



SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Autumn 1999

Birds on our Patch — May to October

Birds of prey had another good season. In addition to the well-known Brighton pair, a second pair of Peregrines raised 3 young in the area. Even more excitingly, a pair of Montagu's Harriers were present in the breeding season and may have made a breeding attempt. Buzzards and Hobbies were reported regularly and migrants included a Black Kite over the Cement Works in June, Honey Buzzard over Shoreham in late August and Ospreys seen in late September at both Goring and Brighton Marina. For those who like their birds really big, a White Stork was seen soaring over Highdown Hill on 6 September.

Reports from both east and west of the area indicated that common migrant passerines were seen in relatively small numbers during the autumn. However, 40 Wheatears was a good count near Steyning on 29 Sept. Wader passage in late August and September was better, with good numbers of Curlew Sand-

pipers on the Adur (and up to 4 Little Egrets), 11 Knot at Widewater. Less usual waders at Goring included single Ruff, Greenshank and Whimbrel.

Windy weather in mid-September brought out the seawatchers who found a Leach's Petrel at Shoreham Harbour (17th) and off Southwick (18th). A Manx Shearwater flew east past Shoreham (23rd), a Long-tailed Skua was seen at both Southwick and the Marina (24th), and 3 Mediterranean Shearwaters, 10 Arctic Skuas and Little Gull were a good tally at the Marina on the 25th.

In October, a Grey Phalarope was on the Adur (2nd), a Lapland Bunting on Portslade Beach (10th) and 3 Snow Buntings at the Fort (11th). Many of these birds were seen only briefly, but a Pallas's Warbler at Brooklands (25th) did for the day and was seen by a good gathering of members. Also present that day was at least one Firecrest and

numerous Goldcrests. Another Pallas's Warbler was seen briefly at Portslade Station by an observer who had to leave to catch his train and the bird couldn't be relocated later in the day.

Thanks to Dave Smith, Peter Whitcomb, Bernie Forbes and Chris Wright



Leach's Petrel

Indoor Meetings

- 11 Jan We open the year 2000 with an illustrated talk by **Cliff Walder** about his visit to Antarctica. We had a small taste of this exciting journey at our last members evening.
- 8 Feb **Alf Simpson**, the voluntary warden, will tell us about **Ebernoe Common** the Sussex Wildlife Trust ancient woodland which has recently been declared a National Nature Reserve. We are following up the talk with a field trip on 25 March, so please mark this date in your diaries.
- 7 Mar **Garden Birds - Going nuts or gone to seed** is the title for **Andrew Cannon's** talk about the BTO Garden BirdWatch. For more about garden bird recording please see the next page.
- 5 Apr **AGM** followed by a talk by **Richard Ranft** on **Birdsong** (a repeat visit by popular request).

Last Field Trip of the Century

Join Stanley Allen for a post-Christmas walk from Fort Haven car park, Shoreham on **Monday 27 December** at 09.00 hours. Species seen in previous years have included: Purple Sandpiper, Mediterranean Gull and Black Redstart, as well as assorted gulls and waders on the River Adur.

*We Wish all
members a Merry
Christmas and a
Happy New Year*



Recording garden birds - a personal view

I joined the BTO Garden BirdWatch in March 1998 after hearing a talk by a BTO staff member. At first it's hard to remember but you soon get into the habit of keeping weekly records. I make myself a rough sheet on which I list the birds I expect to see most weeks, and then starting each Sunday, I note each species as it appears and substitute higher counts as they arise during the week. Sometimes I do get to the end of the week and wonder - was there really never more than one Woodpigeon? But generally, I think, I'm fairly accurate (except of course you never know what you miss when you're out or not looking!). At the end of each quarter, I copy my results onto the count form, and now I will complete the SDOS form also, all at the same time.

Participants receive a quarterly newsletter, *the Bird Table*, and it's very interesting to compare your own garden against the national results. For example, the numbers of Goldfinches visiting gardens in spring has increased dramatically in the last few years and we have seen this in our garden too. The peak is in April and early May, too late for the previous winter SDOS survey - but if there is sufficient support Martin is will-

ing to keep the survey running all year round in line with Garden BirdWatch.

You do not have to feed the birds to take part in either survey. Gardens without artificial feeding are interesting for comparison purposes. In our garden, we feed only in the winter and spring and in limited amounts, as we are more interested in improving our garden as a natural resource for birds. It's easier to count birds if you put out food though. It's jolly hard work getting anything to put down on the list in mid-summer, I can assure you. But even then there can be surprises if you keep your eyes open, such as a Pied Flycatcher that visited our pond briefly in August 1998. During this year's quiet period, we saw Bullfinches several times coming to our garden to eat seeds of *Viola labradorica*. The latest copy of *Bird Table* had asked for details of any sightings of this declining species to be sent to a researcher and I was delighted to comply.

Another summer bird in our garden is the Stock Dove, which comes shyly to drink at our pond. We used to hear them calling nearby all summer long but sadly they seem to have declined and visits are now much less fre-



quent. I would be interested to hear if anyone else records Stock Doves as they are hardly thought of as garden birds, so far as I'm aware.

Today (12 November) as I was finishing this newsletter, I was thrilled to see a Redpoll which spent about a couple of hours feeding in our silver birch. Another garden first!

I do hope as many members as possible will support the SDOS garden bird survey. I'm sure you'll enjoy it and may very well want to join in the national survey as well.

Pat Mulcock

Sussex Highlights

The highlight of the summer was a Gull-billed Tern which gave good views intermittently at Chichester Gravel Pits from 7-9 July.

A considerable selection of American waders arrived on this side of the Atlantic in September, but this year, we didn't really receive our fair share in Sussex. Pectoral Sandpiper was the only American wader recorded (one at Weirwood and one at Pagham) among an invasion of an estimated at least 88 individuals of this species nationally.

A Purple Heron visited Castle Water, (7 Aug) and 5 - 11 Dotterel were at Balsdean (23/24 Aug).

The October report from Rye Harbour, published on the SOS Website indicates a good month there. They included: regular sightings of Bittern including two at Castle Water (19th), still ten Little Egrets roosting there (31st), Marsh Harrier on six dates (to 12th), regular Merlin and Peregrine (5 dates). A Corncrake reported from Harbour Farm (2nd) was only the second site record and a Quail at Beach Reserve (31st) was the latest ever. Notable passerines included Black Redstart (25th & 27th), Ring Ouzel (4th), an Icterine Warbler at Castle Water (7th), two or

three Yellow-browed Warblers (12th & 14th), Firecrest (3 dates), at least six Bearded Tits at Castle Water, a fly-over Serin (6th) and two Twite at the Wader Pool/Harbour Farm (29th & 31st).

In West Sussex, Red-backed Shrikes were at Pagham at the end of September and at Selsey in October. Two Black-necked Grebes were at Chichester Gravel pits from late September into November. Ospreys were regularly seen at Thorney Island.

News of recent sightings in Sussex can be found on the Sussex Ornithological Society Website. Note that the address is now <http://www.susos.org.uk/>

Thanks to Peter Whitcomb and others



Thanks again to Richard Ives for the drawings in this issue.

SDOS Garden Watch

You should by now have received two count forms for this autumn and winter. Apologies if you have received more than one but it's easier this way. Further forms will be issued as required. If you haven't received anything please give me a ring.

I hope that as many members as possible will contribute records of the birds seen in their garden each week. I would like records from members living outside the official SDOS recording area also. Please take part, especially if you are already doing the BTO Garden BirdWatch as our survey has been designed to be compatible. All your records are welcome and useful, even if you miss out some weeks. We hope to carry on the survey all year.

Over the years we will be able to build a picture of the fluctuations in number of the common birds in our gardens. It will also be interesting to see what less usual species appear.

So as many returns as possible please and it would be helpful if forms could be returned as soon as possible after completion in December and March. If you find any difficulties with the form or have suggestions for its improvement please let me know.

Martin Ford
Tel 01903 242708

Be sure to come to the March indoor meeting when Andrew Cannon, the organiser of the BTO Garden BirdWatch will be talking to us about the national survey.

Bird Race - change of tactics pays off

Our team, the West Sussex Record Breakers (appropriate name as we hold the current Sussex day record of 136 species set in May 1996) comprises Bernie Forbes, Richard Ives, Tony Fenton and myself. After much deliberation, we chose 5 May as the date for our attempt. In a change of tactics from previous years and instead of starting at 3.30 am at Pulborough Brooks, we decided to begin at West Dean Woods. A good choice as the expected calling Tawny Owl was followed by Stonechat, Grasshopper Warbler, Golden Pheasant, Firecrest, Dartford Warbler, Woodcock and Little Owl as well as commoner species.

Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers flew over the car as we drove to Chichester where we picked up a Common Gull on a playing field: this species can be very difficult to find at this time of year and was the only one we saw. Next to Thorney Island, where Bearded Tits obliged and we also found both godwits, Curlew, Whimbrel, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow Wagtail, Reed and Sedge Warblers and Sparrowhawk. Had I thought to phone resident birder, Barry Collins, we would have known about a late Jack Snipe!

Next on the agenda was Sidlesham Ferry, where we added Common Sandpiper, Avocet and Teal and as a bonus for May, a Pintail. We were steaming along now but next came the now-expected poor seawatch at Selsey. Black Tern was the highlight and we did get Razorbill, Kittiwake, Fulmar, Gannet, Red-throated Diver and Sanderling plus

Common, Sandwich and Little Terns. But it could have been better - for example, we saw no skuas. The wind was light and from the wrong direction and there was an almost total lack of passerine migration along the coast.

Church Norton was quiet, but we added Grey Plover, Greenshank, Dunlin, Turnstone and Great Crested Grebe. Fishbourne Creek produced the hoped-for lingering (or summering) Brent Geese and Chichester Gravel Pits held a drake Red-crested Pochard, Tufted Duck, Pochard and Little Grebe. We rashly diverted to Pagham



The team almost forgot to try for this, their 131st species!

North Wall for a Garganey, which failed to materialise, and thus lost time. We needed to head back inland. Ambersham produced the target species - Hobby and Woodlark but Burton Mill Pond failed us again with just Gadwall added, but no Grey Wagtail, our most glaring miss as we did not get one all day. So spirits were sinking as time ticked away and we were only on 114 species. But our next stop at Pulborough Brooks helped considerably with Little Ringed Plover, Spotted Redshank, Nightingale, Wigeon, Shoveler,

Nuthatch and Bullfinch, the latter often difficult on the day.

Now into evening and on 121 species, we needed nine more to equal our rivals the 'Selsey Scorchers' who went out on 2 May and had a much better seawatch. A quick dash to Arundel brought us to 125, a gamble on Houghton chalk pits, Peregrine and the elusive Jay, while Amberley Mount added Corn Bunting and Grey Partridge but no Buzzard. North Stoke brought a real bonus - a late Hen Harrier and a Barn Owl. So 130 and a draw until we realised that we had forgotten Nightjar so we dashed up to Wiggonholt where we heard one churring and kricking in darkness!

131 was a good score on the day - in perfect conditions 140 - 150 species is possible. We would like to thank SDOS for its generous contribution. Without it we would not have won a prize of £300 which we are spending on improved visitor facilities at Pagham Harbour. Specifically, improvements to the appalling west side path which is almost impassable in wet weather plus steps up from the bottom to the upper path near the churchyard (currently very hazardous). If we do not have enough money we are considering organising a New Year Birdrace to raise more and throwing out challenges to other Sussex teams.

We all had a good day with the bonus of knowing that the money raised was going to a good cause. Watch this space for the millennium year!

Dave Smith

Alternative Birdrace

SDOS Recorder, Peter Whitcomb and a friend went out on 8 May from Brighton to see how many species they could record travelling by bus and on foot. After starting with the dawn chorus in the Brighton cemeteries, they made their way down Sheepcote Valley to the sea. A good seawatch from the Marina gave them Arctic Skua, Red-throated Diver and Manx Shearwater as well as a Hobby in off the sea.

They hopped off the bus at Ovingdean where they failed to locate the Cattle Egret, but did pick up Corn Bunting and Wheatear. A walk at Friston Forest was disappointing, Charleston Reedbed better, but the lower Cuckmere disappointed with near-dry scrapes and few birds. However, a Whinchat was a good addition to the list.

Another seawatch at Seaford wasn't very productive and the team finished a little disappointed, watching the Peregrines at Sussex Heights. Their day total was 79 but the list did include several species which the West Sussex Record Breakers would have liked on their list. The total equalled the record set in Sussex for a 'green' bird race. Three teams took part this year. If you think this total could be beaten why not have a go next year?

Where shall we go tomorrow?

For a change of scene, a worthwhile site to visit at almost any time of year is **Keyhaven and Pennington Marshes** which lie on the coast south of the New Forest in Hampshire.

Start from the car park at Keyhaven (SZ306915) and walk east along the Solent Way. Good views can be had of a series of shallow pools behind the seawall set among rough pasture and scrub, as well as of the shore with views towards the Isle of Wight. The period just before and after high tide is likely to be best.

The area has attracted a number of rarities including most recently a first winter American Golden Plover which was still present at the time of writing.

Pat Mulcock



Horseless but not alone

Richard James our local Countryside Ranger explains his work

The Sussex Downs Conservation Board (SCDB) was set up in 1992 to provide a focus for active environmental management within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As a ranger for the central area, I with my colleagues am responsible for the area bounded by the Ouse at Newhaven to the A24 north of Worthing.

As a ranger, I do not work alone and do not ride at horse! When we do venture out of the office on to the downs it is usually by Land Rover. Much of our work focuses on the maintenance and surveying of all Public Rights of Way with the AONB.

However, the main pre-requisite of a ranger is to be the proverbial 'Jack of all Trades' and the remainder of responsibilities is very diverse, from Urban Fringe projects to leading guided walks. One of my key responsibilities is to co-ordinate work on the conservation management of chalk grassland within the central area. Some of the specific sites that I oversee include Lancing Ring LNR, Steyning Borstal Chalk Pit SNCI, Pepperscombe SNCI, and the downs leading from Steyning village to Washington. Many members of SDOS will be aware of the scrub clearance on Chancetonbury Hill and the cutting of a number of large rides on the scarp slope.

Their primary audience is the Duke of Burgundy butterfly, but other species will undoubtedly benefit. Butterflies and the Early Gentian were the catalyst for the SDCB's work in and around Pepperscombe.

With the added help from Dr. Jacqui Foskett, the SDCB are currently assessing the condition of all chalk grassland sites within the AONB. This will then form the basis for our management in the future. This process is also forging valuable links with landowners and farmers, many of whom I am already working with towards a more sensitive approach to land management. It is on those days, when I escape from the office that make this job what it is. Listening to the Skylarks as they parachute from the heights into the stubble fields above Steyning, watching as Wheatear proudly struts and hops across the chalk sward and into Well Bottom wearing its smart autumnal uniform. Only a few weeks ago, after a day's work with the weekend volunteers, we were all rewarded with a spiralling display from three common Buzzards that rose on thermals up and over Chancetonbury Hill. Not a typical day, but what more could a Countryside Ranger ask for?

Oddments

Subscriptions: rates for 2000 are unchanged at: single - £8.50, family - £12 and junior - £2.50. John Maskell is enjoying a sabbatical year and is travelling the world at present. Pauline Ford is standing in and is collecting subscriptions at meetings. John will be back early in the New Year, and any subscriptions sent by post should still be addressed to John at 41 Lawrence Avenue, Worthing BN14 7JJ.



Many thanks to Brianne Reeve for again hosting the Summer Social in her lovely garden as well as making all the arrangements.



The Editor is delighted to have received already an article for the spring newsletter. More article, ideas and comments would be very welcome. 'Where shall we go tomorrow?' is a new idea, I am trying out. Is it of interest? If so, I would like contributions, please. I suggest locations should be within say, around 2 hours driving distance of Shoreham. Anywhere other than very well known local sites would be suitable and might include nearer places useful for a short visit as well as more distant sites for an all day trip. Contributions should reach me by 15 April. My email address is now cpmulcock@hemscott.net. Tel/fax 01903 776251. Snail mail address: Pinehurst, West Drive, Angmering, West Sussex BN16 4NL.



1999 Records: Peter Whitcomb would like batches of records, as soon as possible, please. Later records to the year end should be sent by the end of January. Please help by stating whether scarce or rare records have been submitted to the SOS for authentication.

Peter's address is 99 Barnett Road, Brighton BN1 7GJ.

Recycle old optics?



RSPB Birdlife is seeking old or unwanted binoculars and telescopes and also field guides covering anywhere in the world for use in the many countries where the development of interest in birds is held back by lack of equipment.

Any such unwanted items that you would be willing to donate can be handed in at Pulborough Brooks or the RSPB's regional office near Brighton Station. The Birdlife International partnership will ensure that all donations get to the places where they will be of most use.

Countries which have been helped so far have included: Bolivia, Russian, Nigeria, Zambia and Indonesia, as well as many others. Please help if you can. The need must be almost limitless!

Still need help with waders?

A number of members seem to find it difficult to sort out common waders and we hope you enjoyed the November indoor meeting which was designed to help in this respect.

Help is of course available at SDOS outings in suitable habitat. But if you feel the need for more, try the regular winter Sunday morning walks at Nutbourne Marshes, organised by the Chichester Harbour Conservancy and usually led by Anne de Poitier.

The walks, which are free, start at 10.30, last 2 hours and everyone from experts to beginners is welcome. Dates are: 21/11, 28/11, 12/12, 9/1, 16/1, 30/1, 6/2, 13/2, 20/2. Walks on 5/12, 2/1 and 23/1 are aimed especially at complete beginners and families and last only 1½ hours.

The meeting place for all these walks is at the gate by the footpath at Farm Lane, Nutbourne off A259 and parking is easy.