



LEADER'S BLOG

Have you been involved in our 30th Anniversary activities or done something special for Nature this summer? Surely you must have been inspired by the intimate recordings of the bittern and other birds raising their young at our Minsmere Reserve during BBC Springwatch to get out and about and get connected to Nature in your own way? But much more needs to be done at national and international level so watch out for the new campaign involving "Bob" (see separate article) as the RSPB seeks to make sure that our politicians are kept up to task as we approach another election. We will be scrutinising those manifesto promises and on-going actions, such as airport expansion, very carefully from an environmental and wildlife perspective.

The Group has been active with its wide-ranging monthly meetings, manning stands and selling goods at local events and fund raising through pin badge collections in various local establishments. Of course we'd like to attract more supporters (and welcome new members) through these activities so spread the word and encourage your friends and neighbours to participate. We can also provide talks to local societies, schools and youth groups if you wish to raise interest about our birds and other wildlife.

Have you noticed any changes or trends affecting our birds recently? For example, the changing arrival or departure dates of our visiting

summer birds or unusual feeding and nesting habits of our more common birds in your garden or local open space? We'd love to hear from you.

As winter approaches remember that after the autumn fruits and berries are exhausted birds will be coming into our gardens looking for food, especially if the weather turns cold or wet. So don't forget to keep those feeders topped up and provide clean water for them to drink and bathe. Place them in direct view of windows and you can enjoy watching the antics of these welcome visitors, even if you're just washing up! You might even see a rarity so keep a camera handy! Alternatively join us on one of our field trips which usually throw up something interesting or unusual.

John Lawrence Group Leader

BOB A JOB

. Hello everyone, I'm Bob - you might have heard a little about me recently. Well, here I am! I'm spearheading a new campaign - 'Vote for Bob' - to get nature on to the political agenda. I hear you're an amazing bunch of humans who love wildlife and want to help. That's exactly what I need.

I may be a red squirrel, but once you get past my bushy tail, pointy ears and primary diet of pine cones and nuts, there's not much difference between me and you. Honest.

I've decided I can no longer sit idly by while the woodlands, meadows and wildlife around me are

disappearing. It's time to make a stand. Squirrels are quite good at standing up when they sense a threat.

I want to challenge politicians to take nature seriously. In the run-up to the General Election now is the time to get nature on their agenda. And over the next few months, I'll be doing just that through my Vote for Bob campaign.

With the help of folk from the RSPB, the campaign is off to a great start. Thousands of people have already cast their vote and shown their support for nature.

You can learn all about me and my campaign and start getting involved by visiting my website voteforbob.co.uk. A vote for Bob is a vote for nature. Sign the petition today. And please share my campaign with your friends and family.



Thanks Bob

SKYDANCER

In 2013, for the first time since records began, hen harriers failed to nest in England. This year, only 3 pairs have bred, in the Forest of Bowland in northern Lancashire. The nests are being watched by

dedicated staff and volunteers, as well as CCTV round the clock. Our Skydancer project, which runs till October 2015, is helping to protect hen harriers across their remaining breeding strongholds in northern England. Working together with local communities, the project aims to restore the species by protecting nests, raising awareness, and education through local schools.

What is fantastic breaking news is that the project has just been voted Best Education Project by the National Lottery and the Awards Ceremony will be shown on BBC1, on Friday, 19th September. There surely can't be a better way of bringing national attention to the plight of this spectacular bird!

In July, the four-week-old Bowland hen harrier chicks were fitted with high-tech satellite tags. When the birds have fledged, they can be followed and we'll be able to gain valuable information about where they hunt, roost and, with a bit of luck, breed.

We now have an ambitious new five-year project, aiming to help hen harriers breed successfully in England and improve numbers in affected parts of Scotland. We've already achieved European Union LIFE+ funding worth £900,000 for the project, but we need to match it to do more.

Our new hen harrier appeal was launched on 15 July to raise funds and awareness of this work, which in turn will help to create the right conditions for these beautiful but threatened birds to return to England and parts of Scotland. Find out more online at: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/skydancer/>

Concern about the plight of the hen harrier has recently generated protests and action from groups, organisations and the public.

In July, protests from conservationists forced Marks & Spencer to abandon its plans to sell red grouse. Concerned over grouse shooting and its impact on hen harriers, M&S will only sell grouse again when its suppliers can prove they abide by a new code of practice on red grouse estate management, drawn up by the

RSPB and the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust.

August 10th was Hen Harrier Day. Just 2 days before the start of the grouse shooting season, this special day of events was planned, by Birders Against Wildlife Crime and other groups, to highlight the scandal of the widespread illegal persecution of Hen Harriers on upland grouse moors, and celebrate one of our most iconic birds of prey. For more information: <http://birdersagainst.org/projects/hen-harrier-day/>.

FLIGHT OF THE CONDOR

Ever since I saw the BBC film series I have wanted to see a condor in flight over its natural homeland, the Andes. So here we were last September staying in the Colca Canyon in Peru.

We set out early in the morning before sunrise to drive from our hot springs resort to the end of the Canyon. La Cruz del Condor is a lookout located at the Canyon's highest point (its maximum depth is 3,400 metres making it one of the deepest in the world) where it offers extensive views over the valleys below. There was an air of expectation and excitement as we took our place amongst the gathering crowd standing along the guard rail at the edge of the canyon, jockeying for the best view.



Far below us on the rocks we could just make out the shapes of three perched birds but many repeat and now mostly discarded photographs didn't bring them to life.

Then at about 8.45 am a large bird with fingered wings flew towards us along the rim of the canyon, then another and another. You could tell the mature birds by their size, their white secondaries and wrinkled

ruddy coloured heads with upright comb and white collars. Cameras were constantly going off trying to capture the power and grace of these birds as they cruised past (many pictures of course were discarded lacking heads, wings, tails or just out of focus). We had up to 8 birds in the air at one time but after about 45 minutes they all melted into the landscape.

We climbed some stone stairs up to the cross marking the top of the viewpoint. From there we were able to look down at three more perched birds, including an adult, at closer quarters. Then there were more birds wheeling around in the air above us, mainly juveniles. This continued for about another half an hour and as quickly as it started it stopped. We were left to peruse the many souvenir and craft stalls laid out on the ground next to the car park before wending our way back along the canyon side, stopping to admire the cacti, the wild flowers and of course the view!

But the memory of those wonderful flying birds will live on... and yes, I did nearly get one good picture.



John Lawrence

LOCAL BIRD NEWS

As I write-12th September migration is well underway. The swifts and cuckoos have long gone as have the sand martins. Good numbers of whinchats have passed this Autumn with 7 birds at Riddlesdown during hay cutting, along with 2 stonechats wheatears and a tree pipit. Hobbies bred successfully at Chelsham, but a local pair of peregrines failed for the second year running. Can you imagine the surprise for birders at

Bough Beech Reservoir when no less than 3 great white egrets and a night heron graced the North Lake for several days?



Great White Egret (B. Hobley).

The selfsame locality holds a very smart immature wood sandpiper at present. However pride of place must go to Ashdown Forest. Were you one of the hosts of birders who watched in awe as a resident short-toed-eagle enjoyed itself there over several weeks in the summer clearing the local adder and grass snake population? The beginning of October is usually very good for ring ouzel passage. I look out on the various web sites for coastal bird observatories like Portland and Dungeness in order to 'get a feel' for what species are currently moving through in numbers. If for example there has been a good fall of ouzels at the coast it pays dividends to check out our local downlands, particularly places like Nore Hill Chelsham with a very good track record for this sadly declining upland species.

Brian Thomas

ARMCHAIR BIRDING

POWER TO YOUR ELBOW

If you are one of those birdwatchers that just can't find the time to join the group on its monthly excursions, or indeed have so many other commitments that even one of our half day meets is not a possibility, why not just spend a couple of hours watching the skies during October from the comfort of a chair on your garden patio! Watching visible bird migration can be a really exciting and rewarding experience, although

most movements are nocturnal or too high to see. However visible migration can be conspicuous particularly during a narrow window in October. The first individual to study the subject in Surrey was F D Power who recorded daily movements, wind direction and strength in Brixton for each October from 1985 to 1909. 'Given a fair morning, between the second week and the end of October, following one or two days of WNW wind-still holding from the same quarter-the passage of birds from 7.30 to 10.30 a.m. is remarkable. Flock after flock crosses my garden in steady flight, and apparently the fixed purpose is to get as far West as they can while the wind continues favourable. Chaffinches were the commonest, followed by Larks and then starlings' (Power 1910).

I have often watched such migration over the years, both from my back garden, but more often from the high vantage point of Nore Hill Chelsham. It shouldn't take you long to even identify the passing species by their distinctive and different calls, be they pipits, redwings, fieldfares, skylarks, bramblings or other finches. To hit on a 'good day' can be an exhilarating experience with hundreds and sometimes thousands of birds passing overhead. At the high vantage point of Nore on such days, when winter thrushes are pouring through, they can be seen on a broad front. It is also fascinating at such times to discover large numbers of migrant song thrushes and blackbirds in the immediate area, and even the odd ring ouzel dropping in from the opposite direction whilst on their way south. It is also well worth checking on local birding websites to see their records of diurnal migration (numbers, species, times, direction etc). In this way you can immediately build up a fairly comprehensive view of the scale of any local passage. As if to prove the above point I happened to take my dog out to Nore Hill today, the 1st October, and found a minimum of 40 blackbirds and a dozen song thrushes in a few small bushes at the summit. You just don't see

these birds here in such numbers at any other time of the year - they were clearly Continental migrants.

HALF DAY TRIPS

Wednesday mornings have proved very popular for our half day excursions with upwards of 20 attendees in the spring when we visited Bough Beech and Mercers Park. Why not join us in April 2015 to walk round the very attractive Old Lodge Reserve on Ashdown Forest. I can't unfortunately guarantee the presence of a short-toed eagle but we should see redstarts, tree pipits, willow warbler, cuckoo, crossbills and fallow deer, with raven, brambling and woodlark also possible. The location is about 40 minutes drive from Godstone via the A22, although I find the Hartfield route more interesting and just as quick. I look forward to seeing more new faces.

Brian Thomas

NO MORE BUZZING

The catastrophic impact of neonicotinoid pesticides on bees has long been suspected, but now it's becoming clear they are hitting the farmland bird population too. They are widely used as seed dressing and like so many pesticides they can persist and accumulate in soils or leach into waterways. A recent study has shown that decreases in bird numbers in the Netherlands have been most rapid in areas with the highest concentrations of neonics in the environment. Studies have shown that birds have declined because these chemicals have reduced their insect food supply, not because they themselves have been poisoned (they found fewer insects in places with elevated levels of neonics). Quite typically in my opinion, the Chief Scientist at Defra has stated 'the correlation does not mean causation'. This sadly but not surprisingly reminds me of the naysayers in the 1960's when our birds of prey were decimated.

Brian Thomas

EVENING MEETINGS 2015			FIELD TRIPS 2015	
JAN	Wed 14th	Chris Gooddie: "The Jewel Hunter" A daring quest to see all the pitas of the world (32) in one calendar year. Did he succeed?	Sun 18th	Farlington Marshes and Hayling Island. Leader Richard Lowe ((01342 835354).
FEB	Wed 11th	Conor Mark Jameson: "Silent Spring Re-visited and Looking for the Goshawk" Double bill. A reprise of his two recently published books, one exploring the debt we owe to Rachel Carson and the other describing his search for the 'lost raptor' – the enigmatic 'phantom of the forest'.	Sun 15th	Shellness and Capel Fleet. Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
MAR	Wed 11th	Brian Pettit: "The Wildlife of Hants and Dorset" Wonder at the wildlife of the New Forest, Brownsea Island and the Jurassic coast.	Sun 15th	Pagham and the Burgh: Leader Brian Hobley (01883 625404).
APR	Wed 8th	AGM. – followed by special guest speaker Steve Gilbert, Conservation Programme Manager, RSPB SE England Region who will be telling us about:- The Greater Thames "Futurescape" vision	Sun 12th Wed 15th	. Pullborough Brooks. Leader Brian Thomas. Half day trip meet 9a.m. Old Lodge car park Ashdown Forest (TV470305) Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
MAY	Wed 13th	Chris Collins: "Birds of the Russian Far East". Kamchatka Peninsula and beyond, including the plight of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.	Sun 10th Wed 13th Sun 24th	Minsmere. Coach , Godstone 7.30 a.m. Half day trip Bough Beech Res (meet Causeway, North Lake 9a.m). Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149). New Forest -7 a.m. Godstone (Brian Thomas)..
JUN	Wed 10th	Paul Roper: "Introducing the Lee Valley" Learn about the history of the area and its attractions as a Regional Park	Fri 5 & 19 Sun 14th	Ashdown Forest (nightjars), meet Long Car park 8pm (south of Wych Cross A22. Cuckmere Haven and Friston Forest. Leader for all Richard Lowe (01342 835354).
JUL	Wed 8th	Dennis Newland: "A Passion for Butterflies" An inimitable personal view of a life-long interest in these delicate creatures	Sun 12th	Mystery Trip Leader John Lawrence (01737 553316).
AUG	SUMMER BREAK		Sun 16th	Thursley Common. Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
SEP	Wed 9th	Glenda Law: "Wildlife of Botswana" Birds and animals encountered on a recent camping safari to this country	Sun 13th	Pett Level and Royal Military Canal. Leader John Lawrence (01737 553316).
OCT	Wed 14th	John Buckingham: "How Birds Work" A simple and entertaining way of looking at the anatomy of birds	Sun 18th	Thorny Island. Leader Richard Lowe (01342 835354).
NOV	Wed 11th	Bill Coster: "Canada and North USA" Enjoy the changing seasons in the Rockies, around Lake Superior and the Yellowstone/Grand Teton National Parks.	Sun 15th	Gillingham Country Park, Motney Hill Leader Brian Hobley. (01883 625404).
DEC	Wed 9th	Christmas Meeting – festivities including members tales/photographs	Sun 13th	Dungeness. Leader John Lawrence (01737 553316).

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 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 2015 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). Publications sent by e-mail will be in glorious colour.

