

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 1998

Birds on our Patch — November to April

Late autumn was notable for some very late records of summer migrants. A Redstart at Cissbury on Oct 28, was followed in November by a number of Swallows along the coast and an exceptionally late Swift over Widewater (6th) and a Ring Ouzel at Sheepcote (24th).

Local patch watchers in East Brighton found an remarkable series of rarities in late November. The first was a Pallas's Warbler at Sheepcote (15-17th) with two present on the 23rd and another at Whitehawk Hill. A Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler in East Brighton Park was new for the area and remained to the 22nd to delight admirers from far and wide. Incredibly this was followed by an 'ordinary' Yellow-browed Warbler around Sheepcote Campsite (24-29th). During this exciting period, a 1st winter Iceland Gull appeared at Southwick on the 16th and was seen at various places on the coast throughout the winter.

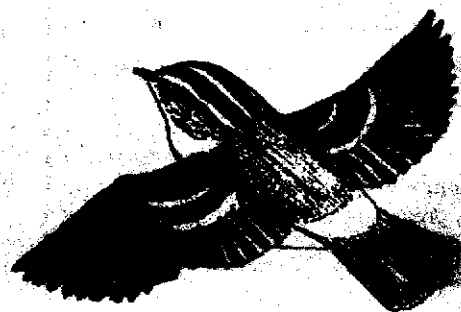
In December, a 1st winter Ring-billed Gull was found in the Southwick roost but was very elusive. Hardy coastal and seawatchers also did well in the latter part of the month as species recorded in the strong winds and gales around Christmas included Great Northern Diver, Velvet Scoters, Sooty Shearwaters, and Great and Arctic Skuas. A few Be-

wick's Swans returned to the Adur Valley and the flock of 49 Greylag Geese there was the highest ever count.

Shoreham Harbour and the Southwick Canal produced some excellent birding

in January. There were up to 7 Purple Sandpipers and gulls there included up to 20 Kittiwakes in the first few days of the month as well as an adult Mediterranean Gull, up to three Little Gulls and sometimes the Iceland Gull. Between the 17th-25th, records from the Canal included obliging Great Northern and Red-throated Divers, 2 Shags, a Common Tern, a Yellow-legged Gull, 35 Red-breasted Mergansers and

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Pallas's Warbler

Forthcoming Field Trips

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|--------------------|--|
| Sun 31 May | New Forest with Bernie Forbes Always a good day and could be great for raptors if the weather is right. |
| Fri 10 July | Ashdown Forest with Peter Friston An evening for Nightjars. |
| Sat 22 Aug | Farlington Marsh with the warden Should be good for waders at this time of year and the reserve warden will know where to find any unusual birds. |
| Sat 12 Sep | Beachy Head with Peter Whitcomb A great place to be in early autumn especially with a leader who will have all the latest news. |

For full details please refer to your programme card. If you have a query, please phone Field Secretary, Tony Fenton on 01273 591291.

SUMMER SOCIAL

Wednesday July 8 at 7.30 pm

in the garden at the
Old Rectory, Coombes

We're trying something slightly different this year. A choice of good food will be provided by a caterer for a charge of £5 per head. You bring whatever you would like to drink.

Please put the date in your diary now and let me know by July 1 if you will be coming, as I have to let the caterers know our numbers by then.

Telephone me on 01273 452497 or use my fax/answerphone on 01273 440311. The Old Rectory is exactly 1.5 miles north from the traffic lights on the A27 by Lancing College.

We have enjoyed many pleasant evenings in the past, but the event does need your continued support.

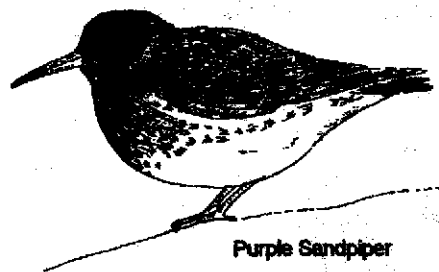
Brianne Reeve

BIRDS ON OUR PATCH

Continued from page 1

two Peregrines roosting on the old Power Station Chimney. Brighton area had a Grey Phalarope on the sea (5th), Sandwich Terns and Little Gulls at the Marina and a Firecrest at Woodvale Cemetery (20th).

If Swallows are arriving earlier and staying later, will we soon be seeing them in every month of the year? This year's first Swallow at Brighton Marina on Feb 20 was the earliest ever in the SDOS area. Seawatching in February and early March was generally poor with low numbers of Avocets, Velvet Scoters and Brent Geese past the Marina. However, a Scandinavian Rock Pipit was there in February and March and on Mar 28, five each of Black-necked and Slavonian Grebes all in



Purple Sandpiper

summer plumage must have been an exciting find. The long-staying Dartford Warbler on Hollingbury Camp still remains despite much clearance work by the local council.

Good numbers of Wheatears passed through at the end of March and Willow Warblers began to appear from the 28th. Cissbury had both Black and Common Redstart at the end of March - the latter exceptionally early and a male Ring Ouzel on Apr 4. A Great Grey Shrike was first seen there on Mar 30 and stayed well into April although it was often elusive.

Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are not common in the SDOS area but four were seen on a field trip near Storrington on Mar 22. The addition of four Crossbills, three Siskins and a Tawny Owl must have made it an excellent morning by anyone's standards.

Thanks to Peter Whitcomb, Bernie Forbes and Richard Ives

Thanks are also due to Richard Ives for the drawings in this issue

Back to 1972

The report for the year includes the following entry:

'Gyr Falcon: 1 in the Cissbury area from Mar 11-22. Seen by many members who behaved correctly and by great numbers of strangers many of whom did not.'

So twitching isn't so new!

The report includes a full list of the then members and I notice quite a few names which are still very familiar and active in SDOS.

Pat Mulcock

SUSSEX HIGHLIGHTS

Pagham Harbour had 3-4 Glaucous Gulls during January as well as wintering Whimbrel and the now regular small flock of Avocets. A Kentish Plover stayed for several days in April. Nearby, many people enjoyed very close views of a Grey Phalarope at Westhamptnett gravel pit from Jan 10-25. At the other end of the county Rye Harbour had quite a good run with Long-eared Owls and a Bittern from January to March, a Shore Lark at the

end of February, and Cattle Egret and Purple Heron in April.

Good numbers of Crossbills remained from last years influx including flocks of 20 at Ashdown Forest and 17 at Ambersham Common. However, reports suggest that the mild winter has led to many winter visitors being generally thin on the ground. There have been no report of Snow Buntings and Smew and Goosander and Short-eared Owls have all been scarce. The Arun Valley held a small wintering flock of White-fronted Geese for the first time for several years from mid December to mid February.

The first few summer migrants were exceptionally early with a Wheatear at Birling Gap on Feb 13; a Redstart in the Cuckmere on Feb 18; and 2 Sand Martins at Weirwood on Feb 22.



Shore Lark

SDOS AGM

For those members who missed the AGM on April 6, here is a summary:

- * Bernie Forbes took the chair due to the absence of our President, Stanley Allen who was recuperating after his operation.
- * Tony Bullock retired as Treasurer after eight years and was thanked for all his hard work over that period.
- * Our new Treasurer is John Maskell of 41 St Lawrence Avenue Worthing BN43 6JA.
- * The current officers and council members are as follows: Stanley Allen (president), Bernie Forbes (chairman), Brianne Reeve (secretary), John Maskell (treasurer), Peter Whitcomb (recorder), Pat Mulcock (editor), Tony Fenton (field secretary), Pauline Ford and Terry Hicks.
- * We would like to recruit new council members and anyone interested should speak to Brianne or any existing council member.

President's Message

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the AGM as I was in hospital getting a new knee, which hopefully will enable me to keep up with some of the more active members on outings! If I had been present, I would have apologised personally for a drafting error in the Society's new rules.

The objects clause, sub paragraph c), refers to the annual licence fee for use of the Sanctuary being payable to 'Environment Agency'. This should, of course, read 'Southern Water'.

Without wishing to make excuses, it is sometimes difficult to keep up with changes: for example, until a few years ago, Southern Water Authority was responsible for most of the 'wet' areas of interest to SDOS, eg. the river, the beach, Ferring Rife and so on. Then the National Rivers Authority was born and took on most of these functions. The NRA then became the Environment Agency, with which I was dealing in relation to the foreshore when I drafted the rules. Perhaps I need a replacement brain as well as a knee!

Finally, my grateful thanks to all of you who sent cards and messages. From the hospital, I ticked Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Little Owl, Nuthatch and Blackcap, plus a drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Stanley Allen

Winter birding in Florida

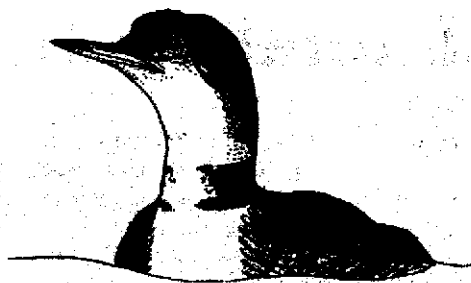
Our late February trip began in the heart of Disneyland as we were lucky enough to be able to use a friend's house at Kissimmee, near Orlando. There's some great birding in this area of many lakes, but good spots are rather spread around and you need to do quite a lot of driving as access is limited. This isn't too difficult once you've become used to reading the tiny road signs and to overtaking in any lane. You soon see why this is allowed - there are so many left turns across the other carriageway that someone is always crawling along in the outside lane trying to find their turning!

We found most of the special birds around Orlando: Snail Kites, Wood Storks, Wild Turkeys and eventually Limpkins. One day we visited the splendid Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge at Cape Canaveral on the Atlantic coast. As is often the case in America, there was a wildlife drive, this time about seven miles long. You can stop and leave the car whenever you wish and we saw a wide range of wading birds, ducks and shorebirds, including Hooded Mergansers and Roseate Spoonbills. What we know as 'waders' are called shorebirds in the US, 'wading birds' are herons, ibises and the like and 'waders' are what fishermen wear when standing up to their thighs in cold water. So you have to watch what you say or you don't make sense.

In our second week, we spent a few days on Sanibel Island which is reached by a causeway from the mainland. This would be a wonderful base for a first trip to north America or for someone

whose partner or family wasn't into birding. The Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge has a superb wildlife drive which is very popular with the general run of holiday makers. It has lots of enthusiastic volunteers keen to introduce all comers to the colourful and conspicuous large wading birds and to point out the numerous Ospreys, ducks and shorebirds. The volunteers wear smart gilets and we found that we were frequently mistaken for them because our outfits were slightly similar. As Americans are not at all shy, it was sometimes quite distracting to be asked to help people identify birds while we were trying to grapple with our new video camera.

The beaches there are delightful but have to be shared all year round by residents, visitors and the wintering and nesting shorebirds, terns and gulls. The birds have mostly learned to tolerate people and can often be very closely approached. While it's not so bad for wintering birds, beach nesting birds such as plovers and terns do have a big problem. An American birder we spoke to was bemoaning the lack of protection on one beach. We had to point out that things could be even worse as in Britain there would also be constant harassment from uncontrolled dogs, whereas there dogs are banned from nearly all beaches and nature reserves. In many ways, Florida takes a robust approach to wildlife protection. It's against the law for people or pets to chase, harass, or molest wildlife. Feeding Alligators can lead to a prison sentence; for if Alliga-



Common Loon, as it is known in America, is quite often seen around the coast in winter

tors lose their natural fear of man, they become dangerous, and have to be killed.

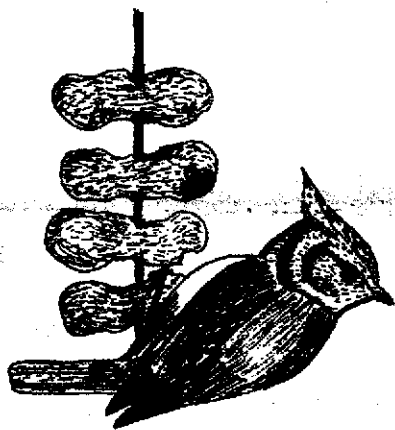
Florida has just had the wettest winter in living memory and winter is their dry season. Everyone was talking about the weather and while we were there a place quite nearby was hit by a tornado which caused the worst-ever death toll. Water levels everywhere were very high and the birds were not as concentrated as usual. We noticed this especially when we visited the Everglades where we found that many recommended ponds were almost birdless. Unfortunately, mosquitoes had just started to get going and although we saw American Purple Gallinules we were rather disappointed to see little that we had not already seen elsewhere.

Plenty of information is available about where to go birding in Florida. We relied mainly on *A Birder's Guide to Florida* by Bill Pranty. This and many other US birding guides can be obtained from Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd (tel 01352 756551).

Pat and Chris Mulcock

Garden Bird Feeding Survey

If you haven't already done so please return your winter garden survey form to Clive Hope at Hillcrest, Byne Close, Storrington,



Crested Tit - the ultimate garden bird?

West Sussex RH20 4BS as soon as possible so that he can complete his summary for the 1997 Report.

Clive has now been running the survey for three years and would like to find a successor to take over.

Would you like to get a bit more involved without taking on a big commitment? Garden bird surveys are something that anyone can take part in (if they have a garden to watch) and do provide useful data. You don't need to be an expert to run one. Clive would be happy to explain what's involved, so if you think you might take this on, please give him a ring on 01903 744489

Remember the Crested Tit which turned up in a Worthing garden! Perhaps next time the lucky observer will be a participant in our survey.

Indoor Meetings

Our 1997/8 season is now over and hopefully most members will agree that we enjoyed an interesting and varied programme. Attendance at meetings was certainly high.

It's a long way ahead but don't forget to double check now that you have entered the dates of the autumn meetings in your diary. The first meeting will be on October 6 and will be a talk by Roy Croucher on the Wildlife of Northern France. Probably most of us know little about birding on the other side of the channel but even if we don't plan to visit there our local birds have wings and many may well travel more than we do.

So try to come along, catch up with the latest news and get the new season off to a good start.

Shoreham Beach Project

Shoreham Beach supports vegetated shingle, a rare and fragile habitat much of which has been lost to development and sea defence construction along the Sussex coast. Typical plants of vegetated shingle are Yellow-horned Poppy, Sea Kale, Thrift and Sea Campion but among the 140 species which have been recorded on Shoreham Beach, the most special are Childing Pink which grows at only one other place on the south coast and Starry Clover which is not regularly found anywhere else in Britain.

The shingle is also important for birds such as Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Rock Pipit as well as various invertebrates and the native Common Lizard (the introduced Italian Wall Lizard is also present). Ringed Plovers no longer breed successfully due to disturbance and the vegetation is threatened by trampling, bonfires and fly tipping.

SDOS has joined the project group whose ultimate aim is to set up a Local

Nature Reserve including the whole shingle area of Shoreham Beach. A management strategy is necessary to balance the needs of people and wildlife because at present the beach has no legal protection from development or harmful activities. LNR status would allow by-laws to be made and future management could involve setting aside areas for wildlife and encouraging people to use the less vulnerable areas. Small areas could be fenced off to encourage birds like Ringed Plover to breed again.

This project is in its early stages and may take a very long time to reach fruition. I or another council member will continue to attend meetings of the project group and will keep you informed of our progress. All concerned feel that the involvement of local people in the management of Shoreham beach is vital to secure its long term future as a special place for both people and wildlife.

Bernie Forbes

From the Recorder

Since taking over as Recorder, I have been asked for guidance on the sending in of sightings and breeding records. The Society is keen to encourage all members to send in their records so that a complete picture of the birds of the area can be shown in our Report. As most members will already be aware of the need to report scarcer birds and all rarities, I propose to use this space to give examples of some 'grey areas' where members may be uncertain of the usefulness of reporting a record.

It really goes without saying that any bird noticed to be in decline, or to have a changed distribution should be considered important. We are fortunate to have good numbers of Corn Buntings and Skylarks, species which are in decline nationally, but what of Tree Sparrow, Sand Martin and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker? Are they really as rare as the lack of records indicates?

Next Issue

The autumn issue is planned for October and the last date for copy is 20 September. Many thanks to all who contributed this time. Please send contributions to Pat Mulcock, Pinehurst, West Drive, Angmering, West Sussex BN16 4NL.

Do Spotted Flycatchers or Grey Wagtails nest in our area? Also for 1997, I have received very few reports of Cuckoos or Lesser Whitethroats.

These are just a few examples and from the Recorder's point of view, it's difficult to formulate any pattern for some of the scarcer breeding birds. I would urge all members to send in records of successful or possible breeding for these species. And even a rookery count wouldn't go amiss!

Nowadays, in a good year, over 200 species are recorded in our area. They range from the very common to the very rare. In between are the species referred to as 'grey areas'. In the 1997 report, I have set out a number of examples to illustrate which records to send in.

But, remember, if in doubt, send it in! The society will not mention the location of a breeding site or owl roost and confidentiality will be honoured. SDOS recording forms are available from me, at 99 Barnett Road, Brighton BN1 7GJ. Please enclose postage with your request.

Peter Whitcomb

The full version of this article will appear in the 1997 report.

Editor

INFORMATION AND REQUESTS

If you haven't yet paid your 1998 subscription this is the last Newsletter you will receive. Please stay with us. Send your dues forthwith to new treasurer John Maskell at the address given on page 2.

Subscription rates are:

Single member..... £8.50

Family..... £12

Junior..... £2.50



A nest box has been erected on Sussex Heights in Brighton in the hope that the local Peregrines will use it. The project has been covered by the Evening Argus and by local TV. So far we can only say that the birds have shown interest and we must keep our fingers crossed for what will be an exciting event if they breed.



According to the Sussex Wildlife Trust's computer records there are hardly any rabbits in Sussex. There are also inadequate records of the estimated 100,000 hedgehogs killed on British roads each year. If you would like to help fill this gap the Sussex Mammal Recording Group can provide the necessary recording forms. Write to Mike Funnell, c/o Buchan Country Park, Horsham Road, Crawley RH11 9HQ or 'phone 01293 542088. For a list of other county recorders contact the SWT at Woods Mill.



Work is proceeding on the 1997 SDOS report but, at present for a number of reasons including the ever-growing amount of work involved, we expect that it will be finished a little later than last year. The Editor and the Recorder request your patience.



A survey organised by the RSPB, BTO and English Nature has revealed an amazing increase in breeding Woodlarks from 250 territories in 1986 to 1,552 in 1997. The New Forest population has grown from 58 pairs to 186 and the Sussex total stands at 65 pairs. The increase has been attributed to a combination of mild winters allowing better survival and greater availability of suitable habitat.