

Shoreham and District
Ornithological Society
Autumn Newsletter
2017



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EDITORIAL

This is another pleasing issue with a broad diversity of content to cater for all tastes. We have both local and international articles and it is always good to see new authors submitting interesting stories for our edification and delight. I am not sure that I have anything as significant as an editorial policy, but broadly speaking if what you have to say is likely to be interesting to members then do write something for us all to enjoy. As I have said before I am very happy to respond through email to any suggestions or questions members might have about a proposed article.

I won't describe all the articles here but just make a couple of observations about the content. Some readers may already have seen the 'Selsey' book review by Bernie Forbes in the SOS newsletter but we decided to reproduce it again here because some of our members may not receive that publication. Jenny Holter has written an interesting account of a birding trip to Levos. I have never been but it obviously has a lot to offer – although Greek it is just off the Turkish coast so there is a more easterly flavour to the birding.

Again I thank everyone for their efforts in submitting articles and photographs and I hope you all enjoy the publication.

Roger Smith

A Greek Odyssey: Lesvos May 2017

Jenny Holter



Featuring Sue Miles, Tim Holter, Phil Jemmett, Jenny Holter, Bernie Forbes, Bob Witney and Anne Witney with Clive Hope as the photographer.

Day 1; Saturday 6 May:

As we drove to our hotel from the airport, Yellow-legged Gulls, the only regular island species and equivalent to our Herring Gull, were sunbathing by the sea and Hooded Crows were also noted in place of our regular Carrion Crow. We checked in at the Hotel Pasiphae in Skala Kalloni, and then headed off for the afternoon towards the lower Tsiknias River. After stopping in the town for some milk and a Spanish Sparrow (!) we arrived by the river where pretty much our first birds were two Little Bittern streaking towards the sea. Eastern Olivaceous Warblers were heard and briefly seen from the tamarisk bushes, whilst Corn Buntings and Crested Larks were rather more obliging. At the river mouth we noted Little and Common Terns with a single Great

Crested Grebe. As we drove away a singing Nightingale serenaded us from a bush adjacent to the minibus giving excellent views to all.

Black-headed Bunting



As we passed the Agricultural Fields a beautiful Bee-eater sat on the telegraph wire and a glorious golden Black-headed Bunting competed for attention a few yards further along. A Marsh Harrier was seen quartering the fields near the sea and a further flock of Bee-eaters gave spectacular views, clinging to the walls of an agricultural building, presumably feeding on insects.

We continued on to the Kalloni Saltpans and Seasonal Wetlands where we spotted a pair of Ruddy Shelduck, several Squacco Herons and a Black-headed Wagtail which disappeared rapidly from view.

Further on Phil spotted a Purple Heron sitting on the bank, and several more Squacco Herons together with a Little Egret stood motionless, awaiting their prey. Waders were everywhere and we had close views



of Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Little Stint. Avocet and Black-winged Stilts were also abundant, but heavily outnumbered by Greater Flamingoes in varied hues of pink and white. Bernie picked out a far off Slender-billed Gull on one of the further salt pans, but heat haze and distance made this a difficult bird for the rest of us to clearly identify. Clive spotted a Black Stork fly overhead, its red bill clearly visible.

Our last stop for the day was at some Eucalyptus

Eurasian Scops Owl

trees by the Kalloni Mini- Soccer Pitch in search of the tiny Scops Owl. We all peered into the trees, but it was eagle-eyed Sue who picked one out and we all managed good scope views to round off our day. A total of 46 species had been seen in just a few hours to get us off to a flying start.

Day 2; Sunday 7th May:

A pre-breakfast walk by some resulted in a Stone Curlew at Skala Kallonis Pool, but most of us dipped on this impressive sighting. Our first destination as a group was the Tower hide overlooking the NE salt pans where amongst the waders seen yesterday were now a distant flock of Grey Plover and a few Kentish Plover. Our attention was soon drawn away however by the raptors Clive spotted hunting over the hills. These were identified by Bernie as a light morph Booted Eagle with distinctive underwing markings, and a Long -legged Buzzard with its diagnostic rufous tail, Bernie helpfully shared these key ID features as the two birds were new to many of us.

We continued to the Mesa wetlands where we had Red-backed Shrike perched in the scrubby bushes and a mobile Serin trilling in a small orchard. Common Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover were present on a rapidly drying muddy scrape, whilst Red-rumped Swallow and Alpine Swift were swooping and hawking insects over the whole area. From here, we called at Achladeri Forest, but this was a very short stop due to military operations at the site. We continued on to the Skamnioudi area where we searched for Olive-tree Warbler and Masked Shrike with little success, although Anne did manage to fleetingly glimpse a Middle Spotted Woodpecker, which disappeared too fast for most of us to see. A moustached Subalpine Warbler singing loudly from a treetop, a distant Turtle Dove and the sound of cronking Ravens provided some compensation.

Undeterred, we continued on to the beach at the Polichnitos Salt pans where a Shag was seen flying past over the sea and a lovely White-winged Tern was picked out from the swirls of Common and Little Terns. The tern later settled on a nearby bund allowing us fabulous

scope views of this attractive bird whilst we feasted on delicious pasties and mouth-watering apple pie.

After lunch we called in to the small Alikoudi pool where we were able to compare the distinguishing features of Little and Temminck's Stints, with both feeding together on the muddy perimeter. We then began to retrace our steps and tried again for the elusive birds missed in the morning. This time we were lucky in quickly getting onto good views of a brightly coloured Masked Shrike, followed by several brief but satisfying sightings of the Olive-tree Warbler. At Achladeri Forest we soon found Kruper's Nuthatch, with its showy red breast, flitting high in the conifers overhead. Finally, we called at the upper Tsiknias River where we had another Long-legged Buzzard, Little Ringed Plovers and our first singing Cretzschmar's Bunting. In the evening as we headed out to eat at a local taverna, a Glossy Ibis flew overhead. On our return, a Scops Owl was heard calling in the hotel grounds and this became a regular nightly homecoming occurrence.

Day 3; Monday 8th May:

A pre-breakfast excursion to Metochi Lake proved worthwhile. Although we did not manage to find any of our target Crakes, we had good views of Little Bittern and a Great Reed Warbler was seen posing very well whilst devouring dragonflies. Cetti's Warblers were far more showy than in the UK, drawing attention to themselves with explosive outbursts of song. We also added the more mundane Little Grebe. The highlight of the morning however was a magnificent Golden Oriole, which twice showed itself glowing in the treetops in the early morning light.

After breakfast we headed west to the Lardia Valley, where Short-toed Eagle soared overhead, Black-eared Wheatear sang from craggy rocks

and Rock Sparrow flitted to and fro on distant outcrops. There was little about at Perivolis Monastery, our next stop, but loudly singing frogs in the stream and the challenge of scrambling off the track out of the way of a huge Caterpillar bulldozer provided some entertainment. On to Eresos Junction, where Jenny spotted a bird that initially, appeared to be another Rock Sparrow. As her brain slowly clunked into gear, noting the lemony head markings and trying to recall what bird she had read that about, Bernie came to the rescue and immediately identified it as a Cinereous Bunting. He gave an incredulous look – “some people spend all week trying to find that bird” he said approvingly, and “next time say it looks like a bunting” clearly appalled at such stupidity!!



Cinereous Bunting

We strolled down the road where our first pale Isabelline Wheatear and a chestnut headed Woodchat Shrike were sharing a bush, somewhat ominously for the Wheatear we felt! We then ventured 'off piste' on a footpath down the valley where lovely Black-veined White butterflies basked on fuchsia coloured thistles and Red-backed Shrike and distant Red-footed Falcon were added.



Blue Rock Thrush

Moving on towards the Ipsilou monastery we scanned the cliffs in very windy conditions searching for Rock Nuthatch but no luck, although close views of Cretzschmar's Buntings offered good compensation. The monastery was alive with 'black headed priests', clearly an event was going on, and so we lingered in the car park area for lunch till things were a bit quieter. Seated on the rocks with spectacular views

across the valley and to the sea beyond, we added glossy Ravens and a Blue Rock Thrush with a mouthful of grubs to our ever increasing tally. A Scarce Swallowtail butterfly fluttered past and an Agama Lizard was sunning itself on a stone as we climbed the steep path up to the monastery.

At Sigri Fields an obliging Woodchat Shrike gave good views and a Spotted Flycatcher was feeding in the trees whilst a Nightingale sang. Two Lesser Kestrels were seen hovering in the clear blue skies over the hilltop and at Faneromeni beach we had distant views of both Yelkouan and Scopoli's Shearwaters. Little was to be seen at the fords, with limited water flowing, although a snake was seen slithering off the rock into the water where its yellow head was all that could be seen as it swam languidly across the water.

At the Petrified Forest numerous Wheatear included a Northern and a pair of Chukar scuttled across the road and down the bank as we passed. A Little Owl was also seen sitting on a craggy outcrop by the roadside. A brief stop at the Lardia Valley on our return journey produced Crag Martin circling a rocky outcrop and good views of Subalpine Warbler, with its brick-red breast looking dazzlingly smart in the bright afternoon sunshine.

Day 4; Tuesday 9th May:

Our illustrious leader failed to make it out of bed for our early morning walk with some unconvincing story about having set his alarm for the wrong time. However, Sue stepped up to the mark and guided us unswervingly to a pair of Stone Curlew on Christou River. Kentish Plover gave a good supporting cast and on the marsh we all saw a single White Stork feeding in the long grass and a Glossy Ibis flew over.

Next we returned to the Tsiknias River, the Agricultural Fields and the Salt pans but little was about apart from numerous Bee-eaters. A grey-headed Yellow Wagtail and Wood Sandpiper were seen at the ford. At the beach Clive and Sue were lucky enough to briefly see a Rufous Bush Robin, but despite searching, we were unable to relocate the bird. A strong wind came up off the gulf so after observing waders on the salt pans, where we added Collared Pratincoles, we headed inland to the more sheltered Napi Valley. Here we had a flurry of birds in the shape of Lesser Grey Shrike, with beautiful salmon pink breast, the unmistakable Hoopoe, with bold stripes and distinctive crown, and Middle Spotted Woodpecker disappearing stage left. There was also possible Sombre Tit, although we were unable to get sufficiently clear views amidst the foliage for a confirmed ID. Continuing on our way, we had a fruitless search in conifer woodland for Short-toed Treecreeper before pausing at the raptor watch point. We had to work hard for our target bird here, Rock Nuthatch, which intermittently showed itself for brief intervals. Eventually we all managed to get scope views but it was hard going. A Stonechat was new for the week and some also had fleeting views of Eastern Orphean Warbler.

Returning via the salt pans we had White Winged and Whiskered Terns giving prolonged close views and at the ford a Little Bittern skulked near a scenic blue plastic bag.

Day 5 Wednesday 10th May:

A morning stroll by the Christou River and Kalloni Pool provided rewarding views of the regular local suspects, the highlights being Stone Curlew and Kentish Plover. After breakfast, it was back in the minibus, and we headed to the Filia Mast track where we searched for Eastern Bonelli's Warbler and Sombre Tit. These proved somewhat

elusive, but eventually we all managed to get on to the active Bonelli's Warbler flying back and forth between the trees. On to Kavaki, our target bird was Ruppell's Warbler (or Rupert's Warbler as it is now affectionately known, following Tim's revelations about his childhood enjoyment of Rupert Bear annuals on the journey there!).



Ruppell's Warbler

This was a 'stake-out' bird and when we arrived an abundance of scopes and bins were already assembled around the cliff slope where the bird is habitually seen. Fortunately, we did not have to wait too long before a bird popped up on the bush in front of us, posed for photos, then disappeared back into the shrubs. Our next stop was Molivos where Bernie had promised to treat us all to a coffee. We took a small diversion in the town, as the road to the car park was blocked by a vehicle. This resulted in a hair-raising drive through a row of cafés, squeezing between the tables and chairs set out around the harbour. Stunningly impressive driving from Bernie was matched by the

nonchalance of the café owners, who gave us a friendly wave and moved the odd chair out of the way as we passed. Not quite the response we may have got for such an escapade in England! Whilst most of us relaxed with a drink, the ever restless Sue wandered around the harbour, past a row of octopus hanging out to dry, and returned very happy having managed satisfying views and photographs of a Red-rumped Swallow. At Perasma Reservoir, a Black Tern sat on a rock in the middle of the reservoir.



Ottoman Viper

Also of interest, was a small Ottoman Viper basking on a large stone. The snake was nearly trodden on by Anne as she sought to gain height for a photo of the Black Tern. She now has a lovely photograph of the

viper instead - the most deadly snake on the island! In the fields behind the reservoir, Spotted Flycatchers and Black-eared Wheatear were feeding and displaying.

We returned to base on the north coast track from Efthalou via Skala Sikaminias, and Mandamados and through the Napi Valley once more. The scenery was varied and spectacular as always. We passed the camp set up to receive refugees last year, but this was deserted and there was very little sign of any migrants throughout the week. We ate lunch on a lonely but beautiful stretch of beach, looking across the glistening waters to Turkey, where distant white buildings shone in the bright sunlight. We stopped in the hills of the Napi Valley to scan the countryside and were rewarded with Eleanora's Falcons seen overhead and Red-footed Falcons seated on a distant pylon, intermittently flying lazily around (endeavouring to catch prey such as dragonflies and crickets) before resettling on the same point. Never satisfied, Tim complained he couldn't really see the red feet even through his scope, so from that point on this became known to us all as the no-footed or legless falcon.

An Eastern Orphean Warbler also sought attention by singing loudly and posing very helpfully on the top of a bush long enough for all of us to study its finer details through the telescopes. Our last stop was at the SE salt pans, where we parked at the hide and walked up a track beside the water. Black-winged Stilts were present and a Black Headed Bunting perched on the tall flowers edging the river bed. Suddenly a pair of rare Dalmatian Pelicans cruised overhead, flying in formation, like heavy aircraft on a slow descending flight path. They landed on the water at the end of the pan in front of us, a truly memorable sight. We could just make out the curly tuft on the top of the head and their dark legs – these features help in separating them from White Pelican.



Dalmatian Pelican

Our first Sandwich Terns of the week were also picked out by Tim and a Black Headed Gull was unusual amongst the regular Yellow-Legged Gulls. Our return drive passed the western saltpans and Tsiknias River where the usual waders were on show.

Day 6; Thursday 11th May:

A pre-breakfast trip to the beach at Alykes Wetlands to stake out the Rufous Bush Robin proved successful, with Bernie picking out this elusive bird. This time we all had great if intermittent views as it moved from bush to bush, but the clearly defined eye stripe and rufous tail, flicking continuously, were clearly seen by all of us, and we

returned to the hotel very happy. After breakfast, we drove to Sigri fields and Faneromeni fords and beach where a pair of Black-crowned Night Heron, a Red-backed Shrike, and Little Bittern were all seen. Tiny frogs were everywhere in the shallow waters of the ford. Near the beach, a large, heavy looking falcon flew over, which Bernie eventually identified as a Lanner Falcon (only a couple of pairs are resident on the island so this was quite a find). A pair of Lesser Kestrels also circled and hovered overhead. On the track to Eresos, Black-eared Wheatears were a frequent roadside feature. We walked along the dry gully at Sigri Old Sanatorium where we added Whinchat and Stonechats and another Lesser Grey Shrike. Additional interest was found in a fall of Black-headed Buntings, which shot out of a tiny bush as we approached and masses upon masses of butterflies nectaring on flower heads, including Meadow Brown, Small Copper and an orange Skipper.



A host of nectaring butterflies

In the Meladia Valley a Cretzschmar's Bunting was singing on a rock by the roadside, its rusty coloured breast and blue-grey head looking beautiful in the sunlight. Near a bridge with a small cliff face, we had fabulous views of a family of Rock Nuthatch, flying back and forth between an old hut and the rock crevices.

Day 7; Friday 12th May.

We stayed local for our early morning venture and searched for Zitting Cisticola at the Christou River but had no luck. We again drew a blank on crakes at the Metochi River, but unusually bold Cetti's Warbler, clumsy Great Reed Warblers and skulking Little Bittern put on a great show. In the Potamia Valley there was little on the reservoir but a Long-legged Buzzard soared into view, flashed a ginger tail and



Long – legged
Buzzard carrying
a snake

circled low overhead, posing with a snake in his talons. Downstream another snake was also seen lying in wait, silent and motionless on a low-slung branch over the water. A Red-backed Shrike was feeding beside the stream, and an Eleanor's Falcon drifted past. At the Tsiknias River by the ford, Black-headed Wagtail, Squacco Heron, Wood Sandpiper and Little Bittern were all present. A flock of Bee-eaters chipped noisily in flight at the Agricultural fields and a Little Owl



Kruper's Nuthatch

was seen peering down at us as we drove past. A quick scan from the NE hide produced little that was new, although we had distant views of the Pelicans again. A Great White Egret was possibly seen at Mesa wetlands, en route to and from Achladeri forest, but disappeared in flight before we could confirm a positive ID. At the forest Kruper's Nuthatch was again present, with a family of duller newly fledged youngsters in tow, and this time we succeeded in finding several Short-toed Treecreepers. A Masked Shrike put on another magnificent show flitting from tree to ground and back again whilst we lunched, showing its beautiful black, white and chestnut headed markings. An afternoon visit to the sheep fields provided a productive end to the week. Short-toed Lark were elusive but eventually tracked down and we all had good scope views. Anne saw an Oystercatcher and we all heard it call as it flew off. A small flock of Turnstones then appeared, unusual for

this area. Bernie heard a Greenshank but this was not seen by anyone. Returning via the salt pans, we had fabulous views of a Gull-billed Tern, gliding up and down the channel long enough for us to study the key identifying features. We searched in vain for Scops Owl at the mini soccer pitch, but were too tired to persevere, and returned home more than satisfied with another enjoyable day of birding.



Gull – billed Tern

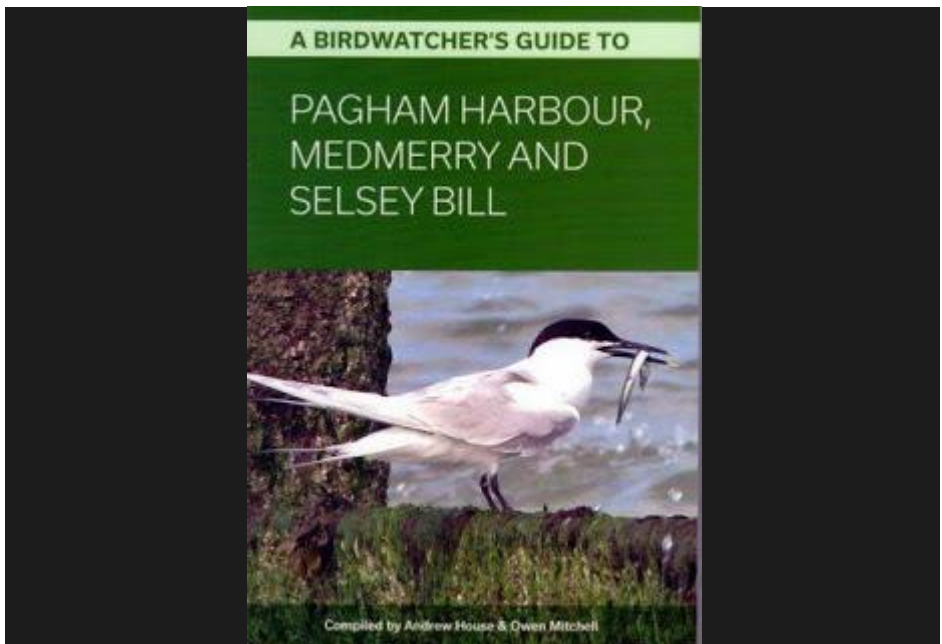
Day 8; Saturday 13 May.

Our last day, and we were due to leave for the airport mid-morning. Some ventured out for a pre-breakfast walk to Kalloni pool, wanting to prolong this amazing experience as long as possible. "Not much seen" we told inquiring passers-by, just Kentish Plover, Black -winged Stilts, Night Heron, Stone Curlew and Black Stork!

We had an amazing trip, with a total of over 130 birds seen, lots of laughter, and great company. Everyone contributed and many of us learned a lot from the more experienced birders in the group. Our particular thanks go to Bernie, for his expertise in guiding us around the island, teaching us how to identify the different birds, and for driving the minibus on some very challenging tracks.

Book Review

Bernie Forbes



A new book; A Birdwatchers Guide to Pagham Harbour, Medmerry and Selsey Bill has just been published this summer, compiled by Andrew House and Owen Mitchell. On receiving my copy and thoroughly reading it from cover to cover I was pleased with its easy reading style and the quality of its production. It does not follow the

format of a County Bird Report in that it is not rammed full of data and statistics. The authors have succinctly managed to digest all the records of common, scarce and rare species that have occurred in the defined area that the publication covers. The first thirty or so pages give the reader an insight into the area covered by the book, with detailed maps of the Selsey Peninsula. I guess many of the regular visitors to Pagham, Medmerry and the Bill will know where to go in relation to the regular sites and when to visit them. This guide goes much further and provides detailed information on how to access many of the lesser known sites in the area. Both regular and casual visitors will find this a real advantage with details on how to find those tucked away sites that frequently do not get a mention. The inclusion of the newly created Medmerry reserve that is now part of Pagham Harbour, is extremely useful. Once again full details of how the visitor can explore this difficult area are found in the book, with tips on when and where to visit. This is essential information for anyone, whether a novice or seasoned bird watcher, wishing to discover this site.

Selsey Bill gets plenty of attention as both the compilers are probably the most frequent visitors to the "Bill" and are kept extremely busy running "Birding the Selsey Peninsula Blog". I spoke to a group of visiting birders who were watching the Elegant Tern in June and several comments were made in regard to the book. The consensus was that the book is very reader friendly and particularly useful to relatively inexperienced bird watchers or the casual visitor. The detailed maps and the general layout were definitely appreciated for the clear directions they provide. There is a checklist of all the birds recorded in the area with a brief history of all records and their current status. This I found extremely appealing and easy to use without having to digest huge amounts of scientific data, and there is no sign of a bar graph on any page. Other wildlife has been included

which can only enhance the value of this publication, with details of butterflies, dragonflies and mammals. Many of the photographs were taken by the authors using compact bridge cameras or were digitised. The results are quite remarkable. I have a few criticisms, perhaps the front cover photograph is flawed in being over-exposed - I would have preferred one of the many excellent Black-winged Stilt photographs to take its place.

Summing up, however, I would thoroughly recommend this book to any visiting birder to Sussex and it would certainly enhance the experience for anyone who visits this site less regularly or even is a frequent local visitor. At £10 it is a bargain and all the profits from the sale go to 'Friends of Pagham Harbour' to fund specific projects at both Pagham and Medmerry: something that is very close to my heart.

February to August 2017 Highlights

Clive Hope

February

An Iceland Gull was briefly on Goring Gap and three Black-throated Divers were together on the sea off Worthing on 5th. On 6th there were five Red Kites and up to eight Buzzards around Harrow Hill up from Michelgrove.

Large numbers of Auks (most thought to be Razorbills) were moving west well offshore at Worthing and later off Shoreham and Lancing on several dates (e.g 550 at the former on 8th) as well as several Red-throated Divers, either on the sea or passing. Some of these were close inshore. Up to three Purple Sandpipers lingered at the Harbour mouth.

Four Egyptian Geese paid a visit to Widewater on 11th, an unusual visitor here. Five Waxwings appeared on Shoreham Beach also on this date and again on 15th (although thereafter elusive) with a single in Portslade on 13th. At Ferring Rife on this day there were a Stonechat, Grey Wagtail and six Reed Buntings, and at East Kingston 10 Redwings, two Mistle Thrushes and four Song Thrushes all together in a paddock. Two Eider passed Ferring on 14th, one was off Brighton and another was in Shoreham Harbour next day. On 15th 260 Brent Geese and 67 Red-throated Divers flew E and Razorbills remained off the coast in good numbers at several sites.

Raptors moving east over Worthing on 18th were 12 Buzzards, a Red Kite and a Sparrowhawk. A Red-necked Grebe appeared on Brooklands lake but seemed unwell on 19th -21st. Five Waxwings were in Newtown Road, Hove on 27th and three remained into March .

March

Five Bewick's Swans were on the Adur levels near Henfield with other wildfowl of several species on 2nd with nine Black-tailed Godwits there next day. A Short-eared Owl was at Beeding Brooks and a Ring Ouzel flew over the A27 at Shoreham on 7th.

There was a mass arrival of Chiffchaffs on 11th with birds inland and on the coast. Five Buzzards and a Red Kite flew east over Ferring on 15th and a Wheatear was at Goring Gap followed by ten there on 17th. A Hen Harrier was near Lee Farm, north of Michelgrove on 19th. Two more Wheatears were at Shoreham on 20th and a Firecrest was in Russell Square, Brighton next day. On 23rd a Bittern was seen at Patching Pond, two Wheatears were at Widewater and one or two Firecrests were in Goring Wood. A Little Gull was on the beach at

Ferring on 24th and four Red Kites were over West Worthing. A Crane was reported over Worthing on 25th.

Sandwich Terns appeared on 27th with four past Ferring and Meadow Pipits were arriving from the sea at several points along the coast. Two Short-eared and one Barn Owl hunted over Beeding Brooks at 1045 on 27th. Brent Geese continued to pass east in small numbers until 28th when c.150 were on Goring beach and later moved off followed by six more Sandwich Terns. Swallows appeared at a few sites on 31st when the first local Common Tern passed Goring Gap.



April

The sight of 15 Red Kites together over Findon looking for scraps on 2nd must have been a spectacle. There was a small fall of migrants on 4th when five Wheatears were at Goring gap and two Redstarts and several Willow Warblers at Brooklands and in a Shoreham garden. A

Little Ringed Plover at Widewater on 5th was an unusual record for this site.

On 9th at Ladies Mile NR Whitethroats had taken up territory and a Redstart and Wheatear were nearby. A good seawatch on this day at Goring and Worthing produced 450 Brent Geese, over 200 Sandwich as well as ten Common and two Little Terns. Also seen were an Arctic and Great Skuas and a party of six Velvet Scoters. Six Wheatears and a Redstart were in the Ferring/Kingston area on 10th and the same species at Goring Gap on 14th (three and one respectively).



Our President had a Redwing in his garden on 12th. The regular pair of Swallows to Coombes Old Rectory were back in residence by 13th when a Cuckoo was seen at Falmer. A Whinchat was at Ladies Mile Patcham on 17th and next day a rarity in the shape of a White-spotted Bluethroat was found near Wood's Mill but didn't linger. Nightingales arrived at several inland sites around this time.

Small parties of Whimbrel were noted passing the coast and mostly single birds appeared on the Adur. Also, unusual numbers of Mediterranean Gulls moved east in the next few days. Two Pomarine Skuas were noted off Widewater on 23rd but sea-watching till then was generally poor. Ringers at our three sites all recommenced activity and early Reed Warblers were trapped at The Ladywell and The Mumbles.

Two Black-winged Stilts were on the Adur between the Toll bridge and Cuckoo Corner on 24th but didn't stay long. More Cuckoos were heard in the Adur Valley and elsewhere on 28th. The wind moved to the south and then to the east-south-east over the weekend of 29th and 30th precipitating a large movement of waders, terns, and notably, around 15 Pomarine and 30 Arctic Skuas most of which flew close inshore affording excellent views, as well as two Little Gulls, other sea-birds and sea-ducks.

May

Swifts appeared at several sites on 4th. On 9th a Black Kite was reported from Steep Down north of Sompting. A late Wheatear was on fences near Ferring Country Centre on 16th. A short seawatch at Ferring on 22nd produced c.70 Common Scoter flying east distantly and at 0900 five Pomarine Skuas that had been resting on the sea took off eastwards also. A Hobby was over Beeding Brooks and a Little Owl was seen at Edburton on 29th.



June

A Quail was heard calling at Steep Down on 2nd. An adult Little Gull was on the Adur at Coombes on 8th.

July

Ringling at our three sites was well under way this month. Exceptional numbers of birds for the time of year were being handled at The Ladywell with Reed Warblers in particular figuring high. It seems to have been a good breeding season for many species. Swifts were moving on 23rd and 24th with c.100 over Ferring and Steep Down. A Cuckoo was in fields between Ferring and Kingston on the first date and Willow Warblers and Sand Martins started moving south through our area. By the month end, Turnstones and Ringed Plovers plus the

odd Dunlin and Sanderling had re-appeared at Goring Gap. Little Egrets moved back to the coast.

August

Willow Warbler passage increased with 43 trapped at Ladywell and 35 at Cissbury on 6th and smaller numbers at other sites. Also at the former on this day seven other species of warbler were handled. 80 Swifts were over the Ferring/Kingston fields on 8th and on the Adur south of the Cement Works one adult and five young Egyptian Geese were seen. Ladywell scored again with six warbler species on 9th and five Wheatears were on Goring beach.

On 13th a day record catch of 95 Willow Warblers was made at Ladywell as well as a male Redstart, a Firecrest and a nearby Spotted Flycatcher. Another Firecrest was trapped at Cissbury the day before. On 16th there were 45 Little Egrets on Goring and Ferring beaches and a Little Gull joined the gull roost at Goring Gap. At Chantry Hill on 23rd were eight Whinchats, two Wheatears, three or four juvenile Marsh Harriers, eight Red Kites, 20 Buzzards, one Peregrine, six Kestrels and twenty Ravens. Four Whinchats, two Wheatears and a Spotted Flycatcher were near Ferring on 24th. On 26th 120 Yellow Wagtails flew over Goring Gap up until 0910 with another 35 landing on the beach before flying out to sea. Along Monarch's Way, north of Cissbury, six Redstarts were seen on 27th with three more trapped at the ringing site to the south along with no less than 67 Blackcaps. A Pied Flycatcher was at Ladywell. Five Redstarts were at Ladies Mile NR on 30th.

In our gardens in 2016

Val Bentley

Those contributing to the Garden Bird Survey information during 2016 were:

Tony Benton, Noranne Biddulph, Paula Blake, Reg Bradbury, Brian Clay, Jay Cooper, John Cooper, Shirley Downs, John Ford, Martin Ford, Clive Hope, Laurie Keen, Cyril & Maureen Leeves, Sheila Marshall, John and Shena Maskell, Janet Paterson, David Potter, Jo Procter, Brianne Reeve, Anthony Robinson, John and Jeannette Simpson, Stephen Simpson, Marion Taylor, Gordon and Vera Tickler, Rae Titcomb, David Tomalin, Peter Whitcomb, Martin Wilson, Audrey Wisdom and myself. There were 27 forms returned for the first quarter, 25 for the second, 22 for the third, and 24 in the fourth.

The geographical locations of the gardens were well scattered: Brighton (2), Hove (2), Shoreham (9), Coombes (1), Lancing (3), Worthing (1), Goring (2), Ferring (2), Rustington (1), High Salvington (2), Findon (1), Steyning (2) and Henfield (2).

As previously, the information from each week was entered into a spreadsheet in order to find which species were the most frequent garden visitors. However, this year there were no 100% attendance records, because one of our newest recorders has a garden backing onto Widewater, and though she can report Mute Swans, she did not have a single Blue Tit! The three-year comparison is shown below.

Species	Average % of gardens used each quarter	2016 overall Position	2015 overall Position	2014 overall Position	Maximum number seen at one time	Average number seen per week(all gardens)
Blackbird	98	1	2=	1	11	1.59
Woodpigeon	97	2	5	4=	30	2.26
Robin	96	3	2=	4=	7	1.01
Blue Tit	95	4=	1	2	19	2.13
Great Tit	95	4=	4	6	8	1.43
Dunnoch	94	6	6	3	8	1.08
House Sparrow	84	7=	10	12	35	3.59
Collared Dove	84	7=	8	8	3	0.66
Magpie	82	9	7	7	14	0.92
Wren	78	10	11=	14	7	0.56
Starling	74	11	13	13	100+	2.75
Carrion Crow	73	12	11=	11	5	0.50
Goldfinch	72	13	9	9	26	1.6
Greenfinch	64	14	14	10	12	0.59
Herring Gull	61	15	16	16	10	0.61

The top six merely shuffled their positions a little, House Sparrow moved up three places and Starling two, while Goldfinch fell by four. It was somewhat sad to see Herring Gull creep into the top 15 at the expense of Chaffinch.

The “Also Rans”

Regular visitors, but outside the top 15 were:

Species	Average % of gardens used		
	2016	2015	2014
Chaffinch	52%	63%	64%
Long-tailed Tit	50%	37%	37%
Blackcap	40%	41%	36%
Great Spotted Woodpecker	38%	36%	28%
Song Thrush	37%	33%	36%
Goldcrest	30%	24%	14%
Jay	27%	31%	20%
Chiffchaff	26%	25%	32%
Feral Pigeon	21%	23%	38%
Coal Tit	20%	15%	21%
Jackdaw	18%	26%	43%

Chaffinches were much less frequently observed compared to the previous two years. The species occurred in only 52% of gardens throughout 2016, a serious decline from the 81% figure in 2012, and in the third quarter were only seen by 41% of the observers. Laurie commented that they were now quite uncommon, and he no longer hears them singing from the gardens in his area. Long-tailed Tits were seen more frequently in 2016, as were Goldcrests, which continued their increase over the previous two years, but Jackdaws were less often recorded, and were down to half of the 2014 figure.

First Quarter

In these first three months there were 45 different species recorded, an increase of four over the same period the previous year and seven more than in 2014. Wintering Redwings were seen by John and Shena on two occasions in January, and by Audrey once in mid-February. A group of Siskins, numbering up to six, were in a tree in Noranne's garden in early March, and single Firecrests were recorded by myself, John C, John and Shena, for whom it was the third ever record of the species, and Martin W who had close sightings of one on five different days in January and February. Just a single Lesser Redpoll was seen by Paula in mid-January, and only she and I recorded Nuthatch – must be something about Henfield!

Mistle Thrushes are not often reported, so it was nice that they appeared for both John F and Audrey. Pied Wagtails were seen in two gardens, and were outnumbered by Grey Wagtails which were seen by John C, Audrey and Cyril and Maureen – their first garden record of the species in 31 years! The only Reed Bunting seen was by Martin F in the second half of March, but a wonderful sighting for Brianne was a Marsh Tit which visited her for 47 consecutive days from 13th January to 28th February.

The only “winter” Chiffchaff was at Paula’s in early February, but Blackcaps were noted in 11 of the 27 gardens, with four, three females and a male, appearing at John and Shena’s on 11th January and Audrey reporting up to six fairly regularly. A male at Martin W’s was almost a permanent fixture on a fat ball feeder, joined by a female from late January, and was at times quite aggressive, so even a Robin showed respect! A “new species” for the Garden Bird list of course were the Mute Swans which came daily into Jo’s garden where she has water troughs attached to the deck!

Second Quarter

The same number of species noted this year as in the same quarter of 2015, namely 45. No lingering winter thrushes, but two male Reed Buntings visited Reg on 9th April, and he saw another on 16th May. A few Willow Warblers were seen – by Shirley, John and Shena, Rae and Audrey. Clive noticed his first “garden” Swallow at the end of April, but even earlier a male Swallow put in an appearance on 27th March at Brianne’s. It spent some very cold nights hunkered down deep in the nest. Its mate did not arrive until April 7th and the pair went on to produce ten young in two broods of five. Laurie was the only person to record Blackcaps during the summer months as a pair were nesting nearby and regularly came to use his bird bath.

Two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were calling in daily to Janet’s to feed on fat packs. A Tawny Owl nested very close to Paula’s house and was heard almost every week, and a pair of Swifts arrived near Noranne’s from mid- May and were noted regularly from then on until their departure. Shirley reported that Wrens were using a Blue Tit

box on a house wall about 8' up, though they weren't spotted until they spent a day on 22nd June helping the young to fledge. Many others observed successful fledging; Rae had Dunnocks, Great Tits and Blackbirds, Gordon and Vera had House Sparrows from nests in their eaves, John and Shena noted young Starlings on 19th May and young Goldcrests on 10th June, and Audrey saw several young Goldfinches feeding with their parents.



Four young Coal Tits fledged from a nest at Paula's. Brianne had a pair of Mistle Thrushes, which attempted to breed, but it seemed that the nest was predated by crows. Jo's Mute Swans produced 5 cygnets, which all came to visit! Finally, a chance sighting of a Common Redstart must have brightened up the day for David P at the end of April.

Third Quarter

There were 44 different species this quarter. Starlings were not recorded at all in eight gardens, but in those where they appeared they were in good numbers with maximum of 25 for Reg and Gordon and Vera. Nineteen Blue Tits were seen by Paula in the week of 10th July, 12 Long-tailed Tits were in John and Shena's garden that week too, and the following week David T was very pleased to see an adult and two young Green Woodpeckers together.

Jo added Kingfisher to her garden list for the year in July, and there were two garden firsts for Martin W this quarter; at the end of August a female Pied Flycatcher, and in September a Willow Warbler. Cyril and Maureen saw a Whitethroat in mid-August, while Martin F and Laurie both saw returning Common Redstarts in the week of 28th August; Laurie's was a female which visited his bird bath for several minutes. Brianne noted one Spotted Flycatcher on 29th August, then two on 7th September – the only garden records of the species this year. On the 24th a Hobby flew low west to east over Laurie's garden.

Fourth Quarter

There were 45 species noted from October to December, and one of these was also new to our list. Compared to this quarter in 2015, Greenfinches seemed to be faring slightly better, being noted by 50% of observers (46% in 2015), though the annual average was 64%. However Starlings were seen in 75% of the gardens (58% in 2015), better than the year average! Tony saw 21 in the week of 18th December, Sheila had 25 in November, but this was trumped by 40 at Stephen's in October. Song Thrushes appeared more frequently this quarter than in the rest of the year, and were seen by nearly 60% of the garden recorders.

December Blackcaps were reported by Noranne, Laurie, David P, John and Jeannette, Stephen and Martin W, with two (a pair) at John and Shena's and two males seen by David T. Brian, John and Shena and David P all noted small groups of Redwings at the end of December, the maximum being five seen by Brian. On Christmas Eve the only Brambling of the year was among a group of Chaffinches at Paula's though it did not reappear, and that "new" species mentioned earlier was a Yellow-browed Warbler seen by Stephen at the start of October, one of an influx along the south coast at that time.

In Summary

The grand total of species for 2016 was 61, two more than the year before. In addition to the Brambling and Yellow-browed Warbler, other species only noted once, and in a single week, were Black-headed Gull, Kingfisher, Whitethroat, Pied Flycatcher, Lesser Redpoll and Siskin. Among other infrequent visitors seen were Mallard, Grey Heron, Stock Dove, Tawny Owl, Green Woodpecker, Firecrest, Treecreeper and Bullfinch.

The summary for the 2016 Garden BirdWatch run nationally by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) shows many similarities to ours. The top seven species were the same, but then came a startling difference. Though Chaffinch showed a 4% decline, it still managed to be 8th on the national list, whereas Herring Gull does not figure in the top 40! Similarly Coal Tit, 25th in the SDOS recording area, was in 12th position nationally. The BTO's "Summary of the Year" from the spring edition of *Bird Table* reflected on the breeding season fortunes of our commoner species. Single-brooded Blue Tits and Great Tits were both affected by dull and wet weather at the most crucial time in June in southern England, so "far fewer young birds than normal were seen in gardens", which "remained evident throughout the remainder of

the year, and Great Tit numbers were the lowest ever in November”. The summary also stated that “Greenfinch numbers continue to decline, and average counts dropped below one bird per garden for the first time ever in October”. On a more positive note though was that “Robins clearly had a good breeding season” and “Goldfinch numbers were high in gardens all year”, though the latter did not quite hold true for SDOS.



Grateful thanks to all who have sent in their sightings for the year, to Paula for her photographic skills, and finally, a special thank you to Audrey, who has decided to hand in her notice on the Garden Bird Survey after sending in a return for every quarter since at least 2004.

Down Memory Lane

John Maskell

On the day that the Royal Navy's new aircraft carrier "Queen Elizabeth" steamed northwards into Pompey Harbour for the first time I "homed" southwards across Spithead to reach my own natal "port". It was an opportunity to visit my Mum and for us both to attend a talk on one of the Isle of Wight's newest nature reserves.

My Mother was born in a cottage at the southern edge of Ryde and a quarter of a century later I also started my life there in what was the family home for more than 50 years. At the top and bottom of our steep road there was easy access to fields and open countryside that inspired my lifelong love of Nature. In the Spring, awaking to the call of a Cuckoo was a regular occurrence. The local fields, which contained two ponds, were a wonderful playground in an era when small children could safely play outside. In the drier months, it was possible to walk to my junior school along the lane with only a few yards of "suburban" landscape at each end. The adventures we had! And when time allowed it was possible to follow rural paths to all parts of the Island.

In the meantime, on the death of my Father, Mum moved to a flat overlooking the Solent (she has Gannet, Brent Goose and Red Squirrel on her "garden list") and I assumed that their location would make "our fields" prime building land. So imagine my surprise and joy when I read that they had recently been designated as a local nature reserve and, when I heard that on 16th August Dr. Ruth Waller was to give a talk about the reserve to the Historic Ryde Society, there was no stopping me!

Accompanying me on the train and then ferry was my trusty mountain bike. Upon disembarking, I pedalled to my childhood paradise and explored the Pig Leg Lane Nature Reserve with its many new paths



and informative notice boards. In my youth, the fields were grazed by horses and cattle but now much has been re-wilded. The oak trees I once climbed have matured but sadly the elms are long gone. In my all-too-brief visit on a hot summer's day I noted more than 20 bird, 6 butterfly and 3 dragonfly species. Of the former the highlights were two Kingfishers in the stream where I used to fish for Sticklebacks and a pair of Raven cronking overhead. The latter certainly weren't there 50 years ago and I don't recall Kingfishers either!



In the distance a steam locomotive could be heard arriving at Smallbrook Junction on the Isle of Wight's preserved railway line... and more childhood memories were stirred... but that's another story!

Over the years Mum and I have often discussed our individual childhood memories of playing and exploring the area some 25 years apart. Much is remarkably similar but we have always disagreed on the amphibian contents of the ponds with Mum quite adamant that she used to dip for Great Crested Newts! So, at the evening talk when I was relating my exploration earlier in the day, Ruth casually enquired, "And did you see the Great Crested Newts?" Mum's face was a picture. No words were necessary!

A message from our new Field Officer

Bob Witney

As many of you will know I took over, with some trepidation, as Field Officer from Dorian Mason at the AGM in March 2017.

Since then I have been back through the previous 10 years of Society Programmes, which Dorian kindly passed over to me, and have come up with a few changes to our usual trips but not too many because Dorian had the best outings pretty much covered as did his predecessors.

So here is my thinking for the 2018 Programme.

We are going to Medmerry twice next year, once in the winter, as we usually do, but then again in the summer so that we can see the difference between the two seasons. In winter we will see the geese, ducks and waders and in the summer it will hopefully be full of butterflies as well as nesting Avocet and, who knows, maybe even an Elegant Tern!

I have added a trip to Arlington Reservoir which is near to Polegate and a SSSI. Around 17% of our members are in Hove or Brighton so I am hoping it will appeal to you. It is an easy 1.5 mile stroll (ease of access is something which members have asked me to consider) and there is the possibility of a cup of tea at the end. We will avoid the actual dam and go into the fields behind it. With any luck there will be lots of wild fowl about.

Burton Mill Pond, which we will do in March, is back. This is a really nice walk with varied habitat and Roger Smith leading, I know it's not the easiest place to get to but it really is worth getting up for.

In April we are going to Buchan Country Park which is overseen by West Sussex CC and has won the Green Flag Award every year since 2010. This may seem like a bit of a trip but actually it's straight up the A24 and then off to the right. We are going a little earlier in the year than we have previously in the hope of fewer leaves and more birds. This year, thanks to Tom Howard-Jones, who has very kindly agreed to lead again next year, we saw a Nuthatch feeding its young and taking no notice of us at all, even when Ron Bewley went in close for some pictures.

In June we are going onto Highdown Hill above Ferring, with Tricia Hall for a Botany Stroll. This replaces our usual Ferring Rife walk which I thought we would miss this year because "Goring Gap and the Coast" with Clive Hope is back on the programme. It is worth pointing out that we will do "Goring Gap and the Coast" when there is a high tide and trying to work out exactly what the tide will be doing in 18 months' time is not the easiest task so the actual date in the Programme may vary by 7 days or so.

Apart from these changes you will see that all the old favourites are there, Tim Holters will trundle around Widewater and the Adur in Shoreham. Bernie Forbes will repeat his excellent forays around the Burgh and to the Adur above Beeding not to mention the ever popular Church Norton. Val Bentley will explore Henfield early on and later in the year we will listen out for the Nightingales at Woods Mill.

Pulborough Brooks is on the schedule for the waders with Kevin Midgley and Cissbury is organised for the Ring Ouzels. I have talked Clive Hope into leading this outing. Lavington Common will provide Nightjars (we saw three this year - one very close indeed - and a couple of Woodcocks too). Warnham LNR, and Anchor Bottom will

be led by Brianne Reeve and myself. Warnham LNR is well worth a visit if you haven't managed to get there yet and again it's easy walking with several hides to sit down; tea is also available.

Can I take this opportunity to encourage members both old and new to have a stab at getting to at least one or two of the jaunts. They are about seeing the flora and fauna of the various locations, and we are very lucky that we have some extremely knowledgeable naturalists to guide us. They are a great way of meeting fellow members; folks who share the same interests as you. You will maybe learn something too: I can't tell you how much I have picked up in the two and a half years since Anne and I joined the Society, and I like to think I have made some new friends too.

I think that's about all I have to say: now where is my 2019 diary.....



My Best Days Birding

John Maskell

Thanks to my wife, Shena's, enthusiasm and organisational skills I have enjoyed a number trips around the globe that have featured birding. There have been many colourful highlights but perhaps the most uplifting was on 19th January 2000 hearing the organ-like song at dawn (yes, me!) and then seeing an endemic and endangered Kakapo in the Pureora Forest of New Zealand's North Island after we'd camped out to target this bird. It is a poor flier and prefers to hop and fly between branches. Having gained special permission to stay in the forest we duly reported back to the warden. "Oh, you saw it did you?" Apparently the forest only hosted a single male Kakapo at the time!

But if I am honest it is still our garden birds that continue to give me the greatest joy. Two particularly memorable days spring to mind.

In a 90 minute session on 8th September 2002, in addition to the usual garden species, we were treated to a fall of passerines in the form of a pair of Blackcaps, a singing Willow Warbler, 3 Spotted Flycatchers, 2 Pied Flycatchers and a Lesser Whitethroat. The whole garden seemed to be alive with a frenzied mass of feathers!

Then on Christmas Day 2010 I drew back the curtains and, as Shena commented at the time in a SDOS User Group e-mail, "My True Love called to me... a Waxwing in our hawthorn tree." Actually it was two. What a Christmas present!

John Maskell

Photograph acknowledgments

The source of photographs is sometimes clear from the text or other markings 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: Great-spotted Woodpecker: Dorian Mason

Back: Great-spotted Woodpecker: Dorian Mason

Page 25 Common Redstart: Dorian Mason

Page 26 Barn Swallow: Dorian Mason

Page 28 Eurasian Hobby: Dorian Mason

Page 40 Nature reserve: John Maskell

Page 41 Common Kingfisher: Dorian Mason

Page 44 Waders in flight: Dorian Mason

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