

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Summer
2009

NEWSLETTER

Summer and Autumn Outings 2009

July 18th Saturday (although we have not stated morning only we should be able to complete the walk by approximately 1300hrs). The Burgh Downland area. Meet 0900hrs at the end of farm road above North Stoke. O.S. Sheet 198. Map reference TQ038112-distance 5K(2) Leader Bernie Forbes 01903 753876. We may find plenty of singing Corn Bunting and sometimes calling Quail are heard!

August 2nd Sunday morning only Cissbury Ring for early migrants and butterflies. Meet at 0900hrs in Storrington Rise car park sign posted east side of Findon Valley O.S. Sheet 198 Map reference TQ130077-distance 4K(2) Leader Clive Hope. 01903 700498.

August 21st Friday evening Pulborough Brooks for waders and breeding ducks. Meet at 1930hrs in RSPB car park. O.S. Sheet 197. Map reference TQ059164-distance 3K (1). Leader Bernie Forbes. 01903 753876.

September 6th Sunday all day Pagham Harbour migrants and waders ducks etc. Meet 0900hrs at Church Norton car park. O.S. Sheet 197 map reference SZ872957-distance 5K (2). Leader Dave Smith. 01903 247231.

September 19th Saturday, Birling Gap to Shooters Bottom, migrants and butterflies. Meet at 0930hrs in Birling Gap NT car park. O.S. Sheet 199 Map reference TV555960-distance 5K(2). Leader Brianne Reeve 01273 452497.

October 11th Sunday Climping. Meet at 09:30 hrs. Park at sea end of lane to Atherington. O.S. Sheet 197 Ref TQ006007—distance 3k(1) Leader Clive Hope 01903 700498

SDOS SUMMER PICNIC

Last year we had a very successful SDOS picnic at which everyone brought food for a shared meal. The idea is that you just bring anything you like, savoury, sweet, salad, vegetable or fruit and everything will be put on tables for a gentle free - for- all!

In 2008 the tables were groaning with good stuff, there was plenty for everyone and very little wastage and no one person was burdened with providing the food. Some soft drinks will be provided but if you would like anything stronger please bring your own.

Margaret and **Dorian Mason** have offered to host this Summer's Picnic Lunch in their seaside garden at :-

**Seagate, Florida Road, Ferring,
BN12 5PE** on
Sunday, July 19th from 12.30pm.

Please contact **Dorian** and **Margaret** by **Saturday July 18th** if you would like to come.

You are asked to park in the Bluebird Café car park (OS sheet 198 TQ 092 015 where we meet for the Ferring Rife outing) then a short walk along the beach eastwards (in the Worthing direction) brings you to the Mason's garden gate which will be marked with an SDOS sign.

Any queries please contact **Dorian** on
01903 700456 or
email: dorian_mason@tiscali.co.uk

Long-eared Owls

Long-eared Owls are often described as very local or even scarce in the UK and some literature remarks on how shy this species can be of human habitation. Over the past five years we have been running a small project trying to build a better picture of these remarkable birds abundance and distribution in Sussex and our work has centred on the Downs either side of the Adur Valley, effectively the SDOS recording area.

LEO's present something of a problem when it comes to recording them. They are the most nocturnal of the UK's owls and their cryptic camouflage makes them very hard to spot during the day when they are roosting. Although males, females and young all have their own distinctive calls, which can be reasonably far carrying, they often seem remarkably reluctant to utter them!

We were already aware of a number of local Downland sites for this species and they all had a few things in common. They all had substantial scrub or small shaws next to rough grassland and none of the sites were contiguous with woodland containing Tawny Owl. Armed with this information we set out up onto the Downs at dusk to stand in open areas to see if we could see LEO's hunting and, surprisingly, found them on the first eight visits we made! Often we would only see a bird hunting once in half an hour but over the years we have confirmed that this is a reliable way to pick up birds in suitable areas, par-

ticularly between January and April. It definitely helps to have at least two people watching though as many times an owl would float silently by and if you are not looking the right way you would never pick it up.

Another method that we have employed, which was originally recommended to us by Terry Goble, was to drive around the Downland late at night to find birds sitting on fence posts, either post hunting or resting after their first hunting period of the night. This has also proved a successful way of recording owls in the SDOS area and it appears to be more reliable during the winter than in other seasons.

In the SDOS area there are at least ten sites where Long-eared Owl are regularly present in the spring however positive breeding success has been remarkably hard to prove. Visits specifically targeted at hearing young birds calling have been carried out at sites where pairs have held territory during the spring, however no youngsters have been recorded.

One possible reason for disappointing breeding success is the lack of availability of suitable nest sites which, in the vast majority of cases in the UK, are disused Magpie, Carrion Crow or Wood Pigeon nests. Some of the sites where Long-eared Owl are present in the SDOS area are heavily kept and there are very few corvid nests to be found in these areas limiting the supply of suitable nesting habitat.

During 2008 the SDOS kindly

funded a number of Long-eared Owl nesting baskets with the aim of supporting this species by increasing the availability of suitable nesting sites. Ten baskets were sited in Downland scrub in the SDOS recording area at the beginning of 2009 and it is hoped that the Owls will take advantage of these secure and long-lasting nest sites which, unlike corvid nests, cannot be destroyed by the weather.

We are very thankful to the SDOS for their support of this species and hopefully we will have good news to report about this species breeding success in the SDOS area in the future.

**Dave and Penny Green.
May 2009**

Sightings for the spring - March to May

At the time of writing it has been a mixed spring in many ways with exceptional numbers of a few species and a dearth of others. Standing out surely has to be the unprecedented multiple appearances of Red Kites with possibly as many as sixteen being reported in our area although duplication is likely with birds moving around daily. Dates span from March 28th to at least April 29th.

The much rarer Black Kite has also been seen at three different locations with singles at Beeding Brooks on March 17th, at Lancing on April 15th and near Sullington on May 3rd. These are the first records for our area of this continental vagrant since 1980.

Continuing the raptor theme, the period from April 15th to 22nd saw nine species recorded in the area with both Kites, Hen and Marsh Harriers (both at Cissbury), Osprey (over Worthing), Hobby (arriving at Worthing from the sea) as well as the resident Buzzards, Kestrels and Sparrowhawks. Another Osprey was over Brighton on 5th and a Honey Buzzard at Patcham on May 2nd.

There appears to have been good influx of our summering warblers particularly in the Adur Valley and parts of the Downs. By contrast Wheatears were rather late in arriving and very spasmodic, several observers commenting they had only seen a handful of birds. Four Yellow Wagtails and a Water Pipit by the Adur at the Shoreham A27 bridge on April 4th and three very smart White Wagtails at Marine gardens, Worthing on 6th were memorable for the observers.

Seawatching has so far been rather disappointing in spite of seemingly favourable winds at times. An Iceland Gull was near Worthing Pier on March 20th with another passing Goring Gap early on April 3rd. There was a Long-tailed Duck off Worthing on Mar 23rd and seventeen Velvet Scoter passed east there on April 7th. One of the better days was on April 10th when 300 Common Scoter, 45 Little Gulls and seven Arctic Skuas passed Goring. Later in the month good numbers of Mediterranean Gulls and Arctic Skuas were logged at the Marina. Up to four Bonxies have been offshore at Worthing in mid April. One watcher saw three Manx Shear-

waters off there on 15th. Common Terns have especially been in very short supply with the only sizable movement occurring on May 13th. Waders such as Bar-tailed Godwits and Whimbrel have, by their normal standards, only put in token appearances and the much awaited Pomarine Skuas seem to have virtually given us a miss though three off Shoreham on May 11th was a nice sighting for our former President. A Spoonbill over Ferring on 14th cheered this writer up and on 16th a local record was broken when over 200, admittedly rather distant, Manx Shearwaters flew west off Worthing in just over two hours. Away from the coast three Dotterel were found on the downs at Chantry Hill on May 5th remaining to the 6th.

Clive Hope

The Future

The Society is looking to the future and we need to recruit a person who would be capable of organising the indoor programme.

This is normally a speaker on a bird subject or closely related topic. The task involves researching speakers from various avenues : word of mouth recommendations, possibly popular speakers we have had in the past or from other bird watching societies and groups, the internet or conservation publications. We should be pleased to discuss some new suggestions for the Programme. The replacement is not urgent

as the 2009 programme is booked and published. The 2010 programme is being worked out by the SDOS committee.

The initial job is fairly straight forward. Check the hall for availability, contact speakers and confirm dates and subjects then remind them a week or so before they are due to come to us. We have a basic letter to send out to each speaker which also asks them to provide a short CV to help us with their introduction at our meeting.

An internet email user would be a considerable advantage. No one would be thrown into the deep end with this task as guidance and training on how to start would be given. If anyone would like to help out in organising this project please contact Bernie Forbes

Newsletter Articles

If any SDOS member/s have any articles for the next newsletter or would be prepared to write something, either regularly or as a one-off, then please contact me.

Russ Tofts
Newsletter Editor

01903 207993
tarsiger@hotmail.co.uk

Swifts in Sussex

A few years ago the Sussex Ornithological Society (www.sos.org.uk) ratified a Biodiversity Action Plan specifically on Swifts in Sussex. We have now taken this forward and I volunteered last year to become the Swift Champion (swifts@sos.org.uk) for Sussex.

It is part of my job to ask for site details of where Swifts are seen to be entering houses/buildings/churches etc. This is leading to a good list which is a valuable tool when anyone advises us of the possibility of these buildings being knocked down, roofs repaired, soffit boards put up, or anything which might stop these birds from using their nest site the following year.

Everyone loves the sound of Swifts which is quintessentially the sound of summer, but more effort is needed to pinpoint their colonies in Sussex. They are only here for three months, and householders can make repairs to their houses at other times of the year unaware of Swifts using their property. There are of course occasions when householders might not want their houses used by Swifts, and care must be taken if one talks to them.

Only this month the Swifts have been moved onto the RSPB's AMBER list of species needing more protection. The RSPB are also going to be more proactive at helping to protect this species. However, in Sussex we do need to keep the information local, so that the data collected becomes part of your SDOS and our SOS records which in turn results in your SDOS annual Bird Report and also the one SOS publishes. Also we can intervene more quickly if anyone tells us if they see scaffolding going up on a known site, or a building been sold for redevelopment

The nest sites of bats are protected by law and people found guilty of destroying their habitat are very heavily fined. I think most birders who want to help Swifts would want to highlight the fact that Swifts are using the same habitat and also need active protection. However, this can only be done by those who can go out now and seek out where the birds are seen to be nesting.

I would therefore urge SDOS members to please take a walk/drive in the evening just around sunset (on calm evenings!) and let me have addresses - road names and house numbers, a six figure grid reference and the date when birds are seen to be entering. Screaming parties are also well worth noting if they are down at roof level as they will indicate local breeding. How many birds involved would also be useful. i.e. if it's a Church how many pairs might be involved.

I also have a stock of Swift boxes which are given free to SOS members. We are trying to get these boxes up near to existing colonies. I am sure I can arrange a good discount price for SDOS members if they have Swifts nesting nearby. In fact Shoreham and Southwick is proving to have good colonies of Swifts (probably due to the age of the houses) and I have a good collection of addresses already, but there is plenty of room for more.

If anyone wants to know more, or has any queries please send me an email at swifts@sos.org.uk

Many thanks,
Audrey Wende
SOS Swift Champion

Indoor Meeting Reminder

The new season of indoor meetings commences on Tuesday October 13th with a talk by Steve Cale entitled **'The Art of Birds'**.

Meeting commences at 7:30 p.m.
Guests welcome but note £2 charge.

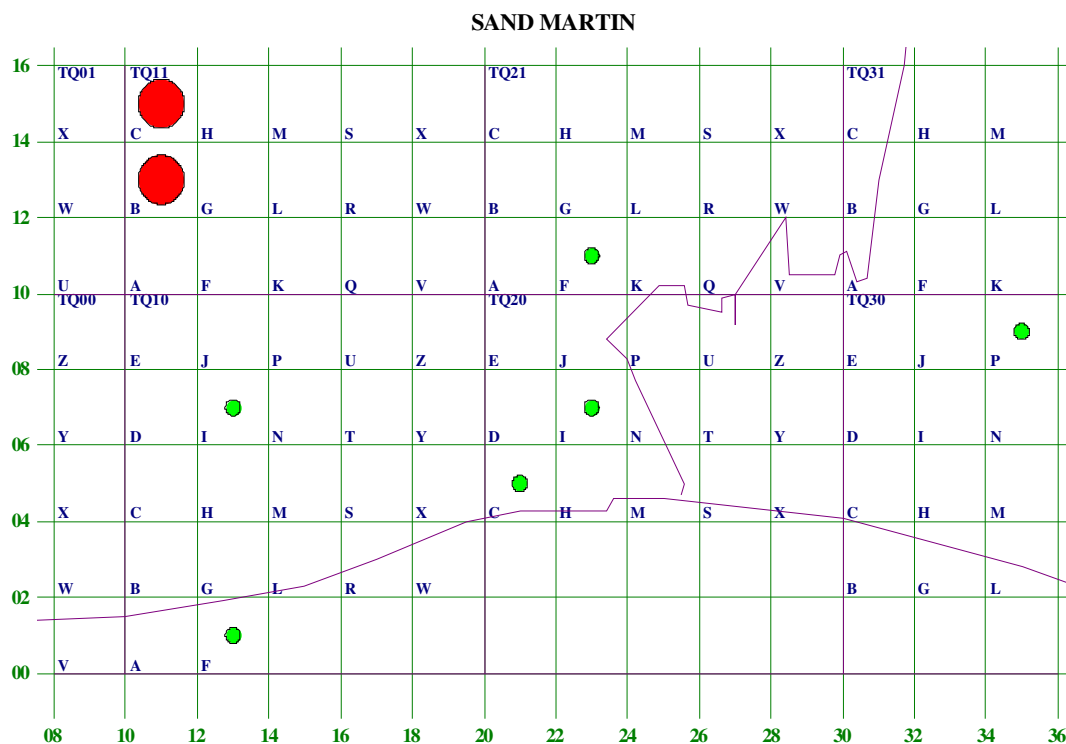


The Breeding Season Survey.

In the last newsletter I reminded the membership about this national survey and drew a small number of winter distribution maps for the Society's recording area. By the time this newsletter reaches you the recording period for the second breeding season (April –July 2009) will be well underway and we will be approaching the half way point for this ambitious four year project. The recording during the breeding season is more challenging as not only have species to be found but also evidence of breeding needs to be observed. In December 2008 a series of early and provisional breeding distribution maps were lodged on the Society's yahoo site and for four species, all aerial feeders, this information has been updated and shown below. The progress, aims and the presentation of the results at a county level can be seen on the Sussex Ornithological Society website at www.sos.org.uk where different species are displayed each week.

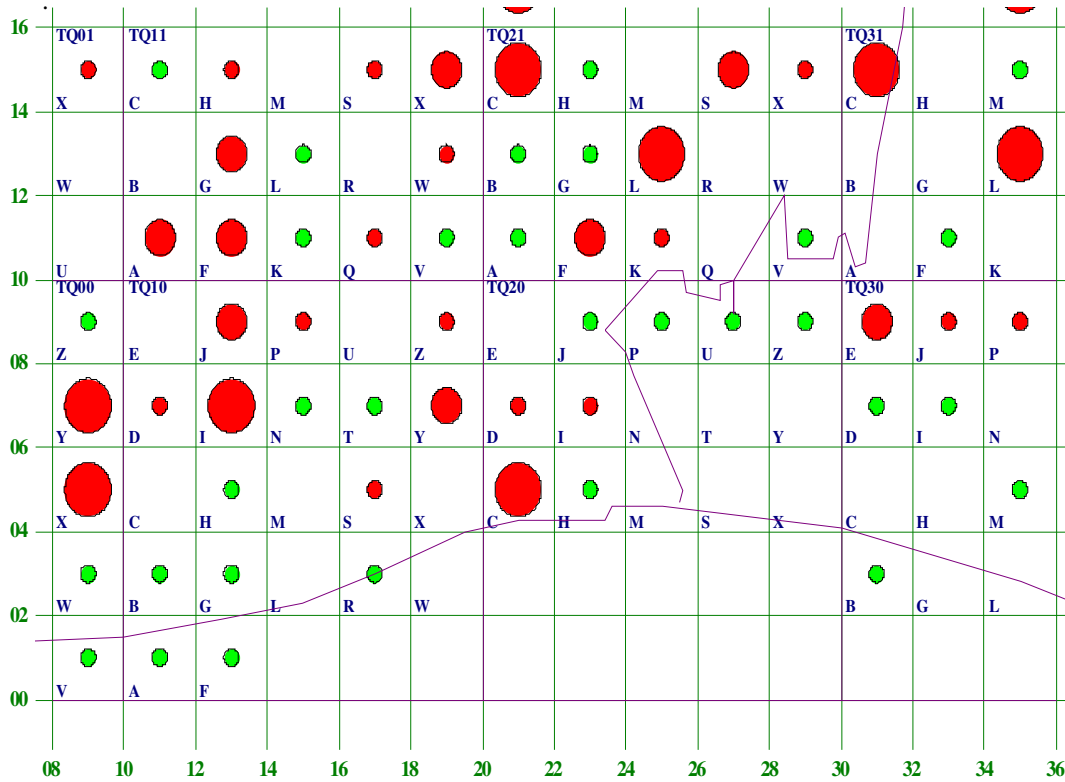
In each of the following maps the large red symbol indicates breeding has been confirmed, the medium sized symbol shows probable breeding in the tetrad (2 km x 2km grid square) and the small red symbol notes that breeding is possible. The small green circle indicated that the species has been recorded but no breeding codes have been assigned to the record.

The Sand Martin is not seen widely in our area, is a colonial breeder mainly in the north-west of our area where quarrying can be found. The map clearly shows this but the species can occupy very temporary banks; currently none have been recorded in our area.



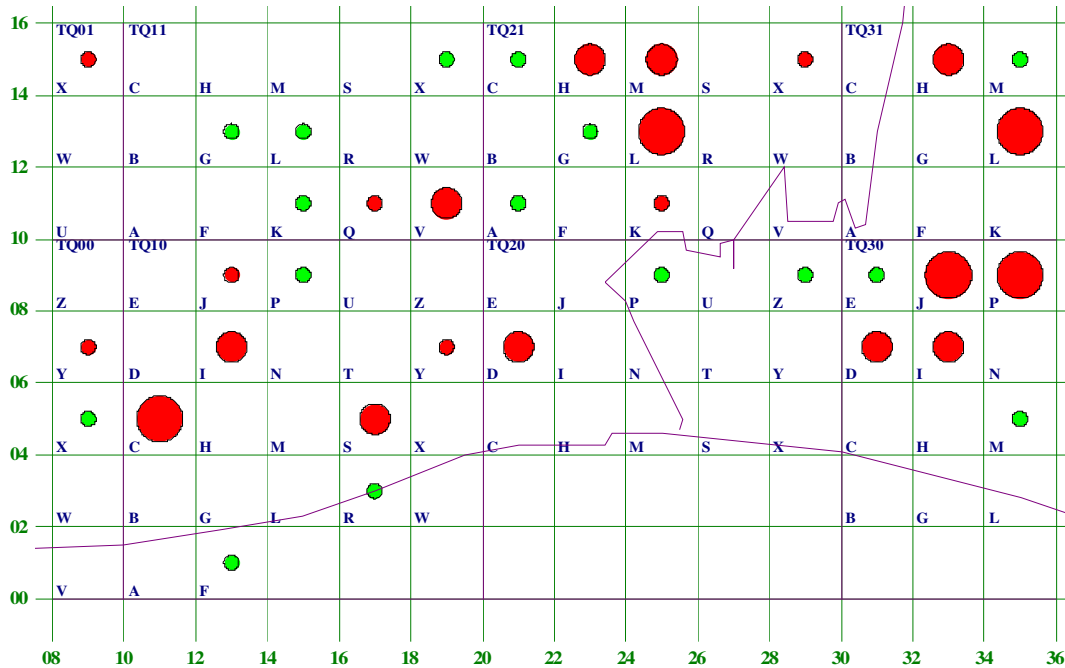
By contrast the Barn Swallow is much more widespread species with April to July records from 67% of the area's approximate 100 tetrads. The map however, shows in only eight tetrads has this species been confirmed as breeding with a further nine where breeding is considered as possible. Surely there are more open buildings in our recording area hosting this species.

BARN SWALLOW

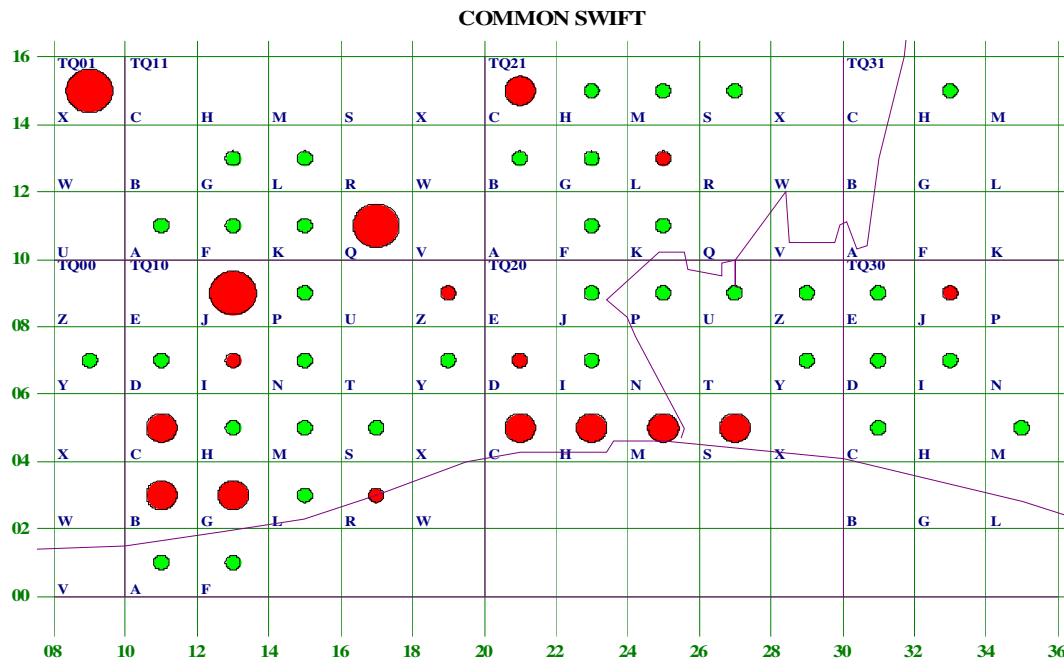


In the last newsletter Laurie Keen expressed concern about the local House Martin population. Indeed there is a national survey currently encouraging the reporting of this species. The map shows, from 2008 records, that House Martins probably or definitely bred in just 14 of the local tetrads. New housing developments or nest boxes are often favoured by this species – are there any near where you live?

HOUSE MARTIN



The final map also depicts a species which is declining in numbers with both national and county society's "championing" the species by promoting recording and the erection of nest-boxes in appropriate locations. Common Swifts have only been recorded as confirmed breeding in just three of the area's tetrads. Most of the Society's members live in the urbanised coastal strip between Worthing and Brighton; surely we should be able to confirm this species presence in more tetrads than is currently shown. Common Swifts are late migrants to return to Britain and may not appear



So how can you help? There is still plenty of time to contribute even for this season. The methodology of the survey has been described in previous Newsletters and can be found on the BTO website (see below). By now most of the local Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs) have already been done or allocated to observers. There are, however, gaps and certain areas of Sussex require more cover (see SOS website). There are also many thousands of roving records received but, here too, there are areas in the county (including parts of the SDOS area) where more recording would fill many gaps. The essence to achieve the most complete distribution maps is to encourage as many observers as possible to assiduously record and log their observations for common, scarce and rare species. Realistically this can be done in three ways:-

1. Entering Roving records on-line into the Atlas at <http://blxl.bto.org/atlas/>
2. Enter species lists or casual records into the BTO's BirdTrack recording system at <http://blxl.bto.org/birdtrack/?Refresh=true> . Please ensure, however, your sites are defined at a tetrad or 1 km square level.
3. Enter your sightings into the SOS's data-base by using the "Record Capture" software. This can be obtained, with instructions, by downloading from the SOS website at <http://www.sos.org.uk/records/submission-forms-programs-and-lists.html> .

Finding evidence to confirm breeding is surprisingly difficult and time consuming; for many common species chance observations in the garden or whilst out and about may fill gaps and are always worth recording. Between August and October there is a break from atlassing but in November the third winter season gets underway.

John Newnham May 2009.

Return of the Raven – the story so far.

The history of the Raven in Sussex was catalogued by Walpole –Bond (1938). In the SDOS area latest dates of nesting were Bramber Castle (1843) and Lancing – Cissbury – Chanctonbury – Findon (1880). Although Ravens hung on along the sea-cliffs of Sussex slightly longer than they did inland, they had certainly ceased breeding by 1900.

During the twentieth century Ravens were only seen sporadically and most sightings were in the autumn or winter. So the presence of a pair of Ravens in the vicinity of the Cement Works in 2001 was a pleasant surprise.

This site was already being monitored as it held a pair of Peregrine falcons which had themselves only resumed breeding in Sussex in the early 1990's. Thus it was a red-letter day when a Raven's nest was found in the Cement Works in March 2002 and two young had fledged by the beginning of May.

The nest was only about 30 feet up on a promontory and was used again in 2003.

Five young were standing in the nest at the end of April but unfortunately were used as target practice by some local youths with an air rifle and three young were shot dead. Once again two young fledged.

Despite the previous year's happenings the Ravens tried again in 2004 at the same nest and this time fledged five young although one was predated by a fox.

By 2005 commercial activity was increasing in the quarry and the Ravens were encouraged to move by partially destroying the nesting ledge. They built a new nest in a higher position but close to passing traffic and also the area had been leased out for a weekly clay-pigeon shoot. There was too much disturbance and the result was that the Ravens deserted before the end of March.

So in 2006 when a new nest site was chosen regular meetings were arranged with the lessee to ensure that the birds had a fair chance. This strategy paid off in a big way as six young fledged.

This new nest site proved to be the most suitable chosen so far and with the same strategy in place as the year before five young fledged in 2007 although one was lost within a few days. Meanwhile the lessee had been given notice to quit which was good news for the Ravens.

From 2008 commercial activity in the quarry was restricted to the storage and movement of aggregates, this was out of sight of the nest. Four young fledged.

This year only two young have been raised. The reason for this is not clear but monitoring in the future may provide answers.

Since 2003 the problems arose due to ignorance of the behaviour of these birds and yet without direct interference 24 young are known to have successfully fledged from this site in eight years. Ravens have also bred at several other sites in the county.

Chris Wright

HELP REQUIRED !!

Your society is in need of some help. From October we want someone to open up and close the hall that we use for our indoor meetings. If you attend most of the indoor talks could you help us? We need a person or persons to arrive around 6.45pm to open up the hall. The keys are kept in a key safe nearby and by using the 4 digit access code this delivers the key. Chairs need to be put out (usually other members are there as willing helpers). At the end of the evening, the chairs must be stacked safely on the trolleys, the hall checked and the key returned to the key safe. Full instructions and familiarisation with the procedure and guidance will be given. If you can help please contact Brianne or Bernie. You don't have to attend all the meetings as we can cover any absences due to holiday/sickness etc..