undated so that the outermost point becomes an island between Matsmässan [24 February, traditionally the first day of spring] and Yule. This ground is generally known as the heath and is thin and overburdened with windborne sand." Of Skanör, Linnaeus wrote: "He is situated a couple of musket shots from the north sea…the road to the village from the mainland can scarcely be seen and instead you drive along the beach when the tide is out, from Kämpinge and or over the heath along bridleways."

He continued: "He who seeks a quiet retreat can hardly find anywhere in Sweden quieter than this, for here no people of the classes reside."

Of Falsterbo, Linnaeus wrote: "Falsterbo is an even smaller village, situated on its own almost a fourth of a mile (2.5km) south of Skanör… Shifting sands have swept across all the streets and lanes. He consists now of 25 citizens, mostly fishermen or seafarers as in Skanör."

"The lantern shines from the southernmost point so that seafarers do not become wrecked on the reef that runs for a whole mile (10km) under the water to the southeast. The lantern is an iron basket hanging from a high pole in which coal burns at night."

Linnaeus visited the peninsula at midsummer and described everyday life, the countryside and the flora and fauna. He noted what he found in abundance, such as amber, bog-myrtle, fennel and children (!), and what was lacking, such as rats, walnut trees and forest.

His observations on the birdlife are sparing, though he noted Oystercatchers "patrolling all the beaches" and that Ringed Plovers and Lapwings "flew in profusion". Had he visited a few months later he would have experienced the fantastic migration of birds that passes over the peninsula every autumn.

Linnaeus called Falsterbo "an open farming village". A view of Storgatan at the end of the 1800s where it merged into Falsterbovägen at the junction with N. Vånggatan. Photo: Lars Dufberg's collection.

A model of the "Lantern" (see Linnaeus's description above). This was the forerunner of the lighthouse, which was built in 1793-96, and which remains a landmark to this day. Photo: Lars Dufberg's collection.

Salted Honey-buzzards

In Linnaeus's day and for many years afterwards, birds were a source of food for the peninsula's inhabitants and offered a welcome variation on the local diet. This is confirmed by a passage in Irish author Patrick O'Brian's 1981 novel *The Surgeon's Mate*, set on an English sea vessel during the Napoleonic era. Visiting Gothenburg, British Royal Navy officer Stephen Maturin receives a gift from the harbour master – smoked reindeer tongues and a barrel of salted Honey-buzzards! The harbour master assures Stephen that they actually are Honey-buzzards and not Common or Rough-legged Buzzards.

"Did you shoot them sir?" Stephen asked.

"Oh no," said the Commandant, quite shocked. "You must never shoot a Honey-buzzard: it ruins the flavour. No, we strangle them."

"Do they not resent this?"

"I think not," said the Commandant. "It happens at night. I have a small house at Falsterbo, a peninsula at the far end of the Sound with a few trees upon it; here the birds come in the autumn, myriads of birds flying south, and great numbers roost in the wood, so many you may scarcely see the trees. We choose the best, pluck them down, and so strangle them. It has been done for ever; all the best salted buzzards come from Falsterbo."

O'Brian is known for his rigorous fact-checking and we can therefore take it as read that there was an intensive buzzard migration at Falsterbo in the early 19th century and that the landscape was largely tree-less. Indeed, it was not until the latter part of the century that tree planting began in earnest in an attempt to curb erosion and sand movements.

The first descriptions of large numbers of migrating birds were made by the zoologist Sven Nilsson. In an 1819 travelogue he wrote: "There's hunting on the beaches. Large numbers of waterfowl were seen and, in fewer numbers, a large Totanus, probably Calidris. Countless numbers of small waders swarmed around."

Äkta nysaltade bivråkar från Falsterbo

Sketch:
Peter Elfman.

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