



SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 1992

Well it is now mid-summer and time to keep you in touch with what is going on and what is planned for the rest of the year. The forthcoming attractions are listed below. Dave is now eagerly awaiting your spring records; I hope you had a better time than I did ! I spent hours scouring the horizons for seabirds without any success and not even a skua of any description, that is a record in itself.

It is time to thank a few people who are standing down from the committee and to welcome the newcomers. Firstly thanks to Les Hemblade for his work as field secretary his shoes have now been filled by Brian Metcalfe if you have any special places of interest you feel would warrant a field trip he's the person to approach. Dave is in his last year as recorder but we have found a volunteer to fill the vacancy but news of that when the time arises.

Finally, I, and the society as a whole really must give a heartfelt thanks to Stanley for his stalwart stewardship of the Society for the past few years. His wit and determination (and the speed at which he went through the agenda at meetings) will be sorely missed. I am sure we would all wish Stanley the best on his "retirement" but no doubt he will continue to play an active role behind the scenes. Thanks for everything Stanley. His position has been filled by another famous face in the Society: Bernie Forbes. I am sure that this popular expert will make a good replacement for Stanley. I wish you all the best Bernie.

The forthcoming attractions for you to note in your diaries are as follows:- for those who enjoy the great outdoors the field outings are-

Waltham Brooks Friday 3rd July at 20.00 hrs. Meet Greatham Bridge.

Barbeque 18th July (see enclosed information).

Hollingbury Camp Sunday 6th September 9.00 hrs.

Cissbury Ring Sunday 11th Oct 8.00 hrs

Chichester Harbour Sunday 22nd November 9.00 hrs.

Adur Walk Monday 28th December 9.00 hrs.

Further information can be obtained from your programmes.

Indoor meetings are:-

Monday 5th Oct:- Acres Wild by Ian Smith.

Monday 2nd Nov:- In Search of Waders by John Reynolds.

Monday 7th Dec:- Members' Evening.

Come along to the events and enjoy yourselves.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF SPRING 1992

As in 1991, this spring held few highlights. Chief amongst these were single Little Egrets in April and May, still only the fourth and fifth records for our area. The former was noted on R. Adur at Shoreham, the Flood Arch, and Widewater during one day only, and the latter passed Widewater and Worthing beach and was probably the same individual seen that day arriving at Selsey Bill.

A brief warm spell in late February/first days of March brought early Wheatears and the earliest Sussex spring record of Sandwich Tern, but cold conditions soon took over once again and remained into April. The consequent northerly airstream ensured that sightings of incoming migrants were few and Wheatears were not noticed again in any numbers until late March; however, Chiffchaffs seemed well-established by the end of the month. The first Willow Warblers & Swallows were late, there not being a general arrival of either until mid-April and from this point onwards, most migrants appeared on time, give or take a few days. Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats appear to have arrived in high than average numbers, as does Sedge Warbler, but one or two observers have commented on fewer Chiffchaffs than usual, although I haven't noticed this to any great degree myself. Swifts were seen arriving "en masse" on the morning of 9th May (see sponsored birdwatch article). Of the less common migrants, at least 3 Grasshopper Warblers were reported, plus the occasional Ring Ousel and Pied Flycatcher.

As for offshore passage, the least said about this spring's seawatch the better. Not exactly the best on record, Common Scoter and Brent Geese passed in good numbers but most of the other expected species, particularly terns and some waders, appeared in very low numbers indeed and there were lamentably few Arctic Skuas, Little Gulls, or Black Terns. No doubt this was due in part to the dominant west to north-westerly airstream through April to Mid-May, favourable easterlies not arriving until it was practically too late. Some late compensation was gained by the appearance of several Pomarine Skua packs numbering up to 15 individuals, and again there was a scattering of Velvet Scoters, Avocets, & Mediterranean Gulls.

At least one Peregrine was noted in May, on John Newnham's field outing, and unusually at least two Short eared Owls stayed on at Upper Beeding and Shoreham Airport into the month. Sightings of Hobby seem to have been above average. Two Red footed Falcons have been seen passing through the area and a lovely Red Kite graced our skies over the Bank Holiday weekend (- what better way to relax ?? - Ed.)

Perhaps autumn will be better, especially to the sea watchers.

Dave Smith (Hon Recorder)

A HELP FOR THE SUSSEX TRUST

As our local area hosts the headquarters of the Sussex Trust we thought that it would be a good idea to raise some money through a sponsored birdwatch. The four of us: Bernie Forbes, Dave Smith, Tony Fenton & myself had arranged a timetable and list of venues in which we hoped to maximise the number of potential species. The date was set for the 9th May.

For those whose memories are rather short I feel I should jog your memories on the weather conditions of the day. It was Cup Final day and the weather was absolutely foul: cold, wet and windy- just what one needs on an 18 hour endurance test. We set off at 4.45 with the rain lashing down and arrived at Sidlesham ferry to begin the march through the species. A Barn Owl quartering the fields near the ferry pool augured well for the rest of the day. The most impressive sight of the early morning were the vast flocks of Swifts migrating steadily westwards, something I had never really witnessed before. By 6.00 45 species had been logged and then onto Selsey for the seabirds.

Movement was slack but both Guillemot and Razorbill were handy in boosting our list. ~~The Serins which had been recorded midweek~~ also managed to show themselves and so the rarest species of the day had fallen before most people had looked out at the weather and turned over and pulled the duvet higher. (we were wet & cold). Another piece of luck was the fly-by by the first winter Mediterranean Gull just the sort of luck you need to help you on your way. An early Spotted Flycatcher seemed to be ruing its decision to arrive on such a day. By 7.00 the list stood at 60. Another couple of hours at the Bill only produced another nine species.

Westfields was dreadful; the rain was falling steadily and only a damp Lesser Whitethroat brought any cheer and another tick. We returned to Church Norton where a party of late Knot was a bonus, no Eiders though and a tick missed. A Hobby was flushed from an oak tree and that piece of luck put us in better spirits (we were to record another 4! before the day was out) No Black tailed Godwits in the harbour at all- surely they couldn't have all disappeared overnight? Things were getting a little desperate, no Mergansers, our 117 from the last trip was beginning to look a long way off.

Thorney was as welcoming as it could be; the rain was falling horizontally owing to a bitterly cold wind whipping across the channel. A quick deafening burst from a Cetti's warbler took off the pressure and made our second site for this species less important. A Merganser was sitting on the grass, thank goodness! We also managed to find a single Black tailed Godwit at this site along with late Wigeon & Shoveler- 2 useful species.

It was now 2.00 with 94 in the bag. Swanbourne Lake was good with Mandarin, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Ruddy Duck and Long tailed tit - the 100 species passed. We then headed inland to the commons. 2 Hobbies were seen displaying a superb spectacle, no Dartfords and no Siskins, the blustery conditions must take the blame for those omissions. Birds were becoming hard to track down; the Woodlarks kept silent and there were no Tree pipits at all. A Stonechat was singing its heart out and that spurred us on, a garden warbler also chipped in and finally a Green Woodpecker managed to laugh.

Burton Mill Pond produced absolutely ~~nothing not even a Marsh or Willow Tit~~; we were now becoming desperate. Fortunately a late burst at Rackham ensured a happy ending. Both Great Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker made their presence known and a Turtle Dove purred in the early evening gloom; by 8.00 we were on 117 and poised to beat our record. The failing light brought the three expected species: Tawny Owl, Woodcock and Nightjar. Our efforts (and foolhardiness considering the dreadful conditions) had yielded 120 species and we had broken the Sussex record! 3 species were seen by only 1 member of the team (Eider, Marsh Tit, and Whinchat) so in fact we had seen 123 species but as it was a team effort we could accept only 120. The following week in superb weather our record was broken by another team who recorded 123 species. The challenge is there and provided we have the right conditions and a great deal of luck 130 is not beyond the realms of possibility. Next year another charity will benefit from our efforts and hopefully we can break the new county record once again. I hope so.

Richard Ives

A Request:- Does anyone have any contact addresses for small ornithological societies such as ourselves? I should be most grateful for any help you can give. Please contact me on Worthing 204567. (Richard Ives)