



SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2006

Now that April's here

"That's the wise thrush; he sings his song twice over", or repeats each phrase five or six times when I've been waiting at Shoreham Station. Wheatears are on our beaches, the first Swallows have arrived all the way from the Cape, and soon House Martins will be sticking mud under fortunate eaves.

Our first outing is to Burton Pond, with damp woodland, and patches of heath and bog around the open water. There will be waterbirds, perhaps a Kingfisher or Grey Wagtail. Bernie will help us look and listen for Nuthatch, Tree Creeper, and the scarcer woodland birds, such as Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Marsh Tit.

Seawatches try some people's patience, but the last two which I attended were blessed by fine weather, expert guidance, good company, and hundreds of birds—gulls, terns, waders, wildfowl, Swifts and Swallows—well worth an early start.

That may serve as practice for rising even earlier the following Sunday. Come into the Downland woods and enjoy the fresh green of the beeches, listen for Blackcaps and Garden Warblers, and remind yourselves how to tell them apart.

The programme continues with visits to the best of Sussex woods and heathland, our annual pilgrimage to the wonderful New Forest, and up Cissbury with its grand views from Beachy Head to the Isle of Wight. Three coastal outings promise many migrants, before we gather again in St. Peter's Hall for an illustrated tour of Britain's nature reserves with Brian Nobbs, on Tuesday 10th October.

Enjoy the Spring and Summer, and please keep notes and submit records - conservation starts from information.

Keith Noble, Newsletter Editor



Swallow

Keith Noble

Guidance for Outings

We are lucky to have expert Leaders, who know the sites, can find and identify the birds, and do their best to help everyone to see them well. They plan carefully and come prepared, and they ask participants to help them make the outings as safe and enjoyable as possible. For everyone's benefit, the Society's Council has approved guidelines for the start of each outing, summarised here.

Notes for Leaders:

- Ask everyone to print their name in the Outings Book as a record of the day
- Advise length and difficulty of the walk
- Type of terrain, steepness of slopes
- Potential hazards, natural and man-made
- Estimated times of lunch and return

FIELD OUTINGS

Apr 23 (Sun)
Burton Pond
Leader Bernie Forbes

Apr 30 (Sun, half-day)
Goring Seawatch
Leader John Newnham

May 7 (Sun, half-day)
Dawn Chorus at Eartham
Leader Brianne Reeve

May 14 (Sun)
West Dean Woods
Leader Dave Smith

June 4 (Sun)
New Forest
Leader Bernie Forbes

June 9 (Fri, evening)
Greatham and Lavington
Leader Dorian Mason

July 8 (Sat)
Cissbury Ring
Leader Clive Hope

Aug 19 (Sat)
Birling Gap
Leader Brianne Reeve

Sept 10 (Sun)
Pagham
Leader Dave Smith

Oct 7 (Sat)
Climping
Leader Clive Hope

Details in SDOS 2006 programme

- Location of First Aid Kit, any medical conditions which the Leader should know about. People who need medicaments, etc, should carry them
- Ask people to notify the Leader if they are leaving the group for any reason, or turning back early
- Introduce the 'backmarker'
- Leader and backmarker to carry mobile phones, ask who else has one, and note numbers
- Check headcount against names in book at start, lunch and finish
- Any accident to be recorded and witnessed in the book

Simple sensible precautions so that we all enjoy the outings.



Water Rail

Keith Noble

Our Indoor Meetings

Do we need to change what we are doing?

As I wait nervously to see how good our chosen speaker for the evening is going to be, I wonder whether it is time to change the type of meeting that we arrange for you seven times a year. I cannot ask at meetings how you would rate the present speaker on a scale of one to ten, but I really would like to know what you like, and what has not pleased you. Attendance at the indoor meetings is encouragingly high but we can never guarantee the quality of the speaker; the write-ups we have are usually written by themselves and therefore full of self-recommendation! We try to ensure the main feature will centre on birds, but we have definitely been informed incorrectly on more than one occasion and there is nothing we can do about it except not have them again.

If you have any ideas to improve these meetings, or you would like to try something a little different, and particularly if you hear of a good speaker, please let me know. Any comments will be helpful, so please give it a little thought.

Do contact me, address and telephone number are on the Programme, and email is briannereeve@yahoo.com.

Brianne Reeve, *Chairman/Hon. Secretary*

Recent Outings

At Shellness on February 5th, eleven people met on what looked to be a brightening day, but proved otherwise. Still, we moved to the shell spit from the raised footpath, seeing plenty of Reed Buntings and Meadow Pipits on the field edges, two ring-tail Hen Harriers hunting across the fields and a couple of coveys of Red-legged Partridges. To everybody's disappointment, including mine, the tide was well out - even so, Knot, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover and Bar-Tailed Godwit were all seen along the shoreline, as were two wonderfully obliging and perching Short-eared Owls, each showing distinctive plumage from the other. A Rock Pipit gave good views and showed all its differences from other pipits. Out on the sea were some distant ducks and Great Crested Grebes in very poor light. Returning to the cars, we moved on to Capel Fleet and the Harty Raptor Watch point for lunch. It was immediately obvious that there were large numbers of harriers everywhere. As the day proceeded the numbers looked as follows: Marsh Harriers 20+ (Juv, Male and Female); Hen Harriers 2 Male, 10+ Ring-tails; Short Eared Owls, at least another 7, with two giving superb close flight views along Capel Fleet.

And then we come to the Rough-legged Buzzard, a juvenile which proved curiously difficult to ascertain as it remained motionless for most of the time we looked at it, except when the leader asked the group to look behind them at a Stonechat. When we looked back after a minute or so, the buzzard had flown. Luckily, it was soon relocated and we saw all the pertinent markings to confirm that it was indeed a Rough-legged Buzzard.

We found White-fronted Geese alongside Greylags in the middle distance. Nine flyover Black-tailed Godwits, two Merlins, numerous Kestrels and a juvenile Red-crested Pochard rounded off what I think we all agreed was a superb day's birding, and I would like to thank those who helped with their expertise and sightings for the benefit of the group.

Paul Stevens

On March 18th, despite the intensely cold weather, strong east to north-east winds and little chance of seeing the sun, 22 people gathered at Iping and Stedham Commons. Interestingly, the three non-members present had discovered this outing on the SOS web-site and opted for ours rather than a Hampshire one a bit further away! We set off heading towards the cover of the trees running parallel

with the main road. Although this area usually produces a few birds, there is the disadvantage of traffic noise. However, we soon saw and heard Chaffinch, Robin and Wren, and several Coal Tits. It was surprising how many of the group were pleased to have close views and to hear the clear call of these tits. They were followed by Goldcrests and an obliging group of Siskins. Everyone had good views of these charming birds, showing their very typical behaviour as they fed in the Silver Birches, giving their slightly mournful call-notes. They were joined by Great and Blue Tits so comparisons could be made.

Moving on into the Common, away from the road, we saw a few Stonechats keeping very low over the ground, sometimes

SDOS Membership

Would any members who have not yet renewed their subscriptions, please do so now.

The 2006 Subscription Rates are:

Ordinary: £12

Family: £18

Junior: £5

Life—Single: £100 (over 65: £75)

Life—Couple: £125 (over 65: £100)

(Rates for Families and Couples are for those living at the same address).

We offer members the facility to pay subscriptions by a Bank Standing Order. Forms are now available from:

41 St Lawrence Avenue

Worthing

BN14 7JJ

John Maskell, *Hon. Treasurer*

Sales Department!

These are available at indoor meetings and usually on outings.

1. SDOS Car Sticker — £1 or £1.20 by post.

2. "SDOS Golden Jubilee" ball-point pen. Black ink. Black and white plastic pen with single commemorative inscription. Comfortable grip.

£.1 or £1.25 by post. John Maskell

'Fifty Years of Birdwatching', the SDOS anniversary book, costs £12.50, plus £2.50 p&p, from Terry Hicks, 7 Berberis Court, Shoreham, BN43 6JA. Phone 01273 591120.



perching on top of the heather. There was no doubt birds were going to keep their heads down on this cold and discouraging day, but the party kept in good spirits and were cheered by seeing a small group of double Snowdrops and a little later the first smaller group of wild Daffodils.

Kestrel, Blackbird, Wood Pigeon and Carrion Crow were added to the list and then probably the birds of the day—Wood Larks. Two were feeding in a farm field just off the Common and gave excellent prolonged views for everyone to see their distinctive markings, improved by the generous use of Bob's telescope which came into its own at this point. Two Dartford Warblers appeared, but too swiftly for most of the party to get onto them. Back to the cars, a welcome rest for lunch, and in a little while the sun came out!

Although this was intended as an early Spring walk, the cold kept all birds well out of sight, and the song we did hear could not be described as strong. So the list only produced 16 species with the Dartfords being a real disappointment but of course that's why we do this bird-watching. We shall go back on another day and see more and perhaps different species. Surely Spring can't be too far away!

Chris Wright

What was about?

The flock of finches and buntings to the north of Lee Farm, Patching, built up to about 500 birds by the end of November. Containing at least 100 each of Brambling and Reed Bunting, and 200 Chaffinches with a few Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings, it remained there until at least mid January before declining. Single Eider and Velvet Scoter were off Worthing in early December.

Any post-Christmas blues were banished by the incredible spectacle of around 3,000 Gannets in a feeding frenzy off Goring and Worthing on Dec 26/27. This constituted a new Sussex record count for the species. Three Goldeneye passed West on the 27th. The usual three-figure tallies of Great Crested Grebes and Red-breasted Mergansers were logged, and a dozen or so Red-throated Divers were regularly observed.

On January 4th, six Bewick's Swans flew along the beach at Ferring and were seen heading over Worthing Pier against a darkening sky. 18 Teal on Widewater on 18th were unusual for the site. Black Redstarts were regularly reported from then until early March at both Ferring beach and Shoreham Harbour mouth. On

31st, 150 Linnets were near the Cement works, and on Feb 4th, 32 Fieldfares at Truleigh Hill.

A Red Kite was close to the A27 north of Hove on 5th, and two Slavonian Grebes off Shoreham Beach next day. Up to six of the latter were reported at several sites through to early March, very good numbers for our area.



Black Redstart

Keith Noble

Another regular was a Water Rail that showed well sometimes at Widewater around the tamarisks. A Ruddy Duck at Brooklands was another scarce bird in our area. Three redpolls were at Storrington Mill Pond on Feb 15th. The Rock Pipits at Shoreham Harbour included one of the Scandinavian sub-species on 16th when a single Purple Sandpiper was on the harbour wall. Cold NE winds from 21st to the end of the month saw a good movement of auks and other seabirds offshore on several days, with 24th and 26th especially productive. 40 Razorbills were off Shoreham Harbour at this time. An Avocet at Widewater on 27th was yet another good local bird, with two female Shovelers for company. A Short-eared Owl, a scarce species in West Sussex this winter, quartered fields near New Salts Farm in late Feb/early March and a Merlin was over Park Brow, north of Cissbury, on March 6th. Two Mediterranean Gulls in full summer plumage graced the fields at Goring Gap on 9th, when two Purple Sandpipers were at the Harbour.

This account is drawn largely from the SDOS Internet User Group, with thanks to everyone who has contributed.

Clive Hope, Hon. Recorder

Mallorca in March

We decided at quite short notice on a March trip to Mallorca to do a bit of walking and bird watching and help put last winter to rest! Thompson's were offering a 7 nights trip with 4 days walking including a leader, which gave us the other days to do our own thing. We landed at Palma at 10 o'clock, and were taken across the island by coach on a rapidly growing motorway to Puerto Pollensa in the north east corner. The rugged scenery here is rated amongst the four top locations in the whole of the Mediterranean.

We were taken out each day by coach and dropped off with our two leaders to have a linear walk. It usually started up hill then a long descent on rough tracks through olive groves or orange and lemon orchards, to a much lower level to the afternoon tea stop, then to meet the coach for the return journey. For those of you who have not visited Mallorca, there is a dramatic mountain range across the north of the island with mainly flat more inhabited land across the south.

Our second walk took us to Soller, divided into the port in the north, and the old town just inland. About 5 years ago a 3km tunnel was built through the high mountains to the south, to eliminate the need for a drive of many hairpins over the top of the mountains.

It was not long before we were graced with a sighting of a Red Kite which drifted out from a ridge above us, a good start for the day. As we neared Soller somebody picked up a couple of Black Vultures in the far distance. These obligingly drifted our way and circled overhead, giving us spectacular views of these 3 metre wingspan birds.

A recent BBC Wildlife programme on Mallorca explained how a mountain farmer had brought these magnificent birds back from near extinction. A flock of about two dozen birds with only two breeding pairs amongst them, has now been considerably extended to a flock of much stronger numbers. He collects, and puts out on his farmland, sheep carcasses from his farming neighbours, as the vultures eat only carrion.

I asked everyone in the party to look out for Hoopoe, but sadly they only put in an appearance to one of the couples when they were out on their own one day.

On another day we decided to walk around the beautiful bay of Puerto Pollensa. We soon came across a rather unusual trio hunting in front of us at the water's edge. It consisted of a Little Egret wading, a Black Headed Gull swimming

and a Cormorant diving, in quite a close group. They had found a shoal of fish and each ignoring the other were doing their best to secure their corner of the catch. I tried in vain to get a photo of all three together!

If you do decide to visit the island to walk and bird watch, remember to plan your trip either before or just after Easter or in September. This will avoid the invasion of families with school children, who I am told turn it into quite another place!

On one of our days off from rambling we took the bus from Puerto Pollensa where we were staying, and travelled south via Alcudia to S'Albufera Parc Natural, the largest and most important wetland in the Balearics. The entrance track leads in alongside one of the main canals. The hedge on the far side was populated with several Night Herons, the male birds sitting on branches like little waiters with their blue-black plumage on head and back, and white bibs. Females were scurrying back and forth along the water line collecting nesting material. Also present were Little Egrets.

Then there were the frogs, hundreds if not thousands of them in another area. Try as we might, we never saw one but they could certainly be heard.

We moved on across the reserve to a raised viewing point, which gave good views across the nearby pools. Strangely enough we had seen this very spot the week before in the BBC 2 programme on Mallorca Wildlife.

The nearest large pool had large tufts of reeds across it, and several of these had pairs of Black-winged Stilts on territory. Large number of Shovelers were in evidence, along with Coot, Red-crested Pochard, Moorhen, Teal, Mallard, Little Egret and Garganey. The visitor's guide lists 90 species overall for the Parc.

One of our party had visited S'Albufera on a previous day and had seen a Purple Gallinule but we were not so lucky.

We had been to the market in Alcudia in the morning and had obviously not allowed enough time to explore this extensive wetland fully, so we have a good excuse to go back! Hope to see you there.

John Ford

Magazines

I have some old Birding World, (Vol 1 No 1 to Vol 3 No 3) and BirdWatching magazines, all in good condition. If anyone would like them, they are welcome—no charge. Call me on 01903 744489.

Clive Hope

For the SDOS 2005 Report

As we had a really exciting year for birds in our area, it would be good to represent this in the SDOS 2005 Report with some stunning images. We are looking for high-quality photos, particularly of the Bee-eaters, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Gull-billed Tern, Grey Phalaropes, or any other birds which you think were special. They must have been taken in the SDOS recording area during 2005.

The pictures will be anonymously judged and picked for their suitability for the Report.

We are also looking for some articles, which could be to do with a survey you undertook in the SDOS area last year, or perhaps something along the lines of "A year in my local patch", for example.

Please send pictures and articles to penny@daveandpen.co.uk, or if you have slides that need scanning, call me on 01273 464784, and they can be collected from your house.

Penny Green, Hon. Report Editor

Surveys

BTO Atlas Winter Pilot.

The Ordnance Survey 10km square TQ20, which includes Shoreham, was one of those selected to test survey methods for the next BTO Atlas 2007-11. Many thanks to everyone who helped with the trial this winter, either by carrying out two visits of three hours to a tetrad, or by submitting records from random birding within the square.

Mary Ferrier, Dave and Penny Green, John and Shena Maskell, and John Newnham teamed up to cover tetrad D. Their nine sessions of twenty minutes each took in the Adur from the Tollbridge to Cuckoos Corner, the Coombes Road, residential areas, and the varied habitats of Mill Hill. They found 46 species, of which just Wood Pigeon was found in every session. Eleven Song Thrushes, six Goldcrests and five Bullfinches were welcome; Kingfisher and Water Rail showed themselves by the River.

In tetrad M, Keith Noble and Victoria Hume found many Herring Gulls, Crows and Starlings on Southwick roofs. While there were plenty of House Sparrows, Greenfinches and Blue Tits, and Robins were singing, some small garden birds, such as Dunnock and Wren, were hard to find. More unusual in town were a Jay and a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

The Canal and Beach added more variety with seven Linnets, four Black Redstarts, and single Kingfisher, Little Grebe, Peregrine and Stonechat.

SOS Surveys of House Martins and House Sparrows

House Martins are delightful, slightly plump but streamlined, with big dark appealing eyes. They may not be great singers but their twittering sounds cheerful, and they still look dapper after carrying a thousand beakfuls of mud to their nests.

They are among our most familiar and popular of birds, but also most mysterious. We are not certain where they spend many of their nights – do they sleep high in the sky like swifts? We know very little about their winter range and habits in Africa. Only one bird out of 290,000 ringed here has been recovered South of the Sahara.

It is suspected that the British population is declining. In the latest London Bird Report there is an account of a survey in north London, which revisited houses where there were 91 nests twenty years earlier. This time there were none. However, the picture is not clear, because colonies may move and we just do not have enough information.

So the Sussex Ornithological Society is asking all its members to take part in a Survey this summer, and would welcome help from SDOS members too. Please join in, using the form with this newsletter to record the number of occupied nests and details of the locality.

On the other side of the form, you could record breeding House Sparrows. Sparrows are now Red-listed as their population has declined by more than 50% in the last 25 years. We need more information to monitor their numbers, while researchers try to understand why they are disappearing.

Please send completed forms to Dr. Tony Cocks, and contact him if you need further information.



House Sparrow

John Reaney

Please send items for the next Newsletter by August 12 to the Editor:

Keith Noble, 19 Roman Road,
STEYNING,

BN44 3FN,

Email: noble@karg.freeseve.co.uk