

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2002

Sprugs*, etc!

I was woken recently by a sound I had not heard for over two years, a gentle chirrup. It must be said it was not at all exciting, even monotonous, but if you had not heard it for a long time it was very comforting. To my surprise and delight this bird had reappeared on the day of the RSPB Garden Bird Count as did another I had not seen in the garden for two years. Neither of these species was chosen to be endowed with very tuneful songs but it was their cheerful persistence I had missed and it also made me realise the truth of the adage, "you don't value something until it has gone." I wondered when I had last recorded these two very common species because, so often, we take them for granted, until suddenly they are not there. You will have guessed by now that I am referring to the House Sparrow and the Starling. Even Bill Oddie had difficulty in finding a House Sparrow in London in his last "Bill Oddie goes wild" programme, and then he heard one before he found it to show us. They are back in my garden and I am pleased to see them, even though in the past we have complained about the mess they have caused in the roof-space and the noise early on a summer's morning!

Talking about birds disappearing brings me to our plans for 2003. Several of the Committee Members have been going through the Reports from 1953 onwards to suggest ideas for inclusion in our proposed book. There is so much of interest, so much of which more people must have the chance to read. Here are some names of people we would like to con-

tact now: Michael Goddard, C. Hitchman, R. Lyon and Mark Welfare - if you know any of them and can supply an address please let us know.

We have followed up some very interesting clues from the Reports, which have resulted in some good stories. There was the Bittern that was iced into the ground in January 1963, those Bee-eaters nesting at Streat, an influx of Cranes, huge numbers of Tree Sparrows, regular sightings of Cirl Buntings, and Stone Curlews and Nightjars nesting on the Downs. Do you know which leader (many years ago) overslept and missed the coach taking a large party to the New Forest? Or which junior member fell into a ditch at Amberley? The reminiscences are coming in slowly but we should like to have some more best / most-interesting / humorous / missed — sightings. We should like to know how some of you came to birdwatching — what or who was the spur to start the hobby?

I am the only member of my family who has had an interest in Natural History in general and birds in particular, but it has been the source of great enjoyment for me for 47 years. The point is that something is always happening, whether it is watching the charming Long-tailed tits in the garden, a Guillemot bobbing on the sea, a Raptor flying overhead or a Moorhen trying not to be seen as it hurries into the nearest ditch. We are fortunate to have chosen a pastime that is cost-free most of the time and can be practiced in almost any location.

Let us hope 2002 will bring exciting records for us all — the 49th year of this Society!
Brianna Reeve

**According to my Oxford English Dictionary, 'sprug' is an Old English name for (House) Sparrow — Ed.*

Forthcoming Field Trips

28 April Goring Seawatch with John Newnham

Our annual chance for those capable of rising early enough to get to the Goring Ilex Shelter by 0800 on a Sunday morning to get to grips with the business of identifying those little white dots on the horizon. AM only.

19 May West Dean Woods with Bernie Forbes

Only open to all those who did not misbehave on Bernie's outing to Burton Pond on 7th April. All day.

26 May The New Forest with Bernie Forbes

(See above!) All day.

28 June Ambersham Common with Bernie Forbes

(see above!) Evening only.

See your programme card for complete details of times and meeting points.

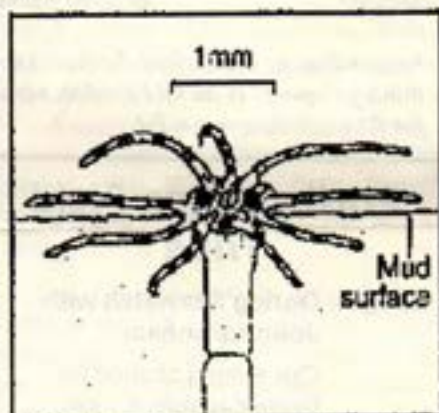
Divers look for world's rarest sea anemone

By Charles Clover,
Environment Editor

A SEARCH for the world's rarest sea anemone to find out whether or not it has become extinct is to begin this week at a salt water lagoon at Shore-ham-by-Sea, West Sussex.

Ivell's anemone, one of Britain's most endangered creatures, was only discovered in 1973 and is thought to be unique to Widewater lagoon, the stretch of sea water trapped by a shingle spit next to the A259 at Shoreham.

The anemone, last seen in 1983, is five to 10 centimetres long, burrows into the mud with only its tentacles extending on the sea-face. This can make it extremely hard to find.



Scientists from the Nature Conservancy Council and the oceanography department of Southampton University will dive in the lagoon, then take sediment samples to make sure they have not overlooked the endangered animal.

If they cannot find the anemone, which is protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, it will be presumed extinct.

Dr Steve Bolt of the NCC said that if the creature was found they hoped to recommend measures for conserving it. "We are hoping to discover why the quality of the lagoon is deteriorating and appears to be drying out," he said.

Salt water lagoons are themselves rare and threatened habitats in Britain. Besides being the home of the Ivell's anemone, Widewater lagoon is also the only known home of the hydroid (a plant-like animal), *clavopsella navis*.

Widewater news by Stanley Allen

You may wonder why I have dug out from my files the cutting (shown on the left) from a copy of *The Times* in the early 1990's. This is why. Recently the Friends of Widewater Lagoon, out of the blue, had a call from Professor Ivell (who first discovered Ivellii at Widewater), asking if he could come on a visit from Germany, to view the lagoon, and assess the possibility of Ivellii still being present. So, on a recent Sunday, the professor duly arrived. No attempt was made to scour the lagoon; but the Professor was optimistic that *his* anemone might well still be present. This is a very delicate creature, and further research must be carried out by experts, for example by one of the Universities who have already carried out studies at Widewater — Southampton, Guildford, Sussex and Norwich. So — watch this space for possible further news — and next time you visit Widewater, think to yourself — perhaps I may be within a few feet of one of the world's rarest creatures.

Schoolkids!

A few weeks ago, we were asked by Friends of Widewater Lagoon (FOWL) if we could help with an educational visit to Widewater of parties of schoolchildren, planned for two mornings in March — the children all from Shoreham schools. I said OK, and then wondered what on earth I had landed us with. I needn't have worried: on each of the two planned mornings, three other SDOS members turned up to help — and I am sure I speak for all of us when I say that we were pleausably surprised by the bright and intelligent reactions from the ten-year-old boys and girls, when introduced, e.g. to the difference between Black-headed and Herring Gulls, and the bright colours of the Ruddy Shelduck. Using a telescope and binoculars for the first time was a particular delight for them — and the first group were able to have a distant view of a Peregrine on the Power Station chimney. My opinion of today's kids rose a long way — and I even felt that SDOS might have a new future member

or two — including Cyril and Maureen Leeve's delightful grand-daughter.

Stanley Allen

SDOS user group

In case you haven't already heard, the SDOS has a computer user group organized for the communication of bird sightings and conservation issues. Members of the user group communicate by e-mail on the internet and a single e-mail sent to the Group is then distributed to all members free.

If you are a member of the SDOS, have an e-mail address and would like to contribute or receive sighting information, please contact me (the User Group Moderator) at the e-mail address given below.

Please confirm your SDOS membership and give details of your e-mail address.

I can be contacted by e-mail on terrance.hicks@talk21.com

Good birding,
Terry Hicks

Peregrines



As we 'go to press' in the last week of March there is good news regarding the rarest resident bird in our area. The regular pair of peregrines at Sussex Heights appear to be about to breed for a yet another year, and activity around the other well-known inland site indicates that breeding may well be attempted again this year. In addition, a peregrine pair have recently been seen around the nest box attached to the chimney of the power station at Southwick, so the likelihood of regularly seeing this exciting raptor is our area in now greater than for many years.

Notes from our Recorder

Whilst researching some old Shoreham Bird Reports for the anniversary next year I was intrigued by the sites that were covered during the 1950's and 1960's. In those days there was an obvious concentration on the Adur valley up to Wyckham Farm and not really much elsewhere. Places on the fringes such as Mill Hill and the Downs near Steyning got the occasional mention but it wasn't until much later that the recording area was expanded to include Ferring Rife, Woods Mill, a fuller extent of the Downs, and the area around Brighton.

Members' names and addresses used to be printed at the back of the Reports up to 1980, and other areas where sightings were mentioned were based on their local patches not far from home. A couple of keen birders living in Westdene, Brighton covered Coney Hill (Patcham) and northwards to the Devil's Dyke. Articles were included on visible migration from the latter site. Today this area has golf courses and tourism, but basically has much the same habitat as it did in the 1960's. With car access so much handier these days, it is perhaps surprising therefore that Devil's Dyke, along with other neglected areas like Newtimber and Wol-

stonbury, rarely gets covered today. The Cissbury and Chanctonbury area wasn't given much of a mention in the 1950's but was probably a popular area with the small handful of birders who knew where to find Stone Curlews. One or two other rarities were recorded from the area. Today the local Ringing Group reports on trapped birds and fly-overs, and but for them the vast Cissbury area wouldn't get much coverage at all.

All the aforementioned areas have had their share of significant sightings over the years. Stone Curlews and Cirl Buntings have long gone, but surely there is always a chance of a migrant turning up again? The arable fields today still look good for Dotterel, Quail or even Corn-crake, and the hills and valleys are a magnet for migrant passage. With Buzzard and Red Kite occurrences on the increase, and perhaps a repeat of a summering Montagu's Harrier, these areas must be worth more-extensive coverage, especially for those who enjoy rambling or exercising their dogs!

Under-recorded species like owls and partridges would be better represented. Stonechats and Corn Buntings need monitoring closely as they are thought to

be in decline nationally. Our area has shown, too, that species once more-common like Cuckoo, Grasshopper Warbler and Turtle Dove seem to be in decline. It would be marvellous to discover that they are all not so scarce as recent Reports suggest.

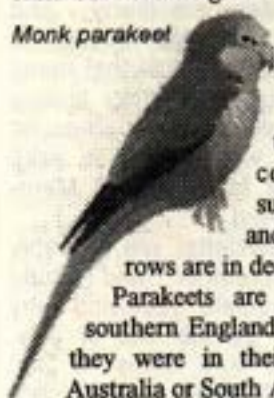
Could I therefore, as Recorder, encourage and tempt more of our members out into the field? Not just in the warmer summer months, but in the winter too. Recording forms will be made available at indoor meetings, or I can send them to anyone who requests them.

We are now inputting data shared with the Sussex Ornithological Society. For members of both Societies, to avoid duplication, please send your records to SOS, but advise me that you have done so. For those of you who are just members of the SDOS please continue to send your records to me either on the forms or by email to p.whitcomb@talk21.com. It is now more important to add Euring species numbers; to be as precise as possible regarding the site (i.e. whether on Widewater or on the sea off Widewater, etc); and if you feel the sighting is significant or the site is relatively unknown then please state a six-figure Ordnance Survey ref. All these are not essential, but they do help. Many thanks. Peter Whitcomb

What species was that?

It seems we should expect exotics to enter our recording area shortly. Parrots

Monk parakeet



are now spreading like Starlings used to! While populations of once-common birds such as Starlings and House Sparrows are in decline, Parrots and Parakeets are flocking across southern England as happily as if they were in their homelands of Australia or South America.

According to recent reports a fifth species of exotic parrot has recently been confirmed as breeding successfully in the wild in southeast England and other sightings have been reported in Merseyside and Cornwall. Ecologists are be-

coming concerned at the impact these increasing populations may have on native wildlife.

The numbers of parrots living in the wild in Britain are now much greater than those of critically endangered native species, such as the Bittern and Corn-crake. The most-recent species to have started to colonise the country has been identified as the Blue-crowned Parakeet (*Aratingo acuticaudata*). It is normally an inhabitant of Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. Information from Kent indicates that two first appeared in Bromley in southeast London in 1997, and by 1999 the number in the area had increased to 15.

It seems impossible for these birds to survive as they come from wild places in tropical South America. Against all the odds they have managed to adapt to liv-

ing in built-up areas in southeast England.

There are also reports of some 6,000 Ring-necked Parakeets (*Psittoculo krameri*) around Surrey, with nearly 4,000 roosting at Esher rugby ground. It is thought that the first recorded breeding of Ring-necked Parakeets in Britain was in 1855 in Norfolk. The species was added to the official British List in 1983 as an established exotic, and since 1998 the population has exploded.

So consult your books and be ready!

Terry Hicks

CHANGE TO FIELD TRIP PROGRAMME

Unfortunately JIM STEEDMAN is unable to lead our field trip to Cissbury Ring on Saturday 6th July. We have therefore decided to bring the date of this outing forward, so that it will now take place on SUNDAY, 30th JUNE. Meet at 9.30 am. in National Trust car park O.S.Sheet 198. Grid Ref. TQ139084 as previously stated.

Exotic list and places seen:

Rose Ringed Parakeet
Sharp Tailed Conure
Monk Parakeet
Alexandrine Parakeet

Central London and Margate
Bromley
Boreham Wood
Windsor

Bird Table Notes

Brianne has been exhorting us to examine our archives of personal bird notes. This Sunday afternoon activity can be as enjoyable (and just as time-consuming) as looking through old family photos!



My first bird table observations I sent into the RSPB at the age of eight, when I lived on Thorney Island. I reported a, then unusual, sight of a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** feeding on the bird table.

Have you noticed how our garden birds have adapted over the years to the variety of bird feeders? Do you remember when **Sparrows** could not cope with nut baskets? Even our ground-loving **Duncock** swings on our RSPB, seed-mix feeder, while our **Robin** happily perches on the window seed-hopper. I'm waiting for our first **Long-tail** on the hanging feeder. Several members already have them as regulars. The **Wren** has been finding tasty spiders in the ivy growing in our window boxes.

After all this rain even the almonds have rotted in the nut basket so I have abandoned those in favour of sultanas on the top of the garden wall. These are actually improved by a downpour and are a firm favourite with our nesting **Blackbirds**. At 8 a.m. if I have not put out a handful there comes an indignant 'tacking' outside the kitchen window!

Do get out your memories and send them in for us to share...and since you ask, yes, I'm still waiting for that elusive goldfinch! Shena Maskell

We managed to set up a resident Goldfinch garden population by first tying dead teasels to the sides of our bird table and sprinkling the heads with Niger each day (a messy business, so hold something beneath to catch the seed that does not catch on the heads!) Eventually, a lone Goldfinch discovered the seed and then brought his friends. We next put Niger on the bird table as well, and they moved to that. Not long after, the first Niger feeders were imported from the USA, and since then we've not looked back — our regular Four Musketeers being joined by many more friends when seed is short — Ed.

Tales Out Of School No. 2 - Lofty Pursuits

Over the years several racing pigeons have visited our school grounds. On one occasion the children alerted me to one that had been staggering around for a couple of days. It was clearly a sick specimen and it was plied with a few tasty morsels in an attempt to aid revival. However, sadly, on the third day it was found dead.

The children who had been monitoring the bird's progress decided to inform its owner. We duly removed the ring to establish the deceased's number and owner. A composite letter was then posted to the Middlesex loft.

Meanwhile I needed to dispose of the corpse. The refuse collection was due the following morning so I elected to use this speedy despatch system! As I lifted the heavy galvanised lid of the 'wheelie-bin' there was a sudden movement from within which startled me and I instinctively let go of the lid. Seconds later, as I gingerly lifted the lid again, I found the cause of my alarm. A starling had been rummaging inside and its vertical take off had coincided with the descending lid. The racing pigeon now joined the body of the starling. Various thoughts sprang to mind including "killing two birds with one stone"! John M. Maskell

Subscriptions

Thank you to those members (the majority) who paid their annual subscriptions before, or shortly after, 1st January. A handful of members have not yet responded to their individual reminders and an immediate response would be much appreciated.

Our current subscription rates are:

Junior	£4
Single	£10
Family	£15

Cheques should be made payable to "Shoreham District Ornithological Society". Monies should be sent directly to me:

John M. Maskell
41 St. Lawrence Avenue,
Worthing,
West Sussex.
BN14 7JJ.

Thank you. John Maskell, Treasurer.

INFORMATION AND REQUESTS

Report: The Annual Report for 2000 was published just before Christmas. As usual, we printed some extra copies and if you would like to buy any or know any non-members who would like to do so, please get in touch with Brianne Reeve



Records: Peter Whitcomb, would appreciate records to be sent to him in batches throughout the year, please, so that they do not all have to be entered into the computer at once! Final records for the year should be reach him not later than the end of January 2003. Please help by noting whether scarce or rare records have been submitted to the SOS for authentication.

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



The Next Newsletter: In future we are hoping to produce three of these Newsletters each year (i.e. at approximately four-monthly intervals), provided we can obtain sufficient material. You will have noticed I hope that all the items in this issue have been written by Committee Members (sorry - and Shenal) IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THIS WAY! I know that many of you go on interesting birding holidays to exotic and not-so-exotic parts of the world. Please write and tell your fellow SDOS Members about them.

The next Newsletter will probably appear in September and I would greatly appreciate receiving any contributions by the end of July. Please send any items to Jim Steedman, 18 Manor Road, Upper Beeding, STEYNING, West Sussex, BN44 3TJ. Tel. 01 903 814 923. E-mail: jim.steedman@virgin.net



For Sale: Secondhand 10 x 42 B/BA Leica binoculars in excellent condition with standard Leica strap, plus bungy' (Neoprene) strap, at around half price. Would all those interested, please contact Chris Mulcock on 01 903 776 251.