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AUTUMN 2012 NEWSLETTER

Winter Outings 2012/2013

Oct 13th (Sat) Cissbury Ring (a.m. only)

Meet 09:00 in National Trust car park.
O.S. Sheet 198. ref. TQ139084—Dist 3K(2).
Leader: Clive Hope 01903 700498.

Oct 21st (Sun) The Burgh.

Meet 09:00 at the triangle, Peppering Lane Burpham.
O.S. sheet 197. Ref. TQ042095—Dist 7K(2-3).
Leader: Bernie Forbes 01903 753876.

Nov 4th (Sun) Church Norton.

Meet 09:00 in Sidlesham Visitor Centre car park.
O.S. sheet 197. Ref. SZ857965—Dist 5K(1).
Leaders: Bernie Forbes and Dave Smith 01903 753876.

Dec 28th (Fri) Seasonal Gathering (a.m. only).

Meet 09:30 in Fort Haven car park.
O.S. sheet 198. Ref. TQ233046—Dist 1K(1).
Leaders: SDOS Committee.

Indoor Meetings

October 9th—Guyana: The Last True Wilderness

by Mike Russell

November 13th—Nightjars: New Technology and Migration Studies

by Graham Appleton

December 11th Members' Evening and Christmas Social

Birding in the Outer Hebrides

My recent birding trip has been to the Outer Hebrides in June, and I thought some members might like to read a brief overview of this tour. Our trip was organized by Island Ventures with David Rosair leading. There were eleven of us plus David driving a small minibus.

As everyone knows, the Hebrides are a long way north, so the easiest way is a flight from Gatwick to Inverness, where we made an overnight stop. Next morning we boarded our minibus for the drive to Ullapool, along the A835. As the ferry was booked for early afternoon we drove along a minor road a bit further north into Sutherland and stopped at a small bay to find Common Sandpiper, Twite and Whinchat. At a nearby loch we found a pair of Black-throated Divers very near, giving wonderful photo opportunities, plus a Green Sandpiper.

Crossing by ferry anywhere in this region gives splendid opportunities to look for Black Guillemots, Razorbills, Shags and Guillemots. We also looked out for cetaceans, skuas and divers. The scenery is stunning, especially passing the Summer Isles. Our ferry docked in Stornaway just after 7pm so it was a fast drive to our first hotel on Harris. Next day we retraced our steps back onto the Isle of Lewis, visiting the Calanish Stones and a restored Black House before reaching the RSPB reserve of Loch na Muilne. A short walk across the machair brought us to a small stone built look-out where we were able to watch two pairs of Red-necked Phalaropes spinning around in a fairly large pool. Of course we were quite a long way away, but through telescopes we were able to see these splendid birds – lifers for me! We also had a grand reunion with Tony Marr who has been living at the Butt of Lewis for some time.

Our three night stay at Scarista Lodge overlooked a wonderful white sandy beach and a turquoise sea, with misty hills in the background. No one about but green fields dotted with sheep. The sound of Oystercatchers, Curlew, and Redshank always in the background. Sundays are strictly observed with no washing hanging out, not many cars on the roads, and all local stores shut, and day three saw us heading for a small promontory on the southernmost point of Harris at Renish Point. Here we walked around the Church of St. Clement who was a leading member of the Roman Church in the 1st Century. The Danish call St. Clement the patron Saint of Seafarers. Although it was the end of June, primroses were still blooming on the banks of the Church, and Arctic terns flew low over a very small harbour. We then drove through a very stark area of granite rocks, on a narrow single track road with passing places, but most amazingly beautiful and barren. Soon we were back into passing green fields where sheep grazed, and in the corners where yellow iris and rushes grew. All over these islands many fields show signs of peat being dug. Peat bricks are dug out with special long narrow spades, then left to dry in small heaps before being collected. Many houses only burn these peat bricks, and it is not allowed to be exported. Getting out to look for more birds and begin our flower list we passed a small bay where we watched an otter catch and eat a fish. We had several wonderful opportunities of watching otters throughout the tour. Passing a small group of houses with long gardens I heard a Corncrake calling, but of course didn't actually see it. On the way back to our hotel we saw a pair of Golden Eagles over the nearby hills, a good end to the day.

Most of the Islands have been joined by long stone causeways which makes travelling a lot easier, and day four saw us packing our cases and moving south. We caught the early morning ferry to the Island of Berneray. Here we made a short drive around this very small island and its active community, picked up some sandwiches, then drove along a causeway with a traffic sign saying Beware Otters Crossing, onto North Uist. We spent a short time looking for a reported Snowy Owl, but no such luck. It had recently been seen over a very large area. We did spot a lovely male Hen Harrier though. Further along we entered the RSPB Reserve of Balranald. A wonderfully remote spot on the west coast with its colourful machair fields. The machair is a deep layer of finely crushed seashells, (only found on the western side) no earth as such, just very fine white sand which has masses of wild flowers growing through it. At this time of year the birds are in summer plumage and a Red Knot on the beach stood out like a beacon. Bar-tailed Godwits, Sanderlings, Ringed

Plovers and Turnstones all in their pristine breeding plumage looked amazing. Small groups of Eider "aunties" with loads of bobbing babies were enchanting. We also saw a pair of Whooper Swans on a nearby pool. Back in the van to park up further along. Here we watched a ring-tailed Hen Harrier trying to catch a Red Grouse, but as the bird was violently struggling to get away it was dropped, so the harrier made another lunge to catch it again. Missed! Suddenly a male Hen Harrier appeared from behind, then a couple of Short-eared Owls. This was all happening in a very small area with a backdrop of hills and pine trees. This was quite enough excitement for one day and we excitedly arrived at the Langass Hotel at 5.30pm. We were to see a lot of Short-eared Owls hunting throughout the tour.

An early start on day five saw us driving south, crossing Benbecula by causeway to South Uist to visit Loch aird a' Mhuile. We found another suitable name for this place "stinky bay" as the seaweed did pong quite a bit. A lovely bay however which had several crèches of Eiders. A careful walk along a storm broken roadway led us to where a few Common Gulls had taken up residence with their chicks. One spotty juvenile was causing mayhem by walking through some Eider families, making all the birds very noisy. Shelduck crèches were seen, plus a Ringed Plover doing his broken wing act to safeguard his nearby chick. After a short lunch break we then drove to the east coast into a mountainous area to look for eagles. However a wet mist descended on us, which caused us to retreat to the minibus. A slow drive back visiting another area gave us a brief glimpse of a White-tailed Eagle as it sat on a high rock on a nearby hill. Yes, they really are huge!

An early breakfast had us departing at 8.30 on day six to drive south to cross Eriskay by causeway and then catch the ferry to Barra. Again we stood out on the top deck watching quite a few Gannets, Razorbills, Guillemots, several distant diver species – probably Red-throated, and a couple of Great Skuas. On arrival we drove straight to the airport for coffee and to see if any planes were due in, as they land on the beach. It wasn't looking very hopeful as it was rather a damp day, but soon it cleared and we drove south down past Castle Bay. We then proceeded to Vatersay, a very small island at the southern tip. We had sandwiches in the local community hall before walking around several hillsides looking for orchids. A single Frog Orchid was well photographed. We then drove to several areas listening out for Corncrakes. The local post office on this island is actually a garage beside a house, but it looks impressive in

our photographs. A very quick drive back to the airport confirmed what we had been expecting, low cloud meant a cancellation of the afternoon plane (no newspapers or supplies for the locals that day). The ferry back to Eriskay left at 6pm then a long drive back to our hotel and a dinner of langoustines and scallops.

The weather for our last day on the islands was not co-operating so we started by visiting a local salmon smokery and watched the various processes the fish go through. Later, after a coffee stop, we drove to Griseaey Harbour in the hope of finding the White-tailed Eagle, but no luck. During a dry spell of weather we walked across some more machair looking at the plants, then onto another "stinkey bay" at Baille nan Cail-leach. The Western Isles website also uses the name Stinkey Bay when reporting birds seen in this area. A flock of 14 Black-tailed Godwits flew around the rocks with a backdrop of storm clouds looking very dramatic. Two Red-necked Phalaropes nearly landed on the rocks but steered themselves back out to sea. Common Gulls, Dunlins and Sanderlings were also noted.

The last day of the tour saw us driving to Loch Maddy for the 11.50 ferry to Uig on the Isle of Skye. During this ferry crossing we saw a distant pod of porpoises splashing through the water. Driving down through Skye, over the bridge and back onto the mainland by way of the Great Glen and Loch Ness had us arriving back in Inverness at 6.30pm, followed by a last dinner together and a flight back to Gatwick the next day. From North to South the Outer Hebrides are approximately 150 miles long from the Butt of Lewis to Barra Head, some people now calling them the Long Island. It is a kaleidoscope of habitats, mountains, moorland, granite rocks and lots of water both sea and fresh, stunning white deserted beaches on the western side and a very peaceful backdrop to birds in their summer plumage. The machair is glorious in summer with flowers, some of which are now quite rare. A much recommended place to discover and enjoy in very peaceful surroundings.

**Audrey Wende
September 2012**

The Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus haliaetus*)

Mentioned in the Bible in Leviticus, by Aristotle who wrote fairly accurately of its habits and by Shakespeare in Coriolanus, he only used birds with which his audience would be familiar.

There have been two records of an Osprey having stayed in the SDOS area, one of a bird which was seen around the Adur from September 18th –27th in 1981 which roosted at Cuckoo Corner. A bird first seen on the lower Adur on September 16th 2005 was probably the same one reported from Steyning and Henfield Levels up to October 2nd. There have been other sightings but usually of birds obviously just passing through on migration.

When this Osprey was first spotted by John Newnham on August 10th 2012 as he placed a celebratory ring on a juvenile Robin, the 5000th bird to be ringed in the Ladywells, no-one would have thought that it would still be in the area forty-two days later! It has caused a great deal of interest, not only to dedicated birdwatchers but to quite a few astonished members of the public as they saw it for the first time. On August 20th I saw it with a very large Grey Mullet, which it had just plucked out of the river near Cuckoo Corner and was carrying torpedo-fashion into a tree at Lancing College. A man shouted to me, 'Was that a Buzzard?' 'No', I shouted back, 'It's an Osprey!' 'I've never seen an Osprey,' he responded. I couldn't help myself by answering, 'Well you have now!' As so many SDOS members have been drawn in to wanting to see this unusual visitor to our area, on several occasions more than a dozen members were gathered at Cuckoo Corner, I decided to find out a little more about this superb bird of prey. At home I found a 'Countryman' magazine from 2005 and a book called 'The Return of the Osprey' by Philip Brown and George Waterston published in 1962, exactly fifty years ago, from which I have extracted the following information.

The Osprey is known as a fish-hawk and, appropriately in our case, as a mullet hawk. They were protected from the twelfth to the seventeenth century for use in falconry probably reaching peak numbers in the sixteenth century. But as shotguns were developed and the sporting estates became more powerful for game preservation, everything that could be regarded as a threat was ruthlessly destroyed: Peregrines, Golden Eagles, Buzzards, Hen Harriers, White-tailed Eagles and Ospreys. From 1831-4 on a Sutherland estate a list was published of premiums paid for birds of

prey:

171 full grown eagles	@ 21/-	£179. 11. 0
53 young eagles or eggs	@ 10/-	26. 10. 0
1055 hawks (unspecified)	@ 1/-	52. 15. 0

Eighteen Ospreys were included in a list of vermin shot in West Inverness-shire between 1837 and 1840.

Also at this time one has to realise that a great deal of collecting was commonplace, either for self-interest or to order for museums in the form of skins or eggs. In the middle of the nineteenth century collectors went to extraordinary lengths to acquire eggs and adult birds on their 'nesting expeditions'. One such deserves to be quoted: 'April 29th 1851 After walking nearly all night (probably from Grantown – twenty miles away. G.W.), he reached the spot in the midst of a snowstorm; and having tied a cord to his life-preserver, he swam off, leaving the other end in charge of a man on shore. On the island, he tied the rope to a stone and climbed up the ruins, slipping about in six inches of snow. Having found two eggs in the nest, he discovered that he had left his cap behind him. He tried one egg in his mouth, but could not breathe with it; and at last he swam ashore on his back with an egg in each hand. He blew the eggs in the boathouse, washing out the inside with whisky. He had taken these eggs for four years, and the old birds have always had a second brood.'

In some cases the egg collectors had been commissioned to provide an adult bird too. They would check the nest for eggs and then wait for the hen to return, shooting her as she came in to incubate. On one occasion in 1892 when the bird was taken away for dissection it was found she was carrying 'another egg, beautifully marked and quite ready for laying. The bird had in her an egg, full size, but not shelled'. What chance had the Ospreys against such determined men?

Even fashion took its toll, the more attractive birds' feathers were used to adorn hats. How many Victorian homes had stuffed birds under a glass dome as an ornament? However we have to admit that we have learned a lot from the work of taxonomists. Nowadays with the everyday use of binoculars, telescopes and cameras and many forms of technology, we do not have to kill birds to identify or observe them.

Moving on to the twentieth century: on Loch Arkaig there was a well-established eyrie which was used annually up until 1908. Despite being heavily protected, both by the police and with barbed wire fences, the

nest was always robbed. One bird returned every year for five years, repairing the nest and looking for a mate.

The last known pair of Ospreys was shot in 1916. By the end of the 1940's the number of sightings of birds on passage began to increase but Ospreys were not seen again as breeding birds in Scotland until the early 1950's when a great deal of secrecy surrounded them and some sites remained undisclosed in the Speyside area.

This is the time when the RSPB and Loch Garten came into the story. There were several years of Ospreys attempting breeding but always something happened to the nest either deliberately or by sad chance. In May 1958 breeding was confirmed at the Loch Garten site and the elaborate pre-arranged plans to protect the birds were set in motion. A camp was set up and a rota for watching was discussed but much sooner than anticipated the alarm was raised by the Ospreys wheeling high above the nest. Then a man was seen within a few yards of the nest tree and a jeep was sent, driven at speed, to the other side of the Loch to make sure he could not get away. The number plate of a parked car was taken and then the two volunteers left the jeep and ran to meet George Waterston who by now was escorting a man and his wife away from the tree. Initially the man gave his name but refused to give his address but Philip Brown recognised him – he lived in Sussex. He admitted to being a collector in the past but following the Protection of Birds Act 1954, had stopped collecting. He claimed, 'he had no intention of harming the ospreys and stoutly disputed our view that, by shinning up the tree and looking in the nest, he had caused them any harm.' Shortly afterwards there was nearly another disaster when a Hooded Crow landed on a branch close to the unguarded nest having seen the unprotected egg, it was scared off by much clapping of hands and shouting at it. More plans were made. It was decided to use an old look-out hide and a tent hidden in the trees to be closer to the nest site. The person in the look-out hide had a piece of cord linking the hide to the wrist of a man resting in the tent, this was considered the best alarm system. On June 3rd about a fortnight before the eggs were due to hatch the nest was robbed, the thief attempted a getaway when he was seen up the tree and in his haste dropped and smashed two fertile eggs, but he escaped. Later it was discovered he had left two hen's eggs for the Osprey to incubate which by her restless actions it was obvious she knew they were not her eggs.

The Ospreys did start building another nest about three hundred yards away but eventually abandoned it, though they were in the area for several weeks. No-one realised at the time that this nest would be the home

of successful breeding in the following three years.

1959 was the year of successful breeding in the eyrie started by the birds in 1958, three chicks were raised. There was a great debate about whether it was in the birds' interest to go public with the nest site and although many people thought it was a ridiculous idea George Waterston argued that it was common knowledge in the area and that knowledge would spread as the chicks became more visible. He arranged for the public to observe the nest from a hide at a safe distance from the eyrie. Even he was probably surprised that about 14,000 people made the journey to see the return of the Ospreys to Speyside in those last forty days of that breeding season. In the following two years the RSPB were responsible for the Ospreys to be protected with round-the-clock guards. By the end of 1961 about 55,000 people had seen these magnificent birds, established and producing young at Loch Garten.

There were still many problems to overcome in ensuing years including the effect of pollution from organochlorines into rivers and lochs affecting the fish which the Ospreys caught, resulting in many infertile eggs. However by 2005 there were 160 breeding pairs in the country, mainly in Scotland. At the end of the 1990's Scottish chicks were used at the start of the Anglian Water Osprey Project at Rutland Water Nature Reserve well-known to visitors to the annual Bird Fair. Ospreys are now given the opportunity to breed in more areas of Britain and are spreading slowly. Most birdwatchers recognise the distinctive jizz of an Osprey, with that pronounced angle in the wings at the carpal joint. Males are slightly smaller than females the latter weighing in more than 5 lbs. with a wingspan of five feet. The dark brown upper-parts contrast with the white under-parts. The feathers of these under-parts are particularly compact to prevent the bird becoming waterlogged when it drops into the water. The legs are very strong, and with large, curved talons the feet are rough and scaly to enable the bird to keep hold of slippery fish, the largest toe is reversible.

Ospreys mature when they are three years old and mate for life, the male arriving first at the nest site where it will do display-flight rising 500-1000 feet into the air. When the female arrives this activity becomes more frenetic. Mating takes place on the eyrie many times before the first egg is laid. Incubation starts at once with the eggs laid up to four days apart. The female rarely leaves the tree in the first month after hatching except to feed herself on a favoured nearby tree whilst the male takes over on the nest. She is the one who tears up the prey, brought in by

the male, to feed to the young birds.

The young will take their first flights about 54 days after hatching with the oldest going first but they all return to the nest to rest, roost, feed and sleep for several weeks. The female is the first to migrate, followed by the juveniles and finally the male. Ringing shows that in the first year the young stay in their winter quarters, in the second year they are found in more northerly situations but they are non-breeding and in the third year they will return to the area of their birth. We are used to the fact that our smaller migrants will return to their natal area in the year following their birth but it must be one of nature's mysteries how an Osprey can find its way back in the third year of its life!

Which brings us to the Osprey which was first seen in the Adur valley on August 10th. SDOS members have had numerous sightings since that date with over a dozen people gathering at any one time, sometimes being rewarded with spectacular views. One of the best was when it was seen dragging the huge Grey Mullet from the river and flying with it up into trees on Lancing College land. Then there was the occasion when it was peacefully perched in a tree when a Common Buzzard came from behind it and literally knocked it off the branch. It had been a regular perch for the Buzzard so perhaps it was fair game! Photographers spent many hours waiting and watching and hoping to get that special picture. Some of those have been outstanding, a reward for great patience.

Those who joined the Adur river walk on August 31st had magnificent views for an extended period of time as the Osprey circled over Passies Ponds. Also on that day it was challenged 'by a very persistent Red Kite. The altercation went on for five minutes or so with both birds gaining height all the time'. Even experienced birdwatchers have admitted they made six attempts before seeing it in action. The Shoreham Airshow brought it into perspective too. 'Its reign as biggest thing in the sky was short-lived as the Vulcan bomber came over soon after'. It was claimed it was 'chased by the B52' and that it was copying the Swordfish which flew over with 'a large torpedo slung fore and aft under its belly'. The Osprey presented in the same way with 'a large fish slung fore and aft below it'. One more fascinating fact is that this same bird has been seen and photographed at Woods Mill. We know it is the identical bird because it has a small rounded piece missing from the second large primary feather on its left wing.

Six weeks after it was first sighted I took a friend to the top of The Ham, overlooking its favourite fishing area of Passies Ponds, and there it was, just having caught its lunch. The day before it was using a telegraph pole

by St. Botolphs Church for a dining table so I drove the few hundred yards to it and we had fantastic close views! So much pleasure has been given to birdwatchers by this one very interesting migrant and the story still goes on.....

With acknowledgement to: 'The Return of the Osprey' by Brown and Waterston.

Brianne Reeve

September 20th 2012

Postscript

It spent time at Warnham Nature Reserve on Sept. 22nd, 23rd and 25th and caught six fish during one day! Meanwhile this extraordinary visitor has delighted all those who have spent hours recording sightings. Passies Ponds have been the centre of attraction and we have found the telegraph pole, at St. Botolphs, which it has used regularly as its dining table as soon as it catches a fish. By Sat. Sept. 29th we had reached Day 51 of it being in the Adur valley and it was seen on four occasions on that day from 9.30am through to 5.50pm. As far as I know it has not been seen since then in the Adur valley but Jake Everitt has just posted that it spent all day today, Oct. 1st, at Warnham - Day 53.

Editor's Comment

Also present fishing at Warnham on the 2nd October and, as I write this on the 3rd October, I've just been shown a cracking photo of it (by a photographer at Pulborough RSPB) lifting off from Warnham Mill Pond with a fish today.

Outings Reports

Knepp Castle - May 16th

Last year we visited the Knepp estate on March 9th, this year we decided to go a little later hoping to see migrants. Twenty four members met at the Bothy to be welcomed by Charlie Burrell, Ted Green, who has a

great deal of knowledge but a particular interest in trees and birds, and Olivia, a student at university who is doing the Nightingale survey for Knepp.

Charlie explained that he had inherited the estate when he was 21 and it was heavily farmed in the conventional manner initially, but then he decided to make the radical change of returning the land to its original state with animals running free, known as the re-wilding project. The three and a half thousand acres was divided into three sections: north of the A272, a central area and a southern area all of which had to be ring-fenced to keep the animals safe: Exmoor ponies, Longhorn cattle, Fallow and Roe deer and Tamworth pigs. The way that each of these species grazed or rootled on the land would serve to control the rough pastures, scrub and hedges. Some of the deer need to be regularly culled, the Tamworth pigs go for Serrano ham and the cattle produce beef; a total of about 68 tons of live meat annually.

There is a huge amount of water which needs to be managed, a vast lake of about 24 acres below the castle and several other large ponds and the latest project to return the River Adur to its original state with meanders and flood plains.

We were about to leave the car park when a mass of almost black small moths with long antennae were spotted emerging from the top of a tall oak, interesting but no-one was able to identify them.

We drove to part of the southern area in five cars and immediately heard and saw a Blackcap in fine song. Crossing one field we came to an area of mixed scrub and two Garden Warblers sang to right and left of us and a little further on another Blackcap. It is always particularly helpful to be able to compare the songs of these two migrants in the field and this was an ideal opportunity. Blackcaps seem to have done very well this year, their short melodious song with a sharp cut-off to finish contrasts with the less musical, longer, rambling song of the Garden Warbler. These two birds certainly proved that description though I acknowledge that they are often difficult to identify. Meanwhile we had superb views of cock Linnets, Yellowhammers, Pied Wagtails and Common Whitethroats. The Lesser has been heard here but did not show for us. Common Buzzards were using the thermals above us and nesting Lapwings swirled and

dipped, enticingly just out of sight, in the next field.

A very large web of Brown-tailed Moth caterpillars was spotted by Phil in some Hawthorn which they defoliate as they feed.

Cuckoo was heard on three occasions and Great spotted Woodpecker several times with a distant soft drumming once. (This could have been a female as I have found their drumming is a softer sound which seems to coincide with the arrival of young in the nest. Fanciful, maybe, but it is so in my garden)!

A flock of noisy Starlings, a Song Thrush mimicking part of the song of the Nightingale, Blackbird and Wren were all noted as we moved on. A group of very handsome Longhorn cattle with young calves did not look too pleased to see so many people invading their space but Charlie led us into a boggy area whilst they moved away. Olivia had told us she had found 25 singing Nightingales in the southern area but this was the only place we heard an all too brief but definitive song.

Turtle Doves had also been heard in this area in the last two weeks but we feel they must have been birds on passage as their soothing calls were not in evidence today. Two Bullfinches, with flashing white rumps, were seen as a slight compensation.

Last year we had found Woodlark and Ted knows they are nesting close to where they were seen then but we could not risk walking through the area in case we trod on a nest.

Moorhens gave away their presence with that slightly clearing-throat call and were obviously breeding nearby, (there were many suitable places), we heard the Green Woodpecker's raucous call, saw a party of Long-tailed Tits as they fed along a hedgerow and found a Common White-throat unusually high in an oak tree before getting back to the cars where a Swallow was singing from the aerial on a house.

We drove back to the Castle and stopped by the large lake which was once a hammer pond (a mill driving hammers for the iron industry) and work is done to assist eels leaving the lake on their annual migration to the Sargasso Sea.

There were no hirundines feeding over the lake apart from one Swift high above us. A couple of Grey Herons flew into the heronry and Charlie explained that whereas they normally nested high up in trees this heronry

was only a few feet above the water. The birds had decided on this safer place due to predation by Common Buzzards. Warnham heronry suffers from the same predation and I have noticed that the Egrets and Herons in the Coombes road have had to see off Buzzard on two occasions in the early stages of nesting.

Finally Charlie took us down to see the River Adur project, the restoration of the natural floodplains and meanders. Already some scrapes have been created, some ditches blocked and diverted to flood lags with the result that Snipe, Woodcock and other wetland birds have discovered the new areas. There is still much to do but the work has made great progress since last year.

Back at the car park, four hours had passed with a truly fascinating tour. This is a very unusual outing for us but everyone had learnt so much about the extraordinary work going on at Knepp and was most appreciative of the time Charlie spent with us. He has asked us to help out with monitoring any natural history on the estate, there is no doubt we shall hope to return to learn more.

Although I made notes during the morning, I have taken some information from the very interesting Newsletters we were given at the end of our tour. I think there is no harm in it reaching a wider audience.

Brianne Reeve

Anchor Bottom - May 26th

Thirteen members met Chris Wright at Fiveways, the eastern end of Anchor Bottom and were later joined by two more who had walked up from Dacre Gardens. It was a beautiful, warm sunny day with a rather too-strong easterly breeze. Linnets flitted about in the trees in the car park and a welcome Swift flew low over us. We were in a good position to have telescope views of the Little Egrets and Grey Herons in the trees along the Coombes Road. There are seven nests of the former and four of the latter this year but viewing them is not easy even from close to the nest site which is surprising considering the size of the birds. We followed the South Downs Way westwards finding Skylark and Corn Bunting both of which perched on fence posts giving us time to

compare them and to hear their songs. At the fence line we turned back into the field to look at some rather poor specimens of Meadow Clary, *Salvia pratensis*, a rare plant listed in the Red Data Book. This small patch had no flowers but later, in the floor of the valley we found the much larger group, some in flower of the most stunning blue, and a few more larger spikes not yet open. These plants are eaten by rabbits, deer and cattle so they do not have an easy time. We then took a diagonal path along the hillside towards the east to get down into the valley, it was very slow progress because we had obviously hit a day of butterfly emergence, the most numerous were Adonis Blues and then very pleasingly, Brown Argus, another of the blue butterflies which is not seen - or as easily identified by many people. The Brown Argus is very small but has bright orange spots on the undersides and when they open their wings there are more orange spots on a dark brown velvet background. Jim Steedman was with us to confirm our sightings, full of information about the differences, life cycles and foodplants. We saw newly emerged butterflies in their crumpled state before their wings had expanded and dried when they are particularly vulnerable, and several mating pairs of both Adonis and Brown Argus. For our members it was wonderful to sit on the ground and watch these natural happenings at such close quarters. It was a perfect day to see the true glory of the Adonis, the enamel blue is almost indescribable. The foodplants were all around us which are vital for the blue butterflies: Horseshoe Vetch, Kidney Vetch, Birds-foot Trefoil and Rock Rose and we saw dozens of pristine butterflies. Moving on we admired the Meadow Clary and maroon-flowered Houndstongue close to a large rabbit warren. A little further on we saw the first signs of the aptly named Fragrant Orchid and nectar rich Sainfoin. Crossing over to the north-facing slope we were able to see all the colour range of the Green-winged Orchids from the palest pink through to lustrous purple. At the top of the hill another Red Data Book species, Red Star Thistle grows in profusion, not good news for the cattle which graze this area. It was at this point the one and only Swallow was seen. Where are all the hirundines? We spent some time looking into the quarry where the Raven nest has been home to three young this year and a Wall butterfly showed itself

just in front of us. A Peregrine flew across the valley and disappeared over the far skyline. Birds were calling from the copse but it was very difficult to hear song as the wind was whipping it away, but we picked out Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff (giving alarm calls as we were obviously too near a nest), Yellowhammer and Chaffinch. The copse is the place where we expect to see the delightful little Green Hairstreak butterfly, there were two, possible, but unproven sightings. Throughout this walk Peter Casebow had been using his telescope to bring birds, butterflies and flowers into close focus for us all to share, a great benefit to everyone. And he added the last birds to our list, two low-flying House Martins near the car park.

Brianne Reeve

Lynchmere Common - May 27th

Twelve members gathered for the outing to Lynchmere Common at 09:00hrs on Saturday morning a new birding destination for the SOS. The common is situated in the far north west of the county rubbing shoulders along side Surrey and Hants. Comprising of 307 acres of Common Land incorporating Lynchmere, Stanley and Marley Common a mixture of heathland, woodland with some very mature stands and coppice, our walk concentrated on Lynchmere Common. During the walk we found plenty of singing Blackcap and Willow Warbler with a Spotted Flycatcher feeding high up in the canopy. Nearby a Marsh Tit put in a very brief appearance with a young bird begging for food. Plenty of Great spotted Woodpeckers were heard and seen as was Nut-hatch. Common Buzzard was evident and we had a Hobby high up over the woodland chasing prey. Siskin could be heard calling, counting a flock of 20 birds flying over and later we had close views of a juvenile Siskin near the pond. In the mature woodland we had a close Firecrest with another singing nearby. A pair of Mandarin Duck were in the lush vegetation around the pond. Returning to our cars we relocated to Blackdown

for the p.m. session although finding the correct turning in Haslemere proved extremely difficult and we lost a couple of members (John and Liz please accept my apologies). Taking our lunch in the very warm sunshine we enjoyed the soft call of a Bullfinch and one or two Common Buzzards were up thermalling. The walk out onto the high heathland was a pure delight with many sightings of mobile Crossbills and the 'chip-chip' calls a constant companion. As we walked on the heath we had close views of Common Whitethroat, Stonechat and delightful singing Woodlark with 4 Common Buzzards interacting. The views over the surrounding countryside were soaked up by the group making all of us appreciate that we do live in a marvellous county, so a big thank you to the group for making the walk so enjoyable.

Bernie Forbes

Wiggonholt Common - June 8th

Eighteen hardy (foolhardy?) people gathered in the RSPB Pulborough car park at 8pm this evening, admittedly all in winter gear, in the hope of seeing/hearing a Nightjar. Overhead a Buzzard and a Swift came into view and a group of noisy Jackdaws flew by and a Wren and a Blackcap sang heartily. Russ and Dorian were in charge of the party and we set off round the edge of the Reserve in the Rackham direction. The only birds were a large collection of calling corvids which suddenly rose above the trees circling, swooping and diving for no apparent reason (though we searched for a possible bird of prey). On reaching the road we walked up to the possible viewing point for Nightjars with Russ telling us where they had been seen in previous years, and some of the churring posts. We stood or sat on tree stumps for some while waiting for the light to lessen, overlooking a wide area which would enable us to have the best chance to follow a Nightjar if it did fly by. A Tawny Owl, calling several times, very close by was a pleasant surprise 9.15pm and still no sign and we were all beginning to feel rather cold. Just after 9.30pm. there it was that wonderful sound, the first churr of the evening! It came from behind and above us in the other open area where there are low Chestnut trees. We had all managed to get in place to watch and listen and up it came, flying silently towards us like a huge moth, so agile - a twist and

turn and it disappeared to the lower area where we had been standing. We followed and as soon as we heard it churr again, cupped our ears to get every benefit of the sound. It seemed to be on Parham land but the churr cut off and the bird was seen flying to our right parallel with the road. Although, we followed we did not hear or see it again.

For at least eight of the party this sighting of a Nightjar was a 'lifer' and for the rest of us it was a relief to have seen this one bird on a very inclement June evening. As always the outing had been a time of cheerful conversation and a good deal of bonhomie - we do enjoy our outings whatever the weather!

Brianne Reeve

Warnham LNR - June 16th

Just seven members met this morning at Warnham. The weather was a little cool and cloudy with occasional sunny periods. We started by looking from the road towards the weir where the Grey Wagtails have bred, there was no sign of them but two female Mallards were behaving in an extraordinary manner feeding on the lowest part of the weir seemingly oblivious of the force of the water, yet they held themselves without effort on the steep slope. Suddenly we were diverted by a Mink which intended crossing the road by us but turned back into the Reserve and was seen swimming strongly towards the first hide - beware young ducklings. The first hide is only yards from the Visitor Centre but it gives good views over the lake and we spent some time watching a pair of Great-crested Grebes which we were told had lost their nest in the dreadful storms of last weekend. Two pairs of Common Terns and a single female Mallard were on the nearest raft, the eggs of the terns were due to hatch today but not for us to see! We did have some wonderful views of an adult bird twisting and diving over the water. It was good to see Sand and House Martins and just one Swallow flying very low over the lake as they hunted for insects. There are still very few hirundines to be seen anywhere and here the Sand Martins were in the majority. Leaving the hide we walked across the meadow where we could hear the monotonous call of a Reed Bunting which was eventually located surprisingly high up in a tree. In the reeds below on the lake edge a Reed Warbler gave out

brief bursts of song. Both these species had also lost their nests last Sunday yet here they were starting all over again; instinct is a powerful emotion.

We made our way to the Walnut Tree Plantation where Chiffchaff and Goldcrest were heard but the best sighting was an adult Green Woodpecker flying away from the top of a much used dead tree from which a very noisy juvenile demanded food.. There were holes all over the tree but the young bird was in the top 'flat' and could be seen poking its head out frequently calling for the parent to return with food. We had some excellent telescope views of this attractive youngster.

Our next stop was in the Heron Hide where we saw eight Grey Herons, five of which were juveniles, two still on the nest. The three slightly older ones, still sporting their fluffy head feathers, were on the water's edge with two adults in attendance for protection. There was a large group of Herring Gulls on the water with four Lesser Black-backed just doing nothing!

We continued on our way across the boardwalk with several Blackcaps singing, and Chiffchaff with the female giving her answering 'prrrt' call to the male in the tree above her. At the end of the boardwalk and to the right is the huge stand of the impressive Giant Butterbur, its leaves are much larger than the biggest dinner plate.

A brief snatch of a Marsh Tit was heard as we moved onto the very long, stoutly built boardwalk at the furthest point of the Reserve. Young birds could be heard all around us but were difficult to see in the leafy canopy. (On my recce two days ago I had seen Marsh Tit here and heard the gentle drumming of a (?) female Great spotted Woodpecker).

There was discussion about the vast quantity of Hemlock Water Dropwort which is so prevalent here, a very poisonous plant with Parsley-like leaves. More pleasingly were the lovely spikes of Common Spotted Orchid in several places on the Reserve. The weeks of heavy rain has made everything grow so much, management must be a continuous problem. By now the wind was getting stronger making it even more difficult to see birds in the swaying trees but the Reed Bunting was still showing and singing as we retraced our steps through the meadow.

We had enjoyed the walk round this interesting site, there is always

something new to see, the weather had been kind and the company easy and relaxed!

Brianne

Chantry Hill - August 18th

Twelve members and a visitor assembled at the Chantry Hill car-park for a stroll along the South Downs Way and back along the track bordering the escarpment of the Downs via Kithurst Hill - gloriously warm and sunny weather. There was a scattering of Willow Warblers and White-throats along the Way as well as Linnets, Yellowhammers, Greenfinches, Chaffinches, an elusive Bullfinch, one or two Meadow Pipits and the odd passing Swallow. Unlike last year though, the hoped for raptor sightings were few and limited to Buzzard and Kestrel. We did however manage to find two Whinchats on a fence and an obliging Redstart that everyone had fair views of. On the return leg we looked out for butterflies among the plethora of downland flowers. Chalkhill Blues, at least five superb Small Coppers and the abundant Meadow Browns were all in evidence. A Skipper raised hopes for the scarce Silver spotted but it was just an oddly patterned Large.

Clive Hope

Pulborough Brooks - August 24th

Despite the unpromising weather six members gathered for an evening stroll around the Brooks. The rain stopped about three quarters of an hour prior to the start time and luckily stayed dry until the end of the walk. A Whinchat, present for its second day, was still atop the new anti-deer fencing around Upperton's Field. On the walk down the zig-zag a small mixed flock of Long-tailed Tits, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaff with one Common Whitethroat was seen.

On the South Brooks fifteen Snipe and three Green Sandpipers with a number of Teal, Mallard and a couple of Shoveler were on view. From the Hanger Viewpoint a couple more Green Sandpipers and a single Snipe were the only waders.

A pre-roost gathering of Pied Wagtails numbered over thirty birds. Two Spotted Flycatchers, a single Blackcap, a couple of Willow/Chiffs and a single perched Buzzard kept us entertained before a Sparrowhawk zipped by on the lookout for a late supper. Finally, a couple of the group managed a glimpse of one of the Barn Owls by the car park. As we left the reserve the rain started again!!

Russ Tofts

Adur Valley - August 31st

Seventeen of us set off for the walk down the River Adur with high hopes given that an Osprey had been gracing the area for the past three weeks. We were certainly not disappointed as the bird appeared within the first quarter of an hour and cruised around Passies Ponds for some considerable time allowing everyone superb views. Before our next stop opposite the Cement Works we saw Kestrel, Cormorant, and two Little Egrets perched in a hedge. There was speculation about the number of Common Sandpipers, as they were quite flighty, sheltering in their usual position along the muddy bank and in the vegetation below the Cement Works, but finally a double figure count was agreed. They were accompanied by a single Dunlin, an infrequent visitor this far up river. We moved a little further south where we saw the regular Pied Wagtails which breed locally, and hirundines represented by Swallows and House Martins hunting for insects low over the fields. Time for a second visit from the Osprey which had been seen as far away as the Tollbridge, but now came right over our heads, once again heading for Passies Ponds where it circled for some while but without any evidence of dropping down to fish. We then turned our attention to the line of trees and bushes bordering Passies and the first of four Common Redstarts was seen. Jake pointed out the faint eye-ring which is easily seen through a telescope or on camera. In the background, through a gap in the hedge, a statue-like Grey Heron stood in the water. It soon became apparent that there was a lot more activity around the fence line. First we picked out a very attractive Lesser Whitethroat, then a Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Common Whitethroat, Blackcap and Reed Warbler. There was so much to watch, birds were being called from every direction. We felt that little was to be gained by going further south so we turned back and looked at the trees which run to the river from Passies. Immedi-

ately Bernie spotted a Treecreeper unusually on a gate-post. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was searching for grubs on a dead branch and also a Green gave its strident call as it flew by out of sight. In the same area we watched Spotted Flycatchers doing what they do best as they flashed in and out of the trees. We must have spent at least half an hour recording this incredible fall of migrants, probably due to the wind now coming forcibly from the north. The sun was shining but most of our members had chosen to wear warm clothing which was certainly needed. All the migrants we saw were, very sensibly, in the lee of the hedges. We returned to the South Downs Way footbridge and moved north to view the cattle and any birds in their vicinity where Bernie had picked up two Whinchats earlier at Botolphs. It began to look as though we would have to admit defeat, but no, behind us on the east side of the river, a Whinchat was on the fence. A scan round the field of sheep produced five Yellow Wagtails, probably the first of the autumn for this area, though two were seen last week near the Tollbridge much further down river.

As we retraced our steps towards the cars Russ saw a Hobby. After crossing the footbridge we found two more Whinchats and the Yellow Wagtails had joined the horses in the paddock to the right of the path. What a morning! The best we have ever had on this particular walk. So many birds seen so well, there is no doubt the autumn migration is really happening. (We were very fortunate to have arranged this outing on the day before the Shoreham Airshow when the noise would have deterred the birds from showing themselves).

Chris Wright

Cissbury Ring - September 2nd

Eleven members gathered at the base of Cissbury Ring on the north side. In dull and overcast autumnal conditions with a northerly breeze. Walking up the gentle east slope it appeared that there were few birds around with only a few contact call notes of Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff. Halfway up the slope a Crossbill was heard calling the very diagnostic chip-chip-chip call and most of us glimpsed it as it flew west along the northern face of the ring. On the slope above the Rifle Butts we found at least 6 (possibly 8) Common Redstarts flitting in and out of the bushes. In one small hawthorn we counted 3 males together all of them very showy and

still looking resplendent. Noting a few Common and single Lesser White-throat, overhead in the murky sky small parties of House Martin and Swallows were seen moving west. In the grass at the top of Lychpole Hill we found 3 flowering Frog Orchids. Not the most handsome of plants and why are they named after a frog? The gorse bushes on the top of the ring we only found Wren and brief views of skulking Lesser Whitethroat. In the valley below we could hear Common Buzzards calling with the wheedle begging call of young birds carrying a long way. Around the Flint Mines we found another group of Common Redstarts (5 birds) feeding in the hawthorn bushes with a few Common and Lesser Whitethroats. By now the low cloud had turned to a constant drizzle and the group made their way back down finding just a few Greenfinch, Linnet and Goldfinch. By 11:15 hrs we called it a day; not a huge list of species although well pleased with views of the Redstarts.

Bernie Forbes

Local Birding

Birding in the SDOS area and nearby has had little in the way of rarities or unusual species so far this Autumn. The Adur Osprey has probably generated the most interest for SDOS members and other local birders and photographers. A notable count of 203 Mediterranean Gulls was at Ferring on 20th September (Dave Smith). On the 23rd the Worthing seawatchers had five Balearic Shearwaters and any suitably rough weather may produce further birds plus skuas, auks etc in the next six weeks or so –keep an eye on the weather maps! The first local Ring Ouzel of the Autumn was at Edburton on the 29th September but keep a look-out on Cissbury over the next three weeks. Also on the 29th a Honey Buzzard seen near Lyminster. Finally, a Pectoral Sandpiper has been at Pulborough RSPB for four days with Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Merlin and Water Rail as a supporting cast.

Next Newsletter

The next newsletter, the Winter issue, will appear in February. Copy deadline for this will be 20th January. If you would like to contribute anything then please contact me at:-

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