

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2000

Birds on our Patch — May to October

The two memorable features of this late summer and early autumn were first the invasion of Clouded Yellow butterflies and secondly the incredible numbers of Honey Buzzards which after having been blown across the North Sea by easterly winds later crossed the Sussex coast on a broad front.

The total number of Honey Buzzards recorded in the whole of Sussex this year was four in August, 378 in September and 50 in October (SOS website 18/10/00). Normally, less than ten are seen during the whole autumn.

In our area the majority of Honey Buzzards seem to have been seen in the vicinity of Brighton. The first was ahead of the main invasion on 7th September, followed by two on the 22nd, four on the 25th, six from Hollingbury Camp on both 26th and 27th, 15 from there on the 29th and at least 28 on the 30th. The Clouded Yellows had arrived rather earlier with the peak being around the 19th August when some 220 were seen pass-

ing through Sheepcote Valley and the following day when 130 were counted in the Shoreham Airport area. Smaller numbers were everywhere, however, and many people added the species to their garden list for the first time.

Highlights from the spring included a Night Heron roosting on rocks at Brighton Marina before flying inland (12 May), a Red-backed Shrike on Mill Hill (7 June) and a Woodchat Shrike at Sheepcote Valley (13-15 June). Patient seawatching at Brighton Marina produced some excellent records including: a Nightjar in off the sea, two individual Long-tailed Skuas, Balearic Shearwater (27 Aug), three Sooty Shearwaters (5/6 Aug) and a Roseate Tern (6 Aug).

Brighton's Peregrine Falcons again successfully fledged three female young from their nest box on Sussex Heights. Strangely, this pair has only produced female young a total of eight since 1998. Brighton also had a singing male



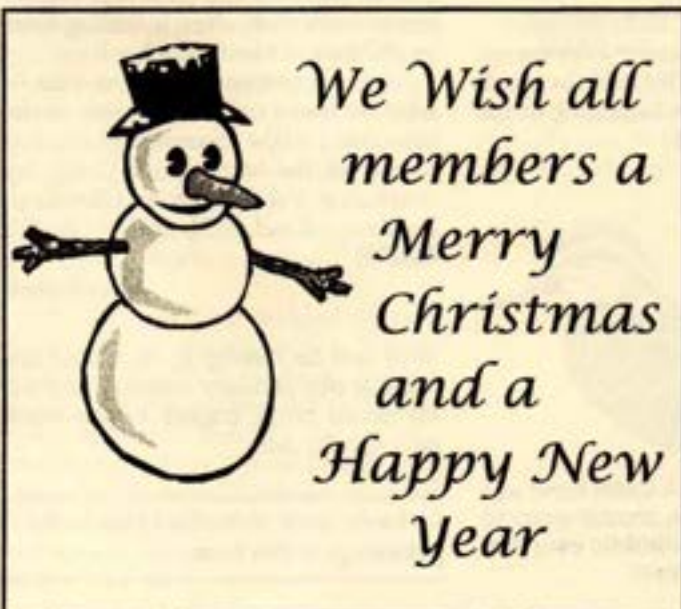
Honey Buzzard

Black Redstart in May and June.

Early signs of winter included two very early Redwings over Sussex University on 15 Sept and the first Brent Geese past the Marina the next day.

Information received mainly from the SOS website:

www.susos.org.uk



Indoor Meetings

- Tues 9 Jan We start our programme for 2001 with a talk by Mike Russell of the Sussex Wildlife Trust about the Henfield Bird Survey. A book is due to be published in November 2000 and Mike is eager to tell us about the results of this local survey.
- Wed 7 Feb One of our members, David Harper will tell us about his work on Corn Buntings in particular and other birds in general. David has a reputation as an exceptionally entertaining speaker
- Tues 6 Mar Kevin Briggs will talk to us about the Loon Valley in Lancashire.

For further details of indoor meetings please see your programme card.

SDOS Garden Bird Survey Autumn - Winter 1999 - 2000

Records from 32 gardens were submitted for the very mild autumn and winter periods.

A total of 58 species was recorded, with Pat and Clive Hope recording the maximum number of species of 31 in their Storrington garden.

Only two gardens saw Redwing and Fieldfare, while five recorded Siskin. There were also two records for Brambling and one for Ring Ouzel.

Blue tit, Blackbird and Collared Dove were recorded in all gardens and Robin and Dunnock failed to appear in only one.

House Sparrow was present in all gardens except five but often in counts of less than ten and sometimes sporadically. Eleven gardens consistently produced counts of more than ten with a 'hot spot' at Steyning in Judith and Jim Steedmans' garden where a maximum of 50 was recorded. The Steedmans also recorded the highest number (100) of starlings while four gardens failed to record this bird.

Chaffinch and Great Tit appeared in 27 and 24 gardens respectively but were 'out-scored' by Greenfinch and Wren which were both recorded in 29 gardens.

Encouragingly, Song Thrush was recorded in 25 gardens, all-be-it intermittently.

Additional notes on several of the forms contributed interesting asides to the bare figures, for example, Carol Wingate noted that a Blue Tit record was the first ever for her garden and Hazel Jackson recorded both Greater Spotted

Woodpecker and Green Woodpecker for the first time in fifty years. Colin Holters' garden at Burgess Hill is a 'charming' place for Goldfinches with a maximum count of 66 - black sunflower seeds seem to be the attraction.

Over wintering Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps used 9 and 10 gardens respectively.

Many thanks to all members who contributed their records for the past winter. At the time of writing, early July, a good number of record forms has been returned for the spring period so if you have the time, and inclination, please continue with your recording. New participants are always very welcome and this survey is not confined to those who live within the SDOS recording area.

Martin Ford

Visit the BTO's new Garden BirdWatch web site at <http://www.bto.org/gbw/gbwhome.htm> and have a look around. There are extracts from the GBW quarterly newsletter and links to various other sites of interest to garden birdwatchers.



Birdwatching Trip To Poland

Mike Russell is also organising a trip to Poland next year through The Wildlife Trusts travel company. We will be taken around by Marek Borkowski, whom some of you may have seen on the recent Bill Oddie birdwatching programme, and his colleagues. The dates have been fixed for May 20th - 30th 2001 and the time there will be split between the Bialowieza Forest and the Biebrza Marshes in north-east Poland. Marek is very keen to work with the Wildlife Trusts and is trying to encourage wildlife visits to the area as a means of conserving one of the last remaining wildernesses in Europe. If you would like details please contact Mike on 01273 492630.

We are very sorry to have to report the sudden and unexpected death of Tony Miller.

He was a great supporter of SDOS, attending indoor meetings and many outings which he particularly enjoyed.

Henfield Birdwatch 2000 is ready for launch!

During 1999 nearly 100 people took part in a survey of the birds of the parish of Henfield. The result of all this diligence was a staggering 37,000 records and, as you can imagine, the inputting of this amount of data, and the analysis of it has been a very time consuming affair. The end product is the publication of "Henfield Birdwatch 2000" which I hope will meet the twin aims of the project, which were to:

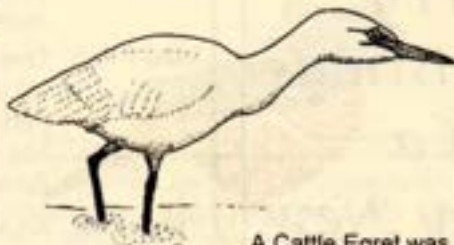
- provide comprehensive information of the state of the birds of the parish of Henfield at the beginning of the 21st century, and;
- involve a large number of the

community with a common interest in birds in a project.

We hope that, in the book, we have produced a very readable account of the birds recorded in the parish last year. A number of people have contributed their own personal view of their own involvement in the project and it will be liberally sprinkled with photographs, sketches and paintings mainly by residents themselves, including some by children of Henfield school.

I won't give any clues as to what we found out in the survey in the hope that I might encourage you to buy a copy of the book (price £5.00), by contacting Val Bentley at Chetsford, London Road, Henfield (01273 494723).

Mike Russell



A Cattle Egret was a popular visitor to Henfield early this year.

Mike will be talking to us about the book at our January meeting and will no doubt bring copies of the book with him for sale.

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

Peru pelagic - a nautical adventure

It was last August when I set off in a high-powered launch from our hotel in Paracas, on the Pacific coast of Peru.

I had already visited the high alkaline lakes of Las Salinas, (4200m plus), and experienced both altitude sickness and the odd sight of three species of flamingo, simultaneously. I had also been taken to the wonderful, protected rainforest world at the Tambotbata Research Station, five and half hours upstream from Puerto Maldonado, to mention just two backgrounds to a sensational birdwatching experience. The trip to the guano islands, Las Ballestas, was the single most important event in the three-week tour, on my personal agenda.

So off we went, and as the mainland faded slowly from view, so the birdlife became richer and stranger. Of course, there were gulls - Band-tailed Gulls, common Grey-hooded Gulls, Kelp Gulls, Grey Gulls and just once seated on the calm ocean, a group of beautiful Swallow-tailed Gulls, members of the genus *creagrus*, which like *rissa* (kittiwakes) is ostracised from the great *larus* genus.

The bird families were mostly as in British waters: there were occasional Chilean Skuas; White-chinned and Pintado Petrels (pintado meaning painted because of the elaborate patterning of the plumage); and, of course, cormorants. These birds whose vast numbers led to the accumulation of the guano deposits, known even to school geography textbooks. They included the widespread Neotropic Cormorants, Guanay Cormorants and the Red-legged Cormorants which are quite beautiful by cormorant standards.

Then the terns - Large-billed Terns, Arctic Terns, Yellow-billed Terns, Royal Terns, Elegant Terns, the dull, grey Peruvian Terns - and the extraordinary Inca Terns, which are grey with red feet and bill, yellow wattles below the bill, and with 'a striking creamy-white feathered handlebar moustache leading back and down from the wattles, curving upwards like and ram's horn at the bend of the wing' to quote *Seabirds of Britain and the World!*

Storm petrels were new to me, but were very common once we were out of sight of land. They were mostly Wilson's but also some Black-chinned. The shearwater family was represented only by the Black species. I wanted to see a diving petrel and knew that only one had been seen on this pelagic two years before - this time we were lucky and saw six including one just ten feet from the boat. There were bottle-nosed Dolphins, a Humpback Whale heaving out of the sea a mile away and a Manta Ray right under the boat.

On the islands were a sad handful of Humboldt Penguins, just nine - but at least they represented an Antipodean bird family. South American Sea Lions were plentiful, as were Peruvian Boobies (the local gannets). On one of the islands we saw a Coastal Miner, enjoying the lifestyle of a Rock Pipit, while being a member of the vast American *tyrannidae* family.

The time came to head back for lunch and a visit to a good wader habitat. It was cloudy and the breeze was light. We were all delighted by the birding experience we had been treated to. Then suddenly there was a loud bang, and our light chat stopped

abruptly, as did the Pintero, our launch.

One American woman went pale, muttering, "oh, God!" fervently to herself and burying her face in her hands. There was an islet not too far away, but the mainland was invisible. The Peruvian skipper looked intense but not panic-stricken. The sea was empty of white horses, but the Pintero, nonetheless, soon began to rock quite energetically. A chatter got underway concerning the nature of the Pintero's problem. The skipper spoke into his radio but there was no connection. 'Ayuda Pintero!' was repeated many times.

The skipper climbed to the back of the boat, to investigate the possibility of repair. No joy, of course. But suddenly, the opposite of the ancient mariner's albatross, 'Southern Giant Petrel' was shouted, and we all had a grand view of this endangered bird with its six-foot wingspan, flying right by us.

I was glad to have seasickness pills with me, and several others were glad to accept one. I recommend Stugeron! We started to get a bit silly to mask our worries, which, in my case were quite real. The skipper continued at intervals to make attempts to establish radio contact. And suddenly he succeeded.

Forty minutes later we were enjoying the pleasures of transferring from one launch to another in mid-ocean. Two hours later, we were off again, in a minibus to see Surfbirds, a Hudsonian Godwit and about eighty Wilson's Phalaropes, spinning inanely in a pond to add a further surreal touch to a surreal day.

Graham St. John Smith

Sussex Highlights

Rye Harbour was the place to be in August with a Semi-palmated Sandpiper, which remained faithful to Ternery Pool from 11th until at least 29th and also Bluethroat and Aquatic Warbler during the month. Rye also did well in September with a mobile Marsh Sandpiper, while Pagham harbour had a good run of Wrynecks in early to mid-September.

A Corncrake was watched for five minutes on the coastal path at Beachy Head on the 17 September. Several Tawny Pipits appeared (Selsey, Newhaven and Beachy) during the weekend of 23/24th and also on the 23rd a Buff-breasted Sandpiper took up residence in the Bracklesham area and was seen at several different locations until at least the 1 October.

Beachy Head was the place to be during the weekend of 30 Sept - 1 Oct. An incredible 62 Honey Buzzards were counted on the Saturday and the Sunday tally was 13 Honey Buzzards, two



Short-eared Owls, eight Marsh Harriers, one Common Buzzard, three Osprey, five Kestrels, four Hobbies, two Sparrowhawks and a Peregrine. Almost like Gibraltar!

Mid-October brought two Dotterels to Scotney Gravel Pits, Sabine's Gulls to Newhaven and Seaford (11th/12th) plus a juvenile in Pagham Harbour (14th). On the 14th also, an impressive 10 Spoonbills were seen in flight over the Harbour. Then the action moved back to East Sussex with the first Yellow-browed Warbler of the season at Beachy Head (15th) and at Coombe Haven, nr Bexhill, a Radde's Warbler (14th/15th) and also there a Redstart, Black Redstart, Water Pipit and Wood Lark.

Thanks mainly to the SOS website

Where are we going next year?

Field trip leader, Chris Wright, previews next year's programme

As the days shorten, the temperature plummets and the rain deluges - let us look ahead to some of the delights which await us next year.

In order to avoid repetition some outings will be held jointly with the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS). The two societies have often in the past visited the same site within a week or so and this has inevitably affected the numbers attending. In 2001 visits to Dungeness, Burton Pond, West Dean Woods, Grove Ferry and RSPB Pulborough Brooks will be combined SOS/SDOS outings.

Next year's schedule also includes several outings of more general natural history interest, specifically timed to target butterflies and plants. Lets face it, anyone who has attended most of this year's outings will know that the birds can sometimes be uncooperative or busy elsewhere at certain times of the year. However, a shortage of birds can often co-incide with an abundance in other areas and in order to exploit these hoped-for riches visits are being arranged to Rewell Wood, Cissbury Ring and Beeding Hill.

Regular favourites such as the Goring Seawatch, the festive Adur walk, and visits to Itchenor, Pagham Harbour and Birling Gap are sure to whet the appetite and the popular day in the New Forest will concentrate on the Pig Bush areas.

Oh yes, and there is a new venue for Nightjars! Hopefully, something to interest everybody.



Council Update

At our autumn meeting, the council welcomed three new members. Chris Wright, Field Trips leader, is busy planning next year's outings. Diane Hicks has joined as a council member and Jim Steedman has been co-opted to assist the Report Editor. At the meeting it was decided that subscriptions for 2001 will remain unchanged.

Among environmental issues discussed was the state of Widewater, where water levels and pollution are causing problems; and the proposed golf course to the west of the airport. We have established a good relationship with the proposed developers, with a view to assisting them with the environmental aspects, especially so far as birds are concerned. However, the developers still have to resolve their difficulties over access to the site.

Stanley Allen

Summer Social?

Unfortunately, this year's summer social had to be cancelled due to lack of support. At the time of going to press, we are still undecided whether to hold a social next summer.

I (or any council member) will be very pleased to listen to your views for or against and especially to hear any suggestions as to the form the social should take, bearing in mind especially the unpredictability of our climate. Is July the best month?

If we decide to hold a summer social next year, the date and details will be announced in the spring newsletter.

Brianne Reeve

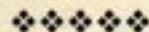


Webwatch

The excellent Birdguides website continues to improve with national sightings updated every few minutes (www.birdguides.com). Sitaline is a new feature which carries reports from regular birders at various sites around the country, about less common rather than rare birds. Also check out the 'Surveys' section of the SOS website (www.susos.org.uk) for reports on the 1999 and 2000 Swift surveys and more.

Oddments

Subscriptions: rates for 2001 are unchanged at: single - £8.50, family - £12 and junior - £2.50. Subscriptions may be paid at indoor meetings or send to our treasurer, John Maskell at 41 Lawrence Avenue, Worthing BN14 7JJ.



Apologies if you took up the suggestion in last spring's Newsletter to visit Pett Pools and found it quite useless for waders. Unfortunately, the usual pumping had to be cancelled for the protection of breeding Great Crested Grebes.



1999 Annual Report Thanks to Jim Steedman and Terry Hicks who have kindly taken this over at short notice. Please be patient if it takes a little longer.



2000 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.



Past Annual Reports SDOS holds extra copies of past Annual Reports. However, we can only store so many. If anyone would like a back report the following are available: 1990 - 1998 (inclusive), a few copies from 1978, 1980, 1983, and 1985 and only one copy each of 1963, 1968 and 1975. Please contact Brianne on 01273 452497 as soon as possible.



Contributions for the Spring Newsletter are most welcome and can be about anything likely to be of interest to our members. Send to newsletter editor, Pat Mulcock. I prefer contributions in electronic form, if possible. Have we any more artists among the membership? Unfortunately, only black and white line drawings reproduce satisfactorily.

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