

Shoreham and District  
Ornithological Society  
Spring Newsletter  
2019



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# Editorial

Roger Smith

Yesterday, in early March, I went out with a friend for a day's birding on the heathlands and downs of West Sussex. We easily found Dartford Warbler on Ambersham Common and over two hundred Fieldfare were feeding on a nearby pasture where some form of 'muck' had recently been spread. At Burton Mill Pond Firecrest were located, after some effort, in the Western Hemlock stand to the east of the valley where they now seem to be present for much of the year. In an adjoining field, amidst a large cattle herd, there were a dozen Little Egrets, some foraging amongst the animals in the manner of Cattle Egrets. We went on to West Dean Woods where, literally, a kettle of Common Buzzards was accompanied by a couple of Red Kites and as we walked back to the car we could hear the croaking of invisible Ravens.

I first took up birdwatching in the early 1990's and many of the highlights of yesterday were strikingly different to the birding experience I might have had thirty years ago. Stealthily and constantly environmental change reshapes the nature of the world in which we live and the experiences that we have of it. Some of these changes we might reasonably judge are for the better, for example the diminishing pressure on mammalian and avian predators seen across Europe since the 1970's, whilst others, often associated with agricultural intensification, have resulted in the dramatic declines observed for many smaller species and probably are for the worse. Remember though that agricultural intensification has brought food security to the billions of people who have arrived on the scene since many of us took up birdwatching.

As we now move forward in our modern quest to save the planet a not entirely trivial question it seems to me is which version of the planet would we be aiming for? It is unlikely to be possible to turn the clock back, even if that was desirable, so how would we like birdwatching to be in the future?

## Norfolk in winter

Sue Miles and Jenny and Tim Holter

For the last 5 years, Tim, Jenny and Sue have 'migrated' around the end of January for a birdwatching weekend in north Norfolk. With snow forecast overnight Sue set off a day early arriving late afternoon at her favourite place, Thornham Creek, a muddy channel set in open area of saltmarsh and fields. Skeins of chattering Pink Footed Geese flew overhead plus a Barn Owl quartering the ditches which seemed a good omen for the trip.

The following day we all met at Abbey Farm, Flitcham, where a flock of Bramblings were seen in the roadside hedgerows but there were no Tree Sparrows as seen in the past. We dipped yet again on the infamous Little Owl, apparently it is resident in a tree behind the pond.

A reported Smew then lured us to Snettisham. En route 2 splendid Barn Owls were hunting in a field, One pounced on prey and we watched in awe as it eagerly devoured its meal. At Snettisham the Smew proved elusive, but a moment to remember occurred when a Cormorant caught a large eel, manoeuvring it partially into its throat. At this point it was mobbed by 3 other Cormorants, all greedily trying to snatch the eel. The commotion escalated as 2 Great Black-backed Gulls joined the fray at which point the eel managed to escape from the cormorant's throat into the water closely followed by all 4 Cormorants, leaving the 2 Gulls floating serenely on a patch of water that had seconds before seen a maelstrom of activity.

Whilst scanning the nearby mudflats Jenny spotted a Peregrine hunched over prey tearing at the bloody flesh, completing a trio of birds with prey in a few short hours. We then headed back to our usual late afternoon spot in the hide at Holme where we watched Marsh Harrier hunting before coming into roost.

The next day the bitterly cold northerly wind was accompanied by sleet showers but undaunted we drove to Holkham Gap to look for Shorelark.

We had been told of the new eco-friendly visitor centre and took refuge from the sleet whilst sheltering outside. The staff took pity on us and opened early to allow us in. It is a circular building with a café, display area, toilets and eating area around the edge. Both Tim and Sue at first glance thought it had a glass domed roof but the centre of the building was open to the elements. Sue was intrigued by a sign saying “wrapper free ice-lollies”, but we felt no additional ice was needed today! Once the sleet eased we walked to the saltmarsh to look for Shorelark but drew a blank. However we had brilliant views of 30 jaunty Snow Buntings. Cold and wet we headed for Cley where there was very little bird life on the reserve. At the beach we found another flock of Snow Bunting but no sign of the reported Glaucous Gull.

Before going on this trip it had been decided it was time Jenny had her own scope so a visit to Cley Spy was planned. Jenny had sought advice on the purchase with Bernie Forbes, in particular, being very helpful. At Cley Spy feeders are set at various distances from the shop enabling a prospective customer to check clarity and ease of focusing. Yellowhammer, Bullfinch, Brambling and Greenfinch were amongst the birds on the feeders and in the hedgerow beyond Jenny spotted a Hen Harrier which delighted the staff who quickly appeared to see it. With this good omen, a decision was finally made to buy a Kowa 663. The shop also threw in a free overhaul of the tripods belonging to Sue and Tim. Excellent service.

Clear blue skies the next morning meant Jenny was raring to try out her new scope so we made the short drive to Thornham Creek where there were two Spotted Redshank and a dozen or so Twite, pecking at the seedheads on the saltmarsh with their winter yellow bills. On the walk to the beach dunes Jenny spotted a Pipit which caused much discussion. A white throat, a strong supercilium and its pale colour indicated Water Pipit with which other nearby birders concurred. The sea-watch added Long-tailed Duck, Eider, Guillemot and Red-breasted Merganser to our list. Jenny declared that she was very happy with her new scope.

We returned to the car and ate lunch overlooking the fields at Choseley where a Rough Legged Buzzard had been seen days earlier but there was no sign of it for us! Whilst at Snettisham Tim had expressed a wish to see the Knot murmuration so we made our way back there. A biting cold wind drove Sue and Jenny back to the car but not before we had witnessed a huge roost of Oystercatchers. We watched as their numbers steadily increased to thousands as more flew in to then march steadily forward in front of the incoming tide. We also observed the start of the Knot murmuration. As the tide approaches over the mudflats waders take to the skies before settling further up the beach. We could appreciate that as the mudflats are progressively covered by the tide the spectacle must be accentuated. Only a taster for us in the fading light but Tim was happy with that. Now we know what to expect, next year we will attempt to plan a visit combining the optimum tide and roosting times.

On our final day a wet morning greeted us but the lure of the Shorelark proved strong so it was back to Holkham where, despite the wind-blown drizzle leaving us drenched, we happily watched a flock of 19 feeding on the saltmarsh. Then on to our traditional final day visit to Titchwell where Tim and Jenny watched a Water Rail but few other birds were about.

The lack of birds this year was noticeable with no fields full of Pink Footed Geese but our species total of 93 was still respectable.

So it was the end of another great break in an area of diverse habitat with the saltmarsh and open skies being the main attraction, but it was sad to see so many new houses being built on fields in such an iconic birding area.

# Syrphin' safari

Russ Tofts

As I write it is cold and gloomy but, by the time this newsletter drops through the letterbox, garden birds will be singing, Goshawks will be displaying, Ravens rolling and tumbling, the first Hairy-footed Flower Bees will be buzzing irrepressibly around your Pulmonaria and the recently emerged Adders will be putting in long stints of sunbathing. Also the first hoverflies will be emerging.

To hoverate (verb) - to set forth in the pursuit of members of the family Syrphidae.

For most members of the SDOS birds are a source of pleasure and fascination; they certainly have been for me for the last fifty and more years. Most summers, however, can feel a little bird-less, as a result of secretive breeding behaviour, lack of migration movement and the general decline of many species due to a variety of factors. So historically, birders (myself included), have tended to look elsewhere in the summer months, often focusing on butterflies and dragonflies as both groups are attractive, diurnal easily identified and present at many familiar sites. Unfortunately, there are just too few species in the UK. In a good summer a focused tour of the country could enable a determined observer to see all but the rarest vagrants for both groups.

As a result of volunteering at RSPB Pulborough I felt I needed to broaden my areas of interest and, with the enthusiasm and influence of one particular staff member, I settled on Hoverflies. Why? Well firstly, hoverflies are 'good guys', they are important pollinators, they can be found for a good eight months of the year, and they don't bite or sting and are attractive to look at. Secondly, with a species list of 280+ there is plenty to 'get your teeth into' if you are interested in listing. And thirdly many are photogenic: in this day and age which of us doesn't carry a camera of some sort? DSLR's, bridge cameras,

point-and-shoot cameras and mobile phones are all capable of producing good pictures of the larger species at least.

For those people with reasonably sized and diverse gardens a list of 30-40 species is possible and a good large site such as a nature reserve may have double this number. We are fortunate in the south-east in having better than average numbers of species; as you go north and west the numbers drop away but as with butterflies and dragonflies specialist species occur for those with 'listing / twitching' inclinations.

Many species can be identified visually with normal binoculars but most will require close-up images from a camera and, of course, a good number will need specimens to be taken and examined under a microscope. Some Hoverflies have evolved to mimic other insects notably, bumblebees, honeybees, wasps and sawflies; some are very close in appearance and behaviour but most aren't. The photos at the end of this article show the range of mimicry.

It doesn't take too long to 'get your eye in' and separate hoverflies from other Diptera, wasps and bees. The following will help greatly in putting species names (or genus names at least) to any hovers you might find.

Britain's Hoverflies: Ball S and Morris R, Wildguides, 2015

British Hoverflies: An Illustrated Identification Guide: Stubbs A E, Falk S J, 2002

Hoverfly Recording Scheme - <http://www.hoverfly.org.uk>

UK Hoverflies on Facebook

Steven Falk's Hoverflies on Flickr

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/63075200@N07/collections/72157629600153789>

Good hovering for 2019 and don't forget to submit those records!!





## Hoverflies: names and descriptions below in clockwise order

*Volucella bombylans* (a bumble bee mimic)

*Volucella zonaria* (a hornet mimic)

*Xylota sylvarum* (a solitary wasp/sawfly mimic)

*Chrysotoxum verralli* (a wasp mimic)

# The future for habitat conservation in the Lower Adur

Tim Holter

Since last year I have been providing local assistance to Richard Cowser who is the Conservation Officer for Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS). Richard's objective for the River Adur is to seek mitigation and compensation habitat north of the A27 to address the decline of wetland birds in the Lower Adur Estuary south of the A27. Richard does not live in the Adur area, so needed someone with local birding knowledge to assist at meetings. I was recruited due to my WeBS knowledge. Also, via SDOS, I am able to liaise with other knowledgeable local birders.

## Background

The Adur Valley area north of the A27 up to the Bramber boundary is within the South Downs National Park. The area south of the A27 is within Adur and Worthing District Council's (AWDC) boundaries. This means that development control along this stretch of the river involves two separate planning authorities. This division adds additional complexity to environmental management decision making in the valley. The following account describes discussions involving various government and conservation organisations seeking to manage nature conservation in the valley in the context of substantial local development pressures.

The Adur Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is south of the A27. The SSSI includes the river habitats, riverbanks, mudflats and saltmarsh from the Ferry Bridge to Cuckoo Corner. Of associated concern, although lying outside the designated SSSI boundary, is the adjacent Shoreham Airfield which is effectively 'riverine habitat', integral to the SSSI habitat in that some bird species, which forage on the SSSI mudflats, roost on the airfield grassland at high tide and in adverse weather conditions.

A decline in numbers of birds in the lower estuary has occurred and this trend is anticipated to continue. It is thought that the decline has been caused by local changes along the river which are contributing to a detrimental impact on inter-tidal and adjacent habitat and wildlife reliant on that habitat.

Some habitat changes may have occurred gradually and possibly date back to the construction of the original Norfolk Bridge and causeway in the 1830/40s. In Victorian times there were mudflats where we now have the RSPB Reserve saltmarsh and the Adur Recreation Ground. Local fishermen had oyster beds in those areas where shellfish harvested from the sea would have been stored before transit to markets. Since that time the two mudflat areas have silted up due to being sheltered from the main flow of the river. The local council used today's recreation ground area as a landfill site in the 1920s. The result has been significant inter-tidal habitat change and reduction. The changing environment also includes adjacent property developments and disturbances from leisure and other activities.

The most recent concerns derive from the latest AWDC Local plan which led to the granting in late 2018 of outline planning approval for a large housing and commercial development at New Monks Farm (the potential site of an IKEA store) and 25,000 square metres of commercial development in the north eastern corner of the Shoreham Airfield.

The north eastern corner of the airfield, which is the least disturbed area and furthest from airport activity, is of major ornithological concern and development here will displace Lapwings which roost there from October through to March. Other waders have been reported in extreme weather conditions and recently the hidden presence of Snipe was revealed. Large numbers of gulls also often roost in this area. Skylarks also are present in the summer

Lapwings are a Red Listed 'bird of conservation concern' due to declining numbers both nationally and in Sussex. Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) Lapwing

records for the airfield once regularly peaked at 900 or more with four figure reports further back in time. Nowadays counts peak at only 100 / 200, not helped by bird scaring tactics for aircraft safety purposes.

The New Monks Farm development close to the western boundary of the airfield will further reduce the area formerly regarded as a 'Green Gap'. The green area west of the airfield has already been eroded by the construction of the Brighton & Hove Albion academy buildings, sports pitches and associated facilities. Development on the airfield site will further reduce the green gap down to the runways and other busy parts of the airfield where bird scaring measures will be concentrated. On a nationwide basis conservation organisations are advocating landscape scale conservation and the creation of wildlife corridors rather than a focus on isolated nature reserves. The opposite trend is occurring locally due to erosion of the Lancing / Shoreham green gap in favour of housing and commercial development. SDOS had submitted objections to the related planning applications at each opportunity.

Action taken in pursuit of mitigation and compensation

When Richard Cowser recently took on the role of Conservation Officer for SOS it was decided there was no likelihood of success in opposing the two existing outline planning applications. Instead Richard commenced talks with Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) about compensatory mitigation to the north of the A27. This may not result in a like for like replacement of the affected habitats or cater for declining species, but our hope is for habitat management that may benefit Lapwings. Additionally Laura Brook from SWT has indicated that the Environment Agency (EA) wishes to pursue mitigation arrangements for planning applications which will cause a loss of inter-tidal habitat. They need to find suitable sites where compensation projects are possible and therefore proposed an inaugural meeting with other environmental organisations.

The first Strategic meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018 allowed those organisations present to explain their issues and objectives with a view to agreeing a common strategic approach when dealing with AWDC. David Griggs from the Environment Agency chaired the meeting. Attending were four EA personnel, two from Natural England (NE), Laura from SWT, a regional RSPB manager, and Richard and I. It was agreed that there is immense value in assessing the Adur estuary, and interventions that degrade or improve it, using an ecosystems approach, by valuing the benefits that the estuary provides to people, and using that as a foundation to engage with communities to connect them with nature.

The objectives of a strategic approach to protecting the Adur estuary were defined as resulting in:

**A healthy estuary, functioning for wildlife and connected with people**

**An integrated and evidence-based natural capital approach to the estuary's habitats**

**Growth and development delivering net gains in estuarine habitat**

**Ownership by the local planning authorities steered and supported by environmental bodies**

**Greater collaboration in our roles as advisors and influencers on growth and development**

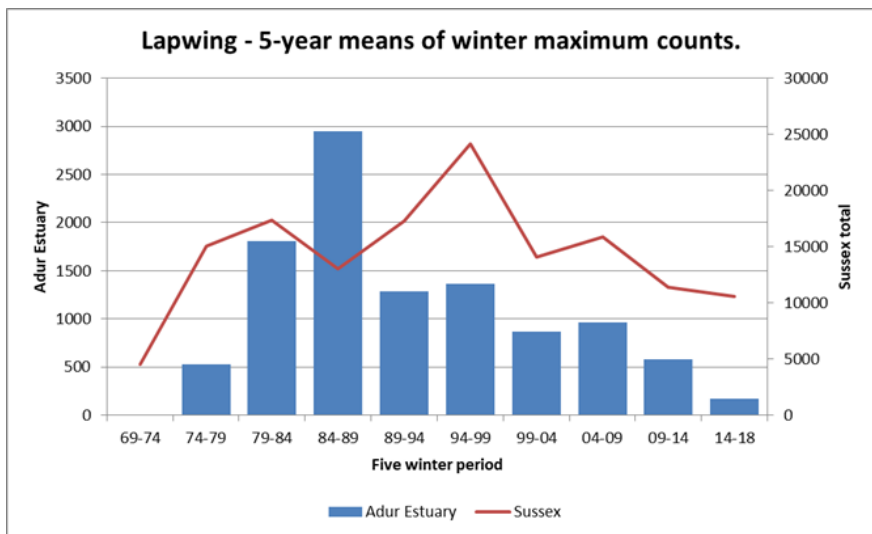
It was agreed that all parties would share the evidence they have on the habitats and species of the Adur estuary, and in particular the SOS would provide evidence on bird/ habitat decline.

Following the meeting Richard compiled an 'SOS remit' relating to an Adur Intertidal Strategy including data provided by John Newnham, SOS Database Manager. A summary drawn from the remit is presented below.

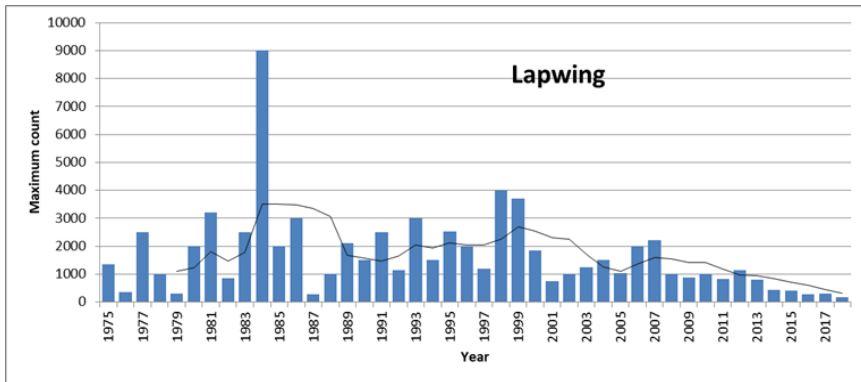
## The SOS remit – a summary of the main points

Wetland bird numbers in the Adur Estuary have already fallen significantly, with peak counts declining this century by between 50% and over 90% for the four most numerous species, and at a much faster rate than across the county as a whole. With projected developments on the north east corner of Shoreham airport, at Monks Farm and around the mouth of the Adur, there will be further pressure on wintering waders and SOS expect to see further declines in the future.

This view was supported by data compilations for the four most numerous waders on the Adur Estuary, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin and Redshank. These tell a similar story – a summary of the data for Lapwings is included below.



Lapwing: 5 year means of winter maximum WeBS counts, Adur Estuary versus Sussex county. The Adur does not show the increases seen across Sussex in the 1990's, and shows a much stronger decline from 1999 to the present than the overall Sussex decline.



Lapwing: Adur Estuary peak annual totals and 5-year moving trend. There has been a decline of over 90% in the trend line this century, most pronounced since 2007

Recognising the scale of development that has already happened, and the additional development that is envisaged in the future, the SOS does not plan to object to further development in the Adur Estuary south of the A27, (unless there is some proposal of very specific concern). Instead SOS would like to see land along the River Adur, to the north of the A27, enhanced for wetland birds, by way of mitigation / compensation for the declining attractiveness (to wetland birds) of the Adur estuary south of the A27. SOS are keen to work with the EA, NE, RSPB, SWT, SDNP and landowners to bring this about. We are also keen to work with AWDC to achieve the necessary support, and hopefully some Section 106 monies, to make this happen.

**A second Strategy meeting was held on 11th September 2018**, this time chaired by Francesca Illife, the recently appointed Sustainability Manager for AWDC. At the first and second Strategy meetings a lot of time was devoted to discussing planning related applications being dealt with by EA which would require mitigation arrangements for lost inter-tidal habitat. However the areas concerned were only a few square metres whereas Richard and I were concerned with mitigation possibilities from the extensive

proposed developments at New Monks Farm and Shoreham Airfield besides recompense for the gradual species decline that has already occurred.

The second meeting also took place before the AWDC planning committee met to consider those two planning applications where approval had been delayed due to South Downs National Park objections. Frustratingly a SDNP representative had not been invited to this meeting. On challenging this AWDC 's response indicated they thought it was too early in the process to involve SDNP.

Richard and I left the meeting with a feeling that there was no imminent prospect of making any positive headway with our objectives. We wondered if it was worth continuing as a part of this strategy planning group.

### **South Downs National Park joins the strategy group**

Following the second meeting Richard wrote to SDNP outlining our concerns and objectives. This was taken up by Jeremy Burgess, Landscape and Biodiversity Lead (Water) SDNP, who has responsibilities across the Park for areas where there are water courses including floodplains and habitat associated with them. At last we were able to engage with the SDNP and we discovered their representative had already held early discussions with AWDC and EA in order to understand their positions.

In the knowledge that Jeremy Burgess had been invited to attend the Third strategy meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018, Richard and I arranged a prior meeting with him on 6<sup>th</sup> December when we were delighted to find that we shared common objectives. Jeremy's background is in ecology and he has extensive experience of working with all the organisations and councils that will be involved including RSPB, SWT, EA, and NE.

**The Third Strategy group meeting on 11 December 2018 was again chaired by** Chaired by Francesca Illife, Sustainability Manager AWDC.



Once again the EA's concerns in respect of planning applications affecting very small areas of inter-tidal habitat took up most of the time. We learned that EA would not give their approval to a planning application resulting in loss of inter-tidal habitat unless that loss was unavoidable. If it is unavoidable a Section 106 mitigation agreement is required. In the first instance the compensating habitat must be within the local authority's area. Only if no mitigation possibility is available locally can the Section 106 funding be used for habitat elsewhere. This might be within the adjacent SDNP area north of the A27 or further afield. A further criterion is a time limit on using the mitigation funds, so planning ahead for possible sites and their acquisition is critical.

It was pointed out that following the Adur Tidal Walls project there are no further areas available within the AWDC boundary south of the A27 that can realistically be used for inter-tidal mitigation. However all things have to comply strictly with set procedures so AWDC will require an ecological survey carried out to demonstrate that there are no areas available south of the A27 before Section 106 funds can be used in the SDNP north of the main road.

From an urgent bird conservation perspective readers will appreciate that these legal and procedural subtleties do test one's patience, but in providing the detail above I hope that members will be able to see the complexities of the process and, indeed, understand why so much time can pass whilst making very little apparent progress.

### **Where are we now?**

Jeremy Burgess will now draw together all the mapping, ground and aerial surveys already carried out by the various organisations. This may reveal the need for more mapping and surveys. Mapping and consultation will hopefully

identify other suitable areas further north within SDNP or in the floodplain beyond the Downs.

Also the aviation authorities will need to be consulted. As I discovered when discussing this topic with longstanding SDOS members, there may be a bird strike issue as the Adur Valley is very close to the airport flightpath. I am informed that the aviation authorities have the right to block any project within a radius of several miles which may cause an aviation hazard. This issue proved to be problematic when SDOS attempted in the past to purchase an area for conservation purposes just to the north of the A27.

Most recently news of the division of the airport lease into several sections raises, not for the first time, the possibility of the eventual closure of this historic airfield. The sale for building construction would eliminate potential aeronautical restrictions on mitigation sites north of the A27.

Now our main concern is for the deskwork to be completed, prospective mitigation or compensation sites identified, negotiations to take place with land owners and project plans and costings made in good time to enable any Section 106 funds that become available to be used within the Adur Valley north of the A27. AWDC suggested there may be an opportunity to negotiate Section 106 mitigation funding when the definitive planning applications are made for New Monks Farm and the airfield. Jeremy suggests there may also be other funding available.

So far as site acquisition is concerned, most land owners in the Adur Valley are farmers who have higher level stewardship funding agreements in place which should give scope for negotiation. Also the meetings have provided an indication that the EA and SDNP may be considering opportunities to make better use of the floodplain as a means of natural flood management in anticipation of rising sea levels and the increasing occurrence of extreme weather events. If this should become a 'Medmerry style' scheme then new wetland habitat could become available in the Adur valley. We hope to learn

more at future meetings. Jeremy, however, reminded us of plans from 20 years ago to allow the Cuckmere to succumb to the forces of nature. This has been very controversial, resulting in no change or cost saving while riverbank maintenance continues. So, in conclusion, my message is: don't hold your breath for the Adur Valley to become part of an improved landscape scale conservation project any time soon. Almost a year has passed already! But, on a more positive note, at least action is now being taken. We are hoping Jeremy can report on progress by April/May

With thanks to Richard Cowser for permission to include the 'SOS Remit' and to John Newnham for the tables therein. Please note the views expressed are the author's and not necessarily those of SDOS or SOS.

## August 2018 to February 2019 Sightings

### Clive Hope

#### August

Fifteen Common Sandpipers were on the Adur just north of the Cement Works on 1<sup>st</sup>.

Swifts were on the move on 3<sup>rd</sup> with 70 over Ferring in the evening. Next day a Pied Flycatcher was at Brooklands and two were there on 8<sup>th</sup> with one in a Hollingbury garden on 5<sup>th</sup>. A Wood Warbler (photograph in John Newnham's report below) was trapped at Ladywell on 9<sup>th</sup> with seven other warbler species. A dozen Wheatears were on fences near Cissbury on 11<sup>th</sup> and two Pied Flycatchers were on the site. A pair of Buzzards bred at Wild Park fledging two young. A Curlew flew over Hollingbury on 18<sup>th</sup> and a Tree Pipit was noted on 17<sup>th</sup> there. Three Black Terns appeared in Shoreham Harbour on 28<sup>th</sup>. Redstarts and Spotted Flycatchers were on show at Lancing Clump on 30<sup>th</sup>. Eight Wheatears at Wild Park on 31<sup>st</sup> was the maximum count of the year there.



## September

At Cissbury on 3<sup>rd</sup> there were 15 Spotted Flycatchers and four Redstarts. On 4<sup>th</sup>, seven White Storks flew over West Worthing heading east. Yellow Wagtails were observed passing over Goring Gap on several days and on 5<sup>th</sup>, 13 were feeding in horse paddocks at Ferring Country Centre. The first 100 bird session at Ladywell on 8<sup>th</sup> included 66 Blackcaps.

A Wryneck was found near Chantry Hill on 10<sup>th</sup> and next day there, 40 each of Raven and Corn Bunting were seen. On 12<sup>th</sup>, 42 Sandwich and three Common Terns appeared in Shoreham Harbour.

Ladywell exceeded its best day with over 150 birds trapped on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 75 of them Blackcaps. A welcome sighting at Hollingbury Wild Park was Barn Owl on 24<sup>th</sup> (and again nearby Oct 5<sup>th</sup>). Golden Plover was on Shoreham Beach on 29<sup>th</sup>.

## October

A late Yellow Wagtail flew west along the beach at Ferring on 2<sup>nd</sup>. On 6<sup>th</sup> a Great White Egret was on the saltings at Shoreham and a Little Stint was feeding with Sanderlings at Goring Gap beach. Sea-watching at Ferring on 9<sup>th</sup> produced two Arctic Skuas flying west and the offshore Gannet feeding flock started to build up.

Overhead passage of passerines, especially Goldfinches with 1460 on one day moving east, was a feature of late October into November. Five Bramblings flew over Hollingbury on 27<sup>th</sup>.

## November

The Ladywell team ringed their 2000<sup>th</sup> bird of the year on 3<sup>rd</sup>. A ringtail Hen Harrier was north of Cissbury on 5<sup>th</sup> and next day six Little Gulls passed west off Worthing/Goring with another on 14<sup>th</sup>.



A rare bird in the shape of a Pallas's Warbler was found at Brooklands on 10<sup>th</sup> and remained, although elusive, in the area for four days. It was in company with several Goldcrests and Chiffchaffs. It is 19 years since the last record at this site. It is worth noting Goldcrests were a feature of both ringing sites in this period suggesting an influx from the continent.

140 Mediterranean Gulls roosted on Goring Gap on 13<sup>th</sup> and on 16<sup>th</sup> a Black-necked Grebe was offshore there. A Black Redstart was at Shoreham Harbour on 17<sup>th</sup>. Cooler weather on 18<sup>th</sup> brought a Woodcock to Ferring Rife. Three Eider flew east off Goring on 21<sup>st</sup> and one was offshore there on 25<sup>th</sup> with a drake Goosander passing close inshore. On 22<sup>nd</sup> a Rose-ringed Parakeet was heard only from north Hollingdean. Four Red-breasted Mergansers were at Widewater on 30<sup>th</sup>.

## December

A Short-eared Owl was a surprise visitor to a seafront garden in Ferring on 4<sup>th</sup> and a Snow Bunting was found at Goring Gap on 7<sup>th</sup>. Although elusive it appeared sporadically over the next few days. A Woodcock evaded the nets at Cissbury on 8<sup>th</sup>. An Eider was offshore at Widewater on the 11<sup>th</sup> and there were still three Mergansers there. The appearance of 53 Lapwings at Brooklands was a surprise for the President on 19<sup>th</sup> and a stunning male Black Redstart was on the fence there. It or another then began a lengthy stay at Shoreham Fort. At Truleigh Hill, a ringtail Hen Harrier was a good sighting on 27<sup>th</sup>. Two Firecrests were trapped at Cissbury during the last session of the year on 29<sup>th</sup>. At Ladywell on 30<sup>th</sup>, four Chiffchaffs were found in the nets making the December total 23.

## January 2019

The year got off to a good start for sea-watchers with high counts of Great Crested Grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers and Gannets off the coast from Worthing to Ferring. As often at this time of year, large numbers of Auks

were moving well offshore. Scarcer species were Velvet Scoters off Lancing. A Black-tailed Godwit in paddocks by Ferring Rife on 1<sup>st</sup> was a site first. The sea-birds stole the headlines off Shoreham and Widewater in the next week or two with large numbers of Gannets (400+) and Razorbills in particular, feeding close inshore and affording a wonderful spectacle.

Two Egyptian Geese accompanied their commoner cousins at Beeding Brooks on 4<sup>th</sup>. Short-eared Owls had been reported from here earlier. On 6<sup>th</sup> a Rose-ringed Parakeet was photographed next to Widewater. Steyning treatment works held at least six Chiffchaffs on 8<sup>th</sup>. A large offshore movement of Auks took place on 12<sup>th</sup> and Red-throated Divers were seen at several coastal sites in ones and twos. Razorbill numbers remained high off Lancing with 120 close inshore.



Four Chiffchaffs and a Firecrest were at Brooklands on 15<sup>th</sup> when the wintering Greenshank and two Curlews were on the Adur at Shoreham, a

Common Sandpiper was just south of the Cement Works and a Barn Owl was seen having a confrontation with a Kestrel at Claysfield near Bramber.

A Snow Bunting appeared again at Goring Gap on 17<sup>th</sup>, delightfully confiding as often they are, and remained in the area for eleven days.

Colder weather meant a few birds came into urban areas with for example, up to ten Redwings in the President's garden, Blackcaps and wintering Chiffchaffs at several sites and a few Teal on Ferring Rife. A Rose-ringed Parakeet came to a garden feeder in Ferring on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Another Caspian Gull was found on the roost field at Goring Gap on 29<sup>th</sup>, making it the most favoured site in West Sussex to find this species. There were still large numbers of seabirds well offshore at the end of the month indicating good feeding availability. Steep Down held high numbers of Corn Buntings with commoner farmland birds at this time.

## February

A Yellow-browed Warbler in a Ferring garden was unseasonal on 1<sup>st</sup>. Golden Plovers and Lapwings escaping the cold and snowy weather further north appeared briefly in fields west of Ferring. Huge numbers of seabirds were off Worthing on 2<sup>nd</sup> with over 6000 auks passing east and 200 plus Gannets and a 100 or more Kittiwakes feeding there. A good passage of 44 Red-throated Divers occurred on 3<sup>rd</sup> and again on 5<sup>th</sup>. Three Firecrests were seen in the Pavilion Gardens in Brighton around this time. A showy Water Rail was on Beeding Brooks on 7<sup>th</sup> and the long-staying Snow Bunting was still at Goring Gap on 11<sup>th</sup> as was the Black Redstart at the Fort at Shoreham Harbour on 17<sup>th</sup>. Brent Geese were starting to move east with 51 off Goring on this day. On 18<sup>th</sup> at Henfield Levels there were 400 Lapwing, 200 Teal, 100 Wigeon, 10 Pintail and 20 Shoveler, a lone Black-tailed Godwit and a Green Sandpiper. Two Red Kites were over Lancing on 24<sup>th</sup> and one over Shoreham on 27<sup>th</sup>.



# Ringling in Ladywell 2018

John Newnham

This was the twelfth year of ringing and study of birds using the Ladywell valley. A total of 40 mist-netting sessions were undertaken which, as Table 1 shows, is more than any previous year although very similar to several other years.

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number netting session	22	29	33	34	39	31	37	25	38	37	39	40

Table 1:- The numbers of ringing sessions in Ladywell in each year (2007-2018).

Like most recent years the ringing effort was not spread evenly across the year with few or no sessions in the early months and a concentration of effort during the productive autumn season. This is clearly shown in Table 2 which also demonstrates that only in September were substantially more birds trapped in each session than the average for the previous eleven years.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2007-17 sessions	16	12	18	35	27	28	33	42	52	46	31	24
Average catch (2007-17)	52	43	35	35	46	36	44	72	94	76	62	56
2018 sessions	0	0	0	1	3	3	4	7	8	6	5	3
Average catch (2018)				32	45	42	46	64	120	78	65	64

Table 2:- The number of ringing sessions in each month and the average monthly catch (2007-17 and 2018).

September was clearly the most productive month with an average catch of 120 birds per outing but these figures, particularly in the month July to October, were notably lower than in 2017 when both August and October provided average catches in excess of 100 birds and during September an average of 150 were trapped on each day. Indeed in 2018 only April, November and December were months with similar or higher average catches when compared with 2017.

The ringing total for 2018 was 2252 birds ringed; this the second highest total achieved but nearly 700 less than 2017. There were 694 records involving retrapped birds and with four controls (birds ringed elsewhere and subsequently caught in Ladywell) the grand total of handlings was 2949. The details for all year's ringing totals are shown in the large Table 3. Record or equal 'top' figures in 2018 are marked in yellow which, of course, includes the Marsh Tit; a new species ringed in the valley. The 13 species ringed in record numbers was comparable to the 14 in 2017. However, like 2017 a further 20 species, which have been ringed in previous years, were not trapped in 2018. It is pleasing to see Song Thrush, a red-listed species of high conservation concern, being ringed in better numbers. For four species, Blackbird, Reed Warbler, Blackcap and Great Tit, the ringing totals had only been surpassed in one other year. Once again despite providing winter seed, the numbers of buntings and finches trapped, other than Goldfinches, remain low.



Figure 1:- Marsh Tit in Ladywell on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2018. (Sue Walsh)

Species	20 07	20 08	20 09	20 10	20 11	20 12	20 13	20 14	20 15	20 16	20 17	20 18	TOTA LS
Sparrowhawk			2	3		2	6		2				15
Kestrel		2	1	1		1		2				1	8
Water Rail										1			1
Stock Dove				2			1	1			1	1	6
Woodpigeon	5	4	4	6	3	1	4	2	7	4	9	5	54
Tawny Owl				1						1			2
Kingfisher	1	2	4	2	5	1	4	8	9	7	10	11	64
Green Woodpecker	3	7	6	4	9	2	2	3	1	2		1	40
Great Spotted Woodpecker	4	4	5	5	7	9	9	7	5	3	5	10	73
Swallow						1	18						19
House Martin		2	34	29	12		62		1	4			144
Tree Pipit											2		2
Meadow Pipit							4						4
Grey Wagtail				1			1		2			2	6
Wren	24	26	31	43	45	32	33	31	52	64	63	59	503
Dunnock	34	31	33	38	47	23	37	22	48	34	45	45	437
Robin	40	39	44	37	57	37	49	30	59	77	49	52	570
Nightingale									1				1
Redstart	1				1	1	1			2	1	3	10
Stonechat								1					1
Blackbird	63	29	62	62	68	49	48	26	67	79	41	71	665
Song Thrush	9	14	23	19	42	12	23	19	28	43	35	58	325
Redwing		2	6	3	1	6		8	6	18	5	9	64
Mistle Thrush				2	3						1		6
Cetti's Warbler					4			3	1	4	3	5	20
Grasshopper Warbler					3		3			1			7
Sedge Warbler		1		2	6		2			4	7	10	32
Reed Warbler	18	26	22	61	51	35	49	23	69	71	105	99	629
Lesser Whitethroat		3	2		4	2		2	6	5	7	4	35
Whitethroat	6	3	5	23	43	15	16	3	18	18	28	25	203
Garden Warbler	1	1	2	2	3	1	1		10	12	13	14	60
Blackcap	25	31	51	145	279	70	109	80	356	329	575	567	2617
Yellow-browed Warbler											1		1
Wood Warbler									1			1	2

Chiffchaff	16	22	71	206	204	65	171	14	673	679	1010	513	3775
Willow Warbler	19	9	14	38	64	30	57	4	155	274	350	191	1205
Goldcrest	1	33	10	25	19	13	11	27	218	70	265	71	763
Firecrest		2	1	4	1	2	4	2	10	4	15	7	52
Spotted Flycatcher	1			2	3	3	3		2	2	2		18
Long-tailed Tit	21	47	64	47	56	18	14	28	40	30	32	26	423
Marsh Tit												1	1
Coal Tit									1	1		2	4
Blue Tit	98	111	144	234	239	114	139	63	116	85	114	164	1621
Great Tit	45	53	55	68	113	57	90	65	61	67	70	109	853
Nuthatch		3	1	3	2	8	6	1			1		25
Treecreeper	7	2	7	11	17	1	7	4	6	6	4	6	78
Jay	2	2	2	4		4	1	1	3	1	1	1	22
Magpie		1	1	1	2		2	1				2	10
Jackdaw				1	3	1		15	9	1		5	35
Rook				1									1
Carrion/Hooded Crow				1									1
House Sparrow	1												1
Chaffinch	11	42	37	31	82	58	63	19	44	30	17	22	456
Greenfinch	5	15	10	20	55	23	14	2	7	6	2	7	166
Goldfinch	11	29	9	7	42	7	4	4	15	9	24	71	232
Siskin						1			3				4
Lesser Redpoll						1			8	6	17		32
Bullfinch		2		3	1	2	1	2		1	9		21
Reed Bunting			1	4	6	3				2	2	1	19
TOTALS	472	600	764	1202	1602	711	1069	654	2120	2057	2941	2252	16444

Table 3:- The annual ringing totals in each year (2007-2018) for each species ringed in Ladywell.

The most productive day was 24<sup>th</sup> September when 170 birds were trapped and the poorest catch of 25 occurred on 4<sup>h</sup> June. During 2017 in excess of 100 birds were trapped on 17 occasions but in 2018 only nine outings reached this standard. Eight of these typically occurred in September and October but 101 trapped on 22<sup>nd</sup> November was the exception. An average of 13 different species were trapped on each day with a range from 9 on 15<sup>th</sup> August to 18 just one week earlier on 8<sup>th</sup> August. Like most recent years

Chiffchaff provided the highest number of individuals caught in a single day with 89 on 24<sup>th</sup> September but 75 Blackcaps trapped two days earlier on the 22<sup>nd</sup> was a close second. Thereafter 28 Blue Tits trapped on 22<sup>nd</sup> December was well behind on this basis. Blue Tits, however, just about remain the most trapped species in the valley as shown in Table 4.

Species	Total handlings
Blue Tit	4029
Chiffchaff	4013
Blackcap	2874
Great Tit	2306
Willow Warbler	1213
Robin	1165
Blackbird	1142
Dunnock	1137
Long-tailed Tit	1034
Goldcrest	941

Table 4:- The total number of handlings (new birds and retraps) in Ladywell (2007-2018).

Net	Central		College portion Ladywell				Applesham pond		
	K	K2	L1	L2	L4	L5	P1	P2	P3
Number caught	85	409	93	127	203	776	348	714	102
Net length(metres)	24	18	18	18	18	30	54	72	18
Birds/metre	4	23	5	7	11	26	6	10	6

Table 5:- The various net productivity in 2018.

Each of the session reports contain a table of mist-net productivity. As mentioned before this has little scientific value and is mainly of interest to those who know the valley well and to see how much birds move about the valley. On most occasions when at least three ringers were present the full set of nets were erected but on days when fewer ringers were present, L1, L2, K and P3 were left in their bags. Table 5 shows, like 2017, most birds were caught in net L5 which is set at the east end of the valley near to the

*Phragmites* fringed stream and a willow stand but K2 set in similar habitat, matched L5 in the number of birds trapped per metre of net.

Just four birds were caught in the year carrying rings applied elsewhere (controls) and the details, plus the late arriving information on AZA2776, are given in Table 6.

Ring No.	Species	Date	Age/S ex	Ringing date	Age/S ex	Ringing site	Distance	Interval
AZA2776	Blackcap	08/10/2017	3M	07/10/2017	3M	Icklesham, East Sussex	70km W	1 day
15418523	Chaffinch	21/10/2018	2			Waiting on details from Brussels		
JBR265	Chiffchaff	24/09/2018	2	14/09/2018	4	Mumbles, Steyning, West Sussex	6 km S	10 days
KJN609	Goldcrest	03/10/2018	2M	23/09/2017	3M	Beachy Head, East Sussex	42km WNW	375 days
Z968189	Reed Warbler	01/08/2018*	4	17/07/2016	4F	Titchfield Haven, Hampshire	66km E	745 days

**Table 6:** The details of birds caught in 2018 and ringed elsewhere.

However, more Ladywell ringed birds were recovered or controlled elsewhere; these details are shown in Table 7. The Kingfisher SH19749 and Chiffchaff JY631 were also retrapped at the Mumbles on 6<sup>th</sup> May and the other Kingfisher (SH25784) was also trapped on 10<sup>th</sup> September. The report of the Chiffchaff recovered in Norfolk in 2017 did not arrive until this year; the bird was retrapped on three other occasions at Holme BO on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 14<sup>th</sup> April and 7<sup>th</sup> May. The Cetti's Warbler S571096 was also trapped at Litlington on six occasions during 2017 where it was considered to be one of the breeding females and again during 2018 on at least seven occasions between 21<sup>st</sup> April and 28<sup>th</sup> July. The Reed Warbler ringed at Titchfield Haven was also trapped in Ladywell on 11<sup>th</sup> May and 6<sup>th</sup> August in 2017 additional to the given 2018 date. The male Blackcap controlled in Powys was recaptured 12 days later at Llangorse Lake on the 15<sup>th</sup> June.

Handling birds and ringing provides considerably more information about population size and structure, species longevity and other aspects of avian

biology than just their movements. Each of the session reports detailed many of the birds retrapped and during 2018 there was a total of 694 retrap records involving 445 different individuals. Most, as expected, were ringed

Ring	Species	Ringing date	Age	Recovery date	Age	Recovery location	Distance	Interval
LH597 45	Blackbird	07/12/20 16	4F	02/03/201 8	-	Worthing West Sussex	8 km W	450 days
AJB38 27	Blackcap	14/07/20 18	3J	09/09/201 8	3 M	Cissbury Ring, West Sussex	6 KM WNW	57 days
ANA89 59	Blackcap	20/09/20 17	3 M	03/06/201 8*	4 M	Llangorse Lake, Powys	238 km WNW	256 days
S5710 96	Cetti's Warbler	26/10/20 16	3F	14/12/201 6	2F	Litlington, East Sussex	34 km E	49 days
Z8833 75	Chaffinch	09/12/20 15	3 M	20/10/201 7	4 M	Berendrecht, Antwerpen, Belgium	329 km E	681 days
JYJ63 1	Chiffchaff	24/07/20 17	3J	02/06/201 8*	4F	Mumbles, Steyning, West Sussex	6 km N	313 days
JVX 566	Chiffchaff	21/09/20 16	3	25/03/201 7*	4	Holme Bird Observatory, Norfolk	245 km NNE	199 days
KLK81 0	Chiffchaff	17/09/20 17	3	10/04/201 8	5	Essex Fm, Aldemey. Channel Islands	181 km SW	205 days
LDJ45 0	Chiffchaff	21/10/20 18	2	23/11/201 8	3	Eastleigh Sewage Fm, Hampshire	74 km WNW	33 days
LDJ47 0	Chiffchaff	31/10/20 18	3	26/12/201 8	2	Litlington, East Sussex	34 km E	56 days
NY590 18	Dunnoek	10/06/20 17	3J	01/02/201 8	-	Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex	2 km E	236 days
S5711 33	Goldfinch	07/12/20 16	3F	16/05/201 8	-	Lancing West Sussex	0	525 days
SH197 49	Kingfisher	02/09/20 17	3	10/02/201 8*	4	Mumbles, Steyning, West Sussex	6 km N	161 days
SH257 84	Kingfisher	27/07/20 18	3	11/08/201 8*	3	Mumbles, Steyning, West Sussex	6 km N	17 days
AJB39 05	Sedge Warbler	04/08/20 18	3	21/08/201 8	3	Llangennith, Swansea	287 km WNW	17 days
FJ049 67	Woodpige on	04/10/20 17	3	09/08/201 8	-	Lancing West Sussex	0	309 days

**Table 7:** The details of birds ringed in Ladywell and recovered (all controlled except those marked '-' in the age column) elsewhere.

either in 2017 or 2018 and Table 8 shows the time interval for the individuals retrapped in 2018.

Species	< 1 yr	1yr	2yr	3yr	4yr	5yr	6yr	7yr	TOTALS
Woodpigeon					1				1
Kingfisher	6								6
Green Woodpecker				1					1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	4								4
Wren	26	6	2	1					35
Dunnock	15	3	3	2					23
Robin	16	4	4						24
Blackbird	13	4	13	1		2	2	1	36
Song Thrush	6	2	3		1				12
Cetti's Warbler	2								2
Sedge Warbler	1								1
Reed Warbler	30	9	2	2					43
Whitethroat	1								1
Blackcap	29	1	1						31
Chiffchaff	22	1							23
Goldcrest	8								8
Long-tailed Tit	4	3	1	3					11
Blue Tit	72	18	3	3	3				99
Great Tit	58	8	5	1	3	1			76
Treecreeper	1	2							3
Chaffinch	3								3
Goldfinch	2								2
<b>TOTALS</b>	319	61	37	14	8	3	2	1	445

**Table 8:** The year of ringing of birds retrapped in Ladywell during 2018.

Ten species accounted for the 28 birds trapped in 2018 which had been ringed three or more years earlier; these are clearly seen in the table. The individual with the longest duration between ringing and re-trapping was a Blackbird. The ages of these birds, however, are a long way short of the national longevity records of nearly 15 years for Blackbird and almost 14 years for Great Tit. Multiple retraps are a common occurrence in Ladywell and have frequently been described over the years. The current record holder is a Great Tit which has now been handled on 25 occasions since July 2011 but this individual failed to be seen in Ladywell in 2018. Likewise a Blue Tit which had been caught on 19 occasions and a Great Tit seen on 18 ringing sessions but both were not seen in 2018. A Dunnock was the bird



retrapped in 2018 with the fullest history of being handled, now on 19 occasions.



Figure 2:- Wood Warbler in Ladywell on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2018. (Clare Buckle)

Each time a bird is trapped as much useful information is recorded as time permits. Most birds trapped have their age, sex, wing length and weight recorded but additionally full moult details of the flight feathers (primaries and secondaries) were recorded on 32 individuals of 11 different species. This was notably fewer than during 2017 but like last year Long-tailed Tit (6) and Blackbird (7) were the species with most full moult records. Throughout the year degrees of post-juvenile moult were recorded, in particular the number of retained greater coverts, but we felt our data were insufficient and numbers too small to take part in a national survey of the extent of post juvenile moult that has occurred in the greater coverts, alula, tertials and tail of Blue Tits. There are some thoughts that this may vary across the country.

During the autumn the session reports mentioned the estimates of stored body fat and the pre-migratory development of the pectoral muscle. During 2018 these measurements were taken on all migrants when time and conditions allowed. Table 99 shows the average fat scores (recorded on a scale one to eight) for the two commonest species in September and October comparing 2017 with 2018. Although it is difficult to draw significant conclusions it is interesting that the fat Blackcaps were carrying, particularly in their main passage month of September, was similar to last year whilst Chiffchaffs, caught in markedly fewer numbers, were considerably leaner in 2018 than 2017. This clearly could be caused by many influencing factors but perhaps the sallows and reeds n Ladywell held fewer aphids, food favoured by Chiffchaffs, in 2018.

	2017		2018	
	September	October	September	October
<b>Blackcap</b>	2.6	3.0	2.5	2.0
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	1.6	2.1	1.1	1.3

**Table 9:-** The monthly average fat score for Blackcap and Chiffchaff in 2017 and 2018.

For ten of the past seasons nest-boxes sited in the valley have been carefully studied and the details of inspections were recorded for the BTO's Nest Recording Scheme. There were 39 nest boxes in the valley but four had been displaced from trees since the last inspection in the late autumn and one was inaccessible. Out of the 34 available boxes 21 were occupied but five of these failed at the egg stage (four Blue Tits and one Great Tit) with two boxes of Blue Tits each with a full, un-predated clutch, of 11 cold eggs. Possibly one or both adults had died, perhaps killed by the local Sparrowhawks. The table shows the number of nestlings in each box. It appears all the nestling Great Tits fledged but Blue tits did not fare quite so well as a total of 13 were found dead and unfledged in boxes. However, at least some birds fledged from each of the boxes. Table 10 compares this spring with the previous years and it appears this spring was the second most productive after 2011 and a better portion survived from egg to fledging than in the last six years. During

December the boxes were revisited and the damaged, older boxes were replaced.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of boxes available	11	11	23	23	24	29	32	32	21	37	34
Blue Tit	3	3	8	13	11	10	9	9	10	12	15
Great Tit			3	5	2	4	7	6	6	6	6
Nuthatch					1	1					
Total occupied boxes	3	3	11	18	14	15	16	15	16	18	21
Occupancy %	27	27	48	78	58	52	50	47	76	49	62
Total eggs laid	19	28	89	149	107	103	126	114	95	120	137
Total pulli ringed	19	25	78	130	83	44	88	69	67	95	86
Total young fledged	19	23	75	102	56	42	55	25	47	57	79
% survival egg -> fledging	100	82	84	68	52	41	44	22	49	48	58

**Table 10:** Summary of the Ladywell’s nest-box occupancy and success 2008-2018.

On each visit, including some short visits for stocking feeders or maintenance work, a list of species recorded was logged onto the British Trust for Ornithology’s Birdtrack recording system. On most ringing occasions between 30 and 45 species were recorded; a total of 83 species were seen during the year with new species being Shelduck recorded in May and a Marsh Tit recorded during August. The number of species recorded since 2007 now rises to 119. The summary from the 49 lists generated by the team is shown, along with the first and last dates and the percentage of occasions seen, in the appendix below. Only Woodpigeon was recorded on each visit.

When possible notes were made of butterflies and odonata recorded and for the first year the younger team members, with retained high frequency hearing, identified Roesel's Bush cricket as a widespread colonist in the valley.

The valley is, in parts, a wild wood and mobile telephone signals are very variable thus the team's health and safety policy notes that at least two permit holding ringers should be present at each session. Indeed the average number of ringers present for the 40 sessions was just over three, a number of 'staff' which makes the task of erecting and dismantling the mist-nets easier and helps cover the ground between the two ends of the valley. The number of ringers varied between two and six with each of the regulars being available at different times and Table II clearly shows three ringers was the most frequent sized team.

Number of ringers	Number of sessions
2	10
3	16
4	12
5	1
6	1

**Table II:** The number of persons present per ringing session.

During the year the number of sessions each team member was able to attend were John Newnham (30), Sue Walsh (29), Mark Mallalieu (28), Clare Buckle (19), Chrissi Twitchen (3) and Emily Mustafa (8), who became a trainee at the year's end. Visiting ringers from the Cissbury team included Val Bentley (2), David Campbell (3) and Domhnall Finch (1) and from the Knepp Estate Penny Green joined us once. Alexi Francis, a potential trainee, joined us on three occasions in May and June. Towards the end of the year Mark graduated to gain his A permit and Clare has gained more experience in preparation to gain a permit to ring independently in 2019. Throughout the year, but particularly in the summer, considerable 'gardening' is needed to maintain the net rides in operable conditions and my thanks go to all the members of the ringing team for their regular efforts with this and the ringing throughout the year. I would like to extend our continued gratitude and

thanks to the college authorities and staff, particularly Jon Hutcheon the farm manager, and to Hugh and Christopher Passmore of Applesham Farm for their on-going interest, help and support with the ringing in Ladywell. Sometimes the landowners visit us during a ringing session and we are always pleased to see them.

During 2019 the team moved to inputting all the ringing data into the new BTO on-line recording software (DeMon). All the team have now become familiar with this and I am very grateful to those who take a turn at loading the detailed records into this system. I also thank those who then prepare session reports to feed back to landowners, interested college staff and local birders and ringers who have followed the work done in Ladywell. These reports are copied then to the local Shoreham District Ornithological Society members. Sadly the new DeMon software does not easily generate tables for these reports so all the data are copied into the old IPMR software to provide analysis and generate tables. The changes planned for Birdtrack which were scheduled for early 2018 have still not completely materialised.



Figure 3:- Roesel's Bush Cricket Ladywell August 2018. (Clare Buckle)

# Ringling at Cissbury 2018

## Val Bentley

There were 24 ringing sessions at the site in 2018, two fewer than in 2017, and the number of captures was lower, roughly at the same level as in 2016. It was good to have two additional qualified ringers to help at Cissbury this year. David Campbell has moved into Worthing, and Domnhall Finch is working with the University of Sussex. Both are C permit holders. Alex Brookes did not continue training in 2018, but trainee Mya Bambrick has now been with us for three seasons and is a very competent member of the team. We were therefore on occasion able to set most of the nets, though the A rides at the western end were not used at all, as in 2017, and the run of nets at D was not set after mid-August when autumn passage meant catches in the other nets were generally sufficient for the “on duty” team to manage.

During the year 1003 birds were trapped, of which 845 were new, 156 retraps and 2 controls, i.e. capture of a bird ringed elsewhere. Table 1 lists the species captured in 2018, and includes a column listing the new birds of each species ringed in 2017 for comparison.

The first visit was as late as 14<sup>th</sup> April, due mainly to the extremely cold weather prevailing in February and March throughout the country, but that day brought the first returning migrants, three Blackcaps, four Chiffchaffs, and two Willow Warblers; a Song Thrush ringed as a 2<sup>nd</sup> year bird in January 2015 was retrapped. There were Ring Ouzels on the top of the hill, though few are ever trapped on our north-east facing slope – only nine in the 35 years of operations, five in 1988, and most recent one in 2000. The day must have been warm as Brimstone, Red Admiral and Comma butterflies were on the wing.

Species	Total Captures	2018 New	2017 New	2018 Retrap	Control
Blackbird	27	18	14	9	
Blackcap	318	294	335	23	1
Blue Tit	35	21	18	14	
Bullfinch	25	12	19	13	
Chaffinch	11	10	5	1	
Chiffchaff	103	97	198	5	1
Duncock	30	16	22	14	
Firecrest	10	4	7	6	
Garden Warbler	14	13	9	1	
Goldcrest	45	36	104	9	
Goldfinch	2	2	5		
Great Tit	33	27	11	6	
Greenfinch	4	4	2		
<i>Lesser Redpoll</i>			19		
Lesser Whitethroat	4	4	1		
Long-tailed Tit	58	25	23	33	
<i>Marsh Tit</i>			1		
<i>Redstart</i>			3		
Redwing	2	2	7		
Reed Warbler	11	11	11		
Robin	56	43	25	13	
<i>Sedge Warbler</i>			1		
Song Thrush	19	17	10	2	
Spotted Flycatcher	1	1	1		
<i>Stonechat</i>			1		
<i>Swallow</i>			21		
Treecreeper	4	3	2	1	
Whitethroat	49	47	59	2	
Willow Warbler	116	115	124	1	
<b>Wood Pigeon</b>	1	1			
Wren	25	22	15	3	
<i>Yellowhammer</i>			3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>845</b>	<b>1076</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table 1: Captures at Cissbury 2018**

Species in **bold** were ringed in 2018 but not 2017. Those in *italics* were ringed in 2017 but not 2018.

## **Spring & Early Summer**

During the rest of April, May and June there were only four sessions and 60 birds captured. On 5<sup>th</sup> May a Blackcap ringed in August 2015 was recaptured; it had been retrapped twice before, in May 2016 and April 2017 and was presumably a bird breeding elsewhere but using a similar migration route each year. I was en route to Cissbury on 20<sup>th</sup> May when a deer ran out in front of my car on A283 and wrote off both itself and my car – no ringing that day! Of the 17 birds trapped on 10<sup>th</sup> June, brood patches were evident on three Blackcaps, two Robins and four Whitethroats, and the first juveniles were ringed, a Long-tailed Tit and a Whitethroat. A week later a singing Reed Warbler must have been a late arrival, though it was not captured. Then followed a period of inactivity of over a month.

## **Late Summer and early Autumn**

The only July visit was on the 21<sup>st</sup>, when juvenile / first year birds comprised 18 of the 29 birds ringed, including the first of three young Treecreepers and a family of four Greenfinches; a male Blackbird ringed as a juvenile in 2013 was retrapped. By the end of July the totals stood at only 86 new birds and 26 retraps.

By contrast, we were able to run six sessions during August, and raise the totals to 446 and 60 respectively by the end of the month. On the 1<sup>st</sup> there were birds passing through from their breeding sites elsewhere, two Garden Warblers, one Reed Warbler and seven Willow Warblers. Sadly Cissbury has now lost both Willow and Garden Warblers as breeding species. The last “proper” juvenile Garden Warbler was in 2012, though we have had some females with brood patches on site in the breeding season in 2013 and 2016. They were regular at Cissbury, and we even had a very long-standing



returning female who was at least nine years old on her final recapture in 2007. It is awe-inspiring to realise that she must have flown over 50,000 miles in her lifetime, fuelled by insects and berries.



Lesser Whitethroat  
21<sup>st</sup> August 2018

Though a male Lesser Whitethroat was heard singing at the end of April and start of May, there were only four individuals of the species captured this year, one in July and three in August. All were first year birds, of which only the July bird was still undergoing post-juvenile moult, and may have come from a nest on or near the site.

The busiest morning of the year was on 21<sup>st</sup> August, on a solo session, when the eight nets at the eastern end produced 109 birds including 31 Blackcaps and 39 Willow Warblers.

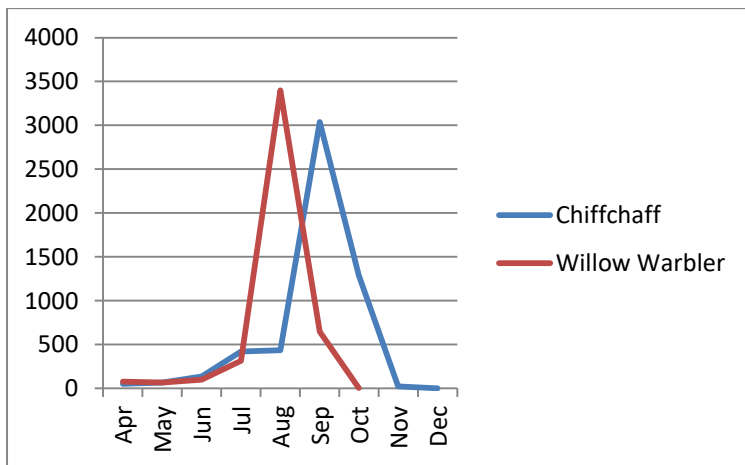
During September four visits were made, resulting in 206 captures, considerably fewer than the 363 birds caught in the four sessions in September of 2017. However the percentage of Blackcaps ringed compared with the overall total was slightly greater than in the previous year. The Whitethroat percentage remained steady, that for Willow Warbler increased, while that for Chiffchaff declined, probably due to lack of sessions in the latter half of September, as the Beachy Head Ringing Station reported a

“pretty grim” year for Willow Warbler and an excellent year for Chiffchaff! So Table 2 below must be viewed with some caution.

**Table 2: Totals of Four Passage Species (as percentages of total number of all birds ringed)**

Year/s	Blackcap	Chiffchaff	Whitethroat	Willow Warbler
2000-2004	25.5	13.7	6.9	6.8
2005-2009	30.6	15.9	5.0	5.8
2010-2014	30.5	18.4	5.5	6.6
2015	38.3	14.2	5.0	4.6
2016	34.4	21.2	2.7	6.6
2017	31.1	18.4	5.5	11.5
2018	34.7	11.5	5.6	13.6

That it was the lack of late September effort affecting the Chiffchaff catch is aptly demonstrated by the following graph showing the different peak passage time of the two *Phylloscopus* species, which plots the total number ringed at Cissbury between 1984 and 2018 against the months of capture.



## Late Autumn and Winter

There were three sessions in the first half of October, two in November and three in December, the final one of the year on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Only three December sessions have been carried out previously, in 2009, 2015 and 2017. With a combined catch of 64 birds this year, including two Blackcaps and a Chiffchaff on the 8<sup>th</sup>, they are worth continuing if weather conditions are favourable.

The “beast from the east” earlier in the year probably had a detrimental effect on the survival of Goldcrests, which can weigh less than 5g. Numbers ringed at the site dropped from over a hundred in 2017 to just 36, of which all but five were trapped in November and December. Other autumn species which we were less successful in capturing this year were Redwing, only two ringed, and Lesser Redpoll which were heard flying over but were not trapped. A Woodcock flew into one of the nets, but managed to escape as I approached.

## Residents

Three of our resident species seemed to show greater productivity in 2018 than in 2017, though our sample size is very small.

**Table 3: Productivity of six resident species**

Species	Number of juveniles and first year birds (to 30/9)						
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Blackbird	17	8	22	12	5	2	6
Blue Tit	10	19	14	12	5	8	8
Dunnock	18	24	29	19	11	13	10
Great Tit	4	10	16	14	9	4	15
Robin	35	24	43	28	24	12	27
Wren	12	13	22	22	13	6	14

Young birds trapped before the end of September included six Blackbirds, 15 Great Tits, 27 Robins and 14 Wrens, while Blue Tit numbers were identical and there were fewer young Dunnocks. Please note that only juveniles and first year birds trapped until the end of September are included in Table 3 as these are most likely to have been hatched on or near the site.

It was reassuring that we found ten Chaffinches which had “ringable” legs. Others were captured, but were suffering from leg incrustations and therefore were released without a ring. The four Greenfinches were all trapped on 21 July and comprised an adult pair with male and female juveniles. Between April and August we caught eight different adult Bullfinches, four males and four females, but their productivity was low with only six young birds ringed this year. Two additional adults appeared after the breeding season, one in November and the other on 29<sup>th</sup> December, a female ringed in July 2015 which had not been retrapped previously (see below)

### Survivors and Movers

The majority of birds retrapped in 2018 were first ringed during the year, but below is a selection of some which have survived over a longer period, whether this time is spent in the UK or elsewhere:

**Table 4: Selection of Retraps 2018**

Ring No.	Species	Ringed	Recaptured	Minimum Age
BJ10974	Dunnock	1.8.15	14.4.18	2yr 256d (ringed as juvenile)
LH18705	Blackbird	10.8.13	13.10.18	5yr 64d (ringed as juvenile)
RF66158	Song Thrush	5.1.15	14.4.18	3yr 99d (ringed as 2 <sup>nd</sup> calendar year bird)
Z306470	Blackcap	22.8.15	5.5.18	2yr 256d (ringed as first year bird)
Z306369	Blue Tit	23.7.15	22.4.18	2yr 273d (ringed as juvenile)
Z306382	Bullfinch	23.7.15	29.12.18	3yr 159d (ringed as juvenile, 1 <sup>st</sup> recapture)

There were two controls, i.e. captures of birds ringed elsewhere. A first year Blackcap trapped on 9<sup>th</sup> September had been ringed at Ladywell on the

14<sup>th</sup> July. A Chiffchaff, also a first year bird, ringed 180 km north at Stanford Reservoir (Northants) on 29<sup>th</sup> September was at Cissbury on 13<sup>th</sup> October.

Only one of “our” birds turned up elsewhere in 2018; a Chiffchaff we ringed on 6<sup>th</sup> October only took three days to fly to Sandwich Bay Observatory where it was caught on 9<sup>th</sup> October. However, a late notification, not received until 2018, was of a Goldcrest ringed on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016 which was controlled at Hilbre Island in The Wirral on both 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March 2017!

### **The More Unusual**



Spotted Flycatcher 15<sup>th</sup> August 2018 (showing the worn plumage of an adult; adults of this species undergo a complete moult in the winter quarters)

Even though the species' range is increasing, it is always satisfying to catch colourful Firecrests, which arrive in autumn in far smaller numbers than

Goldcrests. This year we had four new individuals, which stayed around the site; two retrapped on 29<sup>th</sup> December had been ringed on 26<sup>th</sup> September and 6<sup>th</sup> October. Three juvenile Treecreepers were ringed, in July and August, and a single Spotted Flycatcher, an adult, also in August.

## **Summary**

Thanks are due to our Group Secretary, Brian Clay who oversees the return of data to the British Trust for Ornithology; to Mya, David and Finch for their involvement with the ringing operations during the year; to the National Trust for their permission to ring at the site; and to the owners of the track for allowing vehicular access so a car can be parked near the ringing area.

## Vectis Wanderings

### John Maskell

Spring 2018's Newsletter contained an article that I penned about the RSPB's Brading Marshes Reserve on the Isle of Wight. Recently several members have asked me for an update, so I am happy to oblige. In last year's notes my only experience of the reserve was in the wintertime but thanks to extra visits to my Mum and Uncle, who are life-long residents of Vectis (the Roman name for the Island), I was able to incorporate eight returns and thereby experience Brading Marshes during each season in 2018. Incidentally my 90-year-old Mum is a very patient lady and always takes reading material with her when I take her for "a drive"!

I have now recorded over 60 species at Brading Marshes but still have many gaps... and so have a good excuse to keep returning! Highlight for me last summer was the first Hobby I've seen on the Island. However, the momentous news from this very important reserve in 2018 was the successful breeding of a pair of Bittern. This was the first ever record of Bittern breeding on the Island and says much for the RSPB's management of

this large wetland area. Significantly, Marsh Harriers are now regular breeders here too.

Nevertheless, having experienced a good selection of seasonal variations in 2018, winter remains my favourite time at the marshes. Watching six species of geese, in both January and February this year, over the same gate, was rather special. Spectacularly on 20<sup>th</sup> January a Great Egret feeding in the background and two Marsh Harriers gliding overhead leads me to rest my case!

Should you be tempted to visit the Isle of Wight, then I can also recommend the small 20-acre Hersey Reserve at Seaview just a mile or so to the east of Ryde. The reserve is named after Alan Hersey (1931-1999), a former County Councillor, who had a great interest in the history and environment of the local area. This is a coastal reserve, a Ramsar site and forms part of the Ryde Sands and Wootton Creek SSSI and was created in mitigation for habitat lost when a £4.5 million sea wall was built in 2003. The Reserve is managed by the Isle of Wight County Council and occupies land they hold on a 50-year lease. It is managed by the Council, Natural England, the Environment Agency and local residents. Part of the site is developed for public access, there is a hide for bird watching and the reserve is noted both for its waders and wildfowl. I have found this to be a most reliable site for wintering Greenshank.

On a flood plain, fluvial water runs down the valley into the reserve and a culvert passes under the old toll road and down the beach, through which salt water also enters the Reserve on the rising tide. Water can only drain into the sea at low tide and as a result, a brackish lagoon has formed along with marshes and reedbeds. The reserve includes a small meadow that is maintained by grazing.

From the seawall and beach opposite the reserve, there are excellent opportunities for shore and sea-watching and this part of the Solent regularly hosts rare grebes and divers in the winter. In early February 2019, Shena and I watched a Red-necked Grebe offshore amongst several Great Crested Grebes whilst Black-necked and Slavonians have also been recorded this

winter. Meanwhile Little Grebes are regulars within the reserve. The Ryde and Seaview shoreline is always a good place to watch various wading species with more than 200 Sanderling a regular occurrence in mid-winter; many sporting rings. Also noteworthy are the large flocks of wintering Brent Geese that can be seen feeding on algae and eelgrass at low tide. On occasions I have counted Brent flocks in excess of 500 off the northern shores of the Island.

Brading Marshes and the Hersey Reserves are just two of many natural gems on the Isle of Wight and all are well-worth exploration at any time of year.

Meanwhile I recently acquired a copy of the Reverend Kelsall and Philip Munn's *The Birds of Hampshire & the Isle of Wight* which was published in 1905. As with all such older birding books it serves to remind us of the dramatic changes that have occurred in birding populations over relatively short periods of time. There is an interesting section on eagles and a reminder that White-tailed Eagles were once widespread along the whole of the South Coast of England, before being driven to extinction by persecution that began in the Middle Ages. The last South Coast pair bred on Culver Cliff at the eastern end of the Isle of Wight in 1780. However, there were occasional sightings of single birds during the Victorian period and I wonder whether Tennyson's short poem 'The Eagle' may have been prompted by a sighting of one of these roamers during his 40-year residency at Farringford House in Freshwater, being just a short distance from the cliffs that tower nearly 500 feet above the English Channel. Well, we can all dream! Indeed, Roy Dennis and his Foundation announced their dream last year to work with the Forestry Commission to re-introduce White-tailed Eagles to the Isle of Wight. Building on the success of the Scottish reintroduction scheme, where there are now over 130 breeding pairs, a feasibility study is being undertaken. The plan is for a small population to become established on the Isle of Wight which would lead to birds spreading east and west along the South Coast. Exciting times indeed!



## Bramber Brooks west of the River Adur.

### Brianne Reeve

In 2016 nearly 40 acres of the floodplain below Bramber Castle was bought by Riversong, whose Managing Director, Nick Mills, lives overlooking this designated Site of Nature Conservation Interest, part of the land being a Scheduled Ancient Monument due to the undisturbed salterns. He had been concerned when certain planning ideas had surfaced which would have been detrimental to the historic, small village of Bramber and therefore he decided to save it from development. He is committed to improving the biodiversity, whilst preserving the wildness of the land which has not been managed for many years. (Local Nature Reserve status has now been requested).

Bramber Council has been working with Riversong and has formed the Bramber Brooks Management Committee (BBMC). A successful bid for a grant from the Rampion Wind Farm Community Fund has helped to establish a new nature reserve (dog free) with a circular walk, five wooden bridges to take people over marshy areas, fencing and seating and a Community Orchard planted with mixed apple trees. Also SDOS has donated and erected a Barn Owl nest box within the reserve.

A public footpath crosses the rest of the site but permissive access to the general public has been agreed for the whole area. Schools and local groups are encouraged to come and explore this quiet space, Nick has prepared a very attractive spot for groups to meet and talk. Nick and I have escorted well over 150 people (including more than 50 SDOS members) around the reserve, explaining what we hope to do in the next few years. Part of that is watching and waiting to see what flora and fauna comes into the reserve after clearance and maintenance. The Environment Agency has shown a great interest and is planning to dig two large ponds later this year. This is partly in mitigation for the loss of habitat further south down the River Adur due to the Tidal Walls Scheme.

When I was invited to join the Management Committee I had not realised quite how much work was involved but it has been very rewarding to be included at the beginning of such an exciting project. I am doing this on behalf of SDOS because it will always be of interest to us as a local reserve.

## Photograph acknowledgments

The source of photographs 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: Snow Bunting - Dorian Mason

Page 20: Common Buzzard - Dorian Mason

Page 21: Pallas's Warbler - Ian Redman

Page 23: Corn Bunting - Dorian Mason

Back cover: Black Redstart - Ian Redman

## 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

