

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Winter
2009

NEWSLETTER

Indoor Meetings and Outings March and April 2009

Dominic Couzens has chosen 'Vive la Difference' as the title of his talk on March 10th. He is a freelance writer with regular columns in BBC Wildlife, Bird Watching and Birds. Although he has a light-hearted approach in his lectures he has vast experience and has led field trips since 1988. This talk will show how birds change as soon as you cross on to the Continent, with alterations in behaviour from here to there and then covers many case studies of European birds.

There is a change to our programme for **April 21st**. Following the AGM we shall have a talk by Michael Blencowe of Butterfly Conservation on the Butterflies and Moths of 2008 and where you might see them. Many of our members show a real interest in this subject and Michael is both knowledgeable and very enthusiastic. It is a good time of the year to learn about the insects around us. Dorian will then show us a selection of his bird photographs giving you a chance to admire his expertise but also ask questions: how, when and where!

The outing on **March 15th** is to East Head and Snowhill Marsh, always a popular venue. Paul Stevens is the leader and will hope to find interesting birds on the shore and sea as well as sorting out the geese from the car park. (Do remember there is a charge for the car park).

We have a new venue on **March 22nd** in the New Forest with Russ Tofts lead-

ing his first outing for us. Much will depend on the weather and what is about but there may be several places visited during the day. Lunch will be taken where there are a variety of hides and feeders (and toilets) and maybe Siskin, Redpoll, woodpeckers and some early migrants. Russ will be well informed about other birds in the area too.

April 26th is the morning of the Goring Seawatch led by John Newnham from the Alinora Avenue shelter. It starts at 8am but get there early if you don't want to miss anything and a spare seat could come in useful. This attracts a large number of our members but is a very good time to discover the secrets of seawatching.

May 9th is the date for the Dawn Chorus with Brianne Reeve, starting at 5.30 am. Last year we had 45 species and some superb birds including Grasshopper Warbler, Nightingale and Barn Owl. It really is a very satisfying outing, worth the effort of getting up early. For more precise details please check your 2009 Programme.

Sponsorship for the SOS Avifauna

At the SOS Conference in January a plea was made for sponsorship of individual species for the proposed new Avifauna. There were five members of SDOS Council present and it was suggested that we should sponsor the two birds on our logo: Ringed and Little Ringed Plover in memory of John Stafford. We have given £50 each from the Jubilee account, which is from money raised from the sale of our

50th anniversary book. If anyone else would like to sponsor a bird, please contact Richard Cowser (surveys@sos.org.uk) or Brianne Reeve for more information.

The John Stafford Prize

We are hoping that we shall have some more good entries for the £100 prize this year. Please get your thoughts down on paper on any subject to do with birds relevant to the SDOS recording area and send the result in to any Council member by the end of February.

Sightings for early 2009

Red-throated Divers have been particularly numerous this winter with frequent daily totals exceeding 30 birds and as many as 160 flew west on 24th off Worthing. Just the odd Black-throated has been identified off Widewater. Little Grebes have appeared on Ferring Rife (up to three) as well as the usual Wide-water birds. Cormorants were very conspicuous in the month with large flocks along the shores peaking at 340 on 20th. Brent Geese made an early exit on 31st when 1700 flew east facing strong easterly winds. Large numbers of Auks moved east on 16th (amongst other dates) mostly well offshore. Those identified appeared to be mainly Razorbills. More Purple Sandpipers than for some years appeared at Shoreham with a maximum of seven late in the month (9 in early Feb) and the early cold spell brought up to three Jack Snipe to the Rife. Popular birds in the month have been an immature Iceland Gull ranging

between Hove Lagoon and Shoreham Harbour mouth and a Black Redstart and the familiar Water Rail at Widewater. The outing on 18th to Beeding Brooks was excellent for Owls with two Short-eared and three Barn. On the downs at Chantry Hill a finch flock contained up to 20 Bramblings and another behind the Cement Works along from Mill Hill revealed several Tree Sparrows. Early February saw the arrival of huge numbers of Fieldfares into the area driven by snow and ice from the east.

Clive Hope

Seawatching at Worthing beach in the final quarter of 2008

The following notes are taken from my personal log, but give 'a flavour' of seawatching activity between October and December

October

One of the autumn's best days was the 4th when a Pomarine Skua, 24 Arctic Skuas, four Great Skuas and the first Red-throated Divers of the autumn passed, whilst 2 Shags sat offshore. The 5th produced a late Balearic Shearwater, two Great Skuas, a single Arctic Skua, and a Little Gull. Small numbers of a wide species variety were seen on 6th and included single Great and Arctic Skuas, Little Gull, Eider, Razorbill, and close views of a Merlin dashing E offshore. Two further Little Gulls and a Great Skua passed on 7th. The remainder of the month was unremarkable with the commoner species seen mainly in small numbers, and watches were often punctuated by the calls of Siskins. Goldfinches moved mainly east in good numbers. Very few Mediterranean Gulls were seen. Auks began to appear in low numbers.

November

A Peregrine flew east well offshore on 1st, scattering a group of passing Razorbills in all directions and four Redpolls flew east along the beach. Again small numbers of the commoner species dominated although very few Brent Geese were noted during the whole three-month period. Unusual were three Golden Plovers on 3rd. A late Great Skua passed on 8th and a Velvet Scoter flew west with Common Scoters on 14th. There was no repeat of the 'Skua/

Kittiwake/Little Auk' bonanza of this time in 2007. The 15th was notable for a small grebe, either Slavonian or Black-necked, which landed on the sea but was too distant for specific identification. The first Black-throated Divers of the late-year, two first-winter birds were close inshore on 17th and 100+ Red-breasted Mergansers and a Black-throated Diver were on the sea on the following day. The 22nd produced a Marsh Harrier flying west well offshore, with three Eider on the sea that stayed around for several days. A superb male Goldeneye flew east close inshore on 23rd and a Woodcock arrived from the south and continued inland. On the same day a weather front cleared from the west late morning, and an Arctic Skua passed at 1215 – closely followed at 1220 by a close juvenile Pomarine Skua which lazily mobbed Herring Gulls before continuing west. Meanwhile three Little Gulls flew east. An adult Red-necked Grebe was offshore on 27th and a juvenile was off Ferring beach on 28th both birds rather elusive. The 30th was another good day with four Velvet Scoters, a Great Northern Diver, a Black-throated Diver 12 Red-throated Divers, and another Great Skua.

December

Yet another Great Skua flew W on 2nd, and two Shags were again offshore as was one Black-throated Diver. Little was then seen until 12th when an Arctic Skua and 145 Kittiwakes were logged. The 14th produced a healthy 62 Red-throated Divers and auks began to appear in numbers exceeding 100. On 24th, a Shag sat offshore with a Red-throated Diver and a Fulmar, unusual for this time of year, flew west. Great Crested Grebe numbers built up to over three hundred between Worthing and Ferring on this day. Gannet numbers improved with 221 on Christmas Day and on Boxing Day an unidentified Grey Goose passed east. Very unusual were three Black-tailed Godwits passing east and three incoming Lapwings. 303 large auks flew east in 3/4 hour. The majority of identified large auks during this period were Razorbills. My final seawatch of the year produced 7 Eiders, one Little Egret, and a Shag. Notably neither Little Auk nor Sooty Shearwater was noted during the late-year.

Dave Smith

The Black Isle

The grid reference NH 748, 757 was the first clue given to my husband on his birthday; the task was to discover the location of his surprise holiday during the Easter holidays last year. The destination was the Black Isle, on the East coast of Scotland and although it was not intended to be a birding trip, (especially not with a two-year old in tow) the beauty of being a birder and having a keen eye means it is a hobby that can be put to good use wherever you are. The birdlife certainly kept me happy!

Our holiday accommodation was a tiny cottage beside the lighthouse at the tip of Chanonry Point, a v-shaped promontory that juts right into the waters of the Moray Firth. According to the brochures, Chanonry Point is one of the best sites in Europe for land-based dolphin watching and this certainly proved to be true. In spite of the cold, we could have spent all day on the beach beside the cottage, gazing out at the steely grey body of water, ever hopeful of spotting a dorsal fin breaking the water. Luckily, the hour either side of high tide was the optimum viewing period so this allowed us plenty of time during the day to explore the rest of the Black Isle and its environs.

Being in charge of organising the daily outings, and having done my research, I managed to ensure we were never too far away from an RSPB reserve - perfect for keeping an eye out for any local specialities this part of Scotland had to offer.

Nestled in the village of Rosemarkie was the Fairy Glen RSPB reserve; a deep valley of broad-leaved woodland through which the Markie Burn runs. With springs, rapids and waterfalls, the target birds were Grey Wagtail and Dipper. The rugged paths beside the fast-flowing burn were treacherously muddy, which meant it was difficult to concentrate on anything other than where you were placing your feet. Luckily, the Dippers were very obliging and alerted us to their presence with their piercing, metallic calls as they whizzed past, low over the water. Although we were not quick enough to see where they settled each time, they kept us entertained with their regular patrol up and down the burn as we followed the trails. We chose to have a rest stop at the waterfall and it wasn't

long before we noticed the comings and goings of a pair of Grey Wagtails. They were darting in and out of a crevice right beside the cascade of water, and closer inspection through the binoculars revealed that the gap was full of nesting materials. The pair industriously flew back and forwards, perching intermittently on the branches overhanging the pool in front of the waterfall. This afforded us a much closer look at them and their yellow upperparts seemed to glow against the moss-covered trees and rocks. Satisfied with seeing the Dippers and wagtails, we were then much more aware of the abundance of typical woodland birds around us. We had read that Fulmars had taken to nesting on the inland cliffs that adjoin the reserve but alas, there was no sign of those! However, a lone Buzzard circling effortlessly above the canopy rounded off a lovely day of walking through the glen.

Udale Bay, another RSPB reserve on the north coast of the Black Isle, lies on the shores of the Cromarty Firth. It is part of an extensive area of salt marsh and although the gargantuan oilrigs moored in the firth dominate, they certainly do not detract from the birdlife. The tide, at the time of our visit did not allow for the wader spectaculars we had read about, but the roadside hide provided welcome shelter from the elements and we rapidly ticked off a number of species. A Grey Heron stood motionless in a tidal creek literally a stones throw from the hide and Curlew, Redshank and Oystercatchers probed the mud between the energetic Ringed Plovers and the Cormorants that were loafing about. Swans were gliding up the gulleys that criss-cross the saltmarsh and Greylag Geese were feeding frenetically in the swathes of eelgrass. The highlight however was hearing the shout 'Osprey!' from a fellow birder who had spotted it taking off from the upper platform of an oilrig. We were treated to glorious views as it glided over the bay.

Driving around and about the peninsula of the Black Isle on a day of sightseeing (where birding was limited to gazing out of the car window) produced a lone Red Kite soaring above the South Sutor headland at the entrance to Cromarty Firth. Red Kites were reintroduced to the Black Isle in 1989 in a joint project between the RSPB and what was the Nature Conservancy Council (Natural England) and we saw several others during our stay. The surrounding marshland and farmland gave us plenty of opportu-

nities to see birds that are familiar to us 'down South' in their coastal environment at home here in their breeding habitats. Seemingly every other fence post was occupied by Oystercatchers and Redshank standing sentinel, Lapwings performed their tumbling aerial display flights and the bubbling call of the Curlew added to the atmosphere of the landscape. Nigg Bay on the opposite side of the Cromarty Firth is another RSPB reserve and with areas of wet grassland, salt marsh and mudflats offers similar habitats and birds as Udale Bay across the water. With the tide particularly high by the time we arrived, we stopped only for some fish and chips and observed the seals that were hauled out on the rocks. The telegraph poles on the hills above Munloch Bay, a large inland tidal creek in the south of the peninsula, were regularly used as perches for Buzzards and Osprey and we frequently made use of a convenient roadside lay-by to do a spot of in-car birding.

Reverting to being true tourists, we made our way to Loch Ness for the day and having satisfied our son with monsters and castles, we travelled back on the south side of the loch; definitely the road less travelled! The landscape here was much wilder, snow still graced the top of the mountains and we spotted Red Deer stags amongst the heather and rocks. The true purpose of this detour was to visit Loch Ruthven, the little gem that plays host to the main breeding population of Slavonian Grebes. The time of our trip coincided with the best time of year to catch a glimpse of them, although with only around 40 breeding pairs, we didn't want to get too excited. We aimed to stake out the loch from the hide and wait patiently for our quarry, seeing as we had come all this way! We could see the dark waters from the elevated car park and immediately we spotted two black dots in the middle of the loch so we hastily made our way down the track towards the rocky shore. Our rapid progress was hindered by Common Toads that were crawling all over the footpath, making their way to and from the shallow waters and muddy pools on either side – they were everywhere! However, before we even reached the hide, we could see the two small dots had multiplied and peeking through the sedges, saw that we were actually in the presence of four Slavonian Grebes, elegantly resplendent with the swash of gold on

their heads illuminated against their dark, glossy plumage. Apart from the toads around our feet, our attention was focused purely on the grebes and the only other birds I had actually bothered to record in my notebook were Wigeon and Teal!

In between our sightseeing and birding excursions we were based at Chanonry Point, and we spent many hours braving the elements on the shore, glued to the windows of the cottage or for maximum viewing opportunities, with heads stuck out of the Velux window in the attic! Of course all this was in the hope of spotting the Bottle-nosed Dolphins that are resident in the Moray Firth. Chanonry Point is their favoured feeding ground as the deep channels allow the dolphins to lie in wait for the fish brought in either side of the high tide. The constant sea watching obviously paid dividends in terms of birdlife; mainly Black and Common Guillemots, daily skeins of Greylag Geese drifting like smoke, Red-breasted Mergansers, Turnstones, Cormorants, Brent Geese and plenty of noisy gulls. Harbour Porpoise and Grey Seals teased us constantly and at times the seals seemed to be watching us as they stuck their heads out of the water like periscopes! We were however rewarded with daily sightings of the Bottle-nosed Dolphins and a mother and calf frequently played around one of the inshore buoys which meant we could watch them in comfort through binoculars whilst sitting on the sofa! However, nothing beat being wrapped up warm down on the shore, literally metres from the feeding frenzy, watching the dolphins leap right before our eyes. Despite being a true birder, of all the creatures we saw, the dolphins definitely stole the show!

Mary Ferrier

Garden Birds

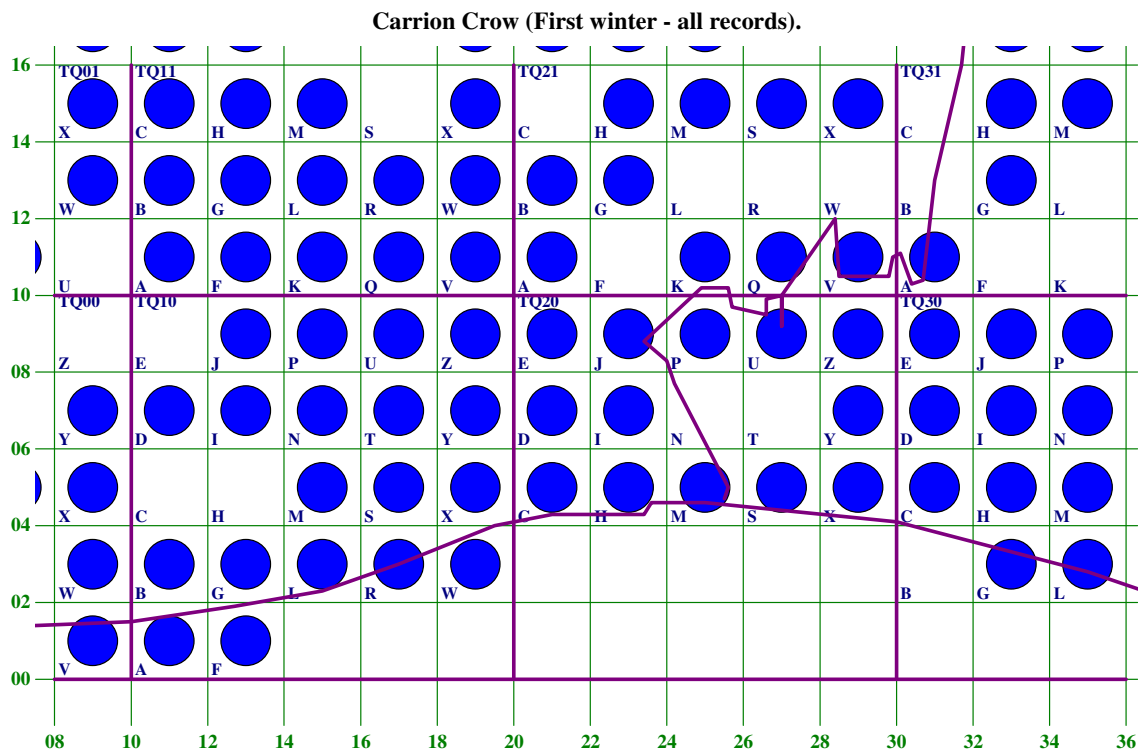
A reminder from our Garden Bird Survey co-ordinator, Martin Ford, that returns for 2008 should now be sent to him. Thanks to all those who have faithfully contributed their records. If any members, who do not already do so and who live in the SDOS recording area, would like to contribute their weekly garden bird sightings, please contact Martin (01903 242708) for forms and details. This will be the 10th year of the survey in this format with approximately thirty members taking part each year.



The progress in the local area.

It cannot have escaped the attention of the membership that there is currently a large national bird Atlas survey. The ambitious plan is to plot the distribution and estimate the abundance of both breeding and wintering birds in each 10-km square in Britain and Ireland during the four year period 2007 -2011. Whilst doing this the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) is conducting the survey at a tetrad (2km x 2km grid square) level. The progress, aims and the presentation of the results at a county level can be seen on the SOS website at www.sos.org.uk.

How are we doing in the Shoreham area? With a local society this should be amongst the best recorded areas in the county. The first map shows the winter (November 2007 –February 2008) tetrad distribution for Carrion Crow in the SDOS recording area; a large, noisy and obvious bird which is likely to be present in each tetrad. This gives a broad indication of the widespread recording in the local area and it is likely that the gaps are areas which have not been visited, or if visited not recorded!



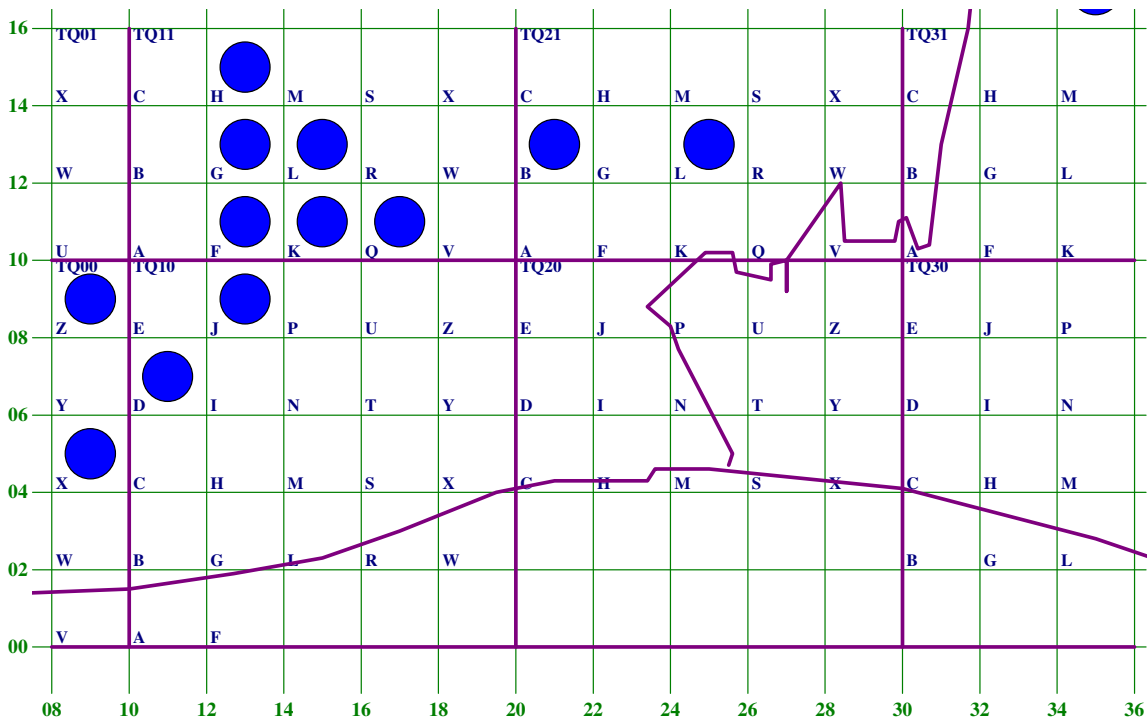
The provisional maps of some species, like the Marsh Tit shown below, may start to reveal where this species is most frequently encountered in our area. It is, so far virtually absent from the eastern portion of our area.

The records for the 2007-08 winter suggested that winter thrushes did not enter the urban districts in large numbers. Certainly this current winter, with the coldest period for the last decade, may have forced these, and other unusual species, into our gardens. I have heard anecdotal news of Fieldfares in local gardens in recent months and hopefully these will have been recorded to add to the map of Fieldfares.

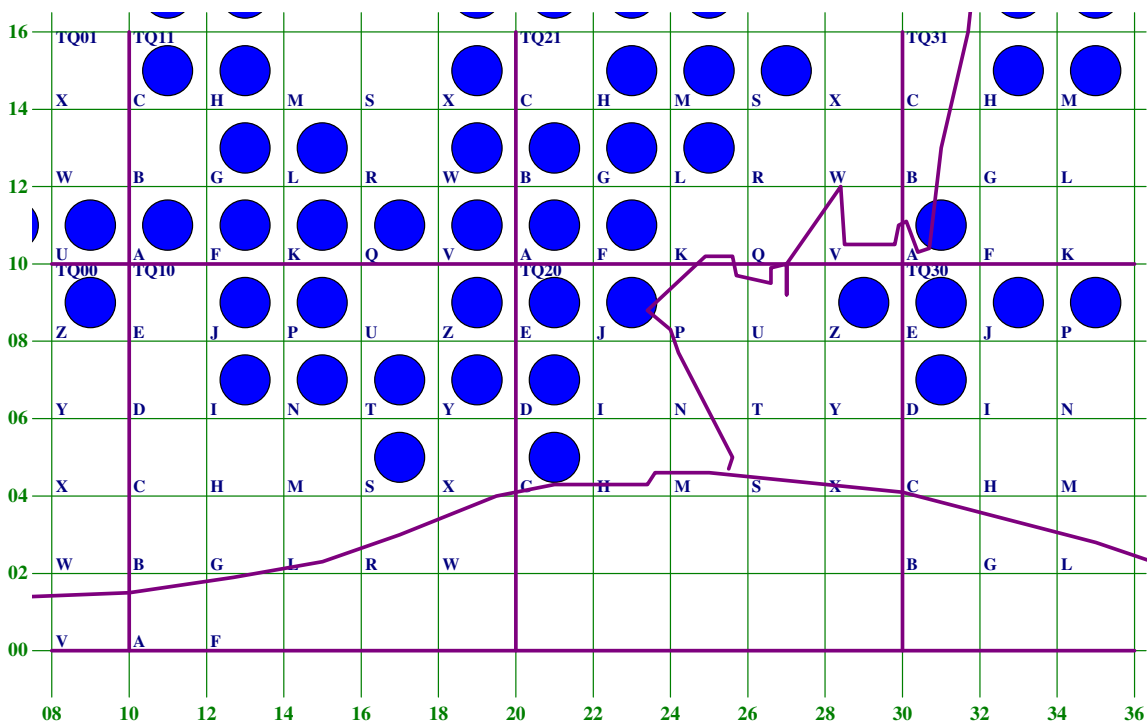
The second of the winter periods draws to a close at the end of February so it is likely that there are many more symbols already on these maps. For those interested in viewing a full range of the local maps these can be found in the file sections on the society's yahoo group site.

So how can you help? 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, a few 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:-

Marsh Tit (First winter - all records).



Fieldfare (First winter - all records).



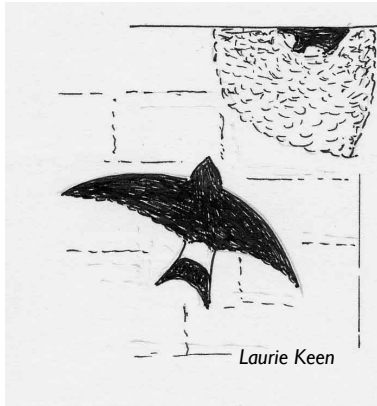
1. Entering Roving Records on-line into the Atlas at <http://blx1.bto.org/atlas/>
2. Enter species lists or casual records into the BTO's BirdTrack recording system at <http://blx1.bto.org/birdtrack/?Refresh=true> . Please ensure, however, your sites are defined at a tetrad or 1 km square level.
3. Enter 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> .

In April the second breeding season starts bringing with it the additional challenges of recording levels of breeding certainty. At least by then the days are longer, the weather warmer and more conducive to get out in the field doing survey work.

John Newnham

Concern for House Martins

Laurie Keen writes..



It has been reported that there was a great concern for House Martins in 2008 and the records from my favourite breeding sites bear this out (see table). Of the four sites, only one has maintained numbers while the other three have crashed.

This includes Newtimber Place which has the most idyllic conditions for this species. Next year's counts will be crucial.

LOCATION	2006	2007	2008
Mile Oak			
Estate	7	7	1
Cottage	1	1	1
	8	8	2
Newtimber Place	13	8	2
Frant Road			
Road	6	6	5
New Court Road	2	3	2
	8	9	7
Stanmer			
Church	6	No Count	-
Farm House	7		-
Barn	4		3
	17		3
TOTAL	46	25	14

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On-line at the SDOS

Don't forget that the SDOS has a number of online services that will enable you to get added value from your membership.

Email Group Join the email group and receive up to the minute news from other members about recent sightings, summaries of field outings as well as all sorts of general news and comment. In turn you can email the group and report your own observations. Once signed up you can also access the email group's Yahoo website to view photos and other files placed there by other members. Contact our IT Consultant, Terry Hicks, who can arrange for you join this group.

Website The SDOS has its own website at www.sdos.org. Here you will find general information about the Society as well as information you can download about our bird recording area and the different species of birds you can see within it.

Electronic Newsletter Over fifty Members have now opted to receive Newsletters electronically. By doing so they are helping to reduce our costs of printing and mailing and also saving our Chairman a considerable amount of time spent in stuffing envelopes! If you are happy to receive future Newsletters electronically please contact our Newsletter Editor, Brian Clay who will be delighted to add you to the Newsletter emailing list.