

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Winter 1994/95

From the Editor

This is my first newsletter and I hope you find it both interesting and stimulating. I very much hope to establish a fixed pattern of publishing the newsletters and of course I would like to incorporate your news and views. I would welcome receiving articles on your birding holidays; special trips; recommendation of new birding areas; conservation issues; and almost anything that would be of interest! Your copy should be legible but not necessarily typed, and your article can be a brief news item or a full length feature up to 400/500 words.

Your new editor: Peter Whitcomb, 99 Barnett Road, Brighton, BN1 7GJ. Telephone (0273) 500416.

Records

A reminder to send in your 1994 sightings and breeding records for the Shoreham area. If you are not sure how to go about sending in your records, or you need more forms, write to the Recorder. NOTE NEW ADDRESS: 93 North Road, Portslade, Brighton BN41 2HD or phone (0273) 422485.

Forthcoming Attractions -

Meetings - Indoor

The first few indoor meetings are listed below. Further details can be obtained from your new programme card.

January 16th - The RSPB Warden, Tim Callaway gives an update on Pulborough Brooks Reserve. Note this meeting is not the first Monday.

February 6th - Graham Walker, of Cambrian Bird Holidays, gives a talk on the Birds of Wales.

March 6th - Nature of the Downs is the theme, with Phil Belden, the Countryside Manager for the South Downs.

Meetings - Outdoor

Further details and grid references can be obtained from your programme card.

January 14th - Fishbourne and Dell Quay. A walk along parts of Chichester Harbour led by Tony Fenton. Meet at Apuldram Church at 9.00. All day.

February 12th - Morning walk around Shoreham and Widewater meeting at Fort Haven at 10.00, transferring to Woods Mill for afternoon walk to Upper Adur Levels. Leader Bernie Forbes.

April 30th - Littlehampton and Climping for Spring movement. Meeting at West Beach car park at 9.00. Leader Rod Shaw.

For details of other walks, including a Dawn Chorus and the annual New Forest trip, please see full details in programme.



Birds on our Patch - Autumn 1994

Two national influxes occurred this Autumn with the highest numbers of Richard's Pipits and Rough-legged Buzzards for many years. Unfortunately the Shoreham area was unlucky with just a brief Richard's Pipit at Shoreham Airport on 24 September. Overflying Rough-legs were reported from Hampshire and two in East Sussex, but none so far in the SDOS area (yet!). Members are asked to be cautious as a small Common Buzzard movement occurred at the same time.

It is difficult to pick out the highlights locally, as it has been such a good Autumn. For the finders, the almost trodden on Corncrake at Sheepcote Valley on 17 September, and a brief Ortolan Bunting on an arable field, Hollingbury on 14 September were very good indeed, but neither stayed around. A Black Stork flew over Worthing on 22 September, but three good birds did stay for many members to see.

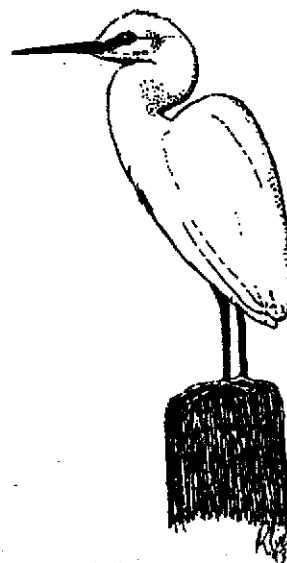
A juvenile Red-backed Shrike turned up on fields near Sompting on 25 September and stayed for 9 days. Many saw this bird, but the local grapevine wasn't working too brilliantly. A Pallas's Warbler was found in East Brighton Park on 22 October and whilst watching it, a second bird flew into the copse. One of the birds stayed around all afternoon, but after heavy overnight rain it could not be found the next day. Probably the best bird was a Common Crane which stayed in the fields north of Bramber between 7-10 November. Those lucky to see this bird midweek fared better than those waiting for the weekend, when the bird was flushed by two people getting too close.

In the Shoreham area, a Melodious Warbler was reported on 21 September. One or two Little Egrets were resident for a period in September on the River Adur, and a brief White winged Black Tern was found on 15 October. More recently there have been Black Redstarts and Mediterranean Gulls in the Shoreham Fort area. Peregrines have again been seen by Southwick chimney and West Pier, Brighton.

Highlights from the Brighton area were a number of Firecrests and Ring Ouzels from Hollingbury Camp, and overflying Woodlarks on 6 and 15 October. A long staying Dartford Warbler has been in the gorse on the Camp from 5 November. A Red-backed Shrike was seen at Sheepcote Valley on 24 October, and a number of Short eared Owls earlier on. Up to 3 Black Redstarts have been seen recently at Brighton Marina. Other Dartford Warblers were seen in early November from Sheepcote and Brighton Racehill.

In the Worthing area, a Radde's Warbler turned up in a garden and was seen by a fortunate few. Also in a garden was a Pallas's Warbler near Ferring Rife. A handful of Snipe and Jack Snipe have been reported from the Rife and recently a couple of Black Redstarts at Goring. A Hen Harrier has been seen at No Man's Land, near Cissbury.

Very late dates for migrants included Reed and Willow Warblers on 23 October at Sheepcote; a long staying Whinchat last seen on 12 November at the same site; a trickle of Swallows in early November; and finally a Wheatear seen flying across Shoreham Harbour entrance on 30 November.



Little Egret

Field Outing Report

The field trip to Pagham and Church Norton on 27th November was held in extremely mild conditions, and with the tide out all day, it didn't look like being a particularly successful day. An overhead Peregrine within minutes, and a couple of Chiffchaff near the car park augered well. Ferry Pool was quiet with no waders at all. Cars then transferred down to Church Norton where the birding improved dramatically. Stonechat and Dartford Warbler were watched from the path, whilst out in the harbour 2 Little Egrets, an Avocet and good numbers of common waders were seen. Out on the sea at least 20 Slavonian Grebes were close in, whilst small flocks of wildfowl included 3 Velvet Scoter. Godwits were surprisingly scarce and Brent Geese numbers were low also. A Firecrest was found near the car park but was unfortunately rather elusive for everyone to see. After the outing officially ended, some members drove round to Pagham North wall where Merlin, 6 Twite and a Ruddy Shelduck were added to the day's tally. All in all, Dave Smith did very well in totalling over 65 species.

Autumn highlights in Sussex

Little Egrets continued to build up through August; on the 25th a British Record 98 were counted at roost on Thorney Island. Wader passage was poor with very low numbers of Little Stint and Curlew Sandpipers. A Grey Phalarope was seen between 11-13 August near Piddinghoe, Newhaven, whilst a Temminck's Stint was at the Cuckmere meanders from 23-26 September. Also at the Cuckmere was an Aquatic Warbler showing remarkably well 24-25 September. Other Aquatic Warblers were ringed at Icklesham.

Birds often looked for in Autumn, like Hoopoe and Wryneck, were few and far between, with none staying for any length of time (and none reported in SDOS area either). Ospreys fared better with a scattering of birds mainly from Weir Wood or Arlington Reservoirs, where a late bird on 27 November was the latest ever in the county. Skua and Black Tern passage was almost non-existent.

Amongst the usual goodies turning up in the Beachy Head area this Autumn were a long-staying Sardinian Warbler from 28 September to mid October. This excellent little bird was elusive and frustrated many birders. There was a Barred Warbler on 13 September followed by a Common Rosefinch on 14th. A Red breasted Flycatcher was at Birling Gap on 2 October, and a handful of Yellow browed and Pallas's Warblers there during the month.

Pagham's highlights included a Melodious Warbler on 17 September, followed by a brief Rose-coloured Starling at Sidlesham on 18th, found by one of our members. The next day a Sooty Shearwater passed off Selsey Bill. Selsey also had a Tawny Pipit 8-10 October and a Siberian Stonechat 8-

9 October in gardens at the Bill. The wintering adult Glaucous Gull is back resident near the Lifeboat Station at Selsey

Other rarities included a Raven at Pilsey Sands on 23 August; a White Stork at Southease, Newhaven 1-2 September; a Purple Heron at Rye on 10 September; and a sprinkling of Yellow-browed and Pallas's Warblers. A Great Grey Shrike was seen briefly at Pulborough Brooks and another has been resident, though extremely wide ranging, at Ashdown Forest from mid October. Twite, an uncommon visitor these days in Sussex, has been seen lately at Pagham North Wall (6) and earlier some at the Cuckmere. The latest report was of a very late Swift in November.

Peter Whitcomb
(with help from Russell Wynn and Bernie Forbes)

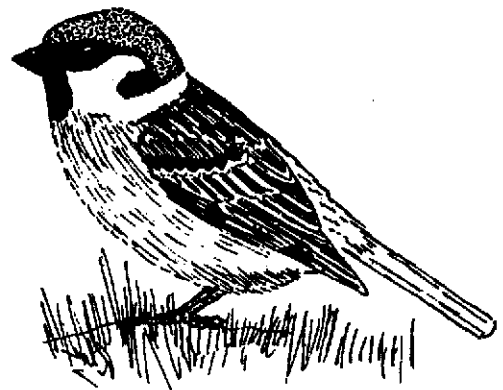
Study Species

In recent years we have heard of certain birds seemingly on the decline. The Red-backed Shrike has now been lost as a British breeding bird - how many of our members remember it in their earlier days nesting in Sussex, and may also recall the passing of Cirl Bunting and Stone Curlew. A survey of Stone Curlews last year failed to find any recurrence of breeding, but at the same time a study of Corn Buntings in Sussex revealed many more than was thought.

It is only with vigilant field work can the real status of scarcer birds be determined. Here in Sussex we have had mixed fortunes. On the plus side are the well documented spread of Fulmar and Kittiwakes (though unfortunately the cliffs east of Brighton are just outside the SDOS recording area) and thankfully a run of milder winters has seen Dartford Warblers making a considerable comeback. Rare breeders such as Cetti's Warbler and Black Redstart are still very rare indeed, whilst raptors such as Peregrine, probably Goshawk and Buzzard are doing much better. However, we mustn't get complacent, particularly as I heard of a shot Buzzard being found during November.

Many of use have thought Tree Sparrows have been in serious decline, and I note no breeding records are mentioned on the last few Shoreham Bird Reports. Next year the Sussex Ornithological Society is targetting Tree Sparrows as well as Grasshopper Warbler as study species, and your help would be appreciated. Also if you care for Barn Owls, the BTO is organising a survey over the next three years. The local contact to get in touch with is Barrie Watson (0273 452476) who will give you more details of how you can help. Records for last year's study species would probably still be welcome - these were Grey Wagtail and Corn Bunting. Maybe someone may find Grey Wagtails breeding in the SDOS area, where in recent years they have only been successful at Woods Mill.

Members are urged to send in all House Martin breeding records. If you didn't report them to Recorder for 1993/94 please do so as this information is urgently needed.



Tree Sparrow

Welcoming New Members - A Message from the Chairman

Each year we lose some members through people moving away and so on. So we must ensure continual recruitment of new members (see below) and having got them, we must make them feel at home and keep them with us. Let us make a point of welcoming any first-timer at an indoor meeting or on a field trip.

I do hope that any member who has any suggestion or criticism or perhaps a simple question when the 'experts' lapse into bird jargon, will not hesitate to contact one of the Council members. Don't be shy, particularly if you have just begun birdwatching, and any question you may want to ask will be carefully answered. We all started as beginners at some stage.

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

Bernie Forbes.

Star Birds

Those twitchers amongst you may like to know of a regular Friday feature on rare birds in the Star newspaper. This is the only birding column in any national daily paper.

Worthing Loss

It has come to our notice of the demise of the Worthing local group of the RSPB. Should any members have friends affected, perhaps it would be a good idea to encourage them to join the SDOS?

Advertisements

The following accommodations come with member's recommendations:

Speyside. B&B in Scotland's best birding areas. Contact Mr and Mrs P. French, Grianan, Strone Road, Newtonmore, Inverness-shire, PH20 1BA.

Wells next the Sea, Norfolk. A homely welcome. B&B in the midst of Norfolk coastal area. Mrs Jean Pope, Bramley, Standard Road, Wells next Sea.

If members would like to advertise books or optical equipment, or if they have recommended holiday addresses, please contact the editor or Brianne Reeve.

January Birdwatch

A couple of years ago a couple of teams in Sussex amassed over 90 species on their New Year's Birdwatch. It is always

nice to get the year off to a good start, and with that in mind it has been suggested we have a little lighthearted competition to see how many birds can be found in one day within the SDOS recording area. The map appears in the Birds of Shoreham and past copies of the SDOS Report.

Whilst Sussex listers usually concentrate on the coastal regime of Pagham or Rye, it will be interesting and somewhat of a challenge to see just how many species can be found locally. The day chosen need not be on January 1st, any day in January is allowed. Please bring your total and lists to the February meeting where a small prize will be given.

There are no rules, except to say only wild birds can be counted - just enjoy your day out! If successful, maybe we can make this an annual event? Any queries contact Bernie Forbes or Peter Whitcomb.

Subscriptions

For those not being able to attend the December meeting, subscriptions are due on 1st January 1995. These should be paid to the Hon. Treasurer: Mr A.D. Bullock, 65 Roman Road, Steyning, West Sussex, BN44 3FN.

Garden Bird Survey

Any Volunteers? A co-ordinator is required to organise this survey and compile the results which are published in a Newsletter or the Annual Report. Run along BTO lines the survey provides a valuable contribution to the work of the Society. It also enables those Members with limited opportunities to record birds in the field to make a positive contribution. Brian Clay can provide more details of what is involved. Phone him on 0903 249225.

Apology

Apologies to our new editor and to all Members. This issue should have reached you before Christmas. A desk top publishing program running on a computer is used to set the newsletter out ready for printing. Unfortunately when I pressed the buttons the screen blew up! A temporary repair was eventually made but too late to hit the deadline. Hopefully a new screen will have been purchased in time for the next publication.

Brian Clay

Thanks to Richard Ives for illustrations.