



RSPB East Surrey Local Group

Newsletter 67
Spring 2020

LEADER'S BLOG

I was reading some of the notable success stories for the RSPB in 2019 – nearly 200 booming bitterns were recorded across the UK; all 5 hen harrier nests fledged young in the Forest of Bowland and only 2 hen harriers disappeared compared to 16 lost in suspicious circumstances last year; and 112 captive-reared back-tailed godwit chicks were released on the Ouse Washes which had the best breeding record for this species in the last 20 years. We also raised £6 million to eradicate mice from Gough Island, a British Overseas Territory, to safeguard the future of the critically-endangered Tristan Albatross and Gough Bunting. Yet these numbers pale into insignificance compared to the recent habitat destruction in the Brazilian Amazon and species loss in the forest fires in Australia, the first driven by man's greed and the latter by climate change.

When you thought that some of these threats to our planet couldn't get much worse along comes coronavirus and our day to day lives are turned upside down. As we self-isolate at home, cocooned from most

forms of social and community interaction, we have to turn in on ourselves and our families. And yet nature seems to carry on regardless as spring plants blossom and birds begin to pair up and our summer visitors start to arrive. Those with gardens will no doubt spend more time outdoors. Consider making it more wildlife-friendly and take time to relax and spend more time observing and appreciating the coming and going of our local birds and other wildlife. Others will turn to social media, the internet and good old-fashioned radio and TV for entertainment, not least programmes on wildlife and the natural world you may never get to see but can still appreciate.

As we ponder these events, we may feel powerless to make a difference on our own to life on the planet or its future. Yet we must continue to speak out against any lessening of the protection we afford our environment and pursue the positive management of our land for agricultural production and wildlife protection and conservation. We must continue to support the campaigning work of the RSPB here and

abroad and believe as an organisation we can make a difference. We must challenge and monitor our government, other world leaders and international business, especially during the latest summit on climate change which is due to take place in Glasgow later this year.

It doesn't have to be all doom and gloom. We belong to the RSPB because we care. Continue to put out food and water for the birds if you can and when life returns to some form of normality come and join us at our meetings and outings or just continue to be proud to support and champion our wildlife.

John Lawrence (Group Leader)

POISONOUS TWITCHING

Apart from a particular love of birds and all wildlife, I just enjoy being out and about in our wonderful countryside enjoying the changing seasons, the stunning countryside we have so close at hand in Surrey, and breathing fresh air. Unfortunately all that changed when I visited a stretch of the River Wandle on the Sutton/Merton borders with Brian Hopley and John Mayer in late February this year. We had heard that a good number of

wintering chiffchaffs, firecrests and most significantly a yellow browed warbler had been spotted in the area, at Poulter Park. We were not disappointed with the avian fare on show; there were more than a dozen chiffchaffs present including at least two birds of the Siberian race tristis, which are noticeably of a distinct grey/brown hue compared with our usual collybita race with its brownish green colouration. In fact they bring to mind a slimed down version of a garden warbler. A pair of firecrests graced us with their presence, the male showing off its most brilliant white supercillium, golden yellow hues and stunningly bright crest. The real rarity didn't disappoint either; we had stunning views of the yellow-browed warbler, an uncommon visitor from the Siberian taiga, as it fed on the abundant insect life opposite us in a bramble patch on the northern bank of what is nowadays a much cleaner little river. Well, I say that till all hell broke loose... A gentleman (I use the word advisedly) appeared opposite us in a food warehouse yard dressed in full facemask and spacesuit like protective clothing and preceded to start up his very

loud bazooka like insecticide machine and spray indiscriminately far and wide, (see photo). He trespassed onto the opposite bank of the river from us and only 10 metres distance. The breeze was quite brisk and in our direction and huge clouds of grey/white powder like mist gusted towards us. We naturally took immediate avoiding action by moving quickly downstream. Notwithstanding this we all suffered adverse reactions in varying degrees to the unknown but obnoxious and poisonous chemicals, including stinging eyes headache burning face, nasal inflammation etc. We were on a public riverside footpath and one can only imagine the affect such an incident could have had if a baby in a pram had been similarly exposed. Mr Hobley saw his GP after the incident and he diagnosed an allergic reaction or most probably mild poisoning. If that was mild poisoning I dread to think of the consequences had we not avoided the clouds of visible smoke-like spray as we did! All relevant Authorities were fully apprised of the incident immediately - The Environmental Agency (re water

pollution implications etc.), Sutton and Merton Councils Environmental Health, South East Rivers Trust, and The Health & Safety Executive. In addition we have asked our new East Surrey constituency MP to raise this with her Parliamentary colleagues in the 2 London Boroughs concerned. To say we are underwhelmed by the response thus far some 3 weeks on is a massive understatement!

I suspect the perpetrators were licensed contractors, in which case they have clearly failed to follow safety advice and correct manufacturers chemical protocols and mandatory public safety advice. I can't wait to get a meaningful response, learn what action if any has been taken and discover what specific substance was involved.

Unfortunately I've got a gut feeling that this unfortunate episode will end the same way as all the conservation/wildlife persecution incidents I and others have endeavoured to get action on in the past, namely no effective action at all!

Brian Thomas

LOCAL BIRDS

It has been a somewhat disappointing winter and early spring for local wildlife, and that was all before the tragedy of the Corona pandemic reached our shores and impacted all our lives and our favourite hobby so massively. For the first time in my memory I have seen more fieldfares than redwings, and both have been in limited numbers. The same goes for another attractive visitor, the brambling, although I was very





Брамблинг: Кэу Бакер

pleased to see a single female in my garden on 31st March, only the second record in 20 years. I think there is no doubt however that this dearth in occurrence is down to us having had such a mild winter.

At Bough Beech Reservoir the first spring migrants from the south, little ringed plovers and house martins were spotted in the second week of march, and a few lucky birders were treated to a small party of spectacular waxwings in the Croydon area, birds that will soon be on their way back north.

Now that garden bird watching is the order of the day, it's great to be able to report buzzards and even red kites almost daily over my Warlingham garden. What isn't so great is the fact that chaffinches - once the most common British bird - are now in unbelievably sharp and rapid decline, with the breeding population having fallen by no fewer than 1.15 million pairs in just 7 years, and by 30% in 11 years. The wren is now our most common bird with 11 million pairs, with the beleaguered chaffinch unbelievably dropping down to joint 5th place with the blackbird. I pray it doesn't go the same way as the turtle dove a species that has dived from 75,000 pairs in the late 90's to

just 3,600 now. Nobody can explain why yet another finch is in desperate trouble (we all remember the disappearance of the greenfinch with disease) but the BTO is urgently trying to raise £100,000 to investigate.

With so much time on our hands in the coming months and nowhere to go, those lucky enough to have gardens will surely be spending a great deal of time in them. I've already noticed a lot of tree felling, hedge hacking and other clearance going on, and we're now in April!

Such work should not of course be undertaken now in the breeding season, and I fear that many virtually new to gardening with time on their hands like never before, might well overdo the clean up and sanitize to such an extent that all those wildlife rich habitat corners will be enthusiastically blitzed to the detriment of nature. So do encourage your friends to leave an oasis of bramble, nettles, long grasses, and to sow wild flowers etc - assuming they can get the seeds of course - and even to dig a pond if possible. I can attest from personal experience how the latter is great for the figure and for ones fitness and wellbeing.

Finally, I know a large number of you take part every year in the Big Garden Birdwatch. I'm going to keep a detailed log like never before of the numbers and varieties of birds I get in and over the garden in the

coming months, and compare notes with my friends. Why don't you join in and let me know what you see. With so many eyes and ears open, I'm sure some real goodies will be spotted and very likely some garden firsts.

Alternatively I see the BTO have made a free offer to join their BTO Garden Birdwatch (see www.bto.org/gbw).

Brian Thomas

NO LEG TO STAND ON

How many times when visiting London or other densely populated areas have you been saddened by the sight of pigeons with deformed or missing toes?

The condition known as stringfoot was thought to result from either infection, a reaction to chemical pollutants or from the birds injuring themselves when alighting on deterrent metal spikes placed on buildings. A French study found the birds often have string or human hair wrapped around their toes and feet, and that this appears to be one of the prime agents as this can eventually tighten and cut off circulation, leading to tissue death and toes falling off. The problem was found to be prevalent in areas of high population and pollution, and districts with a greater number of hairdressers. Birds rummaging amongst spilt domestic refuse and residual cut hair on pavements and failing to untangle themselves are apparently ending up with garroted toes.

Do keep safe and well!

Brian Thomas

EVENING MEETINGS 2020		
JAN	Wed 8	Brian Nobbs: “ Food for the birds – Eat-in or Take-away? ” How birds from hummingbirds to vultures exploit the food resources around them.
FEB	Wed 12	David Darrell-Lambert: “ The easy way to identify Gulls ” How to overcome the pitfalls of assessing the age and type of these birds in the field.
MAR	Wed 11	Glenda Law: “ Australia’s tropical north ”. We visit Uluru (Ayers Rock), Kakadu National Park and Daintree rainforest in search of crocodiles and birds.
APR	Wed 8	AGM – followed by our special guest speaker Peter Holden MBE whose topic will be “ Inspired by Birds ” – an historic look at how people have viewed birds and objects, images and other works of art they have created.
MAY	Wed 13	Chris Collins: “ Arctic Russia: Realm of the Ice Bear. ” Not just a world record for polar bears but also Spectacled Eider, White-billed Diver etc.
JUN	Wed 10	Simon Ginnaw: “ Kent’s wild year ” A personal journey through the seasons capturing stunning landscapes, rich history and beautiful wildlife.
JUL	Wed 8	John Buckingham: “ Bird Ringing ”. An insight into the fascinating work of the Sandwich Bay Bird observatory.
AUG	SUMMER BREAK	
SEP	Wed 9	Bill Coster: “ Bill does Britain ” Some of the best of British wildlife and landscape.
OCT	Wed 14	Rick Simpson: “ New Moon on the Wane – The Curse of the Curlews ”. Why are curlew species declining across the world?
NOV	Wed 11	Andy Skillen : “ Brazil? You must be nuts.....! ” A decade of adventures in South America’s wildlife haven.
DEC	Wed 9	Christmas Meeting – festive fare and members tales/photographs.

FIELD TRIPS 2020	
Sun 12	Shellness & Sheppey (Brian Thomas 07596 171941).
Sun 16	The Burgh (Wendy Bainbridge 07751 784479).
Sun 15	Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry (Dave Bryant 07837 250090).
Sun 12	Rye Harbour/Pett Level (John Lawrence 07952 830240).
Wed 22	Half day Old Lodge Ashdown (meet car park TV 470305 at 9a.m) (Brian Thomas 07596 171941).
Sun 26	Half day Seawatch Seaford Head. Meet 6.30am east end of beach by start of cliffs (Brian Hobley)
Sun 10	Minsmere ; coach pick up Godstone 7.30a.m. sharp.
Sun 17	New Forest. Meet 7a.m. Godstone, (Wendy Bainbridge 07751 784479).
Sun 14	Tice’s Meadow then extended stay Thursley Common (nightjars) Brian Thomas. (07596 171941).
Fri 19	Nightjars: meet Old Lodge car park Ashdown 8pm. (Brian Thomas).
Sun 12	Mystery trip (Brian Hobley 07967 979674).
Sun 16	Pagham Harbour (John Lawrence 07952 830240)
Sun 13	North Foreland/Oare Marshes Brian Hobley (07967 979674).
Sun 18	Mystery Trip. (Brian Thomas 07596 171941).
Sun 15	Dungeness (Dave Bryant 07837 250090).
Sun 13	Elmley (John Lawrence 07952 830240).

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. Alterations to some of the proposed venues may be necessary at the last minute. *Warm waterproof clothing & stout footwear should be worn. Bring a packed lunch for day trips. No dogs. 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 2020 starting at 8.00 pm. *Admission £3.00 for adults, £1.00 for fledglings.* There is no group subscription and new visitors are always welcome.

Other events during the year are notified at the indoor meetings & on the website: www.eastsurreyspb.co.uk

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If you would like to receive this publication by e-mail contact the Editor, Brian Thomas (e-mail: brianthomas47@gmail.com). Publications sent by e-mail will be in glorious colour.

