



RSPB East Surrey Local Group

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2008

No 44

LEADER'S LETTER

Once again we are approaching another year, yes it's the Group's 25th birthday on January 7th – doesn't time fly when you're having fun! Thanks to Ann, we have attended new and varied venues for sales and thank you to everyone who has helped and supported us.

Our outings have been very productive with great northern diver, osprey, wood curlew and pectoral sandpipers to name but a few of the interesting species seen. Whilst it has been good to see so many new faces in the last couple of years or so it would be great if we could increase numbers further both at indoor meetings and on field trips; so why not bring a friend or two along.

Finally please don't forget to support our quiz evening on 31st October 2008. It's teams of 6, the questions are varied and not too serious - it's a fun evening with a super fish and chips interlude. We raised over £550 last time so let's better that and help wildlife. Tickets available at indoor meetings or just contact me on 01883 625404.

Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year

P.S. Don't forget to come to the January meeting to celebrate our special birthday.

CROCODILE ISLAND

Fancy a bird watching safari on an Island in the Nile, at the exorbitant cost of 25 Egyptian pounds - £2.50 sterling?

This consisted of a walk for about an hour and a half with a local guide. As we walked across the complex we saw hoopoe, pied kingfisher, spur winged plover and cattle egrets. Leaving the hotel grounds there were crested larks on the path, fan-tailed warbler, and graceful prinia.

Looking towards the Nile we could see widgeon, shoveller, and pintail on the water, and in the reeds, purple, night, and squacco herons, together with cattle and little egrets.

Further on there was a northern wheatear, and closer to the edge of the Nile there were black winged stilts, green and wood sandpipers, and Senegal thick knees.

As we walked back into the hotel grounds our guide pointed out a nesting black-winged kite and finally a masked shrike.

Well worth the cost - undoubtedly the best £2.50, I've ever spent!

Brian Hobley

LOCAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

There were some good birds seen in our area this spring. Barn owls were seen on Farleigh Court Golf Course and on the Titsey Estate, where a spotted flycatcher

appeared in the first week of May but sadly didn't stay to breed. At the same time black terns were passing through Bough Beech Reservoir and several returning nightingales fluted their unmistakable song to an appreciative audience. An unusual sighting was a snow goose over the Downs at Woldingham on 21st May, and at nearby North Downs Golf Course a marsh harrier passed through on 21st June.

During the next two months at the same site crossbills were seen with up to 18 birds present on 19th July. There wasn't much to shout about in August with it being the wettest on record-much like the whole year in fact!! An excellent find was a wryneck in a Warlingham garden on 8th September but sadly this bird eventually perished. The second week of September brought 3 whinchats to Riddlesdown and the first returning wheatears to Nore Hill Chelsham on the 8th.



Wheatear - Martin Cade

This day was also noteworthy for the arrival of migrant meadow pipits. On the 11th September

there were two stonechats and considerable numbers of chiffchaffs at Warren Barn Woldingham where at least 4 common buzzards were present most of the year. There was a magnificent juvenile grey phalarope at Bough Beech the same day following a countrywide dispersal of this pelagic species including 50 birds seen at one site in Scotland. Bough Beech hosted further 'goodies' on the 15th with a passing osprey (they don't seem to stop these days since the trout fishing/stocking ceased), a returning black tern and a juvenile arctic. It was at this time that significant numbers of migrating honey buzzards were being reported from the eastern counties. In all possibly half the numbers seen in the 'once in a lifetime' movement of September 2000 were involved. Unfortunately only the odd bird was spotted in our area including at Bough Beech and Beddington Sewage Farm. An 'exceptional' passage for the UK however is a drop in the ocean compared to nearly a million of these magnificent raptors which pass through Eilat in Israel in a season. As for dropping in the ocean, your Editor actually witnessed this sad spectacle from Tarifa in southern Spain in the spring of 1984. The honey buzzards had obviously left the Atlas Mountains and the coast of Africa to make the relatively short sea crossing to the Spanish mainland. Unfortunately weather conditions changed very quickly and the weaker birds perished in the sea before our very eyes and the ones that made landfall crashed unceremoniously into the nearest treetops, with bills wide open gasping for air. Weather conditions too played a key part in the outstanding seabird passage on the North Kent coast on 23rd September this year. In a fairly strong north-easterly wind with squally showers a record 267 great skuas passed Reculver, together with 53 Arctic skuas. I

was lucky enough to be at Shellness on the Isle of Sheppey, where along with similar numbers of the above two species we saw 4 pomarine skuas, 162 gannets, 2 Manx shearwaters and an amazing 4 juvenile Sabine's gulls.



Sabine's gull – David Walker

For me a truly memorable day was only dampened by my thoughts of Dave Davenport, who was a regular sea watching fixture here and whose sad passing on 27th April has left an irreplaceable void. When I'm struggling to identify a dot on the horizon I shall forever remember all the kind unselfish advice this wonderful knowledgeable man gave freely to me and countless others. Finally the first redwings of the autumn were seen at Westerham on September 23rd together with a siskin flock in excess of 100 birds. Brambling usually arrive in the second week of October so be alive to their distinctive nasal calls on or about the 10th.

BUTTERFLY PARASITES

I wonder how many of you have seen small tortoiseshell butterflies this year? I haven't seen any!! Only a couple of years ago this species was, along with the whites, the most common of butterflies. Butterfly Conservation say that populations have fallen by over 80 per cent in the South East. A very small fly (*Sturma bella*), common on the European mainland and first spotted over here 10 years ago, is possibly the culprit. The eggs of this fly are being found on nettles, the food plant of the small tortoiseshell caterpillars. It is believed the caterpillars are eating these eggs which then hatch and

kill them. So climate change is perhaps having its first significant effect on our fauna. Watch this space - or possibly watch your buddleia next spring!! The plight of this once common butterfly demonstrates just how quickly things can change, and how important it is to monitor all species no matter how common! Despite the lack of any real summer and poor numbers of other species, at least chalkhill blues were seen in good numbers locally along with silver washed fritillaries.



Silver washed fritillary – Ray Baker

Let us hope that like the world economy things aren't as bad as they seem - I wouldn't bank on it though!!

Brian Thomas

CARNAGE IN THE MED

It has recently been estimated that more than a million birds, mostly migrants, have been killed in Cyprus in the last year and served up as local delicacies. Although trapping and consumption is banned, they still find their way onto restaurant menus. A spokesman for the Birdlife charity on the eastern Mediterranean island, (which unfortunately lies on a key migratory route), says that 'unless decisive action is taken the future will be bleak for Europe's migratory birds.'

Whilst the trapping is totally indiscriminate, the main targets are song thrushes, blackcaps and robins. Birds are caught on sticks dipped in sticky lime, or in fine mist nets concealed in vegetation. In coastal areas particularly, bird-song recordings are played to lure the birds to their sad fate. There

are also reports of boats being used to trap at sea. All this follows on from the appalling single massacre of over 50 red-footed-falcons last autumn on the island at the Akrotiri peninsular.

Such carnage could mean Malta being usurped as migration massacre capital of Europe! Sadly when I look at my Christmas cards this year with the robins in the snow I won't be able to block out the image of these beautiful and harmless little creatures being grilled or fried and sold for 5 euros each in some distant tavern. I know which islands in the Med I won't ever be visiting!

Brian Thomas

CAMPAIGNS

Over the past few years our Society has had some great success with its campaigns. Staff, volunteers and supporters across the UK are to be congratulated on the following:

- More than £1 million raised for both the Save the Albatross and Save the Sumatran Rainforest campaigns.
- Hundreds of thousands of pledges submitted to Number 10 Downing Street in support of the campaigns to Safeguard our Sealife and Stop Climate Chaos.

Our work together has made some wonderful conservation work possible:

- Our Albatross Task Force doubled in size in the past year from 3 to 6 countries and continues to keep seabirds off the hook;
- Our team in Harapan Rainforest, Sumatra is now more than 80 people strong, has effectively halted illegal logging and is beginning to win the hearts and minds of local people in the area.

- As part of Stop Climate Chaos, we can say RSPB supporters played a big role in pressuring the UK Government to come up with a yearly carbon budget that is required to shrink every year. Similar government debates are unfolding in Scotland and Northern Ireland this year and in 2009-2010.

As for our call for an effective Marine Bill to protect our precious marine wildlife, the struggle continues, but there is every hope of a Bill being introduced in Westminster's next parliamentary session, which will give us and our supporters the opportunity to call once again for wildlife protection.

For the campaign to stop the illegal killing of our magnificent birds of prey, the work is just beginning. The Society has a campaign goal to gather at least 100,000 pledges of public support in the first year, and grow this number year on year so that the pressure on wildlife criminals to stop their illegal activity becomes irresistible. Your voice and support really has made a difference so don't stop now.

BIRD ATLAS SURVEY 2008

We are almost at the end of the first year of a four year survey organised by the BTO to assess the winter and breeding distribution of the country's birds. The survey is based on 2km square tetrads being covered four times a year - two in the winter and two in the summer. Each survey visit has to be for two hours, recording all the birds seen and/or heard within that time, and in the summer months recording indications of breeding evidence. One of the four tetrads that I surveyed this year covered the southern half of Godstone to Tilburstow hill, and east to just beyond the village church. I recorded some sixty species in all over the four visits, which broke down into

forty seven species in the winter surveys and fifty three species in the summer months, including twenty eight species where there were indications of breeding. Although I did not see any particularly uncommon birds, common tern were recorded on a number of occasions and common buzzard were also seen a number of times showing the increasing spread of this bird into our area. A hobby was seen on one occasion late in the summer.



Brambling

In addition to the birds recorded on the timed survey visits, a number of other birds were recorded such as brambling, lesser redpoll, and willow warbler.

The timed tetrad visits cover each area in just one year, but additional surveys, known as roving survey visits, can cover any area over the four years as many times as one wants to survey. These roving visits are likely to pick up birds that are missed on the timed visits, so at the end of the four year cycle one should have a complete picture of the wintering and breeding numbers in any given area. In East Surrey many of the tetrads have been covered in this first year and at the end of the four years we should have a good idea of the distribution of birds in our area, and no doubt we will hopefully turn up some surprises.

Keith Brandwood

EVENING MEETINGS 2009			FIELD TRIPS 2009	
JAN	Wed 14th	Dominic Couzens: "Vive la difference." Light-hearted comparison of life styles of British and European birds.	Sun 18th	Harty Ferry & Shellness.
FEB	Wed 11th	Barry Kaufman-Wright: "Seasons of woodland." Enjoy the flora and fauna of typical English broad-leaved woodland.	Sun 15th	Pagham, Selsey & West Fields RSPB.
MAR	Wed 11th	Dennis Newland: "On the River Zambezi in Zimbabwe." A personal insight into game watching in changing weather conditions.	Sun 15th	Dungeness.
APR	Wed 8th	AGM – Guest speaker- Glen Jacobs (RSPB). Learn about the RSPB reserves and attractions of nearby South Essex.	Sun 19 th Sun 26th	Northwood Hill & Cliffe. Seaford Head. (6.30.a.m. meet at Splash Point for sea watch).
MAY	Wed 13th	Patrick Coulcher : "Mountains of Scotland." Enjoy the natural history of the highlands and islands.	Sun 10 th	Minsmere RSPB Reserve. Coach trip (Pick up 7.30 a.m. Godstone).
JUN	Wed 10th	David Darrell-Lambert: "Improve your bird-watching skills." Useful tips on enjoying birding, identifying birds and keeping records.	Sun 14th	Stodmarsh and Grove Ferry
JUL	Wed 8th	Richard Pople : "Birding the Gambia." See many colourful birds in a mosaic of habitats.	Sun 19th	Mystery Trip
AUG	SUMMER BREAK		Sun 16th	Rye Harbour and Pett Level.
SEP	Wed 9th	Gordon Lansbury : "Wild Florida." Come and see the wildlife of this popular American holiday destination.	Sun 13th	Beachy Head, Belle Tout and Birling Gap.
OCT	Wed 14th	Mike Read: "Red Kite country." Admire the wildlife and landscapes of un-spoilt mid- Wales through the seasons.	Sun 18th	Rainham Marshes.
NOV	Wed 11th	Brian Nobbs : "Birdwatching in Trinidad & Tobago." Enjoy the flavour of South America with a Caribbean beat."	Sun. To be arranged	Boat Trip. Chichester Harbour.
DEC	Wed 9th	Christmas Meeting– members' tales/ photographs.	Sun 13th	Elmley Marshes RSPB.



Visit our website for all the latest news:
www.eastsurreyspb.co.uk

Field trips start from Godstone Green Car Park at 8.00 am, unless otherwise stated. Half day trips – see above for time and place. For details of coach trips contact Brian Hobley (01883 625404).

Warm waterproof clothing and stout footwear should be worn. Bring a packed lunch for day trips. No dogs.

Alterations to some of the proposed venues may be necessary at the last minute.

NOTE: If going direct to venue please notify leader at least 24 hours in advance in case of changes.

Indoor Meetings will be held at the White Hart Barn, Godstone in 2009 starting at 8.00 pm.

Admission currently £2.00 for adults, £1.00 for fledglings.

Other events arranged during the year are advertised at the indoor meetings and on the website:

<http://www.eastsurreyspb.co.uk>. There is no group subscription, new visitors are always welcome.

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