn't feel heavy. It has shallow, lightly textured thumb indents which I am not a fan of – I'll put my thumbs where I want, thank you very much – but these indents are subtle enough not to irritate.

This binocular sat naturally in my hands, the one-finger-wide focus wheel came to hand easily enough and build quality seemed pretty good. Focus wheel movement was lumpy at first, but with a bit of use this soon smoothed out – presumably once the lubricant had found its role in life. The wheel moves moderately stiffly through just over one turn, anti-clockwise towards the more distant birds.

For birding, mostly you won't need to move it more



than half a turn. There's a ring for adjusting the dioptre beneath the right eyepiece, which is stiff enough to stay in position once set, and twist-up rubber-coated metal eyecups. The mechanics on these seemed good. Kite's blurb says

these are '4-stage', but I could only find one intermediate click-stopped position, making them 3-stage. That's not a problem though. The eyecups are removable (you unscrew them) so can be replaced if necessary or to allow better

access for cleaning the eyepieces. Waterproof? Yes. Filled with nitrogen? Yes. Rubber-armoured? Of course. One minor criticism – I'd like the strap-attachment lugs a little bit nearer the eyepieces to reduce the chance of them 'interfering' with my hands.

Function

The Ursus produced a very good image, though perhaps not quite so good at close range. Brightness and sharpness are good and I didn't notice any distracting edge-softness. The field of view is very good and focus-precision is good, with sometimes just a bit of 'searching for sharpest'. Close-focus, however, is disappointing. Kite say it's 2.8m but I found that to be seriously optimistic – I measured it at around 3.8m.



For most birding this won't be an issue, but don't buy this Ursus if you want to do lots of insect-watching.

Chromatic aberration on the other hand, aka colour-fringing, seemed to be well-controlled. Airborne House Martins and Swift in an overcast sky were colour-fringe-free, though I did see a little on a chimney-based Carrion Crow and a Starling on an aerial. It really wasn't bad, though – I was quite impressed.

The Ursus performed pretty well in low light, too – delivering a good image 10 minutes after sunset on an overcast day in early May, though it was beginning to struggle in the shadows.

Kite say "the short hinge design allows your fingers to wrap around the barrel, and use the instrument with one hand only". You can use this binocular single-handed, but not because of the short hinge. Those words may be more applicable to the bigger binoculars in the Ursus' range.

Finally, the objective covers. As is pretty well the norm these days, these are tethered and removable. I thought these were a little loose fitting and could be lost as a consequence.

SPECS

- Eye relief: 16.8mm
- Field of view: 7.8°/136m@1,000m
- Close focus: 2.8m
- Weight: 520g
- Width x height: 120x126 mm
- RRP: £199
- Warranty: 30 years
- Supplied with: zip-up, padded case; neoprene strap; objective covers; rainguard
- Web: kiteoptics.co.uk

VERDICT

This is a good, entry-level binocular, that is lightweight, easy enough to handle, and reasonably good-looking(!). Mostly, it delivers a very good view. It has an impressive field of view and seems to manage colour-fringing well. Close-focus is disappointing, but not an issue for most birding scenarios. This Ursus is, however, priced a bit higher than some of the competition.

- OPTICS ★★★★★
- HANDLING ★★★★★
- PRICE ★★★★★
- OVERALL ★★★★★

TRIED & TESTED GEAR

BOOTS

HOKA ONE ONE WOMEN'S SKY TOA GORE-TEX, £160

If you're not a trail runner, you're unlikely to have heard of Hoka One One. And, unless you speak Maori, you will be wondering what the brand name means. Roughly speaking, it means 'fly over the earth'.



If these boots can help you do that, the price is justified.

Hoka One One started out in France and wanted to create a running shoe for going down hills faster. The result was a shoe with a big sole and deluxe cushioning. These days Hoka One One is California-based and also makes products for hiking – which should of course, work for birders. The Sky Toa is one of those products.

This is a very lightweight boot – one size 6.5 with a little bit of mud weighs around 370g. The synthetic uppers claim to be durable and breathable, the rubberised midsole foam provides cushioning, and the 'Vibram' Megagrip hi-traction outsole has "multidirectional lugs for supreme grip on varied terrain". And to keep the wet stuff out, there's a built-in GORE-TEX bootie. This boot, then, should cope from trail to tea-room.

So, how well does it perform? Most of this review took place during lockdown, with the local fen as the main testing ground. We'll need to get out of lockdown to try them on something significantly above sea-level!

The Toa is very lightweight, but its build quality couldn't be faulted. It was instantly comfortable and cosy, and provided soft but effective ankle support and plenty of space in the toe box. The sole is larger than you might expect and delivers plenty of support and 'bounce' – good enough to wear during a never-before-attempted Joe Wicks PE workout! After a fair bit of use, the shoe softened a little (not a problem), but was still supportive. Are they waterproof? Yes. They kept the wet out during a walking-through-wet-grass test and during the splashing-through-some-pretty-deep-puddles test.

These have become my wife Ruth's go-to footwear. She did, incidentally, find wearing better than average socks (Bridgale Hike Ultra Lights) made the experience even better. On the downside, some people might find the Toas a bit warm, and the colour schemes on offer won't be to everyone's taste.

Are they worth £160? Time will tell. I almost forgot. The Sky Toa GORE-TEX is 100% vegan. No cheese with these, then.

Available in black/Antigua sand, black iris/aquamarine and dragonfly/aqua haze in sizes 3.5-9.5. Going up half a size from your normal is recommended. hokaoneone.eu/en/gb

VERDICT

To quote Ruth: "Sometimes, I find it difficult to get good quality boots that suit my feet and walking habits. I would never have considered these but now I have them I really love them."