

SHOREHAM AND DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 1983

Since the AGM, our last indoor meeting at the end of March, we have passed through the period which is potentially the most exciting for birdwatchers in Southern England, the Spring. Expectations were high, with the thoughts of birds and warmer weather arriving. The latter a misconception indeed as "Sunny Worthing" was cold in April and logged twice its annual rainfall in May. One depression followed another each with its frontal systems bringing more rain but with each change in the weather there came hope of an exciting sea-watch. For most of the period the winds alternated between S.E. and S.W. and consequently many memorable sea-watches were logged and the Spring of 1983 will certainly be remembered for the record numbers of terns and skuas.

The first flood of seabirds occurred on April 10 when 1088 Sandwick Terns passed, this not only trebles our previous record day but also equals the best day ever recorded in the County. With the terns came 14 Avocets, a Black-necked Grebe, a Slavonian Grebe, and the first few Artic Skuas. Ten days later it was the turn of the "Commic" to break another record as 3048 streamed eastward, with a further 2320 on April 22 leading to a phenomenal movement of typically shy species. Each day Bonxie and Artic Skuas were noted, but the more attractive Pomarine Skua was very seldom seen with less than ten being noted. Typically Pomarine Skuas, like the Waders, Black Tern and Little Gull whose numbers were also low, seem to move through the Channel in settled high pressure weather with E. to S.E. winds during the early part of May. This year gales from S.W. during this time sent the Pomarine Skuas along the Atlantic coast but brought Atlantic birds into the Channel. 80 Manx Shearwaters on May 2 was a record for the area; Kittiwakes were very evident and on May 11 a Sabine's Gull fluttered slowly westward. Other goodies from the coast included at least 4 Mediterranean Gulls, an immature Glaucous Gull between April 17 and May 19; more Avocets, 4 Scaup, a Garganey, but perhaps best of all a little Egret at Southwick on May 9.

Summer migrants seemed very slow in arriving, a scattering of Chiffchaffs and Wheatears in March was not followed by any large falls except perhaps the 71 Wheatears recorded at Ferring on April 14. The sanctuary was particularly quiet and the same story was echoed by both downland and riverside watchers. 2 Wood Warblers at the Dover, a few scattered Firecrests and occasional Redstarts punctuated a mediocre Spring arrival of Passerines. Even raptors evaded us this Spring, despite some Hobby records there were no Marsh Harriers nor Ospreys.

By now, of course, most of the birds are busy nesting, the Swifts are back in my roof, the Swallows are twittering in the garage at the Sanctuary and the nest boxes are bulging with tit families. Soon the Autumn migration will start and perhaps we shall have plenty of interesting birds come our way then.

J.A.N.

CONSERVATION

Whilst, for the time being, the Adur District Council has reversed its policy and resolved not to promote the area adjacent to the Norfolk Bridge in Shoreham as a Marina, debate still continues over the Widewater Conservation Project promoted by the Council.

Bureaucratic wheels are turning more slowly than usual as further reports are presented to Committees but with little action to show for them, other than the initial litter and debris clearance (Phase 1) which has been completed.

Phases 2 and 3 of the Project include the creation of a new island at the Eastern end, the improvement of the island at the Western end and some re-planting. Final details for both phases have still not been confirmed as planning approval has to be applied for in respect of some of the other engineering works, such as the lay-by on the access road, steps and ramps to the car park and the extension of the coastal walk into Lancing.

So far the Council have responded sympathetically to recommendations from the Society and other conservation bodies with acknowledgement made in their reports. Subsequent developments, particularly those arising out of a further Council meeting on the 19 July are awaited with interest.

RECENT OUTINGS - APRIL TO JUNE

Despite superb winds on the 24 April the expected passage of seabirds off Widewater turned out to be rather disappointing. With rain adding to the winds John Newnham and his party had to seek shelter in the beach huts.

This contrasting with the outing to Sidlesham on the 14 May when members led by Brian Metcalf were lucky enough to see a wryneck, now alas a rare visitor to southern England. Excellent views were also obtained of black tailed godwit and avocet.

About 20 members attended the evening outing to Wiggonholt Common led by Colin Messer on 10 June. The first hour was spent looking at Waltham Brooks, where breeding birds included snipe, redshank, shelduck, Canada Goose, Greylag Goose (feral) and yellow wagtail.

Later the party moved on to Wiggonholt Common where nightjars were seen and heard, as well as a barn owl and roding woodcocks.

STEYNING

Inland at Steyning and its surrounding countryside, members were involved in the Mute Swan census; at least six breeding pairs being located. The survey took one member to a previously unwatched area where five pairs of Redshank were noted in late April. Ten pairs of Herons were recorded near the Heronry at Wyckham Wood though a precise count was not made at the breeding site. The Adur Valley also produced a pair of Grey Lag Geese which stayed for a few days in early April.

By mid-May most summer migrants were at their breeding sites and both Willow Warblers and Whitethroats were present in good numbers; alas this does not appear to be the case for Chiffchaff whose song has not been so plentiful. Reports from the Mumbles reed beds also suggest that this is a poor year for Sedge Warbler, though Reed Warbler numbers have remained stable.

The spring also produced two interesting records; a Hobby was seen near Steyning in early May and a Nightjar was heard one evening at a previously unrecorded site.

COMING EVENTS

INDOOR MEETINGS

The first indoor meeting of the Autumn programme is on MONDAY 3RD OCTOBER at the normal time and place, 7.30p.m. St Giles Church Hall, Shoreham. Phil Clay will be giving a talk on "Strivens and the Adur Levels". This promises to be a most interesting meeting, eagerly awaited by the many members who know of Phil's enthusiastic conservation and birding activities in the area.

Further meetings follow on MONDAY 7TH NOVEMBER, when Mike Hall will talk about the "Birds of Ferring" and MONDAY 5TH DECEMBER when a special Christmas meeting is to be arranged.

FIELD MEETINGS

FRIDAY 12TH AUGUST 18.30 Hrs. Adur Evening Walk.
Meet: West Side Shoreham Toll Bridge
Leader: Stanley Allen Tel Shoreham 63332

SUNDAY 11TH SEPTEMBER 09.00 Hrs. Morning only. Adur Valley and Saltings
Meet: Cuckoo's Corner car park. Map ref TQ201069
Leader: Phil Clay. Tel Steyning 812963. (not shown in 1982 programme)

SUNDAY 16TH OCTOBER 09.00 Hrs. All day. Cissbury Ring/Stump Bottom.
Meet: Car Park north of Cissbury Ring. Map ref. TQ 139085
Leader: Bernard Forbes Tel Lancing 735876

STOP PRESS: RSPB members group - Birdwatch around Shoreham - Sunday 13 November based at Adur Centre. Please mark your diary - further details later.