



Galapagos Dove



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nature

RSPB East Surrey Local Group

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2010

No 47

LEADER'S LETTER

This is the last leader's letter I shall be writing. After 10 years it is time for a change with fresh ideas and a new look, so I will be handing the reins over to the capable hands of John Lawrence who has given us a host of cracking speakers for which I give him my heartfelt thanks. I would also like to give my grateful thanks to all the rest of the committee, past and present, for all their dedicated assistance over this time. I am sure the group will go from strength to strength with still many more new faces and give John the strong support that has been afforded me.

Thank you all for the help and support you have given me over the past decade.

Brian Hopley

A COLD WINTER - GOOD FOR GARDEN BIRDWATCHING

Since the first snow of this winter, I have recorded thirty eight species of birds in the garden - in a usual week I normally record an average of sixteen species. As soon as the snow started to fall, fieldfares, redwings, mistle thrushes, together with our regular blackbirds and song thrushes, stripped the remaining berries off the rowans, holly and cotoneaster. The first snow also brought in a bullfinch

that stayed for just a few minutes, along with a pied wagtail and grey wagtail that came in most days until the end of January. Our regular blue tits, great tits and coal tits were joined by up to eight long-tailed tits, a bird that is usually only an occasional visitor to the garden, but this winter they have come daily, and are still visiting.



Redwing

With the snow on the ground up to three black-headed gulls took the chance of swooping in to grab morsels of food off the lawn. At the end of December a little egret flew in and walked down to feed in the stream on the edge of the garden, and a moorhen took up residence for three weeks. Goldfinches, siskins and lesser redpolls visited the feeders virtually every day, surprisingly in fewer numbers than the previous winter. Up to four great spotted woodpeckers became regular visitors, often squabbling with each other, and one morning a green woodpecker made a brief visit. A jay has become a regular visitor over

the past year, but four carrion crows in the garden is a rare sight. Two hybrid mallards, probably from Godstone Farm, came up stream to loiter in the garden for several minutes one day. A male and female house sparrow, the first for about a year, have become daily visitors although they don't stay for long at any one time. Another almost daily visitor is a fox sometimes appearing during the middle of the day. A male sparrowhawk has made several flights through the garden. I haven't seen him catch anything, but it has frightened off all the other birds for just a few minutes. The first of March, some say the first day of spring, saw a cock pheasant poking among the flower beds.

Keith Brandwood

CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

Reliving our holiday of 3 weeks in Canada in September 2009, we were very fortunate in leaving Heathrow only 20 minutes late on an Air Canada flight to Toronto: it was an excellent journey, really quite smooth. We had the most amazing sight of the south tip of Greenland with just the coastline visible with the snow and glaciers reflecting the sunlight. We were met at the airport by Eileen's son and quickly whisked away to his apartment in Quern, about an hour from Toronto.

During our first week we went out to various places by bus and Paul's car. We were booked to go away for a two night week-end break in the south west part of Algonquin Park (larger than Wales). Once there we were all up and out at dawn to drive along Highway 60 (the only through road in the park) looking for moose. This is the best time as they feed in nearside lakes and ponds, but we only saw one female fairly close. The autumn colours of the maples were picturesque but the highway is too dangerous: with huge trucks speeding by, it's not suitable for stopping. Luckily enough there are several side roads, all dead ends, where you are able to park and take photos. The mornings were frosty and foggy, making the lakes, trees and marshes very attractive. The two most memorable sights were just stopping at a pull-off, getting out of the car and within seconds having gray jays (the size of ours), eating nuts and seeds out of our hands. They were fearless and amazingly tame.

Even more special however, was a male spruce grouse displaying on a roadside verge. Again this species is amazingly tame but very rarely seen. We took photos out of the car window as it ate grit and displayed just a couple of feet away! It is the size of our red grouse, and truly stunning. Other good birds here included chickadee, yellow bellied sapsucker and great blue heron.

Over the rest of our stay we were out visiting reserves, old gravel pits and marshes. At one of these we saw upwards of 40 great white egrets flying and roosting; these are really large birds. In addition there were belted kingfishers, which are bigger than jackdaws. Else-

where we saw eastern kingbird (a flycatcher), hairy woodpecker and red breasted nuthatch. We even chanced upon a group of turkey vultures feasting on a 'road killed' racoon.

Eileen's son has a pole feeder system fitted to his small garden fence and for the first time in eight years there was a ruby throated humming bird on it. Feeding at the same time were: house sparrows, northern cardinal, downy woodpecker, white breasted nuthatch, American goldfinch, house finch, and common grackle.

Whilst out on another day we saw really huge skeins of double crested cormorants going to roost. We also added pied billed grebe, common merganser, wild turkey, spotted sandpiper, killdeer, ring billed gull, blue jay, and cedar waxwing to our trip list. In addition to moose, we saw white tailed deer, several species of squirrel, chipmunk, and the monarch butterfly. After a superb holiday we returned home extremely jet lagged but very happy with so many memorable sightings and experiences. A spring trip would have trebled our tally, but we were very satisfied with our taste of Canada.

D G Dinnage & Mrs EG Grimwood

LIVING THE DREAM (PART TWO)

In concluding my last article at Machu Picchu I was blissfully unaware how lucky we were to visit when we did in view of the catastrophic floods and landslides that have subsequently washed away the only access to this magical place. The next part of our South American venture was to leave Peru, and fly north to Ecuador. We stayed in the capital Quito, some 10,000 feet up in the Andes. Our accommodation, the Villa Colona, was very close to the

centre and from its magnificent roof garden we had a panoramic view over a 30 mile wide city of 2 million. We visited the President's palace and took a trip up the cable car. Taking an overnight bag we travelled north on the Pan American highway to Otavalo, a town with a marvellous indigenous market. We stayed nearby at the Hacienda Cusin in eco huts in the magnificent grounds of an old monastery. Here was peace, perfect peace, with sumptuous vegetable/flower and fruit gardens full of nesting humming birds; and we even had golden-bellied grosbeaks feeding at our table!



Golden bellied grosbeak

To return to Quito, we negotiated rough mountain tracks back south to the Zuletta hacienda. It was here that we saw the massive Andean condor at close quarters. There is a captive breeding programme on this estate, so we were not only able to see wild flying birds but also view them at very close quarters. On day 14 of our trip we flew from Quito, via Guayaquil out into the Pacific, and landed at Baltra on South Seymour Island. Yes we had arrived in the magical Galapagos Islands! An inflatable (a Panga) picked us up from the nearby quay to take us out to our ship for the next 7 days, the Pinta. The azure sky was full of frigatebirds and blue-footed boobies, whilst the clear waters revealed, sharks, turtles, and sea lions.

I was enthralled; this was paradise on earth. I felt I had

chanced upon a lost world and could now appreciate how Darwin had been so captivated.



Elliot's storm petrel

After freshening up on board we lost no time in boarding a Panga to visit North Seymour. En route we were surrounded by Elliot's petrels and Galapagos shearwaters. Once on land the legendary tameness of all the animals was such that great care had to be taken to avoid treading on them! Nesting frigatebirds and boobies were everywhere, as were swallow tailed and lava gulls. I was so entranced by the marine iguanas, only an urgent shout from our guide saved me from a far too close encounter with a massive and threatening bull sea lion, either intent on including me in its harem or protecting his ladies from my advances!



Magnificent Frigatebird

After a 70 mile overnight cruise we woke at Punta Espinoza off Fernandina, the youngest of the 13 major islands in the archipelago. Here was an amazing combination of black volcanic bareness, with pumice lava flows underfoot, but inhabited by thousands of iguanas, Sally Lightfoot crabs, hawks, penguins and flightless cormorants. In the afternoon we landed at

Punta Moreno on Isabela Island. Its rocky shoreline was surrounded by black and red mangrove lagoons and there were close views of 3 volcanoes. The desolate and pristine landscape of immense black lava flows still supported Darwin's finches, Galapagos doves, and mockingbirds. After a rough crossing in the night we were at the obligatory Post Office Bay on Floreana. Like so many before us, including pirates and whalers, we posted our letters in the barrel and picked up ones we could deliver on returning home. At Punta Cormorant in the afternoon we snorkelled from pangas in waters full of the most amazing variety of coloured fish, together with turtles, rays and sharks. For me however, the marine highlight was having sea lions of all ages playing around me and harmlessly brushing by. In the afternoon we walked to the magical Flower Bay, so called because of its fine powder sand.

What a delight to sit with just a handful of others on a prime turtle nesting beach and watch Nasca and blue-footed boobies plunge diving between rays and sharks as they patrolled off shore, whilst countless frigatebirds sailed overhead. On our fourth day we visited Rabida Island, characterized by its red-coloured beach, due to the high iron concentrations. In contrast the afternoon saw us at Las Bachas on Santa Cruz Island where the sand is white and soft from the powdered coral. Not surprisingly it too is favoured by nesting turtles, Sally Lightfoot and hermit crabs. That evening we sailed to Puerto Ayora, mooring next to Prince Charles' yacht and a protective Ecuadorian gunboat! Here we went up into the highlands of Santa Cruz Island to visit the Scalesia forest

and find the wild giant tortoises. Back at Ayora we visited The Charles Darwin Research Station. We did see lonesome George, the only one of his particular kind left, and countless other tortoises, but we didn't bump into Prince Charles who was visiting. The following morning we moored off James Island. Lava flowed here less than 100 years ago. In the 'Ring of Fire' you are on the Nazca Plate and close to the Cocos and Pacific Plates. It was like standing in a moon landscape. After some more spectacular snorkelling offshore here, and close encounters with penguins and fur seals, we cruised round to Puerto Egas on the NW coast.

In the past a family called Egas settled here to extract salt, but the accidental release of goats caused the extinction of the land iguanas, eventually forcing the authorities to kill some 20,000 goats!

A wonderful experience on our last day was visiting the white coralline beach of Cerro Brujo on San Cristobal Island. Highlights were the hundreds of thousands of ghost crabs, Chatham mockingbird and Lava Lizard: both species endemic to this island. These were the same shores Darwin walked in September 1835 since this was the first island in the Galapagos he set foot on. My lasting memory on the final night on the boat, was watching a spectacular sunset and then the appearance of the Southern Cross, accompanied by fluorescent flying fish leaping at fantastic speed high out of the water to avoid the chasing sea lions.

Would I go back? I would jump at the chance!

Brian Thomas

EVENING MEETINGS 2010			FIELD TRIPS 2010	
JAN	Wed 13 th	Barry Wright: "Travels in South America" Birds, scenery and other strange antics from Venezuela to Argentina	Sun 17th	Dungeness Beach, RSPB, and raptor roost.
FEB	Wed 10 th	Bill Coster: "Birds of the Shetland Isles." An innovative digital presentation of this popular birders destination.	Sun 14th	East Head & Snowhill Marsh.
MAR	Wed 10 th	David Boag: "Safari – a book in the making." Enjoy the excitement, spectacle and amusing moments of an African wildlife trip.	Sun 14th	Rye Harbour – Long lagoon and Castle Water.
APR	Wed 14 th	AGM – Guest speaker – Sue Armstrong Brown, Head of Agricultural Policy, RSPB. Farming, birds and the countryside.	Sun 18 th	Stodmarsh & Grove Ferry
MAY	Wed 12 th	Sue Buckingham: "Flowers of South East England". Enjoy the species and habitats of the region, including the Downs.	Sun 25th	Seaford Head & Splash Point (6.30 a.m. start at Splash Point for sea watch).
JUN	Wed 9 th	Chris Ward: "Birds of Aphrodite's Island". The birds and wildlife of Cyprus.	Sun 9th	Minsmere RSPB Reserve. Coach trip (Pick up at Godstone at 7.30 a.m.).
JUL	Wed 14 th	Nigel Choat: "Wild Surrey". Look at the natural history photographed within a 25 mile radius of Guildford.	Sun 20 th	Lakenheath Reserve Suffolk. (NB Early start from Godstone at 6.30 a.m.)
AUG	SUMMER BREAK		Fri 25th	Ashdown Forest (Long car park), 7.30pm meet for nightjars.
SEP	Wed 8 th	John Wyatt: "Pharaoh's birds." An interesting insight into how Ancient Egypt relates to modern birding.	Sun 18 th	Mystery trip.
OCT	Wed 13 th	Ian Rumley-Dawson: "Wildlife of the Rocky Mountains". Enjoy a scenic cross-section of Canadian animals, plants and some birds.	Sun 15th	Lullington Heath.
NOV	Wed 10 th	Terry Bond: "Improve your bird identification skills". An interactive evening challenging our bird recognition.	Sun 19th	Beachy Head, Belle Tout and Birling Gap For passage migrants.
DEC	Wed 8 th	Christmas Meeting – members' tales/photographs.	Sun 17th	Reculver & Oare Marshes.
			Sun 21st	Pagham Harbour & Church Norton - winter swans.
			Sun 12th	Shellness & Harty Ferry.



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. Part 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 2010 starting at 8.00 pm.

Admission currently £3.00 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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If you would like to receive this publication by e-mail contact the Editor, Brian Thomas (e-mail: 13bjthomas@talktalk.net).

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