



House Sparrow



**RSPB East Surrey
Local Group**

LEADER'S BLOG

Did you know that this January will be the 30th anniversary of the official founding of the Group back in January 1984, although aficionados will point out that the Group was actually started following an inaugural meeting held in Bletchingley in September 1983. One of our longest serving Committee members, Brian Hobley, was there and recounts below some of the memorable moments he remembers during these years.

At that time the RSPB only had about 200,000 members but it soon grew to over a million by 1997. Its focus, whilst remaining concentrated on birds, has broadened over the years both at home and overseas as birds know no boundaries and favourable habitats for birds are capable of supporting a wider range of other species. You should by now be aware of the RSPB's new campaign – "Saving Nature" – which aims to improve our connection with the outdoors and all that can be found there. Have you done anything new to better understand and enjoy the wonders of nature, and birds in particular, to enrich your otherwise busy life?

Our wildlife and special places need help more than ever so why not spend some quality time at one of our reserves, especially if you have youngsters, or support the work of the RSPB with an added donation for a project which meets with your approval. You could also join us on one of our trips or come along to one of our evening meetings, the programme for which is set out on the back page.

So please continue to support the work of the RSPB in any way you can and help ensure that those things that inspired your interest in birds and

nature will still be there for future generations. *John Lawrence*



Hummingbird Hawk-moth by Chris Bond (see Local Sightings).

30 YEARS OF VOLUNTEERING

After attending the first public meeting in Bletchingley, I was asked by Doris Stacey, our first Group Leader, if I would organise the monthly field trips which Ken Osborne would lead. I ended up organising and leading them for the next 16 years. I still lead field trips sometimes.

Four leaders later, I took over for my sins - a job I thoroughly enjoyed for ten years between 2000 and 2010. During this time, Keith Noble asked me to teach and get the catering staff at Pulborough Brooks accredited in basic hygiene which I did. I also helped at a Guide Jamboree in Sussex and even opened bottles of wine at the official opening of Surrey's first reserve at Farnham Heath. Because of my catering background, I have produced cakes for special events such as "Guess the Weight of the Cake" for the Swan appeal and different anniversaries including our 20th, as well as our annual favourite mince pies and sausage rolls at Christmas.

After I retired I gave talks to schools, mainly primary but one secondary school where I discovered the talk was to pupils excluded from normal lessons. Their supervisors were amazed I could keep control over them for 40 minutes! Other talks were given to Guides, Brownies and Beaver

groups; Young Farmers; Care Homes; WI Groups and Horticultural Societies. When Ken Osborne died in 2004 we were generously given his books to sell for the benefit of the RSPB. So over the next 4 years we raised over £5,000 from sales at fetes and fairs in all weathers. On one occasion I remember standing in three inches of water with a howling gale force wind in the car park at Dungeness RSPB Reserve.

Having developed a good relationship with the Editors of a local community magazine CR6, I help to advertise the RSPB by writing an article called "At the bird table" which is included monthly in the magazine and delivered to 15,000 households in the Warlingham area. 11,000 "Great Big Bird Watch" flyers have also been delivered free of charge with the magazine over the last three years.

Recently I have been placing and restocking 'pin badge boxes' in local pubs and garden centres. Through doing so, we raise over £2500 annually for RSPB funds.

Having been a Committee Member in various guises for 30 years I can thoroughly recommend volunteering.

Brian Hobley

FEATHERED HOROSCOPE

See what bird you are below (a light-hearted contribution from Elitta Fell)

21 January – 17 February

Robin: A cool exterior disguises a fiery temper and is very opinionated although those opinions are not always shared by everyone. They are proud and particularly home-loving, although have a tendency to be quarrelsome.

18 February – 17 March

Goldfinch: Goldfinch people are colourful characters who are sensitive and always alert. They are gregarious by nature and love being in groups of people, which offers them security. They need to find an outlet for their

imaginative abilities or they are sometimes in danger of becoming nervous and irritable.

18 March – 14 April

Hawk: A powerful individual which displays courage and a sometimes ruthless determination. Avoids problematical obstacles with skill, although must be fully targeted so as not to waste energy in fruitless chases for the impossible.

15 April – 12 May

Albatross: Has a tendency to have a mind that wanders, but when in search of a particular goal, will travel great lengths to achieve it. Occasionally, the albatross may become caught up in things it shouldn't when not seeing clearly enough.

13 May – 9 June

Dove: Peace-loving by nature, doves will trill and coo about things close to their heart. They enjoy a fulfilling love-life and rarely fail to satisfy. They are also patient, adaptable and personable. Their lack of aggression sometimes makes them the victim of more predatory characters.

10 June – 7 July

Eagle: A well-respected figure which has excellent visionary qualities. Eagles will truck no nonsense and will fix opponents with a powerful stare. They have the power to rise above the trivial aspects of humanity, and are highly talented.

8 July – 4 August

Nightingale: More often heard before being seen, nightingales always have something to say for themselves. They are however, very much in tune with their partners. Their unimpressive exterior hides a personality that is just waiting to burst out.

5 August – 1 September

Kingfisher: Another flamboyant and colourful character that is always exciting to encounter. They rush around at great speed and have a close spiritual affinity with water. They have a sharp and perceptive head on them, which can make them impetuous enough to dive in where others would fear to go.

2 September – 29 September

Swan: The swan is a complex character. While appearing on the surface, as a calm and relaxed individual, underneath they are working hard to keep up the pace of modern life. If provoked, their natural

graceful demeanour can give way to a violent temper which puts them in a flap. They are definitely someone to have on your side.

30 September – 27 Oct

Woodpecker: A tough, hard-working character with plenty of stamina. Has no problem drumming up support for their ideas, no matter how wacky they seem. With a lateral-thinking mind they are skilled at dissecting problems and seeing the wood from the trees. However, with their noisy and exuberant lifestyle, you might not want to have one as a neighbour.

28 October – 24 November

Kestrel: A sharp brain helps kestrel people hover from one subject to another without losing concentration. They focus on their life's goal with a single-minded focus, not flustered by what is going on around them. A confidence in their own ability helps them to soar to heights others may only dream of.

25 November – 23 December

Raven: Always impressive, raven people are a tower of strength. They are more intelligent than their peers and are adept problem-solvers. They enjoy challenges and they are stimulated by wild and exposed places.

24 December – 20 January

Heron: Heron people are deceptive. Although they may be solitary individuals for much of the time, they never-the-less have a need to settle in busy communities where they know everyone else. They may get bogged down as they wade the course of life, but have broad enough shoulders to cope with weighty issues. However, their insecure nature often leads them to fish for compliments.

TUNNEL VISION

On Sunday 21st April we had a field trip to new sites for the group around the world famous white cliffs of Dover. Our first port of call (no pun intended), was Samphire Hoe, just outside the town and dramatically directly beneath the 300 foot vertical Shakespeare cliff face. The area was formed of 4.9 million cubic metres of chalk marl excavated from the Channel Tunnel. On the bird front it has to be said things were pretty quiet, which was not surprising considering the clear blue skies-not conducive for falls of migrating birds. We met the local Warden who told us to watch the bushes when any train came past at the foot of the cliffs on the Kent Coast Railway (Dover-Folkestone). Sure

enough, shortly after we saw our first train emerging from the tunnel, it disturbed our first migrant, a handsome black redstart. Stock doves, common whitethroats, and a handsome pair of kestrels nesting in a cliff crevice were also observed here, as well as a passing peregrine. One of the group noticed an animal moving high up on the extremely steep cliff slopes directly above us; it was the sort of place you would expect to see a sure footed mountain goat, but it turned out to be a hunting fox. We speculated on it being specifically adapted to this unique habitat-why not Doverian cliff fox! (We birders are always grabbing at straws to increase our species counts!). Further into the site and towards the shingle beach on the Folkestone side we were treated to cracking views of black redstart, a splendid male stonechat and 3 rock pipits, with one male giving a virtuoso performance of his aerial song flight.

On the way back on the seaward side of this impressive reclaimed spoil heap we saw 2 newly arrived wheatears.

Before departing up the cliff through the very steep one way road tunnel, we stopped at the memorial to the 10 construction workers (8 of whom were British) who were sadly killed building the 32 mile long Channel Tunnel creating a land link between two historic rivals for the first time since the Ice Age.

Brian Thomas

EXPLOSIVE BIRDING

We had beautiful weather for our fieldtrip to Oare Marshes in August. This is one of my favourite venues, since not only do you invariably encounter good numbers and variety of birds at very close quarters, it's also a magical spot in its own right with Faversham Creek, the Swale and distant Sheppey. The tidal marsh was carpeted with Samphire and Sea Lavender and there were numerous migrant clouded yellow butterflies adding their unique sulphur hue to the already multi coloured seascape. Low tide exposes Horse Sands - a temporary island in the Swale- where good numbers of seals, both Common and Grey, were observed, and there is always interesting traffic passing by, such as the attractive Thames Barges. We were lucky to find the rare Bonaparte's gull that had been present in the area for a few days, along with 2 very attractive curlew sandpipers. There is always a large wader roost here particularly at high tide and we were not disappointed with huge numbers of godwits, redshank and smaller numbers of other species including the handsome avocet.

We proceeded along the river wall on the west side of the reserve, encountering stonechats, wheatears, flyover ravens and whimbrel on our way. Caught in a brief shower we stopped at what appeared to be the remains of an old jetty at Dan's Dock, and speculating on its origin we agreed to research the subject. Mark and Elizabeth Young kindly got to the bottom of the mystery and the following facts have been gleaned from the various sources they sent to me.



Black-tailed Godwit by Sam Thomas

Faversham was the birthplace of the explosives industry in England. Two of the three largest factories were situated on marshland near Uplees 2.5 miles NW of the town, and with direct access to the deep watered Swale channel. Almost 500 acres (nearly the size of the City of London), were given over to this venture. However on 2nd April 1916 disaster struck when 15 tons of TNT and 150 tons of ammonium nitrate blew up after some empty sacks had caught fire. There was a tragic loss of life with 116 men and boys perishing; no women died as they didn't work there on Sundays. It was the worst disaster ever in the history of the UK explosives industry. The incident was so severe windows smashed in Southend and the tremor was heard as far away as Norwich. There is a mass grave in Faversham cemetery of the majority of the victims. Today it is a tranquil spot, a beautiful nature reserve, so far removed from its earlier violent industrial history.

Brian Thomas

SALES TEAM NEWS

Ann Fort and her able assistants are to discontinue bringing such a wide range of sales goods to our monthly indoor meetings. With effect from January 2014, only jigsaws, cards and pin badges will be on sale. If however anybody requires other items, please contact Ann and she will bring them along to the next meeting. (Phone 01883 714760, mobile 07905690009, or e-mail annfort.wosa@yahoo.co.uk).

BUTTERFLIES OF SURREY

Butterflies of Surrey Revisited, written by members of Surrey Branch of

Butterfly Conservation, was published on 12th October by The Surrey Wildlife Trust. It has 240 pages, over 100 colour photos, and costs £16. Its Editor Francis Kelly hopes the book will appeal to natural history lovers in Surrey and beyond, and will be of interest to many RSPB Members.

LOCAL SIGHTINGS

With an unbelievably long wet start to the year, things looked particularly gloomy for our wildlife. Spring migrants like cuckoos and hobby were seen to arrive on the south coast and because of the cold wet conditions and consequential lack of suitable insect food, were actually noted flying back south across the Channel! On the 4th April the fifth fall of snow coincided with the coldest April day for 50 years. After the worst year on record for butterflies in 2012, there were fears that several species were so depleted that they might never make a recovery. Fortunately, the floods of spring were followed by our best summer for some time and the butterflies made an amazing and most welcome recovery. Foremost amongst these were the whites, peacock, small tortoiseshell and blues. There was also an increase of Continental migrants with clouded yellow, painted lady and silver y moth being present locally in impressive numbers. A rare migrant hummingbird hawk-moth had just been spotted nectaring in the writer's garden when it was unceremoniously swallowed by a waiting frog! It was no coincidence that conditions were eventually also excellent for wild flowers; this was particularly evident at Warren Barn, where a magnificent and unprecedented yellow carpet of Birds Foot trefoil appeared. Another equally magnificent show was the Greater Yellow Rattle on Riddlesdown. It was as though the unbelievably late spring had forced nature to put on its finest show during an uncharacteristically short window.

When the avian migrants did arrive it was quality rather than quantity, with a firecrest spotted at Upland Road Woldingham on the 12th April. At the same time and in the same area there were up to 3 ravens, two red kites and two ring ouzels. Wheatears peaked at 12 at Bushy Bank on the 19th, and 5 crossbills were seen over North Downs Golf Course the next day. During May a nightingale held territory on Riddlesdown, the first for many years there. The first hobby was not seen until 9th May, and was only one of 3 sightings in the east of our area. Two pristine whinchats were spotted at

Court Farm on 16th May, the same number appearing along with a redstart at Nore Hill on return passage in late August. What was significant in the autumn was the dearth of returning birds, with only a single wheatear appearing at Chelsham. It is quite possible that being so late to their breeding quarters, they had no time to dally on their way south and possibly flew straight through our area.

Redstarts however bucked this trend with a total of 4 sightings, one being a 'first' in the writers Warlingham garden. It was most frustrating to learn, via the internet, of a wryneck present on an unnamed Woldingham site. Despite exhaustive enquiries its finder or whereabouts were never discovered. These beautiful members of the woodpecker family last bred at



Wryneck

Woldingham in 1968, their disappearance coinciding with that of the majestic steam trains on the nearby East Grinstead line.

Reminders of the winter ahead came with the first major influx of redwings on 10th October. Twenty-six years on from the 87 hurricane the storm force winds that crossed our area in the early hours of the 28th uprooted the berry laden cotoneaster in the writer's garden. Any hopes of attracting waxwings back this year have thus gone.

Brian Thomas

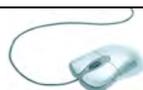
FIELD TRIPS

Members will note from the schedule on page 4 that Mike Reed, who gave us a very interesting talk in October entitled 'Bats in Surrey,' has kindly consented to lead an evening walk on Ashdown Forest on Friday 6th June. With good weather and a bit of luck Mike hopes to find us a 'bat highway' in the Vachery area, Long Car Park.

This is of course also good habitat for birds, so we hope to encounter 'churring' nightjars, 'roding' woodcock, tree pipits, stonechats and possibly Dartford warbler. If you can't make that date, we are meeting at the same time (8pm) and place (Long Car Park) a fortnight later on the 20th when we shall be concentrating exclusively on finding the species of birds mentioned above.

Brian Thomas

| EVENING MEETINGS 2014 | | | FIELD TRIPS 2014 | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---|--|---|
| JAN | Wed 8 th | Neil Glenn "Moroccan Spice" Birding from the Sahara to the Atlas Mountains | Sun 12th | Elmley Marshes. Leader Brian Hobley (01883 625404). |
| FEB | Wed 12 th | Bill Coster "Texas" Presentation includes 20 species of New World warblers and inimitable soundtrack. | Sun 16th | Dungeness Leader John Lawrence (01737 553316). |
| MAR | Wed 12th | Peter Holden "The RSPB's Natural Secrets" Focus on the great work done by the RSPB not just for birds but for all wildlife. | Sun 16th | Pett Level & Rye Harbour. Leader Richard Lowe.(01342 835354). |
| APR | Wed 9th | AGM- followed by "Giving Nature a Home" A campaign update by Chris Corrigan, Regional Director of RSPB South Region. | Sun 13th Wed 30th | West Dene Woods & Burton Mill Pond. Half day trip Bough Beech Res (meet Causeway, North Lake 9a.m). Leader on both Brian Thomas (01883 623149). |
| MAY | Wed 14th | John Buckingham: "Bird Migration-Part 3" Join us for yet another fascinating insight into the wonders of bird migration. | Sun 4 th Wed 7 th Sun 11 th Sun 25th | Dawn Chorus Ashdown For. (R.Lowe). Half day Mercers Park Merstham (Sailing Club car park 9.a.m). Leader B. Thomas. Minsmere. Coach , Godstone 7.30 a.m. New Forest (7.a.m. Godstone). B. Thomas. |
| JUN | Wed 11th | Glenn Duggan : "Trogans-true birds of the Tropics" Learn about these truly beautiful birds including the resplendent quetzal. | Fri 6th Fri 20 th Sun 22nd | Ashdown Forest for bats and nightjars 8:00pm Long Car park (South of Wych Cross on A22, first car park on right). Leader Mike Reed. Same venue and time as for 6th, for nightjars and woodcock. Leader R. Lowe. Stodmarsh & Grove Ferry. R. Lowe. |
| JUL | Wed 9th | Dr Nikki Gammans " the reintroduction of the short-haired bumblebee" Hear about an innovative project to address the plight of our declining bee population at Dungeness. | Sun 13th | Mystery Trip |
| AUG | SUMMER BREAK | | Sun 17th | Oare Marshes. Leader Brian Hobley. |
| SEP | Wed 10th | Richard Lowe: "A Year on the Farm" Follow a year's bird recording on a Surrey farm as part of a Wildlife Farm Alliance. | Sun 28th | Bock Hill. Leader Brian Thomas. |
| OCT | Wed 8th | Ian Rumley-Dawson: "Sea birds of the Southern Oceans" Identify those rarely seen birds that ply between the Antarctic convergence and isolated sub-Antarctic islands. | Sun 12th | Shellness & Harty Ferry. Leader John Lawrence. |
| NOV | Wed 12th | Mark Young: "Skokholm, Pembrokeshire" Record of a stay on one of the best breeding bird colonies in the UK. | Sun 16th | Pagham Harbour & the Burgh. Leader Brian Hobley |
| DEC | Wed 10th | Christmas Meeting –festivities including member's tales/photographs. | Sun 14th | Dungeness & Hawthorn Corner. Leader Richard Lowe. |



Visit our website for all the latest news:
www.eastsurreyspsb.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 2014 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.eastsurreyspsb.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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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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