

# SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Autumn 1996

## DON'T MISS 'BIRDS OF SUSSEX'

The long-awaited County Avifauna is now available and the Sussex Ornithological Society has received many congratulations and favourable reviews of its excellent publication. When the *Birds of Hampshire* was published, in September 1993, it set a new standard for county avifaunas and we should not complain that a wish to live up to this standard has meant that production took somewhat longer than planned. The work is enhanced by colour illustrations and line drawings by John Reaney and many superb photographs by Roger Wilmshurst (a former SDOS member) and other well-known photographers. Another SDOS member, John Newnham, acted as assistant editor.

As a relative newcomer, I found the chapters describing the different habitats in Sussex extremely readable and infor-

mative. The species accounts are comprehensive, in so far as the necessary data exists, and enable us to see where the gaps in information are e.g. for recently declined species such as Corn Bunting. In a work of this size one will always find something to criticise (e.g. the difficulty in distinguishing the different dots on the distribution maps) but all who bird-watch regularly in Sussex will surely find a copy essential.

*Birds of Sussex* can be purchased from the shop at RSPB Pulborough Brooks, which is open daily, priced £23. Alternatively, it can be ordered by post from Mrs I Simpson, Hardanger, Littleworth, Partridge Green, Horsham RH13 8JF (add £3.75 pp; cheque payable to SOS). If you haven't yet got a copy, don't leave it too long as only 2,000 copies have been printed and there may be no more.

Pat Mulcock

## Your Views are Requested

Our venue for 1996, St Peter's Church Hall in West Street, Shoreham has been a successful move. I know some of you had difficulty in locating the place (next time I shall give a grid reference and not a sketch map!) but the Hall is larger, the catering facilities better and the parking much easier than at St Giles. In 1997, the church is unable to let us have St Peter's Hall on a Monday evening on a regular basis, so we are changing our meetings to the **first Tuesday of the month** except for the last meeting of the year which will be on Monday 8th December.

I hope you have enjoyed the speakers we have had in 1996; I would like to know what you think of my choices and what you would prefer. However, 1997 is fully booked with a variety of interesting subjects on offer so we look forward to your support.

The annual Barbecue was held again at the Old Rectory at Coombes

and was an enjoyable evening helped by good weather and, of course, excellent company. However, we feel it is time for a change so that not quite so much work falls on a few. The committee suggests a Fish & Chip Supper (instead of a barbecue) provided by a Vendor Van. Would you please let us know:

- \* Would you like or could you offer another venue?
- \* Do you have another idea for this social evening?

**Do tell us please.**

Brianne Reeve

I am sure all who attended the barbecue last July would like to thank Brianne and all her helpers for providing such a marvellous meal for us. We can't expect her to do it every year but hopefully she'll be persuaded to lay on another barbecue in a year or so.

The Editor

## FORTHCOMING INDOOR MEETINGS

Nov 11 .. Have Hide Will Travel by well-known photographer Mike Mockler

Dec 9..... John Newnham's Quiz Night

**Remember normally FIRST TUESDAY in the month from January 1997**

Jan 7 ..... The Four Seasons

Feb 4..... Understanding Bird Behaviour

Mar 4..... Manitoba

Apr 1 ..... AGM and talk on India

Non-members are most welcome at indoor meetings. The visitor fee of £1 should be paid to the treasurer on the night.

# BIRDS ON OUR PATCH — April to September

The rather cold spring weather seemed to keep early migrants back a few days but it was soon business as usual. A Nightingale in full song at Lancing Clump on 17/18 April was a sign that all was well. The seawatchers had to endure many days of little movement and many species were well down - skuas were very scarce and many of the regulars at Worthing didn't manage to see any Pomarines at all!

The over-wintering Dartford Warbler at Hollingbury remained into July but failed to attract a mate; a Hobby observed moving north over Shoreham on 4 May was a sign that spring had finally arrived. At least two Honey Buzzards were recorded in the spring:

IN over Worthing on 2 June and one coasting over the Sanctuary a few weeks later. The bird of the spring, however, was an Alpine Swift. One was seen very briefly on a seawatch on 18 May and then one (the same?) was found coming into roost at Shoreham cement works on 19th. The early birds the following day were rewarded when the bird circled around the buildings and then disappeared - the large evening gallery were somewhat disappointed as the bird was never seen again. The next day a Caspian Tern was reported off Brighton by a visiting birder.

The few windy days in early July produced a Great Skua on 3rd but unfortunately the flock of Storm Petrels off Selsey did not move eastwards into our airspace. A Kentish Plover was found feeding on Worthing beach for a few hours in August but it was unnerved by a dog which chased it along the beach and it disappeared eastwards not to return.

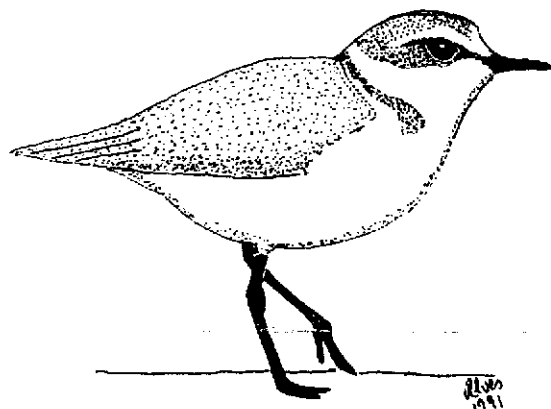
The old Shoreham faithful Mediterranean Gull returned to the harbour on 3 August

and has been seen fairly regularly since. The harbour also boasted a very early Guillemot which stayed a few days. A flock of Eider off Southwick for most of the summer were very unseasonable. Swift movements seemed earlier this year and by the second week in August they had become a rarity. During the month two small Crossbill flocks flew over Hollingbury Camp - a scarce bird in Sussex this year. The best August bird was a Red-backed Shrike which graced the eastern side of Lancing Ring - in exactly the same bush as in 1995 - but alas it was only seen by a few lucky observers and it was gone only a few hours after it was discovered. A Little Egret has been seen a few times on the River Adur recently and it roosted in the Sanctuary on one occasion.

The tell tale signs of the impending autumn/winter came in the shape of a Merlin which sped over Sompting on 29 Aug. Autumn migrants are filtering through fairly quickly and unless there are some special climatic conditions, it is likely that many of them will migrate over our area without being recorded. A Wryneck graced Mill Hill on 7 Sept along with a few Whinchats but could not be relocated the following day. On 14th an Osprey flew over Cissbury.

Late News: Grey Phalarope at Brooklands in early October.

Thanks to R. Ives & P. Whitcomb



## SUSSEX HIGHLIGHTS

Late May records included a long staying Melodious Warbler in Belle Tout woods, a Purple Heron at Rye and a Red-footed Falcon near Icklesham. Seawatching either side of our recording area produced Storm Petrels, both Manx and Mediterranean Shearwaters and Roseate Terns.

Warmer weather in June brought in a couple of Spoonbills at either end of the county, Honey Buzzard at Rye, with an overnight roosting Caspian Tern there on 14th. On 23rd a Black Kite drifted over Ashdown forest and a Night Heron resided at Alexandra Park, Hastings into July. Storm Petrels were seen off Selsey for a short period.

Some interesting possible breeding records concerned Marsh Warbler and a welcome return of reeling Grasshopper Warblers at two locations. A pair of Mediterranean Gulls fledged two young at Rye LNR, believed to be the first successful breeding in Sussex,

though Little Terns had another sad year there.

August records included a Kentish Plover at Pagham Harbour and perhaps the same bird at Pilsey; the latter site produced belated news of a suppressed Greater Sand Plover on 6th. A Red-backed Shrike was at Birling Gap on 13th. Rye produced a ringtail Montagu's Harrier, Pectoral and Wood Sandpiper on 16th. Little Egrets topped the 100 mark at the Thorney roost.

Early September was relatively quiet apart from a good scattering of Wrynecks and Ospreys. However, the surprise bird was well-worth waiting for — a Booted Warbler at Pagham, only the third for Sussex and the first viewable one, showed well for many observers beside the Long Pool from 28th - 1st October.

Thanks to Tony Wilson

## FUTURE FIELD TRIPS

Nov 24... Thursley Common

Dec 28... Adur Walk, nr Shoreham

### Early 1997 Dates for your Diary

Jan 19 ... Itchenor, Chichester Hbr-  
Bernie Forbes - all day

Feb 16... Pagham Harbour with  
Richard Ives - all day

Mar 23... Brighton Marina - morning  
only. A new venue

Apr 27 ... Shoreham Sanctuary with  
Stanley Allen - morning  
only

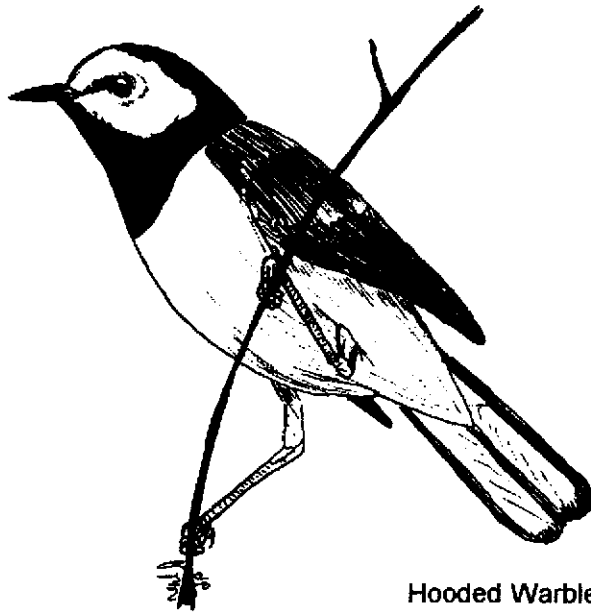
Full details shown in programme  
card. If in doubt phone Field Sec,  
Tony Fenton on 01273 591291

**Members are reminded that the  
'Birdwatchers' Code of Conduct'  
must be observed at all times  
during Field Meetings. If unsure  
please ask the leader on the day.**

# THOSE TESTING TEXAS TREATS!

It would appear that some of our members have been gripped with Stateside fever as at least four SDOS members visited the Lone Star State in April and they all agree that it is a fantastic experience. I must admit that the landscapes are not breathtaking - it makes the Netherlands look positively mountainous - but the array of species, the warmth of the weather and the people make it a wonderful place to visit. Bernie and I went on a two week fly drive around the major birding sites in the south and west of Texas, a mere round trip of 3,000 miles, but we logged up nearly 300 species in that time.

There can be little to beat the New World warblers as they forage for food on the woodland floor or among the foliage of the Live Oaks - it is hard to believe how many bright birds there are. Yellowthroats, Hooded Warbler, Prothonotary Warblers - all resplendent in their stunning yellow plumages - along with Roseate Spoonbills, Red-shouldered Blackbirds



Hooded Warbler

and Pelicans .... the list goes on. For those of you who like a challenge there are plenty on the other side of the pond: the LBJ's (little brown jobs) such as New World Sparrows; we spent hours getting all the details on these little devils and then consulted

four different bird guides and what did we find? We had a choice of four species as every field guide seemed to contradict the others - that wouldn't have been so bad but three of the books were written by the same author! No one talks about sparrows in America as very few people are capable of identifying them.

Early spring (late March - early May) is a wonderful time to be on the Texas coast as millions of birds pass through en route to their breeding sites in the rest of North America. Texas has the largest state total of species recorded and this is hardly surprising as it is vast - but driving is easy and there are very few

police on the B roads to check your speed! The coastal marshes go on for ever and there are hundreds of large alligators in the swamps. We heard a story of a group of English birdwatchers looking for American Purple Gallinule - one birder found one and called his friends over to see it but by the time they arrived at the spot it had disappeared down the throat of an alligator - more of a rip to pieces than a grip off!

If you enjoy watching large numbers of raptors, thousands of waders, superbly coloured passerines and meeting very friendly people, then Texas is for you.

Richard Ives

## Red Signals Danger

In a jointly-published document produced earlier in the summer by eight leading conservation bodies, the 280 bird species regularly occurring in the British Isles were sub-divided into three conservation priorities - red, amber and green.

There are 36 birds on the red list. All are in decline either recently or historically and include rare breeding species such as Marsh Warbler, Corn-crake and Roseate Tern. It is alarming to note birds on the danger list such as Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Spotted Flycatcher and Turtle Dove which a few years ago would have been in the green category.

The amber list includes a mixture

of rare or scarce breeders, highly localised species and those in moderate decline - all earmarked for medium conservation concern - totalling a massive 110 species. The remaining 134 species are regarded as safe for the time being but may require some monitoring. Copies of the review can be obtained from the RSPB.

Locally, a decline in numbers of certain species has been noted and certainly birds like Turtle Dove, Tree Sparrow, Spotted Flycatcher and Grasshopper Warbler cannot be taken for granted. It would be useful if all records of species in decline could be reported to the Hon. Recorder.

Peter Whitcomb

**Atlas of Sussex Butterflies** with a commentary on their changing status by Joyce and Peter Gay.

Available from Butterfly Conservation, Sussex Branch, £5 post free. Orders to Wellbrook, High Street Henfield, W Sussex BN5 9DD. Cheque payable to Butterfly Conservation, Sussex Branch.

Or can be purchased from shop at Pulborough Brooks.

### Management work at Cissbury Ring

A great deal of management work is being carried out under the auspices of the National Trust at the above site.

More scrub clearance sessions are planned for this winter on Fridays or Saturdays and more volunteer help is ALWAYS welcome.

Tel 01903 815889 for further details.

### Bogey Birds

Storm Petrels were seen off Selsey Bill this year, but other commitments caused me to dip, not for the first time, on this elusive species. These birds are still fairly scarce in Sussex and remains a species that you would normally only chance on during a seawatch in bad weather. However, the Quail remains my main bogey bird, heard most years but still never sighted. Considering the amount of birding I do each year it's rather surprising that I've never ticked Bluethroat or Savi's Warbler.

These birds are my 'bogey birds'. Have you got your own local bogey birds? I know a few who attended the Birling Gap outing on 7th Sept saw their first Wryneck. Why not write in for future publication and maybe we could organise an old-fashioned SDOS members telephone grapevine.

Peter Whitcomb

## AN INTRODUCTION TO DTP

The Council has asked me to take over as acting editor of the report and newsletter following the retirement of Peter Whitcomb due to pressure of work. I had been helping Peter to put the 1995 Report together, so I have finished it off, with assistance from Brian Clay; I'm sorry it's late but hope you will find it reasonably satisfactory.

Both the report and the newsletter are prepared on a computer using a Desk Top Publishing Program (DTP) and I'd just like to explain a little of what is involved. DTP enables one to attempt on a home computer the sort of layout produced by those who have spent five years at college studying design. I attended a mere one day course at Southwick, but that was a great deal better than nothing. I'm learning more

as I go along helped by those with more experience.

It may be helpful for you to know something about what makes a publication attractive and readable. Have a look at an SDOS or County Bird Report and compare it with a Bird Magazine or a Newspaper. Which is easier to read and why? It's not only the size of type which matters but the length of line and how close the lines are together. The human eye cannot easily follow a line more than about sixty characters long. Because I presume you would like to be able to read the articles which people have taken the time and trouble to write, I've put part of the report into two columns which I hope will be easier to read.

However, there is still really too

much text on each page and this brings me to another point: the Report must not become too big. The type of booklet which we use becomes unsatisfactory if it contains more than about 72 pages: the Sussex Bird Report is now using a 'perfect' binding but this is only economical for a print run of upwards of 1,000. So, the only realistic option is to keep our report within limits. It would be interesting to know what members think are the most important and interesting items and what might be omitted. Anything left out could be included in a newsletter instead. E.g. would field trip reports be better in the newsletter? I would be interested to know what you think.

If you'd like to learn more about computers, I can recommend phoning Shoreham-based John and Jeanette Simpson for a list of their courses. Tel 01273 461689.

Pat Mulcock

### Calling Garden Watchers

Clive Hope, the organiser of SDOS's garden bird feeding survey is looking for more participants. Last year only 17 members took part but nevertheless a total of 44 species was recorded of which 32 actually took food or water provided. Small urban gardens are just as important as large rural ones and it's surprising what may turn up (especially in a coastal area) if you keep looking.

The Annual Report 1995 has a full account of last winter's survey. If your garden is within the SDOS recording area ring Clive for a survey form on 01903 744489 or write to Hillcrest, Byne Close, Storrington RH20 4BS.

### Shoreham Bird Report 1996

Records should be sent to the Hon Recorder as soon as possible, preferably in batches through the year with the last few during January. Rod Shaw's address is 93 North Rd Portslade BN41 2HD.

Copy for regular features and other contributions is also requested in January and February and should be sent to the Acting Editor, Pat Mulcock, Pinehurst, West Drive, Angmering BN16 4NL.

We hope to have the report ready somewhat earlier next year but it is not possible to make a firm prediction of the publication date at this stage.

### Looking Back to 1958

*Extracts from SDOS's sixth annual report:*

**Stone Curlew:** a pair raised one young and at least two more pairs present in the breeding season on Downs between Lancing and Steyning.

**Nightjar:** a few pairs present in summer in suitable habitat behind Lancing.

**Twite:** up to 35 by R. Adur from 5 Feb - 2 Mar and several other records.

**Snow Bunting:** more than 50 in a field near Coombes on 18 Mar.

**Gull Bunting:** up to 40 in a north Lancing field from 9 Mar to early Apr when they dispersed for breeding.

**Tree Sparrow:** up to 55 in a north Lancing field 9 Mar to 20 Apr.

## News from Pagham Harbour

The Friends' (FoPH) autumn newsletter reports that although Little Terns again failed to breed, the efforts of those maintaining the watch over the fenced off area were rewarded by successful nesting by about 12 pairs of Oystercatcher and at least 20 pairs of Ringed Plover. However, they now have a problem as the tern watchers' caravan needs repairs which would cost £1,000+. Anyone who could help them replace it should phone 01243 641508.

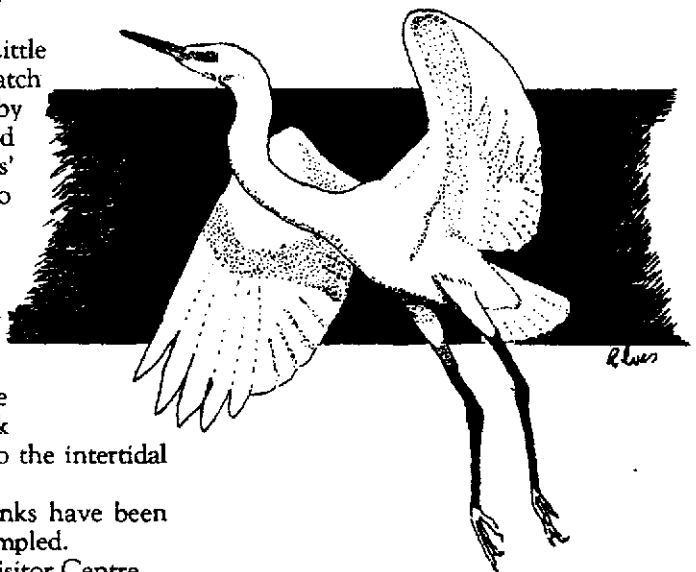
Due to local government cuts, Pagham Harbour suffers from chronic staffing problems and FoPH have helped out with funding a new contract warden's post, this time for 12 months instead of four as previously. It is hoped that this will help towards implementation of the management plan.

The Environment Agency has completed repairs to the tramway thus averting the threat that the tides would break through and expose the hidden horrors of the old rubbish tip to the intertidal ecosystem.

Botanists will be pleased to hear that 100,000 Childing Pinks have been counted; the tern watchers also helped to prevent them being trampled.

Membership of FoPH costs only £3 single; details from the Visitor Centre.

Pat Mulcock



Thanks to Richard Ives for the three illustrations in this issue.