

# SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## Summer 1995

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### *From the Editor*

My thanks for the kind responses to my first newsletter which were greatly encouraging. It was agreed at the last Council Meeting that we should issue newsletters twice yearly and for your information the publishing dates will be 20th May and 20th October (copy dates approx 2-3 weeks beforehand). Articles can, of course, be sent to me at any time.

### *Council Matters*

A special meeting was held on 10th April to discuss the possible purchase of the Society's own computer and the methods of printing of both the Annual Report and newsletters. Expenditure in excess of £1200 was outlined but no immediate decision was taken. The current year's Annual Report, seriously delayed by the computer situation, will be produced using the same methods as in previous years and the standard set maintained.

The Society possesses very few known computer experts, but we urgently appeal for anyone amongst the membership who has a home computer and may like to volunteer their services to help with the setting up of the newsletter, or in the major task of 80 odd pages of text for the Annual Report. Can you use a Word Processor and do you have access to a computer? Could we share or borrow a computer? We need to look at all the issues and offers of help should be directed to:-

Brian Clay, 30 the Drive, Worthing, BN11 5LL (01903 249225).

### **SUMMER BARBECUE - Saturday July 15th 7.30pm**

The Old Rectory, Coombes All food is provided; meats, salads and desserts, the charge being £3 per person. You are asked to bring your own drink, plates and cutlery. Garden chairs would be useful, but some will be provided.

I should be grateful for some help from about 5.30pm to set out chairs and tables and do last minute food preparation. If you are willing to help please let me know.

### *Forthcoming Attractions*

#### *Field Outings*

The next few field trips are detailed below. Full details can be obtained from your programme card.

**June 4th** - the eagerly awaited walk round the New Forest's special area. Meet at Telegraph Hill carpark at 8.30. Leader Bernie Forbes.

**July 1st** - a short evening stroll to Waltham Brooks, then afterwards to North Parham for nightjars and woodcock. Meet at Greatham Bridge at 20.00. Leader Roy Sandison.

**September 9th** - Sidlesham and Pagham Harbour. Ideal time for migrant birds, especially waders. Meet at Information Centre at 9.30. Leader Dave Smith.

**October 8th** - Cissbury Ring to watch ringing demonstration, weather permitting. Meet at Cissbury Ring north carpark at 8.00. Morning only. Leaders Brian and Hilda Metcalfe.

#### *Indoor meeting*

**October 2nd** - the Autumn programme starts with a talk on the wildlife of the Adur Valley and Downs, given by Keith Noble. St Giles' Church Hall 7.30pm.

The Old Rectory is 1.5 miles exactly from the traffic lights on the A27 by Lancing College. Turn into the Coombes Road towards Steyning, the drive entrance is on the left and marked with an SDOS notice.

To enable me to organise the food, please ring me to book a ticket by July 12th. Do come even if it rains - the food will still be here!

Brianne Reeve 01273 452497

## Birds on our Patch - late winter/spring 1995

Highlights back in January were a 1st winter Ring Billed Gull briefly at Shoreham Harbour on 4th, and a storm-driven Grey Phalarope at the entrance of the harbour (17-20th). Winter residents included the regular Black Redstarts and Purple Sandpipers (the latter still at Brighton Marina in early May!) and large concentrations of gulls were reported in roosts along by the power station, which included up to 4 Med Gulls and a few Little Gulls.

A Bearded Tit was found in a small reedbed near Stretham Manor, Upper Adur Levels on February 3rd, and in the same area 2 Lapland Buntings were seen briefly in a flighty flock of Skylarks. A summer plumaged Black Guillemot passed Brighton Marina on 16th, the first in Sussex for nine years, and only the second ever in the SDOS area. A Dartford Warbler re-appeared at Hollingbury Camp (18th) and may have been the same bird as seen there at the end of 1994. Other February birds reported were Merlin and a number of Firecrests, whilst on the Adur Levels near Henfield, the Bewick's Swan herd peaked at 45 (?), believed to be the best count for many years.

In March a pair of Barn Owls were to be seen on the northern parts of Shoreham Airfield until the month end. Other news included a very early Whimbrel passed Shoreham on 10th, and the first Wheatears were on the 11th at Hollingdean allotments and at Sheepcote. A couple of Ring Ouzels were seen in the Brighton area and Sandwich Terns were noted from Marina on 22nd, where an Eider had resided for almost a month. No specific numbers of wintering Blackcaps were reported, nor were any garden Siskins.

After a relatively quiet March (except for a big movement of Avocets on 10th), seawatching really started on April 23rd, totals at Brighton Marina included 2 Pomarine Skua, 27 Arctic Skua, 17 Little Gull, 7 Med Gull, 2 Slavonian Grebe, 8 Black throated Diver, 33 Diver sp, 15 Velvet Scoter and an assortment of terns including both Arctic and Little. Thereafter the Skua passage continued with Poms most days and also the odd Bonxie or two. On April 30th an adult Sabine's Gull was seen off Worthing and on May 1st another two good birds were Manx Shearwater and Puffin. Other species seen on seawatches were Avocet, Whimbrel and Peregrine, but so far very few Black Terns (up to 4th).

### Sussex Highlights

There is hardly space for bird news from other parts of Sussex, but some that come to mind were a Grey Phalarope at Selsey (Jan 1st), Long Eared Owls at Rye Harbour roost, Red Kite near Lewes/Selmeston, Great Grey Shrikes at Pulborough and Ashdown Forest, 2 Shorelarks on the Crumbles, Eastbourne, 2 Ospreys end April at Arlington reservoir, and a number of Blue headed Wag-tails from the Pevensy area and again at Arlington.

Peter Whitcomb

### The Hollingbury Parakeets

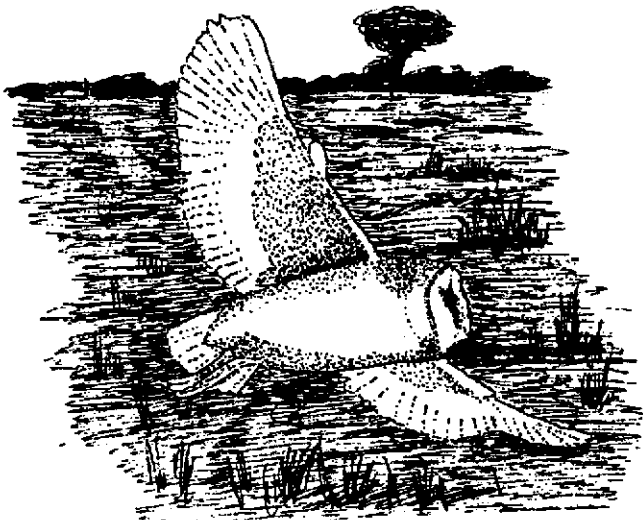
Members often ask about the colony of Ring necked Parakeets in Hollingbury Woods. Only 4 birds can now be found. The oldest pair had nested behind the tennis courts, but the tree was blown over in a January storm, 1995. The birds fly around all the local woods, sometimes across the golf course, and westward of Ditchling Road where they are occasionally seen feeding in gardens, or around the woods near Withdean Stadium. If anyone wants a casual visit to see them and are not sure of the directions, phone me on 01273 500416.

Peter Whitcomb

### Field Outings Report

Bernie Forbes' Adur Valley outing on 12th February was very well attended, even most of the Council members turned up for the morning session! The three speciality birds around Shoreham Fort took some finding. Four Purple Sandpipers were on the opposite arm, and the Mediterranean Gull did a brief fly-over, whilst the Black Redstart was flitting around gardens, and with a group of 30+ it was sensible not to stay too long. Other birds seen were Rock Pipits and a large flock of Ringed Plover. The sea was quiet, but 6 Mergansers were on Widewater giving excellent views.

Transferring up to Woods Mill in the afternoon, with the weather still fine and bright, a few more members joined in. The muddy walk across the fields produced Green Woodpecker and Sparrowhawk. The group was able to study the local Tree Sparrows along the old railway line near Stretham Manor. Bullfinch, Redwings and Fieldfare were also noted. Out on the floods were hundreds of Lapwing, but Golden Plover numbers had dwindled. A pair of Pintail was all that was left of an assortment of wildfowl only a week earlier. Bernie took the group along the west bank of the Adur where good views were had of a herd of Bewick's Swans. The expected Green Sandpiper was flushed by 2 members who left early, and a Grey Wagtail was seen briefly on the return to the carpark.



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With the Spring migration well under way in April, a few members reported a general lack of common migrants at coastal sites. Some of the earliest dates so far known have been Swallow at Lychpole Hill (2nd); Yellow Wagtail on Lower Adur (7th); Whitethroat at Wildpark (10th); Whinchat at Sheepcote (10th); Grasshopper Warbler at Hollingbury (11th); male Pied Flycatcher in Park Crescent, Brighton (15th); Tree Pipit over Hollingdean (16th); Swift over Brighton (20th); and Nightingales in the Coombes area (no date). Some of the more scarcer birds reported were a Short Eared Owl at Sheepcote early month, and a Montagu's Harrier there briefly on 13th. Hawfinches are rare these days, but one was seen over Wildpark on 12th, and 2 were at Hillbarn, Worthing towards the end of the month. Additionally, a Little Bittern was found in the Shoreham area at a sensitive and private site, and it was decided not to release details.

## Looking back on Bristol - Peregrines & Blackcaps

We moved to Angmering from Bristol in June 1994; so what will we miss most from our time there? Perhaps most of all, the breeding Peregrines, as the watch-point was only a short distance from our home and the over-wintering Blackcaps in our garden.

Peregrines returned to breed at their historic site in the Avon Gorge in 1990, after being absent since the 1950s. However, they were not welcomed by everyone, especially not by Tippler Pigeon Fanciers; in 1990 the nest was vandalised and two of the four young were killed. So, from 1991 onwards a watch has been organised by Bristol Ornithological Club. The birds have bred successfully every year except 1993, when eggs were laid, but failed to hatch, possibly because the female was young and inexperienced. From 1993, a pair of Ravens has bred in close proximity to, but generally co-existing peacefully with, the Peregrines.

If visiting the Bristol area, it is worth calling in at the watch which is usually maintained during the breeding season, from early April to mid-June, on the Circular Road around Clifton Down at approximately ST564742. Park where a barrier of horizontal tree-trunks has been fixed to prevent inebriates from driving over the edge of the gorge, and look for watchers with telescopes at any time during daylight hours. Provided the Peregrines are breeding successfully, and have chosen to nest on the far side of the Gorge, there should be good views. Buzzards are often seen soaring over Leigh Woods and Sparrowhawks are common. Peregrines are usually present in the Gorge all year, but are difficult to see out of the breeding season.

Despite living in suburban Stoke Bishop, we recorded 52 species in eight years in our medium-sized garden. Bristol has had a good population of wintering Blackcaps for many years and anyone who has only watched Blackcaps during migration or the breeding season, would be amazed at their varied behaviour in winter. In our garden, they began eating berries in November, favouring deciduous Berberis, often feeding within a few feet of the house and some individuals showing great agility in reaching berries at the ends of spindly branches. They turned to birdtable foods from late December and ate almost anything. It was sometimes difficult to keep a constant supply of food due to voracious Starlings; we found baked potato a useful standby, regularly eaten by Blackcaps, but ignored by Starlings unless fat or oil was added. We hung a basket of peanuts on a long wire to defeat Squirrels and also had a log with dripping for Woodpeckers. Blackcaps learned to use both and some could feed with the confidence and grace of a Nuthatch, if not quite the agility of a Tit. One winter we had a resident female which conformed to the often-reported aggressive behaviour pattern of wintering Blackcaps, but most of our regular Blackcaps would avoid feeding in close proximity to other birds, preferring to sit patiently waiting an opportunity and withdrawing immediately another bird approached.

That's all in the past now and we're enjoying getting to grips with Sussex birdwatching. Unfortunately, we live just outside the Society's area, but we're looking forward to taking part in many activities including sea-watching.

Pat & Chris Mulcock

## Stop Press News

From Seaford, a Black Kite in off the sea (April 18th), followed by a Marsh Harrier and Osprey during the next week. In May a Red Rumped Swallow was resident early morning/evenings at Arlington Reservoir (11-13th), whilst 3 Dotterel were in fields behind Denton, Newhaven (12-15th). One or two Red Footed Falcons and numerous Hobbies have been reported. From West Sussex a Temminck's Stint was at Sidlesham Ferry recently.

Bernie's four man team accumulated 124 species on their West Sussex bird Race with best birds Roseate Tern and Pomarine Skuas, and approx. £500 raised in sponsorship.



## Is there a Sign Writer in the House?

The Society urgently needs to produce four warning signs for a conservation project and requires the skills of someone to do the lettering on the signs which will be no more than 18 inches square in size. Any offers of help to Bernie Forbes on 01903 753876.

## Environmental Matters

During 1994 there have been a variety of issues concerning our area and in which the Society had it's say. Our views on several sites, such as Widewater, the river Adur, and a proposed golf course near Lancing were written into District Council plans.

At Sompting, various environmental bodies including the SDOS were asked to advise on use of a freehold site acquired by Adur District Council. The open area where a Red backed Shrike was seen last autumn, and the possible inclusion of part of Sompting meadows is an ongoing project.

The Society formed a close liaison with the Friends of Widewater Lagoon, and have contributed to the purchase of shrubs; and lastly the wader roost at Goring Gap has been under threat with proposals to build croquet lawns, car park and centre. The Society made a written representation objecting to the plans.

All members should be alert to such threats, however small, and to loss of habitat. It is important to note the value of sending in your records as these have been used to help contest planning applications, for instance, a golf driving range at New Salts Farm.

Stanley Allen

## Annual Report/Publicity leaflet

Apologies for the late production of the Annual Report for 1994, this will follow this newsletter in a few weeks. Mailed out with this letter, is a copy of the Society's new publicity leaflet which we hope you will read and pass on to potential new members.

## Day Birdwatch within SDOS recording area

Following on from the winter newsletter's friendly challenge to find as many species as possible within the recording area, two teams have so far amassed 84 and 70 species. Bernie's team went out on a wet day in January and did extremely well to attain the high total. Amongst the best birds were Golden Plover, Guillemot, Green Sandpiper, Tree Sparrow, Black Redstart, Bewick's Swan, Med Gull, Purple Sandpiper and Marsh Tit. Peter Whitcomb and Ian Lawes did a "trial run" later in February and though they had better weather, many of the expected birds had gone from Henfield Levels. Their best birds were Long Eared Owl, Dartford Warbler, Green Sandpiper, Purple Sandpiper, Eider, Red throated Diver, Bewick's Swan and Grey Wagtail.

The "challenge" remains open through the year. Why not try in the autumn? Personally I found the restriction of keeping within the SDOS area an intriguing one - it certainly makes you realise how well (or not as in our case) you think you know your own area! Give it a go.

## Breeding Surveys

Mention was made in the winter newsletter concerning two important requests for information on nesting Tree Sparrows and Grasshopper Warblers in Sussex. The contacts who require your response are for Tree Sparrows: Tim Parmenter, 22 The Kiln, Burgess Hill, RH15 OLU; and for Grasshopper Warblers: Robert Edgar, 6 Turnpike Close, Ringmer, BN8 5PD (or phone 01273 813737 if you hear a bird reeling from May onwards). Both species should also be submitted to our Recorder, Rod Shaw, at the end of the year.

## Reminders

Copy date for the autumn newsletter is September 27th. Also note your Recorder needs your sightings, etc for the first part of the year. Please help to make his task easier by sending early winter/spring sightings in now.

## Advertisements

**Stoborough, Dorset** A marvellous centre for touring East Dorset, Durlston, etc, with Dartford Warblers across the road, and Nightjars 2 minutes away. Nick and Eileen Cake, Hyde Hill, 64 Furzebrook Road, Stoborough, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5AX

**Wanted** Old Sussex Bird Reports 1973/74/76, also pre 1962. Offers to Peter Whitcomb, 99 Barnett Road, Brighton BN1 7GJ.

**Toller Porcurum, Dorset** Excellent B&B en suite from £20 per night. Near Dorchester, plenty of comfort. Angela and Roger Seckington, The Manor, 5 Kingcombe Road, Toller Porcurum. 01300 320010.

**The Kingcombe Centre, Dorchester.** Day, weekend or longer courses on birds, butterflies, flowers, history and country crafts. Full details from Brianne Reeve or write to: Nigel Spring, The Kingcombe Centre, Toller Porcurum, near Dorchester. 01300 320684.

## Hove nestbox scheme

Recently the SOS published an article on nestbox recording in Sussex, and our members living in Hove area may be interested in a patch known as Three Cornered Copse. The area forms a green corridor with Hove Park, and permission has been granted for erection of nestboxes. As well as common species using the boxes, other birds that have nested include Spotted Flycatcher, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat, Linnet, Long tailed Tit and Mistle Thrush. The area totalled 157 nests of 15 species in 1994.

Further information on the BTO Nest Recording Scheme can be obtained from Dr Barrie Watson, 83 Buckingham Road, Shoreham by Sea, BN43 5UD. Sussex is not well represented as it could be, so new contributors are always welcome.

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## The Birds in the Garden

On a tiny patch of Sussex stands a house, attached to which is a long and narrow garden, at the end there lies a ditch. In winter, in the rain and when the days are short and dark, this garden is a haven and becomes a nature park.

There-in stands a bird bath where even in the rain, we watch the Starlings splashing, preening, in order to attain that perfect feather fitness which is their hope of life when fleeing furry animals, in this world of strife.

High on the line, the peanut container is used by all the tits, whilst on the ground beneath the pole the Robin pecks at all the fallen bits Oats, flaked maize and sunflower seeds are scattered on the ground for Sparrows, finches and the like, I hope that cat is not around.

When the ground is hardened by the frost or snow, and the berries on the bushes have lost their Autumn glow, Hungry Mistle Thrush and Redwing will invade our tiny space to feed on fallen apples - these disappear at quite a pace.

We have a perky Blackbird, he's really a bit of a pig. He comes into the garden in order to have a quick dig, then its up to the backdoor with a chuck, chuck, chuck, as he begs for a grape and please, one more for luck.

When the cold, damp winter's over, and warm days of Spring arrive, We'll remember those birds in the garden and the lucky ones still alive will pour forth their praises, from their chosen patch in delightful song; their aim? a little 'lady' to catch.

Hazel Jackson