



Firecrest



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nature

## RSPB East Surrey Local Group

**NEWSLETTER**

**OCTOBER 2010**

**No 48**

### LEADER'S BLOG

This is my first Leader's letter since taking over from Brian Hobley at the April AGM. Brian was leader for over 10 years and will be a hard act to follow. Thankfully he will still be around and with the support and enthusiasm of the rest of my Committee we will continue to represent the RSPB locally. We have stands at many local events so please come and say "hello". We also organise monthly meetings in the White Hart Barn, Godstone and car outings around Surrey, Kent and Sussex. So why not join us and introduce your friends?

With far-reaching public spending cuts on the horizon, support for environmental interests, including our particular interest in native and visiting birds and their varied habitats, will be under increasing pressure. The recent "Letter to the Future" campaign with government has highlighted the need for a healthy environment as well as a healthy economy. Can we really afford not to continue to support appropriate conservation and management programmes and controls within our own reserves, but also in other protected places - the general countryside and beyond? 2010 is incidentally the

"International Year of Biodiversity". Although we may have differing views on the impact of species loss, the degradation of tropical rain forests, overfishing in our seas, the spread of wind farms etc., surely all our lives will be the poorer without albatrosses, bitterns, corncrakes, turtle doves and even the humble house sparrow as part of our birding experience?

We therefore need a continuing powerful voice for nature. Your continuing membership and financial support for the work of the RSPB will therefore be even more valued in the coming months. So speak up!

*John Lawrence*

### GARDEN BIRDS DYING?

A virulent disease called trichomonosis may have hit your gardens bird population. The disease is well known in pigeons, doves and birds of prey that feed on them. Since 2005 however, it has emerged in greenfinches with a massive drop in their numbers of over 33%. Chaffinches have also been affected with a 20% decline over the last 5 years. It is not caused by a virus as many people believe but by a protozoan parasite. The saliva of an infected bird can easily be picked up by healthy individuals at bird baths or feeding stations. Accordingly

it is very important to keep your feeders and birdbaths clean by disinfecting them periodically and changing the water daily. It is also wise to only put small amounts of food out so that old stuff doesn't accumulate. If you notice fluffed up individuals looking lethargic or having difficulty swallowing, then 'your' birds are likely to have it. There is a tendency for such birds to stay close to feeders or water sources so there is a strong possibility that you will eventually discover corpses in your gardens. So keep vigilant and don't stop feeding birds, just make sure you keep everything clean to reduce the risk of a local outbreak.

### LOCAL BIRD AND WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS



**Great Grey Shrike**

After a magnificent great grey shrike appeared in the Beddlestead valley Chelsham for a few days at the end of March the best birds in April were 20 wheatears and 3 ring ouzels at

Nore Hill in the same Parish. May was good for tawny owls with 2 young seen at Riddlesdown and yet another ring ouzel turned up at Woldingham. In June a lucky few saw a golden oriole at Gabriels farm fishery Edenbridge - somewhat ironic when we went all the way up to Suffolk this summer in what turned out to be a vain attempt to track these now very, very rare UK breeders down! In July a flock of 9 crossbills flew over your Editor's Warlingham garden. On 20<sup>th</sup> July 20 mistle thrushes were at Warren Barn Farm, Woldingham, along with a family of little owls. Thanks to a tip off from Ann, tawny owls with two youngsters were seen exceptionally well from rooftops in and around Hurst Green Church. August was fairly quiet with a noticeable dearth of hobby sightings locally, but 3 immature curlew sandpipers turned up with a young osprey at Bough Beech during a heavy rainstorm on the 29<sup>th</sup>. September saw further good wader sightings at this locality with ringed plover, little ringed plover, spotted redshank (2), green and common sandpipers, ruff and greenshank. Ravens like buzzards have expanded their range and 2 were seen at Bough Beech on 8<sup>th</sup> October along with 8 buzzards. The writer saw his first redwing of the autumn on 6<sup>th</sup> of that month but larger flocks started to move through NNE on the 11<sup>th</sup> in gusty winds. As I write this on the same day there were 2 late wheatears at Nore Hill and a rare ring ouzel at Bough Beech. Red kites are doing exceptionally well locally with a minimum of 6 sightings in the spring just on the Woldingham downs and several in the autumn centred on the Marden Park area.



**Silver Washed Fritillary**

It won't be too long now before they nest in Surrey again and I believe this true of the raven as well. On the butterfly front it was a terrific year for silver-washed fritillaries with up to 6 of these magnificent insects at Gangers Hill, Woldingham on 9<sup>th</sup> July in company with 2 white-letter-hair-streaks and 3 purple emperors. The same species of fritillary was seen along with white admirals during August in the rides in Kings Wood Sanderstead.



**White Admiral**

As I write this today, the 11<sup>th</sup> October, there were small copper and comma still on the wing, and it's great to report that the small tortoiseshell seems to be making something of a comeback after what looked like total extinction here in the south. Finally adders were seen at Madeira plantation, Woldingham during the summer and up to 13 fallow deer can now be seen in the Marden Park area, supplementing their more common cousin here the Roe. Muntjac are also with us, but not encountered as much as the other two.

## **CREST-FALLEN IN NORTH KENT - A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE!**

Ten of the group met at Godstone for this trip to North Kent on 17<sup>th</sup> October. Our timing was excellent as our first port of call was at Oare Marsh and it was high tide. The east flood contained good numbers of roosting black-tailed-godwits, along with dunlin, redshank, snipe and lapwings. A couple of the group were lucky to get a brief glimpse of a water rail, and three high flying bearded tits was an unusual spectacle. On a turning tide we looked over the emerging mud flats on the Swale and were rewarded with excellent views of that most elegant of waders the curlew sandpiper. We saw up to six of these amongst a dunlin flock. Looking across the water towards Sheppey we picked up two distant spoonbills amongst the many egrets; I wonder how long it will be before these spectacular birds are nesting in southern England? We braved the strong and cold northerly wind with the odd shower, and walked along the western bank of Faversham Creek. We were fortunate in finding a smart red-throated-diver here that looked somewhat comical as it slid across the mud into the creek. On the way back to the cars we heard the explosive song of a Cettis warbler. We moved on to Reculver Towers and on reaching this ancient monument we spotted a number of small birds catching insects high up on its walls. They were goldcrests, -Europe's very smallest bird, and rather than being just a family party it soon became apparent that we had chanced on a recent and large scale 'fall' of these diminutive creatures. There were hundreds of them, moving from the beach inland to suitable cover. Many were clearly exhausted, and at least one disorientated as it momentarily landed on the telescope I was carrying! Behind the nearby Oyster Farm we encoun-

tered just more and more goldcrests, and in a newly harrowed field discovered four very handsome bramblings. With so many recently arrived continental migrants it made sense to check out the small copse of poplar, sycamore and hawthorn behind the caravan park. With so many crests 'on offer' we thought it a fair bet that firecrests might be present.



**Pallas's Warbler**

Our hunch eventually paid dividends, not with a firecrest however, but because we got excellent views of an agile and very handsome Pallas's warbler, a rare Asian vagrant. This was a new and very exciting bird for many of the group, but I would not be surprised however, if the lasting memory was of all those countless goldcrests; a truly unique experience. We returned to our cars very content with an excellent day's birding and thankful that we hadn't been flattened on the seafront by one of the hundreds of charity day cyclists doing their bit for the British Heart Foundation.

#### **LAKENHEATH FIELD TRIP**

Twelve of the group turned up for a 6.30 a.m start to visit a new venue - Lakenheath Suffolk. The early start was a very good idea since the roads were very quiet and we did the 110 miles journey in one and three quarter hours. We were somewhat disappointed to have left good weather at Godstone only to encounter a strong cold wind and a bit of drizzle further north! This reserve was made possible by the acquisition,

some 13 years ago, of former farmland and poplar plantation (grown originally here for commercial match production). It was a good area for golden oriole, but with many of these trees disappearing with felling the Society stepped in just in time to save habitat for this beautiful and very rare British bird. Whilst the inclement weather did not make listening or viewing birds in the reed beds or poplar plantations particularly easy, we did get some great sightings. Foremost of these had to be the many and very close encounters with cuckoos which were very vociferous, and in direct contrast with the situation in our local area; obviously they are still doing well here. Superb flying views of bitterns were also noteworthy and reflect the success of site development to encourage extensive bittern friendly reed beds.



**Common Crane**

Several close marsh harriers also performed for us but the two pairs of cranes decided to remain hidden on the day. The warden advised that one pair had lost their young but the others had two chicks - this is fantastic news. Some of the group heard brief snatches of golden oriole song/calls but no birds were sighted. It remains to be seen if these magnificent summer migrants manage to hang on here, as the species has declined in the UK from a peak of 40 pairs in 1971 to no more than 10 today. News of their success this year on site sounded disappointing! We didn't manage to catch up with grasshopper warbler, but despite the movement of the wind blown

reeds we did get good views of reed and sedge warblers that nest here in abundance along with the beautiful bearded tit. Our circular walk took us back via the Little Ouse and its tranquil water meadows with grazing Herefords and the odd narrow boat gliding silently by. The weather picked up and good numbers of swift and hobby flew very close to us. Whitethroats had obviously had a very good season as their song was heard everywhere and several young were in evidence. The visitors' centre, built only three years ago, was our last stop before the car park. We then drove the short distance north to Weeting Heath Reserve (Norfolk Wildlife Trust). We managed to see one stone curlew here, and had great views of a family of 4 stoats playing directly in front of the hides. We ended the day with cracking views of several more stone curlews at another site on the way home. All in all it was a very enjoyable day and I'm sure we'll be back next year when the orioles and cranes, and the weather, might be more obliging.

#### **QUIZ NIGHT AT GODSTONE.**

The group held a very successful quiz night on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October. Despite the excellent fish and chips supper arriving a tad late, it really was a fun night with over sixty people attending. and contributing to an overall profit of £366. It was a very close thing with two teams running neck and neck at the end and it took three tie-breakers for the 'Nonames' to eventually emerge as overall winners. Many thanks to all those who helped on the night, particularly to Quiz mistress Elitta, and her very able assistants Kathy and Richard. Do come along next time, you are guaranteed a great evening.

*Brian Thomas*

EVENING MEETINGS 2011			FIELD TRIPS 2011	
JAN	Wed 12 <sup>th</sup>	Gordon Langsbury: "Bird Islands of Britain" A last visit to the Group by this renowned bird photographer.	Sun 16 <sup>th</sup>	Dungeness.
FEB	Wed 9 <sup>th</sup>	Peter Holden: "A Celebration of Birds" Recollections with film clips of his 40 years' work for the RSPB.	Sun 13 <sup>th</sup>	Harty Ferry & Elmley.
MAR	Wed 9 <sup>th</sup>	Bill Coster: "Namibia and Hawaii/Midway" Two inimitable digital presentations of these less well-known areas.	Sun 27 <sup>th</sup>	Rye Harbour
APR	Wed 13 <sup>th</sup>	AGM – followed by Dieter Hoffman, Head of Global Programmes, RSPB. "A trip around the globe" – an overview of the RSPB's valuable international work.	Sun 17 <sup>th</sup>	Selsey Bill & Church Norton
MAY	Wed 11 <sup>th</sup>	Glenda Law: "Wildlife of Guyana". A recent visit to this under-reported birding destination.	Sun 8 <sup>th</sup> Sun 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Minsmere (Godstone at 7.30a.m Coach Trip). Acre Down New Forest (7.00am Godstone)
JUN	Wed 8 <sup>th</sup>	Jackie Garner: "Birds in Art". Enjoy the work of this talented artist, combining her love of birdwatching with painting.	Fri 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 12 <sup>th</sup> Fri 17 <sup>th</sup>	Ashdown Forest [Nightjar Watch]* Amberley Wild Brooks & Pulborough Ashdown Forest [Nightjar Watch]* *7.30p.m. at Godstone, 8.00p.m. at Long Car Park
JUL	Wed 13 <sup>th</sup>	Barry Wright: "Travels in South America" Birds, scenery and other strange antics from Venezuela to Argentina.	Sun 17 <sup>th</sup>	Mystery trip.
AUG	<b>SUMMER BREAK</b>		Sun 14 <sup>th</sup>	Stodmarch & Grove Ferry.
SEP	Wed 14 <sup>th</sup>	John Wyatt: "The Fauna of Ancient Egypt" More highlights from recent research and a fascinating book in the making.	Sun 18 <sup>th</sup>	East Head & Snowhill Marsh.
OCT	Wed 12 <sup>th</sup>	David Boag: "The Kingfisher". A reprise of his innovative study of one of our most colourful birds.	Sun 16 <sup>th</sup>	Reculver & Oare Marshes.
NOV	Wed 9 <sup>th</sup>	Dennis Newland: "On elephant back in Nepal" A journey through the country's National Parks and cultural sites.	Sun 13 <sup>th</sup>	Pagham Harbour & The Burgh.
DEC	Wed 14 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Meeting – members' tales/photographs.	Sun 18 <sup>th</sup>	Shellness & Harty Ferry.

All trips start from Godstone Pond at 8.00a.m. except where stated above



Visit our website for all the latest news:  
[www.eastsurreyspb.co.uk](http://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 Holey (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 2011 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](mailto:13bjthomas@talktalk.net)).

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