



LEADER'S BLOG

This spring welcomes the 30th Anniversary of the East Surrey RSPB Group! This year is also the 125th Anniversary of the RSPB itself so there are twice as many reasons to celebrate!

Since the Group was founded we have organised over 3,500 trips all over the South East and occasionally on to the Continent; listened to over 3,000 talks about birds and related topics and donated over £35,000 towards the conservation work of the RSPB. Yet the active members of the Group have barely exceeded 100 volunteers and participants at any time so we can all be proud of our achievements to date and give ourselves a big pat on the back. We'd love to see more people at our meetings or on our outings so check out our calendar of events and see if there is anything that takes your fancy.

Many of you may visit an RSPB reserve occasionally or just enjoy being members and reading the magazine when it drops on the doormat so you cannot be unaware of our latest advertising campaign to "Give Nature a Home". Please stop and consider one small thing you could change in your daily lives to engage with nature or make your garden more inviting to birds and wildlife, especially if you have youngsters around. We'd love to hear about your successes, even if it is just an unusual bird you've seen. You can always approach us at one of the local fetes we attend during the summer and tell us how you

have stepped up for Nature and what it means to you.

The evenings are now drawing out after what has been a very wet yet mild winter. Many of our smaller birds have not had to face very cold temperatures and will have an opportunity to make up for population losses suffered during the previous two exceptional winters. However, our gale-lashed coasts have already seen significant sea-bird deaths, which is especially worrying for birds such as the Puffin. Our birds therefore continue to need a helping hand not forgetting our returning migrants. This year we have donated £1000 to agricultural conservation and research. The future of the Turtle Dove looks increasingly ominous with factors such as agricultural intensification, habitat loss, hunting and disease driving its steep decline. Some commentators have predicted that without drastic action, the Turtle Dove could become extinct in the British Isles by 2020.

If enough of us care however, and are prepared to support wildlife-friendly farming and chivvy politicians to make the right decisions and policies then there may still be a future for birds like the Turtle Dove in our countryside. Spread the word, enjoy the summer months and get out and about bird watching wherever you are and whenever you can. It's why you belong to the RSPB isn't it?

John Lawrence
Group Leader

How You Can Give Nature A Home This Spring.

The Oxford dictionary tells us that the garden is 'a piece of ground adjoining a house, used for growing flowers, fruit or vegetables' and for many; perhaps that is all it is. Where *are* the butterflies that once turned the lilac spires of our Buddleias into a gently tapestry of fluttering wings? Where is the Song Thrush and his mound of shattered snail shells? And where now can you see a pond so full of frogspawn that a bird would struggle to find a drink by its edges? Our gardens are home to a wonderful range of wildlife but even the most unobservant of us can see that our patches of England are becoming worryingly empty. The 'State of Nature' report published last year observed a decline in 60% of the 3,148 UK species studied over the last 50 years; 31% declining 'strongly'. With roughly one in ten of these species at serious risk of extirpation (local extinction) and with the continued expansion of urban areas, the need for action has never been stronger. This is where YOU come in! This spring, you have a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to become CEO and Managing Director of your very own nature reserve. I would begin by recruiting your volunteer work force. Children are great for this: whether they're your kids, the grandchildren or even the neighbours, your know-how is exactly what they need and their enthusiasm and energy is exactly what you need to get this project up and running. Your next step is to decide exactly what you can do; remember, the only limit to your

garden nature reserve is your imagination. Here are some tips:

Bird box:

Essential for bringing breeding birds into the garden during spring but also as a roost for birds such as the diminutive wren during the cold winter months. A garden must.

Bug Hotel:

Get down to your local supplier of building materials or ironmonger and grab a few wooden pallets, if you're lucky they'll let you have them for nothing. Stack them onto one another and get the kids to create lots of nooks and crannies for bugs to hide in; use bamboo canes, old pipes and anything else you can think of! Great for getting children inspired by nature.



The garden pond:

Whether it's an old sink or pre-formed fibreglass pond, animals love water! I've seen frogspawn in a puddle before, so there's no such thing as too small: get a few pond plants and a few large stones to allow amphibians to get in and out and watch it develop year on year. How long will it take before you get your first dragonfly in the garden?

For more ideas visit the RSPB website. *Sam Thomas*

WET WET WET

We have been hearing for several years now about global warming and how if the science is right this may impinge on our lives in various ways. I have noticed much earlier nesting of birds and emergence of spring flowers like the bluebells which you can now see in mid March. To many talk of the melting Polar icecaps and even seeing the dire effects this can have on magnificent species like the polar bear still doesn't seem relevant to their lives. Just recently however, a lot more people seem to be sitting up and noticing that climate change can affect their lives even here in leafy Surrey. Us Brits have always discussed the weather; it is after all a

national pastime, but when you get a years rainfall in a matter of weeks alarm bells start ringing and people who were formerly of the 'red sky at night brigade' are now talking of Gulf Stream displacement and fast moving Atlantic depressions. Any

of us who have lived in the district any length of time will have witnessed the intermittent emergence of the Caterham Bourne flow: but even that seems to have taken on new dimensions this time round. Never before have I seen it also flow from opposite Knight's garden centre in Woldingham, nor form a huge lake at Bug Hill which immediately attracted hundreds of common and black-headed gulls, mallard, moorhens and even a beautiful pair of swans. If only all species could successfully adapt and survive such a rapidly changing environment. Talking of which there have been fewer winter thrushes during what has been an extremely mild period, but those that have joined us from Scandinavia, such as the attractive redwings, have had a bumper crop of worms to feed on, many of which have been forced to the surface by the high water table and frequently drowned.

The devastation wrought in our district by the October 1987 storm will long be remembered with the loss of so many magnificent trees. The total flattening of the more exposed woodlands was as if nature had decided to implement its own coppicing policy. There was an immediate burst of ground flora in the newly sunlit clearings, and warblers thrived in the low vegetation until such time as the canopy closed in once more. Strange as it may seem it was from this time on that deer also appeared in numbers in the district. The combination of this Winters saturated ground along with so many days of strong winds, has caused considerable loss of trees again, though nothing comparable

of course to the Great Storm. Wild cherry, silver birch, willows, larch and other conifers in particular, have been badly affected. It is often only when you venture deep into the woods that you appreciate just how many trees have succumbed. The loss of sallows is bad news for our small breeding population of the magnificent purple emperor butterfly on Woldingham Ridge; whilst the thrushes and doves won't

be impressed with the loss of so many cherries, but the fungi and the woodpeckers – particularly the greater spotted - will relish all that decaying insect infested timber once again. *Brian Thomas*

RAPTOR KILLING

I make no apology for using these columns once more to highlight the continuing and appalling catalogue of crime against birds of prey in the UK. The magnificent hen harrier has now become extinct as a breeding bird in England as a direct result of being illegally persecuted on upland grouse moors managed for commercial shoots.

I would stress that I am not personally against the shooting of game, as long as it is carried out in accordance with the law. Indeed, well run shoots can greatly benefit small passerines by providing suitable habitat and vital food during the hard winter months. What is so very sad is the continuing ignorance and attitude of certain landowners and gamekeepers who continue to exterminate any bird with a hooked bill. We and other like-minded conservation organisations have spent vast time trouble and money in reintroducing magical birds like the sea eagle and the red kite, but sadly both species are still being poisoned or shot on some estates. We all worry increasingly about distant lands where the wonderful tiger and elephant may soon disappear forever, but there is a crisis much nearer to home that surely has to be similarly addressed as a matter of urgency. The relevant legislation protecting our wildlife just isn't good enough and the penalties incurred in contravening them are derisory. It was with this in mind that John Armitage recently initiated an e-petition to DEFRA (the responsible department), calling upon the Government to introduce a system of operating licences for upland grouse shoots. Following any proven offence of persecution on the shoot concerned, i.e. illegal trapping, use of poisons, shooting or the interference with or destruction of nests, the licence would be revoked for a period of not less than two years and commercial shooting activity cease. In addition the Government is also being called upon to introduce an accreditation scheme or licensing system for all

gamekeepers, be they employed in a full time or part time capacity. If an individual then has any proven involvement with raptor persecution, the licence would be withdrawn for a period of three years along with the right to hold a gun licence. Any repetition of an offence would result in the licences being withdrawn for life.

I was only too pleased to sign the petition and when it recently received more than 10,000 signatures the following official response was received which I believe is worth quoting here in full: *'The Government is aware of incidences of illegal killing of birds of prey and Ministers take the issue very seriously. To address this, senior Government and enforcement officers in the UK identified raptor persecution as a national wildlife crime priority. Raptor persecution is subject to a prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance plan led by a senior police officer through the Raptor Persecution Delivery group. The National Wildlife Crime Unit, which is funded by the Government, monitors and gathers intelligence on illegal activities affecting birds of prey and provides assistance to police forces when required. Shooting makes an important contribution to wildlife control and conservation, biodiversity and to the social, economic and environmental well-being of rural areas, where it can provide a supplement to incomes and jobs. The overall environmental and economic impact of game bird shooting is therefore a positive one and it has been estimated by the industry that £250 million per year is spent on management activities that provide benefits for conservation. When carried out in accordance with the law, shooting for sport is a legitimate activity and our position is that people should be free to undertake lawful activities. There are no current plans to restrict sport shooting in England. This Government encourages all shoot managers and owners to ensure they and their staff are following recommended guidelines and best practice to reduce the chances of a conflict of interest with birds of prey. We acknowledge that crimes against birds of prey are abhorrent but it should be noted though that, despite instances of poisoning and killing of birds of prey, populations of many species, such as*

the peregrine falcon, red kite and buzzard have increased. While a small minority is prepared to kill birds of prey, and where possible these people are brought to justice, this demonstrates that the policies in place to conserve these species are working.'

I believe this official response beggars belief and is an unbelievable insult to our intelligence. It is however consistent and no doubt emanates from the same civil servants who saw no harm in recently issuing shooting licences to kill buzzards, before their Ministerial boss was immediately forced to retract in the face of a national howl and cry of gargantuan proportions. Yes the response is very much a one sided whitewash and I will explain why.

It is fair enough to point out the social, economic and environmental contribution made by shooting. I would have no problems at all with this if the landowners and vicariously their gamekeepers on upland grouse moors hadn't singlehandedly brought about in 2013 the extirpation of the hen harrier.



If you are going to use economic arguments by all means but be objective and let's have a proper cost benefit analysis. The RSPB has well over one million paying members, and together with other dedicated groups there are now over 5 million people signed up to conservation organisations in the UK. You can no longer argue such a bird only has an intrinsic value, I like millions of others are paying for its protection and preservation by way of not insignificant subscriptions, donations, legacies etc. Collectively on wildlife trips/holidays/reserve visits, expensive optical equipment etc we invest multi millions in the national and local economies. How can the case be put for good environmental practice when some upland shoots have been so badly managed with irresponsible heather burning and other poor husbandry, that they fast become grouse

monocultures, to the exclusion of breeding golden plover dunlins and virtually all other wild species? It almost reminds one of the North American Dustbowls a signal consequence of the greed and stupidity of man. How could we have let it all happen again? Remember the magnificent osprey and how it was shot and poisoned from the land by the early 1900's. The birds return to Loch Garten in 1954 captured the imagination and 'ownership' of the nation. Over 2 million visitors have been to see the birds. The Welsh people are rightly proud of 'their red kites' and adopted them as the national emblem. Conservation bodies have spent huge sums reintroducing this species elsewhere in the UK and it has proved a great success story. If the last wild pair of tigers on the planet inhabited a grouse moor in Yorkshire, the eyes of the world would be upon us. If it happened to be on one of the 'rouge' shoots the problem would not be guarding against poachers from outside, more likely gamekeepers from within. What would happen I believe is that vested interests would be forced to one side; the land would be compulsory purchased and declared a national park, complete with a Loch Garten type public viewing hide. It is a tragedy that something upon these lines, even if only on a relatively small scale, could not have been done in time to save the iconic Yorkshire hen harrier. I'm dreaming of course, you only have to look at how the proposal to bring in vicarious liability for landowners for the actions of their employees/gamekeepers was given short shift at Westminster recently notwithstanding the fact that it is on the statute book in Scotland and evidence would suggest it is already having a positive effect there. What can you do? Well we have after all been told that 'Ministers take the issue very seriously'. So please join me sign this e-petition which remains open to signatures and will be considered for debate by the Backbench Business Committee should it pass the 100 000 signature threshold. It's not aimed at the vast majority of well run shoots, just at that illegal minority that stain our conscience and who give the sport a bad name.

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/>

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 Forest: (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 -7am 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 (07821 600851). Same venue/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 fly 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 members' 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) or Richard Lowe (01342 835354).

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.

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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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