

Shoreham and District
Ornithological Society
Spring Newsletter 2014



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Adult and first winter Little Gull at Brooklands in 2014

The Little Gull winters at sea in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Black and Caspian Seas. They return in spring to breeding grounds in the Baltic countries, eastern Europe and Russia and breed in colonies in freshwater marshes.

Numbers pass along the English Channel and SDOS photographers Ron Bewley and Dorian Mason were able to capture these images at Brooklands in early 2014.

The two birds above are adults. Notice the black under-wing of the flying bird. These adults will develop a black hood and, perhaps, a pinkish flush on the breast as the breeding season approaches. The bird to the left is a first winter bird showing the characteristic 'W' shaped upper wing pattern.

Editorial

This Newsletter represents an exciting development for the Society and is designed to replace the previous Report with a more current and less formal publication. Nevertheless the Newsletter aims to be a publication of record for observations made by members in the SDOS recording area and a number of articles in this first edition document sightings of birds in our gardens (Val Bentley), collate local records (Stephen Simpson)) and document the activity of the local ringing groups (Phil Clay and John Crix).

The first article by our Chairman (Brienne Reeve) reminds us all of the exceptional weather of last winter and its effects upon habitats and our wildlife. The UK Meteorological Office has published a short account of the winter's weather which was characterised by a relentless sequence of depressions moving into the British Isles on an unusual southerly track. The individual storms in themselves were not particularly unusual but Brienne's article captures their severe cumulative effect.

In a time when we often read of declining bird populations and range retraction it is good to hear some better news. Ravens have rapidly and successfully recolonized Sussex in the last decade and Chris Wright's article charts this advance and documents the trials and tribulations of our local pair. Little Egrets too have advanced across England and Wales over the last twenty years and Brienne Reeve reports upon the establishment of a breeding colony at Coombes in the Adur valley.

Saline lagoons behind permeable shingle beaches are an unusual habitat and we are fortunate to have this ecosystem represented locally at Widewater lagoon. The relatively urban location does, however, provide conservation challenges and Tim Holter reminds us of these and how he is representing our interests on the management committee. Finally gulls are a conspicuous feature of our local birding scene and Russ Tofts tells us how to get more from gull watching by reading rings and using the email and the web to find out more about gull movements and their ringing history.

This last article by Russ also brings home for me the new possibilities for birding brought about by blogs reporting bird news in real time, the instant availability of a multiplicity of electronic information sources, and the use of digital photographic to capture a vibrant and contemporary record of our observations. The newsletter aims to build upon these sources to produce an entertaining and current account of our local birding and nature scene.

It is envisaged that the emphasis of the newsletter will be on local and county birding set in the broader context of our local natural environment. This newsletter is, however, a work in progress, and I hope to hear from you about what you are interested in. Your contributions will be very welcome but I am also seeking your ideas to help chart the way forward. The copy date for next edition is late August 2014. I hope you enjoy this first edition.

Roger Smith (rogerfs@hotmail.co.uk)

Newsletter Editor

The wettest winter on record

‘We have had the wettest winter on record.’ How many times have we heard that in recent months!

Keeping records can be a daunting and demanding activity but each year I buy a page-a-day diary and write up anything of interest. Our memories are surprisingly unreliable and these notes can be very useful. My natural history records are easily identified by the colour of pen I use: red for birds, green for flora and blue for butterflies and all insects. I do refer to these diaries, not only to check personal details, but the weather and the phenology (dates of seasonal happenings, flowers opening, migrants arriving).

Since Christmas 2013 we have watched the rain fill dykes, overflow into surrounding fields and even the main roads have not been able to cope with the vast amount of water. My records show we had just over seven inches of rain in January and by the end of February another six plus inches, whereas in

March rainfall was less than an inch! (The comparison with 2013 when we had deep snow in March is astonishing).

The Adur has had some of the highest tides and with the strong winds too we have seen water driven into areas which are flood plains but also where there has never been flooding in living memory. Now we have to think of the knock-on effect of this amount of rain.



Even seabirds and ducks cannot cope with some of these conditions. The sea has been whipped up to such a fury many seabirds have been found on the Sussex coast either dead or starving not having been able to find food. The dabbling ducks like Mallard, Teal and Wigeon moved on to the flooded fields but they did not need the water to be too deep. Think about the Kingfisher, it simply cannot fish if it cannot see its prey, and wherever we looked the water was distinctly muddy.

We have had an amazing display of Snowdrops, Aconites and Crocuses but I have not seen the Bumble bees I would have expected at this time seeking out nectar. Consider the number of creatures which either live or hibernate in or under the ground. Bumble bees, moles, voles, mice, rabbits and even the humble, but so important, worm. Each has its part to play in the natural cycle of life even if it is as food for something else. In these extraordinary conditions many must have drowned in their underground homes.

Butterflies have varied life cycles, some over-winter as an egg low to the ground, some as a caterpillar, many as chrysalids or pupae and some as adults. The first three mentioned are most vulnerable in very wet weather and we shall not know until the summer what the survival rate has been. The

latter stage also has its drawbacks. As we have had quite mild temperatures Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks have been tempted out of hibernation, especially on a sunny day. Our old house is a favourite place for them to find refuge and to date I have released over fifty of these beautiful insects, with a dozen or more Peacocks, as they fight to get outside. I cannot say if they find the right kind of flower for sustenance or a place to shelter when the sun is not there to keep their bodies working but recently I have seen them in the garden so I know some have survived. There has been enough warmth to tempt Brimstones (both males and a female), on to a Hyacinth in full bloom, showing their exquisite shape to perfection.

The delicate and well-named Little Gull was seen regularly over Brooklands and Widewater in February and March. There were queues of birdwatchers trying to get the best photograph of this delightful gull as there were three on a long visit to Brooklands. Its winter plumage does not have a full black head as seen in summer but it is dark grey on the under-wings with white tips to the feathers. There were two adults and a first winter bird which had the distinctive 'W' marking across the upper wings. They were a most welcome sight.

Now it is time to check the migrants which have come along the coast, exhausted after their long journeys from the south: Wheatears, Swallows and small warblers, desperate to make landfall and find food. Spring is well on its way and all the excitements it will bring to birdwatchers!

Brianne Reeve

Winter Storms and Ferring Beach

The winter storms have dramatically altered the appearance of our beach. The massive waves have emphasised the east-west drift of shingle, pushing it up into steep piles on the top of the beach and completely submerging the breakwaters in places. On the night of the 4th of January, a particularly high spring tide, accompanied by a storm, sent a mass of water, seaweeds and

pebbles onto the seating area of the Bluebird cafe, but, luckily, no water came into the building. Tons of sand have also been washed out to sea leaving an expanse of chalk and flint pebbles where the sandy beach should be. Old sea defences have also been exposed with their upright timbers looking like the backbones of ancient dinosaurs.

The storms gave us an unexpected glimpse of life further out to sea. Hundreds of Common Starfish littered the beach. These had been flung upsidedown to reveal their tube feet. A splendid blue lobster was found and several Green Sea Urchins together with Spider, Edible and Common Shore crabs. When visiting the Black Rocks at West Kingston, we have often found the beautiful Dahlia Anemone. Sadly some of these were now dead on the beach with their tentacles withdrawn. Along with the familiar black egg cases of the Common Skate and the fawn egg cases ('mermaid's purse') of small sharks like the Dogfish, were hundreds of wind-blown, cream-coloured Common Whelk egg capsules. Our dog loves to eat these!

During these stormy times more specimens appeared: jelly-like Sea Squirts which shoot out jets of water when squeezed; a yellowy-orange sea slug called a Sea Lemon; a sponge called Mermaid's Fingers and the more familiar Hornwrack which looks like dried buff-coloured seaweed but is really a colonial animal. Most interesting of all were several chitons or 'Coat-of-Mail' shells, a primitive mollusc whose shell is made up of 8 overlapping plates. It represents an interesting link between segmented worms and molluscs.

The most recent find was a tree trunk covered in Goose Barnacles. These curious crustacea start life like little shrimps, then settle down on a piece of driftwood, a pile of a pier or even the underside of a boat, grow white, shiny, shell-like plates and attach themselves by a long dark stalk. They are filter-feeders. Their name came about because they bear a superficial resemblance to Barnacle Geese and, a long time ago, people did not understand that geese migrated but thought they spent part of their lives in the sea as the diminutive barnacle!

Another aspect of the storms has been the unwelcome arrival of a mass of fishing gear: ropes, gill nets, plastic weights filled with concrete, and improvised, blue, plastic lobster pots made out of oil cans. The Conservation Group have removed much of this. There have also been reports of palm oil which can only have come from boats. This substance coagulates in sea water, forming white or yellow lumps. It is poisonous to dogs. A more welcome arrival has been sea coal, formed into smooth ovals by the sea and foraged for by several people who say it burns very well and with little ash. Finally, the violent scouring of the beach exposed part of a plane which came down in 1955. It could be seen at low tide just on the Kingston Gorse side of the cafe.

Tricia Hall

The Return of the Raven

The eastward spread of the Raven must surely be the most significant avian event so far in this century in our part of the world. When we consider that there was no proven breeding in Sussex between two wild Ravens in the whole of the twentieth century, and in most years no more than a handful of sightings were recorded, the turn-around has been remarkable.



The fact that this has been achieved through natural expansion of range is even more satisfying although whether it could have happened without the more liberal attitudes of the game-keeping fraternity is open to question.

The first confirmed breeding was at Beachy Head in 2001 although nest-building was observed at several other locations throughout the county. In 2002 the first successful pair in West Sussex was reported in the SDOS area. The trials and tribulations of this pair have been documented elsewhere,

but suffice to say, that productivity was affected by poor choice of nest site in the early years making the nest vulnerable to predation. In 2003 five young were standing in the nest at the end of April but unfortunately were used as target practice by some local youths with an air rifle and three young were shot dead.

However since 2006 the birds have used the same nest which is in an ideal location with an overhang favoured by this species and out of sight of other birds breeding in the vicinity. So although the Ravens had been on site throughout, it actually took them five years to find a safe nesting place.

Despite regular observation, starting in early February, the birds are virtually never seen carrying the sticks they use as nesting material. It is a large, elongated conical shape, looking as though it is hanging from the cliff edge. Sometimes decisive repairs are made to the previous year's nest but on one occasion when the young had been particularly clumsy with wing-flapping and exercise almost the whole nest had to be replaced in the following season and was completed in three days. It does need to be a substantial construction for these birds which, when fully grown, have a wing-span of 115-130 cms. (roughly 45-51 ins), slightly larger than a Common Buzzard.

Egg-laying is usually completed by the end of February and the young fledge in early May. From this time five or six birds can be seen together in the air but careful observation makes it possible to distinguish the adults which will show signs of moult whereas the young will have a fine glossy plumage. Thirty-nine young have fledged since 2002 in twelve years with never less than two and a maximum of six in 2006, the first year at the new nest site which is still being used regularly.

The Raven is always an exciting bird to watch and it is probably no exaggeration to say that the county population now stands at about fifty pairs.

Chris Wright

Egrets, Herons and Rooks at Coombes.

April 17th 2011 was the day I found Little Egrets had started a colony in trees over the Coombes road. There had been a large Rookery in that area for many years and it was surprising that such a graceful and quiet bird as a Little Egret should suddenly choose to take up residence within the incredible cacophony of a Rookery. The first Little Egret nest was immediately above the centre of this narrow road. It was exciting, as I drove under it, to look up and see an elegant pair of birds standing on or by the nest sixty feet above me. Then I discovered that there were also Grey Herons nesting in close proximity to the Little Egrets. It seemed, that although there was so much activity, the three species of birds were living together without any signs of aggression towards each other.



The Rookery comprised of about fifty nests with their breeding cycle well ahead of the Grey Herons and Little Egrets. As the trees began to be covered in new spring growth it became very difficult to make an accurate assessment of the number of nests. Many SDOS members came and peered through telescopes watching both Grey Herons and Little Egrets

at all stages from very young birds, through to 'teenagers'. They appeared to have specific routes as they moved about in the tree canopy, the Grey Herons much more secretive than the Little Egrets. There was a great deal of

bill-clapping and a delightful 'glob-lobbing' greeting when adults returned to the nest site and it was quite obvious that the young only responded to their own parents.

By early August there were sixteen young Little Egrets seen regularly in the field below the colony. The Grey Herons produced at least seven young but they dispersed and left the nest site much earlier than the Little Egrets.

In 2012 and 2013 the numbers from both species were much the same as the first year. During the early part of 2014 the violent winds and endless rain destroyed all but one of the nests in the Rookery and there was no sign at all of any of the Grey Heron and Little Egret nests, they had been unable to withstand such a fearsome natural force.

By the end of February a pair of Rooks had commandeered the one surviving nest and very soon more nests were being constructed during the early morning; five on March 2nd, thirteen by the 4th and thirty-two attended nests by the 18th and eventually over fifty by the end of the month.

Meanwhile in the field below the Rookery I was recording small groups of Little Egrets and one or two Grey Herons. Then on March 31st I was in Anchor Bottom, (well over a mile away as the Crow flies) looking towards the colony and I suddenly saw a Little Egret fly purposefully into the trees in the Coombes road. Since then I have walked along the riverbank and seen sixteen Little Egrets and two pairs of Grey Herons. Perhaps the Rooks are a very good cover for the other two species because the continuous noise and raucous activity they emit covers the more gentle behaviour, the bill-clapping and glob-lobbing of their larger neighbours.

It is quite astonishing that such large birds are able to disappear into the foliage, at the moment I am not sure about the number of nests but there is no doubt this colony is definitely up and running!

Brianne Reeve

Widewater Saline Lagoon Local Nature Reserve

With the production of my first SDOS Newsletter report on Widewater it is only right that I should acknowledge the late Stanley Allen's championing of the conservation cause at this Local Nature Reserve. He was a retired solicitor and after performing a management role with Sussex Cricket Club he became at various times SDOS Treasurer, Chairman and President. Widewater was a habitat close to his heart as he had fond memories of childhood visits and the use of a beach hut close by.

It is now one year since I met Stanley and inherited a very thick file of papers he had accumulated over many years as he sought to preserve the habitat at the lagoon, just one of many environmental causes in which he took an active role.

Stanley had represented the ornithological cause upon various 'lagoon' committees over the years. This representation lapsed a few years ago with Stanley's advancing age and disagreements between committee members that seemed to make his objectives a lost cause.

So, quite an act to follow!

Lancing Parish Council has ownership of the Widewater reserve and therefore financial responsibility but West Sussex County Council have an ecological responsibility due to the status of the reserve: a Local Nature Reserve and Site of National Conservation Interest.

Much to Stanley's recent satisfaction the County Council appeared to have taken a re-invigorated interest in their ecological responsibility and this resulted in a request for SDOS to provide an ornithological representative on the management committee, hence my inheritance of the archives.

In 2013 the County Council organised and funded a very necessary periodic marine survey. This was conducted by Sussex University and can be viewed on the SDOS User Group. This will inform a new management plan to be

drawn up shortly. Conservation of marine life takes priority due to the nature of the site but I shall do my utmost to follow in Stanley's footsteps by ensure birding aspects are taken into account.

As birders I see our conservation wish list including:

- Consideration to be given to varying water levels to make the lagoon more appealing to waders on migration in the manner experienced a decade or so ago. This was Stanley's main objective but has been thwarted by the strengthened sea defences and the sea water mitigation pipe. This is perhaps a lost cause.
- Signage to be improved to enhance public awareness of the Nature Reserve status in order to reduce interference on this sensitive site, most particularly canine! Once upon a time Ringed Plovers nested. Recently a Swan was bloodily injured by a dog! Jim Steedman's ears are still ringing from a rude response when challenging the irresponsible attitude of a bird chasing out of control dog's owner on 23rd April!
- Erection of stock fencing as a barrier to entry to the sensitive areas. This proposal received unanimous management committee support in February but, in these stringent times, likely to run against a financial barrier regarding priorities if council tax payers are expected to foot the bill!

Autumn and Winter 2013/2014 highlights from my records were:

- Little Grebes started to return to the lagoon towards the end of September and peaked at 28 during January. By April they have departed to nesting sites elsewhere.
- Teal, another winter visitor peaking at 30 during December.
- Mergansers are seawater based 'sawbills' usually wintering off shore. They are regular winter lagoon visitors, arrived in December and maintained a lagoon presence until March peaking at seven.

- The Goosander is generally a freshwater 'sawbill'. One redhead (female) Goosander during November sparked much birding interest. In February four were present during the last week. Perhaps salinity was lower due to heavy rainfall this winter?
- Mute Swans: Two adults were accompanied by their six cygnets which they encouraged to depart towards winter's end. The adults are nesting again. This year's nest is out of public sight below the eastern car park lagoon bank.
- A pair of Magpies currently have an easily observed nest (if you can find its location!) in the tamarisk bushes near Tamarisk Island.
- Glaucous Gull: A gull from the Arctic whose UK presence in small numbers along the coast is often associated with severe north westerly gales, as occurred this winter. A large strikingly white (whitish/creamy) gull distinctively standing out from the crowd. Our local specimen, which I believe was one of the earliest seen, took up winter residence around the port at Shoreham after being initially spotted by birders at Widewater.

'World of Widewater' are the lagoon's 'friends group'. They organise working parties and man the information booth. They plan to replace this with a new education and visitor centre and the SDOS will be invited to supply display material. They produce a regular newsletter to members and lagoon neighbours and I am maintaining a monthly summary of bird sightings for them to publish. Hopefully this will raise the profile of ornithological conservation and responsibility around the lagoon and help to counter the canine problem, dumping of waste and the lighting bonfires on reserve ground. I am grateful to members posting their sightings on the SDOS or SOS forums which I examine to glean daily survey content in addition to my own occasional surveys. The more reports the merrier please! Please record whether birds reported were around the lagoon, on the beach or offshore. Thank you.

Tim Holter

Winter 2014: Some local highlights

January 2014

Red-breasted Mergansers were at Widewater, including six on the 1st and ten on the 19th. Little Grebes were also at Widewater, 12 on the 1st and 27 on the 19th. One Little Gull was seen flying W from there on the 3rd with one at Brighton Marina on the same day. At Goring Gap on the 4th the gull and wader roost produced 200-300 Dunlin, around 40 Great Black-backed Gulls and four Mediterranean Gulls. A Grey Phalarope was seen by many at Hove Lagoon from 5th to 14th. A 1st winter Glaucous Gull was seen at Widewater on the 7th before being seen regularly around Shoreham Harbour to the 17th with a possible sighting of the same bird at Brighton Marina on the 19th. An adult Glaucous Gull flew west at Shoreham Harbour on the 17th.

Purple Sandpipers were at Shoreham Harbour including seven on the 17th and six on the 19th. A pair of Black Redstarts was on Southwick beach on the 10th and one was seen just west of Brighton Marina on the 19th. On the 12th, from Worthing beach there were 25 Red-throated Divers, twenty Kittiwakes and two Eider. Two Firecrests were at Woods Mill on the 19th.

On the 19th at Beeding Brooks there were 600 Wigeon, 400 Teal and 93 Shoveler, with five Ruff and 1000 Lapwing there on the 26th and 40 Pintail on the 29th.

At Goring Gap there were 600 Common Gulls and 220 Black-headed Gulls on the 19th and two Velvet Scoter flew W at Widewater on the 21st.

February 2014



The long staying Glaucous Gull was seen throughout the month at Shoreham Harbour with probably the same bird being seen at Widewater on the 11th. A female Black Redstart was recorded on the 1st. A Puffin was seen at the harbour mouth on the 9th. There were six Purple Sandpipers on the 10th, five on 17th and 10 on 28th. Six Kittiwakes were present at the eastern end of the harbour basin on 15th and a Slavonian Grebe was on

Southwick Canal on 22nd and 23rd.

At Widewater there were between two and six Red-breasted Mergansers on various dates from 10th to 28th (peak of six on the 16th). There was a Goosander on the 10th, two on the 12th and four on 17th and 19th and three on the 23rd. A Guillemot was on the sea on the 13th. A Mediterranean Gull was recorded on 19th and a Little Gull flew west on the 19th. There were 23 Little Grebes on 15th and 18 on the 28th.

There were exceptional counts of waders on the field at Goring Gap in the middle of the month. On the 12th, around 335 Sanderling, 270 Turnstone, 120 Grey Plover, 100 Ringed Plover and at least 400 Dunlin and on the 13th, around 250 Sanderling, similar counts of Dunlin and Turnstone and 98 Grey Plover. On the 16th there were approximately 800 Common Gull and 200 Black-headed Gull.

Also present were a Redshank on the 12th, an immature Iceland Gull on 17th, and a Little Gull on 19th, three Red-breasted Mergansers offshore on 19th and 22 Mediterranean Gulls on 24th.

A Little Gull was at Brooklands on 19th and two birds were there on 21st and 27th. On 28th there were three, two adults and one 1st winter bird. A 1st winter Iceland Gull flew west on the 27th.

At Beeding Brooks a family of Bewick's Swans (two adults, two juveniles) were present on 9th. One Short-eared Owl was recorded on 10th.and two on 16th. Two White-fronted Geese were there on 15th and 16th. On 17th, counts of 400 Pintail, 300 Wigeon, 100 Teal, 40 Shoveler, 220 Lapwing, 200 Fieldfare and one Ruff were recorded. There were 20 Gadwall on 18th, one Swallow on 22nd, two Black-tailed Godwits on 23rd and seven Ruff on 23rd.

Elsewhere Blackcaps were recorded at four sites, one at Steyning on 2nd, a male in West Worthing on 21st, a female regularly in Shoreham including 21st and two males in Goring on 28th. Thirty Corn Bunting and ten Yellowhammer were on downland above Upper Beeding on 19th. Between one and five Little Gulls were present at Wyckham Farm from 13th to the end of the month. 60 Skylarks were in stubble there on 2nd.

A Siberian Chiffchaff was in the area of Steyning sewage works throughout the month with two there on 18th and 28th. Other Chiffchaffs were at the same site, including ten on 28th.

March 2014

Three Little Gulls were at Brooklands to the 5th and one was at Wyckham Farm on 1st and two were there on 3rd. The Siberian chiffchaff at Steyning was recorded up to the 6th with two there on the 5th. There were six Purple Sandpipers at Shoreham Harbour on 3rd and seven on 20th. There were three Red-breasted Mergansers at Widewater from 1st to 3rd and four on 4th. A Glaucous gull was present at Shoreham Harbour from 3rd to 11th and on 27th, and one was at Goring Gap on 7th and Ferring beach the next day. A Glaucous Gull was also recorded on East Worthing beach on 24th.



Wheatears were at Ferring beach on 13th, just north of Cissbury on 15th, Lancing on 17th, Brooklands on 17th, Ferring on 18th (two males) and Shoreham Harbour on 18th. There were three at Shoreham Fort on 19th, a male was on Southwick beach on 20th and a female was at Shoreham Fort on 27th. On the 28th there was a pair at Widewater beach, one at Worthing beach and two at Ferring Rife.

From Worthing beach on the 2nd there was a Whimbrel, a Manx Shearwater and ten Red-throated Divers. On the 8th there were 18 Teal, 15 Shoveler and 4 Black-tailed Godwits (a scarce species on seawatches). On the 28th five Sandwich Terns were seen from Worthing and six from Brighton Marina. Brent Geese were seen in large numbers on 28th from Brighton Marina (400) and from Worthing on 30th (360) and 31st (309). 165 Common Scoter were seen from Brighton Marina on 28th and from Worthing 325 on 30th and 360 on 31st. Other sightings from Worthing included six Avocets on 28th, two Bar-tailed Godwits on 28th, an Arctic Skua on 30th, a drake Garganey on 30th and Common Tern on 31st. On the 29th a Barnacle Goose was seen by several observers moving east along the coast of the SDOS area with Brent Geese.

Stephen Simpson

These records were sourced mostly from the postings on the SDOS User Group and the Recent Sightings pages of the Sussex Ornithological Society web site and are therefore unchecked.

What was in the garden in 2013?



First Quarter 2013

Snow in the week of 20th January led to the only reports of winter thrushes arriving in gardens. Redwings were seen by Stanley Allen, Noranne Biddulph, Martin Ford, Sheila Marshall, and Gordon & Vera Tickler, and Fieldfares by most of these folk too, plus by Peter Whitcomb, Martin Wilson, Clive Hope, John & Jeannette Simpson and Cyril & Maureen Leeves, who watched 24 of them completely strip a yellow-berried pyracantha.

During January-March Lesser Redpolls were seen by Jim & Judith Steedman at Upper Beeding, up to a maximum of five at one time. Marion Taylor in Lancing saw a Firecrest, as did new participant David Potter from Goring who was able to get a superb photo of the bird sitting on the branch of a conifer. Siskins were seen in six different gardens, with maxima of six in

Worthing at John & Shena Maskell's and eight at Laurie Keen's in Hove. Reed Buntings visited five gardens, with up to four at John & Jeannette Simpson's in Shoreham and five in Rustington at Sheila Marshall's early in January. Sheila had her first ever visit from a Yellowhammer in mid-March, and two Bramblings were regular at Stanley Allen's from mid to late March. Other unusual visitors were a Kingfisher at John Cooper's Steyning garden in February and two 2 Water Rails at Martin Ford's in Ferring in March. Brianne Reeve had never seen a Nuthatch in her Coombes garden until one arrived in late October 2012 and stayed through until March 2013. She also recorded Treecreeper on several occasions during this quarter.

Unusual behaviour noted was a Blackbird seen on a fat ball feeder by Reg Bradbury on Broadway Park, Lancing, and Goldcrests using feeders in David Potter's Goring garden.

Second Quarter 2013

A Brambling was seen and photographed by David Potter at Goring, his second record of this species in 25 years, and another continued to visit Stanley Allen on Mill Hill, Shoreham for the first couple of weeks of April; in fact he saw as many of these as he did House Sparrows! Two Reed Buntings regularly visited Sheila Marshall until the start of May, and Siskins lingered in Worthing at John & Shena Maskell's – they also reported a Rose-ringed Parakeet in May. Reed Buntings were also seen by John & Jeannette Simpson in Shoreham and by Reg Bradbury who reported them into the beginning of June, with a pair on a feeder on 27th May.

Summer visitors passing through included two Willow Warblers at Audrey Wisdom's in Shoreham, and another at Laurie Keen's in Hove, though he commented that spring migration seemed poor this year. A Redstart and a Whitethroat were in Noranne Biddulph's garden in Hove in April, another Whitethroat was seen by Cyril & Maureen Leeves, and a Spotted Flycatcher was at Martin Wilson's in Withdean in late May. On 14th April John Cooper could hear a Nightingale singing from a mill pond adjacent to his house in

Steyning – it was still singing on 6th May, while on 26th June a female Mallard with nine ducklings invaded his conservatory!

Just four gardens reported Stock Doves, and only at Marion Taylor's near Lancing Manor were they seen regularly. Audrey Wisdom had good numbers of House Sparrows, particularly during the first half of April, and Starlings were in abundance at Gordon & Vera Tickler's with at least 20 counted each week in June.

Third Quarter 2013

During the 3rd quarter of the year, Audrey Wisdom noticed an increase in starlings from 11 in the first week to 25 in the fourth as they brought their young to empty seed balls as fast as she put them out, but by the end of August and through September, she saw none at all! At Mill Hill, Stanley Allen also reported a dramatic loss of all birds from mid-August to the end of September, the worst in 40 years of garden watching there and Laurie Keen's worst weeks' GBW ever were the two middle weeks of September. Clive Hope in Ferring wrote "no birds" against the weeks of 25 August and 8 September!

John Ford's garden in Steyning was also very quiet, apart from an invasion of small birds at 10.05 on 9th September, which included Blue, Great & Coal Tits, Nuthatch and Goldfinches – all gone again by 10.30. However, David Potter seemed to have reasonable numbers in his garden in Goring, including a maximum of 25 Goldfinches in mid-September, while all the Starlings must have gravitated to Gordon & Vera Tickler's garden in Shoreham, where there were more than 20 each week through August and 30 in the first week of September. Cyril & Maureen Leeves were visited for two days in August by a migrant Common Redstart and in September Maureen found a Sedge Warbler in their garage, which obligingly landed in a bucket so she was able to carry it out and send it on its way!

Fourth Quarter 2013

A Grey Wagtail put in a brief appearance for Noranne Biddulph in Hove – for one day only, on 30th September; in the same week Peter Whitcomb in Brighton recorded 3 Chiffchaffs at once. At the end of September, other migrants were a late Willow Warbler at Jean Carder's Shoreham garden, and two of my favourite birds, Spotted Flycatchers, seen by Laurie Keen. Redstarts were reported by Martin Ford at the end of September and by David Potter in mid-October. In November Martin Ford again recorded Water Rail in Ferring. Starlings turned up in good numbers yet again in Gordon & Vera Tickler's garden, 16 in mid-November, Sheila Marshall had a maximum of 25 at the beginning of that month, but the most seen was 40 in the week of 13 October by David Potter. Audrey Wisdom's House Sparrow maximum was 20 at the end of October.

Reed Buntings were seen by Clive Hope and Sheila Marshall, while December Blackcaps were recorded by David Potter, Stephen Simpson, John & Shena Maskell, Rae Titcomb and Martin Wilson.

Val Bentley

Reading rings on gulls

Birders scanning the Goring gull roost or other local sites may possibly have noticed some gulls carrying rings. Those wearing metal rings, possibly originating from BTO ringers, are of little interest to 'normal' birders as they are, for the most part, unreadable even with a telescope or digiscoping equipment. In many years I've only ever been able to read two such rings. The advent of colour rings, however has changed all that.

Over a few days at Goring, Dave Sneller and myself recorded three colour ringed Herring Gulls and four Mediterranean Gulls. Such rings are usually (reasonably) easy to read, come in a variety of colours and normally contain three or four alphanumeric characters in black or white. The colour ring will

normally be below the 'knee' on the opposite leg to the metal ring which again, typically, will be below the 'knee' although sometimes above. Richard Fairbanks finds colour ringed 'large gulls' in and around the Adur so it will be worth keeping an eye open there too.

Some groups may choose to colour ring the right leg in adults or the left in pulli or vice-versa. Depending on the orientation of the bird it can sometimes be difficult to determine some characters on the ring. For example a bird that I saw recently showing what I thought was a number '1' eventually moved and it turned into letter 'T'.

To find out about a bird's history use the website www.cr-birding.org. You will be asked for some basic details of the ring and species and then the site will give you an email contact. My experience is very positive to date. Details of three of the Mediterranean Gulls at Goring were sent off late afternoon and full histories were back by 07:30 the next day. For a Black-headed Gull at Arundel a response came back in four hours!

The return details come in a variety of forms. Many will be a full history via an email, others may be in the form of a spreadsheet listing 'your' bird and others from the same catch. Two groups ringing Black-headed Gulls responded to me last year with substantial pdf files detailing their projects to date plus histories for individual birds. For the three Herring Gulls at Goring mentioned earlier links were supplied to the North Thames Gull Groups website with full history and google map -

enter these links into your browser to view this history:
<http://www.ntgg.org.uk/map/GR75873> :<http://www.ntgg.org.uk/map/GR58193>:
<http://www.ntgg.org.uk/map/GC85696>

Also bear in mind that within the SDOS area and surrounding coastal habitat you may also encounter colour-ringed waders as demonstrated by Ron Bewley's recent SDOS post regarding a Sanderling. In these cases the rings will occur in multiples on both legs but with no letters or numbers. The

combination of ring colours and position on leg will identify the bird and provide an email contact again using the above website. One of the most frequently encountered species with this type of ring sequence is Black-tailed Godwit. I appreciate that this is not a common species within the SDOS recording area but members may come across ringed birds in the Hampshire and Sussex harbour systems or in the Arun valley.

I encourage you to enter your sightings. The colour ringing teams rely on birders like us to record and reports these birds.

Russ Tofts

Winter ringing at The Mumbles

Feeding of birds at The Mumbles / Strivens Reed Bed during the winter started as long ago as 1971, although at that time the only fare on offer was peanuts and a wad of beef suet. How times have changed, with the array of seed feeds and feeders on offer these days.

The winter ringing then comprised a couple of nets by the feeders in the Grey Alder wood that surrounds the reed bed, sometimes with a few other nets scattered around. Table 1 shows a session from 1978. However, this may have been a slightly un-typical session for that time; a typical session would not include this variety of species, mostly just Blue and Great Tits!

The Corn Bunting was caught in some nets we set occasionally in the reeds for birds coming into the roost of up to 600 birds that was there at the time; all long since gone.

Since the demise of ringing in “Strivens Reed Bed” in 1979, it was into the 90’s before any feeders were placed in the new ringing site, “The Mumbles”, situated along side and to the east of the former site, astride the old Steyning Railway.

It was at this time that the first Reed Buntings appeared in the nets, although not specifically targeted and the mists of time have taken their toll, only the ringing records on the computer remind me of what was happening, with some appearing in the records in 1994.

Species	New	Re-trap	Total
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	0	2
Wren	1	0	1
Dunnock	1	0	1
Robin	1	0	1
Blackbird	2	0	2
Long Tailed Tit	1	0	1
Blue Tit	62	6	68
Great tit	20	4	24
Starling	2	0	2
Lesser Redpoll	1	0	1
Corn Bunting	1	0	1
	94	10	104

Table 1: Ringing session totals for 4th February 1978

However it was the year 2000 before any of the species were “officially” recorded on the computer data as being caught at the feeders, as denoted by an “A”, in the appropriate place in the computer records. That year 22 Reed Buntings were ringed.

Since then feeders have been set in various places during the winter, and have now settled into a regular pattern with feeders being set up from the end of October to March/April. Nyger seed is provided in one or two locations, Black sunflower seed in another, and “ordinary (Canary) seed” (minus the black sunflower) in the reed bed and in some willows nearby.

Numbers of birds attending build up through the late autumn and peak in December and January, but this is mainly due to the number of Blue and Great Tits attending, Other species’ numbers peak at other times for

Chaffinch, April appears to be the peak month, but the Reed Buntings continue in to April, especially last year with the cold spring. This year has seen a build-up of Greenfinches into April.

Table 2 below shows the numbers of birds of the six commonest species found at the feeders for the first 4 months of the year and for the last 4 years. The columns relate to new (N) birds ringed; (R), the birds retrapped that were already ringed, and (T) the combined total.

Recoveries and controls of birds visiting The Mumbles feeding station

Chaffinch: surprisingly only 1 record

Age code 5 (1st Year) male ringed 12/03/2011 controlled, 18/04/2014 Kuopio, Finland 2193km NE 37 days duration.

From wing measurements it appears that there are a number of “continental Chaffinches each winter.

Greenfinch: 9 records

Stepping: 7 records: 5 “dead bird found” (most likely trichomoniasis), 1 hit glass.

Partridge Green: 1 record DBF

Arundel: 1 record DBF

Henfield 1 record cat

Rather sad that disease is providing most of the records.

Goldfinch: 15 records

Wales: 1 record; 5 Male ringed 26/01/2013; controlled Bardsey Island 22/04/2013, 372km NW 86 days

Stepping: 10 records

Hardham; 4 records: 3 birds controlled at Hardham. 1 bird ringed at Hardham, controlled Mumbles

SPECIES	YEAR	JANUARY			FEBRUARY			MARCH			APRIL		
		N	R	T	N	R	T	N	R	T	N	R	T
CHAFFINCH	2011	3	2	5	19	3	22	30	4	34	2	0	2
	2012	3	0	3	19	1	20	26	13	39	9	7	16
	2013	6	1	7	2	3	5	9	3	12	9	3	12
	2014	12	3	15	11	2	13	5	7	12	4	3	7
GREENFINCH	2011	3	0	3	18	0	18	19	1	20	5	1	6
	2012	4	0	4	9	1	10	9	1	10	1	1	2
	2013	9	0	9	4	1	5	4	1	5	8	4	12
	2014	6	0	6	12	1	13	10	0	10	24	8	32
GOLDFINCH	2011	47	14	61	42	26	68	32	26	58	6	3	9
	2012	19	4	23	22	13	35	21	8	29	2	0	2
	2013	38	8	46	13	8	21	8	5	13	6	0	6
	2014	22	8	30	22	5	27	12	4	16	0	1	1
REED BUNTING	2011	22	14	42	27	20	47	20	18	38	2	8	10
	2012	13	4	17	46	25	72	31	54	85	3	17	20
	2013	9	15	24	12	7	19	7	7	14	22	24	46
	2014	18	2	20	19	11	30	25	34	59	3	8	11
BLUE TIT	2011	27	11	38	59	27	86	19	21	40	5	9	14
	2012	20	17	37	11	7	18	9	40	49	2	8	10
	2013	62	53	115	30	12	42	16	24	40	5	17	22
	2014	42	35	77	30	12	42	7	14	21	1	1	2
GREAT TIT	2011	13	5	18	13	16	29	9	18	27	3	16	19
	2012	10	4	14	2	6	8	6	38	44	3	13	16
	2013	7	13	20	5	3	8	2	7	9	2	14	16
	2014	7	9	16	7	10	17	6	12	18	0	5	5

Table 2: Numbers of birds of the six commonest species occurring at the feeders

Great tit: 9 local recoveries / controls

None involved a bird visiting the feeding station.

Blue tit: 35 recoveries / controls

These seem to gad about a bit more than their larger cousins.

Surrey, (Tandridge): 1 bird 22/11/11 found at The Mumbles 03/11/2012 and 15/12/12

Surrey. (Gomshall): 1 bird ringed Gomshall, 27/08/09, found Mumbles 17/10/11(not at feeders)

Plumpton: 1 record; 1 bird ringed 16/04/11 found Mumbles 19/11/11

Warnham: 1 record: 1 bird ringed Mumbles 27/12/2009, found 27/02/2011

Shoreham: 2 records; 1 ringed Shoreham 07/08/02; found Mumbles 08/03/03; 1 ringed Shoreham 01/08/02: found Mumbles 22/02/03

Also; Bramber: 2, Steyning: 2

Other records outside winter season include Steyning, 6; Henfield 3; Upper Beeding 1; Storrington 1 (from), Horsted Keynes 1 ; Cowfold 1 , Beachy head 1

Reed Bunting:

The most interesting report of a Mumbles ringed bird was from France; A Reed Bunting ringed at the Mumbles on the 13/4/2009 was controlled 05/08/2009 at La Mare Vauville, in Manche a distance of 176km south. There appears to be one way traffic between the ringing site at Icklesham, East Sussex and The Mumbles, with no less than 8 birds having been ringed there and controlled at The Mumbles, but with none travelling east. The first movement as of a bird ringed there 16/11/2002 and found at The Mumbles on the 11/01/2003. A Mumbles bird ringed 16/11/2002 was found at Stoke Lake, near Guildford, Surrey on 11/01/2003.

In a similar area, a bird ringed at Send on the 11/12/ 2005 was controlled at the Mumbles on 02/03/2008. One Mumbles bird ringed 27/02/2011 was found at the Ladywells site, Shoreham on the 28/11/2011.

Other Species

The feeders do attract, of course, other species too, and perhaps the most interesting are Lesser Redpoll and Siskin. One of the Siskins ringed was found in Sligo, Ireland. Perhaps also that was where the Bardsey controlled Goldfinch was heading in that Bardsey is used as a stopover for birds on the way to Ireland.

Siskin

The Bardsey Siskin was ringed on the 28/02/2009 and found (hit window) on the 28/4/2010. Another ringed 21/02/2009 was found at Bin Forest Grampians 12/04/2009.

Lesser Redpoll

Continuing on the theme, A Lesser Redpoll ringed at Copeland Bird Observatory, Co Down, on 01/10/2012 was controlled at The Mumbles on the 16/02/2013. A further Lesser Redpoll ringed at The Mumbles was controlled at Kinver Edge, Staffordshire on the 16/03/1996.

Other species attracted to the feeding station include Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Robins and Dunnocks grub about under the feeders, as do Water Rails, and of course there are Sparrowhawks that are attracted to the birds at the feeders.

However we never quite know what might turn up, so the Little Bunting that appeared on the 19/11/2011 was quite the nicest surprise. It was re-trapped two further times, on the 26/11/2011 and 3/12/2011. It seemed fascinating to me that the home territory for this bird was the same area in which the Finnish recovered Chaffinch was found. Maybe it was caught up in the finch migration.

One would hope that the food provided helps sustain these birds on their journeys and also helps their winter survival.

Phil Clay



Yellow-browed Warbler in the hand at Cissbury Ring

Ringling at Ladywell in 2013

The Ladywell valley stream forms a border between Applesham and Lancing College farm land and throughout 2013 the Ladywell ringing team was again grateful for the interest and support of our landlords: Hugh Passmore of Applesham Farm and Jon Hutcheon, Lancing College Farm Manager.

2013 was the third year in which we, with the strong support of Lancing College's Headmaster, Jonathan Gillespie, and also Phillippa Faulkner, Head of Biology, continued to extend our activities to provide something of an educational programme for Lancing College students. We had one group of

Lower 6th-formers working with us on Wednesday afternoons during the Lent term and a new group during the Advent term. Our main objective here is to enable students to gain experience of handling wild creatures and obtain a CV-enhancing familiarity with the disciplines involved in field work of this nature. The reality of the British climate determined, however, that working at the ringing table was not always possible and indoor sessions were required on several Wednesday afternoons.

For the second year in succession Sue Davies and Mark Taylor of the College's Design & Technology department helped out with these indoor sessions by having our ringing students build nestboxes, later to be hung on trees in the valley. Features of these rather superior boxes include the waterproof hinge made of Hypalon (the synthetic rubber material from which inshore lifeboats are made) and a protective anti-predator entrance plate engraved by D&T laser cutter with the date and student's name. Thus each student will leave a small mark on the fabric of the College: a socially correct 21st Century version of carving one's initials under a desk lid.



In March we gave our annual Biology syllabus-linked lecture on Ringing and Conservation to the whole of the 4th Year and just after Easter we mounted, in the main College foyer, an exhibition which was initially planned as a vehicle to further publicise ringing in the valley. However, enthusiastic input from the College Archivist, Anne Drewery, who provided a wealth of material dating back to the 1890s, prompted us to re-focus the exhibition as a celebration of the fact that there has been an interest and practice of ornithological recording in the College for at least 130 years.

One by-product of our study of the archive material was that we were able to lay to rest the great toponymic debate of whether the valley in which we conduct our ringing is Ladywell or Ladywells. The century and more worth of documents we examined were consistent in their use of the singular - whereas the main evidence for the plural use is the name of a house further along Coombes Road (which may represent a dropping over time, or through ignorance, of the possessive apostrophe in any case).

Perhaps an even more valuable by-product of the exhibition was that we were able to extract about 1000 historical ornithological records from the documents provided by Anne. These records, now safely cached in the database of the Sussex Ornithological Society, highlight the passing from our landscape of the likes of Cirl Bunting, Turtle Doves and Red-backed Shrikes. And the continuity of recording is maintained into this century, not only through our Ladywell ringing data, but via the Birdtrack records we generate each session. We submitted more than 30 full species lists in 2013, with a total of 78 different species observed in Ladywell in 2013. A third of this year's lists included the Little Egret, for example - unheard of in 1890.

Alongside all this we also managed to run 37 ringing sessions. The table below indicates that our 2013 totals and averages were not dissimilar from those we experienced in 2010 (which I tend to regard as an average year for the site).

	No. of sessions	Total New birds	Total Retraps / Controls	Overall total	Average catch per session
2010	35	1202	689	1891	54.0
2011	40	1602	1116	2718	68.0
2012	32	711	739	1450	45.3
2013	37	1069	948	2017	54.5

Hidden in these high-level numbers, however, is the story that spring was very late in 2013 – for example due to very cold weather we managed no ringing sessions at all in March. Our ringing data - lower ratios of Blue Tits to Great Tits captured, for instance - indicate that Blue Tits, which do not typically try for a second brood, were hardest hit. This is reflected in our nest box statistics (Blue Tits being the most common occupants of our boxes in the valley).

	No. of boxes	Boxes occupied	Average no. fledglings per occupied box
2010	23	11	6.8
2011	23	18	5.6
2012	24	14	3.4
2013	29	14	3.0

The key indicator is the 3.0 average number of fledglings per occupied box - worse even than 2012, which was a bad year for birds in nearly all respects. We experienced the depressing reality of this in the field early in July when Sue Walsh and John Newnham did a final check of boxes previously full of happily squirming pullus life and found several now containing the decomposing bodies of Blue Tit chicks that hadn't made it.

On the up side the warm late-spring and summer meant that across the country many species of migrants had a good breeding season. On our local scale, for instance, one session in late August yielded a record 22 Willow Warblers. Thus, in terms of overall numbers, the failure of a local population was balanced out by an improvement (over 2012) in numbers of autumn migrants.

Finally, there are a few noteworthy items on the team personnel front. Certainly the saddest was the hugely eager - but ultimately failed - effort of

one friend/aspirant trainee (who I don't intend to name) to get to grips with the manual-dexterity aspects of ringing. It is to his great credit that he eventually recognised that he was not going to become adept at handling birds or even putting up mist nets and so opted to move on to other things.

Another individual, Nicki Hoare, showed that she has considerable aptitude - and definitely great enthusiasm - for all aspects of ringing. So much so that John Newnham took her on as a trainee in 2013. Unfortunately the demands of her college course were becoming increasingly fierce by the end of the year and she eventually had to put her ringing vocation on hold. We look forward to Nicki successfully completing her college career and rejoining us for the real work of continuing her ringing training.

I mention these cases to illustrate the thought that a career in ringing is not to be undertaken lightly!

Whereas by very positive contrast - and thus a good note on which to conclude this report - was that in October the British Trust for Ornithology confirmed Sue Walsh's promotion to a 'C' ringing permit. A key feature of the 'C' permit is that its holder is licensed to run a ringing site on her own - not a trivial responsibility in the case of a site such as Ladywell - so, perhaps not surprisingly, progression from Trainee to C permit status normally takes at least two years. But also perhaps not surprising to those who know Sue's energy and determination, is that she achieved this promotion in just 20 months.

John Crix

note: The SDOS Yahoo user group web site provides an archive of all Ladywell ringing session reports. For ease of searching all reports are titled 'Ladywell'.

A request for information from our Swift champion

These brilliant birds will have recently arrived in the Shoreham and Worthing area.

The earliest arrival dates are typically between the 7th and 13th April but many arrive in early May. Some birds of course will be moving through the county whilst others will be returning to an address near you. Swift nest sites can be affected by roof repairs to older buildings. Please make a note of houses where nesting is presumed and if possible let me know at swifts@sos.org.uk . If you find scaffolding has been put up at a building which birds have used in the past, please also let me know.

Conservation work is being carried out on the building at St. Botolph's Church, near Steyning, and we have been able to negotiate that Swift boxes be inserted into the building as we understand two pairs of birds were using this Church last year.

Audrey Wende

Forthcoming outings

We shall hope to see some Nightjars at Lavington Common on Wed. June 18th starting at 8 pm. It is quite a long way for some people to drive so if anyone is happy to offer a place in their car please tell Dorian. dorianmason@sky.com or 01903 414024

Bernie will be leading the outing to The Burgh on Sun. July 6th starting from North Stoke at 9 am. We could see anything from Quail to Harriers!

We always have a rewarding evening looking at waders at Pulborough RSPB which is on Wed. August 20th starting at 5.30 pm led by Dorian.

Three days later on Sat. August 23rd we shall be exploring Ferring Rife and the surrounding fields with Clive Hope starting from the Bluebird Cafe car park at 8 am.

Chris Wright will be leading the Adur Valley Walk on Wed. September 3rd starting at 9 am when we hope to see a few waders, farmland birds, the Egret colony and migrants on their way south.

Please would you note that the outing to the Cissbury area will now be Sun, September 21st starting at 8 am.

For further information please check your blue Programme card.

Brianne Reeve

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(Officers in post following the A.G.M. of 11th February 2014)

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Photographs

Firecrest: Dorian Mason

Little Gulls: Ron Bewley and Dorian Mason

Common Kingfisher: Dorian Mason

Common Raven: Dorian Mason

Little Egret: Wendy Ball

Glaucous Gull: Bernie Forbes

Red-breasted Mergansers: Wendy Ball

Winter Wren: Dorian Mason

Yellow-browed Warbler: Val Bentley

Lancing College nestbox: Sue Davies

Herring Gulls: Roger Smith

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Breaking news: Russ Tofts from Pulborough

On May 7th 2014 I saw a peregrine falcon with white characters (50) on a black ring on the right leg and a BTO ring on the left leg. Return comments from the ringer, Phil Everitt are as follows: 'Black 50 is one of the Amberley birds that I ringed on Ray Mears', 'Wild Britain' TV programme. One of our key research interests is philopatry; whether the birds return to their natal area and we now have a number back near their birth place after a period of wandering, so it will be brilliant if it is 50. Black 50's mother is 03 - she's 12 years old now having been born on Chichester Cathedral in 2002. Black 50 was the only male in a clutch of three young and weighed 700g.'



