



Cuckoo by Martin Cade



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**RSPB East Surrey
Local Group**

NEWSLETTER

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LEADER'S BLOG

Now that the Queen's Jubilee and both Olympic events are over we can get back to serious birding matters like catching up with autumn migration. One of our most thought provoking evening talks in 2012 was John Buckingham's on bird migration. We look forward to him returning to tell us more about the reasons for, and mechanisms of how, birds manage to navigate their way back to their breeding or feeding grounds and why rarities turn up in unexpected places from time to time. But check our programme for next year as there are many more exciting and interesting topics covered, and if there is anything that you would like included in future please let me know.

It's sobering to think, however, that numbers of many of our iconic summer visitors – cuckoos, turtle doves, swifts, house martins, even swallows - have plummeted in recent years. Have you noticed any significant changes locally? We would love to hear about them and maybe hazard a guess about their causes.

And yet we can still look forward to thousands of waders, ducks, geese and their predators returning to our shores, seeking a welcome haven in our relatively mild winter months. Our programme of outings seeks out the best opportunities to enjoy these seasonal variations of bird life so why not join the intrepid few one Sunday? Our boat outing around Chichester

harbour in November might suit you.

The RSPB continues to speak up for birds and with your continued support we can seek a world richer in nature. We can all, in some small way, contribute to or support wildlife conservation projects wherever they can add most value for generations to come. But above all, continue to enjoy your birding in whichever way suits you.

*John Lawrence
Group Leader*

EVOLUTION IN ACTION

The holiday to New Zealand was never meant to be a birding holiday, more a general sightseeing and wildlife experience in a very distant country. And on both fronts the country certainly did not disappoint.

The experience going through airport security alerted us to how serious the New Zealanders look after their wildlife with a Bio security check as well as the normal baggage and personal checks. They do not want any more introduced species after the Maoris brought dogs and rats, and the Europeans followed with all variety of birds, small mammals and plant species; and then there is public enemy number one, the possum, from Australia. These introduced species are wiping out all the indigenous species to the point that many of them are now on the verge of extinction. They need all the help and protection they can get, and many small islands off the coast are now nature reserves

where there is an eradication programme of all introduced species.

So having survived a mild rebuke, because of some mud on my walking shoes, we had arrived in Auckland, set to journey southwards across both islands.

The North Island is all about wonderful scenery, volcanoes and Maori culture, and it is easy to get your fill of all three as you drive southwards. The area all around Rotorua is splendid for culture, scenery, and (unfortunately) the constant smell of sulphur from volcanic vents. The magnificent Tongariro National Park is the backdrop to the Hobbit films, with Mount Doom (Mt Ngauruhoe) prominent at 2,287 metres. The only disappointment of the North Island was the cancellation, due to bad weather, of our visit to Tiritiri Matangi Island, one of the major success stories of indigenous species protection. But this was balanced by a wonderful dusk tour of an enclosed 225 hectare nature reserve just outside Wellington. This is an area where almost all introduced mammal species have been eradicated behind 3 metre high fences, allowing species such as the diminutive little spotted kiwi and the takahe to survive and be seen.

The South Island is different again: dramatic scenery, dramatic weather (13 metres of annual rainfall in one place on the west coast!!) and dramatic wildlife (and only 1 million people spread over the size of England). First stop was

Kaikoura, the capital for whale-watching excursions.



Sperm Whale

We headed out to sea to be rewarded with sightings of 3 sperm whales and a large pod of dusky dolphins.



Royal Albatross

Additionally there were excellent sightings of royal albatross, Buller's mollyhawk, shy mollyhawk, giant petrel and Cape petrel.



Buller's Mollyhawk

The mollyhawks are slightly smaller versions of the enormous albatrosses, but nonetheless still have huge wingspans.

Across to the west coast and out came the torrential rain, unfortunately obscuring all views of Mt Cook, but not stopping us walking up to the face of a glacier with a guide -a fantastic, if rather wet, experience.



Cape Petrel

The final days saw us in the south-east extreme of the South Island, in Curio Bay next to the Catlins Forest Park. When we collected the keys for our wooden beach chalet from the owners they told us not to worry if we heard strange noises in the night, it would be the blue penguins nesting under the chalet!! And we did hear them, but unfortunately never managed to see them going to or from the sea at dawn or dusk. That wasn't the case with the yellow eyed penguin, second rarest penguin to the Galapagos penguin; with two seen in broad daylight crossing a nearby beach back to their nests after a day feeding at sea. A magical moment! The same beach also gave us our first sea lions guarding their young pup. What photo opportunities in a completely public area!

En route to our final destination of Dunedin we had a fortuitous stop in a wooded area where our count of smaller species rose dramatically, including the bellbird, fantail, tomtit, silvereye and NZ pipit. If you are ever in Dunedin don't miss Otago Harbour, a great place for red-billed gull, white-fronted tern, white-faced heron, the magnificent royal spoonbill, pied and variable oystercatchers, pied stilt, and Hector's dolphins, a very small but playful member of the dolphin family.

If you want fascinating and dramatic natural history showing evolution in action, New Zealand has it all.

Tony Natt

BIRDS OF THE WINDIES

A four day stay in Tobago at the Blue Haven Hotel, near the beach where Robinson Crusoe's model was cast away, was extremely productive for birds. Early morning walks in the grounds enabled me to see blue, grey, and palm tanagers, bananaquits, barred antshrikes, tropical kingbird and mockingbird, and rufous-vented chachalaca, a large species with a loud voice sounding like a flock of turkeys on speed. By the beach restaurant we encountered Trinidad motmot, which were partial to chips even if they were on your plate. A trip into the rain forest enabled me to see

rufous-tailed jacamar and one of the rarest humming birds - the white tailed sabrewing - almost driven to extinction by two massive hurricanes. The following day a trip to Little Tobago, a national nature reserve, produced sooty tern, brown noddy, and a colony of nesting red-billed tropic birds which were being parasitised by magnificent frigate birds. The highlight here was being shown a white tailed nightjar roosting in leaf litter just a few feet from where we were standing. On the way back to the hotel yellow crowned night heron, little blue heron and southern lapwing were all encountered close to the roadside. For a non specialised birding holiday it was great.

Brian Hopley

NOT SO SWIFT

What a spring and summer! No wonder we are renowned throughout the world for talking about the weather. One of my golfing pals, Frank Carmichael, rang me up at the beginning of July to enquire if the large number of swifts flying south over his property in Farleigh were returning to Africa. I immediately replied that, although they normally only stay 3 months with us, they don't usually return south as part of their 12,000 mile round trip until August. I suggested that they were most likely just moving away from a bad weather front in order to find food. After all, for a bird that flies 1.2 million miles in its average lifespan of 16 years, popping across the channel say from heavy showers in the South East to swallow a crop full of French flies(not fries!), would be a piece of cake, if you see what I mean. How wrong I was! Observations from Bird Observatories and other reports confirmed that there was an unprecedented early mass exodus of the species. Huge numbers, of what is already a fast declining species in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, have failed to breed this year. When insect food is in short supply swifts can slow their metabolism, and normally this proves to be a very successful and useful survival strategy. However this has not been a normal year, in fact it's been the wettest April to

June ever recorded. No surprise then to hear reports have been received of adult swifts pushing unhatched eggs out of their nests. The lack of insect food has meant they have been unable to feed themselves sufficiently, let alone incubate eggs or feed chicks. Let's hope the birds return to their traditional breeding roof eaves and towers in good numbers next spring, so that we can once again witness those evocative and magical screeching aerial chases across our evening skies.

Brian Thomas

TREES IN TROUBLE

Ray Baker, who lives at Lingfield, commented on the dearth of acorns on our oaks this year. When I checked my local trees I was amazed at how few had any acorns. Apparently the Forestry Commission are so short of good quality acorns this year (for germination) due to poor production across much of the UK and near Europe, that they have had to go as far afield as Poland to source supplies (and they don't want to use those due to genetic differences!). Most opinion seems to favour this phenomenon just being within the bounds of natural year-on-year variation, but neither Ray nor I are convinced of this and investigations are ongoing. This is, of course, very bad news for our wildlife, particularly the jays. Large numbers of these attractive birds join us from the near continent at this time of year and normally feast on the acorns. A sign of things to come was seeing one today in my garden, feeding on cotoneaster berries, something I haven't witnessed before. It isn't only a catastrophic year for the oaks, since my apple trees are also devoid of any fruit whatsoever. Reports of late-ripening berries, fruits and nuts in gardens and countryside - all vital natural food sources for wildlife - could leave birds, mice, voles and other mammals seriously hungry. Natural food is very important at this time of year and a lean autumn crop is the last thing that our wildlife needs. Providing food like fat-balls and seeds for birds is important, but it would be wonderful if

more people managed their gardens specifically with wildlife in mind. Not cutting back berry-bearing hedges, so that any fruit can be eaten by wildlife, and leaving fallen apples etc on the ground for species like blackbirds, thrushes and woodpeckers would be of considerable benefit. Instead of cutting off old seedheads now (e.g. plants like lavender), why not delay this until the spring, so attracting colourful species like goldfinches and redpolls. If conditions are particularly tough again this winter, such measures could prove a vital lifeline.

Brian Thomas

LOCAL BIRD NEWS

Having lived in the area all my life I have accumulated a long and varied list of different bird species. It obviously gets increasingly difficult to add new birds. It was therefore exciting for me to add yet another the other day whilst walking near Warren Barn, Woldingham. I saw some jackdaws and carrion crows, 'mobbing' another bird high in the sky. These encounters in our area usually concern birds of prey, particularly buzzards or sparrow hawks being harassed and dived upon by corvids (i.e. members of the crow family); but on this occasion their target was a magnificent raven, by far the largest and most impressive member of the same family. Once very much confined to Wales and the SW, these impressive birds have, like the buzzard, expanded their range eastwards in very recent times. They have a very distinctive deep honking call, which is often the first thing alerting you to their presence. So keep your eyes and ears open over the winter, and you could well spot one on your doorstep.



Turtle Doves (Martin Cade)

It has, of course, been a good few years since we have had breeding turtle doves in our immediate area, with the possible exception of Hurst Green. I would be very interested, however, to hear if readers had noticed any reduction in the numbers of its cousin, the collared dove, since this species seems to have reduced markedly in the Warlingham area over the last 2 years. As I write this in the first week of October, migrant swallows are still passing through, but grounded migrants have been few and far between, with just a handful of wheatear, whinchat, and stonechats at Nore Hill Chelsham. A firecrest was found dead in the summer on a road near Croham Hurst. Could these diminutive and extremely handsome birds be breeding in our area now I wonder? A bit further afield, Weirwood had a wryneck close to the dam end of the reservoir and Bough Beach a late honey buzzard.

Brian Thomas

FIELD TRIPS

You will note that each venue for next year has been allotted a specific leader. This will mean in future that no one person is committed to leading a disproportionate number of outings. Please also note that the April and September trips - St Margaret's Bay, and Beachy Head - which are particularly geared to finding passage migrants, could be swapped around if weather/wind conditions and rare bird sightings warrant this. If you have any queries about a specific trip (e.g. you might want to attend one but not the other) please contact the trip leader by phone the day before the outing to check.

Brian Thomas

EVENING MEETINGS 2013			FIELD TRIPS 2013	
JAN	Wed 9th	Danny Green: "The Long Journey North" A lavish Audio Visual show from some of the remotest parts of northern Europe, including Scotland, Finland, Iceland and Svalbard associated with a book launch.	Sun 13th	Westdene Woods & Burton Mill Ponds. (Leader: Brian Thomas 01883 623149).
			Mon 21st	Half day trip to Sevenoaks Reserve and Bough Beech Reservoir. Meet Godstone Green Car Park at 9a.m. (Leader: Brian Thomas).
FEB	Wed 13th	John Lawrence: "South to Antarctica" To the other extreme join your Leader for a "twice" in a lifetime trip to the Antarctic peninsula via the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.	Sun 17th	Church Norton and The Burgh. (Leader: Brian Hobley 01883 625404).
MAR	Wed 13th	Dennis Newland: "From Temples to Tuskers in South India" In his own inimitable style we view a Hindu temple and a Christian wedding in Chennai Cathedral and enjoy the wildlife of some lesser known reserves.	Sun 17th	Rye Harbour-Long Lagoon & Castle Water. (Leader: John Lawrence 01737 553316).
APR	Wed 10th	AGM followed by our Guest speaker Mark Thomas, Senior Investigations Officer with the RSPB on "Wildlife Crime".	Sun 21st	St Margaret's Bay and Bockhill Farm (Leader: Brian Thomas 01883 623149).
MAY	Wed 8th	Glenn Duggan: "Rare and Extinct Birds of the World" Guaranteed to get you arguing about the top ten contenders.	Wed 24th	Half day trip around Bay Pond and the Godstone countryside. Meet Godstone Green Car Park 9a.m. (Leader: Brian Thomas).
JUN	Wed 12th	John Buckingham: "The Wonders of Bird Migration" Further fascinating insights into why and how birds migrate.	Sun 12th	Minsmere RSPB Reserve. Coach trip (Pick up at Godstone at 7.30a.m.).
JUL	Wed 10th	Ken Bare: "The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty" Learn about our wonderful local countryside and the work of the Surrey Hills Society.	Sun 26th	Acre Down New Forest (Leader: Brian Thomas 01883 623149).
AUG	SUMMER BREAK		Fri 7th & 21st	Ashdown Forest for nightjars. Meet 8pm, South of Wych Cross on A22, first car park on right (Long Car Park).
SEP	Wed 11th	David Boag: "The World of a Wildlife Photographer" David's compendium of "favourites" and "tips" from over 30 years of work in the field.	Sun 16th	Pett Level & Icklesham. (Leader: Richard Lowe 01342 835354).
OCT	Wed 9th	Mike Reed: "Bats in Surrey" A local enthusiast's view of these ever popular night time fliers.	Sun 14th	Mystery trip. (Leader: Richard Lowe 01342 835354).
NOV	Wed 13th	Brian Pettit: "Life's Tough at the Top" Enjoy a wide screen presentation of the wildlife of the Mountains of France and Spain and the birds of the Camargue.	Sun 18th	Oare Marsh & Reculver (Leader: Brian Hobley 01883 625404).
DEC	Wed 11th	Christmas Meeting – members' tales/photographs.	Sun 15th	Beachy Head, Belle Tout & Birling Gap (Leader: Brian Thomas 01883 623149).
			Sun 13th	Shellness Point & Harty Ferry. (Leader: John Lawrence 01737 553316).
			Sun 17th	Grove Ferry and Stodmarsh (Leader: Brian Hobley 01883 625404).
			Sun 15th	Dungeness Point, RSPB & Raptor roost. (Leader: Richard Lowe 01342 835354).



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.

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

Contact details of field trip leaders: Brian Thomas (01883 623149); John Lawrence (01737 553316)

Brian Hobley (coach trips) (01883 625404); Richard Lowe (01342 835354)

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 2013 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.

Group Leader: John Lawrence (01737 553316)

Newsletter Editor: Brian Thomas (01883 623149)

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