

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER JUNE 1987

COMING EVENTS

Lectures 1987:-

Monday 5th October:- Mr A. Cleave - "Summer in Iceland".

Monday 2nd November:- Mr Mike Mason - "R.S.P.B Reserves".

Monday 7th December:- Quiz Evening - with Question-master Dr. John Newnham.

All lectures are held at St. Giles' Church Hall, Upper Shoreham Road, Shoreham by Sea at 7.30pm.

Field Outings:-

Friday 3rd July:- Waltham Brooks and Coates Common. Meet 8pm at Greatham Bridge. Map ref-TQ032163. Evening only. Leader John Dixon. Boots advisable! Tel West Chiltington 2234.

Saturday 22nd August:- Adur Walk. Meet 9am at car park between footbridge & Lady Jane pub. Morning only. Leader Stanley Allen. Tel Shoreham 63332.

Saturday 5th September:- Ferring Rife. Meet at Lemon Tree Cafe at 8am. Map ref-TQ092015. Morning only. Leader Mike Hall. Tel Worthing 43177.

Saturday 19th September:- Sidlesham Ferry/Pagham Harbour. Meet 9.30am at the Information Centre. Map ref-SQ856963. All day. Leader Dave Smith. Tel Worthing 47231.

Sunday 18th October:- Cissbury Ring. Meet 8.00am at car park north of Ring. Map ref-TQ139085. Morning only. Leader Chris Fox. Tel Ashington 892948.

Sunday 6th December:- East Head/West Wittering. Meet 9.30am in West Wittering car park. Morning only. Leader Richard Ives. Tel Worthing 210419.

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\* BARBEQUE:- SATURDAY 11TH JULY - 27 WEST DRIVE - FERRING \*
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\* From 8pm onwards. See Note Enclosed..... \*
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HELP!!! CAN YOU HELP AT THE BARBEQUE?? - VOLUNTEERS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED TO ASSIST WITH COOKING AND SERVING AT THE BARBEQUE. PLEASE LEND A HAND TO ENSURE THE CONTINUING SUCCESS OF THIS EVENT.

~~~~~ IF YOU CAN HELP 'PHONE MIKE HALL STRAIGHT AWAY ON WORTHING 43177. ~~~~~

MEMBERSHIP CARDS:- Membership cards will be issued for the 1988 season. These will be handed out to Members who pay at the Society's meetings. Would those members who pay by post and want a membership card sent to them please send a stamped self-addressed envelope to the Honorary Treasurer as in previous years.

### Comings and Goings.

Not all members are able to attend the A.G.M. and some may therefore be unaware of the changes that took place in the Committee at that meeting. For their benefit and as confirmation to those who attended the following changes occurred.

Stanley Allen resigned as Hon. Treasurer after six years service. We thank Stanley for all his hard work and sound advice in establishing a secure financial foundation for the Society. Stanley will remain on the Committee as an ordinary member and we welcome Chris Fox, well known to many members, into the post of Hon. Treasurer. Another departure, this time Bernie Forbes who steps down as Hon. Recorder. The task of the Recorder is unenviable; many hours of toil sifting, evaluating and writing up the records which form the basis of our Report. Bernie has undertaken these duties cheerfully and diligently and we are extremely grateful to him.

To fill the post of Recorder we are pleased that after a years probation in the post of Field Secretary Dave Smith has, in a rash or off-guard moment, agreed to take on the duties. Dave is a very experienced ornithologist and is the ideal person to take on the task. This in turn required a volunteer to arrange the field outings and Richard Weal, an existing committee member whose organisational talents have already generated to the winter birdwatch weekends, is well qualified to become Field Secretary.

John Dixon.

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### Your Records and the Corvid Survey

Don't Forget:- The new recorder is already after your records; please send in now your records for the first 6 months of the year. Records and counts of Rooks, Crows, Jackdaws, Magpies and Jays are particularly required for the Corvid Survey. Dave Smith's address is:- 15 Ryecroft Close, Goring-by-Sea, Worthing.

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### The Data Protection Act

Some members may be aware from the last A.G.M. or have spotted from the envelope which enclosed the Annual Report (if you noticed in the excitement) that the Society is plunging into the computer age by computerising the membership records. This exercise not only removes the chore of writing out by hand several times each year the envelopes for each mailshot but also assists both the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer in keeping track of membership comings and goings, recording and analysing subscription details and even chasing defaulters! In so doing the Committee is conscious of its responsibility in holding this information, limited though the information is. The Committee therefore gives an assurance that the information held will only be used for the purposes stated above and will not be disclosed to any person who has no connection with the Shoreham District Ornithological Society or its activities. However if, despite the above statement, a member is unhappy about information held in this way they have the right to request that their information is deleted from the computer records. If so, please contact the Hon. Secretary, John Dixon, or the Editor, Brian Clay, either of whom will ensure that this is done.

Provided that everybody has not rushed off to have their records deleted can I request that all members check the names and addresses on their envelopes carefully and let the Secretary or Editor know of any inaccuracies or omissions. There is a saying in the computer world - "Garbage In, Garbage Out" - and given my typing skills, or lack of, I do not claim immunity!

Brian Clay

## Garden Bird Feeding Survey

This is the fifth year of the survey and although the relatively small number of contributors makes scientific analysis impossible never the less much useful and interesting information has been gathered.

As with the previous two winters the winter of 1986/87 provided some of the most extreme low temperatures and snowfalls of this century. However this area did not appear to experience a notable influx of northern thrushes and other winter visitors unlike the two previous 'hard' winters when they regularly entered gardens. Certainly Redwing and Fieldfare were reported but most contributors recorded lower numbers than in 1985/86 with shorter and less frequent visits.

In total 51 species have now been recorded on the survey with recent additions being Mistle Thrush, Siskin (3 in Worthing), Brambling (2 in Ferring, 1 at Southwick), Yellowhammer (1 at Shoreham), Meadow Pipit, Tawny Owl, Tree Creeper and most recently a female Redstart during October in Joan Nye's garden.

In addition to receiving the data I have felt privileged at reading the numerous accounts of what food has been supplied and how bird behaviour changes under certain conditions. The menu is now very extensive ranging from the bulk of bread, cooked potatoes, cereal of various kinds to the more exotic sunflower seeds, raisins and Christmas pudding. Our birds have dined on peanuts by the tonne! (It would be interesting to ask every member of the Society to make a log of the number of lbs. of peanuts bought and provided during the winter!) More usefully perhaps someone could organise a bulk food supply for society members' purchase and distribution during the November meeting. Fat, cheese and scraps have often appeared in contributors foodlists and no doubt the list is not exhausted yet.

I feel that many contributors have gained, as I have done, from the incentive to watch the garden methodically which the survey provides. There are a number of changes which might be made to the present format; I have indicated that I wish to retire from compiling the survey but I will be very pleased to discuss future plans with a successor as soon as possible. Certainly I hope that a study of the birds which use our gardens will continue to be one of the Society's activities.

Mike Hall.

Any Volunteers?? (Ed).

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### Spring 1987 - Where Were the Birds?

After a relatively quiet first quarter of the year, hopes were high of a warm spring with plenty of birds to see - I always look forward to seeing the first incoming landbird migrants after a long, cold winter and still get the same pleasure from seeing the first bright male Wheatear and hearing the first Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers.

Initially we were not disappointed, with a small influx of Firecrests and Black Redstarts in early April and the first Willow Warbler singing at Upper Beeding on the early date of 15th March. Chiffchaffs arrived from mid-March with the first Wheatears close on their heels and 5 Sand Martins were present at Washington on the 5th April. However, cold conditions persisted with a north to westerly air stream until the middle of April when the hoped for warmer weather finally arrived bringing migrants with it. No large flocks have as yet been reported but Willow Warblers, Whitethroats, Blackcaps, Reed and Sedge Warblers and Redstarts were noted in small numbers.

Encouragingly, at the time of writing with the breeding season well under way, several species which gave cause for concern in recent years are present this year in higher numbers. Whitethroats are much-increased with reports of breeding numbers reaching saturation point in some parts of the Downs; additionally Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat numbers seem up with Blackcaps in similar numbers to usual. I haven't noticed as many singing Chiffchaffs this year and a personal feeling is that they may be a little down on previous years. The breeding population of Sand Martins in our one colony is as much as 50% up on last year although previously occupied sites nearby have not as yet been recolonised.

Nightingales have been noted from previously unoccupied areas, including the first breeding record for the Mumbles reserve. Whinchats arrived in early May; notably 7 at Hill Barn on the 9th, and Cuckoos were present in good numbers, 4 being at New Salts Farm on the 3rd. Turtle Doves seem thin on the ground and one or two people told me that they haven't seen too many Swallows, although House Martins and Swifts appear to be numerous. Lapwings are breeding in similar numbers in the regularly-censused downland areas and unusually 30 Ringed Plovers were still on the Adur in late May.

Raptors were few with the occasional Hobby sighting but the highlight must surely be the melanistic Montagu's Harrier over Broadwater on May 4th, heading for the Downs. A Buzzard or two was seen early in the season, Ferring Rife held a Short-eared Owl briefly on the 28th March and in early May a large raptor, almost certainly a Marsh Harrier, was seen heading northwards.

As usual in spring, coastal watchers' thoughts turned to the sea. Unfortunately this season for the most part was spent in literally 'sea' watching with few birds to break the monotony. We had our share of easterly winds but these were always light and often accompanied by mist and poor visibility. No two springs are the same but this was one of the dullest I can remember, generating such comments as "Bumble bee 1E", "WET WET WET", "More bikinis than birds" and the terse "No Birds!" in the daily log. Understandably, coverage in the dominant westerlies was well below average.

April 4th should have been a taste of things to come with a late afternoon movement of 1053 Common Scoter E and SSW; the highest day total for this species since March 1980. 2 Velvet Scoter and a Bonxie also passed east. Otherwise, no real movements were noted; Arctic Skuas were lamentably few as were Bar-tailed Godwits and "Commic" Terns although Whimbrel passage was at or above average and Sanderling appeared in better numbers towards the end of May. The seasons highlights were a pair of Gargany leading a Common Scoter flock on April 3rd, a party of 18 Avocets moving east on April 17th, single Great Northern Diver, Spotted Redshank and (unusually) White-fronted Goose on April 24th, 9 Pomarine Skuas lazily moving through together on May 8th and a few Black Terns in the second half of May.

Few rarities were noted although a verbal report has been received of Crane and Hoopoe at Brighton Marina. Brooklands held a Red-crested Pochard in May, which was most likely an escape. However, within short distances of our area in other parts of Sussex and in Hampshire the Spring has been exceptional for European vagrants including Black-winged Stilts, Black Kites, Roller, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared Wheatear, Black Stork, Little Bittern, Night Herons, Little Egret and Serins - a pity that all of these avoided us! Hopefully the Autumn will bring better things.

Dave Smith.