

**S** HOREHAM  
**D** ISTRIC  
**O** RNITHOLOGICAL  
**S** OCIETY

## AUTUMN 2010 NEWSLETTER

### Autumn and Winter Outings 2010

#### September 19th (Sun) N. Wall & East side of Pagham Harbour.

Meet 09:00 at end of Church Lane, Pagham. O.S. sheet 197.

Ref. SZ879977 - Dist. 6K (2).

Leader: Bernie Forbes and Dave Smith 01903 753876.

#### October 9th (Sat) Thorney Island.

Meet 09:00 at corner of Thornham Lane. OS Sheet 197. Ref. SU757049.

Dist. 4K (1).

Leader: Clive Hope 01903 700498.

#### November 21st (Sun) Fishbourne Creek.

Meet 09:00 in car park by Apuldram Church.

O.S. sheet 197. Ref. SU842032 - Dist. 4K (1).

Leader: Bernie Forbes and Dave Smith 01903 753876.

#### December 30th (Thu) Seasonal Gathering.

Meet 09:30 in Fort Haven car park (a.m. only).

O.S. sheet 198. Ref. TQ233046 - Dist. 2K (1).

Leader: SDOS Committee 01273 452497.

### Upcoming Indoor Meetings

#### October 12th—Winter Farmland Feeding Projects and Pagham/Medmerry Update

by Adrian Thomas

#### November 9th —Birding at Selsey and Pagham Harbour

by Owen Mitchell

#### December 14th—Wild Spain: A Birdwatcher's Delight

by Shena Maskell and Bernie Forbes

### Seawatching – a less than reverent view!

by

**Dave Smith**

**Early January, 09.30 hours.** I'm sitting in the seafront shelter on Worthing seafront, opposite Marine gardens. It's overcast with a strong north-easterly wind and biting cold, requiring maximum clothing layers. For company I have an all-too-vocal 'man of the road' who has already imbibed a few cans this morning and thinks I'm his best mate. He drones on incoherently & I stick to the 'scope', attempting to hold a pen with freezing fingers *and* record the offshore movement. Today is busy and consists mainly of over 1,000+ large auks & frequent Red-throated Divers.

**Early May, 09.00.** I'm in the same shelter & it's only slightly warmer! My 'best mate' has acquired a portable CD player. The good news is that he's sober. The bad news is that he's assaulting our eardrums with something that resembles music but only on a good day. However, we've already logged several hundred Common Terns, a few Little Gulls and Little Terns, 2 Black Terns, 7 Arctic Skuas and two Bonxies. A good day! No sign yet though of that enigmatic Pomarine Skua. They have a habit of passing at 15.00 hours when the passage of other birds has died for the day - & no-one's here.....

Seriously, seawatching is not the easiest of birding disciplines and it's taken most of us many years to become anything like proficient. Birds appear at all distances in differing lights and weather conditions and the

bounds of identification are frequently challenged. There are some who criticise the BBRC particularly for their seemingly hard line re. seawatch flypasts— but they're right to do so. 999 times out of 1000 you only get one chance and that's often a brief one. The bird moves in one direction and does not return (unless you are *exceptionally* lucky).

No matter how good you are at it, there will still be birds left unidentified and not logged. Frustrating though are the many occasions when something's slipped past the 'scopes and only picked up going away. If you see something 'call' it, don't worry about making an incorrect identification. You will NOT be chastised as i) you will be heavily in both our debt and admiration if it turns out to be a Long-tailed Skua, and ii) we all had to learn the 'art' of seawatching ourselves!

Don't let that put you off – learning is fun, and a good way is to join us at the Marine gardens shelter on Worthing seafront. Or, dare I even suggest it - defect to the 'reprobates' at Selsey Bill! (Seriously Owen & Co at Selsey are a great bunch and very helpful).

We have other distractions too; many people ask if we are watching ships, a few realise we're birding; but the joint prize for the most unusual goes to the individuals who asked "Are you watching the fish?" and, "Are you watching the sand dunes?" (The latter turned out to be large heaps of mud and sand excavated by bait-diggers)

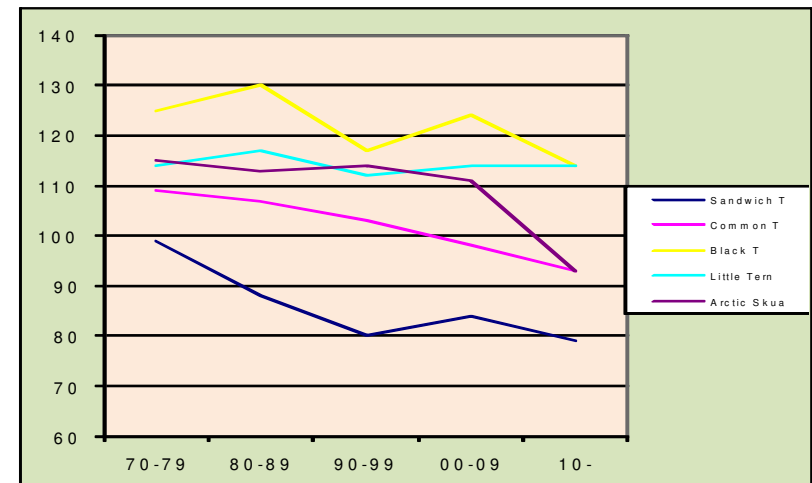
I've no doubt already painted a mixed picture of seawatching off Worthing but believe me, despite the inevitable quiet days it is enjoyable. So why do we spend so many hours gazing over the sea? I think the answer is manifold. We log all offshore passage and the results are accumulated and published in the SDOS and SOS Annual Reports. This in turn contributes to our knowledge of passage patterns and species densities, and long-term declines are often quickly suspected where a species appears in fewer numbers over successive years (e.g. Little Tern).

However a prime motivator is the anticipation/excitement of what might pass next. Will it be that long sought after pack of Pomarine Skuas? Black Terns? No. It's a Sandwich Tern. Again. But it *could* have been that pack of Poms so you hang on for that hour or two longer and often **patience pays off**. The 'cameraderie of the shelter' and shared sightings with friends adds considerably to the experience. OK, many watches are quiet but few draw a blank, and the 'great days' linger long in the memory. I'm probably the only local seawatcher who missed the legendary day of 7<sup>th</sup> May 1981, probably still the best spring watch in the area's history. I had

taken the day off work, but instead of heading for the shelter the twitching instinct drove me to Kent for a Purple Heron. My excuse is that I was younger and even more foolish then than I am now, and at least I did see a Purple Heron. Seawatching is fun – honestly!

## Global Warming—a personal insight by Richard Ives

Scientists are always on the case stating this and that but one thing they all, apart from those hired by the major oil companies, seem to agree on, is that things are changing in the climate department. I feel that things are changing but ,without hard data, it could just be a personal feeling based on a whim. However, after collecting and collating data for over 40 years, I do seem to have some data which adds credence to the idea that things are warming up or at least there has been a shift in the seasons. I have been drawing up some graphs based on my observations to analyse the trends. These are based on a ten year mean to take out the anomalies on a year to year basis. Any record from abroad which would influence the data has been omitted so that the net result is a migrant trend for Sussex and in most cases for the SDOS area itself.

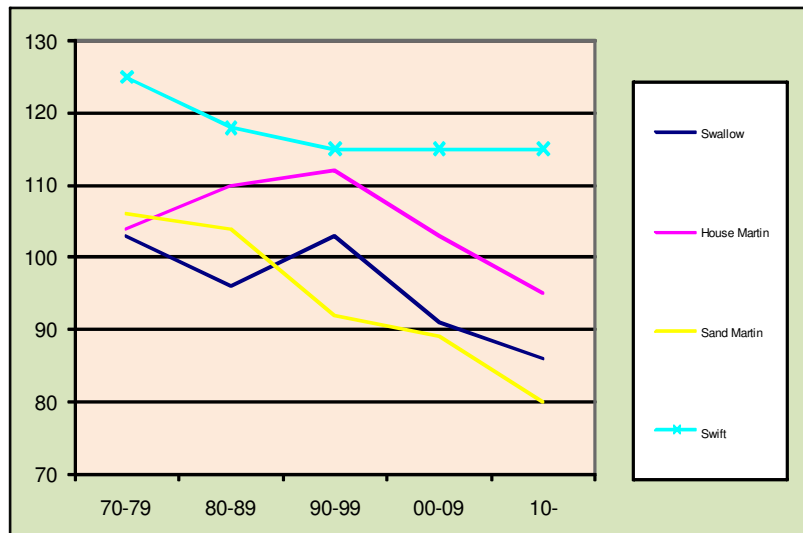


Scale: 115=25th April, 100=10th April, 90=31st March, 80= 21st March

The first graph (above) depicts the arrival dates of some of our seabirds and it clearly shows a downward trend; an earlier arrival date. In every species, save Little Tern, there is a marked change in arrival dates with Sandwich Tern and Arctic Skua arriving nearly three weeks earlier than my records showed in the 1970s. That is an incredible change in just four decades.

Climatic changing may mean that these species do not migrate so far south in the winter and so they have a smaller distance to return and hence the change in their migration patterns. However, there is a knock on effect as well as these species' prey might have also changed in their distribution patterns and this could lead to a lack of food when their young are at their most vulnerable. As Skuas often harry terns it is not surprising that their earlier movement is closely linked to that of their quarry species.

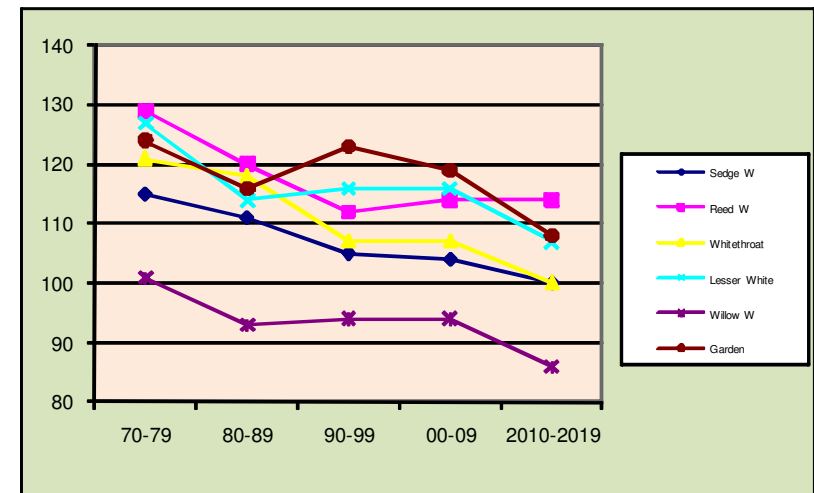
However, in other species which depend on insects, their movement is even more critical as starvation could be an issue should they miss the peak emergence of their prey species. In the following graph of the hirundines and Swift the same pattern emerges: an earlier arrival date on all species which shows that they have changed either their migration patterns or they leave their winter quarters earlier so that they can feed up once they arrive.



Scale: 120=30th April, 115=25th April, 100=10th April, 90=31st March, 80= 21st March

This is a slightly dangerous strategy as we are all too aware of the vagaries of an English spring. However, there is a driving force for these species: to find the optimum breeding site so that they have a better chance of being successful in their quest to maintain the species.

The picture is the same with our warblers (see below); this would indicate that there has been a major change within the migrating avifauna not just with a few species which may have particular needs. I would imagine that everything which makes up the food web has also adapted to the shift in climate and so birds are just reflecting this change. It is much easier to observe migrants than look closely at the less obvious life forms which play a vital role in sustaining life.



There are probably many botanists and entomologists who could also produce data which would support this argument. It is imperative that the amateur records his sightings accurately as you never know when your data may be used to substantiate a theory which may enlighten the government, the scientific world or the man in the street.

I never imagined that when I started keeping records as a boy (before the days of computers) that one day I could produce a series of graphs which point out an interesting trend. It is fairly clear that something is changing in our environment and perhaps there will be a new group of species which will colonise this island to take advantage of these changes but

the record of European species making the big jump across the Channel has not been as successful as predicted in the 1970's but who knows, the next few decades could see major changes. Keep your pens and paper ready to make notes of when this happens. One day it may have some historic significance.

### **Editors Comment**

*I'm sure most people, including non-birders, are aware of the increase of visiting and subsequently breeding Little Egrets over the same period as Richard's observations. Cattle Egrets followed some decades later although seem to have 'stalled' a little. Great White Egrets are being seen much more commonly and I'm sure it won't be long before they breed (assuming they haven't already!!). This year has seen Little Bittern and Purple Heron breeding in southern England and a colony of Spoonbills establishing itself in Norfolk..*

*On a non-avian note Wall Brown butterflies, whose fortunes have fluctuated drastically over the same period, seem to have preferred the last couple of cold winters and drier summers with larger colonies and a slight northward expansion. Silver-spotted Skipper is reacting even faster with substantial new colonies springing up and less dependence on the very specific habitat requirements needed in previous years.*

*I'm sure that many of us will see substantial changes in the next couple of decades and maybe a grandchild of a current SDOS member will be able to produce similar graphs to Richard's in a future newsletter, featuring a whole range of species, some new and some probably lost forever.*

## **A few notes on spring skua 'jizz' & flight.**

by  
**Dave Smith**

The following are just some of my own impressions of skuas passing Worthing in the spring months, and concentrates on the shape and flight patterns of the more distant birds rather than their plumage detail. Often due to poor light, difficult weather conditions, distance etc. plumage detail is impossible to ascertain, so 'jizz' and flight have to be relied on for identification. Our regular spring skuas are (from the largest to the smallest) Great Skua (or Bonxie), Pomarine Skua and Arctic Skuas with Long-tailed Skua almost mythically rare. It may be useful to mention here that Great and Pomarine Skuas are closely related and are monotypic (both have

evolved from a single common ancestor), whereas Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas are also monotypic but have evolved from a different common ancestor. This makes e.g. Pomarine and Arctic Skua no close relative although they can look superficially similar.

**Great Skua** (or 'Bonxie') – Large, compact, exudes power & a 'brute of a bird!' Distant (and close) individuals resemble a large dark, deep-chested, heavy-bellied gull with a wide wing-base, whilst wings at times do not seem over long - but this is down to the sheer bulk of the bird. Flight is always powerful & wingbeats often look distinctly 'stiff'. Always appears short-tailed. Adults have twin pointed short tail projections but this is very difficult to see in the field – I've only seen this feature well on a dead bird. At distance large gulls, compared to Bonxie are more 'rakish', less compact, slimmer-bellied, and show a much lazier flight. Capable of rapid acceleration (as are all skuas), especially when it's homing in on a likely target. Tends to parasitise larger seabirds than the other skuas e.g. large gulls and even Gannet. On one occasion, off Norfolk I saw one attack an incoming flock of Bewick's Swans!

When landing on the sea *habitually raises its wings once before settling.*

### **Pomarine Skua**

A close adult Pomarine Skua is unmistakable, with a unique 'jizz' and should not cause confusion with any other skua species. However problems can manifest themselves with distant birds, especially if distance is great enough not to be able to see the prominent and usually long two-feather central tail extension (or 'spoons'). Pomarine is smaller than 'Bonxie' but is still a large and powerful skua, often appearing 'barrel-chested' with an attenuated 'rear end', the latter produced principally by the tail length. Wingbeats are slow, methodical and the most gull-like of the skuas. You can see the identification pitfalls here as not only must Bonxie and Arctic Skua be eliminated, but also large gulls! Some (usually single) skuas in these circumstances will pass unidentified and it can be difficult to split a 'Pomarine' from a large, purposeful Arctic Skua at range. Pomarine Skua can travel in quite large packs (my largest to date is twenty-six) and a group of these at distance are easier to identify than single birds. A pack, even at range, with their rhythmic thud-thud-thud' wingbeats look sinister, and remind me of something evil pouring out of Mordor in Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings". Occasionally a distant bird, perhaps just out into the mist, can look like an unidentifiable species with long legs! Less agile than Arctic Skua when targeting other seabirds, it is more likely to mob large gulls rather than the smaller gulls or terns.

However, most Pomarine Skuas on passage just pass through and harassment of prey species is seldom observed.

### Arctic Skua

Appreciably smaller than Herring Gull although there is some size variation between individuals. Pale-morph birds often look larger and heavier than dark morph but I must emphasise, not always. Slimmer than Pomarine, Arctic appears less powerful in flight than both 'Bonxie' and 'Pom' and usually its flight appears more buoyant, especially in strong winds (when it is inclined to shear).

My impression of its head and body is of a 'long pear-shape' similar to that of Sandwich Tern, with rear end not as attenuated as Pomarine Skua. Adult Arctic Skua, as 'Pomarine' possesses a twin-feather central tail extension (or 'pins') which can be difficult to see on relatively close birds let alone the more distant. This is the skua we see mobbing other seabirds most frequently, usually small to medium sized gulls and terns. It is noticeably agile on these occasions and follows every twist & turn of its target.

An exception was on one occasion off Worthing when four Arctic Skuas 'ganged up' on a (probably sick) Herring Gull and despatched it. Usually passes singly or in small groups (the most I've seen in one flock is seven).

### Long-tailed Skua

I'll only make brief mention of this one as it is a county rarity and jizz & flight details are of little value on their own, as you will most likely need to provide at least some plumage detail for a Records Committee acceptance. The smallest of the skuas and around the size of Kittiwake, long & slim, and with the most buoyant flight of the four species. A close fly-past is essential – those long, trembling whip-like pins can become invisible at any distance. The major pitfall is a small Arctic Skua with long tail pins, and some 'Arctics' possess remarkably long pins! If it's a dark-morph, it **will** be an 'Arctic' – there is still much speculation as to whether a dark-morph Long-tailed even exists.

Finally, many thanks to Clive Hope for his helpful comments.

**Editor's Comment** For those unfamiliar with the word, 'jizz' is a [term](#) used by birders to describe the overall impression or appearance of a bird garnered such features as shape, posture, flying style or other habitual movements, size and colouration combined with voice, habitat and location.

*Thought to be derived from a US military term **G.I.S.S** — General Impression of Size and Shape - although the origin will probably remain a mystery.*

## Birding in the Baltic (part II)

by  
**Russ Tofts**

And so to Latvia...

We set off from Tartu early on a grey wet day which promised little, and delivered less.... well almost. The drive to the Latvian border was uneventful so to liven things up we decided to get lost and wound up driving through lots of damp uninteresting Latvian countryside. Light relief arrived in the shape of a chain ferry across a river. Whilst waiting, a Black Woodpecker flew over which cheered us up no end. Eventually we relocated the road to Riga and pressed onwards the Latvian capital. A fine Goshawk, soaring over the main road, was a nice addition to the list although sadly there was no opportunity to pull over and enjoy it. We arrived at an area on the north coast where we stopped for a short walk; pristine sandy beaches with not a soul for miles - not surprising as it was bright but cold. Some sea-duck offshore were typical, and two nice continental Willow Tit were seen. A brief look at the vast Lake Engure produced several Little Gull and a couple of Honey Buzzard.

We checked in to our hotel for the next two nights, a converted hunting lodge, now part museum, part hotel. The hotel grounds held a pair of nesting White Storks, a couple of Common Crane in nearby fields, singing Icterine Warblers and several noisy pairs of Fieldfare. The next morning saw us up early for a rendezvous with our guide for the day, Janis Kuze, who spoke excellent English and was a fount of knowledge of all things (naturally) Latvian. He then proceeded to show us around his 'home patch' - the Kemeru National Park. Our first stop saw us hiking through a heavily wooded area producing Grey-headed and White-backed Woodpeckers plus lots of signs of European Wolf and Beaver although no sightings of the animals themselves. Elsewhere, Janis gave us access to an area near the reserve headquarters which would have been impossible without him, providing great views of a large reed-fringed lake. A well constructed tower hide overlooking Dunduru Meadows yielded Lesser Spotted Eagle and a herd of Konick ponies, descendants of wild horses,

introduced to the area by the Latvian WWF.

Another night at the hunting lodge, where they never quite understood our relationship with alcohol, was followed by a long drive to Cape Kolka in the north-west of the country. Not too many years ago this area would have been inaccessible to foreign tourists especially those with telescopes and big lenses; thankfully the departure of Soviet military personnel means that birding here at one of the very best migration watch points in Europe is now a possibility.

On arrival the immediate coastline was fog-bound and this produced many raptors (Common Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Black Kite, Marsh Harrier, Peregrine, Hobby and Sparrowhawk) all struggling to orientate themselves ready for the crossing to Estonia. A large party of Common Cranes were trumpeting away, also confused by the fog. Periodically, large grey shapes would emerge from the mist, call some more, then dissolve back into it. At the very tip of Cape Kolka a Black Woodpecker swooped around the last patch of cover before also deciding that the time was not right to continue its northward journey.

The weather cleared and offshore, the by-now ubiquitous 'Arctic migration' species were much in evidence, although typically more distant than at other sites; some nice Goosander and our only Scaup of the trip rounded off the day's birding.

Sadly the next day turned out to be a damp squib—literally. The first hour or two of daylight demonstrated the potential of this site with thousands of migrating finches, mostly Siskin, but good numbers of Common Crossbill and Hawfinch. A single Golden Oriole and a Hobby rocketing north were the last birds before rain set in; we packed and left for our final night in Latvia back at the hunting lodge.

Next day we headed off to the airport, where a very dirty Skoda was returned to the hire-car company; Tony and I expected to be flying home alone with Bernie and Shena doing 'hard time' for the state of the car !! Unlike the outbound flight the return was thankfully 'stag and hen less' and in no time we were back at Stansted where our adventure began.

And so ended our brief sojourn to the Baltic States; a successful trip with 190 species including many sought after East European specialities, good food, good company and, thankfully, no hitches.

## NEWS FROM OUR GARDENS

by  
Val Bentley

### January- March 2010

The cold weather in the first couple of months of 2010 drove many birds to the south of the Downs, where it was marginally warmer, and into gardens. Redwings were recorded in 24 of the 32 gardens, mainly in January, with the largest numbers seen by Hazel Jackson (24) and the Sandisons (40) who watched them stripping their berberis bushes. Fieldfares were not quite so widespread, turning up in 18 gardens. Fifteen were seen by Brianne Reeve at the end of February, and 30 were recorded by Sheila Marshall. Audrey Wisdom noted a mixed flock of 30/40 on 10<sup>th</sup> January, feeding on remaining hawthorn berries.

Wintering Blackcaps were regular visitors to 18 gardens, mainly single birds, though the Maskells had three in mid-January. Reed Buntings were seen by five of our recorders; Reg Bradbury had a pair on 26<sup>th</sup> February, Clive Hope three in mid-January, and five were seen by Sheila during March. Brianne enjoyed views of a large mixed flock of finches from 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> January. Up to 200 were flying in and out of her trees from a neighbouring field, the flock consisting mainly of Chaffinches and Linnets but with some Redpolls, Greenfinches and a single Brambling. Three Bramblings were reported by John Cooper at Steyning in early March, and a Coot visited him a few times at the end of February and into March, venturing in from an adjacent mill pond.

A Little Owl noted by Stanley Allen at the beginning of January is an excellent garden record.

### April-June 2010

There were good numbers of Greenfinches in Stanley's garden, with a maximum of 14 on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. Noranne Biddulph noted nests of Blackbird, Dunnock and Blue Tit and had several different migrants passing through, such as Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers. Laurie Keen also ticked off Whitethroat and had her first spring record of Redstart for many years. A Garden Warbler was seen in the Maskells' garden at the end of April. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were recorded in six gardens, including a pair with a youngster seen by Geoff Nicholls in Steyning, but Green Woodpeckers turned up in only three.

**Field Outings Reports**  
by  
**Noranne Biddulph**

**Goring Seawatch on Sunday 25th April**

John Ford reported that Great Tits were nesting in a woodpecker box – he provides a range of food sources, not only a standard bird table, but niger seeds which are mainly taken by Goldfinches, black sunflower seeds enjoyed by finches and Dunnocks, and ground food in a mesh cage, which is popular with most small species and Blackbirds. Martin & Pauline Ford were able to watch the progress of a family of Blue Tits on a nestcam – ten eggs laid, six young successfully fledged, and had a pair of Robins doing what Robins are meant to do i.e. nesting in a watering can! Laurie was puzzled and slightly worried by a pair of Blue Tits who took bread to their nestlings at least 19 times then suddenly stopped doing this. A couple of Reed Buntings regularly visited Sheila’s garden in Rustington until mid-May, but sadly one was found dead in June, caught in a feeder. Sparrowhawks were seen by three participants, including the Maskells, who saw a male in early May and a female later in the month.

Of the less common residents, Coal Tits were seen by the Maskells, the Patersons and the Sandisons, and Goldcrests by the Maskells, Marion Taylor and Rae Titcomb. As Starling youngsters started to get about, larger groups were seen by Audrey Wisdom and Roy Westwater (both with 22), John Ford and the Ticklers (30+), and Phil Jemmett (34). While Song Thrushes were recorded in all but three of the gardens during January-March, in this period they were only seen in eight gardens, and only single birds on all but one form.

Two more unusual observations from this quarter were two Red-legged Partridge which provided a Good Friday garden tick for David Tomalin and a Crow which was seen carrying off a wriggling frog at the Ticklers.

**HENFIELD BIRDWATCH**

will be unveiling their third book (Henfield Birdwatch 2010) at the Henfield Village Hall at 7:30 p.m. on Friday 26th November. Stephen Moss (BBC wildlife programme producer) will be presenting a talk on Bird Names, and SDOS members are welcome to join us. Entrance in £3 and the book will be priced at £7.50

The annual society sea-watch was held opposite Alinora Avenue in Goring. John Newnham was joined by 12 people at 0800hrs. After a glorious previous day with a good sea passage this morning was very dull, damp, and misty with a soft south west wind. The session started very quietly with very few birds passing, indeed by 0945 there were only four of us left sitting in the shelter. Suddenly my mobile phone was heard above the noise of the jet-skies and Dave Smith, who was watching at Selsey Bill, informed us of a good collection of skuas and terns following the bad weather and heading our way. Indeed as the mist and cloud started to lift the passage of birds did improve but only two Arctic Skuas and not one tern were seen by us; the others presumably passing by in the mist and gloom. The following table lists (from the log) the species and numbers recorded between 0800 and 1100 when we called it a day.

Westbound and Eastbound	
RED-THROATED DIVER 1	BLACK-THROATED DIVER 2
SLAVONIAN GREBE 1 offshore	FULMAR 23
GANNET 27	CORMORANT 6
BRENT GOOSE 111	SHELDUCK 2
COMMON SCOTER 423	RED-BREASTED MERGANSER 12
RINGED PLOVER 1 on beach	SANDERLING 8
WHIMBREL 51	CURLEW 1
ARCTIC SKUA 2	MEDITERRANEAN GULL 6
BLACK-HEADED GULL 27	COMMON GULL 2
GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL 3	SANDWICH TERN 455
COMMIC TERN 280	LITTLE TERN 1
SWALLOW 8 heading north	WHEATEAR 1 on beach

To the above Herring Gull and Carrion Crow can be added giving a total of 26 species noted. The highlights, clearly the summer plumage grebe sitting offshore, the lines of Brent Geese and the pair of Skuas, one light and one dark phased bird. If the fixture remains on the SDOS calendar then some consideration should be given to the venue as the shingle beach is bulldozed so high at Alinora Avenue that the view of the sea

from the shelter is seriously obscured; not a problem if the weather is sufficiently good to sit on the beach but I don't think our outings organiser has sufficient ethereal connections to guarantee this.

### **Woods Mill – Nightingale Walk on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May**

Val Bentley greeted 28 SDOS members who had ventured north to the parish of Henfield in the car park at 8 o'clock. While everyone was disappointed to learn that there were no Barn Owls nesting there this year, there had been several Nightingales heard in the area in the previous 10 days, so the group set off expectantly round the Reserve, aiming for the meadow at the eastern end. On the way we saw and heard many of the resident species and summer migrants such as Blackcap and Willow Warbler, the latter generally absent from the rest of the Henfield Birdwatch recording area. Another declining species for Sussex, a Cuckoo, called, and Song Thrushes were still singing loudly as darkness began to fall, as though trying to rival the bird we had really come to hear. But as most other birds fell silent, and the group's chat reduced to whispers, first one Nightingale began to sing, short snatches at first, then another started and then another, until we were listening to three different males singing beautifully in the surrounding hedgerows.

### **Pulborough RSPB – Dawn Chorus on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May**

Seven members met Brianne Reeve at 5.30am at the Reserve car park. It was cold and overcast but even in the car park Blackcap and Chaffinch were singing well and a lot more could be heard further afield. Walking round the Centre we had both House Sparrows and a Whitethroat in the closest bushes and then the Whitethroat posed, singing, on a bare branch giving everyone good views. A few Linnets flew across as we moved down the zig-zag path, a male was seen as it landed in a small tree and a Greenfinch wheezed nearer to us. We were just listening carefully to the song of a Garden Warbler, when the drumming of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was heard coming from beyond the car park.

We retraced our steps and standing in the car park we heard the tantalising drumming of the Lesser Spotted echoed by the shorter drumming of the Great Spotted Woodpecker coming from the area known as the tumuli. We hurried there, only to find after a very little time that the Lesser started to drum back at the car park with the Great Spot in hot pursuit (or so it seemed)! The drumming was virtually continuous for almost an

hour. We had occasional glimpses of the Lesser Spotted and heard a second one on the opposite side of the Reserve far off to the right. Woodlark was also heard at this point though at some distance away. As we returned to the car park a Goldcrest was heard and a Jay seen.

On the way towards Netleys Hide, we added Cuckoo, a Grey Heron, two Nuthatches and the first of four Nightingales before reaching the 'dipping' pond. It was pleasing to watch a group of Swallows feeding very low over the field as we made our way between the hedges and then in the next field a large number of House Martins were feeding in a frenzy in the far corner.

At Little Hanger, where the north-east wind was intensely cold, we recorded four Little Egrets feeding amongst Mute Swans and Canada Geese. A pair each of Mallard and Gadwall was on the water with a group of Shelduck. Suddenly a Nightingale started singing a few yards below us and we all had telescope views of it at the top of a bush. This bush seemed to be a popular one as we had Dunnock, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff in it before we moved on to the picnic area above Netleys. Here we were treated to close views of another Garden Warbler and heard Willow Warbler. Then we heard and saw the bird which is undecided what it is: it sings Willow/Chiff and as it has pale legs it is probably more inclined to being a Willow Warbler. There seem to be more records of this slightly strange phenomenon but it certainly is interesting to see the bird singing the two songs. As we started back to the Centre, a group of Swifts and a few Swallows passed overhead.

When we got back to the car park we heard the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker drumming again and had brief views of it in the large Oak tree. It had been an extraordinary morning, none of us had ever heard quite such an astonishing amount of drumming going on for such a long time, perhaps it was enhanced by the fact that our performance had not been interrupted by anything other than birdsong which is why we make such an early start to hear a dawn chorus. The final tally was 48 species. Once again a very satisfying outing in goodly company!

### **Anchor Bottom on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May**

This evening outing led by Chris Wright on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May was attended by 18 hardy souls who set off against a strong south-westerly wind but at least the sun was shining. A Skylark sang above us as we traversed the top of Anchor Bottom and we were able to identify some of the downland species which were still trying to make themselves heard against the wind. Yellowhammer, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Linnet, Whitethroat and

Magpie were observed along the bushy scrub. On the more open ground a Meadow Pipit was seen carrying food. A Willow Warbler could be heard singing (after 8pm) but it did not show itself.

We made our way through the Gorse and scrub to the edge of the Cement Works. En route a pair of Stonechats was spotted on the fence line that runs down to the valley bottom. Our Recorder, Clive Hope, commented that this species has not been seen in many places this year and may well have suffered as a result of our long, harsh winter. As we moved on a Cuckoo was heard a couple of times and a Grey Partridge call was picked up. Our evening was completed by 'scoping the Cement Works vast working site where this year's brood of three Ravens were seeking a roosting perch for the night. One of them even went on to the original nest for a rest whilst the other two young and one adult found footholds on the cliffs nearby. This year is the first time that the young have occasionally returned to the nest after fledging, this behaviour has certainly not been seen in the nine years in which these birds have been monitored at this site.

It was pleasing to note that Peregrines are still present and a male bird provided good views silhouetted on the top side of the chimney. With a following wind we all returned safely to the car park. The intention is to make this a morning outing in the future as there is so much more to be seen during the day. Thanks to all those who attended and especially those who transported the telescopes and shared them with other members.

### **Wiggonholt Common - for Nightjars on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> June**

By the time nine members met Chris Wright in the RSPB car park at Pulborough at 8pm, the day that had started well had become definitely overcast and tending towards an uncomfortable drizzle. When the roll call was taken (a very necessary procedure on this particular outing as people tend to get lost and one did!) the rain was beginning in earnest. We hurried for the cover of the trees to the south of the car park and stood looking out over the bowl area. It was eerily silent apart from the distant song of a Blackbird.

We decided to walk round the newly cleared area of the Reserve, past the Tumuli and out to the Triangle. A few Crows were seen and Blackbirds, Robins and a single Chaffinch were heard but not seen.

By now it was just after 9pm and suddenly there was a distinct, close call of a Goldcrest – or was it – there was no flourish at the end! It was decided this was most likely a Goldcrest.

We made our way up to the area where Nightjars have been seen most frequently, though the noise of the rain on the trees was not encouraging. Determined and ever hopeful we did a long circuit but only found the magnificent highland cattle to admire as they watched this group of humans apparently enjoying a walk in heavy rain and most gloomy conditions. It was at this point it was realised that one of the party was missing – thank goodness for mobile phones!

We waited until the light had completely faded and all the Robins had stopped their doleful night-time song, still no churr or any hint of an Owl or Woodcock but suddenly the best sighting of the evening, a Glow-worm, living up to its name perfectly, shining its strong, tiny light out from under some dead leaves.

It is hoped that all those new members who had attended their first outing and seen so few birds will not be too discouraged and will give us a further chance to prove ourselves. All of them were very interested to have seen parts of the Reserve they had not realised existed and we certainly had some points of bird behaviour discussed which might not have happened had there been more birds to see.

### **Cocking Down on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July**

Bernie Forbes met six members in the car park at Cocking Down for the outing around Bepton and Venus Woods. The weather a little blustery with warming sunshine made it a very enjoyable stroll. Although most of the bird song had ceased for the breeding season we found plenty to keep the group entertained with many rather distant raptor sightings of Common Buzzard, Red Kite and Peregrine.

In the woods we found Firecrest and many parties of Coal Tits. One foraging party of tits had a couple of Siskin with them. The faint contact calls of Bullfinch were heard during the walk with at least 4 pairs calling unfortunately none were seen. Lunch was taken in a forest clearing and to the south; Common Buzzard, Red Kite and Hobby were glimpsed. The chip, chip calls of Crossbill was also heard. It was a day for butterfly watching, along the rides and clearings we found many Silver Washed Fritillaries, with sometimes six together busily flying up and down plus Green veined White and Ringlets. The most exciting find was a female Purple Emperor which settled in a tree low down and we were able to watch it for over 5 minutes before it bounded off. This was my first sighting of this species of butterfly in this woodland making the walk very worthwhile.

On the way back down we heard Nuthatch and saw Treecreeper and a mewing Common Buzzard right overhead. We noted Yellowhammer still

singing in two different areas and a lone Chiffchaff was half heartedly bursting into song. Arriving back at the car park at around 15:30 hrs with our small group, it turned out to be a very pleasant amble in agreeable company.

### **RSPB Pulborough Brooks on Friday 27th August**

Five members met up with Bernie and Carol in the car park at RSPB Pulborough for the evening wader walk. The group strolled down to the Hanger view point on a fine evening after a rather cold and dull day. The next hour or so was spent looking out over the North Brooks. The recent heavy rainfall had replenished most of the pools and there was plenty of birding activity to keep everyone busy scanning through the birds on view. Green Sandpipers were calling continuously with most of them gathering in a tight flock just below the viewpoint. In the end eighteen were counted. Also found were a couple of Dunlin, Common Sandpiper, Snipe and two Ruff. Hundreds of Canada and Greylag Geese were out feeding in the water meadows with good numbers of Lapwing and Teal present as well. Around the cattle several Yellow Wagtails were barely visible darting around in the long grass in the descending gloom. Along the river bank a Barn Owl was hunting, patrolling up and down and providing a fitting end to an enjoyable evening's birding

#### **Editor's Comment**

*The following report has been repeated here due to an error in the Spring newsletter.*

### **Rackham Woods on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February**

Because of the horrendous weather forecast of heavy rain and strong wind, only Helen Bryett and her dog, Fred met the leader Bernie Forbes for this walk. Well done Helen! My excuse is that I wear glasses.... In the wood they found a Great Spotted Woodpecker, small parties of Tits which included at least two Marsh Tits, a Treecreeper was briefly seen and a Nuthatch was heard. The Brooks were full of ducks; Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and a few Pintail but what made the lashing rain and very cold start worthwhile was a party of sixteen Bewick's Swans close by, in the flooded meadows, their bugling calls carrying in the wind.

## **BOOKS FOR SALE**

I have been given a large number of books which belonged to Cliff Walder and which his sons thought might be appreciated by SDOS members. Cliff was a great traveller all his life, visiting every continent. Mostly the books are field guides but there are some showing photography at its best. There are about 60 books covering countries like India, various parts of Africa, the Middle East, Israel, North America, Costa Rica, Argentina, Venezuela, Texas, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

There is Sharrock's 'Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain & Ireland' with the transparent overlays of environmental factors. (1970)

Two complete checklists of birds of the world 1980 & 1998 Birds of the Western Palearctic Volumes I-IX and many more.

If you are interested I should be happy to give you more information on any particular book. I shall also take them to the first Indoor Meeting on October 12th.

A reasonable donation to SDOS is all that is required.

**Brianne**

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## **Next Newsletter**

The next newsletter, the Winter issue, will appear early in the New Year. Copy deadline for this will be 31st December. If you would like to contribute anything then please contact me at:-

**tarsigercyanurus1@btinternet.com** or **01903 207993**

**Russ Tofts**  
**Newsletter Editor**