



SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 1997

Birds on our Patch — January to April

The icy blasts ensured that our local area did well for unusual wildfowl. Both Smew and Goosander were recorded on 1 Jan and numbers of the latter probably reached over 35. The Adur was the centre of the main flock but others were recorded in the Canal and off shore. Three Scaup spent a few days in the Canal and Brooklands held 180 Tufted Ducks with a smattering of Scaup too.

Raptors included our first winter record of Marsh Harrier which stayed for about ten days, hunting around the airfield. Two Barn Owls regularly hunted there, too. A Buzzard was seen moving east over Palace Pier in mid-January and a Peregrine still chased Starlings at West Pier. A Merlin was seen moving west of the Adur on the 6 Jan. Male and 'ringtail' Hen Harriers were noted on separate dates in February from the Standean area of north Brighton where Tree Sparrows were also regularly seen.

During the cold spell, Woodcocks were recorded in unusual numbers and from a number of sites with at least two at the Withy Patch at the beginning of January. A small Crane which was seen briefly at Ladywells (5 Jan) would

have been the rarest bird recorded during this time but the observers will never know if it was Little or Baillon's. Another frustrating sighting was of a suspected Night Heron seen flying south over Kingston Lane on 15 Jan while the observer was waiting at the traffic lights — a brief binocular view ruled out Little Egret, but then the lights changed!

A flock of Bewick's Swans were at Cuckoo's Corner for a few minutes before the dog walkers disturbed them. It was rumoured that there were three Whoopers as well! It's amazing what a cold spell can produce.

Offshore, there was an impressive array of auks with 30 Razorbills fishing off the Marina on 28 Jan. This seems to be the largest swimming flock ever recorded in the area. Many divers were present offshore at the end of January to mid-February, with at least one Black-throated Diver seen from

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Forthcoming Field Trips

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Sat May 24 | Fishbourne/West Dean Woods
Dave Smith — All Day |
| Sat June 14 | Porton Down — details below
Reserve Warden — All Day |
| Fri July 4 | Ashdown Forest for Nightjars
Peter Friston — evening only |
| Sat Aug 30 | Farlington Marsh — Please note date
Clive Hope — All Day |

I have had confirmation from Porton Down Conservation Group of the above date for our escorted tour which will start at 10 am and finish around 4 pm. I'm told that there is a very small risk that our date may have to be changed for operational reasons.

Numbers are limited, so anyone intending to come should let me know by **June 1st**. First come, first served. I will send a map and instructions to all those registering with me for this outing.

Tony Fenton (Tel 01273 591291)

SUMMER SOCIAL

Wed July 16

At the Red Lion Pub
Shoreham-by-Sea
at 7.30 pm



The Red Lion is next to St. Nicholas Church, opposite the Toll Bridge over the River Adur. There will be a buffet supper at £5 per head. We will have a private room and there is also a garden. It will be possible to bird watch from the nearby tow-path and a short walk can be arranged if anyone wishes.

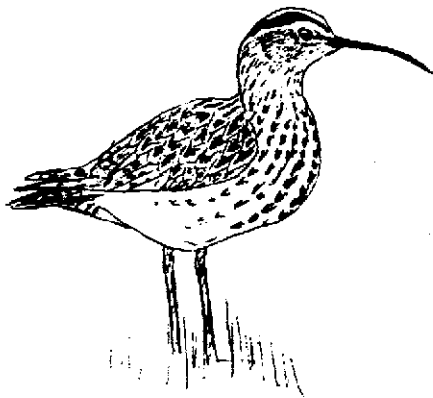
If you hope to come please ring or write to Brianne Reeve by **May 15th** at the Old Rectory, Coombes, Lancing BN15 0RS; Tel 01273 452497.

If you have contacted Brianne, further information will be sent to you at the beginning of July. This event has been arranged instead of the barbecue which was shown on your programme.

BIRDS ON OUR PATCH

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the Marina on three dates in late January. Other records from the Marina were a male Scaup, a flock of Pintail moving east on 5 Feb, the first Fulmar on 29 Jan and daily since then, and a flock of 38 Brents moving east on 28 Feb showing that early spring migration had begun. A second winter Glaucous Gull (originally reported as an Iceland) was seen between Shoreham Fort and Brooklands on 22/23 Feb. However, a Ring-billed Gull, reported at



Shoreham in mid-February, could not be re-found despite an extensive search of the coast and so could not be confirmed.

Ferring Rife in January held Little Egret, Water Rail and Jack Snipe, and an exceptional number of Grey Partridges were present in Goring Gap and in fields behind Kingston Gorse. The Goring wader roost was not often used this winter as the birds usually stayed on the beach at high tide. The regular wintering Sanderling flock reached at least 70 and up to four Bar-tailed Godwits were noted.

SUSSEX HIGHLIGHTS

There were four Bean Geese at Lewes Brooks in January and up to 16 at Scotney Gravel Pit into February. Scotney also held three Snow Geese and a Pink-foot with the mixed White-front, Grey Lag and Brent Goose flock. Eleven Smew at Chichester Gravel Pits during January, included five drakes and a male Red-crested Pochard was there in January and February.

Wintering Whimbrel were noted at Pagham Harbour and at Thorney Island. A Red-necked Grebe was at Bewl Water on 11 Jan and at Arlington Reservoir from 20 Feb to well into March. Arlington Reservoir also hosted a 2nd winter Iceland Gull on 26

An early sign of spring was two Chiffchaffs seen in Worthing on St Valentine's Day. It is likely that the wintering birds perished during the cold spell and so these records could constitute real migrants. A few Blackcaps were recorded early in the year, but may have succumbed to the weather. Both Dartford Warbler and Woodlark have managed to survive the winter, as subsequent visits to their breeding grounds found both species. The Dartford Warbler which spent last summer at Hollingbury Camp, also survived the cold weather and was singing well into March; and another bird was reported from Sheepcote Valley in February.

Other winter passerines included two Twite on the river Adur, near the Toll Bridge on 10 Jan; two Firecrests at Woodvale Cemetery in January and others were reported from the Brighton area in February and March. A Nuthatch was an unusual record in Preston Park, Brighton.

March Seawatches from Brighton Marina produced 2/3 Mediterranean Gulls; 1170 Brent Geese and two Whimbrel east on 11th; a Manx Shearwater east on 14th; White Wagtail and 18 Avocets on 17th; and a number of Sandwich Terns from 21st.

A very early Wheatear was at Brighton Marina on 4 Mar and recent migrants seen have included: Willow Warbler at Hollingbury on 30 Mar, two Blackcaps at the Wild Park on 31 Mar, an early Common Tern past the Marina, and a pair of Ring Ouzels on Hollingbury Camp on 2 Apr.

As the breeding season progresses, it will be interesting to see how our local resident species have coped with the winter so please keep taking records so we can try to assess how damaging the cold spell was.

Thanks to Richard Ives and Peter Whitcomb.

Feb and six Little Gulls on 31 Mar.

A Great Grey Shrike, was probably present in Ashdown Forest from January to March, but this winter roved over a wide area and was very elusive. Bitterns were reported from at least three sites in Sussex during January: Lewes Brooks, Rye and Swanbourne Lake.

An April highlight was a male Serin in the Ferry House garden at Sidlesham from at least 2nd -7th. An early Nightingale arrived at Pulborough Brooks on 10 Apr and migrants on the same day there included a pair of Garganey, a male Pied Flycatcher and an overflying Osprey.

SDOS AGM

For those who missed the AGM these were some important points:

- The President, Stanley Allen, said that the rules of SDOS are being revised and updated and that a copy of the new rules will in due course be sent to all members.
- The Secretary, Brianne Reeve thanked those members who had undertaken to open the hall for meetings and organise refreshments and raffles.
- The Treasurer, Tony Bullock, said that subscription rates have remained unchanged for another year but that membership would lapse if any subscription was not paid by the AGM.
- The current officers and council members are as follows:
Stanley Allen (president), Bernie Forbes (chairman), Brianne Reeve (secretary), Rod Shaw (recorder), Tony Bullock (treasurer), Pat Mulcock (editor), Tony Fenton (field secretary), Pauline Ford Terry Hicks and Peter Whitcomb.

Beginners Courses

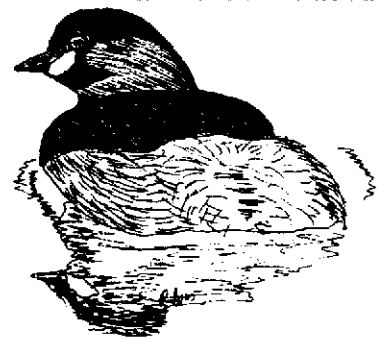
We realise there may be a need for special meetings for younger or less experienced members in addition to the regular field outings for all members. The following two dates have been 'booked'.

Sun June 8 Swanbourne Lake, Arundel

Sat Aug 30 Pagham Harbour

Interested members should contact **Peter Whitcomb 01273 500416** for starting times and other details. The aim will be to help less experienced members with identification and other aspects of birding such as migration, estuary or woodland birds and seawatching.

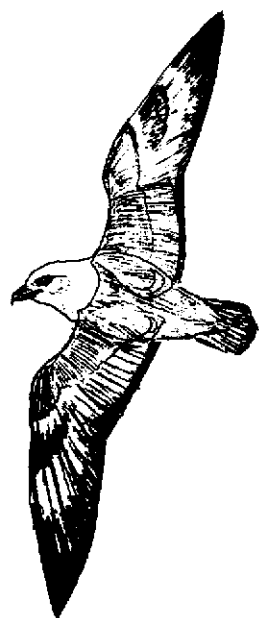
Other dates could be arranged so please 'phone so we can gauge interest.



Ninety six and all that!

A few years ago Peter Whitcomb threw down the gauntlet to members to record as many species as possible within our recording area on one day in winter. Although response was muted, a small team usually finds time to enliven the grey short days by racing around all the local habitats in order to break the existing record. Bernie, Tony Fenton and I decided to break our own record on 9 February this year. The omens were not too good as most of the birds had moved on after the wintery blasts of January.

At 7.30, we trudged across the fields near Henfield to check out the Upper Adur Levels - the lack of rainfall meant that our duck count was not going to be too impressive and so it turned out with only three Wigeon grazing the fields. A distant herd of swans consisted only of Mutes and so our first target species: Bewick's had been lost. However, 2 Green Sandpipers and a Kingfisher ensured that the trek was not in vain. The most interesting sight was a large salmon moving up the tiny stream into Woods Mill along with an ornamental goldfish! Had it been flushed down a loo in Small Dole and survived the rigours of the treatment works? The mind boggles - but I don't think I'd eat it on toast! A cursory glance over Wiston Pond was extremely productive with Shoveler, Pochard and Teal and a Peregrine which was the most exciting species of the day. A nearby woodland provided



all the birds we needed to keep the list ticking over nicely. We were on 70 species before we hit the coast and things were looking good. A slight detour on to Mill Hill provided a superb Little Owl and Grey Partridge along with Yellowhammer and Corn Bunting. Our luck held as we recorded the three Smew sailing along the Adur at Cuckoo's Corner.

At the Marina, our next port of call, there were rafts of auks and many divers. Both Guillemot and Razorbill

were logged and a solitary Kittiwake made up the numbers. Unfortunately, no Fulmar made an appearance and that dampened the spirits somewhat. The three Purple Sandpipers were sheltering inside the harbour which more than compensated as they have been difficult to see this year. It was becoming obvious that the 1996 record of 88 species could be achieved if the remaining species were where they should be.

The Southwick Canal harboured a female Goldeneye and the Old Fort produced Black Redstart, Mediterranean Gull, Red-throated Divers, a female Red-breasted Merganser and luckily a female Goosander which was passing eastwards. Widewater held a few Pochard and we gripped back a Fulmar - things improved appreciably when we recorded a Stonechat. Having trawled all the waders at the Goring roost, we were on 96 species and the ton beckoned! Unfortunately the grey day meant we found no raptors in the west of the recording area - and we were too tired to wait for a Tawny Owl.

A hundred species could surely be achieved if conditions were perfect - perhaps on a winter's day in 1998. So why don't you try? We'd like some competition and maybe you could even get some sponsors to help a local conservation charity. It's great fun and you can learn a great deal about our local birds and habitats as well. Go on - you know it makes sense.

Richard Ives

Birdwatch UK Bird Race '97

A team of SDOS members: Bernie Forbes, Richard Ives, Tony Fenton and Dave Smith will be taking part in the annual bird race on 10 or 11 May. The team currently hold the record for a day list in West Sussex of 136 species set on 5 May 1996.

The race this year will raise money through sponsorship to help the RSPB and Birdlife International conserve declining farmland birds throughout Europe. This will help both our local threatened birds such as Skylark, Corn Bunting and Grey Partridge as well as the less familiar Corncrakes, Great Bustards and Ortolan Buntings.

To sponsor the team, 'phone Bernie Forbes on 01903 753876. SDOS will also be making a contribution from our funds.

Friends of Widewater Lagoon (FOWL)

Since its foundation a few years ago, FOWL has achieved much success in caring for Widewater, which many take for granted, but which is really quite special. FOWL was formed to try to awake local interest and above all to enlist volunteers to carry out much needed conservation work.

Their efforts were recognised this year when officialdom bestowed the status of a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) on Widewater. This doesn't give as much protection as an SSSI but is a welcome and timely step.

Widewater gives endless pleasure all year round to many SDOS members; most will know that it is probably the last nesting place in the Shoreham area for Ringed Plovers. Here FOWL are doing great work in erecting fencing in the western area to try to protect these delightful birds in the nesting season. This action has

proved successful during the last two years. I can remember when Ringed Plovers nested in many areas between Widewater and the Harbour arm, just after the war before there was any development of Shoreham Beach.

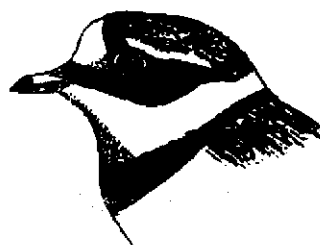
Sadly FOWL is in some danger of collapsing due to a falling off in

support for conservation work - and this is a great pity. The success in forming FOWL and organising its activities is almost entirely due to Vic and Linda Howard, both SDOS members, who live overlooking Widewater. So, if any of

you fell like giving any help - which can be great fun - please do give Vic or Linda a ring on 01903 761880.

SDOS is not just an organisation for watching birds; their environment must be constantly protected - and here is an excellent opportunity to do something practical.

Stanley Allen



The Shoreham Sanctuary

**Reminder:
Field Trip
Sun 27 Apr**

Over 40 years ago, John Stafford negotiated with the then Brighton Water Company for SDOS to have the use of the area of land owned by that Company, which lies between Mill Hill, Shoreham and the A283 Shoreham to Steyning road. Ever since then "the Sanctuary", as it became known to members, has been used mainly for ringing. Many birds passing through have gained a ring, place on their leg by the capable hands of Drs. Stafford, Watson, Newnham and others — perhaps doctors are particularly suited to this task!

Now, the land is owned by Southern Water — which has just been taken over by Scottish Power. SDOS's right to use the Sanctuary is a little tenuous — we have merely an annual licence for which we pay a minimal fee.

Unfortunately, in these days of increased security, Southern Water cannot be so free and easy as to who visits the site as in days gone by. Nevertheless, members can make arrangements to visit by contacting our Chairman, Bernie Forbes, our secretary, Brianne Reeve, or myself. Visitors are requested not to take their car beyond the first gate — there is ample parking just off the A283.

Often more birds can be seen from the road than from within the Sanctuary, as it has quite a thick canopy. It also has a fine collection of wildflowers and members who join the outing on April 27 will have help in identifying plants from that splendid botanist, Betty Bishop. Sadly, her husband George, who was with us on last year's outing, has since died.

Stanley Allen

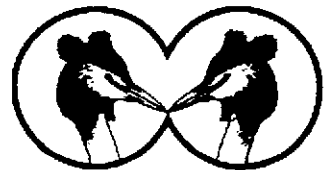
Garden Survey

If you've not already done so please send your garden bird recording form to Clive Hope immediately so that he can complete his summary for the 1996 Report. Clive's address is: Hillcrest, Byne Close, Storrington West Sussex RH20 4BS.

1997 Records

Please help the Hon Recorder, Rod Shaw by sending in records throughout the year and not all at once in January. Please see the last report for full details as to how records should be submitted. **Send in some winter and spring records now.**

Bird Fair Trip



The National Birdwatching Event

The Friends of Pulborough Brooks are running a coach trip to the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water on Saturday August 16th. The trip is open to all, so 'phone for details 01798 875851 from early June onwards. As this is a new venture, no one knows how popular it will be, but the BBWF has become tremendously successful in a few short years. An early start will be needed as it will be a long journey.

This year's BBWF will be raising funds for Birdlife International's Mindo project. The first step in a continent-wide effort to protect South American birds and their habitats. The Mindo forest, in north-west Ecuador, has 450 species of birds and many species of mammal, including the threatened Spectacled Bear. The figure-head bird for the Fair is the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, one of the most spectacular birds on earth. However, this biodiversity hotspot is threatened by forest clearance and development.

Norfolk Break?

We hope to arrange a long weekend break in North Norfolk in January or February 1998. It will be for 2 or 3 nights from a Friday to a Sunday and we expect the cost to be around £100 per person in a shared room for bed, breakfast and evening meal. If you would be interested please clip the coupon below and send to Bernie Forbes. You will be contacted nearer the time.

I/we are interested in the proposed 1998 Norfolk weekend.

Name(s)

Phone no.

Send to Bernie Forbes,
93 Wembley Avenue, Lancing,
West Sussex BN15 9JY.

From the Editor

To be really interesting and useful this newsletter needs contributions from lots of members of SDOS. Please try to find time to write something for a future issue. Suggested topics include:

- Your local patch.
- Finding an unusual or rare bird.
- Suggestions for where to go bird-watching either locally or further afield.
- Gardening tips e.g. plants with good berries for birds or how to provide nest sites in the garden.
- Bird feeding tips.

In fact anything likely to be of interest to members of SDOS. We don't have that much space so please try to keep your contribution short (max 300 words) and indeed don't be afraid to send me just a single paragraph — very useful to fill that odd space. Additional black-and-white drawings would also be welcome: not only of birds but also of habitats, local landmarks or people birdwatching. Drawings have to be suitable for scanning, so please 'phone for guidance before putting in a great deal of work.

Please also let me have any suggestions as to what you would like covered in the newsletter and I'll try to find someone to write anything that's requested. Is there anything that our newer members would find helpful? We won't know unless you tell us.

Please send all contributions requests and suggestions to me, Pat Mulcock, Pinehurst, West Drive, Angmering West Sussex BN16 4NL or phone me on 01903 776251. The copy date for the next newsletter is the date of the first meeting of the autumn season — October 7th and the newsletter should be with you in early November.