



East Surrey Local Group
NEWSLETTER



LEADER'S BLOG

Well, it's been decided that we shall be leaving the European Union although nobody has yet set out what Brexit will actually mean for us. However you voted I'm sure the RSPB will continue to champion the legislation and policies which aim to protect our wildlife and habitats and ensure that the standards currently applied in European Directives are not watered down or overridden by political short-termed-ness or commercial expediency. The latest "State of Nature" report due to be published this September will act as a bench mark by which to judge the Government and other policy makers.

Next January's Big Garden Birdwatch is to be extended by an extra day from Saturday 28th January to include Monday 30th January. If you haven't already participated why not join in next year? You only have to observe and record the birds in your garden (or at a public open space) for an hour and submit your results on-line or by post. Once smitten you will be amazed by how much

more you will become aware of your local birdlife and how your identification skills and understanding of bird activity will be improved, especially if you can involve and enthuse youngsters.

So far this year we have undertaken some very interesting outings. Our annual coach trip to Minsmere in early May revealed the usual regulars such as bittern, hobby, little tern and sand martin and incoming migrants such as nightingale, reed and sedge warblers, garden warbler, common whitethroat and blackcap. We also ventured to new venues such as the Lea Valley and Medmerry, near Pagham. At the latter we were treated to a roost of over 300 Mediterranean Gulls (usually we see only a handful!) and the evolving habitat was alive with butterflies and should be good for waders. Another regular must is the visit to Oare Marshes, especially if you are interested in wader identification and rare visitors. If you can't join us on Sundays we are still running mid-week morning and evening trips so please check

the programme for details and come along. No particular expertise is required and there is plenty of sharing knowledge and identification skills.

If you are more sedentary in your birdwatching activities why not come along to one of our evening meetings (every second Wednesday of the month in the White Hart Barn, Godstone, except August)? Hopefully there will be a topic or area covered to interest you. And as winter approaches, enjoy your birdwatching however you do it!
John Lawrence, Group Leader

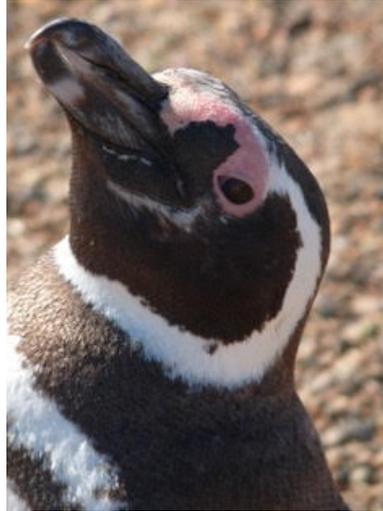
SOUTH AMERICA (part 2)

In the Spring Newsletter I left you at the tip of South America at the notoriously dangerous Cape Horn. It was the early morning of 22nd February when we left the turbulent South Atlantic seas and force 8 wind behind and headed out into the open ocean on a 430 nautical mile course NE towards the Falkland Islands. There were birds everywhere, many species of both prions and petrels and several sightings of both Wandering and Royal Albatross. We dropped anchor in Port Stanley's deep water port on East Falkland the following

morning at 7.a.m., and soon boarded tenders for a half hour trip to shore. The other large island is West Falkland and there are another 200 smaller islands, comprising an area of 4700 square miles. The total population of the archipelago is only about 3000, and the islanders affectionately call themselves kelpers, after the kelp seaweed that grows in abundance around the shores. Stanley was established by the British in 1845, and it became successful as a deep water port specialising in repairs for boats travelling through the Straits of Magellan on their way to the Californian Gold Rush. The harbour holds the record for the world's largest graveyard of 19 Century ships (destroyed by the treacherous North Atlantic storms), and we had seen many of the 20 hulls even before we landed, although not Brunel's Great Britain which rested here over 80 years before being recovered and returned to Bristol for restoration in 1970. We couldn't have picked a better day; clear and pure blue skies, brilliant sunshine and relatively no wind - by no means typical according to the locals. I've been to many beautiful places in the world, and maybe it was the perfect weather, but magical best describes my first impression. Even all those wrecks seemed to perfectly fit and not detract from the landscape. Unspoilt and undeveloped the Falklands are the perfect host to thousands of penguins, sea loins, elephant seals, dolphins and orcas. In the day ashore I did my very best to see as many of these as

possible, but I very much regret not having been able to stay much longer.

My wife and I were very fortunate however - in view of the high



demand for, but dearth of, suitable vehicles on the island - to have booked well in advance for a trip to the privately owned 35,000 acre sheep and cattle ranch with a unique wildlife haven at Bluff Cove lagoon. In the 1982 war the farm was occupied by the Argentines before being liberated by the British troops on their final push to Stanley. We were picked up from the pier by minibus and taken across the island to rendezvous with a waiting driver in a specialist 4x4 safari vehicle, better able to negotiate the tricky off-road terrain. Apparently Darwin crossed the farm on horseback here in 1834. It was an interesting if bumpy ride to the beach across very rugged ground. The scene that awaited was idyllic. A stunningly wild and beautiful cove with deep blue ocean, and golden sands heaving with a multiplicity of wildlife. We were surrounded by

Gentoo penguins (the rookery holds 1000 birds here), several majestic King penguins were also present along with a supporting cast of brown skuas, flightless steamer ducks, the stunningly beautiful upland geese, and the skies were full of Turkey vultures. As one of the last untouched landscapes on the planet, it's no wonder the pristine beaches and crystal clear waters teem with hundreds of species of wildlife. We had to be dragged away but before doing so we found time to sample a wonderful cream tea complete with wild Diddle Dee berry jam, in a small beach hut erected for visitors by the farm owner. This was a short and expensive excursion, but worth every penny.

On returning to the port my wife and I split up - not permanently that is, although she has sufficient grounds considering the amount of birding I do! Her itinerary included a bit of souvenir hunting in the small number of attractive little shops, and looking at the famous Christ Church Cathedral with its corrugated iron roof and magnificent whalebone arch made from the jaws of two blue whales. Other tourists visited the cemeteries of the fallen and some of the battlefields of the 82 conflict. Much as I would have liked to have spent time here and in the maritime museum, my priority was to see more of the wildlife; so I hopped on the local bus which took me some 4 miles to Gypsy Cove, a National Nature Reserve. It is a small bay with a crescent of stunningly white sand, sheltered from prevailing winds. The beach is



backed by dry heath-land, dune and tussac grass which can grow to 10 feet in height and is particularly important for wildlife in the Falklands - a land without any native trees!

Once again the vista was breathtaking. I encountered my third species of penguin here as some 200 pairs of Magellanic - known as jackass in the islands because of their loud mournful braying call - nest here. There are two things to be particularly wary of as well; one is stepping on and causing the collapse of the penguins underground nesting burrows and the second is wandering off track into a minefield from the 1982 conflict, although such dangers are roped off with plenty of warning signs. I wondered however, how long it would be before the authorities complete the task of making the islands mine free! Adjacent to the Cove is the larger picturesque area of Yorke Bay, a favoured feeding ground for waders, wildfowl and gulls. I walked in the other direction all the way to ordnance Point. There are low cliffs here with rock cormorants and night herons, and I also saw bay-winged hawk and the striking crimson coloured long-tailed meadow lark. Totally absorbed in the magic, I nearly missed the

last bus back to the pier and onward to the waiting ship.

We departed port at 6pm that evening and headed NW for a 600mile cruise to our next port of call Puerto Madryn Argentina. At sea all the next day, highlights included massive flocks of great shearwaters, a few Cory's shearwaters and another glimpse of a massive wandering albatross.

It was 6.00 a.m. on my birthday, the 25th February, that we docked at Puerto Madryn, the gateway to Patagonia's wonders. It wasn't the conquistadores who first settled here, but 150 colonists from Wales in 1865 seeking to escape religious persecution in Britain and lured by the Argentine government's promise to provide 100 square miles of land along the Chubert river. Named after a Welsh baron the colonists founded other towns in the province but while they retain much of the Welsh heritage only the street names remain in Puerto Madryn. We went on a bone shaking 2 hour drive across the vast stark semi desert zone steppe landscape to the Unesco World Heritage site of the Valdes Peninsular. It's one of the world's great wildlife preserves comprising over 1500 square

miles of unparalleled landscape of plateaus, headlands, salt water lakes, depressions and rugged coastline. Over half of the world's Southern right whale population frequent these waters, which are also home to major colonies of seals, sea lions and countless seabirds.

We visited the beach where David Attenborough narrated the Blue Planet sequence of Orcas taking seal pups. We didn't see any killer whales but the coast was heaving with masses of sea lions and seals with their pups. Returning inland we encountered the ostrich-like rheas and several guanacos, a species related to alpacas and llamas. We had lunch at the Estancia San Lorenzo, a family-owned sheep station that stretches along the shores of the Golfo de San Matias. This is home to an immense colony of nesting Magellanic penguins which we were able to carefully walk amongst. The thorny bush and sandy habitat was also excellent for rufous-coloured sparrow, Patagonian mockingbird and the exquisite burrowing owl. After another 2 hour drive along the dusty and barren steppe landscape we returned somewhat exhausted to the welcome comforts of our luxury ship. Though very tiring and very different to the scenery and tranquility of the Falklands it had been a wonderful experience. Join me again in the next Newsletter for the final instalment of this epic cruise covering the beautiful cities of Montevideo Uruguay and Argentina's famed capital Buenos Aires.
Brian Thomas (Editor)

EVENING MEETINGS

- 11 Jan Andy Skillen: *"Walking with Bears"* Amazing guided adventures "on foot" in arctic Canada to view brown and polar bears
- 8 Feb John Bevis *"The Keartons: Inventing Nature Photography"* Amazing lives of the founding fathers of natural history photography.
- 8 Mar Brian Gallop: *"A Trip to Zambia"* Learn about the wildlife and attractions of this less-visited African country.
- 12 April AGM – followed by our special guest speaker, Alan Loweth, who will be telling us about: *Broadwater Warren* - How to make a Nature Reserve.
- 10 May Chris Collins: *"Amazing Birds"* Learn some amazing facts about avian travels, feathers, endemism and new species.
- 14 June David Boag: *"The Nature of New Zealand"* Enjoy the unique wildlife and outstanding scenery of these remote islands.
- 12 July Keith Brandwood: *"I paint bird pictures"* Learn how a local artist prepares and executes a picture of a bird study.
- August Summer break**
- 13 Sep Martin Davies: *"Wild Ethiopia."* Explore the conservation and development issues facing such a diverse country.
- 11 Oct Ashley Grove: *"Trinidad and Tobago, home of the Hummingbird"*. Marvel at the colourful birdlife of these islands, including some on film with sound.
- 8 Nov Bill Costa: *"Hungary and Spain"* View many iconic European birds and raptors of mountains, forests and the countryside.
- 13 Dec Christmas Meeting – festivities, including members tales/photographs.

FIELD TRIPS

- 15 Jan Dungeness. Leader Brian Hobley (01883 625404).
- 12 Feb Sheppey. Leader John Lawrence (01737 553316).
- 12 Mar Gillingham Country Park. Leader Brian Hobley (01883 625404).
- 16 April Medmerry. Leader Richard Lowe (01342 835354).
- 19 April Half day trip Old Lodge Ashdown Forest (meet OL car park TV470305 at 9.a.m. Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
- 26 April Half day seawatch Seaford Head. Meet 6.30 a.m. east end of beach by start of cliffs. Leader R Lowe (01342 835354)).
- 3 May Half day Bough Beech Reservoir - meet BB Causeway 9.00a.m. Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
- 7 May Minsmere. Coach pick up Godstone 7.30 a.m. sharp.
- 21 May New Forest. Meet 7am Godstone. Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
- 7 June Half day Warnham Horsham, meet Blindley Heath pond 8.30 am. R. Lowe.
- 18 June Stodmarsh & Grove Ferry. Leader Richard Lowe (01342 835354).
- 9 & 23 June Ashdown Forest (nightjars), meet Long Car park 8pm (south of Wych Cross). Leader Richard Lowe (01342 835354).
- 16 July Mystery trip. Leader John Lawrence (01737 553316).
- 13 Aug Oare Marshes. Leader Brian Hobley (01883 625404).
- 17 Sep Birling Gap & 7 Sisters Country Park. Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
- 15 Oct Pagham Harbour. Leader Brian Thomas (01883 623149).
- 19 Nov Easthead West Wittering & The Burgh. Leader Richard Lowe (01342 835354).
- 17 Dec Pett Level & Rye Harbour. Leader John Lawrence (01737 553316).

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 2016 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: www.eastsurreysrpb.co.uk. There is no group subscription, new visitors are always welcome.

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RSPB is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

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