

Shoreham and District  
Ornithological Society  
Autumn Newsletter  
2019



# CONTENTS

Editorial	3
Birds One Should Know	4
RSPB Adur Estuary Nature Reserve	10
March to August 2019 Sightings	12
Swallows at Coombes 2019	19
SDOS Garden Birds 2018	23
Obituary John Reaney	31
Obituary Jim Steedman	34
A tribute to passed members	36
Volunteer Field Officer	38
Test your ID skills	39
Photograph Acknowledgements	41
Society Officers and the User Group	43

## Editorial

As I write it is towards 5pm in mid-September here in Pulborough and looking out of the window for a bit of inspiration I can see three, I guess, Small White butterflies flitting about some downy thistles in the autumn sunshine. Also today on the sunny side of the house a couple of Red Admirals have been engaged in constant patrol and around lunchtime a small party of Chiffchaffs moved through, spending some time working through the riverside shrubs in an industrious search for food. The Sussex gardener, Christopher Lloyd, observed that glorious autumn days should be enjoyed one by one as a bonus rather than with the sense of entitlement associated with those of summer. Last year good weather hung on well into the Autumn. Perhaps it will be the same again this year.

Following a few weeks abroad I went for a stroll round Pulborough Brooks this morning, largely drawn by the promise of seeing the Red-necked Phalarope that has been here for a few days. Interest in the bird had clearly diminished and I had to find it for myself but after a few minutes it obliged. There was a substantial flock of geese too and numbers are now building up in the Arun valley – later in the Autumn flocks will fly honking over the house as they move between the roosting sites and their feeding grounds, often in cleared maize fields.

Sadly this issue contains a couple of obituaries. John Reaney's artwork has embellished the Society's publications over many years and I have taken the opportunity to incorporate some examples of his work in this edition. I hope you enjoy the Newsletter.

Roger Smith

# BIRDS ONE SHOULD KNOW

BENEFICIAL & MISCHIEVOUS

BY REV. CANON THEODORE WOOD

*ILLUSTRATED BY*

ROLAND GREEN F.Z.S.



G.S.

# Birds One Should Know

John Maskell

For a recent birthday a friend gave me a somewhat battered book that was clearly intended as a joke. The ancient text in question was the Reverend Canon Theodore Wood's *Birds One Should Know: Beneficial & Mischievous* which was published in 1921. I was about to donate the book to a suitable charity shop when curiosity encouraged me to open it... and I proceeded to spend an absorbing two hours reading the entire volume. I discovered the text to be beautifully illustrated with many black and white drawings by Roland Green and "reading between the lines" found it to represent an entertaining comment on changes in bird life and social history.

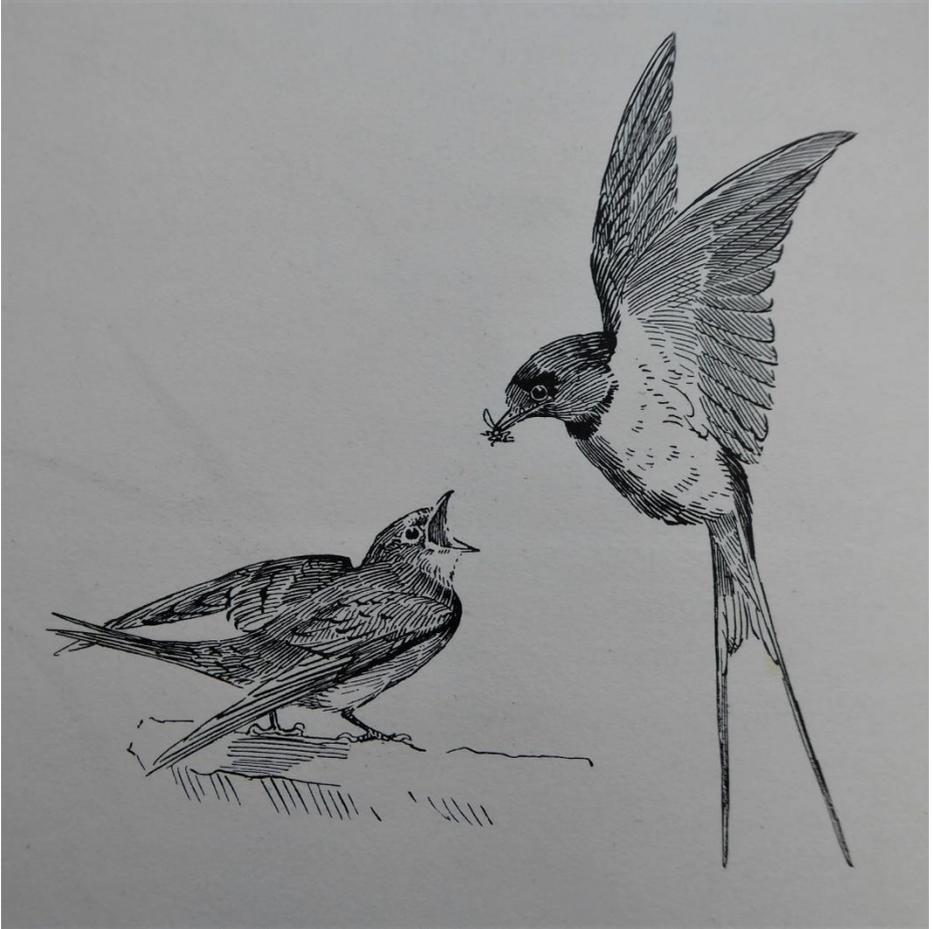
*Birds One Should Know* has chapters on 33 common species with a further three also mentioned. The book is a thoroughly captivating and instructive read in a style that is delightfully dated and "politically incorrect". Each species is dealt with in terms of it being a friend or foe to the farmer and "mischievous" is applied to many birds! The poor Woodpigeon gets short shrift with the observation that "it is sad to have to admit that the Wood Pigeon, or Ring Dove, has no redeeming qualities at all. It is simply a pest to the agriculturalist." However, passing over such comments the book provides a fascinating insight into the attitudes of a century ago when far more people were connected to the land and were much more aware of their avian neighbours.

The tome makes for sober reading as one is reminded of how many birds have declined in the past century. The first surprise was to find Red-backed Shrike amongst these common birds and Canon Wood comments that the shrike "is one of our regular 'summer visitors'". Birdtrack tells me that I have seen a Red-backed Shrike on three occasions in the UK, the last being in 1998 at Pulborough Brooks! Even more remarkable are Wood's notes on the



Spotted Flycatcher by Roland Green

Spotted Flycatcher as “a familiar bird in almost every country and suburban garden, where it may be seen on any day in late spring and early summer....” In 30 years of watching our own garden we have recorded a Spotted Flycatcher on seven dates but the last was on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2002 when a breath-taking trio stopped by on their southerly migration.



Swallows by Roland Green

Of the Song Thrush Reverend Wood observes, “Almost more generally familiar even than the blackbird is the Thrush, which not only abounds in all parts of the country, but may be seen and heard in any suburban garden.” Here in West Tarring they used to nest in our garden 30 years ago but now they are only an occasional and rare winter visitor. As to my favourite bird, the House Sparrow, Wood says that “No description of its appearance or its habits is necessary, for it is as common in the streets of the smokiest town as it is in the open country.” Now I’m sure that there was no link between breeding success and smoke, but you try finding a House Sparrow in post Clean Air Act- London these days!

“The Greenfinch, which also goes by the name of the ‘Green Linnet’, is one of the best-known of our smaller birds, not only because it is very common in almost all parts of the country, but also from its fondness for nesting in gardens.” Well I wonder how many SDOS members are fortunate to have Greenfinches nesting in their gardens these days? A pair using our garden feeders on 17<sup>th</sup> January was the first garden sighting for more than three months and an example of the decline of this species in recent years.

Nevertheless, the book is not just a catalogue of what has been lost, for there have been some positive trends and changes in conservation laws since Wood was writing just after the end of the Great War. Of the Goldfinch we read that “this exquisite little bird, unfortunately, has been trapped in such large numbers by professional bird-catchers that it is now comparatively scarce in most parts of the country.” Nowadays the Goldfinch represents one of the more successful recoveries and regularly visits many gardens where suitable food is available. If our entertaining clergyman were writing today, I’m sure that the Collared Dove would also have had its own chapter. It first bred in the UK in Norfolk in 1955 and has continued to expand its range with 980,000 pairs noted by the BTO in 2009. Hereabouts they used to regularly build their flimsy nests in our garden but are now only an occasional visitor.



Great Tit & Blue Tits on Cocoa Nut by Roland Green

Finally, *Birds One Should Know: Beneficial & Mischievous* unintentionally highlights changes in our knowledge of birds thanks to the valuable work undertaken by ringers. We certainly know more about where our migrants go in the winter. According to Wood both the Cuckoo and Swallow travel to *North Africa*. As we now know from ringing recoveries and tracking devices, they fly much further south beyond the Sahel.

In post-World War One austerity most households would not have had the resources, that we now possess, to encourage birds into their gardens, especially as birds may have been seen as intent on eating valuable garden produce! However, Wood does advise that of the “seven kinds of Titmice” found in Great Britain, the Great and Blue “may easily be attracted even to a suburban garden by the simple expedient of suspending half a cocoa nut, or lump of suet, by a yard or so of string from the branch of a tree”. We have certainly come a long way when one looks at the variety of feeders now available to entice and support our avian friends, whilst I would like to think that our attitudes are now much more sympathetic towards birds and the wider world of Nature.

Now it may usually be used as a metaphor, but my experience was a timely reminder of the old idiom “don’t judge a book by its cover”!

## RSPB Adur Estuary Nature Reserve

Tim Holter, Jess Aidley and Tony Benton

Positioned between the Houseboats and the A259 this small reserve of 60.3 hectares (149 acres) came into RSPB possession in 1987 following the demise of the Harbour Authority’s plans for a marina. Its management is the responsibility of the Senior Site Manager South Downs Reserves (Julianne Evans) at RSPB Pulborough Brooks. It is at the seaward end of the Adur Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated in 1987.

Despite the long period as a Nature Reserve and designation within an SSSI neither RSPB nor SSSI signage has, to the best of our knowledge, been displayed to inform the public of the status of the reserve and the value and sensitivity of its wildlife. Also when the Tidal Walls project was completed early in 2019 notice boards were erected on the river banks but, as yet, no SSSI information panels have been placed on them.

In 2017 we wrote to the RSPB about signage and disturbance at the Nature Reserve. Tim Holter pointed out that members of the public had been critical about the lack of information boards and Jess Aidley drew attention to the steady increase of disturbances by water craft. In response Julianne Evans of the RSPB was able to advise that finance was available for a new information panel. She liaised with Tim and Jess over its content during 2017/18. It was to be positioned next to Shoreham town centre on Coronation Green which faces the reserve. Julianne indicated that further panels and signs might be considered in subsequent financial years.

In the Summer of 2018 Tim Holter was shown the new sign at a Pulborough event and later that year Tony Benton ran an SDOS 'Gullfest' on Coronation Green, an educational event available to the general public. That Autumn Tim sought a progress report on the signs installation and received an indication there was a delay due to issues to be resolved with Adur and Worthing District Council who own Coronation Green.

This summer, due to ongoing concerns about disturbance to the site and signage we again wrote to the RSPB and a meeting was held at Pulborough on 9th September 2019. This was a very positive meeting between ourselves, Julianne Evans and John Oliver of the RSPB. The meeting provided us with a clearer understanding of the restraints and financial and other difficulties impacting upon the management of the reserve but also began the charting of a way forward.

It was agreed that a management plan for the Reserve will be drawn up and where appropriate, as Volunteer Wardens, we will assist on matters of

liaison with local authorities. At an early date Julianne Evans will meet with the Volunteer Wardens to decide the desired positions of RSPB signs and information panels. We can then monitor progress towards completing the signage plan.

We discussed raising the profile of RSPB by running further, and possibly collaborative, public events following the recent successful local events recently led by Tony Benton with support from SDOS members. More detail will be provided in our next Newsletter and we anticipate that there will be positive progress to report.

Editor's Note: the three authors are Volunteer Wardens for the Reserve and, additionally, Tony Benton is SDOS Community Engagement Officer.

## March to August 2019 Sightings

### Clive Hope

#### March

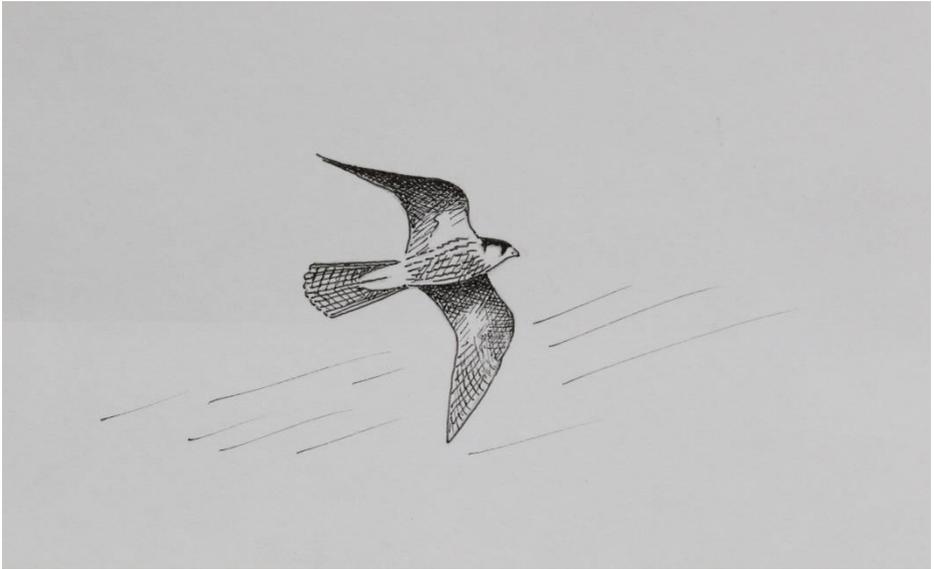
On 1<sup>st</sup> on the Adur near the Toll Bridge were two Black-tailed Godwits, never common here. Five Short-eared Owls were at Bramber Brooks on 11<sup>th</sup> and at Rye Farm on the Henfield Levels on 13<sup>th</sup> there were plenty of Canada and Greylag Geese, two Mute Swans, Grey Herons on two of the three nests in the heronry, a solitary Shelduck on the water, 120 Wigeon, 10 Teal, five Shoveler, eight Pintail and a pair of Gadwall. Wheatears appeared on 20<sup>th</sup> with five at Shoreham Beach, at least twelve between Widewater and Lancing and seven at Goring Gap. A showy Water Rail was frequently observed in Ferring Rife from the bridge to the Country Centre around this time. An incredible flock of seven White Storks roosted in a tree in a garden near Bramber Castle on 26<sup>th</sup>.



## April

A Black Redstart was by Ferring Rife on 1st and the first Willow Warbler heard singing nearby. A Swallow was over Widewater on 7<sup>th</sup>. Seawatching from Worthing on 5<sup>th</sup> and Brighton Marina on 8<sup>th</sup> was fairly productive for Scoter, divers, and terns of two species. Five Great Skuas at the former and a group of five Black-necked Grebes at the latter were of particular note. A large passage of Mediterranean Gulls was underway on 17<sup>th</sup> with well over a hundred passing east along the coast. Nine Wheatears were at Truleigh Hill on 18<sup>th</sup> and a Curlew, five Whimbrel and three Greenshank were on the Adur at Shoreham next day. Reed Warblers and Whitethroats were evident in the Adur valley from 22<sup>nd</sup>. On 23<sup>rd</sup> a Cuckoo was calling in Spithandle Lane near Wiston. Also this day, sea-watching at Brighton logged 390 Bar tailed Godwit, 13 Whimbrel, 91 Common Scoter, 126 Mediterranean Gull, 52 Black headed Gull, 25 Sandwich Tern, two Avocet, four Curlew with six Whimbrel, a Brent Goose, four Shoveler and a Common Seal. Similar totals were noted off Worthing. Next day three distant Pomarine Skuas passed well offshore at

Ferring in a very poor spring for the species in our area. An Osprey passed over West Worthing on 29<sup>th</sup>. At Cissbury on 30<sup>th</sup>, there was a Ring Ouzel as well as eight Swifts and good numbers of Whitethroats.



## May

At Cissbury on 2<sup>nd</sup>, there was a male Whinchat, two pairs of Stonechats, 12 Whitethroats and eight Swallows. A Hobby flew over Truleigh Hill on 4<sup>th</sup>. The Downslink near Henfield registered Reed, Sedge and Grasshopper Warbler on 9<sup>th</sup>. Waders scored well on the Adur at Shoreham on 16<sup>th</sup> with four Whimbrel, a Common Sandpiper and Redshank.

The Ladywell team trapped 158 birds of twenty species on 21<sup>st</sup>, their best May day for eight years and included a Tawny Owl. Three Common Sandpipers were at Brooklands on 22<sup>nd</sup>.



## June

At least two Spotted Flycatchers and a Cuckoo were at Cissbury on 1<sup>st</sup>. A White Stork passed over Wild Park on 3<sup>rd</sup>. Swifts were widely reported as breeding at Bramber, Beeding, Shoreham, Southwick and Hove after arriving later than usual. At High Salvington, good breeding success of tits, finches, Wrens, Blackbirds, Robins, Dunnocks and Great Spotted Woodpeckers was noted by the end of the month. Curlews were moving on 30<sup>th</sup> with seven west past Ferring.

## July

On 1<sup>st</sup> an unseasonal Arctic Skua flew slowly east offshore at Ferring. The breeding success referred to above was also true for warblers. The ringing recoveries at Ladywell on 3<sup>rd</sup> showed that of the 20 Blackcaps and nine each of Chiffchaffs and Reed Warblers trapped nearly all were juveniles. The first juvenile Yellow-legged Gull of the season was at Goring Gap. Ferring Rife



provided a Grey Wagtail and a surprising eight Reed Warblers (two fledglings) and five Whitethroats. On 8th, a juvenile Yellow-legged Gull was off the Gap.

A Greenshank had returned to the Adur by 9th. The first Willow Warbler of the autumn called at the seaward end of the Goring plantation.

On 10<sup>th</sup>, a walk from below the Adur footbridge up towards the Cement Works and back produced one Bar-tailed Godwit and three Whimbrel by the airport. A Common Sandpiper and 11 Swallows were south of here while on one of the sandbars a roosting flock of 14 Mediterranean Gulls was joined by a Sandwich Tern. 21 more Mediterranean Gulls flew down the river of which six broke off to join those roosting. On 17th, a pair of Ringed Plovers with four chicks were discovered on the roof of a warehouse in Shoreham.

Brooklands on the 20<sup>th</sup> held a juvenile Yellow-legged Gull, four Common Sandpipers and a Little Grebe. Also this day, a 3.5-hour watch from Ferring block produced a Bonxie, two Common Scoters, four Teal, two Common

Terns, two adult Common Gulls, three Turnstones, 36 Gannets, 42 Sandwich Terns and a juvenile Mediterranean Gull.

A Common Redstart in the trees on the railway bank in Shoreham on 26th was a surprise for the Treasurer. On the Adur, a smart Black-tailed Godwit was near the A27 bridge. A Little Tern passed west off Goring on 30<sup>th</sup>. Common Sandpipers peaked at eleven on 31<sup>st</sup> on the Adur near the Cement works, their favourite location.

## August

Willow Warbler passage was underway in earnest on 1<sup>st</sup> with 62 trapped at Ladywell (of 123 birds of all species in the day) and others were seen in West Worthing and Goring. Cissbury followed with 24 on 3<sup>rd</sup> but the star bird there was a Grasshopper Warbler. Meanwhile on the Downs along Monarch's Way west of Steyning Bostal, a Redstart, three Wheatears and a Quail were seen on 2<sup>nd</sup>. Eight kinds of warbler species out of twenty of all species were handled at Ladywell on 3<sup>rd</sup>. A big arrival of Willow Warblers occurred on 8<sup>th</sup> with a staggering 113 trapped at Ladywell, 38 at Cissbury and 22 seen along a portion of Ferring Rife. Wheatears re-appeared on local beaches with four at Goring Gap and others at Widewater and Shoreham Harbour. A smart Black Redstart was at Truleigh Hill on 14<sup>th</sup> and at Widewater an immature Little Gull was present. On 15<sup>th</sup> a Pied Flycatcher and Tree Pipit were seen at Cissbury. Waders at Goring Gap on 16<sup>th</sup> consisted of 46 Turnstones, 26 Ringed Plovers and two Sanderlings. Next day eight Redstarts and four Wheatears flitted along the fences at Findon Gallops with Whitethroats of both species in the bushes there.

A Quail was calling on the east side of Steep Down on 20<sup>th</sup> and heard again on successive days. A surprise in the nets at Ladywell on 22<sup>nd</sup> was a Tree Pipit, several of which had been heard passing over at other downland sites in recent days. Sixteen Whinchats on 23<sup>rd</sup> were near the South Downs Way at Chantry Hill. The Bank Holiday weekend of 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> saw very good numbers of migrants primarily at downland sites, with staggering totals of 83



Spotted Flycatchers, 29 Redstarts and five Pied Flycatchers seen near Chanctonbury on 26th. Others were at Mill Hill, Lancing Ring, Cissbury and Highdown. A Honey-Buzzard passed over Worthing and a Great White Egret was reported passing the coast at West Worthing / Goring.

Six young Wheatears were in a garden on Truleigh Hill on 25<sup>th</sup> and seven Redstarts and a Marsh Harrier were seen along the Monarch's Way / Steyning Round Hill. A great find of a Wryneck near Woods Mill on 27<sup>th</sup> delighted the observers. Meanwhile at Ladywell 142 birds were handled, 56 Willow Warblers and 44 Blackcaps making up the bulk of the catch. Eight Whinchats at Goring Gap were feeding in the rough field in the SE corner. Five Wheatears were on the west bank of the Adur in Shoreham on 28<sup>th</sup>. The only migrant seen at Goring Gap on this day was a Pied Flycatcher in the southern part of the Plantation.

A summary of Wild Park NR sightings for the month of August follows.

Coverage started on 2<sup>nd</sup> with a few Swifts and Swallows over. On 8<sup>th</sup> there were eight Whitethroats and some Willow Warblers plus a Garden Warbler and a juvenile Chiffchaff confirming local breeding. The first Redstart and Lesser Whitethroat of the autumn were on 18<sup>th</sup>. Things picked up on 21<sup>st</sup> with up to ten Swifts and 20 Swallows over, ten Tree Pipits, 20 plus Whitethroats, 15 'Willow-Chiffs', a Garden Warbler and a Spotted Flycatcher. From 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> two to four Redstarts were seen. On 22<sup>nd</sup> a Nuthatch and Tree Creeper were noted - likely the first time these scarce birds were seen on the same day at this site. The observer reported what he assumed to be a family party of Tree Creepers a week earlier. On 24<sup>th</sup> two Buzzards circled over the Coomb with a juvenile calling from the woods, and a female type Stonechat was the first of the autumn. On 27<sup>th</sup> there was a female Pied and at least six Spotted Flycatchers, ten plus Willow Warblers and three Wheatears plus a Nuthatch calling. Then on 28<sup>th</sup> two Spotted Flycatchers, four Chiffchaffs, three Willow Warblers a single Redstart and a Whinchat were followed on 29<sup>th</sup> with four Whinchats, eight Whitethroats, two Redstarts, a Lesser Whitethroat and finally, on 31<sup>st</sup>, four Redstarts.

On a non-birding note, the Painted Lady invasion seemed to be peaking around this time. I had twelve on one buddleia in my garden on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>.

## Swallows at Coombes 2019

### Brianne Reeve

Even after forty-three years of welcoming Swallows back to Coombes I cannot help wondering if they will return each year. March 2019 passed without a sign of a Swallow and so did the first, second and third week of April. Then on the 22<sup>nd</sup> there was one male here all day until 7pm but no sign of him in the stable that evening, but the next day I was greeted by two Swallows swooping in and out of the stable which is very close to the house.

When I went to close the doors at 8.20pm there was a Swallow perched on the nest used for the first brood last year.



By the end of April I was much more confident as the stable Swallows were repairing the nest, also a younger pair had decided to use the lower garage, a 100 yards away at the top of our drive. I was in a quandary because I know one should not interfere with nature but it was quite obvious that these younger birds did not know how to repair last year's nests. In 2018 two different nests were used but they were in a dreadful state and looked very unsafe, even so they had two broods three in the first nest and four in the second. A friend was keen to put up a 'purchased nest' which I have to admit was not regarded positively by the birds, but it did spur them on to try and construct a new nesting site in the adjoining garage, about six feet off the ground, on a shelf under the lowest slope of the roof. The nest was a terrible mess of mud and grasses but at least it was not falling apart.

I had to wait until June 10<sup>th</sup> to be sure both pairs were feeding young, those in the stable were a few days ahead of those in the garage and to my surprise

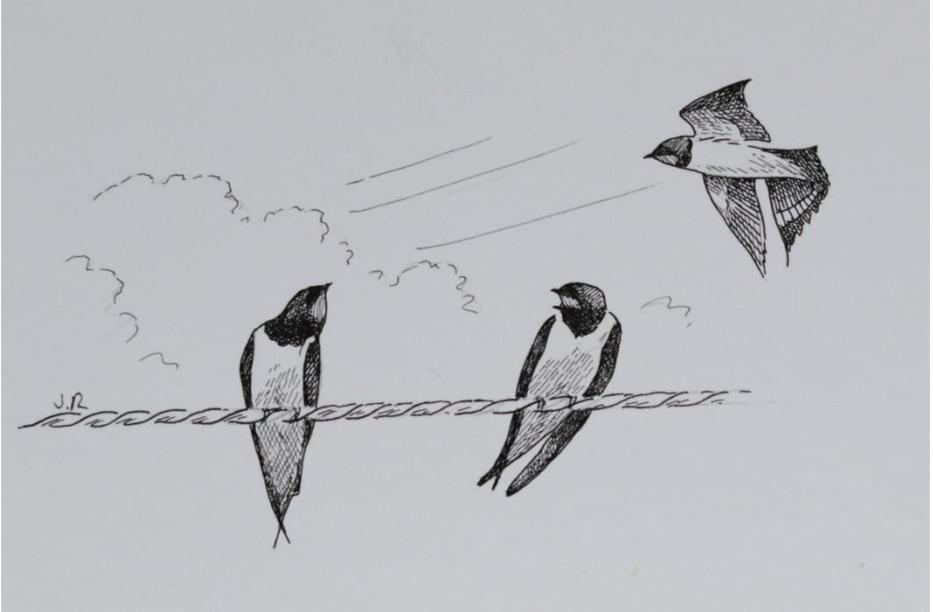
the dates were almost exactly comparable with last year's records despite what I thought was a very slow start. But the weather was not good for insectivorous birds and the nights were cold with the Swallows really hunkered down in the nest high up in the stable.

On the evening of June 13<sup>th</sup> the 'Springwatch' team in Scotland showed distressing footage of breeding birds suffering due to the dire conditions. This included the Swallows desperately trying to keep their young warm by brooding them in the nest, these were very close to fledging, but the adults simply could not bring in enough food and all their offspring perished. Here at Coombes, I recorded 2.8 inches of rain by the middle of June. On one day I was very concerned; it had rained all day and the Swallows had not left either the stable or garage because the weather was so bad.

Last year I remember a similar day, staring miserably out of the kitchen window at the pouring rain when my attention was drawn to a bird in a very upright position on the top of one of the bird feeders; its head was right back on its shoulders and the beak was wide open pointing upwards. Opening the door I could see it was a Swallow! It was an astonishing sight. I had never seen a Swallow come anywhere near the bird feeders and here it was perched on the very top drinking the rain! It was there for at least two minutes and as it hardly moved I could see it was absolutely drenched. I approached very slowly and could hardly believe what I was seeing, head back, beak wide open, drinking the rain. Suddenly it was aware of my presence and flew off round to the stable. Could it possibly be that it was taking liquid back to the nestlings because there had been no chance of catching any insects? Where was my camera to record such an extraordinary happening?

By the end of June I could see five young Swallows in each of the two nests with the ones in the stable comfortable in a large-cupped nest which had been used many times before, those in the newly constructed nest in the garage seemed very cramped but were thriving. On one occasion I watched the number of visits by these adults over a period of three minutes, thirteen

times, and without removing a faecal sac at any point! When I tried counting the visits to the stable nest it was halted by a Sparrowhawk swooping past the stable doors and causing alarm calls as the two adults chased off the intruder. The young of both pairs respond at once to alarm calls from their parents, disappearing into the depths of the nest immediately. All these young birds fledged safely and were seen returning to roost at night on or close to their nests.



This could not last long because the females were on to their second broods. On August 5<sup>th</sup> feeding was going on constantly to unseen young in the recently used nest in the stable. The garage pair built a second nest about two feet away from their first. One morning I was shocked to see one stable Swallow hanging, bat-like over the edge of the nest, completely ignored by the adults as they came in to feed. Somehow it managed to recover itself because there were five young with open gapes a short while later. Ten days later all these had fledged and only returned for a rest occasionally

during the day and to roost at night. The second garage brood of four did not fledge until August 20th.

In 2016 and 2017 all the young Swallows had taken time to test their flying ability inside the stable and the garage but it has been noticeable that in 2018 and this year they had all left the nests and flown outside in less than twelve hours from fledging. In those earlier years the Swallows stayed for over 160 days and stayed late into September, but in 2018 it was down to 150 days and this year only 131 days and in both instances they had all seemed to have left Coombes by August 31st. However on September 5<sup>th</sup> just before 8 pm, I went to see why I was still getting droppings on my car windscreen every day and there were still three young Swallow perched on the saddle rack! The birds were seen finally on the 12<sup>th</sup> September

I do wish I knew whether I am seeing some of the same birds returning year after year. I have been definitely known and trusted by the stable Swallows for several years but the garage ones have been much more wary. Nevertheless they have all given many visitors to the garden a great deal of pleasure and intimate sightings. It has been a record year with a total of nineteen young Swallows raised and safely fledged. I can only look forward positively to the Spring of 2020.

## SDOS Garden Birds 2018

### Val Bentley

There were 27 different gardens where SDOS members were recording for our survey in 2018, though some did not contribute for all four quarters, a few dropped out during the year and a couple joined; those participating were Val Bentley, Tony Benton, Noranne Biddulph, Paula Blake, Reg Bradbury, Brian Clay, Jay Cooper, John Cooper, John Feest, Martin Ford, Clive Hope, Laurie Keen, Cyril & Maureen Leeves, Matt Lemere-Goff, Sheila Marshall, John & Shena Maskell, Janet Paterson, David Potter, Anthony

Robinson, John & Jeannette Simpson, Stephen Simpson, Marion Taylor, Gordon & Vera Tickler, Rae Titcomb, David Tomalin, Peter Whitcomb and Martin Wilson. There were 25 forms returned for the first quarter, 21 for the second, 20 for the third, and 22 for the fourth.

As previously, the totals for each week have been put onto a spreadsheet, and averaged out to see which species were our most frequent garden birds. It only takes one sighting of a species in one quarter to “count”! The table below shows the results for 2018, with the previous two years’ positions for comparison.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Average % of gardens used each quarter</b>	<b>2018 overall position</b>	<b>2017 overall position</b>	<b>2016 overall position</b>	<b>Maximum number seen at one time (Observer &amp; week)</b>	<b>Average number seen per week all gardens (2017)</b>
Woodpigeon	100%	1=	1	2	20 (Ford, 14 Oct)	1.91 (2.10)
Blue Tit	100%	1=	2=	4=	28 (Blake, 26 Aug)	2.43 (2.21)
Robin	99%	3	2=	3	8 (Blake, 27 May)	0.91 (0.95)
Blackbird	96%	4	4	1	10 (Potter, 28 Jan & 4 Feb)	1.49 (1.54)
Great Tit	95%	5	5	4=	11 (Blake, 17 Jun & 12 Aug)	1.25 (1.34)
Magpie	91%	6	7	9	13 (Potter, 21 Jan)	0.95 (0.91)

Species	Average	2018	2017	2016	Maximum	Average
Dunnock	87%	7	6	6	7 (Blake, 27 May)	0.96 (1.04)
Goldfinch	82%	8	8	13	16 (Clay, 28 Jan & Bradbury 4 Nov)	1.81 (1.76)
Carrion Crow	78%	9	10	12	4 (several observers)	0.49 (0.44)
Starling	75%	10	13	11	70 (J & J Simpson, 4 Nov)	3.36 (2.41)
Collared Dove	72%	11	12	7=	8 (Blake, Jan & Feb)	0.64 (0.63)
House Sparrow	70%	12	9	7=	70 (Maskell, 26 Aug)	2.89 (2.50)
Wren	65%	13	11	10	5 (Blake, 1 Apr)	0.41 (0.47)
Long-tailed Tit	62%	14	15	17	20 (Keen, 7 Jan)	1.63 (1.40)
Herring Gull	60%	15	14	15	12 (Whitcomb, 25 Mar)	0.71 (0.75)

The top 15 remained the same in 2018, though with some changes to the order. Woodpigeon maintained the top spot, though Blue Tit managed to rival it this year. Blackbird continued in 4<sup>th</sup> place having been 1<sup>st</sup> in 2016, Magpie continued its rise and overhauled Dunnock, House Sparrow was down to 12<sup>th</sup> this year but Starling crept up a couple of places. Goldfinch maintained its 8<sup>th</sup> place after a lower year in 2016. The most abundant in

terms of individuals seen was Starling, and this species and House Sparrow were seen in somewhat larger numbers than in 2017, both having maxima of 70 birds. However, despite returning forms for all four quarters, Brian and Janet, both in High Salvington, recorded no House Sparrows, and Rae and Martin W had no Starlings.

### The “Also Rans”

Species	Average % of gardens used			
	2018	2017	2016	2015
Greenfinch	51%	58%	64%	69%
Chaffinch	49%	53%	52%	63%
Song Thrush	42%	39%	37%	33%
Great Spotted Woodpecker	41%	48%	38%	36%
Blackcap	38%	32%	40%	41%
Goldcrest	36%	35%	30%	24%
Coal Tit	35%	28%	20%	15%
Jay	34%	31%	27%	31%
Sparrowhawk	28%	22%	18%	13%
Jackdaw	28%	31%	18%	26%
Feral Pigeon	27%	21%	21%	23%
Chiffchaff	24%	36%	26%	25%

Regularly recorded, but not in the top 15, are shown in the Table on Page 26.

Greenfinches and Chaffinches were both less frequently seen, though in my garden Greenfinches are often the most numerous bird seen on my sunflower heart feeders. Song Thrush improved slightly, particularly in the first quarter when they were recorded in three quarters of the gardens – a shame that they seem to disappear during the rest of the year. The number of gardens reporting Coal Tits has more than doubled since 2015, though they are never abundant.

## **Some Garden Highlights**

### **First Quarter**

From January to March 49 species were seen, five more than in 2017. During February and March we suffered “the beast from the East” with a run of sub-zero temperatures which must have driven more birds into gardens in their difficult search for food. Blackcaps were seen in 15 of the 25 gardens, and were recorded every week by both Brian and John & Shena, who had a maximum of 8 in the final week of February. Redwings were seen by nine observers, up from just four in 2017, with Matt counting 10 in January and Paula 11 in February. Fieldfares were recorded by Paula and Peter in the same late February week. It’s always nice to have garden “ticks”; Tony had two in one morning on 1<sup>st</sup> March with a Red-legged Partridge followed by a Blackcap. At the end of March another Red-legged Partridge was fed by Noranne in Hove for three days in a row. As in 2017 the only person to see Siskins was Brian, with 6 in the final week of March. The wintering Lesser Whitethroat which arrived at John & Shena’s in December 2017 stayed around and was seen during the first three weeks of January, then again at the end of February and beginning of March, enjoying buggy nibbles apparently! This is only the fifth winter that the species has been recorded in Sussex, though there were two others seen, in Ringmer and Hove. The only winter Chiffchaff was seen by Tony in early February,

Gordon & Vera commented that since the final day of 2017 they have had regular visits from a single Goldcrest and 3 Long-tailed Tits, which are their first winter sightings of these in 27 years. Laurie and I were lucky to see Firecrests, John C recorded Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail, and Martin F was the sole observer to get a Reed Bunting, which had probably nipped in from Ferring Rife, and a Brambling was in Sheila's garden in mid-March. John C had a flyover from a Red Kite on 26<sup>th</sup> February.

## **Second Quarter**

There were 40 species seen this quarter, six fewer than in 2017. Laurie's Firecrest stayed around until the end of May, it was a brilliant male mainly seen at the birdbath, and during the quarter he had some good raptor sightings over or near his garden – Peregrine on 14<sup>th</sup> April, Buzzard on three occasions, Hobby on 21<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May and Sparrowhawk on 13<sup>th</sup> June. Another Brambling appeared, this time at Brian's at the start of April.

Newly fledged Starlings arrived at Tony's at the end of May, and as Blue Tit numbers were swelled by juveniles Paula had a maximum of 24 at the end of June. Jay was amused by a juvenile Blackbird which pulled up a worm, but then seemed unsure what to do with it! John & Shena noticed House Sparrows using a Swift box and saw Dunnocks behaving badly in April! A Herring Gull at Gordon & Vera's kept pinching food they'd put out for hedgehogs and Marion was visited by Jays most weeks, with four in late May. Laurie noticed the first young Long-tailed Tits on 28<sup>th</sup> May, Great Tits on 16<sup>th</sup> June, Dunnocks on 24<sup>th</sup>, and Greenfinches on 7<sup>th</sup> July.

David T reported a very unusual sighting on 12<sup>th</sup> April; only 12 feet away and with a chestnut crown, facial marking and little black bib, a dead cert for Tree Sparrow. Of course by the time he went to get his phone to photograph it, it had gone! This probably doesn't "count" as far as official records are concerned, but I know that one turned up in a ringer's garden in Hardham in October, so there must be a few out there somewhere.



### **Third Quarter**

Only 36 different species were recorded from July to September, six fewer than in 2017. Blue Tits must have had another good breeding season; maximum counts were 24 at John & Shena's in the week of 19 August, and 28 at Paula's the following week. Clive was particularly pleased to see a Song Thrush in his garden at the end of July, the first for several years! The top House Sparrow count was at John & Shena's with 70 in the final week of August, though they only managed a maximum of one Starling during the quarter. Reg however had more than 40 Starlings in the first couple of weeks of August, but then none appeared again until mid-September. A male Firecrest was in Laurie's garden again on four occasions in July, and he saw a female on 22 September, so possibly they were breeding in Benfield Valley.

As migration got under way, Laurie noted a Spotted Flycatcher and Willow Warblers in September, Reg also recorded Willow Warblers, as did John &

Shena who saw three in late July and early August. A Redstart visited Martin W's little bird bath on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August – only his second garden sighting of the species in 30 years at the house!

## **Fourth Quarter**

And so to the final three months when 42 species were seen, also fewer than in 2017. John F and John & Shena were the House Sparrow champions this quarter, with 32 and 36 being their respective maxima. Collared Doves were only reported in half the gardens, yet during April- June they were in all but one – very strange.

Blackcaps can still be hanging around late into the autumn prior to migration, but I am assuming that December records are of wintering birds. This year there were weekly sightings by John & Shena throughout December, a single record from Brian in the final week of the year, and 2 males seen on the 11<sup>th</sup> by Gordon & Vera, apparently feeding on crabapples. Redwings were only recorded in three gardens this quarter; it was a mild autumn and no doubt this and other species were finding enough food without needing to visit our gardens. Other visitors were a Grey Wagtail at Marion's from mid-November until the end of the year, a "first time in 35 years", Great Spotted Woodpecker at Anthony's in October, a couple of Reed Buntings at Paula's in late November, and a Treecreeper at Laurie's in October/November.

## **In Summary**

The gardens participating in the survey were distributed throughout the SDOS area. The locations were Brighton (2), Ferring (2), Findon (1), Goring (3), Henfield (2), High Salvington (2), Hove (2), Lancing (3), Rustington (1), Shoreham (7), Steyning (1) and Worthing (1). The total of 53 different species recorded was the same as the previous year, though the actual species differed slightly. Nine species were seen in only one garden, including Siskin, Bullfinch, Spotted Flycatcher, Lesser Whitethroat and Kingfisher.

Several of us also take part in the BTO national Garden Birdwatch and predictably the national data is generally similar to ours. The first four are identical, with our next four (Great Tit, Dunnock, Goldfinch and Magpie) not too far behind, but nationally House Sparrow comes in 7<sup>th</sup>, compared to 12<sup>th</sup> for SDOS, while Herring Gull is 33<sup>rd</sup>, compared with 15<sup>th</sup> for SDOS. Chaffinches and Coal Tits were 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> nationally, but only 17<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> for us.

The BTO reported in their 'Bird Table' magazine that by the autumn "many of the species that took a dramatic plummet in numbers as a result of the harsh conditions arising from the 'Beast from the East' seem to have made a recovery, with their reporting rate only slightly lower than average for the time of year. This might indicate that the dry warm conditions from late April until July favoured many breeding species as their feeding was uninterrupted by bad weather. It will be interesting to see how 2019 turns out!

Many thanks to all those taking part in the SDOS Garden Birdwatch for their observations and comments.

## Obituary

### John Reaney January 1st 1940 – August 4th 2019

It was very sad to hear that John died on August 4th 2019. He had been in hospital for ten days and seemed to be getting better and was looking forward to going home but that was not to be.

I remember talking to John many years ago about his work as an artist and was surprised to learn that he had never had any tuition in Art at school, none until he went to Evening Classes at Brighton Art College in the 1960's. Drawing took over but not quite as he had intended. He spent



twenty years in a Portslade Drawing Office and for the last two he was in charge....of just himself. On the day of his retirement in 1975 Richard Porter came to see him about two of his paintings which needed some touching up. Richard suggested John should go freelance and said he was sure the RSPB would be interested and want to use his work. This proved to be very good advice; the RSPB used his illustrations, exhibitions followed at places like Abinger House and Woods Mill and he sold many of his exhibits.

Although he is mainly known to SDOS and SOS members for the birds he has drawn for our Reports, Newsletters and the John Stafford Prize, he loved to draw mammals, their fur fascinated him. He travelled all over Sussex to make his initial sketches and then finished them off in the house in Brighton which had been his home for nearly seventy-nine years. His favourite medium was pastel, then watercolour, but his pen and ink sketches gave him great satisfaction and SDOS has a great many of these unique studies. He has done illustrations for several books by different authors and was very pleased to be made a Member of the Society of Wildlife Artists in 1986. His paintings were exhibited regularly there in London.

John was always very pleased to do drawings for SDOS publications some of which are reproduced in this Newsletter as a tribute to him. Also it is with particular pleasure that I can tell you that John bequeathed his Swarovski telescope to SDOS. This has already been used at the September Coronation Green event in Shoreham and we are most grateful for such a generous gift.

John was a quiet, gentle, man with a delightful sense of humour. He left a request that instead of music being played at the end of the Crematorium service he would like to have the recorded calls of White-fronted Geese. Quite a challenge, but John Newnham to the rescue, and John Reaney's last wish was fulfilled!

## Obituary

Jim Steedman August 11<sup>th</sup> 1933 - August 14<sup>th</sup> 2019

Jim was born in Brighton in 1933 at the home of his paternal grandparents where his parents were lodging. The story goes that his grandfather had walked down from Scotland to Brighton to find work.

When Jim was 14 months old his parents bought a house on the brand new estate at Patcham, hard against the Downs at the back of Brighton. During the move a bed frame was propped up against a wall and Jim, who was just learning to walk, tried to pull himself up on this, but in doing so pulled the frame on top of himself cutting through his lower lip very badly. This meant a prolonged stay in hospital with his arms fixed in cardboard tubes to prevent him touching the wound and isolation from his mother who he was only allowed to see in a mirror. This experience left Jim with a lifelong fear of being shut in with people so he needed to sit at the very back of any audience where he could get out quickly.

He went to Patcham Junior School along with many other children from the Patcham estate and then on to Varndean School. When Jim was 16 his father came home for lunch from his work at the railway office.....and died. Jim had to leave school to earn money and he was given a job at the office which included technical drawing as well as outdoor work on the railway line. Sometimes this could be hazardous such as night work at Lewes on the bridge over the river. Whilst working he studied for his engineering qualifications: Member of the Institute of Structural Engineers and Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers at evening classes at Brighton Technical College.

Later on he worked in London at several more general engineering offices where he came in contact with Charles Reynolds who was the author of 'The Concrete Designers' Handbook'. They became friends and when Reynolds died Jim brought out two up-dated versions of the Handbook. As computers



took over from books for design work Jim wrote many programmes for concrete design which he marketed successfully.

But Jim had another very full life. Listening to music was something of an obsession for him and he built up a huge library of records and tapes which he played on many evenings. His memory for music allowed him to relax and enjoy long pieces of music just going through his mind. Ever eager to extend his general knowledge Jim joined the Open University as a student in Arts subjects and obtained his OU degree.

In 1974 he and Judith met through an advert in the RSPB magazine: 'Quiet bachelor of 40, interests music and natural history seeking penfriend....' They were married the following year! Now he had someone to share his other great love, wildlife. He spent much of his free time walking round his local

area armed with binoculars spotting birds and insects. This hobby led him on to become very involved with Butterfly Conservation, eventually making meticulous recordings of the Adonis Blue and Silver-spotted Skippers in particular. As it happened both these species were to be found on steep hillsides which would have tested the physical ability of a much younger person but Jim was undeterred.

Both Jim and Judith have been staunch supporters of SDOS. Jim edited some of the first Newsletters, long before the era of word processing printers and coloured photographs, but he was always very appreciative of the quality of the publications now produced by the SDOS.

Judith Steedman: August 2019

## A tribute to passed members

### John Maskell

Shena and I were saddened to read of the deaths of three gentlemen who made very significant contributions to the SDOS, our own lives and the wider sphere of Nature. Allow me to make some observations.

I only met John Reaney a couple of times but greatly admired his bird illustrative work. He was a highly talented artist and his work enhanced numerous SDOS publications, especially the Annual Reports over very many years. In the Society's book 'Fifty Years of Birdwatching' there are no fewer than 24 of John's works whilst the last SDOS Annual Report, which covered 2012, included 14 of his pen and ink drawings. As a fan of his work I was very touched when I was presented with a framed original of a Ring Ouzel "as a token of gratitude" for 15 years' service as the Society's Treasurer. That portrait looks down on me whenever I am at work in my study. Thank you John for sharing your great talent so generously and modestly.

Mike Tucker was a great character with a wicked sense of humour who enlivened many SDOS events. I recall that the first time I met him he arrived late for an SDOS outing at Belle Touted and bounded down the hillside making a bravado entrance! As Bernie mentioned, Mike was a very knowledgeable lepidopterist and wrote the Butterfly Conservation's booklet on the Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*). When I asked him to sign my copy he refused! I thought he was joking but he was serious... and only obliged when I was later able to answer his questions to show that I had read the tome! It was no surprise that Mike's various houses were always named "Atalanta". Mike's ex-wife Carol was a SDOS accounts auditor so I visited their home on a regular basis and discovered that before it became fashionable Mike "gardened for wildlife" and he gave me some good advice when I decided to "enrol". Mike was a true all-round naturalist and Shena, Bernie and I greatly appreciated his participation in several Avian Adventures overseas trips where his butterfly and plant expertise helped to expand the group's knowledge. Mike kept careful records and also recorded meteorological statistics in his garden. Thank you Mike for your humour, advice and great company... and encouragement to explore Jazz.

Jim Steedman was a true polymath and, when you got to know him, a great raconteur. Like Mike he was a true all-round naturalist with an encyclopaedic knowledge of many aspects of Nature. Jim's technological expertise served him in good stead as the Society's Newsletter Editor and also Annual Report Editor. In the world of Butterflies the survey work that he and Judith conducted over many years is legendary. He also recorded moths and was a modest dragonfly expert. It was always exciting to meet Jim and Judith on SDOS outings as it was time for a good natter (sorry walk leaders!). On one such occasion Jim and I were chatting about the work of Olivier Messiaen, the French composer who transcribed bird song for piano. I commented that I would love to hear Messiaen's orchestral Turangalila Symphony in a live performance. A year-or-so later Jim told me of a forthcoming performance at the Royal Festival Hall in London and kindly booked me a ticket. It was a memorable evening and the first time I'd been to the RFH since I was a student. I suddenly realised what I'd been missing... and a decade or so

further on Jim has been directly responsible for me attending several hundred concerts and operas! I would often meet Jim and Judith at the RFH and I recall animated conversations afterwards on the train back home. Thank you Jim for your life-changing inspiration... and that book on Wagner.

## Volunteer Field Officer

### Audrey Wende

A volunteer is needed for the position of Field Officer for the Shoreham & District Ornithological Society (SDOS). This role is also a Council position. The excursions for 2020 have already been planned and are about to be published so there is plenty of time for an incoming person to find their feet.

The job entails some knowledge of the local area so that approximately 18 field outings a year can be arranged, but the Society has a pool of experienced leaders so most of the work is about the timing of events and their organization over the year. Liaising with leaders is an important part of the job to ensure a good mix of coastal, woodland and down-land walks are provided. A sub-committee of knowledgeable leaders is available to give advice on tide-tables when arranging coastal walks and sea-watching dates.

Although this has been a one person job, Bernie Forbes and Council members will form an informal sub-committee to give full support and advice on the identification of new locations and new leaders. The Society also organises Impromptu outings which are finalised nearer to the date.

The following year's programme is given to members at the first autumn meeting, The 2020 provision has already been sorted but we would like to find a member who can take over this job as soon as possible and subsequently assume responsibility for planning for 2021.

Please contact Brianne Reeve for more details.

Test your ID skills: name these birds







## Photograph acknowledgments

The source of photographs and artwork is often clear from the context or other attribution and those are not listed here. Note also that some of the bird photographs are illustrative; they may not be of the actual bird referred to in the account.

Front cover: Little Egret: John Reaney

Back cover: Yellowhammer: Dorian Mason

Page 13: Common Whitethroat: Dorian Mason

Page 14: Eurasian Hobby: John Reaney

Page 15: Dunnock: Dorian Mason

Page 16: Arctic Skua: John Reaney

Page 18: Spotted Flycatcher: Dorian Mason

Page 20: Barn Swallow: Dorian Mason

Page 22: Barn Swallows: John Reaney

Page 29: Tree Sparrow: John Reaney

Page 39, 40 & 41: Ron Bewley, Dorian Mason, Bernie Forbes

## Society officers and the User Group

(Officers in post following the A.G.M. of 12th March 2019)

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If you use an email address but are not a member of the User Group then please consider joining (<https://groups.io/g/sdos/join>) to make sure you receive up-to-date information about SDOS activities

