

Shoreham and District
Ornithological Society
Autumn Newsletter

2014



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Editorial

Your correspondents have been busy over the summer and here is the second bumper edition of the newsletter with eight more pages of ornithological entertainment than last time! You will notice that we have specified a lighter paper for this issue. This decision is driven by postage costs rather than the cost of production, as heavier paper takes us into a higher weight class.

In this edition Peter Whitcomb reminds us, using his records from Wild Park, Brighton, of the considerable reduction in the numbers of autumn migrants in recent years. There are two articles about conservation issues. Bernie Forbes tells us of his efforts to save the yew trees at Cissbury Ring and Brianne Reeve gives us a personal view on the Rampion wind farm. Environmental management is often about reconciling differing objectives and it is important that the society continues to represent the interests of birds to those engaged in land management or the production of renewable energy.

Sue Miles and Bernie Forbes have been 'up north' and provide us with accounts of different environments and birds. Remember that the Orkney islands that Sue writes about are as far from Shoreham as the French Pyrenees!

Our Recorder, Stephen Simpson has summarised the highlights from the last few months of observations in the local area, and also provides us with information on arrival and departure dates. Tim and Jenny Holter have written interesting accounts of the WeBS survey and developments at Widewater. Finally Val Bentley has written an updated version of our garden birds in 2013 and an account of the ringing activity at Cissbury.

I thank all our correspondents for their efforts and I will email about the deadline for the 2015 spring edition soon.

Roger Smith

The Decline of Autumn Migration at Wild Park, Brighton

Peter Whitcomb

For well over twenty years I have collated sightings from the Wild Park area of Brighton. Recently I had reason to check back on a high day count and delving further into archive records in the 1990's I realised how much things have changed from then to the present day. We can see this in the excellent tables and data that the BTO produce, but I decided that it would be useful to compare a then and now from my own set of records.

The method I used was to take autumn totals for each year and, because of the annual fluctuation, I prepared decade averages in order to compare the two decades. The years used were 1990-1999 and 2000 to 2009. Even looking at some of the high counts, it quickly became clear that most of these were in the first decade, or even before, with very few recent exceptions.

Table A (1990-1999) shows the autumn averages for the first decade of the survey and alongside are the highest and lowest totals with that decade. Of course there were good years and bad years which is why I have shown the averages for the ten year periods.

Table B (2000-2009) shows the comparative numbers and in addition the percentage difference between the two decades – in most cases quite a serious decline is evident. It might be argued that in the first decade there were more birders covering the area and passing on their sightings, but I was very careful not to risk duplication at the time. More eyes, in theory, should see more birds, but this is not always the case.

I have chosen to exclude some species for various reasons. Passage birds like Cuckoo, Hobby and Turtle Dove were always irregular at Wild Park, and there have also been records of scarcer species such as Wryneck, Hoopoe and Grasshopper Warbler. I felt these infrequently recorded birds

should not be in the survey, so I have concentrated on the more regular species. Cuckoo probably bred in the early years but declined so rapidly as to become irregular. I have also excluded winter thrushes.

Yearly fluctuation surely does not account for the species with the largest percentage declines; Ring Ouzel, Black Redstart and Pied Flycatcher. Some further explanation is necessary here. In 1988 there was an exceptional number of Ring Ouzels which influenced the averages. Not only was there a record 46 in one day, but there were other above average counts that year too. The **day** count of 46 was significantly higher than any other subsequent **year** count. Rather bizarrely, thinking back now, Black Redstarts were regular on Hollingdean allotments in the early 1990's. At the time it wasn't unusual to day count half a dozen, and they were present annually there up to 1997. Thereafter the pattern changed with just the odd single noted elsewhere in the area.

The declines of other regular visitors, though, would seem to be part of a national pattern. The well-documented tables and analyses that the BTO produce show serious changes for some birds and here at the Wild Park the declining numbers of Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Whinchat seem to agree. The two warblers have also shown signs of breeding decline in the Wild Park area too. Of particular interest are the maximum day counts of these three species – 22 for Garden Warbler in 1983, 43 for Lesser Whitethroat in 1988 and 27 for Whinchat in 1994. Now look at recent numbers in the table!

Turtle Dove is not included in the tables as it was somewhat irregular and always in very low numbers, but this too had a decline of 73%. Next, in terms of reduced numbers, come House Martin, Tree Pipit, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest and Spotted Flycatcher. It really doesn't seem that long ago that House Martins nested more frequently in nearby urban areas of Brighton, whilst Willow Warblers last nested in the Wild Park at the end of the 1990's. Perhaps for this species there is a trend for a northern breeding range shift combined with a national decline.

Overflying passage (visual migration) can influence the averages, as it would not be that unusual to miss out on a day when elsewhere along the coast there was significant movement, in particular of hirundines, finches and skylarks. There is always this possibility with any species as we cannot vouch for a complete daily count throughout the autumn. This is why using an average should tend to balance things out. I also think it is likely, with greater experience of recognising calls over the years, and the popularity of observing visual migration, that finches come out quite well in this survey. Crossbills, Redpolls and Reed Bunting, for instance, show an increase, whilst Siskin only have a slight decline.

The increase in numbers of Meadow Pipit and Grey Wagtail are not easily explained. Meadow Pipit numbers fluctuate enormously from one day to another, and from one week to another. Grey Wagtails are documented as being on the increase in urban Brighton recently, but I doubt if this would influence the figures. The fact that Grey Wagtails are rarely seen outside of the Autumn period here suggests that the birds observed are on passage.

Table A

Average Year Counts for Autumn 1990-1999 for regular migrants passing through Wild Park LNR			
Species	Highest count	Lowest count	Average count
Skylark	600	246	410
Sand Martin	83	0	28
Swallow	15500	998	6284
House Martin	18300	580	6901
Tree Pipit	93	5	42
Meadow Pipit	2154	375	863
Yellow Wagtail	76	6	28
Grey Wagtail	19	0	5
Black Redstart	6	0	3

Species	Highest count	Lowest count	Average count
Common Redstart	45	7	26
Whinchat	122	6	51
Stonechat	48	0	24
Wheatear	142	33	80
Ring Ouzel	110	1	23
Lesser Whitethroat	186	28	85
Common Whitethroat	434	78	231
Garden Warbler	29	1	11
Blackcap	232	41	147
Chiffchaff	762	105	357
Willow Warbler	515	68	280
Goldcrest	582	5	217
Firecrest	15	0	4
Spotted Flycatcher	103	5	50
Pied Flycatcher	11	0	5
Brambling	46	0	14
Siskin	567	23	208
Redpoll	172	3	63
Crossbill	48	0	11
Reed Bunting	9	2	4

Table B

Average Year Counts for Autumn 2000-2009 for regular migrants passing through Wild Park LNR and the decade change				
Species	Highest count	Lowest count	Average count	% change
Skylark	585	120	281	-31.50%
Sand Martin	57	0	20	-28.60%
Swallow	9818	690	3158	-49.70%
House Martin	5908	721	2921	-59.70%
Tree Pipit	47	6	20	-52.40%
Meadow Pipit	1520	396	942	8.40%
Yellow Wagtail	44	8	22	-21.40%
Grey Wagtail	23	2	8	37.50%
Black Redstart	1	0	0.4	-86.70%
Common Redstart	18	3	13	-50%
Whinchat	44	7	16	-68.60%
Stonechat	38	6	20	-16.70%
Wheatear	116	26	58	-27.50%
Ring Ouzel	6	0	2	-91.30%
Lesser Whitethroat	39	11	22	-74.10%
Common Whitethroat	297	73	146	-36.80%
Garden Warbler	5	0	3	-72.70%
Blackcap	135	76	103	-29.90%
Chiffchaff	406	132	236	-33.90%
Willow Warbler	151	71	109	-61.10%
Goldcrest	227	22	77	-64.50%
Firecrest	14	0	2	-50%

Species	Highest count	Lowest count	Average count	% change
Spotted Flycatcher	40	7	19	-62%
Pied Flycatcher	5	0	1	-80%
Brambling	18	2	6	-57.10%
Siskin	812	8	175	-15.90%
Redpoll	233	8	64	1.60%
Crossbill	75	0	17	35.30%
Reed Bunting	27	1	8	50%



Reed Bunting, Norfolk Estate: Wendy Ball

Saving the yews at Cissbury Ring

Bernie Forbes

Many of you will be aware that Cissbury Ring - a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a wonderful place to see birds and features highly in the spring and autumn migration. Of course it holds a good number of common breeding species and a fair few winter visitors as well. Being the highest point just above the southern slope of the downs and near the coast it attracts large numbers of migrants moving along the south coast. Many of the migrants move west in the autumn and to a lesser extent east

in the spring so it is a natural stopover for a variety of birds. Some birds spend long periods feeding

up, especially in the autumn, for the long journey back to their wintering grounds in Africa. One of the Ring's special birds for me is the Ring Ouzel, a beautiful but



skulking thrush that most birders love to see. The males have a striking gorget breast band giving them an elegant superior look. Their skulking behaviour is frequently given away by the harsh 'chack-chack' call that, once learnt, is never forgotten. They occasionally appear on spring migration although nowadays in much smaller numbers than, for example, the six I recorded at Cissbury on 28th April 1976. Nowadays their spring migration is less spectacular although it is still not uncommon for a few birds to be seen on the ring and frequently around the same trees!

The southern yew on the ring is the place where they are regularly seen. When they arrive they draw visiting birders from all over Sussex and Surrey and the yew tree features on the SOS website and the SDOS user

group as the place to find them. A staggering 65 were recorded around Cissbury on 19th October 2005 with over 20 birds in the yew! I was horrified when Mike Snelling emailed me on Saturday (19 July 2014)



informing me that the National Trust Ranger at Cissbury Ring intended to fell this important and ancient tree. In the ranger's words they needed to fell the tree so they could safely graze cattle on the ring to maintain the habitat for wildlife! I was aware that yews and cattle don't go together as the foliage is toxic to cattle although I thought this an extreme example of conservation gone mad!

On the Sunday morning I was unsure how to draw attention to this threat so I posted a plea on the SDOS & Sussex Wildlife user group and the SOS web site asking for help in providing email addresses or phone numbers of bodies or individuals that I could contact. Within 30 minutes of posting I received phone calls and emails offering contact names and a great deal of other useful information. In fact I was overwhelmed with offers and it took me the rest of the day to formulate a plan of attack writing numerous emails. This involved contacting various organisations that I thought would have some interest in the management of Cissbury Ring. I therefore contacted Natural England, the National Trust Office, Sussex, the National Trust Ranger, Cissbury Ring, Worthing Borough Council (the landowner) and many private individuals who I thought may be able to help. In my email I explained the reasons why the tree should be saved and the fact that it was a vital resource for migrating thrushes and especially Ring Ouzels, a nationally declining species. In the mean time emails continued to arrive, all of them condemning the proposed action by the National Trust with some saying they would stand in front of the tree to prevent it being felled and others stating they would resign from the NT if the tree was cut down! The following day I had a phone conversation with the National Trust Ranger- Cissbury Ring, who told me that he was still proposing to fell the tree that week, despite all the protest! We had a long conversation over the matter and I asked him not

to go ahead and wait until the matter was resolved. That evening I received a reply by email from Natural England to say they were aware of the problem and were in negotiation with National Trust Sussex to come up with a compromise. On the Tuesday I had a confirmation email from Jane Cecil, Manager of South Downs for the National Trust stating that they were prepared to save the tree. Their condition was that they are able to get permission from English Heritage and Natural England to erect a fence as it is an Archaeological Site and thus protected. The proposal is to fence off the immediate area around the tree to prevent cattle from browsing and feeding on the yew. We are not quite home and dry as permission is required for the fence, although the other yew tree within the Ring was fenced off a long time ago, so the precedent has already been set. I have been in direct contact with Jane Cecil from NT Sussex and said that the SDOS may be able to help with a grant specifically for the fencing cost. The SOS may also contribute. Hopefully this issue will have a good ending and I promise to keep you all up to date with any news regarding the tree.

Fingers crossed that we have a Ring Ouzel autumn and that many of you will be able to see this enigmatic species feeding in and around the magnificent Yew. I would like to thank all of you who contacted me and those of you who made direct contact with various representatives of the National Trust. I would especially like to thank Jane Cecil of the National Trust Sussex and Nigel Hiscoke of Natural England whose speedily involvement helped to preserve our Yew.

Photographs:

Ring Ouzel: Dorian Mason

Cissbury Ring Yew tree: Bernie Forbes

Wind Farm off the Sussex coast

Brianne Reeve

E.ON has been granted permission to erect a Wind Farm 8 – 16 miles off the south coast between Worthing and Seaford. It will cover 64.5 sq. miles

and will be viewable from Selsey Bill to Beachy Head. There will be up to 175 turbines up to a height of 700 ft. (that is 200ft. higher than Blackpool Tower). The claim is that it will have the 'capacity' to generate 700 megawatts of electricity, but as wind is intermittent the actual output of this £2 billion scheme will at best average only 240MW. E.ON may earn around £325million a year of which £220million will be subsidised through our electricity bills. There will be subsea cables of about 19km to carry the electricity ashore. Landfall will be at Brooklands just east of Worthing and from there 45m trenches will be dug across the Brooklands Golf Course, under roads (including the A27), over the downs through farmland, under the Coombes road, the River Adur, the A283 and eventually on to the new substation to be built south of Bolney 27km from Brooklands. It will take two - two and a half years to install the huge cables from the wind turbines to the grid.

When asked where the major items of equipment would be sourced, for example the turbines and the turbine blades, the answer was they would be imported, probably from Germany. No local jobs then.

The impact of work on the sea-bed and on-shore cannot be quantified and therefore is of great concern. E.ON claims it will return the area to 'better than it was before'! They say they understand the potential impact of the Wind Farm on views from the Heritage Coast, on commercial fishing and the effect on fish by pile-driving.

Onshore they say they will take into account Public Rights of Way, hedgerows and ancient woodland, chalk grassland and thereby the insects and flora and the effect on breeding birds. Do we really think that work would stop for a few breeding birds?

Regarding birds and here I quote: 'There are two potential impacts on birds from wind farms – the risk of them colliding with the turbine blades and the possibility they may lose feeding areas. Surveys have been carried out over the last two years to find out the species using the Rampion area for feeding, foraging, resting, flying, breeding and migration. The Secretary of State also carried out an environmental assessment of Special Protection

Areas and birds, which found there would be no significant affect on them from the development of the Rampion project'. Can one really believe that birds will **not** be affected by this vast area of whirling blades?

Nor does this tie in with newspaper headlines: in Spain 6,450 birds were killed in one year by wind turbine blades. In Britain 'available evidence suggests that wind farms can harm birds' - in July 2013 birders had gathered in the Outer Hebrides to watch a Needletail Swift only to see it caught and killed instantly in the blades of a wind turbine. In America wind farm deaths are much higher than expected; 573,000 in 2012 including 83,000 birds of prey.

Dr Rausing of the Coignafearn Estate in Scotland fears for the future of Golden Eagles as a wind farm is proposed close to her property: 'what mad policy is it that describes as 'green' energy, that costs more in infrastructure than it will ever produce in energy and which utterly ruins the landscape in which it is built?' Roy Dennis, of Osprey fame, and ecologist to the Coignafearn Estate, says that wind farms turn a pristine wilderness with unbroken views into an industrial site.

As with any manufactured item there is an environmental cost to the manufacture of renewable energy hardware. It will need to have fossil fuel or nuclear power on standby because of the intermittency issue. Although wind farms are supposed to have a twenty year life, it seems that after as short a time as twelve to fifteen years, it is rarely economic to operate the wind farm and they will need to be replaced. So what happens to those 175 wind turbines, how will they be disposed of when they cannot work any longer? Can this huge investment that we are paying for, really be a viable option? Have we investigated the use of tides, wave power – surely a regular and reliable resource.

In twenty years time what are the next generation going to think of the legacy we have left them here on the south coast?

(These are my personal views and are not necessarily shared by SDOS.)

WeBS and Birds on the Adur Estuary

Jenny and Tim Holter

We began to take part in the WeBS count for the Adur Estuary in January 2013. We had no experience, and were apprehensive about our ability to identify waders successfully at a distance and in flight, particularly since we did not have a scope. However, as we live in Shoreham, and regularly walk and birdwatch the river, we were keen to give it a try. After all, not many places can boast of their own RSPB nature reserve within walking distance of home!

We met with Pete Hughes, the warden at the time, and initially started counting alongside Jim Glover, who had been doing the count for 25 years, and felt it was time for someone else to take over. At the end of our first winter's apprenticeship, we were ready to go it alone, and submit our records to the BTO survey. As data is entered online, we are able to see records over a substantial period of time, and it is interesting to note the changes in bird species and numbers, and also the birds of interest that have been recorded.

Early records are somewhat sporadic. The first record of a count on the Estuary is from 1st December 1964 which noted the following: 300 Dunlin, 40 Redshank, 30 Ringed Plover and a single Spotted Redshank. Astonishingly, Gulls were assessed, but recorded as 'none present'! In January 1967-69 significant counts of Mallard (100) and Swan (71) were recorded but no other species.

There is then a sizeable gap, with the next set of records being in 1975 – 6, when the river was studied more closely as there were plans to build a marina on the intertidal areas near the houseboats and Creek. Fortunately the plans for the marina did not go ahead, and we believe it was around this time that the RSPB acquired the reserve.

John Newnham reported in an SDOS article in 1976 that the Adur held 25% of the Sussex wintering population of Ringed Plover, 10% of the county's Redshank and 4% of Dunlin. Peak counts from this period were

175 Ringed Plover (August 1975), 85 Redshank (Oct 1975), 1250 Dunlin (Jan 1976) and 1350 Lapwing (Nov 1975). Other birds of note from this period were a Kentish Plover in Jan 1975, a Curlew Sandpiper in Aug 1975 and small numbers of Knot and Bar Tailed Godwit.

Consistent recording at the site did not begin until January 1981, but there are now over 30 years of winter records available. During the 1980s there were substantially higher numbers of waders recorded than we might expect to see today, including 1570 Dunlin, a peak of 9000 Lapwing and 330 Ringed Plover. In contrast, we have barely managed double figures of Dunlin and Ringed Plover around the river, although we did have an exceptional count of 262 Dunlin at Shoreham Airport on a particularly grim and wet day in February 2013, together with 4 Ruff, a first record for the WeBS count (although they have been sighted on the river in the past). Lapwing numbers are in the hundreds rather than thousands, and are likely to decrease still further with the proposed airport development. Redshank numbers have not declined quite as drastically as other species, and numbers are regularly around the 70-80 mark. However, this still represents a significant decrease from previous levels.

There are probably a number of reasons for this alarming slide in our local bird populations, and it should be noted that many of these species have also suffered drastic national declines too. Increased use of the river for leisure activities, such as canoeing, is one possible factor. The river also sits within a wider habitat for waders, and increased disturbance on the beaches from leisure activities and dog walking is also likely to have impacted on Ringed Plover numbers. There have also been changes to the river itself. Over time, as a result of eutrophication, probably caused by run-off from agricultural fertilisers into the river, the bare mudflats have been encroached upon by saltmarsh vegetation and increased silt sedimentation. This has reduced the feeding opportunities for some species.

However, 'one bird's meat is another bird's poison' and there have been winners in this process as well as losers. In November 1981 just a single Snipe was recorded. One of the shocks we had when we took over the

count was the high numbers of Snipe present, even though they are barely visible, during the winter months. As the tide comes in and pushes the birds up from the saltmarsh, it is just possible to make out their distinctive striped heads and ludicrously long bills, before they take to the air in search of alternative high tide habitat. In the 21st century, peak counts are regularly over 150 birds. Teal are another winner, beginning to be recorded consistently in 1995, with just 5 reported, as compared to a recent high of 113 (January 2013).

Whilst weather conditions can affect individual counts, such as an influx of Wigeon along the riverbank in extreme conditions, another significant factor is also climate change. The first Little Egret was reported in 1995, and has been recorded every year since 2000, with a peak of 17 birds counted in September 2006. It will be interesting to see if numbers increase in response to the nearby egretty. Who knows what other species the future may bring – Spoonbill perhaps?

A total of 71 species has been recorded as part of the WeBS survey, including highlights such as Little Stint, Goldeneye and Scaup. It should of course be noted that the WeBS count is a regular once monthly high tide record. Other birds of interest have also been reported using the river over the years – from John Newnham’s reports of Grey Phalarope in 1954, 1959 and 1960 to intermittent sightings of Avocet, last year’s long staying Osprey and in June this year a Great White Egret (as per SOS WeBSite). So if you are not sure where to wander on an afternoon this winter, you could do worse than the river Adur...

Widewater Saline Lagoon Local Nature Reserve News

Tim Holter

During the summer months the attraction of this site for birders has been at a low ebb although it still provides an enjoyable walk by the sea. The main period of interest is over the winter, commencing with the autumn migration and the return of wintering birds, through to incoming Spring migrants and departure of overwintering birds to nesting sites elsewhere.

As I write the late summer/early autumn period is gaining pace. Jim and Judith Steedman have regularly observed a few southbound Wheatears along the beach on each visit since late July, and at the end of August, Bernie Forbes and associates reported the first of many Little Grebes returning to the lagoon for the winter. I wonder if last winter's peak daily count of 28 will be exceeded.

Whereas waders have been sparse, Jenny and I have observed a maximum of 9 Little Egrets, whilst a Widewater resident reports 17 being present on one day in July.

The seemingly resident pair of Mute Swans raised six cygnets in 2013. This year only one has survived. No doubt this is due to predation of the nest. This year's nest was on the lagoon bank below the car park where it would have been easily accessible to foxes and other interfering animals, whereas the 2013 nest was within the relatively protected garden of a Brighton Road property. That property was demolished earlier this year and the site is busy with building activity.

Last year bad weather drove Sandwich Terns to take temporary refuge on posts within the lagoon but I am not aware of a similar occurrence this year although Terns are regularly observed passing close off-shore.

We await the return of wintering Teal and always hope for the autumn passage of some interesting waders if we are lucky enough to have exposed damp mud at the appropriate time now water is usually maintained at a fairly constant level by the sluice.

I am told that prior to the strengthening of the sea defences and installation of the sea-water mitigation pipe and sluice about a decade ago, percolation of water through the shingle bank would have resulted in regularly changing water levels due to tidal activity. This would have helped to keep mud around the lagoon moist and attractive to foraging waders. Re-introduction of changing water levels was a cause pursued by my predecessor, the late Stanley Allen. This seems to be a lost cause. Apart from birders' desires there is little other interest. The Brighton Road residents dislike mud and

rotting vegetation with associated flies and the Environment Agency is unlikely to fund any changes.

Lost cause it may now be, but if only West Sussex County Council could have been as pro-active as East Devon CC! Whilst on holiday in Devon recently, Jenny and I discovered what might have been! With no prior knowledge of what we were to find we visited Black Hole Marsh LNR, part of a growing complex of County Council owned LNRs by the River Axe Estuary between Colyford and Seaton. This area of flood plain marsh had been reclaimed for grazing for 150 years until acquired by East Devon County Council in 2008. The marsh is separated from the estuary by the Seaton Tramway railway embankment. Working with the Environment Agency, scrapes and islands were engineered to create a saline lagoon surrounded by new hides looking over the lagoon and estuary. An innovative but simple sluice incorporating a float and valve system enables an appropriate amount of water to automatically flow under the railway from the estuary to flood and drain the new lagoon with every ebb and flow of the tide without inundating the entire habitat or exposing rotting vegetation. Search the various internet sites under Seaton Marshes/Black Hole Marsh/ Colyford Common to see what has been achieved and details for an interesting stop on your next West Country holiday!

Returning to Widewater committee progress is slow but the intentions remain positive. Unfortunately, due to Public Authority spending restrictions the rangers only have temporary contracts and therefore inevitably apply for newly advertised jobs before their contracts expire. This results in a loss of continuity for projects which they are unable see through to completion. In the space of just over one year I am now dealing with my third West Sussex CC representative/ranger. However I am again very impressed by the apparent commitment and enthusiasm of our latest ranger, Martyn Burkenshaw.

Currently Martyn is actively liaising with the 'friends' group, World of Widewater (WOW), and will oversee their forthcoming maintenance activities including cutting back vegetation growing away from the seaward side banks across the lagoon shingle, removing vegetation invading

previously open shingle areas and ‘improving’ the island by removing all structures and vegetation apart from rare ‘sea heath’. Also he is arranging for the experimental cutting of the long grass on the wide grassed area between Tamarisk Island and the eastern causeway. The objective is to assess whether this will make this area more attractive to geese, lapwing, gulls and waders for roosting and foraging. Feedback and observations from SDOS members over the winter period will be helpful. Finally Martyn is preparing a new five year plan which will be discussed by the committee in October prior to approval by the County Council Ecologists and other interested parties.

Both WOW and our Ranger require bird sightings statistics so please let me have your personal survey results if you are visiting, preferably via the SDOS User Group for the benefit and interest of all members.

Bonxie Bonanza on Orkney

Sue Miles

Being a poor sea watcher I gratefully accepted an invitation to spend a week on Orkney knowing that with more polar bears in the world than Great Skuas and a large nesting population on Shetland and Orkney this was an opportunity not to be missed. My only previous encounter with a Great Skua, or Bonxie as they are known, had been a close flyby on Staffa.

Our holiday bungalow overlooked a loch and was surrounded by fields with Common Gull, Oystercatchers and Curlew. On our first evening Hares were bounding in the grass outside the window and a Short-eared Owl flew by.

Marwick Head, a RSPB reserve, is home to colonies of nesting Auks, Fulmar and Kittiwake. Orkney Vole burrow entrances can be seen plus Eider and Twite with Corncrake calling. There are 18 calling males on Orkney. Wild flowers abound including sea campion, squill, thrift and kingcups. An Arctic Skua circled near the cliffs and many Bonxies were flying close by.

The Old Man of Hoy was on my list to see so I took the passenger ferry to Hoy seeing Black Guillemot in the harbour and Great Northern Diver en route. I began the ascent at Rackwick with Bonxies continually flying overhead. The walk passes through Moor Fea, a moorland with nesting Bonxies and I duly found 2 on nests but at a distance. The Old Man is spectacular and well worth the walk with nesting Puffins giving added pleasure. I walked back along a deserted, imposing valley to Moaness. Near the end is Sandy Loch where Bonxies come to bathe. An amazing sight as numerous birds fly to and fro, swim or sit by the loch emitting their guttural cry.

My friends wanted to see Hoy and had booked the car ferry for the following day. Sadly this was our only wet day but I had been told there were a pair of Red-throated Divers on a lochan on Hoy which we duly located. Pulling off the road up a track opposite to eat our sandwiches, I was delighted to find a nesting Bonxie just 3 yards away providing an excellent view of this not very attractive yet powerful bully of a bird.

Orkney is an excellent location for birdlife, tranquillity, history and coastal path walks.

A week in Northumberland

Bernie Forbes

We had planned a week's holiday in June this year staying in Seahouses on the Northumberland coast. Arriving late on Saturday we explored the small fishing port and its pubs discussing our options for the week. Whilst keeping in touch with the bird news for Sussex, I also saw that a Bridled Tern had been seen on the Inner Farnes that day! As we had already planned to visit The Farnes to see the puffins I hoped to see the tern as well. The next morning we investigated boat trips to the islands and the best one was an all day trip visiting many of the islands, but this was sailing on Tuesday, three days away! Would the tern stay that long? I hoped so. This was not a birding holiday so a casual approach was called for! Our cottage was only a stone's throw away from the harbour and every day I

would see the boats off- loading their passengers, many of them birders. I would hear the odd comment such as ‘the tern was amazing’, ‘it looked



stunning’, and the ‘best bird I’ve seen for years’! I was still playing Mr Cool trying to tell my brother that I was not a real twitcher and was more interested in the cute broods of Common Eider and their attendant mums bobbing in the surf.

Tuesday was getting nearer and the nerve was holding steady. In the meantime we took a stroll from Crastar to Dunstanburgh Castle seeing auks, fishing terns and the kittiwake colony on the cliffs by the ruined castle. I even found a couple of Puffins amongst the Guillemots and Razorbills close inshore. Back at Seahouses the islands were still glimmering in the late afternoon sunshine and still the boats spilled out contented hordes of birders all rushing for a fish supper or into the pub that we had adopted.

Tuesday morning arrived at last but it was raining with heavy overcast skies! The weather was forecast to clear the Northumberland coastline by mid-morning. Wearing our wet weather gear we gathered on the jetty in the harbour at 1000hrs. It was cold with light drizzle and the prospect of spending all day out on the North Sea was not looking so attractive for the less committed in the group. Our boat, The Serenity, set off from the harbour. The sea was surprisingly calm and the plan was to land on Staple island in the morning. On the way out masses of auks were seen flying or swimming with close views of Puffins and Guillemots and the skies were just full of Arctic Terns. Sailing close to the cliffs the noise was amazing with the not unpleasant smell of fish hanging in the air. Rows and rows of Guillemots, smaller numbers of Razorbills and many Kittiwakes were all packed onto the narrow ledges. The Puffins occupied the top of the cliff. They were less packed together and looked far more sedate than the lower

rowdy ranks! It looked like the crammed terraces at a Premiership match, with sound to match.

At Staple Island the swell was too much for the boat to land and the NT



Wardens were closing the landing jetty on safety grounds and clearing the island of anyone who had managed to land earlier! Our skipper informed us that due to “Elf and Safety” we would have to change our day schedule and he quickly hatched a

new plan. This meant going back to harbour and then going out again later, as we were not able to land on the Inner Farne until it opened at 1330hrs. At midday we set sail once again, this time in bright sunshine with the drizzle gone and the skies brilliant blue. Was this a good omen? Passing more auks and a large herd of Grey Seals hauled out on a sand bar we sailed towards our destination. I could see that a couple of boats had already landed and the entire island was crawling with tourists, birders and photographers. On the landing jetty there was an obvious gallery of birders with scopes and binoculars all pointing in one direction. It was pretty much useless using the ‘bins’ on approach as the swell made it impossible to hold them steady. With my nerves as sound as a rock we slowly disembarked. I confidently strolled along the quay to casually ask the tight group of birders if the tern was showing. “No mate it flew off as you arrived”!

Uttering a few unprintable phrases I had to explain to Carol that I would hang around while they explored the island on their own. I did not have to wait very long. The tern was suddenly picked out in flight close by dropping into the masses of terns roosting on the rocks and the beach right in front of the assembled group. Even with binoculars the views were

stunning; a kind birder offered his scope for close up views which I enjoyed for a few minutes as we all appreciated this spectacular bird far from its normal summer range.

Happily I left the quay to run the gauntlet of the head diving Arctic Terns. The experience of being so close to these wild birds was just amazing. All around us Puffins were waddling in and out of their burrows completely oblivious of admiring gazes. They were flying back and forth with beaks full of glistening sand eels. The entire area was a blaze of wild flowers with Arctic and Sandwich Terns nesting in their midst.

It was time now for us to walk back to the jetty via the Arctic Tern assault course - even waving our newly purchased Puffin tea towel was insufficient



defence against the avian attack! Our boat anchored off shore and we all enjoyed watching the Bridled Tern amongst the roosting flock. Back in the harbour Carol said it was a magical day that would stay with her for a very long time. For me it was a fantastic experience,

one of the best birding days out. Nearly as good we got a £10 refund for the disrupted morning! That put another big grin on our faces as we contentedly supped our beer in the pub

Photographs: Carol Forbes

Shoreham District Ornithological Society 2014 Highlights

Stephen Simpson

These records were sourced mostly from the postings on the SDOS User Group and the Recent Sightings pages of the Sussex Ornithological Society web site and therefore are not confirmed.

April 2014

A Red-breasted Goose flew east with around 40 Brent Geese at Worthing on the 3rd and a Swallow was seen arriving there on the same day. From 3rd to 5th there were five Tufted Ducks at Brooklands. At Anchor Bottom on the 6th there were three Chiffchaffs and a Yellowhammer, and a singing Blackcap and Willow Warbler. A male Swallow singing at Coombes on the 10th was joined by a female on the 12th. Sixteen Little Egrets were at nests at Coombes on 6th. House Martins were at Upper Beeding on the 13th when a Red Kite flew W high over Ferring.

On 14th in the Ferring Rife / East Kingston area there were two Common Redstarts, a Common Sandpiper, a Ring Ouzel and a Whitethroat. Six Whimbrel moved past Worthing on 15th followed by another 28 and an Arctic Skua next day. Six Whitethroat territories were identified at Cissbury on the 17th. A Nightingale was heard in the Coombes / Anchor Bottom area from 22nd to the end of the month. A Common Crane flew west at Steep Down on 19th and one flew west along Worthing beach on 21st.

Two Red-breasted Mergansers were off Goring Gap on 21st and a Wheatear was on the beach there on the same day. Fifty nine Whimbrel flew past Hove on 20th and 34 were seen from Widewater on 23rd. Great Skuas were seen from Goring Gap on 18th, 20th and 21st, three from Widewater on 23rd then eight past Worthing on 26th plus three Arctic Skuas there on the same day. Arctic Skuas were also seen from Goring Gap on 21st and 27th. Two Common Terns were seen from Widewater on 23rd.

Four Eider flew east at Goring Gap on 27th and 11 Brent Geese flew east at Worthing beach on the same day.

A male Whinchat was at Steyning Levels on 24th, a Lesser Whitethroat was at Anchor Bottom on 24th, a Red-rumped Swallow was at Steyning Sewage Works on 27th and Reed and Sedge Warblers were found between Cuckoo Corner and Coombes on 29th. A Cuckoo was heard at Coombes on 29th.

May 2014

Seawatching from Worthing on the 1st produced 374 “Commic” Terns (including flocks of 130 and 90), 51 Sandwich Terns, seven Little Terns, three Black Terns, two Arctic Skuas, 16 Whimbrel, 103 Common Scoter, five Kittiwakes and two Black-throated Divers (all flying E).

Two Great White Egrets were at Widewater on 1st and five Swifts were seen flying N at Anchor Bottom on 5th. A drake Garganey was a surprise flying W close in at Ferring on the evening of the 1st. Six Swifts were over Worthing on the 12th. Juvenile birds were seen at various sites including: Grey Wagtail on 2nd, Dunnock on 2nd, Raven on 3rd, Coot on 9th, Little Grebe on 9th, Mallard on 9th and Starling on 11th.

May 5th was an outstanding day for seawatching. A significant number of Pomarine Skuas were seen from the Sussex coast, including 27 past Worthing up until 10 a.m., eight from Goring Gap, four from Brooklands and 26 from Brighton Marina. Eight Arctic Skuas were seen from Goring Gap with six from Worthing (possibly different birds) and 11 from the Marina. Over 300 Common/Arctic Terns were seen at both sites and 700 Common Scoter moved E. A Black Tern was seen from the Marina and at Goring Gap also seen were 27 Little Terns, 10 Bar-tailed Godwits, 28 Whimbrel and over 60 Sandwich Terns. Four Dunlin were at Widewater.

On the 6th 40 Little Terns passed Worthing and on 7th, two Great Skuas and four Eider were seen from Goring Gap and there was an Iceland Gull on the grass. Two Pomarine Skuas flew E at Ferring on 18th and three were

seen from Brooklands on 19th as well as an Arctic Skua. An Osprey flew in from the sea at Ferring on 25th.

A Nightingale was still at Anchor Bottom on the 3rd and three were at Woods Mill on the 11th with one there on 15th. Also at Woods Mill a Garden Warbler was singing on the 9th and two Cuckoos were heard on the 15th. Two Spotted Flycatchers were in East Kingston on 12th with a Redstart. At Passies Pond a Cuckoo was still being heard towards the end of the month.



June 2014

On the 1st a Great White Egret flew N up the Adur. Turtle Doves were recorded at Woods Mill several times throughout the month. Also at Woods Mill young Little Grebes were seen from two broods and Reed Warblers were feeding young on the 5th. Seventeen young Little Egrets and four young Grey Herons were seen at the colony at Coombes on 11th. Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls were seen with chicks at Shoreham on 17th. A Black Redstart was singing just west of Southwick Power Station on 20th and 23rd.

There were 30 singing male Corn Buntings at Steep Down on 22nd. Also there were three Stonechats, two Yellowhammers, a Cuckoo and a Reed Bunting.

From Worthing beach on the 22nd, four Common Terns, 10 Sandwich Terns, one Curlew, 12 Gannets, one Mediterranean Gull, two Razorbills, six Fulmars, one Arctic Skua and 230 Common Scoter which was a large number for this time of year. Five more Curlews flew W past Ferring at the end of the month.

July 2014

On the 1st at Woods Mill possibly two Little Grebe chicks were at the nest from probably the third brood this year. Also at Woods Mill on the 2nd a pair of Moorhens with four small chicks, juvenile Coots and a Kingfisher. Two Turtle Doves were seen there on the 4th.

A Quail was heard near Ditchling Beacon between 2nd and 7th, an Eider was seen on the beach at Ferring on 4th, 25 to 30 Swifts were over Worthing Railway Station on 16th, seven Sand Martins flew E at Worthing beach on 19th and an Arctic Skua flew W there on the same day.

A Hobby was at Shoreham Airport on 7th, a Yellow-legged Gull was on a sandbar opposite the airfield on the 12th, five Common Sandpipers were downstream of the Tollbridge on 13th and there were a number of Reed Warblers in the ditch between the airfield and the river on the same day including six singing males and two recently fledged young being fed.

Garden Bird Survey 2013

Val Bentley

I am very grateful to the following 29 members who sent in quarterly returns on which the following is based: the late Stanley Allen, Noranne Biddulph, Reg Bradbury, Jean Carder, Brian Clay, Jay Cooper, John Cooper,

Mary Darby, Shirley Downs, John Ford, Martin Ford, Clive Hope, Laurie Keen, Cyril & Maureen Leeves, Sheila Marshall, John & Shena Maskell, Janet & the late Gordon Paterson, David Potter, Antony Robinson, John & Jeannette Simpson, Stephen Simpson, Jim & Judith Steedman, Marion Taylor, Gordon & Vera Tickler, Rae Titcomb, David Tomalin, Peter Whitcomb, Martin Wilson and Audrey Wisdom. A key to the location of the gardens is at the end of the article.

The number of different species seen during the year was 63, an encouraging increase on the poor total of 54 in 2012 which was a poor breeding season, when the number of migrants passing through would have been reduced. This year there were sightings of Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher as well as the more usual Whitethroat, Blackcap and Willow Warbler.

During the first quarter 49 different species were recorded, seven more than in the same period in 2012, and similar to 2011. Song Thrush crept back into the top ten, in place of Goldfinch, recorded in 23% more gardens than for this period last year. Surprisingly, Blue Tits boycotted two of our observers!

The following species were only seen at a single site:

- Brambling (Stanley)
- Common Gull (Clive)
- Kingfisher (John C)
- Mallard (John C)
- Lesser Black-backed Gull (David T)
- Lesser Redpoll (Brian)
- Water Rail (Martin F)
- Yellowhammer (Sheila)

First Quarter (January – March)

Species (2012 brackets)	place in	% of gardens used	Maximum number seen	Average seen per garden
1=	Blackbird (1=)	100	7	2.41
1=	Great Tit (4=)	100	4	1.37
1=	Robin (1=)	100	3	1.14
4=	Dunnock (6)	97	3	1.14
4=	Woodpigeon (4=)	97	10	2.60
6	Blue Tit (1=)	93	12	2.63
7=	Collared Dove (10=)	90	8	1.23
7=	Magpie (7=)	90	6	1.00
9	Wren (7=)	86	2	0.38
10	Song Thrush (-)	81	5	1.05

Stanley noted a big increase in Chaffinches, recording a maximum of 21 in mid- February. Greenfinches (up to 20 seen) preferred the feeders. He found it a great delight to watch two Bramblings which visited regularly for the latter half of March and into early April. A Reed Bunting was a regular visitor to Reg's garden; up to four were seen by John & Jeannette and five by Sheila in the week of 13th Jan. Janet & Gordon reported their first garden Siskins with three in mid-March, while just down the road Brian had 12 in

the week of 24th, and the species was seen by six other observers. Brian and Jim & Judith were the only ones to see Lesser Redpoll.

During the coldest of the winter weather Fieldfares turned up in ten gardens during the week of 20th January. Eight were seen by Martin F, 10 by Sheila, 13 by Peter and 24 by Cyril & Maureen but Redwings were fewer in number and only recorded by six of our observers, though mostly during that same week. Cyril & Maureen watched the Fieldfares completely strip a yellow-berried *Pyracantha* bush, only leaving when the last berry had gone!

Despite not making the top ten list, House Sparrow deserves a mention as the flock feeding at Audrey's was much larger than in the same period last year, averaging at least 26 rather than 12. The largest flock of Starlings numbered 46, recorded by Stephen in early January. Goldcrests were seen in almost half of the gardens, but Firecrests only by David P and Marion.

Wintering Blackcaps were recorded in 15 gardens (55%), representing a minimum of 13 birds in any one week, and were regularly seen by Brian, Laurie, Sheila, John & Shena, Janet & Gordon, David P, Jim & Judith and Gordon & Vera. The maximum recorded at any one time was three by David P.

In the second quarter 47 different species were seen, though I'm not sure whether we should count the Rose-ringed Parakeet which turned up at John & Shena's at the end of May! Greenfinches were seen in more gardens than in the first quarter, but were fewer in number. The most numerous bird was Starling, with an average of 3.1 per garden, and a maximum of 40 at Stephen's in the week of 26th May.

In April Blackcaps were recorded in 19 gardens, i.e. nearly 70%, but as in 2012 only Laurie saw them regularly throughout the quarter, as a pair were nesting nearby; Great Tits took over a disused House Sparrow box in his garden, and Blue Tits successfully raised a brood. John C was entertained again this year by a Nightingale singing in bushes close by, first heard on 14th April, but still singing on 6th May. On 31st he noticed Swifts investigating a

nest site in an adjacent building (Court Mill), and on 26th June a female Mallard and 9 ducklings invaded his conservatory!

Second Quarter (April - June)

Species (2012 place in brackets)		% of gardens used	Maximum number seen	Average seen per garden
1=	Blackbird (1=)	100	6	1.81
1=	Blue Tit (1=)	100	8	1.50
1=	Dunnock (1=)	100	4	1.04
1=	Robin (5=)	100	4	0.94
5	GreatTit (5=)	96	7	1.18
6	Woodpigeon (1=)	93	10	2.13
7=	Goldfinch (9=)	89	7	1.02
7=	Magpie (7=)	89	5	0.96
9=	Collared Dove (7=)	86	4	0.88
9=	Greenfinch (9=)	86	18	1.53

Winter visitors such as Brambling and Lesser Redpoll departed by mid-April, though Reed Buntings continued to visit Reg until mid-June, and he saw a pair at a feeder on 27th May. Returning migrants seen by several were Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers; Whitethroats were recorded by

Rae, Cyril & Maureen, and Stephen. Rae had a female Redstart on 22nd April and a Spotted Flycatcher was a good find for Martin W at the end of May.

Third Quarter (July – September)

Species (2012 place in brackets)		% of gardens used	Maximum number seen	Average seen per garden
1=	Blackbird (1=)	100	5	1.42
1=	Blue Tit (2=)	100	10	2.75
3=	Robin (2=)	96	4	0.74
3=	Dunnock (7)	96	3	0.69
5=	Great Tit (5)	92	5	0.99
5=	Woodpigeon (2=)	92	10	1.55
7=	Greenfinch (8=)	84	3	0.96
7=	Magpie (8=)	84	6	0.76
9	House Sparrow (-)	80	25	4.06
10	Collared Dove (6)	80	11	1.03

Though several of our recorders commented that there seemed to be a marked reduction in birds from mid-August to mid-September and even Audrey's local seed merchant noticed a drop in sales, in the third quarter there were 45 different species, including a few migrants on the move towards the end of the period. Martin F, David P and Stephen all recorded

Whitethroats, Stephen had a Lesser Whitethroat on two occasions, David P spotted a Garden Warbler, and Cyril & Maureen saw not only a female Redstart, but found a Sedge Warbler in their garage which obligingly landed in a bucket so Maureen could send it on its way!

House Sparrow crept into the table this quarter for the first time since the same quarter in 2011, and John & Shena and Stephen saw flocks of over 20 birds. Large groups of Starlings numbering 30 or more were seen by John & Jeannette, Stephen and Gordon & Vera, but Cyril & Maureen recorded the maximum with 40 in the middle of August. Shirley noted that a male Blackbird and a young Magpie had learned how to hang on to a fat ball basket.

In the final quarter 44 species were recorded. As previously Song Thrush numbers were much lower at this time of the year than in the first quarter and were only seen by 37% of our observers; an appearance of one in Jay's garden merited an exclamation mark on her form! Starlings were also sparsely recorded, in only 58% of gardens, though Sheila saw 25 at the start of November and David P had 40 in mid-October. Flocks of over 20 House Sparrows were reported by Audrey, Gordon & Vera and Stephen. As well as her sparrows, Audrey recorded relatively large groups of Collared Doves, with a maximum of 16 in November.

In the first week of the quarter two Spotted Flycatchers passed through Laurie's garden, and Peter saw three Chiffchaffs. On 30th September a Buzzard flew down John C's garden at approx. 20 ft. chased by resident Crows. Another Buzzard lifted off out of adjacent trees and the pair was then chased off by a flock of Jackdaws. Reed Buntings were seen by Clive and Sheila, while December Blackcaps were recorded by David P, Stephen, John & Shena, Rae and Martin W.

Fourth Quarter (October – December)

Species (2012 place in brackets)		% of gardens used	Maximum number seen	Average seen per garden
1=	Blackbird (1=)	100	8	1.52
1=	Blue Tit (1=)	100	12	2.38
1=	Robin (1=)	100	3	0.84
4	Great Tit (6)	96	4	1.27
5	Woodpigeon (5)	88	11	1.77
6=	Dunnock (1=)	85	4	0.73
6=	Magpie (7)	85	8	0.84
8=	Chaffinch (8=)	77	6	0.86
8=	Collared Dove (-)	77	16	0.99
10=	Crow (10)	73	4	0.48
10=	Greenfinch (-)	73	6	0.65

Seen in only one garden this quarter were:

- Buzzard (John C)
- Fieldfare (Janet & Gordon)
- Grey Wagtail (Noranne)

- Kestrel (Marion)
- Rook (David T)
- Spotted Flycatcher (Laurie)
- Tawny Owl (Brian)
- Water Rail (Martin F)

For the seventh year running, only Blackbird was reported from every garden in each quarter, though Blue Tits and Robins were only missed by a few. Starlings were down from an average of 70% of gardens to 59%, Chaffinches from 81% to 69%, but Greenfinches and Goldfinches remained stable, after the improvement in 2012.

Thank you to all the recorders for their diligence!

Garden Locations

The late Stanley Allen (Sh), Noranne Biddulph (H), Reg Bradbury (L), Jean Carder (Sh), Brian Clay (H S), Jay Cooper (L), John Cooper (St), Mary Darby (E P), Shirley Downs (Sh), John Ford (St), Martin Ford (F), Clive Hope (F), Laurie Keen (Ho), Cyril & Maureen Leeves (Sh), Sheila Marshall (R), John & Shena Maskell (Wo), Janet & the late Gordon Paterson (H S), David Potter (G), Antony Robinson (Sh), John & Jeannette Simpson (Sh), Stephen Simpson (G), Jim & Judith Steedman (U B), Marion Taylor (L), Gordon & Vera Tickler (Sh), Rae Titcomb (Sh), David Tomalin (Fi), Martin Wilson (Wi), Peter Whitcomb (B), Audrey Wisdom (Sh)

(B) Brighton, (E P) East Preston, (Fe) Ferring, (Fi) Findon, (G) Goring
(H S) High Salvington, (Ho) Hove, (L) Lancing, (R) Rustington, (Sh) Shoreham, (St) Steyning, (U B) Upper Beeding, (Wi) Withdean. (Wo) Worthing

Ringling at Cissbury 2013

Val Bentley

2013 proved to be fairly similar in results to the previous year. The group was in operation for exactly the same number of sessions (28) though the

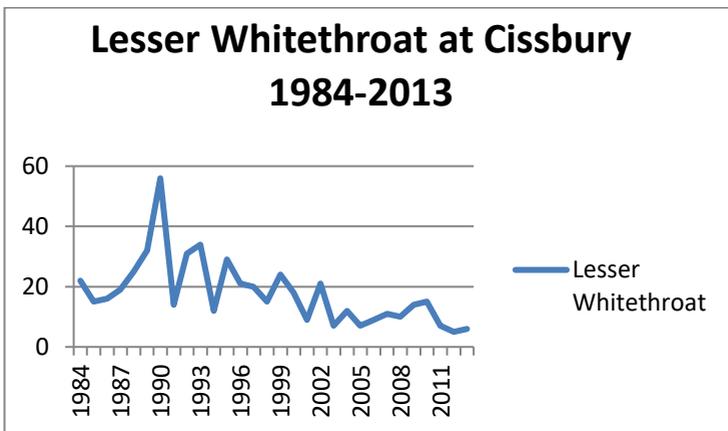
total of birds trapped was higher at 1180, compared with 937 in 2012. Of these 938 were new birds, 239 retraps, and three controls, that is a capture of a bird ringed elsewhere.

The first visit to the site for other than for vegetation management purposes was on 4th May, the start of our unofficial Constant Effort Site (CES) sessions. Due to habitat changes, we are unable to participate in the national scheme, but the discipline of a timetable of one session in every 10/11 day period, with a specified number of nets, between the start of May and the end of August does keep the ringers focussed! This first session, which resulted in just 25 birds in the nets, was certainly quieter than the equivalent one the previous year, though only to be expected after the very poor breeding season in 2012. Migrant species trapped were three Whitethroats, seven Blackcaps and one Willow Warbler, though this last bird would just have been passing through as the species no longer breeds at the site. Six of the Blackcaps were re-traps including two that had been ringed in 2009, one of which had only been caught once in the intervening time – in 2010. The oldest bird caught that day was a male Blackbird ringed as a juvenile on 25th August 2007.

Throughout May and to nearly the end of June, low numbers of birds were the order of the day; 17 on 12th May, 18 on the 25th though including our sixth ever Kestrel, 15 on 2nd June and only 9 on 15th which must be one of our lowest ever days, though not uneventful. There were a few SDOS members visiting that day and all were puzzled by cheeping of nestlings nearby, but disagreed as to the direction it was coming from. Eventually it transpired that Great Tits were nesting in a hole in the old railway sleeper we use as a seat – hasty decampment followed, and nets were taken down a little earlier than usual. Also that day, and after the departure of our visitors, we caught an adult male Mistle Thrush, only our second in all our years of ringing at the site.

Though 2013 was regarded retrospectively as a “good” summer, the early part of the season was cool and rather wet, not ideal conditions for parent birds to start to raise their broods. Apart from a young Long-tailed Tit on

2nd June it was not until the 15th June that the first juveniles of our resident species appeared in the nets, with one apiece of Blackbird, Robin and Dunnock. In 2011 the first young birds were found on 28th May, and in 2012 the first juvenile Robin appeared on 29th May. The session on 29th June produced the first juvenile Chiffchaffs, 12 of them, and by the end of July, 26 had been ringed. These were all birds that were still in juvenile plumage and would have come from very local nests. On CES session number 8 on 14th July families of juveniles of two different species were ringed, seven Great Tits and four Lesser Whitethroats. It was good to see this latter species, as their numbers have declined here since ringing started in 1984 (see below for graph of new birds ringed at the site over the past 30 years). Interestingly, the BTO website Status Summary states “Lesser Whitethroat abundance was roughly stable (albeit with short-term fluctuations) from the 1960s until the late 1980s, but the CBC/BBS (*Common Birds Census/Breeding Bird Survey*) and CES trends provide evidence for a subsequent moderate decline that lasted into the late 1990s. These changes were statistically significant, and large enough over the relevant periods to trigger BTO alerts. BBS has subsequently shown a significant sharp upturn, but this contrasts strongly with the continued decrease recorded by CES ringers.” It may be that the habitat change mentioned above, increasing density of scrub and progression into areas of woodland further up the slope, is having an effect on this species at Cissbury.



As we moved into August we saw the start of the passage of Willow Warblers, a species whose breeding population has plummeted in Sussex. They have disappeared from Cissbury - the last bird with juvenile plumage was ringed in 2010. A total of 45 Willow Warblers were ringed this year, our fourth lowest total, all of which have been in this century. Passage of Blackcaps was highest in September, and continued into mid-October, while Chiffchaffs reached a peak in numbers in early October with the last trapped on 16th November. Numbers of both these species increased over 2012 in relation to the totals of new birds ringed during the year, (See Table I below) indicating a better breeding season for them.

Table I: Totals of Four Passage Species (as percentages of total number of birds ringed)

Years	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	25.7	11.8	8.3	11.5
2011	34.9	20.9	5.4	5.7
2012	24.1	15.3	4.5	7.0
2013	32.3	23.0	5.0	4.8

As well as the Willow Warblers, we trapped some other summer migrant species which do not breed at Cissbury; six Reed Warblers between 10th August and 8th October, a Redstart on 17th August, a Sedge Warbler on 15th September and a scarce visitor from the east, a Yellow-browed Warbler, on 5th October. This was our third record of this species, the previous two being in 1991 and 1997, both of which were also in early October.

The first autumn visitors to the site were two Firecrests on 8th October, and three more were ringed before the end of November. Apart from one bird in September, Goldcrests did not arrive until the end of October, and a total of 12 were ringed. Only three Redwings were ringed this year, one

on 17th October and two on 16th November. The final session was on 29th November, when ten Blackbirds and three Song Thrushes were ringed, presumably an influx from elsewhere.

Most recaptures were of birds ringed in 2013 or the preceding two years, but those of more venerable age were three Blackbirds, ringed in 2006, 2007 and 2009, two Blackcaps, ringed in 2009 and 2010, a Great Tit from 2010 and a Long-tailed Tit from 2009. The oldest of the Blackbirds was a first year bird when ringed in 2006, was trapped three times in 2007 and just once in each of 2011 and 2013.

There were a few controls. A Long-tailed Tit ringed at Cissbury in 2011 was captured three times during the year a little further east by the team operating at Ladywell. A Blackcap we caught on 5th October had been ringed 245km away in La Neuville, northern France just seven days previously. A Chiffchaff we ringed on 29th September 2012 was controlled in similar scrubland habitat at Tilshead, Wiltshire on 25th September 2013, and another Chiffchaff ringed near Sheringham (Norfolk) on 24th August was trapped at Cissbury on 15th September.

Thirty-two different species passed through the group's hands this year and the totals are shown in Table 2 below. We ringed 15 juvenile Bullfinches which was nearly twice the productivity of 2012 but, rather strangely, only trapped one adult, a female ringed as a first year bird on 26th November 2011. The two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were an adult female ringed on 29th June and a first year bird on 10th August. The Kestrel was a male in its second calendar year, and the two Sparrowhawks ringed in November were both first year males. The single Yellowhammer that was trapped twice was first seen as a very young juvenile, just out of the nest, on 19th July 2011, and although obviously now a female, appeared to be a non-breeder as no brood patch was evident on either of the two captures in May and June.

Only a single juvenile Song Thrush was caught, on 14th July, though from 9th September until the end of November 21 first year birds were ringed.

Some of these could have been raised on the site, but those found in late October and November may be winter visitors.

Table 2: Total Captures at Cissbury 2013

SPECIES	Total	New Bird	Retrap	Control
Blackbird	57	33	24	
Blackcap	357	303	53	1
Blue Tit	38	28	10	
Bullfinch	27	15	12	
Chaffinch	5	4	1	
Chiffchaff	231	216	13	2
Dunnock	62	38	24	
Firecrest	5	5		
Garden Warbler	18	12	6	
Goldcrest	17	12	5	
Goldfinch	4	4		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	2		
Great Tit	24	17	7	
Greenfinch	9	9		
Jay	3	2	1	
Kestrel	1	1		
Lesser Whitethroat	7	6	1	
Long-tailed Tit	49	22	27	
Mistle Thrush	1	1		
Redstart	1	1		
Redwing	3	3		
Reed Warbler	6	6		
Robin	76	47	29	
Sedge Warbler	1	1		
Song Thrush	31	26	5	
Sparrowhawk	2	2		
Whitethroat	56	47	9	

SPECIES	Total	New Bird	Retrap	Control
Willow Warbler	45	45		
Woodpigeon	1	1		
Wren	38	28	10	
Yellow-browed Warbler	1	1		
Yellowhammer	2		2	
	1180	938	239	3

Ringers at Cissbury during the year were Val Bentley, Brian Clay, Phil Clay, Tom Flower, Ralph Hartfree and Sue Walsh, with single visits from Luke Dray, John Newnham, Adam Webster and Chrissi White. We remain grateful to the National Trust for their permission to ring at the site, and to the owners of the track for allowing vehicular access.



A young bullfinch, taken on 28th September 2013, still in virtually complete juvenile plumage, but with just a hint of the bright pink feathers coming through on the breast - it's a boy!(Val Bentley)

Arrival and Departure Dates of Migrants

Stephen Simpson

Shoreham District Ornithological Society – Arrival of Summer Migrants			
	Arrival		
Species	Average 2007 to 2012	2012	Location
Osprey	09-Apr	03-May	Worthing
Hobby	14-Apr	20-Apr	Mill Hill
Whimbrel	19-Mar	11-Mar	Hove
Arctic Skua	07-Apr	14-Apr	Worthing beach
Pomarine Skua	25-Apr	25-Apr	Worthing beach
Sandwich Tern	16-Mar	10-Mar	Ferring
Common Tern	04-Apr	14-Apr	Worthing beach
Cuckoo	14-Apr	16-Apr	Waterhall
Swift	22-Apr	16-Apr	Waterhall
Sand Martin	29-Mar	26-Mar	Worthing beach
Swallow	17-Mar	16-Mar	Oreham Common
Willow Warbler	30-Mar	31-Mar	The Mumbles
Garden Warbler	18-Apr	02-May	Poynings
Whitethroat	07-Apr	14-Apr	Steining Round Hill / Woods Mill
Reed Warbler	15-Apr	08-Apr	Woods Mill
Nightingale	14-Apr	07-Apr	Woods Mill
Wheatear	14-Mar	15-Mar	Kithurst Hill

Shoreham District Ornithological Society - Departure of Summer Migrants

	Departure		
Species	Average 2007 to 2012	2012	Location
Osprey	25-Sep	10-Oct	Shoreham
Hobby	03-Oct	10-Oct	Wild Park
Whimbrel	12-Sep	23-Aug	Lancing
Arctic Skua	01-Nov	03-Nov	Worthing beach
Pomarine Skua	27-Oct	01-Oct	Worthing beach
Sandwich Tern	27-Oct	13-Oct	Worthing beach
Common Tern	22-Oct	16-Oct	Worthing beach
Cuckoo	19-Jul	24-Jul	Woods Mill
Swift	02-Oct	09-Sep	Durrington
Sand Martin	04-Oct	13-Oct	Ferring Rife
Swallow	22-Nov	15-Nov	Goring beach
Willow Warbler	24-Sep	10-Sep	Steep Down
Garden Warbler	19-Sep	09-Sep	Cissbury
Whitethroat	28-Sep	23-Sep	Beeding Brooks
Reed Warbler	21-Sep	22-Sep	The Mumbles
Nightingale	16-Aug	18-Aug	Cissbury
Wheatear	05-Nov	26-Oct	Worthing beach

Shoreham and District Ornithological Society – Arrival and Departure of Winter Migrants			
	Departure		
Species	Average 2007 to 2012	2012	Location
Red-breasted Merganser	-	29-Apr	Worthing beach
Red-throated Diver	-	09-Jun	Worthing beach
Purple Sandpiper	-	23-Mar	Brighton Marina
Fieldfare	30-Mar	29-Mar	Chanctonbury Ring
Redwing	28-Mar	31-Mar	Wild Park
	Arrival		
Species	Average 2007 to 2012	2012	Location
Red-breasted Merganser	-	28-Sep	Worthing beach
Red-throated Diver	-	13-Oct	Worthing beach
Purple Sandpiper	-	16-Oct	Shoreham
Fieldfare	09-Oct	21-Oct	Lancing
Redwing	01-Oct	07-Oct	Wild Park

Red-breasted Merganser, Widewater: Wendy Ball



Society officers

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

President	Bernie Forbes	bernieforbes@talktalk.net	01903 753876
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Council Member	Audrey Wende	mauwende@delta18.plus.com	
Council Member	Clive Hope	clivehope@btinternet.com	

Forthcoming Events

On October 14th Mike Read will talk to us about a southern English working forest and on November 11th Bill Coster takes us to the far north into Norway and Finland with superb close views of birds we do not often see in our area. The December meeting on the 9th is a social, relaxed evening with a mixture of contributions from yourselves. If anyone has **any** ideas for a short talk, quiz or photos or anything else please contact Brianne Reeve.

Clive Hope will be leading an outing from Goring Gap and along the coast on October 18th. It starts at 8.30 am to catch the early birds!

On November 9th Bernie will be at Sidlesham Visitor Centre to take you round the Pagham area and Westfields.

Finally our Seasonal Gathering on December 29th will start from Fort haven on Shoreham Beach at 9.30am.

You may receive your Programme for 2015 either with the Newsletter or at an indoor meeting or on-line.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU HAVE PAID YOUR SUBSCRIPTION FOR 2015.

We have sent it to you because we need you to have the dates and times for the events in January 2015. Our Treasurer Tim Holter is always happy to mark your Programme when you do pay your subscription.

Brianne Reeve



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