

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

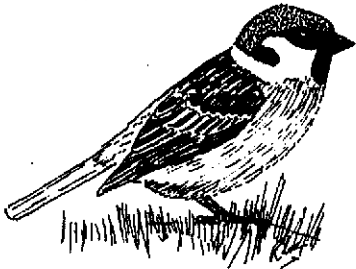
A Council meeting was held following our AGM in April, and I was elected Chairman for the year 89/90. I am conscious that this is a great honour, because I regard my association with the Shoreham District Ornithological Society as being really something rather special- we are, in my book 'small but beautiful'. Nonetheless I am a bit overawed; I follow in the chairmanship of such illustrious ornithologists as John Stafford, our President and founder of the Society, followed by John Newnham and Mike Hall. I can never hope to get anywhere near their bird-watching expertise but I will do my best to prosper the interests and well-being of our Society. I feel we have a super mix of expert and 'learner' birdwatchers, of young and old, of both sexes.

Each year though, we lose some members through people moving away and so on. So we must ensure continual recruitment of new members, and having got them, we must make sure we make them feel at home, and keep them with us. I'm particularly anxious that we make a point of welcoming any first-timer at an indoor meeting or at an outing.

Finally I do hope that any member who has any suggestion, or grouse, or perhaps a simple question when the experts lapse into bird jargon, will not hesitate to contact me or one of the Council members. Don't be shy, particularly if you have just begun bird watching, and any question you may want to ask will be carefully answered. We all started from, shall I say 'Sparrowhood'!

Good birding, and I hope you enjoy our meetings, indoor and out.

Stanley Allen



Birds in the Recording Area from Spring to early Summer 1989

The mild winter progressed to a warm early spring and, as expected, many migrants appeared earlier than usual, notably Wheatears in the first week of March with Sand Martins and Chiffchaffs close behind; the latter being well established before the end of March. Other March sightings included Willow Warblers, Swallows and a very early Hobby on the 27th March which preceded our earliest record by 18 days.

Apart from Blackcap most 'sylvia' warblers (Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler) appeared to arrive on traditional dates. For the second year running House Martins gave cause for concern; there being very few by the end of April; even at the time of writing (end-July), numbers seem rather low. Although Chiffchaff arrived in noticeably good numbers, I haven't heard or seen that many Willow Warblers- has anyone else formed this impression?

On the plus side, Whinchat, often scarce in spring, appeared in higher numbers this year. Swifts appeared in the third week of April and, in common with many other migrants ought to have a good breeding season, aided by the hot, dry, insect-producing conditions. Large flocks were noted over Broadwater in the third week of July but by the first week of August this bird has become a rarity in the neighbourhood. Counts of occupied Sand Martin nests at the traditional sites give cause for optimism and may well be up to or even exceeding a 100% increase on last year- one sand pit holding a colony of 100 pairs.

As usual, the highlight of the spring (for some of us!) is off-shore passage. The period was dominated mostly by light easterly winds and although there were few days of heavy visible passage, numbers of the expected species were steady- and made for more enjoyment over a longer period! Although the unusual failed to appear, Pomerine Skuas particularly passed in good numbers but Arctic Skuas were disappointing and only the occasional Great Skua was noted. Other species noted in larger than usual numbers were Little Gull, Mediterranean Gull (easily the best-ever spring for this species), Black Tern, Greenshank, with sightings of less common species such as Avocet, Manx Shearwater, and Puffin (1)

A feature of this spring's sea-watch was the days of sometimes spectacular wader passage; flocks often being mixed and involving several species. This of course made life quite difficult at times for the observers; just arriving at an accurate flock size can be difficult enough, without the additional problem of having to identify and count the six or eight wader species comprising the group, flying along the tideline closely-packed and at great speed. It is worthy of note that at this time of year the Feral Pigeon often makes up its mind to become an extreme nuisance by joining with these flocks, where it is least expected; one memorable individual caused much initial confusion by leading a pack of summer-plumage Grey Plovers- it even displayed a similar colour scheme!

Although "Commic" Terns did not appear in huge numbers on any one day, a healthy total for the period of 5,000+ were recorded.

Despite disturbance, a pair of Ringed Plovers were successful on the shingle at Brooklands. All records of breeding or attempted breeding by this species will be most welcome. There have been a number of reports of Quail in the Cissbury area, and it appears to have been generally a good year for them along the South Downs.

Already the first autumn migrants have appeared. There were 2 Whinchats at Goring Gap in the second week of July, juvenile Willow Warblers have begun to move through, a Reed Warbler was trapped at Cissbury during the month.

Rarities on this occasion have been left to last, as (as yet) none have been noted in what has been a relatively quiet period nationally. However, there were 2 Red footed Falcons (male and female) just outside our area at Castle Hill at the end of May, the female staying on to provide good views. I'd like to hear from anyone who knows anything about a Great Reed Warbler near Shoreham Airport in June, as rumours are rife that in fact one did appear there for a few days!

As usual, I'm hungry for your records, and would be most grateful to receive any for the first half of the year. Good luck and good birding!

Dave Smith, Recorder

The Day Out

As you are probably aware the RSPB encouraged its members to participate in a sponsored birdwatch to enable them to fight the needless suffering and illegal import of parrots into Europe. Seeing this as a fair enough cause and a chance to clock up a few species Dave Smith, Bernie Forbes and myself decided to take up the challenge. After meticulous preparation: a few drinks in the local pub, the route and timing was decided upon and everyone got 'psyched up' for the big day; 27th May.

We set off at 2.45 am (!!) and we were down in deepest Dorset before many of you had had your milk delivered. It was a perfect day; blue skies and a cooling wind. We stood at Portland Bill and the species began to fall. There were 3 Puffins, 2 Manx Shearwaters, 3 sightings of at least 2 Peregrines and many Razorbills and Guillemots. After having frozen and seen about all that was possible on the bill tip we headed inland towards Weymouth. On route there was a scream as a large greyish brown raptor was seen being harried by a couple of crows, it was a young male Montagu's- a superb creature which flew off westwards and clipped a resting hobby as it passed out of sight. Incredible! 55 species by 7.00.

Radipole held its usual collection of specialities with Cetti's Warblers singing everywhere and Bearded Reedling 'pinging' through the reeds. There were a few unseasonal duck feeding on the lake: Pochard, Goldeneye and a Ruddy Duck. The list was growing quickly. A few miles off we reached Lodmore, another RSPB reserve, which came up trumps with Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank, Pintail and Shoveler. 83 species by 9.25. It was time to get back onto the road and head eastwards to the New Forest.

The birds were rather more elusive in the forest and it took some time to locate Whinchat and Dartford Warbler but the Stonechats were singing away beautifully. The woodland birds were present in good numbers except Woodpeckers and Treecreeper. The best find was a Firecrest in breeding territory. Wood Warblers were in fair numbers as were both Redstart and Tree Pipit. No Chiffchaffs. We moved southwards to another area of the forest and were rewarded with Woodlark, Redpoll and an incredible sight of 8 Hobbies catching dragonflies over a marshy area. 108 species at 3.15 and Sussex to come.

It was rather unusual to visit Church Norton in the afternoon and it was decidedly peaceful not a birdwatcher in sight. There were still a few waders around and we ticked off Grey Plover, Knot, Black tailed Godwit and finally Green Woodpecker and Pheasant. It was late afternoon as we headed towards Coldwaltham to look for Nightingale and Garganey. We failed on both counts but did get Yellow Wagtail and Little Ringed Plover. No Chiffchaff; although the species' list was now at 117.

Finally the day ended at Wiggonholt where the midges evening was just beginning! They took their toll on our sweaty brows but it was wonderful watching a Barn Owl hunting over the open fields and the final bird of the day was a Woodcock roding over the woods. It had been an exhausting day but we had managed to see 123 species and still missed a number of common species including Chiffchaff and Cuckoo. It was an incredible achievement and the money will go to a

worthy cause. The terrible trio can thoroughly recommend this way of raising money- it is a wonderful way to see a lot of birds. Next time there is such an event don't be shy perhaps you could even track down the elusive Chifchaff- who knows?

Richard Ives



A Fine Way to See Clovelly !

Viewed from the sandstone cliffs above Westward Ho !, the brooding slab of rock that is Lundy squats massively on the horizon, 18 miles out in the Bristol Channel. It appears at this distance much as a sperm whale might to a watcher from the crow's nest, with its blunt brow, high plateau and flukes of rocks at its northern end, a likeness heightened by the slim white tower of the Old Light spouting mistily from the hump. But it wasn't whales that we were after, or Lundy's luxuriant thyme, thrift and bluebells. The island has one of the densest populations of sea birds around these shores, and it was to observe some of the 100,000 breeding pairs, and perhaps to intercept some of the exciting spring migrants passing through, that we deposited ourselves manfully, if somewhat hungrily, on Bideford Quay at 4.30 am.

It seems an inevitable exigency of the tide that expeditions must start at this hour, and to dismay us further a long finger of wind came over the hills from the Atlantic and vigorously shook a tall pine tree standing on an eminence across the river. This at once despatched Skipper Hutchins of 'Felicity' with all haste to Westward Ho! to acquaint himself better with the state of the open sea, which is hidden from Bideford by a curving channel. Apparently, if a south-westerly wind grips this pine by the throat and really shakes it, that is a clear signal to most skippers not to risk their 28-ton diesel schooners (and passengers, one supposes) on this exposed crossing.

An hour later Hutchins returned looking thoughtful and, carefully avoiding visual contact with the dancing pine, cast off and headed perkily downstream on a fast ebbing tide, his solitary lieutenant meanwhile setting up the bilge pump..... Crossing the bar, where the waters of the Torridge and Barnstaple estuary unite and pour in a confused, shallow jumble out to sea, the 'Felicity' began to 'walk a about a bit,' and we were soon hanging on grimly to anything that seemed immovable, as there was no protecting rail. Once out of the channel, we were into the Atlantic rollers, with a force 5 breeze on our port quarter, and we spanked on merrily for about an hour except when one or two short, steep seas caught us, and 'Felicity's' prow

sat up and we peremptorily sat down. Using binoculars under these conditions was a trifle hazardous, a lot of air shots being obtained, but some most rewarding views were gained of Manx shearwaters, fulmars, razorbills and guillemots in their rapid, stiff-winged glides through the wave troughs, and of pearl white gannets, with yellow heads and black tipped pinions, winging easily behind the boat. For them, these were sublime conditions.

Next, however, the little radio receiver tuned into the shipping forecast proclaimed gale force 8 winds and a rising sea for Lundy and, ours being only a reserve boat, and faced with 12 miles of exposed water still to cross, Skipper Hutchins decided to put her about and run for home before things became too uncomfortable. Accordingly, the sheet came down, we made a slick turn in a wide trough and started punching for Bideford, the wind dead ahead!

It was disconcerting to find that there would now be insufficient water to carry us over the bar at Appledore, and that we should have to run for the nearest haven. It was even more unsettling to look down into the tiny engine room and to watch the water spurting steadily in as a tall sea dropped us heavily into a trough and the seams were forced open under the strain. But the mate only grinned; he'd taken out and replaced a main bearing in a steeper sea than this, with the boat swinging on a sea-anchor.

Gradually the threatening sea rose and with it came the wind, bouncing off the cliffs beyond Westward Ho! under which we were passing and making the vessel toss about alarmingly; so much so, that loaves of bread intended for the island's hotel came shooting out of the miniature cabin like corks from a pop-gun. The rigging moaned incessantly and suddenly all was blotted out by thick mist, driven before the wind. The motion increased so that it was difficult to hang on, while the bilge was emptying itself by being catapulted through the engine hatch at each surge. A watery sun appeared through the wrack and, by all the sounds and portents, we were about to cross the Styx into the Inferno when suddenly the sea smoothed out beneath us and the wind dropped away. It was like shutting a huge door, but we realised that the vessel was in a small sheltered bay. As the clinging mist slowly dispersed we could see a wooded hillside almost falling into the sea, with here and there stone roofs showing through the greenery. At the water's edge a small familiar stone jetty curved into a line of fine old buildings, a cobbled stairway vanished up the steep slope. As one of my exhausted companions remarked, "A fine way to see Clovelly!"

R.J.Sandison

