



# SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

*Autumn 2001*

It is with great sadness that I must record that Pat Mulcock, Report and Newsletter Editor for this Society, died in August after a long, determined fight against cancer. She was only 57.

Pat came to this area after living and working in Bristol as a solicitor. It was not long before Pat and Chris discovered the SDOS, the SOS, the RSPB (where they worked at Pulborough Brooks as volunteers) and the Sussex Branch of Butterfly Conservation, and became members of our Society. This was followed by Pat offering her services to the SDOS Committee, where her informed and forthright views often promoted lively discussions.

When it was decided to try and change the format of the SDOS Annual Report Pat's help was invaluable, especially her computer expertise. She spent many hours rearranging the way that the Report was presented and improved this over the four years in which she was involved. Not only this but she also took on the task of producing our Newsletters - again, no mean feat.

In the Spring of 2000 she was told she had cancer and understandably she and Chris concentrated on her lengthy and arduous treatment. It was almost a year later that they had to face the fact that her cancer had spread inexorably and that nothing further could be done. Chris and Pat's reaction was to use every remaining moment to do what they enjoyed most. They travelled to Devon and, despite foot-and-mouth restrictions throughout much of the county, were delighted to be rewarded with good views of the Large Blue butterfly on one of its reintroduction sites. They visited various gardens on the way, recounting their pleasure in all Natural History to friends who shared their enthusiasm.

Several SDOS members went to see Pat during the month before her death and could not but admire her courage right up to and during the last few days. We shall miss her and all she gave unstintingly to the SDOS and other Sussex organisations concerned with natural history.

Brianne Reeve

Brianne has written a very moving tribute to Pat Mulcock, and I would just like to add my own appreciation of the very considerable contribution she made to the Society during the her years on the council, and particularly her brilliant editorship of our Annual reports and Newsletters. I must add that it was not until her funeral that I learnt of her profession; like me, a solicitor. How she must have chuckled quietly to herself at our meetings when I was holding forth on some remote legal interpretation of the Society's rules. Sorry, Pat; rest in peace.

Stanley Allen

In addition to her work for SDOS, Pat was Conference Organiser for the SOS. She also produced the Friends of Pulborough Brooks Newsletter for some time. When I was Newsletter Editor for Butterfly Conservation (Sussex Branch) she always responded positively to requests for articles, as she did when asked to do survey work by the Branch Recorder. I shall miss her greatly.

Jim Steedman

## Forthcoming Field Trips

- 25 Nov Pulborough Brooks with Chris Wright**  
An afternoon-only visit to our local RSPB Reserve where numbers of wintering wildfowl will now be building up, plus a few waders and perhaps an owl or two.
- 31 Dec Shoreham/Adur with Stanley Allen**  
The traditional post-Xmas walk. Possibilities include Purple Sandpiper and Black Redstart.
- 13 Jan Dungeness with Dave Smith**  
Get your year-list off to a good start at this prime site, where the sea, pits and RSPB Reserve provide a good variety of wintering divers, grebes, gulls and wildfowl.

## Indoor Meetings

- 5 Dec Wendy Dickson - Birding in New Zealand**  
Wendy comes to us from Shetland to tell us about her travels to the other side of the world
- 9 Jan Ian Rumley-Dawson** will remind us that next summer is not so very far away when he talks to us about **Butterflies and Moths**.
- 5 Feb Gordon Langsbury**, the expert photographer and authority on waders will compare and contrast two very different islands that must rank among birders wish-list of destinations, with his talk entitled **Islands Apart - Lesbos and Gotland**.
- 5 Mar Colin Shawyer** director of the Hawk and Owl Trust.



## Widewater Update

by Stanley Allen

Widewater is a unique salt water lagoon, unique not only in Sussex, but also in Britain, and indeed in Europe; but without exhaustive study and care, it is in danger of dying'. Those were the words of Bob Edgar, of English Nature, at the inaugural meeting some three years ago of the working group set up by, and chaired by, West Sussex County Council. The essence of the terms of reference included primarily to carry out exhaustive studies as to the very nature of the lagoon - where does its water come from; why do its levels vary so much; what makes up its wild life. It was also essential to set up a necessary management plan, and to obtain, if not SSSI status, at least recognition as a LNR (which now has been achieved).

Various hydrological studies have been or are still being undertaken by the Environment Agency, and assisted by the

University of Surrey's Department of Engineering; considerable work has been carried out which has indicated an alarming drop in the number of invertebrate species over a 60 year period up to 1997. We want to know why.

Apart from WSCC, English Nature, the Environment Agency and the university, other members of the group consist of 'FOWL' (Friends of Widewater Lagoon), Lancing Parish Council, Adur DC, and SDOS, whom I represent.

The whole of our recent September meeting was taken up by listening to an excellent presentation by Halcrow, the consulting engineers, who will soon be commencing more extensive sea defence works from near the Good Shepherd Church, up to east Worthing, and these works will see the erection of more rock breakwaters similar to those already built in recent years east of the Church.

Obviously, our Group were concerned at the possible effect these works might have on Widewater; Halcrow's presentation allayed most of our fears, and indeed it is possible that they will be able to incorporate certain pumping arrangements which could result in a more even flow of water into the lagoon; this will be the subject of a great deal of further study.

Meanwhile there are still many unanswered questions; e.g. does the very rare Ivell's anemone still live in the lagoon (the only other place where it is found is Cape Town harbour!); why has there been a sharp decline in winter wildfowl, and birds such as Coot and Little Grebe, compared for example with Brooklands?

I will try and keep SDOS members up to date as to the health of Widewater - which is probably SDOS's most watched habitat.

## Birds on our Patch — May to October

Undoubtedly the best bird of the period (and indeed of the year so far) was the Pectoral Sandpiper that dropped in on a muddy puddle just south of the Upper Beeding bypass and was found by Keith Noble early on 13<sup>th</sup> October (unlucky 13 for some SDOS members who were travelling to Scotland and elsewhere!) and only stayed about 24 hours, allowing excellent close views to those members who managed to see it. This is probably the first record in our area since the one on the Adur opposite Shoreham Airport on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1970. The Little Stint accompanying it was rather overshadowed by its transatlantic neighbour, in more senses than one.

Another excellent discovery was the Dotterel spotted in a field near Steyning Round Hill by Chris Wright on 20<sup>th</sup> September. Sadly, this lone bird could not be relocated later that day, and extensive searching next morning was to no avail.

Balearic Shearwaters have figured in quite a lot of sea-watching reports this

summer and several have been seen in our area, both at the Marina and off the Shoreham beach.

Up to four Quail were recorded on the Downs between Coombes and Annington Hill around mid-July. Seven Crossbills flew over Preston Park Station on 10<sup>th</sup> August and a Melodious Warbler was sighted in Sheepcote Valley on 18<sup>th</sup>

August, but could not be re-located after the initial sighting. There was an Osprey off the Marina the next day, and a Wry-neck in Sheepcote Valley on 24<sup>th</sup> August. Next morning a Tawny Pipit flew north over Hollingbury Camp calling. The first migrating Honey Buzzards were sighted on 1<sup>st</sup> September, when two flew west over Hollingdean, another passed over Brighton on 8<sup>th</sup> September and one more flew over the Marina and then north-west over Brighton on 10<sup>th</sup> September. To make absolutely sure it got into the SDOS records, a Ring Ouzel appeared in Peter Whitcomb's Hollingdean garden on 9<sup>th</sup> September, and Pied Flycatcher, yet another Honey Buzzard, and three Common Buzzards were seen at the Wildpark on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. There have been several Little Egrets around the RSPB area at Shoreham during the Summer and Autumn with up to three present at the end of August.

My thanks to Peter Whitcomb for supplying most of this information.



Dotterel (in Spring breeding dress)

# Costa Rica - Birdwatchers Paradise?

If you are keen to see a large number of unfamiliar birds from unfamiliar families, in an unthreatening and friendly environment in which you don't even have to worry about eating salad vegetables, then Costa Rica is a perfect choice of destination.

I was part of a Wings group, an American company, but organised from the UK by Sunbird. The days were long and demanding, but the atmosphere was friendly, and to see over 450 bird species as well as 20 mammals with a number of reptiles and, of course, brilliant butterflies included, in just ten days was simply brilliant. It would be tedious to give any general description of where we went, so I am going to limit this article to just two experiences.

Our first stop after San Jose was high up in the mountains, at a place called Trogon Lodge. You may know that trogons are rather ponderous forest birds, found in Africa, Asia and tropical America. They mostly eat fruits and sit around conspicuously enough on branches. What makes them so impressive is their colouring. Their plumage consists of great swathes of bright, but not iridescent primary colours, including purple and orange in some species. Fine so far. But you may have got a bit further and come across quetzals. These are distinctive members of the trogon family, just as jays are distinguished in the crow family. Quetzals are so stunning that in Guatemala, the unit of currency is the quetzal. I saw a type of quetzal in Peru two years ago. But not a resplendent one. The Resplendent Quetzal was head and shoulders in desirability above all of the potential species I might come across in Costa Rica. It is actually less flamboyant than ordinary trogons as far

as basic pigmentation is concerned, but it is red and green and white, almost as large as a chicken, and the male has bright green tail streamers, a full two feet long which flick as it flies, like old-fashioned kite tails. And as I left my room for 6 a.m. breakfast, and joined the party on the lawn and facing the forest beyond the lodge, it was not difficult to spot a pair of quetzals, with the male obligingly tail-a-flutter. A small creature against the grandeur of the trees, but strikingly beautiful.

Some days later we had an afternoon coffee break, though quite a unique one. The van stopped outside a small one-storey building which hinted gently at being able to offer refreshment. And inside we walked into a collection of curios. On the right were an antique piano, boasting far fewer than half of its notes. There were photographs, simple paintings, dried leaves, natural curios, and an empty vivarium. We were told this recently held a family of tarantulas, which visitors were invited to have crawl on them! Coffee was free, and so were light refreshments. The family - several children and a couple of adults were visible through a hatch, seated round a table and chatting. We were invited to make a donation of about twenty-five pence a head, but the leader told us that he always paid double, for there was a special reason for the stop.

Beyond the main room was a veranda, and all along the veranda were a series of honey-feeders and bird tables. As soon as we arrived the tables were restocked with tropical fruits. And we were able to watch from extremely close range, a legion of birds enjoying what was on offer. There were six species of hummingbird at the honey, with

the large Violet Underwings taking the prize for splendour. There were a variety of gaudy tanagers, but among the total of about 20 species, the Red-headed Barbet took the prize. Barbets are like giant heavy-headed, massive-billed finches to look at. Both male and female were at one of the tables by the veranda. The female was as large as a green woodpecker and its greens were hardly less intense, but the male was unbelievably bright, with its scarlet running down to its nape at the back, and to mid-chest at the front.

I shall say nothing of the Banded Anteater, or ocelot, or Mexican hairy porcupines..... Costa Rica really is worth a visit!

Graham St. John Smith

*Copies of the Sunbird birdwatching holidays brochure for 2002 can be obtained from Sunbird, PO Box 76, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 1DF*



## SUBSCRIPTIONS SPECIAL OFFER

Due to the increase in speakers fees, the need to upgrade the Society's computer system and the necessity for public liability insurance the Committee has decided to raise subscription rates as from 1.1.2002. The new rates will be:

Single - £10

Family - £15

Junior - £4

These increases are the first in 4 years and the Committee hopes that members will still view membership of the Society as value for money.

As a gesture of goodwill you can avoid the increases for one year by renewing your subscription for next year before 1st January 2002. Members availing themselves of this opportunity need only pay the current rate Single - £8.50; Family - £12; Junior - £2.50. Hopefully this incentive will help to reduce the Society's postage costs; some 60 reminders were issued earlier this year!

Subscriptions can be paid at indoor meetings or direct to me at:  
41 St. Lawrence Avenue,  
Worthing, West Sussex.  
BN14 7JJ.

John M. Maskell.  
Hon. Treasurer

# Garden Bird Survey

Records received for the very wet and generally mild Autumn and Winter, 2000 showed a marked lack of wintering thrushes, with only four records for Redwing and none for Fieldfare. Details of these and other records will appear in the annual report.

At present, 19 returns have been received for Spring 2001 and several recorders report breeding success for most of the common garden birds.

I particularly enjoyed two anecdotes received with the Spring records. The first being from Christine Nichols who observed a Robin taking advantage of the warmth from the garden shed roof, on a sunny day, by laying down and spreading its wings appearing to sunbathe. The second from Marion Taylor recounts that a family of mice overwintered in a previously never used nest hole in a bird table. However, dur-

ing Spring they were ousted by a pair of Blue Tits who successfully raised a brood and departed, leaving the mice to quickly return to their former home.

At present 8 members who return SDOS garden bird counts also participate in the BTO garden survey. BTO would surely welcome those records from other members who would be prepared to submit them.

Thanks to all who continue to contribute their observations and any additional garden recorders would be very welcome.  
Martin Ford

## Tales Out of School

One advantage of teaching in an urban school is that the grounds are a focal point for visiting birds when the children aren't around! I'm fortunate that my present classroom has windows on two sides and the vista takes in the playground and sports field. When not engaged in pursuing educational excellence I sometimes permit myself the odd glance outside! Most interesting is to observe regular individual avian characters. My own favourite is a Carrion Crow.

I first became aware of Hoyalong some years ago. This character has a deformed right leg and has difficulty walking. It hobbles in a most ungainly manner and hops on its left leg when frightened and then uses the sound limb to project itself skywards. Hoyalong's mate, whom I've assumed is constant, is never very far away and they are clearly survivors. They visit our school grounds throughout the year, especially after break-times when the hordes leave behind tasty morsels from carelessly eaten snacks.

For the past 5 years -my- Crows have successfully reared five pairs of chicks. They are enthusiastic parents and have been seen dive-bombing a local moggie in defence of their offspring. Herring Gulls have also been speedily scrambled!

My casual observations have made me appreciate that injured birds can overcome disabilities and survive very well. Hoyalong & Co. defend their territory most successfully. These Crows are not the raucous thugs so often portrayed but caring, resourceful and slightly roguish characters who convey to me a feeling of warmth each time they drop by.

John M. Maskell

## Bird Table Notes



I know they're there! I can hear them tinkling as they pass overhead to someone else's teasels. We have tried

niger seed in the recommended feeders. One Blue Tit became addicted but not a finch. We wooed them with teasel heads primed with niger seed; the squirrels showered themselves daily. We even grow Echinops for them. Could it be that we have too many overhanging trees? Just how do you lure Goldfinches into your garden?

Since replacing peanuts with unblanched almonds (surplus to culinary requirements) we have frequent visits from a Coal Tit as well as Great Tits and Blue Tits. The nuts fit well into the peanut feeder and because they don't appear to rot in the rain, have a longer 'shelf-life'. In recent winters, we have tempted Blackcaps with blue-cheese parings. Are these offerings too exotic for our native species? Should I desist? What delicacies have your Garden Birds been partial to? Do share your thoughts.

Shena Maskell

## INFORMATION AND REQUESTS

**Records:** Peter Whitcomb, would appreciate batches of records as soon as possible, please. Later records to the end of the year should be sent by the end of January 2002. Please help by noting whether any scarce or rare records have been submitted to the SOS for authentication.

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



**Report:** The production of the Annual Report for 2000 is now well in hand. All the necessary contributions, with the exception of one (someone's ears should be burning!) are now with the Editors, and we hope that you will receive your copy by the end of this year.



**Pictures:** Richard Ives supplied the Dotterel drawing, and the impression of Widewater comes from the sketches that Patricia Hall did for our *Birds of Shoreham* book. The drawing of the Resplendent Quetzal is reproduced with thanks from the Bird Holidays 2001 prospectus. This company is among several which organizes holidays to Costa Rica each year, and copies of its 2002 brochure can be obtained from Bird Holidays, 10 Ivegate, Yeadon, Leeds, LS19 7RE.



The **Spring Newsletter** is planned for May and I would appreciate receiving any copy for the next issue by the end of March. Please send contributions to Jim Steedman, 18 Manor Road, Upper Beeding, STEYNING, West Sussex, BN44 3TJ. Tel. 01 903 814 923. E-mail: jim.steedman@virgin.net

I would be very interested in comments and suggestions as well as actual articles. Would you like to have more about garden birds in future newsletters? Have you any suggested plants which are particularly attractive to birds and grow well in your garden? Would you like articles about bird identification? If so, is there a group of species you find particularly difficult?