

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER 1990 NEWSLETTER

Well the year is turning towards those long cool, evenings the time of the year when one curls up in front of a warm fire and television and nothing will persuade one to leave those cosy environs. Well I hope the following will stir the lethargy from those sun bronzed muscles and you'll wend your way down to the lectures which have been arranged for your benefit. They are as follows:-

- Monday 1st October Mr. D. Harper - Bird Colour- What it Means.
Monday 5th November Mr and Mrs Simpson - Conservation in Sussex.
Monday 3rd December Members' Evening.

For the even more adventurous amongst you we have a chance to get some fresh air and hopefully a rare bird with the following field outings. They are not only extremely friendly but also informative; they sometimes iron out those difficult identification problems and the leaders are always willing to explain "the little brown jobs" which can be difficult to put a name to. Don't forget to wrap up warm as some of the places can be rather barren at the best of times. The outings are as follows:-

- Sunday 16th September. Hollingbury Camp with Mr. P Whitcomb.
Meet at Car Park half mile south in Coledean Lane
TQ 324084. 9.00 start.
- Sunday 21st October. Clymping and Littlehampton Golf Course with
B.Forbes and R Ives. Meet at Littlehampton
beach car park at 9.00.
- Saturday 24th November. Pagham North Wall with D. Smith. Meet in lane
near Pagham Church at 9.00. Full day.
- Saturday 29th December. Adur Walk with S. Allen. Meet at Lady Jane
near Shoreham Footbridge at 9.00

NEW SALT'S FARM - AN UPDATE

You may be aware that there was a planning application to set up a target golf area on this very interesting site. The application appears to have been turned down but the developers have decided to appeal against the ruling. This means that the area is still under threat; I would, therefore, urge members to write to the Planning Department at Adur District and make your feelings known !

BIRDS OF THE AREA, SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER 1990 by Dave Smith

After another very mild winter, thoughts in early March again turned to spring migrants and sea-watching. The anticipation of early arrivals was high, and turned out not to be without foundation; the first Wheatear was noted at Brooklands on Mar 4 with a Willow Warbler there on Mar 17, Chiffchaffs were again early being well established before the end of the month, Firecrests were noted on 11th & 14th, and single Ring Ouzels were seen at Hollingbury on Mar 24 and Broadwater on Mar 25. An early Sandwich Tern passed Worthing beach on Mar 16, and a Whimbrel on Mar 17. Blackcaps began to appear from end-March, with most of the later "landbirds" migrants arriving around expected dates, some even being a little late. Again concern was felt for House Martin; the now-usual pattern again occurred, of a very few early arrivals then practically no more until towards the end of May.

A few incoming Sand Martins were noted - disturbing indeed is the recently received report that last year's largest breeding colony, at Rock Common, is not occupied this year, and few pairs are present at nearby Sandgate Park.

Nightingales were heard at Brooklands on Apr 24 and in a West Worthing garden on April 25. A Tree Pipit flew north over Brighton Marina on April 1st.

As is usual during the spring, the greatest number of hours put in locally were by stoic observers peering out to sea through telescopes. To briefly summarize the season, we were blessed with many light north-east and east winds, but few of the hoped-for south-easterlies, the weather remaining dry and settled for most of the period.

Marsh ducks, particularly Shoveler, appeared in good numbers at the end of March, and 8 Garganey passed Brighton Marina on 18th. It was a record spring for Little Gull passage, this species being recorded frequently and at times in numbers. Mediterranean Gulls proved that last spring was no fluke, again appearing frequently in April and May. Other species which showed in encouraging numbers were Pomarine Skuas (47 together on Apr 29), Black Tern, Avocet (several parties including one of 15 on May 4), Greenshank, and there were several incoming Short eared Owls, with the occasional Hobby.

Noticeably down in numbers were "Commic" Terns, Arctic Skua, Divers, and Whimbrel, with an average or near-average showing for Bar tailed Godwit, Sandwich Tern, Great Skua, and other wader species not previously mentioned. Miscellany included a very interesting (but unidentified) tern on Apr 29, Black tailed Godwits, Red necked Grebe, Spotted Redshank, Roseate Tern, and the first seawatch record at Worthing for Mandarin.

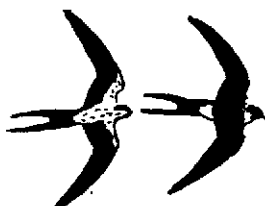
And so to the rarities. After the last two or three years of the Recorder bemoaning the fact the rarities were appearing everywhere but in our area, we have at last had our fair share.

An immature Great Spotted Cuckoo was found on the north side of Shoreham Airport on Apr 4th which stayed several weeks, delighting many observers. A "first" for the area, and the first record of a live bird for Sussex (the only other being a corpse found at Bognor in the 1960's). Hopefully all members who wished to see it found out about it!

Shortly after this bird's arrival, a Red Rumped Swallow was located at Widewater late in the afternoon of Apr 23, but had disappeared by early evening. TWO were then discovered (by the lucky JAN) that evening at Brooklands, but had gone by the following morning. The recorder comments upon the fact that after remarking at Widewater that the "bird" may well have flown over to Brooklands, he could not stop there as he was already late for a football match, thus missing another "first" for the area (and a very attractive one too). (the editor fared little better as he actually stopped and watched JAN looking but could not see whether he had a smile on his face [he had]) Such is life!

Finally, on May 14 a Little Egret passed Worthing Beach, flying along the tideline. Magnificent! (I missed it by half an hour DIS)

Having resigned myself that locally at least, it is not to be my year, I wish all members "good birding" again for the remainder of the year, with the usual reminder to keep those records coming in; any for the first six months of 1990 are now most welcome indeed.



On a more mundane note, I am sure our treasurer, Chris Fox, would be most grateful to receive your subscriptions for 1991 as soon as possible so that our finances can be kept in good order. You can either pay him at the indoor meetings or send a cheque to his home address which can be found on the last page of the Bird Report.

Dave Smith would also be most grateful to receive your reports for the first part of the year. He has an onerous task of compiling the systematic list and the sooner he has the data the sooner he can get down to collating all the information. His address also appears in the Report. (Please follow his advice on the formatting of the records which is mentioned in the report on page 89)

IN CUCKOO LAND by Richard Ives

I received a frantic phone call from Dave Smith on the evening of 4th April saying that a lorry driver had reported a Great Spotted Cuckoo near the Shoreham Flyover. I woke very early the following morning doubting my sanity and drove over to Shoreham on my motorbike. It must have been the coldest morning of the whole winter with a thick hoar frost covering the whole landscape. No right-minded Mediterranean visitor would have chosen early April to make its landfall but I was soon to be proved wrong.

There were a few unfamiliar faces standing around looking thoroughly bored when I picked out a large yellowish plastic bag stuck in a bush. Through binoculars this amorphous lump was clearly discernable as a young Great Spotted Cuckoo. What a majestic creature it was too! A lovely yellowish wash to its throat and a warm brownish grey mantle punctuated by white spots and flecks. The bird slowly warmed up as the sun gained in strength and the bird began to look less uncomfortable. It began to fly around and attack the Brown-tailed moth caterpillars which adorned most of the bushes along the A27. SDOS members began to arrive in good numbers and everyone had the chance to catch up with this extreme rarity.

Fortunately during its two week stay most people had good views of the birds and many members experienced first hand what a "mass twitch" is like. Everytime a rarity touches down in this country the same hordes descend into the area. Fortunately, the crowds were well behaved, the bird performed well and everyone was happy. I wonder how often we will experience seeing a Great Spotted Cuckoo before our normal Cuckoo returns or for that matter whether any of us will be around before another is recorded in our local area? Wherever it went I wish it all the best for creating so much pleasure for our members and for putting Shoreham on the map. What's next I wonder?

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GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 1989/90 by Brian Clay

The Garden Bird Feeding Survey was re-launched rather hurriedly last autumn at the October meeting. Mike Hall, our former Chairman, had previously organised the survey but his departure left a gap that could not immediately be filled. I rashly volunteered but was a little late to properly organise things for last winter. It was therefore with some surprise that I received 4 complete returns. Although a comprehensive scientific analysis would be a little suspect on such a small sample a few general comments can be made.

Only two species were recorded as feeding regularly in all gardens in the same months: Starling (November, December & February) and Blackbird (January & February). Other species present, some occasionally, in all four gardens were Blue Tit, Robin, Song Thrush and Wren. Comments were made by the contributors on the mild winter and this no doubt was reflected in the low numbers of finches and winter thrushes.

The highest number of species (23) was recorded in Clive Hope's garden in Storrington; those attending the Society's lovely barbeque there this summer will appreciate why. The maximum total of birds in a month (85) occurred at George Martin's garden in Worthing in December 89. Indeed, December was the best month of the winter with the most species recorded (23), the greatest combined total of regular and occasional feeders (59) and the highest maximum total of 220 birds. However, the highest number of regular feeders but also the lowest number of occasional feeders occurred in February, perhaps a sign of birds returning to breeding territories?

All the expected species (i.e. those on the pre-printed form) occurred except Marsh/Willow Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Additional species included Carrion Crow (in 3 gardens), Redwing (2), Jay, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Siskin and Woodpigeon.

As not all members can get to indoor meetings I have enclosed a form and the simple instructions with this Newsletter. Please participate; someone must get Great Spotted Woodpecker or Marsh Tit. Finally a thank you to those pioneering members who contributed last winter- "out of little acorns" etc.....