

Shoreham and District
Ornithological Society
Autumn Newsletter
2016



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EDITORIAL

Another bumper edition thanks to our contributors. I suppose I could claim that editorial skill produces 50 or so entertaining pages twice a year but somehow an appropriate amount of copy just appears - like a recurring miracle. Anyway all future contributions will be gratefully received. If you want some advice please get in touch.

Tom's article on Texas birding reminds me of an enforced stopover caused by the Icelandic volcano eruption in April 2010. Our return journey from Panama ground to a halt in Houston and the only thing to do was to go birding, so we got a car and headed off down to the Rio Grande. As Tom says Santa Anna and San Padre Island were amazing but I especially remember Bentsen State Park from which I emerged with one lifer and 200 mosquito bites. There's no gain without pain but I thought this was a particularly lousy deal. Panama, in contrast, was fairly bug free.

Bernie and Wendy have both written fascinating accounts about our breeding birds and there are the regular contributions from Clive, Stephen and Val. Peter has written about the effect on our birds of further development in Brighton Marina. As always Dorian's photographs enliven the text which has benefited also from Brianne's scrupulous proof reading. Again I thank everyone for their efforts.

Roger Smith

Birding in the Lone Star State

Tom Howard

Birding the Rio Grande Valley, Texas by doing it yourself turned out to be surprisingly easy and most enjoyable. Three of us - Wilf, Danny and I - went on 8th to 15th April 2016. The weather was fine, even hot at times. We were lucky and caught some falls during the spring migrations. Wilf loves researching and planning trips. He is very good at it but tends to be restricted in the length of time he can be away. So our schedules were busy with a long list of alternative sites ready should we need them.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley in Southern Texas is a well-known birding destination. The area we covered was from Falcon Dam and Roma in the west to South Padre Island on the east coast. It is about 120 miles across and has an amazing number of reserves, refuges, parks and private gardens that are open to birders. During the winter months there are hundreds of feeding and drinking stations. They attract and retain a wide range of exciting birds including raptors. The feeding season ends before April so we missed that but we experienced spring migration falls as compensation. We stayed in McAllen for the western region and Harlingen for the eastern. Being the USA you have a huge choice of accommodation and convenience for eating. We used "up market" motels and of course we hired a car. It is easy to drive around and mostly we found the sites without much difficulty. Some sites charge an entry fee but never more than a few dollars per car or person.

Before we went I had been concerned that without a local guide we would not know where to go or be able to identify the birds. In the end neither of these were a problem. The sites we visited were very rewarding, even though they may not have been the very best for that particular time of year. Wilf and Danny are experienced birders and, with the help of the Sibley field guide and the amazing friendliness of the local people, we think we did well in working out what we spotted. We found Dave Gosney's site guide to be very helpful. It was great fun meeting residents with the full Texas outfit of pickup

truck, dungarees and huge beard who had lots of feeders in their trailer yard and a deep knowledge of the birds both present and anticipated.

Following our research into commercial itineraries, trip reports and tour adverts we had an impossibly long wish list of places to go. Birding company tours tend to last for longer. They start further north in, for example, Houston and work their way down along the coast and taking in the Edwards Plateau area as well as the valley. Reluctantly we crossed off High Island and King Ranch (I really fancied a City Slickers experience) for lack of time and added them to our list for the next visit. We took an internal flight from Houston to McAllen and back again to save time. We had a firm plan - and we were ready to deviate from it.



Greater Roadrunner – a ground-dwelling cuckoo

Some of the reserves are huge. Because of our schedule and preferences we barely scratched the surface of most of them. A few we returned to because we wanted to try them again at a different time of day and weather

conditions. The commentary below is intended to give just a hint of their nature and my main memories.

One of the locals commented that "It is nice to see tourists because most Americans think we are dodging bullets and fighting drug gangs". There are at least five different agencies working on security along the river border with Mexico. They are noticeable but not intrusive. Their presence probably makes the area especially safe for ordinary tourists. Almost all of the people we met who were waiters, bar tenders, hotel and shop staff were Mexican or other immigrants from countries such as the West Indies. In some of the roadside shops and snack bars no one spoke English at all. I noticed that it was easier than usual to have a joke and a fun chat with the service staff we met. Maybe one of the unexpected consequences of migration in the US will be the birth of a sense of humour.

On our first day we covered the stretch of river from Falcon Dam to Roma Bluffs. Roma is 50 miles upriver from McAllen and Falcon State Park is 16 miles further on. The Rio Grande was much smaller than I had expected. This was a good spot for Kingfishers and Raptors. We saw Green and Belted Kingfishers, Osprey, Crested Caracara, Turkey and Black Vulture and started our never-ending attempts to identify several species of hawks in flight. We enjoyed finding attractive birds such as Ladder-backed Woodpecker and Black-crested Tit Mouse. A noisy group of brilliant Hooded Orioles played out a dispute close to us in the village gardens.

Next we went to Chapeño. It is a private somewhat run-down camp site which charges a small fee for access. We paid the person who came out when we honked as instructed. He looked like a character from Deliverance with an impressive beard and gruff manner. His mood did not improve when we reversed into his car. But no noticeable damage was done and we made a hasty move away down the track to the river bank. It is a nice spot and we watched Martins and found our first waders, Spotted Sandpipers, from the comfort of the barbecue benches. Moving inland the terrain rises, becomes drier and is liked by desert species such as Cactus Wren, Black-throated

Sparrow and Verdin. Falcon Dam State Park includes desert trails, the shore of a reservoir and a trailer park. The campers put out food in the winter and the wildlife come for the citrus fruit and marshmallows. The Greater Roadrunners and deer have become very tame. Roadrunner was my personal star target bird - but I would have to wait until tomorrow for my first sighting.

There were several water birds, including: Double-crested Cormorant; Great White Egret; Anhinga; American Coot and more Ospreys. As the afternoon wore on we ended up at The Roma Bluffs World Birding Centre which has information displays and a good viewing platform overlooking the river and the Mexican river bank. The history of Roma as a gateway between the countries is interesting and the old bridge is preserved alongside the modern roadway and check points. It was noticeable how quiet the American side of the river was compared to the Mexican side. There they were enjoying Saturday afternoon with picnics, games and music. They even had boats. It seemed to be so easy to cross the river if they wanted to. We found our first humming bird and watched the sandpipers rafting down the river catching insects on the logs before flying upstream to hitch another ride.

The next day we took a wrong turning on our way to The Bentsen - Rio Grande Valley State Park and found a large area of good looking habitat. It was probably was an abandoned airfield. So we stopped and explored. A young White-tailed Hawk sat in a tree and let us get quite close before lazily flapping away. Eastern Meadowlarks were singing from posts and beautiful Indigo Buntings were flitting about in the bushes. We tried to get a good view of something moving about in the grass. It wasn't my Roadrunner - but the unexpectedly long ears of a Jack Rabbit. Several large swirling kettles of raptors soared across and over us before disappearing above the scattered clouds. A lovely start to the day; made the more special because we had found it all for ourselves.

Bentsen Park is very big by UK standards. They run free transport to shuttle visitors around the site. It covers 760 acres of woodland and sub-tropical

scrub and is close to the river. It is renowned for raptor migration. We met with a friendly group of raptor recorders set up on the raised bank of the



Raptor Counters at Bentsen State Park

water channel that runs past the visitor centre. We walked the length of the park and on the way we had good views of a Greater Roadrunner (at last). We made it to the Hawk Tower which is an impressive structure with an easy-access ramp running all the way to the viewing deck. There were Plain Chachalacas creeping about in the trees and Altamira Orioles flying between the upper branches. We caught the "tram" (mini bus) back to the visitor centre. Next came The NABA International Butterfly Park which makes a refreshing change from the big scale of Bentsen. It has cultivated gardens designed to attract and support butterflies plus wilder woods and open areas where rare trees and plants are encouraged for the benefit of insects. For

example they are growing Hackberry Trees for the scarce Hackberry Butterflies which feed on the sap. We loved the variety of spectacular butterflies - and it was a good area for birds too. A confiding Killdeer let us take close-up photos while a sinister Common Grackle kept an eye on us. Hummingbirds and Orioles liked the flowers and a Roadrunner trotted along the track keeping us company. A Wild Turkey flew past which was a jolt to our senses.



Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge

Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge the next day was more than twice as big as Bentsen and has a lot more water. There are mysterious avenues of trees draped in moss and, when we were there, long hedges of flowering mimosa. It has a bird list of over 400 species and a butterfly list longer than all but 3 entire states in the USA. We changed our focus to ducks, waders and water birds and were given some great photo opportunities. Flocks of Red-winged

Blackbirds squabbled over the food at the centre feeding station and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers fed within touching distance. Chachalacas picked up the overflow and hummingbirds zoomed through the bushes. It took us a long time to cover quite a small area of the Refuge. The tree tower and canopy walk were fun and we watched woodpeckers at eye level. One highlight was all-too-brief views of the outrageously colourful Painted Bunting. It can't get better than this? Yes it can and it did as we moved on to the Estero Llano Grande State Park for the late afternoon. We liked that so much that we changed our plan and went back again the next morning.

There is a big viewing deck at the visitor centre overlooking a shallow lake. Many visitors spend the whole day right there enjoying the comings and goings, the ID challenges and the might-have-been photographs. We started to get to know the Yellowlegs, the Dowitchers, the Sandpipers, the Rails, the Ibis (White-faced not Glossy), the Stilts, the Grebes, the many ducks and the glorious groups of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. A guy asked if we would like to see the Paraques and we scurried after him. He came from Blackpool and was leading a small group of birders (even older than us). He patiently showed us one bird camouflaged among the dead leaves in a thicket and later we found a second one nearby. But we would never have known they were there without his help. Eventually we had to force ourselves to leave. That evening we moved on to Harlingen to explore the Eastern end of the Valley.

During my research I had been attracted to a boat trip into South Bay off South Padre Island and we booked one which specialised in birds as well as the local Bottle-nosed Dolphins. Off early we got to Port Isabel in time for breakfast with a view of the causeway. This was a great way to start the day - birding while eating pancakes and bacon. It was very calm, a bit misty and very atmospheric. We saw lots of good birds, including: Mangrove Warbler (the big tick); Terns; Gulls; Roseate Spoonbills; Ospreys (all over the place); Waders and Black Skimmers. But the undoubtedly star attractions were the Dolphins with their babies. They came when called and responded to cheers and clapping. The trip was a joy. By the time we got ashore it was raining. This was to be a bonus as the adverse weather caused an overnight fall that

we would enjoy tomorrow. That afternoon on South Padre Island we explored The World Birding Centre and the adjoining Convention Centre with their board walks, pools and bushes. These give great close views of waders, ducks and water birds - and, as we would discover later, falls of migrants.



World Birding Centre: South Padre Island

The next day we made the right decision and went back to The Convention Centre early to see what had happened overnight. When we arrived there were plenty of birders and volunteers already busy - a good sign. For the next few hours we were amazed, excited and overwhelmed by the numbers

and variety of birds all around us. The American birders were most helpful pointing out unusual ones and answering our questions about the ones we found. Some of my highlights included: Yellow-billed cuckoo; Lesser and Common Nighthawk; Black and White Warbler; Tennessee, Blackburnian, Cerulian, Blue-winged and Yellow-rumped Warblers and Yellow-headed Blackbird. There are very few green oases that offer shelter, food and water for migrants along this region of the coast in the spring and autumn and this made the Centres very productive. In addition to the two Centres there are some Valley Land Fund Lots. These are plots in residential areas that have been set aside as tiny reserves with feeders and water supplies. We visited two lots joining the groups of photographers and adding to our lists. Late in the afternoon we squeezed in a short visit to Laguna Atascosa. This is a huge reserve of over 45,000 acres. You can drive for 15 miles through the site and only get to see a quarter of it. It is famous for rare mammals such as Ocelot as well as birds. It is one of the places where Aplomado Falcons are being reintroduced. We were watching two distant possibilities when a young couple pulled up and told us that there was a male sitting on the wires by the side of the road "10 pylons along". There was and it stayed as we craned our necks and cameras from our car parked almost directly below it. That evening we drove back to McAllen for our last day.

Before starting our flights home we had time to go to two more sites. Quinta Mazatlan is an impressive old house close to the airport. The extensive gardens are a World Birding Centre and some of the rooms in the house are open to the public. Green Parakeets nest in palm trunks and Red-crowned Parrots are regular. We also bumped into their resident Javelina (Collared Peccary). Our last visit was to the McAllen Nature Park. This is a public space that is being developed for birds and wildlife. They have towers of artificial gourds which house Purple Martins.

Overall we saw some 240 species during a busy and most enjoyable trip. We would like to go again - maybe in the winter months when the feeders are in full swing and, hopefully, the insects are not biting so badly.

In search of the enigmatic Honey Buzzard

Bernie Forbes

I guess for many of us Honey Buzzard is a mythical species that is perhaps never seen or very rarely encountered in Sussex. Certainly it is hardly ever recorded in our local area except for the occasional spring or autumn migrant. It is one of those birds that is tricky to identify and it helps if you have a few years' experience of observing raptors. They are not actually a Buzzard species and are more closely related to the West Palaearctic Kites. One of the easiest ways to see them are in those places around Europe where they can be observed during the spring or autumn migration seasons, for example, in Southern Spain (Gibraltar) or the Eastern Mediterranean.

Honey Buzzards are a long distance migrant, wintering in the forests of tropical West and Southern Africa. They breed in many European countries where suitable wooded habitat exists and are found right up to the Arctic Circle in Scandinavia and Western Russia. They are a shy, retiring species when breeding and they tend to spend a great deal of time in wooded habitat, hunting their prey by foraging on the forest floor. Their diet is mainly wasps and bees including adults, larvae, pupae and the honeycomb which they dig out from underground nests. Their specially adapted talons are good for digging and the feathered tarsus affords them some protection from the stings! They will, of course, eat other prey, including amphibians and nestlings, especially during adverse weather conditions during the summer.

In Sussex the Honey Buzzard is a very rare breeding bird and not easily found. There are less than a handful of pairs each year, despite our County having vast tracts of what is considered suitable habitat. Because of the sensitive nature of this species naming locations is not appropriate in this article.

Over the past 12 years I have been fortunate to see them in most years, although not always in the same area. Even though the habitat remains unchanging they often do not return to the same locations to nest. I suppose

that, as the Great Britain is an island and is also at the northwestern limit for this species, they are always going to be thinly distributed. One of the overriding factors limiting the species in the United Kingdom is the domination of our weather by the Atlantic weather patterns which tend to make our summers on average cooler and wetter than mainland Europe.

Over the past few years I have found Honey Buzzards in two separate parts of the county and I was fairly sure that there must be more areas where they might occur. Last year 2015 Dorian Mason and I decided to try to find other areas in the county that might be suitable for this mysterious species. I spent many hours poring over OS maps looking for potential areas where the habitat looked good. One of the biggest problems is that we do have vast areas where they might occur and therefore finding a good spot to see them is difficult to say the least. One essential ingredient for our search was that we could observe likely woodland from a raised watch-point with an uninterrupted panorama of at least 150 degrees. With this in mind Dorian and I made a few trips looking for such a place and in June 2015 we found what we thought might be a good location for observation. The site has a 180 degree elevated view of a more or less uninterrupted panorama of woodland and open glades interspersed with small areas of agricultural land.

Honey Buzzard observation requires a huge amount of patience and a careful eye combined with an enormous amount of luck. Generally, you don't just turn up and the birds appear. Frequently you can spend many hours watching without seeing a Honey Buzzard at all or you can watch for a protracted period and just see, perhaps, a few minutes of activity which can be very frustrating! Last year in June we arrived at our likely site armed with comfy chairs, telescopes, enough food for a long watch and a bucketful of enthusiasm. After just over an hour's watch we suddenly picked out an adult Honey Buzzard rising from the forest canopy in front of us, although it was a long way off and too far for any pictures .We watched in awe as we trained our scopes! As the Honey Buzzard suddenly gained height it started to display in front of us and we congratulated ourselves on our wonderful stroke of luck! The display is one of the most fantastic aerial performances of

any bird of prey (web link to see the display below). It is very dramatic display and very exciting to witness. Birds normally will perform over their territories to establish dominance thus enhancing productivity and pair bonding. We did stay for another couple of hours without seeing any further activity.



The Honey Buzzard observation site

For much of the remainder of the 2015 summer I was working away resulting in only two subsequent visits when, unfortunately we saw no further Honey Buzzards. This summer (2016) we decided that we would dedicate more time to our search. We returned to the site at noon in late May on a rather warm day. We settled down in our comfy chairs for what we thought might be a long vigil but, whilst on full raptor observation alert, we both fell into a deep sleep! I suddenly woke up and right in front of me were two Honey Buzzards passing at eye level and only 40 metres away! Dorian was still fast asleep as I

kindly suggested he should wake up and get his camera snapping! With Rip Van Winkle now more or less awake the birds were just visible but way to our north. Dorian was by now fully functioning and managed to rattle off a couple of record shots before they both flew out of sight into thick cover. The fly-past that we partially witnessed was part of their display flight where the male flies low over the forest followed closely by the female with the tailing bird mirroring its movements. This is called "FollowThe Leader".



Male Honey Buzzard over Sussex woodland

The photograph on the previous page was taken in a Sussex woodland a few years ago when a bird suddenly appeared right overhead circling around. Dorian managed to take this fine study. The bird is a male and the three

bands in the tail, which Common Buzzard does not have, are clearly visible. The secondaries are well defined with rich barring and the primary tips are black with a thick dark trailing edge to the under-wing. The carpal patches are very dark. The heads of males are generally plain grey and the barring on the underside of the body is obvious. The striking grey head and the broad trailing edge indicate a male; females generally do not have a such a prominent grey head and strikingly barred body and underwing.

This summer we have visited our new site numerous times and enjoyed multiple sightings of Honey Buzzards with birds displaying. We have observed two male birds flying around together for some a considerable time over the territory. Apparently unmated males frequently try and "muscle in" on an established pair. Twice we have seen a bird rising from the forest carrying prey in its talons and heading towards the probable nest site to feed waiting youngsters. On one of these occasions the male bird was carrying a frog! We continued to visit the site several more times during the summer and on our final visit in late August we saw 5 Honey Buzzards up together thermalling around for some time. Unfortunately on this occasion the birds were too far away (even in the scopes) to confirm the presence of juvenile birds.

(my thanks go to Dorian Mason for his patience and photographic skills - without his company I would have given up on this project long ago)

Flight display weblink <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sxpdgYrSa4>

Our Tawny Owls in 2016

Wendy Ball

Forty years ago we planted a small Cedar deodara (a Cedar that grows in the Himalayas) in our garden little realizing what an important habitat it would provide as it grew larger. It has provided sanctuary, home and food for a wide variety of species. Wood Pigeons, Collared Doves, Blue Tits and

Goldcrests have all nested there; and Great Spotted Woodpeckers have made exploratory holes in its substantial trunk.

A couple of years ago we decided that we would install a Tawny Owl nest box. We selected the location carefully as, if successful, we wanted to be able to observe the box from the house and see owls entering and leaving. Earlier this year we heard owls calling in the vicinity and also from the Cedar tree. We spent some time over the next few days listening and looking from a variety of windows until, finally, patience was rewarded. On the 10th of April we actually saw the female emerge from the box. Exciting! However, it must be said, watching and listening to owls into the early hours of the morning is not a recipe for a good night's sleep.



The female emerging from the nest box on the 9th May

On the 14th of April we heard the female Tawny calling repeatedly from our Cedar and a male responded from a northerly direction. Gradually the male was heard to move nearer, eventually calling from trees nearby. We could

see the female emerge from the box and perch on a branch and then we lost sight of her although both owls were obviously in the immediate vicinity. Interestingly the calls changed to being very soft, low pitched and short which we had not heard before.

On several occasions after this, whilst working in the garden, we heard muted noises emanating from the box although nothing was seen until the 9th of May when the female was seen to emerge. We were thrilled. The following night the Tawny came out earlier and sat for some time surveying the garden. It was surrounded by a cacophony of alarm calls from an astonishing number and variety of birds. There were several breeding birds in the garden including Robins, Blue Tit, Blackbird, House Sparrow, Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon. Some of these were nesting in the same tree as the owl. A Magpie also joined the throng, and when the owl retreated back into the box for a short while, several of the birds flew onto the lip of the box briefly to check it out. Fascinating to watch! Eventually the Tawny Owl flew off approximately 45 minutes after it had first appeared.

At the end of May we were away for three weeks but upon our return from Scotland we had our first sighting of the juvenile which had begun to roost in another conifer at the bottom of the garden. Our local Blackbirds were quick to warn us when the owls were about. Tawny Owls can be fearless in defence of their nests and young and thus we have been extremely careful in our observations. Because the owl's flight is silent, it may not be detected until it is too late to avoid the danger. Dogs, cats and humans may be assaulted, sometimes without provocation. Perhaps the best - known victim of the tawny owl's fierce attack was the renowned bird photographer [Eric Hosking](#), who lost his left eye when struck by a bird he was attempting to photograph near its nest. He later called his autobiography '*An Eye for a Bird*'.

During the following weeks we observed, almost on a nightly basis, how the young owl showed increasing independence. It was being well fed by its

parents and it happily moved from tree to tree within a small area,



© Wendy Ball

The first image of the growing owlet

calling incessantly. Although its presence was clearly indicated by the reaction of other birds, it was so well concealed that we could not locate it ourselves. Then it moved to a small stand of trees adjacent to our bedroom. It would begin calling for food incessantly as the light levels dropped and perched conveniently on a pole which was illuminated by our security light. Food passes by the adults were very brief and all the prey seen was small mammals. Increasingly, the juvenile began to fly from this favoured perch down to the ground and back again and appeared to be eating small unidentifiable items. It also preened a great deal and flexed its wings. The call of the juvenile is very distinctive and has been likened to a squeaky gate. The parents care for young birds for two or three months after they fledge, but from the end of July through August to November the juveniles disperse to find a territory of their own to occupy. If they fail to find a vacant territory, they usually starve.



© Wendy Ball

A lucky image of an adult Tawny Owl bringing prey

It has been very difficult to photograph the birds due to the need to avoid disturbance and also the poor light. Although we have been very fortunate to have spent many hours observing the owls, and have had our cameras set up by the windows in the house, opportunities of capturing unusual images have been few. The last sighting of the juvenile was on the 11th of July. I returned home at 11.00pm and it was perched on its favourite post calling incessantly as usual. The following night it had left. All this just shows that, as Adrian Thomas has told us, if sometimes you provide the right environment,

put up a sign that says 'Owl des res' and keep your fingers crossed, then things might go right! It has certainly given us a very privileged, fascinating and tantalizing insight into the lives of these birds.

Selected records from 2015

Clive Hope

The following list gives some notable records in the SDOS area from 2015. A complete tally of all remaining species is included at the end. Thanks again to John Newnham for providing the information from the SOS Database. Full details of all the birds recorded in our area will be found in the SOS report.

Bewick's Swan

Two were on Henfield Levels on Dec 26th.

Tundra Bean Goose

One was on Beeding Brooks on Jan 2nd.

Whitefronted Goose

One past Worthing Beach on Jan 19th.

Greylag Goose

A maximum count of 200 on Beeding Brooks on Jan 25th.

Barnacle Goose

One on Beeding Brooks on Jan 26th.

Brent Goose

Totals past Worthing beach were 812 E in Mar, 1472 E in Apr and 21 W in Sept, 952 W in Nov and 152 E and 65W in Dec.

Egyptian Goose

There were two E past Worthing on Mar 22nd and 9 W past Goring on Oct 20th.

Eider

13 past Brighton Marina on Apr 24th.

Long-tailed Duck

One off Brighton on Apr 8th

Common Scoter

Sea-watch totals from Worthing were 403 E in Apr, 107 E in May and 168 E in June – a poor passage!

Goosander

At Widewater three on Jan 4th and one or two there or on the Adur till Feb 9th.

Quail

One at Steep Down on Jul 29th and near Cissbury on Aug 2nd.

Great Northern Diver

Singles off Worthing beach on Oct 19th and Dec 6th and one present in Southwick Canal from Nov 18th to Dec 24th.

Shag

One or two Brighton from Sept 20th to Dec 17th and Shoreham Harbour and Worthing Aug 20th to Nov 3rd.

Little Egret

The colony at Coombes had 12 nests in May. 46 flew W at Ferring/ Goring on Aug 5th.

Great Crested Grebe

A maximum count of 290 off Worthing on Feb 9th.



Red-necked Grebe

One off Worthing on Nov 27th.

Slavonian Grebe

Two off Ferring and one each off Widewater and Hove (Mar 6th).

Honey-buzzard

Singles over Brighton on Aug 16th and Patcham on Sept 7th.

Black Kite

One over Sheepcote Valley on May 21st.

Marsh Harrier

Single birds at four sites with two near Chantry Hill on Sept 1st.

Hen Harrier

Four records. Singles at Sheepcote Valley on Jan 30th, Stanmer Park on Feb 10th, Steep Down on Dec 18th and Beeding Brooks on 20th.

Osprey

The five sightings were from Brighton on Jul 30th, Hollingbury Aug 16th, Shoreham and Southwick on 29th and Waterhall on Oct 4th.

Water Rail

A pair that bred at Woods Mill raised two young and attracted much attention.

Little Ringed Plover

One flew N at Worthing beach on Apr 20th.

Purple Sandpiper

There were six at Black Rock on Jan 23rd and a max. of seven at Shoreham Harbour on Feb 23rd.

Common Sandpiper

Along the Adur between Shoreham and Beeding maximum numbers were 11 on Jul 25th and 17 on Aug 28th.

Green Sandpiper

Three at Bramber on Aug 1st.

Ruff

Six were at Rye Farm Henfield on Mar 9th.

Jack Snipe

Eight from four sites in the first winter period and one on Steyning Levels in Oct.

Black-tailed Godwit

24 at Widewater on Feb 12th, one at Shoreham on Mar 16th/17th and again on Apr 27th.

Pomarine Skua

The only records were of one off Worthing on Jan 1st and one off Brighton on May 5th!

Black Guillemot

One in s/p passed E off Goring gap beach on Apr 16th and was seen again on 25th.

Little Tern

Just three seen, all off Worthing, with one on May 6th and two on 8th. A very poor showing in common with terns and skuas generally this year.

Black Tern

One off Brighton on May 5th then in the autumn, three feeding off Goring on Aug 25th, singles at Widewater, Shoreham and Worthing on 26th and off Ferring on Sep 20th then Worthing on 22nd.

Mediterranean Gull

On Apr 12th 57 flew E off Worthing.

Yellow-legged Gull

One at Hove on Jul 28th and one at Worthing on Aug 23rd.

Caspian Gull

One on the Adur at Shoreham on Nov 7th and 8th.

Woodpigeon

880 over Hollingbury camp on Nov 9th was the highest count in a mediocre autumn for the passage of this species. 600 at Steyning on Dec 11th.

Turtle Dove

Present at Woods Mill from May 11th to Aug 1st with a maximum of four.

Cuckoo

Four sites from the east and 18 from the west of the Adur.

Barn Owl

Ten sites held breeding pairs all from the west of the Adur.

Little Owl

One pair seen mating but no other breeding records.

Long-eared Owl

A pair with two juveniles on the Downs in May and one Brighton Nov 23rd.

Short-eared Owl

Ten sites with up to three birds (in Jan at Goring Gap and over Henfield Levels in Oct) west of the Adur with an obvious influx in early Oct. One or two Shepcote Valley Dec 4th to 19th.

Swift

21 Toad's Hole Hove on May 9th and 150 over Kithurst Hill Jun 28th. Last seen Sep 30th Worthing beach.

Hoopoe

One each in Goring and Stanmer Park on Apr 17th/ 18th.

Wryneck

One Shepcote Valley Aug 29th.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

One in Hove on Jan 7th.

Hobby

One pair possibly bred in the area since a juvenile was seen with an adult.

Rose-ringed Parakeet

Singles in Brighton on Jan 15th and Mar 6th.

Great Grey Shrike

One present in the Ladywell/ Cuckoo corner area between Jan 19th and 22nd.

Goldcrest

27 trapped for ringing at Ladywells on Oct 22nd when a large influx to the county took place. 30 there on Nov 12th.

Swallow

First reported on Apr 2nd at Patching Pond. Passage of 870 E at Sheepcote on Jul 31st and Wild Park total between Aug 16th and Oct 9th was 1163.

3500 flew E in four hours at Goring/Ferring on Sep 7th.

The last were two at Cissbury on Nov 8th.

House Martin

Wild Park total between Sept 3rd and 30th of 530. 600 were present all day over the Adur valley at Ladywells on Sep 5th.

Yellow-browed Warbler

One in a Hove garden and one at Cissbury on Oct 8th.

Wood Warbler

Three records - from Ladywell on Apr 28th, Findon Park Farm on Jul 30th and Cissbury on Aug 1st.

Willow Warbler

Just 36 logged in Wild Park Aug 15th to Sept 23rd.

Whitethroat

70 at Sheepcote Valley on Aug 16th and from this date to Sept 30th a total of 146 recorded.

Dartford Warbler

One near Shoreham Power Station on Apr 4th.

Grasshopper Warbler

One at Hollingbury Camp on Sept 19th.

Starling

Palace Pier Brighton held 16000 on Jan 18th and 17400 on Nov 25th.

Ring Ouzel

Six Apr records with four at Devil's Dyke on 14th then at Cissbury and Truleigh Hill from Oct 8th to 20th with a maximum of six on 14th at the former site.

Fieldfare

500 at Small Dole on Nov 8th was the largest count.

Redwing

A large movement over Sheepcote Valley on Oct 14th with 2100 NW.

Pied Flycatcher

Singles in Apr at Lancing Clump on 13th and Stanmer Park on 17th. Three autumn birds at Hollingbury, Pyecombe and Sheepcote.

Whinchat

An exceptional 23 on Beeding Brooks on Aug 30th when also ten on Brighton Racecourse.

Wheatear

First were on Mar 11th at Applesham and Stanmer Park and the last at Shoreham on Nov 20th.

Hawfinch

Two over East Worthing on Mar 8th and one at Woods Mill on May 8th.

Crossbill

Two Stanmer Park on Feb 10th, six Brighton Jun 6th and five over Sheepcote Valley on Jul 9th. One at Cissbury on Sep 20th and two over Lancing on Oct 2nd.

Siskin

Autumn movements were 275 E at Worthing / Ferring in Sep and 155 E there in Oct.

February to July 2016 Highlights

Stephen Simpson

These records have been 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.

February 2016

A Glaucous Gull was at Goring Gap from 1st to 3rd and 12th. Also there on the 1st: 130 Sanderling, 75 Grey Plover and 60 Ringed Plover.

A Glaucous Gull was just south of the Tollbridge on 2nd. A Short-eared Owl was recorded near Shoreham Airport on 3rd, 11th and 13th. There were 12 Little Grebes and five Redshank at Widewater on 11th and a Purple Sandpiper was at Shoreham Harbour on the same day. There were 52 Redshank and the over wintering Greenshank at the Adur on 13th. The Marsh Tit first seen at Coombes was ultimately seen for 47 consecutive days.

1500 Lapwing were recorded in the area of Henfield Levels on 14th. Firecrests were recorded at Victoria Park Worthing on 15th, Lancing on 20th and Lancing Ring on 28th.

A Rock Pipit was at Shoreham Fort on 17th. A Glaucous Gull and three Purple Sandpipers were there on the same day and both species were recorded again on 26th. The Glaucous Gull was in the area on 28th and a Black Redstart was also at Shoreham Fort.



On 21st at Goring Gap there were 47 Grey Plover, 86 Sanderling, 13 Turnstone, 14 Ringed Plover, 85 Dunlin and 9 Oystercatcher. A Mediterranean Gull was there on 24th. On 27th from West Worthing beach: 46 Great Crested Grebes, 15 Red-breasted Mergansers and seven Red-throated Divers.

March 2016

A Glaucous Gull was at Shoreham from 1st to 12th and at Goring Gap on 12th. An Avocet was at the Adur at Shoreham on 1st. Two Purple Sandpipers were at the Harbour on 2nd and there were other sightings until three on 20th. A Black Redstart was recorded at Shoreham Fort several times between

4th and 21st. There were an estimated 17-18,000 Starlings at Brighton Pier on the evening of 4th.

Two Chiffchaffs were at Widewater on 2nd and Chiffchaffs were also recorded there on 12th and 21st. Also there on 5th were a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers, 23 Teal on 7th and a Great Crested Grebe was on the sea on 6th.

40 Corn Buntings were at Steep Down on 9th. There were at least 60 Redwings at Cissbury on 10th and around 150 Fieldfares at Chantry on the same day. A Siberian Chiffchaff was recorded at Steyning Sewage Works from 12th to 20th. A Quail was at Widewater on 19th. A Swallow was seen there on 24th and a Swallow was at Coombes on 27th.

Offshore at Worthing on 10th were 124 Great Crested Grebes, and 44 Red-breasted Mergansers were seen from Goring beach on 20th. Both species were recorded on the sea on other days.

A Sandwich Tern flew E at Goring beach on 18th and five Sandwich Terns flew E in one flock at Goring Gap on 19th. Two flew E at Ferring on 22nd and two flew E at Widewater on 24th.

Seven Brent Geese flew E at Goring beach on 18th and 50 Brent Geese were seen flying past Widewater on 19th. 230 flew E at Ferring on 21st, 150 flew E at Goring beach on 25th and 322 flew E there on 26th. 12 Common Scoter moved past Goring Gap on 19th and 18 flew E at Goring beach on 26th.

A female Wheatear was on the beach at Ferring on 22nd, two were at Goring Gap on 22nd, a pair of Wheatears was at Shoreham Airport on 24th and a female Wheatear was at Shoreham Fort on 29th. Four Wheatears were on the beach at Widewater on 30th.



A Firecrest was at Ferring Rife on 21st, one was at Shoreham Fort on 26th and three Firecrests were recorded at Brighton on 30th. A Willow Warbler was singing at Patching Pond on 30th.

April 2016

On 1st at Goring beach a Red-necked Grebe flew E and as did three Garganey, after being on the sea. Two Black-throated Divers, 14 Red-throated Divers and a further 9 Divers flew E there on 2nd as well as 87 Common Scoter, 12 Sandwich Terns and one Common Tern. An Arctic Skua flew E on 3rd.

A Pied Flycatcher was near Steyning on 2nd and a Swallow flew over Widewater on the same day. A Kittiwake was at the Adur at Shoreham on 3rd and four willow Warblers were singing near Shoreham Airport. Seven Buzzards were soaring over Mill Hill on 8th.

Three Little Gulls, three Kittiwakes and 148 Sandwich Terns flew E at Worthing on 10th. A female Black Redstart was at Goring Gap on 10th and an Osprey flew N over Southwick on 11th. A Common Crane flew over Steyning on 12th. Also on 12th at Cissbury Ring there were a Ring Ouzel and a Pied Flycatcher and near Chanctonbury Ring a Cuckoo was heard. A Cuckoo was heard at Coombes on 13th and a Brambling was at Mill Hill on 13th. Two Swifts were seen on 15th and House Martins were seen at Upper Beeding on 20th.

Two Slavonian Grebes were on the sea at Goring on 15th and 11 Whimbrel and one Bar-tailed Godwit flew E there on 21st. A flock of nine Pomarine Skuas flew E at Shoreham on 21st. Over 70 Whimbrel flew E past Ferring on 21st. Three Great Skuas were seen from Goring beach on 22nd, where one Avocet flew E and a Hobby flew in from the sea.

A Turtle Dove was near Woods Mill on 27th.

May 2016

A Whinchat and a Spotted Flycatcher were at Cissbury on 4th. A male Hen Harrier was seen near Steyning on 6th. Near Woods Mill on 6th were two Nightingales, two Turtle Doves and a Cetti's Warbler. A Nightingale was also at Woods Mill.

Two Arctic Skuas and three Pomarine Skuas flew E at Goring on 5th. Four Black Terns flew E at Widewater on 5th and an Arctic Skua flew E there on 6th. A Great White Egret flew E past Shoreham on the same day. A Greenshank was also on the beach at Goring on 6th. Two Black-throated Divers flew past Shoreham on 7th.

11 Pomarine Skuas flew E at Goring on 6th in two groups of 4 and 7. Later, three Pomarine Skuas flew past Shoreham Harbour and later but still in the morning four flew E past Widewater. Timings suggest these were all different birds, making a total on 21 over 5th and 6th.

Five Swifts flew over Worthing on 6th and three were over Shoreham on 8th. On 10th 95 Common, 31 Sandwich and 15 Little Terns passed E as well as two Bonxies and a variety of waders at Worthing. Another 68 Common and five Little Terns went through at Ferring next day but fog precluded comprehensive coverage. A Honey-buzzard flew N over Southwick on 15th. 140 Gannets were fishing off Ferring on 16th. A Purple Sandpiper was at Shoreham Harbour on 21st. A late Red-throated Diver lingered off Ferring on 26th. A Little Grebe was at Woods Mill on 27th and a Cetti's Warbler was there on 28th and 29th. A Cuckoo was heard near Woods Mill on 27th on 29th and a Cetti's Warbler and two Nightingales were near Woods Mill on 29th. On 29th, Red Kites were seen over Worthing, Lancing, Hollingbury and Henfield and one was seen over Ferring on 30th.



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June 2016

On 1st a beautiful Goldcrest was seen in a garden near Steyning. A Willow Warbler and some Corn Buntings were on the Downs above Hove on 5th. A

Black-tailed Godwit was at Widewater on 8th and ten Swifts were over Worthing on the same day. Swallows were seen to fledge at Coombes on 13th. Turtle Dove, Cetti's Warbler and Hobby were recorded near Woods Mill on 15th.

Corn Buntings were also at Steep Down on 18th as were a family of Stonechats and around 30 Swifts. A Common Sandpiper was at the Adur near the Cement Works on 21st.

On 29th, sea watching at Ferring produced Curlew 10W and Sandwich Tern 10W. An Arctic Skua on the sea chased some Sandwich Terns and also flew off W.

July 2016

On 3rd Corn Buntings were seen at Steep Down and a Golden Oriole was seen at Steyning on 6th.

27 Curlews flew W at Ferring on 5th and one also flew W there on 9th. A Common Gull was at Goring Gap on 9th.

Four Common Sandpipers were seen at the Adur, north of the flyover, on 11th. A flock of Cormorants flew W over Southwick in a V formation on 19th. Nine Swifts were over Worthing with six and 10 Sand Martins over East Kingston fields on 21st.

A Black-tailed Godwit was at the Adur by Shoreham Airport on 27th and on the same day at the Adur at Coombes there were seven Common Sandpipers and at least six Little Egrets. Also on 27th, over 100 Gannets, mainly juveniles, flew E past Shoreham.

On 30th along Monarch's Way there were two Sedge Warblers and a male Common Redstart. A Common Gull was at Goring Gap on 31st when there were two Sedge Warblers just west of Ferring Country Centre.

August 2016

A Wheatear was at Shoreham Fort on 8th and eight Wheatears were by Steyning Bowl on 14th. On Chantry Hill a juvenile Marsh Harrier was seen on 11th, and on 15th there was a Whinchat, a Spotted Flycatcher and 39 Ravens were seen flying over.

On 10th two Wheatears were at Goring Gap and two more were at Ferring/East Kingston. 16 Little Egrets were on the beach at Goring/Ferring on 11th, also 15 Ringed Plovers and 20 Turnstones. These had increased to 57 and 40 respectively with four Dunlin and two Sanderling by 15th. Willow Warblers were moving through the county in some numbers at this time and 12 were around Ferring Rife and East Kingston on 14th. Ladywell ringers trapped record numbers (c.150 in a week).

A Cuckoo flew W over Goring Gap on 14th.

On 17th at Beeding Brooks there was a male Redstart and a Spotted Flycatcher, and an Osprey flew over. Eight Whinchats were along Monarch's Way just N Cissbury on 18th and three Spotted Flycatchers were at Cissbury on the same day.

On 20th around Truleigh Hill there were three Redstarts, a Pied Flycatcher and a Whinchat. Two Pied Flycatchers were in Steyning on 24th. At Beeding Brooks on 25th there were five Whinchats, two Wheatears, a Spotted Flycatcher and a Redstart. There were at least 50 Ringed Plovers, 35 Turnstones and a Wheatear on the field at Goring Gap on 21st.

A Pied Flycatcher was at Woods Mill on 25th. There was also a Pied Flycatcher at Cissbury on 30th and on or near Cissbury on the same day six Redstarts, five Wheatears and at least 23 Spotted Flycatchers and 35 Willow Warblers. Three Sandwich Terns were using the gull roost at Goring Gap on 28th. Two Ravens were near Chanctonbury on 29th. A Grasshopper Warbler was at Hollingbury Fort on 31st.

In the Gardens in 2015

Val Bentley

Participating in the SDOS Garden Bird Survey during 2015 were: Noranne Biddulph, Reg Bradbury, Brian Clay, Jay Cooper, John Cooper, Gwen Davies, Shirley Downs, John Ford, Martin Ford, Clive Hope, Laurie Keen, Cyril & Maureen Leeves, Sheila Marshall, John & Shena Maskell, David Milton, Janet Paterson, David Potter, Brianne Reeve, Anthony Robinson, John & Jeannette Simpson, Stephen Simpson, Jim & Judith Steedman, Marion Taylor, Gordon & Vera Tickler, Rae Titcomb, David Tomalin, Peter Whitcomb, Martin Wilson, Audrey Wisdom and – at last - myself! There were 27 forms returned for the first quarter, 25 for the second, only 23 for the third, and 26 in the fourth. All the figures for each week were entered onto a spreadsheet so that I could do a bit of number crunching to find out which were the most frequent garden visitors, and the “top” birds will come as little surprise. In fact the top 15 remained the same as in previous years, though with some juggling of positions:

Species		Average % of gardens used each quarter	2014 overall Position	2013 overall Position	2012 overall Position	Maximum number seen in one week	Average number seen per garden per week
I	Blue Tit	100	2	3	2	15	2.17
2=	Blackbird	99	1	1	1	8	1.73
2=	Robin	99	2	3	4	5	1.08
4=	Great Tit	98	6	6	5=	7	1.28
5	Wood Pigeon	96	4=	4	4	13	2.02
6	Dunnock	93	3	5	5=	6	0.95
7	Magpie	87	7	7	7	16	0.94
8	Collared Dove	86	8	8	8	13	0.93
9	Goldfinch	81	9	9	9=	30	1.73
10	House Sparrow	78	12	14	13	38	4.32
11=	Carrion Crow	72	11	12=	12	4	0.45
11=	Wren	72	14	12=	15	5	0.39
13	Starling	69	13	15	14	36	2.65
14	Greenfinch	69	10	11	11	10	0.88
15	Chaffinch	63	15	10	9=	8	0.75

First Quarter

All the figures for each week were entered onto a spreadsheet so that I could do a bit of number crunching to find out which were the most frequent garden visitors, and the “top” birds will come as little surprise. In fact the top 15 remained the same as in previous years, though with some juggling of positions:

The number of different species recorded was 41, a slight increase over the 38 recorded in the first quarter of 2014. Once again, no Fieldfares or Siskins were recorded in what was generally another mild winter, though with a colder spell in February. However, John & Shena had visits from lone Redwings in four different weeks in January and February. Reed Buntings were recorded by Reg, Martin F, Sheila and Jim & Judith; but they were only in good numbers with Jim & Judith, who saw them each week from 11 Jan, with a maximum of 6 in late February and early March. The fluctuation in the amount of gardens recording Song Thrush this quarter continued, rising to 52% (44% in 2014, 83% in 2013 and 58% in 2012). Long-tailed Tits however were less often seen, only in 37% of gardens (48% in 2014, 62% in 2013 and 52% in 2012). The three “garden” finches were seen in approximately the same proportion of gardens this quarter as in 2014, with a slight increase in the number of individuals, though Clive reported that though he has experienced a return of Greenfinches, he had not seen a single Chaffinch.

A very early, or more likely wintering, Chiffchaff was seen by Laurie on 15 & 16 Feb, and another by Peter later that month. Otherwise they were not noted until migrants started arriving in March. Wintering Blackcaps were seen in 13 gardens, one more than last year, with two seen by Gwen, Laurie and David T, and three, all males, noted by John & Shena towards the end of January. In fact, having also seen two females together they could confidently say they had at least five different birds visiting.

Mistle Thrushes haven't appeared on the survey forms at all for at least the previous three years, but Audrey recorded two from the start of January through to early February. Water Rails are unusual too, but one sneaked over from Ferring Rife to Martin F's garden. Audrey also recorded the only Grey Wagtail of the quarter while Jim & Judith were the only ones to have Bullfinch. Rae said she'd seen her first garden Song Thrush for years and described it as "a rare treat"! Brianne recorded Tawny Owl, but *not* in the garden – it must have fallen down the chimney, and hit her husband Robin in the chest as he pulled the curtains in their sitting room, then flew silently round the room without hitting any precious ornaments.

Second Quarter

There were 45 different species seen between the last few days of March and the end of June. John & Shena saw the last of the winter thrushes, a Redwing in the first week, though surely a female Siskin that turned up there on 10th May should have been elsewhere by then. Reg noticed the only Reed Bunting in early April, and Shirley reported a Black Redstart. Summer migrants returned; Whitethroats were seen by John & Shena, Brianne and Janet – who had never recorded one in the garden before. Marion saw two Garden Warblers and Willow Warblers turned up in five gardens, with John & Shena rather greedily having eight in mid-April! Brianne's house proved attractive to Swallows, as it was in 2014, with the birds actually flying in and out of the house itself for a while; by the 27th she reported that five young were on the point of fledging from their nest in the stable.

Finding a nesting pair of Mistle Thrushes in April was a real thrill for David T; sadly though it was a short-lived excitement; one morning he found a heap of feathers under the tree and there were no subsequent sightings. Breeding success was mixed, with some reporting few fledglings seen. Martin W noticed two very young Long-tailed Tits in the garden on 1 Jun, and commented on how amazingly small they seemed – just tiny lumps of fluff!

Starling numbers suddenly increased during the week of 25 May, which marked the emergence of juveniles. Totals of 29 at Shirley's, 20 at Cyril & Maureen's, 27 at Stephen's, 34 at Marion's, 30 at Vera & Gordon's and Audrey's were eclipsed by 100+ at Martin F's during that week – the following week he only saw 2!

An unusual sight for Marion was noticing a Robin feeding Wren babies, with a Wren in attendance too. During the week of 14th June Audrey noticed lots of young birds on feeders and a flat roof where food is put out. She also gave an example of how a small change can make a huge difference – her son created a rockery, including a couple of small sunken water bowls, near her feeders and this has attracted insects which in turn have attracted ground feeding birds. An added bonus has been its use by Stag Beetles and Slow Worms.

Unfortunately, not quite counting as “garden” birds, but exciting nonetheless, were two raptor sightings by Laurie in May. On the 6th a Hobby came in from the north, preceded by two Swifts, and on the 20th a Peregrine flew very fast and low over neighbouring gardens.

Third Quarter

Forty-one species this quarter. Returning migrants were recorded from August. Martin F and Clive both reported Whitethroats, and Willow Warblers were seen by Brian, Audrey and John & Shena, though only single birds this time! Stephen saw a Redstart in early September and Spotted Flycatchers were excellent observations by both Brianne and Martin W, who noticed one lingering for just 15 minutes in the week of 30 Aug.

Noranne must be in a fairly good Swift area as she noted up to 20 flying around in mid to late July, with the last on 15 Aug; Laurie noticed a very late one on 14 Sep. Audrey's House Sparrow numbers peaked at 38 at the end of August, and she had good numbers of young Goldfinches feeding on

sunflower seeds and using her new water sources. A notable non-sighting came in a comment from John & Shena – the week of 29 Sep was the first they can remember without a garden Blackbird since their marriage in 1979!

Fourth Quarter



Red-legged partridge in David Potter's garden

There were 43 different species in the final quarter. Two species were seen in fewer gardens than their yearly average: Greenfinches were only seen by 46% of observers (year average 69%), Starlings by 58% (year average 69%). Compared with the final quarters of the previous three years, the Greenfinch figures were disappointing as they were seen by 72% of recorders in 2014, 73% in 2013 and 74% in 2012. Wrens, however, were more in evidence, recorded in 81% of gardens (year average 72%). Reg was puzzled by the lack of Blackbirds, which had boycotted his garden between 16 Aug and the end

of the year. They were still turning up elsewhere, so the reason remains a



David Potter's Sparrowhawk

mystery – and he did start seeing one occasionally in January. Noranne was surprised by the lack of Goldfinches, but they must all have been availing themselves of a food supply in Shoreham, because Audrey had over 20 each week from October to December, using a sunflower heart feeder, At Ferring

Clive had a Goldfinch garden record of 14 in mid-December, and a flock of 20 Long-tailed tits were seen by David P earlier in the month.

Goldcrests turned up in 12 gardens, and Firecrests in three, mine, John C's and Martin W's – Martin said he had only recorded one there before in 27 years, but he saw two on 15th Oct. Audrey recorded Grey Wagtail again from the middle of November, with two in the final week of December. A Red-legged Partridge was a colourful visitor to David P's garden on three different occasions, a Sparrowhawk reduced his Goldfinch flock by one and Marion's son reported a Buzzard sitting in a tree eating a rat. In the final two months single Blackcaps were seen by Shirley, Laurie, John & Shena, David P, Brianne, Stephen, Martin W, but Audrey was delighted to see a group of five in late December. Other winter visitors were two Siskins seen by Laurie on 27 Nov and two Redwing at John & Shena's which were roosting in a mimosa tree and were disturbed by John checking his moth trap,

The “Also Rans”

Regular visitors, but outside the top 15 were:

	Average % of gardens used			
Species	2015	2014	2013	2012
Herring Gull	44%	47%	50%	47%
Long-tailed Tit	37%	37%	47%	47%
Great Spotted Woodpecker	36%	28%	33%	32%
Song Thrush	33%	36%	46%	41%
Jackdaw	26%	43%	33%	31%
Feral Pigeon	23%	38%	23%	29%
Goldcrest	24%	14%	22%	24%
Coal Tit	15%	21%	26%	22%

Of these species Great Spotted Woodpeckers were seen in more gardens in 2015 compared to the previous year while Jackdaws and Feral Pigeons were both less frequent visitors and Song Thrushes declined again. However Goldcrests were back to their 2012 level after a decrease in 2014 and in the final quarter were seen in almost half the gardens. The BTO Garden BirdWatch (GBW) noted of the species that “In 2015, however, we saw a very high autumn and early winter peak due to a large increase in immigrant birds into the UK”.

In Summary

Sixty different species were recorded during the year, an increase of 12 over 2014 but three fewer than in 2013.

The BTO’s summary of the GBW year said “Thanks to a wet spring, some of our common bird species appeared to have poor breeding season, leading to low average numbers during the second half of the year. Many of the seed-eating and insectivorous species were seen in very high numbers toward the end of the year, possibly due to a poor tree-seed crop and stormy weather. It was also another year with low winter migrant numbers, which could have been driven by relatively mild winters at both ends of the year.”

Again there were differences between results from our local recording area and the national figures. Chaffinch averaged 9th position nationally but was 15th for us. SDOS put Wren as equal 11th, but nationally it only crept into 15th position in two of the four quarters. Herring Gulls were our 16th, but don’t figure nationally, while Coal Tits made it to 7th in the UK in the final quarter, but didn’t even make our top twenty.

Thank you to all our garden recorders for their efforts. We have had some new observers join in 2016, but Audrey has decided not to continue, which will reduce our overall numbers of House Sparrows and Goldfinches quite considerably!

Somewhere else to go?

Peter Whitcomb

During last winter (2015 – 2016) the breakwaters of Brighton Marina were out of bounds owing to storm damage. In the Spring I had my fingers crossed that the arms would re-open soon for the anglers and seawatchers, but for the most part there was no access to either breakwater. The east arm was partially open on and off during the summer, but the more popular west arm has been out of action. Seawatching at the Marina is one of the things I particularly used to look forward to during spring. As a bonus I always searched the small inner beach of the harbour on the way to the end of the arm. A Black Redstart or perhaps a couple of Wheatears? Or one of the local Rock Pipits or wintering Purple Sandpipers on the rocks. The gull roost may turn up something more than a few Herring or Black Headed Gulls. But all this will change soon.

There are plans to develop the inner beach of the Marina. For three decades or more the area has been a safe haven for gulls, waders and passage birds. As a result of this development gone will be the dozens, sometimes more than a hundred, gulls which use the shoreline to loaf around, preen and bathe. Gone will be the small flocks of Turnstone and Ringed Plover who shelter on the beach when the winds are strong. Gone will be the visiting Common Sandpipers. Gone will be the pair of Ringed Plover that attempt to nest each year. Gone will be the chance of an incoming passerine when it sees the blocks of flats rather than a natural shelter. Remember it was in this inner harbour that a Black Guillemot was found some years ago.

The western beach adjacent to Brighton Marina is an SSSI, and for some reason I thought the inner beach was too. When the plans were announced of the developments, the birds could not complain. Progress? Certainly not



Proposed development of the inner beach, Brighton Marina

for the birds. They will have to find somewhere else, and it is with some regret that I may have to go somewhere else too.

Peter Whitcomb

Message from our President

Bernie Forbes

If our small, successful and friendly society is to flourish and continue in the way that it has done in recent years then we need more people to help out with our good work. Therefore, if any of our members feel that they would like to join our small committee to help to run the society, we would like to hear from you. You do not have to be an expert on birds; enthusiasm is more essential than being a birding brain. We just need willing volunteers to help out with organising our Society for the future.

Brianne Reeve, our energetic Chairman, has agreed to remain in post in a slightly less demanding roll and it has been agreed that I, or Roger Smith, will chair any SDOS committee meeting that we hold during the year. In the future at our indoor meetings you may find one of the committee standing in to chair these meetings and to help to introduce or thank speakers. I am sure that members will join with the Committee in thanking Brianne for continuing in her role and we all hope that, with assistance from the membership, we can find a way towards a more equitable division of labour into the future.

Cover photographs

Front: Green Woodpecker – Wendy Ball

Back: - Greater Cormorant - Dorian Mason

Society officers

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Keeping up appearances



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