

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN/WINTER 1991

Well let me begin by apologizing for the delay in the Annual Report. It was most unfortunate that the finished article took so long to be published once all the reformatting had been completed in May. It was delayed at the printers who, despite repeated reminders, were unable to print it for another 4 months. Needless to say, no one was very happy about the situation but hopefully it won't be repeated in the future.

The evenings are drawing in so it is time to remind you about our indoor programme for the rest of this year and the early part of next. I hope there is enough variety to tempt everyone out to sample the delights we have on offer. Any feedback from you would be most appreciated; if you have any suggestions please contact any of the committee members and we shall endeavour to help.

November 4th	Graham Hart - Conservation of Butterfly Habitats
December 2nd	Members' Evening
January 6th	Barrie Watson - Wildlife of New Zealand
February 3rd	Mike Russell (Woods Mill) - Wildlife Show Case or Theme Park?
March 2nd	David Cottridge - Hide and Seek
April 6th	AGM then Mr Williamson - Kingley Vale

And for the more adventurous the field trips are:-

Sunday October 20th	Climping Beach with Roy Sandison. Meet Littlehampton Car Park 9.00. All day.
Sunday December 1st	Thorney Island with Clive Hope. Meet 9.00
Saturday December 28th	Adur Walk with Stanley Allen. Meet Lady Jane 9.00. Half day.
<u>1992</u>	
Sunday 19th January	Amberley with Bernie Forbes. Meet Greatham Bridge 9.00. All day.
Sunday 23rd February	Dover Woods with Richard Ives. Meet Dover Car Park 9.00. Half day.
Sunday 5th April	Goring Gap and Ferring Rife. Meet 9.00. Half day.

More details (ie. grid references) available from your SDOS card. Those for next year available on receipt of 1992's subscription! The Treasurer would be most grateful to receive any subscriptions from now on - payment can be made at the indoor meetings.

Local Birding Spring 1991

I suppose that I could sum up the season as "started well, finished well, with a black hole in the middle!" A number of observers have commented to me that this spring was the worst in their personal experience. No doubt this was due to the dominant north to north-easterly airstream that prevailed for most of the period, bringing few migrants in at times when large scale arrivals were expected and making for some rather dull seawatches. Consequently the better falls of migrants, locally at least, were late: in the last 10 days of May.

The unusual did put in an appearance, however, and two major rarities (both potential "firsts" for the area, if accepted) put in brief appearances. The first was a summer-plumaged adult Laughing Gull on the River Adur at Shoreham on 6th April whose stay was sadly brief; later that morning it was seen flying east off Seaford (East Sussex). Following this sighting, on 9th May a bird showing the characteristics of Lesser Crested Tern flew eastwards close inshore at Worthing beach; of interest the usual bird which has habitually frequented the Farne Islands in the last few summers arrived there (albeit briefly) two days later. Perhaps it will have the good grace to pass next year at a reasonable hour when all the "regulars" are watching, instead of mid-afternoon! Myself, MPH and JAN just missed it ..(so did I! - Ed.)

A Crane was reported over Southwick on 5th April - 2 were found in the east of the county the following day. Interesting raptors included several Hobbys in off the sea plus scattered sightings elsewhere, an Osprey was reported at Patching Pond and a Marsh Harrier flew NE over Findon Valley on May 30.



OSPREY

Migrant passerines appeared generally late, and certainly the peak arrivals did seem to be on later dates than usual; for example groups of Wheatears were still arriving at the end of May, and there were falls of common migrants (Willow Warblers, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat) towards the end of the month. However, first arrivals for most species seemed to be on average dates, and some (Cuckoo, Nightingale, Reed Warbler) were slightly early. At the time of writing (early June) very few Pied Flycatchers, Redstarts, and Ringed Ouzels have been reported.

Returning to the spring seawatch it was rather quiet although most days, whilst no numbers of any one species passed, there was a steady "trickle" to hold interest, and reasonable variety. This spring was NOT the season of the Pomarine Skua, with only around a dozen seen, although both Selsey and Seaford fared better. Most of the expected "quality" species (Black Tern, Mediterranean Gull, Avocet, Velvet Scoter, Little Gull, Great and Arctic Skuas, Shag etc.) were noted, but fewer than usual. Wader passage was generally bleak, except for a huge movement of Bar tailed Godwits on 24th April, and I suspect that the Sanderling total will be reasonably high, with regular parties passing in late-May. Very few Greenshanks were seen, and Black tailed Godwits moved eastwards with 10 on 11th May, and 2 on 22nd May in the company of 2 fine summer-plumaged Spotted Redshanks. Sandwich Terns trickled through in regular numbers, and although there were few days of heavy "Commic" Terns passage, the total for the season may not be as poor as we had thought. The county as a whole experienced an influx of Garganey in late March, two passing Worthing beach on 29th.

Other spring highlights included single Glaucous Gulls, an adult at Goring beach on 15th March, and a second-summer individual at Worthing beach on May 10th. At the latter site a Black necked Grebe sat offshore on 29th March, and a Serin flew past calling on a date in May.

Outside our area but still in Sussex, late May & early June produced a sequence of semi-rarities and rarities; a Dotteral at Woodingdean on 27th May, a pair of American Wigeon (the first for Sussex) at Pett Pools on June 1st, a superb summer-plumaged Red throated Pipit in the Cuckmere Valley for a few days at the end of May, and a male Wilson's Phalarope, also in summer plumage, at Sidlesham Ferry on 3rd June.

Finally, (and at the risk of repeating myself yet again!), a reminder that any 1991 records you have would be much appreciated - particularly counts of Fieldfare flocks along the coastal strip in the February "freeze", as I'm attempting to evaluate just how many were involved.

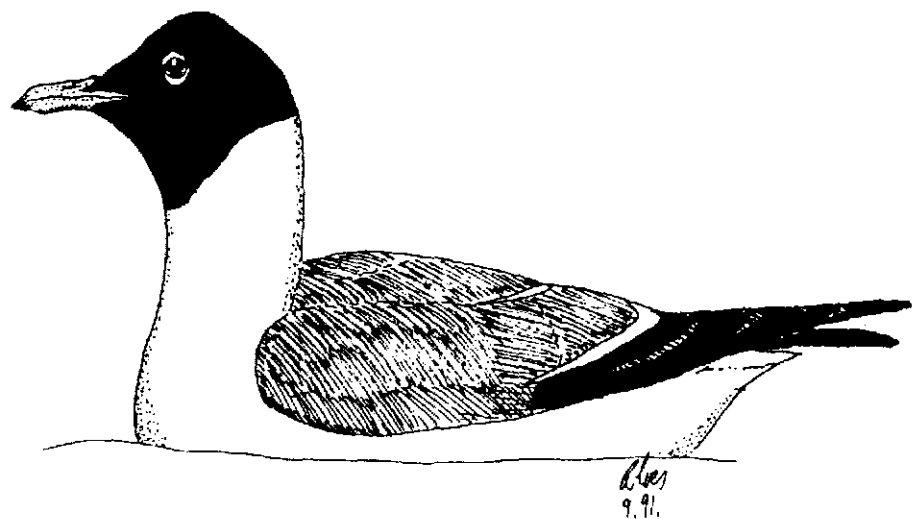
Dave Smith (Hon. Recorder)

Summer update

As this newsletter was put back owing to the delay in the report I just thought I'd add a few notes on what happened in the summer. Basically not much! However the early autumn saw an improvement with a Black Stork and Marsh Harrier recorded over Cissbury by some lucky...(expletives omitted) observer. Widewater hotted up (as did the weather eventually) in mid-July when several unusual waders graced us with their presence: 2 Wood Sandpipers, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 1 Little Stint, and Greenshank. Ferring beach followed suit with 4 Curlew Sandpipers, Knot, Little Stint, over 50 Bar tailed Godwits (a record?) and Sanderlings.

The outing to Hollingbury also produced one of the best autumn birds in the shape of a Honey Buzzard! Perhaps a few more members will join the leaders on a few more outings as rare birds do turn up! See above for details on the next few field outings. Perhaps I'll see you there?

Richard Ives (Hon. Editor)



LAUGHING GULL

Pagham Harbour

Thanks must be given to all those who wrote to the W.S.C.C. opposing the wildfowling application for a renewed licence. As most of you are well aware this application was turned down owing to the strength of opposition from conservation groups and members from societies such as ours. I am sure the wintering wildfowl and waders will make the most of their undisturbed feeding in the coming years !

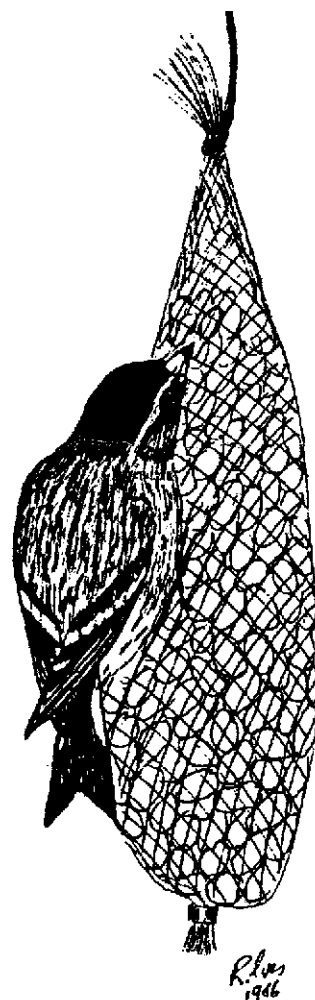
Environmental Fair

I have been informed that the conservation open day at Southwick Community Centre was a success and we may have gained a few new members as a result. The only complaint was the lack of numbers which must be partly attributed to the date chosen: Cup Final Day - let's hope that the mistake won't be repeated in future years.

GARDEN BIRD FEEDING SURVEY

The time of year has again been reached when the Society conducts its feeding survey of garden birds. Firstly a thank-you to all those members who contributed last year. The results are being analysed and the outcome will be published in the 1991 Annual Report together with first impressions of the numbers visiting this winter. Last year I asked for comments on the survey and suggestions for improvement. Although a number of suggestions were made which require more detailed thought one particular request which will be introduced this winter is to extend the period of the survey to the end of March. The justification for this was clearly borne out last year with the cold snap bringing many winter thrushes into gardens after our survey had ended!

Apart from this change regular contributors can continue as before. For those wishing to participate for the first time the "rules" are quite straightforward. The Survey attempts to record for each month the range of species, frequency and maximum number of birds **coming to food which has been put out for them within a defined area**. Natural foodstuffs occurring in the garden such as shrub berries and soft fruit are **not** relevant to the survey unless they are presented artificially at the feeding station. A number of participants did ask whether naturally occurring food could be included and I will give further consideration to this in time for next season as it would still be useful to distinguish between the two. The "season" will now run from the beginning of October to the end of March. I have enclosed a survey form with this newsletter which gives further details and my address and 'phone number in case you have any query. Please send the completed form to me at the end of the season.



Brian Clay

.....AND FINALLY - MEMBERSHIP AND THE LAW!

You may have realised from the computerised address label on our mailing envelopes that details of the Society's membership are held on a computer. The Data Protection Act sets out regulations governing the use of computers holding personal information. Although it is not necessary for the Society to formally register the fact that we are holding personal information, we are obliged to notify all members that such details are held on a computer so that, if any members object to this, they can ask for the details to be removed. However we can reassure members that these details are used for administrative purposes only and are not divulged to any third party.